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Negotiating Identities:

The Case of Adventist-raised Gays and Lesbians in Norway

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Abstract

Forming an identity in a religious environment that condemns homosexuality has posed a major challenge to many gays and lesbians. Realizing one's homosexual identity under such circumstances often leads to a tension or identity conflict. In seeking to resolve or avoid conflict between their religious and sexual identities, gays and lesbians have applied different negotiation strategies.

This study explores the process of identity negotiation among religiously reared homosexuals within the framework of identity theory. The context for this study is the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in South Norway. Through in-depth interviews, I study the related experiences of ten homosexual¹ informants raised in the Church, exploring how social ties and religious affiliation have affected their identity negotiation process. Based on a four-path model for conflict resolution strategies, I discuss how the strategies employed by the informants can be understood in terms of identity theory, focusing on the emerging themes in the interviews.

Based on the four salient themes of “*within-ness*,” *moral acceptability*, *silence/avoidance*, and the *parental role*, my thesis suggests an experienced notion of a hegemonic Adventist identity. Governing major and vital aspects of their social and psychological life, most informants make strenuous efforts to conform and reject/suppress their homosexual identity. Culminating in an identity crisis, most end up either rejecting their Adventist identity or seeking to integrate their homosexual and Adventist identities.

Using insights from Rappaport's empowerment theory and Honneth's theory of recognition, I discuss some normative implications of the findings for positive/healthy identity formation among homosexuals in the Adventist community. I conclude that the emergent themes of Adventist identity in the experience of the informants can be reframed as to create a safe place for gay and lesbian community members.

¹ One informant had recently come out as bisexual/pansexual upon being interviewed, after identifying as lesbian over a period of 10+ years.

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1 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In light of the public debates around gay marriage and rights the recent decades, the topic of homosexuality has been increasingly addressed by both the church leadership and amongst lay members of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church on a wide span of platforms (Akers & Eyer, 2012; Cruz, 2015; Gane, Miller, & Swanson, 2012; Ferguson, Guy, & Larson, 2018; Grady, 2015; McLarty, 2015; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012; Williams, 2017). In the swarm of theological and political publications, statements and commentaries that previously have comprised the vast majority of Adventist contributions to public discussion on gay marriage and gay rights, there is, however, still little reference to sociological research on the dynamics, beliefs and attitudes among Adventists concerning homosexuality and homosexuals in the church. One survey based on a representative sample study in the United States measuring American Adventists' beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality was published on *Adventist Today* in 2015, charting for the first time a highly rudimentary map over the implicits behind Adventist responses to homosexuality, providing some quite interesting and unintuitive findings (Grady, 2015).

In 2012, film producers Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer released the award-winning American docudrama *Seventh-Gay Adventists*. Drawing attention away from the theological and political dispute for a moment, this documentary seeks to understand the mental, social and religious experiences, hopes, fears and dreams of gay Adventists across North America, shedding light on the practical every-day challenges of being gay in a conservative church environment. Contributions like this have resulted in an increased awareness to the prevalence of LGBTs within the Adventist community, as well as to the too often reductionist treatment of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population. Such contributions have in various ways set the stage for a nearer, more human and practical dialogue in flesh and blood as to the issue of homosexuality, homosexuals and their place within the Adventist community.

1.2 Personal Motivation

Having grown up in the SDA Church, and having through various experiences developed a deep respect for and devotion to the fundamental teachings held by the Church, the struggle of realizing and juggling my Adventist and homosexual identities, which often is taught as being mutually exclusive, has been keenly felt, even to the point of despair.

After my baptism into the church as a teenager, an ill-used axiom of trusting the word of God and not feelings as a “good Adventist,” combined with the negative and dismissive attitudes towards homosexuality in the Church, led me to reject my sexual identity and fiercely suppress my emotions in order to defend my Adventist identity. Over the years, this proved to be detrimental to my mental and physical health. Often undergirded by a reductionist, ill-informed and pointed rhetoric in matters of emotion, love and sexuality, the urgency of living up to our unique calling as God’s end-time church, protecting our Adventist identity and obeying God’s commandments sustained in my own experience a certain suppression of open, intelligent and authentic discussion on personal and collective challenges such as homosexuality.

It is against the backdrop of such experiences that I wish contribute. By bringing to light the flesh and blood reality of Adventist-reared homosexuals—their social, psychological and spiritual experiences and the challenges they face in forming an identity, and a positive identity as such, in the Church. I hope to motivate the Church and other religious communities to strive for an authentic, person-centered, re-humanizing discourse that takes seriously the voices and testimonies of those involved, acknowledging and recognizing the God-given humanity in all human beings, including LGBTs.

1.3 Presentation of Topic and Statement of the Problem

This thesis studies the ways in which subjects raised in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Norway negotiate their Adventist and homosexual identities. The SDA Church, a protestant denomination comprising about 20 million members worldwide, holds a traditional view of sexuality and marriage, stating that “sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman” and that “Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships” (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012). In light of this

and of the findings of previous similar studies (Drumm, 2005; Drumm, 2008; Rodriguez, 2010; Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011), the assumption in this project is that gays and lesbians raised in the SDA Church in Norway face similar challenges in forming a positive and integrated identity.

However, there are several reasons to expect some differences in the findings from its American counterparts. Firstly, studies focusing specifically on gay and lesbian Adventists are, to my current knowledge, scarce and limited to North America. The SDA Church forms, both globally and locally, a close-knit community sharing a strong historical identity and purpose. With distinctive teachings such as “present truth,” human holistic nature, and a strong emphasis on healthy living and education/intellectual cultivation, Adventism offers a unique social and cultural framework for this study.

Secondly, the SDA Church serves as a culturally diverse environment with widely differing attitudes in issues of gender, sexuality and religious practice. This makes the context of Adventism in Norway and Scandinavia distinct. The lower prevalence of religious belief/practice (as well as the associated traditional attitudes in issues concerning sexuality and gender equality) in the Norwegian population (Botvar, 2010; Joas, 2010; Magnussen & Repstad, 2010; Newport, 2017; Schmidt, 2010), serve as the wider, societal context for Norwegian Adventist culture. This might provide some unique insights into the experiences and coping strategies of Adventist-raised gays and lesbians. Hence, the purpose of this research is to gain a perspective on the dynamics of growing up as a homosexual in the complex and highly paradoxical environment of Norwegian Adventism.

1.4 Main Research Question and Sub Questions

1.4.1 Main Question

The main question of question of this research will be the following:

How do gays and lesbians raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway socio-psychologically negotiate their religious, sexual and social identities?

1.4.2 Sub Research Questions

Important sub-questions are:

- i) To what extent and in what terms do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians experience a tension between their socio-religious identity and sexual orientation?
- ii) How is the tension typically resolved (if any)?
- iii) To what extent do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians participate in and/or feel included and a part of the church community? How do they relate to the wider Adventist community
- iv) What motivates/demotivates Adventist-raised gays and lesbians to be/from being a part of the Adventist community?
- v) How do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians relate to the Adventist faith, Christianity and religion as a whole, and how has this changed over the years?

1.5 Aim and Objective of Study

The objective of this study is to;

1. Examine the extent to which some gays and lesbians raised in the SDA Church in Norway experience or have experienced an inner conflict between their sexual and socio-religious identities.
2. Examine the ways in which they cope with or seek to resolve (or have resolved) this inner conflict.
3. Discuss some ways in which the SDA Church/community in Norway might provide a safe place for gay men and lesbians struggling with identity conflict and facilitate to their needs in an empowering way.

1.6 Outline of Thesis

In chapter 2, I demonstrate the social/theological attitudes and tendencies observable in Adventist approaches and responses to the issue of homosexuality and homosexuals over the last fifty years. I use significant publications, articles and statements made by the Church to establish a clear political and cultural context for the ensuing research findings. I briefly

summarize some findings from previous research in the SDA Church and other similar religious communities, drawing out some relevant points for the research question of this study.

In chapter three, I present the theoretical framework for this study. Beginning with a summary of the basic points from Julian Rappaport's empowerment theory, I move on to expound on three emphases in identity theory. As a continuation, I move on to present the four-path model for identity conflict resolution as developed by E. M. Rodriguez and S. C. Ouellette. Lastly, I expound on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, and the effect of love, respect, and esteem (and the lack thereof) on the individual's relation-to-self.

In chapter four, I present the methodology for this study. The research strategy and design are presented and briefly discussed, as well as the methods used in data collection and its treatment. The ethical considerations in the process of collecting, storing and treating the data are also presented, followed by some important methodological challenges that I have faced in this study. Finally, I discuss the reliability and validity of the findings of this research based on its methodological approach and execution.

In chapter five, a presentation of the data significant to the research question(s) ensues. The findings are organized in two sections according to the topics of (1) how informants' relate to themselves, their families, and their community, and (2) how they relate to the Church, Adventism as a religion, and God. Within each section, I present four topically related themes that emerged in the interviews, using significant quotes as headlines that expressively summarize the recurring experiences, followed by a short summary in the end.

In chapter six, the presented data are analyzed and discussed through interaction with the theoretical framework presented in chapter three. The data is firstly analyzed from the theoretical perspective of identity theory and the four-path model. This analysis serves as a basis for a following discussion around some normative implications that can be deduced within the framework of empowerment theory and the theory of recognition.

Finally, in chapter seven, follows the conclusion of the study, in which I summarize and present this thesis' answer to the main question and sub-questions of my research.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 *Homosexuality and the Seventh-day Adventist Church*

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. (...) For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012).

This statement found on the official website of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church communicates a widely held, fundamental belief in the SDA Church that is deeply rooted in a biblically informed, prototypical ideal of heterosexuality. A similar emphasis on the moral exclusivity of heterosexual marriage over against all other forms of sexual relations is made in a document approved by the General Conference listing the global Church’s 28 fundamental beliefs (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015, p. 10).

In line with the Adventist movement’s restorationist birthing legacy in the 19th century, *sola scriptura*² has been central to the SDA Church’s agenda, doctrine, mission, identity and self-conception (Knight, 2000, pp. 30-31; Syvendedags Adventistkirken, 2019). Referring to the Bible as its’ only creed and adhering to a historical-grammatical (i.e. biblical literalist) approach to the biblical text, the Church’s teachings, attitudes and practices regarding homosexuality cannot be properly understood apart from their theological underpinnings and bible rhetoric. In the Church’s statements concerning homosexuality, there is a consistent use of a threefold theological argumentation in their references to Scripture. These are (1) God’s design at Creation, (2) biblical prohibitions against sexual immorality, and (3) Jesus’ (restorationist) teachings (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012).

² “The Scriptures only,” the view that the Bible serves as the only standard of faith and practice for Christians.

2.1.1 Gauging Attitudes among American Adventists

The topic of homosexuality has the recent decade been more widely addressed by both leadership and members in the SDA Church on a wide span of platforms (Akers & Eyer, 2012; Cruz, 2015; Gane, Miller, & Swanson, 2012; Ferguson, Guy, & Larson, 2018; Grady, 2015; McLarty, 2015; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012; Williams, 2017). Empirical research on the beliefs and attitudes among Adventists concerning homosexuality, however, is scant. A survey based on a representative sample study was published on *Adventist Today* in 2015 gauging American Adventists' beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality, providing some tentative insights into the social milieu of homosexual church members in North America.

Firstly, it is interesting to note how most of the basic beliefs about homosexuality among the informants almost split down the middle according to this survey (Grady, 2015). 45% of the informants agreed that homosexuality is the result of factors beyond voluntary control, while 55% disagreed. In response to whether homosexuals can be changed to heterosexuals 55% agreed that they could, while 45% disagreed. Furthermore, only 53% (against 47%) of the informants agreed to allow gay and lesbian people membership in good standing with the church. What concerns the public political debate, only 56% of the informants agreed that Adventists should politically oppose the legalization of gay marriage, while 44% disagreed. 77% of the informants believed that gays and lesbians have the same rights to employment and housing opportunities as heterosexuals, while 23% were against this. Although there are significant limitations to the representability of these findings, the results suggest a complex and wide range of beliefs and attitudes among American Adventists on the personal and political questions of homosexuality (Grady, 2015, "Conclusions," para. 2).

2.1.2 Official Responses to Homosexuality

In a previous essay written as part of my master's program, I looked at the characteristics of contemporary Adventist responses to homosexuality and to homosexuals in the Church. Based on recent Adventist publications such as articles, books and various kinds of statements addressing the issue of homosexuality, and using an approach similar to Thomas & Olson's (2012) study on evangelical elites' responses to homosexuality, I made a comparison of the two

(cf. Drumm, 2005, p. 48). As to the similarities between Thomas & Olson's findings and those of my own findings, I made the following observations.

2.1.2.1 Parallels in Evangelical and Adventist Responses

Firstly, the majority of responses made by the Church as represented by the religious and affiliated educational institutions (in this case, Andrews University), are nearly identical to the "biblical intolerance" response of evangelical elites as described by Thomas & Olson (2012, p. 262). This mode of response views the Bible as the "exclusive source of moral authority regarding homosexuality." Using a literal approach to biblical interpretation homosexuality is assessed as sinful and wrong in relation to personal morality. In the Adventist context, this mode of response is anticipated in the widely recurring biblical references used to undergird negative assessments of homosexuality. These negative assessments are for the most part framed within the religious discourse of the divine ideal, sin, redemption and holiness (Andrews University, 2015; Gane, Miller, & Swanson, 2012; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2014; Venn, 2011; Williams, 2017).

A second mode of response observed by Thomas & Olson (2012, p. 252-254, 262) dubbed "natural intolerance" appeals more to science, medicine, and the natural order as sources of moral authority than the Bible, although references to the Bible do not disappear. In comparison, the last decade of Adventist publications has seen substantial discussions using a medicinal and scientific approach to homosexuality. Issues such as causal factors, nature and nuances of homosexual orientation and gay identity, psychology and the possibility of changing orientation are also discussed (Andrews University, 2015, p. 17; Gane, Miller, & Swanson, 2012, section 3: "Counseling Issues," and section 4: "Testimonies"). These scientific assessments, which have appeared rather recently, generally acknowledge the difficulty of changing orientation (although stressing that this may not be impossible), as well as the complexity and lack of sufficient knowledge as to the causes for homosexuality.

Thirdly, the "personal accommodation" response emerging in the 2000s among evangelical elites (Thomas & Olson, 2012, pp. 265-266) is characterized by (1) a view of the Bible and science as co-dependent sources of moral authority, (2) a gay-tolerant position in public policy debates, and (3) an emphasis on the importance of loving homosexuals. These are reflected in the Adventist context by the Church's growing emphasis this recent decade on

manifesting Christ-like love to homosexuals (Lawson, 2018, “Emergence of Gay Issues,” and “Church Statements and Political Involvement”).

As to the public policy debate concerning gay marriage and gay civil rights, much of the same hostile and intolerant attitudes have been and still are displayed, as with the evangelical elites. With a history of political resistance towards same-sex marriage (Lawson, 2018, “Church Statements and Political Involvement”, para. 6ff), there is a continued appeal to the Bible and a rendering of gay marriage as an indirect threat to religious freedom—also with expressed concerns for the rights/well-being of children in same-sex families (Gane, Miller, & Swanson, 2012, section 2: “Religious Liberty Issues”).

However, it is important to mention that more progressive Adventist responses to homosexuality have also been given by a substantial number of Adventist ministers, pastors and professors (e.g. McLarty, 2015; Ferguson, Guy, & Larson, 2018). Accompanied by the testimonies and recounted experiences of gay, believing Adventists, these responses, similar to the evangelical “personal accommodating” response observed in Thomas & Olson, draw on a combination of the Bible, science and personal experience in order to emphasize the importance of Christian love and God’s grace for the imperfect, as well as the immutability sexual orientation. A recent statement published by the Swedish Union of the SDA Church, titled “Room for Everyone”, the Swedish Union states,

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sweden has failed in its relationship to LGBTQs and has neither promoted confidence nor created conditions for constructive dialogue. For a long time, the Church has had a hard time recognizing and managing the complexity of the LGBTQ issue. Although the Church has clear theological explanations concerning sexuality and marriage, these often lack guidance for pastoral and spiritual care in congregations. This lack of knowledge and insight means that members and employees often fail in their response to LGBTQs. (...) We want to overcome as many obstacles as possible so that the Church can become a safe place where everyone—regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity—can get to know God and grow as His disciples (Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Swedish Union, 2019, p. 3).

In a list of “We Want to Affirm” statements, they later express,

We want to affirm the biblical teaching that God created humanity in His own image, as male and female, and that He instituted marriage between a man and a woman as His original will and ideal for sexual

relations. At the same time, we want to affirm the needs of all persons for closeness, meaningful fellowship and loving relationships (Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Swedish Union, 2019, p. 3).

This response represents a newer discourse emerging around the topic of homosexuality and homosexuals in the SDA Church (as among the evangelical elite), that, while not rejecting the notion of the “correct”—the “ideal for sexual relations,”—makes a shift in emphasis towards relational values and the aspects of love and God’s grace.

However, as to the general attitude towards homosexuals among the Adventist churches, Lawson (2018) makes some summarizing remarks:

The evidence suggests that Adventist congregations and pastors usually offer their members conditional, rather than unconditional love. Because of this, the best way for a gay or lesbian member to survive there is to remain closeted—but this prevents strong bonds from developing because these members must try to hide who they really are. This forces them to turn instead to the gay community for genuine, caring friendships. The closet is an uncomfortable space in which to be confined. Given the negative situations that they must often endure, it is amazing how many gay Adventists remain committed to their congregations (Lawson, 2018, “Congregations and Pastors”, para. 7).

2.2 Previous Research on Identity Conflict

The topic of identity conflict among gays and lesbians carrying a religious identity has been addressed by multiple psychological and sociological studies over the last thirty years. Various studies have explored the identity forming processes, the challenges and strategies (and their associated outcomes) used by gays and lesbians to negotiate an experienced identity conflict—especially those coming from Judeo-Christian traditions (Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011, p. 269). In view of the research question of this paper, a summary of some of these studies, their theoretical frameworks, notions and findings, are pertinent.

2.2.1.1 Identity Integration in a Gay-positive Church

Serving as an inspiration and springboard to the research question of this paper, Rodriguez & Ouellette (2000) explore the complex and diverse process of identity integration as experienced by forty gay and lesbian members and informants of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York (MCC/NY), a gay-positive church in Manhattan. Firstly, the backdrop of conservative Christian denominations is addressed as well as the anti-gay messages by which

gays and lesbians often experience an identity conflict. The article thus provides four mental strategies used by the research informants to resolve it: (1) rejection of religious identity, (2) rejection of homosexual identity, (3) compartmentalization of identities, and (4) integration of identities. The discussion presents the following findings:

- 1) Involvement at MCC/NY (through role involvement, worship service and activity/ministry attendance) was an important means of identity integration for both gays and lesbians;
- 2) For some research informants, integration took place independent of their participation at MCC/NY through the reading of relevant literature, personal development, talking to other individuals and personal religious experiences;
- 3) More lesbians reported never experiencing conflict between their homosexual and Christian identities, and reported being fully integrated more often than their gay male counterparts;
- 4) Despite external animosity and internal conflict experienced by many gay Christians between their identities, “many feel very strongly about their religious beliefs and about their homosexual identity” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 345), and refuse to reject either one.

2.2.1.2 Identity Negotiation in Gay Evangelicals

Thumma (1991) explores the socio-psychological dimensions and processes of identity negotiation among gay evangelical Christians from the symbolic interactionist perspective (*adult socialization, the internalization of social meanings, reinterpretation, and response*). These are understood as the basis for the formation of self-concept. The context for this study is the gay-positive, evangelical organization Good News and their ministry to gays from the evangelical community. Having presented its theoretical framework, the article moves on to describe the context for change: the Good News organization and their history and program, expounding on four main points about Good News’ agenda. This agenda is described in five steps:

- 1) Convincing potential members that it is permissible to alter their religious beliefs;

- 2) To present the doctrines (cognitive structures) that support the proposed identity revision;
- 3) Facilitate to integrate the new gay Christian identity through evangelistic activities and social interactions;
- 4) Strengthen and maintain the newly revised identity through community and group support, and/or encouraging increases in orthopraxy such as individual piety and outward religiosity, and strict adherence to orthodox doctrine.

The socio-psychological principles behind Good News' steps for change are analyzed within the wider research of Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self (2011, pp. 264-267), and are neatly expounded in light of the widely acclaimed cognitive dissonance theory. Providing an overview over the extensive amount of research on the issue of identity conflict among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) people, Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self's study provides a helpful and practical summary of the research findings.

2.2.2 The Social Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists

Some sociological research has been done on the issue of gays and lesbians raised in the SDA Church (Drumm, 2005; Drumm, 2008). On the basis of more than ten years of research "into the social aspect of gay and lesbian Adventist life," René Drumm (2008, Part Three) recounts her research participants' experiences of growing up in the SDA Church, coming out to family, friends and church in an Adventist environment, and their social relations and relations to the Church as openly gay. According to her findings in a qualitative study of 37 gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists, most of the participants grew up in Adventist homes that "were firmly entrenched in in the Adventist religion" (Drumm, 2011, "Growing Up Adventist"). She relates,

Participants in this study overwhelmingly reported growing up experiences of typical Seventh-day Adventist families. The majority of participants described having family worship, following a vegetarian diet, keeping the Sabbath, and other traditions promoted by the church. Nearly all participants related that they had come from a close-knit family. (...) Seventh-day Adventist education was another important factor influencing these participants. All of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample attended a church-affiliated school for at least some portion of their education. (...) The combination of being raised in Adventist homes and attending Adventist schools produced a similar acceptance of Adventist teachings

and traditions among the participants. Most participants accepted the Adventist religion and belief system in its entirety (Drumm, 2011, "Growing Up Adventist").

Drumm (2011, "Denial") relates that participants' first reaction to realizing their homosexuality was denial that was often connected with religion or God (Drumm, 2005, p. 51), and they would make religious efforts, using various religious tools, to attempt to change their sexual orientation. These included prayer, claiming Bible promises, use of religious rituals, and immersion in religious activities (Drumm, 2011). "About one-third of the sample sought professional help to change their sexual orientations" (Drumm, 2011, "Professional Help to Change Orientation"). One-fourth attempted suicide. Another way of attempting to resist homosexuality was the pursuit of a heterosexual relationship or marriage.

After realizing that their sexual orientation was not going to change, one-third of the participants left the Church while retaining and gay/lesbian identity, many of them still sustaining some Adventist traditions (vegetarianism and Sabbath observance). The majority of those who left did so because they no longer believed in Church doctrine. Another condition of leaving church was the lack of ability to conform to church expectations (celibacy), themselves still believing that homosexuality was wrong (Drumm, 2011, "Believe Doctrine, Cannot Conform, Leave the Church"). A third condition for leaving church, was "righteous indignation," were some participants left still believing in most of the Adventist doctrines, but did not attend due to the Church's stance on homosexuality.

Two of the 25 who retained church membership did so by being celibate. 23 of 37 participants had fully integrated their sexual orientation and Adventist lifestyle and church membership, and were in general either in a same-sex relationship or looking for a life partner (Drumm, 2011, "Integrate Gay/Lesbian and Adventist Affiliation"). Three conditions that appeared to facilitate the gay/lesbian identity and church affiliation, according to Drumm (2011, "Conditions Leading to Integration"), were (1) "having an accepting church congregation," (2) "having a job that would not be in jeopardy if sexual orientation became known," and (3) "having an accepting family."

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the sociological theories that form the framework for my analysis and that are used in the findings discussion. I begin by presenting Rappaport's theory of empowerment with its central concepts of true paradoxes, dialectic thought and divergent reasoning. Considering the overall purpose of approaching my findings in line with empowerment theory's central principles (using dialectic tension to contrast the represented experiences), this seems like a natural place to start. Moving on, I present identity theory and its three emphasized aspects or directions. These serve as the basis for my approach to the concept of identity. Based on central elements from symbolic interactionism, role theory, and perceptual control theory, an important contribution in identity theory is the proposition that each person's self consists of multiple identities (Simon, 2004, "Identity theory," para. 2). Following this line of thought, I proceed to clarify some key theoretical concepts in Baumeister et al.'s theory of identity conflict and Rodriguez & Ouellette's four-path theoretical model of how subjects attempt to resolve conflicting Christian and homosexual identities (also referred to as the four-path model). Having expounded the four-path model, I move on to expound on the more normatively bearing points of Honneth's theory of recognition and its three forms of love, respect and esteem, and how the presence or lack of these three forms of recognition affect the subject's relation-to-self.

Many different sociological approaches have been used in the various studies on identity and identity formation among gays and lesbians (Rodriguez, 2009; Troiden 1989). The approaches used in this study have therefore been selected according to the following set of criteria.

Firstly, there is the specificity of the topic of this study, being the identity negotiation process among Adventist-reared gays and lesbians in Norway. "Identity negotiation" here suggests a notion of identity that recognizes a social negotiability—i.e. the fundamentally social nature—of the informants' expressed identities. It also betrays the processual emphasis of this study's approach. Hence, a social constructivist- / symbolic interactionist-informed approach to the topic of this study seems appropriate.

Speaking of identity in a sociological context, another important criterion was an integrated, balanced approach to the notion of identity (and identity formation) that, in line with the purpose of this study, recognizes both the role of the agency and that of the social structure, and that operates with a dialectic between the two insofar as it addresses this study's main question. One of the more recognized efforts to integrate insights from agency-emphasizing theories like social constructivism and more structurally inclined theories such as functionalism and role theory is identity theory. The nuances of the interactional emphasis and the structural emphasis serve the purpose of dialectic awareness, while the perceptual control model provides valuable theoretical model for understanding the logic and mechanism of the more psychological aspects of identity formation.

Finally, the theory of recognition with its expounded relational, practical principles and their social implications, serves as highly useful for the normative discussion around the findings of this study, grounding, in a sense, the theoretical insights into social praxis.

While I have been aware the danger of overextension and superficiality with the implementation of three theoretical perspectives (plus two theoretical models), I have sought to make the emphasis of this study clear in the analysis and discussion, while simultaneously contending and (hopefully) demonstrating a significant, internal relevance and complementation of these chosen approaches. Whether I have succeeded in this attempt, time will show.

3.2 Empowerment Theory

Joseph E. McGrath . . . came to the conclusion, rightly I think, “*that most of the social issues of our time are fundamentally of this form: a basic opposition of two or more ‘valid’ (that is morally correct) principles*” and that “*most social issues of this form have at least two ‘decent’ solutions (i.e., morally justifiable) sides to them (often more than two)*” (Rappaport, 1984, p. 4).

Julian Rappaport, American psychologist and professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, concurs with social psychologist and editor McGrath's observation. Central to Rappaport's contribution to social work and social psychiatry is the idea that by looking for the paradoxical, using divergent reasoning within a dialectic, individuals and communities can, through the mutual reliance between experts and non-experts and a shared

sense of urgency, find solutions to social and community problems that are different, and even contradictory, in order to gain control, find meaning and empower their lives.

Basic to Rappaport's argument is the assumption that human social systems for living are paradoxical in nature, and that discovering these paradoxes in social and community relationships is crucial for understanding and finding empowering (organic, autonomy-based) solutions to social and community problems (Rappaport, 1984, pp. 2, 3). Drawing on the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of paradox, Rappaport explains the fundamentals of "true paradoxes" and "false paradoxes." These terms he respectively ascribes to the principles of antinomy over against absurdity or self-contradiction. Antinomy, described as "a contradiction in law, or between two equally binding laws," is neatly illustrated by reference to an example of freedom and equality in government:

If we maximize one we find that the other is necessarily minimized. Allowing total freedom will lead the strong . . . to dominate the weak and equality to be obliterated. Equality will require constraints in freedom, which will necessarily impose limits on certain people (Rappaport, 1984, p. 3).

An essential part of looking for and recognizing paradoxes in social and community relationships is the identification of antinomies ("true paradoxes") and absurdities/self-contradictions ("false paradoxes") in these relationships.

For the next step, a part of the solution to social and community problems is, according to Rappaport, to identify which side or moral principle that has been emphasized as opposed to the side that has been ignored, with the purpose of confronting "the discovered paradoxes by pushing them in the ignored direction" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 3). Problems based on antinomies are essentially dialectical and contextual; thus, they call for divergent reasoning and divergent solutions as opposed to convergent reasoning and solutions (Rappaport, 1984, p. 6). Their solutions may be different and even contradictory, depending on social and cultural context. The discovery of divergent solutions happens within the "dynamic tension" of the dialectic, where "giving attention to one truth [happens] in such a way that attention then immediately is given to its counterpart" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 4).

Looking for paradoxes/antinomies in social and community problems using divergent reasoning with dialectical tension serves as the antidote to one-sided, centralized and over-generalized thinking, solutions and paradigms based on a top-down mapping of social

policies—tendencies with social and community institutions that create many social problems (Rappaport, 1984, pp. 8, 16-17). On a more general level, the pervasive belief that experts should solve all our problems extends the sense of alienation and loss of ability to control life. It is in this sensitization to a plurality of divergent, local solutions, which in turn opens up for “a diversity of people with a diversity of experiences who work out the solutions,” that empowerment theory’s purpose and efficacy is discerned. The empowerment ideology demands “that we look to many diverse local settings where people are already handling their own problems in living, in order to learn more about how they do it”—this, in order to create social policies and programs that can aid others who are shut out from current solutions in gaining control over their lives by handling their own problems (Rappaport, 1984, p. 15). This implies a focused attention on the structures of society where people live out their (authentic) lives, such as the family, network of friends and the church, and calls for a reversed, or “backwards”, bottom-up mapping—a social movement, with a cause transcending ourselves and a sense of urgency where the people tell officials and experts what social policies are necessary (Rappaport, 1984, pp. 7-8, 17, 19).

3.3 Identity Theory

In line with symbolic interactionism’s central idea of the mind’s reflexivity and ability to recognize the self as an object and relate to it much like any other object in a situation, identity theory seeks to understand the process by which the self comes to understand itself in relation to others (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 19, 25). For Sheldon Stryker, one of the originators of the theory, an identity is an “internalized positional designation” (Stryker, quoted in Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 25) for a given position or role that a person has in society. A person can have multiple roles, and hence, multiple identities. Identity theory builds on four premises that are central to the theory:

- 1) “Behavior is premised on a named or classified world” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 26). The names and class terms designating different aspects of the physical and social environment carry meaning in terms of behavioral expectations. Both the classification of objects and the expectations as to how one is to behave with reference to those objects are learned through social interaction.

- 2) “Among the class terms learned in interaction are the symbols used to designate ‘positions,’ which are the relatively stable, morphological components of social structure. These positions carry the shared behavioral expectations that are conventionally labeled ‘roles’” (Stryker, quoted in Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 26).
- 3) “People in society name or label one another in terms of the positions they occupy, such as teacher or judge. When they do so, they invoke shared meanings and expectations with regard to one another’s behavior as a teacher or judge, for example” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 26).
- 4) “People, using the reflexive aspect of the self, also name themselves with respect to these positional designations” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 26).

Different aspects of identity theory are emphasized in a slightly different way by theorists (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 37). Particularly relevant to my thesis is George McCall and J. L. Simmons’ interactional emphasis focusing on how identities are maintained and negotiated in face-to-face interactions, as well as Peter J. Burke’s perceptual control emphasis, focusing on the internal dynamics within the self that influence behavior. Sheldon Stryker’s structural emphasis—how structure influences identity and behavior—also comes with some relevant insights. Following is an exposition of the relevant points of each approach that will be useful for this thesis’ analysis and discussion.

3.3.1 The Interactional Aspect

Central to the interactional emphasis of George McCall and J. L. Simmons is the concept of *role identity*, an “imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant” of a given social position (McCall and Simmons, quoted in Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 39). Role identities have two dimensions: a *conventional* dimension (the cultural expectations tied to social positions, which actors try to meet) and an *idiosyncratic* dimension (the distinctive interpretations that actors bring to their roles). Individuals enact *role performances*, a behavior guided by their role identities, both in reality and in their imagination, in order to have their role identities (both their idiosyncratic self-understandings and conventional/normative views) legitimized. As individuals typically claim more than one role identity, there are two types of identity hierarchies—the identity *prominence* hierarchy and

identity *salience* hierarchy. Both contribute to determine an individual's behavior. The prominence hierarchy reflects the level of importance of the various identities to the individual, the most important ones being at the top, and as such is a reflection of the individual's *ideal self*. It is more enduring and stable. The salience hierarchy indicates which identities are more likely to be evoked across various social situations, and is a reflection of the individual's *situational self*. This one is more fluid.

Three factors contribute to decide which identities are prominent: (1) the amount of *support* that an identity generates, both from the self and from others, (2) the level of *commitment* to an identity by an individual, and (3) *extrinsic/intrinsic rewards* that an individual receives from an identity, such as money or favors (extrinsic) or personal gratification or esteem (intrinsic). Four factors contribute to decide which identities are salient: (1) *prominence* (the most significant factor), (2) *support*, (3) *extrinsic/intrinsic rewards*, and (4) the *perceived opportunity structure* in the situation (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 40-41).

When a role identity receives less support than expected, and particularly from an audience that is important to the individual, he or she will seek to focus attention on an identity that has received prior support. This affects the overall prominence and salience of the identity. However, if an identity receives less extrinsic or intrinsic rewards than expected, the individual experiences relative deprivation (increasing the desire for the reward) and is more likely to enact the identity in the future. The perceived opportunity structure represents the perceived amount of profit an individual will experience for playing out an identity in a given situation, and is not accurately assessed.

Seeing that one's personal expectations to a role identity may differ from others, the successful enactment of a role identity requires negotiation and compromise with others in the situation (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 42). This is not only due to possible conflict in the meaning of identities and their corresponding behavior, but also since it is in relation to the other(s) that each actor in a situation understands his or her role. Negotiation and compromise help the interactions to run smoothly and aids the development of durable relationships, which also help stabilize the persons' prominence hierarchies. In the case that one's role performance is not supported and one's identity is threatened, the ensuing experience of negative emotions may prompt a series of "mechanisms of legitimation" (McCall and Simmons, quoted in Burke &

Stets, 2009, p. 43). These are *short-term credit*, *selective perception*, *selective interpretation*, *blaming others*, *switching identities*, and *withdrawal from interaction*.

Finally, McCall and Simmons have also called for an expansion of the self-identification process to include actors' self-disidentifications ("who am I not") (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 44). Self-identification and self-disidentification is proposed by McCall to be regarded as the positive and negative poles of identity. He raises the issue for future research of how self-identifications ("Me") can become self-disidentifications ("Not-Me"), and vice versa.

3.3.2 The Perceptual Control Aspect

Peter Burke's work focuses on the internal dynamics operating for any one identity. Burke argues that a person's identity and their behavior are linked through a common system of meaning, and that the meaning evoked by a person's behavior should correspond to the meaning held in their identity (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 48). As such, a person's behavior confirms the meanings in their identity. Meaning is in other words critical to understanding an identity. More recent conceptions of these ideas expand on the dynamics of meaning, identity and behavior and incorporate the perceptual control system. The perceptual control system, a cybernetic model based on the work of William Powers, operates with four basic components that together constitute an identity: a perceptual *input*, an *identity standard*, a *comparator*, and a behavioral *output* to the environment (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 50, 61). The identity standard represents the defining character of an identity and consists of a stable set of self-meanings (e.g. "boss" = responsible, efficient, decisive, friendly, authoritative etc.) serving as the reference point for the input. The input is the individual's *self-relevant perceptions*, and the output is their *behavior*. The central idea is that it is an individual's perceptions of the environment that control their behavior. One's self-relevant perceptions (how one sees oneself and the feedback obtained from others) are compared with the identity standard in a constant comparing process (the comparator), with the goal of matching the self-meanings in the input to the self-meanings in the standard (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 64). If there is a difference, the comparator outputs an "error signal" indicating a discrepancy between the identity standard and the input/perceptions, resulting in a corresponding negative adjustment in the output/behavior. This perceptual control process is an ongoing, continuous loop (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 67).

The identity operation process is a process of identity-verification, which is the goal of an identity. However, this verification process can be disturbed or hindered, resulting in stress and negative emotions (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 68-69). Four types of interruptions are spelled out by Burke & Stets (2009, pp. 77-79):

Type I is *the broken loop*, where the continuous identity-verifying process is disturbed by significant changes in the environment (e.g. losing a loved one, changing jobs etc.).

Type II is the interruption caused by *interference* from other identities—in other words, a role-conflict situation, where the verification of one identity leads to the non-verification of another.

Type III is the interruption caused by an *over-controlled* identity. Here, stress arises both from the greater sensitivity to error in the over-controlled identity, and from the other identities that, in lack of sufficient mental resources, cannot be attended to and monitored simultaneously.

Type IV is a kind of interruption built into the functioning of all identities by means of their *episodic* nature, although there is variability in duration and frequency of activation for each identity.

Successful identity-verification results in increased self-esteem, with the three major bases in the form of *self-efficacy/-competence* (from verified role identities), *self-worth* (from verified social/group identities), and *self-authenticity* (from verified person identities) (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 125). Self-esteem represents the “evaluation of the self that is made by the self” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 79). Failure results in diminished self-esteem.

3.3.3 The Structural Aspect

Sheldon Stryker’s structural emphasis in identity theory is rooted in bringing together role theory’s conceptualization of society as a structure of positions tied with behavioral expectations (roles), and Mead’s ideas of self and action (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 44). As with McCall and Simmons, role identity is Stryker’s key concept, yet with a greater focus on the normative, conventional aspect of role identities rather than their idiosyncratic aspect. Rather

than starting with the individual's role identity meanings, Stryker's starting point is the meanings of role identities that are largely shared among individuals. He is concerned with how the social structure affects one's self, identity and behavior. People have multiple identities, which are internalized role expectations, and these are, as in the interactional emphasis, hierarchically organized.

Stryker's *salience* hierarchy indicates, as with McCall and Simmons, which identities are more likely to be evoked across situations, but differs from that of McCall and Simmons in that it directly influences the choices people make among behavioral options in the long run, and in this respect functionally resembles McCall and Simmons' prominence hierarchy (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 46). The difference between their prominence hierarchy and Stryker's salience hierarchy is the individual's own awareness of their hierarchies. A self-awareness of which identities are more important to the individual is assumed in the former and not in the latter, although the individual's behavior would inform them as to an identity's ranking in the hierarchy. Hence, one could say that Stryker's salience hierarchy assumes a more genuinely pragmatic attitude and behavior among individuals, while McCall and Simmons' prominence hierarchy reflects a more fundamentally idealistic self-attitude behind a situational, pragmatic behavior.

The main important factor that influences the salience of an identity here is an individual's degree of commitment to that identity, which is equated with the incurred costs for not playing out that role identity (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 46). The higher the cost, the higher the commitment. The cost has two dimensions: the *number* of ties in the social network based on an identity (the quantitative aspect), and the *strength* of these social ties (the qualitative aspect). This is supported by empirical research, and specifically by one study examining participants' commitment to their religious role identity (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 47-48).

3.3.4 Role Identities, Social Identities, and Person Identities

Although identity researchers have focused on the categorization of the self as an occupant of roles in a social structure, studies in the different meanings that people attribute to themselves provide additional bases for identities. These include *social identities* and *person identities* (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 112). While role identities focus on the position individuals hold, social

identities are based on a person's membership in a group (e.g. Christian, Norwegian, etc.). Person identities are based on the persons' characteristics or qualities that makes them distinct from other individuals (e.g. conscientious, domineering, etc.).

While a role identity "is the internalized meanings of a role that individuals apply to themselves" (e.g. teacher, student, etc.), *social* identities are internalized meanings of group belonging. Social groups have *prototypes* containing a set of features (an interrelated set of perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behavior) that captures similarities among ingroup members and differentiates them from outgroup members (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118). The prototype's maximization of similarities among ingroup members and dissimilarities between ingroup and outgroup members follows the *metacontrast principle* in that it does not describe a typical ingroup member, but "are polarized away from outgroup features and describe ideal, often hypothetical, ingroup members" (Hogg, quoted in Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118). *Depersonalization* happens when ingroup members see themselves in terms of the prototypical attributes of ingroup members, taking on the group's identity. The verification of one's social identity verified and feeling accepted strengthens a sense of belonging, and being judged valuable based on who one is (rather than what one does) increases one's self-worth (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 120-121).

Finally, person identity meanings are based on culturally recognized characteristics that individuals internalize to define themselves as distinct and unique. Hence, verification of person identities leads to increased feelings of authenticity, as verification of role identity increases self-efficacy and verification of social identities increases self-worth (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 125).

3.3.5 Identity Change

There are four general sources of systematic identity change in identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 180, 186):

- 1) Persistent problems with the verification of an identity;
- 2) Conflicts between two (or more) identities held by an individual;

- 3) Conflict between the meanings of an individual's behavior and the meanings in their identity standard;
- 4) Adapting identity standard to fit into situation.

3.4 Identity Conflict and Integration

In their study on identity integration among gay and lesbian informants in the gay-positive Metropolitan Community Church of New York, Rodriguez & Ouellette (2000, pp. 334-335) spell out four strategies for how gays and lesbians attempt to alleviate conflict between homosexual and religious identities. Their approach draws upon the contributions and testimonies from various sociologists, psychologists and church leaders among gay/lesbian minority. Following Baumeister et al.'s (1985, p. 408) notion of identity conflict as "the problem of the multiply defined self whose definitions have become incompatible," Rodriguez (2009, pp. 14-16) makes the following key points:

- 1) There are two components of identity conflict: (1) having a strong commitment to two distinct identity components, and (2) having a multiplicity of identity. With a strong commitment to one and not the other, the former would override the latter identity.
- 2) Rodriguez (2009, p. 15) points out that Baumeister et al.'s identity theory diverges from Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory in the proposition that an individual's "total identity is comprised by a series of sub-identities that are dynamic in nature."

The four paths to resolve conflict between religious and homosexual identities are: (1) rejection of the religious identity, (2) rejection of the homosexual identity, (3) compartmentalization of identities, and (4) integration of identities. Each of these strategies is further spelled out below.

Rejection of the religious identity involves "divorcing oneself from the Christian religion," either by becoming an atheist or by engaging in non-Christian religion that does not hold negative views of homosexuality (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334). This includes also the more subtle, gradual and quiet slipping out of religion.

Rejection of the homosexual identity involves both seeking to become heterosexual through reparative therapy and/or practicing sexual abstinence.

Compartmentalization of identities is the strategy of resolving conflict by keeping the two identities completely separate, achieving identity consonance (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334). Being done “in order to avoid conflicting prescriptions for behavior” (Baumeister et al., 1985, p. 419), gays and lesbians following this strategy will keep religion out of the homosexual aspects of their lives and vice versa. Identity consonance is not achieved, however, unless complete isolation between the two is sustained.

Identity integration involves an integration between gays’ and lesbians’ “religious beliefs and their homosexuality into a single, new, workable understanding of the self,” holding a positive gay identity and a positive religious identity, and combining the two in their lives without feeling conflict (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, pp. 334).

This four-path model has been successfully utilized in studies comparable to Rodriguez & Ouellette, such as Pitt’s (2010) study identity integration in black men from various African-American churches, and Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell’s (2015) study on same-sex attracted current and former members of the Mormon church.

3.5 Theory of Recognition

Fundamental to philosopher Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition is the idea that “due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people,” it is a “vital human need” (Charles Taylor, quoted in Anderson, 1995, p. x). The term “recognition” serves as the translation for the German term “*Anerkennung*,” corresponding to the Norwegian “*anerkjennelse*.” To “recognize” someone in this sense bears the connotation of ascribing to him or her some positive status. The failure to give someone due recognition indicates the opposite—to “disrespect” them (translated from “*missachtung*” in German).

Building on the work of earlier philosophers such as G. W. F. Hegel and G. H. Mead, Honneth stresses the importance of social relationships for the development and maintenance of a person’s identity (Anderson, 1995, pp. x-xi). Honneth argues that human self-realization—

the development and maintenance of a personal identity—requires the establishment of social relationships that enable a mutual exchange of three kinds or forms of recognition—love, respect, and esteem. Anderson neatly summarizes Honneth’s approach as follows:

The possibility for sensing, interpreting, and realizing one’s needs and desires as a fully autonomous and individuated person—in short, the very possibility of identity-formation—depends crucially on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These three modes of relating practically to oneself can only be acquired and maintained intersubjectively, through being granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes. As a result, the conditions for self-realization turn out to be dependent on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition. These relationships go beyond (a) close relations of love and friendship to include (b) legally institutionalized relations of universal respect for the dignity of persons, and (c) networks of solidarity within which the particular worth of individual members of a community can be acknowledged (Anderson, 1995, pp. xi-xii).

Central to Honneth’s theory is his account of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, along with the forms of recognition by which these are sustained, and also fought for—love, rights, and solidarity, respectively. This correspondence between the three forms of recognition and the various aspects and dimensions in the human organism that they address, is illustrated in Figure 2 (Honneth, 1995, p. 129). Each form of recognition affects in a fundamental way the person’s practical “relation-to-self” by internalization processes.

Because the normative self-image of each and every individual human being—his or her ‘me’, as Mead put it—is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of being disrespected carries with it the danger of injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse (Honneth, 1995, pp. 131-132).

It is within this framework, as well as within the framework of social struggle for recognition enabling identity-formation, that Honneth expands on the dynamics of both recognition and identity-formation.

3.5.1 Love and Basic Self-Confidence

In speaking of recognition as a constitutive element of love, what is meant is an affirmation of independence that is guided—indeed, supported—by care (Honneth, 1995, p. 107).

Honneth suggests that recognition in the form of love and friendship enables an individual's self-confidence in relating to themselves—their relation-to-self. Love relationships, such as friendships, parent-child relationships and erotic relationships between lovers, are constituted by “strong emotional attachments among a small number of people” and are referred to as primary relationships (Honneth, 1995, p. 95). When a person's needs and emotions are “confirmed” by being satisfied or reciprocated—in other words, *recognized*—, the person gains a basic confidence in themselves and their emotions—both in their experience of needs and feelings, and in their expression. This basic self-confidence, as Honneth calls it, serves as the psychological precondition for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect, thus rendering love as being “conceptually and genetically prior to every other form of reciprocal recognition” (Honneth, 1995, p. 107).

Honneth refers to Hegel's description of love as “being oneself in another,” and emphasizes that love is less of an “intersubjective state” and more a “communicative arc suspended between the experience of being able to be alone and the experience of being merged” (Honneth, 1995, p. 105). In other words, love, or “be[ing] at home in the other” is a balance of both “ego-relatedness” and “symbiosis.” Recognition in the form of love is therefore characterized by a “double process, in which the other is released and, at the same time, emotionally tied to the loving subject” (Honneth, 1995, p. 107). As illustrated in the opening quote, love entails a recognition of independence, guided by care.

Finally, Honneth clarifies that the love relationship presupposes liking and attraction, and is not extended at will beyond the social circle of primary relations to include all partners of interaction. Yet it is love's structural core of a symbiotically nourished bond “emerg[ing] through mutually desired demarcation” that enables the basic self-confidence needed to participate in public life, according to Honneth (1995, p. 107).

The counterfeit to love in this context is according to Honneth “the practical maltreatment in which a person is forcibly deprived of any opportunity to freely dispose over his or her own body,” and represents “the most fundamental sort of personal degradation” (Honneth, 1995, p. 132). This causes, irrespective of intention behind it, a humiliation more destructive to a person's relation-to-self than other forms of disrespect in that it does lasting

damage to one's basic self-confidence and to one's trust in the world, affecting all practical dealings with other subjects.

3.5.2 Rights and Basic Self-Respect

Having rights enables us to 'stand up like men', to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone. To think of oneself as the holder of rights is not to be unduly but properly proud, to have that minimal self-respect that is necessary to be worthy of the love and esteem of others. Indeed, respect for persons ... may simply be respect for their rights, so that there cannot be the one without the other. And what is called 'human dignity' may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims (Joel Feinberg, quoted in Honneth, 1995, p. 120).

Honneth argues that, just as children through love acquire a basic self-confidence, learning to trust their own needs and emotions and the expression of these, "adult subjects acquire, via the experience of legal recognition, the possibility of seeing their actions as the universally respected expression of their own autonomy" (Honneth, 1995, p. 118). Just as love generates the psychological foundation for trusting one's own sense of one's needs and urges, rights develop a form of consciousness that enables a person to respect oneself seeing one deserves the respect of everyone else. Legal rights serve as the "depersonalized symbols of social respect" (Honneth, 1995, p. 118). Although differing from love in the essential respects, legal relations represent the same mechanism of reciprocal recognition (Honneth, 1995, p. 107-108). It is in taking the perspective of "the generalized other" that we learn to recognize other human beings as also being bearers of rights, which in turn helps us to see ourselves as morally responsible and "legal persons," in the sense that we can be sure that certain of our claims will be met (Honneth, 1995, p. 108). Honneth emphasizes that it is only with the establishment of *universal* human rights, based on the moral responsibility of all human beings as a free and moral agents, that the associated human respect and self-respect as truly autonomous moral agents is made possible.

Honneth explains what the denial of rights entails:

For the individual, having socially valid rights-claims denied signifies a violation of the intersubjective expectation to be recognized as a subject capable of forming moral judgements. To this extent, the experience of this type of disrespect typically brings with it a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a legally equal interaction partner with all fellow humans (Honneth, 1995, pp. 133-134).

3.5.3 Solidarity and Basic Self-Esteem

What makes esteeming someone different from recognizing him or her as a person is primarily the fact that it involves not the empirical application of general, intuitively known norms but rather the graduated appraisal of concrete traits and abilities (Honneth, 1995, p. 113).

While legal recognition is concerned about how the constitute quality of persons should be defined, social esteem operates within an “evaluate frame of reference within which the ‘worth’ of characteristic traits can be measured” (Honneth, 1995, p. 113). Social esteem is directed at the particular, characterizing qualities of persons, and the evaluate framework encompasses the “ethical values and goals comprising the cultural self-understanding of a society” (Honneth, 1995, p. 122). The culturally defined values of a society provide the criteria to measure the “worth” of particular personality features, and in turn the esteem of persons, according to the degree to which they appear to be in a position to contribute to the realization of societal values and goals.

Esteem is a form of recognition that, when organized in status groups, allows a feeling of group-pride in their practical relation-to-self, being recognized by all other members in society as member of a social group that collectively can contribute to societal goals (Honneth, 1995, p.128). The internal interaction between members within such groups often take the form of solidarity—a mutual sympathizing with one another’s ways of life based on symmetrical esteem. The internalization process in this respect—which I argue can be understood as an internalization of group or societal values and goals—fosters the belief in one’s own achievements or abilities as “valuable,” in that they will be recognized as so by other members of society as well. Symmetrical esteem between autonomous subjects—that is, viewing “one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis”—serves as a prerequisite for solidarity (Honneth, 1995, p. 129). These kinds of relationships take the form of solidarity in that they inspire not merely passive tolerance but “felt concern for what is individual and particular about the person” (Honneth, 1995, p. 129). Honneth emphasized that “symmetrical” here indicates a mutual experience of being free from collective denigration and of being recognized for one’s accomplishments and abilities (Honneth, 1995, p. 130).

[O]nly to the degree to which I actively care about the development of the other’s characteristics (which seem foreign to me) can our shared goals be realized (Honneth, 1995, p. 129).

The hierarchy of values that enable social esteem also enable social denigration. For individuals engaged in forms of life or manners of belief that are measured as inferior or deficient in the accomplishment of societal goals, these persons lose the ability to relate to their mode of life as something of positive significance within their community (Honneth, 1995, p. 134). This social devaluation typically leads to a loss of self-esteem and the form of self-realization that required the encouragement of group solidarity.

The experience of being socially denigrated or humiliated endangers the identity of human beings, just as infection with a disease endangers physical life (Honneth, 1995, p. 135).

Honneth argues that this historically has been shown to lead to “psychological death” and “social death” on the one hand, and struggle on the other, incited by the negative emotional reactions of shame (such as feeling hurt or indignant) comprising the psychological symptoms of being illegitimately denied social recognition (Honneth, 1995, pp. 135-136).

In the context of the emotional responses associated with shame, the experience of being disrespected can become the motivational impetus for a struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995, p. 138).

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 *Research Design*

While it is possible to apply both quantitative and qualitative strategies in social research, I find the qualitative approach to be most appropriate for the research questions of this study. Qualitative research can be described as a “naturalistic, interpretive approach, concerned with exploring phenomena ‘from the interior’ (Flick, 2009) and taking the perspectives and accounts of research informants as a starting point” (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014, p. 2). As a representational qualitative study, it is as such concerned with the categories, concepts and explanations that can be generalized to the study sample’s parent population (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston, & Morrell, 2014, p. 350). This entails an inductive theoretical approach in which “theory is the outcome of research which involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations” (Bryman, 2016, p. 22). In practical terms, I will analyze the gathered empirical data from the perspective of my theoretical framework in order to build a theoretical understanding of the identity negotiation processes and outcomes among Adventist-reared gays and lesbians in Norway.

4.1.1 *Case Study*

Being “concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question,” (Bryman, 2016, p. 60), the case of this study is the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in Norway. A case study can be a single community or organization, and case studies tend to use qualitative methods—hence, not to generalize, but to analyze the unique features of a case (Bryman, 2016, pp. 60-61).

Using an idiographic approach, I am interested in the particular experiences of gays and lesbians raised in the SDA Church and its affiliated Adventist social community. One of the reasons I chose this case was the convenience of access to relevant information about the Church as well as the potential research participants in my social network. Another factor was the personal insight into the various aspects of Adventist culture and thinking as an “insider.” Lastly, while some sociological research has been done on the issue of homosexuality and the SDA Church in North America, no sociological research has been done (according to my

knowledge) on the Adventist community of Norway, which is particularly close-knit due to its relatively small constitution.

4.1.2 Qualitative Interviewing

There are two major types of qualitative interviews, being (1) the unstructured interview, and (2) semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2016, p. 468). The interview process is flexible in both cases, with the emphasis in the interview being what the interviewee sees as important in explaining and understanding events.

As a method of data collection, I chose to use semi-structured interviews, implying the preparation of a list of questions, or an interview guide, using open-ended questions. This was to ensure that the topics necessary to answer the research questions were covered. However, questions were not asked in the exact same order in each case, allowing the informant leeway to jump between topics according to their perceived relevance. This ensured that their distinctive context or framework of thought became more clear, making it easier for me to gain insight into their points. The scope of the interviews ranged from about half an hour to one and a half hours and were conducted in a private environment (their own homes or my current residence) in order to secure a sense of privacy and safety in relating sensitive issues. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. While this required some extra traveling on my behalf, I wanted to, as far as possible, ensure a clear and uninterrupted communication, also giving me the advantage of being able to read important cues in their body language, and vice versa.

4.1.3 Selection of Informants

Employing purposive sampling, in which “participants [are sampled] in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are posed” (Bryman, 2016, p. 408), I contacted relevant individuals personally via Facebook or e-mail. These were individuals that I, through acquaintance, knew were relevant to my research question, which in turn helped the efficiency of the sampling process.

Eleven informants were interviewed, with ages ranging from early twenties to early fifties. As it became clear in the interview that one informant did not sufficiently match the criteria for my research (having not been raised in the SDA Church, but joined the Church as an adolescent), I decided not to use the collected data from this interview. During the process of conducting interviews, I was referred to other potentially relevant interview subjects. However, due to the limited resources (including time), I decided to keep the sample size at ten, as also initially intended.

4.1.4 Recording of Data, Storage and Transcription

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, providing the freedom to engage with the interviewees and provide relevant follow-up questions and cues. The audio files were then transmitted to my personal computer and stored in an encrypted compartment of my hard drive, using VeraCrypt. Importing the audio files to DSS Player Standard, I transcribed each of the interviews into Word documents, storing them together with the audio files. I also took several back-ups of the encrypted project file as to ensure no data was lost.

Having transcribed the interviews, I sent an encrypted copy of the transcription to its respective informant, providing each one the password via telephone. This was to ensure that they were given the opportunity to correct, add to and/or confirm the provided information. All but two informants verified the transcriptions, while the remaining two have not been interested in reading their transcribed interview.

4.1.5 Ethical Considerations

Seeing it is the research informant who makes the central object of study in qualitative research—their lived and experienced reality serving as a basis for all knowledge produced therein—, a mindful and proactive sensitivity to the best interest of the informant's physical and mental well-being is crucial. It is no secret that the topic of sexual and religious identity is of an exceptionally personal and politically sensitive nature. A lack of sensitivity to this fact could cause mental and physical harm to the informant in multiple ways, and undercut the

research findings. Following is an elucidation of the guiding ethical principles and their practical implications in the context of this research.

4.1.5.1 Informed Consent and Confidentiality

It was not until my research project was approved by Norwegian Center for Research Data (RSD) that I began conducting my research, sampling and interviewing the informants. As part of the application of approval, a draft of the interview guide was required as well as a draft of the document of confidentiality to be handed out to the informants.

Bryman (2016, p. 691) defines informed consent as a key principle in ethical research, implying “that prospective research informants should be given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study.” Scholars’ opinions differ in the details of how much information is needed. Webster, Lewis, & Brown (2014, p. 87) suggest that an informed consent necessitates the following points:

- 1) Adequate information about the funders and purposes of a study and research;
- 2) The relationship between the researcher and the funding organization;
- 3) The voluntary nature of participation and rights to withdraw at any time;
- 4) The practical implications of participation (such as the type of encounter, duration and interview topics), and
- 5) The confidentiality and anonymity of the data obtained.

Prior to interviewing the informants, a document of confidentiality was handed out to the informants providing information about the research corresponding to all the aforementioned points. These were sent out in advance and signed upon meeting. I made sure to welcome any questions as to the research, its purpose, and their role as informants both before and after the signing of the documents, and the interviews.

4.1.5.2 Role as Researcher

Personal integrity is vital as a researcher in order to make ethical considerations and decisions in the research process, and to ensure a high quality of the scientific knowledge produced. This involves a keen sensitivity to the personal nature of the data that is being collected, especially in regards to topics such as sexuality and religion. It is important to note that the interactions

between the researcher and the informant can affect the informant and their responses. This can be especially true for the researcher who might be able to identify with the informants—which in turn can influence the professional distance and obscure the professional role of the researcher. There must be a clear separation between the professional role of the researcher and the researcher as a private person.

As for my role as a researcher, being an “insider” in the SDA Church both posed a challenge and an opportunity for my research. The challenge was to be able to maintain a professional distance necessary to ensure the reliability of my findings—not to have my affiliation with the SDA Church or previous acquaintance with some of the informants affect, sway or inhibit the authenticity and truthfulness of the informants’ responses. However, my affiliation with the SDA Church proved, even surprisingly, to be a major help to the informants’ sense of comfort and security, ceasing, as it were, their opportunity to speak openly and boldly about rather specific and church-/faith-related challenges that not necessarily would be understood by, and thus perhaps not related to, an “outsider” researcher. My affiliation with the SDA Church proves, from my own experience, also to be a major strength in the communication process, not only effectively establishing mutual trust, but also providing an additional experiential insight into the meanings in the informants’ accounts and choices (and avoidance) of certain cultural terminology.

With my “outsider” role as a student researcher, there was generally an extremely clear understanding of the nature of and purpose of my encounter with each informant, and each of them showed a clear resolve to commence the interviews after signing the information sheets without further due. After the interviews were completed, most informants would be interested in hearing my own experiences, some of which I also related.

4.2 Challenges and Dilemmas

While the interviewing process itself went as planned, the process of scheduling the interviews posed a major challenge, seeing that the informants were scattered across the country. This required an intense logistical scrutiny in order to save the precious resources of time and money. An additional challenge was the late approval of my research project by NSD, limiting the

resource of available time for the project as I, besides conducting my research, was working a part-time job.

However, things fell into place as I got an overview over the available slots in their respective schedules, giving me the chance to book flights and bus tickets that would efficiently take me from one meeting place to another, being able to conduct all of the out-of-town interviews over a short time span.

4.3 Coding and Analysis of the Data

The transcribed interviews were imported into the qualitative data coding software QSR NVivo where I immediately began coding the interviews into to labeled “nodes.” Firstly, I coded the informants’ responses topically according to the interview questions they were responding to, each node containing an interview question and its following response. Such topics included their religious upbringing, their identification with the Adventist faith, discovering their homosexuality, coming out etc. Already at this initial level, a process of analysis and interpretive prudence was necessary due to the flexible and spontaneous nature of the semi-structured interviews. While the various follow-up questions, probing questions and interpreting questions aided a clearer understanding of the informants’ meanings, they also made the topical transitions more smooth and subtle. This initial step was driven by two important concerns: (1) not to lose the context of, or base for, the informants’ responses, and (2) to minimize the loss of narrative flow that results from the fragmentation of the data (Bryman, 2016, p. 583).

As a next step, I went down on a miniscule level and coded each phrase into short-sentence, summarizing nodes that caught each basic meaning and thought. This was naturally the most demanding part of the coding process, requiring attentiveness to the narrative flow in the responses. Having done that, I began organizing all the sub-level nodes into themes, grouping them together according to sub-question motifs. This allowed the themes that were important in the experience and reflections of the informants to emerge within the context of each question. These mid-level themes or motifs were compared across the interviews in order to identify the recurring ones, and to analyze further the similarities and differences between

the emergent thematic aspects. I also wrote color-coded memos in order to make the themes of significantly positive experiences (green) and negative experiences (red) stand out.

Finally, using the research sub-questions as a matrix, I inserted the salient themes linked with summarized data labels according to which research question these themes would address or help to explain. Going through the salient themes once again, I selected one quote that summarized each theme in a way that reflected the experience, more or less, of all or most of the informants, using these also as a springboard for contrasting them with significant trend “deviations” in the experience of other informants.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important criteria for establishing and assessing the quality of research. The (external) reliability of a study indicates the extent to which a study can be replicated. The validity of a study refers to whether it is valid in the sense that (1) there is correspondence between the empirical data and the theoretical ideas developed by the researcher (*internal* validity), and (2) whether findings can be generalized across social settings (*external* validity) (Bryman, 2016, pp. 383). As this research is conducted by me only, the measurement of internal reliability (whether members of the same research team agree about observations and findings) does not apply.

Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research—including the unique role and experiences brought by the researcher into the field—and the impossibility of reproducing the social settings and circumstances of a study and the social interactions in which data is collected, there has been discussion as to the relevance of these criteria for qualitative research. These criteria have been widely developed within quantitative research traditions, and while some contend for an assimilation of these criteria into qualitative research, others indicate that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to different criteria (Bryman, 2016, pp. 383-384). However, qualitative researchers have tended to use these terms in similar ways to quantitative research, as I also chose to do.

The reliability of this study is firstly indicated by the previous research done on the similar subject and providing similar outcomes. The significance of this research, however, is

that it is done in Norway. Secondly, many of the same issues, undergirded by similar experiences and reflections, were raised by the informants during the interviews, another indication of the reliability of this study and research design. With the purpose of keeping as much as possible of the original meanings and thoughts of the informants, I have implemented low-inference measures such as audio recording the interviews, carefully transcribing them including significant use of body-language, such as nodding, and continuers or other prompts encouraging the informants to elaborate or explain themselves (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 271). In the coding process, I would as far as possible avoid the reconstruction of the responses from the interviewees, making sure that the code labels/keywords were the own words of the informants, and that the mid-level themes were phrases used by the informants themselves.

The internal validity of this study is defended by (1) the restricted conferring with other studies and social theory during the coding process in order to avoid, as far as possible, reading these into the data, and (2) the subsequent sifting out social theory that stands out as particularly relevant to the subject of identity-formation and negotiation. External validity requires that the findings not only apply to the examined case, but also to similar social settings. The external validity of this study consists in the generalizability of the experiences and socio-psychological processes of identity negotiation of ten informants raised in the SDA Church in Norway, implying that these aspects are applicable to all Adventist-reared homosexuals in Norway.

5 FINDINGS

The research question of my thesis focuses on the social and psychological processes of identity formation among by gays and lesbians raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Norway:

How do gays and lesbians, raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway, socially and psychologically negotiate their religious, sexual and social identities?

In the following chapter, I present the findings from my research. As most of my informants (who are represented by pseudonyms throughout the chapter) lived in and around my own hometown, Oslo, this gave me the opportunity to swiftly commence the interviewing process, also keeping impressions more freshly in mind as I efficiently progressed through the interviews. Patterns in the informants' recounted experiences and felt challenges, as well as their impact on the informants' self-defining process, immediately began to emerge. I have organized the important findings into two parts, each reflecting three aspects of their self-defining process: (1) their relation to self (self-understanding), to their family, and to their social community; and (2) their relation to the Church institution, to Adventism as an ideology, and to God. I will present the most salient themes emerging from the informants' accounts in a manner that reflects my research sub-questions. Each part is organized chronologically, beginning with informants' upbringing and home environment, moving on to the discovery of their homosexuality, the coming out process, and finally their current state and prospects for the future.

5.1 Relating to Self, the Family, and the Community

This part focuses on the informants' related experiences and impressions from their social surroundings—their home environment and their social circle in the Adventist community—and the informants' understanding of and relation to self. Themes are organized and presented according to salience, progressing chronologically from the informants' early years and upbringing to their discovery of being different, coping with this difference, coming out as gay and their present standing with their family and community.

5.1.1 “No one ever mentioned the word”

When asked about their memories of discussions or comments in their upbringing relating to the topic of homosexuality, most of the informants report having little to no recollection of any mentioning of it at all. One of the informants, Hanna, relates:

No one ever talked about homosexuality when I grew up, and no one ever mentioned the word. No one ever stated it was wrong. Yet it was in a way—it was implied through the entire system that it was not an alternative (Hanna).¹

Another informant shares his own experience of the silence around the topic in his own home.

I think homosexuality was a topic that was not discussed at home whatsoever. That it was a non-topic. (...) I did not experience it as being taboo; just that it was a non-topic (Kim).²

Reflecting on his newfound friendship as a child with an older missionary student at his church, Kim describes how the missionary students’ abrupt disappearance without any further explanation later served as an indication to him of the social climate in relation to homosexuality.

I never heard anything about the reason [for his leaving]. I was, like... Nothing. It was not until many years later, when I myself came out of the closet, that I realized he was gay. (...) To me this indicated how accepted it was, the fact that it was, like... This story was put under a cover. It was a case simply to be nodded at (Kim).³

Later, when Kim for the first time confided in a close friend about maybe being gay, his friend, clearly being uncomfortable with the issue, would laugh it off and change the topic of conversation, as if it never happened. Kim specifies how similar incidents of silence on and/or avoidance of the issue when socializing as an adult with Adventists as openly gay reinforced a feeling of being unaccepted and unwelcome, albeit covered by a façade of polite friendliness. He explains that because of the official and negative views of homosexuality in the SDA Church, Kim’s default assumption was—unless otherwise was explicitly stated—a non-accepting attitude. This, combined with the silence on the issue, would as an adult make him anxious of confrontation when in church, often ruminating over the possible presence of someone who did not want him there.

Another informant and one of the younger ones in this study, Mathias, relates of a complete oblivion to the concept of homosexuality up until the age of twelve. He sees this in light of a personal tendency to be selectively attentive to matters not conceptually understood or seen as immediately relevant to himself. He states:

I suffer from not having heard about something ever in my life until it is pointed out to me, then I am aware of it. For instance, if someone uses a word I have never heard [learned], then I [feel as if I] have never heard it. But then I might hear it 15 times the following day. (...) I am very oblivious to what I have not taken any position on (Mathias).⁴

However, Mathias relates that after becoming conscious of his sexual attraction to men depicted on the Internet and thus recognizing the concept of homosexuality, he began noticing others' (negative) remarks on the issue, especially from his grandparent.

Despite how homosexuality appears to be a nearly non-existing topic in most of the informants' childhood and early adolescence, many report having an immediate and keen sense of the incongruity of their homosexual feelings with their social and religious context once they became aware of them. Even before their awareness of their own homosexuality, several informants relate experiencing an unease and discomfort in the rare occasion that homosexuality was casually referred to.

I remember, like, there were times when people would guess who among the teachers and others were gay, right? And I always felt that game was a bit awkward, because I thought, "What if someone mentions my name in a similar setting?" (...) I felt quite a bit of discomfort around this (Hanna).⁵

Another informant, Nina, recounts how she in primary school was struggling to understand her feelings towards an older girl, lacking any concept of gay relationships:

I remember thinking, "If I were a boy, then I would wish she were my girlfriend." And then I thought, "No, but I'll never be a boy." (...) It did not occur to me that [being Maja's girlfriend] was an option, you know? So it was, like... I wanted to come as close to her as possible,—“Okay, I wish she were my sister” (Nina).⁶

Later, having been in love with a girl in her class during middle school—being the time during which she began to realize her own sexuality—Nina reports feeling physically ill and saddened upon reflecting on the nature of her feelings towards the girl. The same sadness coupled with physical illness later arose again as a reaction to her kissing a girl for the first time in ninth

grade. This was the time during which Nina, according to herself, began to date boys compulsively, on the condition that they never engage physically with her—anyone else was fine.

Niklas, one of the older informants, relates that although there never was any focus on homosexuality in the pathfinders or church he attended, there was a pervading emphasis on the family as being an ideal, around which core Sabbath traditions revolved. Dutiful as he was this and other religiously inferred ideations led him to pursue a “perfect life” according to all the religious and social values he had learned. Years later, after having gone through a nerve wrecking coming out process, fearing the potential loss of the life he had built, Niklas recounts some ambivalent feelings about the outcome:

People were very considerate (...), and the pastors met me with understanding, acceptance, and a kind of expectation that everything would be okay, in a way. But then it was, like, that’s it. I have been on the verge of... (...) “If this plane goes down, then that is completely fine.” I have thought this a hundred times. (...) I am very thankful that [family and friends] took it as well as they did, and the pastors. But there was very soon a vacuum. And that is what I think is so strange—that people did not take it more seriously. That they did not express more care, more inclusivity, ask how I was doing seeing how this permeates all of life. From pastors you have admired for many years! Instead, there is silence, distance, and something they still will not talk about (Niklas).⁷

Niklas emphasizes that while no one actively distanced themselves from him in a marked manner, there was an increased loneliness and sense of exclusivity, also due to the context of his coming out, rendering him more vulnerable to isolation and depression than prior to his coming out. He feels that, in light of how problematic it is to be gay in the first place, the silence and complete lack of care or initiative to inquire about the issue, either on a personal and/or a political level, seems unnatural and inauthentic.

In contrast to the other informants’ experiences of silence and/or avoidance on the issue of homosexuality, three informants relate early memories of being confronted with the concept of homosexuality in different ways. Attending a public primary school, Sebastian recalls feelings of sympathy coupled with fear when for the first time hearing about homosexuals in class, sensing he could understand how they felt. In retrospect, Sebastian identifies this as a fear of being different. Amanda and Nathaniel (including Mathias after his awareness of homosexuality as a concept), both immigrating with their parents to Norway at a very young

age, report enduring a long history of listening to the disdainful remarks from their parents whenever hearing or seeing anything on television or on the radio relating to homosexuality or homosexuals. (Both emphasize that sexuality was not a topic discussed at home whatsoever.) Amanda relates how her mother who previously had loved watching *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* immediately abandoned it when learning that DeGeneres was lesbian. Long before realizing her own lesbian orientation, Amanda would leave the room out of discomfort and fear of betraying her true sentiments whenever her parents would begin commenting on the issue, which happened on a quite frequent basis.

I could not understand why they were so... (...) Like, “Why does it bother you so much? What is the problem?” And every time they did this I would leave the room. Even from a young age, whenever they began their “argh” [protesting] thing. (...) I was not angry, it was just uncomfortable sitting there and listening to it. It was very uncomfortable (Amanda).⁸

These casual remarks, including her dad’s expressed delight at the reported incarcerations of homosexuals in their home country, have led Amanda in later years to fear for her own security at home since realizing her lesbian orientation. She relates how her initial denial of the slightest possibility of having a lesbian orientation—conceding, in her mind, to the possibility of being bisexual at the absolute worst—was driven by the fear of being rejected and expelled from her family by her parents, losing contact with her beloved siblings. Nathaniel, like Amanda, Mathias and most of the other informants, report spending considerable amounts of time trying to suppress/eliminate his homosexuality—a second major theme that emerged during the interviews.

5.1.2 “Every night I prayed that God would either heal me or kill me”

Eight out of ten informants report having attempted, on different levels and over varying periods of time, to suppress their own homosexuality. However, not all such attempts were conscious or even understood as such in the informants’ own minds at the time. Some relate how it is in hindsight that they have more clearly understood their behavioral and/or emotional response to topic-related “triggers.” Hanna’s lesbian orientation came to her as a shock as she was conversing in confidentiality with a friend, realizing that she for the first time was in love, and

as such with the friend in which she was confiding. Upon reminiscing about her previous behavior in relation to homosexual themes, she relates:

I cannot be certain of this, for this goes back in time, but I kind of have a feeling that if I had been in a different setting I would have had access to this information about myself a lot earlier—but that I never been searching for these kind of answers in the given context. I have, in a way, actively not been searching for these kind of answers throughout (Hanna).⁹

In response to the question whether this was because she feared to discover her own lesbian orientation, Hanna states:

Yes, well—when I look at myself in retrospect, then yes, definitely. But (...) I did not have such an active thought process [around it] (Hanna).¹⁰

Niklas reports seeing, retrospectively, signs of his same-sex attractions in his youth, but emphasizes that this was something he would pay minimal attention to and hardly was aware of at the time.

I did not ponder it, to put it that way. Because—I can perhaps now see that I was a bit afraid as to whether there would be this kind of deviance in me. It was at least something I would not talk about with anyone (Niklas).¹¹

Niklas further relates how a nickname ascribed to him by another pupil led him to suppress his feelings thus more. However, he specifies that the inner conflict he experienced at that point was not major, partly due to the fact that he had been taught that homosexual feelings was normal and a passing phase of adolescence.

At school there was [someone who said] that it was common to feel some attraction towards both sexes during the teenage years—and that this was normal, that this could happen. (...) My interpretation was that, okay—if one had such feelings then this was something everyone had. It was not because you were gay that you possibly had an attraction to [other] boys. Everyone had it. This was normal, and one chose the opposite sex nevertheless since this was how things were—and everyone was, in a sense, ultimately heterosexual. (...) I would not say that there was no [inner] conflict. But to the extent there was a conflict, it was not big. It did not permeate all of life. My conclusion was that if there were any feelings towards the same sex at all, then this was normal, to put it in those terms (Niklas).¹²

It was not until many years later, as Niklas was achieving his dreams and his ideals of the perfect Christian life, that the conflict within emerged in his own awareness and his struggle became

more explicit. This led him into a more active, conscious attempt to suppress it, filling his time with work and hoping that his next life achievement would settle things, clinging to his instinct of living dutifully to his ideals and what he believed was expected of him by God, his family, his friends and his church. However, as time passed, Niklas became increasingly depressed and his creativity and cheerfulness dimmed. He slowly began to realize the all-encompassing inescapability of his struggle.

It became more of a struggle, a conflict, where I was struggling with myself and, like,—“Okay, should I be the person that everyone thinks I am, or should I be the person that I am?” (Niklas)¹³

Perplexed and in stuck in a major dilemma, he felt that this was an issue he could not confide in his friends or pastor, despite the closeness of their relationship. Describing homosexuality as being a taboo, and feeling the strong need for someone to talk to, Niklas relates how he turned to dialogue online with other gays, being met with understanding, until he later decided to progressively open up to his closest family, friends and church.

There were no gay role models. There were no role models to associate with. To the extent there was, they were very abnormal. Right? You would see pictures of Pride parades (...), and there you would find completely other things than at least what I stood for. (...) That was actually a confirmation that, “Well, okay, then I am not gay either” (Niklas).¹⁴

In Kim’s case, the struggle to fulfill his ideals culminated in his entering an engagement with his girlfriend as a means of “tying himself to the mast.”

Well, it was sort of an avoidance thing. Right? “I will not continue to be interested in men” and all that. So now, we are going all-in to, like, force myself to remain faithful, keeping it all about women and, like... “I will manage to live this heterosexual life that I in a sense have said that I would (...).” So, it is a way of tying yourself to the mast (Kim).¹⁵

One of the younger informants, Mathias’, also reports strenuous and calculated efforts to hide and eradicate his homosexual orientation once he became aware of them. After making the connection between homosexuality and his fondness of attractive men on the Internet at the age of twelve, Mathias became painfully aware of a close relative’s remarks—with whom he lived at the time—and her overwhelmingly phobic reactions to any depiction of homosexuality on television. Mathias relates how he never heard anyone stand up for gays in these family situations.

No one would defend gays either. They were either of the opinion that it was wrong, or they were indifferent, you know? I was the only one who sat there and [gasp]! (Mathias)¹⁶

Since discovering his own homosexual feelings, Mathias resolved not to acknowledge them in any way, fearing that those feelings might become permanent if he did.

There was a constant focus on [the issue] that if I did not say it, then it was not true. If I did not myself acknowledge it, then I could get rid of it. And if I told anyone, then I confirmed it. (...) And so there was this major focus on never letting myself be disclosed, because (...) if someone busts me, notices my reaction, picks up something, starts [interrogating me] (...), I will be forced to concede and then (...) I would not be able to resist it. So, there was, like, a rock-hard mask, suppressing it and praying to God every day to be healed (Mathias).¹⁷

While attempting in various ways to suppress his own sexuality and to remove his same-sex attractions from by invoking a sexual and/or romantic attraction to girls, Mathias began praying, now as a high school student, that God would kill him.

So then, when it [removing my attraction to men from my sexuality] did not work, I was, like, “Okay, repress your sexuality.” This is when I started in high school. I prayed every night that God would either heal me or kill me before I became gay. Because if God made sure that I was run over by a bus—I cannot commit suicide, because then I murder myself, and that is wrong. However, if God sends a bus that can run over me before I do anything with another man, then I have not done anything wrong. So, then it was,—“You must either heal me, God, or you must kill me, because I will not kill myself—and I do not want to become gay” (Mathias).¹⁸

Like Mathias, Emma relates about her own search for healing as a teenager after realizing her lesbian orientation and feeling disgusting and perverted.

As dad and I were discussing homosexuality in Sabbath school, I felt a bit sorry for the poor gays. (...) “But dad, can we not... What if you are gay?” (...) Then he said, “Well, if you are gay then you must simply pray to God, and then he will fix you.” It was a simple solution, so I remembered it and kept praying... “Phew, now you are being fixed!” (Emma)¹⁹

Amanda reports entering a different kind of self-destructive behavior after realizing her lesbian orientation. She relates how she began compulsively dating men over a period of six to seven months. When asked if this was an attempt to change her sexuality, she responds:

I am not sure if it was [an attempt] to [make] myself heterosexual. (...) It was mostly to punish myself, actually, because I did not like it. It was not something I enjoyed at all. Still I did it over and over again.

So, I think it was mostly to punish myself. “This is what you deserve. (...) This is what you have to live with for the rest of your life.” (...) It was mostly to punish myself (Amanda).²⁰

Similarly, Nathaniel, being sixteen years old at the time, was driven by his mother’s vehement condemnations of Ellen DeGeneres, and, fearing the loss of his family if outed, withdrew from all contact with other gay men, going into what he calls “the fugue state.”

I will never forget, she was, like, “That is wrong, that is a sin! She is going to burn in hell! This is not how God created us!” And after that, I remember I was, like, “This is wrong. I cannot be like this.” (...) Then I was afraid of what... Well, whether they would catch notice of anything. That I would lose my family. (...) I deleted [my account on] Gaysir [a Norwegian dating website for LGBTQs], I deleted everything. It was, like, “This is wrong. I will not live like this. This is not God’s way. (...) I must make my family happy.” (...) I never got a girlfriend or anything. I just decided not to act on it. (...) [After six months] I had suppressed myself for such a long time that it started to... People said I was not being my usual self. I was being negative, in a bad mood, grouchy. (...) Well, my personality changed completely (Nathaniel).²¹

While nearly all of the other informants report early and more or less conscious efforts to repress or ignore their homosexuality, one informant, Elsa, being the oldest of the informants in this study, explicitly relates how her discovery of being in love with a girlfriend as a heterosexually married woman did not incite any need to repress the fact.

Actually, it was kind of, like, humorous. There was no feeling of panic of any kind, but more of a funny variation to what this life has to offer. (...) I was, as mentioned, married and had no need to act on it in any way—but [it was] more of a discovery in and of itself (Elsa).²²

Elsa sees her own relaxed attitude about her discovery in light of having what she describes as an atypical Adventist upbringing. In recalling her own upbringing and behavior as an adolescent girl, she relates:

I played around with kids, climbed and competed—it was like... In that way, our upbringing was perhaps a bit atypical. And we were also very free, we had little prejudice, or like... We grew up with a very open mind towards people. (...) I was very enthusiastic about girls. I had many that I liked, like, intensely liked. But I myself never thought it had anything to do with orientation. I did not have anything to pin it down with. (...) I realized [later, when falling in love with a woman,] that it has been latent there the whole time. But I have not had any basis for comparison. It was not a topic. (...) I am not among those who grew up as a child with an internal longing that I just did not dare to express. I have simply not sensed it (Elsa).²³

Although Elsa herself did not experience any felt need to repress this fact once discovered, she relates having serious concerns about potentially hurting family and/or friends in the process of coming out—a challenging process fraught with uncertainty and high risk for each of the informants.

5.1.3 “I did not dare to tell them at home without having a back-up plan”

Ambivalence, anxiety and the fear of rejection from their family, friends and church community constitutes the central theme in most of the informants’ accounts of the process leading up to their coming out. It is their home environment and the jeopardy of their relationship to their parents and/or family that emerges as the salient perplexing factor. Before telling his parents, Kim, like several other informants, feared the worst:

Well, I was terrified prior to telling them at home, because I thought they would throw me out. It was in a way—it was sort of a crisis magnified out of proportions in my own head. Therefore, I did not dare to tell them at home without having a back-up plan. There had to be a back-up plan—if something [bad] happened, then I could take my things and stay at someone else’s place. So that back-up plan was there (Kim).²⁴

Some of the informants report being worn down by isolation, depression and anxiety for years before being able to reach out for help and open up. A part of the mental preparations before coming out to their community and loved ones, was, in several of the informants’ experience, preparing to lose life as they had known and cherished it.

It was exactly because of this... The robust picture of God, and also the [Sabbath] day and what you are supposed to be and not be, and my family, (...) and the Christian and Adventist community in Norway and (...) [everything] that I had built (...) that I was terrified would tear apart. So, I had a thousand reasons to remain closeted! (...) There were some friends of mine (...), one of them stated very clearly, “Oh, but now, Niklas, you will have to find a new community, new friends—you are going to turn into a different person!” I was just, like, “Huh? What are you saying?” (...) I felt no need to get new friends, I felt no need for a new community—I wanted to remain exactly as I was! (Niklas)²⁵

After years of suppression and efforts to eradicate his own homosexuality, Mathias was mentally broken down and deeply depressed, having finally given up a life-long battle. After graduating high school, he relates going through an identity crisis where he left God and broke contact with other Christians. Feeling that he could not tell anyone about his struggle, he

isolated himself and lost contact with his family, struggling with self-hatred, destructive thoughts and social anxiety, needing assistance from friends to buy groceries. With the additional element of falling in love with his new college friend, Mathias felt he no longer could bear his secret alone and reached out for help. Coming out to his friend, Mathias was met with understanding and an offer of assistance in coming out firstly to his circle of non-religious college friends and then to his family. As he was about to come out to his mother, he feared that his younger brother would catch ear of the matter and bring news to his close relative. Having secured some privacy with his mom, he relates:

Then I say, “You can tell there is something important that I need to talk to you about...” She looks up at me and she says, “Have you made someone pregnant?” And I say, “What, no! I have not!” And mom is, like, “Are you gay?” (...) I remember being terrified—I have some trust issues, so I was thinking, “I might have lost my mother now, even though she for the moment is telling me that she loves me.” (...) However, as she was leaving she told me that she thought it was such a charm that I was gay since gay men always love their mothers so much. (...) I remember this one [remark] sinking in, like, “Okay, so she has... This is okay” (Mathias).²⁶

As Mathias’ mom shared the news with the rest of the family (except for a close relative), he was flooded with words of loyalty, love and support, and even enthusiasm by some. He also gives account of a following confrontation between his family and his close relative concerning the way in which they as a family should respond to his coming out.

Similarly, three other informants report their coming out as resulting in a mixed reception by their closest family. Nina tells about her challenging relationship with her father after coming out to her parents as lesbian.

Dad has never said anything to me, but he has always conveyed to those I have dated, he has had conversations with them, like, “You are a great person, I respect you, I like you as a person. But I believe you are harming my child.” There were many conversations like this that were difficult to deal with. (...) He could tell [my ex], like, “Well, I do not like that you are dating my daughter,” and still she would buy a new apartment here and he would catch a train (...) to set a new floor and paint her walls (“Nina”).²⁷

When coming out to her mother, Nina felt she took it worse than her father did at the time—her father asserting that he loved her regardless while her mother locked herself in after hearing the news. However, Nina explains how her mother shifted in witnessing her daughter’s pain while breaking up with her first girlfriend.

It was around the time I broke up with my first girlfriend. Because then I think she saw the weight of my heartbreak, how difficult the breakup was for me. And that she at that point was, like, “Okay, this is real,” in a sense, “This is not a phase. (...) This is how things are going to be and I love my daughter regardless” (Nina).²⁸

Nina describes how her father would later become increasingly “extreme” in his views and confrontational in behavior, posting anti-LGBTQ content and comments on Facebook and entering into dispute with Nina’s LGBTQ friends—at which point she confronted him repeatedly and finally cut contact.

Two of the informants, Amanda and Nathaniel, have come out to friends and siblings, but not to their parents. Although having been met with acceptance and support by their siblings, Amanda and Nathaniel are doubtful and reluctant to come out to their parents due to their parents’ culture and personalities. To the question of what the solution is to Amanda’s felt tension towards her parents, she responds:

Sometimes I think that it really is to move far away, just get away from it all (...) and, in a way, just live my life. (...) I do have a really good relationship to all of my siblings. Moving away from them is also a problem. I would not want to live far away from them. But as for me, I honestly think [it is] to move away and start a new life without my parents. (...) I do not feel that I am ready to tell them, because I feel they are not ready to listen to me (Amanda).²⁹

Nathaniel relates:

I will never be able to tell my parents. (...) That we all agree on. This is what my sister also has been saying, and my younger siblings. We were, like, “This is not anything they need to know. They will never understand it. There is no point in creating more drama than necessary.” (...) Perhaps if they had found out in 2014, I think they would be, like, “We do not want to have anything to do with you.” But a lot has been happening in my family now. They have grown a little—they have met some challenges with living in Norway and the different opinions that people have here. (...) I do not think they would break contact [with me] if I said no. But they would perhaps be... They would perhaps distance themselves more (Nathaniel).³⁰

Nathaniel also recounts how it was not until he moved away from home that he first began to accept himself and later came out to his friends—many of which already were of the opinion that he probably was gay, without it ever being any issue or topic.

In Emma and Sebastian's experience—their father's side being the Adventists in their families—, coming out to them has been, and still is in Sebastian's case, a source of tension and pain. Sebastian relates:

[My stepsiblings] have no connection to Christianity or Adventism. So, it was of course no problem to them. My mother and stepmother also have a liberal viewpoint. It is rather the original paternal side, the Adventist root, that is not quite... That still is an open wound. (...) There was no talk about him not loving me, or expelling me. He asserted that that was completely out of the question. (...) I thought that things were actually quite fine, but later I was told that it was a shock to him. We have spoken only a limited amount of times ever since. However, there have been some heated discussions. I still do not feel accepted by those in my family who are still connected to the Adventist church (Sebastian).³¹

In Hanna's case, as with three other informants, most of her life was, to use Hanna's own words, "within"—her social, student and family life were all situated within the Adventist church community. In coming out to her friends as a lesbian, she did not encounter any negative reactions—just a sense of puzzlement and difficulty to understand and talk about the issue.

It depends on what you compare it to, right, because—from an Adventist perspective, it went fine. In the sense that no one appointed me to damnation and sent me to rehab. But it was also, like, a very new and unknown territory to them, that is what I felt. (...) Well, it was, like,—“Well, it is just the way it is,” in a way. (...) In an ideal world I would preferably have had people around me would told me this was okay. (...) I felt that I could not spend time talking about it... It was more of an exchange of information, and that was it (Hanna).³²

To her parents, Hanna's discovered sexual identity and following relationship with another woman was an issue of theology.

We sat and discussed for two years, more or less, before I told them it was enough. I cannot do this anymore. (...) They did not comprehend the... It was quite of a sudden change. For I was, in a way, like, a normal Adventist daughter, and then (...) suddenly things are different. (...) I feel they have been struggling with the theology—that that is what is the difficult part for them, and still is. But not shame or those kind of things. I have not witnessed any of that. Rather, that they are grappling with, like, a theological puzzle that they are not able to solve (Hanna).³³

Four out of five female informants, Hanna, Emma, Amanda, and Nina, including two of the male informants, report going through a “bisexual bargaining phase.” In Hanna, Emma and Nina's case, this involved convincing themselves of being bisexual and/or using the self-identifying term bisexual when coming out in order to “soften the blow” (“Hanna”), before

finally coming to terms with their lesbian identity. Amanda, as mentioned earlier, reports bisexuality as at one point being her self-ultimatum in her mental bargaining between her attraction to women and her parents' values.

As a contrast to the prevalent experience of perplexity and dread shared by the informants in the time prior to coming out, Elsa shares a story of hopeful, “naïve” (in her own words) anticipation of acceptance and positive assurance. Feeling at home in her local Adventist church, which she describes as generally more open-minded than the surrounding Adventist congregations, Elsa relates her feelings of disillusionment when her pastor and close friend, one of which she chose to confide in about her personal discovery and relationship with another woman, promptly suggested she cease her church membership.

We were very good friends, (...) I had in a way expected that—I think I was so naïve that I thought he would say, “Elsa, we will work this out.” (...) I asked, “But I need advice in regards to [my family], so that being in church will not be difficult for them, causing any aggression and the like. What should we do?” “Well, the easiest way is if you simply opt out,” he said. (...) I had in my naïve mind thought he would say, “We will work this out,” not, “You must opt out”! (Elsa)³⁴

Notwithstanding Elsa's foremost concern being the well-being of her immediate family and friends rather than the formalities around her church membership—her family, though somewhat disconcerted by Elsa's announcement, being accepting and for the most part supportive—, she relates feeling abandoned by her friends and community to handle the circumstances alone at a time where she was being at her most vulnerable.

What I think is that the church community actually has not dealt with this, church-wise. It is I who has dealt with it. And I have had to bear it, and because I am able to bear it, I am still able to have anything to do with church (Elsa).³⁵

Although Elsa has observed an increased sensitization in people around her after coming out, describing fellow Adventists as giving more expression of appreciation of her at church camps and other church events, Elsa feels these responses are somewhat ambiguous.

No one is helping me to understand—is it okay that I am gay and that I am here? Or is it more, “Now Elsa is here, soon this might pass, and then we will have managed to keep her”—“she is still here,” you know? (...) I do not [know], right, because no one is saying anything. So, I can try to guess or I can stop thinking about it, or think, “Well, people are friendly and nice and want me to be here” (Elsa).³⁶

5.1.4 “My parents. I keep coming back to them”

One final theme that pervades the interviews with my informants is that of their parents. In all of the younger informants’ accounts (eight out of ten being under the age of 35), their parents constitute a central part of their concern as young adults in regards to having recently come out or still being in the process of coming out. Eight out of ten informants experience ongoing tension and/or pain in their relationship to either one or both of their parents as a result of feeling unaccepted and/or having opposing views on homosexuality.

Hanna describes her relationship to her parents as good. Yet she feels their decent behavior towards her and her partner is superficial. She senses an increased openness while not knowing whether they really have changed their views.

They have started to behave nicely; they have not changed their position. So, that is lying there like this thing under the surface that is not being addressed. Which I am thinking that—I have been taking a break for a couple of years now, but I might address it again. (...) I feel they have become more open in... But, in a sense, I do not know where it ends. I have not been willing to ask, seeing I in a sense needed a break from that kind of input (Hanna).³⁷

From several responses, it becomes clear that the informants’ parents play a crucial role in their own approach to homosexuality. Emma began praying God to “fix” her have learned from her father that God would do so if homosexuals prayed about it. Amanda emphasizes that it was her parents’ attitude that was in her mind when being in denial of the possibility of her being a lesbian.

I think it is because of my parents. I always keep coming back to them. I remember their remarks, their glances... I had these in my mind, in a way. I had it in my head (Amanda).³⁸

Similarly, Nathaniel shares that it was his mother’s hostile reaction to homosexuality on television that led him to adopt a similar attitude towards his own orientation, for a time changing his behavior and living in depression. In both Amanda and Nathaniel’s case it is the fear of their parents’ reactions that keeps them from coming out to them.

Spending much time with a close relative in his upbringing, Mathias relates how most of his religious rearing was through the person concerned.

My [close relative] spent a lot of time with me in all of my vacations, helped me a lot, because she [his mother] studied when I was little. (...) My [close relative] is very conservative, so I feel that my Christian upbringing came from [his close relative], not from my mom (Mathias).³⁹

On the basis of hearing a lot of negative input on the issue of homosexuality at home, Mathias would suppress and attempt to get rid of his homosexuality, even praying God to kill him, before he “turned gay.”

In relating about his religious upbringing, Kim gives expression to frustration and resentment recalling the feeling of alienated from his friends and indoctrinated by the rules and expectations of his parents.

I went slalom skiing, and would not go slalom skiing on the Sabbath, because—well, no, this you could not do, because you could not be engaged in competition! ... These stupid things that alienate you from other kids your age because you are made to be different. (...) Because you had to stand up for the choices that your parents had made for you, it became such an integrated part of my identity that even many, many, many years after coming out of the closet it was, like, “Of course I am an Adventist!” (Kim)⁴⁰

Nina is careful to elaborate her difficult relationship to her father. Sebastian still feels there is an “open wound” with his father’s family, who are the Adventists in his family. As it has already been shown previously, and in the following as well, the informants’ relationship to their parents is addressed to such an extent that it would seem unnatural not to address this as one of the most important themes emerging from the interviews.

5.2 Relating to Church, Adventism, and God

In this part, I focus on the self-defining process as expressed through the informants’ related experiences with the SDA Church and Adventism as an ideology, and their notion of God. Themes are organized and presented according to salience in the responses given by the informants. Starting with the informants’ relationship to church and Adventism in their upbringing, this account progresses through their discovery of being different in the context of the SDA Church, the church’s role in their coming out process and its aftermath, and in their present lives.

5.2.1 “Everything is within”

When asked to describe the faith and religious practice of their parents and social circle in their upbringing, nearly all of the informants portray a religiously active and church-centered family and social life. Church-centeredness—the weekly church attendance on Sabbath, and the active participation in other church community-related activities throughout the week—emerges as an important theme in all of the informants reflections on their religious upbringing.

Church was very important in my family and my upbringing. There were pathfinders’ activities there. (...) We attended church weekly and went to the pathfinders weekly. (...) We attended the family camp meetings, as they were called back then, every single summer. (...) I also went to several pathfinders’ reunions. And seeing I came from a smaller congregation where there eventually were fewer young people, it was quite important for us to attend these events in order to have wider social environment and all (Niklas).⁴¹

Mathias, like Niklas and most of the other informants, also relates attending church weekly, in addition to attending Bible studies/courses and summer camp meetings, from a young age.

Since starting in school, we went to church every single Saturday until I moved away from home. (...) I continued going to church on my initiative (Mathias).⁴²

Half of the informants report having parents, uncles, or grandparents working for the SDA Church in various parts of the world, including Norway. All of the informants had at least one parent who identified as Adventist in their upbringing. About half of the informants report playing an active role in their local church in various ways, eventually taking various responsibilities as young members of the church board. In addition to the participation in church-related activities, eight out of ten informants report having attended the Norwegian SDA Church’s high school, Tyrifjord videregående skole (TVS). This, combined with their weekly church attendance on the Sabbaths and other days of the week, underpins the centrality of the church and the Adventist community throughout or in vital periods of the informants’ upbringing and adolescence. To some this complete or nearly complete immersion in the Adventist community meant less contact with and exposure to the local, non-Adventist community.

I feel that I maybe did not get to connect so well with my local community as I attended an Adventist school and we lived in an Adventist house. (...) Anyways, a house, a school, a church, and it was like... I belonged to all of these places. (...) You also have the entire global community with which you are

connected at all times. (...) I had friends who went to church. Perhaps that is what made it this way (Hanna).⁴³

In sharing about her leaving the church as an adult, Hanna explains how the close-knit and all-encompassing community of the SDA Church, both locally and globally, made her choice thus more difficult, seeing so many positive things about the Adventist community.

It was good, but I do not think I had the feeling that there was any alternative, you know? (...) It is not a sect, despite some making those claims. But it is not... Everything is within. (...) I think—it takes a lot to leave this, because there is so much good that is going on, there are so many good people, so many good attitudes, activities, projects, right? That it takes a lot to turn this down for something else (Hanna).

This “within”-ness results, as Hanna sees it now, in a lack of knowledge in the church in regards to social and societal issues and poses a challenge to the relevance of the church to people outside in society.

Well... I find that there are massive gaps in knowledge. Real knowledge gaps. (...) There might be differences between those working within the Adventist community and those who have (...) regular jobs outside in society—because then you are subject to diverse influences. However, that people would take in literature and research that is not written by Adventists and not published at Norsk Bokforlag [the Norwegian Adventist publisher]. It can really become, like—you reproduce yourself so much that you will not take in other experience. (...) Like, it turns into a club (Hanna).⁴⁴

While not having attended any Adventist school since moving to Norway, Nathaniel and Amanda similarly describe their home environments as “very Adventist,” both having grandparents working for the SDA Church in each their native countries and a wide circle a family friends in the church.

Though having much of their family and social life immersed in the Adventist community, a couple of informants, however, relate being a part of other Christian communities as well.

Well, yes, we went to church every Saturday. Mom and dad were always very open about it in a sense not being that important whether I was an Adventist or what I was, as long as I was Christian. So, I also had many Christian groups that I was a part of, the Pentecostal church and the state church, among others (Nina).⁴⁵

Sebastian relates:

In fact, I am from an Adventist family. (...) My father was brought up as an Adventist. (...) I can remember going to Sabbath school when I was little. (...) [I was left out] a bit there, sort of. I have not grown up with an Adventist rearing, that framework, quite as many others have. Was brought up quite secularly, actually. With a Christian faith always present in one form or another. (...) There were no explicit, like, rules, doctrines, those kind of things, given me. So, when I got older it was very natural for me to connect with other Christians. (...) So, I spent most of my time in other churches (Sebastian).⁴⁶

It was not until he enrolled as a student at TVS that Sebastian later came to learn about and identify with the Adventist faith. It was not until he left the “comfortable” Adventist social environment that he began to question his agreement with basic Adventist teachings. The lack of explicit religious rules and doctrines in Sebastian’s upbringing, however, stands in stark contrast to most of the other informants’ descriptions of their religious rearing, which leads us to the next highly salient theme.

5.2.2 “If you do not do what is expected of you (...), you will not get to heaven”

In the accounts of informants, this central theme frequently emerges in the thematic context of church-centeredness, and is a theme of Adventist codes and the preoccupation with religious/moral acceptability in regards to behavior and/or lifestyle. Nearly all of the informants report identifying (in various degrees) with their parents’ and church community’s basic Adventist beliefs while growing up. Although the informants’ expressed impetuses for identifying with and/or taking part in Adventism as adolescents vary, the majority of the informants report growing up with a clear set of religious rules and expectations as to what it means to be an Adventist—some finding such rules more encumbering than others.

That was the only thing we were allowed to watch on Saturdays, six o’clock, and we were not allowed to turn on the TV before that. (...) Very strict to begin with. (...) I think this was the only thing that loosened up a bit. But all the other things—it concerned what movies I should watch, what music should listen to, who I should be friends with, for instance. It was just very much, like, “You must do this, that, this and that!” (Amanda)⁴⁷

Several of the informants describe the religious practice at home as being without any extremes, while referring to the abstinence from television and competitive sports on the Sabbath and non-consumption of pork as some essential, “classic” Adventist rules.

As I see it now, it [the religious practice at home] was kind of right in the middle, actually, compared to how liberal or conservative people can be in Adventist circles throughout. From what I know, that is. (...) Well, there was no TV on Saturdays; we were not allowed to play soccer games if they ran on Saturdays, and... Well, there were, in a sense, classic rules (Hanna).⁴⁸

Kim relates, like Amanda, being frustrated with the rigidity with which some rules were upheld.

So, [there were] no extremes. There was not, like, only love and no rules, or only rules and no love. So, it would be like a golden middle way. There are several of these rules (...) that I wish that mom in a way would say, “Okay...”—been a bit more flexible about. Sports on Saturdays, for instance (Kim).⁴⁹

In Nathaniel’s case, the pressure he felt to fulfill the expectations as a “gentle, Christian boy” was primarily in his own home environment, leading him to adapt two different “personalities” when at home and when outside with friends, in order to avoid conflict with his parents.

It sounds a bit weird, but I have always had a different personality while at home from when I am outside. (...) Nathaniel at home was (...) very quiet, very... Did not do much. Actually, I was very rarely at home—I was outside a lot when I was younger. (...) I hate to have, like, rules for how they want me to be (Nathaniel).⁵⁰

When asked to describe what kind of expectations he felt from his parents, he responds:

To come home, read the Bible, to not... It was, like, “The Sabbath is the Sabbath, do not watch TV, do not go out.” (...) Things would also clash, because I was also—the other personality also just popped up. Like, opinionated, wanting to discuss things. There was a lot of turbulence. (...) When the other personality popped up, things would go awry, because that they did not like (Nathaniel).⁵¹

When outside with friends, Nathaniel would feel free to be himself, describing himself as social, outspoken, talkative, engaged in discussions around various topics, worryless, and free from rules.

After leaving her Christian identity, Nina relates having inhibitions to engage romantically with a girl she was in love with due to the resilience of her internalized views. She compares it to an Adventist code—the abstinence from pork—juxtaposing this with the equivalent Muslim practice.

Even though I felt a love towards this girl, and I think she felt it in return, it did not work. Because I think it is kind of, like—it sounds stupid using this as an example, but kind of like pork? (...) Even though you

are done with being an Adventist or a Muslim, you are still not able to eat pork because it is so deeply ingrained in you that it is a filthy thing (Nina).⁵²

Some of the informants provide in-depth accounts of how the Adventist worldview and its fundamental teachings was internalized and celebrated from a very early age—particularly the emphasis on the imminence of Christ’s second coming and the end of the world. Niklas explains how these beliefs served as a fundament in his own development, giving him a sense of purpose, yet also affecting his attitude towards his own homosexual feelings. He relates quite eloquently the background to his adult striving to reach his ideals and hiding his homosexuality.

[As Adventists] we were early aware of that this was something special. That it was the right thing; that it was the truth; that it was intended directly from God. And that, I believe, constitutes a part of the core reason, in my case, that I did not come out at an earlier point. Because, as an Adventist one believes strongly that Jesus will return—Jesus’ second coming. There was a strong focus on that. (...) It depends a bit on your social circle, I think. However, there were these books like *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*. (...) There are some incidents from the pathfinders’ reunions and family camp meetings where I remember lying down in the caravan to sleep at night while my parents sat and discussed with other parents. There were very spiritual discussions about all the things that would happen before Jesus would return and all that. And I especially remember thinking, “Now there might not be any pathfinders’ reunion next year, or any family camp meeting! Because, Jesus is coming back before that!” Well, it was so imminent. Looking back on this now, there seemed to be both a sense of fear and a fantastic joy (Niklas).⁵³

Mathias also explains how the emphasis on the end times and judgment day was a defining part of his Adventist faith and religious outset as a child.

I was very much into the book of Revelation and the book of Daniel, and... You must remember that this is around the age of nine and ten. (...) So, this is something I am trying to get a coherent understanding of—the cryptic prophecies of the book of Revelation. (...) I attended a course in the book of Revelation at church. Well, it was me and mom. We went to study the book of Revelation together. Adventists are very focused on judgment day! So, yes, I got a lot of lecturing about judgment day as a kid. I never thought I would reach my twenties (Mathias).⁵⁴

Hanna relates how she upon returning to her local church after working as a student missionary abroad, felt estranged from what she described as a more “technical” religious practice that her peers were implementing.

A group that I had [studied] with—a conservative circle of friends (...)—had occupied [Hanna’s local church]. And the afternoon activities were then to go through the book of Revelation, and to draw timelines and hand out pamphlets from the 80s (...). It was in a sense a very technical and missionizing approach to faith, in my view. And I did not relate to that (Hanna).⁵⁵

Whether it be in the ideological context of end-time urgency or it be in the social context of family values and social code, the idea of fulfilling a set of specific religious/moral expectations in order to live ethically and be morally acceptable (either to God, the church, the parents and/or community) is a central theme pervading all of the informants’ accounts of their Adventist upbringing.

The reason I am sharing this incident is to illustrate this thing about *the* truth, in a sense. And if you are not within—if you do not do what is expected of you, what the Bible teaches, then you will not go to heaven. And that is what has been the main focus in my upbringing. (...) If I had any feelings that were not in harmony with what was normal, this was a sufficient reason to keep them as far under the carpet as possible (Niklas).⁵⁶

Mathias’ struggle to get rid of his homosexuality, and ultimately his prayer to God to kill him before he would do anything wrong, was according to himself about getting rid of or avoiding sin. Returning in prayer to God after coming out to his friends and family, he would pray to God to keep him at least *almost* sinless.

With me, it came from a point of humility, like... “Perhaps God can help me to live virtually sinless?” And then with time it has grown into that I do not believe God has a problem with homosexuality. But it started as a small thing, like, “Okay, maybe God can help me to be, like, not too bad, even though I am struggling with these things” (Mathias).⁵⁷

In contrast to most of the other informants, Nina describes having an open-minded attitude and acceptance of gays as a Christian girl, having several close friends who identified as gay, yet always thinking of herself as a heterosexual as she did not fit the lesbian stereotype.

It was not about me trying to be a good Christian or anything. (...) It [heterosexuality] was in a sense the norm, it was not... I thought gays were here and lesbians there, you know. And I did not fit into the pigeonhole of what I considered to be lesbian (Nina).⁵⁸

When asked to give an account of the main cause of difficulty in her own experience with coming out as lesbian, Nina neatly summarizes her struggle:

To me, what is most difficult is that people have such clear opinions about how things ought to be—that people make up an opinion about how this individual should be or how society should be, and that one is not able to look outside of this. (...) It is that other people have a clear view about how I ought to be, and then I, in a sense, do not live up to their expectations (Nina).⁵⁹

5.2.3 “Simply distancing myself from the church”

In the process of coming to terms with their own homosexuality in light of the expectations of their family and community, most of the informants (seven out of ten) describe a simultaneous process of increasing distance to the SDA Church. Although the issue of homosexuality did not constitute the only reason for this increased distance in several of the informants’ experience, it is frequently described as a catalyzing, demotivating factor. One informant who left the church quite immediately, was Hanna, who upon realizing her love for another woman and her lesbian sexuality, instinctively felt her discovery was incompatible with what she describes as “the system,” and immediately resigned from her church assignments.

I felt (...) that I had pushed away such an important part of me... Or, in an way, the access to my own self—in one way or another had pushed this away to the advantage of a system. And that when I first let this come to the surface, I wanted in a sense to protect it. Take it seriously. Because I could just have pushed it aside and gone back to church. Or rather, stayed, if I had had enough faith in the organization (Hanna).⁶⁰

She elaborates about her felt need of distancing herself from the church:

I did not feel any associated anguish. (...) I did not want to be under any influence by the Adventist community. I felt that now I cannot... Well, it was polluting, to be honest. In regards to sensing the true state of things. (...) I knew what they would say and how they would think and why that was logical. I kind of know the system, and I did not need any more of that. I needed space to... Well, to think my own thoughts (Hanna).⁶¹

However, Hanna reports the loss of her Adventist identity as a slower and more gradual process. She relates how it was in her theological discussions with her parents and with her girlfriend, among others, that she began to realize what she herself stood for. When asked about what specific discoveries she made during these interactions, she responds,

Looking at the way one is true to the biblical text (...)—how people sometimes read things quite, like, word-perfectly, and how the point of detail becomes highly important... And those who are preoccupied

with the book of Revelation and its prophecies, and calculations that people have done wrong before and yet again attempt at... It becomes like a mathematical approach to faith—that I have never identified with. (...) There are of course many ways of being an Adventist. But (...) where I was at, both my church membership and the kind of people who were there, there was no room for me in the Adventist church (Hanna).⁶²

Another informant who left the Adventist community quite abruptly was Nina. After being burned out and bedridden for two weeks, during which her friends assisted her with food and groceries, Nina finally made the decision to leave the Adventist community she was a part of.

Well, I was sick for two weeks, I was completely burned out, and people brought me food. That is, my friends brought me food. And I figured, “I cannot do this anymore, I just need to go home and take care of myself” (Nina).⁶³

When asked about the reason for her leaving, Nina responds,

It was just that I felt it was so two-faced how people who were quite respected in the Adventist church said one thing and did something completely different, and that was in a way okay as long as it was concealed. And if it was not hidden, you would receive ugly glances. (...) They could, like, cite the most beautiful Bible verses while they themselves were not practicing it. I get it that people are human, but I do not think that you should shout so loudly about your faith if you willfully are doing the opposite. One thing is to talk as the person one desires to be. But I felt there were so many, and that there was such a big difference. (...) Yes, I just did not feel it was so genuine (Nina).⁶⁴

Nina relates how she after leaving the Adventist community also left her Christian identity. It was during this time that she confronted her lesbian sexuality and later came out to her family and friends. Being a student in a new, secular environment, she describes her new circle of friends as being inclusive and accepting both in regards to love but also to drugs, her new community as such being very accepting and “not the worst, but not the best either.”

To Sebastian, the issue of homosexuality was only a part of a wider philosophical problem that his mind began grappling with, increasingly questioning the basis for his own difficulties with homosexuality.

Right, so it [the Adventist community] is a sphere that is easy to be comfortable in, and then the world is a bit different. (...) Then I think there was a gradual development with me towards not understanding why it [homosexuality] was such a big problem. Or rather, that there was a frustration about it, about it being something I felt was not my own opinion—that is was an attitude imposed on me. (...) There was

really a bouquet of several fundamental attitudes that I was not so sure that I stood for. So, it was in a way just one of many things that led to me having the religious identity that I have now, which is very ambiguous (Sebastian).⁶⁵

However, it was not until being in a new environment as a student abroad, during his preparations for hosting a Bible in the local Adventist church, that he realized he did not agree with Adventist teachings.

It became apparent that they did not have enough people to speak there, so I regarded it as an opportunity to grow in faith. I could host Bible studies there and, like, show some courage concerning this. It was actually in the scrutiny of Bible texts and such in order to host these meetings that I realized I in some sense did not agree with myself. (...) So, I think that was, like, what catalyzed it, that I actually... That I arrived at a point where I actually had to stand for what I said, realizing that I did not (Sebastian).⁶⁶

Nina, Hanna and Sebastian do not report making any conscious effort to bridge their own homosexual orientation with their Adventist identity and/or beliefs, in contrast the other informants. The remaining informants relate going through in internal and sometimes external struggle for a place in church and for an integrated gay and Adventist identity after coming out. One of them is Kim, who began the process of confronting and seeking to reconcile his homosexual orientation with his Adventist beliefs after jokingly being asked by a friend if he was gay.

So, I start googling when I get back home (...). Then I find articles about an organist in the Church of Norway who came out of the closet. I find books written by Christians about coming out of the closet. So, I start reading—I actually contact several of these persons to, like, “Hello, I’m stuck, I need some help here!” (Kim)⁶⁷

While exchanging with several openly gay Christians, Kim decided to attend the Open Church Group, a Christian fellowship for lesbian and gays.

Because it was, like, “It must be possible to be Christian and gay at the same time.” (...) One of the priests in the Open Church Group had written a long, like... About the theology behind homosexuality and so on. So, there were several things that,—“Okay, fine, it is possible to build a bridge here” (Kim).⁶⁸

Being a student the time, and struggling to make his homosexual orientation and Adventist identity meet, Kim relates struggling with stress and insomnia, being given a prescription of sleep medication by his doctor. However, eventually he would encounter further difficulties with his church, this time for being in a relationship with another man, finally being subjected

to church disciplinary measures. Struggling in his personal and professional life and feeling ostracized by his church, Kim's mental health began to deteriorate.

Over a period of two years, I was very, very depressed. In addition (...),—pretty much straight after coming out I had asked to play an active role in Proses [a biannual conference supported by the SDA Church]. And it was, like, “No, you cannot.” Or, like, “We cannot have homosexuals on the stage.” (...) I had also been a part of a drama group. And that was, like, “No, you cannot be a part of this. That does not work” (Kim).⁶⁹

Kim reports feeling especially mistreated as the basis for his exclusion—his sexual orientation—had not been a problem in previous cases. Being under church discipline and being rejected from leadership roles, church began to lose its attraction to Kim. It was a PowerPoint presentation that denigrated homosexuality and homosexuals right after a beautiful sermon that became the “nail in the coffin”, making Kim leave in anger.

I felt it was so extremely unnecessary (...). I believe that the person who made it had good intentions, but it was just completely, like,—completely not thought through. (...) Firstly, one is not considering what kind of theology this is undergirded by, and secondly, the kind of message you are conveying to the person in audience. (...) It was definitely a turning point. I have hardly been to church after this (Kim).⁷⁰

While Kim no longer regards himself as an Adventist, he does identify as a Christian having most things in common with the SDA Church.

Similarly, Emma prefers to view herself as a Christian rather than an Adventist. When asked about her relation to church, Emma relates that her awareness of the SDA Church's position on homosexuality and of there being people in church who regards homosexuality as a “societal problem,”—despite there being “many Adventists who are accepting and affirming” (“Emma”)—makes her uncomfortable. This, and what she describes as an “us versus them mentality,” prompts her to pull more out of the SDA institution, yet not desiring to distance herself from the people themselves.

When asked about the solution to his felt conflict between his homosexuality and faith, Mathias responds,

Just distance myself from the church. (...) I stopped receiving the input that this is wrong, got friends who were atheists, because if there is anyone in society who has understood love, it is the atheists. (...) I received a lot of love, acceptance, tolerance, they (...) were also, like, “How can Christians go around

and point fingers and judge? (...) Does not the Bible speak about love? Is God not supposed to love you?”
(...) So, just keeping some distance to the church that is being a morality police—then I could nurture my own relationship with God (Mathias).⁷¹

Mathias further relates his experienced frustrations with the church and Christians focusing on debating minor issues rather than loving people and “saving the youth.” He also feels there is partiality in church as to how homosexuals are met compared to other cases regarded as sub-ideal.

I feel a bit sick going to church and hearing someone say it is difficult to show homosexuals love since the Bible says it is wrong, and then half of the congregation who is sitting there is divorced. You do not have to say that homosexuality is theologically acceptable. You simply have to stop saying that it is disgusting while not giving a shit about whether there is a homosexual in church or not, if we are supposed to accept that half of the congregation is divorced (Mathias).⁷²

Amanda stopped attending church when she realized she had done so only out of habit, to please her parents. She feels that the church teaches that you cannot be gay and Adventist. Several of the other informants report having the same perception. Although sharing the same sentiments, Nathaniel, Elsa, and Niklas, however, describe their relationship to church as good. Nathaniel reports feeling a strengthened appreciation for church after a personal experience.

I have some Christian friends who are not Adventists, and I was at, like, a prayer meeting (...). And there was a special... Because, we were just sitting and talking, and then (...) I just got this warm feeling of someone taking hold of me—it was, like, “It is okay. Just be who you are. You do not have to choose.”
(...) And we had simply prayed and talked about being Christian, and then just—that day it was as if someone touched my shoulder and said, “It is okay!” (Nathaniel)⁷³

Nathaniel felt accepted by God and by his Christian friends—not by the SDA Church, however, explaining that “humans are humans.” He still feels he has a rightful place in the church. He chose to be baptized into the SDA Church after this incident, valuing the sense of community while being happy with keeping a privacy about his personal life.

5.2.4 “I just told myself, ‘I can be both’”

An important theme that emerges from the interviews in this research is the theme of combining informants’ sexual identities with their religious beliefs. Six out of ten informants report having

integrated their homosexual and Adventist identities, one of which reports still being in the process of attempting to do so.

Despite not necessarily feeling accepted by his church, Nathaniel reports being confident in his gay and Adventist identity—that he will not “burn in hell.”

It was something I just told myself, “I can be both.” (...) I was pondering all the Bible studies, that God creates each individual—well, that you are special. And then I was, like, “He has created me, and so—this is me. Then he has created me this way. My attraction to men has not been inserted into my head by anyone. It is not something that I have acquired from anywhere. No one has put those feelings in there. I am born with these feelings.” So, I simply had to accept that no matter what—there will always be someone who says the opposite. (...) It is possible to have a faith and it is possible to live as you are created (Nathaniel).⁷⁴

Although having never felt any internal conflict between her homosexuality and Adventist beliefs, Elsa relates how she still can feel a certain level of insecurity of the “validity” of her Adventist identity. She explains,

When in church I feel it is, like,—in my own head I am an Adventist. And as I would say growing up,—“I am a half-ventist,” is what I used to say. (...) Kind of, like, freethinking. Well, many who are thinking Adventist,—“Okay, you are a vegetarian, you do not smoke, you do not drink”—that it is these things. But I have not been preoccupied with these things, and might not know the book of Revelation and the prophecies that well either. (...) However, I have grown into the Adventist church and have thrived there and felt that this concept suits me. And I believe that the Sabbath is the right day and feel that much of what Adventists think and believe is, like, where I... It would be strange to start believing in something else! (Elsa)

Elsa explains her beliefs concerning homosexuality and what it means to be a Christian.

On the hand, I am not sure whether it is correct to be homosexual and Christian. That is, I do not think that it [homosexual] is what we were meant to be. (...) I do not believe that mankind was created this way, I believe that people have become this way in accordance with the development of sin, or sin’s influence on us. But I also believe that... I am more focused on the moral, because seeing I am this way, and that (...) we human beings are selfish—we were not meant to be selfish—but now that we are, our job is to simply acknowledge the actual circumstances and implement God into our lives. (...) As with selfishness, the church must have room for... I mean, show by hands whoever has stopped being selfish, right? (Elsa)⁷⁵

Elsa emphasizes the importance creating a room for openness and honesty in church, and not differentiating and excluding certain “sinners” from the rest as all Adventists/Christians are “sinners.” Mathias relates his own understanding of the issue of homosexuality and his current picture of God.

I do not believe God has any problem with homosexuality at all. I believe God is love, and I believe that this love boils down to the fact that it does not matter whether homosexuality is created or a product of this world, because God is love and God accepts it (Mathias).⁷⁶

Though having differing views and ways of reconciling their homosexuality with their religious beliefs, about half of the informants report feeling no current internal conflict between the two. One informant, although identifying himself as Christian rather than Adventist, feels his primary connection is to the SDA Church.

Well, me personally, if I had to choose, then I would be buried by an Adventist pastor and not a priest from the state church [Church of Norway]. So, it is like... It has to do with identity. I still feel that my primary attachment is to the Adventist church (Kim).⁷⁷

Emma also prefers viewing herself as a Christian, disliking an Adventist exclusivity and feeling the division between Adventists and other Christians is imposed, as she perceives there are more inward disagreements than outward.

In a way, I would rather think of myself as a Christian. (...) I have many much bigger disagreements with other Adventists than with other church denominations (Emma).⁷⁸

To Emma it was a new picture of God that she was given through her local Adventist church and a new understanding of the “clobber texts” in the Bible on homosexuality that helped her combine her Christian faith with her homosexual identity.

I began to accept that, “Okay, this is how I am and I am not going to change, so (...) then I am rather angry at God.” That he should judge me for, like... Well, I felt unjustly treated. (...) And then my picture of God was a bit changed (...). I feel like I in a way was being more tolerant and loving than God, with my picture of God. Sexual orientation should not be that important. You have to accept people—and if I am thinking that I am more loving or tolerant than God, then my picture of God must be wrong (Emma).⁷⁹

In contrast to the rest, three informants, Nina, Hanna and Sebastian, have left their previous Christian/Adventist identities in the process of coming to terms with their faith and their

sexuality, some more gradually than others. In response to the question of what he identifies himself as spiritually, Sebastian responds,

That is also a difficult question that I do not quite know how to answer. (...) The fundamental pillars of my former faith (...) have somewhat eroded the last three to four years, perhaps. And then I am not quite sure where it all has collapsed. (...) I do not know if there is any label that fits, or that I am comfortable with (Sebastian).⁸⁰

To the question whether he believes in God, Sebastian emphasizes an inner doubt that is directed towards himself and his own capacity to know how the world really is—an essentially existential matter to him. Hanna's response to the question regarding spirituality resembles that of Sebastian.

I do not know. (...) In a sense, I [have] rather peeled away more and more of what I had learned. And so I have not built anything else yet. (...) I would not say I am a Christian. But I have not strongly distanced myself from it either, you know? It is an unresolved matter, in a sense. In any case, I do not believe in the same way as I did (Hanna).⁸¹

Although Hanna does not identify as Christian, she has not abandoned her belief in a God of love.

My picture of God has in a sense always been that it is a loving God. (...) I have not associated God with anything conservative, but that humans in a way have messed it up now and then. So, that I still have, in some sense (Hanna).⁸²

Praying to God after coming out to his friend—not for healing or death this time, but for guidance—Mathias felt for the first time that his prayers could be answered.

When I began praying that God would lead my life in a way that was worthy and that he saw would be good for me and that he could accept, I suddenly felt that God was there for me again. And, like, things began to fall into place. (...) I felt, like, that God would intervene in the most trivial matters. My friend said, 'Maybe you should say something to your mom?' (...) And the same day mom sends a text message asking if she can visit over the weekend! (Mathias)⁸³

5.3 Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I have presented the findings of my research from the data collected through interviews. I have presented them in two sections, each addressing three aspects of how the informants have related to important aspects of their social environment and religious upbringing. Beginning with their upbringing and progressing through their realization of their homosexuality, the ensuing personal struggle, and, eventually, their coming out and current state, I have emphasized the recurring themes in their accounts. For the sake of not missing important nuances, I have sought to contrast the recurring trends with opposing experiences and accounts.

The findings demonstrate that while experiences of struggle and pain are prevalent and shared by all informants, there is diversity in how they come to understand and tackle the conflict between their homosexual and Adventist identities. This, as well as the important themes, I now proceed to elucidate from the perspective of identity theory.

6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I analyze the findings in the theoretical framework of identity theory, followed by a discussion around the normative implications as suggested by an application of empowerment theory and the theory of recognition. The analysis is organized into three parts that reflect an emergent narrative of a hegemonic Adventist identity. The discussion is organized into three parts as well, in accordance with the three forms of recognition that humans need to form a positive relation-to-self.

6.1 *The Dynamics of Building, Losing, and Re-Building an Identity*

6.1.1 Building a Hegemonic, Adventist Identity

6.1.1.1 “Everything is within”: The Hegemony of the Adventist Identity

From the interviews, most of the informants’ Adventist identities appear to be highly salient prior to going through an identity crisis during or after their high school years. In light of the themes of church-centeredness and “within-ness”, identity theory’s identity-verification model provides some valuable insights into the informants’ identity-formation processes and the environments in which these took place.

Firstly, a social “within-ness” can be inferred by the number and importance of the informants’ Adventist-framed social ties (AFSTs)—their social ties within the Adventist community. These gave rise to various Adventist-framed core identities (AFCIs), including core role, group and person identities. A high level of commitment to their AFCIs is discerned from the following: On the hand, there is the *quantitative* aspect, or extensiveness, of commitment—the relatively high number of AFSTs compared to non-AFSTs, including family- and friendship-relational ties, and community- and church/faith-related ties. On the other hand, there is the *qualitative* aspect, or intensiveness, of commitment—the depth of the ASFTs of the aforementioned AFSTs. The indispensability of vital family and friendship ties during the informants’ upbringing are apparent from the interviews (especially parental ties) and indicate a high salience of the corresponding AFCIs (such as son/daughter, brother/sister, student, etc.).

(What the Adventist meanings of these AFCIs represent is further discussed in the following segment.)

A social environment that is experienced to be sufficiently comprehensive and socially rewarding might diminish “outgroup” social interaction and input, as it becomes less relevant. The related comfort of not being challenged within the Adventist social environment indicates a social environment with relatively few behaviors and meanings that can be labeled as counter-normative or “non-Adventist” (contradicting the Adventist prototype). Informants’ AFCIs are verified with relative ease compared to their non-AFCIs. The easily gained support and rewards for their AFCIs contributes to further increase in their salience. It rewards the individual’s self-esteem both by increasing self-worth as a “valid” member of the Adventist group, and the sense of self-efficacy, through having the role performance of their AFCIs supported. The Adventist community can become a perceived opportunity structure for the goal of individual’s most prominent/salient identities: identity-verification.

The sense of internal “reproduction” that some of the informants relate can in this way be explained (at least in part) by identity theory’s identity-verification mechanisms and a low-disturbance Adventist environment. The observed fact that a sense of an ingroup and outgroup (“us versus them”) arises with social identities (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 118) explains some of the informants’ felt “us and them” mentality and there being “no alternative” to their Adventist identity. A study done by Stryker and Serpe finds that “persons with many relationships based on religion (high commitment) have more salient religious identities that are associated with more time spent in religious activities” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 48). This is also seen in many of the informants’ extensive participation in church-related activities throughout the week while growing up, such as the pathfinders, Bible studies and regular church attendance.

In light of this, I argue that the themes of church-centeredness and “within-ness” suggest a hegemonic Adventist identity in the experience of most of the informants, an identity seen as governing central aspects of their own social life, development and identity-formation. This hegemonic Adventist identity is also used as an opportunity for self-realization both by themselves and by other group members. This analysis does not pretend to give an exhaustive account of all the dynamics of this hegemony, however. Can all aspects of such a hegemony be explained by the workings of identity theory mechanisms? Are there aspects or meanings within

Adventist ideology or prototype itself that contribute to sustain a social and cultural “within-ness”? Although these questions stretch somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, the informants’ relationship to Adventist ideology/prototypes might further illuminate the implications of Adventist meanings for identity negotiation.

Lastly, some informants report growing up with a significant amount of social ties outside of the Adventist community, such as through attending public schools or being a part of other Christian communities, or simply just socializing with non-Adventists. It should be noted that some of these used to identify and/or still identify themselves primarily as Christian rather than Adventist. However, in the interviews most of them relate being a part of an Adventist culture—at least in part as children of Adventist parents—that at some point made them feel different from other Christians.

6.1.1.2 “If you do not do what is expected of you...”: The Meanings of Adventist Identity

The theme of moral behavior/acceptability focuses on the behaviors seen as important and “good” within the Adventist culture. This theme of “good” behavior—or, following the logic of identity theory, “good” role performances—has evidently played an important role in informants’ coming to terms with what it means to be an Adventist, and the shaping of their own social, role and person identities.

A basic concern for morally/socially valid behavior is discerned from the incentives behind most of the informants’ efforts to repress unacceptable traits—in this case, their homosexuality (this is further addressed in part 6.1.2). However, a more ideologically driven preoccupation with moral acceptability is also discerned in a few of the informants’ accounts. Their concern stretched beyond the negative aspect of homosexuality to include a positive emphasis on “God’s ideal” for both sexuality, spirituality, for social life, church life and family life. This ideological concern that encompasses all aspects of social life is both implicitly and explicitly undergirded by internalized Adventist beliefs, such as the imminence of Christ’s return and the judgment of the world. It was a conscious awareness to these internalized beliefs that moral acceptability would become an important meaning in their own Adventist identity, being a standard against which all other identities were compared.

Speaking of the other controlled identities—or Adventist-controlled identities (ACIs) as I will call them—these would include role identities such as “son/daughter,” “student,”

“partner,” “church-leader,” “Bible teacher,” etc. Person identities are also included, containing meanings that match the Adventist standard. From the emerging themes, I suggest some prototypical meanings in the Adventist identity standard include “conscientious,” “having moral integrity,” “God-fearing,” “knowledgeable in the Bible,” “loving,” etc. The prominent social identity (and one of the most salient ones) would likely be the Adventist social identity, providing a sense of belonging and self-worth. The intrinsic rewards for “good” role performances of the Adventist role (through these ACIs) could include the positive feelings of moral self-efficacy (increasing self-esteem). In practical terms, this could result from the verification of Adventist self-meanings such as having moral integrity, being accepted (verified) by fellow Adventists and by God, being prepared for Christ’s return and the judgment of the world, and having an assurance of salvation. External rewards could be prestige within the church community, being given greater responsibilities/positions within the church and opportunities to make an influence.

This depersonalization and “merging” between one’s identity and Adventist ideals—the all-encompassing pursuit of and identification with moral acceptability—is only represented in one or two of the informants’ accounts. However, the concern for moral acceptability—or, rather, verification—from God/family/the community as a “good” Adventist/Christian (i.e. a high moral identity) emerges as an important part of what it means to be a “typical Adventist.” This is most explicitly expressed in the informants’ clear lists of particular behavioral expectations found in the “classic” Adventist rules at home. Appropriate Sabbath behaviors is a recurring example, such as going to church, refraining from sports on the Sabbath, and restricted use of television. Other recurring role expectations are the studying the Bible/book of Revelation/prophecies, and abstinence from certain foods (pork, coffee, meat).

It is important to note that several of the informants report feeling restricted, burdened or alienated by some of these expectations and/or behaviors. This clash indicates a disagreement between “conventional” Adventist role expectations in their social environment (home, church, community) and the idiosyncratic aspects of the informants’ Adventist role identities/performances. This illustrates that not all the conventional meanings or expectations were internalized; there has been a process of negotiation. Another possibility is that these meanings indeed did constitute a part of these informants’ Adventist identities, but that they

conflicted with meanings in other identities in their “ideal self” that were more important (prominent) to the individual.

In any case, an outspoken protest would invoke costs such as censure and diminished self-esteem. Burke & Stets (2009, p. 172-173) specify that the perception that “others in the situation do not see them as acting as moral persons, this lack in verification as to who they are brings about feelings of shame and guilt.” Switching identities (compliance, behaving like a “good Adventist” or a “good son/daughter”) or withdrawal from interaction (silence, or avoidance of home environment) seems to be the preferred mechanisms of legitimation in these “clashes” of moral identity expectations between the informants and their parents. For some, these mechanisms of legitimation would eventually result in what one informant refers to as “two personalities,” or two (salient) identities—one identity that would be more salient at home, and another one when outside.

It is difficult to tell exactly how much of the Adventist role expectations in their social environments were internalized or appropriated by the informants in their upbringing. From their own accounts it would seem, however, that the more “technical” aspects of Adventist role performance expectations—especially in regards to the Sabbath rules—were generally less important to most of them, while the more social aspects of their Adventist identity, including social behaviors such as going to church and the pathfinders, were more important. Several of the informants would for instance continue attending church long after moving away from home, and some also continuing to do so after adopting an openly gay identity.

One informant explicitly states how it is the sense of community that he appreciates with the SDA Church and that keeps him wanting to be a part of it despite not feeling acceptance for his gay identity there. Another informant shares how she felt estranged from her peers’ preoccupation with interpreting biblical prophecy and handing out Adventist pamphlets in the streets. Although the preoccupation with Bible prophecy and the end-times represent common behaviors among Adventists (and also historically; Knight, 2000, pp. 42ff), these behaviors and meanings were not an important part for most of the informants’ Adventist identities during their upbringing, although studying the Bible (including the prophetic material) certainly was a part of what it meant to be an Adventist for some.

The meanings and themes of Adventist identity cannot be discussed without addressing the important theme of parental influence. Interestingly, there is a wide range of experiences as to the Adventist behaviors of their parents; “liberal” or “conservative” are regularly used measures. While some informants refer to them as “super conservative,” others refer to theirs as “without any extremes” (“moderate”?), while other informants again refer to their home environment as “very liberal” and without many religious rules.

What I first noticed was that the informants referring to their home environment as “without extremes” would bring up most of the same Adventist rules as those who saw their parents as “super conservative.” On this note, it is relevant to note that the informants whose home was “without extremes” grew up having a larger degree of their social ties (friends) situated within the Adventist community compared to those with “super conservative” parents. The latter did not attend any Adventist schools, for instance (one did for only a couple of years), while the former informants did.

This might indicate that the informants are operating with different social frames of reference (prototypes) in their evaluation of the religiosity of their parents, the parents’ religiosity seeming more “moderate” when compared to Adventist ingroup prototypes and more “conservative” when compared to outgroup (secular?) prototypes. One of the informants refers to the religious behavior in his home as “a golden middle-way” and yet later expresses frustration and resentment with the “stupid rules” of his parents that gave rise to feelings of alienation from his friends. He states that he would internalize and defend the choices they made for him, integrating them into his identity to such a degree that even after coming out as gay he would not question his Adventist identity. While considering his home as being “moderate” in the Adventist framework, he still resents the level of “indoctrination” (in his own words) of the technicalities of “good” Adventist behavior that conflicted with his own (once again) more important social identity meanings.

Lastly, one of the informants growing up in a “liberal” home relates identifying herself as a “half-ventist” among other Adventists, seeing she never was preoccupied with what she considers to be typical Adventist meanings and behaviors (the book of Revelation/prophecies, vegetarianism). In defining her own Adventist identity, she speaks of her belief in Jesus Christ and the grace of God, her belief in the Sabbath, and her being brought up (socialized) into the

church and feeling at home in the Adventist way of thinking. Another informant with a more secular-Christian upbringing, appropriated an Adventist identity when in an Adventist school, but left it again after scrutinizing Adventist doctrines during as preparations for a Bible study. Hence, it is clear that while informants are aware of conventional behavioral expectations at home and in the Adventist community as to what it means to be a “good” Adventist, the technical meanings in these expectations might conflict with their more prominent social identities and/or their own idiosyncratic meanings of the Adventist identity.

6.1.1.3 “No one ever mentioned the word”: The Non-Meanings of Adventist Identity

Despite silence around the topic of homosexuality in the informants’ upbringing (or, perhaps, precisely *because* of it), there is an early sense of homosexuality and homosexual behavior as being a disturbing element to their Adventist identities. This is seen in some of the informants’ subconscious avoidance/denial and fear of elements in the social environment that might significantly challenge their Adventist identities. Internalized ideals and/or norms from their social environment in relation to sexuality would make several of the informants implicitly and even actively (though not consciously) avoid situations/behaviors and deny/overlook meanings that challenged these meanings or might expose them as “different” in this sense from everybody else.

This behavior firstly illustrates how the meanings communicated and interpreted through social behaviors and structures also infer the *non*-meanings of these behaviors and structures. (This is a normative/counter-normative dialectic.) These non-meanings also constitute a part of the expectations to the role performance as a “good” Adventist. The meaning of observing the Sabbath by refraining from sports implies also the non-meaning of desecrating the Sabbath by engaging in sports, for instance. One informant states that the strong emphasis on the family in the Adventist community served as a strong implication to him that homosexuality was a disturbing element that did not serve his Adventist identity. Still another female informant relates feeling attracted to a girl in primary school, yet not finding any way to be closer to her than as a sister in her daydreaming, hardly having been explicitly told at that point that gay relationships were wrong.

On the other side, one informant relates how he was for a time completely oblivious to the concept of homosexuality and that his same-sex attractions were “wrong.” This, however,

should not be understood as if the implicit non-meanings in social behaviors and structures are difficult to perceive, but rather as a case of selective perception—a mechanism of legitimation when an identity is threatened (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 43). This mechanism of self-protection is further addressed in the next part.

Could the active avoidance/denial of non-meanings that significantly challenge the informants' Adventist identities be interpreted as a process of “dis-identification” that happens alongside the process of Adventist self-identification (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 44)? For some of the informants, this initial sub-conscious avoidance/denial later develops into a conscious and explicit mission, as is illustrated in the following part. At this point, however, it seems clear that this avoidance, regardless of what level of consciousness it operates on, serves as a protection mechanism for their (straight/heterosexual/Adventist) identity rather than being a defining element constituting their Adventist identity standard. The possible role of dis-identification in the identity negotiation process will be further discussed in the following part in conjunction with the increase of conscious efforts to fight homosexuality.

6.1.1.4 Summary

The church-centeredness of the informants social lives, and the “within-ness” of their social life, suggest a strong and hegemonic Adventist identity that provides informants with many vital social rewards. In light of the emergent theme of moral acceptability, as well as some of the informants' ideological sentiments, an important internal reward might be that of moral self-efficacy, provided by an acknowledged Adventist role identity. However, most informants did not fully adopt conventional Adventist meanings, but rather chose to conform, thus avoiding negative feelings such as shame and/or guilt. In one case, this would result in a certain compartmentalization of his identities at home and outside, to avoid (external) conflict. Also, an avoidance of implied non-meanings is seen in the informants related behavior as to the issue of homosexuality.

Moreover, the findings concerning the particular role of the family and SDA education in the formation of “within-ness” is comparable to the findings of Drumm, (2011, “Growing Up Adventist,” para. 3-5).

6.1.2 Challenging and Losing the Adventist Identity's Hegemony

6.1.2.1 “Every night I prayed...”: Defending the Adventist Identity

With most of the informants, the suppression/avoidance of their homosexuality began at a subconscious level, avoiding situations and ignoring elements in the social environment that would confront them with the issue and would significantly challenge their Adventist identities. This deflecting behavior includes several of the mechanisms of legitimation, such as withdrawal (from interactions or situations that threaten one's identity) and selective perception (ignoring cues that do not support their identity) (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 43-44). Naturally, however, most informants report an increased awareness of their homosexual feelings over time. At this point, about half of the informants report being distressed and making conscious efforts to suppress and/or eradicate these feelings through various measures, some of which include prayer and in various ways seeking to establish a sexual/romantic attraction and/or commitment to the opposite sex. Some would fill their time schedules with work and avoid their home environment. Others would seek to force themselves to live heterosexually by entering committed heterosexual relationships or use dating as a form of self-discipline or self-punishment.

On a general level, it is apparent from the interviews that these latter efforts or behaviors are motivated by negative emotions and distress. The initial adjustments in behavior (withdrawal, selective perception) are, on the other hand, not coupled with significant distress. Considering the perception control model, they appear as error signal compensations for disturbances in the environment that bring “redeemable” mismatches between the informants' self-perceptions and their identity standards. These are disturbances that undermine the verification of their identities (Christian/Adventist)—but the loop is not broken. Eventually, however, the informants' self-relevant feedback is persistently and significantly “disturbed” by information/meanings that fundamentally alter their understanding of themselves (self-meanings)—in this case, realizing that they are homosexual by having homosexual feelings and/or behaviors. Seeing that none of them prior to this point acknowledged the meaning of “homosexual” as being (fully) applicable to themselves, it seems premature to speak of the earlier disturbances as interference from a gay identity—i.e. as a role/identity conflict (Burke

& Stets, 2009, p. 77). At the point of realization, however, a fundamentally different self-meaning is perceived and acknowledged via the environment—the meaning of “homosexuality” and “homosexual.” They are no longer able to avoid or ignore these meanings because they are now not encountered primarily in the environment, but within their own self-meanings. Hence, the disturbance perceived in one’s social environment and self-in-situations has become a “disturbing” identity.

For most informants, the discovery of a new homosexual self-meaning interrupts their Adventist identity in multiple ways. For some, it eventually breaks the loop in the identity-verification process. One informant left her Adventist identity shortly after realizing she was in love with a girl. Another informant left her Adventist identity after a breakdown just prior to coming out as lesbian. These experiences are further addressed in part 6.1.3. For most of the other informants, however, this new identity does not break the loop entirely, but begins interfering with their Adventist identity over time. A conflict between their Adventist and new homosexual self-meaning emerges, causing increasing amounts of anxiety. This, in turn, leads some to over-control their Adventist identity by spending more resources on monitoring and making behavioral changes in order to compensate for the mismatch between self-perceptions and the Adventist identity standard. To several, this also involved a negotiation process with the interfering homosexual identity, which is further discussed in the following part.

The initial evasion of disturbing elements in the social environment and the subsequent conflict of roles and/or identities in which most of the informants make behavioral changes in their personal and social lives, ought to be understood as identity defense mechanisms. Exactly what social, role and person meanings constituting the “Adventist identity” are perceived as being threatened varies from individual to individual; they are complexly and uniquely interrelated. From most of the informants’ responses, the most pressing concern regarding their homosexuality seems to be their Adventist-framed *social* identities, fearing that family ties and friendship ties would be jeopardized if their homosexual identities were “acted out.”

However, although family and friends were the most pressing issues in their struggle to suppress their homosexuality, their social identities are inseparably related to their person and moral self-meanings. While nearly all of the informants struggled to “live up” to the moral expectations of their social environment, some of the informants also report significant amounts

of effort to defend their moral (person) identity as Adventists. These meanings and values were esteemed, rewarded and verified within the group, and perhaps less so outside in non-Adventist circles. The Pride parades were a relevant “outgroup” point of reference (or anti-prototype) in one of the informants’ reflections. The meanings and behaviors, or values, that he associated with Pride conflicted with meanings and values in his person identity as an Adventist. Hence, he felt he could not be gay. Herein lies the aspect of dis-identification.

These defense mechanisms are employed from a point of distress and fear, and a fear of loss as such. But what exactly are the dynamics of this fear in identity conflict? This further discussed in the following part.

Lastly, there was one informant who did not respond with fear upon realizing her homosexuality, indicating, according to identity theory, that she perceived a certain stability and satisfaction in her social “economy” at the time of realization. Later, however, the same informant reports feelings of concern when coming out to family and friends, although not being out of concern for her own social integrity (apparently), but out of fear of hurting any of her closest family. This also might indicate a sense of social stability and, perhaps, very different meanings in her Adventist identity, or even the prominence of other equally or more important identities in the process of coming out.

6.1.2.2 “If you do not do what is expected of you...”: Fearing a Non-Verified Adventist Identity

The instinctual protection and defense of the Adventist identity over against an emerging homosexual identity as observed with most of the informants, is not something to be taken for granted. What makes this conflict so much more intense for some of the informants in this study?

In his theory of cognitive dissonance, Festinger argued that the dissonance between two conflicting cognitive elements increases with the person’s commitment to both of these elements (Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011, pp. 264-265). Understanding these “elements” as including a person’s multiple identities, the high level of conflict and intensity of struggle thus serves as an indication of high commitment to both the conflicting identities. For several informants, the struggle became threefold: (1) A struggle of choice—i.e. making an impossible choice between two equally true and binding identities; (2) a struggle of acting out

this choice by defending or committing to the one identity more intensely, and (3) the struggle of suppressing or “un-committing” to the other identity.

- 1) The struggle of choice is echoed in one informant’s conflict with himself over whether he should live as everyone knew him or as he truly was. This “either/or” approach to the conflict is explained by the hegemony of the Adventist identity and the hegemony-threatening meanings of homosexuality; this is explained further down.
- 2) Reinforcing one’s Adventist identity becomes a struggle seeing that (1) it is being over-controlled (providing less intrinsic rewards than expected, leading to relative deprivation), leading to a higher sensitivity to error or non-verification, and (2) the homosexual identity is constantly obstructing the verification of one’s Adventist identity.
- 3) Finally, the suppression or “un-committing” to the homosexual identity becomes a struggle for the very reason that the non-verification of this person identity leads to negative emotions and depression, and diminished self-esteem (diminished feelings of authenticity).

One could naturally ask why a person would subject himself or herself to the pain of identity conflict rather than refraining from adopting a conflict-raising identity in the first place—in this case, the homosexual identity, which in all the cases in this study emerged at a much later stage. On the other hand, one could ask why subjects, given the high level of commitment to both identities, would willingly subject themselves to the pain of choice and of suppressing one identity if both identities contained truly authentic self-meanings. I argue that both these questions are explained by the hegemony of the Adventist identity.

Firstly, the late emergence of a homosexual identity can be explained by the Adventist identity’s hegemony over *social* identities, in which there is a lack of access to neutral/positive symbols and meanings of homosexuality in the informants’ social environment during their upbringing. Given the fundamentally social process of identity-formation, it is evident that discovering a homosexual identity becomes difficult in a social environment in which these meanings and behaviors are silenced and/or heavily censured. Later, when one is made aware of homosexual meanings it is a spontaneous process of self-identification that is no more

voluntary than that of recognizing oneself human in other human beings. This self-identification is usually not positive, but rather a reluctant conviction immediately followed by shame or self-disgust and perceived as a threat to their Adventist identity.

Secondly, and most importantly, the “either/or” experience of identity conflict is explained by the *integrated* moral and social aspects of the Adventist identity. As we have seen, informants’ Adventist identity—including the meanings of being “good” and/or morally acceptable—is integrated with social ties and role identities since childhood. Considering the perceived centrality of being morally “good” as an Adventist, the Adventist identity seems thus to be inseparably connected to informants’ (high) moral identity. While any failure to have one’s moral identity verified (being less esteemed) would bring a certain amount of shame/guilt, the particularly “moralizing,” normative import of the Adventist identity and the explicitly counter-normative nature of the homosexual identity renders this kind of identity conflict as pivotal for social and psychological survival. Homosexuality is also notoriously tied to symbols of the ultimate indifference to moral accountability and normative (sexual) behavior—namely, the story of Sodom and Gomorra—and the ultimate cost of indifference, being the ultimate kind of “non-verification:” God’s eternal destruction through fire. It becomes evident that a homosexual identity is thus felt as attacking a most fundamental and ubiquitous theme in what it means to be an Adventist, and to the informants, to be a “good” person at all. The verification of one’s homosexual identity through corresponding behavior would make it impossible to have one’s moral and person identities as Adventist verified, resulting in a keen sense of shame/guilt and a decreased sense of authenticity, in addition to jeopardizing prominent social and role (Adventist) identities serving as fundamentals to one’s sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.

Hence, the perception is that the homosexual identity and Adventist identity are mutually exclusive, and that the existence of a homosexual identity threatens the Adventist identity governing most of one’s life and purpose to live. On the other side, there is an immense commitment to the homosexual identity threatening the Adventist identity. This must again not be understood as something conscious or driven by will, but as reflecting the equally immense survival implications of the homosexual identity. This is further addressed in 6.1.3.

In speaking of the informants’ relating to their homosexual identity, I would like to address my intentional discourse around homosexual identity in terms of identity *emergence*.

While previous studies speak of homosexual identity formation as identity *change* “in which a previously held image of sexual orientation is replaced with a homosexual image” (Cass, 1984, p. 145)—i.e. a change in self-meanings constituting the subjects’ heterosexual identity—I have hitherto focused on the process of emergence of such self-meanings as an Adventist. This has been done for several reasons, including (1) to stay as close as possible to the discourse of the informants themselves, (2) to emphasize and focus on the identity conflict as experienced between their socio-religious identity (as a whole) and their discovered sexual identity.

While it is implied in the informants’ accounts that “the[ir] former image is likely to have been heterosexual,” it is precisely due to the fact that “the promotion of an ideal heterosexual image is one of the most prominent features of socialization in industrial societies” (Cass, 1984, p. 145) that a discourse of sexual identity *change* in the context of Adventism could, rather than being useful, distract from the point of it being a *discovery* of one’s (homo)sexuality in a hegemonic, heteronormative environment rather than a change in sexuality. Hence, I speak of homosexual identity *emergence* rather than homosexual identity formation. (The “prominence,” according to Cass, of heterosexuality in the Adventist context clearly should not be understood as referring to any salience of sexual topics/education in the Adventist social environment. Quite contrarily, sexuality was not a discussed topic in most of the informants’ homes or social environment. Rather, heterosexuality “prominence” is, especially in this case, understood as the heteronormativity on which the social structure is built.) Moreover, a discourse of sexual identity change in this context could distract from the important point of the informants’ struggle, upon discovery, to sustain their Adventist/Christian and moral identities rather than a heterosexual identity. Rather than being an identity with its own fully developed set of self-meanings, the discourse of nearly all of the informants indicates a basic heterosexual self-meaning as constituting a part of their socio-religious Adventist/Christian identity standard.

Nevertheless, within the context of following the norms and/or living up to their Adventist ideals, several informants specifically address a struggle to *live* heterosexually. Only a couple of informants specifically relate thinking (actively) of themselves as heterosexual. In any case, to the extent there was a developed heterosexual identity, this was tightly controlled by their religious identity and was eventually changed as the self-meanings in their sexual behavior did not match the heterosexual/Adventist identity standards. As a part of this process,

several informants report going through a “bisexual bargaining” phase in order to “appease” the Adventist side of their identity and avoid conflict. However, the non-negotiability of their homosexual identities soon proved to be a face threatening their entire social life as they had known it.

6.1.2.3 “I did not dare to tell them...”: Losing the Adventist Identity’s Hegemony

For several of the informants, the increasing efforts to control and verify their Adventist identities over against their homosexuality ran as a parallel to an increased interference from their homosexual self-meanings/identity. These interferences could culminate in sexual behavior such as fantasizing and/or the use of pornography, homosexual encounters or simply a heightened sense of one’s homosexual feelings and reactions in everyday situations. These “failures” frustrating their Adventist identity would result in increasing amounts of shame/guilt, anxiety, depression and loss of self-esteem, as they were not able to live authentically from their own values and/or in accordance with social norms.

Self-esteem has been found to serve as a protection from various stressors, including (1) experiences and information that might otherwise prove “harmful” to the individual, (2) distress, and (3) depression (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 81). Viewed as a reservoir of “energy” and a “buffer” that is used in the identity-verification process, persistent failure in identity-verification empties this reservoir, leaving the individual more vulnerable to the negative effects of lack of identity-verification. This makes the individual more vulnerable to minor non-verifying experiences that otherwise would prompt the individual to implement (and learn) new ways of achieving identity-verification (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 82). This self-esteem reservoir or stamina helps individuals not to avoid all “costly” situations in order to find the rewards for passing through those situations.

The ensuing depression for several of the informants resulted in an increased social isolation and resentment towards God and the church. While some would enter a type of “fugue state,” as one informant describes it, characterized by a period of passivity, helplessness and despair, others would begin to reach out to other homosexuals outside the Adventist community in order to pursue some further understanding of the issue. Most of the informants who reached out, did so from a point of complete despondency after long periods of employing various measures to handle the conflict on their own.

Realizing that the homosexual identity was here to stay implied different resolutions to different informants. One informant left her Adventist identity quite promptly, perceiving that the two identities were incompatible and feeling an urgency to protect her newfound authentic self from the “pollution” of Adventist culture, feeling in hindsight that she had set aside her access to her own authentic self for “a system.” Another informant left his Adventist identity during his scrutiny of Adventist beliefs, realizing he was not in agreement with fundamental Adventist teachings. Losing his Adventist identity served as an important catalyst to his acceptance of his emerging homosexual identity, which he perceived as having been partly suppressed by his Christian identity. The last of the informants who rejected their religious identity, did so after a longer period of illness, after which she realized and acknowledged her lesbian identity (as opposed to previously thinking of herself as “Christian and heterosexual”). In these accounts, self-authenticity (the verification of one’s person identity) emerges as an important impetus for giving up one’s religious identity. It was not until they set aside their hegemonic Adventist identity that they were able to fully access and/or accept their authentic selves.

While some rejected their religious identities (two of which did so without experiencing an identity conflict), nearly all of the informants who experienced an identity conflict were reluctant to give up their religious identity. Rather, they would commence a pursuit for new input from new people—a new social environment in which they could explore, firstly, the possibility of verification and comfortable with (i.e. accepting) one’s homosexual identity, and secondly, the possibility of combining their religious and sexual identities. This entailed a pursuit of identity-verification outside the Adventist social environment. One informant reached out to his non-religious best friend and their circle of friends at university. Here he experienced a strong verification of his homosexual identity, but also of his Adventist identity, his friends pointing to other examples of openly gay Adventists and to the Christian doctrine of God’s love. Another informant contacted and began corresponding with other homosexuals over the Internet, being met with sympathy for his hard-pressed situation and support of his homosexual identity. Still another informant contacted profiled gay and Christian media persons, being referred to and reading literature expounding on the issue of being gay and Christian.

These are examples of a majority tendency to seek out new people and a social environment outside of one’s Adventist community in order to come to terms with one’s

homosexual identity and to receive some kind of verification that this is who one is. Only one of the informants had her first verifying experience *within* the Adventist community, discussing the issue of homosexuality and the Bible with a supportive church member and being given a new perspective on the biblical texts and a new picture of God. To her, it had been unimaginable to think there were Adventists who were affirming of LGBTQ people.

However, while most of the informants began to feel verified in their homosexual identities outside of the Adventist community, to many the emerging (and at this point, crucial) self-acceptance was coupled with an anxious anticipation of the costs of coming out and seeking verification of their homosexual identity *within* the Adventist community. To some, this would mean the loss of their social belonging and the life as they had known it, fearing the worst: being expelled from their homes, losing their friends and their church membership. How can the commitment to such a young and seemingly “worthless” homosexual identity (in socio-psychological terms) be challenging the socio-psychological hegemony of the Adventist identity to such an extent as to make a person brave the consequence of losing his or her family, friends and church?

It is my view that certain aspects of this question are best answered in light of Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition—a perspective from which this issue is further discussed in 6.2. However, when considered in light of identity theory—the “worth” (prominence/salience) of an identity being measured by levels of support, commitment, rewards and perceived opportunity structure—it is evident that factors such as social support and perceived opportunity structure are, in this case, factors strongly discouraging homosexual identity prominence. An identity conflict/crisis is thus not instigated or upheld by these. Similarly, the informants’ initially non-existent commitment to and experience of costs from their homosexual identity would seem to inhibit it from ever becoming prominent enough to challenge their Adventist identity. However, in light of identity theory and the theory of identity conflict, I argue that the assimilation of homosexual self-meanings into a person identity, combined with “the sum total of the pressure to keep perceptions of self-in-situation meanings in line with the self-meanings held in the [Adventist] identity standard,” conditions the informants to develop and increase commitment over time to their homosexual identity in the pursuit of restoring *self-authenticity* (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 51). This requires some clarifications.

Firstly, “assimilation” does not refer to a process of calculating, voluntary appropriation, but designates a process of spontaneous, involuntary internalization. A term that captures the essence of the process I am addressing here is *conviction*, defined as the acquisition of a firmly held belief or opinion that is not likely to change. (This process is previously referred to in 6.1.2.1, para. 2.) Assimilation of homosexual self-meanings is an experiential process of conviction of self-meanings, a process of which the informant may or may not be fully aware. It is an *associative* process (i.e. the association of symbols with the phenomena they symbolize), where the subject compares the signal self-meanings in his or her behavior (such as falling in love with a person of the same sex) with corresponding meanings in socially constructed symbols, such as “homosexuality.” This spontaneous association is followed by an assimilation of homosexual self-meanings based on conviction of correspondence between these meanings.

From the point of conviction and onwards, commitment to sustain verification of one’s interfered Adventist person identity (in the pursuit of restoring self-authenticity) thus “feeds” commitment to the interfering homosexual identity. As the behavior of the prominent Adventist identity conflicts with the behavior of the homosexual identity, there arises a persistent mismatch between the self-relevant meanings perceived in one’s behavior (self-in-situation meanings) and self-meanings in one’s identity standard. This persisting failure in identity-verification (one identity is verified at the expense of another)—entailing a decrease in the sense of self-authenticity and a sense of reward deprivation—increases the individual’s monitoring and control of, and commitment to, the “interfered” identity (“Adventist”) and the “interfering” identity (“homosexual”). The pressure that increases commitment to one’s person identities thus stems, in this case, partially from the perception-control mechanism itself.

In addition, I suggest there are the other pressure aspects of (1) conventional Adventist identity meanings (moral acceptability), and (2) the Adventist identity’s hegemony. An internalization of the conventional Adventist meanings of moral concern and high moral acceptability combined with the Adventist “governance” of core person, social and role identity “economies” of social support and intrinsic/extrinsic rewards would indicate a high internal and external pressure (and thus commitment) to the interfered Adventist (and interfering homosexual) identity—both in order to restore a sense of social stability/predictability (reduce anxiety), and to restore a sense of self-authenticity (reduce depression), and last but not least, to minimize a keen sense of shame and guilt stemming from the non-verification of one’s high

Adventist moral identity standard. Thus, the already high commitment to verifying Adventist identity (especially one's moral self-meanings) is further increased by the persistently reward-depriving (and anxiety-/depression-inducing) effect of the new homosexual person identity. The increasing commitment to restore one's sense of self-authenticity thus "feeds" attention and commitment over time to the interfering and interfered identities, resulting at last in an identity crisis.

It is important to note that the increasing commitment to their homosexual identity up to the point of an identity conflict/crisis is not explained by regarding it is primarily a pursuit of a new social identity (as a member of the LGBTQ community), or a new role identity as "homosexual" or "gay" on the informants' behalf. The establishment of a new social identity as an LGBTQ member and a new role identity as homosexual or gay are assuredly aspects of the *resolution* to the identity conflict/crisis in several of the informants' experience. This process begins with their discovery of self-verification outside of the Adventist community, and is important in the rebuilding of a sense of "leverage" (as one informant calls it)—of self-worth and self-efficacy in the potential loss of your own community (which will be further discussed in 6.1.3.1). However, it is my intent to demonstrate that it was precisely their commitment to the social and role identities they already *within* the Adventist community as Adventists/Christians that contributed to the emergence of inner conflict. For most of the informants this conflict involved a conflict between a person identity (homosexual) and their social identity (Adventist)—a conflict between being authentic and a sense of belonging and self-worth and self-efficacy as a part of their. For some who were active in church their homosexual identity was also a threat to their role identity in the church—a conflict between being self-authentic and self-competent. Finally, this conflict for many also involved a conflict between person identities, in which personally held values were in conflict with one's sexual behavior.

Thus, seemingly "worthless" homosexual self-meanings become prominent identities, not driven by a commitment to these self-meanings *per se*, but by virtue of pursuing and sustaining/restoring self-authenticity and reducing anxiety/depression through identity-verification. This process is intensified by the import of one's interfered person identity for social survival in a social environment of "within-ness." The sense of urgency becomes magnificent in the case that person identity self-meanings comprise high moral meanings that

are “easily” compromised and highly controlled, thus generating high amounts of distress with the slightest interference.

While most of the other informants grappled with the conflict between their Adventist and homosexual identities, one of the informants relates no feelings of identity conflict or distress when discovering she was in love with another woman. In her response to questions regarding her religious upbringing, she emphasizes the unorthodoxy both of her parents’ gender roles, their liberal approach to people and the prominence of religious themes of God’s love and grace. While she shares Adventist meanings implying that homosexuality is not a prototypical, normative ideal *per se*, she also affirms other meanings in her Adventist (or Christian) identity that firstly deny, in essence, the actuality of the Adventist prototype (that the perfectly morally acceptable Adventist exists) and on this basis secondly de-emphasizes the conventional Adventist meanings of moral acceptability—or rather, the *over-control* of such meanings. She also rejects, or dis-identifies, with the corresponding behaviors—the “us versus them” or exclusive practices in her community—again, based on another meaning in her Adventist (or Christian) identity: *grace*, which from her accounts seems to include social meanings and behaviors such as *tolerance* and *compassion* and other affirming (i.e. identity-verifying) behaviors that contribute to making room for honesty and openness—or what I in this context would refer to as *authenticity*.

Herein is seen a particularly interesting negotiation of Adventist identity meanings in regards to a homosexual identity. There is an internalization of prototypical and normative Adventist meanings that sustain a certain dialectic tension between her Adventist ideals (identity standard) and homosexual identity, and a rejection (or affirmation?) of other Adventist meanings that seems to resolve or hinder a conflict between the two.

For most of the informants, the realization of their homosexual identity served as a threat to the hegemony of their Adventist identity. The compromised sense of self-authenticity caused by this interfering identity (an identity conflict) instigated a pursuit of restoring the sense of self-authenticity. To some, this restoration meant the fall (rejection) of their Adventist identity. To most of the informants, this pursuit meant an increased commitment to their Adventist identity (an initial rejection of their homosexual identity) and, in seeking to restore self-authenticity, an increasing commitment to their homosexual identity, finally leading to an

identity crisis. One informant reports, however, no experiencing any conflict between her homosexual and Adventist identities, although report some tension or uncertainty as to whether they truly are compatible.

6.1.2.4 Summary

As the informants became increasingly aware of their homosexual identities, several moved from subtle avoidance to outright battle against it. What had been perceived as disturbances from the environment became a self-meaning that they could no longer deny. Thus, an identity conflict began, their new homosexual identity interfering with their Adventist identity. The fear of a non-verified Adventist identity was in several ways a fear of losing one's social life and sense of moral integrity—precisely due to the integrated, hegemonic nature of their Adventist identity.

However, as the rejection of their homosexual identity led to increasing amounts of anxiety and depression, all of the informants realized had to seek verification of who they were outside of the Adventist community. This is where they began accepting themselves. One informant, however, did not grapple with conflict with her newfound sexual identity, explaining her self-acceptance (and integrated sexual and Adventist/Christian identities) in terms of a dialectic that still addressed moral acceptability, but emphasizes the relational aspect of morality.

These findings are comparable to the participants' resistance to homosexuality as described by Drumm (2011, "Dealing with the Conflict..."). Some common strategies to resist the homosexual identity are denial, prayer, heterosexual relationships, and immersion in religion.

6.1.3 Affirming the Gay Identity

6.1.3.1 "I just told myself, 'I can be both'": Embracing the Gay Identity

Once the informants realized their homosexual identity, the hegemony of the Adventist identity was threatened and an identity conflict emerged. Most of the informants then sought to establish and strengthen their Adventist identity. However, realizing the grim direction of their ever-

increasing anxiety and depression despite their efforts, and accepting the loss of the hegemony of their Adventist identity by seeking verification outside of “within,” they eventually began to explore the possibility of having both identities verified “within.”

Before coming out to their family, friends and community, informants relate a negotiation process in which they personally found some kind of resolution to the conflict between their homosexual and religious identities. After failed attempts at negotiating their homosexuality, the next step in resolving the experienced identity conflict consisted in accepting and embracing the homosexual identity, followed by a negotiation of their Adventist/Christian identities. As the negotiation of their Adventist/Christian identity was relevant to many of the informants’ ability to fully embrace their homosexual identity, the former is partly addressed here and in the following and final part.

Firstly, the meanings in religious experience and belief emerge as an important theme in the context of embracing a previously highly interfering homosexual identity. Having been verified in their homosexuality in a different social environment, and Christian environments as such for some, most of the informants also experienced a change in their perspectives on God, the Bible, and on themselves as Adventist/Christian. The recurring meanings that were changed enabling informants to embrace their homosexual identity were meanings relating to their picture of God, with an increased emphasis of God as *more* loving and tolerant (accepting) than previously believed, and that God accepted (verified) who they were. A changed perspective on the relevant biblical texts and an emphasis on God as one’s creator (as a homosexual person) are other meanings that were appealed to in the context of embracing one’s gay identity. These new meanings also helped strengthen some of the informants’ commitment to their faith—their religious identities—, one informant being baptized shortly after, and another one relating how he with newfound hope resumed his prayer life. However, while one grew closer to the SDA Church, most of the other informants still questioned their belonging in church despite having reconciled their sexuality and their beliefs—as will be further discussed in the following part.

As has been mentioned earlier, for three of the informants the embracement of their homosexual identity was preceded by a loss of their religious identity. One of these, however, still reports having a fundamental belief in a God of love, although not identifying as Christian

or Adventist. For her, as well as for the informants who sought to integrate their sexual and religious identities, the process of reevaluating the meanings in one's religious identity also continued in the aftermath of coming out to family, friends and community. Having embraced themselves, the informants turned to seek a verification of their new identity "within."

Although the reception among family and friends was not as dire as several of the informants anticipated, the reactions, both in their social environment and within the informants themselves, indicate mixed feelings. On the one hand, it seems that while they did receive verification of their social and role identities as beloved/appreciated "family" or "friend" or "community member," there was little direct recognition of their homosexual identity. Where there was not silence or avoidance of the topic altogether, there was questioning and/or discussions around the certainty of the homosexual identity and the moral acceptability of homosexuality in light of Adventist normative beliefs and behavior. In cases where families were "mixed," the Adventist side of the family would be the ones questioning and/or critically assessing the moral issue of their homosexual identity. These discussions can also be regarded as identity negotiation processes, in which the idiosyncratic and conventional meanings of the Adventist and homosexual identities are negotiated in the family.

In most of the cases, the problematizing/negotiations around the moral acceptability of homosexuality revolved around homosexual *behavior* (i.e. homosexual acts), reflecting the thematic emphasis on the behavioral aspect of Adventist identity meanings. While most parents were more readily accepting of the subjects' homosexual orientation (i.e. feelings), the fact that they were "living it out" was problematic. This separation between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior can be confused with the theoretical elements of identity and identity behavior. While meanings in an identity standard *always* seek expression through corresponding behavior, behavior is not limited to specific actions, but includes also the emotional aspect.

It is rather a question of role *performance*, in which the subjects' performance of their homosexual identity is problematized in light of conventional, normative expectations. While the moral/theological aspect of the discourse was prominent (to the extent there were discussions), the socially normative aspect of social esteem also played an important part. Some were accepted promptly by parents seeking to hush things down, some explicitly asking the

subjects to downplay their homosexual identity and/or avoid conventional homosexual behavior (LGBTQ activism, Pride parades etc.). Again, these are role performances that were not supported.

Firstly, the subject's "ideal self" in which the homosexual identity is prominent/salient is challenged by the inquiry to not "act it out." As pointed out earlier, such separations between homosexual orientation and "homosexual behavior" can give rise to confusion as the meaning of "behavior" likely is understood/experienced by the subject to encompass much more than sexual acts. Provided there is agreement on the intended meaning as being sexual performance, problematizing not just one specific sexual performance, but any sexual performance at all of a homosexual identity obviously presents a challenge to the homosexual identity itself. While challenging the salience and even the verity of the subject's homosexual identity (identity non-verification), it also challenges the moral identity of the individual, indicating that a high moral identity / Adventist identity cannot be verified in conjunction with a homosexual identity. This suggests an identity conflict and the possibility of experiencing shame/guilt from not having one's moral standards verified.

To several informants, these confrontational conversations affected their relationship to the relevant family members in a negative way. Nevertheless, several parents would make an effort to manifest care and verify their relationship in other ways that were valued by the informants. Still there would be a certain withdrawal from interactions or settings which did not legitimize the informants', in this context, unconventional and to them highly prominent homosexual identity. There was generally, however, a movement towards acceptance with the parents, some realizing the genuineness and impact of their son or daughter's sexuality upon witnessing the heartbreak of losing love on the one side and the joy of finding love on the other.

While friends would generally be more understanding and accepting (not letting informants' homosexual identity affect their social tie in and of itself), the ensuing silence or avoidance of the topic, both at home and among friends, left several informants with a feeling of not being acknowledged in their homosexual identity. In light of the implicit heteronormativity and with the awkward silence and lack of explicit support in their newfound identity, being among other Adventists would give rise to anxiety and feelings of insecurity and inauthenticity, also eventually leading to withdrawal for most, though not for all of them.

6.1.3.2 “Simply distancing myself from the church”: Protecting the Gay Identity

While some were met with much understanding, compassion and tolerance, other informants were subjected to church discipline, directly invalidating their role identities in church (and non-verifying their moral and Adventist identities), which two were willing to give up at the point. In the process of embracing their sexuality, certain meanings of their Adventist identities were thus changed, both as a result of the idiosyncratic contributions through personal reflection and as a result of the non-relevant, conventional meanings and expectations they were met with upon coming out, some of which were quite anticipated. These various expectations and feedback would lead some to distance themselves from church in order to protect the self-esteem and identity agreement that they had struggled so long to rebuild.

While most of the informants have kept their religious identity—some considering themselves more or less as Adventists still and others preferring to view themselves as Christian—, four of these have chosen to distance themselves from the SDA Church. Three of these connect their non-verifying experiences as openly gay individuals to the Adventist community’s attitudes and/or the Church teachings on homosexuality. One of them relates not feeling like an Adventist anymore, indicating that her social identity is not Adventist. However, for three of the other informants their distance to Church is not an indication of a changed social identity as much as it is an indication of the protection of their homosexual and moral identity. This increased distance to the Adventist community was a part of the resolution of their identity conflict/crisis.

The cut in “negative feedback” (in the sense intended by the informant) by changing one’s social environment underpins the mechanism and effect of the perceptual control model. In removing themselves from an environment where the homosexual identity is not esteemed and their moral/Adventist identity not verified, the informants avoid the distress and loss of self-esteem associated with identity non-verification. These distressing emotions are, in the context of moral acceptability, especially laden with shame/guilt when is perceived as being an immoral person (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 173). Given the now increased commitment to and prominence of their homosexual identity, switching identities, a legitimation mechanism alternative to withdrawal, was reminiscent of their past suppression of their homosexuality and the ensuing anxiety and depression.

As for the meaning of moral acceptability, it is unclear exactly how the supposedly integrated informants relate to this Adventist meaning. While it may seem that those distancing themselves from the Adventist social environment would distance themselves from (reject, de-emphasize) the concern for moral acceptability (given their “immoral” or counter-normative sexual behavior in Adventist conventional terms), it is evident from the interviews that several of the informants no longer view their homosexuality as morally problematic from a religious viewpoint. Hence, the integration of their identities. This could indicate that rather than rejecting or de-emphasizing the Adventist meaning of moral acceptability, the informants have changed other meanings in their Adventist/Christian identity standard as to what behavior is considered as morally acceptable.

However, when elaborating on their main difficulty with the church, informants tend to emphasize unhelpful (“un-Christian”) attitudes and ways of approaching the “morally unacceptable” (behaviors, people) rather than defending the acceptability of homosexuality *per se* over against Adventist doctrine. This might indicate a shift in moral concern with less preoccupation with the concern of morally “correct” behavior (in terms of Adventist code), and more concern as to relational, Christian values such as tolerance, compassion, love etc. It is not doctrine or disagreements in moral definitions that emerges as their primary issue, in other words, but invalidating behavior and the reservations to accept (acknowledge) who they are.

This (moral) emphasis on relational values rather than conventional Adventist meanings of moral acceptability is demonstrated in Elsa’s case, who, along with two other informants, chose to remain in church. Despite being encouraged to cancel her church membership by a pastor (which in her case has not significantly affected her relationship to the church), and also feeling insecurity as to whether others are okay with her lesbian identity, she feels this is where she belongs and wants to be a voice for other marginalized church members. The two other informants also feel they belong in the SDA Church, accepting (without necessarily agreeing with) the Church’s teachings on sexuality while emphasizing values and attitudes such as tolerance, openness and active compassion towards people whose behaviors or lifestyles are not deemed “morally acceptable.”

6.1.3.3 Summary

Having come to be accepted by others outside of the Adventist community, informants begin to accept themselves and embrace who they are. This, in turn, brings an emerging recommitment to their religious identity, having acquired some new identity meanings that emphasize God as more accepting than previously believed. This is significant in light of the theme of moral acceptability. While coming out to their families did not realize their worst fears, there were mixed feelings discussions on the moral acceptability of homosexual behavior would give way to silence/avoidance of the issue altogether.

Parallel to their embracing their homosexual identity, there is an increased distanced by some to the SDA Church, in order to protect their newfound sense of self-acceptance—possibly from the conventional preoccupation with moral acceptability. These findings are comparable to those of Drumm’s (2011, “Leave the Church while Retaining Gay/Lesbian Identity”). However, some informants choice to stay, appreciating the sense of community.

6.2 The Struggle for a Positive Identity: Some Moral Implications

6.2.1 Loving Homosexuals in Church and the Parental Role

The crucial role that the informants’ parents have played in their identity formation process demonstrates the centrality of the family in socio-psychological development and identity formation. No one finds it easier to love, respect, and esteem an individual than the individual’s own parents. The centrality and role of parents/family thus might provide important indications as to how family-based communities can assist positive identity formation by providing a safe environment for community members.

As an evangelical organization driven by a calling to “love people as he [Jesus] loved them,” (Syvendedags Adventistkirken, 2019), a highly relevant question in the context of this study’s focus on identity formation in the SDA Church would be: In what ways can the Adventist sensitivity to moral acceptability be harnessed and used in order to positively relate to community members who do not identify with or “reach up to” the community’s prototypical and/or moral ideals? In what ways can people with “sub-ideal” or un-esteemed traits or ways

of life be recognized in the Honnethian sense as to feel both loved, respected and esteemed by a community who desires to love as Jesus loved?

From the informants' perspective, I argue that this question is guided by considering the role of the family, especially parents, in identity formation of an individual. The struggle of identity-verification as illustrated in the accounts of this study's informants is indeed a struggle of being recognized for their authentic selves. Returning to the sociological dynamics of love and friendship as a form of *recognition* (as spelled out by Axel Honneth), we discover some implications of love in the context of moral acceptability, and its fundamental role for a positive relation-to-self and relation-to-others. Being fundamental to the development of respect and esteem, and defined as the "affirmation of independence guided (...) by care" (Honneth, 1995, p. 107), the question emerges: How can the autonomy of homosexual community members be affirmed and be "released" in the Church, safely being able to be their authentic selves while yet being emotionally tied to the Church's vision through mutual care? Or, to frame it within the context of the parental role: How can the autonomy of the child be affirmed, being "released" by the parents to be their authentic selves, while yet being emotionally tied to the parents' visions through mutual care?

These questions are guided by what Honneth defines as the antipode to love, "the practical maltreatment in which a person is forcibly deprived of any opportunity to freely dispose over his or her own body" (Honneth, 1995, p. 132). Being contrasted to the affirmation of autonomy, this deprivation evidently applies to the psychological as well as the physical aspects, and, I would argue, the moral aspect, in the form of lack of trust in the subjects' (here, the homosexual's) moral capacities. As love's recognition of the person's needs and emotions enables the individual's self-confidence in relating to themselves, the consequence is, as illustrated in the insecurities and identity confusion of the informants', a lack of basic self-confidence—not "knowing oneself" or one's needs and emotions, and lacking confidence to express these. Not only does this create a basic distrust to oneself, but also to other people and the world, also impeding the development of self-respect.

A salient theme in informants' related struggles is that of silence and/or avoidance of issues in their communities relating directly to their personal identities. In the context of the non-meanings implied through the social structure and the importance of moral verification,

silence around the issue of homosexuality was to many a source of anxiety, deep shame and even self-loathing that over time would be detrimental to their psychological and social functioning. For parents and the wider community, a first step in loving homosexuals indicates, I suggest, not being silent about or avoiding the sensitive issue of homosexuality, but with keen sensitivity engaging in confidential conversation with their child/community members whilst recognizing and affirming their autonomy as individuals capable of making their own moral judgments. Another loving step is the educational address and engagement with the issue of homosexuality, both scientifically and spiritually, as to the implications of various beliefs, standpoints and scientific observations.

As for the last point of “within-ness,” some implications as to loving the homosexual in a social environment of “within” would be ensuring that homosexual community members are not excluded on the basis of personal traits or identities, but are (like everyone else) recognized as autonomous, independent community members who, in a sense, both are “within” and “without.” “Within,” as far as they share the same fundamental community values/visions and sense of “mutual care” for other community members, and “without” as far as they in their personal individuality diverge from community stereo- and prototypes. Here again the parent’s and family’s role in affirming the child’s personal individuality as a unique person (increasing self-authenticity) and their social commonality as sharing fundamental attributes with others in the family (increasing a sense of belonging and self-worth), serves as both an example and a crucial starting point for the Adventist and other social-relational communities.

6.2.2 Esteeming Homosexuals in Church and the Moral Dialectic

Seeing that a concern for moral acceptability constitutes, in the informants’ experience, an important Adventist meaning, it becomes relevant to discuss how marginalized, un-esteemed community members who do not “qualify” as being or leading estimable (“morally acceptable”) lives can find a safe social environment in the Adventist community in which they can build a positive identity with a sense of value as contributors to the common goal of the community.

In the experience of an informant, there is a felt tension between her reality and the ideals as affirmed by her Church. Speaking in terms of Rappaport’s theory of empowerment, this tension between the Church’s heteronormative standard/social structure and the reality of

homosexual members serves as a highly potent example of the paradoxical and essentially human dialectic of the *ideal* and the *real*. In what ways can Adventist sensitivity to moral acceptability be harnessed and used in order to recognize, include and positively esteem church and community members who do not identify with all aspects of Adventist prototype or “reach up to” socially hegemonic ideals?

6.2.2.1 Rediscovering the Dialectic of Moral Acceptability

The experiences of the informants in this study might, considered in light of empowerment theory, indeed suggest some guiding principles on this issue. With several of the informants who integrated their sexual and religious identities, there is seen, not a rejection of moral behavioral concern, but a shift in its preoccupation. The shift is from a preoccupation with Adventist behavioral code to a preoccupation with Adventist-relational values or principles, and as such a shift in attention from certain aspects of Adventist-prototypical ideals to other aspects of these ideals. Some informants describe this shift in terms of a theological/philosophical dialectic between upholding Christian moral standards and accepting (loving?) shortcoming human beings (using the example of love versus egoism). In their discourse around identity, informants betray another form of dialectic: of affirming their Adventist identity and accepting their homosexuality.

In any case, this shift in moral preoccupation happening along a continuum of two poles of moral truth enabled informants to embrace the one without rejecting the other. This enabled them to be(come) more integrated and holistic as individuals, healing the compartmentalization of their beliefs and practical lives, and being able to authentic in both their Adventist and homosexual identities. This reasoning within a dialectic tension and the shift from conventional preoccupations to the more ignored aspects of Adventist ideology patterns the core principles of empowerment theory and bears normative implications for community members and policy-makers within the Adventist community as well as other ideological organizations. According to empowerment theory, the discovery of solutions to social and community problems happens within the dialectic of a “dynamic tension” where “giving attention to one truth [happens] in such a way that attention then immediately is given to its counterpart” (Rappaport, 1984, p. 4). This involves the identification of antinomic moral truths (i.e. *moral paradoxes*) behind an emerged social conflict and shifting the focus and emphasis towards the ignored side. This process is therefore highly context-oriented, and the practical solutions it provides contextual

or context-specific rather than universally generalizable. Yet, these solutions are guided within the framework of valid moral truths.

When considering informants' keen sense of social concern for moral acceptability, as well as their encounters with intimidating silence/avoidance of the topic of homosexuality, it becomes evident that understanding homosexuality through the concern for homosexual community members' sense of self-value probably constitutes an ignored direction in the context of the Adventist community. In their experience, certain aspects of Adventist ideals have eclipsed others. This has, in their minds, created dichotomies where being Adventist/morally acceptable and homosexual were conceived of as mutually exclusive, thus resulting in efforts to suppress and eliminate the latter, to their own harm. (Herein is seen a consequence of losing sight of the moral dialectic, and applying convergent reasoning/solutions, in socially and moral issues.) Now, as integrated gay Adventists/Christians, these informants have renounced these conventional dichotomies as indeed false, realizing through their battles and wounds that being authentic in their homosexual and Adventist identities was not just a possible option—it was their *only* option.

6.2.2.2 Rediscovering the Paradox of Adventist Identity

For some informants, not being able to be their authentic selves in the Adventist community led either to the rejection of the Adventist identity or to a certain compartmentalization of identities. In the latter cases, the Adventist role/social identity was activated/salient and verified in Adventist settings, while prominent person identities (e.g. the homosexual identity) were more hidden. Being a “good” Adventist revolved around role and social performance, the rewards of which provided them a certain sense of self-competence and self-worth. As we have seen, the informants who rejected their Adventist identity did so, not primarily in a pursuit of self-competence or self-worth, but self-authenticity, seeking to be recognized for their individuality rather than their social role. For the others, remaining implied a certain separation between their personal life and “Adventist” life, some of their most important person identities thus being relatively unaffected and unrelated to their role or social performance in Adventist settings.

The significance of this is that both identity-conflict resolution strategies (rejection and compartmentalization of identities) are premised on an experienced dichotomy/conflict

between being Adventist (“morally acceptable” behavior) and being authentic (genuine behavior). This is a fundamentally paradoxical issue, as Adventist-prototypical meanings—relevant to this case, *heterosexuality* and *truthfulness/authenticity*—imply and affirm potentially contradicting behaviors. In the case of homosexuals in the SDA Church, being a “good” Adventist (i.e. behaving like a heterosexual and being truthful/authentic) is an impossibility, seeing that following the one principle would be breaking the other. An alternative Adventist-prototypical meaning to heterosexuality is the removal of the sexual aspect altogether—celibacy/asexuality—, implying that celibate/asexual behavior is equally “morally acceptable” (and thus “Adventist”) behavior. However, in the case of homosexuality and homosexuals in church, the meaning of celibacy/asexuality has consistently been used as to deny or ignore the inherent and fundamental paradoxes of Adventist/Christian morality (upholding the “ideal” while accepting the “real;” “law” and “grace” etc.), and to obscure the dialectic of morality in issues pertaining to homosexuality/homosexuals at the expense of their social and psychological integrity and health. In accordance with the findings in this study and others, the conventional Adventist/Christian moral meanings have evidently not allowed the healthy and authentic participation of most homosexuals in the Adventist community, nor have they allowed an ascribing of positive value to homosexual community members as contributors to community goals. On the contrary, they have notoriously launched an intense sense of low self-value, anxiety, depression and suicidality as the vast majority of homosexual subjects have, as a consequence of ideological fixations and ungrounded, convergent policies, sought to change their homosexual identity and/or eliminate/repress their sexuality altogether—again, to their own harm.

A general danger of losing the moral dialectic in a community sharing a preoccupation with moral behavior and converging meanings of what is “morally acceptable” is firstly the constraining of the sense of personal authenticity among community members.³ Secondly, certain kinds of personal development (change in person/moral identity meanings through

³ This is not to say that being “impersonal” in social settings cannot be an authentic part of a person’s self-meanings. For individuals whose person identity self-meanings emphasize personal distance, being their personal selves in a more impersonal, “professional” environment can indeed be a rewarding experience, giving rise, ironically, to an increased sense of genuineness and (self-) authenticity on their behalf. However, as the particularity of faith communities such as the SDA Church lies in their appeal to and discourse around the most personal aspects of human life and identity, it safe to assume a certain collective intent and expectation of interpersonal familiarity and openness.

perceptual control) can be hindered, as person/moral identities deviate from the group prototype become deactivated (“hid away”) from fear of identity-verification failure, thus being barred from all input. Community members’ primary reason for engaging in such a social environment might thus be the sole maintenance of one’s sense of self-competence (by recognition of one’s role(s) in the community) and self-worth (by recognition of one’s belonging to the community), while these role and social performances might not reflect their authentic selves. Finally, the danger of losing the moral dialectic in a community with a preoccupation with moral acceptability is uniformity in thinking (perceiving diversity as a threat and becoming exclusive), intolerance, and ultimately injustice/suffering and social conflict, due to convergent, one-sided reasoning.

Returning to the question of how Adventist sensitivity to moral acceptability can be harnessed and used in order to recognize, include and positively value to (i.e. esteem) community members who do not identify with aspects of Adventist prototype or match conventional ideals (in this case, homosexuals) we learn, by analyzing the experiences of the informants of this study within the framework of empowerment theory, that the first step is one of *rediscovery*. It is a rediscovery of the inherent dialectic in Adventist/Christian morality, a rediscovery of the paradoxical truths (“law” and “grace”) on which it is founded, and a shifting of emphasis towards the side that has been ignored and neglected—in this case, shifting the social and/or political emphasis or preoccupation with Adventist behavioral code to Adventist relational values or principles. Just as shifting the emphasis towards other important aspects of Adventist moral/prototypical ideals enabled the informants to recognize their own value as human beings and to come out of self-destructive mindsets and behaviors driven by shame, shifting the moral emphasis in social interactions with conventionally marginalized and unesteemed community members can increase their sense of value and establish a positive, healing relations. This shifting in moral emphasis is guided by a hierarchy of social community values and goals, and the consideration of community goals to which homosexual community members, in power of their individuality, can contribute.

6.2.3 Respecting Homosexuals in Church and Multilateral Control

While cultural paradigms and value systems (by which the “worth” or esteem of personal attributes and modes of life are measured) are changed through informal, interpersonal interaction, the formal, political structures that emerge in social organization constitute an important influence, both as to the estimation and respect of individuals. In answering the question of how Adventist sensitivity to moral acceptability can be used in order to recognize, include and positively relate to (i.e. respect/esteem) non-prototypical community members, the natural and necessary continuation of discovering the moral dialectic and moving the emphasis from Adventist behavioral code to Adventist relational values, includes not only love and the ascribing of positive value, but also respect.

As an aspect of love’s recognition of a person’s autonomy, as well as the validity of their needs and emotions, respect stems from a recognition of a person as an autonomous moral agent with the capacity of forming moral judgments. Legal rights serve as an application of this principle to “the generalized other” in communities of many persons. As the “depersonalized symbols of social respect” (Honneth, 1995, p. 118), legal rights enable a person to respect oneself seeing one deserves the respect of everyone else. Having socially valid rights-claims denied signifies a denial of the subject’s capability of forming moral judgements. This contributes to a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a legally equal interaction partner with all fellow community members.

6.2.3.1 Grounding the Moral Dialectic in Multilateral, Divergent Policy-making

It is evident that the informants in this study experience themselves as being marginalized and more or less shut out (also in a literal sense) from the social and church policies of their local churches. Their experiences testify to feelings of disempowerment, helplessness and anger under a hegemonic paradigm of Adventist identity, both in their personal lives and in relation to other community members. Their strong sense of “within-ness” and of the conventional, one-sided solutions to maintaining Adventist identity and moral integrity, from which they have felt excluded as integrated, gay Adventists, betrays a sensitization on their behalf to an exclusive policy and/or praxis that does not take all community members’ social and psychological well-being into account. (The issue of top-down policy-making was explicitly addressed by a couple of informants during and after the interviews, as well.)

Unilateral thinking, centralizing paradigms and over-generalized, convergent solutions are tendencies with social and community institutions that, based on top-down mapping of social policy, create many social problems as it injuriously precludes/ignores the diversity of community members while propagating a pervasive belief that experts should solve all problems (Rappaport, 1984, pp. 8, 16-17). Rather than empowering people to solve personal and social problems, it extends a sense of alienation and loss of ability to control life among community members. Precisely because of this, empowerment theory calls for a bottom-up rather than a top-down mapping of social policies, in which experts and leaders look to “diverse local settings where people are already handling their own problems in living, in order to learn more about how they do it” (Rappaport, 1984, p. 15). This is done in order to aid community members that are shut out from current solutions in gaining control over their lives by handling their own problems. This mapping process implies the implementation of divergent reasoning and a plurality of divergent, local solutions, which in turn opens up for “a diversity of people with a diversity of experiences who work out the solutions” (Rappaport, 1984, p. 17). This results in divergent, context-specific, and even contradictory solutions that, even so, are anchored within the same dialectic framework of principle truths.

The questions that arise from these principles are: In what ways can the Adventist community in Norway open up for a diversity of people to work out solutions in the issue of homosexuals and healthy identity formation in church? How can the experiences with handling their own problems of identity conflict enlighten and contribute to the social and church political process? How can the rights of having their social and psychological (and spiritual) needs addressed and respected be positively affirmed by the Church, so that they can be understood to be “legal persons” with a sense of self-respect?

I suggest it is through “a sense of urgency” among leaders as well as community members—and particularly homosexual community members as such—and their realization of mutual dependency.

In a study on the reconciliation of Christian heterosexual counselors’ Christian beliefs with LGBT affirmation, Minnix (2018, p. 117-118) deliberates the obstacles to reconciliation between their beliefs and LGBT affirmation and the influential factors aiding the reconciliation of their beliefs with LGBT affirmation. Major obstacles were (1) fear of loss of belonging, and

(2) being taught not to question (and thus betray God). Three major influential factors aiding this reconciliation process were (1) finding a community where it felt safer to question one's religious beliefs and practices, (2) evidence that gender identity and sexual orientation is not a choice (e.g. coming out stories and scientific research), and (3) spiritual practices (prayer, and scripture study) (Minnix, 2018, pp. 118-119). A major factor in postreconciliation (having reconciled one's Christian beliefs with LGBT affirmation) was a person-centered approach to LGBTs, using person-centered language, with "references to empathy, a valuing of diversity, and a commitment to refraining from imposing one's views on others" (Minnix, 2018, p. 119).

Interestingly, nearly all of these findings are reflections of the reconciliation, or conflict resolution, process themes of how the informants themselves found self-acceptance: at first being fearful of losing their social belonging, then finding a safe place where they could question their beliefs (outside of the Adventist community), then realizing that their homosexuality was not a choice, and lastly, most of them employing spiritual practices to reaffirm their religious identities and find peace with God.

Only by understanding how homosexual community members (who at first resented their own homosexuality) solved their own problems and implementing/empowering their voices and insights, can the moral dialect be grounded multilaterally and allow for the mutual empowerment of leaders and lay members of the Adventist community.

6.2.3.2 Occupying Thematic Obstacles to Identity Integration

In similar manner to empowerment theory, *Occupy Religion* (Rieger & Pui-Ian, 2012) problematizes "top-down" and uniformity-enforcing policy-making, describing an emergent, empowering movement of the "99 percent" (the common people) over against the "1 percent" (the policy-making elite). Some of these insights seem particularly relevant to the themes within the findings of this study, including social "within-ness," moral acceptability, silence/avoidance around homosexuality, and hegemonic Adventist identity, and underpins the normative points of empowerment theory.

The concept of "occupy religion" invites us to rethink the nature, purpose, and functions of theology, which means God-talk. For too long, theology has been conceived as a reflection of faith for the internal consumption of religious communities, and as a highly specialized discipline with very abstruse language in the academy. We believe that theology should be done in the public square more intentionally,

promoting conversations and stimulating debates for the welfare of the people (Rieger & Pui-Ian, 2012, Chapter 1, “Why Occupy Religion?”, para. 12-13).

This is a challenge to the obstacle of “within-ness,” by which the informants’ process of coming to terms with themselves and other community members as homosexual has been painfully difficult. How can the policy-forming, interactional processes governing the socio-psychological welfare of community members and shaping community culture be opened to include the interests and well-being of “outsiders” or those on the margins of “within”?

“Occupy religion” does not imply the use of force in taking over religious and institutions. Rather, it “indicates the conceptualization of a democratic and participatory space for religious life (...) and active engagement” (Rieger & Pui-Ian, 2012, Chapter 1, “Why Occupy Religion?”, para. 13). Challenging the boundaries between elites and masses, it aims to “demystify and debunk religious doctrines and social teachings that provide both religious sanction and justification for (...) social inequality” through critiquing “religious institutions and structures that silence, discriminate, and marginalize people because of class, race, gender, and sexuality and thus hand the power to the 1 percent” (Rieger & Pui-Ian, 2012, Chapter 1, “Why Occupy Religion?”, para. 13).

How can the core Adventist beliefs and ideals and the sensitivity to the morally acceptable be sustained without suppressing, silencing or marginalizing community members who do not identify with all aspects of Adventist prototypes? How can the all-encompassing aspects of Adventist social identity accommodate personal authenticity and admit the verification of other identities that are not in direct agreement with conventional Adventist meanings and ideals?

I argue that answers to these questions can be found in “a sense of urgency” among community members, and through the collective reframing of theological and political professionalism and into a social movement.

The unity of the 1 percent might be described in terms of uniformity. It is the uniformity of economic theory (...), the uniformity of politics (...), and the uniformity of religion (like the idea of God as unilaterally controlling top-down power). (...) The unity of the 99 percent, by contrast, can only be unity in diversity. (...) [I]n terms of religion, it is (...) a reversal and broadening of power, which moves from the bottom up, so that all can participate in the production of life. The traditions of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible and of Jesus in the Gospels exemplify (...) such a reversal and broadening of power.

Solidarity in this context is not the support of people who are exactly like oneself but rather what we are calling deep solidarity. Solidarity is the support of others who are different yet experience similar predicaments (Rieger & Pui-Ian, 2012, Chapter 2, “What are the alternatives?”, para. 10).

7 GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary

My research has explored the ways in which gays and lesbians raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway have come to understand themselves in light of their religious upbringing and their homosexual identity. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews, I have been able to use the shared experiences of ten homosexual informants raised in the Church in order to explore how their social ties and religious affiliation affected their identity formation process. Based on a four-path model for conflict resolution strategies, I have discussed how the strategies employed by the informants to resolve an experienced identity conflict can be understood in terms of identity theory, focusing on the emerging themes in the interviews.

Four salient themes have been discovered in the analysis of the data: (1) “*within-ness*,” (2) *moral acceptability*, (3) *silence/avoidance* around homosexuality, and (4) the importance of the *parental role*. My thesis suggests an experienced notion of a hegemonic Adventist identity. Governing most aspects of their social and psychological life, most of the informants make strenuous efforts to reject/suppress their homosexual identity. After increasing amounts of distress, most end up either rejecting their Adventist identity or seeking to integrate their homosexual and Adventist identities.

Using insights from Rappaport’s empowerment theory and Honneth’s theory of recognition, I discussed some of the normative implications of the findings for positive/healthy identity formation among homosexuals in the Adventist community. I conclude that while growing up in the SDA Church in Norway has proven difficult and as contributed to a significant amount of stress and mental unhealthy for gays and lesbians, the emergent themes in Adventist experience can be reframed as to create a safe place for gay and lesbian community members in which they can receive all three forms of recognition necessary for the development of a positive relation-to-self.

7.2 Research Findings in Response to Research Questions

The main question of my thesis has been:

How do gays and lesbians raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway socio-psychologically negotiate their religious, sexual and social identities?

The research sub-questions have been:

- i) To what extent and in what terms do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians experience a tension between their socio-religious identity and sexual orientation?
- ii) How is the tension typically resolved (if any)?
- iii) To what extent do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians participate and/or feel included and a part of the church community? How do they relate to the wider Adventist community?
- iv) What motivates/demotivates Adventist-raised gays and lesbians to be/from being a part of the Adventist community?
- v) How do Adventist-raised gays and lesbians relate to the Adventist faith, Christianity and religion as a whole, and how has this changed over the years?

The main research question is answered in light of the following research sub-question answers.

Firstly, beginning with the research sub-questions, nearly all of the participants experienced an early conflict between their homosexual orientation and Adventist identity to the extent where it for many gave rise to an identity crisis, resulting in increasing amounts of anxiety and depression. This conflict affected all aspects of their lives.

Secondly, the related experiences of the ten participants in this study suggest that, after a prolonged time of suppression and attempting to change or get rid of their homosexuality, they either reject their Adventist identity (in varying “degrees,” from identifying as Christian to not religious at all) or attempt to integrate their Adventist and homosexual identity.

Thirdly, the majority of participants chose to leave the Church for different reasons. While some no longer believed in the Church doctrines, others left for feeling unjustly treated and out of a sense of partiality. Some, again, are still active in church, appreciating the sense of community, while yet feeling a certain tension around the issue of being gay in church. Leaving (Church also meant leaving the Adventist community.)

Fourthly, the attitudes around homosexuality are a major issue for those distancing themselves from the Adventist community, feeling that the silence/avoidance of the topic in church is an indication of non-acceptance, as well as the issue of partiality. For those remaining in church, the sense of community and belonging are important factors for choosing to stay.

Fifthly, the participants in this study all identified as Christian/Adventist, more or less, up until the teenage years when they began to experience various forms of internal struggle. Although not being directly associated with the coming out as gay/lesbian afterward, a couple of participants rejected their Christian identity. A couple of participants identify now as Christian rather than Adventist, while about half of the participants still identify as Adventist (and gay), entailing a personal belief in God and in that God accepts them as they are.

7.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Unfortunately, a limitation of time has been a setback in the completion of this research project. This has been due to the relatively late commencement, following an extensive time of waiting for the approval of the NSD application, in combination with my personal working schedule the last academic year.

This means that I have not had the chance to delve as deeply into the analysis and discussion around the findings as I had hoped for. The unique setting of Scandinavian/Norwegian cultural and political framework (as contrasted to that of North America, for instance) serves as fruitful ground for further studies as to the issues pertaining to gender, sexuality and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, also comparatively.

Another suggestion for further research is the study on the sense of compartmentalization/integration as reported by research participants operating in different cultural frameworks. What struck me during the interview process was the sense of self-integration among some participants that seemed out of congruence with their related experiences. This made me aware of how cultural reference might affect the meanings of identity compartmentalization and identity integration.

The increased differentiation of secular society, including the privatization of religion, might suggest that the “integrated” lifestyle of research participants in a modern, secular society might correspond to a compartmentalization in another less secular society.

This might also be transferable to the lifestyle of homosexuals reared in conservative religious communities (having accustomed to “hiding” aspects of themselves so as to not offend) and heterosexuals. Such a comparative study might critically engage with a potential (yet not surprising) weakness of the four-path model for determining whether individuals are integrated or compartmentalized.

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9 ATTACHMENTS

9.1 Attachment no. 1: Interview Guide (English)

Personal information

- Tell me about yourself: Who are you? What is your occupation? What are your interests? What are your plans for the future?
- Do you have a family? Are you single? In a relationship? Married?
- What do you identify as spiritually/religiously?
- What do you identify as sexually?

Upbringing and internal identity formation

- Have you always thought of yourself in this way?
- How did you arrive at your present understanding of yourself in terms of identity?
Would you share a bit about the process?
 - What kind of relationship did you have to Adventism in your upbringing? Did you identify yourself as Adventist?
 - How would you describe the faith of your parents (before you came out of the closet)? Conservative, moderate, liberal? What kind of attitudes did they have towards homosexuality? What about your friends and acquaintances in church?
 - Did their faith/opinions affect you at that point?
 - When did you realize that you were not like everybody else? What were your thoughts when you realize that you were queer? What did you feel?
 - Did/do you experience any form of identity crisis or internal conflict between your sexuality and your own or your parents'/friends'/acquaintances' beliefs? If yes, why/how? Or, why not?
 - If yes, could you share about how you experience(d) this crises or conflict?
 - Did it in any way affect you physically, psychologically or spiritually?
 - What kind of feelings have/do you had/have?
 - Do you want to share how you handle/handled the crisis or internal conflict?
 - Have you made any efforts to unite Adventism and your sexuality?
How and why, if that is the case?

- Have you made any efforts to “pray the gay away”—that is, suppress and/or change your sexuality? If yes, how and why?
- Have you made any efforts to change your beliefs—that is, to repress or reject your religious convictions? If yes, how and why?
- Did you in any way live out your sexuality in secret (in a relationship, sexual experimentation, kissing)? How and why? Were you open about this with anyone?
- If you have not attempted to resolve your internal conflict, why not?

Further development after openness about sexual orientation

- Would you share a bit about how you came out of the closet (if you are out), what happened?
 - How did you experience it? Did you come out to all at once?
 - How did your parents and your closest circle react when you came out? Did their reactions affect you? How?

Present understanding of own identity and the current process

- How do you feel thinking back on these things?
- Do you currently experience any form of internal conflict / identity conflict? Would you say that this conflict is resolved? If yes, how?
- What about your current relationship to your parents, other Adventists and the Church? How would you describe it?
 - Do you experience that the attitudes of your parents or other Adventists in your social circle have changed after you came out of the closet?
 - Are you currently active in church?
- What about your general relationship to religion? And your relationship to your sexual orientation?
- Do you think you would be an Adventist today if you had not felt any conflict / had resolved the conflict in a different way? If so, why?
 - Does faith/spirituality (or a faith community) that affirms your sexual orientation interest you?

- Looking back at this process, what do you experience as being the most important cause for the emergence of conflict? What about the main reason for its resolution?

9.2 Attachment no. 2: Interview Guide (Norwegian)

Personlig informasjon

- Fortell litt om deg selv: Hvem er du? Hva gjør du til vanlig? Hva interesserer du deg i? Hva er planene dine for fremtiden?
- Har du familie? Enslig? Kjæreste? Gift?
- Hva identifiserer du deg som mht. til livssyn?
- Hva identifiserer du deg som mht. seksuell legning?

Oppvekst og intern identitetsforming

- Har du alltid tenkt sånn om deg selv?
- Hvordan har du kommet frem til identitetsforståelsen du har av deg selv nå? Vil du fortelle litt om den prosessen?
 - Hva slags forhold hadde du til adventismen i oppveksten? Identifiserte du deg som adventist?
 - Hvordan vil du beskrive troen til foreldrene dine (før du kom ut av skapet)? Konservativ, moderat, liberal? Hvilke holdninger hadde de til homofili? Hva med venner og bekjente i kirken?
 - Påvirket troen/meningene deres deg på daværende tidspunkt?
 - Når gikk det opp for deg at du ikke var som alle andre? Hva tenkte du da du innså at du var skeiv? Hva følte du?
 - Opplevde/oplever du noen som helst form for identitetskrise eller intern konflikt mellom din seksualitet og din eller foreldrene dine/venner/bekjente sin tro? I så fall hvorfor/hvordan? Eller, hvorfor ikke?
 - Hvis ja, vil du fortelle om hvordan du opplever/opplevde denne krisen eller interne konflikten?
 - Påvirker/påvirket den deg på noen som helst måte fysiske, psykisk eller åndelig?
 - Hva slags følelser har du kjent på/kjenner du på?
 - Vil du fortelle om hvordan du håndterer/håndterte krisen eller interne konflikten?

- Har du gjort forsøk på å forene adventisme og legningen din? Hvordan og hvorfor, i så fall?
- Har du gjort forsøk på å «pray the gay away» – altså, å undertrykke og/eller endre din seksualitet? Hvis ja, hvordan og hvorfor?
- Har du gjort forsøk på å endre tro – altså, å undertrykke eller oppgi din tro eller religiøse overbevisning? Hvis ja, hvordan og hvorfor?
- Levde du ut seksualiteten din i skjul på noen måte (kjæreste/seksuell eksperimentering/kyssing)? Hvordan og hvorfor? Var du åpen om dette til noen?
- Om du ikke har gjort forsøk på å lette konflikten inni deg, hvorfor ikke?

Videre utvikling etter åpenhet om legning

- Vil du fortelle litt om hvordan kom du ut av skapet (hvis du er ute), hva som skjedde?
 - Hvordan opplevdes det? Kom du ut til alle på én gang?
 - Hvordan reagerte foreldre og dine nærmeste da du kom ut? Påvirket deres reaksjoner deg? Hvordan?

Identitetsforståelsen og prosessen i dag

- Hvordan oppleves det nå når du tenker tilbake på disse tingene?
- Opplever du noen som helst form for intern konflikt / identitetskonflikt i dag? Vil du si at denne konflikten er løst? Hvordan, i så fall?
- Hva med forholdet ditt til foreldre, andre adventister og kirken i dag? Hvordan vil du beskrive det?
 - Opplever du at holdningene til foreldrene dine eller andre adventister i din omgangskrets har endret seg etter du kom ut av skapet?
 - Er du aktiv i kirken i dag?
- Hva med forholdet ditt til religion generelt? Og forholdet ditt til legningen din?
- Hadde du vært adventist i dag om du ikke hadde opplevd noen konflikt / fått løst konflikten annerledes, tror du? I så fall hvorfor?

- Interesserer tro/åndelighet/spiritualitet (evt. åndelig fellesskap) som anerkjenner din seksuelle legning deg?
- Når du ser tilbake på denne prosessen, hva opplever du som den viktigste årsaken til at konflikten oppstod? Hva med hovedårsaken til at den ble løst?

9.3 Attachment no. 3: Letter of Confidentiality

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet: «Mellom sex og sabbat: Identitetsutvikling hos skeive oppvokst i Adventistkirken»?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvordan skeive oppvokst i adventisthjem i Norge bearbeider identitetskonflikten som kan oppstå mellom tro/tilhørighet og legning. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Mye sosiologisk forskning har blitt gjort på skeives psyko-sosiale oppvekstforhold, deres opplevelser og identitetsutvikling i diverse religiøse miljøer. Lite tilsvarende forskning har blitt gjort på skeive med adventistbakgrunn, imidlertid.

Dette prosjektet har som formål å belyse temaet homofili, religion og identitet fra et psyko-sosialt perspektiv med adventismen som kontekst. Dette innebærer et samarbeid mellom studenten og et utvalg av skeive personer med adventistbakgrunn som er villige til å dele sine opplevelser gjennom et dybdeintervju. Dataen som samles inn skal brukes utelukkende til dette prosjektets formål.

Prosjektet er en del av masteroppgaven til student _____ i masterprogrammet Religion, Society and Global Issues (RSGI) ved MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole i Oslo.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Til dette prosjektet søkes personer som opplever en seksuell tiltrekning til personer av samme kjønn, enten man identifiserer seg som skeiv (homofil, lesbisk, bifil osv.) eller ikke. Jeg søker personer i mitt eget nettverk som har vokst opp i et praktiserende adventisthjem. En trenger ikke å ha noen tilknytning til kirken i dag for å delta i forskningsprosjektet.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Informasjonen som trengs til dette prosjektet vil samles inn gjennom dybdeintervjuer på tomannshånd med studenten. Hvis du velger å delta, innebærer det at du stiller til et

dybdeintervju på forhåndsavtalt tidspunkt. Intervjuet vil gjennomføres på mellom 45 minutter til én time og vil tas opp på lydopptak. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om dine erfaringer og opplevelser med det å finne og forme din identitet – stikkord er oppvekst, identitetskonflikt, legning, kirken, tro, relasjoner og tilhørighet. Jeg stiller opp med en liste med noen forberedte, åpne spørsmål og tema (jeg bruker halvstrukturerte intervjuer). Du vil ha mulighet for å styre samtalen dit du føler for, og fortelle det du opplever som viktig angående disse temaene.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun studenten som behandler og har tilgang til opplysningene som oppgis gjennom intervjuene.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med pseudonymer og en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data.
- Du vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes ut ifra noen av de opplysningene som til slutt blir publisert.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 30. november 2019. Innen da skal alle personopplysninger og opptak være anonymisert og ikke-identifiserbare.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,

- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole, har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- MF Vitenskapelig Høyskole ved Sturla Stålsett (e-post: sturla.stalsett@mf.no).
- Vårt personvernombud: Berit W. Hillestad (e-post: berit.w.hillestad@mf.no).
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på e-post (personvernombudet@nsd.no) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig: _____ Student: _____
(Forsker/veileder)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Mellom sex og sabbat: Identitetsutvikling hos skeive oppvokst i Adventistkirken», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i dybdeintervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, 30. november 2019.

Signatur:

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

9.4 Attachment no. 4: Letter of Approval from NSD

Prosjekttittel

Identitet og selvforståelse hos skeive med bakgrunn eller tilhørighet i Adventistkirken

Referansenummer

662179

Registrert

15.11.2018 av [student].

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

MF vitenskapelig høyskole for teologi, religion og samfunn

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Sturla Stålsett, sturla.stalsett@mf.no, tlf: [...]

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

[...]

Prosjektperiode

01.11.2018 - 30.11.2019

Status

15.01.2019 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

15.01.2019 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 15.01.2019 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD ENDRINGER

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om religion og seksuell orientering og alminnelige personopplysninger frem til 30.11.2019.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Kajsa Amundsen

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

9.5 Attachment no. 5: Citations from Interviews (Norwegian)

¹ Det var aldri noen som snakket om homofili da jeg vokste opp, det var aldri noen som nevnte ordet. Det var aldri noen som sa det var galt. Men det var på en måte – det lå i hele systemet at det ikke var alternativet (Hanna).

² Homofili tror jeg var et tema som ikke var diskutert hjemme whatsoever. Altså, det var et ikke-tema. (...) Jeg opplevde det ikke som et tabu, bare sånn at det var et ikke-tema (Kim).

³ Jeg hørte aldri noe om hvorfor. Jeg var, liksom ... ingenting. Det var først mange år etterpå når jeg da liksom kom ut av skapet selv at jeg skjønnte at han var homo. (...) For meg – det på en måte sa noe om hvor akseptert det var, det at det ble, liksom – den historien var det lagt lokk på. Det var bare en nikkesak (Kim).

⁴ Jeg lider veldig av det at jeg har aldri hørt om noe i mitt liv til jeg blir påpekt det, og så vet jeg om det. For eksempel, hvis noen bruker et ord jeg ikke har [lært], så [tenker jeg] jeg aldri [har] hørt det før, men så kan jeg høre det femten ganger dagen etterpå. (...) Jeg er veldig oblivious til det jeg ikke har tatt stilling til (Mathias).

⁵ Jeg husker det var liksom av og til at folk liksom skulle gjette hvem som var homo rundt forbi av lærere og forskjellige folk, ikke sant? Og jeg synes alltid den leken var litt ubehagelig, for jeg tenkte sånn der: Hva hvis noen sier mitt navn i en sånn setting en annen gang? (...) Men jeg hadde ganske, sånn, stort ubehag knyttet til det (Hanna).

⁶ Jeg husker at jeg tenkte: «Hvis jeg var gutt, så skulle jeg ønske at hun var kjæresten min.» Også tenkte jeg: «Nei, men jeg kommer aldri til å bli en gutt.» Så det var liksom sånn. (...) Det gikk ikke opp for meg at det var en mulighet, hvis du skjønner? Så var det sånn, jeg ville komme så nært henne som mulig: «Okay, jeg skulle ønske at hun var søsteren min!» (Nina)

⁷ Jeg møtte stor forståelse, aksept, og på en måte en forventning om at dette skulle på en måte gå bra. Men, så var det liksom that's it og. (...) Jeg har vært på nippet til ... (...) «Om dette flyet faller ned, så er det helt greit.» Det har jeg tenkt hundre ganger. (...) Men jeg er utrolig glad for at [familie og venner] tok det så bra som de gjorde da, og pastorene. Men, det ble veldig fort et vakuum. Og det er jo det som jeg synes er så rart, at ikke de tok dette mer alvorlig. At ikke du kunne vise mer omsorg, mer inkludererhet [sic], spørre hvordan det går, i og med at dette er så livsgjennomgripende, da. (...) Fra pastorer som du på en måte har sett opp til i så mange år! I stedet for så blir det stillhet, avstand, og fortsatt noe som de ikke vil snakke om (Niklas).

⁸ Det var liksom: (...) «Hvorfor plager det deg så mye, liksom. Hva er problemet?» Og hver gang de gjorde sånn så gikk jeg alltid ut av rommet. Til og med fra ung alder, hver gang de begynte med det

argh-greiene. (...) [Jeg var] ikke sint, det var bare ukomfortabelt å sitte der og høre på sakene. Det var veldig ukomfortabelt (Amanda).

⁹ Jeg kan ikke vite dette, for dette er jo på en måte tilbake i tid – men jeg har på en måte en følelse at hvis jeg hadde vært i en annen setting, så jeg hadde jeg tilgang til denne informasjonen om meg selv mye før. Men at i de rammene, så søkte jeg aldri etter de svarene, da. Og jeg har på en måte aktivt ikke søkt etter de svarene opp igjennom (Hanna).

¹⁰ Ja, altså – når jeg skal se på meg selv tilbake i tid, så ja, definitivt. Men (...) jeg hadde ikke en så aktiv tankegang [rundt det] (Hanna).

¹¹ Nei, jeg reflekterte ikke nok over det, da, for å si det sånn. Fordi at – jeg kan jo kanskje nå se at jeg var litt redd med tanke på dersom det skulle være et sånt avvik hos meg, så var ikke det noe som jeg i hvert fall ville snakke med noen om (Niklas).

¹² Jo, jeg tror jeg husker at vi – på skolen så var [det noen som sa] at i tenårene så kunne det være vanlig at man kunne føle noe tiltrekning mot begge kjønn – og at det var normalt, at det kunne skje. (...) Min tolkning gjennom det var jo at, okay – dersom man hadde noen sånne følelser, så var noe alle hadde. Det var ikke fordi du var homofil at du eventuelt hadde noe trekning mot gutter. At alle hadde det. At dette var helt normalt, men at man likevel valgte, da, det motsatte kjønn for det var sånn det var, og, på en måte, alle var egentlig heterofile, da. (...) Jeg vil ikke si at det ikke var en [indre] konflikt. Men i den grad det var en konflikt, så var ikke den stor. Den var ikke livsovergripende. Min konklusjon var at dersom det i det hele tatt var noen følelser for det samme kjønn, så var det vanlig, for å si det sånn (Niklas).

¹³ Da ble det mer en kamp, en konflikt, hvor jeg jobbet med meg selv på en måte: «Okay, skal jeg være den alle tror jeg er, eller skal jeg være den jeg er?» (Niklas)

¹⁴ Det var ingen homofile forbilder. Det var ingen rollemodeller å assosiere seg med. I den grad det var det, så var de veldig unormale. Ikke sant? Du så bilder fra noen Pride-parader (...), og da var det jo helt andre ting enn hva jeg sto for, i hvert fall. (...) Det var jo egentlig en bekreftelse på at: «Jammen, da er jo ikke jeg homofil heller» (Niklas).

¹⁵ Nei, det var jo en slags sånn der (...) avoidance-greie. Sant? «Jeg skal ikke fortsette med å være interessert i menn» og sånn. Sånn at, nå går vi all in for å liksom tvinge meg selv til å bli faithful, og det, ja, kun handler om damer og, liksom ... «Jeg skal klare å leve dette her heterofile livet jeg har på en måte sagt jeg skal gjøre.» (...) Så, det er (...) en slags måte å binde seg selv til masten på (Kim).

¹⁶ Så var det ingen der som ville forsvare homofile heller – enten mente de det var galt, eller så var de likegyldige, ikke sant? Det var bare jeg som satt der og (gisp)! (Mathias)

¹⁷ Det var jo et stadig fokus på at hvis jeg ikke sa det, så var det ikke sant. Hvis jeg ikke anerkjente det selv, så kunne jeg bli kvitt det. Og hvis sa det til noen, så bekreftet jeg det. (...) Så var det det her store fokuset på å aldri la seg røpe, for hvis (...) hvis noen¹³¹ buster meg, ser reaksjonen min, skjønner at det er

noe, begynner å grave, (...) så vil jo det tvinge en bekreftelse ut av meg, og (...) da kunne jeg ikke gjøre noe imot det. Så, det var liksom en beinhard maske, trykke det ned og så be til Gud hver dag om å bli frisk (Mathias).

¹⁸ Og så når det [å fjerne tiltrekningen til menn fra min seksualitet] ikke gikk, så var jeg, sånn: «Okay, fortreg din seksualitet.» Og da når vi fram til når jeg begynte på videregående. (...) Jeg ba hver kveld at Gud måtte enten gjøre meg frisk eller drepe meg før jeg ble homofil. Fordi hvis Gud sørget for at jeg ble påkjørt av en buss, så ... Jeg kan jo ikke ta selvmord, for da dreper jeg jo meg selv og det er jo galt. Men hvis Gud sender en buss som kan kjøre på meg før jeg gjør noe med en mann, så har jeg jo ikke gjort noe galt. Så, det var da: «Enten gjør meg frisk Gud eller så må du drepe meg, for jeg kommer ikke til å drepe meg selv. Og jeg har ikke lyst til å bli homofil» (Mathias).

¹⁹ Når vi snakket om homofili i sabbatsskolen med meg og pappa, (...) så synes jeg litt synd på de homofile, stakkars. «Men pappa, kan vi ikke ... Hva hvis man er homo, da?» (...) Og da sa han: «Jammen, hvis man er homo, så skal man bare be til Gud, og så fikser han deg.» Det var liksom en lett løsning, så den husket jeg jo, så jeg drev jo og ba. «Phew, nå blir du fiksa!» (Emma)

²⁰ Jeg vet ikke om det var for [å gjøre] meg selv heterofil. (...) Det var egentlig mest for å straffe meg selv, for jeg likte jo ikke det. Det var ikke noe som jeg nøt i det hele tatt. Men jeg gjorde det om og om igjen. Så, jeg tror det var mest for på en måte å straffe meg selv. Dette her er det du fortjener. (...) Det er det du kommer til å leve med resten av livet ditt. Så, det var mest for på en måte å straffe meg selv (Amanda).

²¹ Jeg glemmer aldri, hun bare: «Det er feil, det er en synd! Hun kommer til å brenne i helvete! Sånn er det ikke sånn Gud har skapt oss!» Og etter det, så husker jeg at jeg ble sånn: «Dette er feil. Sånn kan ikke jeg være.» (...) Så ble jeg redd for hva ... hvis de skulle få vite noe, da. At jeg kommer til å miste familien. (...) Jeg slettet [kontoen min på] Gaysir, jeg slettet alt og bare ... Det var, sånn: «Dette er feil. Dette skal ikke jeg leve. Det er ikke Guds vei. (...) Jeg må gjøre familien min lykkelig.» (...) Men jeg fikk aldri meg jentekjæreste eller noe sånt. Jeg bare bestemte meg for å ikke act on it, da. (...) [Etter seks måneder] hadde jeg undertrykt meg selv så lenge at det begynte å – folk sa jeg var ikke meg selv. Jeg var negativ, sur, grinete ... Ikke hadde det noe bra med meg selv, fordi jeg bare ikke ... Jeg byttet helt personlighet, da (Nathaniel).

²² Egentlig var det bare litt sånn vittig. Det var ingen panikkfølelse av noe som helst slag, men mer en sånn en artig variasjon av hva dette livet har å by på. (...) Jeg var jo som sagt gift og hadde ingen behov for å agere på det på noen som helst måte, men mer en sånn en oppdagelse i seg selv (Elsa).

²³ Jeg herjet med unger og klatret og konkurrerte, det var liksom ... Så sånn var vår oppvekst kanskje litt utypisk, også at vi veldig frie, vi hadde lite fordommer eller lite sånn ... Veldig åpent syn på mennesker, vokste vi opp med. (...) Men jeg hadde en veldig stor begeistring for damer. Jeg hadde veldig mange som jeg likte, sånn intenst likte. Men jeg trodde aldri selv at det hadde noe med legning å

gjøre, jeg hadde ikke noe å henge det på. (...) Så så jeg jo [da jeg ble forelsket i en dame] det at det har ligget der hele tiden. Men jeg har nok ikke hatt noe sammenlikningsgrunnlag – det var ikke et tema. (...) Jeg er ikke av de som vokste opp og har hatt en lengsel i meg som barn og bare ikke turte å få den frem. Jeg har bare ikke kjent før (Elsa).

²⁴ Nei, altså, før jeg fortalte det hjemme var jeg livredd, for jeg trodde jo at de kom til å kaste meg ut. Det var på en måte – i mitt hode var det sånn krisemaksimering. Så, jeg turte jo ikke å fortelle det hjemme uten at jeg hadde en backup-plan. Det måtte finnes en backup-plan – hvis det skjer noe, så kunne jeg ta tingene mine og så reise til noen andre. Så, den backup-planen eksisterte (Kim).

²⁵ Men det er jo nettopp på grunn av det ... Det sterke gudsbildet, for så vidt og med [sabbats-]dag og hva du skal være og ikke være, og familien min, (...) hele kristen- og adventist-Norge, og (...) [alt] jeg hadde bygd opp (...) som jeg var livredd for skulle rakne. Så jeg hadde tusen argumenter for å være i skapet! (...) Jeg ville fortsatt akkurat det samme som jeg var, jeg. Det var noen venner hos meg som fortalte når jeg kom ut for de – jeg tok for meg en og en person – en av personene så veldig klart: «Å ja, men nå, Niklas, så kommer du til å finne et annet miljø, andre venner, du kommer til å bli en annen person!» Jeg bare: «Hæ? Hva er det du sier for noe?» (...) Jeg hadde ikke behov for nye venner, jeg hadde ikke behov for nytt miljø, jeg ville være akkurat det samme som jeg var! (Niklas)

²⁶ Så sier jeg: «Du hører det at det er noe viktig jeg må snakke med deg om ...» Og så ser hun mot meg og så sier hun: «Har du gjort noen gravid?» Og jeg sier: «Hæ, nei! Det har jeg ikke!» Og mamma, bare: «(Gisp) Da er du homofil?» (...) Jeg husker at jeg var livredd – jeg har litt trust issues, så jeg tenkte liksom at: «Det kan godt hende at jeg nå har mistet moren min selv om hun sier hun er glad i meg til meg her og nå.» (...) Og så hun jo, når hun skulle dra, at hun synes det var koselig at jeg var homofil fordi homofile menn er alltid så glad i mødrene sine. (...) Jeg husker at det var den [kommentaren] som satt litt sånn, bare: «Okay, dette har hun ... Dette er greit» (Mathias).

²⁷ Pappa har aldri sagt noe til meg, men han har alltid gitt uttrykk for til de som jeg har vært sammen med, så har han gjerne hatt samtaler med dem, da, om sånn: «Du er en fantastisk person, jeg respekterer deg, jeg liker deg som menneske. Men jeg mener at du skader datteren min.» Så, det var mange sånne samtaler som var vanskelig å forholde seg til. (...) Han kunne si til [eksen min], sånn: «Ja, nei, jeg liker ikke at du er sammen med datteren min», men allikevel så kjøper hun seg ny leilighet her og han tar toget (...) for å legge nytt gulv og male veggene hennes (Nina).

²⁸ Det var rundt når jeg gjorde det slutt med min første kjæreste. For da tror jeg hun så hvor kjærlighetssorg jeg hadde, hvor vanskelig jeg hadde det med det bruddet. Og at hun da: «Okay, det er på en måte ekte, det er ikke en fase. (...) Sånn som dette kommer det til å være og jeg elsker datteren min uansett» (Nina).

²⁹ Noen ganger så tror jeg at det er egentlig at hvis jeg bare flytter unna, bare kommer meg vekk fra det (...) og på en måte bare lever livet mitt. (...) Og jeg har et så veldig godt forhold med alle søsknene

mine. Og det å på en måte flytte fra dem er jo et problem også. Jeg vil ikke bo langt unna dem heller. Så, for meg så tror jeg helt ærlig, så tror jeg [det er] å bare flytte og på en måte bare starte et eget liv uten foreldrene. (...) Jeg føler ikke at jeg er klar til å fortelle dem engang. For jeg føler ikke at de er klar for å høre på meg (Amanda).

³⁰ Jeg kommer aldri til å kunne si det til foreldrene mine. (...) Det er vi alle enige om. Det sa jo søsteren min også, og småsøsknene mine – vi var bare, sånn: «Det er ikke noe de trenger å vite. De kommer aldri til å forstå det. Og det er ikke vits i å lage mer drama enn nødvendig.» (...) Hvis de hadde funnet det kanskje i 2014, så tror jeg kanskje de hadde, sånn: «Deg vil vi ikke ha noe med å gjøre lenger.» Men nå, så har det skjedd ganske mye i familien min. De har vokst litt – de har møtt litt utfordringer med det å bo i Norge, og de forskjellige synspunktene vi har her. (...) Jeg tror ikke de hadde brutt kontakt hvis jeg hadde sagt nei. Men de hadde blitt – de hadde kanskje tatt litt mer avstand (Nathaniel).

³¹ [Mine stesøsken] har ikke noe forbindelse til verken kristendom eller adventisme. Så, for dem var det selvfølgelig ikke noe problem. Min mor og stemor har også et liberalt utgangspunkt. Så, det er mer den originale farsside, adventistrotten som det ikke er helt ... som det er et åpent sår med enda. (...) Det var ikke snakk om at han ikke var glad i meg på noen måte, eller noen utstøting. Bekreftet at det ikke var aktuelt på noen måte. (...) Og så tenkte jeg da først at det egentlig er ganske fint – men så har jeg blitt fortalt etterpå at han – det var en sjokkopplevelse for ham. Og så har vi snakket et begrenset antall ganger siden. Men det har vært litt mer hete diskusjoner. Så, jeg opplever fortsatt ikke aksept fra dem i familien min som fortsatt har tilknytning til Adventistsamfunnet (Sebastian).

³² Det kommer an på hva man sammenlikner det med, ikke sant, fordi – i adventistsammenheng, så det gikk jo greit. Det var ingen som dømte meg nord og ned og sendte meg på rehab, på en måte. Men det var også veldig, sånn, nytt og ukjent territorium for dem, sånn jeg opplevde det. (...) Altså, det var bare: «Ja, sånn er det jo», på en måte. (...) Altså, i en ideell verden så skulle jeg helst ha hatt noen rundt meg som sa at dette var greit, da. (...) Jeg følte ikke at jeg liksom kunne bruke tid på å snakke om det eller ... Det var liksom bare en informasjonssamtale, og så var det det (Hanna).

³³ Vi satt og diskuterte, mer eller mindre, i to år før det liksom – før jeg sa at nå er det greit. Nå orker jeg ikke mer. (...) De skjønnte ikke den ... Det var en ganske sånn brå vending. For jeg var jo på en måte en sånn der, ganske sånn, normal datter i adventistsammenheng, og så (...) plutselig var det andre ting, da. (...) Men jeg opplever at de har slitt med teologien, da – at det er det som er vanskelig for dem, og fortsatt. Men ikke skam eller sånne type ting. Det har jeg ikke opplevd. Men at de sliter med en sånn teologisk nøtt, da, som de ikke klarer å løse (Hanna).

³⁴ Men vi var også veldig gode venner, (...) jeg hadde på en måte forventet at – jeg tror jeg var så naiv at jeg trodde at han skulle si: «Elsa, dette skal vi finne ut av.» (...) Jeg spurte: «Men jeg trenger råd i forhold til [familien min], at ikke det skal bli tungvint for de å være i kirken og skape aggresjon og sånn

– hva skal vi gjøre?» «Nei, det letteste er jo om du melder deg ut», sa han. (...) Jeg hadde jo i mitt naive sinn tenkt at han skulle si: «Dette skal vi finne ut av», ikke: «Du skal melde deg ut!» (Elsa)

³⁵ Det jeg tenker det er at menigheten har egentlig ikke håndtert dette, menighetsmessig. Det er jeg som har håndtert det. Og jeg har måttet bære det, og fordi jeg klarer å bære det, så orker jeg å forholde meg til menigheten ennå (Elsa).

³⁶ Det er ingen som hjelper meg å forstå – er det greit at jeg er homofil og er her? Eller er det bare det at: «Elsa er her, snart så går det kanskje over, og så har vi klart å bevare henne – hun er her fortsatt», ikke sant? (...) Jeg [vet] ikke, ikke sant, for det er ingen som sier noe. Så jeg kan gjette, eller jeg kan la være å tenke det, tenke at: «Ja, folk er vennlige og hyggelig og ønsker å ha meg her» (Elsa).

³⁷ De har bare begynt å oppføre seg hyggelig, de har ikke endret ståsted. Så, det ligger jo der som en sånn underliggende greie som ikke blir snakket om, da. Som jeg kanskje tenker at – nå har jeg hatt en pause i noen år, men kanskje jeg må ta tak igjen, da. (...) Jeg opplever at de har blitt mer åpne i ... Men jeg vet ikke hvor det stopper, på en måte. Jeg har ikke villet spørre, fordi jeg trengte på en måte en pause fra sånn type input (Hanna).

³⁸ Jeg tror det er på grunn av foreldrene mine. Jeg kommer alltid tilbake til dem. Jeg husker de kommentarene de hadde, bare ansiktsblikket deres ... Jeg hadde det liksom i tankene. Jeg hadde det i hodet (Amanda).

³⁹ [Min nære slektning] var veldig mye med meg i alle feriene mine, hjalp meg med masse, for hun [mamma] studerte mens jeg var liten. (...) [Mine nære slektning] er veldig konservativ, så jeg føler at min kristne oppvekst kom fra [vedkommende], ikke moren min (Mathias).

⁴⁰ Jeg drev og kjørte slalåm, og kjørte da ikke slalåm på sabbaten, fordi – nei, men det skulle man ikke gjøre, for man skulle ikke drive med konkurranse! ... Sånne dumme ting som gjør at man blir alienated fra andre barn på din egen alder fordi man blir gjort annerledes. (...) Fordi man måtte stå så mye opp for de valgene som da foreldrene hadde gjort for deg, så ble det liksom en sånn integrert del av min identitet at i selv mange, mange, mange år etter at jeg kom ut av skapet, så er det sånn der: «Selvfølgelig er jeg adventist!» (Kim)

⁴¹ Kirken betydde veldig mye i min familie og i min oppvekst. Det var speideraktiviteter der. (...) Vi gikk jo i kirken ukentlig og var på speideren ukentlig. (...) Hver eneste sommer så var vi på familiestevnet som det het da. (...) Jeg var også på flere speiderstevner. Og i og med at jeg var fra en mindre menighet og etter hvert at det ikke var så mange unge der, så var det veldig viktig for oss egentlig å være med på de tingene der nå for å få et større miljø og sånn (Niklas).

⁴² Fra jeg begynte på skolen så var vi i kirken hver eneste lørdag til jeg flyttet hjemmefra. (...) Jeg fortsatte å gå i kirken på eget initiativ (Mathias).

⁴³ Jeg opplever at jeg kanskje ikke fikk så stor ³⁵¹knytning til nærmiljøet mitt, fordi jeg gikk på adventistskole og vi bodde i et adventisthus. (...) Men i hvert fall, et hus, en skole og en kirke, og det

var liksom ... Jeg tilhørte alle stedene. (...) Du får jo hele miljøet på verdensbasis som du er tilknyttet til enhver tid, da. (...) Jeg hadde venner som gikk i kirken. Det var kanskje det som gjorde det ("Hanna").⁴⁴ Altså ... Jeg opplever at det er massive kunnskapshull, da. Reelle kunnskapshull. (...) Det er kanskje også forskjell på de som jobber i Adventistsamfunnet og de som har (...) vanlige jobber ute i samfunnet – for da får man ulik påvirkning. Men, at man på en måte tar til seg litteratur og forskning som ikke adventister har skrevet, da, som ikke er utgitt på Norsk Bokforlag. Det kan bli veldig sånn – man reproducerer seg selv så mye at man ikke tar til seg annen erfaring. (...) Det blir en klubb, liksom (Hanna).

⁴⁵ Ja, vi gikk jo i kirken hver lørdag. Mamma og pappa var alltid veldig åpne om at så lenge jeg var kristen, så var det på en måte ikke så veldig viktig om jeg var adventist eller hva jeg var. Så, jeg hadde jo òg mange andre kristne miljøer som jeg var en del av, blant annet pinsemenigheten og statskirken (Nina).

⁴⁶ Jeg er egentlig fra en adventistfamilie. (...) Min far er oppvokst som adventist. (...) Jeg kan huske at jeg gikk på sabbatsskole når jeg var liten. (...) [Jeg falt] liksom litt utenfor der. Jeg er ikke oppvokst med adventistoppdragelse – den rammen – helt som mange andre har. Vokst opp ganske sekulært, egentlig. Men med en kristentro i en eller annen form til stede alltid. (...) Det var ikke noen tydelige, sånn, regler, doktriner, sånne ting, for meg. Så, da jeg ble eldre så var det veldig naturlig å liksom søke kontakt med andre kristne. (...) Så, jeg var mest i andre kirker (Sebastian).

⁴⁷ Det var det eneste vi fikk lov til å se på lørdager, klokken seks, og vi fikk ikke lov til å slå på TV-en før da. (...) Veldig strengt i begynnelsen. (...) Jeg tror det var det eneste som ble litt slappere. Men alt det andre - det gjaldt hvilken film jeg skulle se på, hvilken musikk jeg skulle høre på, hvem jeg kunne være venn med, for eksempel. Det var bare veldig sånn: «Du skal gjøre sånn, sånn, sånn, sånn!» (Amanda)

⁴⁸ Sånn som jeg ser det nå, så var det [hjemmets religiøse praksis] litt sånn midt på treet, egentlig, i forhold til hvor liberal og konservativ man kan være i adventistmiljøene rundt forbi. Av de jeg kjenner til, da. (...) Det var jo ikke noe TV på lørdag, fikk ikke å lov til å spille fotballkampene hvis det var på lørdag, og ... Det var på en måte klassiske regler, da (Hanna).

⁴⁹ Altså, [det var] ingen ekstremhet. Det var liksom ikke sånn der – bare kjærlighet og ingen regler, eller bare regler og ingen kjærlighet. Så, det ville liksom være en gyllen middelvei. Det var jo en del av disse reglene (...) som jeg liksom skulle ønske at mamma hadde liksom sagt: «Okay ...» – vært litt mer fleksibel på. For eksempel, sport på lørdag (Kim).

⁵⁰ Det høres litt rart ut, men jeg har alltid hatt en annen personlighet mens jeg har vært hjemme enn når jeg har vært ute. (...) Benjamin hjemme var, sånn (...) veldig stille, veldig ... Gjorde ikke så veldig mye. Jeg var egentlig veldig sjeldent hjemme – jeg var veldig mye ute når jeg var mindre. (...) Jeg hater å ha sånn regler hvordan de på en måte vil at jeg skal være (Nathaniel).

⁵¹ Kom hjem, lese Bibelen, ikke ... De var, sånn: «Sabbaten er sabbaten, ikke se på TV, ikke dra ut.» (...) Altså, det krasjet jo selvfølgelig, fordi jeg var også – den andre personligheten bare poppet frem også. Sånn, opinionated, som skulle diskutere. Det var mye turbulens. (...) Når den andre personen poppet frem, da, så gikk det skeis, for det likte de ikke (Nathaniel).

⁵² Selv om jeg følte en kjærlighet overfor hun jenten, og jeg tror hun følte det tilbake, så gikk det ikke allikevel. For jeg tror det er på en måte litt, sånn – det høres teit ut å ta det som eksempel, men litt sånn svinekjøtt? (...) Selv om man er ferdig med å være adventist eller muslim, så klarer man fortsatt ikke å spise svin, for det sitter så langt inni deg at det er noe som er skittent (Nina).

⁵³ [Som adventister] så ble vi tidlig klar over at det var noe spesielt. At det var det riktige, at det var sannheten, at dette var ment direkte fra Gud. Og det tenker jeg er noe av kjernen, da, for mitt vedkommende i hvert fall, i grunnen til at ikke jeg har kommet ut tidligere. Fordi at, som adventist så tror en jo veldig med at Jesus skal komme tilbake – Jesu gjenkomst. Og det var veldig sterkt fokus på det. (...) Det er litt forskjellig ut ifra hva slags miljø du går i, tror jeg. Men det var jo disse bøkene med Slektenes håp og Mot historiens klimaks. (...) På speiderstevnet, og familiestevnet, så er det noen episoder der hvor jeg husker at jeg lå bak i campingvognen og skulle sove på kvelden, mens foreldrene mine satt jo snakket med andre foreldre. De hadde veldig sånne åndelig prater, da, om alt som skulle skjer før Jesus kom tilbake og sånn. Og da husker jeg spesielt at man faktisk tenkte: «(...) Nå er det ikke sikkert det blir speiderstevne neste år! Eller at det blir familiestevne neste år! Fordi at, Jesus kommer tilbake før den tid!» Det var så nært, da. Sånn jeg tenker tilbake på det nå, så var det både en fryktfølelse og en fantastisk glede (Niklas).

⁵⁴ Jeg var jo veldig inni Åpenbaringen og Daniels bok og ... Du må huske at dette er da ni-, tiårsalderen. (...) Så det er noe man prøver å ha en helhetlig forståelse av – de kryptiske spådommene i Åpenbaringen. (...) Da gikk jeg på Åpenbaringskurs i kirken. Det var meg og mamma, da. Vi gikk og studerte Åpenbaringsboken sammen, og ... Adventister er veldig dommedagsfokuserte! Så, ja, jeg fikk mye dommedagsbelæring da jeg var liten. Jeg trodde aldri jeg skulle rekke tjueårene (Mathias).

⁵⁵ Da var det en sånn gruppe som jeg hadde [studert] med – en konservativ vennegjeng (...) – som hadde inntatt [menigheten min]. Og da var liksom ettermiddagsaktivitetene å gå igjennom Johannes' åpenbaring og tegne opp tidslinjen og dele ut pamfletter fra 80-tallet (...). Det var på en måte en veldig teknisk og misjonerende inngang til tro, da, i mine øyne. Og jeg kjente meg ikke igjen i det (Hanna).

⁵⁶ Men grunnen til at jeg forteller om den episoden der, det er å illustrere det med *sannheten*, på en måte. Og hvis du ikke er innenfor, da – hvis du ikke gjør de tingene som er forventet av deg, som Bibelen lærer, så kommer du ikke til himmelen. Og det er jo det som har vært fokuset, sånn sett, mye i min oppvekst, da. (...) Hvis jeg hadde noen følelser som ikke var i harmoni med det normale, så var det i hvert fall grunn nok til å holde dem så langt under teppet som mulig (Niklas).

⁵⁷ Fra meg så kom det fra et ydmykt ståsted, at ... «Kanskje Gud kan hjelpe meg å leve så godt som syndfritt?» Og så har jo det vokst med tiden til at jeg ikke tror Gud har noe problem med homofili. Men det startet jo som en liten sånn: «Okay, kanskje Gud kan hjelpe meg å, liksom, ikke være så veldig ille, da! Selv om jeg sliter med disse tingene» (Mathias).

⁵⁸ Det var ikke noe at jeg skulle være en god kristen eller noe sånt. (...) Det var på en måte normen, det var ikke ... Jeg trodde at homser var der og lesber var der, hvis du skjønner. Og jeg passet ikke inn i den båsen så på som lesbisk (Nina).

⁵⁹ For meg, det som er vanskeligst det er at folk har så klare meninger om hvordan ting skal være – at man gjør seg opp en mening om hvordan det individet skal være, eller hvordan samfunnet skal være, og at man ikke klarer på en måte å se ut ifra det. (...) Det er at andre har en klar oppfatning om hvordan jeg skal være, og så lever jeg på en måte ikke opp til deres forventninger (Nina).

⁶⁰ Jeg følte (...) at jeg hadde skjøvet en så viktig del av meg ... Eller, på en måte, tilgangen til meg selv – på en eller annen måte hadde skjøvet det bort til fordel for et system. Og at jeg når jeg først på en måte fikk det opp, så ville jeg på en måte også verne litt om det, hvis du skjønner? Og på en måte ta det litt på alvor, da. For jeg kunne jo bare ha skjøvet det til siden og gått tilbake inn i kirken. Eller – blitt værende, hvis jeg trodde på organisasjonen nok, da.

⁶¹ Jeg hadde ikke noe kvaler knyttet til det. (...) Jeg ville ikke ha noen påvirkning fra Adventistsamfunnet. Jeg kjente at nå kan ikke jeg ... Det var forurensende, da, for å være ærlig. Eller, på å kjenne på de tingene som var. (...) Jeg vet jo hva de ville si og hvordan de ville tenke og hvorfor det var logisk. Jeg kan på en måte det systemet, da, og jeg trengte ikke mer av det. Jeg trengte litt plass for å ... For å tenke mine egne ting, da (Hanna).

⁶² Man ser på den måten man er tro mot bibelteksten (...) – at man leser ting ganske sånn ordrett innimellom, da, og at detaljpunktet i Bibelen blir veldig viktig ... Og også de som er opptatte av Åpenbaringen og de profetiene der, da, og utregninger som man har gjort feil før og så prøver man seg en gang til ... At det blir mer sånn matematisk tilnærming til tro – det har jeg på en måte aldri kjent meg igjen i. (...) Det er selvfølgelig mange måter å være adventist på. Men (...) akkurat der hvor jeg var plassert, da, både med menighetsbrevet mitt og hvilke mennesker som var der, så var det ikke plass til meg i Adventistkirken (Hanna).

⁶³ Jeg ble vel syk i to uker, jeg var helt utbrent, og folk kom med mat til meg. Eller, vennene mine kom med mat til meg. Jeg fant ut at: «Jeg kan ikke dette mer, jeg må bare dra hjem og ta vare på meg selv» (“Nina”).

⁶⁴ Det var egentlig bare at jeg syns det var veldig dobbeltmoralsk at folk som var ganske respektert i Adventkirken sa en ting og gjorde noe helt annet. Og det var på en måte greit så lenge det var skjult. Og hvis det ikke var skjult, så fikk man stygge blikk. (...) De kunne liksom finne de fineste bibelvers, og så gjorde de ikke det selv. Jeg skjønner jo at man er menneskelig, men jeg syns ikke man skal rope så

veldig høyt om troen sin om man bevisst gjør det stikk motsatte. En ting er at man snakker som en person man har lyst til å være. Men jeg synes det var så mange, og jeg synes det var så stor forskjell. (...) Ja, jeg synes ikke det var så genuint, bare (Nina).

⁶⁵ Ikke sant, det [Adventist-miljøet] er jo en sfære som det er lett å være komfortabel i, også er verden litt annerledes. (...) Og så tror jeg det skjedde en gradvis mer sånn utvikling mot at jeg ikke skjønnte hvorfor det skulle være et så stort problem. Eller, at det ble en frustrasjon rundt det, rundt at det var noe jeg følte ikke var min oppfatning – at det var en holdning som var pålagt meg. (...) Det kom egentlig bare en bukett av flere sånne fundamentale holdninger som jeg ikke var helt sikker på om jeg sto for. Så, det var på en måte bare én av mange ting som også ledet til at jeg har den religiøse identifiseringen som jeg har nå, som er veldig ambiguøs (Sebastian).

⁶⁶ Og så ble det tydelig at de hadde litt for få til å tale der, og så så jeg på det som min mulighet til å liksom vokse i tro. Jeg kunne holde bibelstudier der og liksom være litt frimodig på det området. Det var egentlig i ransakingen av bibeltekster og sånne ting for å holde disse møtene at jeg skjønnte det at jeg er ikke enig med meg selv, på en måte. (...) Så, jeg tror det kanskje var katalysatoren, at jeg faktisk ... At jeg kom til et punkt der jeg måtte stå for hva jeg sa, og så innså jeg at jeg ikke gjorde det ("Sebastian").

⁶⁷ Så, jeg begynner å google når jeg kommer hjem (...). Så, da finner jeg artikler om en organist i Den norske kirke som kom ut av skapet. Jeg finner bøker av kristne som har skrevet om det å komme ut av skapet. Så, jeg begynner å lese – jeg tar faktisk kontakt med flere av disse personene for å, liksom: «Hallo, I'm stuck, I need some help here!» (Kim)

⁶⁸ For det var sånn der: «Det må gå an å være homo og være kristen samtidig.» (...) En av prestene i Åpen kirkegruppe hadde skrevet et sånn langt ... Om teologien bak homofili og sånn. Så, det var liksom flere ting som: «Okay, greit, det går an å bygge en bro her» (Kim).

⁶⁹ En periode på to år hvor jeg var veldig, veldig deprimert. I tillegg (...), så var det sånn – ganske rett etter at jeg kom ut av skapet, så hadde jeg liksom spurt om jeg kunne få lov til å være aktiv på Prosess og sånn. Og det var sånn der: «Nei, kan du ikke være.» Eller sånn: «For vi kan ikke ha homofile på scenen.» (...) Jeg hadde jo også vært med i dramagruppe. Og det var sånn der: «Nei, det kan du ikke være med på! Det går ikke» (Kim).

⁷⁰ Jeg følte det var så ekstremt unødvendig (...). Jeg tror sikkert at personen som hadde laget dette hadde en god intensjon, men det var bare sånn der – totalt ugjennomtenkt. (...) Man tenker for det første ikke på hva slags teologi det ligger bak det, for det andre, ikke hva slags budskap man sender til personen som sitter i salen. (...) Det var absolutt et vendepunkt. Jeg har vel knapt nok vært i kirken etter det (Kim).

⁷¹ Bare å ta avstand til menigheten. (...) Jeg sluttet å få den inputen at dette var galt, fikk venner som var ateistiske, fordi er det noen i samfunnet som har skjønnet kjærlighet, så er det ateistene. (...) Jeg fikk mye kjærlighet, aksept, toleranse, de (...) var også sånn: «Hvordan kan de kristne gå rundt og peke

fingre og dømme, liksom? (...) Snakker ikke Bibelen om kjærlighet? Skal ikke Gud elske deg?» (...) Så, bare å holde litt avstand til kirken, som er moralpoliti – så kunne jeg liksom pleie mitt eget forhold til Gud (Mathias).

⁷² Jeg blir litt kvalm når jeg går inn i kirken og hører noen som sier at det er vanskelig å vise kjærlighet til homofile fordi Bibelen sier det er galt, og halve menigheten som sitter der er skilt. Dere må ikke si at homofili er teologisk akseptabelt. Dere må bare slutte å si at det er vemmelig og drite i om det er en homofil i kirken eller ikke, når vi skal akseptere at halvparten av de som sitter i salen er skilte (Mathias).

⁷³ Jeg har noen kristne venner som ikke er adventister, så jeg var på sånn bønnesamling (...). Og det var en spesiell ... For vi satt og bare, vi satt bare og snakket, og så bare (...) fikk [jeg] en sånn varm følelse av noen som tok meg – det var, sånn: «Det går bra. Bare vær den du er. Du må ikke velge.» (...) Og vi hadde bare bedt og snakket om det å være kristen, og så bare – den dagen, det var bare som om noen tok på skulderen og bare sa: «Det går greit!» (Nathaniel)

⁷⁴ Det var noe jeg bare sa til meg selv: «Jeg kan være begge.» (...) Jeg tenkte på alle bibelstudiene, at Gud skaper en enkelt – du er spesiell, da. Og så var jeg, sånn: «Han har skapt meg, og da – det er meg. Da har han skapt meg på den måten der. Det er ingen som har puttet det at jeg liker gutter i hodet mitt. Det er ikke noe jeg har fått fra noen steder. Det er ingen som har plassert de følelsene der. De følelsene er jeg født med.» Så, jeg måtte rett og slett bare akseptere at uansett hva – det kommer alltid til å være noen som sier noe imot. (...) Det går an å ha en tro og det går an å leve sånn som man er skapt (Nathaniel).

⁷⁵ På den ene siden, jeg vet ikke om det er riktig å være homofil og kristen – altså, om ... Jeg tror ikke det var sånn vi var ment til å være. (...) Jeg tror ikke menneskeheten er skapt sånn, jeg tror mennesker har blitt sånn i tråd av syndens utvikling, eller syndens påvirkning på oss. Men så tror jeg også at ... Jeg er mer opptatt av moralen, for når jeg er sånn og (...) vi mennesker er egoistiske, – vi var ikke ment til å være egoistiske, – men når vi først er det, så er vår jobb å bare erkjenne de faktiske forholdene og implementere Gud i vårt liv. (...) Menigheten må ha rom for, på lik linje med egoisme ... Altså, rekk opp hånden den som slutter å være egoist, ikke sant? (Elsa)

⁷⁶ Jeg tror ikke Gud har noe problem med homofili i det hele tatt. Jeg tror Gud er kjærlighet, og jeg tror at den kjærligheten bunner ned i at det spiller ingen rolle om homofili er skapt eller et produkt av denne verden, fordi Gud er kjærlighet og aksepterer det (Mathias).

⁷⁷ Altså, jeg personlig, hvis jeg skulle velge, så ville jeg ha blitt begravd av en adventistprest og ikke av en statskirkeprest. Så, det er litt sånn der ... Det har med identitet å gjøre. Det er fortsatt Adventistkirken jeg føler meg mest tilknyttet til (Kim).

⁷⁸ Mens jeg vil heller, på en måte, tenke at jeg er en kristen. (...) Jeg har jo mange større uenigheter med andre adventister enn med andre kirkesamfunn (Emma).

⁷⁹ Jeg begynte å akseptere at: «Okay, sånn her er jeg og jeg kommer ikke til å forandre meg.» Så (...) da blir jeg heller sint på Gud. For at han skal fordømme meg for, liksom ... Jeg følte meg urettferdig behandlet, da. (...) Og så fikk jeg et lite skifte i gudsbilde (...). Jeg føler liksom at jeg var mer tolerant og kjærlig enn Gud gjennom det gudsbildet mitt, på en måte. Legning skal ikke være så viktig. Man må akseptere folk – og hvis jeg tenker at jeg er mer kjærlig enn Gud, så på en måte må jo gudsbildet mitt være feil? (Emma)

⁸⁰ Det er også et vanskelig spørsmål, som jeg i dag ikke vet helt hvordan jeg skal svare på. (...) De siste tre-fire årene, kanskje, så har de grunnpilarene som min tidligere tro (...) på en måte forvitret litt. Og da vet jeg ikke helt hvor det hele har rast hen. (...) Jeg vet ikke om det er noen knagg som passer, eller som jeg føler meg komfortabel med å sette meg på (Sebastian).

⁸¹ Jeg vet ikke. (...) Jeg [har] heller på en måte skrelt bort mer og mer av det jeg hadde lært, da. Og så har jeg ikke bygget opp noe annet foreløpig. (...) Jeg ville ikke sagt at jeg var kristen. Men jeg har ikke tatt sterk nok avstand fra det heller, hvis du skjønner? Det er på en måte et uavklart punkt, da. Men, jeg tror ikke på den måten som jeg gjorde, i hvert fall (Hanna).

⁸² Mitt gudsbilde har på en måte alltid vært at det er en kjærlig Gud. (...) Jeg har ikke forbundet Gud med noe konservativt, men at mennesker har på en måte tullet det til innimellom. Så, det på en måte har jeg fortsatt (Hanna).

⁸³ Når jeg begynte å be om at Gud måtte lede livet på en vei som var verdig og som han så ville vært godt for meg og han kunne akseptere, så følte jeg plutselig at Gud var der for meg igjen. Og, liksom – ting begynte bare å falle på plass. (...) Jeg følte, liksom – Gud grep inn helt ned i sånne banale ting, at ... Han kompisene min sa at: «Kanskje du burde si noe til moren din?» (...) Og så sender mamma en melding samme dag og spør om hun kan komme på besøk til helgen! (Mathias)