

**Metaphorically Speaking: Ethnic Analogies
And The Construction of Gay Identity**

by

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Abstract.

Gay identity formation is presented as a life-long process culminating in the acceptance of a positive Gay self-image and coherent personal identity as a member of a clearly identifiable group. It is argued that many contemporary men sexually attracted to men indicate that they are characterized by more than a simple erotic preference for men (homosexual); they also reject the negative societal stereotype associated with this sexual orientation and therefore, they are "Gay." Being Gay thus becomes a political statement as well as a statement of sexual orientation. Interview data collected from 15 ethnically and racially mixed Gay men are used to examine the ethnicization of gender. Respondents indicated a break with previously held notions of a "male role" inspired by their primary socialization and underwent a secondary, or re-socialization process into the Gay community culminating in a general recognition and identification with a "Gay ethnic identity."

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Blessed are those who love the lesbian, the Gay, and the Straight, as they love the sun, the moon, and the stars. None of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them.

-Alice Walker: The Temple of my Familiar.

Introduction.

The emergence of a Gay rights movement in the Western world over the past two decades is regarded by some social theorists as a major feature of cultural change in the latter twentieth century (Chesebro, 1981; D'Emilio, 1983; Gough and Macnair, 1985; Herdt, 1992; Rosaldo, 1993; Kimmel, 1993). There is clearly a Gay culture in the anthropological sense. More accurately, there are a number of sometimes overlapping cultures divided by class, age, "race", ethnic background and geography. What I mean by this is what is often referred to as "Gay lifestyle" - that whole set of values, assumptions, symbols and styles of behaviour, from keyrings to camp humor, that allow Gays to believe that they have more in common with someone else once they know that this person is Gay.

In conversations, literature, and the arts, 'Gay'¹ men frequently speak of the Gay community as "my people" and "my family". References to psychological factors, common language or "Gay-Speak", perception of shared historical experiences and a consciousness of kind sometimes lead to the acceptance and use of an ethnic analogy.

¹ It must be pointed out that, for the purpose of this study, when I refer to "Gay" I refer specifically and solely to Gay men. That is not to say that I discount the experiences of lesbians but rather that I see the two groups as being separate and worthy of independent inquiry. Furthermore, I must emphasize that when I speak of Gays, I am focussing on a somewhat specific socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnographic context (Urban North America: Montreal and Vancouver). This is important in that even in today's world the social construction of "Gayness" varies greatly and becomes very different once we move outside the Western World (Thompson, 1987:17).

I intend to ask, from my position as a Straight male, what does it mean to interact with society as a Gay person - historically, politically, and personally? I ask this with the twofold intention of both discovering whether 'Gay' can reasonably be conceived as an ethnic identity and in the hope of introducing into the discourse of Gay studies the issues associated with the social and political ramifications of claiming ethnic group identification based upon being Gay.

Approach and Methodology.

Both the substantive composition and bibliographic contents of this paper are formed by my attempt to investigate the above by keeping a particular focus of study, which is as follows:

First, it will examine the notions of ethnic group and ethnicity. It will provide a comprehensive examination of various definitional models of ethnicity in the hope of contributing insight into how the notions of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' have changed in the social sciences. These changes represent a shift away from the one-time conception of ethnicity as an immutable, objective fact when the discipline was much more positivistic. Today's subjective or socially subjective interpretation reflects minority-majority power structures and illustrates how these definitions were developed in

part to show how ethnicity was used in response to discrimination. These models will be deconstructed and their different elements will be analyzed in the hope of testing their usefulness and applicability to both the formation and prioritization of Gay identity.

Second, it will compare and contrast "Gay" and "homosexual". In a very real sense, the shift outlined in the first section can be likened to the changing conceptions from the stigmatized 'homosexual' to the culturally constructed 'Gay.' Indeed, while based on different philosophical assumptions, the objective definitions of ethnicity constitute examples of essentialism. Consequently, the second section of the paper will examine the differences between 'homosexual' and 'Gay' and discuss the essentialist/constructionist debate with a particular focus on the works of Simon and Gagnon, 1967; Stein 1977; D'Emilio, 1983; Epstein, 1987; Money, 1987; Herdt, 1992; Rist, 1992; and Chapman, 1993.

Third, by using both a structured interview and unstructured life stories, it will examine whether an ethnic analogy is being used by Gay men. If it is being employed, I will investigate whether or not individuals feel that they have a sense of ethnic membership by virtue of their being Gay. By examining such notions as ethnic identity versus ethnic personality, liminality, and the push/pull

factors often used in human geography and urban anthropology, I hope to (1) analyze how the respondents see the contingencies of Gay 'ethnicity'; and, (2) illustrate how the informants have prioritized their identities and how this in turn relates to the ideological and institutional development of an ethnic identity.

Fourth, drawing together elements discussed in parts I, II, and IV, should the respondents use an ethnic analogy, I will investigate whether this analogy is sociologically sound. Moreover, I will discuss the possible problems associated with the use of an analogy (e.g. recognition) and investigate alternatives (minority group, etc.).

Keeping the above in mind, I will examine whether it is reasonable, with certain qualifications, for the Gay community to employ the 'ethnic' analogy - both as a relatively accurate characterization of contemporary Gay identity formation, as well as a politically defensible starting point from which the Gay movement can evolve in a progressive direction despite resistance from legal policies, religious beliefs, and popular opinion. That is to say that claiming 'Gay' as an ethnic identity as well as a minority group, alternative life-style or sub-culture, serves both to defend and affirm perceived and actual differences as well as the right to the same protections against discrimination that are claimed by other ethnic groups in society.

Part I: Some Basic Concepts.

Theoretical Considerations.

The discussion of ethnicity and social identification which follows relates conflict over allegiance and belonging not only to one's place in the status system, but also to internal conflicts over the priority to be given to past, present, or future-oriented forms of self-identity. In his primary sense of belonging, an individual can *lean* toward one of three orientations (DeVos, 1975: 8-9):

- (1) a present-oriented concept of membership as citizens in a particular state (American) or as a member of specific occupational group (Lawyer);
- (2) a future-oriented membership in a transcendent, universal religious or political sense (Christian or Democrat); or
- (3) a past-oriented concept of the self based on one's ancestry and origin, that is, ethnic identity (DeVos 1975: 8-9).

These three categories, while serving to help to organize ideas, fail to explain how they overlap or otherwise affect each

other and therefore necessitate some clarification. The first concern that should be pointed out is that the three categories are not mutually exclusive. Depending upon the situation, an individual may identify himself as being either "Canadian", "Catholic", or "doctor". While he may consider his primary identity to be a doctor, his being Canadian or Protestant may take precedence if and when he travels (i.e., Cuba or Northern Ireland). That is to say that his nationality and his religious beliefs are not considered important - they are taken for granted - unless they become an issue (not being American in Cuba and being Catholic in Northern Ireland). One aspect of a person's identity that is frequently taken for granted is someone's sexual orientation; people are assumed to be heterosexual. This is understandable given that one rarely questions one's sexuality unless and until it seems to differ from the perceived norm.

Another point that can be made is that the three categories frequently overlap and can even displace one another. Religion (future-oriented) can be a means of abandoning one's ethnic identity (past-oriented) by adopting a transcendent worldview, as may happen when somebody who was previously not religious converts to a religious denomination or sect. Or it can support a sense of ethnicity, as in the case of the Welsh Protestants who reject the

Church of England (DeVos, 1975: 19). Religious adherence on the part of an ethnic group may also become a symbol of resistance of the dominant group, thereby reducing religious affiliation to simply a means of asserting ethnic identity.

The key word here is "lean". This implies a preference or a conscious choice. For example, one might chose to identify oneself primarily as a Christian rather than an Egyptian or as a Jew rather than a Canadian. In addition to religious adherence, socioeconomic advantages often provide the impetus for a switch in identity prioritization. As Waters notes, ethnicity is willingly set aside for socioeconomic advance (Waters, 1990: 107). Thus one Ricardo Martinez might adopt the name Richard Martin if he felt the anglo-sounding name might aid him in gaining employment.

If religion, a future oriented concept, can be used to displace nationality (present-oriented), and nationality (present-oriented) can be used to displace ethnicity (past-oriented), would it be fair to say that sexual orientation (present-oriented) can be used to displace/overlap ethnicity (past-oriented)? Any attempt at providing an answer at this point would be premature. As is, the question is far too misleading and must be qualified.

The first major pitfall lies in the fact the ethnicity is unlike other any other form of identity. Ethnicity is involuntary. By this I

mean that one's initial ethnicity comes about as a result of coincidence rather than a conscious decision. A person has no choice as to the specific cultural group which provides for him the basic process of socialization; it is an accident of birth. An individual is born into a given society and, in many cases, into a minority racial or cultural group. Both the general society (ex. Canada) and the more specific minority racial or cultural group (ex. Italian, Jewish, Jamaican) affect the ways in which an individual is socialized and the way they see themselves and their "place" in the world. That they have no say into when, where and to whom they are born implies that their membership in that group (specific family in a specific society at a specific time) is involuntary.²

Ascription is, of course, the key characteristic that distinguishes ethnicity from voluntary affiliations such as religious or political party membership. Of the three types of identity, both present- and future-based identities are deliberate choices. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, is perceived by most to be acquired at birth. But this is a matter of degree. In the first place, in greater or lesser measure, there are possibilities for changing individual identity. Linguistic or religious conversion will suffice in some cases, but in others the changes may require a generation or more to

² This does not mean however, that at a later stage in his life, an individual might not very well choose the ethnicity which appears to maximize his status and opportunities (ex. Italian rather than Canadian or "Paulo" rather than "Paul").

accomplish by means of intermarriage and procreation. In the second place, collective action, in the sense of conscious modification of group behaviour and identification, may effect shifts of boundaries. It is, therefore, a putative ascription, rather than an absolute one, that we are dealing with. Ethnicity thus differs from voluntary affiliation, not because the two are dichotomous, but because they occupy different positions on a continuum (Horowitz, 1978: 113-114).

The second greatest obstacle lies in the fact that, traditionally, neither occupational groups (lawyers), nor single-sex groups (women), nor limited-age groups (adolescents), nor social classes (proletariat) are normally ethnic groups because they usually are seen as forming sub-cultures rather than cultures in their own right. Gays, belonging to a single-sex group, are usually defined as a "community", "sub-group", or "sub-culture". Moreover, a person whose sexual activity is exclusively homosexual will leave no descendants; and a society all of whose members are exclusively homosexual would die out in one generation; thereby preventing a sense of continuity in the classical sense of "blood", "heritage" and "ancestry".

The fact that both a perception of an ethnic boundary as well as ethnic culture itself (albeit ever-changing) are presumed to be

handed down through the generations also presents a difficulty; at first glance, it seems that Gay "culture" lacks both the historical "roots" and the standard transmission devices. This problem is further compounded by the fact that individuals being socialized into a Gay community will already possess a variety of cross-cutting identities - ethnic, "racial", class, gender, religious, occupational, and so on - which may claim much greater allegiance and inhibit the secondary socialization process (Bottomly, 1991: 84). A distinction must be made between primary and secondary socialization. When I refer to primary socialization, I mean being socialized into a specific ethnic or cultural group within a greater society. This group might occupy either a dominant or subordinate position and will certainly have its own conceptions of heterosexual male roles which are reinforced by customs. Secondary socialization, in this case, refers to re-socialization into a different group (Gay men) and often involves the rejection of previously held conceptions of male roles. Secondary socialization into the Gay sub-culture is required because virtually nobody is enculturated as members of the Gay community from birth.

The treatment of these seemingly inexhaustible objections rests ultimately on the particular interpretations of "ethnic group" and "ethnicity" that are adopted.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Groups.

Any definition of ethnicity is to an extent arbitrary and 'situated'. Most significantly, variations among definitions depend on the level of generalization, the methodological approach used, and the types of the variables included (Isajiw, 1974: 5). For example, the level of generalization can be either abstract or specific. While it is one thing to ask what ethnicity is, in general, regardless of place and time, it is a different matter to ask what ethnicity means in immigrant societies such as North America. Given that this is the geographical reference point of this study, a more specific definition may be required.

While it is not my intention to review the literature, which has already been done [Shibutani and Kwan (1965); Barth (1969); Greeley (1974); Isajiw (1974); DeVos and Romanucci-Ross (1975), Glazer and Moynihan (1975); Dashefsky (1976); Rose (1976); Stein (1977); Wallman (1979); Epstein (1987); Tonkin (1989) Waters (1990); Chapman (1993); Rosaldo (1993)] I will briefly indicate the fundamental yet shifting usages of ethnicity and their relationship to this study. In so doing, I will point out my criteria for constructing definitions of “ethnic group” and “ethnicity.”

An investigation into the existing definitional possibilities reveals a debate between two opposite conceptions. On the one hand

we have the classical definitions of ethnicity which treat it as an inescapable given, an absolute ascription (Barth, 1969; Greeley, 1974; Dashefsky, 1976; Rose, 1976; Isajiw, 1979; Wallman, 1979; Chapman, 1993). And in opposition to this traditional view we have the conception of the "New Ethnicity" as being socially-subjective, situational and open to interpretation and construction (Tonkin, 1989; Waters, 1990; Rosaldo, 1993).

Traditionally, ethnic groups and cultural groups were seen as being one and the same. That is to say that they, like cultural groups, were considered to be an objectively verifiable social phenomenon. The meaning, symbols, values, and norms, in short, the tradition, which they shared, could be anthropologically observed, regardless of the ideological statements, or expressed opinions of members about their tradition or their relationship with it. Consequently, classic definitions of ethnicity and ethnic group revolved around an attempt at describing a series of observable traits. One would only have to cross reference a given person or group of persons with this list in order to find out whether or not they belonged or 'fit into' a particular category.

This objective compilation of lists of traits, in effect a descriptive definition, is characteristic of earlier attempts to define ethnicity (Greeley, 1974; Dashefsky, 1976; Rose, 1976;

Isajiw, 1979; Wallman, 1979). As Isajiw (1974) demonstrates, the vast majority of classical attempts at explaining ethnicity do not assume that ethnicity is simply a category, but rather that it refers to *actual, verifiable, concrete groups with specific and sometimes unique properties which can be used to distinguish them from other groups* (Isajiw, 1974: 14).

Among the attributes used in these comparisons are the implicit if not explicit references to actual or potential political group determination as well as

common national or geographic origin or common ancestors; same culture or customs; religion, race or physical characteristics; language; consciousness of kind: "we feeling," sense of people-hood, loyalty; Gemeinschaft relations; common values or ethos; separate institutions; minority or subordinated status or majority or dominant status; immigrant groups.

(Isajiw, 15).

The distinctions mentioned most often are then: (a) common national/territorial origin, e.g., "soil"; (b) shared ancestral "roots", e.g., "blood"; (c) same culture; (d) religion; (e) "race"; and (f) language.

According to this objective conception of ethnic groups, a person does not belong to an ethnic category by choice. He is born into it and gradually becomes related to it through emotional and symbolic ties (Rose, 1976: 78). Shared cultural traits such as

language and religion can be accounted for by enculturation. The psychological identification as being different is a result of one's background, more specifically, one's socialization. While this is clearly an important factor, it is seen as being learned and therefore of secondary importance.

Common ancestral origin, real or imagined, is the single most important factor in defining ethnicity *from a classical perspective*. Along with this objective condition of descent comes the need for continuity. Ethnicity then, as seen from a positivist framework, is something with intrinsic empirical reality which is grounded firmly in one's lineage or genealogy and further reinforced by enculturation and subsequent psychological identification.

As an objective condition, this classical interpretation of ethnicity fits in well with common beliefs. When asked, most people will define their ethnicity as being the condition of belonging to a particular group (Italian, Scots-Irish-Canadian, Jewish, etc.) Yet there is a second, less often-used interpretation of ethnicity. Defined as "ethnic pride" in the 1973 edition of the American Heritage Dictionary, this definition is decidedly subjective and entirely bereft of objective criteria. Max Weber also consistently excludes any reference to objective criteria when he asserts that:

we shall call "ethnic groups" those human groups that entertain a *subjective belief* (emphasis mine) in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and emigration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely *it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists* (emphasis mine). Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a *presumed identity* (emphasis mine), not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the *political sphere* (emphasis mine). On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in the custom, physical type, or, above all, language exist among its members. (Weber, 1968, Vol. I, p.389)

Weber focuses on a presumed or subjective identity which facilitates group formation in the pursuit of common interests. Glazer and Moynihan echo this and point out that the emphasis in ethnicity has recently shifted away from culture, language and religion as such and has moved towards *interests* (Glazer and Moynihan, 1979: 8). This "New Ethnicity" differs from traditional-objective ethnicity in a variety of respects. It is about personal identity and the consciousness of self. It is socially constructed by individuals and collectivities around power, place, and time. It examines processes rather than structures. But most of all, by looking at human agency and change, it focuses on how ethnic groups

constantly make and remake themselves according to perceived conditions and interests (Stein and Hill, 1977; Tonkin, 1989; Waters, 1990; Rosaldo, 1993).

These interests are pursued effectively by ethnic groups as well as by interest-defined groups. Yet, as Glazer and Moynihan point out, one of the striking characteristics of the present situation is the extent to which we find the ethnic group defined in terms of interest, *as* (emphasis mine) an interest group (Glazer and Moynihan, 1971: 7).

The new interest-driven sense of ethnicity combines an affective tie with the pursuit of explicitly sociopolitical goals in "interest group" form: ethnic identities become instrumental and not just expressive (Stein and Hill, 1977: 13). Ethnicity becomes a means to an end and not just an end unto itself. Moreover, the new ethnicity is political and "forward looking", seeking to expand the group's social position, while the old ethnicity was "backward-looking", aimed at "preserving" the past against the encroachments of centralization (Stein and Hill, 1977: 15);

The new ethnicity, then, is subjectively constructed rather than objectively defined. Despite the fact that the objective approach serves as a quick means of categorization, the main difficulty with it is that it does not adequately explain the

persistence of ethnicity across generations or, more importantly, its emergence as an increasingly important part of identity within rapidly changing social contexts.

If 'ethnicity' is to serve as an analogy for comprehending Gay identity, then ethnicity must be understood as something that is neither an absolutely inescapable ascription nor something chosen and discarded at will; as something there from birth, nor something one joins like a club; as something that makes one neither fundamentally different from others, nor fundamentally the same (Epstein, 1987: 286).

It is at this point that the subjective approach is useful in that it makes allowances for defining ethnic groups as those human groups that entertain an ostensible belief in their common descent; it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. As Shibutani and Kwan (1965) noted,

an ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind...united by emotional bonds; although they may share a common heritage, far more important, however, is their belief that they are of common descent.

(Shibutani and Kwan 1965: 18)

It seems clear that some combination of objective and subjective perspectives is necessary in understanding ethnic identification. To this end, from the objective position I recognize

that

the most basic notion of ethnicity as "belonging", as noted by DeVos and Romanucci-Ross (1975), and concurred in by most scholars, derives from those basic facts of birth; the given facts of sex, biological features, time of birth, place, and descent. *The extent to which persons or groups identify with these facts then depends on the individual, the ethnic group itself, and external factors* (emphasis mine).

(McCready, 1983: 210)

That is to say that a general objective definition of ethnic group would be an involuntary group of people who share the same culture (Isajiw, 1974: 21). I reiterate that what I mean by involuntary is that the person has no choice as to the specific cultural group which provides for him the basic process of socialization; it is an accident of birth.

The genus for my definition therefore is the *involuntary group*. By including the socialization process as the basic element of the concept, involuntary group connotes also the sense of peoplehood and the Gemeinschaft type of relations as other related elements in the concept (Isajiw, 1974: 20).

An ethnic group cannot be understood as an involuntary group alone however. It must be self-perceived or attributed and it exists only as human aggregates utilize it as a basis for aggregation and of socio-cultural organization (Devos 1975: 16). It exists only insofar as it is recognized, interpreted and experienced. Ethnicity

consequently can be rightly understood as an aspect of a collectivity's self-recognition and "ethnic pride" as well as an aspect of its recognition in the eyes of outsiders. It involves the creation of, and the belief in, a "moral community" à la Durkheim through the symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate "us" from "them". Ethnicity involves a double boundary: a boundary from within (created and sustained by the socialization process) and a boundary from without (established by the process of intergroup relations) (Barth, 1969).

For the purpose of this study, I am using more of a subjective description of ethnicity than a compositional definition. *The important matter in linking the two approaches is that the subjective ethnic identification should not be seen as something arbitrary but as a phenomenon based on a real link between a person and a group which has shared a culture.* Keeping this in mind, it is feasible to loosely define an ethnic group as an involuntary group of individuals united by ties of culture and/or real or imagined ancestry who are conscious of forming an involuntary subgroup within a society and who are identified by others within the society as belonging to this involuntary subgroup. There is no requirement for a persistence, over generations, of the same socialization or cultural pattern, yet some *perception* of a group boundary must

endure. This perception, or ethnicity, can be sustained by shared objective characteristics, such as language and religion, or by more subjective notions of common interests, contributions to a sense of 'groupness', or by some combination of both. In any case, symbolic or subjective attachments must relate, at however distant a remove, to an observably real group.

Gay versus Homosexual.

'Gay' as a distinctive social category was not distinguished in popular discourse until the early 1960's. By the 1970's, it was increasingly widespread; by the 1980's, though still not sanctioned in American culture at large, it was prevalent if not canonical in the Gay cultural system. The simple use of the word 'Gay', however, is insignificant when compared to its pragmatic consequences which take into account an entire cultural system. This spectrum includes not only same-sex desires but Gay selves and personal identity creation, Gay neighbours, and Gay social practices that are particularly distinctive of our prosperous, post industrial, Western society (Herdt, 1992: 4).

'Gay' represents more than a sexual act, as 'homosexual' once did. It connotes not only identity and role, but also a distinctive system of norms, attitudes, rules and beliefs from which the culture

of Gay men is made, a culture that sustains the social relations of same-sex-desire (Herdt, 1992).

What does being Gay mean? Is being Gay an orientation (like a fixed, immovable or permanent position relative to some other alignment)? Or is it possibly a preference (like a taste for strawberry ice cream chosen over vanilla)? Sexual theory (especially the works of Simon and Gagnon, 1967; Stein 1977; D'Emilio, 1983; Epstein, 1987; Money, 1987; Herdt, 1992; Rist, 1992; Chapman, 1993) has been preoccupied with a debate between these two views; "essentialism" and "constructionism" - a debate which not only is of great importance in reorienting our thinking about sexuality, but which also has been ingrained in the folk understandings of "Gayness" in our society - often in highly contradictory fashion.

Essentialism is often equated with "traditional" views on sexuality in general, but can be linked specifically to deterministic theories such as sociobiology. Essentialist views emphasize the "natural" dimensions of sexuality. Consequently, essentialist conceptions of homosexuality seek to account for such persons on the basis of some core of difference, whether the difference be medical or hormonal, or a consequence of early child-rearing, or "just the way we are" (Simon and Gagnon, 1967; Stein 1977; Epstein,

1987; Money, 1987; Rist, 1992; Chapman, 1993)

While essentialists treat sexuality as a biological force and consider sexual identities to be cognitive realizations of genuine, underlying differences, constructionists suggest that both sexuality and sexual identities are social forms which represent cultural constructs rather than immutable biological facts (Stein, 1990).

In the first case, there is considered to be some "essence" within homosexuals that makes them homosexual - some Gay "core" of their being, or their psyche, or their genetic make-up. In the second case, homosexual, 'Gay', and "lesbian" are just labels, created by cultures and applied to the self.

(Epstein, 1987: 241-2)

Where essentialism takes for granted that all societies consist of people who are either heterosexuals or homosexuals (with perhaps some bisexuals), constructionists argue that the notion of "the homosexual" is a Western socio-historical production, not universally applicable, and worthy of explanation in its own right. And where essentialism would treat the self-attribution of a "homosexual identity" as unproblematic - as simply the conscious recognition of a true, underlying "orientation" - constructionism focuses attention on identity as a complex developmental outcome, the consequence of an interactive process of social labelling and self-identification (Simon and Gagnon, 1967; Stein 1977; Epstein, 1987; Money, 1987; Rist, 1992).

Constructionism as a critique of sexual essentialism has played an important role in debunking the traditional view of Gays as being essentially and unalterably different. Much like essentialism, though, constructionism should not be thought of as a specific school, but rather as a broader tendency of thinking that has found representations in a number of disciplines. At the risk of oversimplifying, it can be said that recent historical and sociological work on Gays in Western societies traces its roots to two schools of sociology: symbolic interactionists, particularly the pathbreaking work of John Gagnon and William Simon on 'sexual conduct'; and labelling theorists, especially Mary McIntosh's analysis of the 'homosexual role'.

(Epstein, 1987: 246)

In 1967, Simon and Gagnon established the first constructionist explanation for the socio-cultural organization of "homosexual" life. Building upon symbolic interactionist theory, they contextualized this development, arguing that "the patterns of adult homosexuality are consequent upon the social structure and values that surround the homosexual after he becomes or conceives of himself as homosexual" (Simon and Gagnon, 1967, 179). In this way, they traced the origin of homosexual life to the elements of surrounding cultures and social structures.

While symbolic interactionists debunked the notion of a 'natural' sexuality, it was that first provided the means to challenge essentialist views of 'the homosexual' as a natural, transhistorical category. This challenge, which lies at the crux of

the constructionist argument about homosexuality, can be expressed in the assertion that although every known society has examples of homosexual behaviour, only recently (and only in the west) has there arisen a conception of 'the homosexual' as a distinct type of person (Epstein, 1987: 248).

As Stein points out, in place of essentialism, McIntosh (1982) argues that 'the homosexual' has come to occupy a distinct 'social role' in modern, western, industrialized societies. Since homosexual practices are widespread but socially threatening, a special, stigmatized category of individuals is created so as to keep the rest of society pure. By this means, a "clear-cut, publicized and recognizable threshold between permissible and impermissible behaviour" is constructed; anyone who begins to approach that threshold is immediately threatened with being labelled a full-fledged deviant: one of "them" (Stein, 1990: 254).

A homosexual identity, then, is created not so much through homosexual activity per se (what labelling theorists would call "primary deviance"), but through the reactions of the deviant individual to being so described, and through the internalization of the imposed categorization ("secondary deviance").

(Epstein, 1987: 248)

Seemingly, when we scrutinize the essentialist-constructionist debate closely, it immediately unravels into two underlying

dualisms: 'choice' vs. 'constraint', and 'sameness' vs. difference'. Indeed, the theoretical debate is located on the all-too-familiar terrain of nature vs. nurture.

Constructionism insists that homosexuals and heterosexuals are basically the same; that is to say that they are not fundamentally distinct types of beings. It underlines the possibilities for the self-conscious creation of sexual identities ('choice'). Essentialism, conversely, stresses the existence of constraint on one's sexual identity: sexual desires are a 'fixed orientation' rather than a 'preference'.

As against the essentialist position that sexuality is a biological force seeking expression in ways that are preordained, constructionists treat sexuality as a blank slate, capable of bearing whatever meanings are generated by the society in question.

Essentialists are "realists" in their insistence that social categories (e.g., "homosexual", "heterosexual", "bisexual") reflect an underlying reality of difference; constructionists are nominalists" in their contrary assertion that such categories are arbitrary, human-imposed divisions of the continuum of experience - categories create social types, rather than revealing them.

(Stein, 1990: 244-5)

Constructionism, however, has trapped itself in the basic dualisms of classic liberalism.

Liberal discourse goes back and forth between two extreme views of the relation between the individual and society: either it asserts that individuals are free to create themselves, rise above their environments, and take control over their lives; or it sees individuals as simply the product of their environment (or their genes or what have you), molded like clay into various shapes. Similarly, constructionism vacillates between a certain type of libertarian individualism in which sexual categories may be appropriated, transcended, and deconstructed at will; and just the opposite conception of the individual's sexual identity as created for him or her by the social and historical context. In either case, the 'individual' is pitted against 'Society'; and what is missing is any dynamic sense of how society comes to dwell within individuals or how individuality comes to be socially constructed.

(Epstein, 1987: 259)

Once we abandon both the strict essentialist notion of identity as forever fixed within the psyche, as well as the strict constructionist conception of identity as an arbitrary acquisition, we can recognize that a Gay identity may have a comprehensible significance for individuals without necessarily binding them to any limited notion of what this identity is supposed to entail.

Widespread social and political changes in our society have transformed the meanings of "homosexuality." Originally stressing the causes of individual examples of homosexuality, American cultural discourse has obscured and ignored the causes of collective 'homosexual' roles and 'Gay' culture, thus minimizing or altogether rejecting the legitimacy of any inquiry into the subject.

Over time, various investigators have argued whether "homosexuality" and 'Gay' should be identically labelled and whether or not they should be identified as communities or cultures, ghettos, or life-styles, orientations or preferences. As a result of this, contemporary Gay studies have been polarized, hindered by the absolutes implicit in the nature versus nurture discourse. To summarize, an essentialist view holds that Gay people, as a people, have existed throughout recorded human history, an aberrant by-product of nature; a constructionist assessment says that our conception of Gay people has been established by the values of contemporary Western society and that it would be infeasible to draw an analogy between homosexuality as practiced in, for example, ancient Greece and as it is defined today in either Canada's or America's extensive Gay subculture (there are differences between the two). Both concepts are essentially incongruous and incompatible; one attempting to unite feelings and behaviour across vast expanses of time and variant cultures, the other deconstructing modern perceptions of homosexuality as medical and psychological conceptions.

Inasmuch as Gays have never been a systematically categorized group, type, or subculture, Western Gays have always had as a central intellectual concern the need for sound definitions

and accurate labels that reflected the view of homosexuality as seen out of their own particular life's window rather than that of the so-called "professionals" (Thompson, 1987).

Subscribing to the belief in the need for specific, relevant definitions and as an alternative to the prevailing fascination given to the word "homosexual" and its related assumptions, I would suggest that the word "Gay" and its connotations are more likely to generate insightful understandings regarding the social and cultural meanings of same-sex relationships and their implications in the study of new ethnicities. In this context, the word "Gay" designates a more complex as well as a distinct kind of human action than the sphere of actions identified by the word homosexual. The word "Gay" is a meaning-centered, social, and multidimensional concept. It identifies those who have embraced a distinctive world view or outlook of reality which is self-imposed and a self-defined component of the beliefs, actions, and even the vocabulary affecting human interactions. Hence, the word "Gay" specifies a type of consciousness controlling personal identities, social inclinations, and anticipatory orientations. Various interdependent factors define and consolidate this Gay consciousness and the Gay community that shares this world view.

Part II.

Part II deals with methodological issues related to the recruitment and interviewing of 15 Gay male informants over a two-year period.

Field work in Gay communities is shaped by two factors: the secrecy of many Gay populations and the stigmatization both of Gays and of researchers who study them. Given the stigmatization of Gays, researchers must be especially careful to protect the identities of respondents. The literature on field entree, trust, and research negotiation does not adequately portray the processual and problematic character of field-work. Entree into public Gay settings is easy, but entree into more private areas depends on personal relationships with Gays. The major research bargain in such relationships is the same as that of everyday life: mutual exchange of information and interaction.³

To reflect this reality, I decided to approach the information gathering process in two mutually supporting ways: (1) with a structured interview based upon a standardized questionnaire⁴; and, (2) with an open discussion on any specific topic related to the questionnaire (e.g. "coming out"). These facets were chosen by the

³ For a thorough discussion of related issues, see Warren, Carol A. "Fieldwork in the Gay World: Issues in Phenomenological Research" in Journal of Social Issues 33, no.3 (1977), 93-107.

⁴ A tabular summary of the respondents' backgrounds, derived from the structured interviews, can be found on pages 41-45.

respondents according to their general interest and were dealt with as oral history.⁵

(1) The Questionnaire.

In developing the questionnaire, I relied heavily upon my review of the literature which came to form the core of Part I. In order to encourage the completion of the questionnaire, and being fully cognizant of the fact that information about an individual's sexual orientation can lead to serious problems with friends, family, and employers, I felt it necessary to assure the respondents of their complete anonymity. However, it was also necessary for me to obtain informed consent from each participant. I felt that I had to ensure that each respondent was aware of the nature of the study and his right to withdraw his participation at any time.

In order to satisfy the requirements of both anonymity and informed consent, I designed a fact sheet which was attached to the front of each questionnaire. (Both the fact sheet and questionnaire are reproduced in Appendix A). This fact-sheet describes essential information about the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of participation. The respondent was asked not to sign his name but to check the bottom of the page to indicate that he had read the questionnaire before beginning.

⁵ Respondents' statements can be found on pages 46-81.

A preliminary draft of the questionnaire was pretested on 3 respondents; their comments were used to reword several items for increased clarity and comprehension. The final revised questionnaire contained 48 items, took about 1-2 hours to complete, and served to provide a data base of background information, opinions and experiences which were later expanded upon using oral histories.

(2) Oral History.

After completing the questionnaire, individual respondents were encouraged to elaborate on those aspects of his story which were most significant to him. It was hoped that data derived from the questionnaires could be used as background information while the oral history section would provide depth to a range of informants. Aside from promoting the development of mutual empathy, the oral history can uncover much which is hidden, neglected or dismissed by more traditional interviewing techniques.

This section contains the result of unstructured interviews with 15 Gay men. Their stories span the last 2 years and they are wide-ranging accounts, covering home and family life, parent's backgrounds, education and work, memories of friends and lovers and being Gay in different cultures. The interviews were organized chronologically, usually based on an outline decided by the speaker

who selected the topic to be discussed. I did not want this section to be a series of case studies of Gay men, nor did I want my sociological comments to interfere with the flow of their words. The men talk for themselves about themselves. Obviously, shared experiences and common themes emerge, but I felt that by interposing conclusions and taking such themes out of context, the rich, multilayered texture of a person's life can so easily be distorted. I therefore limit my comments to those found in Part IV: Analysis and Discussion.

(3) Recruiting the informants.

As mentioned previously, my goal was to obtain informants from as diverse a cross-section of the community as possible. I therefore used a variety of methods to reach potential respondents.

I first approached friends and acquaintances, both in Montreal and Vancouver, and asked them if either they personally or anyone they knew might be interested in participating in the study. They in turn either introduced me to acquaintances of theirs who either participated themselves and/or introduced me to someone else.

In addition to this snow-ball sampling, I approached several university groups such the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgendered Students of McGill (LBGTM), Concordia's Queer Collective and the

Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals at UBC (GLUBC).

Concurrent with these activities, I appeared at a number of meetings of local Gay organizations. I explained the purpose of the study and, when asked, described its theoretical foundation and methodology. I distributed questionnaires, pencils, and stamped return envelopes to any interested members at these meetings. One person⁶ responded and this person later introduced me to one other participant.

(4) The Sample.

The lack of representative sampling has been perhaps the most troublesome criticism of research on Gays. Much of the research, for example, is based on samples which are biased in favor of White respondents who are relatively well educated and affluent (e.g. Masters and Johnson, 1979). Another sample bias favors those who participate in some aspect of the public Gay community such as a bar, club, bathhouse, organization, church, etc. (e.g. Warren, 1977). I do not know how many Gays rarely or never participate in the public Gay community, or how these individuals differ from those who do

⁶ I attribute this apparent lack of interest to three factors: (1) Several organizations I visited serviced a primarily francophone clientele. Consequently, the complexity of the questionnaire and the "language barrier" may have been a factor. (2) The fact that I am "Straight" was/is often perceived as an impediment to my research. (3) A great deal of attention was being paid to the preparation for several activities related to the Farah Foundation AIDS awareness campaign and my presentation was followed by campaign recruiters.

participate. Therefore it is difficult to judge the importance of this bias. A second objection, equally applicable to this study, can be seen in the fact that most samples are drawn from a few highly unrepresentative geographical locations.

In an attempt at responding to these criticisms, I turn to a noted researcher who has argued that sample representativeness is required only for certain types of research, and that the charge of nonrepresentativeness has not been applied in a meaningful way to much of Gay studies.

If the focus of one's study is demographic (inferring population characteristics on the basis of sample characteristics), the sample representativeness is crucial to the adequacy of the study. If the focus is to explore diversity, sample representativeness is not particularly relevant, provided that the sample is sufficiently diverse as to represent the main variations or diversity in the parent population....If the focus of one's study is to refute general claims about a population, highly nonrepresentative samples from a biased subpopulation are adequate to refute, although they have virtually no potential for establishing general theses about the total population .

(Suppe 1982: note 2)

As the goal of my fieldwork was to explore diversity while pointing out commonalities, I felt that I had to make a conscious effort at ensuring that my sample was as varied as possible. In defense of the diversity of my sample, I can make only one major observation: my respondents were chosen specifically for their

diversity. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds and include members of a wide range of “racial”, age, educational, occupational and religious groups.

(5) Points of convergence: a self-reflective moment.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this project was overcoming the barriers between myself and my peers. Time and again, I was asked by friends and colleagues alike “why are you doing this project on this subject?” or “what makes you think they would want to talk to you?”

Outside of my supervisors, I have for the longest time been uncomfortable discussing my project. I have felt that it was not enough to simply state that I was working on “Gay male identity construction” but would have to add in such descriptors as “they” feel or “they” think.

Even amongst my peers, while living in a graduate-student residence, I sometimes found it difficult describing my thesis research. One fellow anthropology student whom I hold in fairly high regard told me that when asked by his parents what his peers were researching, he felt too uncomfortable to talk about my work. I can hardly blame him for his omission as I myself have often felt it necessary to be deliberately vague; I felt that it would be more

comfortable for most people to hear me say that I was working on the intersection of gender and ethnic identity than a “Gay issue”.

When I did clearly state my interests and objectives, I was shocked at the reactions. One of my professors during my undergrad. studies politely said “that’s an interesting idea” while two others offered me some “friendly advice” by stating that “you’re killing your career” and “are you sure that you want to be labelled as someone who researches Gay issues? It might hinder your future work?”. Something tells me that if it were not en vogue to be politically correct, I would have heard somewhat harsher words.

If I thought that I could discuss these problems with friends or family, I was wrong. My attempts at verbalizing my questions and concerns were met with confusion and I did not have to experience a palpable distancing too often before I realized that “that” topic made many people very uncomfortable. Their discomfort made it impossible for me to share a very important part of my life with them. It alienated me and worse still, made me question my ability and willingness to work in this area. I later realized that I was altering my behaviour to assuage the discomfort of others. I would deliberately avoid the subject altogether because it made other people feel better to not have to deal with it. I had, in a very real sense, put myself in a closet of my own making.

One day I realized how difficult it must be for Gay men to come to grips with their own sexuality in the face of levels of disapproval and disappointment far exceeding the ones I had to deal with. I wondered how often they had to suppress their need to talk, to be understood and not just politely listened to. How often did they spare their friends and family the discomfort of having to deal with one of “them”?

If my own experiences left me feeling abandoned and insecure about my work, I wondered how theirs would make them feel about their lives. It is one thing to put your work aside for six months and give up hope: I cannot imagine what it would be like to give up on oneself for fear of going on; for being permanently labelled one of “them”.

My research made me realize that one of the root causes of discord in our society lay in the fact that we have a deeply inbred concept of our own fellow human beings as being intrinsically “other”. We often see people in “other” groups as categories rather than as human beings and we often refuse to see or understand the life-style or life perspective that these others have. This is the essence of discrimination: formulating opinions about others not based on individual merits, but on their membership in or association with a group with assumed characteristics.

Many of those who shared their opinions with me initially thought that I was going out as a representative of all Straights to examine all Gays - to neatly fit (or force) them into a comfortable category and make them more comprehensible to Straights. This was never my intention. Fortunately for me, it was easy for me to explain that I am not, and do not intend to be representative of all Straights/heterosexuals. I am simply Alan Simoneau, a student of anthropology perhaps but more importantly, a student of life. The people with whom I spoke, I spoke to as people, not as categories.

I came to develop a real sense of rapport with some of my informants and learned a great deal throughout our conversations; both about them and about myself. They create and recreate themselves on a daily basis. So do I. It was therefore through a great deal of self- as well as other analysis that we were able to approach the subject, not necessarily as researcher and informant, but as collaborators. Indeed the only question I was ever asked (albeit in a multitude of forms) was "why do you, as a Straight person, want to write about this?". My answers were never short so it is difficult for me to try to faithfully represent them here. What I can honestly state is that I am not trying to analytically discern what made or makes them Gay. If I come to understand this one day, it will be of secondary importance to me personally. I sometimes

wonder if there is an answer (or many answers) to that mystery. My real motives lay in something far simpler.

The crux of the matter lay in the fact that whether we chose to admit it or not, most people question their sexuality at one time or another. Who am I to say that my answer is better than another's... Fortunately for me, I met several men who understood what I meant. I soon learned that when you first meet people all you notice is the differences between you and them but with time, you start noticing the similarities: I guess that's how all friendships begin.

Part III.

Part III represents an overview of structured and unstructured interviews undertaken with 15 gay men over a period of two years. The interviews were either entirely tape recorded or, where background noise prohibited taping, reconstructed from extensive notes. A tabular summary of the respondents' backgrounds entitled Description of Sample Characteristics is provided to familiarize the reader with the informants personal histories. Additionally, respondents' prepared statements are presented in the hope of giving the reader a better sense of key issues, ideas and experiences prior to the in-depth discussion found in Part IV.

Table 1: Description of Sample Characteristics

NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	PARENT'S OCC.	PARENT'S ECONOMIC CLASS
Sam	25	store manager	contractor/housewife	upper middle class
Trevor	26	bouncer	barber/domestic	working-class
Ian	22	student/waiter	lawyer/teacher	upper-class
Yves	24	student/artist/waiter	accountant/housewife	middle-class
Brian	27	computer programmer	restauranters	middle-class
Sami	32	store owner	salesman/housewife	middle-class
George	31	entrepreneur	furrier/housewife	working-class
Donald	57	restauranteur	restauranteur/housewife	middle-class
Bernard	36	airline employee	carpenter/housewife	middle-class
Colin	22	waiter/designer	contractor/nurse	middle-class
Marc	27	account executive	lawyer/housewife	middle-class
Glenn	21	computer programmer	butcher/saleslady	working-class
Troy	23	waiter/actor/dancer	teacher/housewife	middle-class
Vinh	27	student	civil servant/housewife	middle-class
Steven	32	security agent	teacher/teacher	middle-class

NAME	SELF-DEFINED ECONOMIC CLASS	ETHNIC BACKGROUND	PARENTS' RELIGION
Sam	not specified	Italian	Roman Catholic
Trevor	working-class	Jamaican	Anglican
Ian	middle-class	Moroccan Jew	Jewish
Yves	working-class	French Canadian	Roman Catholic
Brian	middle-class	Chinese (Cantonese)	Presbyterian-Taoist
Sami	middle-class	Turkish	Muslim
George	upper-middle	Macedonian Greek	Greek Orthodox
Donald	midle-class	English-Welsh	United Church
Bernard	middle-class	Canadian (British)	Anglican
Colin	middle-class	Canadian (Scot-Brit)	United Church
Marc	upper-middle-class	Canadian (German/Finnish/Brit)	Lutheran
Glenn	middle-class	Scots-Irish-Canadian	Presbyterian
Troy	working-class	Afro-Canadian	Baptist
Vinh	middle-class	Vietnamese	Buddhist
Steven	working-class	Indian-Canadian	Baptist

NAME	RELIGIOUS ADHERENCE PARENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY	
Sam	none	extremely negative
Trevor	none	hostile
Ian	none	homosexuality seen as being incompatible with Judaism
Yves	none	homosexuality seen as as sin/mental disorder
Brian	none	homosexuals seen as degenerates
Sami	none	Passive homosexuals are degenerates
George	none	taboo subject
Donald	United Church	homosexuality seen as a sin/mental disorder
Bernard	agnostic	combination of sickness and criminal behavior
Colin	none	extremely negative, adherence to "artistic" stereotypes
Marc	none	homosexuals are social outcasts & moral degenerates
Glenn	none	hostility (father), way of getting attention (mother)
Troy	none	extremely negative
Vinh	Buddhist	taboo subject
Steven	Baptist	very accepting of difference

NAME	AGE OF COMING OUT	EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP	FACED DISCRIMINATION
Sam	20	no	yes: family, landlord, employer
Trevor	n/a	no	n/a
Ian	17	no	yes: family, landlords, random
Yves	20	no	yes: family, employer, landlords
Brian	20	no	yes: family, customers
Sami	17	no	yes: family, friends, employers, customers
George	19	yes	yes: family, Red Cross
Donald	17	yes	yes: family, military, landlord
Bernard	20	no	yes: family
Colin	19	no	yes: family, work-related, random
Marc	23	yes	yes: family, social situations
Glenn	19	yes	yes: family, teachers
Troy	21	no	no
Vinh	23	no	yes: random
Steven	14	no	no
			44

NAME

PRIMARY IDENTITY

Sam

gay

Trevor

gay

Ian

gay

Yves

gay

Brian

gay

Sami

gay

George

gay

Donald

gay

Bernard

gay

Colin

gay/occupation tie

Marc

gay (occupation a close second)

Glenn

gay

Troy

gay/black

Vinh

gay

Steven

gay

45

Sam

Profile:

Originally from Montreal but now living in Vancouver, Sam was raised in an upper middle class, Italian-Canadian, Catholic family. He is 25 years old and manages a health food store.

It all comes down to this: when I lived in Montreal, the first twenty-two years of my life really, I didn't really choose who I was. All the decisions were made for me...sort of like this ideal that was held up to me....a mold I had to fit into. I was baptized when I was a baby; it was decided that I would be catholic and I was raised as one. I went through all the regular rituals; first communion, confession, confirmation, etc. it was expected that one day I would marry...it was expected my bride would be Italian. I was born an Italian male, the only male in the family. I was raised with this idea that I would carry on the family bloodline: that was more or less all that was expected of me: get a good job, marry a good Italian woman in a catholic church, and have lots of children. It was all show, really.

All I know is that from a very young age I felt different in Italian school and I felt different at family gatherings. I felt that it was all an act and that I didn't want it to go on. I did not belong; the religion was not part of me, the traditional dances were not part of me, the music was not part of me, nothing was part of me. Except the food; I love pasta. But that alone doesn't make me Italian.

So, for so long I knew I wasn't Italian. I just didn't belong. I didn't fit into the mold of being an Italian but I wasn't ready to admit who I really was. At times this hesitance prompted me to act in weird ways I sometimes acted like a woman; sometimes dressed like one. My family called me a rebel. My father called me useless. He wondered how I could be his son. You see, my father knew. He always did. At first it seemed like nothing but instinct. He detected my difference quite early. It wasn't a conscious awareness but more

like a vague premonition, one that he stored away and remembered later for use in the intimidation and humiliation to come.

I was his scapegoat. Whenever something went wrong it was always my fault. I didn't have to do anything wrong, I could be in the wrong place at the wrong time...but I always got the beatings. It's almost as if he knew something was wrong with me and was trying to beat some sense into me. Whenever we were in public he always put on the act: we were a good little family...his family.

So, while I was called the rebel by some and "that useless piece of shit" by my father, I didn't know what to call myself. I just went about my daily business, got good grades in high-school and spent time with my friends who were mostly female. I guess I never really knew what the hell I was, I just knew that I wasn't the typical Italian teen-ager.

Then it happened. While my friends and I and would go out clubbing and they all joked about how many girls would be flirting with me, I realized that I was falling into the old act. I didn't want to be what most people saw me as: typical Italian stud; all he does is go out with his friends and pick up. Did they ever notice that I never went home with any of them? Did they ever realize that one of the other guys stepped in after I had, as somebody once put it, "made the kill". Anyway, while we were going out clubbing I was getting involved in a Gay support group. I thought I had found a place where I really belonged. The people accepted me as a person: not as a Straight person, not as a Gay person...just a person. I thought that it was great. I knew that I belonged here, that I could be myself. Besides, I always had a greater physical and emotional attraction to guys, I never was really attracted to women (sure I found some pretty, but more like a bouquet of flowers than as people I could really love). The first man I was with sexually was incredible. I never felt so loved before. I thought I was in paradise. I was convinced that no woman could ever be like this and that this relationship (it turned out to be one) would last forever. I know now that both Straight and Gay relationships hold many things in common: lies, deception, betrayal. Oh well, that's life. Despite this I

knew immediately what I had more or less suspected for many years: I was different from the others...I was different because I was Gay.

When I first came out I knew that I had found a place where I could be myself, where I had something in common with everyone and I didn't have to fake anything. I have to say that what I had in common was not forced: it was not conscious...it just seemed that we all shared something that Straight people just couldn't understand. It was at that point that my family just gave up on me. I was expecting my father to kill me but he just turned his back on me and refused to say anything more than "I knew it". To this day my entire family refuses to talk to me. I doubt that they even mention my name.

All of this made things easier on me. They literally pushed me away; my bags were packed for me within an afternoon. All this confirmed to me that I wasn't one of them. By now I knew what I was. I knew who I belonged with and I knew why. I decided to move out of town because there was nothing left here for me but memories of who I used to be. I decided to go west to Vancouver.

Being in Montreal I had to be Italian. I was recognized as being so by everyone. My looks said I was Italian, so did my name. But I am not Italian! I am Gay. It's strange that as soon as I went to Vancouver I didn't have to try to do or be anything...I just WAS.

Trevor

Profile:

Trevor grew up in a working class family in Kingston, Jamaica and moved to the Little Burgundy district of Montreal when he was 12. He is 26 years old, works as a doorman and is reputed to have gang ties.

Alright. So, what am I? Am I a Black man? Am I an African-American? Let me tell you something. I grew up in Kingston. I'm a Jamaican. Unless you understand that you'll never understand me. I grew up poor. While I was in Jamaica that's all I had time to think about...being poor. When my family moved up to Canada when I was twelve everything changed. We all moved to Burgundy and that's when my life started, see.

I knew I was Gay from the time I was 13. I knew it and I hated it. Fuck man, I had live twelve years in Jamaica. I knew what a fuckin' Bati Man was. I knew that I was it. I looked at guys and got a hard on. The bitches, fuck man, they didn't do nothing for me.

I knew that I was sick, man. That something was wrong with me. I knew that if my boys found out that my life wouldn't be worth shit. Bati men don't get any respect.

Anyway, you see that I decided that this just wasn't me. I just had to toughen myself up, see. I was the rudest of Rude Boys. Just ask around. But hell, you know that already. I ran with the boys and did what I had to do to get the Respect I deserved. If it meant taking someone on, I did it. If it meant shanking [stabbing] someone, I did it. I carry my 9 [Berretta 9mm semi-automatic pistol] to this day and nobody messes with Trevor 'cause Trevor ain't gonna take shit from anyone. When I walk the streets, I get respect. When I work the door, I get respect. Shit, when I was inside [Bordeaux prison], I got respect.

Let me tell you something, respect don't mean shit. I couldn't look at myself in the fuckin' mirror without being sick. What the fuck, I knew who and what I was...it made me sick. Everything I ever knew told me that I was wrong: my mother and her religion [Baptist]; my father and his macho ideas of what a man is supposed to be; the boys; the movies; everything.

Fuck that. I know I'm not like you. I'm not like most of you people. I'm a fag. I'm queer. I'm a Batty Man. But that won't get me anywhere in life.

The Black community says I should be respected, so I am. They say I should fuck the Bitches, so I do. They say I should take care of my family, and I do. They say I shouldn't be a Bati Man...but what they don't know won't hurt them.

I'm not a Black man. I'm a Gay Black man. I was born Gay just like the way I was born Black. I can't change either. Everybody thinks that, when it comes down to it, being Black is all there is. So I play the game. I'm Michael Jordan, Malcolm X, and Ice T all rolled up in one. If you fuck with me, you're going down. That's what they see. That's what they want to see. They couldn't handle anything else.

You ask me what I am...even if you don't ask I know that's what you mean...I'm a fag. All that other shit is just like the clothes that I wear. It's as much a part of my life as my 9, see. I carry it with me because it's part of my life...no...I carry it with me because it lets me live my life the way they say that I'm supposed to. It's easier for me to be seen the way they want to see me than the way I really am....but I am a fag.

Ian

Profile:

Raised in both an Upper Class Jewish home in Montreal as well as on a Kibbutz in Israel, Ian works as a waiter while studying to be a bio-chemist. He is 22 years old.

What do you see what you look at me? If your like most Straights you see a guy who has a style of dress which is typical of his age. Yes I do wear docs. My jeans are Levis and my jacket is a typical Black leather m.c.. When you look beyond the surface there is more to meet the eye. That is of course you know what to look for. The most obvious are the patches. The typical pink triangle and the standard "silence = death". Well, what about the key-chain? How about the blue handkerchief that sticks out of my left, back pocket? Well if you don't know by now I'm not going to be the one who tells you what it means.

I'm Gay. I'm Gay and I'm proud. I'm Gay and I'm proud and I'm in your face. Deal with it. I am who I am and I make no apologies about it. Seven years of Muay Thai say that I don't have to. The lessons I learned growing up as a Jew say that I should be proud of who I am, and that I should not allow anyone to think that they can step on me. You can call me an activist but I prefer to call myself a militant. I am different. I am different from these people who call themselves the norm, and I must always be different from them. I do not belong to them, nor they to me. As the saying goes, I'm here, I'm queer, get used to it.

I'm sure my parents don't appreciate the fact that I'm proud to be Gay. As far as they're concerned it's bad enough that I'm Gay, that I'm vocal about it makes it worse. They were always like this. I guess I gave them reason to be. I told my dad that I thought I was Gay on the day after my Bar Mitzvah. I almost gave him a heart attack. Here I was, a good little Jew talking to him about the sexual

and emotional desires I had of another man. That was the first and only time he ever hit me. Two weeks later I was shipped off to Israel where I lived with my grandmother on a Kibbutz (believe it or not they still have them).

Here I became a better Jew. Here is where I learned more about my heritage and the importance of continuing the family line. Here is where I did my military service. All this made my father proud. Unfortunately for him, here is where I also fell in love...with a man of course. Now if you think coming out in Montreal is hard, imagine what it would be like in a Kibbutz on the fringes of the Negev desert where support groups are not exactly common. Forget about even trying to express my Gayness in the army, the Israelis take their soldiering seriously. It was a rare thing indeed when I was able to get a piece of ass, so to speak. So, when my mandatory service was over, I moved back to Montreal.

It was here that I decided to embrace the Gay life- style completely. I came out. I was no longer just a soldier who fucked other men. That is strange given that the I.D.F. [Israeli Defense Forces] has many women in it. I told my family that I was Gay and I moved into the village. My mother called in the Rabbi who told me I wasn't a good Jew because Jews were never "like that". It was at that moment that I renounced my faith. That whole environment pushed me away because they could not accept me for what I was. I was not going to change, they were not going to change; the only thing I could do was abandon my faith. It had already become secondary to my being Gay. I know it was a conscious choice but in reality I had no choice. Everything about me was Gay. I felt that I had more of a connection with the so-called "sexual deviants" than I did with the Jews; both groups were murdered in Auschwitz. It wasn't just a Jewish problem.

So here I am, trying to get a few points across to whoever will be reading this. I might as well be direct about it, after all, that's just the way I am.

First, I was born Gay.

Second, no matter what everyone tried to brainwash me into thinking over the years, nothing could take away the fact that I am Gay.

Third, I am proud to be Gay. There are others out there who are just as proud.

Fourth, I have chosen to live my life as it was meant to be lived: as a Gay man.

Fifth, that choice put me at odds with my religion and my race. They chose to persuade me to change but it couldn't be done. When they saw this they chose to present me with an ultimatum. Either I was Gay, or I was I Jew.

Sixth, I was forced to be Jewish through socialization into my family. While I was always proud of my heritage, this pride ended when I was forced to choose. I was prouder to be Gay than I was to be Jewish; it was closer to me.

Seventh, I chose to be true to myself and to be Gay. In a way, I had no choice, it's the way I was born. The fact that I decided to accept this proves to me that it's right for me.

Eighth, my choosing to be Gay means that, at least to me, I am not a Jew.

Last, I am Gay. I am proud to be Gay. There are others like me and we are our own people. I personally will fight for my people and I am not the only one who will do so.

Yves

Profile:

Yves is twenty-four years old and grew up in a Middle Class family in the entirely French-speaking area of Lac St-Jean, Quebec. He moved to Montreal when he was eighteen years old and is presently studying English Literature and Fine Arts.

I never understood how a man and a woman could be together. I never understood why a man would want to be with a woman when he could be with another man. After all, who better to understand a man's thoughts, his dreams, his desires, and his soul.

I always knew I was different. I used to think of myself as being some kind of a spirit. I wanted to believe that I was not of this world; in a sense I guess I was right about that.

Really, when you think about it you can see that Gays are not like Straight men. We do not see the need to limit ourselves by following ridiculous notions of manhood. More than anyone else we know what it is to be a man. We are strong, caring and wise. We are brave in the face of opposition and creative in the face of stagnation.

If all of humankind could be represented as a tree and its branches, Gays would be the branches that grow the farthest away from the tree itself. Its fruit (no pun intended) and its seed grows the sweetest because it has the most room to grow. We are always pushing the boundaries and redefining the norm. It is our creative energies that represent the best that mankind has to offer. From Plato, Aristotle, Socrates and Alexander the Great to Michelangelo to Tennessee Williams and Walt Whitman to Michel Foucault, where would the world be without the Gay spirit. Without us, as a people, humankind's lot would be stagnation. Our creativity is the driving force which ensures growth. We are like the next step in the

evolution of man.

Because of all this, it is important to appreciate the fact that Gay people are different and 'that if we deny this difference we are relegated to the status of second-class nonGay people - that is, homosexuals. That we sleep with other men does make us different. It should not however, define our existence. It is an outcome of our difference, not the cause.

As a distinct people we have certain things about us which emphasize these differences. Sure we love other men. Sure we sleep with other men. But if you think that is the only difference your falling into the typical heterosexual trap of looking only at the stereotypes.

We have our own language. This includes not only the borrowed terms like trick, number and ball, but also, for example, camp and closet. Again this is just a result of our difference, not a cause. We did not create a complex language and then build an identity around it. The boundary was already there; the language is just proof.

The same thing goes for our norms. We did not exactly create them out of thin air. They do represent what we feel and think. Like any other group, we have rules of behaviour. If you follow them, you fit in. If you do not, you just do not belong. It would be fair to say that we are very selective about who we call one of "us". That must be true of most minorities.

Obviously, we are not born knowing the rules of the game. All of us go through years of programming in the Straight world. In most cases, before we know what Gay is, we are taught that it is wrong. Try carrying that around with you when you realize that you are Gay. Thankfully, we have an extensive social support system; both formal and informal. While many of us are socialized primarily through support groups and their members, some of us benefit from a more personal approach.

I remember when my "sisters" took me to my first Gay-pride

parade. I have never felt such a feeling of belonging on that day. I knew I was not alone in the dark. I had friends, I had family, I had people. My people.

Brian

Profile:

Brian works out of Montreal as an independent computer programmer and has a background in both political science and sociology. He is twenty-seven years old and was raised in a Middle-Class, Chinese (Cantonese) household.

I find it funny how most Straights tend to put all Gays in the same basket. I find it funny because we as Gay people are fundamentally different among ourselves and that's why - and how - we're just like Straights.

Just because there is a difference among us does not mean that we cannot form an ethnic group of our own. It is the recognition, indeed the celebration of these differences that make us so interesting. Besides, how many ethnic groups do you know that are made up of clones? You could not tell me that Jews, who are seen as being a unique ethnic group, are all the same whether or not they live in Israel, New York, or Lisbon. While their differences may set them apart from each other, their shared feeling of being Jewish sets them apart from everybody who is not. The same could be said about Armenians. They have diverse backgrounds and diverse experiences, but they consider themselves to be Armenian just the same.

Who has a right to be labelled an ethnic group and who does not? Who determines that right? What makes an Greek-Italian-Canadian define himself as being Greek instead of Italian or vice versa? What makes me define myself as Gay rather than Chinese?

While it is true that I am Chinese, it is not the guiding force in my life that Gay is. I'm not suggesting that being Gay is an overwhelming force that causes me to do something or act in a specific way. What I am saying is that being Gay affects my perspective in a way that being Chinese doesn't.

Everything about me is Gay. I was raised in what I feel to be a typical Cantonese Chinese culture. I chose to immerse myself in the Gay culture just as the Greek-Italian-Canadian chooses to immerse themselves in one or the other. If you find that to be too subjective a choice, that's just the way it is. I am most familiar and most comfortable with being Gay because being Gay represents being myself.

The decision, if you want to call it that, was not made over night. I always had a strong tie with my traditional Cantonese culture. Despite this tie, I always felt that it was an act for me, that I was just "passing". For a long time I didn't know what I was, I just knew that I was not your run-of-the-mill Chinese. I started finding things about my culture that I had trouble dealing with, but I knew that I couldn't find my place in life just by looking at what I didn't like about my family.

For a long time I had denied the feelings I had felt for men. They always struck me as being closer to me...at least some of them. After my first homosexual sexual experience, I started wondering. I had relationships with women before but I just didn't feel right about them. Men however, represented so much more to me. I couldn't love a woman any more than as a sister. I guess that concept of "romantic love" never manifested itself until I was with a man.

It all struck me one day when I was reading Lao Tzu [the founder of Taosim]. I realized that man should order his life to gear in with the way the universe operates. I interpreted this to mean that I should order my life to gear in with the way my universe operates. What I mean by this is that I should go with my nature and that I should not, as it were, rock the boat. Not only was that the end of my search for identity, but it was also the end of my readings into Taoism. It was almost as if, having served its purpose, it had lost all further meaning to me.

My identification with my being Gay was a long and deeply personal process. I am what I am today not only because I was born Gay, but because I was able to recognize the fact that being Gay

meant more to me than being Chinese. It was, and still is, an all encompassing system just like the way being Chinese is for my family. Everything I do I do as I Gay man. I am not a Gay Chinese man. I am a Gay man who happened to have been born into a Cantonese family and who happened to be socialized accordingly. I do not deny my Chinese heritage, I celebrate it. But when I do honor it I do so as a Gay man, for being Gay has become primary in my life.

So, when you think of Gays, try not to think of the prevailing stereotypes. While we are a group, the fact that we are internally diverse does not detract from the fact that we are distinct from Straights. While recognizing that we are a people, we do not forget our differences. It is these differences, when properly recognized, that can be used as resources to be used in our day-to-day lives as political and social beings.

Sami

Profile:

Raised in a working-class family in Montreal, Sami is a 32 year-old small-business owner of Turkish descent.

I remember that I liked boys from an early age. I remember feeling something - a kind of tingling sensation all over my body - when I looked at them admiringly. I always wanted to be with other boys; to touch them.

For Turks, male friendship and the physicality between them is actively encouraged. You can hold the hand of a male friend or your brother. In fact, you are expected to kiss your father and other male members of your family as well as your male friends.

I thought how I felt was “normal”. I never had the clarity in my mind that my feelings about boys were something other than what other people were feeling.

Later on, in junior high school, I started hearing jokes about “faggots”. I laughed at them along with the others until I figured out that who they were talking about was me! I felt as though my entire world was turned upside down. If I wasn’t normal, what was I?

While I was trying to figure this out, I had my first sexual experience; it was with another boy: a friend of mine. Some people might consider it experimentation or “playing doctor” but I don’t. I knew what I was doing, I knew what I wanted.

From that first time until this very day, I have been very submissive sexually. And that caused a problem because like many other Mediterranean countries, the Turkish language has two words for homosexuals. One word describes a passive homosexual and the other an active one. If you ask a person what is a passive homosexual

then the answer will be that it is the homosexual who plays the role of a woman in a relationship so the relationship between two men are always perceived as a reflection of a heterosexual relationship. People just think that they live like a heterosexual couple and they have very defined roles. Therefore, to be *kulampara* - which is the word describing the active homosexual - is perfectly Ok; it can even be flattering word, meaning that you are such a man that, not only are you capable of screwing a woman, but also a man. But to be the other, *ibne* is a terrible thing. It is very much linked with the idea that the woman is a second-class human being. To pretend that you are a woman is even worse: you become a third-class citizen.

I was always pretty effeminate and when I made the mistake of coming out to my family when I was 17, I was labelled as an *ibne* and life became hell. I was ostracised. Nobody would touch me. It hurt me to see that all other male relatives of mine would show each other affection but they treated me as a diseased person. They all walked all over me and made me feel that I was a waste of time.

Luckily for me, I went away to school and moved into an all-male residence. While I was there I walked a fine line between joy and total fear. It was as if I had "Gay" stamped across my forehead. It seemed as if there were many others there with a similar stamp. I made plenty of friends and had several lovers and came to be accepted by them. Unfortunately, the residence had some jock-types and they seemed to resent our presence. That's where the fear came in. Several of us were jumped and beaten and one guy, someone who was even more effeminate than me, was raped by three guys he said looked like foot-ball players.

Most of the time, I was left alone by the jocks. I joined a support group, made several Gay friends, and came to feel accepted, like I belonged somewhere, with these people. I was no-longer a third-class citizen. I was a member of a vibrant community. I had a place. I had a new family that accepted me more than my biological family ever did.

George

Profile:

George is a 31 year-old Greek entrepreneur who grew up in a working-class family in the Park Extension area of Montreal.

About my socialization? I was brought up in a very Greek way. As you may know, Park Ex. is very much a "Greek ghetto". My family is Greek Orthodox and I was until I moved out when I was 20. My father was a furrier while my mother was a housewife.

My mother's always mixed with Greek people and that's partly why she's never really picked up English or French. Until I went to school I couldn't speak English because I wasn't allowed out to play with the other kids and my parents only spoke Greek to me. I ended up playing with my brothers and sisters, and cousins.

I don't remember ever hearing anything about homosexuals from my family. I now know that I had a Gay uncle but he lived with his old mother and hid it pretty well. I don't know if anybody suspected or knew anything about his life-style, but it seems to me they would have to either be blind or stupid not to see what he really was. In any case, nobody ever brought him or any other homosexual-related subject.

Ever since I can remember, I've always been attracted to boys. In an innocent way, that is. At junior high I never thought that there was anything wrong with it. It was only later on in high school when people started saying things and I realized that other people thought it was really bad. It was then that I started feeling depressed and isolated. I started to feel very paranoid about getting too close to boys in my school in case they assumed that I had those feelings, so most of my friends were girls.

Also at about this time, I realized that there were certain

aspects of my culture that I didn't like, so I totally rejected it. I refused to be called by my proper name and chose an English name instead. I refused to speak Greek at home, listen to Greek music or go to church.

I didn't like the way men treated women, they were very macho and I knew that I couldn't live up to that. They were very closed-minded about everything that was not Greek. Everything Greek was the best. Greeks were superior athletes, scholars, lovers, etc. You name it, they were the best at it. I guess that they ignored the fact that half of them were alcoholics who spent most of their time cheating on their wives or gambling away most of their money.

Of course, Greeks were never Queer. In the "Old Country" there were of course men who fucked other men, but they were almost excused. When people did speak of them they would refer to them as being "those people". Of course they were not one of "those people". On the other hand, they never stopped to consider that for each person who fucked, there was somebody being fucked. These people would have been considered to be the lowest of the low. They were not men, they pretended to be women.

I knew that I was different from them since I was about 12. I knew that I liked to have sex with boys when I was 16. I knew that I loved one when I was 19 and that's when I knew that I was Gay. I also knew that if my family ever discovered what I was, there would be hell to pay. It was bad enough that I was not embracing my culture like the rest of my family. Being Gay would have been too much of a difference.

I never came out to my family, I never had to. My mother opened a letter from my first real boyfriend. I remember her saying that she thought the letter was for her. She said that she didn't have her glasses on. She kicked me out that very day.

I moved into the village with my boyfriend who was not only not Greek but very active in the Gay community. I became an activist along with him. I saw that the Gay community was where I belonged.

I was respected and loved. I went from being different to being alone to being a fag to being Gay. I like to call myself Queer. It is a political definition rather than a purely descriptive one. I'm proud to be called Queer and if some people don't want to identify me as being queer, then its their problem not mine.

My partner and I are politically active. We've been together for 7 years and have no rights as a couple. Our friends, people like us, have been beaten up because of their being Gay. We've all been discriminated against: by our families, at work, by society at large. The only way we will get our basic human rights is to join together as Queers. God knows, we are different from you and you from us. Why can't we recognize this in a positive way. One parade a year is not enough.

Donald

Profile:

Donald is a self-described Canadian of English/Welsh stock. He is a 57 year-old small-business owner who grew up in a middle-class Vancouver family.

As an older Gay man, I remember things that younger Gays can only read about. I remember the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s that demanded full individual and human rights for members of racial, religious, and ethnic minorities. I remember the insistence by members of these groups on the right to cultural diversity and self-determination. The impetus for Gay activism came from these social movements and they came from Stonewall. I am surprised to see how little people know about these pivotal events.

We've come a long way but we still have an uphill battle to wage. I've been with the same partner for over ten years but we do not have marital benefits. We have no right to adopt and, in some places, we can be arrested for our sexual behaviour - even though we are two consenting adults and do what we do in the privacy of our own home. When the two of us walk together outside of our community, we are often stared at, especially by younger people. I've been called "Faggot," "Queen," "Queer," "Fairy," and dozens of other names.

I think that is the biggest problem: ignorance. Sure you can say that society as a whole has become more accepting. You can point to the occasional book, movie of the week, star-of-the-moment or alleged Gay issue and claim that society has changed but the single greatest hindrance to Gays is that people still feel that being Gay is morally reprehensible. Their ignorance is what has to be changed, not us. They need to be taught that Gay love is like any other kind of love. We have long-term relationships and family structures like any other person. They need to be taught this in the cradle, in the

schools, in the media and through government intervention. We've got to make sure that Gay and Lesbian issues are included in school curricula. Schools already profess an interest in multi-culturalism, it's about time they include our culture. Sure we might be White, Black, Yellow, Brown or Red. We might be Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Seikh but we are Gay first and foremost. Nothing anybody can do will change that. It's a fact of nature. Its about time the media stops treating us a pariahs. Gay does not = AIDS. It never did.

On a higher level, the government needs to realize that no individual can enjoy freedom if he is cut off from his community. We are denied an official status. Instead they call us a sub-group or sub-culture. Our society has enough problems as it is. The Gay community has even more: discrimination, high suicide rate, isolation, fear, persecution. If the government would only realize that if they supported our community, like any other ethnic community, they would enrich our lives as individuals. As individuals, we in turn would greater support society. Its just that simple. unfortunately, state policies tend to encourage assimilation. The only problem is that Gays cannot be assimilated. We cannot be made to be Straight any more than Straights can be made Gay so why bother even discussing it. Acknowledge us for what we are: a group of human beings. We may be discriminated because of our differences just like Jews and Blacks, but we are human beings nonetheless.

Bernard

Profile:

Bernard is a 36 year-old airline employee working out of Vancouver. He was raised in what he calls a “sometimes middle but more often than not lower-class family typical Canadian family.”

The definition of “race” in the Webster’s encyclopedic dictionary is: (a) a group of people of common ancestry or stock {the English race} (b) a class or kind of people unified by common interests, habits, characteristics (c) a variety or breed of plant or animal (d) a division of mankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct type (e) a major group of living things.

There is a great deal of debate about homosexuality being genetic in nature. I've read quite a bit of myself. One thing that holds true in every case is that there is no real proof that it is or that it is not genetic in nature. But that does not stop us from reproducing. Both my parents were Straight, both were non-diabetics. I am Gay and I am a diabetic. If there is a gene that causes homosexuality it may act just the same as the gene for diabetes. It is very common for genetic traits to skip one or more generations.

However we do fall in line with definition "B" above. One does not have to match all characteristics of a group to be a part of it. Muslims and Jews also consider themselves separate races. And that is based on their religion.

I know one Gay man who has fathered 2 Gay sons and 3 Straight sons. And I know one lesbian who has mothered 3 Straight daughters. These are their biological children. Having Gay parents does not mean that you will be Gay any more than having Straight parents means that you will be Straight.

One thing that is a lie in my opinion, is that homosexuality is a choice. In our world wide society Gays are still on the bottom as far as equality goes. There is not one country on this planet that has laws that treat us as equals with Straights. In many places in the USA alone Gays are being killed "literally" and nothing is being done about it. After Colorado passed its anti Gay laws many Gays were openly harassed, beaten, had their homes bombed and were fired. All simply because the law said that we had no protection under the law and that simply being Gay was basically a crime. Who would "choose" a life style that opens the door to so much hate and violence? The only choice that a Gay man or woman has to make is whether they will come out of the closet or not. I came out because it was more painful living the lie of the closet than being true to myself in this racist society.

It was more painful for me to hear people say they liked or loved me when they didn't even know who or what I was, than to hear my father tell me that I am not welcome in his house anymore because he hates Gays. The pain did not come from his hating my sexuality. It came from realizing that he never really loved me in the first place. But at least I know the truth and so does everyone else.

I got over in time and have come to believe that one cannot choose who their relatives are but one can choose who their family is. A family is 2 or more people coming together to love and support one another. I have Gays, Straights, Blacks, Whites, Jews, Christians, Muslims and many others who are members of my family. Very few of them are related by blood.

Colin

Profile:

Colin is a 22 year-old clothing designer/waiter of Scottish/British descent. He was born and raised in a middle-class household in a Vancouver suburb.

Well, I was never wanting to be like the other boys. And so by recognizing that I wasn't like them, I knew that I was different. That's the only way I can classify that. And so, growing up Straight through school, I always knew I was not like the other boys. I always identified with other women. Maybe not necessarily identified, but it was easier to socialize with them. As long as I can remember, and as far as being sexually attracted or curious, I remember doing the gym thing around 12-14 years old; being in the locker room, and having a shower, and always kind of curious to see other boys. I always knew I was different, always. I just knew that.

I used to pray "please don't make me Gay." At, first I used to pray "please don't make me like them" because I knew that it was wrong. And that was because of my religious upbringing.

For quite some time and because at this time I was still having relationships with women, I could accept the fact that o.k fine I'm bisexual, that's fine. Just please don't let me be Gay. My first experience with a man was when I was eighteen years old but I was still not satisfied with saying that I was Gay. It was very difficult for me to accept that, even though it was not just a question of me having sex with other guys. I was still also sleeping with women and that made it easier for me to not accept the fact that I was Gay, although I enjoyed sleeping with women. But then I started to realize I could not have my cake and eat it too. I just did not feel that comfortable, with having a relationship with women, and saying to her "No, no. I'm not sleeping with anybody else." But then inside I needed to be intimate with men. So eventually, just deducted that I

could not be honest in a relationship with a women if I was sleeping with a man. And vice versa. Because trust is an important part of a relationship. And so is monogamy.

That would have been when I was twenty actually. That was three years ago. I was twenty when I realized. But now I could at least say that I'm Gay, and that I'm o.k with that.

One of the things that helped me change was what happened to a friend of mine. She was Gay and in the closet and felt alienated from both sexes, and she jumped off the BroadStreet bridge and killed herself.

So, her desperation came from her need for her to be accepted. Far away from rational thinking and any other aspect of her life. Her family didn't matter, her school didn't matter. But, her acceptance of her own sexuality was the driving force of her life, and she couldn't control that and she killed herself. And she was a very close friend of mine, and I watched her go through all of that, so I had to decide really quickly about whether I was going to keep shoving it back because I knew one example of how you could basically bury it so deep it becomes a time bomb. That really scared me and really pushed me to understand how difficult it could be to be Gay.

Marc

Profile:

A self-described “Canadian Mutt”, Marc was brought up in a family with a “comfortable” income, Marc is a 27 year-old salesperson who lives and works in West Vancouver.

I was scared about the Gay people for a really long time, I was scared of the way I thought they thought and acted. It was like that for a long time until I started getting involved in active fund raising.

It was then that I realized that there was a common bond and that was the need to be accepted. Not just tolerated, but accepted. There was a great degree of emotional isolation which fuelled this need for recognition and acceptance. An isolation that was caused by discrimination, prejudice and hatred. I don't think any other group feels that much isolation and that is what gives Gays their greatest push.

It seems that Gays of my generation have become more accepting but that can be misleading. Maybe more Straight men and women are allowed in Gay bars where before, maybe five or ten years ago, people would spill a drink on them or generally just be rude to them. They felt that the hets were invading our space. Because they were so isolated and had to function in isolation, they needed their own space and were very protective of it.

Maybe some clubs have desegregated, but the world hasn't. No it seems that if you leave the success of the geographical Gay community, everything changes right away. As an individual, you feel like you're on your own. What I mean by that is that I am not going to feel as comfortable going up to a Straight male salesperson in a Footlocker and try on shoes and talk to him because he is just going to treat me differently than someone would from within my community. This would be true even if it was the same type of store

with a similar het male salesperson. The fact that it is located in our space means that we are, at least on the surface, more accepted.

When Straights come into our neighborhood, it's on the understanding that we will be there in spades. We don't have to hide in the alleyway. We can walk together, hand-in-hand, without fear of taunts. We can be ourselves because we are surrounded and supported by our own. If non-Gay people can't handle it, they should stay where they belong, in their neighborhood, where they make their own rules.

Here in our own neighborhood we have our own unwritten rules. There is no discrimination. We've felt enough of that first hand to give it back. There is no racism, prejudice, or hatred of any kind. We live by the motto "live and let live". We can be ourselves but more importantly, we have to let others be themselves too. That is how we support each other and build a sense of community. We may all be different in our own special way but we are all the same in an equally special way. Apart from being Gay or lesbian or queer or transsexual or bi or whatever, we are all human beings who deserve respect. Who can blame us for creating a place where this is possible. After generations of persecution, our people are starting to come into their own and they've discovered that having a place of their own is a big part of this.

Glenn

Profile:

Glenn is a 21 year-old computer programmer of Scots/Irish descent. He grew up in a middle-class home in Calgary and now lives in Vancouver.

I remember hiding the fact that I did not want to be Gay. And so, in saying so, I knew already that I was Gay. And I wanted to stop, I had to stop. I did not want to feel the feelings that I was having.

Then one day I came to the realization that I was born that way and that was the end of that. Some people think that you become Gay because your father wasn't around, you were spoiled by your mother or through some other aspect of your socialization. But I think that you are born that way. I don't think given an option people would chose to be Gay. It's not fun being discriminated against, being beaten, and kicked and spit at, and called names all through their lives. Especially children can be extremely cruel. I don't think anyone would choose that life style.

I had a hard time coming out to my family but I guess that I never really fit in with them anyway. I was never really happy growing up, my father saw to that. I can't say that he was physically abusive, but he certainly did abuse me emotionally and psychologically.

I can remember him asking when I was five, If I wanted to be a little girl or something. All this just because the way I played with other kids, I always wanted to play house and all sorts of things like that. So he asked me that and at that point I wanted to say "Well I don't know, ya I guess so" because I thought that would be more fun. And I could tell that he wanted to hear me say no so that is what I said. I don't think I was very convincing because he always treated me differently from my brother, he treated me like I was unwanted.

When I told him that I was Gay we got into a huge argument. My dad thinks it's wrong so I told him to go to hell. He probably thinks I'm going to go to hell or something because he is a Jehovah's witness one day, a Baptist another day and I don't know what the next day.

I didn't exactly get support from my mother either. She kept insisting that I see a shrink. She forced me to go despite my protests. After that, I was definitely afraid of everybody finding out about me so I just went back into the closet.

I suppose that there are just some things that you cannot hide for too long. I think that if I had stayed closeted for much longer I would have self-destructed. Luckily for me, I met my first partner...almost by accident.

He was a member of a project group of mine in college and we fell in love. Actually we fell in lust first and love came out of it. I suppose that he was the first man to really love and care for me.

He was already quite out and pretty political about it. He introduced me to tonnes of friends and I soon joined several groups along-side him. We attended a Gay-friendly Anglican church, moved in together and marched in the Gay pride parade together. I had never felt like I belonged before and it felt incredible.

I decided to cut all ties with my biological family because they did not accept who and what I was. They cut me out before I decided to do the same to them. The Gay community became my new family.

My partner and I decided to move to Vancouver about 8 months ago. We decided that it was more economically viable to do so but the fact that there is a large and vibrant Gay community here played a major role in the decision.

I don't think that we consciously get together and segregate ourselves or make ourselves a visible minority. I guess we just

individually need to be accepted and there are always certain areas of any country where this is more possible. Vancouver itself is a little bit more tolerant than another place would be. I suppose it is because we have been so active there

I've spoken to alot of people about that and it's almost as if people are actively trying to build a community, to build the family that they never really had. A family that they were cheated of not because of anything they did or said, but just because of the way they were. Add the fact that we are stronger in numbers than we are as individuals and that we have common grievances to address, such as discrimination, and I'd say that we have a community with a sense of purpose. We have created a haven for those like us. It may have taken generations, but it is getting done little by little. Eventually, we'll be so self-aware as a group that society will have no choice but to accept us for what we are.

Troy

Profile:

Troy is a 23 year-old struggling actor/dancer and oftentime waiter. He is Afro-Canadian and grew up in Truro near Halifax and moved to Vancouver when he was 19.

My mother and my two brothers know. My dad, I think has an inkling. I never really sat down and talked to him about it right out. My mom once told me to "stop it": she was getting worried about me. My younger brother is sort of the silent jockish type. He doesn't really care that I am Gay. I told him before I came up here and after a big pause in the conversation he just turned to me and said "you were my brother before you were anything else. So whatever you are you are."

His reaction was one of the reasons why I was able to come out to more people. Coming out means being honest with yourself and honest with people that you care about and not being worried about what everybody else thinks about you. It means that you are just happy with who you are.

I am a very private person. I don't really belong to any "Gay groups". Sure they are good because there has to be people out there to help. Its just not my cup of tea. I take everything to a personal level. Sure I do stuff like AIDS benefits or things like that whenever they ask me to volunteer but when I want to help people, I usually try to do it on an individual level.

I think that alot of people involved in groups, especially older Gays, being Gay defines who they are. I think its part of me, a huge part of me, but there is more to me than being Gay. I would guess that alot of Gays my age would feel the same because it has gotten so much easier to be accepted, especially in Vancouver.

I guess that for many Gays, their Gayness is sort of like a

defense factor or something like that. Sort of like the strength in numbers mentality. This is probably more the case in older guys: in their thirty's and up I would say.

I've had to deal with my sexuality on my own, in a private way. Then again, I've had to deal with being Black in a racist society on my own. I didn't go out and join a Black Panther-type organization just to make myself feel more secure. I never thought about being on of those QueerNation guys either.

I remember walking on the street about two months ago and people drove by in their car and yelled "Hey Nigger!". I was so shocked that I stopped and stared for the longest time. I just couldn't get it. It's 1995 and they still call me nigger? A while before that happened, a similar incident happened where somebody drove by and yelled out "faggot-ass". I know that it was obvious that I am Black, but how the hell did they know I was Gay.

On any given day, I can be faced with discrimination. I mean I'm a Black guy right? There is nothing to do about that. I am Gay but I don't act Gay. One you can escape while the other not really. I can pass as Straight. I can never pass as White.

I guess I just developed ways to cope over the years. If I don't want to be called nigger, I stay out of certain areas. Anyway, when they call me nigger, they are attacking more than just me personally. They are attacking what they think Blacks are all about. The same thing goes with being called a fag. I can just not act Gay and nobody would ever guess. If I act Gay and somebody insults me, they are attacking what they think Gays are all about: their attitudes, behaviour, lifestyle, etc..

Even when I am passing as Straight and somebody cracks wise about Gays, it touches me. I guess it's because I belong to that category of people. Even though I can temporarily pass, I will always be a member of that group because I was born into it just like I was born Black.

Vinh

Profile:

Vinh is a 27 year-old graduate student at McGill university in Montreal. He emigrated to Canada from VietNam 8 years ago where his father was a civil servant and his mother a housewife.

I am intrigued by your project because it deals with issues that I've been grappling with over the recent years, though without much success toward a clear understanding/resolution. As a Vietnamese-Canadian Gay male, my sense of identity bears the palpable confluence of ethnicity and gender in all its fluidity. The essentialist/constructionist hasn't helped in clarifying the lines drawn in the shifting sand of theory and practice: for as an academic-in-training and a naturalized citizen of a new society my sensibilities have been fine-tuned to the constructed nature of these socio-cultural categories, and yet as a gendered and ethnic-identified person I still harbor yearnings for an essentialized core to my subjectivity. More sophisticated versions of identity-theory and politics would highlight the essentialized nature of constructions and the constructed nature of essences, but somehow I feel that they remain bound to the terms of an irresolvable binarism. And I'm not quite ready to do away with identity altogether because I recognize its real and forceful presence in history and in my own life. Are gender and ethnicity aspects (possibly complimentary) of a larger sense of identity? And if so, what are the parameters of commonality and difference between them and others? Or are they just metaphors and tropes in our discourse and language of (self-) representation? I'm not sure I even have a hunch as to which direction to turn here, especially if I'm already caught in a circle of symbolic self-referentiality. I guess sometimes one needs to turn the being-meaning duality on its head and ask what something means -- what it can/should mean -- even when we still have no answer to what it is.

I'd say that ethnic identity, perhaps palpably more so than

gender identity, is intersubjective: ethnic identity has meaning mainly if not only at the level of group identification, while gender identity can often remain at the individual level.

Steven

Profile:

Steven is a 32 year-old security guard of East-Indian decent who grew up in a middle-class suburb of Vancouver.

Gays have a valid argument for advancing Gayness as an ethnicity. While the common gloss on ethnic issues promotes several errors and misconceptions, such as race=ethnicity, or the exclusivity of ethnicity, in reality ethnicity is a complex and fluid construct without precise bounds.

As an example, religious affiliation may have the character of ethnicity, or what I term "pseudo-ethnicity" (though I am not wholly satisfied with this term.) For example, Judaism is plainly a religious, philosophical system. As such, those who adhere to its tenants ought to be considered Jewish and those who do not follow its beliefs ought not. Nevertheless, we find that a body can be an atheist and still consider himself a Jew. The state of Jewishness has transcended the merely philosophical and become an ethnicity.

Now Jewishness may not be an ideal exemplar due to the actual racial component. Roman Catholicism provides another illustration: many Catholics who no longer actively express their religious affiliation will not hesitate to identify themselves as Catholic -- some do feel the need to add qualifiers such as "lapsed Catholic" or "backsliding Catholic." Yet the identity as Catholic transcends the religious implications alone and carries with it social and cultural components that are indeed ethnic.

So, as this relates to Gay ethnicity: the social and cultural elements of ethnicity are manifestly present in many or most expressions of Gay identity. The formation of communities, creation of rituals, implementation of specialized slang and jargon, translation of history, these aspects of Gay identity also echo the

traits of ethnicity.

Certainly a Gay ethnicity is not necessarily exclusive. Just as one may simultaneously be Irish and Catholic, one can equally be Irish and Protestant. One can be Irish and Catholic and Gay and American and a Democrat. The bounds of ethnicity, as I mentioned earlier, are fluid and not starkly defined. But a Gay ethnicity surely exists, even if it is consciously created and joined. I am inclined to think of all ethnicities as “artificial” in that they would likely not exist in a pure state of nature. Thus, the conscious aspect of a Gay ethnicity is no liability to treating the issue as one would treat any ethnicity, in my view.

Part IV: Analysis and Discussion.

Description of the Sample

How do the respondents rationalise their adoption and use of an ethnic analogy? Is it a conscious decision or is it couched in their discourse? Clearly, there is no simple answer to these questions. Any group, no-matter how small or seemingly homogeneous, is comprised of people with different experiences, different assumptions, different perspectives. The informants' strategies and goals are like ours; diverse and complicated. They, like all people everywhere, are compelled by needs for security and support and in some cases to compete and dominate. They feel envy and grief and joy. They bask in pride, cringe in fright, and smoulder in resentment. Above all, they are individuals, each seeing the world from a unique vantage point in a unique way.

This section and its contents are in no way intended to force them into a homogeneous, monolithic "class" and in no way represents a conscious attempt at categorization. Nevertheless, some commonalities are apparent and worthy of note. First among these is that an overwhelming majority of the informants define themselves as presently belonging to the middle-class (10/15). Of the remaining five, one did not specify class and three were self-

defined members of the working-class (Trevor, Yves, Troy and Steven). What is particularly interesting here is that three of the four respondents belong to clearly definable “racial” minority groups: Trevor is Jamaican, Troy is afro-canadian and Steven is of East-Indian descent. The fourth, Yves, while belonging to a linguistically-defined minority group in Canada (French speaker) is part of the political majority in Quebec. While his status as an arts student/waiter undoubtedly affects his economic class, one would suspect that this could be temporary and subject to change upon his graduation and securing of employment/commissions. For Trevor (bouncer) Troy (waiter/actor/dancer) and Steven (security guard⁷), one wonders if their skin color has had anything to do with their opportunities for advancement. While Steven clearly stated that “I’ve never had a problem finding a place to live and I’ve never been denied a service or employment” and Troy mused that “Being Black is cool now...it’s ‘in’”, Trevor cultivates an image of the stereotypical “rough neck” and this must be taken into consideration. His image will be further discussed below under the heading of Social Identity versus Self-Conception.

Another observation that can be made is that of the fifteen

⁷ The term “security guard” might be misleading. In fact, Steven works in executive protection (bodyguard), drives a 40,000\$ sports car and very likely makes well over 50,000\$ per annum. While he may define himself as belonging to the working-class, I would suggest that his income level puts him well within the middle-class.

respondents, nine come from what can traditionally be called “ethnic groups.” Of the remaining six, one is French Canadian while five are self-described Canadians of British, Scottish, Welsh, German or Irish descent. Of those belonging to an ethnic group other than “Canadian” (of whatever ancestry), five are the children of recent immigrants (Sam, Ian, Brian, Sami and George) while two are immigrants themselves (Trevor and Vinh). Of the fifteen, only one expressed any concrete religious affiliation (Steven: Baptist). While religion is not perceived as being important to any of the fifteen except for Steven and Brian (who admits that religion might play a role as he becomes older), three respondents claim that their race does play a role (Trevor, Brian and Troy). For the most part, age is perceived as being unimportant. The exception to this rule is Donald, who at age 57 claims that “I think that I’m feeling it a bit more right now.” What is not unimportant is the strong identification many informants have with their occupation. When asked to elaborate upon the final part of survey question#1⁸, eleven of the fifteen stated that occupation came in second. For Colin, there was a “straight out tie between orientation and [his] occupation as a designer.” Bernard stated that “[his] occupation could change

⁸ The question that was asked was “Which of the following is of greater importance to you in constructing/operationalizing your identity: your age; race; ethnicity; occupation; sexual orientation; religion? Please list these factors according to their importance to you.”

tomorrow and it wouldn't affect the way [he] really was at [his] core." For Steven, occupation was of tertiary importance and followed religious affiliation. Trevor brushed this rating system aside and seemed to claim that the only two important things were sexual orientation and race.

By far the greatest factor in constructing and operationalizing the respondents' identities was their sexual orientation. Time and again, each and every informant claimed that all other factors paled in significance. The only marginal exception can be seen in Colin's claim of a tie between orientation and occupation. Other than this, primary identification was consistently along the lines of sexual orientation and all concerned felt that they were born gay.

While the respondents' felt that their sexuality was a result of nature rather than any nurturing process, all of them experienced the first doubts about their sexuality when they were between the ages of 10-14. While this age range corresponds roughly with the average age in which most boys undergo puberty, all of the informants stated that they knew that they were "different" from an extremely early age. Whether this age is represented in the abstract - e.g. "if I had a first memory it would be an attraction to a friend of the family" (Donald) - or the specific - e.g. "I knew at least from the time I was 5" (Sami) - the fact remains that all of the respondents stated that

they were aware of their “difference” well before the onset of puberty. This sentiment is perhaps best expressed by Steven who said that “at first I was attracted to [men] in an admiring way. Sexual or physical attraction didn’t follow until puberty.”

Somewhere between the ages of 12-18, twelve of the fifteen informants had their first same-sex sexual experience. Of these, eleven came about as the result of experimentation and one as the result of non-consensual rape (Colin). Of the remaining three, one (Bernard) refused to comment stating “I’d rather not get into my first time because I wasn’t a willing participant (indicating a possibility of rape). Honestly, I haven’t dealt with it yet and cannot begin to do so now.” The remaining two (Steven and Glenn) had their first same-sex sexual experiences within existing friendships that later developed into relatively long-lasting relationships. While Steve’s deteriorated after approximately one year, Glenn and his partner had been together for nineteen months at the time of his interview. Other than Glenn, only two other respondents were involved in an exclusive relationship. Both George and Donald had established long-lasting relationships of seven and ten years respectively but neither had any contact with their families.

Given that their families, and in particular their parents’, attitude towards homosexuality was described as either a “taboo

subject” or “a combination of sin and mental disease” this comes as no surprise. Indeed, the experience of familial rejection is shared by the fourteen of the fifteen respondents who claimed different levels of disapproval ranging from total and absolute to acceptance by one or two members of the entire family. Curiously, the exception to this rule is Steven who claims that his families’ Baptist convictions and belief in the “Golden Rule” promoted an atmosphere of respect and support in his family. While Steven benefited from a positive atmosphere, the others did not. It is for this reason that the informants gradually abandoned or decreased the importance of all previous identities and came to create and accept a gay ethnic identity.

Social Identity versus Self-Conception

The informants’ comments sketch a life-long process culminating in the acceptance of a positive Gay self-image and coherent personal identity as a member of a clearly identifiable group. They reflect the fact that there are two major (and sometimes contradictory) sources of a person’s identity: the social roles that constitute the shared definitions of appropriate behaviour, and the individual’s life experiences.

Social identity refers to how others identify the person in

terms of broad social categories or attributes, such as occupation, age or ethnicity Herdt, 1992). Another important term here is self-conception; a cognitive phenomenon which consists of the set of attitudes an individual holds about himself (Herdt, 1992). Social identity corresponds to self-conception in that both are based in large part on social roles. In the former, others define appropriate behaviour for the individual in such roles, and in the latter, the individual internalizes these definitions to form a part of his or her self-conception. While identity deals with defining who the individual is, self-concept refers to the individual's reflection about identity. In Trevor's case, for example, his social identity would be that of a well -"connected" twenty-six year old Black man who works as a doorman. As he put it, "I'm Michael Jordan, Malcolm X, and Ice T all rolled up in one. If you fuck with me, you're going down. That's what they see. That's what they want to see."

Trevor's self-conception, however, is based upon what Erikson would call ego-identity; an intrapsychic phenomenon that consists of the psychological core of what the person means to himself (Erikson, 1992: 261-62).

I'm not a Black man. I'm a Gay Black man. I was born Gay just like the way I was born Black. I can't change either. Everybody thinks that, when it comes down to it, being Black is all there is. So I play the game.

is. So I play the game.

Trevor's self-conception, therefore, is that of a Gay man who passes for his social identity in order to get along. As he put it, passing has been necessary for his survival.

I'm a fag. I'm queer. I'm a Batty Man. But that won't get me anywhere in life...The Black community says I should be respected, so I am. They say I should fuck the Bitches, so I do. They say I should take care of my family, and I do. They say I shouldn't be a Bati Man...but what they don't know won't hurt them.

Gay Identity Formation

Herdt's examination of the existing literature on adolescent homosexuality has shown that four preconceptions still profoundly affect the understanding of "becoming" Gay. First, people assume that the youths are heterosexual: everyone should be Straight growing up. Second, adolescent homosexuals privately experience isolation; they feel stigmatized (internal homophobia) because they desire the same sex. This sentiment was expressed several times by different respondents.

Troy : I always knew that I was different. In one way or another, I always knew that I was different from the other boys around me and I remember being attracted to them sexually when puberty started. Actually I was attracted to them before that but couldn't figure out why.

so afraid of Gays that I wouldn't admit it to myself though.

Colin: I used to pray "please don't make me Gay." At, first I used to pray "please don't make me like them" because I knew that it was wrong. And that was because of my religious upbringing.

The third preconception is that to express their desires erotically homosexuals must act or dress like the opposite sex, being gender reversed in self-identity and behaviour. Sam, a 25 year-old health-food store manager suggested that his preconceived notions of homosexuals prompted him to "to act in weird ways....sometimes acted like a woman; sometimes dressed like one." Finally, anyone who has homo-erotic desires must be like everyone else who has them, thus conforming to the stereotyped symbolic images of "homosexuality" in the social imagination of the hegemonic culture that oppresses homosexuals. The mythology of the "homosexual" has people imprisoned by these preconceptions of homosexuals as "queers", "faggots", and "fairies" (Herdt, 1992: 8). As Colin, a 22 year-old waiter put it, "I think that a lot of them have bought too much into the stereotypes and that's why there are so many old Queens out there." This is echoed by Sam who joked that

there are some older Queens that are just so funny that I can't stop laughing about them. I think that they are the ones who

are reinforcing the stereotypes of Gays being weak-wristed fairies but all I can say is to each his own.

In her survey of the literature on Gay identity, Vivienne Cass has found that the process of identifying oneself as being Gay is marked by (1) defining oneself as being homosexual as opposed to being heterosexual; (2) having an image of self as being homosexual; (3) having an image of the way a homosexual person is supposed to be; and, (4) adopting behavior consistent with this image in relation to homosexual-related activity (Cass, 1979: 108).

These studies suggest and the respondents confirm that when one recognizes himself as being Gay, the first thing they become aware of is that there is something "wrong" with them. Furthermore, their own feelings about themselves are "wrong". Society tells them that they are "sick" and that their sexual desires are "unnatural"; all this despite the fact that these desires seem to come quite naturally to them (Gough and Macnair, 1985: 7). As Yves, a 24 year-old Quebecois student put it,

My fantasies were about guys but I separated them from who I thought I really was. Eventually, the crushes became somewhat more emotional as well as physical and I could not help but think that I might be what I only knew as "a fag."

Compounding this problem is the fact that the common starting point for most Gays - and one that distinguishes Gay people from all other

oppressed groups - is that they first become identified as part of the Gay minority by themselves rather than by others, and thus as isolated individuals.

According to the respondents, the initial phase of gay identity formation appears to emerge in childhood and adolescence as a sense of being different from one's peers. This perception of difference and feeling of separateness may be manifested in a variety of ways, such as emotional and sexual arousal in the presence of same-sex peers, gender nonconformity, and feelings of alienation. During adolescence, the earlier childhood feelings of isolation combine with a specific sense of sexual difference to sensitize the teenager to the possibility of his homosexuality. That is to say that the individual experiences a labelling of difference and that label is "homosexual." Whether homosexuality can be traced to early social learning or biological predisposition, the evidence now available suggests that, at least for some individuals, childhood and adolescent experiences may serve as the basis for the adult homosexual identity (Plummer 1975, Trodden 1979, Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith 1981, Green 1987).

During the next stage of homosexual identity formation, the individual has a heightened awareness of possibly being homosexual and a corresponding awareness of the societal attitudes about

and a corresponding awareness of the societal attitudes about homosexuality in general. Therefore, the individual develops an understanding of the significance of the “homosexual” label. Any same-sex sexual experience becomes significant for the individual because society’s negative view of homosexuality renders it so.

Faced with negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality, the individual may rationalize his feelings and actions in many ways. He may, for example, dissociate himself from his actions and separate his identity from his activities or emotions. “I first entertained the idea that I was Gay when I was about 19 years old but because I hadn’t done anything about it, I wrote it off as simple fantasies or a long phase” explained Brian, a 27 year-old computer programmer of Chinese descent. By compartmentalizing sexual desire and sexual identity, the individual may resort to dissociation to avoid homosexual self-labelling. It may be that dissociation is aided by an assumption that these same-sex sexual experiences are a passing phase or a belief that they have little or nothing in common with homosexuals as a group. Donald, a 57 year-old restaurateur stated that “I remember thinking to myself that my having sex with another boy didn’t mean anything for the longest time.”

While dissociation is one coping mechanism, the possibility

possibility that his homosexual activity or interests stem from a homosexual “orientation”. As Brian put it, “I stopped thinking that I was going through a phase and recognized that I was Gay and that was the way I was intended to be so I shouldn’t rock the boat by fighting my very nature.” Oftentimes however, the individual’s internalized homophobia causes a rejection of a homosexual identity. Cass (1979) identifies this discrepancy that may exist between homosexual feelings, thoughts, or behaviour and homosexual identity as being “identity confusion”.

Information gleaned from the respondents leads one to believe that identity confusion can be resolved in various ways. For example, the individual may chose to refrain from any behaviour that is perceived as homosexual and avoid any further information about homosexuality. Donald discussed this when he related a story of an old lover:

We met several times over the next couple of years for quickies. This young man, by the way, ended up getting married and having several children. It just goes to show that either not all men who have had sex with men are necessarily Gay. Then again, it may also say that not all married men with children are necessarily Straight.

Alternately, as Yves, Brian and Donald explained, one might continue participating in homosexual activity while denying that such

experiences are homosexual. Both strategies, with their mechanisms of avoidance and denial, drain large amounts of energy that could be channelled into productive and rewarding activities. The latter strategy, although temporarily resolving identity confusion, precludes the possibility of achieving an integrated personal identity. The individual's identity and behaviour remain dichotomous, opposing entities.

An alternative strategy for resolving identity confusion lay in the possibility that the individual can perceive homosexual behaviour as correct and acceptable and proceed to reducing confusion by obtaining information about homosexuality (through books, discussions, professional assistance, peer counselling, etc.). Confusion reduction may lead to a phenomenon which Cass terms "identity comparison" (Cass, 1979). This is characterized by a tentative commitment to a homosexual self-definition and is often facilitated by support groups. Sami, a 32 year-old small-business owner described this when he stated:

I met several Gay men who introduced me each to others and got involved in a support group that helped me deal with separation from my family and previous friends. Here I learned different views of Gays and came to see myself not as an *ibne* but as a man who had value. I learned new and different things about myself and about others who faced similar challenges when they came out. I learnt that I was not alone.

Cass suggests that progression beyond identity comparison is associated with the extent to which an individual can tolerate being different from others as well as resist outside pressure of social norms.

When a combination of external support, internal strength and willingness to resist outside pressures is present, the individual may yet enter another stage of identity formation (tentative self-acceptance) which is characterized by (1) homosexual identity acceptance, (2) commitment to a homosexual identity, and (3) identity integration. The first two phases complete the process of homosexual identity formation; the last phase represents a process of homosexual identity management where the individual functions within society as a homosexual. In all aspects of this final stage the individual is engaged in a critical evaluation of social attitudes toward homosexuality. Concurrent with this assessment lies the possibility of acceptance of a *Gay* identity. The term most often used to refer to this phase of emerging self-acceptance as Gay is “coming out”.

Coming Out

Definitions of “coming out” vary from person to person but generally share some common characteristics. In its simplest form,

coming out entails a person's declaration that he is Gay. While this may be limited to family and friends, coming out is often represented as being a debut: "where an individual, for the first time, publicly identifies himself as Gay by an action, such as going to a Gay bar" (Chesebro, 1981: 15).

Crucial to the coming out process is the participation in a Gay collectivity and a Gay social identity in which "Gayness" is constructed according to a set of symbols, meanings and codes of conduct. It is during this socialization process that one "becomes" Gay through his understanding of and identification with Gay symbols and ideology and becomes oriented to the sensibilities of Gay life. As Herdt demonstrates, through and subsequent to the coming out process,

One comes to an acceptance which is a new perception of one's self. With regard to collective identity one defines oneself with respect to one's boundaries or differentiation from heterosexuals ("Straights") and with respect to the commonalities and bonds one shares with other Gays in terms of affiliation. Affiliation may also be signalled by political involvement in the Gay civil rights movement and by developing a network of relationships which is primarily Gay.
(Herdt, 1992: 88)

Also central to coming out is the task of integrating personal and public identities. It not only provides the opportunity to interact with other Gays, legitimates the Gay experience, and thereby enables

the individual to develop an acceptance of a Gay identity, but it irrevocably puts an end to what Bernard called “living the lie of the closet.” In a similar vein, Sam suggests that the word “freedom” best describes coming out:

If I had to put it in one word, it would be freedom. I guess it's because that if you're out, you are free to be yourself. You don't have to fake anything and you don't have to lie or worry about hiding something. I guess it means that you give yourself the freedom to be who and what you are. To act like a Gay man and not be worried about reactions from anybody.

The process of coming out itself is often likened to a rite of passage in that the ultimate social goal is status change. Van Gennep (1960) has shown that all rites of passage or transition are characterized by three distinct phases: separation, margin (or *limin*), and aggregation.

The first phase is marked by symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. In this case, the detachment is represented by the emotional isolation caused by the respondents' families' rejection of them because of their homosexuality. This repudiation is perhaps best illustrated by Sami when he stated “I am not in touch with any member of my family. They turned away from me when I came out...[and] since that time, I have been ostracised and ridiculed.”

During the second, or liminal phase, the state of the individual

is characterized by ambiguity and the condition of social limbo. Those in this phase question their previous assumptions, feelings and actions but have not yet adopted a new identity. In a sense, they are neither “here” nor “there” as indeterminacy is at the heart of liminality. In the informants case, the liminal phase would be marked by their gradual introduction to other gays and the subsequent attempts at confusion reduction. Whether in the form of friendships, relationships or support groups, the informants entered a phase wherein they started with a set of preconceived notions about homosexuality and, through critical analysis, eventually came to develop a tentative gay identity. Brian illustrates this as follows:

My parents felt that homosexuals were sick degenerates who had nothing better to do than bugger little boys. Not only did they feel that they were sick, but they felt that they were a continuation of their culture and a stain upon that all-important family honor...I think that not only prevented me from coming out but also prevented me from recognizing myself as being a Gay man...I joined a support group and met a guy and fell in love and he brought me to all the right places...Everything was so new and fresh and I was able to learn so much about others as well as myself...It was only only when I realized that [my parents] were wrong and that you could be Gay and honorable and Gay and successful and Gay and good that I realized that being Gay was not the end of the world.

The final, or aggregation, phase of a right of passage is marked by the individual once again being in a relatively stable state and by

virtue of this new status, has new rights and responsibilities. As Turner demonstrates, an individual who undergoes reincorporation is now expected to behave in accordance with certain accepted norms and standards (Turner: 94-95). As the respondents noted, coming out forever altered their self-perception as well as the perception others had of them. That seven of the fifteen informants (Sam, Ian, Sami, George, Bernard, Glenn, Troy) chose to focus on coming out indicates that it is both an important theoretical concept and an important personal experience.

It seems that to fully achieve a Gay identity, it must be integrated with all other aspects of the self. It is therefore impossible to have a positive self-image if one is closeted. The acceptance of a positive Gay self-image is closely linked to the opportunity one has to interact with other Gays and to learn more about the Gay community. Indeed, it would be fair to say that a particular sense of "me" emerges out of seeing oneself as a part of a "we". Group affiliation helps one define oneself and the development of positive Gay group identity marks an important stage in the development of a fully integrated Gay self-identity.

To be out of the closet and openly Gay in our society says a clear "no more" to discrimination and both confirms the individual Gay person and challenges society's norms. Ian, a 22 year-old

chemistry student suggested that

coming out means accepting yourself as you are and being honest about it. It also means that you demand acceptance from others. After all, if they can't accept you as you are, there's no point in going through the motions of a friendship with them. Coming out means that I am what I am, I accept myself the way I am, and you better do so also if you want to be around me.

To be uncloseted has its costs however. No longer invisible, the "out" individual can become a target for discrimination, with everyday interactions often being problematic. Social acceptance can never be guaranteed since each new situation holds the possibility of rejection. An individual's proclamation of a Gay identity can be met with physical abuse and verbal harassment. More often, a person's civil liberties may be jeopardized, and rights to employment and housing may be abridged. Perhaps the highest and most frequently paid price for coming out is rejection by friends, family and community.

Out of the Closet: Family Reactions

As the respondents' narratives demonstrated, reactions to their coming out varied from tacit acceptance to barely restrained disapproval to complete and utter rejection. Different cultural and religious backgrounds may account for much of these differences,

but one gets a clear impression that the informants' homosexuality was seen as being less than desirable. It would seem that all of a sudden, a person ceased to be a son or brother and became a stigmatized "other". Clearly, social constructions of being Gay are stigmatized in the society at large and by belonging to a certain ethnic group, such stigmatization is reinforced by sub-cultural definitions of what it means to be male. This stigmatization is further compounded by the fact that definitions from the "old country" also come into play. As Sam put it, "my family just gave up on me." In an earlier conversation he attributed it to *destino* . Perhaps this carries some weight. As McCready discusses, southern Italian social, economic and political structures created among Italian peasants a tradition of compliance and meekness characterized by the conviction that individuals had little control over their lot in life.

The emphasis was on the role of "destino", or fate. In the face of misfortune and the forces of nature, fatalistic attitudes among Italians reflected a belief that individual or collective efforts did not make a difference.

(McCready, 1983: 119)

While far removed from Calabria, Sam's parents, and particularly his father, demonstrated the notion that they believed that they were cursed with a diseased son who was in turn destined to live out the life of a *homosexual* deviant. For his family, Sam's rejection

seemed to be the only way to deal with the situation (“out of sight, out of mind”).

Sami faced ostracism as a third-class citizen when he was labelled as *ibne*. Old-country conceptions of an *ibne* entered into the equation and Sami was perceived not only as a homosexual, but as the passive partner who “pretended to be like a woman.” Thus he was considered to be not only a naturally flawed person but one whose conscious choice to be the “receiver” forever branded him as a degenerate of the basest kind and the complete antithesis to all things masculine.

For his admitting his homosexuality, Ian was seen as an aberration: “Jews were never ‘like that.’” His behaviour was seen as going against traditional Jewish family values and structure which, like that of many Chinese (including Brian’s family) “tended toward a patriarchal, patrilineal extended family whose primary dyad was the father-son relationship and which was characterized by inclusive relationships of mutual dependency within the family, continuity, respect for authority, and asexuality” (McCready, 1983: 256). Both Ian’s and Brian’s being gay seemed to be perceived as a threat to the continuation of the family line. In Ian’s case, he was immediately shipped off to his grandmother’s where it was believed that life on a Kibbutz and constant exposure to Jews and more

traditional beliefs would “straighten him out.” In this particular instance, it was believed that the much more permissive North American Urban society was in some way a contributor to Ian’s “belief” that he was a “homosexual”. If, by this logic, he was somehow drawn to homosexuality in this environment, all that was required to put an end to this was a total and absolute change in surroundings, education, peer group and cultural influence. As Ian pointed out, this relocation did bring about some of the desired results: “I became a better Jew...I learned more about my heritage and continuing the family line.” It did not however, change his sexual orientation: “here is where I also fell in love...with a man of course.”

Ian’s was not the only family where homosexuality was seen as being not only contrary to but also a direct threat to traditional ways of doing and being. Brian’s relationship with his parents were strained because they felt that he was going against Chinese tradition that dictates that elderly family members receive respect, care, and support from the younger generations. This belief has been attributed to the principles of filial piety or "Hsaio Ching", which explains the responsibility a son or daughter has for the aged parents: to give respect, honor, and devotion, and provide for the happiness and financial needs of the aged person. It teaches that the elderly are entitled to harvest all they have given to their offspring

and seems to be the single most important factor in determining both individual group action (McCreedy, 1983: 81). Despite Brian's belief to the contrary, his parents felt that his being Gay, among other things, prevented him from fulfilling his familial obligations.

Perhaps the most striking narratives deal with what Trevor and Troy describe as antiGay attitudes in the Black community. Their stories and comments illustrate the fact that Gay Black men experience a severe conflict between their racial identity and their sexual orientation. Herdt suggests that

Along with religion, and popular culture, another source of Black antihomosexual attitudes is the influence of gender roles in Black culture. Men and women are socialized to adopt conventional gender roles that emphasize physical and emotional intimacy between opposite-sex partners. Male sex role expectations are intended to result in Black men fulfilling their roles as husband and father. Homosexuality diminishes the number of men available for marriage and therefore constitutes a threat to the Black family
(Herdt, 1992: 150-151).

Indeed, the reasons for homosexual intolerance within the Black community are so intricately woven in the North American/Caribbean Black culture, they have become part of everyday thinking. Tales describing the animalistic sexual prowess of the "Black Man" have created a standard that Black men must live up to. Homosexuality contradicts this standard. As both Trevor and Troy illustrate, the whole idea of being Gay (or lesbian) in the Black

community is considered to be counterproductive. That is, to the propagation of the “Black Race”.

Trevor alleges that the Black community is in a constant struggle against the “White man”. Kriegel supports this allegation and notes that as resistance to their demands for equality continued, Black men began to assume an image in which Black was not *equal* to but *bigger than* White.

As the sixties moved into the seventies, Black men were saying that they were tougher and braver and nastier and subtler than their White counterparts, that a Black man ate and drank and fucked and blew music and drove and boxed and ran and played football and baseball and basketball and even breathed in a way that his White counterpart could not emulate - an that being the case, why, then, it followed that he was more the man of the two.

(Kriegel, 1975: 176)

Christianity is also quite a strong influence among Caribbean and American Blacks and as Troy mentioned in an earlier conversation, the Bible states that

If a man also lieth with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

(Leviticus 18:22).

In a conversation with Bell Hooks described in Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics (1990), sociologist Cornell West stated that

one of the reasons we believe in God is due to the long tradition of religious faith in the Black community. I think, that as a people who have had to deal with the absurdity of being Black in America, for many of us it is a question of God and sanity, or God and suicide. And if you are serious about Black struggle you know that in many instances you will be stepping out on nothing, hoping to land on something. That is the history of Black folks in the past and present, and it continually concerns those of us who are willing to speak out with boldness and a sense of the importance of history and struggle.

(Hooks, 1990: 204)

West goes on to say that given the violent and discriminatory nature of American society,

you have to ask yourself what links to a tradition will sustain you given the absurdity and insanity we are bombarded with daily. And so the belief in God itself is not to be understood in a non contextual manner. It is understood in relation to a particular context, to specific circumstances.

(Hooks: 204)

“Be fruitful and multiply” states the “Holy Book”. It also clearly states that homosexuality is wrong. With the community being composed of supposedly God-fearing people, the doctrine is often accepted as fact without question and taught to their children without question. This is clearly illustrated by Troy, a 23 year-old waiter/struggling artist:

My father’s opinions and attitudes totally prevented me entirely from telling. He’s a Bible-thumper. You know the type, God and Jesus are responsible for every positive thing that ever happened or will happen, the Bible is supposed to be

followed to the letter and homosexuals are all damned. What's worse about it is he's not alone. He's got a whole bunch of other ignorant friends who would just as soon burn me as speak to me because I'm going against God's word. They just don't think for themselves. If the Bible says I'm damned, then I'm damned. That's what they were taught and that's what they teach their kids.

Perpetuating further the whole concept of "White man's disease," or homosexuality, is the popular media which tends to portray Gays as being exclusively White. Who is seen in the Gay Pride marches? Who is seen venting their anger in homophobic situations? In printed ads, posters featuring icons of Gay beauty, how many are Black? Most Gay images are predominantly White ones.

Whatever the reason, Black Gay men seldom are to be found in policymaking positions in the Gay world; Black men seldom own Gay establishments (even Black-oriented ones); Black Gay men are often the targets of discriminatory admissions policies for Gay activities and establishments; and, Black Gay men are under represented in the Gay mass media.

(Brod, 1994: 174)

Blacks, whether Gay or Straight, are not seeing themselves as Gay individuals. They often cannot relate. As a result, an unfair correlation is created: Gay equals White. It therefore comes as no surprise that many Blacks think of homosexuality as a "White man's disease," confined to the White community.

Common interpretations of the "male role" often contribute to

the lack of empathy for Gays in the Black community⁹. As both Trevor and Troy indicated in previous conversations, the Black community and their peers both held certain “masculine traits” in extremely high regard. It is these two groups, parents and/or guardians and the ever-present peer reference group, which represent the most influential socializing agents in the Black community (Franklin, 1984: 54). Franklin demonstrates that while there are some similarities between Black male socialization and White male socialization, in the sense that there are numerous agents of socialization, there also are some striking differences. The greatest of these is that a large proportion of Black males are reared in families headed by women (Franklin, 1984: 53). Yet many young Black males, like their White counterparts, learn to *value* masculine traits as well as their expressions and *devalue* certain traits associated with femininity, in particular those such as passivity and submissiveness (Franklin, 1984: 59). As a result, the

⁹ While I use the word “common”, this in no way implies that I personally believe that there is but *one* male role employed by Blacks or any other ethnic-racial group. Rather, I would subscribe to the following: as in any other community or culture, the best, brightest, and most productive people are rarely also the loudest, the crudest, the most duplicitous and hypocritical, the most calculating and aggressive, the most careerist, ambitious, shallow and cutthroat. And yet, when it comes to the Black world as projected through a White-dominated media, one quickly arrives at the impression that there are only two kinds of Black people: the successful ones who do nothing but promote themselves, and the underclass ones who spend all their time robbing, stealing, doing drugs, and killing. We are all aware of this double image. What I am trying to point out is that they are flip sides of the same coin, and neither of them has anything to do with who Black people- Black men or Black women - really are.

(Berger, 1995: 302)

Black male sex role is seen to be “a set of expectations and behaviors which emphasize physical strength, submission and dominance of women, angry and impulsive behaviour, antifemininity, and strong male bonding” (Franklin, 1984: 111). Trevor’s comments suggest that he internalized this to a great degree and uses these stereotypes to support the illusion that makes up his social identity. Aside from “fucking the bitches”, Trevor stated that

I was the rudest of Rude Boys. Just ask around. But hell, you know that already. I ran with the boys and did what I had to do to get the Respect I deserved. If it meant taking someone on, I did it. If it meant shanking [stabbing] someone, I did it. I carry my 9 [Berretta 9mm semi-automatic pistol] to this day and nobody messes with Trevor 'cause Trevor ain't gonna take shit from anyone. When I walk the streets, I get respect. When I work the door, I get respect. Shit, when I was inside [Bordeaux prison], I got respect.

Trevor mentions his “boys” and much can be said of this as “strong male bonding” often comes about as the result of contact with one’s peer group. Trevor’s comments support Brod’s claim that

the Black man’s peer group is a kind of misogynist adaptation some Black men have made to a racist American society and can result in behaviors that range from ritualistic to innovative. Norms for the Black man’s peer group include (a) maintaining proper sexist attitudes toward women and femininity in general; (b) little tolerance for nonaggressive solutions to disputes (therefore having the proper in-group hatred and antagonism - especially toward other Black men); (c) having sufficient contempt for societal nonmaterial culture and appropriate respect for societal material culture; (d) support for the heterosexual sexual script (objectification,

fixation, and conquest of women).

(Brod, 1987: 160)

Granted, both Trevor's, and to a much lesser extent, Troy's comments are reflective of what Brod calls "Black marginals within a culture of poverty" (Brod, 1987: 187) yet race and/or ethnic-specific patterns of masculine role assumptions are usually the case (Franklin, 1988: 110).

What is important here is that Black masculine role assumption must be understood within the context of Black males' internalization of certain traits society associates with masculinity: domination, competition, aggressiveness, sexual conquest, conspicuous consumption, exterior emotionlessness ("coolness") and violence (Franklin, 1988: 53-59) . When a society encourages its males to consistently express their masculine traits, those males who consistently express an androgynous sex-role are at a distinct advantage. Conversely, those who are seen as exhibiting feminine or non-masculine traits (e.g. Gays) are at an indisputable disadvantage.

Black youth, already being conditioned by religion, the lack of positive Gay images, as well as the expectations in general of what is Black are also subjected to homophobic messages of major music industry icons. Buju Batton, for example, a major international reggae

star created a controversy when he sang the words “Boom! Bye-Bye! In a Batty Boy Head!”.

Being homosexual in the Black community is almost always asking for *more* trouble. Suddenly the individual is a double minority. Already hated for being the wrong color, they get backlash for being a deviant, a “girly-man”, or trying to be White. Homophobia exists within the Black community for the same reasons it exists in other communities: ignorance. However, members of the Black community have the additional problem of accessibility. They do not seem to have easily access to the educational tools that are the true cures for ignorance. Coupled with the factors of religion, media, self-hate, and role-playing, members of the Black community often feel that they have justification for their homophobic feelings. This sometimes translates into the sentiment that Gays are pretenders to the throne of disadvantage that properly belongs to those of African descent and that their relation to the rhetoric of civil rights is one of unearned opportunism.¹⁰

Whether categorized as a stigmatized “other”, a threat to the community and traditional ways, or a third-class citizen, the informants have all expressed the opinion that they were “pushed” away from the community in which they were brought up. Sam used

¹⁰ For a complete discussion of this, see Gates 1994.

this term repeatedly: "They literally pushed me away.; my bags were packed for me within an afternoon. All this confirmed to me that I wasn't one of them." This belief was echoed by Ian who felt forced to chose between being gay and being Jewish.

That whole environment pushed me away because they could not accept me for what I was. I was not going to change, they were not going to change; the only thing I could do was abandon my faith. It had already become secondary to my being Gay.

Indeed, this "pushing" away from the family support network seems to be one of the most pivotal moments in most of the respondents' lives. Brian, a 27 year-old computer programmer of Cantonese descent has "fairly regular contact" with his family despite the fact that his "entire family knows that [he] is gay but don't seem to want to accept it." Sami, a 32 year-old store owner, stated that he was not in touch with any member of his family. He believed that Turkish norms and perceived male roles prompted his family to turn away from him and asserted that "I have been ostracized and ridiculed. They say that I wanted so much to be born a woman that now I must pretend to be one." Likewise George, a 31 year-old market-researcher of Greek descent maintained that his family's beliefs and actions pushed him away.

My parents threw me out of their lives when they chose- mind you they made a decision- when they chose to kick me out of their house. I haven't heard from them since and have not made

an effort to contact them either. As for my siblings, well that's an on and off kind of thing...all-in-all I'd have to say that they are not entirely reliable.

Finally, we can see how 27 year-old Marc's mother's reaction served to push him away: "My mother lives in another city and we don't speak. We haven't had much to say to each other after she slapped me and called me a degenerate."

Identity Prioritization

Whether it came in the form of packed bags, ultimatums, refused acceptance or ostracism and ridicule, various family members made a conscious choice to push the respondents away. One can see the relevance of this in identity prioritization by turning to human geography and urban anthropology for an analogy. In these areas of inquiry, push-pull factors are used to explain why a person or group of persons physically move from one place to another. In this type of analysis, the "push" factors represent anything undesirable or alienating about a present location (therefore making it less suitable for habitation). Conversely, "pull" factors represent real or imagined positive elements believed to be present in other areas. These attractive factors may represent anything from a more suitable climate to promises of employment or kinship support. What is key is that the "pull" factors not only tempt one to relocate, but

also serve to emphasise or amplify the negative “push” factors by virtue of a *perceived* favourable comparison.

Applying this analogy to ethnic identification, one can see that while an individual will have been socialized and integrated into a specific social/cultural group via primary socialization, this in no way precludes the chance of a later rejection of that same system in whole or in part. Depending upon individual personalities and life experiences, it may come to pass that one becomes less inclined to look upon their cultural background or social system favourably and more inclined to look elsewhere for a system that is believed to be more compatible. Oftentimes this rejection of traditional ways comes during adolescence and reflects a person’s desire to define themselves in contrast to their parents’ seemingly anachronistic attitudes or behaviour. For others of mixed cultural heritage, this process often entails the selection and emphasis of some traits or traditions from one or more ancestors rather than from others. One might choose to define oneself as being part Cherokee and minimize their relationship with their “White” ancestors. One might emphasise their “Greek-ness” in being Greek-Canadian or their tenuous claim to Basque ancestry rather than a more obvious but less “glamorous” French or Spanish.

It is important to note that this conscious selection of traits

or allegiance to one background over another is entirely normal. People make and remake themselves each and every day of their lives and what may be fashionable, sexy or politically correct one day may be discarded the next. What seems to set the informants apart from most others who experience this process lies in the extent to which they claim to be “pushed” away. The informants clearly illustrate that they felt that the most crucial element of their identity (their sexuality), whether they recognized it at the time or not, had been and continues to be labelled by others as being incompatible with or threatening to their ethnic identity. Whether the individuals had come to accept their sexuality or not, they realized that they were not “like the others.” The stigmatized position of Gays within their social system and their various interpretations of their sexuality led the respondents to either face the impossibility of rejecting their sexuality or further question their status in groups whose perceived attitudes towards Gays varied from disavowal to abhorrence.

Years of living a closeted life of denial led to identity confusion characterized by self-doubt and occasional exploration. What seems clear is that concurrent with this confusion was the perceived pushing away of the individual by their family, friends and community. Whether this manifested itself by way of jokes directed

against Gays in general or specific attacks against the individuals themselves (caustic remarks, infringements upon privacy, living in a climate of extreme tension or fear of discovery), the respondents felt isolated and alone.

Whether the respondents had come to accept their sexuality or not, they have made it abundantly clear that they felt that they did not belong. Sam stated that “I knew that I wasn’t Italian” while Ian asserted “I am not a Jew”. For many, this feeling led to a rejection of traditional ways, religion or family in toto. Some came out and clearly stated that they rejected their ethnic identity while others only alluded to it. This disavowal of their past and all that is associated with it led to a time where the informants felt that they were neither their past selves nor were they being true to themselves (e.g., Sami: “If I wasn’t normal, what was I?”).

While exploring their sexuality, the respondents invariably came across literature, individuals or groups which not only reduced their confusion about themselves, but gave them a sense of belonging. Yves, a 24 year-old student/artist/waiter stated “I knew that I was not alone in the dark. I had friends, I had family, I had people. My people.” Bernard compared this feeling of acceptance to his past relationship with his family:

My parents would say one thing and actually mean another so I

learned rather quickly to take whatever they said with a grain of salt. My father lorded over us with an iron hand. I think he was trying to make up for the fact that he had never accomplished anything in his life. My mom never stood up to him because she didn't want to rock the boat. When I came into the Gay community and lived on my own, I realized the honesty and love that was there was incredible.

George found acceptance and said "I saw that the Gay community was where I belonged." Likewise Glenn, a 21 year-old computer programmer, claims acceptance is key:

I felt accepted in the Gay community. I do feel accepted. my parents never made me feel this good and it seems that I'm learning all about what love and respect are all about and for the first time in my life I feel important. I have more of a sense of identity now than I ever did and think that I've only just begun. What did my parents do for me. They made me feel like shit. They rejected me before I knew who I was and sometimes made me feel like jumping off a bridge. I don't feel that way now and don't think I ever will again.

Acceptance, respect and a sense of belonging and community provided a great deal of "pull". As George put it, "I went from being different to being alone to being a fag to being Gay." In Sam's case, the factors which pushed him away from identifying himself as being Italian were numerous.

Every Italian I've met, especially those from southern Italy and especially Sicilians are so fake it's not even funny. They're so backwards. When I went to Italy a few years ago their attitude there was so different from my parents and other family. Ok I

don't think that they appreciated the fact that I was Gay but at least they were tolerant of me. Sure they didn't accept me but they did a much better job than my parents did. I can't stand the attitude of most of the Italian people I know. They are so much into conspicuous consumption and are very "showy". It seems that everything they do repulses me. The way they act bothers me. The way they speak bothers me and the way they think irritates the hell out of me. I can't and won't identify with them because they do nothing for me and don't represent anything that I am.

The traditional, anti-Gay, religious, and image-oriented culture did not appeal to him. On the other hand, he felt the accepting, open-minded, and non-judgemental pull of the Gay community which made him appreciate a sense of belonging that he did not have in his Italian "world". Like Sam, Ian's push factors were based principally on the denial and closed minds of his traditional Jewish culture versus the acceptance and appreciation that the Gay community had to offer.

The degree of socialization into the Gay community varied from person to person but included elements of language, history, symbols, and modes of conduct. With socialization came the acceptance, understanding and pride of this newer, adopted system. Being Gay, more specifically being part of a Gay community with shared beliefs, symbols, language and sense of history came to be the single most important aspect of the respondents identity. In this

sense, the secondary socialization into the Gay community became of primary importance to the informants (over and above their primary socialization into their family and ethnic group). This can be seen repeatedly in the answers to interview question 10. When asked "Do you think that your socialization into the Gay community is at least as important as your primary socialization", the answers were telling indeed:

Sam: Well, as far as I am concerned, I am who I am today because of my secondary socialization. Sure I was brought up with my family first but they never accepted me and finally rejected me altogether. My socialization into the Gay community was the first time I felt that I truly belonged. As far as I am concerned, everything that happened to me before my coming out and being accepted here is irrelevant. It didn't have much to do in developing who I really am, it just made it harder for me to be me, if you know what I mean.

Ian: Being brought up at home with my parents and later on with my grandmother was a big joke. They never wanted me to be myself or really develop my own personality. They just wanted me to fit into their stupid mold about what a good little Jew was like. They sheltered me from the world and tried to keep me as ignorant as they were. When I did show some individuality, all they did was try to stifle my feelings. Because of that I think that they did more harm than good. Sure they provided me with the basics and did a lot to make me who I am but that is very limited compared to what I chose to do later on in life. You see, my family forced me to be raised one way but I

chose to more-or-less be another. When I started to live my life as a Gay man, I chose who I wanted to hang around with and be, I guess you could say, taught by. As far as I can tell, that secondary process was much more important than the stuff that happened to me earlier in life because I chose it for myself, to suit my own needs.

Yves: Okay, as you explained it you mean that primary socialization is with my family and secondary is with the community, right? I think that if given a choice, my socialization into the community is much more important to me than what I had with my family. It is similar to comparing what I learned in primary school with what I learned during the rest of my life. Yes what I learned in primary school is important, but I had to go farther to get anywhere with my life. If I was still in the same milieu with my family, I would stagnate just as they do. For me to fully develop I had to be socialize into the Gay community for it is here that I truly belong. It is more important to me because it represents what is truly me as opposed to what others tell me should be me.

Brian: It is far more important to me personally. I didn't have a choice as to how I'd be raised from birth but by deliberately choosing to order my life the way it was meant to be ordered, I made the choice to live as a Gay man. All that entailed a paradigm shift that totally changed my world-view for the better. By familiarizing myself with what amounted to a rich Gay culture, I changed for the better. While I wouldn't go so far as to say that I reinvented myself deliberately, my socialization into the community did bring about significant change. My secondary socialization if you will signalled a type of rebirth or process where I changed from the me that was created for me and the me that was created by me.

Sami: I decided to be socialized again. I decided to involve myself in this community because I felt that it best represented me and made me feel good about myself. My primary socialization with my family left me with nothing but pain. For years they called me names and mocked me. For years they told me that I was a piece of shit. Yes this socialization is more important than what my family gave me because my family gave me no love. They fed me and gave me clothing and a house to live in but that is that. I would be incomplete if I had not met other Gay men. I would still think that I was alone with my own curse and that nobody would ever understand or love me.

George: My primary socialization is important but it doesn't hold a candle to what I learned later on in life. It is kind of like I was two people. The first was the younger Greek me. I think he was a caterpillar. When he got kicked out and came out and admitted to himself who he was he became a butterfly. I know this sounds fruity but that is the best analogy I can offer. I learned more about myself in that one year after coming out than I did for the previous twenty.

Donald: I think the most important thing to say here is that the primary socialization is inescapable. This means that it invariably holds some significance to people regardless of whether they enjoyed their early lives. Secondary socialization in my case came about as a result of a choice or decision that I've made. I most certainly could have gone through my life in the closet, hating myself each and every day of my life. I chose to live my life this way. I chose to emerge myself in what you could call Gay culture and most importantly, I chose to ascribe more importance to this secondary socialization. It was a choice and I made it and continue to make it. So the

simple answer is that my socialization into the Gay community is far more important to me because it reflects who I am and the decisions I've decided to make.

Colin: At least as important would be an understatement. My secondary socialization brought out the best in me and made me realize who I really was and what I really wanted for my life. My parents rose, sure. But they only provided the basics. My dad never loved me and my mom tried to be June Cleaver all of the time. I was never appreciated. Never understood. I wonder if they really loved me, especially my dad. When I started meeting this new crowd I found that my work was appreciated and that people really liked me for who I was. I could be myself. I wish that my life actually started when I was about twenty or nineteen so that I wouldn't have all this garbage I'm carrying around with me right now.

Marc: Let's see now. On the one hand I had parents who hated what I was and made no bones about it. I had a father who never had time for our family, who had an affair and divorced my mom when he got caught. I also had a mother who was so messed up and bitter about one thing or another that she never had time for anything or anyone but herself. On the other hand, I had a group of great friends who helped me with my problems and needed me to help them with theirs. We supported each other and still do. Which socialization do you think is more important? One where I learned that I was a piece of shit and another where I was a valued member of a community? Obviously my second socialization is more important to me. It's the only reason why I wasn't entirely messed up.

While the importance of secondary socialization into the Gay community is clear, there are two vastly differing exceptions. Trevor's statements reflect the distinction between ethnic identity and ethnic personality. Ethnic identity is a form of role attribution, both internal and external. Ethnic personality is what one does more spontaneously as a result of being socialized within an ethnic group. In Trevor's case, his ethnic personality is that of a Black man. He acts like he has been socialized to act (posturing, mannerisms, playing the dozens, etc..). It comes easy to him. His ethnic identity, despite the fact that he keeps it to himself and shares it only with other selected Gays, is that of a Gay man. He is Gay first and foremost. His ethnic personality reflects the fact that he can no more escape the fact that he is a Black man living in a certain geographical area with its own sets of rules of behaviour than he can escape the fact that he is, and was born, Gay. While it may not seem apparent to the reader, he does feel a sense of ethnic pride in being gay. Perhaps the greatest barrier to him making this more obvious to outsiders is the lack of acceptance of gays in his community and among his peers. Until this barrier is overcome, he is content to play the game of balancing his ethnic identity with his ethnic personality, but to the insider, he is clearly proud to be gay.

You ask me what I am...even if you don't ask I know that's what

you mean...I'm a fag. All that other shit is just like the clothes that I wear. It's as much a part of my life as my 9, see. I carry it with me because its part of my life...no...I carry it with me because it lets me live my life the way they say that I'm supposed to. It's easier for me to be seen the way they want to see me than the way I really am....but I am a fag.

The second exception can be seen in Steven's case. Whereas the above respondents' expressed the sentiment that their primary socialization was mostly harmful, this 32 year-old security guard of Indian descent indicates the opposite was true in his case. When asked whether his primary or secondary socialization were more important to him, he stated that:

I think that both took place at the same time and are inseparable. I am a member of my community and my community includes Straights and Gays. In my view, I haven't been socialized by two different groups in two diametrically opposed ways. I was not pushed out of my home and subsequently attracted to some Gay ghetto for affection or support. I've lived a normal life that included friends of various backgrounds, each of which have contributed to my socialization. That I am Gay goes without saying and I do identify as such and claim that particular world-view as my own. But just as a Italian-Chinese man might embrace elements of both cultures and combine them into a more personal identity, I have done so with what has been present in my life. All are important and equally so.

Clearly, the degree of acceptance of and exposure to gays during the primary socialization process affects not only future acceptance of other gays, but of oneself as well. Steven's words

serve as testimony to those who would ignore the existence of or mock the presence of gays in our society. Acceptance rather than tolerance seems to be the only way to ensure the likelihood of happiness and self-fulfillment.

Summary

Above all, this section should serve to illustrate that the respondents have undergone a life-long process of identity management stemming from their perceived sense of dissimilarity from other members of their primary social groups. Following this perception of difference, the informants entered a phase wherein they assigned a label to that perceived difference: "homosexual." Next, because no idea exists in a vacuum, the respondents came to understand the cultural significance of the homosexual label in terms of its negative associations. As a corollary to these associations, the informants adopted various coping mechanisms ranging from dissociation to rejection to suspicion that this difference stems from a homosexual orientation. For each of the respondents the result of the discrepancy between behavior, feelings and beliefs led to a phase of identity confusion. This confusion was approached in various ways throughout the informants lives. For some, refraining from same-sex sexual activity provided a

temporary answer. Others continued to participate in homosexual sexual activity but continued to deny that they were homosexual (dissociation). Eventually, the informants participated in activities, support groups or relationships which facilitated confusion reduction and this led to a tentative acceptance of a homosexual identity. Ultimately, the respondents achieved self-acceptance and the adoption and maintenance of a “gay” identity. The final catalyst for this change was coming-out and the single greatest impediment to this was the lack of acceptance by society in general and family in particular.

Despite being pushed away in one form or another, the respondents have turned the confusion of living a closeted life into the eventual acceptance of a positive Gay self-image and coherent personal identity as a member of a clearly identifiable group. If the informants interviewed during the course of this research in some way represent a larger gay community, it might be fair to make the following observations:

(i) Gay men generally see themselves as having been born gay. In terms of an ethnic analogy, they are an involuntary group in that they had absolutely no say as to how they would be born. The main issue here is that many people see gays as neither being a product of the primary socialization process nor members of an involuntary

group and cannot therefore be classified as an ethnic group. It would seem that there are two questions here.

First, are Gays "born" or "bred"? The constructionist notion that views sexual identities as wilful self-creations denies the experience of a involuntary component to identity. This has caused most Gays to assert that there is some biological basis to their Gayness. This is reflected in a growing inclination within the Gay movement in North America to understand itself and project an image of itself in ever more essentialist terms. Being Gay then, is seen as being the most basic and fundamental aspect of the individual's existence; they are born Gay.

The second problem is the question of primary socialization. If this is the key to ethnicity, how can we speak seriously of Gays as an "ethnic" group? It would seem that there is one fundamental difference between Gays and other groups that we normally associate with ethnic groups. Ethnicity is generally conferred at birth and passed on by the family through primary socialization.

The entrance into a Gay community, admittedly occurring later in life, constitutes both a secondary socialization and a break with one's primary socialization. While the individuals generally consider themselves to have been born Gay, that they choose to live as Gay men is a matter of personal choice. Clearly, this cannot be

called primary socialization. This does not mean, however, that the secondary socialization does not take on a primary *importance* to the individuals concerned.

To summarize then, Gays, by virtue of them being born Gay, are an involuntary group. Furthermore, they also constitute a voluntary group in that they choose to live out their lives as Gay men by adopting a Gay lifestyle. In selecting this life-style, they place primary importance on their secondary socialization.

(ii) There is a perception of a shared culture or over-lapping cultures among gay men. If “ethnic group” is understood in the sense of a group of persons sharing the same or some cultural traits rather than the belief in common ancestry, there may be some justification in using an ethnic analogy. Insofar as the informants are concerned, there is a belief in a shared “gay” culture in general and in particular, a common North American urban Gay culture built upon shared perceptions of common experiences such as discrimination, coming out, rejection by families, etc.

(iii) Gay men tend to see themselves as a clearly-identifiable group.

(iv) Gay men believe that they are perceived by others as being members of a clearly identifiable aggregate which differs significantly from the larger society.

(v) This self- and other- recognition stems from the fact that there are perceived boundaries (language, culture, symbols) separating Straights and Gays over and above sexual orientation. Ethnicity can be seen as a form of social organization and the persistence of boundaries is what marks ethnic groups rather than the mutable "cultural stuff" within. It would be fair to say that, in the North American context over the past two generations at least, there have been subjective boundaries which have served to divide "Straights" and "Gays" whether they be called that or "heterosexuals" and "homosexuals", "normal" or "deviant", "average" or "perverted". What these terms serve to represent is not as important as the fact that there have been clear distinctions made between "them" and "us".

(vi) Gay men have a shared common interpretation of the past insofar as gays as a group are concerned. This includes, but is not limited to, a belief in a history of persecution and oppression. A sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, and/or a common sense of survival has been of great importance in uniting

people into self-defining in-groups. Group identification is a generalized attitude indicative of a personal attachment to a group and a positive orientation toward being a member of the group. Therefore, ethnic group identification occurs when the group in question is one with whom the individual believes he has a common history based on shared individual characteristics and/or shared socio-cultural experiences.

The importance of symbolic or subjective attachments relating to an observably real group with a consensus acceptance of a shared interpretation of the past depends upon who is interpreting the past as well as how they are doing so. Most Gays feel that they share some commonalities of experience with those who have come before them. It should be recognized that not only do Gays exist, but they have a history. This history includes the murder of homosexuals by the majority culture - by burning, by stoning, by hanging - imprisonment, castration, expulsion from school, job, church, family, and armed forces, commitment to insane asylums, and general ostracism. But this history also records the contributions made by homosexuals to art, music, science, literature, and in fact, to any and all areas of knowledge.

While the commonalities may not be as extreme as those mentioned above, the feelings of isolation versus the satisfaction of

coming out are seen as being almost universal experiences. These experiences are seen as being both symbolic and subjective attachments to an observably real group with a consensus acceptance of a shared interpretation of the past (which is of course open to subjective and sometimes selective interpretation). In a very real sense, the Gay community is a community of memory; one that does not forget its past. Stories of collective history and exemplary individuals as well as painful stories of shared suffering are an important part of the socialization process in that both serve to create and sustain a Gay identity.

(vii) Gay men undergo a secondary socialization process into the gay community and this process often results in the prioritization of gay identity over and above any previously held ethnic identities. In the respondents' cases, previous ethnic allegiances were subverted because of the negative experiences associated with them: rejection, stereotypical images of "the homosexual", etc. In their stead, "gay" was adopted as a more positive pseudo-ethnic identity based upon boundaries, shared culture, etc.

Conclusion.

Clearly, ethnicity as a metaphor is in use by the Gay men who came to form the core of informants. It has been demonstrated how Gays could conceivably fit into this ethnic model of identification. Perhaps there is some merit in considering why they would choose to identify themselves along ethnic lines.

Ethnic membership allows people to identify themselves as belonging to a moral community with shared cultural values. In this sense, ethnicity is not merely a meaningless label. It carries with it a significance that is recognized and understood by both members and non-members (even if the limit of recognition and understanding is limited to knowing that one is or is not a member of that group). In this sense, ethnicity performs (1) as a basis for classification of individuals and groups; (2) as a foundation upon which identity is built; and (3) as a basis for action and social organization.

"Gayness" is an integral part of day-to-day life as well as the total emotional and intellectual existence of individuals. To claim that being Gay is an unimportant difference - in the face of laws, government policy, religious belief, medical opinion, and popular opinion and prejudice to the contrary - is clearly false. Claiming 'Gay' as an ethnic identity serves both to defend and affirm these differences as well as the right to the same protections against

discrimination that are claimed by other ethnic groups in society. To be Gay, then, means to be on par with Italians, Blacks, or Jews. It would seem that the "politics of identity" have crystallized around the notion of 'Gayness' as a real and not arbitrary difference. While gay men seem to accept the notion of a 'gay ethnic identity' the question of whether it becomes accepted in society however, remains to be seen.

Appendix A.

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS.

This interview will last about an hour and a half to two hours. The interview is part of a formal study that will be part of an M.A. Thesis for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University (Ottawa, Ontario). The purpose of this study is to examine how Gay men construct their identities.

I will be asking you question about your current and past life, your family, your experiences in "coming out," and your feelings about growing older. Your help in answering these questions is very important to me because I am interested in your personal experiences and how they may or may not support what the "experts" say.

Although I will write your first name down, please be assured that this interview is completely confidential.

May I have your permission to tape record or take notes during our discussion? I do this only in the hope of maintaining accurate records and to ensure that the words I use will be your own. Rest assured that all tapes and materials will be placed in a secure place, and all names will be removed from these materials at the end of the study. The final results can be presented in such a way that no individual can be identified and you are free to drop out of the study at any time.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Please check here
when read []

Appendix B.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.

1. Social Life:

- What is your age?
- What is your occupation?
- What were your parents' occupations while you were growing up?
- How would you define your economic class?
- Which of the following is of greater importance to you in constructing/operationalizing your identity: your age; race; ethnicity; occupation; sexual orientation; religion? Please list these factors according to their importance to you.

2. Social Life:

- How many of your friends are Gay/Straight?
- How much of your leisure time do you spend socializing with other Gays/Straights?
- Are you satisfied with your current social life? If no, how could it be improved?

3. Involvement With Family:

I would like to know about members of your immediate family-spouse, parents, children, or siblings. How many brothers and sisters do you have (living or dead)? What is your birth order?

- Do you have a spouse, parents, children, or siblings who are living?
- At the present time, are you regularly in touch?
- Do they know you are Gay? If yes or no, how does this affect the relationship?

4. Exclusive Relationships:

- Do you currently have a partner?
- Do you live together?

5. Coming Out:

- What does "coming out" mean to you?
- Are you "out" to your family? Friends? At Work?

6. Involvement In Gay Community:

- Are you involved with any Gay organizations such as local Gay rights groups, Gay religious groups like the Metropolitan Community Church, etc.? How do you feel about these organizations?
- Do you ever go to Gay bars, bath-houses, beaches, or places known as Gay "cruising" areas?
 - Why or why not?
 - If yes, how often?
 - How do you feel about these places?

7. Intergenerational Attitudes:

- In your estimation, is there a "generation gap" between younger and older Gays?
- What do you think of Gays in their thirties? forties? fifties?

8. Discrimination:

- Do you feel that you have ever been discriminated against because you are Gay? For instance, have you lost or been denied a job, a service, an apartment?
- If yes, when? What were the circumstances? What did you do about it?

9. Adaptation:

- Do you ever feel that you have to "pass" as being Straight in order to avoid discrimination? Do you do so with friends? Family? At work?
- Have you ever done so in the past?

10. Socialization

- What is your ethnic background?
- Do you identify with this? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- What was your parents' religion, if any? What is yours, if any?
- What was your parents' attitude towards homosexuality while you were growing up? Did their attitude change when you came out to them? Did it prevent you from doing so?
- How were you socialized into the Gay community?
- Do you think that your socialization into the Gay community is at least as important as your primary socialization? Why or why not?

11. Nature vs. Nurture

- Can you tell me about your first sexual experience with a member of your own sex? How old were you? How old was the other person? What was your relationship to your first partner-friend, relative, stranger, etc.?
- When did you realize you were attracted to members of the same sex?
- When did you first admit to yourself that you were Gay? How did you feel about this?
- When did you first get to know other Gay people?
- What was it like being Gay when you first came out?
- Do you think that you were born Gay or that you became Gay as a result of socialization?

12. Gay or Homosexual?

- What does the term "Gay" mean to you?
- What does the term "homosexual" mean to you?
- Do you feel that the terms mean different things? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that "homosexual" has negative connotations?

13. Ethnic Analogies?

- Do you feel that Gays,
 - (a) share a common culture?
 - (b) share a common ancestry?
 - (c) are conscious of forming a sub-group within society?
 - (d) are identified by others as forming a sub-group within society?
 - (e) have certain characteristics that separate them from Straight people? If yes, do these characteristics change over time or are they constant from one generation to the next?
 - (f) have, as a group, an observably real past?

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell or ask me?

Appendix C: Glossary of Terms.

Bi: Bisexual. Persons who are sexually attracted to both women and men.

Coming out: A developmental process by which an individual develops a Gay identity and acknowledges that identity to the self and discloses it or “comes out” to others.

Gay: Persons who are affectionally and sexually attracted to other men.

Gay Ghetto; Gay ghettoization: Urban neighbourhoods with a particularly heavy concentration of Gay male and/or lesbian residents, often including Gay/lesbian businesses and organizations; the tendency of many Gays/lesbians to seek out and migrate to such areas to reinforce Gay/lesbian identity and self-acceptance.

Gender roles: Behaviors, attitudes, or feelings that are defined as “appropriate” or “inappropriate” for one or the other sex, or both.

Gender role flexibility: The ability to comfortably express and engage in a range of attitudes and behaviors independent of whether they are defined as “appropriate” or “inappropriate” for one’s sex.

Het: Heterosexual. Persons whose sexual and affectional feelings and behaviors are predominantly for members of the opposite sex.

Homophobia; homophobic: An irrational fear of homosexuality in one’s self and others.

Homosexual: Persons whose affectional and sexual feelings and behaviors are predominately or exclusively with members of their own sex. The term is considered offensive by many Gays since it is perceived as referring solely to sexuality without acknowledging the emotional and spiritual aspects of the Gay experience.

Identity: Sense of self; self-concept.

Identity formation: Individual identity development that occurs over a lifetime whereby one's own set of unique personality characteristics distinguish the self from others.

Individuation: The development of one's own identity separate from the identities of others.

Internalized homophobia: The taking in or internalization of society's negative attitudes and assumptions about homosexuality by Gays.

Involuntary: With respect to involuntary socialization, coming about as a result of coincidence rather than a conscious decision. A person has no choice as to the specific cultural group which provides for him the basic process of socialization; it is an accident of birth. An individual is born into a given society and, in many cases, into a minority racial or cultural group. Both the general society (ex. Canada) and the more specific minority racial or cultural group (ex. Italian, Jewish, Jamaican) affect the ways in which an individual is socialized and the way they see themselves and their "place" in the world. That they have no say into when, where and to whom they are born implies that their membership in that group (specific family in a specific society at a specific time) is involuntary. This does not mean however, that at a later stage in his life, an individual might not very well choose the ethnicity which appears to maximize his status and opportunities (ex. Italian rather than Canadian or "Paulo" rather than "Paul").

Immersion: A process that leads to complete the identification with the patient, self-negation, and possibly loss of the will to live.

Invisible minority: Persons who are not considered part of the mainstream culture, whose minority identity is not externally discernible, and whose identity becomes known only if it is disclosed.

Mainstream society: Refers to the majority culture, values, and lifestyle of a country.

Oppression: The result of a system where one's access to power is limited or controlled.

Passing: Hiding or covering up a part of one's self. Often refers to hiding one's homosexuality by "passing" as heterosexual.

Primary socialization: Socialization into a specific ethnic or cultural group within a greater society dependent upon when and where an individual is born and who he/she is raised by. Example: Ian was born into an upper-class Jewish family in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. As a result, his primary socialization included elements of both a specific ethnic-religious nature (Jewish) and those of the greater society (Montreal, within the Province of Quebec, within Canada). Primary socialization includes notions of the "male role" as defined by society generally and reinforced by ethnic customs.

Secondary socialization: Voluntary socialization into a different group which often involves the rejection of previously held conceptions. Example: Ian voluntarily associated himself with the Gay community and therefore underwent a re-socialization process which included him re-defining his conception of male roles. Note: Secondary socialization into the Gay sub-culture is required because virtually nobody is enculturated as members of the Gay community from birth.

Sexual orientation: An individual's feelings of affectional and sexual attraction for persons of the same, opposite, or both sexes.

Social construction: Meanings for concepts and identities provided by the ideological systems developed for their explanation.

Stereotype: Shared sets of beliefs that describe attributes, personalities, or characteristics of people because of who they are assumed to be or based on the group(s) to which they belong.

Stereotypic: Conforming to a shared set of beliefs or stereotypes.

Visible minority: Persons who are members of a culture that is not considered to be part of the mainstream, and whose identity is easily identifiable by means of race, ethnicity, and/or cultural/linguistic characteristics.

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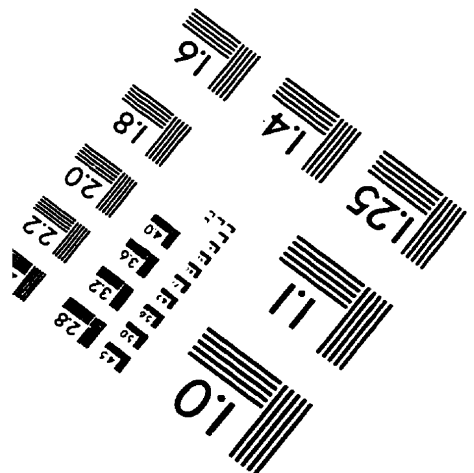
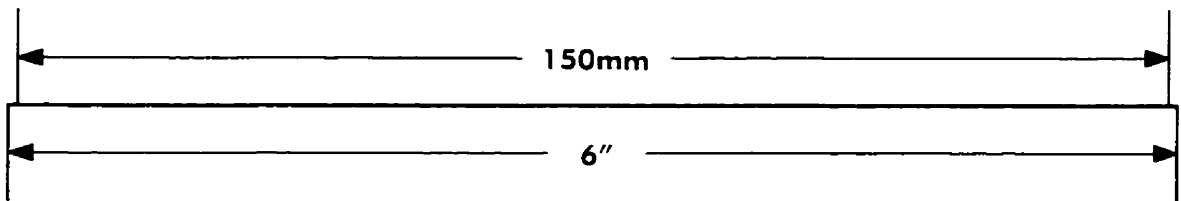
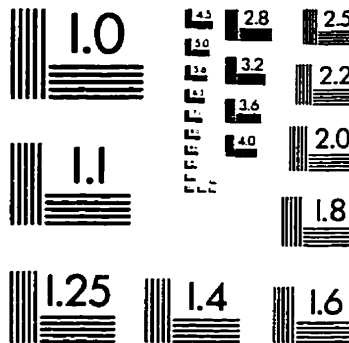
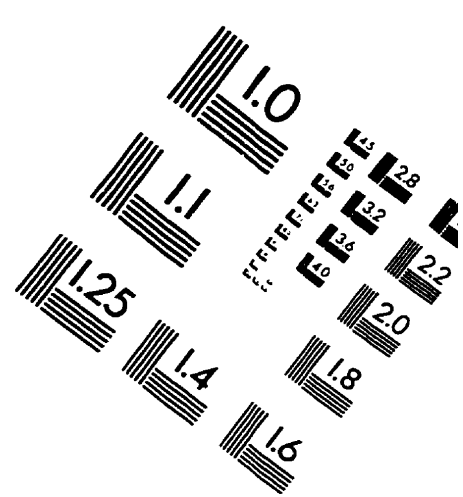
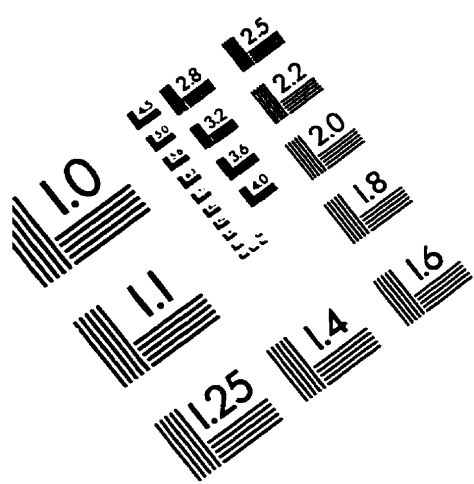
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