Summer camps run by the church were also organizations that contributed to the socialization of gay and lesbian Adventists. "In the summers my brother and I were sent to summer camp which we greatly enjoyed" (Cindy). "During my childhood years, I went to summer camps at Glacier View Ranch" (George).

There were other organizations that were less common that also provided socialization opportunities for participants.

When I was sixteen, I remember being elected to be the secretary-treasurer of the Spanish Youth Federation. It became my task to get a draft of the constitution for the organization written up. Being in the federation meant organizing several day-long programs around the state in different churches and meeting a lot of people (Juan).

Church-sponsored activities

In addition to the organizations connected to the church, there were church-sponsored activities that served as agents of religious socialization. One of the regular activities that churches sponsor is campmeeting. Campmeeting is a series of religious meetings that are generally held in the summer. This practice dates back to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Historically, Adventist congregations would join together regionally for a week to ten days for spiritual renewal. These gatherings were a cornerstone of evangelical religions across the North
with residence halls, while others are day schools. All of the colleges and universities have sex-segregated dormitories. While these schools are operated and funded on the local level, they must be supported on a state (conference) and regional (union) level.

All of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample attended a church-affiliated school for at least some portion of their education. Although one individual's experience lasted only three weeks, most attended for a significant portion of their education.

The greatest influence on my development as an Adventist was probably the fact that I attended SDA schools from first grade through a master's degree (Tom).

Another participant recalls,

I went to Adventist schools all my life--kindergarten through two years of college. I went to boarding school for academy and an Adventist college a few hours away after I graduated. I had a good experience. My teachers were great. I really never questioned the Adventist beliefs having grown up in the environment (Nathan).

Experiences at school offered opportunities to become more socialized in Adventism and in some cases was the forum where individuals learned about homosexuality in connection with religious teachings. A male participant recalled,

It wasn't until I got to college before I ever actually heard the words that homosexuality was a sin. In my (non-SDA) high school experience I had been given the impression that sex between guys happened because there were no girls around (Donald).
Homosexual Identity Development

Sense of Difference and Confusion

For gay and lesbian Adventists, early homosexual identity development began with a sense of feeling different from other people. This sense of difference often led participants to feel confused about their sexual identity. This sense of difference was very common, perhaps more among males than females. One male participant remarked, "I’ve known [I was different] since I was four or five" (Alan). Another male said, "From my earliest memories I have been curious about naked men. It’s that basic drive, an intense interest" (Tony). "From very early on, I knew I was different, ‘weird’; I’d truly come to accept that about myself" (Brandon).

A female recalls, "All throughout the growing up years, I felt I was different. I wasn’t normal, I wasn’t like everybody else" (Sue).

The only avenue I found where I could safely deal with my attractions for girls was in my own imagination. I spent hours looking through the Sears catalog or any other material I could find with pictures of women. I knew I was ‘weird’ being attracted to girls like that (Joanne).

This sense of difference often went unlabeled and treated as an unexplainable part of life. One male participant described a relationship he had with a roommate, "I
approached the subject. I figured that one day I would probably just be straight, and it would all be over (Steve).

Around age 11 or 12 I read a chapter in the book *On Becoming a Woman* which talked of 'unnatural love.' It made me afraid, so afraid I buried it any time it came up for the next 25 plus years (Anna).

Seeking professional help to lessen confusion

For about 60 percent of this sample, professionals were sought in order to lessen identity confusion.

I did a senior paper on homosexuality and the SDA church. Reading the material for the paper, I knew, 'this is who I am.' I went straight into therapy to see if I could get this figured out (Mark).

The psychologist I saw [in college] was helpful, but I was still too scared to let him really be of much help, although I did at least discuss my homosexual feelings and attractions (Adam).

Another male participant said that his friends encouraged him to go to a church-related treatment center to help him deal with his depression and confusion. He recalled,

I told them all my story, what I'd been through, how I'd tried to change. I had group therapy and many self-help meetings. A counselor said to me, 'You have to accept you're gay. You don't have to like it, but you must accept it.' I admitted it then and said it was okay and some days it really is (Alan).

Identity Exploration

Separation of religion and sexuality

Once individuals realized that they were gay or lesbian, they used a variety of ways to explore their new found
quent. Everything was telling me that she was the one that could cure me" (Mitch). Another exception was noted by a male participant, "My first sexual experience was with a female prostitute when I was 17. She was given to me by my buddies" (George).

The following excerpts from interviews illustrate the typical nature of these relationships.

In the summer of my sophomore year in college I met this girl whom I liked very much and with whom I started spending a lot of time. It was rather confusing as to what this meant since I really liked a lot of qualities about her, but did not feel the same electricity I had in the presence of men. One thing that saved us and allowed the relationship to build over the next year and a half, was that we both had this idea that sex was for marriage. As a result our relationship was very cerebral and not intimate, and yet, we were able to build an emotional bond that kept us together (Juan).

A lesbian participant recalled a heterosexual relationship,

We dated for over two years and had a lot of fun. I admired him for having high moral standards, even though we were in our late twenties, he never tried to get me to have sex with him. That's probably why I liked him enough to go out with him for so long (Nan).

Most gays and lesbians considered themselves "virgins" even though they had experienced homosexual relationships. "I graduated from college and dated a girl and got engaged, but never had sex, because premarital sex was taboo, you just didn't do that" (Donald).
was teaching. I took the magazine and hid it. I wanted to read it and yet I didn't want to be seen reading it. I waited until after school when I was alone in the building and read through the entire issue, taking in every word. It was reading that article that I really acknowledged my homosexuality for the first time (John).

Gay publications

Gay publications also assisted lesbian and gay Adventists to explore their sexuality.

It took awhile, but I eventually found a group of lesbian friends through a listing in Gayellow Pages and an ad in Ms magazine. I rented a P.O. Box and began receiving their materials (Nan).

A couple of books that were rather defining were two books by Patricia Nell Warren, The Front Runner and The Fancy Dancer. Both books I read in 1976 and sort of opened the door towards understanding what it was like to be gay. It sort of gave words to my own feelings and they were important in getting some kind of image of a male homosexual world (Juan).

Traveling out of town to explore covertly

Traveling to other places offered lesbian and gay Adventists avenues to explore their sexuality covertly. Traveling to another geographic location afforded the anonymity that these individuals needed to safely explore their sexuality.

I attended at least two national conferences a year that would take me away from home. I always used those trips to explore my sexuality. One time I attended a gay parade. Another time I went to a porno theater (Harold).

I would visit Washington DC occasionally to meet with my gay friends and soak in gay culture. I started reading gay genre literature. It was a
Known partners

Particularly among women participants, engaging in same-sex relationships with persons who were known to them was one way to explore their sexual identities. Men also took opportunities to have sex with willing partners who were known to them; however, it was less frequent than among women.

After my student missionary experience, I went back to college. I was really on top of things academically, but the pressure was building emotionally. I felt I needed to settle this thing in my mind. 'Sue,' I said to myself, 'You don't know, because you've never been in a relationship with a woman. Maybe you'd be turned off if you were in a relationship with a woman.' I felt like I was going to lose my mind. If I continued, I would end up in a nut house. Whether I go to hell for it or not I have to find out whether or not I was gay. I told a friend who was supportive of my struggle. As time went on she and I became closer and closer. I'd go study at her room and she'd walk me back to my room. She would say goodnight, shake hands, then hug. She expressed willingness to be part of an experiment to see if I was gay. We started holding hands, holding each other and kissing. It wasn't long before we were lovers and she was in love with me (Sue).

One gay man recalls his first night at an Adventist college, which was also his first experience attending an Adventist school:

I talked to one guy fairly late into the night. We talked about his academy experiences. I remember him throwing in gay issues and wondering if this guy knows about me. He'd tell me stuff like the guys at academy would fool around and he didn't know if they were gay or just wanted sex. After we talked, we both went to our own rooms to sleep. Then around 2:30 in the morning, the guy
orientation. A participant in the early stages of coming out remarked, "If I could just take a pill to change this, I would in a second" (Mitch). One participant who remembered no efforts to change orientation stated, "Never at any time in my wildest imagination have I believed that I could change" (Tony). Because he did not see change as a option, he made no attempt toward this end.

Prayer

One strategy to resist homosexual identity development mentioned by all of the participants was the use of prayer. This generally took the form of praying to God to take away homosexual desires.

I spent entire nights agonizing in prayer with God. Begging Him, 'Please Lord! Please! Don't let me be gay!' I found myself praying, 'Please Lord. Let this cup pass from me but your will be done.' I find it amazing, when I hear people who honestly believe that gays and lesbians choose to be gay! My God! I had spent 33 years consciously choosing the very opposite without success (Joanne).

"I have prayed my entire life (since age 13) that the Lord would change me. I didn't want to have these feelings. I didn't want to go to hell, I didn't want to be this way" (Mitch).

One day, when I was with some friends at the beach, I went off by myself to talk to God about it [homosexuality]. I said, 'God, why did you
Denial was not only used extensively among the participants, it was often used by them for prolonged periods of time.

I began to wonder if I was 'gay' when I was a teenager, I believe, but I know I denied it to myself. I did not actually acknowledge to myself that I was gay until after I was 45 years old (Tom).

"Not until my middle thirties did I decide to face my sexuality and do something about it" (Meg).

Here I am in my mid-forties and I'm still struggling with being gay. My wife asked me before we were married if I was gay. I said 'no.' I was gay, I realized it, but I couldn't admit it (Harold).

**Turning off feelings**

Since lesbian and gay Adventists could not "control" homosexual feelings, more than half made a conscious decision not to feel their emotions at all. This "turning off" feelings allowed them to resist homosexual identity development at least for a time. "I learned not to feel. Looking back, I did develop a lot of emotionless-ness. I wanted to be like Spock in Star Trek" (Brandon).

**Heterosexual marriage**

Another strategy to resist homosexual identity was to engage in a heterosexual marriage. At this stage, most individuals realized their homosexual orientation, but pursued a heterosexual relationship and marriage to resist developing a homosexual identity. Participants who did
"claim" these promises, that is, believe that God's help will come to them if they ask, referring to certain Bible texts.

I resolutely decided I could overcome this, with God's help. It was sin and all sin could be overcome through Christ. I began looking for Bible texts to admonish myself. I'd look for promises of overcoming and asking friends to pray for me (Sue).

Use of religious rituals

Four participants engaged in religious rituals to resist homosexuality. The "laying on of hands" is a religious ritual where Adventist ministers and elders of the church pray for the person who needs "healing." The laying on of hands is done in a group while touching the individual.

One male informant recalled,

Soon after my first affair I was filled with guilt. So the next morning I said to him (my partner), 'You can't stay here. This is wrong.' He left and I got into the religion thing again. People prayed for me with laying on of hands (Alan).

Immersion in religion

The hope of changing sexual orientations led Adventist gays and lesbians to participate in additional religious activities in order to rid themselves of homosexual desire. They reasoned that if they would immerse themselves in religious activities, the homosexual tendencies would lessen.
not make women sexually attractive to me or take away my fascination with men" (Richard).

While the majority of the counselors that participants sought treatment from were not Seventh-day Adventists, there was one whose name has become notorious among lesbian and gay Adventists: Colin Cook. Cook is a former Adventist minister who was fired in 1974 because of homosexual activity (Lawson 1987). Cook later married and claimed to have changed his sexual orientation to heterosexual and developed a change ministry for other Adventist homosexuals (Lawson 1987). The following chronicles one participant's experience with Colin Cook.

After I learned of Colin Cook, I wrote to him and he wrote back to me encouraging me that I too could experience the freedom from homosexuality that he had and that others had. He left wide open the possibility of having a family and a wife. I received a great sense of peace and courage from those letters. Colin also suggested that I consider taking some time out, preferably a year and relocate to Reading, Pennsylvania where Quest Learning Center was. This way, I could get this issue dealt with and move on to the rest of my life. In the mean time, I ordered the tapes he had for sale. It was a ten-cassette set called 'Homosexuality and the Power to Change.' When they came in the mail, I remember being so paranoid of what kind of box they were going to arrive in. I hid them and I started to listen to them whenever I was alone. I slowly listened to each tape and that was the beginning of what I called 'selling my soul' to Colin. He was extremely open and frank about his homosexual experiences. I was diligent in wanting to begin doing what he advocated. I transcribed the tapes and started keeping a journal as Colin recommended. I began to try and monitor my feelings, looking for any
suicide as a way to rid themselves of the "problem" of homosexuality.

My suicidal thoughts became more dominant in my everyday life, and I was hospitalized because my college campus counselor felt I was a danger to myself. I thought that suicide would be the best solution to my problem [being gay]. Death seemed like the only option. Death appeared to hold everything I wanted from life and which life couldn't give me—everlasting peace and permanent freedom from homosexuality (Jason).

Another participant recalled,

Quite frankly, if it weren't for the guilt of how my parents and family would feel if I killed myself, I would have done so and been successful, a long time ago (Steve).

One woman shared a poem she wrote soon after college:

So many years I've hidden and shrank away,  
Until finally the secrecy has become my greatest enemy  
I tire of life and its endless problems, seemingly unsolvable.  
Caring no longer, I yearn for the ending of it all.  
In hopeless agony push away all friends, too afraid to share,  
Determined not to let them see me hurting, confused and weak.  
Every path is strewn with hopelessness.  
...SUICIDE

Acceptance of Homosexual Identity

After experiencing a variety of identity resisting strategies, all of the participants in this study used other strategies to accept their homosexual identities.

Resignation

The strategy that may have allowed for the transition from identity resistance to acceptance was experiencing a
The Adventist church teaches that the Bible condems homosexuality. Most participants had never questioned traditional Adventist interpretations of the Bible passages that refer to homosexuality. Not until they faced the issue of homosexuality for themselves, did the participants review Bible texts used by the church to condemn homosexuality. During this review, participants did not rely on traditional Adventist interpretations of the Bible texts.

I felt that I should look again at the scriptures that had tripped me up before: Romans, Timothy II, Deuteronomy, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. I asked God to help me understand. I told Him that I knew who I was, I didn't blame myself or Him or my parents or anyone. I read the scriptures and knew that they did not condemn me for loving those of my own sex (Marvin).

I began a real sincere prayer and study campaign, desiring to know only the truth in regards to homosexuality and the scripture. I was willing to accept whatever direction God would lead. Having spent my entire life on the side of believing homosexual behavior was a sin, I was still most comfortable with that belief. I spent weeks, and months, in prayer and study. And over that time, my picture of those few scriptural texts that are used to condemn homosexuals began to change. I had a friend who took me to an MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) and I went to hear a study. The title was "Homosexuality in the Bible" and it made me look at Bible texts differently, especially those particular texts [that refer to homosexuality]. I realized that I could be gay and Christian (Joanne).

Changing views of God

For about half of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample, their view of God had to change in order to
Jim remembers that conversation as significantly influencing his ability to accept his homosexuality.

One woman participant went to an Adventist college president for answers about sexual orientation.

I went to see him and I told him 'This is who I am [lesbian],' and I asked him, 'What does this mean?' He pulled out books that explained Bible texts with the real Hebrew meaning. I took it from there." From that interaction, Irene received the clear message that she could be both an Adventist and a lesbian. "It was like the whirlwind inside me stopped and I was able to meld my spiritual and sexual identities.

Receiving a "Sign" of God's approval

For some lesbian and gay Adventists, integrating homosexual and religious identity required a "sign" of God's approval. Adventists teach that God has given "signs" to people, as exemplified in the Bible, as to what course to pursue in life. Participants used this strategy from their belief systems to facilitate acceptance of their homosexuality. One woman remembers her first experience with feeling what she interpreted as God's approval.

Spring break we went to Maine skiing and spent the whole week being together. I experienced what it was like to live with a woman, cooking, skiing, making love, with no fear. It kept going through my head, 'God, is this what we were supposed to be doing?' We were making love one morning and all of a sudden a beam of sunlight came in and touched both of us and an immediate realization hit me that it was right (Sue).

I had a dream that woke me with the horrible screams of a woman echoing in my mind. The dream was an image of me fighting with myself. As I
ibly wonderful experience, it was good to meet other gay Adventists, and I was sufficiently impressed to join Kinship. I have been a member ever since (Adam).

I learned of Kinship through the Gayellow Pages. It was a great relief to realize [from Kinship contacts] that nowhere in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy is there a mention—let alone a condemnation—of homosexuality as one’s natural orientation (Nan).

I want to share with gay men and women as I have been so powerfully blessed. I see the ongoing need for mentoring, giving, and role modeling as a gay man, for it helps all concerned, and it is a two-way street. Within the organization of Kinship, I feel blessed to have so many wonderful role models (George).

While Kinship is a proven source of information, for some gay and lesbian Adventists, connecting with Kinship is not entirely positive. A male participant remarked,

Kinship really poses a conundrum for me most of the time. I have met some marvelous people through the forum, but many parts of the forum are unhealthy and I find the dynamics a threat to my spiritual health.

Kinnet

Kinnet is an Internet group begun by members of Kinship. Some Adventist homosexuals found new role models through Kinnet. "Being the computer nerd that I am, I had never heard of any gay SDA’s until I was surfing the net on my own and found Kinnet" (Peter).

Soon after we got our computer and were connected to the Internet, I started surfing and found Kinnet. I couldn’t believe it! I screamed out to my partner, ‘Oh, my God! There are gay
a gay co-dependency anonymous group, but rarely do
so anymore because I also feel very culturally
uncomfortable there (Tom).

The gay community offers so much in things I
don't relate to like 'new age,' drugs, and alco-
hol. I also see a lot of co-dependency in the gay
community. There's lots of bad out there. On
those issues, I'm not with the gay community
(Carol).

Coming Out

Once participants used strategies to accept their
homosexual identity, they were able to come out and acknow-
ledge their homosexuality. Coming out may involve coming
out to oneself and/or to others, both gay and straight.

Coming out to self

Coming out to self begins with admitting homosexuality
to oneself. The coming out process was often one of the
most painful life events of gay and lesbian Adventists.

While I began to acknowledge my homosexual tenden-
cies, I was only able to deal with bits and pieces
at a time. Months, even years went by when I
would ignore these issues again (Joanne).

I came out to myself in the summer of 1980. I was
20 years old and a summer student at the Univer-
sity living in San Francisco. I knew I was gay
and I was scared . . . scared of myself and
frightened of my passions (George).

Coming out to others--gay

Coming out to others, whether gay or straight followed
coming out to self for all participants in this sample.
However, there was no particular order in coming out to
"Mitch, you're not that; I want my best friend to be my best man. I want you in my wedding."

Commitment to Homosexual Identity

Sometime after accepting their homosexual identities and coming out, about 75% of the sample in this study made a commitment to homosexuality as a way of life. Commitment to homosexual identity in this case means that the participants live as openly gay or lesbian persons. The participant no longer attempts to live life as a heterosexual. For example, while not all participants in this stage are out in every aspect of their lives, for the majority of the time, they are more out than closeted. The following excerpts from interviews illustrate the stage of commitment to homosexual identity.

Overall, I think that my gay identity continues in formation, because it seems like one is always coming out. Different places and different stages in life seem to demand a different mind set and expands the identity one has formed. I usually take the opportunity to get to know other gay and lesbian students through the gay/lesbian organization on campus, and have worked with one of the AIDS projects in the state. I continue to work with Kinship in various capacities (Juan).

I socialize with lesbians now, go to parties, dance, eat, and drink with them. For the first time in my life, I finally feel like the 'round peg in the round hole.' I fit, and they fit into my life. They are my family, and I am a part of theirs. All the things we do together continue to help me form my identity, which I consider to be evolving each and every day (Meg).
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The analysis chapter discusses the conditions that move participants through the process of identity construction and consequences of moving through that process. This chapter also offers interpretive insights of the findings from this study. Concepts from processual symbolic interactionism illuminate the discussion throughout.

This research examined the process of how Adventist homosexuals construct their identities through the lens of symbolic interactionism, specifically, processual symbolic interactionism. Processual symbolic interactionism focuses on "the nature of interaction as process" (Franklin 1982, p. 89). As a major contributor to processual symbolic interactionism, Herbert Blumer summarized the major premises of symbolic interaction. Blumer notes that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them (1969, p. 2). The primary "thing" that Adventist homosexuals were acting towards in this study was their own emerging identities as homosexuals within the context of their established Adventist identities. The "meanings" that Adventist homosexuals had for this thing, homosexuality, was sin, which leads to eternal destruction.
ters" (1969, p. 2). Gay and lesbian Adventists learned to deal with the things they encountered by seeking out new information through social interaction. Participants then interpreted that information in a way that allowed their homosexual and Adventist identities to blend.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

How can the reader be confident that the information presented in the analysis and conclusions is trustworthy and credible? Many steps were taken to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of this report. The primary tool I used to ensure accuracy was employing member checks. Member checking allows participants to review the report for accuracy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This was done at two stages. The first member check was giving the participant a copy of the interview transcript to review. Next, after initial analysis was complete, member checks were used again. This time the member checks were used to confirm working hypotheses in the analysis.

I also used peer debriefers to clarify, discuss, and advance the analysis. Primarily, these peers were other doctoral students who offered critical and constructive feedback about the analysis. These debriefers often answered the question, "Does this make sense to someone unfamiliar with the topic?"
Adventist education. Donald recalled, "One of the reasons my parents decided to move to the small town where I grew up was because there was a church school there." Thus, the family supported the socialization efforts of the school and church, and they in turn, reinforced values taught at home.

Familial socialization appeared to be the most important feature in developing an Adventist identity. Participants referred to their families primarily in positive terms. Remembering family life as influential and meaningful, participants were clear about the beneficial environment of growing up in an Adventist home. This contrasts with other research on gay and lesbian populations. Pattison and Pattison found that their "subjects reported that the primary cause of their homosexuality was unsatisfactory relations with their parents. Eight subjects stated that their fathers were distant, aloof, and uninvolved with them" (1980, p. 1558). Since Pattison and Pattison only studied 11 gay men, this difference could be because of small sample size. In addition, the Pattison and Pattison study was designed to support the possibility of change in sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. The view that homosexuality is caused by a poor home environment is often connected with theories on changing sexual orientation. Therefore, the Pattison research finding was consistent with researcher assumptions. In contrast, this re-
Homosexual Identity Development

It is important to note that while the stages of homosexual identity development are described linearly, in no way should they be conceived of as distinct, sequential phases. While gay and lesbian Adventists were engaging in strategies to resist homosexual identity development, they also learned of strategies that aided in the acceptance of homosexual identities.

Sense of Difference and Confusion

While opposing viewpoints on homosexual identity development abound (Cass 1979; Coleman 1982; Plummer 1975; Troiden 1988), a few common threads and themes remain. As mentioned in the literature review, most identity developmental models note an initial sense of difference and confusion as individuals come to see themselves as homosexual (Coleman 1982; Plummer 1975; Ponse 1978; Troiden 1988). This sense of difference and confusion was true of participants in this study.

To manage identity confusion, participants used a variety of strategies. One of the most commonly used strategies to manage confusion was avoidance. As with the sense of difference and confusion, this strategy was found in other research (Cass 1979; Troiden 1988). A second common strategy was for the participants to seek professional help
102). Each participant took action, choosing from various options, to decide just what course of action to pursue.

It is during the exploration stage that role-taking began. "Role-taking is the process whereby an individual imaginatively constructs the attitudes of the other, and thus anticipates the behavior of the other" (Lauer and Handel 1977, p. 60). When participants explored homosexuality, they observed the behavior of other homosexuals and imagined themselves in that role. Participants used a variety of strategies that allowed them to engage in homosexual role-taking.

Strategies in identity exploration
Separating sexuality and religion

The strategy that may have provided the basis for all other exploration strategies was the participants' ability to separate their religious beliefs from their emerging sexuality. The Adventist identity remained an intact part of individual identity in this population. Participants made a decision to remain an Adventist while exploring homosexuality covertly.

This type of exploration is an example of Goffman's normal deviants, where "people pass, and they do so in both directions, into or out of the stigmatized category" (1963, P. 133). Participants carried on their everyday lives in their predominant roles as Seventh-day Adventists. Then, as
explore sexuality was a short-term solution to the problem of understanding their sexuality.

Exploring same-sex relationships

Having same-sex relationships was another strategy this sample used to explore sexual identity. As mentioned in the literature review, this type of exploration is common (Cass 1984; Plummer 1975; Troiden 1988). Troiden points out a gender difference in sexual behavior during the exploration period he refers to as identity assumption (1988). According to Troiden, males are more likely to use gay bars and anonymous sex to initiate and explore sexual involvements (1988). In contrast, as indicated in the literature review, women are more likely to begin exploring within an emotional relationship with another woman (de Monteflores and Schultz 1978). While findings from this sample support that men explore sexual orientation sexually while women explore through relationships, this finding was not true in all circumstances for male participants. In general, women in this sample explored their sexuality within the confines of a relationship. Female participants did not take part in anonymous sex, while some men in the sample did. However, while some researchers hold that anonymous sex is commonplace among gay males (Risman and Schwartz 1988), only about one third of the males in this sample explored their sexuality through anonymous sexual behavior. Therefore, for this
as a resisting strategy (Troiden 1988). The literature does not, however, address the other resisting strategies identified here to any notable extent. The resisting strategies delineated in this section may expand and contribute to the identity-development literature.

My sense from the data is that gay and lesbian Adventists may engage in strategies to resist homosexual identity to a greater degree than other studies indicate. These data demonstrate an extensive use of resisting strategies by the participants as noted in the Findings Chapter. Processual symbolic interaction may help explain the importance of these strategies for this population. As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer 1969, p. 2). When participants held the meaning of homosexuality as sinful, they actively resisted homosexuality as an identity, thus explaining the greater degree of engaging in these strategies.

Denial

Along with the larger gay and lesbian population (Troiden 1988), homosexual Adventists used the strategy of denial to resist homosexual identity development. However, participants in this sample may have used denial more extensively than other studies have indicated. For example, Dank
Prayer, Bible promises, rituals, and immersion in religion

The use of prayer, claiming Bible promises, religious rituals, and immersion in religion were strategies that seem rather unique to this population. The identity development literature does not discuss these strategies as ways to resist homosexual identity development. While there are personal accounts from individuals who have used these strategies (Davidson 1970), no research documents their widespread use.

One reason that this may be true is the way other researchers have obtained their samples. For example, Dank began with a questionnaire administered to "self-admitted homosexuals attending a meeting of a homophile organization" (1971, p. 181). Cass recruited subjects through private social functions, a homosexual rights march, a homosexual counseling service, personal acquaintances, newspaper advertisements, and clients referred to the researcher from various agencies for counseling regarding homosexuality (Cass 1984, p. 154).

While Adventist gays and lesbians might possibly be recruited through these methods, it is unlikely.

For individuals in this sample, their primary identity was Seventh-day Adventist with their homosexual identity developing later in life. While they may respond to a general advertisement for volunteers in a research project, lesbian and gay Adventists are more likely to participate if
Acceptance of Homosexual Identity

How do lesbian and gay Adventists come to accept their homosexual identity? Processual symbolic interaction may be helpful in explaining this phenomenon. According to Franklin, "Human beings construct their behavior during the course of execution" (1982, p. 102). Human behavior is emergent in nature. Through the processes of identity development outlined above, participants negotiated their identities with no pre-determined course of action. Participants made interpretations about their actions to themselves concerning the use of exploration and resisting strategies, and they outlined new choices of action. When participants recognized that resisting homosexual identity was not the only course to pursue, they moved on to strategies that allowed for the acceptance of homosexual identity.

Resignation

The primary strategy that allowed for the transition from resisting homosexual identity to accepting homosexual identity was resignation. Resignation was characterized as having tried every reasonable strategy to change sexual orientation with the participant concluding that change was not possible. Once participants were resigned to having a homosexual orientation, they sought other strategies in order to accept homosexual identity.
understanding of this Bible story. At the heart of the story is the main character, Lot, who tries to protect two male travelers from being gang raped. This story does not describe loving, consensual homosexual relations, rather, it describes attempts to humiliate and control others. Thus, this story does not apply to homosexuality as a sexual orientation, but to a society that is inhospitable and violent.

The re-interpretation of Bible texts among religiously affiliated gays and lesbians is supported by other research (Goss 1993; Swigonski 1996; Thumma 1991). Thumma writes that the reinterpretation of Bible texts "is to be viewed as a legitimate undertaking that does not destroy the validity and efficacy of the scriptures" (1991, p. 340). Since lesbian and gay Adventists identified primarily as Adventists, doing "right" according to the Bible was mandatory. Therefore, re-interpreting Bible texts in a new way was an important strategy in the acceptance of homosexual identity.

**Changing views of God**

Adventists traditionally view God through the duality of the perspectives from the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God is portrayed primarily in terms of demanding obedience in all things with resulting vengeance for disobedience. The New Testament reveals God through the
In order to come to an acceptance of a homosexual identity or self-image, gay and lesbian Adventists needed to discover if a "significant other" could see them as homosexual and Adventist simultaneously. When the religious authority was affirming of a homosexual orientation, participants were able to move towards accepting a homosexual identity.

Receiving a "sign" of God's approval

Adventists believe that God reveals His will at times through direct or symbolic communication with humanity (Ministerial Association 1988). Adventist lesbians and gay men sought some "sign" from God regarding their homosexual orientation and how to deal with it. The accounts of these "signs" are documented in the Findings Chapter of this document. The Thomas theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," (Janowitz 1966), helps explain the importance of this strategy. When gay and lesbian Adventists defined their experience as a "sign" of God's approval of homosexuality, it became reality for them. As a result, the very real consequence was that they were able to use that experience as a strategy of accepting a homosexual identity.

Developing new role models

Adventist lesbians and gays developed new role models as a strategy of accepting their homosexual identity. This finding was not only expected, but required from the symbol-
with a particular religion, researchers generally report a movement away from religious groups and toward the larger gay and lesbian community (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Shallenberger 1996). Participants in this study demonstrated movement toward religious groups, specifically, Adventist gay and lesbian groups, rather than the larger homosexual community.

Coming out

Coming out is an important strategy in accomplishing identity work among lesbian and gay Adventists. What led Adventist lesbians and gays to use coming out as a strategy? Once lesbian and gay Adventists developed and used strategies to accept homosexual identities, they were more prepared to come out to themselves and others. However, the point must be made again that these strategies to accomplish identity work are not linear. People do not necessarily explore their identities, then resist their identities, then accept identities, and then finally come out. While exploring identities, Adventist gay and lesbians may come out to themselves and then resist homosexual identity. Or, lesbian and gay Adventists may come out to others who are gay or straight, resist homosexuality identity with a variety of strategies, and then use other strategies to accept a homosexual identity.
or when other people were so suspicious of the participant's orientation that others confronted them.

Tony recalls his coming out experience,

I knew what the reaction would be [if I came out] and I never intended to come out. During my first year at an Adventist college I got caught 'fooling around' with another guy. A friend who was a dorm monitor encouraged me to talk to the dean and get it straightened out. Instead, the dean told me to be out of the dorm by sundown. Since a whole lot of people knew, I knew it was only a matter of time before my parents found out, and I decided to go back home and face the music. It was as bad as I had imagined except they didn't throw me out. There was a lot of crying and yelling and finger pointing (Tony).

One male participant, who was heterosexually married at the time, was forced out by his wife.

Finally, as AIDS was in the news more and more, my wife asked me, point blank, if I had been having any sex with men. Although I had been living a lie for years, I was certainly not able to lie bold-facedly, so I told her that I had. It was one of the most painful experiences of my life. We continued in the marriage until she decided to ask me to move out (Adam).

Concepts from symbolic interaction may be helpful in furthering our understanding of coming out. Under either condition of coming out, the individual functions as an active agent in responding to his or her environment. Symbolic interaction holds that humans are active in shaping their own behavior and that they can choose between alternative courses of action (Blumer 1969). It appears that the primary motivating factor in coming out to others was the
The rejection from family members varied from mild distancing behavior to total disowning. One participant recalled the night he came out to his parents, "My dad took it hard. At one point he came into my bedroom and said, 'if your mother and I would have known about this, she would have had an abortion'" (Nathan).

Most parents of lesbian and gay Adventists tried to convince them of how "wrong" homosexuality was. While they did not reject the son or daughter, they rejected an essential part of them, their sexuality.

When my parents became aware of my homosexual involvement they sat me down. They read from the Bible and told me about how homosexuals are going to hell, and they tried to get me out of it (Carol).

I did come out to my mother, who is praying for me. She hasn't turned her back on me. She's hoping that I'll see the light, that I will come to her way of thinking, that it [homosexual behavior] is a sin (Mark).

Rejection by family members contradicts some of the identity literature associated with coming out. According to Cass, "selective disclosure is made to others, particularly friends and relatives. Generally speaking this stage represents a relatively peaceful and stable time for the homosexual" (1984, p. 152). The rejection by family members caused great emotional turmoil in the lives of gay and lesbian Adventists. For these participants, coming out was
breakup of a heterosexual marriage is in the section of this
document, "Consequences of commitment to homosexual identi-
ty."

Forced out of residence

Another consequence of coming out was for the partici-
pant to be forced out of his or her residence. Primarily
this occurred when a young adult was living at home at the
time of coming out. Joel recalls,

One night I was out late and returned home. My
parents started questioning me. They said, 'We
both think you are homosexual, tell us the truth,
are you?' 'Yes,' I told them. My mother immedi-
ately burst into tears, 'What did we do wrong?
What made you do this?' My dad on the other hand
stormed out of the room and slammed the door. He
came back about 30 minutes later and said, 'I
won't tolerate you in my house any more. Pack up
and leave.' And so I did. I left home at age 18.

When gay and lesbian Adventists were forced out of
residence, it was generally under two conditions. One
condition was when the participant was living at home with
parents at the time of coming out. The second condition
occurred within a heterosexual marriage where the heterosex-
ual partner asked the participant to leave. No participants
in this study came out to landlords, for example, or were
asked to leave their apartments.
The primary condition for losing a job when coming out was when the participant was employed by an Adventist organization. Participants who did not work within institutional Adventism did not report losing their jobs after coming out.

Church membership withdrawn

Having their church membership withdrawn was a consequence of coming out for some participants. No one in this sample had church membership withdrawn immediately after coming out. However, eight experienced a similar consequence, that of not being allowed to transfer their church memberships. In the Adventist church, when members move to a new location, the sending congregation must recommend the member to the new congregation. If the sending congregation refuses, this constitutes having church membership withdrawn.

When I requested my church membership transferred here, the church board in the other state voted not to transfer it. Instead, they decided I was no longer a 'member in good and regular standing,' and my name was removed from the church books (Nan).

In the cases where the church membership was not withdrawn, participants experienced a fear that it would be taken away. "I wanted to come out, but I couldn't. I was so scared of being excommunicated from the SDA Church" (Cindy).
"lost," God has decided they will not go to heaven, then their name is taken off the book. The church membership books and the heavenly book are at times obscured leaving members to believe that if they lose church membership, they cannot go to heaven.

Tying church membership so closely to salvation is a powerful method of social control by the church. Members are unlikely to do anything publicly that would cause their church membership to be revoked. Therefore, coming out to people in the church for these participants has been selective.

Movement toward commitment to homosexual identity

In spite of the painful experiences, coming out was often a renewing experience for those gay and lesbian Adventists who could do so publicly. This coming-out experience helped participants move toward committing to a homosexual identity.

Despite the difficulties involved in coming out, I proceeded with strengthening my new found self-acceptance, by refusing to pretend anymore. I sent a coming-out letter to all of my close family and friends (Joanne).

At about age 36 I began coming out. By the time I was 40, I was very out and had quite a number of gay friends. Now, there are very few people who know me to any degree at all who don't know I'm gay (Adam).

Movement toward a commitment to a homosexual identity is expected from the symbolic interaction perspective.