Goffman (1963) refers to this as in-group alignments. People so align themselves with their stigmatized group that they see themselves according to their group affiliation. Once Adventist lesbians and gays came out, it was a statement to themselves and others of their group alignment. This in-group alignment allowed participants to move toward a commitment to homosexual identity.

Conclusion
Commitment to Homosexual Identity

According to Troiden, commitment to homosexual identity "involves adopting homosexuality as a way of life" and is common among the larger gay and lesbian community (1988, p. 53). As reported in the findings, 75 percent of the participants in this study had embraced life as a gay or lesbian person. Troiden (1979) sees the beginning of commitment as when a person enters a same-sex love relationship. In this study, the finding was not supported. In the case of two women participants, they were in a same-sex love relationship prior to coming out. It was much later, after resisting homosexual identity development and other stages that they made a commitment to homosexual identity.

Lesbian and gay Adventists differed in the characteristics they displayed in this stage than what other research indicates. Cass (1984) refers to commitment as identity
Fear of being "lost"

The Adventist Church teaches that homosexual behavior is a sin and as such, will keep the person out of heaven. Adventists refer to being kept out of heaven as being "lost." Nearly all of the participants in this sample at some point feared they would be "lost." One participant illustrates,

It felt good to finally be able to admit the truth to myself, after all those years of living in denial. But I also felt like it would cost me my salvation, if I acted upon my new found identity (Nan).

Having church membership withdrawn and the fear of being "lost" were worrisome consequences for many gay and lesbian Adventists. Being an Adventist is both an ascribed and achieved status. The ascribed status happens at birth, while the achieved status occurs at baptism and the granting of church membership. While organizations cannot take away a person's ascribed status, the church reserves the right to revoke church membership. Participants in this study that continued to believe the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines did not want their church membership to be withdrawn. This may be true since having church membership withdrawn is often connected to the fear of being "lost." The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that when people are "saved," their names are literally written in a book in heaven, The Book of Life (Ministerial Association 1988). When people are
Loss of job

When lesbian and gay Adventists employed by an Adventist organization were "outed" in the work place, four participants were summarily fired. One participant recalls,

The fateful night came in 1990 when the Dean of the school where I was teaching called me in her office. She had heard about my 'gay sympathies,' and she wanted to hear nothing more. I would either publicly declare my heterosexuality and take a wife, or I could leave quietly at the end of the academic year. I was to disclose this to no one, and if I was discreet, the Dean promised to endorse my departure with a letter of recommendation. On July 1, 1991, I quietly left (George).

Another participant recalled the day he was confronted at work,

That morning when I got to work I got a call from the Financial Vice president's office wanting me to go there for a meeting. When I arrived my director was there also. It seems that 'anonymous people' had reported two things to them: first, that I had been seen in the local airport kissing a man on the lips; second, that someone had found nude pictures of me on the web. I was suspended with pay for two weeks. I needed to turn in my keys and passwords. Two weeks later, after the investigation was finished, I had the option of resigning with benefits to be negotiated or be fired with all of this put on my record (Harold).

A more common approach to handling church employment was to find another job before coming out. One woman participant recalls,

I couldn't come out. I knew I would risk losing my job and church membership. I finally decided to quit and seek employment in the private sector. I just walked away from everything. It was one of the most difficult yet one of the best life changing-decisions I have ever made (Cindy).
not a time of peace and stability. Instead, coming out was a time of profound loss and isolation.

Symbolic interaction may help explain why negative family reactions were anticipated by the participants. According to Mead, all symbols are universal. "Thinking always implies a symbol which will call out the same response in another that it calls out in the thinker" (1934, p. 145). The term "homosexual" was a symbol for someone who was sinful and could no longer be an Adventist. Participants realized that family members would recognize that symbol in the same way they had experienced it. Since the family members had not gone through the processes the participants had gone through, they knew that the symbol "homosexual" would call out resistance from their families.

Decision to divorce

Once lesbian and gay Adventists came out to their heterosexual spouses, all of the participants in this sample made the decision to divorce. However, at this stage of homosexual identity development no one made an immediate move to divorce. Instead, the couples made a decision to end the marriage after the gay or lesbian participant progressed to the stage of commitment to homosexual identity. Therefore, information from participants illustrating the
response of truthfulness on the part of the participant. Those participants who voluntarily came out did so because they felt a need to be truthful about themselves. They chose to share their negotiated identity with others. Participants who were forced out could have denied their homosexuality to others when confronted. Even those participants who were "caught" could have made up some excuse or promised to change; however, they did not choose to do that. Being truthful is an important part of the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Since truthfulness was such an integral part of their identities as Adventists, this characteristic often contributed to the coming out process.

Consequences of coming out

While nearly all the homosexual development literature discusses coming out as an important stage of identity development, it rarely mentions the consequences of doing so. Even among sociologists, research focuses on the internal processes of the individual rather than the interactions and consequences surrounding the situation of coming out (Dank 1971; Troiden 1988).

Rejection by family members

When gay and lesbian Adventists came out to family members, they were frequently rejected by them. This rejection was primarily religious. Nearly all the participants in this study experienced some rejection by family members.
All participants in the study were out to themselves and at least one other person in the gay or straight community. This delimitation of the study was used to ensure that participants had already come to the point in identity work where they had already begun to negotiate their identities.

Conditions of coming out

Participants generally came out in one of two ways: voluntarily or forcibly. Voluntary coming out was accomplished when the participant was comfortable enough with the emerging homosexual identity that he or she shared his or her identity with others. Forced coming out occurred when other people in the participant's life became suspicious of the participant's behavior or the participant was "caught" in homosexual behavior.

Voluntary coming out

Voluntarily coming out may be illustrated by a 45 year old male who recalled his second gay relationship, "I remember telling him that if loving you and being loved by you meant I was gay then I was" (Tom).

Forced coming out

While about half of the sample intended not to come out to others, they were nevertheless forced into coming out. The two conditions that compelled the participants to come out were when participants got "caught" in a homosexual act
ic interactionist perspective. George Herbert Mead wrote that the "individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group" (1934, p. 138). For lesbian and gay Adventists to accept their homosexual identities, they needed to interact with new role models, a new social group, who could give them information about that identity. These new role models acted as agents of socialization for the purposes of homosexual identity construction.

The primary social groups that provided new role models for lesbian and gay Adventists were SDA Kinship and Kinnet. Members of SDA Kinship and Kinnet often became significant others for participants in this study. In contrast, church friends who were homosexual and networks of peers were among the less often used groups that provided role models for this population.

Other research supports the importance of "gaining access to homosexual role models that openly counterbalance the heterosexual role models of the preceding years" (Hart and Richardson 1981, p. 102). In addition, the finding that social groups of religiously affiliated gay men and lesbians provide new role models for identity development is supported by other research as cited in the literature review (Thumma 1991). Conversely, for homosexuals not associated
loving and forgiving acts of Jesus (Ministerial Association 1988). When lesbian and gay Adventists were more familiar with the God of the Old Testament, they needed to use the strategy of changing their view of God, focusing on the loving and accepting person of Jesus. In this way, participants were able to accept themselves in a homosexual identity.

Symbolic interaction explains the importance of the strategy of changing views of God. According to Cooley, "there is no separation between real and imaginary persons; indeed, to be imagined is to become real, in a social sense" (1902, p. 89). What God thought of them mattered immensely to these participants. Without having God's approval of their emerging sexual orientation, lesbian and gay Adventists could not move forward in negotiating their new identities.

**Seeking approval of religious authority**

When Adventist gays and lesbians sought and found a religious authority that was affirming of their sexual orientation, the strategy facilitated movement towards acceptance of homosexual identity. Cooley's (1902) theory of the "looking glass self" may offer understanding about the use of this strategy among lesbian and gay Adventists. Cooley's "looking glass self" has been described as "a kind of self-image derived from outside" (Collins 1994, p. 259).
This study identifies six strategies used to accept homosexual identity. Four of the six pertain to participants' concern for and about religious matters: re-interpretation of Bible texts, changing views of God, seeking approval of a religious authority, and receiving a 'sign' of God's approval. It appears that the primary issue among this population is the problem of how a homosexual identity would fit with their identity as Adventists.

Re-interpretation of Bible texts

The Seventh-day Adventist church prides itself with teaching a "correct" interpretation of the Bible. When a new convert seeks membership in the church, it is often referred to as someone "coming into the Truth." Members of the Adventist church place a lot of weight on the church's position on any given issue. Since the church has historically pointed to certain Bible texts as supporting the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, all lesbians and gays in this study at one time believed that to be true.

One example of a Bible story that is used to support the position of the sinfulness of homosexuality is in Genesis 19 concerning the downfall and destruction of cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The traditional Adventist interpretation is that Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned by God to be destroyed because of the sin of homosexuality. Adventist lesbians and gay men in this study have come to a different
there is some connection to religion. In addition, the sample in this research was enhanced by the researcher achieving insider status. As a Seventh-day Adventist who was shown to be "gay friendly," I was seen as someone who could be trusted and this in turn, encouraged participation. 

Seeking professional help

Twelve participants in this study sought professional help to change their sexual orientation and resist homosexual identity development. However, this effort, in every case, failed. Researchers note that individuals who seek to change their sexual orientation will do so for religious reasons and that such a change is highly unlikely (Friedman and Downey 1994).

Attempting suicide

About one-fourth of the participants in the study considered suicide as a strategy to avoid developing a homosexual identity. Suicide, in this case, refers to either considering suicide, making an active attempt at ending one's life, or living life so recklessly that one's life may be in constant danger. Research indicates that suicide among lesbian and gay adolescents is six times higher than the norm (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising that this strategy was found in this sample.
(1971) notes that the majority of respondents in his sample arrived at a homosexual self-identification between the ages of 15 and 24. Lesbian and gay Adventists in this study were more likely to be in their mid-twenties or older when they identified themselves as homosexual. In addition, more than half of the participants did not identify themselves as gay or lesbian until their thirties or later. This may indicate that lesbian and gay Adventists tend to use denial and other identity resisting strategies for a more prolonged period of time than other populations.

**Heterosexual marriage**

Another strategy to resist homosexual identity was for participants to marry heterosexually. One third of this sample were married heterosexually. Some of the participants realized their homosexual orientation prior to marriage while others did not. In every case, these marriages were not satisfying and ended in divorce. Some Adventist ministers and others in positions of authority continue to advise heterosexual marriage as a "cure" for homosexuality. The finding that heterosexual marriage does not change one's sexual orientation should put that misconception to rest.

One participant recalled of his marriage,

> I feel badly about how much I hurt my ex-wife. I did and do love her in a way, but the passion wasn't there. We were both very hurt by the break-up (Brandon).
population, anonymous sex may be less common than among other gay males.

While exploring homosexual behavior with anonymous partners was important for some gay Adventists to begin forming a homosexual identity, it was not a behavior that persisted for any participants at the time of interview. The Seventh-day Adventist church's insistence of celibacy for homosexuals may have contributed to promiscuous behavior among this population. According to one participant,

The effect of a religious background that causes young gays to abhor themselves also causes them to feel unfit to form lasting relationships. And, thus, when the sexual tension becomes unbearable, it too often 'spills over' into a promiscuous lifestyle and increases the likelihood of contracting AIDS. It makes it more difficult, even after they have come to accept themselves, for them to create lasting committed relationships (Richard).

Once participants moved through the exploration phase of identity development, they seldom sought out anonymous sexual partners. Rather, participants pursued monogamous long-term relationships. Seeking long-term relationships as a pattern in identity development is discussed in the section "Commitment to Homosexual Identity."

Strategies for Resisting Homosexual Identity

Lesbian and gay Adventists used a variety of strategies to resist homosexual identity development. Literature addressing homosexual identity development discusses denial
participants' explored their roles as potential homosexuals, the Adventist identity was suppressed. The primary audience of these role plays was the self. Participants needed to experience the roles of other homosexuals while still clinging to the identity that to them was "normal."

Publication and gay bars

Other strategies of exploring sexual identity include searching out publications and frequenting gay bars. These strategies are mentioned briefly in the literature. For example, in discussing the stage of identity confusion, Cass mentions that once a person begins to ask,

"Am I a homosexual?" he or she generally starts searching for further information (e.g., reading books, listening carefully to any discussion of homosexuality, consulting a professional counselor) (1979, p. 223).

Hart and Richardson note the importance of gay bars in the self-discovery process (1981). Traveling out of town

The strategy of traveling out of town to explore sexuality may be unique to many highly closeted individuals who feel they are risking something to explore homosexuality. However, the literature addresses this only in terms of passing, leading double lives by concealing sexual preferences (Humphreys 1975). These individuals, while passing as heterosexual locally, would not use passing while they were out of town. In this context, traveling out of town to
to achieve a better understanding of their sexuality. This finding is also supported by other research. In writing about lesbians' experiences from a clinical perspective, Sophie notes,

recognition and acceptance of lesbian attraction and behavior is a difficult process . . . hence, it is not uncommon for women to enter therapy with questions and concerns about their sexual orientation and identity (1987, p. 53).

Identity Exploration

During the second phase of identity development that I call identity exploration, participants used various strategies to try to better understand homosexuality. Participants made a decision to actively seek more information about their emerging homosexuality.

Processual symbolic interactionism helps explain identity exploration in two ways. First, processual symbolic interaction holds that "consciousness, or thinking, involves interaction with oneself" (Franklin 1982, p. 102). Sue illustrates this thinking process, "Whether I go to hell for it or not I had to find out whether or not I was gay." Sue interacted with herself, through her thought process, to come to the decision to explore her sexuality. Second, processual symbolic interaction helps explain identity exploration by its emphasis on action. "Human beings are active in shaping their own behavior" (Franklin 1982, p.
search began with no preconceived notions of change and found predominantly positive family relationships.

Lesbian and gay Adventists in this study viewed their socialization as Seventh-day Adventists as a very important aspect of identity construction. The participants tended to be acutely aware of the impact of their Adventist upbringing and its influence on current behavior and interaction patterns. The finding that people realize the importance of religious socialization, extends and supports other research in this area. Thumma notes in his study of Good News, a support group for gay and lesbian Evangelicals, that "those who come to Good News place significant value and meaning upon the conservative Evangelical identity" (1991, p. 338).

It is through familial, church, and school socialization that these participants came to see Seventh-day Adventists as their normative reference group. Lauer and Handel describe a normative reference group as "one that establishes and enforces standards for the individual" (1977, p. 74). These participants looked to other Seventh-day Adventists to answer questions about what behavior was and was not acceptable; what was right and what was wrong. Therefore, it is not surprising that these participants used the traditional teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church when faced with their own homosexual identity development.
Negative case analysis was another analytic process I used to increase trustworthiness and credibility. Negative case analysis involves checking the data for any cases that do not fit the forming analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

**Religious Identity Development**

This study begins with the notion of socialization, defined in the symbolic interaction tradition as "a continuous process of negotiated interactions out of which selves are created and re-created" (Rosenberg and Turner 1981, p.165). For most lesbian and gay Adventists in this study, the concept of "self" began with the ascribed status of being a Seventh-day Adventist. Following this ascribed status, being "born" into the religion, socialization efforts within various institutions by agents of socialization helped deepen the sense of "self" as a Seventh-day Adventist.

For participants in this sample, religious socialization occurred primarily through interacting in their families and church-related institutions, including Seventh-day Adventist schools. While this research reports these socialization efforts linearly, they are not linear. As other research suggests, the family structure and religious institutions and values are highly interrelated and reciprocal (Thornton 1985). For example, the families of participants went to great lengths to provide their children with an
As long as Adventist homosexuals viewed homosexual behavior as a sin, they engaged in strategies to avoid homosexual identity development. Thus, the participants acted toward their homosexual identity on the basis of the meanings that it held for them.

How did the participants come to view homosexuality as a sin, therefore something to be avoided? Blumer explains that "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (1969, p. 2). Adventist homosexuals came to view homosexuality as a sin through socialization efforts of their families, churches, and schools. The reciprocal influences of these institutions presented a powerful reinforcement of the belief of the sinfulness of homosexual behavior.

The situation for these participants appears to be hopelessly paralyzing. On one hand, participants believed homosexuality was something to be abhorred. Conversely, the participants were unable to control homosexual urges and their emerging homosexual identity. Symbolic interaction explains how participants actively negotiated and forged new identities when faced with this dilemma. As Blumer points out, "meanings are handled in, and through, an interpretive process and by the person dealing with the things he encoun-
I am on the board of directors of SDA Kinship, and sing in the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles. I am also involved and occasionally lead out in a gay camping/outdoor group. Mostly, I just enjoy being around healthy positive gay people (Walt).

Socializing with other lesbians, directing the SapphFire group, maintaining several close lesbian friendships, supporting gay-owned businesses, reading gay publications, writing poetry and fiction, jewelry making, a nine year old step-daughter, and a new wife, all keep me busy and vibrant (Cindy).
others. Some participants came out first to other gays and lesbians, while others came out to people who were straight.

Soon after I recognized that I was gay, I started attending a support group for bisexual and married gay men. It was a relief to be able to come out to some people who I thought would understand my situation. It was also a relief to realize that I did know some people who were gay (Brandon).

**Coming out to others--straight**

When participants came out to straight (non-gay) people, they frequently did so with family members, spouses, and friends. Heterosexually married persons usually came out to their spouses first.

I came out to my wife after she found some pictures I had downloaded from the Internet. When she confronted me about my sexuality, I decided to tell her the truth (Brandon).

In addition to spouses, lesbian and gay Adventists frequently confided their sexual orientation to their friends.

The only person I ever discussed my same gender attractions to was my best girlfriend. I would have enjoyed meeting other lesbians, but I was so afraid to be discovered, and feared the ramifications of others finding out that I stayed deeply closeted (Meg).

The fear of being rejected upon coming out was common. One participant came out to his best friend soon after his friend asked him to be the best man in his wedding. After coming out to his friend, he asked, "Do you still want a fag to be your best man in the wedding?" His friend replied,
Adventists.' I contacted them right away and they have been like family to me (Tammy).

Church friends

Other Adventist role models were found among church members. One male recalls,

I became friends with one of the teachers at the church school when I was in college. He was single and 10 years older than me. After a while I felt I could trust him and unburdened myself completely telling him all about my sexual life. He was understanding and told me he felt the same way. It was such a relief to be able to talk about things with someone who understood and didn't reject me, plus he was the first real gay Adventist I knew (Jim).

Network of peers

A small minority of lesbian and gay Adventists found new role models through networking with their peers. Participants used these peer networks as agents of socialization for the purpose of identity construction.

A friend of mine introduced me to a lesbian couple and they in turn introduced me to other lesbian couples. For a year or so we did lots of stuff together. Those couples were great role models for me (Anna).

Gay and lesbian community

Most of the participants in this sample did not develop important role model relationships with the larger gay and lesbian community.

I have very limited contact with the larger gay community. I belonged to a list-serve for married gay men, but felt culturally uncomfortable, probably in many ways because I am so culturally Adventist. So I dropped out of that. I have attended
thought about the dream, I was overwhelmed with the message that the dream carried from God. 'Stop fighting with yourself Joanne! Stop worrying about trying to change! Just give it all up to me. Trust me. I'll take care of it all.'

Role models--new agents of socialization

Finding new role models proved to be an important strategy in helping gay and lesbian Adventists blend their identities. All participants searched for alternative agents of socialization to facilitate identity construction. Generally, these role models were other Adventists, rather than individuals from the larger gay community.

SDA Kinship

SDA Kinship International is an organization that offers networking and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual Adventists. For almost all of the participants in this study, Kinship played a part in connecting them to new role models.

I got the number for Kinship, called and talked to Linda. She suggested I go to California over spring break to meet some Kinship members. I went and met two women and their partners. I felt for the first time that I had met my own kind. We were soulmates. We talked and talked and talked. I learned so much about lesbian language, literature, books, and tapes, the culture. Another couple showed me a different side of the culture. We went to a gay play that was really raunchy. By the time I left California, I realized that there was lot of good and a lot of bad in the lesbian culture and I would need to sift through it (Sue).

After I heard about Kinship, I made contact with a member and went to my first meeting. Although I can't say that the meeting was an incred-
accept their homosexual identity. This change came about by seeing God as more accepting of homosexuality than the participants previously believed.

I felt that I couldn’t be a Christian and gay at the same time. I felt that God wasn’t interested in or concerned about what I did or how I did it. I was gay and therefore cast out of His presence. Now I’ve come to believe that the truth is that God is love, that he offers mercy, comfort, healing, and salvation to all who believe—gay, straight, black, white, fat, thin (Marvin).

As I grow in my Adventist walk, I find God to be more open minded. More and more I’m tending to believe it [homosexuality] may be okay as long as it’s done in the proper way, a monogamous way, consenting and caring (Mitch).

In one case, a book was the catalyst to help the participant get a new picture of God.

I read a book entitled, ‘Healing Grace’ by David Seamands. It helped to change my entire picture of God, from demanding of perfection for acceptance and salvation, to loving me simply because I was His child, and offering me salvation through grace alone (Joanne).

Seeking approval from religious authority

Four gay and lesbian Adventists in this sample received a message from someone they saw as an authority figure in the church. This message helped them accept their homosexual identities. Jim recalls talking to his pastor who said,

Jim, some people's lives seem to go smooth, but yours seems to go up and down. Although you don’t appreciate the ups and downs now, you’ll come to appreciate them and the way God made you later in life. Some of you guys don’t fit the normal mold just like my Ed [his son].
sense of resignation regarding homosexuality. About 90% gay and lesbian Adventists in this sample went through intense periods of trying to resist or change their sexual orientations. After putting time, effort, and often financial resources towards this effort, they eventually realized that change was not going to happen for/to them. It was then that they were overcome with resignation regarding their homosexuality.

I've prayed, memorized scripture, fasted, changed my diet, been anointed, prayed for the Lord to 'cast out the demon of homosexuality' from me, been in counseling—all in the attempt to eradicate this sexual orientation from my heart and mind. I've suppressed my desires and longings to express love, all with the one goal of living a life of holiness, in obedience to God's commands and His ideal for my life. I've spoken with SDA gays and lesbians who have grown up in the SDA church, who are in committed, loving relationships, and have tried to convince them of the 'error of their ways.' After nearly 25 years of praying for God to change me, to take these desires away, to give me the strength to 'live a life of purity,' my sexual orientation was as strong as ever (Joanne).

Re-Interpretation of Bible Texts

Before Adventist homosexuals in this study could integrate their religious and homosexual identities, they first needed to achieve a new understanding of the parts of the Bible that deal with homosexual acts.

I really had a hard time with what I believed the Bible was saying against homosexuality. I loved my faith and didn't want to give that up. I knew my homosexual feelings were very strong and so were my Christian beliefs (Nathan).
changes in my orientation. When I would encounter a woman, I wondered if I could feel attracted to her. I wondered if I could be aroused in any way. My whole life became one of trying to perceive subtle changes and that type of vigilance lasted for many years. I know from my journals that I sold my soul to Colin, believing that his experience was true. It took about six months before I was able to meet with Colin for the first time. I drove to Pennsylvania and spent the weekend there. Colin's wife was away for the first couple of days which gave me complete access to him. There were hours and hours of talking and talking which was an extremely positive experience for me. I shared with him my insecurities, emotionally and physically. Before the weekend was over, Colin was able to move me into a position where I was naked and he was teaching me to 'affirm' myself physically. I knew then that Colin was not true to his word, to his wife, or the public, but I still wanted to believe and change. I knew he was homosexually active as he demonstrated that with me during that first weekend. It was several years, however, before I could admit he was a fraud. Ron Lawson [an Adventist sociologist] published a 14 page research report documenting wide-spread sexual abuse by Cook of the counselees at Quest. During the time I was living at Quest, Ron interviewed me, but I did not tell him of my sexual involvement with Colin. It wasn't until I saw the world's reaction to what Colin had been doing that I understood the magnitude of his actions, and even then, it was over a period of couple of years. I still remained in contact with Colin and slowly became more disillusioned. I finally broke all ties with Colin and wrote a note telling him I didn't want to talk to him. He wanted to stay in touch as friends, but it was too painful. I'm still angry at his arrogance, his ability to excuse himself so easily about the damage he has done and continues to do (John).

**Suicide**

When lesbian and gay Adventists exhausted the possibilities of changing orientation, about one-fourth contemplated
Once I broke off [my first homosexual] relationship, I went to church and became religiously addicted. I decided to take a year off from college and become a task force worker at a boarding academy (Alan).

"During my second year of college this [realization of sexual orientation] was tearing me up. I knew I needed to get away and so I went to Japan as a student missionary" (John).

After my sophomore year in college I decided to become a student missionary. If I had a year off to do nothing but concentrate on ministering to others, I could overcome this. (Sue).

I did a lot of praying. I got involved with church activities like leading out in song service, youth activities, helped out with Pathfinders and I led out in Sabbath School (Nathan).

Seeking professional help

For about a third of this sample of gay and lesbian Adventists, the drive to change their sexual orientations was so strong that they sought professional help to assist them in changing. The results of these efforts were always a dismal failure.

When I was in college I came out to the campus chaplain, and he told me that I could change. He referred me to a counselor who was a former hustler (homosexual looking for sex). I asked him [the counselor], 'You're telling me that you're happily married, completely cured, there's no temptation?' He said, 'Well, no. There is temptation, but the Lord will deliver.' I wasn't sure I could live like that (Alan).

"I prayed, fasted, wept, had aversion therapy, but God would
marry held their spouses in high regard. One participant who was married at the time of interview said,

My wife is the perfect woman. She's pretty, smart, the right mix of an 'old-fashioned gal' and modern woman. Any guy would give his right arm for her. If she were only a guy, she'd be perfect (Mitch).

In general, participants hoped that marriage would change their sexual orientation. One female participant remembered her heterosexual marriage,

I guess I allowed myself to fall in love with the idea that this guy loved and cared for me. When he asked me to marry him, I was 32 years old and figured this was God's answer to my prayers. After all, we were taught that if we asked God to take away unnatural desires he would do so (Nan).

Mitch recalls, "At the time I married my wife, I knew I was gay. I believed I could change with the Lord's help."

Other participants were less sure that the marriage would change them, but wanted to give it a try. On his wedding day, one participant recalled,

Standing in the church waiting to say, 'I do,' I was thinking, 'I shouldn't do this. Hans, you're gay. But you can't back out now. What will the church think of you?' I wanted to be married. I wanted to be straight. I thought I could pretend (Hans).

Claiming Bible promises

Adventists believe that God, through the Bible, promises help in times of need. Participants were taught to
make me this way? I'm not crazy, but it feels
that way sometimes. I don't know what to do. I'm
just leaving it in your hands' (Carol).

Denial

All of the participants in this sample at one time or
another used denial as a strategy to resist homosexual
identity development. One woman reports,

My first reaction [to realizing my homosexuality] was screaming inside, 'No! God, No! I'd rather
die.' I ran out of the building and decided to run until I collapsed or found something to throw myself off of. I got exhausted and fell down. I got up, kept running and ended up at a pond. I got on a raft and paddled out to a rock. I sat on the rock and screamed at God (Sue).

Often the denial was much more subtle, like an old ache that wouldn't go away. "I couldn't admit to myself that I was gay. It seemed to be such a sin. I just knew it had to be my fault, my choice made wrong somewhere I didn't remember" (Marvin). "I never claimed or owned being gay. It was just always an unnamed troubling temptation that I battled with" (John).

Even following a same-sex relationship, denial was frequently very strong. One lesbian participant recalled,

Although we were lovers in every sense of the word, we had both been raised in such strict homophobic religions, that we never admitted we were lesbians. We told ourselves we were two people who fell in love with each other and both just happened to be female (Nan).
comes in complaining of a headache and asked me to
rub his shoulders. I started rubbing his back and
he said that I didn't do it right, so he would
show me. He rubbed my back and then my chest. It
progressed to my first gay sexual experience
(Hans).

Anonymous sex

In cases where participants did not know any gay or
lesbian Adventists, or felt that pursuing a relationship was
impossible, participants engaged in anonymous sex to explore
sexuality.

About a year and a half after getting married
I had a sexual encounter with a man in a men's
room at the public university I was attending for
graduate school. From that point on, I was engag-
ing in rest-room sex fairly regularly. During
this time, I always felt guilty about it and was
constantly trying to 'overcome' it. Always without
success, of course (Adam).

Resisting Homosexual Identity

After confirming a gay/lesbian sexual orientation,
homosexual Adventists made monumental efforts to change
their orientation or resist homosexual identity development.
Gay and lesbian Adventists reasoned that they could retain
their Adventist identity if they could rid themselves of
homosexuality, reversing the process of homosexual identity
development. These efforts were based on religious convic-
tion rather than societal convention. Adventist gays and
lesbians believed that having a homosexual orientation was a
sin and that it must be overcome. Nearly every participant
in this study made some efforts to change his or her sexual
wonderful process of exploration and learning and when I was 'full' I could go back home (George).

Going to gay bars

Lesbian and gay Adventists frequented gay bars to explore their sexual orientation.

I did finally have to admit to myself that I must be gay and that it was probably not going to change. So I began to try to connect to the gay community. I knew of one gay bar in the local area, so I proceeded to go there one Wednesday evening. As a life-long Adventist, and as someone who had not more than one or two swallows of any alcoholic beverage, a bar was not a particularly comfortable place for me. I ordered a 7-UP, sat at a table, and mostly just looked around (Adam).

The discomfort that this and other participants expressed centered on being in a bar since drinking alcoholic beverages is prohibited in the Adventist religion. However, since the gay bar is one of the best known gay meeting places, gay Adventists were willing to frequent them as a method of exploring the gay community. Another participant recalled, "I felt really out of place when I tried gay bars and have never really become comfortable there, and so stay away" (Richard).

Engaging in same-sex encounters

Participants used same-sex encounters as strategies to explore the possibility of being lesbian or gay. Some participants explored sexually with friends or acquaintances, while others sought anonymous sex partners.
One participant said,

I do think that given this particular set of circumstance where 'heterosex' was something to wait for until you were married, and 'homosex' was never discussed at all, this meant that my early sexual development was basically guilt free (Tony).

Publications

Non-gay publications

One fairly safe way to covertly explore homosexuality was for gay and lesbian Adventists to seek out publications regarding homosexuality. Particularly among older participants, these first publications were primarily from non-gay sources.

I began to travel to the state capital 80 miles away with my dad when he attended conference executive committee meetings on Sundays. I think my parents were thrilled that I was being so intellectual, for I spent the day at the public library—where I looked up everything I could on homosexuality. These were mostly reports from shrinks dealing with homosexual clients who could not bear their own sexuality (Richard).

I walked up to the local library that was a mile away. I found the art collections there and saw how many of them had nude bodies and I was fascinated by that. I also looked up what homosexuality was and found that it gave me the label of what I was experiencing (Juan).

In one case, the publication that helped the participant recognize his sexuality was an Adventist periodical.

Ministry Magazine published an issue featuring Colin Cook. Cook was a self-proclaimed "ex-homo-sexual" who started a change ministry. When I saw the cover publicizing an AIDS 'solution,' it shocked me. I was working as a missionary at the time and someone had left it at the school where I
identity. One strategy that nearly all Adventist gays and lesbians undertook was to consciously separate their sexuality and religious beliefs. While their religious convictions and identity remained strong, Adventist gays and lesbians explored their homosexuality covertly.

I had difficulty merging my spiritual side and sexual side. At first I compartmentalized them. I kept my religious side here and my sexual life over there with lots of space between them. When you were on this side you didn't think of the other side and vise versa (Donald).

This compartmentalization allowed lesbian and gay Adventists to retain their religious identity while exploring their sexual identities.

**Exploring heterosexual relationships**

More than half of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample recalled some special relationship with the opposite sex. In these heterosexual relationships, Adventist gays and lesbians generally followed traditional Adventist teachings in regard to sexual abstinence outside of marriage. Only two participants in this sample experienced heterosexual sex with a partner prior to marriage. In one case the couple was engaged and the sex took place "five to six weeks before the wedding ceremony" (Adam). Another participant had an ongoing sexual relationship over a period of two years with the woman he eventually married. He recalls, "During that time, my male fantasies weren't as fre-
knew he liked other guys as much as I like guys, but neither of us considered ourself gay" (Nathan).

Another female recalls her early years as quite sexually neutral. "I always thought I wasn't going to be a sexual person. I was always a book worm, the intellectual type" (Irene).

Strategies to manage identity confusion

Avoidance

One strategy participants used to manage identity confusion was avoidance. Participants actively avoided homosexual urges or situations that might lead to homosexual behavior. To some extent, all participants in this study used this strategy. A woman remembered a college experience,

One day I was in the library, working at the card catalog. A woman I knew stood next to me and said 'Hi.' I felt her presence and then there was an attraction response. It was then that I realized that I could not control that biological response. I was so flustered, I ran out of the library (Sue).

A young man shared his reaction after his first homosexual encounter, "After three days, I was incredibly racked with guilt. I told the guy I had the affair with that I couldn't do that anymore" (Alan).

Little by little I ran into a few other people in the church schools that I knew were like me [gay]. But, I never mentioned it. On into 11th and 12th grades I went to public school. I recognized a few others that were also gay, but again, never
At times the Adventist school system provided a setting that produced a dysfunctional outcome from the school's perspective. The goal of Adventist education is to provide a learning atmosphere to deepen students' commitment to Adventism. Instead, the Adventist school system lent itself to offering lesbian and gay youth opportunities to explore their sexuality. When attending boarding academy or college, Adventist youth are thrown together in closer proximity, allowing them to deal with their identity issues.

In my junior year of academy I realized that I had homosexual tendencies. My roommate was devastated by a break-up with her boyfriend and told me that she missed being held. She asked me if I would hold her. I knew that it felt good, but I thought it was just the normal thing of being close friends. I didn't put any labels on it (Sue).

Especially among the men, life at boarding school was often difficult. The dormitories offered little privacy. For example, some dormitories provided only group showers and toilet stalls without doors. The opportunity to see and become aroused in response to the naked male body was anxiety producing. One participant remembers,

I would get up at 4:30 in the morning and be at the showers before anyone else. I was always afraid of showering with other guys and afraid I would get turned on (Brandon).
America during the 19th century and continue on a smaller scale today.

One participant recalls,

Every summer we would go to the Spanish campmeeting on the grounds of an academy in the Northeast. It was a wonderful time and place. I think it was there that I really started to think beyond what the church's teachings were (Juan).

Hans remembers,

Our family went to campmeeting once a year in the town where the Adventist college was located. We would get up very early Sabbath morning to get there in time for Sabbath School and the church service. I enjoyed it and always left with the normal spiritual high.

Another type of church-sponsored activity that acted as an agent of religious socialization was sacred music concerts performed in Adventist churches. Individuals and groups of musicians from Adventist congregations produce concerts and tour Adventist churches in evangelical efforts.

One participant recalls,

I went to a Heritage Singers concert at a church in California. I was so impressed. The next day I took my mom and sister to the concert. I saw these people who were my contemporaries talking about another kind of Christianity, a happy kind. After that I rejoined the Adventist church (Jim).

Adventist education as an agent of socialization

The Adventist church operates approximately 1061 private elementary schools (church schools) and secondary schools (academies) and 13 colleges and universities in the United States. Some of the academies are boarding schools