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Sexual and spiritual identity transformation among ex-gays and ex-ex-gays: Narrating a new self

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**Sexual and spiritual identity transformation among ex-gays and
ex-ex-gays: Narrating a new self**

by

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Dedication

To my mother and the memory of my father

Barbara Ann Peebles and Billy Charles Peebles (1933-1999)

and to my dear mentor and friend

Mrs. Kathy Jeffrey

Without whom I never would have begun the graduate school quest

And to three who have supported me from the beginning of my life in Austin and who
serve here as representatives of my entire community of friends and hope

from Austin to Indonesia and back again

Dr. William and Mrs. Yvonne Taylor

and

Mr. Kyle Miller

Without all of whom I never would have finished

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**Sexual and spiritual identity transformation among ex-gays and
ex-ex-gays: Narrating a new self**

Publication No. _____

Amy Eilene Peebles, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Keith Walters

This dissertation is a qualitative sociolinguistic study of the ways in which certain groups of evangelical Christians dealing with same-sex attraction use narrative to negotiate perceived conflicts between their sexual and religious identities. Specifically, I collected the personal “life story” narratives of two groups: ex-gays, or self-identified evangelical Christians who claim to have transformed or are attempting to transform their sexual identity in order to bring it in line with their understanding of evangelical Christian theology, and ex-ex-gays, or individuals who claim to have attempted some form of sexual identity transformation and concluded in the end that it was not possible, not necessary, or both. This study also includes analyses of the discourse of an ex-lesbian support group, as well as focus group discussions from both men and women involved in an ex-gay ministry where I conducted three months of ethnographic fieldwork.

Using Burke’s (1966) notion of terministic screens and applying Linde’s (1993) work on the creation of coherence in life stories, I analyze the role that both overarching

metanarrative beliefs and personal narrative constructions play in individuals' attempts to resolve spiritual and sexual identity conflicts and create a coherent sense of self. Narrative is employed by speakers as a means to make sense of their lives and achieve a coherent sense of self. By focusing on stories of the management of identity conflict, I investigate a significant form-function interaction, i.e. the linguistic structures that result when challenges to one of the primary personal and social functions of narrative are intrinsic to the life experience and hence the language event. These narratives are theoretically important because they provide a salient opportunity to test the limits of performativity (Butler, 1990) and the potential of narrative to transform membership in what have come to be viewed as relatively fixed identity categories. Individuals use narrative not only as a means of expressing identity, but also as a primary tool for creating and transforming it; thus, analyzing these narratives' genres, structures, and features provides insight into the critical roles language and narrative itself play in sexual and spiritual identity transformations.

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Transcription Conventions

The notational conventions employed in the transcriptions include the following (partially adapted from Ochs and Capps, 2001):

- . A period most often indicates the end of a sentence, but also is used to represent falling intonation contour.
- ? A question mark indicates rising intonation; thus, its use is not restricted to questions only.
- (?) A question mark in parentheses indicates indiscernible speech, and the number of question marks corresponds roughly to the number of words missed in the transcription. On transcripts involving group interactions, a question mark in place of participant name indicates that the identity of the speaker could not be accurately determined.
- : A colon indicates lengthening of the preceding sound, proportionate to the number of colons listed.
- A single hyphen after a word, part of a word, or a single sound indicates a quick cut-off, self-interruption or correction. A series of hyphens after single sounds or parts of words indicates a quick-type of repetition with no discernible pause.
- , A comma indicates an impressionistically brief pause with “continuing” intonation and is therefore not restricted to a clause boundary situation. For example, the comma usage in a transcription such as “I, I, I think” indicates that there was a brief but discernible pause between the repetitions.
- A longer dash indicates a pause that was impressionistically slightly longer than the pause length indicated by a comma. Any pauses of discernibly longer duration than “dash-length” pauses are indicated by the word “pause” in notational brackets, e.g. <pause>.
- / The backwards slash indicates latching, or no pause or break, between two segments or words thereby connected, i.e. between the segment followed by a slash and the immediately following segment that is preceded by a slash.
- [Left square brackets occur in sequential pairs on two successive lines indicate a point of overlap onset between two speakers’ utterances.

- [] Enclosed square brackets occur in sequential pairs on two successive lines between two speakers and indicate that the segments, words, or phrases included therein are overlapping speech.
- word Underlining a word or a part of a word indicates some form of stress or emphasis on the underlined segment.
- [...] Square-bracketed ellipses indicate that a portion of the transcript has not been included for length of presentation considerations. The sequential ordering of the excerpts from the entire transcription is never altered through the use of ellipsis.
- (word) A word or portion of a word within parentheses indicates uncertainty on the part of the transcriber.
- <word> Words enclosed within a combination of “less than” and “more than” symbols represent explanatory comments with respect to the preceding segment and give information on things such as background information setting, accompanying gestures, voice tone, and so forth. Identifying elements that have been blanked rather than pseudonymized are also placed within these symbols.
- bold** Bold-faced items are used for the purpose of highlighting portions of the transcript that are most relevant to the discussion within the text and are not part of the original transcription.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring semester of 2000, I was the teaching assistant for an undergraduate course called *Language, gender, and sexual orientation*, where I began learning to take the efforts sociolinguistics has made to think rigorously about various social identity categories and apply them to matters of sexual identity and difference. During this time, I was exposed to the growing literature on language and sexuality. This literature consisted partly of research on “coming out” narratives, or stories in and through which a narrator’s sexual identity is established and expressed as homosexual. In these narratives, the self was seen as a site of struggle before reaching the resolution of defining and accepting the sexual identity of the self as homosexual. In addition, a growing number of researchers were applying Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity to the gender and sexuality axes of identity, in which language is seen to create identity, rather than merely express or index it.

When reading these studies, I thought immediately that if Butler, Cameron (1997), and others really wanted to think about language and the limits of performativity, they should consider people who identify as ex-gay because ex-gay individuals are using language in complex ways that ultimately question the limits and power of narrative and discursive performance with respect to both gender and sexuality. Further, if ever there were narratives of the self as a site of struggle and change, ex-gay narratives would be quintessential representations of such. As with the work on coming out stories, I felt that an investigation of these ex-gay narratives would be a valuable contribution: they are narratives that deal with a similar theme, namely the subjective experience of same-sex attraction, but ones in which the struggle of the self originates from deeply held religious convictions that seem to require a different sexual identity resolution, which opens up

another set of narrative issues entirely. I mentioned some of these ideas in a discussion with my professor after class one day and was sure that the topic would someday prove to be an intriguing and worthwhile study for someone.

With respect to my own work, however, I promptly forgot the discussion and my thoughts on the matter, as I was already committed to and preparing to depart for an extended period of research in Indonesia related to another topic entirely. A year and a half later, I paused to reflect on an extremely challenging year in the field, filled with as many hard and wonderful experiences as it was research disappointments. And as I sat overlooking the beach in Pangandaran, West Java, I remembered. This dissertation is the result of that moment of remembering.

The present project is a broad qualitative sociolinguistic study of the ways in which certain groups of evangelical Christians dealing with same-sex attraction use narrative to negotiate perceived conflicts between their sexual and religious identities. Specifically, I collected the personal “life story” narratives of two groups: ex-gays and ex-ex-gays.¹ Ex-gay individuals are defined here as self-identified evangelical Christians who claim to have transformed or are attempting to transform their sexual identity in order to bring this identity in line with their understanding of evangelical Christian theology. Ex-ex-gay individuals are defined as those who claim to have attempted some form of sexual identity transformation and to have concluded in the end that it was not possible, not necessary, or both. In addition, this study includes analyses of the discourse of an ex-lesbian support group, as well as focus group discussions from both men and women involved in an ex-gay ministry where I conducted three months of ethnographic fieldwork in the summer of 2002.

¹ I will discuss within the dissertation how the terms “ex-gay” and “ex-ex-gay” are potentially problematic; however, these are the popular terms associated with these respective groups and will be used throughout for ease of reference.

The primary research questions addressed here are three: 1) What role do both overarching metanarrative beliefs and constructions of life story narratives play in individuals' attempts to negotiate conflicts between their sexual and religious identities? 2) What linguistic features and linguistic and social functions are characteristic of both individual narratives and group discourse in this kind of sexual and spiritual identity work? 3) In what ways can individuals use narrative means to either re-make their sexual identity or reconcile whatever conflicts they perceive to exist within their religious beliefs regarding homosexuality to create a coherent sense of self and to what extent are they satisfied with these narrative resolutions?

Given the highly contested subject matter of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, which centrally involve issues such as the moral status of homosexuality and whether homosexuality can or should be changed, the topic of this dissertation is inherently controversial. In his article on spirituality in the academy, Brummett (2000) noted that data such as these raise exactly the sorts of issues the academy shuns, for they deal explicitly with religion, morality, and claims of absolute truth. Such is the type of spirituality that makes the academy uncomfortable, even without the additional spice of discourses on homosexuality. Yet the very presence of such controversy and discomfort indicates that much stands to be gained from an investigation of these matters for both sexuality studies and the social sciences.

Consequently, I seek an objective, scholarly shelter within which to look at these narratives from a linguistic perspective, setting aside the matter of determining whose view is correct in this academic context. Thus, rather than focusing on the question of "Who's telling the *right* narrative?" which usually both drives and divides popular and some academic discussions on this issue, my research represents a focused inquiry into *how* people are using language to make sense of their identity while demonstrating a

plurality of possible narrative negotiations and resolutions as individuals manage perceived conflicts between their religious and sexual identities.

When embarking upon any investigation, every researcher approaches a particular topic as a positioned subject, inescapably embodying his or her own personal background, life experiences, worldview, and beliefs with respect to the area of inquiry and object of study. As for the current project, I would venture that truly neutral subject positions are likely nonexistent for any who take more than a passing interest in the issues upon which this research touches. With respect to my own subject position, I was raised in an evangelical Christian home and have personally dealt with issues of faith and sexuality, experiencing the clash between my understanding of my sexual identity and my religious beliefs as the deepest and most profound conflict of my life. My process was an individual one in which no ex-gay ministry ever played a part, and I reached what for me is a peaceful resolution only after years of struggle. Yet I realize that others' processes of dealing with these issues are very different than mine and that there are many possible resolutions to this conflict besides my own. Thus, while I have my own personal experience and views with respect to the subject matter at hand, as any researcher would, those views do not determine the results of the inquiry. If anything, my experiences have heightened my vigilance regarding objectivity, since within this project, it is the life stories of my participants that I seek to explore and tell, not my own.

I will now address the questions of why the present study matters and what is to be gained from an in-depth examination of the language of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives and discourse. First, narrative is employed by speakers as a means to make sense of their lives and achieve a coherent sense of self. By focusing on stories of the management of identity conflict, I investigate a significant form-function interaction, i.e. the linguistic structures that result when challenges to one of the primary personal and

social functions of narrative are intrinsic to the life experience and hence the language event.

In addition, this work is novel in that ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives represent an interesting intersection between conversion narratives and coming out stories that, to the best of my knowledge, heretofore have not been examined linguistically in detail.² Further, while work has been done on narratives of individual religious conversion, little has been done on the narrative structure of the transformation that is said to continue *after* the conversion event. My work also contributes to the understanding of this understudied aspect of religious life narratives.

With respect to language, gender, and sexuality studies, these narratives are of theoretical importance because they provide a salient opportunity to test the limits of performativity (e.g. Butler, 1990) and the potential of narrative to transform membership in what have come to be widely viewed as relatively fixed identity categories. Also, in terms of content, both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives vary in the degree of concord between the expressed sexual identity category and actual experience of sexual desire or object choice and clearly are greatly influenced by concurrent membership in other social categories, namely, categories associated with religious identity. Thus, this work is particularly relevant to recent discussions of whether language and sexuality research should be conducted with a primary emphasis on social identity categories or should be focused more on desire. In addition, the tight links between the identity variables of gender and sexuality, and their inextricably bound implicational relationship in ex-gay theology, in particular, also make these narratives highly relevant to the study of language and gender.

² However, a conference proceedings article on this subject has been published, which was a preview of the present project. Cf. Peebles, A. E. (2003).

Finally, the current study also contributes to the overall understanding of human sexuality. First, by examining narratives of attempting sexual identity transformation, this study sheds light on social construction analyses of sexuality and adds to discussions on the degree of fluidity present in sexual identity. Second, this work also informs discussions on ethics, values, and beliefs concerning sexual orientation and sexual practice held by both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay individuals. Lastly, because religious beliefs were the primary motivation for all of the individuals being studied to attempt change in some way, this project will give insight into the power and influence that religious discourse has with respect to individual sexual identity and its possible expressions.

The outline of the dissertation is as follows. In chapter 2, I conduct a review of the literature. In so doing, I locate the current project within the landscape of the significant research areas that are germane to the topic at hand. In chapter 3, I describe and outline the research design and methodology for the study. The main body of the dissertation and analyses are given in chapters 4 through 10.

Chapters 4 through 6 deal particularly with ex-gay narratives and discourse. Specifically, in chapter 4, primarily through analyzing support group interactions, I examine and begin to exposit key aspects of the language and discourse employed in the ex-gay ministries I studied. In chapter 5, I delineate the ex-gay evangelical Christian religious metanarrative that both initiates the motivation for sexual identity transformation and provides the frame and much of the content of ex-gay individual life narratives. In chapter 6, I discuss the significant and powerful language ideology that is operative within much of ex-gay evangelical understanding and demonstrate how this ideology affects the linguistic practice of ex-gay Christians in salient and overt ways.

With respect to ex-ex-gay narratives, in chapter 7, I delineate the key components of new or modified metanarratives and belief systems that allow for a deproblematized

embracing of a homosexual identity, in parallel fashion to chapter 5 and the ex-gay metanarrative. In chapter 8, I discuss specific features of ex-ex-gay narratives and demonstrate the transformation of both terms and tropes as they narrate their transition from an ex-gay to an ex-ex-gay identity position.

In chapters 9 and 10, I return to addressing both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives. In chapter 9, I consider both types of narratives and analyze specific aspects of the narratives' genres and structural organization, and I end the discussion by highlighting two salient features of these narratives that merit further study. Chapter 10 represents the final analysis chapter, in which I briefly establish the ex-gay ministry setting as a community of practice and then discuss matters of language, gender, and linguistic performance within that community of practice. I then demonstrate the different ways in which gender is addressed in ex-ex-gay narratives. In chapter 11, I conclude with a brief recapitulation of the findings, their importance, and implications both for theoretical application and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I identify the areas of inquiry and prior studies that are germane to the present project by giving a review of the relevant literature. In so doing, I seek to locate this study within the landscape of the existing research and describe the primary academic precursors of and influences on my thinking about the subject at hand. Specifically, this dissertation is positioned at the intersection of three areas of research literature, and I discuss each area in turn.

In section 2.2, I outline the first area of research, which involves prior studies done on ex-gay Christian ministries from other disciplines; here I also address the small beginnings of work being done on these issues in the field of linguistics proper. Second, as I discuss in 2.3, the enormously wide body of literature with respect to narrative and life stories and all that those works encompass is certainly and technically relevant to the current work; however, within this area, I particularly focus on narratives of identity conflict and self-transformation. Third, in section 2.4, I detail how this study relates to and is influenced by the recent and burgeoning number of linguistic investigations applied to gender and sexuality. In section 2.5, I briefly address other areas of language research that have a connection to the topic at hand. I conclude in section 2.6 with a synthesis of how these areas have shaped the current work both in its intention, design, and aspirations.

2.2 EX-GAY MINISTRIES: PRIOR WORK

Within sociolinguistic research on language and sexuality, at the time of proposing this project,³ I had seen brief references made to ex-gay ministries in two articles. First, Liang (1997:307) footnoted a distinction between her definition of coming out stories, i.e. an individual's narrative account of realizing and accepting his or her gay or lesbian identity, and other narrative accounts of homosexuality and "homosexual tendencies," including those seen in ex-gay ministries. Second, in an article on ideology and lesbian identity creation, Wood (1999) cited Exodus' belief statements as an example of a dominant heterosexist ideology. Exodus⁴ is the primary ex-gay Christian organization that provides oversight and support to a large number of individual Exodus-affiliated (i.e. officially sanctioned by and connected with Exodus) ex-gay ministries. To the best of my knowledge, these passing mentions were the extent of the ex-gay presence in the sociolinguistic literature, as no examination of the language and identity issues present in ex-gay, much less ex-ex-gay, narratives or discourse had been published within the field.

However, a year into the current project, I learned that other work was beginning on the language of ex-gays in addition to my own. Heintzelman (2003) presented a conference paper in which she analyzed tapes of ex-gay testimonies that had been given at several ex-gay conferences (namely, annual Exodus conferences) in terms of a Labovian master narrative framework. In June 2004, Heintzelman presented an expanded version of the ex-gay testimony paper, in which she highlighted connections between language and gender, and she is currently working on a dissertation analyzing

³ December 2001.

⁴ On its official website, Exodus is described as "the largest Christian referral and information ministry dealing with homosexual issues in our world today" and "a worldwide interdenominational, Christian organization called to encourage, strengthen, unify, and equip Christians to minister the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ to those affected by homosexuality." URL: <http://www.exodus.to>

aspects of the language of Exodus and public versions of ex-gay testimonies. In addition, Stewart (2003) delivered a paper in which he employed Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the framing and representation of homosexuality in the media with respect to the controversy over a study that claimed “some gays can go straight” and that some homosexuality is changeable through therapy (Spitzer, 2003). Thus, while there has indeed been almost no work done in linguistics proper on ex-gay language and identity issues up to this point, there is the indication that more work in this area is forthcoming.

At least three dissertation projects from other disciplines are relevant to this project, two from sociology and one from American Studies. First, sociologist Christy Ponticelli (1993; 1996; 1999) focused her work on the organization of Exodus. For her study, Ponticelli researched an ex-lesbian support group for nine months and performed content analyses of published testimonials and personal interviews with ex-lesbians. She concluded that the stories the women told described a resocialization process similar to religious conversion experiences (1999).

Within this dissertation, Ponticelli (1993) applied a Foucauldian model of “discipline and punishment” (Foucault, 1979) to interpret the identity processes at work in an ex-gay ministry. In so doing, Ponticelli compared the ex-gay Christian God, who is believed to be all-knowing, to Foucault’s description of a Panopticon prison, where prisoners are under constant observance and threat of physical punishment. Because the ex-gays believed their God is always loving and good, she theorized that disappointing God was in itself a threat of “mental punishment” (140).

In addition, Ponticelli assumed an essentialist position with respect to sexual orientation; thus, she posited contrasts between the ex-gay identity and “the *real* person or previous person” (142, emphasis in original) and ex-gays’ “*essential* homosexual attractions and feelings” (144, emphasis in original) and postulated that ex-gay ministries

were training individuals to engage in “deep acting” (Hochschild, 1983), sexual repression, and behavior modification. Thus, Ponticelli described the ex-gay identity process as requiring a “constant management and denial of emotions” (143).

Second, also in the field of sociology, Michelle Wolkomir (1999) conducted extensive field observations of two all-male groups—one in an ex-gay ministry and one in a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)⁵—in which members of both groups were trying to resolve feelings of conflict regarding homosexuality and their understanding of Christian theology. Specifically, Wolkomir studied a men’s Bible study group within an MCC congregation that was focused around the topic of the Bible and homosexuality. MCC fellowships have a pro-gay theological base and a primary ministry focus on the gay community. Through group observations and in-depth interviews, Wolkomir concluded that the gay Christian men reconciled their homosexuality with Christianity through a process of collective ideological revision, primarily with respect to the interpretation of the Biblical text (1999; 2001b).

With respect to ex-gays, Wolkomir posited that these men “created moral selves” by reinterpreting their experience of homosexual attractions. Wolkomir wrote that the men moved from viewing these attractions as inauthenticating their Christian identity to actually strengthening this identity, because the ex-gay ministry teachings provided them with a new interpretational framework of endeavoring to resist sin that in turn produced feelings of righteousness. For both of these groups, Wolkomir analyzed the identity work as involving social processes based in emotion and commitment to social networks and revisions to ideological conceptions of self and the world (1999; 2001a).

⁵ The official MCC website explains that Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) are “a worldwide fellowship of Christian churches with a special outreach to the world’s gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities.” URL: <http://www.mccchurch.org>

Finally, from the field of American studies, Tanya Erzen (2002) completed a dissertation using historical and cultural studies approaches to conduct an extensive ethnography of an ex-gay ministry over an 18-month period. While she clearly positioned herself as an “outsider,” during the course of her research, she was not only an acute observer, but actively participated in the offices of the ministry by assisting with the website and administration. In this work, Erzen recognized the centrality of the religious worldview in the lives of ex-gays. She therefore sought to understand and analyze this worldview and beliefs about sexual identity within the ex-gay ministry, in addition to describing the history of the ex-gay movement and its relation to the politics of the Christian right. Erzen’s work is thus quite comprehensive and broad in its scope, in that she not only gave an in-depth account of one particular ex-gay ministry operation and the many individuals represented therein, but also contextualized the ex-gay movement as a whole within both the historical and contemporary societal landscape and addressed the impact of ex-gay ministries on the shifting societal views and rhetoric regarding homosexuality. In addition, Erzen interviewed former ministry participants who identified as ex-ex-gays as part of this research.

As I note later in the dissertation, there is a high degree of uniformity of belief and teaching materials used between ex-gay ministries; thus, while no two ministries are identical, there are most often close parallels between them. In that each of the above-described studies involved an ethnographic investigation of an Exodus-affiliated ex-gay Christian ministry, these studies obviously have previously discussed many of the same issues addressed in the current project; thus, they include prior observations that are similar to and overlap with my own with respect to the different Exodus-affiliated ministries that I researched. These works represent a valuable and rich beginning to the study of ex-gay identity, which certainly includes ex-gay language and discourse.

However, as these studies came from fields other than linguistics, their foci and emphases obviously differ from the current project, and understandably, the content-based analyses of ex-gay talk and experience components of these studies have what students of language would see as under-theorized notions of language, narrative structures, and their relation to identity as well.

Therefore, the current sociolinguistic examination of these matters has much to offer. By conducting a detailed analysis of not only the content but also the narrative structures, terministic screens, and actual linguistic form that both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives take, I hope to contribute to the understanding of the nature of the organic relationship between the language used and the intentional functions these narratives serve for indexing and/or creating a coherent sexual and spiritual identity for the individuals who tell them. Additionally, metanarrative analysis will provide a broad contextualization of discursive constraints within which these identities are both formed and performed. As I demonstrate, ultimately narratives are never merely encoders and conveyors of information; rather, the meanings behind them and their telling are often much more profound. I now turn to address the next relevant body of literature, namely literature that addresses life narratives.

2.3 LIFE NARRATIVES: CONFLICT AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION

The study of narrative spans the breadth of the social sciences (e.g. Polkinghorne, 1988) and beyond, from cognitive psychology (e.g. Bruner, 1990) to philosophy (e.g. Taylor, 1989) to folklore (e.g. Atkinson, 2002). Research on personal narrative has ranged from investigating its linguistic structure (e.g. Labov, 1972) to its organization as discourse units within cultural story patterns (e.g. Polanyi, 1985) to its personal and social function of creating a coherent sense of self (e.g. Linde, 1993). Recent work has illustrated in detail the fact that humans narrate continually throughout their everyday

lives, almost to such a degree that life seems to be actually lived and experienced through the narratives we constantly tell about it (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

In an excellent review of research conducted on narratives of personal experience, Ochs and Capps (1996) highlighted how the narrative framing of life event sequences are integral to the shaping of the self, positing that “narrative and self are inseparable,” where self was “broadly understood to be an unfolding and reflective awareness of being-in-the-world, including a sense of one’s past and future” (20-21). In that article, Ochs and Capps discussed how two dimensions are considered foundational in approaches to the study of narrative: temporality and point of view. With respect to temporality, chronological sequencing of events “offers narrators a vehicle for imposing order on otherwise disconnected experiences” (24) (e.g. Ricouer, 1988, Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Riessman (1993) also pointed out that across the many disciplines that engage narrative investigations, all scholars agree that sequence is a minimally required and basic element of narrative; however, that sequencing is not restricted to chronological orderings, but may also be consequentially (e.g. Young, 1987) or thematically organized (e.g. Michaels, 1981). Regarding point of view, Ochs and Capps stated that narratives express far more than just a recounting of event sequences; rather, these events are transformed into a plot and thus into a coherent story through the “interweaving [of] human conditions, conduct, beliefs, intentions, and emotions” (1996:26).

In terms of function, narrative is primarily a “sense-making activity” (Ochs and Capps, 2001) through which humans create a coherent account of their lives and selves. Linde (1993) focused her work on how individuals use life stories and the attendant “coherence systems” or beliefs about and ways of interpreting and understanding the world and life events that individuals invoke to tell a coherent life story, thereby

achieving a coherent sense of self as well. For Linde, just as for Ochs and Capps, “narrative establishes the self” (98).

As mentioned in the introduction, much can be learned about narrative itself through observing the linguistic forms and expressions that result when a primary function of the life narrative, namely the creation of a coherent sense of self, has been significantly challenged by deep identity dilemmas core to the individual life experience. Because of the vast breadth of the literature on personal narrative and the self, I must restrict my focus here primarily to the discussion of studies involving the narrative management of identity incongruence, identity conflict, and also stigmatized aspects of the self. Narrative studies have addressed self-identity distress and its management and repair from relatively minor life events, such as losing a contest and re-narrating agency and culpability such that an identity of “loser” is deflected (Shrauf, 2000) to major life challenges and occurrences, such as being forced to reconceptualize the self and the life story almost entirely due to chronic illness or life-changing injury (Frank, 1993; 1995).

With respect to negatively valued or problematic aspects of the self, Goffman’s (1963) early work on the “management of spoiled identity” encompassed a range of possible social identity liabilities, from physical deformities to having a criminal record, and included mentions of “the homosexual.” Capps and Ochs (1995) conducted an extensive study on one woman’s narration of her life in terms of life-dominating agoraphobia and experiences of panic. In this work, they demonstrated that narrative not only expressed her experience but also continually re-created the experience of panic and repeatedly constructed her identity as an agoraphobic person. Capps and Ochs’ work on agoraphobic discourse offers insights similar to the therapeutic approach known as “narrative therapy” which was developed with a specific focus on training counselors and therapists to help clients “re-story” their lives and narrate themselves as a protagonist

overcoming an externalized problem, rather than locating the problem as core to the identity of the self (e.g. White & Epston, 1990).

Concerning cases of identity incongruence, Mason-Schrock (1996) wrote on the interactive narrative processes by which transsexuals constructed a differently gendered “true self” within a transsexual support group. This work and other studies of transsexual (e.g. White, 1998) and intersexed (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967) individuals address a particularly challenging instance of narrative self-construction, because transsexuals’ “bodies, as signifiers, belie the new gender identities they want to claim” (Mason-Schrock, 1996:176). Mason-Schrock’s use of the term “true self” brings up an important trope with respect to life stories in general. Linde (1993) wrote that a sense of “continuity” of the self over time and throughout the life story is a crucial component of experiencing coherence, and this continuity is much related to individuals’ conceptions of a “true self.”

While Mason-Schrock, following Gergen and Gergen (1983) and others, considered the “true self” as only having a phenomenological reality which was brought about by the stories told about the self, he focused on this aspect of stories because the belief in such a self represented such a powerful narrative motivation and foundation. With respect to what is meant by a “true self,” in addition to delineating the notion of a stable core self that is continuous throughout time and change, Mason-Schrock also referred to Erickson’s (1995) work, which he stated posited that “people invoke the notion of a ‘true self’ or ‘real self’ when they believe they are acting consistently with closely held values—that is, when they are acting ‘authentically’” (1996:177).

The “true self” and living “authentically” are key themes in both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives. Stein (1997) wrote that coming out stories in the gay community are “based on the ideal of being ‘true to one’s self’ and expressing one’s ‘authentic self’”(70), which clearly in these cases involves a one-to-one correspondence between the

experience of same-sex attraction and the development and expression of a homosexual identity. However, for ex-gay Christians, and for ex-ex-gays at some earlier point in their lives as well, their deeply held religious convictions and commitment to a religious identity is seen to be irreconcilably at odds with embracing homosexual behavior or a homosexual identity. Consequently, two aspects of the self that are often experienced as integral and core, namely the sexual and spiritual identity, cannot be coherently united in the life experience and hence in the life story. At least initially for all of these individuals, to embrace homosexuality is seen as antithetical to the true self because to do so, they would not be acting consistently with their deeply held values, as above.

As we will see, ex-gays privilege their religious convictions over the embracing of homosexual identity and believe in an ontologically real true self that is “rooted in Christ” through their spiritual conversion and faith as Christians. Ex-gays claim this true self serves as the defining basis for all other aspects of their identity. For the case of ex-ex-gays, most in this study came to a place of reconciling their spirituality and faith with homosexuality, thereby integrating both the spiritual self and the homosexual self and claiming that being homosexual was the consistent identity of the true self all along.

Ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives are not only narratives of identity conflict, but they are also narratives of conflict resolution (or the continued search for resolution), and both groups achieve this resolution through various experiences of sexual and spiritual identity transformation. Thus, of particular relevance to the current study is work done on stories of self-transformation. Self-transformation stories include work done on conversion narratives, or transformations due to a religious or ideological change (e.g. Stromberg, 1993; Ginsburg, 1989), coming out narratives, or stories of realizing and accepting a homosexual identity (e.g. Liang, 1997; Wood, 1997, 1999), and recovery narratives, such as those seen in Alcoholics Anonymous (e.g. Warhol & Michie, 1996;

Holland, Lachiotte Jr., Skinner & Cain, 1998). Researchers with respect to each of these types of self-transformation stories have applied Linde's (1993) notion of the creation of coherence through the life story, and as will be seen in chapter 9, I follow this precedent in applying all of the above perspectives to the analysis in the study at hand.

2.4 LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

The third area of literature relevant to the current project involves the current and expanding body of work done on language, gender, and sexuality. In discussing public discourse about gays and lesbians, including religious discourse, Morrish (1997) used the work of Foucault to demonstrate that such "discourse shapes not only ideology but also identity and the sense of self" (336). With respect to ex-gay identity, Erzen (2002:23) wrote that the "ex-gay movement has created a new identity group that challenges how sexual identities emerge based on a process of religious and sexual conversion." I have already mentioned research on coming out stories and the interesting intersection with that research and research on conversion narratives that this study represents.

In addition to coming out stories, recent debates in the language, gender, and sexuality forum have centered around whether research in this regard should focus on social identity categories or the actual experience of sexual attraction and the object of desire. The work of Don Kulick strongly advocates the desire-based model (e.g. Kulick, 2000; Kulick, 2003; Kulick and Cameron, 2003), whereas researchers such as Morrish and Leap (2003), while acknowledging the importance of desire, strongly argued for the primacy of social categories and the necessity of thinking in such terms. Eckert (2002) engaged this debate from both perspectives and advocated a dually considered and grounded approach to the issue. In addition, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) responded to the desire-versus-identity debate by demonstrating the limitations of a desire-centered approach that seeks to set identity to the side; in so doing, they rigorously established the

close and interconnected relationship between identity and desire, as well as the importance of understanding the socially and ideologically located and mediated practices in which both of these aspects of the self are constructed and performed.

This literature is relevant to the current study because there is frequently variation in the degree of concord between the self-identification of sexual identity and the actual experience of desire. For example, Stein (1997) discussed the struggle some women who embraced a lesbian identity primarily from a feminist political motivation had with persistent heterosexual desire and the sense of inauthenticity as lesbians that such desire produced. In the case of ex-gay Christians, there is, at least initially, incongruence in emotions, sexual desire, and the desired and/or professed sexual identity. Ponticelli (1999) stated that being ex-gay implies that one is “struggling with homosexual tendencies” and does not always imply that same-sex desires have diminished. Thus, it is valuable to research the reported experience of ex-gays in this regard and analyze whether or not this (at least initial) lack of concord caused them to experience feelings of identity inauthenticity, and if so, how this dilemma is resolved as they narrate and thus enact the “true self.”

With respect to identity proper, much has been written from the perspective of identity as performance (e.g. see Morris, 1995, for a review article). Beginning with Judith Butler’s (1990; 1993; 1988/1997) work on gender identity as performance, identity is not who one is, but what one does. Hence, Butler (1988/1997) frequently wrote of gender enactment rather than expression and stated that the self has no *a priori* essential identity content with respect to gender or other aspects. Therefore, she also contrasted her view with Goffman’s (1959) “life as stage” perspective in which there is a self as “actor,” but one who is always playing different roles.

Butler's work was applied to feminist linguistic studies in works such as Cameron's (1997) analysis of young men's performative constructions of heterosexual masculinity, where talk and linguistic practice were demonstrated as one of the major "repeated stylizations of the body" that phenomenologically brought a particularly gendered self about. Thus, Cameron stated that talk does not express who one is, but rather creates who one is. (Interestingly, Stromberg's (1993) analysis of conversion narratives was actually based on a performative analysis as well, as he claimed the repeated telling or "performing" of the conversion narrative brought about an efficacious and continued realization of the claimed conversion itself.) Specifically, dramaturgical analyses of the self as role presentation (Goffman, 1959) and Butler's (1990) notion of identity as performance can be applied to analyze ex-gay narratives as performative enactments and presentations of a desired sexual self. Barrett's (2002) observations on the relevance of queer theory to sociolinguistic theory are also applicable to the current project, as he addressed sociolinguistic variables of identity such as gender and sexuality and discussed the indexical performance of these through language and linguistic practices as well.

Relevant to language and gender, the concept of situated learning taking place within a community of practice (Wenger, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991) has become a significant theoretical tool for linguistic studies. In my analysis of an ex-gay ministry setting in chapter 10, I specifically apply Holmes & Meyerhoff's (1999) and Eckert & McConnell-Ginet's (1992) notions that gender is not static or constant across communities, but is formulated and constituted differently among different groups and unto different purposes. In so doing, I also apply Ochs' (1992) work on the construction of gender ideologies in communities through both direct and more extensively through indirect indexical means.

2.5 OTHER RELEVANT RESEARCH ISSUES

Keane's (1997) review article on language and religion revealed how much of the research in this vein has been exoticized examinations of things such as "glossolalia" or speaking in tongues (e.g. Goodman, 1972; Maltz, 1985) or spirit possession (Boddy, 1994). Also, as I have mentioned, while work has been done on religious conversion narratives (e.g. Stromberg, 1993; Titon, 1988), not much has been done on the transformation that is believed to continue after the conversion event. The present work also will contribute to this aspect of religious life narratives.

Ochs and Capps (2001) work on narrative began to address the presence of religious beliefs, prayer and dialogical encounters with the Divine, and so forth, in people's quotidian experience. Meigs (1995) also addressed the common use of religious language and the heavily quotative behavior in terms of the Biblical text in the lives of conservative Christians. In discussing life story research, Atkinson (2002:129) wrote:

Regarding mystical-religious issues, life stories can provide clues to what people's greatest struggles and triumphs are, where their deepest values lie, what their quests have been, where they might have been broken, and where they have been made whole again.

Therefore, with regard to religion and spirituality, the life stories of ex-gays and ex-ex-gays—for whom religious beliefs are or have been central to their sense of self and identity—can teach us much about religion as personally lived experience.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This review of the literature is clearly not intended to be exhaustive, but is given to reflect those areas of work most relevant to the current project and that have influenced and informed my thinking with respect to its topic and design. I would like to close here with a brief explanation of my rationale and approach to the project analysis itself. My goal in this project has been to present and analyze these narratives as best I can from the

perspective and beliefs of the *tellers*. My first task in this relatively uncharted area of linguistic inquiry has been to describe and to understand. Consequently, as the dissertation progresses, it will become evident that I have not applied certain lines of analysis that would impose *a priori* assumptions from the research worldview that would inevitably lead to a “false consciousness” interpretation of the data, experience, and worldview of the participants.

For instance, I do not address power in Foucauldian terms of constraining discourse and ideology that is a binding illusion whose adherents are captive and blind because that is simply not the way individuals in this study experience or understand their lives. Both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays are ultimately very aware of power issues, but they address these issues primarily in terms of interactions between a Supreme Being and individual responses of agency—agency to which they attach a primary moral dimension. Similarly, while I point out the relevance of the concept of performativity with respect to identity, I refrain from the *full* application of this model, as we can predict that the presuppositions of Butler (1990) and others would necessarily also lead to “false consciousness” or “blind captives” conclusions due to the contrast between the phenomenological view of gender, sexuality, and identity as “social fiction” represented in Butler’s (1988/1997) work and much of feminist theory and the ontological views held by the ex-gays and most of the ex-ex-gays in my study.

I would like to point out here that these types of analyses with respect to ex-gay Christians have been done (e.g. Ponticelli, 1993) and will undoubtedly continue to be done, perhaps as the default position. However, I submit that such analyses often tell us as much (or more) about the worldview and presuppositions of the researcher as they do about the people and issues purported to be studied. Erzen (2002:19) stated that researchers and ethnographers of issues involving religion must “commit to

understanding belief instead of viewing it as ‘false belief,’” even when the beliefs of those studied represent views that are antithetical to those held by the researchers themselves. For the purposes of this project and in keeping with most research on personal narratives and belief systems, the question of objective truth and the actual veridical issues of the narratives themselves are set aside (e.g. Stromberg, 1993; Atkinson, 2002).

Thus, again, I seek first to present the life narratives as they are understood and experienced by those who tell them, not impose my own beliefs and perspective and thereby complete an exercise in researcher solipsism or play the role of the “Omniscient narrator” (Bruner, in Capps and Ochs, 1995) who tells the real story that the dupes are too blind to see. I want those who trusted me with their stories to be not only “listened to” but also “heard” (Bourdieu, 1991). Such an approach does not then prohibit or exclude analysis or critique, but places understanding as the necessary prerequisite upon which such critique and analysis must be based. As an example of measures taken to achieve this goal of understanding, readers will note that I have documented the numerous Biblical allusions that occur throughout the narratives themselves. In so doing, my intention is not to give unsolicited “Sunday School” lessons, but to demonstrate the pervasive “ventriloquations” (Bakhtin, 1981) of the religious text and worldview, as ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives simply cannot be understood apart from a firm grasp of the Christian belief system that has both supplied the “conflict” and the “cure.”

Part of the difficulty with the present topic originates from its cultural salience and attendant controversy, because especially in light of current times, this project and its data can be hard to “exoticize” and thereby more easily stand apart from one’s own position to observe the issues involved. However, I would like to invite the reader to do so, and perhaps offer a strange parallel to the present project as a stimulus in that

direction. In her ethnography of lesbian history, Stein (1997) explained that during the early 1970s, many previously heterosexual women in the feminist movement declared themselves to be lesbian and joined with friends or structured consciousness-raising groups to help them solidify their new sexual identity: “Homosexual desire was not necessarily a prerequisite” (69). Thus, reconstruction of sexuality was seen as possible through a socialization process and restructuring of values. This scenario bears some similarity to the case of ex-gays, where embracing an ideology (or theology, as the case may be) leads to a re-definition of self and a conscious effort to change what they had previously perceived as their sexual identity. Interestingly, Stein’s work also includes a chapter entitled “Ex-lesbians,” in which she described the furor and debate caused by prominent cases of apparent sexual fluidity and movement back and forth between homosexuality and heterosexuality which seemed to challenge the essentialized notions of lesbian identity that were held by much of the lesbian community. These cases had nothing to do with religion or moral convictions, but caused deep divisions nonetheless.

Returning to the current study, as previously mentioned, my religious background gives me an insider’s understanding of the language, the use of the Bible, and other aspects of the evangelical Christian culture exhibited in the communities I have studied. Additionally, the fact of my past faith and sexuality conflicts and that my post-sexual identity resolution involved a return to Christian identification admittedly provides me with spontaneous personal empathy towards both groups. However, no matter how readers are positioned to the topic at hand or respond to the narratives themselves, they should be able to appreciate that the participants in this study have experienced deep conflicts and view these conflicts as very real and complex and as having most serious implications and consequences in this life and in the eternal afterlife in which they (or nearly all of them) so firmly believe. On a strictly human level, these narratives

minimally challenge us to acknowledge the real-life struggles and experiences of pain in the lives of those documented here, and even if we strongly disagree with their views, to respect them as they use narrative to stitch back together the self that has been rent in two.

Thus, in this dissertation, I examine a synchronic slice of life stories in which, by virtue of their now being analytically frozen in time, both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays *are* narrating new selves, and I hope to learn from the narratives of both groups more about how humans in general use language and linguistic processes to accomplish a unified and coherent story of the self and its identity, especially when that accomplishment is achieved out of the self in conflict.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I outline the design and research methodology of the current project. In section 3.2, I discuss the process of obtaining the data, from participant selection to negotiating access to research sites to actual data collection. In section 3.3, I detail the disposition and analysis of the data. Finally, in section 3.4, I conclude with a discussion of the study's primary foci and limitations.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned in the introduction, this project was designed to be a broad qualitative research inquiry into the language used by two groups, specifically, ex-gays and ex-ex-gays, in their process of sexual and spiritual identity transformation. The project includes two types of data—one type involving individual narratives and one involving group discourse. Specifically, I elicited ex-gay and ex-ex-gay individuals' personal life stories, which were followed by subsequent post-narrative interviews. In addition, I collected recordings of ex-gay support group meetings and focus group discussions at an ex-gay ministry.

My original goal was to collect a large sample of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives; hence, my original intention was to gather a total of 80 narratives with an equal number from both groups (i.e. 40 ex-gays, 40 ex-ex-gays), as well as equal numbers of both males and females represented within each group. The desire for a fairly large quantitative amount of data was not out of any hope of generalization or measurement in a strict positivistic sense. However, with relatively so little research having been done on the language of ex-gay narratives, much less ex-ex-gay narratives, I hoped to assess the

general character of the narratives, as well as be able to compare the degree of similarity between them with respect to content, structure, tropes, themes, and so forth, across as extensive a sample as possible. In the end, I was able to collect a total of 55 life story narratives, comprised of 18 ex-gay men, 17 ex-gay women, 14 ex-ex-gay men, and 6 ex-ex-gay women.⁶ In the upcoming discussion on participant selection, I address why these numbers pattern in the ways that they do and the disproportions in the sample size that they consequently represent.

In addition to these narratives, I also was able to record eight ex-lesbian study/support group meetings. Additionally, I organized and recorded four ex-gay focus group discussions, two with men only and two with both sexes participating. Finally, I conducted one-year follow up interviews with nine ex-gay individuals who had given me their life story narrative a year earlier. This dissertation is based on these corpora, the actual obtaining of which I will now detail.

3.2.1 Participant selection

Obviously, the relevant sources of data for this study were people who at some point had dealt with issues of conflict between their experience of same-sex attraction and/or understanding of their sexual identity as homosexual and their religious identity as evangelical Christians and had minimally either disavowed or at least at some point attempted to disavow homosexuality or a homosexual identity as a result. Specifically, the participants fell into two groups, depending on the current status of their identity conflict resolution, ex-gays and ex-ex-gays.

The ex-gay group for this study is comprised of individuals who at one time self-identified as homosexual and who claimed either to have experienced or to be in the

⁶Appendix A contains a list of all of the ex-ex-gay participants and provides basic demographic information for each of them. Appendix B contains a similar list of all of the ex-gay participants and their demographics. Each of the appendices is divided by sex for ease of reference.

process of a transformation of their sexual identity in order to comply with their understanding of Christian theology. Thus, the ex-gay participants fell into two sub-categories based on their involvement in ex-gay ministries at the time of the interview. The first category of individuals, which accounts for the majority of the ex-gays in my study, included those who were currently working to transform their sexual identity as active members of ministry support groups. The second category included individuals who were not currently involved in a ministry but who claimed to have experienced a change or transformation in their sexual identity due to their Christian faith. The majority of this group had participated in an ex-gay ministry to some degree in the past; only two had not but rather claimed a personal faith journey that had resulted in transformation.

The ex-ex-gay group is comprised of individuals who claim to have attempted some form of sexual identity transformation and concluded in the end that it was either not possible, not necessary, or both; these individuals now self-identify as homosexual. Most of the ex-ex-gays had at one time been involved in an ex-gay related ministry or support group, but a few in my study had not—a fact which provides a good segue into a needed acknowledgement of complications with respect to my best laid plans of discrete categorization.

When I first designed the study to include ex-gays and ex-ex-gays, I did not anticipate that identity categorizations with respect to these two groups would present any difficulties, which was true in most cases. For ex-gays, at the time of participant selection, whether individuals had been involved in an ex-gay ministry for three weeks or claimed to have been living an uncomplicated heterosexual married life after an ex-gay transformation journey from 12 years prior, they all were placed into the ex-gay category,

though there was obviously a great range represented among them with respect to the current stage of their identity transformation.

With respect to ex-ex-gays, the situation became a bit more complex, and I want to make clear the spectrum of diversity among these participants as well. The majority of ex-ex-gay participants fit the category as I had originally envisioned: they had at one time been participants in an ex-gay ministry to some degree. Among these individuals, however, there was a wide range with respect to the length of involvement in the different ministry settings. For instance, while she was a college student, Maggie traveled and visited a residential ministry setting during her academic winter break for one week to seek counseling, but that was the extent of her participation in an actual ex-gay ministry. Alex attended a support group and Christian counseling for three months; Ricardo was involved in an ex-gay support group off and on for seven years. Despite the wide variety of experiences, individuals such as these, with at least some experience in an ex-gay ministry, fit my original conception of the ex-ex-gay category. This category was so conceived in order to locate groups (i.e. ex-gays and ex-ex-gays) with the similar life experiences of both identity conflict and attempting some form of sexual identity transformation in response to that conflict.

However, as ex-ex-gay participants were harder to find (to be discussed below), I widened the necessary life experience beyond the boundary of having actually experienced involvement in an ex-gay ministry to obtain a larger sample. Thus, as stated above, a few of the ex-ex-gays in my study had never participated in such a ministry. Several respondents described trying to “go straight” through heterosexual marriage and church involvements, but in the end defined themselves as homosexual and embraced a gay identity. These individuals I included in the ex-ex-gay category because the basic

religious conflict was present, along with some attempt to disavow homosexual behavior and/or a homosexual identity in response.

Some individuals were harder to classify based on their self-identification versus my criteria. For instance, Brad had come to Liberty for a brief period of time but then had left the ministry.⁷ According to Brad, this departure was neither because he did not think change was not necessary, because at the time of the interview he still considered homosexual behavior sinful, nor that he thought transformation was not possible, because he still believed it was, but rather because he decided that he did not want to change and “give up” homosexual activity at that time. As a result, Brad described himself as “still in the process, but trying to act like [he] [was] not” and therefore he did not technically self-identify as ex-ex-gay; however, I placed him in the ex-ex-gay category because he contacted me in response to my request for ex-ex-gay interviews and because of his life trajectory at the time.

In addition, in response to my calls for participation, which I thought were explicit enough and although I asked screening questions as well, I had some respondents who had never actually struggled with their religious faith and sexuality. For instance, I conducted one interview with a man who described himself as being raised going to a Christian church but disbelieving all aspects of traditional religious faith beginning in high school; his narrative was, then, basically an early life coming out story. While I appreciated hearing his story and valued his interview (which I have kept for future analysis), his life simply did not have the key element of religious conflict and at least a minimal attempt to refrain from homosexual behavior or dis-identify as homosexual, which is basic for the purposes of my inquiry. Consequently, I did not include him in the

⁷ I did not meet Brad during my initial three months of ethnographic research in 2002. Brad had come to the program during the year following my departure. Thus, I met and interviewed Brad during my two weeks of follow-up research at Liberty in June of 2003.

ex-ex-gay data pool. In his urban political study of the gay and lesbian “community” with respect to political and economic involvement, Bailey (1999) wrote that instead of discussing “identity,” with its static and discrete implications, a more useful formulation would be the “problematic of identity,” which would capture the complexity of individuals and their shifting identities, community associations and self-constructions. Hence, even before the data collection began, in my participant selection I began to experience the theoretical “problematic of identity” in quite a tangible way.

This having been said, participants for the study were selected on the basis of three criteria: self-identification as a potential participant (combined with sufficient approximation of my criteria, as above), age, and sex. First, potential participants were individuals who described their sexual and religious identity and life experiences in ways that made them eligible for inclusion in either the ex-gay or ex-ex-gay group. Second, all participants were required to be 19 years of age or older. This minimum age for participation was originally set at 21 in an attempt to ensure that participants were at an age where differentiation from family had had an opportunity to take place and an autonomous sense of both sexual and religious identity had been established. However, Lori and Morghan, aged 19 and 20 respectively, were participants in the ex-gay ministry I extensively researched, and as such were part of the ex-lesbian support group. Consequently, I lowered the minimum age of involvement to 19, and after collecting their life narratives, I had no reservations about their inclusion. Third, participants were selected on the basis of sex in order to have as equal a representation of males and females in the study as possible.

As noted, Appendices A and B provide a list of all the study participants and their relevant demographic information. However, I would like to mention here that while there is racial diversity represented in my sample, the preponderance of the participants

were white. Among the ex-gays, there were two African Americans, one male and one female, two South East Asian women, (i.e. one Chinese Filipino and one Chinese Indonesian), one North Indian man, and five Hispanic individuals (one man and four women, with Mexican, Puerto Rican, El Salvadoran, and Mexican American representatives). Among the ex-ex-gays, all were white with the exception of one African American man and one man whose father was white and whose mother was Puerto Rican.

3.2.2 Negotiating access and conducting the research

I will now address the means of participant recruitment for both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays and how I negotiated access to both groups. First, as I mentioned in the introduction, I have in the past dealt with similar issues of faith and sexuality in my own life. While I had never attended an ex-gay support group or been part of an ex-gay ministry prior to beginning this research, because of my personal life experiences, I have friends and acquaintances who, having reached different identity resolutions, are on both sides of the issue. As a result, I knew people whom I could get in touch with to see if they would be willing to help me contact both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays.

For the sake of temporal linearity, I begin by discussing my negotiation of access to the ex-gay ministry sites and the ex-gay data collection process. Methodologically, I began with the ex-gay portion of the project for two reasons: first, I anticipated that ex-gay participants would be easier to find simply because many of them have coalesced into unified and localized communities of practice through their active participation in ex-gay ministries. Second, it seemed prudent to learn as much as possible about the workings of an ex-gay ministry and ex-gay narratives prior to collecting ex-ex-gay narratives in order to have a better understanding of the ex-ex-gay data at the time of the telling, rather than working in a retrospective manner.

Thus, in January 2002, I began attending ex-gay support group meetings on a weekly basis at a newly begun ministry in my area. In addition, I began driving three hours to attend another ex-gay ministry group on a bi-monthly basis. In each case, before my first attendance, I contacted the respective ministry leaders to discuss my project and seek permission for my coming to the groups for the purposes of research. In these discussions, I made it clear that my data would include both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays and that the focus of the dissertation was neither to promote nor disparage ex-gay ministries, but to conduct a careful examination of narrative and discourse use from a linguistic perspective. Both of these leaders were open and helpful and granted me permission to come and observe. Thus, I attended both of the groups for observation purposes, and upon receiving IRB approval in February 2002,⁸ I began taking field notes and preparing for data collection.

In the end, however, I was unable to obtain actual recordings of the support group meetings due primarily to the open nature of both of these groups. The terms “open” versus “closed” refer to the status of group membership and attendance. In a closed group, there is a period of group membership formation, after which the group is no longer open for joining or dropping in. Often, there is a commitment to meet as a small group for a certain length of time and accomplish a particular goal, e.g. complete a book study over the course of 16 weeks. Hence, in a closed group, the same people attend on a regular and consistent basis.

Conversely, in an open group situation, often called a “drop in” group, new members and individuals may join or drop in at any time, and there is no expectation of consistent attendance or commitment. Therefore, because of the sporadic nature of attendance and the possibility of new people on any given week in these two ex-gay

⁸ This study received UT-Austin IRB approval on February 14, 2002. Protocol #2002-02-0059.

ministry groups, it was not feasible to ask the group to consider whether or not they would be willing to be recorded, much less obtain group consensus and each individual's informed consent. I did continue to attend these groups through the beginning of May 2002 for observation purposes, and I also attended a weekend conference taught by a prominent ex-gay ministry leader, Sy Rogers, which was sponsored by the further distanced ministry.⁹ While I was unable to obtain any group recordings, several individual members of the groups agreed to participate in the one-on-one life narrative interviews. Thus, I conducted my first four individual interviews in March of 2002, which was the beginning of my actual recorded data collection.

Significantly, Rico,¹⁰ the leader of the newly established group, had previously participated in an ex-gay ministry that had a residential program, which will be called Liberty throughout this dissertation. Rico, knowing my desire to do group recordings, informed me that Liberty was a much better potential setting for such, as the program had several groups running that were more consistent with attendance due to the live-in ministry participants. Rico also stated that there would be numerous individuals for potential life narrative interviews, because in addition to the current ministry participants, there were many ex-gay individuals who had been participants at Liberty and remained in the area as well. In April 2002, Rico arranged for me to talk with Mick, the ministry leader at Liberty, and after considering my request for access, Mick agreed to let me visit. Thus, a few weeks later, I traveled to another state and spent three months¹¹ at Liberty for the purposes of data collection.

⁹ "Lessons Learned: Insights for Redeeming the Sexual Generation," Sy Rogers, April 12-13, 2002.

¹⁰ All names of ministries and individuals throughout are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. The concern for confidentiality is also why the locations of the ministries and even the states where I conducted the ex-ex-gay interviews are not specified.

¹¹ The actual dates of my research at Liberty, from arrival to departure, were 5/13/02 to 8/7/02.

The ministry at Liberty, an Exodus affiliate ministry, offered what its founders described as a year-long “residential Christian discipleship program” that focused on building the participants’ individual relationships with God and helping them with their stated goal of dealing with the issue of same-sex attraction and/or behavior in their lives. There were two men’s houses and one women’s house, where between four to six ministry participants lived and shared household responsibilities, with a ministry staff person either present or available on-call at all times. It is important to note here that all participants were at Liberty of their own will and desire and were free to leave the program at any time. Liberty has an “If you see this as a problem in your life and want help, we’re here” policy, does not recruit, and has an application and acceptance process.

All of the members of the live-in program at Liberty participated in various weekly ministry meetings, of which there were several. Both men and women had separate study and support groups that met for two hours weekly; the men met on Monday nights and the women met on Tuesday nights. These meetings were also open to individuals in the community who were not part of the live-in program, but the live-in participants were by far the majority. On Wednesday nights, both men and women live-in participants met collectively as a “house church,”¹² during which there was a time of worship through singing, prayer, and a lesson. On Thursday night, there was a larger

¹² While there is variation among the concept of “house churches” and its implementation across different evangelical groups, in general the house church movement began to spread among American evangelicals around the late eighties. This movement is seen to be a shift away from an official church institution as the sole or primary place for worship and community and is considered to be a return to “New Testament” Christianity, or the first century church model, where small groups of believers met in homes for worship, study, and prayer. Specifically here, Liberty’s home church was a moderate version of the house church model. Thus, while the church described itself as a “fellowship of house churches,” there was still a traditional Sunday morning gathering for worship and a sermon, a full church staff, and a church building, typical in organization and practice to most non-denominational churches. However, members were also strongly encouraged to be part of one of the many house churches/small group fellowships that met during the course of the week, and these groups were considered to be the actual core of the church. In this context, members were believed to primarily experience the Christian life as a community, as they met in smaller numbers, developed closer relationships, and had more opportunities for direct involvement and active participation.

meeting with an extended time of worship held at the non-denominational evangelical church that served as Liberty's home, after which men and women would divide into groups for a Bible-based teaching. This meeting included all of the residential program members, as well as a good number of individuals from the community, family members, and so forth. All residential members also attended this same evangelical Christian church on Sundays.

The members of the residential program held full-time outside employment during their time at Liberty, but their work schedule was required to be such that they could participate in the nightly meetings. Residential members also met with ministry leaders for "one-on-one" discussions and prayer on a weekly basis. During the program, there were assigned numerous books to read, Bible studies, and prayer and journaling exercises.

At the end of a year, a participant's progress would be assessed and if he or she had completed all the program requirements (e.g. readings, ministry activity participation, exhibited "growth" in relationship with God, self, and others), a graduation celebration would be held to "bless" the participant and honor their completion of the program. The graduation was held at the church, and the graduate was able to invite up to ten people who had been a significant part of his or her journey during that year. Family members often came from out of town to attend these celebrations, and graduates would invite mentors or friends from the church whom they had made during the year. The members of the graduate's household prepared and served a meal to the graduate and his or her guests. At these ceremonies, the graduate would often give a testimony of thanks to God and others and describe significant points in the year or "journey," and the attendees would speak words of blessing to the graduate. The ministry leaders would attend and

pray a prayer of blessing for graduate and for the continued journey after he or she left Liberty.¹³

I did not go to Liberty with the intention of doing an ethnographic study of the ministry itself; I went because Liberty provided me access to the recorded data I had found so elusive in the other ministry settings. However, understanding the context in which that recorded language was produced is vital to understanding the language itself. Therefore, I give this description so that the readers have an idea of what the residential program at Liberty involved. Also, while the object of my study was not to produce an ethnography *per se*, I took an ethnographic approach to my research involvement at Liberty. Hence, I attempted to become as much a part of the community as I could (as much as a researcher who was constantly asking people to sign consent forms or turning on a tape recorder could, that is). With this in mind, I attended every meeting that was open to me and also attended Liberty's evangelical church base on Sundays. In addition, I attended the Exodus Annual Conference¹⁴ with a large number of Liberty participants in August. In so doing, I experienced two twelve-hour drives with three of the women at Liberty on the way to and from the conference, which certainly helped in building rapport, as road trips seem to do in almost any context, research notwithstanding.

During this three-month period, I conducted ethnographic interviews and collected the life history narratives of 14 men and 13 women who were either past or current ministry participants. For participation in the individual interview portion of the study, I asked participants to meet with me one-on-one for a single session with an estimated duration of approximately two to three hours. In actuality, the shortest

¹³ "Graduating from the program" is mentioned in a few of the Liberty participants' transcript excerpts. This discussion is primarily intended to inform the reader of what is meant by such a reference. Though I was not able to attend a graduation in my initial three months of research, I was grateful that Justin allowed me to attend his ceremony/dinner during my follow-up research visit in June 2003.

¹⁴ Exodus 2002: 27th Annual North American Conference, Wheaton, IL, July 31-August 3, 2002.

narrative/interview session lasted 45 minutes, and the longest ran well over six hours; however, the average duration tended to be around three hours from start to finish. I asked the participants to set the location for the interview so that they could choose the most comfortable and convenient place for them. The interviews were conducted in places ranging from an empty conference room in the ex-gay ministry offices, the church, the participants' homes, to my own lodgings. I recorded each of the individual narratives/interviews on 74-minute mini discs using a Sony MZ-R70 Mini Disc digital recorder and miniature unidirectional stereo microphones.¹⁵

I began each of these narrative sessions with a brief interview, through which I obtained the participant's basic demographic data and background, such as age, sex, ethnicity, religious affiliation, occupation, and so forth. After finishing these questions, I simply asked the participants to tell me their story. Occasionally, participants hesitated or struggled with where to begin, at which times I prompted them with no more than an additional phrase such as, "obviously with a focus on your understanding of your sexuality and your faith," because I wanted to obtain their orientation to the narrative and events, not one supplied by me as the researcher if at all possible. This methodology clearly gathers data that falls into what Ochs and Capps (2001) typified as the kinds of personal narrative most frequently analyzed in the social sciences, which are characterized by having "one active teller," being a "highly tellable account," and "relatively detached from surrounding talk and activity." However, as the data will show, the clear "linear and causal ordering" and "certain, moral stance" aspects of their characterization are less constant (20).

¹⁵ I had originally intended to videotape the interviews as well for any participants that were willing to have both types of recordings done. Clearly, such recordings would have provided a whole other arena of information and rich additions of valuable detail with respect to body posture, gesture, and so forth. However, after both digital sound and video recording the first two interviews and much consideration, I decided to continue the project with sound recording alone due to the sensitive nature of the data and perhaps overzealousness with respect to confidentiality.

I consciously approached the narrative elicitation with the intention of minimal involvement, limiting myself to as few interruptions as possible and seeking to alleviate the artificial and stilted feel of my lack of interactional response by backchannel cues rather than active participation. During the telling of the story, I did at times make requests for clarification or for narrators to elaborate on certain points. Riessman (1987) observed that “western, white, middle-class interviewers seem to expect temporally sequenced plots and have trouble hearing ones that are organized episodically” (1993:17). At times, I realized that my requests for “clarification” were actually effecting an imposition of temporal ordering upon a non-linear thematic or episodic telling and that I was in some ways fulfilling Riessman’s characterization. As a result, I made greater efforts to reframe my questions and limit them to topical clarifications (though I confess that I did not always succeed). Also, depending on the setting and appropriateness to the situation, I took notes on gestures and body movements during the telling.

After the participants concluded their stories, I followed up with further questions.¹⁶ These questions were not fixed, but flowed from what was relevant to each individual’s story. Due to the subject matter at hand, many of the questions were necessarily of a sensitive and personal nature, such as, “Do you ever currently experience same-sex attraction?” or “How would you describe your sexuality now?” Each participant was reminded and assured at the beginning of the interview that he or she could decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time (which, as it were, never occurred). While there is a good deal written on the subject of conducting sociolinguistic interviews (e.g. Briggs, 1986), I admittedly relied as much on my prior training and experience as a social worker, through which I had gained a fair amount of

¹⁶ Appendix C contains the general question guide that I used for each interview, with the framework of topics and sample questions that were addressed.

practice conducting intake interviews and assessments and obtaining client psychosocial histories.

In addition to the individual life narratives, I also attended and recorded the weekly women's Bible and/or book study and support group meeting. Though the support group was not officially closed, the group was regular in the membership and consistent in attendance, being composed primarily of members of the live-in program. Therefore, the group members were able to consider if they were willing to participate in the research study, reach consensus, and each of the individual members give her informed and written consent.

With respect to this aspect of the data collection, there was a risk that some participants would be self-conscious about having a researcher present in the sessions and being audio recorded. This self-consciousness could have made them feel less free to express themselves and in turn get less benefit out of their group participation, in addition to affecting the data. Thus, before I sought consent or recorded data of any kind, including taking field notes, I attended several group sessions in order to build trust and rapport with the members and to hopefully minimize the effect of my presence as a researcher (though obviously no measures can completely remove the "observer's paradox"). The group recordings were also done on mini-disc, and I alternated between using the unidirectional microphone and a Sony ECM-F01 boundary effect flat microphone. The microphone was laid as inconspicuously as possible on the table around which the group members sat and talked, though members would sometimes indicate their awareness of it through jokes and remarks.

In addition, I asked the group what would make them most comfortable and tried to accommodate them in any way possible. I told the group members that I was willing to be a participant observer in the group if they would like, which indeed was what they

preferred. Ponticelli (1993) was a participant observer while conducting her research with an ex-lesbian support group at the group's request, so assuming this role with respect to researching ex-gay groups is not without precedent. As previously mentioned, I obtained a total of eight support/study group session recordings.

With respect to the men's weekly session, there was concern that the presence of a female researcher might inhibit some of the group members and keep them from feeling comfortable enough to share freely and openly. Consequently, I did not attend or record the men's meetings, but arranged for and recorded two focus group discussions among smaller groups of men in the Liberty live-in program. In addition, I conducted two impromptu focus group discussions with a mixed sex group, one with current Liberty participants, and the other with former participants who still attended the evangelical church that served as Liberty's home base.

I completed my initial research at Liberty in the early part of August 2002. In June 2003, I returned to Liberty for two weeks of additional research. Specifically, I conducted follow-up interviews with six men and three women who had been live-in program participants at the time of their interview the previous summer. In these secondary interviews, I asked them to tell me about the previous year and their experience in the ministry. Thus ended the ex-gay data collection phase of the study.

During this follow-up trip, I conducted my first ex-ex-gay life narrative interview with Brad, a man who had come to Liberty during the year after my departure. As the summer of 2002 had been slotted for ex-gay data collection, so the summer of 2003 was planned for intensive ex-ex-gay data collection. In May 2003, I officially met with a pastor of a Metropolitan Community Church who agreed to help me in my ex-ex-gay participant search, and after two weeks at Liberty, I returned to Texas and began the search and data collection in earnest.

As anticipated, participants for the ex-ex-gay portion of the study were more difficult to find due to the fact that ex-ex-gay individuals tend not to coalesce into single, unified communities of practice in contrast to the ex-gay ministry settings, where groups of potential participants are already gathered. However, as many ex-ex-gays do reach a gay Christian identity resolution, I was able to find several participants through contacts with pastors and ministers at several Metropolitan Community Churches. Through the MCC churches and a “snowball sampling” effect, where one participant would put me in touch with other potential contacts, I gained nine interview participants. I arranged to conduct these interviews in empty classrooms at the MCC that the individuals attended.

After a long-planned research trip to California for the month of July fell through, I placed a statewide advertisement in which I requested volunteers for unpaid research participation in the gay and lesbian magazine *The Texas Triangle* and received a total of four interview participants from responses to that ad.¹⁷ Hence, during the month of July, I drove over 1,400 miles to conduct 14 ex-ex-gay interviews, at one point traveling over 300 miles to a neighboring state to conduct an interview with a man I had contacted through a search on the Internet. These interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes, with the exception of one interview that was conducted in my home. However, I still needed many more narratives to accomplish my goals for the study.

In addition to my search for individual ex-ex-gay life narratives, I also was looking to see if I could find any ex-ex-gay support groups, as I knew that such groups could potentially exist. Because I had collected data from ex-gay support groups, logically, from a research and methodological standpoint, if such ex-ex-gay groups did

¹⁷ A copy of the advertisement is given in Appendix D. In addition to this advertisement, I had posted similar calls for participation on a gay consumer website, sent e-mail requests for potential participants to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) groups in several major Texas cities. I also contacted other gay-affirming churches and placed postings on their websites. Some potential ex-ex-gay participants did not wish to take part in the project if it was not explicitly seeking to discredit ex-gay ministries, so I had to forego some possible interviews because of the design and intention of the project.

exist, there was a possibility of obtaining discourse data in a setting comparable to the ex-gay support group meeting. Despite a solid effort, I was not able to find any ex-ex-gay support groups during the course of my research; however, I stumbled upon what I consider to be the next best thing.

While continuing my search for additional interview participants through Internet searches, I read an article that briefly mentioned a small, informal ex-ex-gay support group in a location across the country from me. At the time, the article was already two years old. However, one of the leader's names was mentioned in the article, (whom you will see quoted in this dissertation as Alex), and I was able to make phone contact with him. While the group had been an informal dinner/discussion/support group of about 15 men who had met semi-regularly for over a year, it was now defunct and the members had not met in some time. However, after I explained the project, Alex was extremely helpful and gracious, and he agreed to forward an e-mail to the group list in which I described the study and requested that individuals contact me if they were willing to participate in the interviews. From these e-mail contacts, I arranged eight interviews, and in August 2003, I flew cross-country to a tri-state area for ten days of data collection.

As a result, while I was unable to get actual ex-ex-gay support group discourse, I did happen upon a rather dense and multiplex ex-ex-gay network of relationships. These men had coalesced into a significant community through their involvement in a season of support group types of dinners and meetings. As the meetings were described to me, the men got together for dinner and discussions related to faith and sexuality on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. As the group was initially forming, the group members began by "telling their stories" about their life experiences of sexual and spiritual identity conflict and involvement in an ex-gay ministry and/or therapy. As a result, all of the August interview participants knew each other, frequently referred to one another during their

life narratives, and several of them had been involved in the same ex-gay ministry prior to assuming an ex-ex-gay identity position.

I conducted these interviews across a closely bordered tri-state area, meeting participants in locations such as their homes or offices, actually beginning the trip with an interview in an empty airport terminal immediately upon disembarking the plane. I should note here that I was never more grateful for the support of the Social Science Research Council grant than at this particular point in the research, as the extensive travel required to obtain the ex-ex-gay data simply would not have been possible without such generous outside financial assistance.

Throughout this period of data collection, I was finding many more male participants than female. In general, there are more men involved in ex-gay ministries than women, so this disproportion in the sample was not surprising, but I was seeking to remedy it if at all possible. Two of the women I had interviewed in Texas provided me with other contacts by forwarding my e-mail request for participation, just as Alex had done for me. However, these respondents were scattered geographically, each of them living in a different state beyond reasonable driving distance, which precluded a research trip for an in-person interview. I therefore ended up conducting two phone interviews, which I recorded by connecting the mini-disc equipment to a corded telephone with a Dynametric TLP-102 telephone logger patch. In both of these cases, I mailed the consent form to the participant in advance and it had been signed and returned to me prior to the phone appointment. I conducted the last ex-ex-gay life narrative interview for the study by phone in September 2003, having collected 21 ex-ex-gay narratives in all. While this amount was half of my originally hoped for data, my research conscience was clear, as I had done all I knew to do in my attempt to gather as many ex-ex-gay narratives as I had ex-gay ones.

Regarding the ex-ex-gay data collection, a final word concerning researcher and participant rapport is worth mentioning. Apart from the two participants I knew personally beforehand, my relationship to most of the ex-ex-gay participants involved a single episode of a face-to-face encounter. For the two women with whom I conducted the phone interviews, there never was an instance of a physical meeting. Clearly these circumstances had to create some difference in terms of relational dynamics and rapport with respect to the ex-ex-gay and ex-gay groups. While I had only known a similar number (namely, three) of the ex-gay participants personally before the research began as well, the fact that most of them attended ministries at which I appeared multiple times—with by far the majority being collected at Liberty during my extended three-month stay—established trust and rapport over a period of time.

However, in analyzing the data and considering the interview dynamic from my perspective, I could at least *perceive* no significant qualitative difference in the level of openness or degree of comfort that individuals seemed to display. For all of the ex-ex-gay participants, I had talked with them at least twice by phone to arrange times, locations, discuss the project, and so forth. Regarding the long distance research trip, I had talked with each of the men on multiple occasions, some of them at great length, and I dined with several of the participants either before or after their interview sessions. More often than not, they asked my own position with respect to the issues at hand, and I always shared my past history and current resolution. (The ex-gay ministry participants had certainly required this self-revelation of me as well. Selah had welcomed me on the second day of my arrival at Liberty with the greeting, “You give us your story, and we’ll give you ours.”) With both groups, I found that rapport was built in these cases of self-revelation through having the shared experience of past conflict with faith and

homosexuality, despite any differences in the actual specifics of our present identity positions.

However, there were two differences that I could perceive between the ex-ex-gay group and the ex-gay group with respect to the data collection, and these differences related first to the setting and second to my own comfort as a researcher. First, the ex-ex-gay interviews were often more definitively constrained by time boundaries. While the duration of these life narrative tellings and interviews were quite comparable to the ex-gay data, being on average around two-and-a-half hours (with the longest, Dee's narrative, lasting four-and-a-half hours), on occasion, time constraints prevented me from asking all the follow-up questions I would have liked. This constraint only occurred on a few occasions, and often was a result of having scheduled two interviews back to back in order to fit them in on the longer trip, whereas such problems did not occur at all with the ex-gay interviews because there simply was a wider range of scheduling possibilities.

Also with respect to the follow-up questions, I saw that at times (not always), my own desire to be sensitive to those participants with whom I had not had more opportunity to build trust caused me to refrain from asking questions or gently "challenging" or "pushing a point" to get further elaboration. The most salient example of this difference, and the instance which brought it clearly into my awareness, was a post-narrative interview situation with an ex-ex-gay man. This participant had stated clearly that the sexual ethics within his new gay Christian belief system restricted permissible (i.e. "moral") sexual activity only to that which occurs within the bounds of a committed relationship (whether heterosexual or homosexual). At the time of the interview, the man was not involved in a relationship, nor had he been for some time, and I asked him a follow-up question with respect to celibacy. When he responded with, "Are you asking me if I'm celibate?" with rather increased loudness (not out of anger, but

surprise) and a rather shocked tone, I in turn was rather shocked, as this was the first time (and, as it turned out, the last time) that such a response had occurred out of over 50 interviews that I had conducted up to that point. Thus, I interpreted it as an equivocation (though I have no way of knowing if my interpretation was accurate), and I immediately beat a path of retreat, shuffling the question off as unimportant and re-directing the interview, which resumed and continued the previous level of comfort and affable interaction from that point to its conclusion.

However, because a key theme of this participant's life narrative had been bringing his sexual identity and behavior into alignment with his understanding of sexual ethics, the question was quite within the bounds of relevance for ascertaining the degree to which he had been able to accomplish this goal and his degree of satisfaction with his current state of resolution. In this regard, the degree of congruence between current sexual ethics and current sexual practice was relevant to and a consistent topic of discussion in my conduction of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay interviews. I by no means seek to dramatize this occurrence or make it seem more than it was by this mini-narrative re-telling; it was a brief moment of interview tension that passed as quickly as it arose. Again, I recount the incident only because through it I realized the interview difference which I am now discussing, as I knew immediately that it was my concern over researcher-participant trust and rapport that kept me from owning up to the intent of the question and graciously reminding him that he certainly did not have to answer.¹⁸

Conversely, I simply did not feel the same degree of interviewing tension with the ex-gay participants, especially at the Liberty setting, due to the relationships that had been built over time. I do not think that this fact affected the data much at all, because

¹⁸ In one of the nicest and longest opportunities for post-ex-ex-gay interview interactions I had, this man and I went for a walk and talked further about our lives, and he kindly treated me to ice cream. Hence, I like to think the above-described moment was merely one of brief discomfort, hopefully more for me than for him, as rapport did not appear to be different or diminished by comparison to other interview situations.

with both groups, I most often pressed through and found a way to ask the questions anyway. But as these were differences that were perceptible to me, I felt they were worthy of acknowledgement.

With these issues having been addressed, the actual individual narrative data collection process was identical to the previously described ex-gay data collection process. Obviously, as the post-narrative follow-up questions flowed out of and were relevant to the life narrative, these questions differed in content to some degree from individual to individual, but differed significantly between the two groups. For example, a question such as “Was there a defining moment or an event that triggered your decision to leave the ex-gay setting and embrace a gay or lesbian identity?” was only relevant to the ex-ex-gay participants.

3.3 DATA: DISPOSITION, ANALYSIS, AND PRESENTATION

After the completion of the data collection phase of the project, I was overwhelmed by being in possession of approximately 180 combined recorded hours of both group sessions and individual narrative-interviews. As previously stated, I intentionally sought to collect a large number of narratives in order to gain a broad perspective on the relatively unstudied language of both of these groups. However, these corpora then required some handling decisions for the sheer sake of manageability.

I knew the data well, and after collecting so many narratives, I began to see and hear the characteristic patterns, themes, and tropes repeated and the narrative frames and shapes emerge with a high degree of consistency. Thus, after reviewing and considering the entire collection, I selected approximately six¹⁹ “characteristic” narratives from each

¹⁹ Due to the small sample size of ex-ex-lesbians, I fully transcribed five of the interviews and only selectively transcribed sections of the sixth.

sex for each group (i.e. ex-gay men, ex-gay women, ex-ex-gay men, ex-ex-gay women) to transcribe from start to finish.²⁰

This yielded 23 full-length narrative and interview transcripts to review and with which I could work in detail, some of which were almost 60 single spaced pages in length. Thus, with many of these full-length selections, I hired assistants to aid me with first-pass transcriptions, which I then reviewed. In addition, I chose to topically catalogue and selectively transcribe from any number of other narratives from each category in order to have access to more transcripts without the burden of producing the transcripts in complete form. Finally, I personally transcribed all of the multi-speaker sessions, including the ex-gay women's support group meetings and the ex-gay focus group discussions, most of them in their entirety or with only small sections of ellipses.

With respect to the transcriptions themselves, all researchers of language know that transforming talk into written text is a theoretical proposition (Ochs, 1979) and must be motivated and justified, because different forms of transcription will highlight and yield different observations of the object of study. While the current project is indeed a linguistic analysis that seeks to analyze more than content alone, I have transcribed the narratives on a fairly "clean" (Riessman, 1993) near content-level basis rather than encoding detailed speech features and interactional and micro-level phenomena. I refer to the broad design of the study to motivate this level of transcription, as I seek here to describe and analyze a large sample of the macro-structures and language of the narratives. Thus, I have included false starts, repetitions, and some impressionistic indications of pause and voice quality, while leaving out numerous other details that would certainly yield interesting information and observations. In terms of the continuous paragraph presentation style, I considered transcribing the talk segments using

²⁰ As a back up for the original mini-discs, I made two copies of each digital recording on audiotape. The audiotapes were then used for the transcribing process.

Chafe's (1980) notion of idea units or other means of line-by-line organization, but due to concerns about presentation length and the relatively scant loss for the purposes of this project at this level of the analysis by the paragraph arrangement, I chose to retain the former.

With respect to the data presented within the dissertation, a list of transcription conventions is given following the Table of Contents. As noted there, within all excerpts, bold-faced items are for the purpose of highlighting the most pertinent portions of the talk being discussed and are not a part of the original transcription. The only modifications I have made in presenting transcript excerpts are as follows. First, within any segment of talk presented, I have removed all of my own non-lexical content backchannel cues, which were included in the original transcriptions, unless these cues occurred in connection with comments of mine that have also been excerpted. Second, my use of ellipses never changes the ordering of the narrative elements or distorts the purpose or point of the narrator's talk; rather, ellipses are used solely out of length considerations. Third, all participants' names are self-chosen pseudonyms, and I also purged the transcripts of any identifying information. Thus, often there may be a blank, such as "<city>"; however, at other times I pseudonymized references instead of blanking them for ease of readability and wish to make clear that any specific mentions of places or persons have been so transformed.

3.4 CONCLUSION

In this study, I set out to describe the language and use of narrative in the lives of ex-gays and ex-ex-gays regarding their respective experiences of sexual and spiritual identity conflicts and transformations. To the best of my ability, I have done this project as originally designed and as described in my subsequent proposal to the SSRC Sexuality Research Fellowship Program. However, there were challenges to carrying out my

intentions, and there are therefore limitations to this study with respect to differences that exist between the two target groups.

As I have previously discussed, there is an imbalance present in the sample size between both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays as well as between women and men in each group. In addition, the facts of travel and length of established researcher-participant relationship imposed differences upon the interview interactions between the two groups. While such differences represent a limitation of the study, I would assert that there is no way that a researcher could do a completely parallel study with an identical pattern of investigation between both groups. Even if I had been able to achieve numeric equivalence, to then place a group of ex-gay ministry participants alongside an ex-ex-gay group of individuals and treat them as absolutely analogous collectives—with the differences between them existing only in their particularized identity affiliations—would be both an artificial imposition and construction, a “utopian imagining of communities” (Pratt, 1987).

The fact is that various groups of individuals both constitute themselves in different ways and are positioned differently within society and with respect to other groups therein. Ex-gay ministry participants form a relatively dense, multiplex network of relationships. With the support of the local ex-gay ministry, the local church, and larger organizations such as Exodus, ex-gay groups represent a community of fairly uniform beliefs and hence identities as ex-gay evangelical Christians (cf. chapter 5, section 1). Ex-ex-gay individuals represent a looser network with much more diverse beliefs and affiliations (cf. chapter 7, section 1) and with differently constituted and positioned structures of support, such as MCC fellowships and other gay-affirming churches and community organizations. Consequently, my study is constrained by these facts, and as a researcher, I must continue to think about the ways in which I can both accommodate and rigorously account for these realities. The realities themselves have at

one level rendered my parallel study design implausible and certainly made the presentation of my results seem less orderly and tidy.

I believe a primary strength of the present work lies in its breadth and scope. While this project is clearly not a quantitative or positivistic inquiry, by collecting such large corpora of data, I am able to demonstrate degrees of generalizability and the extent of iterability of language use across a fairly extensive narrative sample. Here I seek to analyze narrative and discourse structure at the most abstract level, looking primarily at the metanarrative and the terministic screens that provide the content of, framework, and coherence systems for the life narratives themselves. Yet, as with so many things, one's strength can become one's weakness. Therefore, an additional limitation of this study is that in order to obtain this wider view and perspective, I necessarily had to draw back and not bring many of the finer narrative and linguistic details into focus at this time. Such analyses simply must await a later project.

The group discourse and narratives of ex-gays and narratives of ex-ex-gays is relatively uncharted territory for linguistic analysis. As a result, I have chosen to survey the land and give an accurate description of the topography as the appropriate precursor to conducting deeper analyses of the narratives' intricate "soil composition." In so doing, I establish a broad, interpretive background that accounts for the macro-level of language and against which properly informed analyses of micro-level linguistic phenomena can then be done. In chapter 4, I begin this macro-level endeavor by establishing the terministic screens of ex-gay discourse within the ministries I studied.

Chapter 4: Terms of transformation in ex-gay discourse

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Across the broad spectrum of human experience, from illness (e.g. Ochs and Capps, 1996) to conversion (e.g. Stromberg, 1993) to coming out (e.g. Leap, 1999), the phenomenon of people gaining a sense of empowerment and help from acquiring new language to describe confusing or difficult life experiences is well-attested. In discussing her work with an ex-lesbian support group, Ponticelli (1999) stated that the mastery of Christian discourse is vital in the process of creating a new identity. In the present study, gaining language was explicitly referenced in by far the majority of the 38 ex-gay interviews conducted. Thus, acquiring Christian discourse and new discourse about homosexuality is essential to and therefore frequently described as a conscious part of ex-gay experience.

The organization of chapter 4 is as follows: in section 4.2, I begin by discussing the search for new language and discourse as a recurrent and often explicit theme in ex-gay narratives, and I demonstrate how the language ex-gays learn and the Christian discourse they acquire can be schematized into terministic screens that primarily fall along two axes, the spiritual and psychological. In addition, in the ex-gay ministry setting, this language learning is a community process that is experienced and occurs collectively. Then, in section 4.3, I address parallels between narrative therapy and the ex-gay understanding of language and identity with respect to “externalizing” and “internalizing” language use. I then highlight the divergence of ex-gay understandings from narrative therapeutic approaches, and in so doing, I also introduce the frequent use of the “medical metaphor” in ex-gay discourse.

4.2 EX-GAY TERMINISTIC SCREENS

It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak—2 Corinthians 4: 13 (New International Version)

In a preliminary conversation before I conducted an “official” interview, I asked Morghan, a 20-year-old white woman in the live-in program at Liberty, why she had come to the ministry. Her response of “Language. I came to get language,” poignantly illustrates the search for language as described above. Morghan’s reply so explicitly referenced language that it took me by surprise, and I wondered if this response was in any way affected by my position as a researcher from the field of linguistics. But later, when I collected Morghan’s life narrative and conducted her formal interview, Morghan fleshed out fully her seeking of language, not in response to a question, but in the course of telling me her story. This focus on language can be seen in excerpt (4.1), where Morghan recounted becoming involved in an ex-gay ministry and Christian-based therapy. (Excerpts (4.1a-c) represent a single continuous stretch of talk, which are subdivided for ease of discussion.)

A brief sketch of the excerpt is as follows. In (4.1a), Morghan described her conscious search for a framework for understanding and responding to homosexuality, a search in which Morghan’s finding specific language was a crucial component. Morghan gave a brief summation of her story in (4.1b), where she clearly employed the new framework and demonstrated some of the language she had gained from her search. Finally, in (4.1c), Morghan returned to the importance of language to the process of her dealing with homosexuality.

(4.1a) Morghan: And I found a ministry that deals with Christian homosexual struggle, <name of ministry>, and the lady there referred me to a therapist. And I went and saw a therapist twice a week for two months, which helped out tremendously because I learned so much. **I finally got names for the things that I was experiencing.** And I was never-in all of my spiritual training in

<name of youth ministry>, they didn't know anything about **same-sex attraction, emotional dependency, or homosexual struggles**, and I was never taught those things. And so, finally, **I was equipped with what I should have been equipped with a long time ago**. But nobody, nobody ever prompted me to get help about it. 'Cause they didn't think it was that big of a deal. I suppressed it. So um I got help, um, and through a lot of prayer and suffering, **I decided to move to <city> to be a part of this ministry. To gain more of an understanding of-of what it is that's going on inside of me that I don't understand**.

(4.1b) So, to wrap everything up, **I struggle with emotional dependency, same-sex attraction, and homosexual tendencies** because, I don't know if I was abused or not, sexually or otherwise, um, there are characteristics in my childhood that would indicate such. I had um, I think, I heard it from Jane, I think, I had an early awakening of sexuality as a kid, um, and when that happens, like you're just, your hormones and your emotions are multiplied by five thousand when you're going through puberty and that just doesn't help. So, um, because of a **lack of a mother-figure** in my life, an **early awakening of sexuality**, um, **insecurities** in who I was, not only as a girl, but also as a beautiful girl, um, these were all **deficiencies**,

(4.1c) that were never approached other than in a very spiritual "God can fix everything" sort of way. Nothing was ever focused. If you want to get anything, like, a laser, is more intense than a flashlight because it's more concentrated, and what we need in these highly deficient areas of our lives are **laser-like teachings and laser-like knowledge**, and all I was getting was spotlights. I don't need spotlights, I know that I have sin. OK, I'm exposed. **Help me put a laser pointer on what needs to be fixed so that I can be fixed. So that I can know freedom. So that I can put a description to my salvation experience. Put a description to my same-sex attraction and understand what's going on. Because until I understood the terminology of my salvation, I didn't know that I was saved. And until I understand the terminology of the problems inside of me, I can't recognize those problems, and I can't fix them.**

In (4.1c) above, Morghan described a dependent relationship between knowing her "salvation" experience and knowing the terms associated with and describing that experience. Implicit in this observation was the fact that without the language of salvation, Morghan would also be unable to tell a story of salvation, or conversion narrative. With regard to same-sex attraction, Morghan implied that the general Christian discourse in her previous possession was insufficient, stating that "spotlights" or a broad

knowledge of “sin” is not enough. Rather, Morghan stated that she needed “focused, laser-like knowledge” to “put a description to same-sex attraction and understand.” As a result, she actively sought specific “language,” “names,” and “terminology.” Morghan believed acquiring this “language” and “knowledge” would empower her to “recognize” and then “fix” her “problems.” Morghan’s language was deliberately gained within the context of the particular evangelical Christian discourse of the ex-gay ministry. Due to her religious convictions, she chose to narrate her life *on*, and therefore *through* and *in*, its specific terms. As with her reference to “salvation” above, these terms equipped her to then begin telling a story both *of*, and one that she hoped *would lead to*, transformation.

Interestingly enough, the beginning of this transformation story is given in (4.1b). Interposed between the comments of the need for language in (4.1a) and (4.1c), Morghan displayed narrative competence within the ex-gay context by giving a concise summary (e.g. “so to wrap everything up”) of her life and her experience of same-sex attraction. In (4.1b), Morghan demonstrated both the “understanding” and “terminology” she has acquired from her involvement in the ex-gay ministry, and even referenced at one point the learning of certain phrases and concepts from other ministry participants (i.e. “I think I heard it from Jane”). As her involvement in the ministry and attempts at transformation were relatively new from a temporal standpoint, Morghan’s story was in its initial stages as well. Thus, (4.1b) summarizes the “recognition” of the “problems,” which was the current stage of her narrative at that point in time, rather than the resolution of them *per se*, because the transformation part of the story was continuing to unfold. The actual content of Morghan’s summation is a preview of a typical ex-gay narrative story, frame, and coherence system, all of which is discussed in chapter 9 (using other excerpts for

illustration). However, the main point demonstrated here is that new language is both recognized and displayed as crucial to the process of narrating a new self.

The rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke proposed an analogy from theology to develop his notion of “terministic screens,” whereby a person’s choice of terms acts as a screen or filter by directing his or her attention in a particular way. As a result, this screen then affects the person’s observations and perceptions of reality.

Believe, that you may understand (*crede, ut intelligas*). In its theological application, this formula served to define the relation between faith and reason. That is, if one begins with “faith,” which must be taken on authority, one can work out a rationale based on this faith. But the faith must “precede” the rationale. [...] The “logological,” or “terministic” counterpart of “Believe” in the formula would be: *Pick some particular nomenclature, some one terministic screen*. And for “That you may understand,” the counterpart would be: *That you may proceed to track down the kinds of observation implicit in the terminology you have chosen, whether your choice of terms was deliberate or spontaneous.*” (Burke, 1966:46)

In the above quote, with a view of language reminiscent of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), Burke asserted that the terms in which people choose to articulate their experiences or views of the world actually come to define, delimit, and in a sense even bring about their worldview. Just as the choice of one set of terms necessarily excludes the choice of alternate possible terminologies, the different possible interpretations of reality associated with the meaning of the non-chosen terms are also excluded.

I had been at Liberty for six weeks when the Tuesday night women’s group completed their study of the Old Testament book of Ruth. The group, which had a general pattern of alternating between studying books of the Bible and “issue-related” books, then began studying a small book entitled *Healing Homosexuality* by Leanne Payne. Upon consideration, I came to realize that its first few pages laid out the essence of the terministic screens for identity in the ex-gay communities within which I was working.

In chapter one of *Healing Homosexuality*, terms such as “healing,” “identity crisis,” “cure,” “sexual neurosis,” “problem,” and “compulsion” are used and introduce the language of psychology and dis-ease. Additionally, terms such as “confession,” “temptations,” “sinful behavior,” “moral and spiritual fall,” and “forgiveness” introduce the terminology from religious and Christian discourse. “It [homosexuality] is a study in both the psychological and spiritual aspects of the identity crisis” (Payne 1985/1996:52). Thus, the psychological (medical) and the spiritual (moral) are the two primary terministic screens in ex-gay discourse. In the ex-gay ministries I studied, while both of these screens are of great importance, the spiritual screen is primary and the psychological screen is secondary. For instance, at a Leanne Payne ministry conference I attended with some members of the Liberty group in June 2002, the Christian psychiatrist Frank Lake (1966) was both humorously and seriously paraphrased as essentially saying: “The Bible has always spoken about the brokenness of the human condition—psychology has just filled in the details.” Thus, the Bible provides the primary frame for understanding “human condition,” and psychology secondarily can “fill in the details.”

An especially explicit reference to these two screens and the effect of acquiring the terms associated with them is given in (4.2) below. In this example, Ranni,²¹ a 37-year-old Chinese Indonesian woman who immigrated to the states with her family in early childhood, described the effect of being introduced to Leanne Payne and her work.

(4.2) The woman who was my accountability partner at <identifying place>, she introduced me to Leanne. The first year of my healing, I had no idea who this woman was, never read her books, and I actually didn’t read her books until much later. But all of a sudden that kind of **teaching and language started coming in** and-and **I needed the language to understand what I was going through**. I needed, um, I think what is really great about Leanne, is that **she puts words and**

²¹ Ranni had no connection with Liberty, and I conducted her interview in another state. This fact demonstrates a high degree of uniformity across different ex-gay ministry settings using the same teaching materials, thus sharing a common understanding and approach to the issue.

definitions to what is psychological and what is spiritual at the same time.

That's unique for me. I couldn't understand it from a **psychological standpoint** purely and from a **spiritual standpoint** purely, I couldn't reconcile it, it-it was split for me again. But in Leanne **giving a language to it** like "a sense of being", ah, **I understand that now**. It-it-it resonated with my soul. **I could understand; I could pray those prayers.**

In (4.2) above, Ranni expressed the importance of being exposed to new language, particularly the language used by Leanne Payne, in coming to understand her experience. Ranni claimed that she "needed the language" of both the "psychological" and the "spiritual" to "understand what she was going through." Thus, once again, an ex-gay identity transformation is formulated primarily around two axes, the psychological and the spiritual, and Ranni's discussion indicates that the language of both screens is essential to both understanding and participating in this process (e.g. "I could understand; I could pray those prayers").

Within the first three quotes on the initial page, we have a picture of the ex-gay journey template. Homosexuality involves a crisis in personal identity, one's true identity is to be found in Jesus, and there is a process of "becoming" involved in growing into one's personhood in Jesus (i.e. "personality is not a datum from which we start" (Lewis, 1949), quoted in Payne (1985/1996:9)). It is this process of becoming, most often referred to as a "journey," that the women in the Tuesday night group were in the midst of, in varying stages and with varying levels of certainty and commitment.

Chapter one of Leanne Payne's book, entitled "Homosexuality as Identity Crisis," sets the narrative stage: homosexuality is not an identity; it is an identity crisis. Rather than a state of being or a description of *who one is*, homosexuality is framed as a state of *not knowing who one is*. The chapter one title page lists the following quote from the author, which outlines an important premise in the narrative framework for the ex-gay journey to the new self.

One of the first things to do with the man (or woman) fearing there is no hope or healing for his deep gender confusion is to assure him that there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a homosexual (or lesbian). There is only a *person* (an awesome thing to be), created in the image of God, who is cut off from some valid part of himself. God delights in helping us find that lost part, in affirming and blessing it. (Payne, 1985/1996:9)

In ex-gay narratives, as in all narratives, the terminology determines the trajectory. The terministic screen (and in this case, the literal faith and willingness to assume said screen) is crucial to creating the competence and ability to narrate a new identity. Thus, the provision of new terms and new understanding is literally given as a first step in the “healing” process.

In a Burkean sense, the new terministic screens of ex-gay discourse operate in both a deconstructive and constructive manner. A conception of homosexuality as immutable, an essential part of selfhood, or definitional of being, must be relinquished in order to open up the possibility of an alternative identity. The deconstructing of said conception is achieved in part by relinquishing the term “homosexual” in its nominal form, and introducing the neutral term of “person,” which is devoid of a specified sexuality, in order to facilitate construction of the new identity. Payne stated: “It is amazing what relief this statement of truth can give to either the one fearing that he or she is homosexual or the one wanting to be delivered from an active homosexual lifestyle” (1985/1996:12). This “relief” comes in large part through the dissolution of the coterminous relationship between “homosexual” and the self, which creates the possibility of a *non*-homosexual identity for individuals whose experience of same-sex attraction is unwanted or seen to be in conflict with their religious convictions and who had previously viewed this as an unchangeable, integral characteristic of the self.

Having thus removed “homosexual” as a defining identity option and having framed homosexuality as “identity crisis,” the “person” who experiences same-sex

attraction is then positioned to look for identity elsewhere. This “person” is said to be “created in the image of God,” which points him or her in the direction of a Creator-God, and to have the problem of being “cut off from a valid part of himself,” which God can help him or her to find. The “person” thus positioned, he or she is then further directed by an ensuing quote from the book of Colossians, chapter 2, verses 9 and 10: “It is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion” (New English Bible).

This New Testament reference places this identity process with “God” within a distinctly Christian framework and alludes to Jesus, i.e. “Christ,”²² as the solution to the identity crisis (i.e. “being brought to completion”) and explicitly introduces text from the Bible. Similar to evangelical Christian theology that first diagnoses the human problem (i.e. sin) and then claims to provide the answer (i.e. salvation), “herein is both the identity crisis and its cure:”

When we first *will* to follow—when we first attempt obedience—God becomes very personal, not just some vague force. Our idea of Him changes. Then, as He points to the depths of our personalities, depths both good and bad that we are not in touch with, our idea about ourselves changes. We find that we do not know ourselves very well. Herein is both the identity crisis and its cure. As we will to be in Him, He gathers together the scattered parts of ourselves we have been separated from. (Payne 1985/1996:12)

A terministic screen operating in a constructive sense is created in the opening sentences of chapter one: “As a sexual neurosis,²³ homosexuality is regarded as one of the most complex. As a condition for God to heal, it is (in spite of widespread belief to the contrary) remarkably simple” (11). In this passage, a coterminous association is formed between “homosexuality” and both “sexual neurosis” and “a condition for God to

²² See Chapter 5, section 2, for a discussion of evangelical beliefs about Jesus as the “Christ.”

²³ This position obviously disagrees with the American Psychiatric Association’s 1973 removal of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’s list of disorders. For an account of the history of the removal decision from the perspective of a psychiatrist who is supportive of ex-gay ministries, see Satinover (1996), where he claimed that the removal was made primarily due to political pressure.

heal.” Thus, from the outset, a definition of homosexuality is established which encompasses both the psychological and the spiritual aspects, or terministic screens, in ex-gay understanding, in which homosexuality is seen as a “condition” to be healed. Note that this construction of homosexuality is one of the possible corollaries to the above-described deconstruction of homosexuality as an essential or fixed aspect of identity.

A fuller treatment of the actual lexical content and paradigmatic frameworks of the terministic screens for ex-gay narratives will be given in chapters 5, 6, and 9. Presently, however, I wish to illustrate the acquisition of new terministic screens as it occurs as a joint endeavor within the ex-gay community.

Some degree of acquiring new discourse happens on an individual level for anyone seeking sexual identity transformation within an ex-gay framework. For those involved in ex-gay ministry support groups, this acquisition occurs as an intentional community activity as well. Example (4.3) is an excerpt from the Tuesday night women’s group during their first discussion of their newly assigned book, *Healing Homosexuality*. This transcript captures the group members as they acquired the definition of the word “neurosis.”

(4.3) Carmen: Did we make it through the introduction?

Anna: <laughs> We may have to cover more of this next week. But **neurosis**, it took me forever. Ok, fine, all right, ok, **I’ll take the title homosexual or lesbian, if I have to, and then pretty soon somebody comes up and says, do you know that’s a neurosis?** I go, <inhales ah>what is that? You mean I’ve got that too? <group laughs> And it’s like, what is that? **Did anybody, and ladies, you will need to get your dictionaries out when you read this./**

Ruth: /I know.

Carmen: Yes. Slowly.

Anna: **I want you to read it with understanding.**

Ruth: **I didn't understand it.**

Anna: **Please get a dictionary when you go through this, write down the definitions so you won't forget, it won't be the last time you hear [it].**

Ruth: [It']s too hard./

Anna: /All right? So. [Who:] would like to share with us.

Selah: [so what does neurosis mean?]

Anna: **Did anybody look that up and would like to share that with us?**

Selah: No, I was too lazy to look it up. But I wondered what it was.

Anna: All right, here's what it is.

[...]

Anna: Any one of various mental or emotional disorders/

Ruth: /what are we talking about?

Carmen: [Neurosis.]

Anna: [characterized] by depression, anxiety, abnormal fears, and compulsive behaviors/

Selah: /Say it again./

Carmen: /Can you go slower this time?/

Anna: /Yeah.

Carmen: [Any one of]

Anna: [You know what], **you know what I'm going to do, ladies, is that um, what I'll do is I'll run that off for you for next week, ok, cause I don't-we're running out of time. And so, I will read it again, and then what we'll do is um go back and address this again next week. Neurosis. Any one of various mental or emotional disorders characterized by depression, anxiety, abnormal fears, and compulsive behavior.** A neurosis is less severe, now this'll make you feel real good, a neurosis is less severe than psychosis.

[...]

Anna: A neurosis is an emotional problem that is solved in an irrational manner, ok. Now, I don't know how that makes you feel, but I know that when I heard that from Leanne Payne, **I thought, oh great, not only do I have one thing to deal with, I have two things to deal with. But in actuality, what happened, is this** [indicating neurosis] **creates that** [indicating homosexuality]. Ok.

Melissa: What is really nice is that **the world's system**, you know that the world has the diagnostic tools to **diagnose psychological disabilities**. They see neurosis as a fixable thing. Whereas psychosis, that's not fixable.
<laughing, Anna laughs>

Anna: **According to mankind**

Melissa: According to man.

[...]

Anna: Ok, we've talked about the problem and not so much the solution, and I-um, that's not my goal to be a focus, ok. **But it's also important for us to understand, and to build our understanding as to what this all means in terms of language and words, because if we just go over these words and nobody understands them, then we're missing out on some important um information, ok.**

(Transcript: Women's group, 7-9-02)

In example (4.3), the participants in the Tuesday night group were collectively learning the meaning of "neurosis," the definition of which is being quoted verbatim from the dictionary. The women were encouraged to use the dictionary and take notes as they read their books at home, to become familiar with the "language and words" and to "build their understanding." During the group, members were taking notes as well, hence the requests for repeating the definition and speaking at a slower rate. It is worth mentioning here that this excerpt provides an example of how engaging with texts and literate behaviors are crucial to understanding and transforming the self in the ex-gay identity process, a topic to which I return in chapter 9, section 9.4.

As the women learned the definition of “neurosis,” they did so within the context of discussing chapter one of *Healing Homosexuality*. “As a sexual neurosis, homosexuality is regarded as one of the most complex” (Payne 1985/1996:11). This statement represents a constructive terministic screen from the psychological axis of ex-gay discourse. The group was not adding the word “neurosis” to their lexicon as an isolate; rather, they were gaining a word association with homosexuality on a definitional level as well. Thus, a relationship of entailment was established between “homosexuality” and the term “neurosis,” and the acquisition of one new term, “neurosis,” also creates a new understanding of “homosexuality.” Anna both expressed and explicitly taught this entailment and constructed a causal relationship between the two terms through sharing part of her own terministic acquisition story; first, she recounted learning about “neurosis” and regarding it as an additional “thing to deal with,” and then claimed a realization where “in actuality...this [i.e. neurosis] creates that [i.e. homosexuality].”

A final note involves the last exchange included in the transcript, involving Anna and Melissa. Melissa, a leader of the group who alternated teaching nights with Anna, began speaking explicitly in professional and medical terms by discussing the diagnosis of psychological disorders. The fact that Melissa holds a Master’s in Social Work added to her ethos among the group members as one who has knowledge and the right to speak in such terms. Clearly, the group’s discussion of “neurosis” had centered on the psychological axis of ex-gay ideology, and Melissa’s commentary gave support from an apparently secular viewpoint for the possibility of sexual identity transformation. Having defined homosexuality as a “neurosis,” the fact that the system that diagnoses neurosis also gives a prognosis of “fixable” involves a logical implication: homosexuality is “fixable” as well.

It is worth pointing out the pervasive backdrop of the spiritual screen throughout the discourse. Melissa, in speaking about the psychological, referred to “the world’s system” and uses the speaker and group-exclusive pronoun “they.” The “world” is a frequent metaphor in the New Testament used to indicate the human aggregate of individuals who do not accept and follow Jesus as the Christ and hence are claimed to be outside the realms of Christian belief. Thus, the 3rd person exclusive pronoun indicates a contrast between the “believers” of the group and what Melissa labeled as the non-believing “world.”

This dialogue accomplished a double reinforcement of sexual identity “healing” as possible and thus a valid and reasonable hope for the women to hold. By Melissa’s setting up a contrast between the secular and spiritual realms, she was able to emphasize that even on purely secular grounds, “neuroses” are seen as treatable and correctable. When Melissa added that “psychosis, that’s not fixable,” laughing and in a half-teasing manner, Anna quickly follows up with “according to mankind,” which was an alternate reference to the “world” that does not acknowledge the Christian God. Melissa quickly agreed, the implication being that even if “the world” says something is not “fixable,” (i.e. “psychosis”), that is only according to “mankind” (i.e. limited to human ability).

Thus, the spiritual screen is implicitly indexed as a predominant force over the psychological dimension, as Anna alluded to the spiritual belief that God is able to do even what “mankind” says is impossible. Hence the double entailment via implicature: “Homosexuality” is a “neurosis.” In the psychological realm, “neurosis” is “fixable.” In the spiritual realm, God can fix even the unfixable. Therefore, both from a psychological and spiritual standpoint, “homosexuality” also should be “fixable” and should be fixed.

4.2 NARRATIVE THERAPY

As section one shows, the ex-gay narratives in this study did not occur in isolation. Instead, the tellers were or had been participants in ministry settings, where narratives are produced as both individual and joint discourse collaborations that are created in a situated-learning community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eckert, 2000). Similar to other support group settings, I found shared support group-type discourse practices and a ritualized function of story telling. However, as I explain below, there is also a key difference in the discourse from other support group situations such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) (e.g. Holland et al., 1998). Rather, as seen in both the deconstructive and constructive terministic screens discussed above, ex-gay discourse diverges from AA-type discourse and shares key similarities with narrative therapy.

It is important to note here that I am not claiming any links, formal or informal, between ex-gay ministry philosophy and narrative therapy; there are none, and as will be discussed below, resemblances to the narrative therapeutic approach found in ex-gay ministry are nestled in a larger support group discourse setting that narrative therapy would disavow. Thus, I must clarify that the present narrative therapy comparison is part of a componential analysis, where I am highlighting how some of the key premises of language in relation to identity in ex-gay ministries correspond to the theorized notions of the same found in narrative therapeutic approaches. Consequently, I am using narrative therapy as a means of exposing these language uses in ex-gay ministry settings and stories.

Narrative therapy is an avowedly post-modern therapeutic approach that involves a conscious re-storying of one's life. White and Epston (1990) based the narrative therapy approach largely on Foucault's notions of power and knowledge, in which power is said to be exercised through institutionalized knowledge and normalizing "truths." It is

around these discourses of 'truth' that individuals are expected to shape and conform their lives. As a result, Foucault claimed these "subjugating discourses" come to control and limit the agency of the individuals who narrate their lives under the influences of such discourses. In narrative therapy, the goal is to empower individuals to resist the dominant discourse that is constraining their lives and help them author alternative stories for a more satisfying life experience and resolution of persistent problems.

According to White (1990), Foucault posited that the objectification and categorization of persons is one of the primary effects of scientific discourse, which passes itself off as an objective view of reality, but is in actuality another system of authoritative control (note that here Foucault was essentially claiming to present the "real objective truth" about claimed "objective" reality). In order to counter this effect, one of the primary foci of narrative therapy is externalizing the problem, which "helps persons identify and separate from unitary knowledges and "truth" discourses that are subjugating them" (White & Epston, 1990:30). Consequently, a foundational technique of a narrative therapeutic approach is called "externalizing conversation," defined as "a way of speaking in which space is introduced between the person and the problem issue" (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston 1997:303). Rather than being viewed as an essential part or characteristic of personality, the "problem" is scripted as external to the self and therefore ostensibly able to be overcome.

The connections between narrative therapy's externalization and the deconstructive terministic screens described in section one are clear. For example, by removing the nominal term "homosexual," and replacing it with "a person" who has a "problem," homosexuality is located outside the self rather than construed as a fundamental or enduring part of personality or personal identity. "Internalizing conversation," or "a way of speaking that locates problem issues firmly in the personality

of the person suffering them” (Monk et al., 1997:303), is viewed as an obstacle to progress in narrative therapy and is the type of story line that needs to be re-narrated to provide an alternative to the discourse which objectifies “people as the problem.”

With this in mind, an interesting embodiment of both externalizing and internalizing conversations occurs during the Tuesday night group’s first session of studying *Healing Homosexuality*. In example (4) below, Anna introduced the externalization of homosexuality through the removal of the term “homosexual,” which has been thoroughly discussed in the previous section. From this “externalizing” introduction, Anna then proceeded to open a discussion of the actual internalization of the term “homosexual” or “lesbian.”

(4.4) Anna: **And so what has to happen is those words, that language, has to take on its true meaning. And-and part of why we’re meeting together is to talk about some of those-those words and the meaning and the background that we have attached to those things.** And when we’re talking about identity crisis, what does that mean? Because the-the describing part here in chapter 1 on page eleven, that **there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as a homosexual, there is only a person created in the image of God who is cut off from some valid part of him or herself.** God delights in us-helping us find that lost part and affirming and blessing it. And **let’s think a little bit about the title that’s been given not only to us in our past, I mean it took forever for me: to sa:y that word.**

Selah: What?

Anna: **Let alone to bring myself under the definition of [homosexual]**

Selah: [Oh.]

Anna: **or lesbian.** It took a lo:ng time because of the-of my background and the shame that was attached to that. [...welcome to entering late-comer...] So, identity crisis, **homo-uh-homosexuality**, according to Leanne Payne doesn’t, **I don’t even think she gives a whole lot of attention to the term, she immediately goes to the deeper/**

Carmen: /right

Anna: which is exactly, it all comes under the umbrella of sinner. But that does not negate what it means to you individually, and that term, that whether or not we accepted it as us, what it did to us when we were labeled that way. [...] so I want to do a little bit of thinking here as to when that may have first occurred to you, either somebody giving you that title or you receiving that title, and saying, yes, that's what I am.[...] at what point did I label myself as that.

(Transcript: Women's group, 7-9-02)

As (4.4) above shows, Anna began by discussing the book's premise of externalizing the term "homosexual." Anna then recounted her own experience of internalization: a reluctant acceptance and self-application of the term lesbian, which she described as "bringing herself under the definition of homosexual." Anna emphasized that at one level, the term is not important: "I don't even think she [i.e. the author] gives a whole lot of attention to the term; she immediately goes to the deeper." Homosexuality is then despecified as a singular identity or experience and subsumed under the general term "sinner," a category into which every human being falls according to evangelical Christian theology.

However, Anna then acknowledged that on another level, the term matters a great deal, stating that this "immediately going to the deeper" and generalizing the understanding to encompass "sinner" does not negate the women's individual experiences or understanding of the identity label "homosexual." Thus, Anna asked the women to think about their own experience related to "the title" [i.e. lesbian] that had been "given to" or "received by" them in the past. In the final line of the excerpt, Anna asked the women to recall specifically when they said, "yes, that's what I am" and identify the point at which they "labeled themselves as that." In so doing, Anna was requesting the women to tell the story of their self-naming as homosexual, which is in one sense a coming out story.

Liang (1997) described coming-out stories as a process of self-naming and discusses the stage of “coming out to self,” which comprises an individual’s acknowledgment of same-sex attraction and may include a recognition of homosexual identity. Thus, Anna was asking the women to describe the process by which and point at which they “named” themselves regarding their experience of same-sex attraction or sexual involvement, which several members in turn shared with the group. Clearly, in this group discussion, the acceptance of the term “homosexual” or “lesbian” as accurate and defining of the self was seen as a critical moment of internalization, an occurrence which the women needed to recognize and understand in order for the internalization to then be undone. This can be seen in (4.5) below.

(4.5)Anna: Sometimes, uh, it took a long time for me to actually <pause> acquire or take that label to myself because I couldn’t believe. **I did not want to name myself that. But I finally had to say, to do the action, the name fits,** you know, and-and it was a hard, hard thing for me to do. **And once I acquired that label, it was really hard [to lay it down.]**

Carmen:[to remove it]

Anna: **Even if I wanted it off of me.**

In (4.5), Anna briefly described her process of “acquiring the label” of homosexual, which primarily consisted of identifying herself with the same-sex sexual activity she was involved in (i.e. “to do the action, the name fits”). Then, Anna referenced the difficulty of undoing the internalization, or self-naming, once she had “acquired that label.” In the midst of this sharing session, Sarah quoted from the book that “it’s [i.e. homosexuality] a lifestyle; it’s not who you are,” as in (4.6).

(4.6) Sarah: And, and like-like the, on page twelve, like she says, um, **the activity of the homosexual lifestyle, it’s a lifestyle; it’s not who you are.**

In the excerpt here, after sharing her own coming out experience, Sarah immediately followed with a comment that emphasized the separation of sexual behavior

from essential personal identity. By distinguishing “the activity of the homosexual lifestyle” from “who you are,” Sarah superseded her previous “naming” as homosexual with an externalized understanding of same-sex attraction, and the language of identity was replaced with the language of behavior.

The distinction between behavior and identity is crucial in the ex-gay understanding of sexual identity and enables homosexuality to be generalized into the Christian metanarrative operative within the ministry settings: the separation of the sin (action) from the sinner (person). For example, in *Healing Homosexuality*, Payne wrote on the issue of self-acceptance and commented that individuals must be helped to “accept the self who has participated in the hated behavior and take care to reject only the harmful behavior” (1985/1996:24).

This type of externalization is best illustrated by the frequent comparison of homosexuality and alcoholism, which in my research is the most commonly made analogy within ex-gay narratives and ministry to describe the ex-gay position that sexual attraction and/or behavior does not necessarily define identity. In a continued discussion of labels, a few weeks after the initial discussions, Sarah made the “alcoholic” observation in (4.7) below.

(4.7) Anna: **When we’re looking, when we’re talking about identity, I-I have met some people that- whose whole identity is their issues.**

Ruth: Word.²⁴

Anna: And it’s incredibly sad. And if they get one, if they-if they find out they have one issue, and they’ll say, Oh my gosh, I’m a-I’m a survivor, I went through this, and-and to certain points, ladies, that’s important. We have to understand, this is what happened to me, otherwise we’re in denial. OK, and there’s a difference between being in denial and saying, Yes, that really did happen to me. But and I think it’s also pretty normal for us to live in that a while and understand

²⁴ In the above context, “Word” is a slang term used to mean “Right on” or “You said it.”

that really happened to me and that means I am a victim. And they get-but the problem is when we get stuck <pause> there.

(?): Sure.

Anna: Is when we get stuck there.

(?): Yeah.

Sarah: **So what you're saying is that um like someone uh decides they're an alcoholic. They identify with that um to the point where it's not a problem that they're an alcoholic. It's who they are. It's-they own it. And that's-and they're nothing but that. That's their whole entire identity.**

In (4.7), Anna discussed identity and claimed that she has met some people “whose whole identity is their issues.” In ex-gay ministries and other therapeutic settings, “issues” is a common term used to refer to personal problems; thus, Anna was speaking of people who define themselves by their problems or past experiences and get “stuck there.” Clearly, in ex-gay settings, same-sex attraction can also be described as an “issue” and is viewed as a problem to be dealt with. Sarah then used alcoholism as an illustration to confirm her understanding of what Anna was saying, where alcoholism is identified with “to the point where it’s not a problem”; rather, “it’s who they are.”

Narrative therapy approaches specifically address the need to “counter alcoholic narratives” and focus largely on the externalization of the term “alcoholic” (Winslade and Smith, 1997). According to Winslade and Smith (1997), “alcoholic” is a type of “personal deficit language” that leads individuals to create a primarily “problem-based” identity, and the statement frequently required in 12-step programs, “I am an alcoholic,” is an internalizing one that locates the “problem the person has been experiencing deep in some unchanging aspect of the individual’s nature and therefore make it hard to change” (164). Consequently, narrative therapeutic discourse replaces the language of a reified “alcoholic identity” to an “alcohol lifestyle” which an individual may find problematic and wish to overcome or change. In this way, the narrative therapy approach to

“alcoholic narratives” is a perfect parallel with regard to the removal of the nominal self-descriptor “homosexual” and introduction of the externalizing discourse such as “the homosexual lifestyle” used in ex-gay ministry settings.

The crucial nature of the terminological exchange in question is perhaps best illustrated through one group participant’s resistance to it. Selah, a 28-year-old Chinese Filipino woman, was a member of the women’s live-in program who often discussed in group meetings that she initially had not wanted to come to the ministry and was not sure she wanted to change or “leave the past behind.” Upon her arrival at the Liberty, Selah informed the ministry leadership that she had come mostly due to pressure from her family and was unsure of her beliefs and participation. After discussing the situation with her, the ministry leadership had advised Selah that she was welcomed to stay if she wished, but that she needed to make her own decision and that it would be best for her to leave if she indeed did not want to be there or to participate. In the end, Selah decided to stay, but remained uncertain as to her commitment to “change” and her beliefs about homosexuality, as in (4.8) below.

(4.8) Selah: I’m just, **when I first came here, I knew I didn’t want to change.** I knew it was like, OK, my folks brought me here blah blah blah, and I felt like, ok, they want me to change, they spent for it, huh, but now it’s like because I have that willingness, when I came here, it was like, ok, fine, one year, ok God, I’m gonna give you willingness, everything, that’s all. And late-and that’s how my **behavior’s been changing, and some feelings changing, but besides, I don’t know, it’s, I still don’t-I’m still not guilty.**

Selah’s discussion in (4.8) illustrates that the level of her commitment to the ex-gay process was uncertain, as was the depth of her certainty that homosexuality was wrong (e.g. “I’m still not guilty”), as she stated later that she still did not “feel guilty” about her involvement in same-sex sexual activity. With this background in mind, Selah openly resisted relinquishing the term “homosexual” and raised the most questions concerning the identity externalization of it, as (4.9a) begins to show.

(4.9a) Selah: Wait, can I ask some questions about the other stuff? I don't know, **I guess I'm still not convinced, is there really no such <sigh> thing as a lesbian or a homosexual?**

Deborah: Uh-oh.

Anna: Hmm?

Selah: I-I-I don't know. Because that's a-me and um, when Lori was here, we-we were discussing, we were like saying, **if that's true, and that that has to be true of every sin. Does that mean there's no such thing as an alcoholic?** There's no such thing as a-a drug addict? There's no s-and **usually in AA, and drug, you know, you have to say that-admit, yes, I'm an alcoholic, struggling with this. Here, it's like, don't admit, that you're struggling with this.**

Anna: OK. I don't, no, **I don't think that that's what we're saying**, I think-I think what she's saying is, **basically sin is sin, no matter what you call it by.**
[And we have to-we have to identify sin]

Ruth: [There's no greater sin.]²⁵

Anna: and we have to call sin sin, yes. **This action that I'm doing is sin**, ok, um

Selah: **But she's [taking the labels off.]**

Anna: [But that's not] she's taking, **what she's doing is she's saying, but that's not who you are. That's who you were, those were the actions that you did.**

Selah: **So you could probably say like you're struggling with drugs, or you're struggling with alcohol, but you're not an alcoholic.**

As seen in (4.9a) above, Selah began by questioning the de-nominalization of "homosexual" or "lesbian" and observed the aforementioned differences between discourse in groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and what she was experiencing in the ex-gay ministry setting. Note that Deborah's expression of "Uh-oh," said in a humorous yet serious tone, indexed the fact that the question Selah was initiating was not new. In

²⁵ I.e. Ruth's comment was cueing off and made in connection with Anna's prior statement of "basically sin is sin." Thus, in saying, "There's no greater sin," she was voicing the frequently emphasized ex-gay teaching that different sins are not greater or less in the eyes of God, but all sin is equal in terms of being an offense against God and a violation of the Divine moral law (though, as most people do, ex-gays believe that different actions clearly have different consequences and results in terms of the natural world.) Cf. Beth's comments in chapter 5, section 5.4, p. 89.

the few weeks prior, similar discussions had been held three times. Selah at first inquired as to whether this lack of parallel to the “My name is X, and I’m an alcoholic” admission statement is a type of denial: “Here, it’s like, don’t admit that you’re struggling with it.” Anna clarified however by once again emphasizing the separation between behavior and identity: “I don’t think that’s what we’re saying...she’s saying, but that’s not who you are.” Thus again, because ex-gay ministries seek to externalize homosexuality by focusing on behaviors, rather than identity, the “alcoholic” metaphor as used among the ex-gays in my study diverges from and does not index a complete parallel to that usage in 12-step therapies or similar support group models (cf. excerpt 4.11).

Selah then remarked on taking the labels off and demonstrated her understanding of the ex-gay ministry teaching by giving an example of externalization using the alcohol example: “So you could probably say...you’re struggling with alcohol, but you’re not an alcoholic.” The dialogue then briefly continued with some discussion of alcoholism and childhood influences, and Selah again questioned why there should be a difference in the language used to address these two matters. Then, in (4.9b), Selah exhibited both compliance and resistance to the material being discussed.

(4.9b) Selah: But I mean, **there are some people who-who got into the lifestyle because, yeah, because of roots. Some, there are some people who got into the lifestyle because friends were more, you know, influence, peer pressure,**
[friends were more strong.]

Anna: [Or curiosity.]

Selah: Or curiosity. **But what do you call people who really, I don’t know, really struggle, like, maybe they have a desire, they, I mean, they’re really attracted.**

In (4.9b), Selah complied by agreeing that there are some individuals who enter the “lifestyle” of homosexuality “because of roots” (i.e. “roots” refers to the ministry’s

frequent discussion of “root issues” from childhood underlying same-sex attraction),²⁶ peer pressure, or other influences. But while she conceded that such may be the case for some, Selah did not concede it for all, and her crucial question was, what then is the term for those individuals who “really struggle,” “have a desire,” or are “really attracted.” Here Selah was setting up an opposition: there are some individuals dealing with a “lifestyle” that they got into (externalized), but there are also those whose experience of same-sex attraction is regarded as an essential part of their personhood, not seen as caused by outside influences. This opposition showed that Selah’s perspective differed at that point from the perspective of the ministry. Selah’s question of, “What do you call people” (in this second category) was subtly asking for a terminological distinction to be made between the two types of people that she had just proposed, a distinction that could most aptly and easily be made by retaining the nominal “homosexual.” Lengthy discussion on this topic continued, and nearing the end of the exchange, Selah described her persistent difficulty as being “caught in that label thing” and the focus on “activity” without a related nominal self-descriptor, as in (4.9c).

(4.9c) Selah: I-I just think I’m just all caught in that label thing, like/

Anna: /Yeah./

Selah: /I don’t know. [yeah]

Anna: Well, she’s not saying [that] you know/

Selah: /To where it’s like there’s no label. There’s an action, or an activity, but there’s no label, I guess, I don’t know.

²⁶ Examples of “root issues” typically discussed in ex-gay ministries as being related to the development of same-sex attraction would be the experience of early childhood sexual abuse or trauma or a lack of bonding with the same-sex parent.

Finally, after more discussion, Selah made her last attempt to claim an innate identity category in which the term “homosexual” could be appropriately coterminous with the self.

(4.9d) Selah: **But you don’t like men, either way.** I mean, I don’t know, **can’t that just be a root too?** That you just simply don’t-interest-simply attracted to guys?

Anna: **No, there’s a reason.**

Selah: **That the very thought of, uhhh, [it’s repulsive].**

[...]

Anna: OK, I tell you what, next [week we’ll wind this up.]

Selah: **[Some of you are just born gay.]**

As (4.9d) above shows, Selah once again vied for the possibility of an individual who simply is not attracted to the opposite sex, irrespective of childhood development or other issues: “Can’t that just be a root too?” Note that Selah made this move while she retained some of the ministry’s language, as she referred to “a root.” Anna’s categorical response of, “No, there’s a reason,” ruled out the possibility of an individual who has a genetically determined or innate same-sex orientation, one without contributing causal factors of the sort the ministry acknowledges. Selah then went on to indicate her repulsion over heterosexual relations. After a bit more dialogue, Selah interjected as the discussion ends: “Some of you are just born gay.” Thus, Selah’s final statement that she believed homosexuality can be a state of being from birth revealed one reason why she so strongly contested the removal of the term “homosexual” as an appropriate label for one’s identity.

In addition, among the group members, Selah was the least certain of her identity commitments and choice to “leave the past,” and while she did not openly question the ministry’s perspective on the moral status of homosexuality as sin (although her previous

statements of not “feeling guilty” might have constituted a subtle questioning of the ministry’s perspective), she did not share the ministry’s belief that homosexuality is always unhealthy. Selah wanted to retain the possibility of a homosexual identity; thus, she wished to retain the term “homosexual.” As a result, at that time Selah was not willing to accept the limitations and re-narrations of the terministic screens and narrative frameworks that had been offered her. In a very real sense, she did not yet fully accept the ex-gay Christian perspective on homosexuality and was not sure she wanted to accept it; therefore, she did not yet fully speak within the terministic screens of the ministry.

Despite their correspondent conceptions of internalizing language, such is where the similarities between ex-gay ministries and narrative therapy end. Narrative therapeutic approaches resist the “language of personal deficit” and any location of a problem, whether for genetic or developmental reasons, within an individual’s character or essential personality. The rejection of this language clearly differs from ex-gay ministries, which as previously stated, externalizes the specified problem-identity, but also internalizes a fundamental flaw in the essential character of every human being: “like everyone else, we are fallen creatures. Therefore, we are sinful and make grievous mistakes” (Payne, 1985/1996:23). From this perspective, though no one need wear the label “homosexual,” all must wear the label “sinner,” as in example (4.6) previously.

Narrative therapy approaches also eschew the medical metaphors frequently used in the language of support groups, such as the discourse in which alcoholism is referred to as a “disease.” However, individuals in ex-gay ministries often use medical metaphors and speak of a “recovery” process, as the excerpt from the women’s group shows in example (4.10) below.

(4.10) Melissa: And one of the things that, you know, with any kind of **addiction**, there’s going to be times when you’re gonna have some sort of **relapse** in your **thought process**, I mean, even in your **behavior process**. You know, and part of,

uh, **recovery** sometimes, you will have **relapse**. And it doesn't have to be-it could be in your mind.

As excerpt (4.10) illustrates, Melissa used the terms “addiction,” “relapse,” and “recovery,” and clearly locates the ex-gay “process” within a medical and treatment framework. Melissa’s use of the phrase “with any kind of addiction” in reference to dealing with same-sex attraction and behavior is worth clarifying. Within the ex-gay communities I researched, while distinctions were made between degrees of addiction, from extreme degrees of “sex addicts” who were unable to refrain from searching out anonymous encounters to others who frequently picked up partners in bars, and so forth, all homosexual behavior is labeled “addictive” at some level. This characterization is due to the evangelical perspective that restricts sexual activity to the confines of heterosexual marriage; thus, all same-sex activity is seen as unhealthy and as relational and sexual disorder, from which all individuals *should* refrain.²⁷ A final note on (4.10) is that the exemplified language use was undoubtedly influenced by Melissa’s position as a professional social worker and her familiarity and ease with this type of therapeutic discourse (cf. discussion of excerpt 4.3); nonetheless, many throughout the ex-gay ministry frequently employ this medical or treatment discourse.

Finally, while there are many similarities between the ex-gay ministry groups I studied and the structure of support groups and support group discourse in general, efforts were made to distinguish the ex-gay group as uniquely and distinctly Christian in an evangelical sense, such as in (4.11) below, when Anna clarified the God with whom the group members were said to be interacting:

(4.11) Anna: **And then, we can do what the Bible says in terms of looking in, we’re gonna look up and out of ourselves and into the cross of Christ and to Jesus, and then we begin to see who we are.** Um, there was a statement in here where it says, when we first will to follow, that means get our will in line and say

²⁷ See chapter 5, section 4, for the discussion of ex-gay beliefs about sexuality.

“I will,” I may not be able to do it fully, I may not be able to walk out the way that I really want to with victory and all that gusto, but when we even think, have a hint in our mind, “Lord, I really want to. My will says I want to do this.” <claps hands> Boom, He is there, and says “I know; I want you to too. I want you to more than you do.” And, when we first attempt obedience, and that’s just a thought, a thought in our minds, **when we first attempt obedience, God becomes very personal, He is there, [ok.] And not just some vague, what do they call it?**

Selah: [Yep.]

Anna: Higher Power thing, ok, not even any-remotely close to that, then our idea of Him changes, and in the process of our idea of Him changing, He begins to change us and our ideas about ourselves, and that is glorious. That is transformation.

(Transcript: Women’s group, 7-9-02)

In excerpt 4.11, Anna’s reference to “they” refers to the 12-step, Alcoholics Anonymous-style groups that were Christian in origin, but not evangelical in the sense that ex-gay ministries are; thus, Anna set up a contrast between such groups and the ex-gay group.

With respect to her work on an ex-lesbian support group, Ponticelli (1999) asked why, in a day when homosexuality is gaining such greater societal acceptance, people choose to situate their lives in a discourse which describes them as “needing change” or “sinful” rather than choosing a universe of discourse within which they can freely embrace a homosexual identity. Narrative therapy and its underlying Foucauldian assumptions would claim that the teachings of ex-gay ministries and evangelical Christian theology itself are instances of “subjugating discourses” in which people are required to conform their sexuality to the norms and standard of the dominant religious discourse. When writing about replacing “subjugating discourses,” White (1990) stated that Foucault made it clear that he felt there were no alternative objective “truths” or “unitary knowledges” around which to center our lives. On the contrary, however, ex-gay individuals’ belief in a singular objective truth is precisely what leads them to choose

to narrate their lives in terms of ex-gay Christian discourse, and it is to the overarching ex-gay evangelical metanarrative that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The ex-gay evangelical metanarrative

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned at the close of the last chapter, Foucault did not believe that there was any objective “unitary truth” around which people could center their lives (White, 1990). But for ex-gay evangelical Christians, it is their belief in a singular, transcendent reality and objective truth that is expressed in their understanding of the God of the Bible and in the historical person of Jesus that provides the center around which they organize their lives and, therefore, the universe of discourse in and through which their lives are narrated. Hence, in order to analyze and accurately understand ex-gay narratives, it is crucial to understand the particular evangelical Christian theology and other beliefs upon which ex-gay narratives are based and within which they are framed. Apart from this version of Christian belief, the ex-gay identity process and the narratives that are both integral to and result from this process, at least as described here, would not exist.

In this chapter, I first delineate the key components of belief that are essential to understanding the personal life narrations of the ex-gay evangelical Christians in this study. Thus, I address aspects of the ex-gay worldview that require explication due to their foundational role and formational effect on ex-gay narratives and group discourse. (The spiritual metanarratives of the ex-ex-gay participants are outlined in chapter 7, but I begin here with the ex-gay evangelical theology because at one point, both the ex-gay and ex-ex-gay participants in this study claimed to ascribe to most or all of the beliefs detailed in the following.)

The organization of chapter 5 is as follows: I begin with comments on moral stance in narratives and the function of the religious metanarrative in 5.2. I then address and exemplify five constellations of ex-gay religious belief, all of which together unite to

form the central constitution of the ex-gay spiritual worldview, namely: ex-gay beliefs about the nature of truth (5.3), sexuality (5.4), morality (5.5), personal identity (5.6), and the belief in a cosmic battle between good and evil (5.7). In 5.8, I conclude with relevant comments on different possible perspectives with regard to ex-gay discourse.

5.2 THE EX-GAY EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN METANARRATIVE

In their work on quotidian narrative, Ochs and Capps (2001) discussed “moral stance” as a basic narrative component and demonstrated how narratives personally encode and perpetuate moral worldviews (45). In ex-gay narratives, moral stance is foundational, providing in one sense the demand for a new self-narration in addition to serving as the primary basis for determining the identity that is to be narrated. Consequently, the moral worldview provides both the frame for and in large part the content of these narratives.

The traditional evangelical Christian metanarrative is the worldview that provides the source and basis of the “moral stance” in the ex-gay personal narratives represented in this study. I define metanarrative here as an overarching story that gives coherence and universal meaning to life as a whole. Smith (2003) captured this precisely in his discussion of the sociology of moral belief-driven behavior in humans:

This Christian metanarrative, like those of most religions, tells an all-encompassing story about the origin and purpose the cosmos, about the nature and destiny of humanity, about fundamental moral order. It offers a master narrative, a metanarrative that seeks to govern all other narratives below and within it. (69)

And for ex-gay individuals, the Christian metanarrative is indeed the master story within which the individual story is situated and by which that story both is and seeks to be governed, as the following discussion will clearly show.

5.3 BELIEFS ABOUT TRUTH: “TRUTH WITH A CAPITAL T”

In his work on evangelical Christian conversion narratives, Stromberg (1993:5) quoted Hunter (1983:7): “Contemporary Evangelicals can be identified by their adherence to (a) the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, (b) the belief in the divinity of Christ, and (c) the belief in the efficacy of Christ’s life, death and physical resurrection for the salvation of the human soul.” Elaborating on Hunter’s note above, it is important to further clarify the beliefs to which the ex-gay evangelicals represented in this study adhere. On numerous occasions during my time at Liberty, I heard the phrase “truth with a capital T” used by ministry participants to refer to the Bible. Again, this belief in an objective, “capital T” truth in essence provides both the motivation and foundation of the ex-gay narratives that are considered here, and it contrasts markedly with perspectives that evangelical Christians sometimes refer to as relativist or postmodern.

Thus, with respect to Hunter’s (a) above, the ex-gay individuals in this study believe the Bible to be the sole authoritative Word of God; consequently, no other text is seen as having the divine power or absolute authority of the Bible. This belief contrasts with those who would claim that the Bible is an authentic revelation from God, but it is only one among many divinely inspired texts (e.g. some forms of Universalism) or those who would claim that, in addition to the Bible, a subsequent revelation and divine text was given which is equal in authority (e.g. The Latter Day Saints (Mormons)).

In the context of the above view, the Bible is consequently given a privileged position and is prioritized above all other sources of knowledge, tradition, or “continuing revelation” from God within the Christian church or in individual believers. “Continuing revelation” refers to the fact that historically, most Christian traditions believe that God continues to reveal Himself and His ways to His church through His Spirit, but that the

essential and foundational revelation has been given through the person of Jesus and the Bible. As a result, according to the evangelical theology of the ex-gay participants in this study, no current or personal revelation can contradict or substantially alter what is understood to have been established in the Bible and still be considered authentic Christian belief. Hence, the Bible as understood by evangelical Christians is claimed to be the ultimate authority in ex-gay evangelical believers' lives. While other Christian traditions would agree with these beliefs, evangelicals place a particular emphasis and focus on the text, which produces a unique evangelical subculture within Christianity as a whole.

Regarding Hunter's observations above, his use of the title of "Christ" in describing Jesus is itself an index of evangelicals' beliefs about Jesus' identity. Jesus is believed to be the Son of God and the promised Messiah who would come from the Jews and be the Savior of the world (whose Messianic title is also "Christ"). Similar to the ex-gay evangelical position on the Bible, Jesus is considered a singular source of salvation and the only true way to God, exclusive of other religious or belief systems. Thus, ex-gay evangelicals' belief in the Bible as God's Word and a singular "Truth with a capital T" is inseparable from their belief in Jesus, whom they believe the Bible reveals as the exclusive, singular Savior who is "the Truth" and "God's Word" in human form. Peter referenced the evangelical belief in the singularity of Jesus when he recounted his conversion, as seen in (5.1)²⁸ below. As background, the excerpt begins with Peter referring to his participation in a "12-step program" to overcome his alcohol and drug addiction, a program that was based on the 12-step model of Alcoholics Anonymous,

²⁸ Note for all examples in this chapter: Unless otherwise noted, all excerpts are taken from the transcripts of the recorded individual "life history" narratives and follow-up interview questions. Thus, I was the only other person present as audience.

which acknowledges the existence of a higher power referred to as “God *as we understood him.*”

(5.1) Peter: And so I went back to the 12-step program, and, um, and when I got there, this, the lady who had helped me to find it the first time was there a couple of meetings later, taking up her six years clean chip.²⁹ **And so, I met up with her, and, and she had found Jesus, and she was driving me nuts here about Jesus. Um, and then, you know, she and I had talked about New Age and Buddhism and all this stuff before, and now to hear her talking about Jesus being the only way, the Truth, the Life, no one comes unto God except by Me.**³⁰ You know, I’m like, “OK, you know.” [...] and she witnessed to me about Christ, and in different ways, and, and because we were friends before, we had plenty of things to talk about. Um, but I couldn’t get past what God had done for her, you know. And putting homosexuality on the shelf, um, I realized that I was a sinner, and, you know, having done the third step,³¹ or the fourth step, and fifth steps, and I realized that I had done a lot of really cruddy things, you know, and a lot of really cruddy things were done to me, and **I could see my own fallenness and the fallenness of the world, and, and so a Savior made sense, even though I didn’t agree with the Savior yet about homosexuality, I knew I needed Him. Um, and so I accepted Him in May of ’92.**

5.4 BELIEFS ABOUT SEXUALITY

In this section, I will outline the “unitary truths” that ex-gay evangelicals believe regarding human sexuality. First, the ex-gay evangelical view is a heterocentric one, which claims that only heterosexual sexual relations are in accordance with God’s will. This view is based primarily on their understanding of the Bible and an intrinsic link that is made between biological sex and sexuality based on issues from the realm of biology and physiology. The evangelical understanding of heterosexuality as divine in its origin

²⁹ The “chip” is a token given in various 12-step groups to celebrate the length of sobriety achieved and is given to recognize periods of days, weeks, months and ensuing years.

³⁰ This is a reference to the New Testament book of John, chapter 14, verse 6, where Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” (New American Standard Bible, henceforth NASB)

³¹ The third through fifth steps are as follows: 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God *as we understood Him*. 4. Made a fearless and searching moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. (See Daniell, B., 2003, for a list and discussion of the twelve steps.)

is drawn from the Biblical account of creation in Genesis, which describes God as creating humans in God's image, male and female.

According to this account, the male was created first, and then God took some substance out of the man's side and created a female partner for him. God brought the woman to the man and bid them to "bear fruit and multiply," which is understood by evangelical Christians as God's creation and institution of marriage (obviously as a heterosexual institution) and the divine establishment of marriage as the intended context into which children are to be born. Thus, the Genesis account is interpreted as primary evidence that heterosexual partnerships are the "Creator's intent" or "created intent," a phrase frequently used in ex-gay circles. Bart directly referred to the Genesis account in his interview, as in (5.2):

(5.2) Bart: I was born heterosexual, and I'm not in denial, that I've ever struggled, but **I was born a heterosexual. Christ called me from the very beginning, God called me from the very beginning to reproduce with a woman, that He saw E-, Adam alone, and He sent Eve, a woman.**

In the excerpt in (5.3) below, Henry elaborated on "created intent," as mentioned above, and established it as a standard for "living normally," thus implying a "created norm" to which people should conform.

(5.3) Henry: **I define normal as being created**, so when I attempt to do what I'm doing, when all of us attempt to do what we are trying are to do, changing our orientation, **we are living normally, because we are trying to align ourselves with what we are created to be.** God created me to be a man. **I don't believe that God made people homosexuals.**

As in most religious and theistic traditions, Henry externalized agency to God, the Creator, as the One who established and designed what is and is not and with the power to ordain what should and should not be. However, in keeping with evangelical Christian theology, Henry retained individual moral agency by having a choice of response to God

and His ways; thus, in his life narrative, Henry framed his story as one of exercising this responsive moral agency by “trying to align himself with what he is created to be.”

Based on their interpretation of the creation story and admonition to “bear fruit and multiply,” the evangelical view is that the dimorphism of biological sex is designed. The claim is that this design, by requiring one male and one female to reproduce human life, thus limiting potentially procreative sexual partnerships to heterosexual coupling, is evidence that, despite other possible sexual configurations, only heterosexual union within marriage was intended by God. Consequently, any same-sex partnership is viewed as outside of this intent and thus not seen as a valid moral option; rather, it is viewed as “brokenness” and “temptation” if desired, and sin if acted upon, either through fantasy or actual sexual contact. During some follow-up questions after telling her life story, Beth referenced these beliefs, as in example (5.4):

(5.4) AP: So what about a homosexual relationship if it was centered in Christ?

Beth: No, because it’s um sex outside of God’s design, and that is marriage. And He designed a man and a woman. I mean, Biblically, scripturally, it’s man and woman that will marry, be the marriage, be the center as far as the family. Not a man-man, not a woman-woman. **And when the Scripture says as far as bear fruit, a man and a man cannot bear fruit, a woman and a woman cannot bear fruit in and of themselves. That fruit that’s to be borne is children.** And to carry on as far as the seed.

For ex-gay evangelicals, the final confirmation of heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual expression comes from several verses in the Bible that they interpret as prohibiting same-sex behavior, drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. Henry referenced these during his interview, as demonstrated in (5.5) below:

(5.5a) Henry: I don’t think He [God] approves of it [homosexuality]. I don’t think He affirms it. I don’t think it was ever His intention for anybody to ever enter into a homosexual relationship. Romans is clear.³²

³² A reference to the New Testament book of Romans 1:26-27—“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the

(5.5b) I was looking at my Bible afterward, and I was talking and getting ready to go to this Methodist church, and I was like, you know what, “Don’t lay with a man as you do with a woman.”³³ There’s quotation marks around that, and that means somebody’s speaking, and you go back to the beginning of the chapter, and it’s God talking, and for you to sit and tell me God didn’t understand His creation, I say, “Come on.” And if you’re going to say that homosexuality is OK, then you have to say bestiality is OK, adultery is OK, incest is OK.

It is important to note here that the evangelical conception of sexual morality approves heterosexual sex only within the bounds of a marriage relationship: pre-marital or extra-marital sex, even if heterosexual, is also considered immoral based on Biblical injunctions. At one of the first ex-gay support groups I attended at the beginning of my research, the teaching lesson of the evening was on “God’s two conditions for sex: complementarity and exclusive, life-long commitment.”³⁴ As Beth stated in her interview, “In God, there’s no degree of sin. Sin is sin. Whether it’s homosexuality, whether it’s heterosexual sin outside of marriage, whether fornication, adultery—it is sin. Period.” Thus, in the ex-gay evangelical worldview, heterosexual marriage is believed to be the only Divinely intended and sanctioned context for sexual activity, and the moral law unequivocally requires celibacy of any unmarried individual, regardless of the strength of the sexual drive or degree of desire.

same way also, the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” (NASB). Fawcett (2002:11) gave an ex-gay evangelical interpretation of this passage as follows: “When Paul speaks of homosexuality as ‘against nature,’ he is not implying that homosexuality is rare or unusual, but rather that it contradicts the intended *telos* of creation.” Thus, due to humankind’s fall into sin, “things are not now as they were intended to be, so what is ‘naturally’ occurring is not necessarily what was ‘naturally’ designed.” Boswell (1980) proposed the most common pro-gay theological interpretation of this passage; he argued that Paul was condemning heterosexuals who engaged in homosexual acts for an exotic type of sexual experience, which due to their intrinsic heterosexuality, was contrary to their nature. Thus, Boswell assumed that sexual orientation as either homosexual or heterosexual is an innate part of human nature; as a result, for those who are constitutionally homosexual, homosexual acts are in accordance with, not “against” nature and thereby are not subject to disapprobation. Many of the ex-gays in my study referenced Boswell and their acceptance of his arguments specifically, just as the ex-gays assumed the traditional interpretation given by Fawcett above.

³³ A reference to the Old Testament book of Leviticus 18:22—‘You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.’ (NASB)

³⁴ Field notes: April 11, 2002

Clearly, the ex-gay evangelical conceptions of sexual morality are determined by the religious worldview and what some term “natural law” arguments. But interestingly, with respect to sexuality itself, Erzen (2002:22) noted a “strange confluence” between the ex-gay position and that held by social constructionists and queer theorists; namely, both groups resist formulations of sexuality and sexual identity as a fixed and immutable reality, whether based in biology or otherwise, and argue that sexuality and identities can change over time. Thus, ex-gays typically resist any internal mapping of sexuality.

The changeable nature of sexuality is obviously a central tenet in ex-gay ministries, but as Erzen pointed out, the “ex-gay movement’s idea of change is a process rather than a radical and complete shift in behavior, identity, and practice” (2002:25). For example, the prominent ex-gay leader Joe Dallas (1991) cited Kinsey’s (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948) conception of a continuum or range of sexual expressions and behaviors, and while he made it clear that he did not agree with all of Kinsey’s findings, Dallas used the Kinsey scale as a conceptual rubric to acknowledge that sexuality is wide, varied and always makes changes by progressive degrees. Therefore, what is “fixed” for ex-gays with respect to sexuality is the “God-intended” heterosexual expression thereof, but due to what they view as sin in humanity, many other expressions and desires are actually manifested. Peter referred to sexual fluidity in his interview, as in (5.6) below.

(5.6) Peter: I mean, to, to say that sexuality is stuck in either gay or straight, to me, I mean, and I’m not a scientist, it goes completely against the scientific rigor of understanding anything, to say that it can only be the two things. [...] I do think that on a non-spiritual level that it’s just amazing to me the things that come away from, come out of the professional organizations in the name of science. It’s kind of like, how can you look at our culture and tell me that sexuality is not fluid? You’ve got (??) and fetishes, you know, I mean, how do you explain fetishes, if sexuality is not fluid, you know, and the, the men in prison who are heterosexual but will-will engage in homosexual sex. I mean, if sexuality is fluid, that would not happen-I mean, if it was solid or fixed, that would not happen <i.e. self-correction>.

Accordingly, the ex-gay view of sexuality and sexual identity is not one of biological determinism; rather, the view is a multi-faceted model that primarily focuses on environmental influences during early childhood development (cf. chapter 10). Consider the excerpt from Peter in (5.7) below:

(5.7) Peter: I think mostly mine was environment. Um, I think genetically I'm predisposed with the soft voice with, uh, feminine characteristics of listening to people, and, um, just really, I don't know, um, I am interested in art, and I was the kid that cried over the dead bird instead of playing football, you know, so, I think, genetically, my temperament and personality (???) which helped set me up environmentally to receive the verbal attacks and things like that. With-with my father being absent, and the need for same-sex love, all of that culminated into, um, my sexual orientation, and set that, at an early age. Um, you know, I-I wouldn't rule out genetics, um, but, again, according to the Scriptures, the flesh is fallen, um, and, you know, they're saying now that diseases could be genetic, so it's just some, because something's genetic doesn't make it a moral right. So, even if it were genetic, I don't believe that me as a-a spiritual creature bearing God's image, that that really deters anything.

As the above excerpt shows, Peter held multi-faceted beliefs about the etiology of his "sexual orientation" that included environmental influences from his early childhood development, such as his "father being absent" and the "need for same-sex love." In addition, he referred to physiological and "genetic" characteristics such as being predisposed with a "soft voice," "temperament," and "personality" that interacted with his environment to "set [him] up environmentally to receive the verbal attacks" and so forth. Finally, while Peter said that he "wouldn't rule out genetics," again, due to the overarching Christian metanarrative of sin and a fallen world, (i.e. "the flesh is fallen"), he implied that such would simply be another manifestation of sin's bringing about something God never intended. Peter referred to the fact that "they're saying now diseases could be genetic," so in his understanding, even if homosexuality were proven to be linked to genetics, that wouldn't "make it a moral right."

It is also important to note here that individuals in the ex-gay category may have a range of differing goals and definitions with respect to “change,” such as no longer engaging in certain behaviors, no longer having proscribed desires, having heterosexual desires, and/or being in a heterosexual relationship. For most ex-gays, the diminishment of same-sex attraction is the first stage of change that they report, and the complete eradication of same-sex desires is not required in the ex-gay worldview to count as transformation or change. As discussed in chapter 4, homosexuality is placed in the general Christian framework of a “struggle against sin,” and it is believed that individuals will always have to contend with sin in some form or another while on earth; thus, if there is the residual presence of same-sex attraction in the life of an ex-gay individual, the metanarrative assertion that “change is possible” is not necessarily challenged or called into question. The excerpt in (5.8) from Mick’s interview demonstrates this belief well. At the time of the interview, Mick was 53 years old, married, and the leader of the Liberty ministry.

(5.8) AP: Do you ever still experience same-sex attractions?

Mick: Yes. Yes.

AP: Does that cause you to experience any sense of instability or identity confusion?

Mick: No, I think that, I think that every, every man has its, every man had their weak point, every woman has her weak point. There are heterosexual men, or if you want to, you know, I believe that basically, we’re all heterosexuals, it’s just that some of us have a gender confusion, but the heterosexual man does have lust in his heart, and I have lust in my heart. The heterosexual man has an object of desire, and I had, I had that. And um, I don’t think that the issue is the object of desire or the lust or all, it’s-it’s what you do with it. It’s all wrong. And so I think that I will probably always um, because of my past, and what I’ve done, I will always have that memory, so I’ll always remember what I did and what I

desired, and I feel like that that is still uh a limp³⁵ in my, my being, but it is not controlling me, and I don't have to give in to it, and it's not me. It's just a thing that has developed, I would say, psychologically in my, in my soul.

AP: So, um, to claim healing, you don't think that that has to be disappeared?

Mick: No, not necessarily, no. I, there again, spiritually, I think we were healed there on the Cross, it was done. But the Word also says we have to work out our healing, we have to work out our salvation,³⁶ so I will always be in the process. But I am light years from where I was. And it's even-I just know that when I see someone that I'm attracted to, it has nothing to do with being homosexual, it means that there's still a little bit or part of me that is incomplete and is desirous of being complete, and that could complete me. Or I-I am inadequate in myself in certain areas, and when I see something, someone that-that intrigues me that way, I just realize that there's just more areas for God to heal. But it-it doesn't label me. And I don't have to do anything about it just other than go to Him and say, "Okay, I still have areas I need healing in." So

AP: But they've diminished over the years?

Mick: Oh, definitely. It's hardly there, yeah. And I'm not saying that I can't get to the point where I'm not attracted, I think that's very possible. But, but to say, I mean, I guess that the world would say, "Well, if you even have a thought, then there's no healing." Well, I, that's, to me, just crazy.

Thus, as (5.8) shows, Mick admitted that he at times still experienced same-sex attraction, but likened it to a "weak point" and a "limp in [his] being" as a result of his past development and consequence of his past experiences, and he emphasized the externalized ex-gay view of same-sex attraction as a temptation rather than indicating an intrinsic identity by stating, "I don't have to give in to it, it's not me." Mick then invoked the Christian metanarrative of life being a continual "process" and journey of healing and "work[ing] out" one's "salvation" to account for why the complete disappearance of same-sex attraction was not necessary to claim "healing," and claimed that he was "light years from where [he] was" and that same-sex attraction had diminished to the point that

³⁵ Mick's use of a "limp in his being" is a probable allusion to the Old Testament story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel, after which he walked with a limp because the angel touched and dislocated the socket of Jacob's thigh during the struggle. Cf. Genesis 32: 24-32

³⁶ "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling"—Philippians 2:12 (NASB)

“it’s hardly there.” Mick concluded by contrasting his just described worldview with a common opposite claim of “the world,” namely, that “if you even have a thought [i.e. homosexual thought], then there’s no healing,” which Mick stated was, “to [him], just crazy.”

It should be noted here that Mick’s comment in (5.8) of, “I believe that basically, we’re all heterosexuals, it’s just that some of us have a gender confusion,” along with Peter’s description of his gender disposition and expression and related sexual identity development in (5.7), give clear evidence of the ex-gay view of biological sex having a direct, one-to-one mapping and correlation with gender identity and ultimately sexual identity, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10.

5.5 BELIEFS ABOUT MORALITY: “CHOICES” AMIDST “CONFLICT”

Evangelical beliefs about objective truth have profound implications for the way ex-gay evangelicals narrate and live their lives, for these beliefs create the irreconcilable conflict between what they perceive to be a valid Christian identity and homosexuality. Just as the ex-gay evangelicals’ belief in a singular truth in Jesus is incompatible with pluralistic validation of other religious belief systems and worldviews, inherently bound to such is the necessary incompatibility of pluralistic validation of ethics and moral standards which they interpret to be in conflict with Christian truth. In his book on evangelicalism in a post-modern world, Webber (1999:95) stated:

While Christians recognize the existence of many narratives, and their importance to the communication of the religious view of each culture, the evangelical problem with postmodern thought is with the relative nature assigned to all narratives. Classical Christianity makes a universal claim for the Christian narrative, and evangelicals stand in continuity with this conviction. Therefore, the idea that the Christian metanarrative is one of many equally valid metanarratives (pluralism) is not acceptable to evangelicals. Evangelicals take the universal character of the Christian metanarrative as an essential aspect of the framework of the Christian faith.

Consequently, in contrast to a pluralistic worldview, where one can choose from among a number of different instantiations of “truth” or belief systems that may be conflicting but considered equally valid, or a secular constructionist worldview where one can, in a sense, create one’s own version of truth and reality, ex-gay evangelicals believe there is only one “capital-T Truth” and one objective reality. This ultimate truth and reality is claimed to be found in and emanate from the God revealed in the Bible. Webber (1999:94) states that evangelicals believe that the Christian metanarrative “is no invention of human ingenuity. It is instead the revelation God’s presence in history working out the salvation of the world.” Because of this belief, should something be perceived as being in conflict with the Christian metanarrative, evangelical believers assume the metanarrative to be right and that their individual narrative must be brought into conformity with the master narrative above it. Henry exemplified this conflict and conformity when he discussed his “wrestling” and tension regarding “Scripture” and “homosexuality.”

(5.9) Henry: Everybody needs to realize, **this wasn’t a light decision** that we³⁷ made. It wasn’t just something, “Oh, you know, I think I’ll change my orientation today,” you know, it was **the result of years of wrestling with it**, and, and **trying to get some kind of balance, and how do I deal with this**, and, and **I made the decision, you know what, I have a choice**. I can-I can, I just lost the word. **I can try and judge Scripture in light of my homosexuality, or I can judge my homosexuality in light of Scripture. And the way I’ve decided to solve this conflict is, you know what, the Bible’s true. It’s sin. And I’m going to adjust my life accordingly to the best of my ability.**

As the excerpt in (5.9) shows, Henry’s comments capture perfectly Smith’s description of the Christian metanarrative seeking to “govern all other narratives below and within it” (2003:69), as Henry discussed his “choice” concerning which of the two narratives, “Scripture” or “my homosexuality,” would take precedence in his life. Henry

³⁷ “We”: previous context has Henry speaking for all ex-gays as he spoke about the ex-gay ministry movement as a whole.

saw these narratives as being in irreconcilable conflict because of his assumptions about the Bible and Christian faith, and “decided to solve this conflict” through privileging the Bible as truth. Therefore, based on his understanding of the Bible, Henry concluded that homosexuality is sin, and then sought to adjust his life according to the master narrative.

Similar to Ponticelli’s (1999) question as mentioned at the close of chapter 4, a colleague of mine commented with respect to the current research project, “I don’t get it. Why don’t they [i.e. ex-gay participants] just go to a church that accepts homosexuality?” However, within the ex-gay evangelical worldview as stated above, the belief in absolute truth makes the believer’s only real choice whether or not to align with that truth. To choose not to align with this “Truth” and reality is to align with or “create” a false or illusory world, one that is outside of God and His will. Dan, an ex-gay man who had been married for 23 years, expressed this belief in the following example:

(5.10) Dan: **There are a lot of things that the Bible states are right and wrong, and I believe in-I believe in absolute right and wrong. And so, one of-one of the things I believe to be true to myself, I have to be true to God. And to be true to myself, I have to-I have to stand up and be willing to say this is a part of my life that I did not choose, but it is not right, either.** Because I was born into a fallen world, we live in a fallen world. And you know I’m not gonna-there are a lot of things that happen to all of us that are wrong, that are hard, you know, that we have to live with. **But I’m not gonna live my life being gay, ah, striving to be something that I’m not. Because God did not create me a homosexual. The fallen world created me a homosexual in my orientation. And so, the choice for me is not whether I have a homosexual orientation or not, but whether I will follow Jesus that far or not. And I will follow Him that far because that’s what I believe.**

In (5.10) above, Dan stated his belief in “absolute right and wrong.” Dan then expressed his belief that to be “true to himself,” he had to be “true to God.” For Dan, this involved admitting the continued presence of same-sex attraction in his life experiences, but also concurring with Christian morality as he understood it; namely, homosexuality is “not right”: “this is a part of my life that I did not choose, but it is not right, either.” Dan

then stated that he is not going to live his life “being gay, striving to be something I’m not, because God did not create me a homosexual.” Thus, here again, Dan ultimately defined his sexual identity by what he believed to be “God’s created intent,” not by his own experience of same-sex attraction or “homosexual orientation.”

As a final example of this belief at work, with no reference to sexuality *per se*, Henry cited his belief in an ultimate reality found in God and the overall Biblical narrative of redemption as determining his reality and implicitly his sexuality. The excerpt in (5.11) was given in response to a question asking how Henry would respond to those that would claim he was simply denying his “true self.”

(5.11) AP: So what would you-what would you say to people who say, “Come on, you know, you’re just in denial. You’re denying your true self, and you’re not living authentically.”

Henry: I would, you know, **a lot of what they say is true or would be true, were it not for one simple fact. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Reality is God. The redemptive story that’s found in the Bible is reality.** That’s it. That’s-that’s, it’s as solid as anything we can touch or look at, and, and anybody can sit there, and they can tell you this, this, and you know what, you were born this way, and you were doing that, and, and you’re, you’re just stuffing, and it’s like, you know, you’re right, but, **Jesus Christ is Lord. He’s God. One day we are going to stand before God and give an account of ourselves.**

To sum up, in ex-gay evangelical communities, sexuality has a Divinely predetermined moral value, and this moral value is directly linked to a more generalized truth value, which is seen as emanating from God and therefore absolute. Thus, it is interesting to note that while ex-gay narratives are stories of transformation and sexual identity change, at one level, ex-gay Christian theology renders actual change irrelevant. With respect to sexuality, the moral requirements of the metanarrative do not change, regardless of whether attractions change or not. The predominance of the belief in objective truth being the ultimate measure is reflected in the language of identity as well;

within the ex-gay communities I researched, the common language of selfhood involved terms such as “true self,” “false self,” and “true center.”

5.6 BELIEFS ABOUT PERSONAL IDENTITY: “NEW” AND “OLD,” “TRUE” AND “FALSE”

Writing from an evangelical perspective in an article discussing narrative therapy and Foucault’s “technology of selfhood,” Sandage (1998) stated: “Foucault was correct that a Christian hermeneutic of selfhood does involve repentance. But what Foucault could not imagine was a good God who would creatively construct a new, gifted self rooted in the nonmanipulative love of Jesus” (70). The creation of a new self in Jesus is foundational to the salvation doctrine of evangelical Christians, and it is a foundational tenet in ex-gay ministry settings. This “new self” is said to be the “true self,” which only Jesus can call forth and bring into being. As Peter said during a ministry teaching, “Only Jesus can tell you who you are.”

As a result, in ex-gay evangelical transformations, it is first and foremost a seeking of identity through a relationship with Jesus, who is said to create and then call forth the true self in Himself, which involves a process of growth and change as one “becomes” and matures into the new self in Christ. This belief is expressed in a phrase often quoted regarding the ministry program at Liberty: “You are not here to overcome something; you are here to be overcome by Christ.” The spiritual identity is prime, and all other aspects of identity are said to be coming into conformity with the reality of the self that is being newly created in Jesus. These beliefs are clearly highlighted in the following excerpt in (5.12), taken from a discussion between several former Liberty ministry participants,³⁸ as they informed me of why they did not like the term “ex-gay.”

³⁸ At the time of this recording, Thomas was a 28-year old ex-gay man whose wife also had completed the Liberty program. Nina and Sadie were both middle-aged and single; Nina had never been married and Sadie was divorced. Both women had been a part of ex-gay ministry leadership at different times in the past. This dialogue was recorded as an impromptu discussion while Nina and Sadie helped Thomas paint

(5.12) Thomas: Because, number one, as a **Christian, um, that's your identity. Your identity is a Christian, not as an ex-gay. Anytime you put the label of ex-gay on someone, you're making that their identity. Not, um, the fact that they're a Christian.**

Nina: That's right.

Thomas: Um, you-**that's become their new identity. Um, not only that, but God never created us gay, He created us as His people, um, and we have put the labels, um, of gay, ex-gay, straight, bi, whatever, on ourselves.** Um, that's kind of my opinion of it. Hate it. <laughs>

Sadie: I remember the first time Rico <i.e. ex-gay speaker> was-he was standing up talking to us on Thursday night, and he said, um, I don't know, I was just early on, visiting Liberty, and he says, "**I am not an ex-homosexual; I am not a homosexual. I am a Christian man,**" or something to that extent. **That was so powerful to me.** I'd not heard that yet, and I'd been there a couple of months, and-and I mean, **that was just the: change, because we're new creatures in Christ, and if you go around identifying as an ex-gay, you're keeping-or an ex-homosexual, you're keeping-you're hanging on to the identity actually.** Nina and I were talking a couple of weeks ago, and it was like [...drops paint supplies; interruption...]

AP: so you were talking a couple of weeks ago

Sadie: about **thinking back on the lifestyle, and our lives in the lifestyle,** and it's like, Who were those peo-**that wasn't us. It's foreign now.**

As shown in example (5.12), Thomas described "the fact that they're a Christian" as the primary basis for a person's identity that believes in and follows Jesus; thus, Thomas' most important self-identification is aligned with his religious beliefs. One's identity in Christ is taken as the given, not one's sexuality. Nina echoed agreement with Thomas on this point and source of identification, and Thomas then proceeded to explain an alignment of identity only with God's creation, which he believed precluded a homosexual identity.

and redecorate a bedroom in Thomas's house as a surprise for his wife, who was away for a week helping at a Christian youth summer camp.

Sadie then shared a related story of the first time she heard someone speak about positing the entire definition of the self in Christ. She claimed that this was an extremely “powerful” moment of realization that effected a change in her: “that was just the: change, because we’re new creatures in Christ” (i.e. a direct allusion to and partial quotation of 2 Corinthians 5:17).³⁹ Sadie implied that she then began to no longer identify herself as ex-gay, where she would be “hanging on to the identity” of the past. Sadie concluded by giving evidence that the shift in her identification was complete by telling a story about “thinking back on the lifestyle” and stating it was as if she wasn’t even the same person, “...that wasn’t us. It’s foreign now.”

This foundational premise of a new self in Christ is present in every ex-gay narrative I collected. Another example is given in (5.13) from Beth’s life story, as below:

(5.13) Beth: Um, I was in the church, I was getting instruction in the Word, but I was struggling with my sexuality on my own, um, because again, I didn’t know about <ministry>. I went to a Christian bookstore, and there were actually books on the shelf talking about homosexuality. I was grabbing everything that I could. I was grabbing it, and I’d take it home, and I’d read it, um, and probably for that first eight months – and again, Hope, who was my supervisor, had now become a personal friend, was now my sister in Christ, and at one point, I even shared with her what my struggle was, you know. [...] So I told her, I said, “Well, my background is homosexuality,” and I’m waiting for the reaction, you know, and it was wonderful, because she goes, “Beth,” she goes, “I don’t know why I got this for you, but I had planned to give you this,” and it was the butterfly that said **“You are a new creation in Christ”** you know, and so we talked about that, and that’s-that was part of where she goes, “Beth,” she goes, **“I don’t understand your struggle, I don’t understand anything about it, but I’m willing to walk with you on this.”**

As shown in excerpt (5.13) above, Beth highlighted the fact that when she revealed her “struggle” with homosexuality to a friend, the first response was with the Christian belief that one becomes a new creation in Christ upon conversion. The processual nature of “becoming” or “walking out” this new identity, as it is frequently

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17—If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come. (NASB)

described, is implied as well by the response of “I don’t understand your struggle...but I’m willing to walk with you on this.” Thus, this exemplifies the evangelical belief that there is a process of “becoming” and growing into the new self once a relationship with Jesus has been established through an individual’s belief in him as the Christ and decision to follow him.

The focus on the beliefs about a new self in Christ in ex-gay ministries has been consistently documented by previous work on ex-gay ministries (Ponticelli, 1993; Wolkomir, 1999; Erzen, 2002). In evangelical Christian theology, there is believed to be a course of Christian growth and development which involves a deconstruction of and “dying to” the old identity, a process of being made new, and a construction of and “putting on” of the new identity, which are New Testament metaphors as detailed below.

With respect to the “old identity,” I held a men’s group discussion that elicited the term “old man,” which I had also heard used by other ex-gay participants in other settings, in addition to “old self.” The context was a question I had asked about the reasoning behind a ministry rule that disallowed “camping,” a stereotypical gay male speech performance. Bart responded succinctly, “Camping glorifies the old man” (cf. chapter 10, section 10.4). “Old man” is used frequently in the New Testament as a metaphor for the self that is associated with sinful behavior and attitudes prior to conversion to Christianity; in more recent translations, “old man” is typically rendered “old self.” For example, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,” Colossians, chapter 3, verse 9 (New King James Version). Evangelical Christians point to the New Testament book of Ephesians, which describes this identity process as follows:

Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in

the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4: 21-24 (New International Version)

Ultimately, ex-gay evangelicals believe that there is a stable source of the self that originates from outside of the self, from the Creator God, from whom the self and identity are ultimately derived. This drawing of the identity of the self from God is illustrated by the following example (5.14), taken from Deborah's life narrative:

(5.14) AP: What would you say to people that might say, "You're just in denial, you're just denying your true self, you know, you're really, you know, naturally attracted to women, so you're just repressing your true self?"

Deborah: Well, I would say to any-anyone who says I'm naturally attracted to women, any thing that seems to be natural, when God touches, it's the way it's supposed to be. **I used to think that I used to be naturally born homo-homosexual, but God showed me something different, God showed me the right way to live. And when you know more about God, then you'll know more of who you are. And when you don't know God, you don't know yourself.** And so sometime we can get caught up in hearing what people say, hearing what-what we think, but if we don't know God, then we really don't know. **You got to know the Creator to know exactly who you are. And that was the problem, the issue with me, I didn't know God was the one that formed me, shaped me, breathed breath into my lungs, created me in my mother's womb, knew me before I was born.⁴⁰ I should have been going to Him to ask Him about who I was supposed to be, instead of going to the world, my friends and family and to the enemy, to ask him who I was supposed to be. I was going to the wrong resource, so we all have to check the resource before we continue to go on with our life.** Who we going to? Are we getting wise counseling or are we getting Godly counseling, you know, un-you know, ungodly counseling or Godly counseling? It's who you allow your counselor to be, in the Spirit or in the natural.⁴¹ It's who you're allowing your

⁴⁰ Excerpt (5.14) is also an excellent example of the way in which evangelicals incorporate multiple Biblical allusions in their daily speech practices (cf. discussion in chapter 6, section 2; also Meigs, 1995). For instance, Deborah's description here employs numerous allusions, which are as follows here and in notes 14 and 15. For example, Job 33: 4—The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Genesis 2:7—Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Psalm 139:13—For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. Jeremiah 1:5—'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you' (cf. chapter, 6, section 4). (All verses here are from the NASB.)

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 2:14—But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (NASB)

counselor to be. And I know today, that regardless of what people say, I walk in the confidence and the assurance that I am a child of the King, a child of God,⁴² and regardless of anybody believing me in that or not, **I have to still walk in the fact that I know that I know that I know who I am in God** and that God is the one that I will serve for the rest of my life.

Hence, in this excerpt, Deborah claimed that only by “knowing the Creator” could she know herself, and that she had to go to God to find out whom she was “supposed to be.” Deborah indexed the already established ex-gay evangelical belief that God did not create people to be homosexual by stating: “I used to think that I used to be naturally born homosexual, but God showed me something different.” Thus, Deborah claimed to have sought the Creator as the one who knew her true identity and would tell her “the right way to live,” which encompassed both sexual identity and behavior.

5.7 BELIEFS ABOUT GOOD, EVIL, AND “THE ENEMY”

In the example just given in (5.14), Deborah stated that she had been “going to the wrong resource” to ask about whom she “was supposed to be,” and said that she should have been going to God “instead of going to the world, my friends and family and to the enemy, to ask him who I was supposed to be.” Deborah’s reference to “the enemy” brings up another aspect of evangelical Christian theology that must be addressed, that is the ex-gay evangelical belief in Satan as an active and personal force of evil, whom the participants in my study most frequently referred to as “the enemy,”⁴³ using New Testament phraseology. Thus, this part of the evangelical Christian metanarrative must also be understood in order to understand ex-gay narratives, as Satan is explicitly mentioned or alluded to in all of the ex-gay narratives and most of the ministry writings and group sessions collected for this project.

John 14:16-17...—And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him, for he lives with you and will be in you... (New International Version, henceforth NIV)

⁴² “child of God”—numerous verses, e.g. John 1:12; Galatians 3:26. (Cf. chapter 9, excerpt (9.22)).

⁴³ For example, the New Testament book of 1 Peter 5:8 refers to Satan as “your enemy, the devil.” (NIV)

The belief in Satan as a fallen angel and the original initiator of rebellion against God and hence the introducer of evil into the world is core to evangelical Christian understanding, which contends that it interprets the Biblical text literally (and even when interpreted metaphorically, the text is read as having literal implications). Thus, the serpent in the narrative of the Fall is taken to be Satan, who is believed to have deceived the first woman, Eve, when she listened to his voice as he contradicted the command of God and enticed her to eat the one fruit that was forbidden. Adam, the first man, was complicit in this evil and openly rebelled by partaking of the fruit as well. This was the original sin and brought about the fall of humankind and humans' separation from God.

Evangelical Christians believe that there is now an ongoing spiritual battle between the forces of good (God) and the forces of evil (Satan). Satan is a created being and is not equal with God, but is allowed to be active as human history plays out to dignify humans with free will and the choice of aligning with either good or evil and ultimately to bring God glory when God defeats evil altogether. This ex-gay evangelical Christian understanding does not allow for neutrality, as can be seen from Deborah's elaboration on the old identity as in (5.15) below:

(5.15) Deborah: I can't identify with homosexuality today. I am no longer a homosexual, so I don't identify with a homosexual today. I don't identify with them. I understand where they are as a broken vessel.⁴⁴ I don't see them as a homosexual. I-I realize that if we speak against, and **if I speak against the enemy's attack or the enemy's identity, it would become more real to somebody, or that person that's struggling.** [...] **When someone calls themselves ex-gay, ex-lesbian, I'm identifying with the old,** and I'm allowing myself to still take off some, take on some or participate in some of the thinking, the carnality that comes along with the lifestyle, if I call myself an ex-gay. **I can never present myself as an ex-gay, I can only present myself as who God created me to be. God did not create me to be gay from the beginning so I can't say that I'm an ex-gay, because this was not my purpose from the**

⁴⁴ "Vessel" is a frequent Biblical metaphor for human beings. E.g. 2 Corinthians 4: 7—But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. Psalm 31:12—I am forgotten as a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. (NASB)

beginning. Now I had a flat tire somewhere in between riding on the road and I veered off somewhere and gotten on (where I should not have) been going, but I'm back on the path that I was supposed to be, the path-that the pathway and the highway is different than a dirt road. And I'm going, I'm back on the pathway where I was supposed to be, and I can't, I don't even want to think about being ex-gay. [...] **Either you—the enemy's doing it or you—God's doing it. One way or another, I do not identify with anything of Satan; my body is a temple of God.⁴⁵ My thoughts are going to be like His. I'm not going backwards. The enemy can't get me there.**

As seen in excerpt (5.15), Deborah established her belief in a dichotomy for the possible sources of identity as being either from God or from Satan, and she clearly stated her belief that a homosexual identity was linked to “the enemy's attack or the enemy's identity.” In fact, Deborah did not even want to identify herself as “ex-gay,” as she believed to do so would align herself with “the old identity” and something “of Satan.”

In chapter 9, I address the multi-voicedness of ex-gay narratives, and Satan's is one of the voices that must be contended with and accounted for within these narratives. Similar to Deborah's reference to “the world,” “friends and family,” and “the enemy,” Ranni delineated the different voices she believed were competing to define one's life and identity in the excerpt given in (5.16):

(5.16) Ranni: There's tons of books out there on living authentically and none of them have the right answer. **The right answer is in the Bible. Period. That's about living authentically because you (learn) who your true identity is.** I'm not searching anymore. I know. [...] **The true identity is what God calls you out to be.** I don't know who that is for you. I know who that is for me. Um Leanne writes that uh f-**for a Christian the goal in life is not self-actualization. Our goal is like, is to, is identification with Christ and who He calls you to be,** and that is the utter struggle of humanity in trying very hard **to listen only to God and not what, you know, the world, the flesh and the devil want you to listen to.** And the more you-your ears are finer tuned to God, the less static you h-hear and are(n't) more distracted to go elsewhere. At least that's how I see it. And I'm

⁴⁵ Here, Deborah referenced the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians 6: 18-20—Flee sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. (NIV)

sure that theologians have written about this—tomes of this—that I’ve just managed to condense to a sentence, but it works for me. <laughs>

In (5.16) above, Ranni first cited the Bible as the definitive source for learning one’s true identity; thus, the first voice is established as a textual one. Corresponding to evangelical belief that the Bible is the Word of God, this textual source would be aligned with the voices of “God” and “Christ.” Ranni then constructed a series of other voices, those of “the world, the flesh, and the devil,”⁴⁶ that compete for one’s attention in opposition to God’s voice, the “only” one that should be listened to. Similar to Ranni’s example, in the women’s group sessions at Liberty, there were numerous discussions during the study of *Healing Homosexuality* where selfhood and identity were inseparably allied with the belief in objective truth: there was claimed to be an objectively “true self,” defined by God, or a “false self,” defined by anything other than God.

As mentioned above, references to “the enemy” occur not only in individual life narratives, but also in the corporate and group discourses that take place in ex-gay ministries. The following portion of Anna’s discussion from the women’s group provides an explicit reference to this other voice, as in (5.17) below:

(5.17) Anna: **I did not want to name myself that** <i.e. lesbian>. But I finally had to say to do the action, the name fits, you know, and-and it was a hard, hard thing for me to do. **And once I acquired that label, it was really hard [to lay it down.]**

Rosa:

[to remove it]

Anna: Even if I wanted it off of me. **Because there is more than when people label us. There’s a whisper in our ear that says, “Oh yes you are, oh yes you are, oh yes you are, do you remember? Yes, you are.”** <group laughs> **And-and that comes from the voice of Satan because he does not want us to walk**

⁴⁶ As mentioned in chapter 4, the “world” is a metaphor in the New Testament used to indicate forces of evil in the world, both spiritual and human. Ranni’s mention of the “flesh” refers to the sinful nature of humans, all of which are said to be in opposition to God, and her pairing the “flesh” with the “world” is an allusion to the New Testament association of these two things (e.g. 1 John 2:16—For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.) (NASB).

in our true identity. As long as he can get us to walk into ah, or to be scattered or torn apart, and you'll see that in-in Leanne's writings in terms of lo:sing a part of ourselves, or being a-breaking apart so that we don't know what it is, we're not even aware of the part that we're missing.

(Transcript: Women's group, 7-9-02)

In (5.17) Anna directly referred to the "voice of Satan" as an active voice that deliberately tried to obfuscate her true identity by reminding her of her past in an attempt to keep her aligned with the "label" *homosexual*. Notice that Anna shifted from discussing her own individual experience in the first person singular, "once I acquired that label...even if I wanted it off of me," to a group-inclusive first person plural, "there is more than when people label us, there's a whisper in our ear," thereby generalizing the experience of dealing with the voice of Satan to all the women in the group. Thus, via pronominal inclusion, all the women present are indicated as having knowledge of him as the one who "does not want them to walk in their true identity." In so doing, Anna not only shared her personal experience, but as group facilitator, also reinforced the perspective of Satan as a source of deception that applied to all the group members and created a shared sense of common experience among them.

As with almost all of the ex-gay narratives, Bart's narrative also included numerous references to "the enemy," to whom he directly attributed deception with respect to his sexual identity, as in (5.18) below.

(5.18) Bart: I was born heterosexual, and I'm not in denial, that I've ever struggled, but **I was born a heterosexual. I have been lied to by the enemy, and I struggled with homosexuality.** I struggled with sexual brokenness. My identity was jacked up, where I didn't really understand what was going on inside of me, but now I realize that I am heterosexual. [...] I struggled, I don't know if I, **maybe I can say I was gay at the time that I lived it, you know, because I gave in to the lie, but as far as Christ calling me or God calling me or even saying now that I am – no, I'm not. I never was, you know. I wasn't born that way.**

In (5.18), similar to Ranni's excerpt in (5.16), Bart set God and Christ's voices in opposition to "the enemy." Notice that Bart did not describe his "struggle with homosexuality" in terms of morality or even sexual behavior—both are perhaps implicit, but the explicit terms of description are truth values with respect to identity: "I have been lied to" and "I gave in to the lie." It is interesting to point out how Bart's references to "the enemy" allow for a complex portrayal of the interaction of his human agency with evil supernatural entities and other factors. Thus, Bart displaced agency with respect to his claim of having been deceived and not having been born a homosexual, but he also reclaimed agency through the interaction of his moral response, saying that he "gave in to the lie" and "struggled."

The opposition between truth and falsehood, good and evil, God and Satan, is a major part of the evangelical Christian master narrative and is present throughout ministry resources and writings. Andy Comiskey, an ex-gay man who founded the ministry Desert Stream, "a multifaceted outreach to the sexually and relationally broken," wrote in his book, *Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness*:

First we must identify the enemy. It is not a political party, the wayward church, or the gay community. There is only one enemy: Satan himself, the deceiver and robber of humanity. "He is a liar and the father of lies" and he seeks to destroy the gullible with his lies. (John 8:44; 10:10). [...] I am convinced that the enemy empowers and employs the homosexual confusion in our culture to seduce men and women into embracing the "gay self." One cannot negate the spiritual deception that occurs when a person identifies with his or her homosexuality as the real, authentic self. (2003:184-185)

In the above excerpt, Comiskey clearly defined "the enemy" as a singular one, "Satan himself, the deceiver and robber of humanity." "The enemy...is not a political party, the wayward church, or the gay community." Thus, Satan is seen as the ultimate source of "deception" behind anyone or anything that might offer a narrative or perspective other than that which ex-gay individuals believe is correct and true according to God.

Comiskey then linked homosexuality with “confusion” and “deception” rather than a person’s “real, authentic self.” The trope of the true self is a powerful one in both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives. While most ex-ex-gay narratives will be shown to claim homosexuality as a God-given, intrinsic part of the true self, ex-gay narratives represent clear disavowals of the true identity as being homosexual. Comiskey specifically addressed this essentialist perspective on homosexuality by saying, “Speaking to the homosexually vulnerable, we die to the lie that we were born gay and are intrinsically homosexual” (2003:190).

As defined in the ex-gay evangelical worldview, homosexuality is sinful and therefore cannot be of God and is seen as outside of the realm of truth. All “struggles” with homosexuality are then cast into a general Christian framework of discipleship, which for every believer is said to involve some sort of “struggle” against “sin.” Note again in the following quotation from Comiskey that the terms of description are “falsehood,” “truth” and reality, not explicitly morality.

We need the community of the cross in order to emerge out of homosexuality. Such freedom involves a radical response to the One who calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him (Lk. 9:23⁴⁷). That response must involve Jesus’ conversion of our wills—a persistent willingness to die to falsehood and embrace what is real and true. (Comiskey, 2003:188)

5.8 EX-GAY DISCOURSE: SUBJUGATING OR LIBERATING?

As previously noted, a Foucauldian perspective would undoubtedly label the ex-gay evangelical Christian beliefs described here a “subjugating discourse” that requires the submission of sexuality to an overarching spiritual universe of discourse that has deterministic and definitive power over the individual. However, due to ex-gay individuals’ worldview, they themselves regard it as a submission that ultimately leads to

⁴⁷ I.e. Luke 9:23, abbreviated in original. “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’.” (NASB)

liberation. While outsiders might view discourses that would allow embracing a gay identity as liberating, ex-gay evangelicals resist such discourses, which from the ex-gay perspective are actually viewed as the “subjugating discourses.”

Because of their beliefs as described above, ex-gay individuals understand homosexuality to be categorically outside of God’s will. Coupled with the traditional Christian thought that true freedom is only found in God and being in His will, embracing a homosexual identity is therefore not interpreted as freedom, but is actually characterized as being “bound.” The names of many ex-gay ministries reflect this belief, such as REACH (Releasing the Chains around Homosexuality) and Breaking Free.

On several occasions during the course of my research, ex-gay individuals quoted Jesus as saying: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” In this discourse, Jesus was questioned about this claim and said in explanation, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”⁴⁸ In light of this statement, ex-gay evangelical beliefs lead ex-gay individuals to speak of homosexuality in the general Biblical terms of “sin,” and they characterize any acceptance of “sin” as the opposite of freedom. Additionally, phrases such as “freedom” and “a right to self-determine identity” and personal “self-determination of sexual stewardship” are frequently used in ex-gay discourse with respect to sexuality and identity, all always interpreted as bringing their beliefs, behaviors, and lives in accord with their evangelical Christian beliefs.

In the following chapter (6), I delineate and exemplify aspects of this language ideology that is also based on and emanates from ex-gay beliefs about the Christian metanarrative and the ex-gay worldview.

⁴⁸ John 8: 32-34—Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’ Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.’

Chapter 6: Language ideology: Implications from the ex-gay metanarrative

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The connection between language and the understanding of truth, sexuality, selfhood, and identity described in the previous chapter is a profound one, for within metanarrative, the individual life narrative is situated. The metanarrative provides the master frame and boundary for acceptable and unacceptable personal narrations. Words and language are critical, for they are always imbued with a truth-value due to the ex-gay evangelical belief that there is no neutrality or relativistic pluralism with respect to truth.

Os Guinness (1998/2003), a well-known author within evangelical circles, stated: “We live between the initial word of God’s creation and the final word of His judgment.” And for ex-gay evangelicals, it is all the words in between that narrate their lives either in accordance with or in contradiction to what they understand to be God’s truth and reality. As I have shown, in the ex-gay worldview, one either accepts or rejects the truth of God’s words, and to reject this truth is to align oneself with the source of words outside of God, namely, Satan, whom, as noted, evangelicals see as “the father of lies.”

The following passage is helpful to understand the heavy import the relationship of language to objective truth has in traditional Christian thought and for ex-gay evangelicals:

[A purely sociological] view of language is also egregiously dangerous to spiritual and mental health, for such a view of language dissolves the relationship of speech to the perception of truth, rendering man the lord of language without affirming the magisterial claims of truth over man. [...] Moreover, the Fall itself,

when it came, derived itself from that demonic disassociation of speech from truth that we call the Lie: “You will not surely die.”⁴⁹ (Reardon, 2000: 21-22)

Thus, in this framework, human alignment with words in contradiction to the words of God constituted the first act of human rebellion against God and brought about the “fall of man.” Words are therefore potent, for through them humans construct their “realities” and “worlds,” aligning themselves either with the workings of God in truth and reality or the workings of “the enemy,” the originator of deception, in “falsehood” and “illusion.” Because of this belief, for ex-gay evangelicals, the referential function of language must be closely attended to and precisely aligned with what they believe to be truth due to the above stated beliefs about God and reality. Also, as in the discourse of many religions, language becomes even more critical because it is accorded more than referential power alone; namely, language is linked with supernatural realities and therefore is seen as having the capacity for supernatural power.

In this chapter, I seek to make explicit the language ideology that emerges from and is shaped by the ex-gay evangelical Christian metanarrative and demonstrate how that ideology in turn shapes the narratives and language use of the ex-gay individuals themselves. I consider three constellations of topics that provide tangible evidences of language ideology at work in the speech of the ex-gay Christians. Specifically, in 6.2, I deal with the divine power of language, in 6.3, the power of naming, and in 6.4, the power of confession. I conclude the chapter with remarks in 6.5.

⁴⁹ The story of the “Fall” is contained in Genesis 3, and “You will not surely die” is a direct quotation of the serpent’s words to Eve from Genesis 3:4, by which he contradicted the words of God and deceived her, enticing her to eat of the forbidden fruit. (Cf. Discussion in chapter 5, section 5.7)

6.2 THE POWER OF THE WORD: INCARNATED AND INCORPORATED

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

—1 Thessalonians 2:13 (NIV)

In chapter 4, I discussed Burke’s (1966) notion of terministic screens, which is taken from his work on language as symbolic action. Leanne Payne, author of *Healing Homosexuality*, addressed the importance of language as symbolic action as well, but from a perspective based on a particular evangelical Christian theology, as seen in the following excerpt from the book *Healing Presence: Curing the Soul through Union with Christ*, which is among the many resource books used and recommended at Liberty and other ex-gay ministries:

...the Incarnation and the Cross [is] God’s way, through His Son, of bringing us back into *communication* with Himself. Our capacity to speak, hear, comprehend—our use, that is, of language—is a most profound mystery. Only man, of all God’s creation, talks—that is, *symbolizes*—continually. In this we are in the image of God, for God speaks. So it is that God and man *talk*. Christ, the Word, who spoke the world into existence and created man, breathed into Adam the spark of life and called him into communication with Himself. And He gave him the task of *naming* all that is created. *Language has to do with the very nature of man, man made in the image of God. God and man are called into conversation.* (1989/1995:56-57) [emphasis in original]

The above quotation links the human capacity for language to the belief that humans are created in God’s image and reveals the evangelical conception of God as one who creates by speaking. “Christ, the Word, who spoke the world into existence” is a direct reference to the creation story in Genesis 1, where God speaks and things come into being that previously did not exist. This “creation by speaking” origins story is succinctly summarized in the New Testament book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 3: “By faith, we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” Thus, placed within an Austinian framework (Austin, 1962), evangelical Christians essentially believe the words of God

are the original and ultimate performative speech acts, actually effecting and bringing about what is spoken (cf. Meigs, 1995).

Also in the above, Payne called Jesus Himself “the Word,” a reference to the New Testament book of John, which begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.”⁵⁰ From an evangelical perspective, it is believed that Jesus existed as God from eternity and that He became human and came to the earth as the “Word Incarnate” or “Word of Life”; thus, the historical person of Jesus is said to be God in the flesh and is referred to as “the Word,” which in the original Greek is “*logos*.” Among evangelicals, this is admittedly profound mystery and beyond complete comprehension, but in essence, the belief is that Jesus became the Divine Communication of God to humankind, inviting humans back into relationship with God through Himself even as His primary work was to make restored relationship possible through His death and resurrection.

The belief in a God who uses speech as the divine instrument of creation and calls Himself the Word has profound implications for the narration of ex-gay evangelicals’ life stories and their own use of language, for language is not only referential, but also creational—not simply constative, but constitutive. Language is believed to be a primary means through which human agency can invoke and connect to supernatural reality; thus, language is accorded a type of “mystical” status due to its supernatural potential. Nowhere is this mystical nature and supernatural potential seen more clearly than with respect to the “words of God.”

⁵⁰ From John 1:1-2, 14. Verse 14 continues: “We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NASB) See also the New Testament book of 1 John 1:1.

Based on numerous Biblical references, evangelicals believe the words of God are living and active, powerful to accomplish something because God Himself spoke them and therefore He will ultimately bring them to pass. Examples of this belief in the “living” aspect of God’s words are given in (6.1) and (6.2) below.

(6.1) Jacob: She shared the Word, what the Word said about homosexuality. Um and it was in a real direct, but it was very gentle, and it was very loving, and it was very tender. There wasn’t any condemnation to it, there wasn’t any “You’re going to hell; you’re going to perish,” it was nothing like that. It was a very simple, “You know, the Word, have you ever?” and told me what the Bible had to say. And I was like, “Wow, I had never ever heard anything like that.” **And I left that night with this feeling inside of me that something had happened. There was like a-a a physical sensation inside of me; you know the Word talks about it being like a seed. And here was the seed. I could almost feel it.**

In (6.1), Jacob used “the Word” to refer to the Bible a total of five times. When recounting the story of the first time someone “shared” passages from “what the Word said about homosexuality” with him (from the perspective that homosexuality is morally wrong), he stated that he left with a “feeling inside of [him] that something had happened” to the point of it being a “physical sensation.” Jacob then said “the Word talks about it being like a seed,” referring to the Biblical metaphor of “seed” for the word of God. The “seed” metaphors index the belief that God’s words contain life in themselves and have power of their own to come to fruition.⁵¹ Thus, Jacob’s claims of “here was the seed; I could almost feel it” provided affective, experiential support for his belief that “the Word” he heard that night was powerful and from God, having begun its work almost immediately inside him in an almost palpable way.

In example (6.2), Bart also referred to the Bible, i.e. “the Scriptures,” as “the Word” and spoke of it affecting him, literally imparting life inside him.

⁵¹ “Seed” is a metaphor used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the word of God, again indicating that it is “living and active,” having a life and power of its own to bring forth life. Thus, the “brings life” meaning of the metaphor encompasses the span of organic, agricultural, and procreative (i.e. seminal “seed”) image possibilities. E.g. Isaiah 55:10-11; Luke 8:11; Hebrews 4:12

(6.2) Bart: And He is still working in my heart. That I'm not homosexual, you know. And through the help of those guys pushing me through Go-, to God, motivating me, encouraging me, **bringing the Scriptures in, showing me what the Word says, and the life being imparted inside of me, like the Word says, that He's going to give life, and life more abundantly. The enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy.**⁵² Well, there it is, plain and simple, you know?

As seen in the excerpt above, Bart not only spoke of “the Scriptures” giving him life, but also incorporated “the Word” in his speech when making this claim. Bart’s statement of “like the Word says, that He’s going to give life, and life more abundantly. The enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy,” apart from sentential inversion, is an exact quote of a verse from the book of John. Thus, Bart essentially used the “words of God” not only to describe what had been happening to him, but he also stated that “Word” (i.e. the Biblical text) to help invoke the state described in “the Word.”

As evidenced throughout numerous examples thus far, the ex-gay narratives in my study have a high frequency of explicitly stated references to Biblical verses as in (6.2) above and numerous Biblical allusions. While clearly the Biblical text is the most important textual source of discourse for these ex-gay evangelicals, providing the master template for their individual life narration, I propose that the power believed to be inherent in the “words of God” is an additional reason for this practice. The ex-gay individuals here believe that God is working to effect what He has spoken, and that what He has spoken is true and good. As a result, the ex-gay believers employ the literal “words of God” in the everyday speech of their lives not only out of a desire to be rightly aligned with what they perceive to be God’s truth, but also in a cooperative effort to bring the words to pass.

⁵² A reference to John 10:10, where Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.” (NASB)

Through employing multiple Biblical allusions and more specifically literally incorporating the Biblical text into their daily language practices,⁵³ these ex-gay evangelicals continue an American tradition of expressing oneself (in speaking or writing) that dates to the earliest Puritans in the U.S. and to earlier Protestants in England and continental Europe (Daniell, D., 2003). The example given in (6.3) provides a vivid reference to this literal incorporation.

(6.3) Deborah: I think it's that you just need to-**you need to renew your mind.**/

Selah: /I don't know, No, I'm, I'm trying to understand the (?) really.

Deborah: Really, you're, really that has a whole lot to do with it, because the way you see yourself and the way you see things and the way you respond, if the world, if you're still carnal, carnality, fleshly, negative, those things are not of God. If those-that's still going on in here<i.e. pointing to the head>, then you ain't putting enough in here <i.e. pointing to the heart>, and if you putting it <i.e. the Bible>in here <i.e. the head>, it ain't going here <i.e. the heart>, you just putting it in there <i.e. the head>.⁵⁴ **It's just like, all of us can sit around the table with great answers, but if we ain't applying the answers to our everyday walk, then we will never come built up with these words in us. It's not-We don't supposed to walk around with the Bible everyday quoting scriptures, [this word, this Bible's supposed to be in us, so when we walk, the Scripture walks.**

Selah: [I know. Supposed to be, yeah, living it out.

Deborah: **This <i.e. indicating the Bible> is what's gonna renew our minds,** so our minds be renewed, then you won't see things the way you used to see, but your mind has to be renewed. **If your mind is not renewed, your life will continue to be walked out the same way it was years ago.**

The excerpt in (6.3) is taken from the women's group discussion, where Deborah was exhorting Selah to "renew her mind," a reference to Romans 12:2, which partially reads, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Ex-gay individuals are explicitly and intentionally seeking self-transformation;

⁵³ Cf. Meigs (1995).

⁵⁴ Deborah's reference to putting "God's word" in one's heart is also a Biblical allusion. For example, Psalm 119:11—Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. (NASB)

as a result, “renewing your mind” is often referred to in ex-gay circles as a Biblically-stated means of being “transformed.”

As in excerpt (6.3) above, Deborah stated, “We don’t supposed to walk around with the Bible everyday quoting scriptures,” referring to the literal incorporation language practice here described, but she also claimed that such was not enough. Deborah said “This Bible is supposed to be in us, so when we walk, the Scripture walks.” Thus, for Deborah, the “Word” incorporated into the language of the believer should lead to the “Word” incarnated⁵⁵ anew in the very life of the believer. Aside from the incarnational allusions of “these words in us” and “Scripture walking,” what is certainly evidenced from the ex-gay evangelical narratives in this study is the incorporational aspect, for when they talked, the Scripture talked. In this way, ex-gay narratives and discourse provide a clear instantiation of language ideology affecting linguistic and rhetorical practice.

Deborah then asserted that the Bible was what would “renew your mind,” but implied that this type of mind renewal was beyond mere cognition by talking about “putting it in” one’s heart, not just one’s head. Within the ex-gay ministry setting, there were many discussions about how intellectual knowledge of the Bible alone is not enough. Thus, Deborah claimed that interaction with the Bible in this ‘heart’ way would lead to a “renewed mind” and a changed life, and without this type of interaction, life would not change but “continue to be walked out the same way.” One ministry leader said to me, “The work of God cannot be accomplished in the power of the mind. It takes the work of the Spirit.” Thus again, in the communities in which I worked, the Word of God is seen as powerful and able to effect change in the mind and hence the life of the individual, not as an automatic formula or a sacred, magical incantation in and of itself,

⁵⁵ This “incarnation” parallels and alludes to what evangelical Protestants term “the Lord’s supper” (i.e. Holy communion or the Eucharist).

but because the Spirit of God works to bring the will of God expressed in the words to pass.

6.3 THE POWER OF NAMING

With respect to language ideology, Briggs (1993) warned that by focusing on unstated, implicit assumptions behind discourse, the analyst risks skewing the understanding of the discourse by inadvertently imposing too much of his or her own interpretation on conclusions made about the “unspoken” behind the actual data. While this is a valid concern that must be guarded against, Kroskrity (1993) reminded us that acknowledging the naturalized and subliminal status of much of language ideology must not rule out attending to the cases where assumptions about language are clearly affecting speakers’ linguistic use at a conscious level (cf. Woolard, 1998).

During the individual interviews with both the men and women, I often noticed instances in which I perceived that speakers’ ideas about language were affecting the content and framing of the narrative, as well as their actual linguistic usage. However, in addition to my own perceptions, I also heard overt references made to thoughts about language and its relation to identity in the interviews as well. Then, prompted by the content of *Healing Homosexuality*, the women’s group began collectively discussing and exploring language-related issues.

As a result, the issue of language ideology was raised to “discursive consciousness,” and I had opportunity to record explicit and extended discussion on, rather than simply make inferences about, some of the language ideology and links between language and identity that are crucial components of the ex-gay narratives I collected. This experience hopefully helped me to avoid my own analytic impositions about the language ideology that frames and influences talk and discourse from beyond the liminality of the speakers’ awareness.

For ex-gay individuals, language and beliefs about language are not happenstance; they are a significant component of the ex-gay identity transformation process. Ex-gay narratives demonstrate an explicit language ideology. In constructivist terms, language has the power to define and create identity. But as described in the previous sections, the constructivism in the ex-gay ideology of language I have observed in the current study refers not so much to the creation of valid, actual alternate realities; rather, language serves to align ex-gay evangelicals with what they understand to be objective reality, and to speak out of alignment is to create a subjective reality that is seen as founded in “deception” and “illusion.”

In light of this understanding of language, consider Deborah’s response to a question concerning whether she viewed homosexuality as an identity or a behavior. (Note: At the time of the interview, Deborah had just “graduated” (cf. chapter 3) from the year-long program at Liberty.)

(6.4) Deborah: It was both. Um, it- **I believe it was a behavior at first and then it became an identity, and the reason why I said it became an identity because it was what you saw, what you saw in yourself and what people saw in you and a title is a, when you title somebody, you identify, you give somebody an identity that they feel they are to walk in.** And when you’re walking in an identity, you take on the behavior as well, as the identity, and so I think it’s the behavior first, because you have to behave to get to where you got to and then as the identity come, and then with the identity the further behaviors. And so I believe it’s two in one, you know, um, **but I think the rule of homosexuality is a- is as um, incorrect way or we, as, or incorrect way that we see ourselves. [...] And-and-and-and sometimes we can get to the place where we can throw all these identities on us and not even re- realize what we’re doing by the words we speak out of our mouths.** And, and that is the downfall with the identity process.

Here in (6.4), Deborah referred to homosexuality as first being behavior and then becoming an identity when it received a “title: when you title somebody, you identify, you give somebody an identity that they feel they are to walk in.” Thus, Deborah expressed her belief that language and receiving a name that identified the behavior

served to reify homosexuality into an identity for her. However, while homosexuality is therefore claimed to be an identity at that point, Deborah simultaneously claimed that it was also an “incorrect” identity and self-perception. “I think the rule of homosexuality is an incorrect way that we see ourselves”; hence, for Deborah homosexuality as identity, yes—as valid and true identity, no. Deborah’s comments bring us to the power of naming, a crucial element to understand in ex-gay narratives and ministry discourse.

While many understand that to name a thing is to exercise power, as Kauth (2000) noted, “to name a thing is to influence social reality” (97), for ex-gay evangelicals, the power of naming is again rooted in their theological beliefs. In four out of seven taped sessions, as the women’s group studied *Healing Homosexuality*, language, labels, tags, and defining terms were discussed at length. Recall the discussion of internalizing and externalizing labels from Chapter 4 on terministic screens and narrative therapy as well as the importance that was ascribed to “acquiring” and “laying down” various labels and identities, especially ones perceived as not originating from God. *Healing Homosexuality* explicitly addressed the power of naming and linked it to Biblical references, as seen in the following excerpt:

False humility, actual sin, or need for psychological healing bars us from living out from the position of knowing who we are in Him. This position is one of authority, and one by which we, the redeemed, are namers of all that is created, even as the unfallen Adam named Creation. Named by God, and molded by His will alone, we are no longer named and shaped by that which is created. This is the maturity and authority that heals the world. We die daily to any selfish or tyrannical authority (a carnal, dominating spirit) that comes from living out of the self-centered old man, as well as to the weak position of “no authority” of a minor under the law; we live from the center, where He dwells, naming in His name. (Payne, 1985/1996:47)

In the above quotation, Payne referred to the Biblical creation account in Genesis, where Adam, the first man, names the animals, and she spoke of being one who names as a position of authority. The association of naming with authority is well attested in

Christian thought. In order to elucidate the Biblical framework for naming that Payne established, consider the following passage on Genesis, chapter 1, verses 18-20, from a well-known Bible commentary:

It is an act of authority to impose names. God gave names to the day and night, to the firmament, to the earth, and to the sea; and he *calleth the stars by their names*, to show that he is the supreme Lord of these. But he gave Adam leave to name the beasts and fowls, as their subordinate lord; for, having made him in his own image, he thus put some of his honour upon him. (Henry, 1961:7)

Thus above, Payne referred to “living out from the position of knowing who we are in Him,” which in the ex-gay framework is a state of knowing the self’s identity in Christ, not the claimed “identity crisis” of homosexuality, as discussed in chapter 3. Payne then emphasized the importance of being named by God alone, and not by any other “created” thing. This source of personal “naming” is vital, because in this framework, to be named by anyone or anything other than God is to come under the authority of something other than God and His truth, and in light of the recent discussion of the evangelical belief in “the enemy,” the alternative sources of names and conceptions of the self become most grave.

Deborah recounted a story she claimed happened several years prior to her coming to Liberty that provides an excellent example with respect to naming. In the excerpt given in (6.5), the challenge to the creation of a coherent sense of self is portrayed in essence as a conflict of narratives—Deborah’s individual narrative of her subjective experience of same-sex attraction and perceived self-identity as opposed to her understanding of the Christian metanarrative in which embracing a homosexual identity is seen as outside of God’s will and plan. Deborah’s narration of this conflict centrally involved who had the authority and power to name the self, and whether her identity is to be defined as homosexual due to her same-sex attractions. Deborah basically asked the question, “Who am I?”

Deborah reported managing this conflict and achieving coherence through the submission of her individual narrative to the Divine narration that she claimed to have received in a vision and word from God. As Bacon (1998) points out, Bakhtin (1981) claims that truth is born in dialogue; ex-gay evangelicals believe that they are born by God's word of unchanging truth.⁵⁶ In Deborah's case, she reported a dialogue with the Divine, and the reported Divine wins.

(6.5) Deborah: And um I prayed one night and I said, "Lord, you know, I'm not in the lifestyle no more; I feel like I'm still homosexual, and I'm no longer walking in this lifestyle anymore. It's been 3 years, going on 3 years, and I haven't been with a woman, haven't been with a man, I've just been with you, and healthy friends." And I said, "But I feel like I'm still in the lifestyle, these feelings won't leave me." And then, the Lord just showed me a vision, He asked me a question, well you know, He said, He didn't ask me a question, He said that um, **I saw myself on my knees, and automatically I just I saw these 2 names over me.** It was, um, He said to me, He said He had called me, you know, and He was ex-expressing to me how much He loved me. **He said, "I never called you homosexual. I never named you to be a homo—I never created you to be that way." He said, "I've created you to do and go and do mighty things in me and for me." He said, "You are my child," he said, "But there's 2 names you can walk under.** You can walk under the name,"—and I saw like some, some, um, like name tags over top of where I was—and He said, "You can walk on this side," and there was like light, lit up, you know, but it was like--it was black, but you could see the word in there—**homosexuality.** And it was like it just lit up. He said, or you can walk, **you can walk under what the enemy is calling you and trying to keep you in or you can walk under this and it had Child of God up there.** And that was lit up, and-and-and that was dark now and this was lit up, and he said **or you can walk under the name that I have called you, you know, a child of God, you're my daughter,** you know, He just started ministering that to me, **and I stood up from on my from my knees from the prayer and I said, "I am not a homosexual, I don't care how I feel, I am not a homosexual. God did not give me that name. He didn't call me that name. I am a child of God."** And that's when I started fighting back, regardless of how I felt. **I was never going back, and I was mea--I meant that. I was going forward.** And so when the Lord spoke to me that night, He continued to speak to me, and I never stopped going back because **I realized then that there was two purposes for my life. It was His purpose and there was the enemy's purpose. I could have the choice of choosing which one I want to go.** I want to choose

⁵⁶ James 1:18—He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all He created. (NIV)

the God way, go God way, if I want to choose the enemy's way, go the enemy's way. **So every time that word or that name homosexual came back, I would always say, "I'm a child of God, I'm a child of God, I'm a child of God."**

The excerpt in (6.5) once again vividly exemplifies the process of re-naming that is central to ex-gay narratives. Deborah claimed that two labels or names were offered to her. Consequently, there are only two possibilities for alignment in the narrative, either with "the enemy" or with "God." This trope of a mutually exclusive dichotomous choice is a highly common theme in ex-gay narratives, the presence and structure of which will be more fully demonstrated in chapter 9.

In response to the reported vision, Deborah chose to accept the re-naming and no longer "walk under" the "name" homosexual; this led her to begin to re-narrate her own life and re-name the sexual identity of the self regardless of whether she continued to experience same-sex attractions or not. For Deborah, establishing this identity premise served to determine and guide her future sexual behavior, in that she stated, "That's when I started fighting back, regardless of how I felt. I was never going back." Thus, Deborah claimed that the authority of her previous narrative of homosexual identity, embodied in "that word or that name homosexual," was broken as she replaced it with a new non-homosexual identity narrative, now represented in the only name she claimed God had given her, "a child of God."

This theme of naming is seen in many ex-gay narratives, and it represents a crucial component of why terministic screens, clarity regarding the term *homosexual* in its nominal form, and the dissolution of its relationship to the intrinsic definition of the self is seen as critical. To come under the authority of any name is powerful in the ex-gay worldview, but with respect to homosexuality, naming has become weightier than ever due to shifting societal mores. For example, Payne's *The Healing of the Homosexual*, originally published in 1985, was issued republished 11 years later as

Healing Homosexuality. In 1989, ex-gay leader Andy Comiskey wrote his first ministry book entitled, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual*. Note that the nominal term *homosexual* is in the title. But within the text, Comiskey stated:

I hesitate to label anyone as a homosexual. To do so implies a more fundamental definition of the person's humanity. "I am Jim, and I am a homosexual" strikes me as a far more binding status than "I am Jim, and I am dealing with homosexual tendencies." The latter conveys the reality that Jim is not synonymous with his homosexuality. Gay feelings are a part of his personhood but need not be *the*, or even *a*, primary reference point. Defining him as *a homosexual* seems to give those feelings an inordinate power to identify him. (1989: 38; also quoted in Ponticelli, 1993:66)

Comiskey's (2003) second book addressed the increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality. Consider the following excerpt:

But nowhere is the battle for truth more evident than in the thick confusion that surrounds homosexuality today. Many other sexual and relational issues are clearly delineated. Most would believe abuse and addiction, even marital breakups, to be destructive and in need of a cure. Not so with homosexuality. [...] Our culture is becoming increasingly "gay friendly." ...we are barraged by the power of the "gay self." That self demands recognition and acceptance. (2003:182, 184)

Thus, while Comiskey continued to alternate between using the nominal form of "homosexual," "homosexually vulnerable," and "homosexual strugglers" in his most recent book, he did so within the context of his clearly stated position that does not recognize the "gay self" as the "true self." Comiskey claimed our culture is in the midst of "confusion" and "misinformation" with respect to homosexuality, where people are wrongly assuming that the "gay self" is solely genetically determined and/or intrinsically part of the "true self." As Hacking noted (1986; cited in Kauth, 2000:95), "Once a label is accepted, alternative definitions and ideologies are excluded," which represents a view of language quite consistent with the Burkean notion of language and terms as filters of attention applied in chapter 4.

Consequently, I propose that shifting societal mores have greatly heightened the attention given to and desire for precision in language with respect to ex-gay discourse and beliefs, as well as ex-gay individuals' personal identification with respect to homosexuality—specifically, the increasingly positive (or minimally, non-negative) construal of “homosexual” as a valid identity position within the larger society. Whereas in the past, to apply the nominal form “homosexual” would be interpreted within the framework of a negative understanding and as “destructive” or “needing a cure,” such an interpretation is no longer necessarily the case. Across the spectrum of American Protestant Christianity, there is also sufficient debate and divergence of view that no longer is homosexuality automatically associated with immoral or sinful behavior, to which many of the ex-ex-gay narratives in this study will attest. As a result, to label oneself “a sex addict” or “an alcoholic” is not as problematic in the ex-gay framework of identity because of the widely agreed upon associations with and meanings of the terms—there is no potential for assigning a positive value or intrinsic nature to these “identities” within our current culture, as is now possible with respect to the identity “homosexual.”

Thus, due to the different possible definitions and varying moral valences associated with homosexuality, in ex-gay communities, a reification of a “homosexual identity” via nominalization is ever more important to either avoid or explicitly clarify with respect to term meanings for these individuals. A minority of the ex-gay narrators in this study used the nominal *homosexual*, and upon querying their meaning, almost all associated it with a behavioral rather than an essential definition of the self. This usage is exemplified in Henry's discussion of sexual identity labels, as in (6.6) below:

(6.6) Henry: I've had people tell me, “You know, well, there's no such thing as a homosexual,” and they go into their little spiel, and I'm saying, “You know what, OK, on the level that you're talking about, you're right, but you go

talk to 99.9% of the world, and they're going to tell you, yeah, there's homosexuals." So, if I go around telling people, "Well, there's no such thing as a homosexual," they're going to laugh at me and think I'm a complete idiot. I'm-I, there are people, **there are heterosexual men that are struggling with same-sex attraction. Um, there are guys that have never developed into their heterosexual identity, but homosexual is someone who has sex with other people, who is attracted, in the-in the lexicon of the language, everybody knows what a homosexual is.** It, these are the people that do these things. **We're identified by what we do, and it doesn't really matter if it's accurate or not,** it's just what people, that's, in the language and the culture, that's what it means, and if you start playing games with the words, they're going to look at you like you're nuts.

In (6.6), it is clear that Henry was comfortable using the nominal form "homosexual," but this usage was within the ex-gay understanding of the term as being related to "what people do." Though he agreed with some of the philosophical and religious premises behind avoiding the nominal, i.e. "on the level you're talking about, you're right," he expressed a desire for linguistic pragmatism in the use of terms. However, due to the changing societal definitions, what is certain is that when Henry used the term "homosexual," not everyone would apprehend or agree with the behavioral premises with which he nuanced it in his own understanding (e.g. "guys that have never developed into their heterosexual identity").

Relevant to this discussion is a remark that Peter, an ex-gay ministry leader, made to me about the need for clarifying the meaning of terms:

(6.7) Peter: I hope one of the things your project might do is reclaim language. Because we're all using the same terms, but we mean different things. I talk to the gay activists, and they're saying 'same-sex attraction,' and I say 'same-sex attraction,' and they say, 'See, we're both talking about same-sex attraction.' And I say, 'Yeah, but when I say same-sex attraction, I'm talking about it as a manifestation of a darkened heart, which is a condition to overcome, not an innate identity to embrace.'⁵⁷

⁵⁷ A Biblical allusion using language from the book of Romans 1: 21 "...and their foolish heart was darkened." (NASB)

Clearly, ex-gay narratives are laden with a rich understanding of language as having power to affect and produce destiny. An example of such is given in (6.8) below, where Bart claimed a deterministic effect from the labels and names others gave him as one of two primary factors that contributed to his experience of same-sex attractions. (He claimed the other factor was what he described as experiences of early childhood sexual abuse). To support his claim about the effect of words upon him, Bart quoted a Biblical proverb about the power of the tongue to produce either life or death.

(6.8) Bart: Throughout school, throughout elementary, I was always called a homosexual, a faggot, gay. Not only by people in school, but also my family members. [...] **So I thought that I was a homosexual. I thought that I was going to end up this way. [...] I have become it, because they said it. The Bible says that the power of the tongue brings life or death,⁵⁸ and the things that you speak and the things that you think you are are what you're going to become.** And what people say and people think of you is what you're going to become, because **words are so powerful**, you know. **And so, I've become a product of what they-they have said.**

As (6.8) shows, Bart claimed that words have great power and that he has “become a product” of the words spoken over him where people named him “a homosexual.” During my time at Liberty, all the men and women in the live-in program attended the Wednesday night home group. For six weeks, the group watched a video teaching/preaching series by Sy Rogers, an ex-gay leader who was formerly a male-to-female transsexual (i.e. he had lived as a woman for a year and a half and was scheduled in the surgical program at Johns Hopkins, but his religious conversion took place pre-operatively). I had attended this same series live at a weekend conference seminar in April of 2002 with the ex-gay ministry where I was conducting research before going to Liberty.

⁵⁸ A quotation from the Old Testament book of Proverbs 18: 21: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” (NIV)

Throughout his teaching, Rogers affirmed this belief in the power of words. Similar to Bart's narrative, Rogers gave examples of name-calling and words spoken as contributing to the conclusions people make about themselves and affecting their resultant life choices, including conclusions and choices regarding their sexuality. Rogers also supported his case for the power of words from the Biblical text by linking it to Jesus' statement in the book of Matthew that people will have to render account for every careless word spoken.⁵⁹ Thus, Rogers claimed that while people are individually responsible for the moral choices they make, the sins of others against them—sometimes in the form of words spoken—will also be judged by God.

From a secular perspective, in his work on a theory of sexual attraction, Kauth (2000) discussed McIntosh's (1968/1990) seminal work in social constructionism as applied to issues of sexuality. One of McIntosh's main claims was that the labeling of individuals who engaged in same-sex activity as "homosexual" provided a term that these individuals internalized and then "became" as they fulfilled the "role" of their newly labeled identity. This position is similar to Foucault's "invention of homosexuality" and the creation of a *homosexual species* through the description and naming of homosexuality in a late 19th century scientific article (Foucault, 1978/1990). Kauth posited that there is a complex of factors contributing to the development of sexual attraction and that language and naming alone cannot be considered a singular determining factor. Ex-gay evangelicals also believe that there are multiple factors that contribute to sexual identity development and that "naming" is by no means the whole story; however, the general ex-gay consensus is that the words spoken by others can and

⁵⁹ A reference to the New Testament book of Matthew 12: 36-37—But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (NIV)

often do have an effect on personal development and that this effect can be quite powerful, especially when combined with other influences.

Near the end of his interview, Bart commented on some of the difficulties he had experienced in coming to the ministry because it had brought him out of “denial,” as in excerpt (6.9):

(6.9) Bart: **I’ve struggled not knowing that I was a homosexual. I ne-, not that I am a homosexual, that I have struggled from homosexuali-, homosexual tendencies**, and so, I n-, I have been totally in denial up until I got here that I have struggled, I am struggling with homosexuality tendencies, like I am, you know. **I’m not a homosexual, but I am struggling**, you know.

Here in (6.9), Bart was discussing coming to a point of recognition and admission about his same-sex attractions through his coming to the ministry. He first stated that he had “struggled not knowing that I was a homosexual,” but quickly self-corrected to stating that he was not a homosexual, but “struggled from homosexual tendencies.” Bart stated that he was not denying anymore that he was struggling, but made the distinction between a state of struggle and a state of being quite clear: “I’m not a homosexual, but I am struggling.” Arminen (1996) discussed “self-repairs” in the discourse of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and oral life stories of AA members. Arminen described self-repairs as displays of the speakers’ sensitivity to the AA context and their identity within that context. The repairs she described were all reformulations of statements or presentations of the self that were recognized by speakers as somehow ‘wrong’ or ‘inappropriate’ in terms of AA practices or beliefs and then self-corrected in the course of talk.

With respect to Bart’s self-repair, it is probable that the ex-gay ministry perspective on identity labels influenced the speed and certainty of his correction. But undoubtedly any collective “ministry practice” influence was coupled with Bart’s own already stated evangelical beliefs about the power of words, as in (6.8). Again, language

is not only constative; it is constitutive. Thus, due to the language ideology already described, in Bart's perception, to name himself "a homosexual" would have consequences on several levels, such as a misalignment of his narrative with "truth" and "spiritual reality," an acceptance of an identity he perceived was not from God, and a solidifying of an erroneous self-definition through the power of the words that he himself spoke both to agree with the definition and "call it into being."

The attention given to the power of words and names within ex-gay evangelical circles is well known and salient at the conscious level among the members of the ex-gay community. Brad, who as mentioned in chapter 3 was somewhere "in-between" ex-gay and ex-ex-gay, having left the Liberty program because he "wasn't ready to make the change," explicitly referenced this kind of sensitivity to language and labels, as in (6.10):

(6.10) Brad: I think one of the funniest terms I heard, because **I had a friend of mine that was trying to be so cautious about putting a label that might actually curse somebody with the label if he went around using the term "gay,"** and a couple of us at the table had a hard time not laughing **when he labeled it, uh, "homosexual bondage."** Um <laughs>, they're just two words you don't use in the same sentence <laughs>.

In (6.10) above, Brad told of an incident with his friend who was being "so cautious about putting a label that might actually curse somebody with the label." Thus, Brad said his friend did not want to use the term gay because he did not want to empower that definition over anyone, so "he labeled it 'homosexual bondage.'" The terminology of "bondage" is derived from the previously described evangelical conception of "being bound by sin" (cf. chapter 5, section 8). Brad clearly understood the religious connotation of this phrase, but he also engaged in a parody of his community's concern for words by jokingly giving a sexual interpretation to the phrase, making of it a *double entendre* that his friend did not intend. Brad laughed and told me, "They're just two words you don't use in the same sentence."

6.4 THE POWER OF CONFESSION

One salient instantiation of language ideology that directly affects language practice comes from phrases frequently used among ex-gay evangelicals, namely, “to agree with God” or to “bring [i.e. something] into alignment with God.” The source of the phrase “to agree with God” in evangelical circles emerges from the Biblical use of the verb “to confess”: “confess” is a translation of the Greek word, *homologeō*, which is defined as “to assent, accord, agree with.” A literal translation of *homologeō* is “to speak the same thing” (*homos*, “same,” *legō*, “to speak”) (Vine, 1984:216). Thus, in evangelical circles, one type of speech act linked with aspects of confession is quite literally understood as “agreeing with God” and accepting His view of things according to His word and is linked to a speaking of that acceptance and agreement.

The following provides a good example of this “agreement,” and is taken from Jeanette Howard’s (1991) *Out of Egypt: Leaving Lesbianism Behind*, a book that the Liberty women’s group had completed reading just before my May arrival in 2002. In this excerpt, Howard described how she had always felt like a “gender-itinerant” and how in response to this, a teacher at her Bible school advised her to stand in front of the mirror every day and thank God for making her a woman.

Only after several weeks of could I stand in front of the mirror and say, ‘Thank you, Father, for making me a woman.’ **No sentence has ever been as hard to say as that one. Yet it was a key step for me to take in the process of changing my gender identification. By accepting my God-given physical gender, I was bringing my thoughts into alignment with God.**

Growing up, I had felt so out of place as a woman, it was very tempting to entertain thoughts that God somehow made a mistake. **Coming into agreement with God**, however, meant acknowledging that he not only knew me, but approved of me. **He chose me to be a woman, irrespective of my own thoughts on the matter. God knew what he was doing! ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart’ (Jer. 1:5).**⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cf. chapter 5, section 6, excerpt (5.15).

No longer would I refer to myself as a Christian person, as I had for the past several years. From now on, out of obedience to God, I would call myself a Christian woman. (Howard, 1991:178)

Here, Howard used both the phrases “bringing my thoughts into alignment with God” and “coming into agreement with God” and linked the changing of her thoughts with the speech that issued from her mouth. She claimed that this act was very difficult at first, “no sentence has ever been as hard to say as that one,” but that it was crucial in helping change her “gender identification.” Howard stated that regardless of her own subjective feelings about her gender, she had to “agree with God” as the one who “knew what he was doing,” and then cited an Old Testament verse to support her belief that God intentionally and specifically created her as a woman.

“Out of obedience to God,” Howard changed her speech pattern and self-reference from the neutral human term “person” to the gender-specified term “woman.” Howard went on to report a related dialogue with God: “‘You have believed a lie,’ he revealed. ‘But I am going to change your name. From now on you will know yourself as Woman’”(1991:179). Thus, Howard’s “coming into agreement” led her to “speak the same thing” in order to refuse the “lie” she had believed and to align with what she claimed God had spoken and now believed was God’s truth about her gender identity.

Excerpt (6.11) below provides an example of the women’s group discussing “agreeing with God” as to the moral status of homosexuality:

(6.11) Deborah: **God’s purpose is for us to live as being who He created us to be, no matter what lifestyle we in, no matter how we feel, I don’ t really think God really cares too much of how we feel about the sin. It’s-the fact is bringing us back to our rightful relationship our rightful place with Him./**

Anna: /And our right mind.

Deborah: And our right mind. **And once we, when we’re in the lifestyle, we’re living way be-below where God wants us to live, you know, and it’s impossible to have relationship with God the way the Lord wants you to,**

walking in something God has not created you to walk in. And so um, and you know, **I didn't start off talking like this or thinking like this, it took some time. I didn't start off really wanting to be a Christian,** but-because most of my criticism came from the church. But my-I don't believe my criticism came from God. Once I decided, ok, I'm gonna trust God, once and for all, the Lord never let me down.

Anna: **You made a decision.**

Deborah: Exactly.

Anna: And the decision involved-**the decision involved agreeing [with God]**

Deborah: **[with God]**
that's right

Anna: **Choosing to agree with God,** which in essence, is why you're still here.

In the exchange in (6.11), Deborah began by stating that she didn't think God cared too much about "how we feel about the sin <i.e. homosexuality>," that what mattered was "for us to live as being who He created us to be," thereby setting up the opposition again in the ex-gay worldview between one's subjective feelings or thoughts on things, which for ex-gays may or may not correspond with what they believe to be objective truth and reality. Deborah then claimed that she "didn't start off talking like this or thinking like this," but that it "took some time."

In her position as the leader and facilitator, Anna guided and supplied an addition to, i.e. "and our right mind," and summation of, i.e. "you made a decision," Deborah's narration. In so doing, Anna was both scaffolding and contextualizing Deborah's comments and understandings. Anna then emphasized that Deborah's decision was "to agree with God, which in essence, is why you're still here." Thus, Anna reinforced Deborah's alignment with the "thoughts of God" and the ministry's perspective on the subject of homosexuality and asserted that it was a primary reason Deborah was involved

in the ministry, for without agreement with the ex-gay belief that homosexuality was sin, there would be no reason to be at the ministry.

The above discussion on “speaking the same” is meant to highlight the phrase employed in ex-gay evangelical circles, “agreeing with God,” which is both originally related to the Greek translation of the term *confession* and has a salient effect on language practice. By no means am I proposing that the phenomenon described here is the central understanding or application of confession itself in Christian circles. Confession is primarily a speech act linked to conversion and salvation in the New Testament book of Romans 10:9-10,⁶¹ and the central aspects are related to confession as a declaration of Christian faith, of adherence to creedal beliefs, or as an admission of sin to God (and also Catholic understandings of confession to a priest for the absolution of sin). Thus, the “agreement” understanding is related to these primary aspects of confession but smaller in scope and function. But again, the master narrative’s governance over the individual narrative is clear. For evangelicals, if confessing “Jesus is Lord” leads to salvation through “agreeing with God” in the metanarrative sense, then aligning all the life, thoughts, and speech to be in agreement with God—e.g. for ex-gays, confessing “homosexuality as sin” (as in (6.11))—must be of great significance for the life as well.

It should be noted here that while Protestants believe that one can confess sin directly to God and receive forgiveness without needing a human priest as mediator, the practice of the verbal confession of sin to another Christian is highly encouraged in ex-gay ministry circles. At Liberty, such confessions usually happened one-on-one with the participants confessing to the leader or mentor with whom they met regularly; such confessions involved all types of sin, not simply what the ex-gay individuals deemed

⁶¹ Romans 10:9-10—That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (NIV)

sexual sin. There is a variation of practice among ex-gay ministry groups, and some support group ministries have individuals confess to the group (e.g. Wolkomir, 1999).

Continuing my discussion of “confession,” I also heard the term used in a very different context during my time at Liberty. Here, I would like to make clear that the two examples I offer are the only instances that occurred in all of my data, so by no means was this explicit usage of the term as widespread or characteristic as the other phenomena discussed to this point. However, this usage reveals an aspect of beliefs about language and its power that is significant to the current discussion. Consider the following excerpt in (6.12) from Deborah’s life narrative:

(6.12) Deborah: Homosexual attraction comes with an identity. If you-if you think that you will never be delivered from same sex attraction, then you’re basically saying that you’ll never be delivered from homosexuality. It’s a love thing, I believe, and a-and a trust thing, um if you trust, **if you confess failure before, um, faith, then you’re going to get what you confess. But if you confess that you believe that God is going to heal you, and that God can and it can be happening even if you ain’t seen it, then you’re saying you believe the-with the impossible, and that God can do that.** And um, I believe that just because I didn’t feel that it was wrong but I had to be snatched or had to change this lifestyle that I’m comfortable with-with living, that it couldn’t be done. I’ve always known that if, I’ve always known that I could-that the Lord could do it, but I never thought He could do it in me. OK? Maybe I thought that I was the biggest project that Jesus could ever think about trying to fix, you know, <laughter> **but I always known He could do it, but I didn’t think He could do it in me. And then I stopped doing poor confessions and then I started saying, “You know what? If you can do it in me—in, in them, You can do it in me. I know You can.”**

As seen in (6.12), Deborah described her struggle to believe that God could truly “heal” homosexuality. She then described her belief that “if you confess failure before faith, then you’re going to get what you confess. But if you confess that God is going to heal you...then you’re saying you believe the-with the impossible, and that God can do that.” Hence, Deborah was making an explicit link between one’s faith and belief and his or her own “confession,” and the results that one then experiences. Deborah claimed that

she had general belief that God could heal, but never believed He could really heal her. Then Deborah claimed she “stopped doing” what she labeled “poor confessions.” By “poor confessions,” she indicated statements that were not statements of faith and hope and belief, for example, confessions of “failure,” as above. Deborah said she started stating her belief that if God could do it in others, He could do it in her. Deborah linked these statements of faith to a specific change in her speech and mindset, and claimed at the time of the interview that she had been truly “healed.”

In addition to Deborah, on several occasions during my initial three months at Liberty, I heard Bart mention a verse from the New Testament book of Romans: “God calls [i.e. into being] things that are not as though they were” (NIV), a Biblical reference indicating the evangelical belief that God has the power to create out of nothing (i.e. *ex nihilo*) and does so simply by speaking His word, again harkening back to the creation story in Genesis 1 that was discussed in chapter 5, section 3. Bart also referred to this verse during his one-year follow-up interview, as in (6.13) below:

(6.13) Bart: **And then speaking positive confessions about your life. Yeah, be real. Yes, I struggle. Yes, the devil comes to, to tempt me. Yes, he likes to put things in front of my path, but it’s just like he did Jesus, but that doesn’t mean I’m victorious-that I’m not victorious. That does not mean I’m not free. That means that I have struggles in my life, that I am being tempted, but you know what? Christ is, God and Christ are more powerful than that. You know, they’re the deliverers. I’m not. I can’t do anything on my own without them, you know. So**

AP: When you say positive confessions, what e-, what exactly do you mean?

Bart: **W-, I think the Bible says speak those things as if they were, even though they’re not, and I think, I know the Word says that, but I think what it means is not always living your life saying, you know, like whenever I went home to visit my church leaders, and I let them know what was going on inside of me, they were like, “What is going on with you?” or “How are you doing?” R-, realistically, I am jacked up. There are things inside my heart that I know that I need healing on, but you know what? Christ is my deliverer. Christ is my redeemer. He’s my restora-, restorer. He’s the one that’s the lover of my soul, and He’s the one that’s bringing me f-, bringing**

all this out of me. Those are positive confessions. Those-that being truthful. Yes, this is what I'm dealing with, but you know what? I know that God is the one. And, you know, so many people y-, might think it sounds so religious, so religious that, you know, these words "God this and God that," but it is all about Him, you know, and just being positive about it, speaking positive. No, I'm not a homosexual. No, my identity is not based on any of that, you know. Someone asks you, "You ever struggle with homosexuality?" "Yes, but I have been delivered." You know, speaking those positive confessions about your life, you know, and speaking those things as if they were, even though they're not.

Thus, as the excerpt in (6.13) shows, Bart referred to the Romans verse twice and linked it with speaking out a confession of faith in God and His power to help and free him, despite the current status of his experience with "struggle" or "temptation." Bart described a way of speaking about two levels or experiences of reality at the same time: the *now* of his subjective experience, as when he stated, "Realistically, I am jacked up. There are things inside my heart that I know I need healing on," and the *what will be* of his hope and faith in what he claimed God was doing, as he finished his statement with "but you know what, Christ is my redeemer...and He's the one that's bringing all this out of me."

When Bart said, "Yes, but I have been delivered," i.e. from his "struggle with homosexuality," he used the indicative to refer to things that in fact were as yet unrealized in his experience and used this as an example of a "positive confession...speaking those things as if they were, even though they're not," with the implication that through faith and God's work, "those things," which as yet were a type of future reality in his personal experience, eventually would be realized. And from Bart's already described language ideology, in utilizing the power of speech in this way, there is surely some element of cooperative participation on his part to help those things to be realized. Bart described these "positive confessions" as statements of "truth" about God, His power, and what He was able to do; they were not set utterances, but expressions

drawn from the master narrative that at times seemed formulaic. From Bart's description of "just being positive about it, speaking positive," these utterances also seem to have an affective function of supplying comfort and a hopeful outlook on situations that "realistically" might be uncomfortable and hard in the present moment.

As previously stated, in the conference I attended that was presented by Sy Rogers (and thus in the video series as well), Rogers clearly affirmed the evangelical belief in the power of language, but also addressed what he called the "positive confession movement"⁶² that moved through some branches of charismatic Christianity in the late 1970's and early 1980's with strong words of clarification. Bart's references to "positive confessions" and Deborah's mention of "poor confessions" made hearing Sy Rogers' mention of a "positive confession movement" stand out to me.

Regarding the same verse from Romans that Bart referred to in (6.13) above, Rogers discussed the "heresy" of extreme forms of the positive confession movement and likened them to pseudo-Christian denial. In so doing, he jokingly gave an example of someone making a "positive confession" of having been healed from a cold while snot was still running out of his or her nose. Accordingly, Rogers emphasized that "the Bible says 'God calls that which is not as though it is,' not 'that which is as though it is not'" and sought to ensure that individuals did not apply this verse or use of "faith" in speech to their "struggle with homosexuality" in an erroneous manner that he claimed was not truly Biblical. While Bart and Deborah did not seem to be applying "positive

⁶² For example, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God issued an official statement entitled "The Believer and Positive Confession" on August 19, 1980, stating that the teachings of the positive confession movement were "extreme" and "distortions" of the Biblical teaching on faith and confession and were "in conflict with the Word of God." In this statement of reproof and clarification, the positive confession movement was described as "relying on the English dictionary definition of the word *confess*: 'to acknowledge, or to own; to acknowledge faith in,'" and as dividing confessions into two types, positive and negative. By making statements of faith (i.e. confessions) only in the positive and refraining from "confessing" negative things, this movement taught that only positive things would result and the unacknowledged, negative things would either cease to be, be overcome, or simply not occur.

confessions” to the point of extremes as described by Rogers above (e.g. cf. (6.13), where Bart would still admit that he “struggled,” also cf. Deborah’s comment in (6.14) below), I am certain that the roots of this particular phraseology and language use focus came from their individual church involvements before coming to Liberty and seemed to be toned-down versions of the “positive confession” movement of the past.

With respect to a similar issue, Rogers also referred to the oft-quoted verse about being a new creature in Christ⁶³ and clarified that the original verb tense in the Greek is a progressive, and he claimed that a better rendering of the translation is that “a process of a new creation has begun.” Thus, Rogers emphasized that from his perspective (and likely that of all Christian believers), every Christian goes through a “process” of growth and change, and this fact serves to give a Biblical basis for why most ex-gay individuals do not experience an immediate change in their same-sex attractions and “struggles.” In response to the question, “What have you heard in the church about homosexuality?” Deborah sarcastically referenced what she considered was a common misapplication of this verse during a session of the women’s study, as example (6.14) records.

(6.14) Deborah: **That’s one famous thing they say, if you use the scripture against it, when you give your life to Christ, it’s gone. The old is gone and new is come, and it’s just-it’s just done seeped right on out. It’s gone.**

Anna: Ok. **Everything about it’s gone. At that point.**

Deborah: **Yeah. While you’re still dealing with it.**

Hence, while there is the commonly held evangelical belief in the power of language, words, and faith, ex-gay leaders make efforts to ensure that these beliefs are rightly understood and applied. In my observation, the ex-gay ministries I worked with considered it crucial to counter these types of false expectations of an “instant fix” or

⁶³ As previously noted, this reference is to 2 Corinthians 5:17—If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. (NASB)

being able to quickly pray or speak same-sex attraction away by faith, because they are ultimately seen as unbiblical and will affect an ex-gay individual's identity process, often due to disappointed expectations. Henry referred to this confusion in (6.15):

(6.15) Henry: I don't like the word "change," I don't like the word "healing," I prefer the word "growth," because I think that more accurately reflects what people go through. And they're <i.e. the gay community>, you know, they can characterize this as, you know, "Oh, 'healing,'" like all we need to do is have one prayer and presto, changeo – we're, you know. It's like, "No, that's not what we're saying."

The following quotation sums this up well, from personal communication with a ministry leader outside of, but connected to, some of the ex-gay circles within which I did my research:

In our experience, most often, the reason for such recidivism for those attempting to leave homosexuality, whether it be male or female, is an incompleteness of their healing process, that is, the individual heals at only one or two levels. This is particularly true where individuals look for (and then believe they have found) a "silver bullet" (so to speak) from our Creator which will eliminate their homosexuality. But in many cases, this can carry them only so far as they have not done the work God requires of them as part of the journey.

In summary, in the ex-gay evangelical worldview, language is powerful and "speaking truth" is valid and helpful, but according to ex-gay ministries, "words of faith" are not to be misapplied or looked upon as a "silver bullet."

6.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates that evangelical theology not only supplies the frame and informs the primary content of ex-gay discourse, but it also provides the basis for a significant language ideology that underlies and overtly influences both the form and function of the language employed in that discourse. Thus, language ideology is a powerful component of ex-gay narrative processes and is closely tied to invoking the metanarrative beliefs about truth, sexuality, and identity. The relationship of the ex-gay worldview, language, metanarrative, and individual ex-gay

narratives is summed up well by the following excerpt from the women's group, as in (6.16) below.

(6.16) Anna: **We go to a different identity, and where does it come from? [...] Moving from “OK, this is what we do, this is what we’re labeled” to “This is who we are in Christ,” OK? [...] OK, then-then once we’re in His presence, and we’re laid bare there, and there’s nothing we can hide behind, the mask is all gone, and we understand that He doesn’t see labels on us. He sees us as His children. And-and the labels, and I’m not devaluing that the experiences that we’ve had to get us here in this kind of difficulty. I’m not devaluing that at all, but what I am saying is that when we come to the Cross and we are-we are crucified with Christ, all that stuff is just laid, gone, at the foot of the Cross. It doesn’t mean that our flesh doesn’t rise up and we don’t have to deal with it, but we are a new creature in Christ, and His word is true, we are new in Christ. And the old things are dead, ok. So we are faced then with the question, ok, then why do I still deal with these things, and I-it goes back to because we’re still learning who we are. We’re still learning who the true self is. We’re still learning what kind of center are we living out of. And how do I get there? **It’s a process called sanctification. It’s a process of learning and growing in Christ.****

(Transcript: Women's group, 7-30-02)

Due to their commitment to the ex-gay evangelical metanarrative, ex-gay narratives develop into generalized Christian sanctification narratives, that is, narratives of the transformation that is said to continue *after* the conversion event, with the specific theme of “struggling with homosexuality” displaying both challenges to and proof of the claimed sanctification transformation. The actual structure and form of individual ex-gay narratives will be analyzed and delineated in chapter 9, after the ex-ex-gay metanarrative beliefs and resulting terministic screens have been established in chapters 7 and 8 as follow.

Chapter 7: Ex-ex-gay spirituality: Modifying the metanarrative

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in the introduction to chapter 5, the description of the ex-gay evangelical Christian metanarrative was positioned prior to the present chapter because at some previous point in time, all of the participants in this study, including those in the ex-ex-gay category, claimed to ascribe to all or most of the ex-gay beliefs delineated therein. Inasmuch as the term “ex-gay” is a signifier for a disavowal of homosexual identity, the term “ex-ex-gay” signifies an embracing of a homosexual identity in tandem with a disavowal of the former ex-gay identity and at least some aspects of the ex-gay evangelical Christian worldview.

Both the “ex-gay” and “ex-ex-gay” labels are in many ways shorthand for identities that have become increasingly politicized in recent years (e.g. Erzen, 2002), and both bring differing messages to bear on the political economy of sexual identity: “ex-gay” explicitly encodes the claim that changing sexual identity is possible, and just as explicitly, “ex-ex-gay” encodes the claim that sexual identity change has in some form been attempted and the conclusion reached that it is either not possible, not necessary, or both. But while the sexual self-identification of an ex-ex-gay individual is evident and indexes the past presence of some form of religious conflict about homosexuality, the individual’s current spiritual self-identification is not immediately transparent.

Obviously, with the departure from the ex-gay identity process or “journey” comes some degree of departure from or re-interpretation of the formerly held ex-gay evangelical worldview. For many of the ex-ex-gays in my study, metanarrative remains important to their lives, but goes through a process of modification as new possibilities of

belief that allow for a personal embracing of homosexual identity are searched for and found, created, or both.

Thus, as discussed thoroughly in chapter 3, ex-ex-gay individuals do not coalesce into a single, unified community of shared belief in the same way that ex-gay individuals participating in a ministry do. And as described in chapter 5, while the ex-gay evangelical worldview can be delineated as a fairly uniform set of beliefs about Christianity, truth, sexuality, and so forth that is widely held and agreed upon among ex-gay individuals and ministries, a similar uniform delineation cannot be made with respect to ex-ex-gay individuals' beliefs. There is no singular "ex-ex-gay worldview" to which the majority of ex-ex-gays ascribe: "ex-ex-gay" is a term of *disaffiliation*, not one of a necessary *affiliation*. Thus, to apply a terminological metaphor from the work of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), ex-gays represent a much more "focussed" group identity than that of the comparatively "diffuse" group of ex-ex-gays. While connection with a spiritual community that is affirming of homosexuality has been an important part of the identity process for most of the ex-ex-gay participants in this study, there is a broad spectrum of spiritual beliefs represented within those communities. Even among those individuals who reach a gay Christian spiritual resolution, the range of diversity in belief can be quite wide and extend past the pale of the once held ex-gay evangelical beliefs on more than just the issue of homosexuality.⁶⁴

In this chapter, I delineate the key aspects of beliefs about spirituality and sexuality that emerged in the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected as changing and differing

⁶⁴ This section is not meant to imply that only gay Christians have variations and divergence of agreement on these issues, as evidenced by the wide degree of doctrinal differences exhibited among denominations, churches, and individuals in general who either strictly or loosely religiously affiliate or self-identify with the term "Christian." The point is that there is great uniformity of belief among evangelical Christians on these issues (e.g. means of salvation) that are viewed as central to their Christian faith, and degrees of difference are being delineated in the metanarrative so as to better account for the changing individual narrative as it emerges from an ex-gay position to an ex-ex-gay position, whether the spiritual resolution reached is a gay Christian one or otherwise.

from the ex-gay evangelical belief system—changes which for most created a metanarrative framework which could accommodate a new personal life narration of simultaneous and compatible gay and religious identity. Again, these beliefs represent a continuum of spirituality with positions ranging from current agreement with the ex-gay evangelical belief system but refusal to adhere to it (with spirituality in transition), to agnosticism and disavowal of evangelical Christianity as a whole, but with the majority retaining some form of Christian identification. By no means do the beliefs here described represent all the possibilities of spiritual beliefs held and resolutions reached by ex-ex-gay individuals, but they do reflect the spectrum of beliefs of the ex-ex-gay participants in the current study.

For clarity and ease of reference, chapter 7 is organized to parallel the presentation of ex-gay beliefs in chapter 4 as much as possible. Thus, I begin with a discussion of ex-ex-gay beliefs with respect to truth in 7.2. I then address representative ex-ex-gay perspectives on sexuality in 7.3 and morality in 7.4. In 7.5, I discuss an example of changed conceptions of personal identity, and in 7.6, the occurrence of references to Satan. In 7.7, I offer concluding remarks to this chapter's discussion.

7.2 BELIEFS ABOUT TRUTH

With respect to beliefs about truth and the Bible, many ex-ex-gays in my study maintained their belief in the importance of the Bible, but there was variation in beliefs regarding its authority and role in their lives. Wolkomir's (1999, 2001b) work has well documented the process that many gay Christian men go through in negotiating and creating space for an identity that can be legitimately gay and Christian at the same time. In order to counter traditional interpretations of the Bible as prohibiting homosexual behavior, Christian men who wished to retain their belief in the infallibility and divine authority of the Bible engaged in a process of "revisionist ideological work" that "could

not challenge biblical truth” (2001b: 411). Through their participation in an MCC church Bible study group and investigation of pro-gay theology study materials, the men reached the conclusion that the passages they had originally believed to be condemning of homosexual behavior had been misinterpreted. Thus, the divine truth of the Bible could be retained, as the locus of the fault was not in the Bible itself, but in an erroneous interpretation or application of the Biblical texts in question.

In the current study, for most ex-ex-gay individuals reaching a gay Christian identity resolution, re-negotiating their stance towards the Bible and their prior interpretations of the passages related to homosexuality was an important part of their narrative journey. In the same way that their adherence to Biblical authority and prohibitive interpretations of Scripture provided both a basic frame and motivation for their ex-gay narratives, transforming these previous understandings and interpretations was crucial to creating a new narrative space that can accommodate homosexuality as morally legitimate within Christianity.

In her life narrative, Dana discussed how she was not connected with God or involved in church for a period of six years after leaving the ex-gay ministry. After this six years and a break-up of the relationship that triggered her disassociation from the ministry, Dana explained that she wanted and needed to re-connect spiritually. During times past, after a relational break up, Dana said she would frame it in the context of leaving a wrong situation and returning to God. But as shown in example (7.1), Dana reported that for the first time, she decided to return to her spiritual faith with a lesbian identity as non-negotiable, claiming that she had “done everything [she] could not to be gay” and thus, she was “not going to try that again.”

(7.1) Dana: At the time, I just, um, I think I believed that I had already done everything I could not to be gay, and it had not worked, and so, um (sigh), I wasn't going to try that again. Um, I think I-I-I **just (sigh), um, put it in the**

category of **“This is one of those topics that Christians are going to disagree about,”** you know, and I didn’t put it in a category of, um, **“being a matter of life or death,”** you know. **My relationship with God was a matter of life or death, but my sexuality wasn’t, and so, you know, um, I did s-, seek to learn more about it later.** Um, but I think, I, I just sort of was more . uh, it was just kind of more, oh what’s the word? . I just kind of, it was sort of a non-issue, you know. **It was like, I know who I am,** you know. The last, the experience I’ve been through in the last ten years, um, I know I’m gay, and so, you know, um, and God knows that better than I do, and so, you know, we’re, I’m just, we’re just **going to take that as a given** (sigh), you know, and **when I start to, uh, reconnect with God now, um, you know, it’s going to be this-this is who I am,** and, um, because I wasn’t going to set myself up for failure again, so I think I came at it from that perspective, that **I had already come to accept myself as a lesbian during those six years.** Um, and **I wasn’t really going to debate it with anybody.**

In (7.1), Dana first created a new narrative space by placing the moral status of homosexuality into a “category that Christians are going to disagree on.” While Dana told me that at that point, coming to an actual new understanding of the Biblical text “didn’t even come into the equation,” nonetheless, this shift in focus provided the beginnings of a metanarrative that retained a Christian identity but differed from the ex-gay worldview: Dana now claimed the Biblical position on homosexuality was unclear and open to disagreement among those who claim Christian belief. Then, after establishing her lesbian identity as a “given,” in order to solidify the new space where Christianity and homosexuality were no longer seen as conclusively incompatible, Dana reported that she “did seek to learn about it more later,” primarily through taking a correspondence course through a gay-affirming Bible college, as in (7.2).

(7.2) Dana: I started to take a correspondence course. Uh, there’s a Bible school called <name of Bible Institute> in, uh, <city>, and it’s, uh, pretty much gay, um, uh, it’s mostly gay people. Um, but it’s, um, a s-, very small, uh, Bible college, and, um, so I took a correspondence course from there about homosexuality and the Bible, and that’s when I really started to dig into what the Bible says, and I did a big, I did a long study. I’m still working on it. [...]

You know, and I’ve come to find that there’s some things about homosexuality that, you know, some prohibitions that I believe were, you know, um, made

perfect sense in the historical context of the time, you know, but that, you know, don't necessarily apply now. [...] A lot of the studies that I've done, you know, say that, um, there was definitely lots of same-sex activity during Biblical times, but it was all, you know, in the guise of either idol worship or, um, these like slave-master, man-boy weird relationships, you know, ment-, like mentoring relationships that, you know, w-w-would be illegal now. Um, or, uh, uh, most-, mostly, you know, idol worship, um, fertility rites with some of the, um, Canaanite gods and some of the other nations around Israel. Um, a-, and so, there was definitely a prohibition against it, because the-, those are the settings in which people saw same-sex activity, you know. Um, people didn't really see same-sex monogamous relationships.

(7.2) is excerpted from a longer stretch of talk where Dana discussed investigating pro-gay theology⁶⁵ and beginning a study to “really learn for [her] self what the Bible says” about homosexuality. As a result, Dana concluded that the passages prohibiting same-sex behavior had been misinterpreted, being tied to a historical context that did not apply to same-sex monogamous relationships in today's society. Thus, in an exact parallel to the men in Wolkomir's study, Dana was enabled to maintain her belief in the authority and infallibility of the Bible, as in (7.3).

(7.3) Dana: Um, so, yeah, I definitely think **the Bible is authoritative**. I think that, um, that some of, there's been some **mistakes in interpretation**, in not taking the historical and, and cultural context of the day into account. Um, but **I don't think that means that means the Bible is fallible**. I think that means **men are fallible**. **People are fallible**, you know. People lose sight of, you know, the whole intent, which is that, you know, God's grace is sufficient, and **God wants everybody to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus**, you know. And everything else is just gravy, so why do you want to, you know, argue about the gravy, when n-, nobody's even getting the meat, you know? <laughing> I guess that's kind of, it goes back to s-, **there's so many non-issues in the Bible**, and, you know, if Christians would become unified on the important things, then a lot of the other stuff, I think, would fall away, you know. But, you know, instead we just want to argue amongst ourselves about **things that are not worth arguing about**.

Again, the above excerpt shows the change in Dana's beliefs resulting in a modification of the ex-gay Christian metanarrative to which she once ascribed—a modification in

⁶⁵ In terms of pro-gay theological arguments, Dana clearly was referring to positions advanced by Boswell (1980) and others who claim the Biblical prohibitions of same-sex behavior were restricted to a cultural context that does not apply to today.

which the primary difference is the moral status of homosexuality due to the fact that “people are fallible,” not the Bible or the Christian faith itself.

Related to retaining the Bible as authoritative, Dana also maintained what she saw as the core of her traditional evangelical Christian belief, i.e. “the whole intent,” which she articulated as “God wants everybody to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.” And for Dana, apart from the “meat” of that ultimately important central belief, other possible issues of disagreement, including homosexuality, were relegated to being “non-issues” and “not worth arguing about.” In the excerpt shown in (7.4), she elaborated on the possibility of extending spiritual beliefs beyond the evangelical bounds, particularly with respect to the singularity of Jesus as the way of salvation.

(7.4) Dana: Yeah, **I think especially a lot of gay people come to that** <i.e. Jesus is not the only way to God>, and they come **to embrace other kinds of spirituality, because it is more tolerant, and-and easier, and there’s still so much rejection of gay people in, you know, conservative Christian communities**, and so, you know, a lot of gay people then would say, “Well, then I want to look for something else that is more embracing and more tolerant of-of me.” **And so eventually then, you know, in their quest for acceptance, you know, then they start broadening and broadening and broadening, and, you know, and for me, that just never was satisfying, you know.** Uh, you know, **Jesus is the only one that has proven Himself to be God to me, so, you know, if that excludes me from some Christian communities, that’s OK.** I don’t care. <laughing>

In excerpt (7.4), Dana discussed the broadening of spiritual beliefs that she had seen and stated: “a lot of gay people...come to embrace other kinds of spirituality because it is more tolerant and easier.” Dana claimed that from rejection in conservative communities and in a “quest for acceptance,” many individuals often “start broadening and broadening and broadening,” but that she could not ever find that “satisfying” and retained her belief in Jesus as the singular way to God. Therefore, Dana’s beliefs exemplify a gay Christian resolution where beliefs in the authoritative status of the Bible and the main tenets of evangelicalism were retained.

Similarly, David emphasized what he saw as the central message and “essential” beliefs of Christianity and stated that disagreements on other issues, such as the moral status of same-sex relationships, “probably” wouldn’t ultimately matter. In excerpt 7.5, he defined what he understood to be the “essential Christian,” which again conforms to Hunter’s (1983) core definition of evangelical belief with respect to salvation (cf. 5.3).

(7.5) David: I mean, if you claim you’re a Christian, I would have to kind of wonder, well, the **tenets of Christianity**, I mean, **there are a few that are kind of essential**, and one of them is that, y-, you know, **Christ is our Lord and Savior, that He died for us, that without that death, we would be, we would never have access to eternal life**. I mean, to me, that’s kind of **the essential Christian**. So if you don’t, I-I guess I would kind of have to wonder, if you claim to be a Christian and you don’t really believe that, that’s kind of w-, to me, that, I don’t know, it doesn’t really make sense.

It should be noted that the retention of Biblical authority in the metanarrative does not necessarily imply the exclusion of religious pluralism, as was true for Dana and Mike above. For example, in Elaine’s narrative, she described how she came to believe the Bible had been misinterpreted after reading what she called “pro-gay Christian literature” in a graduate-level course she was taking to become a therapist at a Christian-affiliated university. Elaine maintained her belief in Biblical authority, as in (7.6a), but as her spiritual journey had progressed, she had become unsure about Christianity with respect to religious pluralism, as in (7.6b).

(7.6a) Elaine: I absolutely believe it’s <i.e. the Bible> still the Word of God. [...] You know, in terms of, of social mores, I-I, uh, in terms of mores or rules, I, yes, the Bible is an authoritative source, but like anything else in the Bible, you have to look at it in context, and I think there’s room for interpretation there.

(7.6b) AP: Would you believe kind of still the same CMA <i.e. Christian Missionary Alliance > type of doctrinal mindset that Jesus is the only way to God, or, or h-how about that?

Elaine: Um, I’m, I’m undecided on that. I believe Jesus is the way to God, but is Jesus the only way? I’m not sure. I’ve been questioning that, as of late, and I really don’t know the answer to that. I’m not sure that it’s important for me to find an answer to that because I know that Jesus is my way to God.

Again, (7.6a) shows that Elaine's beliefs about the Bible are preserved with respect to its authoritative status. In (7.6b), I followed up with a question with respect to Elaine's religious background of Christian Missionary Alliance and the evangelical belief in the singularity of salvation through Jesus. Elaine responded that she was "undecided" and had been "questioning that as of late." Thus, Elaine's beliefs with respect to religious pluralism are in a possible transition. Again, the point here is simply to demonstrate the range of diversity found among the participants in my study and to show that the retention of one tenet of the evangelical metanarrative as previously held does not imply the retention of others.

Proceeding in terms of increasing degrees of difference from the originally held ex-gay evangelical metanarrative, with Dana's resolution providing an example of one with very close similarity, the next difference to be discussed is one in which the Bible, while still believed to be a valuable and important spiritual resource, is no longer held to be authoritative. In excerpt (7.7), Frank expressed his view of the Bible as being "instructive" as opposed to "authoritative" in response to a question about the role the Bible played in his spiritual life now. In so doing, he joked about possibly sounding "like a liberal" and contrasted that with his political identification of "very conservative Republican," acknowledging his changed position to be a marked shift that invoked "liberal" and "conservative" difference connotations.

(7.7) Frank: Yeah, I just grew up with the belief that it's all inspired by the Holy Spirit and it's infallible. But now, I'm going, I don't know if that is correct. [...] Maybe I come from authoritative to instructive. Maybe that sounds like a liberal, and I am a <laugh> very conservative Republican <laugh>. Uh, that's pray-the way I look at it.

In (7.8), Olivia explained that she now believed the Bible to be a "holy book to enhance [her] way of living," but not the "Word of God."

(7.8) Olivia: I believe now that-that the Bible is a holy book that contains the message, or, one of the many messages of God, but it is not the Word of God. It contains the word, the holy words, some holy words, the Bible doesn't end with Revelation. To me. But, literally maybe, but not-but, it just doesn't end there. So, to me, I-it's not the word of God. It is a holy book to enhance my way of living, and to enhance-that can greatly enhance, and does.

With respect to the acceptance of religious pluralism, there are different combinations of belief on this point with a change in the status of the Bible as well, as seen in excerpts from Olivia and Frank in (7.9) and (7.10), respectively.

(7.9) Olivia: There are many paths to God. I-I choose the path to God of Jesus. But, do I think that's the only path? No. No.

(7.10) AP: Do you believe Jesus is the only way to God?

Frank: I believe that. Jesus said that; it wasn't Paul saying that, you know. It's from the words of God, so that's a real deal.

In (7.9), Olivia expressed her belief in religious pluralism by stating, "There are many paths to God." Consequently, while Olivia explained that Jesus is the way *she* chooses to access relationship with God, she made clear that she does not think he is the exclusive or singular way.

Frank evidenced a different constellation of beliefs, as he maintained his belief in the singularity of salvation through Jesus, despite his changed perspective on Biblical authority. In the excerpt in (7.10) above, Frank founded this belief on the basis that "Jesus said that; it wasn't Paul saying that"—therefore, "it [i.e. the claim to be the exclusive way to God] was "from the words of God, so that's a real deal." Thus, Frank demonstrated his alignment with David's notion of certain "essential tenets" of belief with respect to Christianity in (7.5). Additionally, Frank evidenced the negotiation of a more nuanced stance toward the Bible, one with a canon-internal hierarchy that privileged the gospel accounts and recorded words of Jesus over other books and authors,

such as the New Testament epistles written by Paul, and he elaborated these distinctions more fully in other parts of his interview.

It is important to note here the processual nature of re-negotiating one's stance to the Bible, because for most ex-ex-gay evangelical individuals it had held such a primary place of importance and was a significant part of their lives at one time. This re-negotiation is clearly demonstrated in many of the narratives, regardless of the ultimate spiritual resolution and conclusions reached. Ricardo discussed his ongoing struggle with determining his posture toward the Bible at length during several points in his narrative and follow-up interview. Ricardo was Frank's (of 7.7 and 7.10 above) partner; they had met and become involved while in the ex-gay ministry group and at the time of the interview had been in relationship for seven years. In (7.11), Ricardo narrated his struggle to understand the practicality of passages that he had in the past interpreted as Biblical prohibitions against same-sex behavior, which led him to potentially question the infallibility of the Bible.

(7.11) Ricardo: **I think God is pretty practical, and I think there's a reason why there were a lot of those laws in Leviticus, that He put 'em in there, uh, and the gay thing, I just don't understand how that's practical.** What am I doing in my relationship with Frank that's hurting anybody else? What am I doing that's hurting anybody else? I can't think of anything, unless, you know, I just, God's-I don't think God's laws are arbitrary. He has our best, our best, He wants the best for us, and when He calls us the apple of His eye, why would He just make rules this, that, and the other for us to do? **And so, part of me thinks, well, the men, you know, maybe the-maybe the Bible isn't the infallible word of God. Maybe we-men have screwed it up somewhere along the line.** Maybe, I don't know.

Later in his narrative, Ricardo continued to process his spiritual journey and questions concerning the Bible. He described how he had been attending MCC, the diversity of belief he had found there, and his discussions on the subject with others, which led up to the excerpt in (7.12).

(7.12) Ricardo: **But most of the people I talk to, they just, they seem to think that the Bible is not right. And that's awfully tough for me to think that because I just, for twenty some years, the Bible is the infallible Word of God. I think it's, 2nd Timothy 3:16 says that, you know, All Scripture is-is uh, useful for training and rebuking and teaching.**⁶⁶ So if all Scripture is that way, you know...I tend to be a perfectionist, and I know I tend to get involved in too much of the semantics, but I hear "all," I think all, you know, all means everything, it means there isn't-it is a hundred percent profitable for teaching. <sigh> So.

AP: So maybe it's that issue that's in flux?

Ricardo: **That's in flux.** That's a good way to put it, **I wouldn't call it suspended, I'd say I'm re-I'm-I'm trying to learn more about-**And I-I was really open by now, after two years, I have better answers, but all I've really heard from people is that, "Well, look at," you know, cause, a-and I was talking to Frank about this the other night. Well, why do we, why can we eat crab now and catfish and-n-n pork, well, um, well, I mean, but been, for me, that's pretty easy. Well, Paul said, in the New Testament, well, you know, he had that dream and uh he said that all thi-, you know, all things are permissible.⁶⁷ Why:, it didn't-and that was just for eating, that doesn't say, I don't think I was, nobody's ever interpreted that to-to include, you know, sexuality too! So:. **And-and Frank was also saying, "Well, Jesus never said anything about homosexuality either," at least nothing that's written down, and so we-we take some comfort from that. It was Paul who talked mostly about it,** it might be-maybe even exclusively in the New Testament, maybe James did, I can't remember.

As in (7.12) above, Ricardo stated that while others he had talked with viewed the Bible as "not right" (i.e. on the issue of homosexuality), he had great difficulty in seeing the Bible as inaccurate, stating that such was "awfully tough for [him] to think about" because for over twenty years, he had viewed the Bible as "the infallible Word of God." Ricardo then demonstrated his continued connection to and struggle with the evangelical metanarrative and culture by quoting a New Testament verse that claims the universal

⁶⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16—All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. (NIV)

⁶⁷ Ricardo was referring to Acts 10:9-16, in which the apostle Peter had a vision of a sheet coming down out of heaven that was filled with animals that were unclean according to the dietary code of the Old Testament law. A voice told Peter to "Get up, kill, and eat." Peter refused, saying that he had never eaten anything impure or unclean. The voice replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (NIV)

applicability of Scripture and grappling with the “semantics” (and therefore implications) of the quantifier “all.”

Ricardo then agreed that the issue was in flux in his life and that he was “trying to learn more about [it].” Ricardo then almost immediately gave an example of a discussion he had had with Frank “the other night,” which evidenced the recentness and continued relevance of these questions to his spiritual search. In the discussion’s recounting, Ricardo gave an example of trying to reason out possible interpretations of changes from the Old Testament requirements of the law (i.e. dietary) that no longer apply today, and he did so based on other passages from the New Testament.

Finally, Ricardo closed the embedded narrative retelling by reporting Frank’s demarcation between the recorded words of Jesus, in which same-sex behavior is not mentioned, versus what was written by Paul and stated: “we take some comfort from that.” Thus, for Ricardo, determining how the Bible fits into his spiritual life was continuing to play a major part in his on-going journey and process of spiritual identity transformation. For example, when I asked what the main difference was in his spirituality now as compared to when he was involved in the ex-gay ministry, he replied: “Well, a lot of it is the place the Bible has in it probably.”

The diversity of belief and breadth of what is meant by those who retain a Christian identification is well illustrated by an anecdote from Olivia’s narrative. At the time of her interview, Olivia was in seminary studying to become an MCC minister. In defining who she saw her true self to be, she identified as both “lesbian” and “Christian.” But she quickly followed up with a clarification with respect to “Christian,” as in (7.13).

(7.13) Olivia: And Christian. But not <emphatic, scratchy voice> Christian like some of these other people are. I-I remember in one of my classes in world religion and Christianity, one of my fellow students, he’s just like, making these broad general statements, “Well, shouldn’t we as Christians be-witnessing to the Buddhists that we run across, and, isn’t that, I mean, that’s part of who we

are?” And I remember interrupting the class, and I said, “Jake, you need to quit using ‘we’ and make some ‘I’ statements there. That’s what it means to you, but that may not mean what it is to me. **We’re all Christians, but you need to make some ‘I’ statements there, because obviously what it means to you isn’t what it means to me.**”

In (7.13) above, Olivia made a clear oppositional delineation between her own identification as “Christian,” emphatically stating that she was “not Christian like some of these other people are” and described a time of disagreement with a classmate on what it means to be “Christian.” Olivia’s concluding statement is indeed apropos for the discussion here, for many are self-identifying as Christian, but what that means to one individual is not necessarily what it means to another in contrast to the relative⁶⁸ uniformity of agreement found among ex-gay individuals on these same faith issues.

As stated in the introduction to the current discussion on the spectrum of ex-ex-gay spiritual beliefs, while most of the ex-ex-gay individuals in this study did continue to self-identify as Christian (though not necessarily evangelical), a few individuals in my study did not retain a Christian identification at all. For most individuals, years of a religious worldview, self-identity, and deeply held beliefs are not easily laid aside. It was thus for these “no longer Christian identified” individuals as well, and their spiritual journey was no less processual than any of the others.

For example, Mark had been deeply involved in the evangelical Christian world through both his work, personal, and family life since his “conversion” in high school. At the time of his interview, he was 47 years old and had been married for 23 years, though his marriage was in transition and most likely heading toward dissolution. At this

⁶⁸ “Relative” is an important qualifier here, as I am not implying that ex-gay evangelicals have absolute uniformity of all spiritual beliefs. Again, it is with respect to what evangelicals view as the “core tenets” of the points being delineated upon which there is uniform agreement. For example, among ex-gays in my study, all agreed that Jesus is the singular source of salvation, but there were differences of belief about whether or not one can lose his or her salvation, which is reflective of denominational belief differences among Protestant Christians in general.

point, Mark had personally disavowed evangelical Christianity as a whole. Mark's spiritual transition out of an evangelical belief system, which he described as "the collapse of evangelicalism" in his life, had begun about five years prior to this time, as he described in (7.14).⁶⁹

(7.14) Mark: I don't know how to explain it, except one day in my mind's eye, it was like this whole structure just collapsed. I-I looked at what I had believed and what I had given my life for to that point and all the suffering I had endured for that point, and it just all of the sudden collapsed one day. It didn't make any sense, and it didn't even seem right to me. [...]

I just felt like all these events had conspired to force me to look at "What's reality here?" you know, "What's the reality that you," you know, "have experienced versus the reality that you keep trying to jam yourself into that doesn't seem to work for you?" And, um, so it wasn't like I did it with great excitement. I was pretty terrified, because, of course, you're thinking, "Well, if I'm thinking these thoughts and I leave the faith," you know, then you, then you're out, you know <laughing>, and you're in outer darkness, and there's nothing, no place to go. Um, but I guess I was, I re-, I know I was really willing to face that. I was just really willing to say, "No, I, if I look back at all the evidence of my life, um, you know, unless I'm just totally untrue to myself and my own experience after all these years, I have to say I can't believe that stuff anymore. I just can't. I have to, I have to try to figure out, I either have to throw myself in whole hog and go to hell, or figure out some other thing to believe, and um.

So there was a period of time that was pretty rocky, pretty messy. Um, I left my home for a month, went and lived in <city> with somebody I had met. Um, felt very unhappy there, just, um, still very attached to my family, very attached to my old self, you know, and just, you know, couldn't see myself living, you know, moving into this lifestyle, you know, a-a j-, quote unquote gay lifestyle. Um, so after a month, came back from <city>, um, which was right at the time that I met this, started m-, you know, meeting, you know, with this group of people <i.e. the ex-ex-gay discussion group>.

From the "collapse" of Mark's evangelical faith and his conclusion that he couldn't "believe that stuff anymore," he proceeded on a quest to "figure out some other thing to believe" and "the reality he had experienced" versus the one he had believed in that "didn't seem to work for him." Through this process, Mark moved from

⁶⁹ Continuous transcript; spaced for ease of readability.

evangelicalism to trying to maintain a Christian framework outside of evangelicalism, but he finally came to question the Christian faith as a whole. As a result, Mark never wrestled at length with the interpretation of particular Biblical passages with respect to homosexuality the way individuals retaining an evangelical identity most often do. Thus, from his narrative, a question of the Bible itself came to be his primary question, as he described in (7.15) below.

(7.15) Mark: Uh, you know, I went at that <i.e. pro-gay theology>, and I know other people have done that. I've read the books. There've been a couple books written about that—re-interpretation of the scriptures. I think they're cheesy, and I think a lot of their, their scholarship is false. I think that wha-, what I began to see, actually, was that going at specific texts falls into the same trap that, that all Christians fall into, which is t-, we're, we're myopic. You know, we read the Bible like right up close to our eyes. I wanted to step back and walk around outside the Bible. How did it come to be? You know, so I was reading, I've read, been reading people like, you know, Elaine Pagels, you know, and the, the discovery of the Gnostic gospels and readings in Church history and how we even got the New Testament, and why Irenaeus in the 4th century argued for only four gospels when there were bunches of gospels, and-and how political and how philosophically weak their arguments were for setting up the New Testament. So I did more, my, I don't <sigh>, I don't-I don't think my particular bent either is to get in and look at micro pieces.

In (7.15) above, it is interesting to note Mark's usage of the speaker-inclusive first person plural pronoun "we" when he referred to "all Christians," because in the excerpt to be given next, Mark explained that after a five-year process, he had currently reached a place of agnosticism with respect to his spiritual beliefs. In terms of Mark's interview, just prior to (7.15), he had given an orientation clause in which he stated, "let's go back a couple of years when I was still believing in God and talking in those terms," (cf. chapter 9, excerpt (9.27b)). Consequently, the usage of "we" may reflect part of the temporal stance shift and the managing of multiple stages of identification; however, such usage might also indicate the continued processual nature of Mark's spiritual journey and the relative newness (and perhaps difficulty) of fully disassociating from his long-standing

identity position of “Christian” (cf. “very attached to my old self” in (7.14)). Again, Mark’s current spiritual resolution is given in (7.16) below.

(7.16) Mark: Um, so **where I am right now is that, um, I don’t not believe in God.** Um, certainly there’s a **deep part of me that hopes there is one.** I really, really **hope** there is one. But I’m really not at all afraid of the thought that, um, if my life snuffs out, there’s nothing. I used to be terrified of that. Oh, that sounds so empty, so horrible, so dark. Well, it wouldn’t be, you know <laughing>. It’d be no consciousness at all. I’m really not, um, it just feels like a rested place. It doesn’t feel like the desert, but it doesn’t feel like a r-, the river either, you know. Um, and I-I just kind of, I’m, I’m at the point of just **trusting in whatever process goes on in your soul,** and if there is somebody bigger who, whoever governs that, and, uh, you know, I could certainly step outside of this experience and say, “**Maybe** this is God’s way of erasing all of the old tapes finally, and in some, some way showing me **him, her, or itself** <laughing>, you know, new, **but right now I don’t see a God.** I don’t, I-I don’t not want to see one. I, it just, it has to be genuine, and, and I don’t know how I’ll know that, but <cough> I think if it, I’m, **maybe** there’s enough of a mystic bent in me **to still hold on to the idea** that if there is a God, He can come up with some unique way, so that it’s really convincing, and it’s creative and, and revealing of some aspect of God that **I just absolutely don’t know, um, or – so that’s really where I am right now.**

Thus, in (7.16) above, Mark discussed the state of his spirituality as one of agnosticism, stating that he did not “not believe in God,” but that at that point he “just absolutely [did]n’t know.” Through his three-time adverbial repetition of “right now,” Mark clearly indicated that he was still in process and was describing his beliefs in their current state, and that those beliefs were subject to change. Accordingly, Mark was in no way sure that agnosticism would be his final spiritual resolution and expressed the fact that a deep part of him “hopes there is one [i.e. a God],” but also stated that he did not fear the thought of a possible atheistic resolution either, as he might have in the past.

By his reference to “the process that goes on in your soul,” Mark made explicit the processual nature of these types of life experiences and hence the narratives told about them. Mark offered several possible scenarios of ways that “God” might still be working, and his use of terms such as “maybe,” “hope,” and “still hold on to” all indexed the possibility of future belief, though this potential belief was uncertain both with

respect to its emergence and certainly its content if belief did emerge, thus only amorphous projections could be made, as indexed by Mark laughing and referring to God as “him, her, or itself.”

Another example of a non-Christian identified spiritual resolution comes from Anne’s narrative, where she described how her spiritual searching had led her to still strongly believe in God and Jesus. However, Anne stated that her beliefs were not necessarily confined to Christianity, and she disavowed many aspects of the institutionalized church and continued to search for God and truth in other religions as well. Thus, at the conclusion of her interview, Anne stated that this was the first time she had told “this side” of her story, which she summed up as “pre-Christian, Christian, post-Christian,” as in (7.17).

(7.17) Anne: And so you know, I-I-I’ve become much more comfortable but I think I’m probably more willing to say today I’m not a Christian, I still very much believe in God, and I still uh believe He’s very involved but I-I don’t think it has to be within the persona of-of Christianity.

[...a few minutes later, at conclusion of the interview]

AP: All right, well I’m sure you’re going to rejoice because I have no more questions. <Anne laughing> Have you ever told your story before?

Anne: Um, not, you know, not this um side of it. I probably did tons of testimonies when I was, you know, in the church, um, but not this side of it, no, I haven’t. So this is probably the first time it got told, pre-Christian, Christian, post-Christian <laugh>.

Thus, this section demonstrates the spectrum evidenced in this study of ex-ex-gay beliefs about truth with respect to the formerly held evangelical worldview, one which ran from continued strong identifications with evangelical Christianity to theistic disaffiliations from and agnostic disavowals of Christian belief.

7.3 BELIEFS ABOUT SEXUALITY

While all of the ex-ex-gay individuals in my study clearly were embracing (or coming to embrace) a homosexual identity, there was again diversity of belief among them with respect to the nature of sexuality itself, ranging from viewing sexuality as a genetically encoded orientation to the result of environmental and developmental factors, with several perspectives in between. Erzen (2002:133) pointed out that “the ex-gay movement sees heterosexuality as innate,⁷⁰ natural, and divinely ordained, and the liberal gay response has been to argue the same position for homosexuality.” This view of homosexuality was by far the most commonly held among the ex-ex-gay participants in my study; thus, in radical departure from the ex-gay worldview that sees homosexuality as resulting from “developmental disturbance” or the “fallen nature,” they came to view their experience of same-sex attraction as indicative of an intrinsic homosexual orientation that is a part of their essential nature,

Among those individuals holding an essentialist view, some claimed that sexual orientation was genetically encoded, while others attributed it to an “innate nature,” acknowledging that the role of genetics with respect to sexual orientation in the current state of scientific knowledge is undetermined. Bruce clearly expressed a genetics-based view in the excerpt in (7.18), where he likened sexual orientation to biological sex or the color of one’s hair, or eyes in terms of genetic predeterminance.

(7.18) Bruce: You’re truly one way or another. It’s the same, you know, I equated it with eye color, it’s just, you can’t change your eye color, and this is just as much a part of you as anything else. [...] But this part is like about your nature, this, to me, it’s about my nature, it’s about who I am. Um, it’s every bit a part of me as, just the same as being a male, I can be no, nothing other than a male. And in this case, um, a gay male, the gay part of me is just every bit a part

⁷⁰ The usage of “innate” is not intended to mean complete biological determinism, as discussed in chapter 5, section 4. See also chapter 10, section 3.

of me as anything else. Um, eye color, hair color, name it, and so you can't really reverse that.

Both Elaine and Dana provide examples of innatist perspectives. In excerpt (7.19), Elaine was responding to my question of what she meant by the term "orientation," which she had just claimed is unchangeable. Excerpt (7.20) contains Dana's response to a question about her views on homosexuality as an identity.

(7.19) Elaine: Well, I don't, um, claim to know anything that scientists don't know at this point, so I can't say it's genetic <laughs>. Nothing has been proven in that regard. Um, I think a lot of it is innate, whether it comes out of, uh, our early, uh, behavior, our early experiences, as well as our genetic make up, I don't know.

(7.20) Dana: I think it's an innate s-, psychosexual orientation. It's, um, i-, an identity in so much as if heterosexuality can be an identity, then homosexuality is an identity for me. But I think of it as deeper than that. I think of the identity as something that you choose or embrace, but I think the nature is more basic. That you can choose to acknowledge or not, but it's still going to be there.

AP: Mm hm. And you, and when you say innate, are you meaning like genetically based or –

Dana: Um, I mean something that is pretty well established either at birth or in the first year or two of life. Um, I don't know enough about, you know, biology and genetics to know exactly what to call that, but, [...] If, you know, if you put it in the nature versus nurture debate, you know, I'm on the, would be on the side of nature.

Thus, as both of the above excerpts show, Elaine and Dana both refer to orientation as an "innate" aspect of the self, which may or may not be determined to have genetic links.

The importance of this shift in understanding cannot be underestimated, and it cannot be separated from the transforming spirituality, especially for those individuals who retain a Christian identification, for new views of both sexuality and the spiritual metanarrative often co-emerge and change in tandem. Having reached different conclusions about the Bible and homosexuality, where same-sex relations are no longer seen as "sinful" or outside of the "created intent," ex-ex-gay Christians then consider

themselves able to explore and forge new understandings with respect to sexuality as well (or vice versa, i.e. with the exception of one, all of the individuals in my data came to (or were coming to) a different understanding of and acceptance of homosexuality, and the spiritual metanarrative was then explored and changed accordingly (cf. Dana, section 7.2)). As a result, in contrast to the previously held ex-gay beliefs about the developmental and primarily nurture-based origins of homosexuality, many ex-ex-gays now claimed homosexuality to be a God-given, intrinsic aspect of the self. Dana expressed this belief in excerpt (7.21) below.

(7.21) Dana: Um, I had to be willing to do that to get to a place where I could see that, you know, eventually, down the road I found, I came to believe, that God never asked me not to be gay, you know. It was always myself saying, “You can’t be gay,” <laugh> and-and other Christians. But, you know, later, you know, I came to believe that God never said, “You can’t be gay,” you know. He said He loves me, you know, and **He made me this way, and who am I, you know, like the Scripture says, you know, you know, “Does the pot ask the potter, ‘Why have you made me this way?’”⁷¹ you know. I am who God made me to be, so <sigh> you know, and, and I’m at peace with that.**

As (7.21) shows, Dana discussed how she “came to believe that God never asked [her] not to be gay” and that God Himself, as her Creator, was the one who “made [her] this way.” Then, in an interesting confluence of new understandings reclaimed out of the troubled metanarrative past, Dana quoted “the Scripture” to affirm that she should not be questioning or struggling with God about her sexuality and “who God made [her] to be.”

Anne also discussed her changed perspective on sexual identity and homosexuality, as in (7.22).

(7.22) Anne: I think it’s an identity. Um, it’s more than a behavior, I think, it’s who you are born. I-I-I guess I-I **used to dispute the idea of being born with it, but I think I have come to the conclusion that God is the God of diversity** um and uh in that as I look at nature, he didn’t make only one kind of flower, we are only-we’re not only stuck with daisies, um we have a plethora of flowers that you know that are categorized and you know how many seeds. We have the same

⁷¹ An allusion and reference to Isaiah 45:9 (also Romans 9:20).

thing with trees and animals and um, I mean, you know the fruit fly in Hawaii, there are like a hundred and fifty versions of the fruit fly, um and I think **a God of such diversity then has allowed a diversity within sexuality as well, and I think he intended it to be there from the beginning um, that there's that part for procreation, but I also believe that there's the other things that, uh, and I think they delight him as well, that he meant them to be, uh a female-female, male-male, and-and then what we consider normal.** [...] I-I think it's part of the diversity of God and I think it's and I think it's part of who you are and um in many way we spend most of our lives trying to deny who you are.

As seen in (7.22), Anne indexed that her perspective on sexual identity had changed, in that she “used to dispute the idea of being born with it [i.e. a same-sex orientation].” However, she claimed to have “come to the conclusion that God is the God of diversity” and that He “has allowed a diversity within sexuality as well.” Thus, she stated that for sexuality, “there's that part for procreation,” but that other arrangements such as female-female and male-male were also “intended” and “meant to be” by God “from the beginning.” The view that homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality and part of a “God-intended diversity” within creation is a primary tenet of the MCC and other gay-affirming spiritual congregations (e.g. Perry, 1972) and was referenced in a number of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected.

With respect to the above perspectives, it is worth noting that a spiritual metanarrative in which same-sex behavior is no longer seen as “sinful,” but is viewed as a legitimate and moral expression of human sexuality obviously opens up the narrative space and possibility for same-sex attractions to be God-given and God-intended. However, in so doing, it also simultaneously renders the ultimate source or nature of those attractions much less important, because the moral status is no longer in question. Consequently, while Elaine expressed an essentialist view as in (7.19) above, she went on to clarify that even if homosexuality were “proven” to develop out of “early childhood experiences,” such ultimately wouldn't matter due to her current understanding of Christianity, as in (7.23).

(7.23) Elaine: Um, I don't think it matters. You know, even if it does, even if it were proven that it comes out of early childhood experiences, I don't think it matters at all, because God loves us, and I think, again, this-this is a variation on the challenge to the Church to love everybody and to accept everybody for who they are, and, you know, it, what-what is really condemned in the Bible is hate, not love, um, of acting out in ways that harm people, not acting in love toward your neighbor, so, you know, the whole theme of the body, uh, the Bible, to me, um, wouldn't condemn it, even if it were proven to be completely environmental. I don't think it is, but, you know, in, i-, in the long run, it doesn't matter to me.

Thus, as (7.23) demonstrates, Elaine's current spiritual metanarrative both opens up space for viewing homosexuality as God-given and innate while at the same time renders innateness unnecessary for the moral approbation thereof.

Ricardo was one of the few individuals in my study who maintained a developmental perspective, largely in line with the ex-gay ministry view that he had so long held, and he discussed that being a "big issue" for him when he first started attending the ex-ex-gay group discussion/dinners, as in (7.24).

(7.24) Ricardo: OK, well, that was a big issue too, when I first started going to these dinner things. What is it? Cause in <ex-gay ministry name>, there was no gay gene, um, you might have had a predisposition to be this way, just because, you know, if you're a pa-more of a passive, introverted boy, you had more of a propensity to be, turn out gay, because your father were harsh or criticizing or stuff, you know, that you just withdraw from your father's love and acceptance. I-I know there're a lot of gay people that really have a lot invested in thinking that there's a gay gene out there; I don't. Um, I still, I guess probably believe I'm this way because of a lot of things <ex-gay ministry name> said. I think I probably did-I mean, I just had, I mean, I meet an awful lot of people who are-who are in, who are gay, and they, I mean, just in <ex-gay ministry name>, you know, and-and, they had terrible relationships with their fathers, and it seems like they did withdraw from their father and decided they didn't want to be, relate, identify with their fathers, and I guess identified more with their mothers or something, and um, I think that's probably how it is. And can you change from that? I think it's your sexual identity. I think once that, a sexual identity is-is-is, beca-is established when you're around 3 or 4, I don't think it can change; I think it's pretty much set.

In excerpt (7.24), Ricardo expressed his continued belief in a developmental rather than an essential nature or genetics-based view of homosexuality. Ricardo first

stated clearly that he did not believe there is a gay gene. Then, after discussing a few of the scenarios and influences that are frequently mentioned in the ministries as possible contributors to the development of same-sex attraction, such as disrupted relationship and lack of identification with one's father, Ricardo stated: "I guess probably believe I'm this way because of a lot of things <ex-gay ministry name> said." However, after stating that he still believed the developmental influence account is "probably how it is" (i.e. how same-sex orientation develops), Ricardo was quick to assert that as a result, "it's your sexual identity" and that "once a sexual identity is established" in early childhood, he did not believe change is possible: "I don't think it can change; I think it's pretty much set."

Maggie provided the only other instance of an ex-ex-gay identified individual who did not ascribe to some form of an innate, deterministic view of sexuality. In (7.25) below, Maggie described her belief that homosexuality is "more of a behavior" and "a choice."

(7.25) AP: So, is homosexuality an identity or is it a behavior, or both, or something else?

Maggie: **I think it would be more of a behavior; I think it's still a choice.** Um, people tell me it's not, that it's just the way you are, it's the way they are, they were born like that. Um, and I've met several men, and several women, who have gotten married to someone of the opposite sex and they go out to the clubs and find someone to play with for a night or two, and then go back to their husband or wife. . And I know some couples who have gotten married, there is a couple in <city>, who he was a gay man and she was a lesbian and they were best friends from high school and both wanted to have a kid, and got married, love each other and have a strong sex life, and you know, they're faithful to each other, as far as I know. **If it is the way we are born, how can those things work? [...] I still feel like it is a choice, at least for me, I don't feel it is something I have to do.** It's been a long time since I met a guy I wanted to go out with. It has been several years since I met anyone that I want to date. But I have met several women that I've wanted to date. But, I really don't think about it anymore. It's kinda like the choice is made and I don't have to worry about whether it's a choice or a behavior or what anymore.

AP: So, in the past, would you have said you were denying your true self, or just repressing who you really were? I know you just said it was a choice.

Maggie: **Yeah, I don't think it's necessarily who I really was, but what I really wanted.**

In the above excerpt, Maggie discussed her observations of various expressions of sexuality and sexual identity that seemed to fluctuate between heterosexuality and homosexuality as part of the reason she did not believe sexuality to be innately predetermined, stating: "If it is the way we are born, how can those things work?" Thus, at that point in time, Maggie still felt like her pursuing her same-sex attractions was "a choice," which she qualified and restricted to herself, saying, "at least for me, I don't feel like it's something I have to do."

Maggie followed this statement with a reference to it having been a long time since she had been interested in going out with "a guy," a reference that indicated Maggie's having experienced at least some potential to be opposite-sex attracted in the past. To conclude our discussion, I asked Maggie about whether she saw her years of refraining from involvement with same-sex relationships as a denial of her true self. Maggie stated that she did not necessarily think it was "who [she] really was, but what [she] really wanted." Thus again, Maggie did not interpret her same-sex attractions as indicative of her "true" sexual nature, but rather simply her "true" sexual desires.

Ricardo's final comment in (7.24) on his belief in the unchangeable nature of sexual identity and Maggie's observations of instances of apparent sexual fluidity in (7.25) highlight, in addition to morality, the crucial issue at stake between the ex-gay worldview and the ex-ex-gays in my study, namely: is change with respect to sexuality and sexual identity possible? And in the most predictable instance of consensus, all of the ex-ex-gays in my study stated that they themselves had not changed with respect to same-sex attraction. Accordingly, almost all of them (with a few exceptions, such as

Maggie, above) attributed this lack of change to an essentialized notion of sexual identity that viewed sexual orientation as an immutable and fixed aspect of the personality; thus, they saw sexual identity transformation as impossible.

For example, Olivia had never participated in a Christian ex-gay ministry, but she had seen a secular psychiatrist with no religious affiliation for several years (and from her narrative, her treatment had been clearly misguided and even abusive). She now held the belief that sexual identity is biologically determined and therefore did not believe in the possibility of any change, as in (7.26).

(7.26) Olivia: And I could learn to live as if I was straight. Would that make me straight? No. It just means-meant I behaved as a straight person. Someone can put themselves through a program, and then come out of it and say they're straight, and they may live that way for the rest of their life, but my interpretation of it is they desired to be retrained. To me, they haven't changed the way they were born. They've just changed what they do with that and they've changed their behavior. [...] I can't blame any gay or lesbian for wantin' to do that, and for maybe deciding to live as a straight person for the rest of their life. But that doesn't mean they're a straight person, that just means they're living as a straight person. I can start using my left hand today, but that doesn't mean I'm a left-handed person, that just means I chose to start doin' that because maybe I would fit in and be accepted.

In (7.26) above, Olivia had just finished telling me a frequently made analogy in the MCC between left-handedness and homosexuality, in which she recounted a story of a left-handed friend she went to school with never being allowed to write with his left hand, but being “retrained” to write with his right hand. She then continued and stated that her “interpretation” of anyone claiming to have experienced a change in sexuality was simply that “they desired to be retrained” and that “they haven't changed the way they were born.” Due to these beliefs, Olivia likened any change of sexual expression to behavior modification: “They've just changed what they do with that and they've changed their behavior.”

Ricardo expressed a similar sentiment and claimed that after years of involvement in an ex-gay ministry, he had seen “people change their behavior,” but never saw anyone’s actual “sexual orientation change,” with the exception of the leader, as shown in excerpt (7.27).

(7.27) Ricardo: **I saw people change their behavior uh but I never actually saw anybody’s sexual orientation change, and like I said, I saw lots—hundreds of people, I don’t know of anybody whose sexual orientation actually changed except for the leader,** who is, you know, <name>, he’s-he’s-he’s kind of like the leader emeritus now, he’s kind of moved out and he’s doing some writing. [...]

AP: So, when you like talk about, you know, people not changing, **for you, if there’s a continued same-sex attraction, then that means they haven’t changed,** I mean

Ricardo: **You’re right, they haven’t really changed—like I-I felt like when I got involved in it, that-that’s what would happen. I thought that’s what they were saying. They’ve changed—I think they’ve changed their behavior** uh they’re not-they’re not loo-they’re not buying the pornography anymore, they’re not, you know, they’re-they’re consciously, you know they see a good looking guy running down the street, they don’t look. Uh you know they can get—**plus I see, plus sexuality to me is on a spectrum, you’re not gay or straight or-or whatever the opposite ends of the spectrum are,** you know, this is like I guess you call it like transvestite, you know, way down here a man who wants to be a woman and somebody down here a super stud who plays football, basketball and everything else, field, and ho-hockey. You know, people are on this spectrum and I think a lot of people who really were in <ex-gay ministry name>, the successes, the role models for the rest of us, I mean the ultimate goal was to get married, married and have kids, that meant you were-to me, that meant you were a success. [...] **I just uh, didn’t see myself changing, and really didn’t see other people. I saw people’s behavior change, yes, and that’s what I was getting at with that-that spectrum thing, people-saw people’s behavior changing, but I didn’t see their um, didn’t see their orientation itself changing. Wherever they were on that spectrum when they came in to the group was exactly where they were when they left.**

In (7.27), Ricardo described seeing individuals’ behavioral activities changing with respect to sexuality, e.g. “they’re not buying the pornography anymore” or “they don’t look,” but claimed that any presence of continued same-sex attraction was evidence

that “they haven’t really changed.” Ricardo then went on to discuss his view of sexuality as being on a spectrum, where there is a range of sexual orientations along a continuum, and he claimed that he “didn’t see orientation itself changing.” Hence, he concluded his statements with, “Wherever they were on that spectrum when they came into the group was exactly where they were when they left.”

Ricardo’s mention of what he called the “spectrum” of sexuality introduces a significant and recurrent theme that appeared in many of the ex-ex-gay interviews I conducted. Specifically, the belief in a fixed and immutable homosexual orientation was frequently attended by a reference to bisexuality or the Kinsey scale in order to account for cases of apparent fluidity or sexual identity change. However, such an invocation represents an interesting tension, due to the fact that bisexuality has most often been viewed as a challenge to immutable, essentialist notions of both heterosexuality *and* homosexuality (as discussed in Murphy (1997)).

Murphy (37) described an essentialist notion of sexuality as follows: “that sexual object-choice orientation is innate and sexual identity derives from sexual object-choice,” and brought out Katz’s (1995) observation that sexual object-choice as a determiner of one’s identity is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, similar to Erzen’s (2002) observation (cf. chapter 5.4), Murphy noted that while social constructionism and queer theory research has emphasized fluidity and change, deterministic essentialism has set the terms of discussions of sexual identity outside of academic circles.

As mentioned in section 4 of chapter 5, Kinsey et al. (1948) constructed a scalar, continuum model to account for the range of possible human sexual behavior, with exclusive same-sex behavior at one end of the scale, exclusive other-sex at the other end, and either-sex directed behavior in the middle. Thus, a common ex-ex-gay metanarrative belief system about sexual identity that was evidenced in my interviews was one that

reified Kinsey's scalar range of human behaviors into different possible configurations of "sexual orientations." Then, for cases where sexual identification and expression seemed to have changed, the scale would be invoked and those individuals would be labeled as having been more toward the middle of the scale or inherently "bisexual" to begin with. Consequently, some degree of fluidity in human sexuality can be accounted for while maintaining a relatively static and immutable view of individual sexual identity itself.⁷² John clearly articulated this view of sexuality in response to my asking him what he thought of the term "ex-gay," which I quote at length in (7.28a) and (7.28b).

(7.28a) John: I think it's a misnomer. I think there are people that choose not to embrace homosexuality, um, but I think that it's a misnomer to call them ex-gay, because **I have personally never met anyone whose sexual orientation has been changed from homosexual to heterosexual. I've met some people that were bisexual, who have managed to suppress their homosexual desires and then still keep alive their heterosexual ones, but I've never met anyone who has actually changed their orientation.**

AP: **So you don't believe it's possible?**

John: **Well, I mean, I mean, I believe it's possible that God could make me black tomorrow, but I don't think that's gonna happen either.** <said in sarcastic, dry-ironic tone>

AP: **So you believe that homosexuality is genetic?**

John: **Yes.**

In (7.28a) above, John expressed his belief that the term "ex-gay" was a "misnomer" because he had personally "never met anyone whose orientation has been changed from homosexual to heterosexual." When I asked if he believed that such a change was impossible, John, who is white, then made clear that he takes a biologically

⁷² Halfway through the writing of this dissertation, I was sent Fawcett's (2002) thesis by a ministry leader I had met during the course of the current research. In his work, Fawcett also outlined Scanzoni and Mollenkott's (1978) view of sexuality with respect to essentialism and scalarity. It was from this resource that I learned of Scanzoni and Mollenkott as some of the primary articulators of the understanding of sexuality I had seen in my data and have described above.

deterministic view of sexuality, as he sarcastically said, “it’s possible that God could make me black tomorrow, but I don’t think that’s gonna happen either,” thereby equating sexual identity and ethnic identity in terms of fixedness. After confirming that his ethnicity analogy was indicative of a belief in a genetic basis for sexuality, the exchange continued as in (7.28b).

(7.28b) AP: So you feel like people that claim to be ex-gay are just basically in denial?

John: If someone were to tell me that they actually did change their orientation, I would probably be really skeptical about it. I would hate to say just categorically that um they’re, I mean, I wouldn’t say they were lying, or anything like that, because I wouldn’t want to, you know, um, malign anyone’s character in this. I-I would have a hard time believing that that really was the case, um, but-a-**and I would probably tend to think that that probab-person probably, because I believe, as is generally held by a lot of people, that sexuality’s along a spectrum, and so anyone that told me that they had desires of the other of the opposite sex when they didn’t before, I would believe they were more along the spectrum towards bisexual, um, and so probably had just suppressed any remaining som-same sex desires that they had.** But, I mean, I would say from my own experience, that I never had any sexual desires for women really. Well, that’s not, actually, that’s not ex:actly true. I did used to, um, when I was in high school think that, like, the Sports Illustrated swimsuit models and everything were really hot. But then again, when you’re in high school, you think that most things are really hot. So, um, but that’s why that was so jarring to me in college to see that that was not appealing to me, because it had been previously. But I had never had any specific desire for any girl. It had always been supermodels that were that, and people in porn, but, you know, I was probably looking just as much at the men in the porn as I was at women. So, I mean, **I would say that I’m pro-if I were to rate myself, I’m probably very close to exclusively homosexual. Um, and, you know, there are some people who are more, kind of in the middle, or in the middle of, between that, and bisexual, um, and I think there are people, I mean, why some people um marry and have no problem for a long time. I mean, I think a lot of it, I mean, a lot of people are pressured into it. But then a lot of people actually say, “Well, I enjoyed having sex with my wife.” Well, I don’t think I could say that if I were to do that, cause I don’t, I don’t think that I would’ve enjoyed. But there are people in my circle at church <an MCC congregation>, um, who have been married, and they’ll say, “Yeah, well, you know, it wasn’t terrible. I didn’t hate it; I enjoyed having sex with my wife.” So, I would tend to place those people more along the middle of the spectrum or closer toward it, and that’s how I would kind of explain anyone who said they were ex-gay or what. But, you know, the**

other thing that I would add is that, you know, it's not my God to, I mean, it's not my job to be God and decide exactly what somebody else is and isn't. I mean, I'll have my own feelings about it, but if someone, well, [...]

AP: But for you, basically, if anybody still has same-sex attraction, then they're still gay.

John: Yes. Or bisexual.

In (7.28b), John stated that he would be “really skeptical” if anyone claimed to have changed their “orientation.” He then went on to explain his beliefs about the spectrum of sexuality, which he prefaced with a reference to popular acceptance and a wide sharing of his perspective, “because I believe, as is generally held by a lot of people, that sexuality's along a spectrum.” Having introduced the spectrum as a rubric for a range of sexual expressions, John then invoked the spectrum, bisexuality, and suppression to account for any instances of apparent sexual change, as when he stated, “anyone that told me that they had desires of the other of the opposite sex when they didn't before, I would believe they were more along the spectrum towards bisexual, and so probably had just suppressed any remaining same-sex desires that they had.”

John then proceeded to give further examples of people in his “circle at church” that had been married and now were embracing a homosexual identity but had openly stated that they had enjoyed sexual relations with their opposite-sex spouse in the past. John then stated that he “would tend to place those people more along the middle of the spectrum or closer toward it” and that this same rationale is how he “would explain anyone who said they were ex-gay or what.” And in contrast to the ex-gay position of possible continued same-sex attraction not defining sexual identity, John's belief was that if a person experiences any degree of same-sex attraction, such indicates that the person is either “gay” or “bisexual.” As a result of this view of sexuality, John had the means to

maintain a coherent metanarrative of human sexuality as both immutable yet changeable to some degree.

Elaine expressed the view that sexual orientation is fixed, yet also referred to the Kinsey scale to account for apparent instances of fluidity, again in response to my question about what she thought of the term “ex-gay,” as in (7.29).

(7.29) AP: OK, um, so what do you think of the term “ex-gay”?

Elaine: Well, uh, Sylvia Pennington wrote a book, There Are No Ex-Gays <laughs>. Um, I tend to agree with that, that, um <sigh>, **to a certain extent, um, orientation, and I use that word instead of “sexuality,” orientation, um, can, i-, is flexible a little bit, uh, but not to the point where if you’re like a six on the Kinsey scale, you’re going to be a one, you know, when you go through an ex-gay ministry. It doesn’t work that way. If you’re a six, you’re always going to be on that end of the scale, there’s no changing that.** Um, there are some people like Joanne Luland, I don’t know if you know who she is, where

AP: No, huh-unh.

Elaine: No? **Um, she wrote several books on lesbian sexuality and is now involved, or at least was a couple years ago, involved with a man, um, i-, there are things like that that cause orientation to be in flux within a-a-a small range, um, but I don’t believe that, um, it can change within a large range, and I don’t know that any change is permanent. I do know that, uh, behavior can certainly change. Thinking patterns can certainly change. But orientation I don’t believe changes.** So, you know, for me, if I were to get out of the relationship I’m in, it’s possible I could find a man and fall in love and get married and live happily ever after, but that’s because I’m more towards the middle anyway. Um, I’ve always had some kind of attraction to men, uh, I, just my major emotional attraction is with women, and that’s where I really make my deep connection, so, you know, and <sigh> **it’s possible that there’s a little room for change, but really, in terms of somebody being gay and then changing their orientation to, to straight – I don’t believe it can happen.** [...] I firmly believe through all the research that I’ve done, as well as my own experience and the experience of others, that **you can change thinking, you can change behavior, but you can’t change ori-, basic orientation. Now, there’s a little room for flux in there, but, um, you know, within a-a small range.**

As (7.29) above shows, Elaine began by laughingly stating she tended to agree with a book entitled, There are no ex-gays. She then went on to describe her beliefs with

respect to “orientation,” which she clarified as a term that she used intentionally as opposed to “sexuality,” (recall from excerpt (7.19) that Elaine’s was an innatist view of sexuality). Also in this excerpt, Elaine surmised that it was conceivable that she herself could one day be involved in a heterosexual relationship, and she accounted for this by the fact that she was, in terms of the scale, “more towards the middle anyway.” In this way, Elaine maintained her belief in a constitutional or “basic orientation” that could not change and restricted instances of “change” to small degrees within the scale.

From Elaine’s reference to Sylvia Pennington’s (1989) book, along with the consistent emergence of the scalar sexuality model being articulated in response to my questions concerning ex-gays, I learned that this account of sexuality was a widely-used apologetic in MCC churches and among gay Christian advocates. As previously noted, Scanzoni and Mollenkott (1978) were among the first and most influential proponents of such apologetics (cf. Fawcett (2002) and footnote 72, *supra*). Thus, just as it was noted that the ex-gay metanarrative construction can account for cases of apparent non-transformation, so this particular sexuality metanarrative construction can account for cases of apparent transformation.

The belief in the unchangeable nature of sexual orientation brings up a final point of contrast between the ex-gay worldview and a common ex-ex-gay perspective, namely, the processual nature of healing and possibility of continued or residual same-sex attraction. Clearly, all of the ex-ex-gay beliefs described up to this point remove healing from being relevant to discussions of homosexuality. As demonstrated, most ex-ex-gays have come to view homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexual expression, with full moral sanction from God. “Not a sickness, not a sin” (e.g. Eastman, 1990), a well-known trope of gay Christian apologetics quoted to me during the course of my research, provides a succinct encapsulation of this difference and negation of the former ex-gay

worldview regarding homosexuality. However, because the theme of “healing as a process” surfaced in several of my interviews, I felt it necessary to address it here.

Prior to the excerpt below, Dana claimed that the ex-gay ministry expectation she encountered was that sexual identity change would most likely be a “long, arduous process.” In (7.30a), Dana then talked about the development of her thinking with respect to this process and “healing.”

(7.30a) Dana: **You know, nobody says, “Oh yeah, you just go <snap of fingers>, you know, like that,” you know. And that’s one of the things also that, ehh, I mean I believe that there’s processes and stages of healing for some things, you know, but I also think that, you know, if God’s going to do a miracle of healing, then a lot of those things that are miraculous, you know, God does suddenly, and you’re suddenly healed, and the affliction is gone, you know. And, you know, maybe there’s one in five million people that that happened to with homosexuality, but, you know, s-, you certainly don’t read about that in the testimonies. You re-, read about a long, painful struggle, you know? And eventually I just came to decide that, you know, I don’t think God wants me to have a long, painful struggle, you know. There are some things that everybody has their personal challenges in, but I just don’t think that’s one of them, so. You know, but it, but it took, it took me, eh, mm, s-, there were many, many years after I left the ministry that I really didn’t think about that stuff. I basically embraced b-, being a lesbian. I told my family “Didn’t work. I’m a lesbian. I’m out to everybody.” Um, you know, and I eventually, i-i-it took a long time then to come back to looking at, um, the whole issue f-, from a spiritual perspective. [...]**

(7.30b) Dana: Yeah, it was like, you know, I’ve been doing this for awhile, and now, you know, I’ve been suppressing any attraction that I might feel towards any wom-, woman or potential partner. I’ve just been suppressing that for the last few years, and I don’t want to live a life where I’m just suppressing that forever. I want it to either go away and be straight and eventually have a healthy, heterosexual marriage, you know, or, um, I want to have a happy, healthy, homosexual relationship. Um, and th-, the in-between is not, you know, my basic orientation has not changed, you know. [...] **And I’ve come to believe that, you know, a loving God is not going to heal you only halfway, and, you know, that, you know, if you’re going to be heal-, if homosexuality is something that needs to be healed of, then God certainly has the power to heal people fully and completely, you know, but that happens so rarely, you know, ehh, that I think it’s a really, I don’t think it would be, I don’t think it’s God’s will that people have to live, you know, in a, in a state of singleness, when they’re not particularly called to being s-single, um, but that they really can’t be, they have no**

desire to be with the opposite sex, you know. They really are homosexual in their innate nature.

In (7.30a), Dana expressed her belief that “there’s processes and stages of healing for some things,” but then contrasted such processes with the “miraculous” that “God does suddenly, and you’re healed, and the affliction is gone.” Dana went on to state that, “maybe there’s one in five million people that that happened to with homosexuality,” but that “you certainly don’t read about that in the testimonies; rather, “you read about a long, painful struggle.” Dana then described how she eventually came to decide that God didn’t want her to have a “long, painful struggle” with respect to her sexuality, stating: “There are some things that everybody has their personal challenges in, but I just don’t think that’s one of them.”

Dana resumed her thoughts about healing a little bit later in the exchange, as in (7.30b). Dana stated that she had come to believe that “a loving God is not going to heal you only halfway.” Thus, by claiming that because God “has the power to heal people fully and completely, but that happens so rarely” with respect to homosexuality, Dana again indicated by implication her belief that homosexuality does not need to be healed.

Prior to this excerpt, Dana had expressed her feeling that the celibate ex-gay life was like being “in limbo.” Here Dana continued by saying that she had been suppressing her same-sex attractions and that she desired “it to either go away” so that she could eventually marry or she wanted to be in a homosexual relationship. Although she had been celibate for four years during her involvement in the ex-gay ministry, Dana had not viewed that as a viable or desirable long-term option at the time. Dana stated that she believed it was not God’s will for someone to “live in a state of singleness” without a particular “call” to be single or celibate.

Dana clearly believed in an innate, constitutional sexual orientation, and thus believed that for people who “really are homosexual in their innate nature,” celibacy is not required and a homosexual relationship is a valid option within God’s will. The perspective that celibacy is not a desired or required (and most times was explicitly stated as an impossible) life option in cases where heterosexual attractions do not develop and same-sex attractions remain was also articulated in most of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected. Thus, this final example has served to illustrate differing conceptions of healing as a process with respect to sexuality between commonly held views among ex-ex-gays and the ex-gay worldview.

7.4 BELIEFS ABOUT MORALITY

As is clear from the previous two sections, most of the ex-ex-gays I interviewed either had reached or were coming to reach a spiritual resolution in which they believed homosexuality to be a valid moral and spiritual option for sexual expression. For ex-ex-gays transitioning from an ex-gay to an ex-ex-gay worldview and narrative, the ex-gay portion of their individual life narratives had, at least for a time, been significantly focused on attaining or maintaining what they understood to be sexual morality in obedience to their religious convictions. In their shift away from the ex-gay worldview, which uniformly held that the only morally acceptable context for sex was confined to heterosexual marriage, ex-ex-gays clearly are negotiating a new metanarrative space in which the expressions of sexuality and sexual activity that do not conflict with their religious convictions have widened beyond the previous boundary.

As a result, for many, determining a new sexual ethic is an important part of reshaping and reclaiming a coherent metanarrative, thereby enabling individual narrative coherence as well. And just as there is not a uniformity of ex-ex-gay spiritual belief resolutions, so also there is a range of ethical system resolutions for sexuality. Similar to

previous sections, I will illustrate a few of the resolutions represented and the narratives given about them.

I begin with Mark because he most saliently articulated how a search for a new system of ethics was a crucial part of his emerging sexual and spiritual identity transformation. Recall from section 7.2 that at the time of his interview, Mark had left evangelical Christianity as a whole and was in a state of agnosticism, which is a clear indication that the quest for a system of sexual ethics does not apply only to those individuals who choose to remain within the confines of traditional religion. For the sake of conciseness, I am quoting the first e-mail Mark sent me at receiving my request for an “ex-ex-gay interview,” in which a search for ethical mooring with respect to sexuality was one of the main things he highlighted, as in (7.31). (Note: Presented as received in the original message.)

(7.31) Mark: I'm married, with three kids <ages omitted>, and for many years all my friends were Evangelicals.

Coming to terms with my sexuality was only one of the reasons I pulled out of the E <i.e. Evangelical> world... being a student of the early Church writings was another... but the confrontation between my sexuality and the E stance was most definitely the catalyst for my personal “great migration.”

To cut to the chase I've done a lot of thinking about my need for, and the legitimacy of, moving on in your faith. And here's the bigger challenge: I've also had to consider my stance on spirituality, in the face of learning how to identify with/relate to the gay community and its mostly mooringly-less spirituality.... In short, it's been harder to leave the security of a stable “home” base... given the fact that you're headed for a “wilderness” with few enclaves of stable ethics (much less morality).

My thought is that, only the strong survive this great migration. A lot of guys I know are not doing the work it takes, mentally and spiritually, to develop their spirituality. Of their own admission, they're floundering.

In the above excerpt, Mark discussed “the confrontation between [his] sexuality” and the evangelical worldview as being the ultimate “catalyst” for his “personal ‘great

migration.” He then described giving a lot of thought to his “need for, and the legitimacy of, moving on in [his] faith.” In so doing, Mark is clearly demarcating himself as in the midst of a major transitional journey from a world and near lifetime of evangelical belief and heterosexual marriage to other realms of spirituality and sexuality.

However, Mark went on to describe what he saw as “the bigger challenge” and then discussed “learning how to identify with/relate to the gay community and its mostly mooringly-less [sic] spirituality.” Accordingly, Mark stated that he had found it “harder to leave the security of a stable ‘home’ base... given the fact that you’re headed for a ‘wilderness’ with few enclaves of stable ethics (much less morality).” Thus, contrasted with the previous and long-held evangelical metanarrative of clearly and uniformly defined spirituality and morality, Mark’s perception of what he called “the gay community” as having “few enclaves” of “stable ethics” or “morality” seemed to him like a “wilderness.” Regardless of the accuracy of his observation of the “gay community” or his ultimate ethical resolution, Mark clearly viewed the attainment of a coherent system of defined ethics as an important part of his journey, and from his concluding comments, also the journey of others making the same “great migration.”

For those individuals reaching a gay Christian resolution, there was a range of possible sexual ethics resolutions, and I highlight representative examples here. First, Ed provided an example of one of the most common resolutions—namely, restricting sex to the context of a monogamous, committed partnership, regardless of the biological sex of the participants. Again, I use an excerpt from an e-mailed response to my request for an interview for the sake of conciseness, because in its concluding paragraph, Ed most clearly and succinctly referred to his sexual ethics, as in (7.32).

(7.32) Ed: I have been with my partner, <name>, for three years. It is the first long-term relationship that I have ever had with anyone, male or female, and it is the first relationship where I have been faithful. On <date, 2003>, we had a

covenant ceremony. We are in the process of adopting a child and our birthmother is due <date>. I am finally at the place where I am at peace with my spirituality and my sexuality, in that I have left a life of sin (casual anonymous sex with multiple partners) and I have entered into an exclusive, committed, long-term love relationship with my partner.

In excerpt (7.32) above, Ed claimed that he was “at peace with [his] sexuality and [his] spirituality” and spoke in conversion narrative terms as he described the transition from what he viewed as “a life of sin,” which consisted of “casual anonymous sex with multiple partners” to what he saw as morally acceptable sexual expression, “an exclusive, committed, long-term love relationship.” Thus, the concepts of sexual morality and sin were retained, but the moral choice involved had changed from being one of refraining from same-sex activity to whether the sexual activity occurred within a context of a monogamous, committed relationship.

John also discussed the part of his spiritual journey in which he began attending an MCC and regularly met with the pastor to talk, part of which was devoted to discussions of sexual ethics. In contrast to Ed’s resolution above, however, John described having come to a “very liberal position,” as in (7.33).

(7.33) John: During the mean time, um, I started going and having more and more discussions with um <pastor’s name> at MCC, and we would do these things he called “Doing Theology,” where we would just sit around and talk about different issues or concerns, um.

AP: What types of things would come up?

John: Well at first, it was more just gay stuff, you know, in terms of uh, some of those same issues about what’s moral and what’s not and trying to figure out code of conduct and that kind of thing. And.

AP: How did you work that out?

John: Um (3 sec), it was a long process, (2 sec) and I um, (6 sec), but I eventually came to a very liberal position with regard to stuff like that.

AP: Which would be?

John: Which would be basically that I didn't think there was anything wrong with sex, um, now cheating on someone would be, you know, different. But as far as, um, even if people wanted to have open relationships, then that would be-as long as the two of them were both cognizant of what was going on, and consenting, then that wouldn't be a problem. Um, and, so as far as, as far as having sex on dates or stuff like that, um, felt like that was okay. Um, and that's probably about as far as it went at that point. [...] <...began describing ethical understanding now> Um, and I don't think that there's anything wrong with sex, even like anonymous sex, um. Now you could get into a debate as to whether some of it is healthy for a person or not, so when I say there's nothing wrong with it, I mean that it's not like categorically condemned, but as far as in the context of ever-of a different person's life, you could argue whether or not something might be healthy for them or not, I'm not just saying just, you know, that it's healthy for everyone to just go sleeping with whoever they want to whenever they want to, cause that is kind of messy emotionally and spiritually and other things like that.

As can be seen in (7.33), John described meeting with his pastor to discuss and “try to figure out code of conduct” and morality issues. John then explained that he had come to a position which would “be basically that [he] didn't think there was anything wrong with sex” as long as the participants were “consenting” and “cognizant” of the sexual arrangements or activities involved. When John discussed his current position that “even anonymous sex” was not wrong, he clarified that by that he meant he believed that it is not inherently morally wrong, i.e. “I mean that it's not like categorically condemned.” Hence, the moral status of anonymous sex was no longer an issue; the question remaining was rather with respect to “whether some of it is healthy for a person or not,” which John said was possible to “debate.” Thus, John ultimately described his system of sexual ethics as shifting from one in which sexual behaviors and activities are categorized as distinctly either moral or immoral to one in which they are categorized as arguably healthy or unhealthy.

Jim described an ethical system similar to John's, as in (7.34) below. (Note: 7.34 represents a continuous turn of talk, with ellipses abbreviating some of the turn for the sake of space.)

(7.34) Jim: Um, probably um, when I feel, **when I would feel uncomfortable, for me, it's the reason. It's not having sex in and of itself that bothers me, it's the reason, I think is where I've changed. And that's what becomes important to me.** If I were to meet someone, and it worked out where I just happened to be horny, or they were, and I was out, and I wouldn't rule out that I might not go have sex with them. I mean, I might go ahead and do that. And I would, and I wouldn't have any guilt like in the old days about that, because I would think, "Well," you know, um, you know, "we both were consenting," and-and you know, and we did this, and-and so we're, and I leave and it was fun, and-and that's it, I mean, that's just all it was. [...] **It's like I believe, I believe it's-it's wrong for a different, if I feel it's wrong, it's for a different reason than I used to think it was wrong, does that make sense?** I mean, I just really don't believe that if I trick with some guy, you know, that I meet out, and you know, I'm not physically hurting him, and you know, degrading him, or you know, and we-we both agree, we have a good time, and we leave. I just really don't feel God has a problem with it. I don't believe God has a problem with that. I believe He'd rather that I, and I would rather myself, because of the-of the way I feel, I would rather do that with someone I care about. [...] **I wouldn't feel guilt, let's say, but I would be concerned now** if I was on the computer every night or I was going somewhere, like a bar or something trying to hook up and feeling frustrated if I didn't, and I was doing that, you know, 2, 3, 4 times a week. **That would be unhealthy for me because it's almost like I'm being driven to do that,** versus, something's, you know what I mean, versus, just making a decision, "Oh, I'm gonna go out to the bar tonight," and you know, and I come home, but I don't feel like I need to do that every single night, [...] I mean, it-it-it becomes more of a point of where, to me, I'm more concerned with, not that, "Oh, God's gonna strike you dead." **I'm more concerned about, OK, where are you at emotionally, what's going on in your head?** You know, OK, you went and had sex with this one guy, and you both like, okay fine, just let that go. But if I'm like, feel like I'm going to parks and spending hours trying to hook up with someone or on-line trying to spend hours, you know, finding someone to come over here, that I would be concerned about and I would need to talk to my counselor about it.

Thus, as in (7.34) above, Jim described having come to the place where "it's not having sex in and of itself" that concerns him; rather, he described having "changed" to where "it's the reason" that he is concerned with now. Jim explained he would no longer have "any guilt like in the old days" over a one-time sexual encounter and had come to believe that there is nothing inherently immoral with sex between consenting parties, e.g. "if I trick with some guy...I don't believe God has a problem with that."

However, Jim then proceeded to clarify that he believed God would “rather,” and that he himself would “rather do that with someone [he] cared about,” thus implying that there might be more and less emotionally healthy sexual expressions. Jim then developed several different healthy versus unhealthy sexual behavior scenarios, and again stated that it would not be having sex itself, but his motivation for engaging in it, his emotional status, and so forth, that are of primary concern to him. Thus, both John in (7.33) and Jim in (7.34) illustrate the development of an alternate set of terministic screens with respect to their current sexual ethic metanarrative—screens which involve a displacement of the old rubric of “moral” versus “immoral” and a shift to a rubric primarily involving an evaluation of more or less “healthy” expressions of sexual behavior.

Finally, Anne represented the most open view with respect to ethically acceptable expressions of sexuality, and it should be clarified that Anne’s was the only view amongst the ex-ex-gay data that was open to this degree (recall that Anne had reached a “post-Christian” spiritual resolution (cf. (7.17))). Anne and her former husband had briefly explored polyamory, or multiple partnerships, such as bringing a third person into their relationship, as a solution to the sexual dissatisfaction they were experiencing in their marriage. However, after investigating this option, Anne reported that both she and her husband concluded that they were not “poly people”; rather, they were both really “monogamous” and needed to be with only one person. Anne then described the congenial and mutually agreed upon dissolution of the marriage, stating that she came to realize that she “had always really loved women” and had been going through “a denial process” most of her life. As a result of the polyamory experience, however, Anne stated that she had come to a “much broader” stance with respect to sexual ethics, as in (7.35).

(7.35) Anne: I still don’t believe that you probably should be having sex with children, um, but I’m-I’m probably much broader than I’ve ever been in my life with having come through the polyamorous little thing, and realizing there are

whole groups of people out there that, you know, live together, sleep together uh in homes, and there are people out there who are heavily involved in the swinger community, uh, and they feel pretty good about what they're doing. It's consensual adults doing what they want to do, um, I'm sure that, you know, there are things that get off into the really weird, deep things, uh, and as long as it's not hurting someone and everyone's consenting, I think it's fine.

Thus, as (7.35) above shows, Anne's beliefs now delimited the boundaries of ethically acceptable sexual expressions by all of the participants being of adult age, consenting, and that the activities did not involve "hurting someone." Again, Anne's resolution is presented here not as characteristic, but rather to represent the diversity and breadth of the spectrum with regard to these issues among the participants in this study.

To conclude, there were other beliefs and resolutions with respect to systems of sexual ethics among the ex-ex-gay individuals in my study; however, most of these were in terms of degrees of difference from or variations on the most common themes presented here. Thus, this section serves to illustrate that achieving a new sexual morality metanarrative is an important part of many ex-ex-gay journeys and exemplifies some of the most common types of ethical belief systems that had emerged from the move away from the ex-gay evangelical metanarrative.

7.5 BELIEFS ABOUT IDENTITY

Obviously, from the discussion of ex-ex-gay beliefs so far, regardless of the spiritual resolution, most ex-ex-gays assume gay or lesbian identity to be an integral and unchangeable part of the true self. For those individuals reaching a gay Christian resolution, they have reconciled (or are in the process of reconciling) a gay identity with a Christian identity. Therefore, with respect to homosexuality, discussions of the "old" and "new" self, as in the ex-gay worldview (cf. chapter 5.6), simply no longer apply. As previously stated, in gay Christian beliefs, homosexuality is viewed as neither sinful nor

in need of healing; rather, homosexuality is seen as variation that is intended by God, as in (7.36).

(7.36) Alex: I went and I enjoyed it <i.e. gay-affirming church>, but I had a hard time inside reconciling that this was really even possible to be gay and Christian. I mean, I heard it all the time at church, but I wasn't to the point where I believed it yet. Um, and I, you know, had to do a lot of, a lot of Bible study and a lot of healing, a-to finally start to realize that the way God's people are isn't always a reflection on the way God is. And that's, you know, began a really **long process of trying to reconcile and accept that there was a reason why God never changed me. And that reason was that God doesn't answer prayers that are contrary to His will. And by me continuing to demand that God do something that was, I, as I learned later, not in His will, um, and I ca-ca-, kind of came to realize that it wasn't God that had made the mistake. That it was my wanting to change something that God had intended.**

In (7.36) above, Alex discussed his coming to a gay Christian identity resolution as he spiritually searched and attended a gay-affirming congregation. He described a process of coming to “accept that there was a reason why God never changed [him],” and proceeded to give a typical Christian theological reason, which was that “God doesn't answer prayers that are contrary to His will.” Alex then claimed that he had been “wanting to change something that God had intended,” and in later exchanges directly referred to “God creating people to be gay.” In so doing, Alex reclaimed both the terms and the validation of the ex-gay evangelical concept of “created intent” to affirm his view of homosexuality as a God-given human trait and his own identity as a gay person.

7.6 SILENCE OF “THE ENEMY”

For the sake of parallelism with chapter 5.7, I simply note here that in contrast with the ex-gay narratives I collected, all of which included at least some reference, and many included significant reference, to Satan as an active force of evil, Satan was not mentioned in most of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected. This contrast is not to say whether or not the ex-ex-gays in my study continued to believe in Satan or not, as it

honestly never occurred to me to ask a question with respect to individuals' beliefs about evil or "the devil." However, after collecting and reviewing all of the interviews from both groups, the contrast between such a high rate of frequency of appearance in the ex-gay narratives versus such a low one in the ex-ex-gay narratives became striking.

Presumably, the closer the spiritual metanarrative remains to evangelical Christianity, the more Satan will remain part of the possible scheme of characters in the play of the life narrative of the ex-ex-gay individual. Dee, who described herself as a "fundamentalist gay Christian," had the highest number of references out of all the narratives, with six mentions of "Satan" or "the devil" in the course of a four-and-a-half hour interview. Jim's narrative and interview contained one reference to "the evil one," stating somewhat humorously and sarcastically, "I don't feel like I've been given over to the evil one." Mark, who had reached an agnostic resolution, referred to "the devil" once in his narrative, but this occurred in a sarcastic reference to evangelical belief, as in (7.37) below.

(7.37) Mark: You know, this, and, of course, you know, the-the other lock-in <laughing>, the other bungee cord they tie on you is that if you leave here, you're in outer darkness – if you leave this system of beliefs, then you're in outer darkness, and the devil's going to get you, and, you know, there's no place else to go.

However, apart from a few instances like the above, by far the majority of the gay Christian narratives I collected contained no mention of Satan. For individuals retaining a Christian affiliation, a possible reason for this absence could be due to variation among the different denominations within Christianity with respect to both the manner in which and frequency with which they tend to speak of "the devil." Additionally, because gay Christian individuals have disassociated homosexuality from a "struggle against sin," Satan would no longer have the role of "tempter" or "deceiver" that he plays in ex-gay

life narratives. However, I have no way of truly assessing the source of this difference, and again, I mention it here simply to denote the contrast.

7.7 PERCEPTIONS OF EX-GAY MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

With respect to ex-ex-gay individuals' perceptions of their experience in ex-gay ministries, there is a predictable unanimous consensus that their ministry involvement did not lead to a change with respect to their experience of same-sex attraction and hence what most had come to view as their intrinsic sexual orientation. Thus, most ex-ex-gays reported that they associated their ministry experience with a repression of their "true self" and sexuality. Apart from this consensus, however, there was a diversity of opinion with respect to the ex-gay experience as a whole. Obviously, the individuals in my study had a wide array of different experiences as well, as they were participants in different ministries at various places and times and with varying levels of commitment and durations of involvement.

During each of the ex-ex-gay post-narrative interviews, I asked individuals if they saw any positive or negative effects in their lives from their time of ex-gay ministry involvement. I offer a few interview excerpts here simply to illustrate the range of various opinions. To demonstrate the diversity and strength of different views, I begin with (7.38) below, where Ricardo was discussing the division that differing perspectives on ex-gay ministries had brought to the ex-ex-gay dinner group.

(7.38) Ricardo: So e-even in these dinners though, I mean, Alex and I, Alex to me is a lot more militant than I am. Alex and it-it turned out, there, it seemed to me like these dinners kind of divided, that-that Laurent was having, kind of divided there because there's some people that I felt like wanted to have more of a political agenda, and I didn't want to have anything to do with that because I felt like <ministry> had taught me a lot, I owed a lot of, like I said, a lot-I owed a lot to that to that ministry even though I don't I didn't feel, I never saw anybody change. I saw people change their behavior. [...] My impression is he was a super-duper gay activist, and he was really looking to try to discredit the ex-gay ministries.

I felt like the ex-gay ministries had done me an awful lot of good, I didn't-I didn't understand anything about God's grace before I went there, and I learned an awful lot about God's grace there. I, and God's unconditional love for us, um, God, I mean, I realized I was transferring, you now, projecting a lot of the coldness and the conditional love of my father onto God, and I felt like I was able to s-split that apart, at least start to, it wasn't completely that way, but starting to split that off, and so <ministry>-and I met all these super people at <ministry>, too, some really great people--I met Frank and Jim and David, uh and a lot of other people too, thousands of other people, they were really great people, they were really trying to improve themselves.

Thus, as (7.38) shows, Ricardo "didn't want to have anything to do with" a "political agenda" or trying to "discredit" the ex-gay ministries. While he claimed that he hadn't seen people "change" their "orientation" (cf. 7.27), he stated that he was grateful for the ministry because he had reaped spiritual benefits from it.

In (7.39), Elaine discussed her perceptions of her involvement with the ex-gay ministry. Elaine represented one of the strongest negative evaluations in my data, stating that it was "very, very damaging emotionally" and that one of the main benefits she derived from it was that it helped her "come to terms with [her]self as being gay."

(7.39) AP: Do you see things that were positive that came out of your experience in the ex-gay ministry?

Elaine: Well, the one positive that really jumps out at me is that it helped me come to terms with myself as being gay <laughing>. I'm sure that wasn't their intent, but, um, uh, I could finally be myself. I-I could say, "This is who I am. Um, I have issues with, I really am attracted to women." And all the other women were there, were the same way, and the men were attracted to men, and they talked about that, and nobody batted an eye, and it was very, very liberating for me. It's the first time in my life I felt like I was accepted, you know, for completely who I was. So it felt really good.

AP: And, um, OK, and h-, and you mentioned some of the negatives, but, I mean, w-, how, how were the ways that you would say that it, it was hurtful or the negative things from coming out from that?

Elaine: Well, it was very, very damaging emotionally for me. Um, I felt ostracized, I felt stabbed in the back. You know, people were, uh, talking about me behind my back, when I asked them to keep confidences, particularly with

<female ministry leader>. Um, went into the hospital, got stabbed in the back, so to speak, um, you know, kicked out, without anybody telling me. They didn't even have the courtesy to talk to me personally. They, they had it relayed f-, through second parties. Um, so I felt like I wasn't respected at all, I wasn't understood. Um, I'm glad that they recommended I get into therapy, that saved my life. Uh, and that was a very good thing. And I really enjoyed some of the people that I met there.

In (7.40), Dana claimed that she had learned a lot and received “growth” and “healing” and stated that though the year was “very difficult,” she was “grateful for the experience.” Thus, while she claimed to have received no benefit with respect to “trying to not be gay,” she did list good things she saw as resulting from her time in the ministry.

(7.40) Dana: It was just s-, still a very difficult year, and, um, uh, I would never want to repeat that. Um, but, uh, eh, I grew a lot. I, I had some healing of some, uh, past issues of, uh, one issue, one experience of s-, uh, sexual abuse, um, you know, that God did really a wonderful, uh, work of healing in my life. Um, I learned how to deal with my emotions, and I had quite a problem with anger, and God really helped me work that out, um, so that I could really start to develop some intimate relationships and some good friendships without, um, <sigh> keeping people at bay with my anger. Um, uh, so, you know, like I said, a l-, uh, there was just a lot of good stuff that came out of that, and, um, it saddens me that so many people who have been in ex-gay ministries and then left and are now identified as gay, um, are still kind of in that, you know, us versus them kind of thing, and, um, uh, so m-, so many good things came out of my experience. It was, you know, I learned how to worship God. I learned how to really have intimacy, uh, with Jesus <sigh>. I've learned how to listen for God's voice. Um, I learned how to, um, read the Bible and, uh, see how i-, i-, it might speak to me, although even that has been much more of a recent thing. Um, I still didn't get that much into Bible study during that time. Um <pause>, learned how to relate to, to men a lot better, to where, uh, I became more comfortable with men – still not attracted to them, but more comfortable, instead of just seeing them as like the enemy <laugh>. Um, you know, I really did a lot of growing, and so I'm really, um, very, very grateful for that time and for that experience, and I, and I know for myself personally that, um, you know, I had to go through that experience of doing whatever it took to try to, um, not be gay, you know. [...] Um <sigh>, you know, and, and I'm at peace with that, but, um, I could never learn that, if I hadn't even learned who God was and learned to have a relationship with God and learned to be intimate and trust, you know, God to <sigh>, to work in my life and healing, heal areas of my life, and to lead me, you know, in different ways. I never would have learned how to do that, if, um, well, maybe I would have learned eventually, but, uh, being part of the <ministry> group and a part of the <name> Church is where I really learned the basics of that, and so, uh, so I'm

really grateful, you know, for that whole experience. Um, yeah, so <sigh>, let's see.

AP: Do you see any negative things that came out of your experience there?

Dana: Um <pause>, well <pause>, there's negative stuff, but whether or not it's of my own making or <pause>, I mean I, I think there's a lot of things that people in ex-gay ministries do that are misguided, but, still, I think everyone is responsible for making their own choices about how they respond to people and how they respond to <sigh> <pause>, to God and to, you know, different things like that.

A final example comes from Frank, who in (7.41) described mixed emotions and thoughts about his ministry experience, stating that he was “still recuperating” and at times is “angry.” Thus, Frank concluded with his perception that there is both “a lot of good” and “some damage” that comes out of the ex-gay experience.

(7.41) Frank: <Ministry name>? I think I'm still recuperating. I mean, uh, I don't think it hurt me necessarily, it really gave me a deeper love for God, and deeper understanding of His acceptance, uh, but I'm still recuperating from having to shut all my emotions up and not allow them to allow me to express love for Ricardo, or saying, I'm struggling with jealousy about this other person, uh, it just shuts me down, it desensitizes me to having emotions. And I feel like there is a euphoric feeling in the ex-gay thing because I was being loved and I was being accepted and God was really great and good. And I know He is great and good now, but I'm kinda angry that I lost a lot of years of my life that I couldn't be happy with who I was. <laughs> You know, you can never get back those years and you kinda go “Damn, I could have had fun, I could have gone out dancing <laugh> I could've,” you know, “I could have done stuff and not felt guilty about it. So, there's a lot of anger and resentment, and probably there's some of that on God, “Why didn't you help me see that was okay?” [...] I think there is a lot of good that comes out of it, but there is some damage too, I know a lot of people come away angry because it doesn't work. And I feel sorry for them because they are concentrating on the part it doesn't work rather than the great aspect you had in it. A better knowledge of God, and of having experienced His love. I don't have negative connotations. I just, I think I desire for those people just to come to a better relationship with God, and let God talk to their heart.

7.8 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to outline the new or modified ex-ex-gay spiritual metanarratives represented among the ex-ex-gay individuals in this study,

particularly as contrasted with the previously held ex-gay evangelical metanarrative. While the ex-ex-gay metanarratives represent a diverse spectrum of beliefs, they uniformly make possible a simultaneous narration of an actively embraced homosexual identity within the individual life narrative that was precluded in the formerly held worldview. Therefore, just as for ex-gays, the metanarrative provides, and therefore is crucial to understanding, the tropes and the terms used to create a coherent sense of a sexual and spiritual self in the individual life narratives of ex-ex-gays. In the next chapter (8), I demonstrate the employment of some of the most common of these changing tropes and terms in ex-ex-gay narratives.

Chapter 8: Transforming terms in ex-ex-gay discourse

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in chapter 4, the adoption of new terministic screens for the understanding of homosexuality and spirituality is an important part of the process involved in an ex-gay identity transformation, as acquiring such provides the language to tell the transformation story. Relatedly, chapter 5 demonstrated that it is ultimately the ex-gay evangelical metanarrative that both provides these terms and governs their employment in shaping the individual life narratives of ex-gays. For ex-ex-gays, chapter 7 established that they clearly maintain an overarching metanarrative, but one that differs in various degrees from the ex-gay evangelical metanarrative they previously held. Accordingly, most ex-ex-gays go through a journey of seeking out new understandings of the self, sexuality, and religious beliefs that leads to a new or modified metanarrative, which provides the possible framework for alternate personal life narrations. Thus, as was true for the previous ex-gay identity, the acquisition of new terministic screens is crucial to narrating a new *non-ex-gay* identity, as the changed metanarrative belief system provides new terms and creates new narrative possibilities that for most individuals can simultaneously accommodate both gay and religious identity.

Not surprisingly, as chapter 7 has shown, many of these new terms and beliefs represent understandings that are in some ways the antonymic correlates of the formerly held ex-gay worldview. In my study, as the ex-ex-gay individuals narrated their lives, they frequently referenced old ex-gay understandings and terms as they reported on the transformation of their beliefs and appropriated the corresponding new meanings and terms of discourse. Such references to the former worldview index the fact that ex-ex-gays are negotiating a narrative of multiple, changing stages of self-identification and of

the transformation of their understandings with respect to both spirituality and sexuality. While chapter 7 clearly demonstrated the primary tropes and terminological transformations that result from the changing metanarrative, in this chapter, I will briefly highlight examples of how these new terministic screens are employed in ex-ex-gay narratives. This discussion will foreshadow chapter 9, where the genre and structure of the ex-ex-gay narratives will be shown to have changed and emerged from the new metanarrative framework.

8.2 TRANSFORMING TERMINISTIC SCREENS

As discussed in Chapter 7, coming to view homosexuality as morally legitimate is one of the primary transformations of understanding reached (or being reached) by the ex-ex-gays in my study, and was almost universally agreed upon (with the exception of one interviewee). Consequently, with the moral status of same-sex relationships no longer in question, ex-ex-gay individuals then considered themselves able to narrate their identities as gay or lesbian without the previously held moral stigma or disapprobation. As a result, homosexuality came to be viewed by most of the ex-ex-gays in my study as an innate, God-given aspect of the self. For example, recall the example of Alex's reclaiming both the terms "created" and "intended" as applied to what he later referred to as his "sexual and affectional orientation" (cf. Section 7.5, excerpt 7.36).

Accordingly, many of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected evidenced a processual transformation of both understandings and terms, as individuals described their changing beliefs and views of homosexuality as going from seeing it as a "sin" to be resisted to seeing it as something intended by God. Ricardo discussed his emerging view of homosexuality in (8.1) below, in response to a question of what his perspective was on homosexuality with respect to behavior and identity.

(8.1) Ricardo: It wasn't behavior. Well, to me it was a sin. **OK, it started out, it was a sin**, and-and, you know, **it was a sinful act**, it was-it was rebellion against God every time I did it. And I could never really get the connection, how is this rebellion against God? I mean, I guess I-I thought I was rebelling against God because I wanted to do things my way. God's perfect will for me was not to have sex with guys, or a emotionally dependent relationship with guys either, um, but it was a, um, so that's how it started out. And-and then it, well, I mean, and, after a while with Jim and with Frank, the other two were more short-term, **it became a behavior, and, s-, in the last two years, it's become an identity.**

As (8.1) shows, Ricardo discussed the chronological development of his changing understanding of homosexuality. Ricardo stated, "it started out, it was a sin"; thus, his initial view attached moral disapprobation to homosexual actions, with no reference to identity, e.g. "it was a sinful act." Then, Ricardo described how "it became a behavior" during the course of his two consecutive longer-term relationships. Finally, Ricardo stated that, "in the last two years, it's become an identity." This changed perspective was accompanied by an emerging creational view that God had "made [him] this way," as in (8.2).

(8.2) Ricardo: I want to be more authentic. I want to be who God made me to be, and I'm thinking this is, why would God do this? Why would God make me this way? I don't really think it's choices that I made. [...] I used to think that God made me straight, but I don't think so anymore, as far as sexual orientation goes.

The excerpt above shows Ricardo's developing beliefs with respect to the origin of his "sexual orientation," as he stated: "I used to think that God made me straight, but I don't think so anymore." Recall that when directly queried, Ricardo expressed a continued belief that environmental and childhood development factors accounted for the emergence of a particular sexual identity (cf. Section 7.3, excerpt 7.24). Thus, (8.2) evidences a continuing transformation of Ricardo's metanarrative understanding of sexuality, one that was occurring in tandem with his own identification with homosexuality, no longer viewing it as a "sinful act," but rather what he understood to be part of the identity of his "true self," as he expressed at other junctures in the interview.

Note also that Ricardo's language placed ultimate agency behind, and therefore responsibility for, his sexuality to God as his creator, e.g. "Why would God make me this way?" and "I don't really think it's choices that I made."

In many of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected, individuals described a changing viewpoint similar to Ricardo's above, and then proceeded to describe a further transformation where they came to view their "sexual orientation" as a "gift" from God that was to be "embraced," "received," and "treasured." This kind of narrative development is reflective of many prominent gay Christian apologetics and testimonies, such as those by MCC's founding pastor Troy Perry (1972; 1990) and prominent gay Christian leader Mel White (1994). Frank described coming to this new place of understanding through his attendance at the ex-ex-gay discussion group, as in excerpt (8.3) below.

(8.3) AP: With that group, like, you were working out the conflict or what purpose did it serve for you?

Frank: That's what I thought it was going to be. Working out what's acceptable and what's not. <laughing> Because I kind of wanted to have the clear cut things and be able to cast stones⁷³ at the other people. **Um, but it was really more understanding that it's, one of the leader's said that it's, it's a gift. Not to look at it as a liability, but as a gift. Something that God has given to you.** And I think that kind of melded with some things that were going in my mind. That, um, to whom much is given, much is required.⁷⁴ And God has given an awful lot of grace, and because we're rejected by a lot of the world, it requires a lot of grace to love them back and to accept them and try and hold them to better understanding of what's going on, just kind of a message of mercy. Does that make any sense?

⁷³ "Cast stones" is a Biblical allusion to the Old Testament law requiring stoning for certain offenses, and Jesus' words to the Pharisees regarding the woman caught in adultery in John 8:7—Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. (NASB)

⁷⁴ Luke 12:48—...And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required... (NASB)

AP: Uh-huh. **In terms of you look at homosexuality or your sexual orientation as a gift?**

Frank: **Uh-huh Not a liability and shame on you.**

Thus, as (8.3) shows, Frank described initially attending the ex-ex-gay group in order to “work out what’s acceptable and what’s not,” in terms of a moral system. However, he stated that what ended up being more important was the transformation of his understanding of homosexuality from that of a “liability” to a “gift” and “something that God has given you.” Frank also located the agency behind homosexuality in God as the “giver” of the “gift” and “an awful lot of grace,” and he then described one’s own personal agency as being “required” to respond to the “much that has been given” with “love” and “grace” toward those who reject homosexuality and to try to present them with a “message of mercy.” All of these phrases, too, are evangelical Christian metaphors and allusions, as well as being metaphors of spirituality more broadly.

In one of several extra-interview discussions, Mark used phrases such as “this language journey” to describe his process, and in that context he specifically referred to acquiring “the ‘gift’ language” and the huge perspective shift it represented after he had so long described homosexuality only in “negative terms.” (Mark had attended the same ex-ex-gay group that Frank had.) Dee’s narrative provides a final illustration of the “sin” to “gift” transformation, and I include longer excerpts from her story to demonstrate more fully an example of the narrated process and progression of these changing understandings and terms.

First, in (8.4a), Dee discussed her initial resistance to taking on the label “gay” due to her traditional evangelical beliefs that associated homosexuality with “sin.”

(8.4a) Dee: I still insisted on the fact that I’m not gay, I just happen to love a woman.

AP: Ok, so you didn’t want to take that label on.

Dee: Huhn-uhn, huhn-uhn, didn't want to do it.

AP: So what was your understanding, like you said that you went to this um person at the school because you felt guilty, so what'd you feel guilty about?

Dee: Oh, I felt guilty because I knew that that was wrong. I knew homosexuality was <pause> Romans 1,⁷⁵ hello!, you know, it's right there! <laugh> So, yeah [...] But I, but I still didn't admit it, I mean, it was like, "No, this is wrong; this is sin," it was just like all the other sins that I'd committed all my life, you know, you return, you repent from it, you turn from it, you don't do it anymore, you know, kind of thing, you're not gay. If you're gay, than that means you, like, live in sin, you know, God forbid, you can't do that, so, you know, that kind of thing.

As the above excerpt shows, Dee stated that due to her understanding of the Bible at that time, she believed homosexuality was "wrong." Therefore, she did not want to "admit it" or take on the label "gay." Excerpt (8.4b) represents a seamless continuation of (8.4a), where Dee began telling the story of how her conception of homosexuality began to change and when she began to "come out" and "embrace it."

(8.4b) Dee: So, so coming out, see I can, <pause> Okay, there's two different terms for coming out, okay, one is your first sexual experience, and that's what some people say, you know, "Well, when did you come out?" "Well, I came out when I was five, well, I came out when I was twelve," you know, whatever, because that-that's kind of like a nice term for <laugh> "When did you first have sex with a person of the same sex?" Ok? **But then there's coming out where you embrace it, you own it yourself, you-it-it doesn't really have that much to do with the sexual act, it has to do with who you are inside, and um that happened when I came to this church** <i.e. an MCC fellowship> after I left Sam's dad, or right before I did, actually I was still with him, and I came here and I talked to two of the ministers that were here, a male and a female, at the same time, and um they aren't here anymore, but they were, Joe Smith and Jane Jones. Jane Jones has her own church in <city> now, <name of church>. She probably got a lot of ex-gays there, too, you need to go there.

AP: Ok.

Dee: <name of church>, that's the name of it; I'll find the number for you. Um, anyway, um, and **I remember then, I will never forget it as long as I live, I didn't embrace it at that moment, but it started me on a journey uh to where I am now and that is, if I never had sex with another person again in my**

⁷⁵ Dee was referring to Romans 1:26-27 (cf. discussion in footnote 32, chapter 5).

entire life, I would still be gay. Who you have sex with does not make you gay. I went, “Oh, now that’s new,” and, okay, because I think a lot of the thing about the gay lifestyle, as soon as someone hears “gay,” they think of two men together, you know, well when you hear straight do you think of two—a man and a woman together inside having sex? No, you don’t think of that, but that’s what you think of when it’s gay. [...]

AP: So just so I, in case we don’t get back to that, so you said, you know, “gay” is not who you have sex with, so what did that journey of definition of “gay,” what did that lead you to?

Dee: **To um, to realize that, um, my feelings inside, um, were going to be there whether I stayed married to this man or whether I didn’t.** And then I could, so I could choose to stay married to this man and be miserable all the time, because it’s like trying to fit a-a, you know, square peg in a round hole. You know, just <makes onomatopoeic rusty screw noise several times> keep on trying and trying, and it just never does fit. Or um, **start to uh, you know, make plans and-and look at, you know, coming out of that marriage and-and uh, you know, living more true to myself instead of trying to pretend, ‘cause I mean, golly, I would always be attracted to women.**

As excerpt (8.4b) shows, Dee distinguished between two different types of “coming out”—namely, “coming out” that serves as a metaphor for a person’s first sexual experience with someone of the same sex versus “coming out” with respect to one’s own personal identity, which Dee described as reaching the place “where you embrace it, you own it yourself.” Thus, Dee made a distinction between the recognition of homosexuality with respect to sexual behavior or “the sexual act” and the recognition of homosexuality “that has to do with who you are inside” and stated that her “coming out” had begun when she started attending the MCC.

Dee then described how she had sought pastoral counsel regarding her continued same-sex attractions while being married and told of a powerful moment that introduced a major potential belief and life change. Specifically, Dee was counseled that, regardless of actual sexual behavior, due to her same-sex attractions, she was and would remain homosexual in her identity. Dee stated, “I didn’t embrace it at that moment, but it started me on a journey to where I am now and that is, if I never had sex with another person

again in my entire life, I would still be gay.” Hence, the “journey” had led Dee to her current belief (i.e. “where I am now”) that she was constitutionally “gay” in her sexual identity, and that this identity would not change and the “feelings inside would be there” no matter what she did externally. As a result, Dee described planning to leave her marriage and begin “living more true to [her]self instead of trying to pretend,” because she stated that she would “always be attracted to women.”

(8.5) Dee: In March of last year, um, **as I started to embrace my sexuality and my spirituality** and actually write about it my journal, because up to that point the struggle was a private struggle, um every once in a while, I’d share it, but you know, with Karen or something but not very much ‘cause it scared the hell out of her, and so she, um so –so I would struggle, I would definitely struggle. And what I would do is I would pull away from her and not-and uh, not, you know, not be, uh, you know, rejecting of um, you kn-any sexual advances, but just, you know, I mean, I’d want to be close, but we can’t do that, you know, kind of a thing, but I wouldn’t say that, it would just be in my mind.

AP: And still from the thought that this is Biblically wrong?

Dee: Mm-hmm, I can’t deal with the guilt. [...]

I was starting to em-write about it in my journal, you know, I never, I mean it was like so private that I wouldn’t even write about it in my journal. It was like, I can’t-I can’t put it on paper, I can’t um—it can’t be concrete, it has to be just feelings, just you know, kind of a few thoughts here and there, but more just a feeling, just a, um, a sense, um, a pervading sense of um, see if I brought my journal it was there, it-I wrote it uh-of um, unworthiness and, you know, that kind of stuff, just pervading, you know. **Um and so as I was, you know, getting a clearer picture and really beginning to internalize the truth that my sexuality and my spirituality, right here, and um, you know, I would say the words, “God uh, God created me gay,” you know, I would say those words,** but the private struggle was still there and I thought, well I’d been reading the M-Message and I thought, I’m just going to read it, I’m just going to read Romans.⁷⁶

Excerpt (8.5) represents a segment of talk that comes a bit later in Dee’s narrative.

As the earlier excerpts just showed, Dee had “come out” in terms of “embracing” her sexual identity as “gay”; however, in this excerpt, she stated that she had continued to

⁷⁶ The continuing portion of Dee’s narrative from this point is discussed in chapter 9, section 9.4.1 (excerpt (9.37)) to exemplify the transformation of textual understandings in gay Christian narratives.

“struggle” and experience “guilt” with respect to her Christian beliefs. Dee said that in March of the last year, she had “started to embrace [her] sexuality and [her] spirituality.” Dee described this process as beginning with “just feelings” and “a few thoughts” and becoming able to “write about it in [her] journal,” because before such an action would have been too “concrete.” Dee then told of how she began to “internalize the truth about [her] sexuality and spirituality,” stating, “I would say the words, ‘God created me gay.’” Thus, Dee was appropriating the language and therefore moral sanction of “created intent” from her Christian belief system with respect to her new and emerging beliefs about her sexuality. Dee then related that her changing understanding had ultimately culminated in viewing her sexuality as a “gift,” as in (8.6) below.

(8.6) AP: So all those years in the past, would you say that you were just denying your true self?

Dee: Mm-hmm.

AP: I mean, I don’t want to put words in your mouth.

Dee: Oh yeah, yes, yes, I was. I mean well, that’s obvious, I mean look at all the things that I did and, you know, **going in and out and back and forth and all the struggles**, I mean it’s like now, um, **over the last, you know, year or so probably, um, I’ve been able to not only accept it in myself, but actually, ready for this? Receive it from God as a gift.**

AP: Receive your?

Dee: **My sexuality from God as a gift. Not as, “Okay, I finally accept this thing that’s really unacceptable,” but rather, “Wow! You gave this to me as a gift, it’s precious, and I’m going to hold it and treasure it and love it,” you know, and treat it as a wonderful thing and not this awful thing that, you know, has to be dealt with and struggled with and felt guilty over and, you know, all that kind of stuff, but-but recognize it and re-and actually receive it.** I mean I-I got more to go, I uh-there’s no question in my mind that there’s more to go, but I actually, after-in that spiritual marker time, **I actually wrote in my journal that I received it, I was receiving it, holding my hands out and receiving it as a gift.**

In excerpt (8.6), Dee had just finished describing her final resolution in terms of what she understood the Bible's stance to be on homosexuality, which she came to believe did not condemn exclusive, committed partnerships like the one she shared with Karen (cf. (9.37)). As a follow-up question, cueing off of Dee's earlier language with respect to "living more true to [her]self," I asked Dee if she would say that her past experience had been one of simply denying her "true self." Dee emphatically claimed that such was the case, and referred to "all the things [she] did...going in and out and back and forth and all the struggles." Dee then went on to describe a further transformation in her thinking in the past year. Namely, she told of moving from a position of being able to "accept it in [her]self" (i.e. homosexuality), and then in the slow-revelation style of setting up a punch line or surprise ending, Dee stated, "Ready for this? Receive it from God as a gift."

Dee then elaborated on this change in her thinking by contrasting it with her old belief system and indexing her past feelings and experiences; hence, Dee opposed terms such as "unacceptable" with "gift" and "precious," and contrasted "wonderful thing" with "awful thing," claiming that her sexuality was a "gift from God" and not something to be "dealt with and struggled with and felt guilty over." Thus, Dee's story represents stage-by-stage the transformation of the terministic screens through which the individual life is narrated as the metanarrative beliefs about both sexuality and spirituality change—specifically here, the transformation of homosexuality from being viewed as "sin" to being viewed as "gift."

The discussion of Dee's narrative above also serves to foreshadow the primary narrative genre and structure of most ex-ex-gay narratives, that is, the genre and structure of a coming out narrative. First, Dee's explicit description of two kinds of coming out, one being where a person owns and embraces homosexuality as "something on the

inside” (cf. 8.4b) as an intrinsic part of his or her identity, places her story within this genre and fits a commonly accepted definition of “coming out.” For instance, Liang (1997) defined coming out stories as narrative accounts of realizing same-sex attraction and accepting gay or lesbian identity and stated that the acceptance was as crucial as the recognition. Second, the way Dee presented her “journey” of both metanarrative and hence individual narrative terminological transformation embodies fully Bacon’s (1998:3) descriptive claim about coming out narratives “as stories which ‘make the recognition of identity the victorious product of a struggle with the self,’ (Roof, 1996) or which ‘come to realize something that has always been true’ (Wittig, 1992).”

Third, as Chirrey (2003) has noted, Barrett (2002), Harvey (1997), Liang (1997) and others have described coming out as a linguistic performative or speech act. According to Liang, coming out stories involve an initial stage of “coming out to the self” and then are part of a process of continually naming the self “homosexual” to establish and continually reiterate gay identity. This self-naming process of “coming out” is said to be “a speech act that not only describes a state of affairs, namely the speaker’s gayness, but also brings those affairs, a new gay self, into being (1997:293). Chirrey investigated this connection further, in part by focusing on the crucial component actual *verbalization* of gay identity through an illocutionary act played in “coming out” and gay experience. Therefore, Dee’s story is clearly linked to the speech act aspect of work on “coming out” stories through her descriptive emphasis on “actually say[ing] the words, ‘God created me gay’” as a crucial act of verbalization leading to her acceptance of gay identity.

However, as Dee’s struggle with homosexuality was primarily based in her religious convictions, it must be pointed out again that for Dee, this verbalization was inextricably connected to her spiritual metanarrative. Thus, in contrast to a typical

coming out declarative with a singular proposition, such as, “I am gay,” Dee’s transformative moment was the spoken fusion of both her homosexuality and spirituality, at once claiming “gay” both as an aspect of her state of being and also one with divine sanction due to originating from divine agency: “God created me gay.” This act of articulation is also reminiscent of the language ideology discussion in chapter 6 in terms of the power of speaking a verbal confession in evangelical Christian understandings. Similar to many of the ex-gay narratives, Dee was also practicing and employing the constitutive power of language by repeating such statements.

Concerning the discussions on ex-gay identity formation in chapter 3, the continued repetition of naming the self “gay” can be seen as the undoing of the “unnaming” process that took place through the deconstruction of the coterminous relationship between “homosexual” and the self. Dee explicitly stated that she began to “internalize the truth about [her] sexuality and [her] spirituality” as a precursor to her external verbalization. Recalling narrative therapy, this internalization would be an example of an “internalizing conversation” (Monk et al., 1997:303), one in which homosexuality is constructed as an integral, intrinsic, and immutable part of the self. However, in contrast to prior ex-gay formulations and due to the deproblematized nature of homosexuality in Dee’s current understanding, this internalization is no longer to be resisted, but embraced and repeatedly enacted, as she now viewed such as accepting a “wonderful” aspect of her personality rather than some “awful thing.” In conclusion, Dee’s narrative demonstrates many aspects of the ex-ex-gay identity process, which most often results in a “coming out” story that represents a parallel counter-journey to the ex-gay identity process.

Finally, Anne's narrative provides a salient reference to "coming out" as a speech act to which the verbal act of declaration to the self and others is a crucial component, as in (8.7).

(8.7) AP: Um, so do you see any negative effects like p-,do, that you carry from being involved in the ex-gay ministry?

Anne: Um I'm sure it comes up, but you know um I think I-I don't know um I haven't, that doesn't mean I won't, but I haven't so far. Um, I think when I finally came through with the push when I was actually looking and realizing that I really loved women, and that I'd always really loved women, and that I-in many ways, I had been going through a denial process most of my life, uh, and that I wasn't going to do it anymore, and that **I was going to experience it, and I was going to feel good about experiencing it, and-and not feel bad about who I was and that this is who I was, and that I'd been denying the full me most of my life, and um, I think in making those kind of proclamations and making it very, being very open with other people and really coming out to everyone, it kind of stepped on that um, and I don't find myself really battling much at all actually.**

As (8.7) above shows, Anne described how she had, so far, not seen that she carries any negative effects from her involvement in the ex-gay ministry. Anne stated that upon "realizing that [she] had always really loved women," she made "proclamations," such as, "I was going to experience it, and I was going to feel good about experiencing it, and not feel bad about who I was." Anne directly linked her lack of struggle (i.e. "battling") with her former ex-gay worldview and experience with "making those kinds of proclamations" and "really coming out to everyone," which she stated "kind of stepped on that [i.e. ex-gay beliefs and related experience]." Thus, Anne explicitly described her "coming out" as a series of declarative speech acts or "proclamations" that quite literally fulfilled Chirrey's (2003:30) description of the illocutionary force of "coming out," which "intends that the previous status quo be erased and that a new world-view should replace it."

8.3 TRANSFORMING TROPES

The second major change in going from an ex-gay to an ex-ex-gay narrative position to be exemplified in this chapter involves the trope of “the struggle.” Recall that in the ex-gay worldview, a person’s experience of same-sex attraction is not seen as indicative of intrinsic or constitutional homosexuality; rather, the person is brought under a generalized framework that applies to all people, that of “sinner,” with each individual person experiencing unique versions of weaknesses and penchants for wrong desires or wrongdoing as a result. Thus, same-sex desire is viewed as a particular “weakness” and “temptation to sin” that is to be resisted in the life of a believer. As a result, a primary trope in ex-gay narratives is that of dealing with, and to varying degrees, overcoming the “struggle” with homosexuality, and oftentimes individuals within ex-gay ministries refer to themselves and others as “strugglers.” Accordingly, several of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected directly referred to the reversal of this type of narration as a major change. David’s narrative most explicitly discussed this shift, as (8.8) begins to show.

(8.8) AP: Now at that point, since you’re, since you’re saying you want to eliminate your homosexual feelings, I mean, had you, had you named it? I mean, had you said, “OK, I’m gay,” or, or did you just, what did you say – “This is just something I struggle with. I-I don’t want, but were you thinking inside, “I’m really gay”?”

David: **No. I was thinking that I was struggling with it – which today sounds absurd. I mean, it sounds so like a catch phrase, like “Oh, I’m struggling with homosexuality.” I don’t even, I don’t even, I wouldn’t even describe it that way today, but only until, I mean, that’s only been in the last maybe five years that I’ve acknowledged that. To say I struggle with homosexuality – what does that mean? I struggle with gambling, I struggle with, you know, with kleptomania, I mean, it’s not like a social disease. It’s not like a condition that you have to go to, you know, uh, g-, Alcoholics Anonymous for, so it’s, but it’s only been in like the last five years that I’ve been, you know, that I finally have thought, “You know, it’s just the way it is.” And I don’t care anymore about how it was, how it became that way, it’s not, just not relevant. Because I used to spend a lot of time thinking, “Hmm, did it begin because of this?” and “Did it begin because of that?” and it’s just like, uuhhh. It’s**

like I feel like I don't really have the luxury of time to sit wasting, trying to figure out where it all started. It's like, this is the way I am, and, you know, it's between me and God, and if God has a problem with it, then I guess I'll find out, but I kind of feel like He doesn't. I mean, He's got bigger things to worry about than who I feel attracted to.

Excerpt (8.8) above occurred near the beginning of David's narrative. David had just described how he had designed a semester project in which the goal was to "eliminate [his] homosexual feelings" while in an undergraduate psychology course in college, which prompted my question about whether he viewed his same-sex attraction as indicative of a state of being or a "struggle" at that point in his life. David responded that at that time "[he] was thinking [he] was struggling with it." He then immediately followed this response with a temporal shift in narrative perspective by giving an evaluative comment from his present day viewpoint, namely, "which today sounds absurd."

David went on to parody what to him now sounded "so like a catch phrase... 'I'm struggling with homosexuality'" by making comparisons to a "struggle" with "alcohol" and "kleptomania," stating, "it's not like it's a social disease" or "like a condition that you have to go to Alcoholics Anonymous for." Thus, David was directly making fun of and countering one of the common ex-gay metaphors and analogies where a "struggle" with same-sex attraction is likened to a "struggle" with alcohol or other addictions. Here David was also declaring an understanding of homosexuality opposite to the ex-gay worldview that conceives of homosexuality as a "condition" rather than an intrinsic part of the personality, and he marked this viewpoint as a relatively recent change, stating that it was only in the last five years that he finally thought, "It's just the way it is." The second half of David's comments in (8.8) highlights another major ex-ex-gay narrative shift that results in tandem with the embracing of a homosexual identity, but for the sake

of continuity and ease of discussion, I will address the import of those comments after completing the exposition related to the trope of the “struggle.”

Near the end of David’s narrative, I asked him when he began to refer to homosexuality in his life as part of his identity rather than a “struggle,” as in (8.9).

(8.9) AP: So when, when was it that you just stopped saying, you know, it was a struggle, and said, “This is who I am”? Was there a point that you took the label “I’m gay,” and kind of—

David: Yeah, it was probably, it’s probably just been in the last few years. I can’t remember the exact <pause> m-, experience or the exact moment when it happened, but I, but **I’m sure that it was just in the, it’s only recently, I mean, it, it w-, that I felt comfortable not saying that I’m struggling with homosexuality.** Um, you know, the last five years, maybe six years.

AP: So what do you think of the term “ex-gay”?

David: <pause> Well, just on, you know, a really superficial level, I c-, I can’t stand it. I just hate all those terms <laughs>, and I don’t like it that there’s an “ex-ex-gay.” I mean, it’s like, gu-, uh, I don’t know what it means, I, uh, to be ex-gay, because I don’t think you can be, so i-, w-, it, **it’s like a kind of a meaningless word. First of all, there would, there would have to be the acknowledgment that you were gay. I don’t know if you say that if you were always struggling with your homosexuality? You were never actually gay, so how can you call yourself “ex-gay,” when you never believed you were, that it was a struggle, because for me, that’s what it always was. I’m, you know, it, the, like the, the mantra “I’m struggling with homosexuality.” Oh, you know, the – what, i-, g-, it’s like d-, I mean, “struggling” – it sounds like you’re trying to get out of a bag or something. It just doesn’t, it’s, it’s silly, a-, and I’m glad I don’t say it anymore, because it’s d-, it d-, because if I’m indecisive about everything else, about going to heaven and going to, you know, whatever, eh, that’s just, i-, y-, another thing to be indecisive about, y-, you know, so I’m glad I don’t struggle with that term anymore, because I don’t want to struggle with homosexuality <laughs>, so, you know, it’s, it just, it just doesn’t, I don’t like it. But then, I don’t like the ex-ex thing either, so that, you know, that makes it equal.**

As (8.9) shows, David discussed how he had previously only referred to homosexuality in his life as a “struggle,” and reiterated that it had only been in the last five years or so that he “felt comfortable” *not* using the language of “struggling.” With respect to what he thought of the term “ex-gay,” David set up a distinction between what

he saw as having accepted a gay identity, thus seeing oneself as intrinsically “gay,” and the ex-gay narration of refusing such an identity and locating the experience of same-sex attraction in the self-extrinsic realm of “struggle,” thus never seeing one’s self as “gay” in actuality.

David then clearly indexed the “struggle” as a major trope of ex-gay life narratives, referring to it as “the mantra” of “I’m struggling with homosexuality” and stated, “for me, that’s what it always was (i.e. a “struggle”),” and he returned to poking fun at this terminology, stating, “it sounds like you’re trying to get out of a bag” and “it’s silly.” David concluded by expressing that he was glad his speech had changed, (i.e. “I’m glad I don’t say it anymore”), stating that if he was “indecisive about everything else,” such as his eternal destination and “whatever” (i.e. David had claimed indecisiveness through much of his narrative and interview), then homosexuality was “just another thing to be indecisive about.” Thus, in an ironic final turn of phrase, David ended by laughing and saying he was glad he didn’t “struggle with that term anymore,” explicitly referring to language at the lexical level (i.e. “term”), because he didn’t “want to struggle with homosexuality.”

With respect to David’s final comment about not liking the term “ex-ex-gay” either, I asked him about his experience in the ex-ex-gay dinner group. In response to my query, David explained that it was from his experience in the dinner group that he had opened up to ceasing using the “struggle” reference, as in (8.10).

(8.10) David: It was good to be with a group of people who talked about where they were now and where they had come from. And Laurent was a great, Laurent is a great, fair kind of facilitator. And I respect, mm, almost everything that he says that has to do with, you know, who we are, and, you know, w-, who God is in our lives, and, I mean, those kinds of things, I’ve, I really, those were good for me to hear. **And it helped me, I think, to understand also that I could stop referring to it as a struggle with homosexuality, that it was, you know, that i-, it could be just the way it is, and that that’s okay.** So in that respect, it was, it was good.

As (8.10) shows, David stated that it was through his involvement in the ex-ex-gay group that he was “helped to understand that [he] could stop referring it as a struggle with homosexuality”; rather, “it could be just the way it is, and that that’s okay.” Thus, just as David’s involvement in traditional evangelical beliefs and the ex-gay ministry had shaped his experience and thus the language of his life narrative into one of resisting and “struggling” against homosexuality, so his involvement in the ex-ex-gay group had offered him a new way of narrating his life apart from the terministic screen of “struggle” so applied.

I return now to the second-half of David’s comments in (8.8) to elaborate on a secondary shift in narrative trajectory as compared with ex-gay narratives, repeated here as (8.11) for ease of reference.

(8.11) David: ...but it’s only been in like the last five years that I’ve been, you know, that **I finally have thought, “You know, it’s just the way it is.” And I don’t care anymore about how it was, how it became that way, it’s not, just not relevant. Because I used to spend a lot of time thinking, “Hmm, did it begin because of this?” and “Did it begin because of that?” and it’s just like, uuhhh. It’s like I feel like I don’t really have the luxury of time to sit wasting, trying to figure out where it all started. It’s like, this is the way I am, and, you know, it’s between me and God, and if God has a problem with it, then I guess I’ll find out, but I kind of feel like He doesn’t. I mean, He’s got bigger things to worry about than who I feel attracted to.**

As the excerpt in (8.11) shows, after David stated that he no longer viewed homosexuality as something with which he “struggles”— at that time, he had come to think, “it’s just the way it is”—he seamlessly continued and connected this shift with ceasing to question or be concerned with the ultimate origin of his same-sex attractions, stating, “I don’t care anymore about how it was, how it became that way.” David then referenced that he “used to spend a lot of time” thinking about the possible scenarios that would account for the emergence of homosexuality in his life, and stated that now, he no

longer felt he had “the luxury of time to sit wasting, trying to figure out where it all started.”

David’s lack of concern with the etiology of same-sex attraction represents another shift from typical ex-gay narratives. Specifically, because homosexuality is problematized in the ex-gay worldview, being seen as a “condition” resulting from “sin” and “brokenness” rather than an “innate” or “divinely intended” personal trait, ex-gay individuals most often include a significant narrative component describing what they understand to be the etiological causes behind the development of their same-sex attractions. Thus, David’s resolution of deproblematizing homosexuality with respect to both himself and God, (i.e. “if He has a problem with it, I guess I’ll find out, but I kind of feel like He doesn’t”) and seeing is as simply “the way [he] is” was attended by an ancillary shift away from concerns over the actual nature and origins of homosexuality in his life. Indeed, with David’s new worldview, such questions become, in his words, “just not relevant.”

I have used David’s narrative to exemplify the two major shifts in both terms and resulting narrative tropes and trajectories with respect to “the struggle” and attention to etiology. However, I wish to emphasize that such shifts were represented in every ex-ex-gay narrative I collected (in varying degrees, depending on the stage of metanarrative evolution and resolution in the identity process). Accordingly, here I briefly provide a second illustration of both of these shifts from Jim’s narrative, as in excerpts (8.12) and (8.13) below.

(8.12) Jim: I had a couple other friends that just revolved around this ex-gay group, and I just got so sick of that all the time, you know, um, talking about the struggle. It was just, I was sick of it. Well, I’m not struggling, I mean, you know, this is not a struggle for me anymore. It’s not like I’m trying to fight it.

(8.13) Jim: I don't believe that it's, I don't believe like I used to it's a learned behavior. **I'm not convinced that I was created this way, but it really isn't that important to me.** [...] It's just prioritizing. And for me, maybe someday it'll mean more to me and that (?), but just, I don't care. **I don't care whether I was born this way or it was learned behavior, to be honest, I don't.** [...] So, I mean, I look at it from that way, it's like, you know, **I think about it, but it's just not that important. I got other things, bigger fish to fry than worry about whether or not, you know, all the ins and outs of whether, you know, I was born this way, or you know, the point is this is the way I am,** and my life is much more peaceful and productive now than when I was living it the other way.

As the excerpts above show, Jim's narrative exemplifies both the abandonment of the "struggle" trope and the attendant shift away from a concern with the origin of homosexuality within the life by coming to view homosexuality as a state of being to be accepted. First, in excerpt (8.12), Jim stated that he "got so sick of that all the time...talking about the struggle." At this point in Jim's narrative, he had been describing his growing sexual involvement with other men and the beginnings of his connection with the gay community in the city where he lived. Thus, Jim said that he was no longer "struggling" or "trying to fight it," and as a result, he was also no longer going to narrate his life in those terms.

Second, in (8.13), Jim asserted that he was not concerned with knowing the ultimate source of homosexuality in his life, stating, "I don't care whether I was born this way or it was learned behavior...it's just not important." Similar to David's articulation, Jim said he had "bigger fish to fry than worry about" those kinds of questions, which he now considered to be extraneous issues. Thus, in Jim's transformed perspective, "the point is this is the way I am," and he claimed that his life was "much more peaceful and productive now" than when he was "living it the other way." Hence, Jim's story provides another salient exemplar of two of the primary and most common shifts of tropes and trajectories evidenced in the move from ex-gay to ex-ex-gay narratives.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated specific examples of how the changing metanarrative in the lives of ex-ex-gays creates the ideological and spiritual space for alternate, *non-ex-gay* narrations of the life—narrations in which gay identity can be embraced as a valid part of the self. These changing understandings and beliefs are attended by the relinquishment of old narrative styles and reference and the gaining of new and transformed linguistic terms and tropes in which to express and articulate the changed conception of the self and its sexuality. In the next chapter (9), I discuss the actual narrative structures and key features of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives.

Chapter 9: Ex-gay and ex-ex-gay life story narratives: Genres, structures, features

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Narrative is a critical use of language that speakers universally employ in their endeavor to make sense of their lives and to achieve a coherent sense of self (e.g. Ochs and Capps, 2001; Schiffrin, 1996; Linde, 1993). However, as I have shown, ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives are largely stories of the management of identity conflict and the search for identity conflict resolution. Such narratives are life stories in which deeply held understandings of what are viewed as core parts of the self, namely, the religious self and sexual self, are (or were) seen to be intrinsically unable to cohere (see also Wolkomir, 1999). Thus, these narratives provide an opportunity to investigate a significant form-function interaction and the linguistic structures that result when challenges to one of the primary functions of narrative are integral to the life experience and hence the language event.

In the previous analysis chapters (4-8), I have established the terministic screens that function as the basic frameworks of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay metanarratives. In so doing, I have described various versions of an overarching “Story” (i.e. worldview) and its associated lexical terms in which the individuals in this study anchor themselves and narrate their personal “stories.” As demonstrated, both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays look to this grand account or master narrative to understand themselves and the world around them, define the limits of and truth about their identities, and thus frame and tell the individual story of their lives. For ex-gays, I have demonstrated that a new metanarrative understanding of homosexuality and the self was crucial for the successful narration of a new *non-gay* identity, whereas for ex-ex-gays, new understandings of spiritual and

religious beliefs were necessary for the narration of a deproblematized and accepted gay identity.

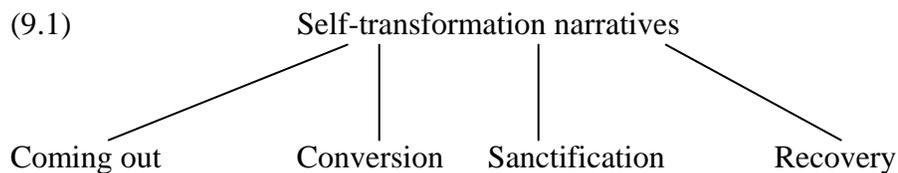
In the current chapter, I hope to both distill and demonstrate how all of the issues discussed heretofore are employed and converge to produce the object of this study: namely, ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, as well as the resultant identities for the individuals who tell them. Specifically, I will address three aspects related to these narratives: narrative genre, dimensions of narrative structure, and particular noteworthy narrative features. First, in section 9.2, I draw back to give an overarching view of the narrative genres to which ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives belong. Within this analysis, I apply Linde's (1993) notion of coherence systems to the already established metanarratives and demonstrate their employment in the overall narrative theme. In section 9.3, I demonstrate the ways in which the narrative structure itself iconically encodes the self and the struggle for coherence. In 9.4, I highlight the importance of literacy and dialogism with respect to ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives. In 9.5, I offer concluding remarks to the chapter.

9.2 GENRES

Crucial to my analysis in this chapter is Charlotte Linde's (1993) work on life stories and the "creation of coherence." Linde defined the life story as an oral, linguistic unit that is vital in social interaction, but one that is also crucially linked to "our internal, subjective sense of having a private life story that organizes our past life, our current situation, and our imagined future" (11). In her discussion, Linde described how "adequate coherence" is one of the primary requirements of the life story both socially and personally, due to the fact that human beings desire to understand their lives "as coherent, as making sense, as the history of a proper person" (17). One of the primary means for creating a coherent life story, and thus a coherent sense of the self that is the

protagonist of that life story, is the employment of various “coherence systems,” which Linde defined as “systems of beliefs and relations between beliefs” that serve to structure life narratives by providing a “means for understanding, evaluating, and constructing accounts of experience” (163, also partially quoted in Liang, 1997:303). Thus, clearly the concept of “coherence systems” is applicable to the meta-realms of religious beliefs and attendant beliefs about human sexuality as have been outlined with respect to ex-gay and ex-ex-gay metanarratives.

With respect to the life story, Linde also defined coherence as a “property of texts” that “derives from the relations that the parts of a text bear to one another and to the whole text, as well as from the relation that text bears to other texts of its type” (12). Thus, before addressing some of the specific structural aspects of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, it is helpful to determine the answer to the broader question of what particular type of texts these life stories actually are, as specifically identifying the genre these narratives represent and category to which they belong will greatly sharpen and inform the analysis of the form, style, and purpose of the narratives. It is clear that both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives belong to the overarching genre of self-transformation stories. But I propose that specifically, such narratives represent an imbrication and intersection of four specific types of self-transformation stories, namely: coming out, religious conversion, recovery/therapeutic, and sanctification⁷⁷ narratives. This imbrication of genre is schematized in Figure (9.1).



⁷⁷ As noted in the concluding paragraph of chapter 6, “sanctification” is the Christian term for the transformation process that is said to continue after and as a result of the conversion event.

All of the ex-gay evangelical narratives that I collected form a kind of composite of these four genres. In a Burkean sense, each of these genres contributes its own scripts and terministic screens and serves as a rhetorical resource upon which the narrators draw to tell their stories. By identifying the genres explicitly, it is easier to understand ex-gay narratives for what they are: stories of individuals who seek to construct a coherent self in the midst of, at least initially, incongruous understandings of religious beliefs and sexual desires, where different cultural scripts and perceived aspects of the self are seen to be in conflict and vie for rights of narration and expression, and stories in which the narrators finally privilege their moral convictions over their experience of same-sex attraction and embark on a road of spiritual and sexual transformation. For ex-ex-gay narratives, the ex-ex-gays' differing identity resolution does not negate that each of these genres forms a part of their narratives as well, because for at least some duration of their life experience, an ex-gay identity was the stance of the life story's protagonist (even as for most ex-gays, a gay identity had been a stance of the protagonist prior to the ex-gay stance).

With respect to these four genres, they will be evidenced in the life story of ex-gays and ex-ex-gays in different ways, obviously based on the chronology of the life experience, consequential/causal progression, and current state of identification. A schematic of the possible sequencing of the life narrative progressions with respect to coming out and religious conversion are given in Figure (9.2) below.

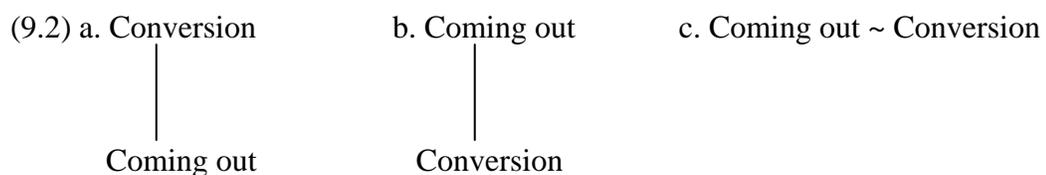
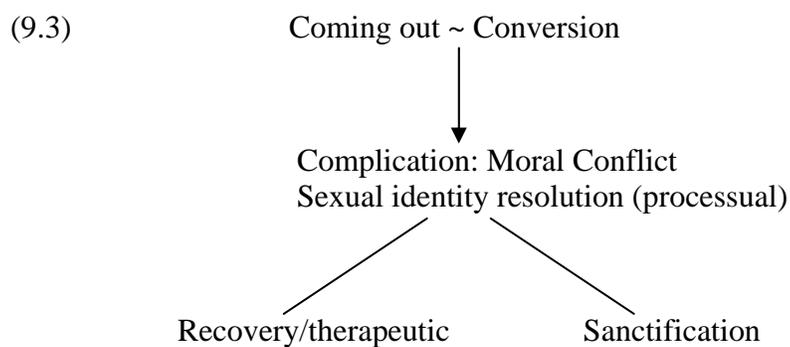


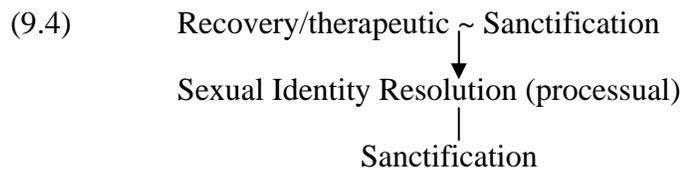
Figure (9.2) depicts the three possible chronological ordering relations between the experience of acknowledging same-sex attraction (here, coming out) and conversion to evangelical Christianity, all of which were evidenced in various narratives throughout

my data. Among the individuals in my story, the most common scenario involved individuals raised by Christian parents or experiencing a conversion early in life (e.g. college or before), for whom the later emergence of same-sex attraction was immediately attended by conflict. As in (9.2b), some individuals in my study had an openly embraced and accepted gay identity, which was followed by a conversion to Christianity and thus introduced a moral conflict in their understanding. Finally, (9.2c) represents individuals who described an experience of a simultaneous awareness of same-sex attraction and emerging Christian conversion and for whom the experience was inseparable in terms of a distinct chronological sequence.

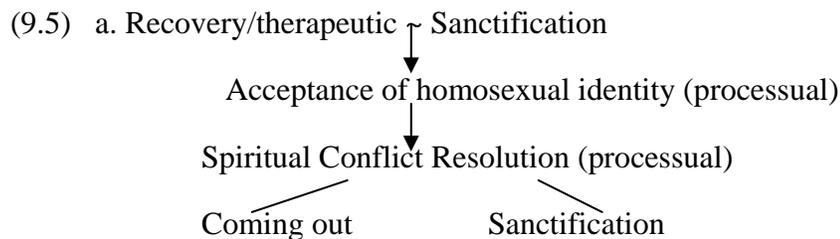
Regardless of the actual order of occurrence, for all the participants in this study, the convergence of their experience of same-sex attraction and/or the perception of their identity as homosexual and their belief in traditional evangelical Christianity introduced a central identity conflict and challenge to the narration of a coherent self. Thus, this conflict led all of the participants to, at the least, minimally explore the possibility of an ex-gay identity narration. In terms of ex-gay narratives, the primary genres become the sanctification narrative and recovery/therapeutic narrative for those who currently claim to be in the ex-gay “healing” or “growth process,” which accounted for most of the ex-gays in this study due to the majority’s being currently involved in ex-gay ministries. This progression, again schematized in terms of genre, is given in Figure (9.3).



Finally, in Figures (9.4) and (9.5), I schematize the progression of the life narratives of both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays. In (9.4), an ex-gay identity narration outline is given where there is claimed a completed resolution of sexuality, thus the recovery portion of the narrative is given in terms of a past recounting rather than a current struggle, and the generalized Christian sanctification story becomes the primary genre of the present life narration.



In (9.5a), I show the narration pattern of most ex-ex-gay narratives, where there is an acceptance of a homosexual identity, followed by a claimed spiritual resolution in which concurrent narration of religious and homosexual identity is no longer seen as problematic. Thus, the coming out story is resumed and the sanctification narrative applies to areas of the life apart from the issue of sexuality with respect to same-sex relationships. In (9.5b), I demonstrate the few cases of ex-ex-gays that reached a non-religious resolution, in which the coming out story is resumed apart from any current narration relating to a Christian or religious genre.



In outlining the above schematics (9.2-9.5), I must clarify that my only intention is to give the reader a general idea of the typical plot progressions with respect to the ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives represented in this study. With few variations, these sequences and progressions proved iterable and almost predictable as I dealt with the complete versions of the life narratives of each group. Ultimately, the individual life narratives were most often syntagmatic fulfillments of the paradigmatic oppositions that were projected and derived from the alternating tropes and stances of the two groups. Obviously, due to limitations of space and time, treatments of the narratives in their entirety are not possible here. Thus, the diagrams are offered only to familiarize the reader with a basic framework of the narrative sequencing with respect to the genres and discussion at hand.

However, there is a drawback in the use of such schematics in that they make the life narrative genres appear to be discrete and the transitions easily divisible, which is most often not the case. While primary narrative genres are used to narrate the relevant aspects with respect to the identity of the protagonist in the life story at a particular time, there is frequent overlap with, contribution from, and convergence of the other types, because shifts in style and focus, often cued by changes in lexical content, often occur fluidly as the life story is told. Inasmuch as the life experience and formation of identity itself is infrequently categorizable into discrete units, so neither are the segments of narration always discrete. I will now demonstrate narrative examples of each of the genres in turn, beginning with coming out stories.

9.2.1 Coming out narratives

In recent years, a number of studies have examined coming out stories and the creation of the self (e.g. Penelope and Wolfe, 1989; Wood, 1997, 1999). As previously noted, Liang (1997) defined coming out stories as narrative accounts of realizing and

accepting gay or lesbian identity; therefore, as explained in chapter 2, she aptly footnoted a distinction between coming out stories and other accounts of homosexual tendencies such as those seen in ex-gay ministries, in that the general understanding of coming out involves an embracing of the homosexuality which ex-gay narratives explicitly disavow and seek to transform. This having been said, both story-types are told by narrators whose experiences of same-sex attraction were sufficient enough to constitute an identity demand and required a response in their conception and story of the self, and correspondences between the two types would be expected.

Most of the ex-gay individuals in this study had a coming out story before they had an ex-gay narrative. Not surprisingly, then, the ex-gay narratives examined reveal a plot-initial tension parallel to coming out stories. Liang described coming out stories as a process of self-naming and discussed the stage of “coming out to self” which comprises an individual’s acknowledgment of same-sex attraction and recognition of homosexual identity. Thus, the process of acknowledging oneself as homosexual is the first component in both types of stories. This process is exemplified in excerpt (9.6).

(9.6) Trevor: I just remember being called that word “queer” again and then called “homo.” I’ll never forget the day I went home after being called that and remembering that from <name of country, i.e. father in military and stationed overseas>, I remember going home, opening up the dictionary to see what the word “queer” meant and to see what the word “homosexual” meant. And I just thought—I-I did-I didn’t remember all my emotions at the time, but I thought, well, that must be it. That must be, you know, what I am. [...] I remember, I would just, every once in a while, even a couple of times of day, I would go to-go open the dictionary, and I even remember where it was, you’d walk in our house, it was in the foyer on this table, <chuckle> like the Bible, and I remember I just opened it up and looked up the word “queer,” opened it up and looked up-looked up the word “homosexual,” and I began to get my identity from that. [...] Always inside, I identified as homosexual. That’s what the books said.

In excerpt (9.6) above, Trevor gives an account of coming out to self and the naming that occurs during this process. Trevor’s experience of name-calling at school

was an external labeling which triggered a personal investigation of the name given him by others. Through use of the dictionary, Trevor acquired the word “homosexual,” which previously was not available to him as a resource. This acquisition of knowledge then simultaneously both allowed and forced Trevor to either accept or deny that label in terms of his own identity. When Trevor admitted that this word captures his experience of a male-centered sexuality, he then accepted the label as a self-definition and repeatedly named himself “homosexual.”

Leap (1996; 1999) emphasized the importance of language as it becomes a major resource for young men’s understanding of their experience of same-sex attraction and construction of gay identity during adolescence. Leap’s research included many “coming out to self”-type narratives and demonstrated the search for information through textual resources and labels acquired through events such as teasing and name-calling as highly common themes in these accounts. Trevor’s story includes each of these components and is a classic parallel. The above is in fact his coming out story, which now serves as an initial component of his ex-gay narrative.

Beyond coming out to self, coming out stories also describe the process of revealing one’s self as homosexual to others. As expected, many ex-gay narratives had this component as well, as self-naming progressed to a revealing of this identity to others. This can be seen in example (9.7), where Jacob comments on coming out to his parents at age 12.

(9.7) Jacob: My parents were very calm about the whole thing. [...] And what they did, they got my parish priest who was my religion teacher, I guess to mentor me. And he was right there with me, “If this is what makes you happy, you just go for it with all you’ve got.”

It is important to note that a smaller number of the ex-gay narratives I collected do not have an “official” coming out story *per se*. Liang (1997:291) discussed the fact

that an individual's identification as homosexual is largely a matter of "personal decision rather than convention" due to the contested nature of homosexuality; for example, the term "homosexual" can be rejected even by those who are sexually active in long-term same-sex relationships. However, even when there is not an official coming out segment, clearly an acknowledgement of same-sex attraction or sexual activity is a key component of ex-gay narratives, for without such a revelation, there is no transformation story to be told. Such was the case for Elizabeth, who lived with a woman for three years in a sexually active relationship, but would never define herself as lesbian or name the relationship to be homosexual. In example (9.8) below, Elizabeth told about her moment of "naming," which is as critical a point in her story as the coming out events given in other types of accounts.

(9.8) Elizabeth: I was in a support group and process group and learned tons, but God was way far away. I didn't realize how far away He was. And I was in the support group and you go through these steps and one of them is confession, and I said the "homosexual" <whispered> word for the first time to people. Driving home that night, the Lord showed back up, I mean, He was right there. And I knew it was my shame that kept Him away. And as soon as I could speak and not feel rejected by these people I was telling, I could let the Lord back in.

Thus, in (9.8), Elizabeth described finally making that step of "confession," this term and the setting described clearly differentiating Elizabeth's situation from a coming out story *per se*, but with the self-recognition and revelatory aspect of the speech act intact. Elizabeth's story demonstrates that in cases where there has been no coming out component or where there has even been the categorical denial of the label "homosexual," a naming must occur in order for the story to progress towards change. In that ex-gay narratives are self-transformation stories with an emphasis on sexuality, the state of the sexuality the individual seeks to transform must in a sense be owned before it can be relinquished. As part of the genre of conversion stories, these narratives clearly

parallel evangelical Christian doctrine, in that one must acknowledge and confess that he or she is a sinner as a crucial initial step towards receiving salvation.

Above, I have shown the initial elements of ex-gay narratives to be parallel with and almost identical to coming out stories. In addition to the self-naming, the ex-gay narratives I have examined always include accounts of first same-sex encounters or relationships, the progression of sexual awareness, and other elements common to coming out stories. However, at some point, there is a clear divergence from the coming out story line in that coming out stories lead to an acceptance of homosexual identity. For ex-gays, either the presence or introduction of a moral conviction against homosexual practice led them to re-evaluate their understanding of themselves and their sexuality and seek an alternative to embracing a homosexual identity.

As mentioned with respect to (9.2), the narrative flow of an ex-gay story from this point depends largely upon the trajectory of the religious life of the individual. For instance, Trevor described himself as having been raised in a Christian home and always having believed that homosexual practice was not compatible with his understanding of that faith. Consequently, Trevor's self-naming as seen in excerpt (9.6)—though followed by a discussion of his coming out to others and being involved sexually with other men—led ultimately to a commentary on the inner conflict and spiritual struggle he experienced and his response to that conflict. This response can be seen in (9.9), where Trevor's expression of a "re-commitment to Christ" reflected his background in which a moral conviction and a traditional Christian belief system had, according to him, "always been present." Trevor validated his return to his faith by clearly indexing a departure from same-sex behavior, and the alternative identification trajectory continues from that point.

(9.9) Trevor: But my re-commitment to Christ was real. [...] In 1976 was my last intimate act with a man.

Unlike Trevor, Jacob described himself as having grown up “secular.” Though his family was Catholic and attended church, he stated that such was what he called “cultural Catholicism” and had no real spiritual connection for him. As seen in (9.7), there was no struggle in Jacob’s coming out story. Jacob referenced this lack of conflict again in (9.10),⁷⁸ stating that there was no moral dilemma because he had “nothing but support” and did not have any religious conviction against homosexuality. But then he went on to describe an occasion where he “came out” to a customer he was helping, which ultimately introduced a moral conviction that would eventually turn the plot of Jacob’s narrative from coming out to a laying aside of the gay identity he once embraced.

(9.10) Jacob: **I didn’t see anything about it that was wrong, um, and I never had a conviction about it being wrong, well, because I had nothing but support. Everything around me supported me; I never heard anything negative.** And one night, I was working, I was working in a chain called <store name>, and I was in automotive at the time. And this lady came in, and you know, I don’t remember ever having any kind of compulsion ever at any one point before to boast about **my being homosexual** but to this woman I just had this compelling need to gush it out at her, you know what I mean? And I was trying to help her find an oil filter or an air filter, and somehow **I came out.** And, she just **shared the Lord with me, and she just spoke the Word to me.** And I mean uh, it was loving, and it was kind.

AP: What did she share with you?

Jacob: She shared the Word, what the Word said about homosexuality. Um and it was in a real direct, but it was very gentle, and it was very loving, and it was very tender. There wasn’t any condemnation to it, there wasn’t any “You’re going to hell; you’re going to perish,” it was nothing like that. It was a very simple, “You know, the Word, have you ever?” and told me what the Bible had to say. And I was like, “Wow, I had never ever heard anything like that.” And I left that night with this feeling inside of me that something had happened. There was like a-a a physical sensation inside of me; you know the Word talks about it being like a seed. And here was the seed. I could almost feel it. And so then from that time, **the brother who led me to the Lord also happened to come out of the lifestyle...**

⁷⁸ The second half of (9.10) (i.e. Jacob’s response to my question) appeared earlier as excerpt (6.1) in the discussion of language ideology in chapter 6.

Thus, example (9.10) shows Jacob's narrative departing from a coming out story and transitioning into a conversion narrative, which for him involved a spiritual identity transformation, i.e. embracing Christian faith or being "led to the Lord," that in his understanding necessarily entailed a sexual identity transformation as well. It is significant to note that Jacob's language with respect to homosexuality changes, shifting within a few phrases of his being told of the previously unheard-of moral conviction. While Jacob described boasting of "being homosexual" and "coming out," after the beginning transition to his conversion story, he used terms such as "the lifestyle." This usage reflects a different conception of homosexuality, moving from seeing it as a state of "being" and identity to a "lifestyle" of choices and behaviors that can be left behind. From "coming out" as homosexual, Jacob begins to speak of "coming out of the lifestyle," and indeed that is the new coming out trajectory of ex-gay narratives in general.

With respect to ex-ex-gay narratives, the ex-ex-gay narrative trajectory most often begins and resolves primarily into the trajectory of a coming out story. As a result, the portion of the life narrative that contains the religious conflict and ex-gay segment is usually retrospectively portrayed as an interruption or complication with respect to the coming out story, where the conflict is followed by a resumption of the general coming out plot, as in (9.11).

(9.11) Dee: **Right after I came out of--went back in, I guess, to the closet** <laugh>, uh back in uh golly, what year was that?

AP: So when you say, "came out," in that context it would be "came out of homosexuality"?

Dee: **Well, that's why I said I changed it, I say, "go back in the closet," I went back in the closet. Okay, um. I came out when I was 18,** um but not, like, big time officially, or anything like that. And then, my--since my family is generations--generational Southern Baptist ministers and ministers of music, you know, going against the status quo was just not cool. And um

AP: And you're from <state1>?

Dee: Um well, <state1> and <state2>, I graduated from high school in <state2> and my dad was in <state2>, but we also, I spent my formative years in <state1>, <city>, <state1>, which is where my parents went back and retired.

AP: OK.

Dee: And uh so, ye-so yeah, I consider myself a southern girl, you know, even though we weren't there that much, but we just, you know, that's where they went back, and-and both of my younger sisters, my younger sisters, live in <state3>, and so we're-we're a very, very strong Southern Baptist, southern family. **And so coming out, you know, to be gay was just like not cool, and I wasn't strong enough as a person, um, until the, you know, the most recent, with my current partner, I wasn't strong enough as a person to stand up and say, "Sorry you can't accept it; this is the way it is." I had to be in my 40's to do that. And so the 20's and uh and 30's were pretty turbulent because of the fact that I would-I would get in a relationship with a woman, then I would say, "Oh no, I can't live with the guilt," and then I'd go back, and then I uh, you know, I'm relatively attractive and charming, and so I never have been without a partner.**

Excerpt (9.11) occurred in the initial portion of Dee's life narrative. In this excerpt, Dee started to refer to her "coming out of homosexuality," which again is the ex-gay narrative trajectory and typical ex-gay terminology, but she then self-corrected and stated that she now saw this as "going back into the closet." Dee's following comments place her narrative clearly in the coming out genre, as she described "coming out" at 18 years of age. However, Dee then described challenges to her "coming out" as she stated that the ensuing years of her 20's and 30's were "turbulent" ones of struggling with her religious background, "guilt" over same-sex relationships, and "go[ing] back" (i.e. getting out of same-sex involvements and attempting to live according to her religious convictions at the time). Dee stated that it wasn't until she was in her 40's and with her "current partner" that she was "strong enough as a person" to "stand up" and fully "come out." Thus, as chapter 8 amply demonstrated, Dee's narrative ultimately resulted in a

typical coming out story of embracing same-sex attraction and a homosexual identity (cf. (8.4b)).

9.2.2 Conversion and sanctification (post-conversion transformation) narratives

In this subsection, I will address the conversion and sanctification narrative genres conjointly for ease of discussion; again, because sanctification is seen as the implication and continuation of the initial religious transformation conversion, these two styles are intrinsically connected and overlap more closely than the other two genres. Regarding conversion narratives, Stromberg (1993:14)⁷⁹ noted that religious believers usually understand conversion to be “an historical, observable event” (e.g. James, 1902) and believe “the transformational efficacy of the conversion experience” to occur in the conversion event itself. In order to demonstrate these two genres and some of the coherence systems employed therein, I will now include a more lengthy exposition of one ex-gay narrative, namely that of Beth, who was 48 years old at the time of the interview.

Beth clearly indexed that the conversion story would serve as the primary narrative genre and frame for her life story in its opening segment, as in (9.12).

(9.12) AP: Well, that kind of brings me to your story, so, um, just however you would, you know, want to share that, obviously, with, um, you know, addressing the issue of your understanding of your sexuality and the development of that, as well as your faith.

Beth: OK. Um, this is always a difficult one for me – where do you start at, and **it’s really your testimony, and it’s really God’s s-, story, um, for me**, um, and I was wondering, well, do I start at the very beginning, which is, you know, my childhood, or do I start at the **point of conversion**. I think probably today I’d start at the **point of my conversion**, because it will have been, uh, **eight years February of next year**, um, and then, kind of what I’ve learned over the last seven years, um, how that relates to my past, or prior to that time period. [...]

⁷⁹ While Stromberg (1993) noted this belief, it should be made clear that his analysis was based on an alternate conception; specifically, he theorized that the conversion narrative itself was a performative act through which transformation was constantly re-created and effected in the lives of believers.

As (9.12) shows, Beth began her story with an evaluation of her difficulty as a narrator with respect to determining the point and perspective from which she wanted to begin, whether from “the very beginning” or from “the point of conversion.” However, from the outset, Beth’s lexical choice of “testimony”⁸⁰ marked the narrative as belonging to a typical evangelical conversion framework, and her reference to “God’s story” is an abstract indicating that while Beth would obviously be the protagonist of her life story, God would be the theme.⁸¹ Beth clearly referred to her conversion as a discrete “point” in time which was chronologically definable, i.e. “it will have been eight years February of next year.”

From that point in her narrative, Beth went on to describe more fully her conversion testimony from seven years prior; however, Beth’s narrative is interesting in that she literally referred to this experience as a “second conversion” and stated that she had had a “born again experience” (i.e. typical evangelical description of conversion) about 15 years prior to her “second conversion.” Beth stated that three years after what she termed her “first conversion,” her “struggle with [her] sexuality” re-emerged, as in (9.13a).

(9.13a.) Beth: **About three years later, the old stuff surfaced – my, my struggle with my sexuality, my interests in women, that kind of thing, you know, and I know there was conflicts happening there, but I was so hurt, and I was so tormented, painfully, in wrestling with this, and I couldn’t find help in the church at that time, that I went back into lifestyle.** But it’s interesting, because at that time I had t-, talked to God, and I said, “God, I can’t tolerate the, I can’t take this pain any longer, and I know I’m turning my

⁸⁰ “Testimony” is a Biblical allusion and term; for example, Revelation 12:11—And the overcame him [i.e. Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb [i.e. Jesus], and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. (NASB) The term is related to “bearing witness” to the Jesus and his life and work, i.e. as most Christians believe, his death, burial and resurrection. The evangelical Christian use of the term “testimony” has commonly come to mean sharing one’s *personal* conversion and transformation story, i.e. what God has done for me in *my* life (cf. the use of “testimony” in excerpts (9.28) and (9.36)).

⁸¹ I am indebted to a reflective piece on narrative by Budziszewski (1988) for my recognition of this distinction between the protagonist and theme.

back on You, but one day I'll be back," and I remember speaking that so clearly, you know, in my spirit that one day I would be back, but I didn't know when that would be and how long that would be. **And so, to come full circle now and to be walking the Christian walk seven years, not perfectly, growing every day, but it's different this time.** And so, there's a part of me that can relate to those that give up and go back into the lifestyle, because I did it – I experienced it. **But I also know that that experience coming at this time once again to God that "You're all I have, and I give it all to You. I give You even my sexuality," which I didn't back then.** I was still holding on to those, those hurts and those issues that I didn't understand, but I was holding all on to that, um, and this time, **I just said, "I give it all to You, including my sexuality and my confusion with my sexuality."**

As (9.13a.) shows, Beth described "giving" her "sexuality and [her] confusion with [her] sexuality" to God in a way that she claimed she had not done upon her initial conversion experience. This excerpt demonstrates once again the trope of the mutually exclusive choice that is seen in ex-gay narratives, as Beth clearly indexed that, according to her understanding, active homosexuality and Christian faith were not compatible, as she equated "going back to the lifestyle" as "turning [her] back on [God]." Then, as Beth described her return to faith (i.e. "to come full circle now"), she used phrases such as "walking the Christian walk," "not perfectly," and "growing every day," through which she was fluidly transitioning into a sanctification-type narrative, that is, the narrative of the transformation process that she believed was to issue out of her conversion experience.

Directly after describing the surrender of her sexuality, Beth continued her narrative as an explicitly ex-gay transformation narrative, as in (9.13b.), which is a seamless continuation of (9.13a.).

(9.13b.) Beth: And, of course, that opened up the door then to get an introduction to <ministry name> and support group and to get now an understanding of those **root issues from Beth Smith that resulted in the choices, whether consciously or unconsciously, that I made to go into the lifestyle** and pursue, um, the **behaviors that I pursued, you know, and lived out**, so –um <laughs>, so then, uh, let me see, so with that then, um, with the

<name> ministry and the support group, **coming to see that the root issues that I have is one, a lack of bonding with the same sex parent.**

As (9.13b.) shows, Beth's conversion story transitioned into a sanctification story with a specific application to the area of her sexuality, which she claimed was newly "give[n] to God" and hence, in her beliefs, subject to the traditional evangelical metanarrative. In this excerpt, Beth described not only a chronological sequence (e.g. Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972), but also a consequential sequencing (Young, 1987; Riessman, 1993) through which she narrated her entrance into an ex-gay ministry as a matter "of course" that was conjunctively linked to and flowed out from her surrender to the Divine, i.e. "I give it all to You, including my sexuality and my confusion with my sexuality. And, of course, that opened up the door then to get an introduction to <ministry name> and support group."

Beth's narrative then continued within the ex-gay "testimony" frame, using both the terministic screens and hence the new metanarrative understanding of her sexuality that Beth had learned through her involvement in the ex-gay ministry. In so doing, Beth employed the terms associated with the ex-gay understanding of homosexuality, such as "behaviors," "choices," and "lifestyle" and began the narrative account of the etiology of homosexuality in her life with respect to the common theme of "root issues."

Through this chronology and sequencing, Beth was beginning to narratively construct what Linde termed a "chain of causality," thereby creating an adequate sense of coherence and shape to the meaning of the life story. As Beth continued her story of her sexual identity transformation process, which she referred to at different points as her "healing" and "the slow surgery" that God was doing, it was however clear that sanctification was the prominent genre and frame, as excerpt (9.14) shows.

(9.14) Beth: And yet, probably at a place of maturity in my life to say, "You know what? OK, I've got to walk this one for me, and I will get there, but I'm not ready

to get there, because you know why? That's not what I identify yet on the inside, but once the identity is there on the inside, then you'll see the reality of it on the outside."

AP: So what identity were you seeking to replace the gay identity with?

Beth: **Holiness. That's the best way I can s-, put it, because I had already gotten, there were the messages out there that says, OK, if I'm married-OK, I'm not gay, and I'm following God, then if I'm married, I've arrived. But what happens if marriage is not for me? What happens if that's not God's destiny for me? Does that mean I'm not godly? Does that mean I'm not holy? And so, what I had to focus on was what it is to be holy in His eyes, purely that.** And certainly with the help of the teaching around me, certainly with the encouragement around me, even if sometimes it was like they were prodding me to like take another step, because, let's face it, sometimes we feel uncomfortable. We don't-want to stay in our comfort zone, and they, and they were prods, they were like taking me out of my comfort zone, you know, and so it, so I'd have to process that, and I'd go, "OK, I'll take a step."

In (9.14), Beth's response of "holiness" as the identity she was seeking to replace her former gay identity with is a direct reference to sanctification, which literally means "to make holy." Thus, in Beth's metanarrative understanding, there is a post-conversion process of being purified and "made holy" by bringing the whole self into alignment with God's will, and from her perspective, her sexual identity was simply one aspect of the self that was subsumed under and affected by that process. In this response, Beth's language is also directly reflective of the ex-gay ministry worldview and teaching. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I attended the annual Exodus national ministry conference with numerous members of the Liberty group in 2002. At the conference, one of the breakout sessions was entitled, "The Opposite of Homosexuality is not Heterosexuality—It's Holiness,"⁸² which again frames the goal of sexual identity transformation into a more generalized goal of Christian sanctification. Also in this

⁸² Session taught by Lance Hastings, Thursday, August 1st, 2002. Exodus 2002 27th Annual N. American Conference: July 31-August 3, 2002, Wheaton, IL. Heintzelman (2003) also remarked on this session title in a conference paper, in which she analyzed taped versions of testimonies given at past Exodus Annual conferences.

excerpt, Beth referred to the “teaching” and “encouragement around [her]” that helped her continue to move out of her “comfort zone” and “take another step,” and in so doing, used language and imagery that is associated with a “journey” and a “growth process.”

As Beth continued her story, she anticipated and pre-emptively answered one of the most common questions with respect to ex-gay transformation stories, which addresses the actual experience of sexual attraction and changing of desire, as in (9.15a.).

(9.15a.) Beth: **Now, maybe the question comes up, “Have I found myself struggling, even in this time of walking with the Lord?” And I said, “Yes.”** And I know **two significant points where I actually became emotionally attached to two women**, who, at different times, were, came into my life, and, or even one that I was counseling with in the ministry. And I saw then that **there was a set up for me to fall emotionally with them.** <...went on to describe the first situation and taking a sabbatical from ministry...> So:, I said, you know what, **I need to take a step back.** [...] **I am emotionally fallen right now.** I need to seek one on one counseling. [...] **So God got the glory in that,** you know, to see, even, **sometimes we fall, but He’s-picks us up if we recognize it, and-and, say, call a, call a spade a spade, call sin a sin and-and move on with it, as painful as it can be emotionally.** <...went on to describe the second situation...>

In the above excerpt, Beth described her experiencing two “significant” instances of same-sex attraction all within the terministic screens of the ex-gay Christian worldview, using terms such as “struggling,” “set up to fall” and “sin.” Notice also that Beth emphasized the “emotional attachment” aspect of the relationships and described herself as “emotionally fallen,” reflecting the ex-gay belief that same-sex relationships can be “unhealthy” and “sinful” at an emotional level prior to any physical “acting out” in overt sexual behavior. While “emotional attachment” and “dependency” are considered to be possible components of the homosexual relationships of both men and women, the women themselves especially stressed this teaching as being particularly applicable to women. While Erzen (2002) analyzed this view as an asexual treatment of women within ex-gay ministries, I did not interpret that the teaching was applied in that way within the

ministry settings I studied, because actual sexual behavior among women was certainly addressed and discussed. However, female-female sexual behavior was believed to primarily issue from a *characteristically* “emotionally dependent” or “attached” relationship between women, returning one once again to the “non-sexual root issues” they believed were often the source of same-sex attractions.

Wood (1999) wrote about the coming out story as a means to create a coherent sense of self and states that “for a life story to be coherent, the justification of one’s choices or experiences must be recognizable and acceptable” (47). But unlike coming out stories, which express a sexual identity that is consistent with the narrator’s same-sex attraction, ex-gay individuals seek to create or live out an identity that is, at least initially, incongruent with their sexual desires. Thus, in response to this segment of Beth’s story, I asked her about her sense of identity concerning this issue, as in (9.15b.).

(9.15b.) AP: Well, how does that make you, I mean, does-does that, did that create confusion in you, thinking, “Well, but look, I really still am gay, I still have same-sex attraction?”

Beth: I didn’t-I didn’t identify with gay at all there, um, because as painful as it was, and even though I wrestled with it a little bit, because it was satisfying some of the old ways of thinking in me, um, I still did not identify with gay. I recognized that it was emotional, I was trying to get emotional needs satisfied through another person, that both of these women had, um, they exemplified the feminine, or they exemplified feminine characteristics that I saw lacking in me, so I was clinging to that or reaching out to that, and it-and it was again, that old way of thinking, and, it had to happen, though, it had to happen so that I could see it for what it was worth, and that it would be part of my healing process to recognize it. [...]

AP: Well, so what do you say to somebody that just says, “Well, give me a break, you’re not changed, I mean, you can still have same-sex attraction, so aren’t you just denying? You’re just in denial, of the fact that/

Beth: **/But I’m not gay, and that’s what I can tell you, is that I don’t, I don’t align myself with gay, I don’t align myself with the gay agenda, that I am not gay. That I am a heterosexual woman who struggles with same-sex attractions because of some voids in my**

own life that began early on in childhood. You know, and I know that sounds like a book answer, but that's what I've come to see for myself, you know. And so, so to recognize those attractions for what they're worth. And—and in actuality, the attractions have so deminimized, you know, and I was thinking about this in preparing for the interview with-with you, that **I can honestly say that I am not attracted to the same sex.** [...]

As (9.15b.) once again shows, in Beth's narrative, as in ex-gay narratives in general, it is a particular evangelical Christian metanarrative and ex-gay belief system regarding homosexuality that actually provides the coherence system that helped her justify her choices and understand her experiences while managing any sense of identity *incoherence* that might seem to be expected in the initial stages of this identity transformation process. Beth employed her new beliefs about homosexuality as a coherence system, which enabled her to narrate a coherent self—one that could experience same-sex attraction and yet not “identify with gay.” Therefore, Beth first narrated her experience in terms of the canonical “struggle against sin,” as indicated by her use of the terms “wrestled” and “old ways of thinking.”

Moreover, because Beth was now narrating her life in terms of the ex-gay Christian metanarrative, same-sex attractions need not be interpreted as indicating a homosexual identity; rather, Beth now narrated her attractions from the perspective that they were primarily emanating from “emotional needs,” and she stated that now she would “recognize those attractions for what they're worth.” She then again created a chain of causality, stating that these experiences “had to happen” so that she could learn to “recognize it.” As a result, rather than constituting an occasion for incoherence and identity confusion, through Beth's location of this experience within the ex-gay metanarrative coherence system, she strengthened her ex-gay identity position and incorporated the incident as a necessary “part of her healing process.”

When Beth responded to my hypothetical challenge, she reiterated her position with a succinct, mini-version of an ex-gay narrative, “That I am a heterosexual woman who struggles with same-sex attractions because of some voids in my own life that began early on in childhood.” In so doing, Beth clearly aligned her sexual identity with heterosexuality and narrated her homosexual “struggle” as originating from “voids” from early childhood. Beth’s ensuing comment of, “I know that sounds like a book answer, but that’s what I’ve come to see for myself” was a narrative evaluation that indexed the desire for her narrative account to be accepted. However, I propose it also indexed the narrative tension between what Ochs and Capps (2001) called narrators’ “yearning for coherence of life experience and their yearning for authenticity. That is, narrators contending with life experiences struggle to formulate an account that both provides an interpretive frame and does justice to life’s complexities” (24). Thus, while Beth’s narrative had literally been several hours’ worth of descriptions of life’s complexities up to that point, I propose that the reduction of her “journey” to a single sentence-length summary and conclusion, with all nuance and intricacy removed, prompted Beth’s evaluative qualification and justification.

Beth concluded that segment of her narrative by claiming that her same-sex attractions had diminished to the point where she could “honestly say that [she is] not attracted to the same sex.” From that statement, she immediately proceeded into the general theme and genre of sanctification once again as she continued her narrative, as seen in (9.15c.).

(9.15c.) Beth: **And it’s not, the vulnerability is not, the sexual part of it, but it’s vulnerability in other areas of my life, you know. And that now, what I work on is issues of the heart, pride, jealousy, envy, and those are probably the hardest things to deal with. I look now, and I go, this whole sexual identity and healing, has been a cake walk, compared to, another level, and another place of holiness that God wants me to be, that’s pleasing to Him, you know. And bein’ dependent upon Him, I’m a very independent person, I’m a**

first-born, I was really kinda nurtured that way, you know, independency, and that's what I constantly wrestle with, is my independency, and that God's saying, "Trust in Me. Be interdependent with Me, okay, if dependency is a hard word for you, then be independent with Me-interdependent with Me." And there's still times I, go off without Him, independent, and that's the ha:rdest <whispered> thing I'm dealin' with, so my sexual identity, and healing, is a cake walk compared to that right now. [...]

Beth's discussion in (9.15c.) shows that the frame for her life story and trajectory for her narrative can most accurately be described in terms of the sanctification narrative and indeed, cannot be truly understood outside of the religious metanarrative framework. As Beth told of "work[ing] on issues of the heart" and listed generally agreed upon human vices such as "pride, jealousy, and envy," she claimed that her "sexual identity and healing" had been a "cake walk" compared to "another level of holiness" to which God was taking her. Beth returned to the issue of her sexuality to conclude her narrative just a few moments later, as in (9.16) below.

(9.16) Beth: You know, so what happens if I don't marry? Does that mean that I am not healed? Does that mean that I am, still have an identity with gay? Not. Not. 'Cause I mean, the reality is, it's like, I'm approaching 50, and I may not ever marry. Do I have a-is there a desire there? Certainly. And at times I've even wrestled with that, thinkin' that maybe I'm not fulfilled because I haven't married, you know, and are there times as far as maybe that part of my life having children and stuff, do I miss that? At times, it may come up. But God has blessed me with so many children, spiritual children that I nurture, and I'm thinkin', God I'm havin' a hard time handlin' all of this, how could I handle a full-time family? But I look and I go, golly, I'm, I-I truly, are there times that I think maybe I haven't-I haven't had a fulfilled life, but I don't want to end my life like that. I want to have a sense that I am fulfilled, and for me, it's like, if it's single, so let it be. If the world thinks that I'm not measured up, then it's only Him who I need to, it's Him who I, you know, when I lay my head down at night, and when it truly comes before His throne, what I'm looking for is the words that really say, "Thy good and faithful servant."⁸³ [...]

AP: And so, who is the true self?

⁸³ An allusion to Jesus' parable of the talents, where a master returns and praises each of his servants who has been a "good steward" with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."—Matthew 25:21 (NIV)

Beth: A heterosexual woman, with issues <laughs>. A heterosexual woman desiring to be holy, desiring to be holy, in God's terms, not on man's terms, but God's terms.

As (9.16) shows, Beth again framed her sexuality in the general post-conversion transformation framework, narrating a teleological progression towards her desired spiritual life goal. She claimed that while she did have a desire to marry, which in her evangelical Christian understanding is the only context in which she could have a sexual relationship, there was a high likelihood that such would not happen due to her age. However, Beth claimed that if hers was to be a single (hence celibate) life, then "so let it be," as all she claimed she was really looking for was to be found a "good and faithful servant" of God. Beth ended by claiming that her true self was a "heterosexual woman," laughing and humorously adding, "with issues," but then seriously re-stated that her overall desire was "to be holy in God's terms."

Before moving on to the recovery genre, I would like to offer one more example of the ex-gay interpretation of same-sex attraction as resulting from emotional needs rather than an intrinsic homosexual identity and the incorporation of experiences of same-sex attraction into the narrative of the "healing process." I do so simply to illustrate that Beth's appropriation of such was a common feature of ex-gay narratives in this study and appeared both in men's and women's stories. Henry's narrative in (9.17) provides an additional instance of the narrative employment of this coherence system.

(9.17) Henry: I had one thing happen to me. There was a guy that was, um, in the church at the time, he's still there, had real long, thick hair, short guy, blue eyes, and I was just wildly attracted to him. And we have to set up chairs in our church, because we meet in a rented building, and I volunteered to set up the chairs, and he was in charge of setting up chairs. So I was in church one morning, setting up chairs with him, and I was just telling God, "How do you expect me to get anywhere, with this guy in this church? I mean, what am I going to do with him?" Um, and I turned to him, and I told him, "I like your hair. I really like your hair. I wish I had hair like that." And it was like somebody reached in and flipped a switch, and I lost all my sexual attraction to him. It's just, just that

quick, that noticeable. **And it was at that point where God began to separate my sexual desires from the emotional things, and He began to show me that a big component of my same-sex attraction was envy.**

With respect to conversion and sanctification for ex-ex-gay narratives, the gay Christian identity resolutions are clearly going to bear the greatest similarities to these narrative genres. In (9.18) below, I give an excerpt from near the conclusion of Alex's narrative, in which he identified both as ex-ex-gay and as a gay Christian, to demonstrate that his story clearly reflects the conversion and "testimony" frame and style that is typical of evangelical Christian narratives.

(9.18) Alex: And um, you know, I-I'm also to the point where, because I've-I've **gone through this journey** and I understand how incredibly rough it is, that if-**if God can use me to reach one other person ou-young person out there with the message that, you know, God loves them exactly the way He created them <i.e. as homosexual>, and it helps keep them from kind of going down that emotional torture path, then-then it's worth it.** Um, it-it wasn't easy for me, and there was a lot of damage along the way, but it, you know, it-it's, I kinda, I believe that you know, **God can take any situation and turn it around and make something useful out of it. And so that's pretty much where-where I am now.**

Thus, as this excerpt shows, Alex concluded his narrative with summative references to his "journey" and statements about God using him to reach other people with "the message," which directly indexed the suasive rhetorical function and "witnessing" aspect of conversion narratives and testimonies in general (e.g. Harding, 1987; Keane, 1997).

In terms of the sanctification genre, with the new ex-ex-gay understanding of homosexuality as a valid moral option and no longer in conflict with Christian belief, same-sex sexuality is then no longer seen as in need of, and thus placed outside the realm of, general sanctification. However, in my data, the narratives of ex-ex-gay individuals retaining the closest associations with an evangelical identity sometimes contained a

sanctification theme to strengthen their identity position as gay Christians, in which individuals emphasized integrity and character growth in other areas of their lives.

I include here a lengthy portion of Dee's narrative because it demonstrates this emphasis most saliently within an additional context that is worth noting. Namely, Dee's sanctification narrative segment is woven throughout and around her narrative construction of a gay Christian counter-trope to the mutually exclusive, dichotomous choice seen in ex-gay narratives, as discussed most recently in Beth's narrative. Here, Dee made explicit the trope of "no other choice," a new trope in which the integration of sexuality and spirituality is the *only* possible choice.

This excerpt came at in the last few minutes of Dee's four-and-a-half hour narrative and interview. As has been demonstrated in other excerpts, it was customary for me to ask individuals how they would respond to the primary tenet of disagreement that would be levied by those subscribing to the opposite resolution position. Thus, for ex-gays I always questioned and hypothetically challenged them on their sexual identity resolution as "denial" (e.g. (9.15b.)) and for ex-ex-gays, if time permitted, I asked them about their response to those who might question their spiritual resolution. It was this question that resulted in Dee's explicit framing of a singular choice, which she described by recounting narrative incidents of responding to this question in the past, with an embedded narrative inset of an extended sanctification-themed segment.

(9.19) Dee: It's <i.e. homosexuality> just-it's not an issue, it's just not an issue, and I think that once you don't make it an issue it's not an issue anymore, but as long as it's an issue for you, it's going to be an issue for everybody else, in all areas of your life. I'm sorry it took me to-you know, nearly half a century to get here, but I'm glad I did and now I'm looking forward to the second half of my life, being much more free and peaceful and exciting and all those things.

AP: Right, Right. Ok, well, so I-I um I ask all-all the ex-gays I ask, "So what do you say to people who would say, 'Come on you're just in denial,'" so um what do you say to people that say you're deceived?

Dee: Nobody says that. <laughing>

AP: Nobody says that.

Dee: Nobody says that to me.

AP: Well, you know what I mean, I'm thinking/

Dee: /But you're talking about out there.

AP: I'm talking about out there, yeah, 'cause nobody's saying to the ex-gay people, "You're just in denial," but the gay community says, "Y'all are all just in denial."

Dee: Right, you're just in denial.

AP: So if you think of the Christian, traditional, mainline Christian, that aren't gay affirming, yet, or whatever, from their position they would say, "Well, you know, there's deception or," so

Dee: Well, <big sigh> let me put it this way, I said this to my mother, no, I didn't.

AP: You thought it. <laugh>

Dee: No, I didn't./

AP: /Just kidding.

Dee: My mother wouldn't like it, I mean, my-my mother it-did-would not, but I did say it to somebody, I said it to Karen <i.e. partner> I know, and I probably said it to other people, too. I said it to my friend Marie, who I never did get to talk about her, I told you, you know, that I'd known her for 20 years and she's still in my life. She's married and miserable, but won't do anything about it. Um

AP: Because of religious convictions?

Dee: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, and because she has as son and her husband's okay, I mean, they-I think he's gay, too, and so they like hardly ever have sex, you know. <laughing> My husband wasn't gay and he wanted it all the time and I was like, "Get back, grrraagh, get away, get away, get away." <laugh> So um so uh anyway, what I said to them was this, "Even if I get to heaven and I find out that what everybody said down here that the Bible said was true and the Lord says, 'Depart from me, I never knew you,'⁸⁴ <voice softens, breaks, slow, teary voice

⁸⁴ An allusion to Matthew 7:23—And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. (NASB)

begins> I will not change the way that I live my life, I will not change the trust that I have in Him, I will not, um, change the love that I have for Him, the witness that I—that I live my life for him, I will not change any of that, I will live my life the same way that I am now, in th-and I'm talking about as a Christian, and as a homosexual, a lesbian, I will not change the way that I live even if He says, 'Depart from me, I never knew you.'" Because I can't live any other way. I can't live without Him here and I can't live, <pause> unless I pretend, without Karen. So that's it. <whispered; sniffs; teary voice ends>

AP: <pause> Well, was that a con-was that conversation that you had with Marie just about religious convictions or something?

Dee: Yeah.

AP: Uh, did, so did- was she implying that in a way?

Dee: Well, <sniff> we just don't talk about it anymore. Um, <sniff> we just don't talk about it anymore. I mean, we still have a really good relationship, but it's kind of like you just agree to disagree, you know, but-but that's how I feel, I mean I really do. I-I believe in my heart <sniff> and in-in the depths of my soul that uh God has gone before me, God is with me, um He's blessing me all the time, He strengthens me, He gives me the power, <sniff> and it's hard for me to believe <sniff> that, be-and you know I, and it's not-it's not bullshit, you know, it's not just words 'cause it was words for a long time, but it's not, it's like the deepest heartfelt conviction that I have <sniff> that God is with me, and <sniff> that I'm in the right place, and I'm doing the right thing, I'm living my life by the highest integrity,<sniff> um uh I uh, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel⁸⁵ in any way, shape or form and it's very hard for me to believe that I could live that way <long pause> and it be wrong, and-and-and my lifestyle be wrong <sniff> because I really do believe, you know, I mean the Holy Spirit doesn't have any problem convicting, <laughs> you know? And I know what conviction feels like and um I get convicted but not about this, I get convicted about, you know, other things that I've done, t-the way that I've spoken to somebody or, or um. If I haven't had a quiet time in awhile and I start to feel, you know, snappy at people or something, and you know, I'll feel conviction about that, you know, if I say something that um is hurtful to somebody, I feel conviction about that. And so it's not like I have a hard heart, or a calloused heart, my heart's very soft, and-and I believe with all my heart, that if this was wrong that the Lord woulda' convicted me a long time ago, and I woulda' turned from it and the Lord would've given me heal:ing from it and a natural <pause> can't stop it from coming kind of attraction for a man, and He has not done that, and I could either spend the rest of my life denying what's really true about that part of me, not being any good to anybody because

⁸⁵ An allusion to Romans 1:16—For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (NASB)

I'd be focusing on that struggle and miserable and all this kinda stuff or I can embrace it and say, "This is what I'm gonna do." I am uh at peace, um, I am happy, I can truthfully say to people that the Lord is my Shepherd and my guide and my strength⁸⁶ and my everything, you know, and make a difference in all kinds of people's lives from now until the day I die, and that's what I mean by I will not change the way that I live, I will continue to trust, I will continue to believe, I will continue to-to uh, you know, hang on to the death of, you know, my beliefs, even if that day He says, "Sorry, I..." you know. It's hard for me to believe that that would happen, but if it did, I still would not change. So do I know that I know that I know that I know that it's the right thing and there's never a doubt and, you know, maybe I'll go to heaven and maybe I won't? No, probably not, all the way down, but I believe it enough to keep goin' every day, year after year, day after year-day, you know. <...continued with sanctification theme...>

In (9.19), Dee constructed the trope of an "only" choice by stating that even if she knew that her resolution ultimately was going to result in eternal separation from God, she "would not change," claiming that she "can't live any other way." In so doing, Dee reversed her prior ex-gay narrative trope of a dichotomous choice by constructing a choice between God and her partner as impossible, thereby making integration the only possible resolution, irrespective of all other considerations.

Dee stated this unequivocal commitment to her spiritual resolution at the beginning and the end of a sanctification-themed narrative inset. This inset was filled with typical phrases and topics from evangelical language and focused on the "conviction" Dee experienced and "integrity" and Christian commitment she exhibited in other areas of her life. Consequently, Dee stressed and fortified her Christian identity within the frame of the hypothetical possibility that she had embraced something that might actually be contrary to her Christian faith. In so doing, Dee also employed coherence system accounts that I found to appear frequently in the ex-ex-gay Christian narratives—for instance, that if God had not provided "healing" through the emergence

⁸⁶ "The Lord is my shepherd", "guide," and "strength" are allusions to Psalm 23 and other Psalms and Biblical verses.

of opposite-sex attraction, perhaps same-sex attraction did not need “healing” and was to be “embraced.” Thus, Dee’s sanctification narrative is used to give a coherent account of her lived experience and justify the gay Christian self that her story revealed.

9.2.3 Recovery/therapeutic narratives

In terms of recovery and therapeutic narratives, Warhol and Michie (1996) applied Linde’s notion of a coherence system to AA recovery stories, which they described as “chronological narrative[s] of substance abuse, epiphany, and recovery” (327). As they rightly observed, such recovery stories are a type of conversion narratives: “Like all conversion narratives, whether of religious awakening or lesbian and gay coming out, these stories are retrospective narratives designed to reinterpret the past in light of a more enlightened present identity” (330). Recall that chapter 4 contained a discussion of the “medical metaphor” of “recovery” and the frequent analogy made between homosexuality and issues such as alcoholism in the ex-gay communities I studied. Ex-gay narratives also strongly resemble the narratives of struggling with and/or overcoming a formidable issue or problem in one’s life, such as those given in AA (the distinct differences already noted in chapter 4 notwithstanding).

Nina’s life narrative provides an example of the employment of this metaphor, in that she referred to her 24 years of lesbian relationships as being “caught up in this soul addiction.” Nina also clearly stated that such usage was intended to be metaphorical when she was describing why she thought people struggled with “coming out of the lifestyle,” as in (9.20) below.

(9.20) Nina: You know, all I can contribute to that is that I have a loving Father who, the Word says that He will not give you anymore than you can take, you know, or tempt you anymore than your are able, you know, and the thing was is, it’s like, the one thing, **the only thing I can compare it to any-remotely in attitude, not how it happens, but in attitude, is like someone who wants to quit smoking.** They want to quit like crazy, but they just keep smoking, keep

smoking because their body is addicted to the nicotine. So, even though the desire of their heart is to stop smoking, yet their body keeps telling them, “I need that nicotine or I’m going to make you miserable.” Well, that’s what sin is like to the soul. It’s like nicotine is to the body. Sin is addictive, and the thing is, you get to the point you say “No,” you don’t want to go there anymore. [...] It’s not an option. Like an alcoholic says, “No,” every day, “No more drinks, no more, no more. Done.”

In Sadie’s background, she actually had experienced a problem with alcohol and had participated in AA in order to “quit drinking.” Consequently, it was interesting to note that Sadie narrated her “struggle” with homosexuality in very similar terms and made direct parallels between the two experiences at several points during her story. At the time of the interview, Sadie had been out of the Liberty ministry for a number of years, but she had previously been a participant and then was the leader of the women’s program for two years. Prior to the excerpt in (9.21), Sadie had just claimed that she now had strong heterosexual attractions. In response, I had asked her about her experience with respect to same-sex attraction during her past process, which occasioned the AA parallel.

(9.21) AP: Did you experience same-sex attraction?

Sadie: Oh yes, oh yeah. I-I struggled, um, probably the first, I want to say first year, year and a half, I struggled. It wasn’t like constant, but it’s when the loneliness would get overwhelming, um, I would see a woman at the store or something, grocery store, or maybe at the mall, and, and I would, I would look at, I would see her and go, “Oh man, she is ni:ce.” But it was so funny, the things that I was taught in AA, when I was trying to quit drinking was you don’t stay in those thoughts, ‘cause if you do, you’re gonna go drink. Same thing, I used that same methodology when I was out of the lifestyle was, I couldn’t stay in those thoughts, because if I do, I’m going to fall. And I knew that, so I would just not stay there.

<...continued with story about moving into a neighborhood with numerous lesbian neighbors and an instance of being “hit on” by a lesbian neighbor...>

Sadie: And I wasn’t sure, “Is she hittin’ on me or not?” and I went in, and I called the gal that I’d been spending a lot of time with in Liberty, the, you know, we were meeting once a week, and I called her and kinda told her how the

conversation went, and she goes, “Oh yeah, she was hittin’ on ya.” But you know, and it was really funny, it really thrilled me <laughing>, but, you know, there was that flesh and that loneliness, that, this person was kind of hittin’ on me, and, ‘cause she was kind of asking me to go out and do something with her, but then at the same time, I had the, enough sense to go call my Liberty, whatever you want to call, discipler, and tell her about the conversation to get clarification, which I knew in my heart, but you know, so I had those attractions, but they, they just, praise God, they didn’t linger, and they, they-they got smaller and fewer and-and more time in between the attractions to where, all the sudden they were gone. You know, it was just like, I started seeing men that were nice looking. And the first couple times that happened I was going, “Whoa.” And then, what has happened, it’s gone almost like I’m a 5th grader or 6th grader again, it’s like, I’m always looking at these guys, you know, like, it’s the first time I’m seeing men, you know, so, it’s like, “Oh.” But yeah, I struggled at the beginning, I-I struggled for-for some time.

Thus, as (9.21) shows, as Sadie narrated the initial stages of her “struggle” with same-sex attraction after making her decision to come “out of the lifestyle,” she made a direct comparison with respect to her AA experience. In so doing, she emphasized the “sameness” of these experiences (e.g. “same thing, I used that same methodology”) in terms of what she had learned in AA with respect to the process of quitting drinking and dealing with temptations to return to the unwanted behavior. In this excerpt, Sadie also claimed that her attractions had diminished over a period of time and that opposite attraction had emerged, thereby reflecting a typical chronological sequence progression I saw evidenced in ex-gay narratives for those who claimed to be further along in the transformation process and at a state of greater sexual identity resolution.

With respect to AA stories, Warhol and Michie stated, “To reproduce the master narrative in recasting his or her life story, the recovering person constructs a new referent for the word *I*: “My name is Susan, and I’m an alcoholic” (335). As discussed at length in chapter 4, in the ex-gay Christian metanarrative, narrating a new self involves the deconstruction of “homosexual” as a self-identifying referent, and the new referent that is then constructed is the *I* “in Christ.” Many of the ex-gay participants remarked on how it

would be difficult for a “non-believer” to understand such a basis for one’s identity; however, as Stromberg (1993) noted, evangelical Christians believe in an inner “true self” that is radically altered through conversion and persists thereafter in this new and transformed state. As shown in the sanctification genre discussion, the journey of life then becomes one of “growing” in this new identity. In excerpt (9.22) below, Lori’s life narrative demonstrates the struggle to establish this new referent and to bring it down from the metanarrative level of belief to the actual framing and narration of the individual life itself. At the time of her interview, Lori was a 19-year-old sophomore in college who had come to spend her summer at the Liberty women’s residential program.

(9.22) Lori: **And He’s <i.e. God> challenging me with that, and um, just even forsaking the lifestyle. I guess I haven’t fully done that, ‘cause, you know, I, it’s me, I feel like it’s me. It’s my identity, it’s who I am, and, I don’t want to be that way, but I haven’t completely turned my back on it, I guess.** So those ’re like, the things He’s dealing with me, right now. [...] I just, I want to get to the point where I can just be like, like no matter what, no matter who comes my way, even if I do desire it, I will still say “no.” I want to determine that in my heart, and I can’t, I can’t say that. Um, Rosa’s been talking to me a lot about that. She’s like, “You need to determine in your heart, even though you feel like this is who you are, and even though you want it, you need to determine that you’re not gonna go back there.” And, so that’s what I’m working on and that’s what I need to do. And it’s-it’s a hard decision to make. [...]

AP: Well, what would you say to people that would say, “That’s just repressing your true self or denying your true self”?

Lori: **Denying my true self? Um, I would say that, if you want to be a disciple, you have to deny your true self all the time.⁸⁷ I mean, you have to deny, you’re a si-, you’re born a sinful person, you’re born with tendencies to do anything, to be an alcoholic, to be a homosexual, to, just, to be rebellious in your heart even, and, you know, daily, you have to deny that.** And, you just have to say, “No, I choose God over this.” So, if they want to say, “You’re suppressing it,” then fine, I’m suppressing it, but I’m-I’m suppressing it for God, and He, I believe He can change me. I just have to be more obedient than I’ve been. He’s not gonna come down and zap me with change, you know, I, it has to be something I actually forsake and say, “I don’t want this.”

⁸⁷ An allusion to Luke 9:23—“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (NASB)

AP: So you feel like a homosexual is really your true self and you have to deny that for God, or, is that your true self, or?

Lori: **Um, I, honestly, I believe I was born with tendencies. And I believe, I hate to say that I was-I believe I was born completely this way, but I do know I was born with a sinful nature, and that just comes along with it.** Um, I-I just think no matter what circumstances happened in my life, I would have been this way, like, no matter what. And, um, it-it's-it's a big controversy to the Christian world, they're like, "Oh, you're not born that way." But, I'm almost tempted to say that I was. **But that's not, I don't use that as an excuse. I don't think an alcoholic should use that as an excuse. Is it my-it's not my true self because my true self is found in Christ⁸⁸ and I am a new creation.⁸⁹ So, it was who I was, and it's something I still struggle with, but, no, it's-it's not my true self, no, it's not, now that I think about it.**

AP: And so who is your true self?

Lori: **Um, my true self, I-I'm, you know, it's that list, I'm a royal priesthood, I'm the salt of the earth, I'm the light of the world, I'm a child of God.⁹⁰ And that's who I am, and that's who I'm striving to be more like. You know, I might not live that way, but it is who I am, and I believe that. I'm trying to believe that, I guess.**

As (9.22) shows, Lori was struggling with making a "decision" with respect to her sexual identity alignment and life trajectory because she still so strongly desired the "lifestyle" and hadn't fully "forsaken" it. She was also struggling to narrate her life in terms of the ex-gay Christian metanarrative, as she equated an intrinsic part of her own identity with homosexuality, (e.g. "it's my identity; it's who I am") and was "tempted to

⁸⁸ Lori's discussion about the "true self found in Christ" is understood by evangelicals to be substantive mystical reality rather than merely metaphorical, and as I have shown, this understanding is greatly emphasized in ex-gay ministries. For instance, a large portion of one women's group session was focused on discussing and memorizing Galatians 2:20, which Anna quoted in her opening to the session as follows: " 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.' The-crux of this <pulls out book>little booklet has been healing, a-about healing homosexuality. But in essence it's far more than that, it's-it's being called to die to lots of things and live to Christ. To live through Christ." (Transcript: Liberty women's group, July 30, 2002)

⁸⁹ An allusion to the by-now-familiar verse from 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁹⁰ "That list" refers to a list of Biblical verses that are said to describe Christian believers and were commonly emphasized during the program at Liberty. 1 Peter 2:9—"You are a royal priesthood..."; Matthew 5:13—"You are the salt of the earth..."; 5:14—"You are the light of the world..."; "children of God"—numerous verses, e.g. John 1:12; Galatians 3:26.

say” that she was “born this way,” which contradicts the ex-gay position that views homosexuality as primarily emerging from child development issues. However, Lori also employed the religious metanarrative coherence system, and in so doing, she was able to maintain the evangelical account of homosexuality being intrinsically unhealthy and immoral even if it turned out that she was born with “tendencies” towards that sexuality (e.g. “I was born with a sinful nature”).

As the exchange progressed, Lori clearly framed her struggle in terms of the religious metanarrative in which she made the familiar parallel with “alcoholism.” The rest of the exchange shows that Lori “believ[ed]” and yet also was “trying to believe” that her “true self” was based on “who [she is] in Christ.” Consequently, her individual narrative was not yet fully fluent in the telling as her “decisions” and “beliefs” were still being worked out and the establishment of the new referent for *I* was still in process.

A final note on this excerpt should be made regarding language and agency. While agency has been mentioned with respect to a few examples prior to this one,⁹¹ a fuller examination of the narrative construction and employment of agency within ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives is warranted but is beyond the scope of the current project. Lori’s statements such as, “I have to be more obedient” and “[God’s] not gonna come down and zap me with change,” provide another instance of the common narration of an intersection between human moral culpability and cooperative agency interacting with the Divine. As mentioned in the introductory chapters, most of both the ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives in this study are constructed primarily within the canonical evangelical framework of moral agency as acted out with respect to one’s individual relationship with God and tend not to emphasize power dimensions outside of this relationship. Thus, a treatment of the language of agency in these narratives would be a worthwhile endeavor.

⁹¹ For example, see chapter 5, excerpts (5.3) and (5.18).

Regarding ex-ex-gay narratives, once again, the deproblematized and embraced status of homosexuality renders the recovery narrative genre irrelevant. Therefore, the only references that I found to an alcoholism metaphor or similar language in ex-ex-gay narratives was to disagree with the analogy or mock the ex-gay use of such a metaphor, as was seen in David's narrative at the end of chapter 8 (cf. (8.8)).

9.3 STRUCTURE

With respect to the relationship between narrative and the self, Linde (1993) described narratives as having an iconic relationship to the self in that "narrative establishes the self" of the narrator (98). In so doing, she discussed how narratives encode the "continuity of the self, particularly continuity of the self through time" (100). From a structural standpoint, I found that both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives parallel and encode the struggle to achieve a unified and coherent sense of self, bearing an iconic relationship to the "conflicted" self in numerous ways.

First, in contrast to a coherent narration of a "continuous self," the organizational structure of the narratives encoded that the life experience of the narrator had often been one of significant discontinuity. This discontinuity is demonstrated in that the life story is frequently narrated as two entirely discrete narratives, alternating between accounts of the sexual self and the spiritual self, not simply as a matter of organization or focus, but because the life experience was perceived as necessarily divided and discrete, thereby rendering concurrent narration impossible. This organization can be seen in the excerpt from Dana's life narrative in (9.23) below.

(9.32) Dana: Um, and, uh, not long after that, **I became friends with another woman, who became my first lover. Um, and all during that time that I was involved with both of those women – because the first one, it, it was, uh, you know, it was a love relationship even though it wasn't sexual. Um, so both of them were intense, and during that time, basically, I just stopped going to church,** stopped going to any kind of Bible studies or any of the activities, you

know, and, basically, I mean, I would have still said, “Of course, I’m a Christian,” but, you know, **I felt like I couldn’t do both, you know, so I just cut out doing anything Christian**, and mostly, that was just guilt. I didn’t want to hear anything that might, uh, be, uh, painful, or that might, uh, convict me of, uh, of f-, feeling that I was being sinful or all that. I think intellectually I felt like I wasn’t so I, but I just said, “Screw it. I don’t want to hear it. I’m going to do this anyway.

AP: Intellectually, you felt like you

Dana: Were s-, were, b-, were sinning, you know, being, uh, uh, that being involved in the lesbian relationship was sinful, and **so, rather than deal with that, I just kind of set up a, a separation, you know, between the sexuality and spirituality**. So, um, let’s see. Then, uh (pause), uh, that relationship ended. It lasted about a year, and then it ended. I did some mission work, um, so then it was sort of like, **“OK, I’m out of that lesbian relationship, so now I can go back to being a Christian,”** and when I did, I like jumped in and, you know, I was working in ministry <laughing>, so it’s sort of like all or nothing, you know.

As (9.23) shows, Dana set up an alternating narrative account of separate, parallel stories with respect to her homosexual life and Christian life because she “felt like [she] couldn’t do both.” Thus, the narrative structure Dana employed to recount her life experience directly encoded her management of the conflict in her life experience at the time, namely, “set[ting] up a separation between the sexuality and spirituality.” Dee also explicitly referred to a “fragmented” life experience, as in (9.24).

(9.24) Dee: And uh that’s when I started hanging out at the bars and doing that whole deal. I did the candy store, and you know, the kid in the candy store kind of thing, um with uh, you know, hanging out at the bars every night and going home with a different one every night and stuff like that, **which is a, um, you know, not a good thing**, but a very common thing in the lifestyle, in the gay lifestyle, uh especially if you come out, you know, after you know, I mean, when you’re an adult.

AP: Mm-hm. So what was your relationship with God like that-at that time?

Dee: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It really, I mean, just absolutely nothing. I just I didn’t um, but that was also in <city> was when the first time that I had gone to um an MCC, and I want you to know that when I went to that MCC, and I heard about it and everything, but I still, even though, I was, it was like, **my life was so fragmented, OK? It’s not, it wasn’t uh, uh, I hate the fact that I can’t**

remember, um, uh my vocabulary's real, real wide in my mind, but then when I try to say the word, I can't. But anyway, um, integrated. It's--it's completely integrated now, OK? My spiritual life, my sexular [sic]—my secular life, my sexual life, you know, e-everything, it's all one thing and none of it, nothing's separate. But at that time, it was so fragmented that um and I ha-and it had been for years, that my spiritual life was over here, God was over here, and then fun was over here, and well, OK, maybe Satan was too, but that's OK, because it was still fun, you know, and-and so as long as I didn't go to church and you know have the guilt put on me, course it was still in there somewhere, but I smoked and drank and you know, tried to, and hung out with people that cussed and stuff like that. It was kind of like my sowing my wild oats, you know, in your face mamma, kind of stuff. I have no doubt at all that a lot of it was rebellion against my mother, but I didn't know that at the time. And um so I started to hang out at the bars and you know, doing all that stuff.

In excerpt (9.24), Dee was describing her early 20s as “fragmented,” and she contrasted that time with her life “now” where she stated that her “spiritual life and sexual life” are “all one thing,” “integrated,” and “nothing's separate.” This brief description and contrast indeed encapsulated the narrative structure of Dee's life story as a whole. Therefore, her narration fleshed out as an alternating story line between the sexual and spiritual life experience, but ultimately became a chronological, consequential, and thematic progression toward their integration and convergence. As a result, concurrent, non-alternating narration became possible for the structure of the end of her narrative. This pattern was not only true for Dee, but also for Dana and for all who had reached (or were reaching) gay Christian resolutions (cf. (7.1) and (8.4)).

The excerpt in (9.24) also presents an opportunity to remark on another primary aspect of the narrative relationship to the self—specifically, narrative activity provides the means for self-reflexivity and moral evaluation (Linde, 1993). Hence, Dee's remarks of “which is not a good thing” with respect to her sexual involvements through the bars at that period of her life and “I have no doubt at all that a lot of it was rebellion against my mother, but I didn't know that at the time” were evaluative comments on both the moral

standing and motivation of the protagonist of the past given from the narrator's present perspective.

As noted, Ochs and Capps (2001) stressed that establishing "moral stance" is a central component of everyday narrative. In ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, as stories of a primary moral dilemma and struggle that is experienced as core with respect to the life and identity of the self, moral stance is not only an important narrative component and function, but also a primary theme; as such, this aspect of the narratives is highly salient and even heightened. Consequently, the evaluation component of these narratives is crucial, and evaluative commentary is frequent throughout. Linde wrote, "Perhaps the most important function of reflexivity is to establish the moral value of the self. People do not want just any objectifiable self; they want a good self, and a self that is perceived as good by others" (122).

With respect to the "perception of others," the social function and negotiation of moral evaluations resulted in an interesting occurrence during Ricardo's narrative, where I as the other audience member (in addition to Ricardo himself as the narrator and the tape recorder) became part of his own evaluative projections.⁹²

(9.25) Ricardo: I really wanted to change. I-I-I-I've-I think maybe, I don't know, I feel like a little bit of a hypocrite saying that, because I'm thinking, "Well, she's probably thinking, 'Well, he, you know, here he slipped up with two guys, at least two guys in the ministry, you know, in ex-gay ministry, who is he trying to fool that he was really trying to change?'" Well, I really wanted to change, I really did.

As a final note on the "double" and "divided" life experience, the excerpt from Ranni's life narrative below demonstrates that, of course, this is a theme of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives. In (9.26), Ranni was discussing her plan for becoming "one"

⁹² Ricardo had made other evaluative comments with respect to his involvement in these relationships during the telling of his narrative. This excerpt occurred near the end of his interview, and a review of the transcript showed that I had made no comment on and asked no questions about this aspect of Ricardo's story.

and not “split.” Due to her religious beliefs at the time, Ranni viewed an integration of homosexuality with the Christian faith as unacceptable syncretism and therefore as an implausible option for her life, so she decided to “walk away from [her] faith.” In the end, however, Ranni’s life decision, hence narrative, became one of an ex-gay trajectory. Therefore, Ranni’s integration ultimately came through her bringing her sexuality into conformity with her evangelical Christian religious beliefs as she had always understood them.

(9.26) Ranni: And I got very hard, very hardened at this point. I was honest enough with myself and with the Lord to know that homosexuality was wrong, and it was during this time that I decided that I couldn’t live a double lifestyle anymore. So right before I went to <name of developing country>, we-I had decided, “That’s it, can’t do this anymore. I know God can’t accept it, so I’ll just-will walk away from my faith. At least I’m happy, I’m not-I’m not feeling guilty, I’m not feeling divided. If I go into the lifestyle, I’ll be one and not split.” So that’s what I decided to do.

Also with respect to narrative structure, I found that several common features emerged as a result of these narratives being stories of two distinct aspects of the self that were, at least initially, resistant to concurrent narration. First, the question of where to begin was frequently a vocalized matter of debate in the opening orientation clauses. Second, orientation clauses were frequent throughout the narrative progression, as narrators continued to re-orient the story to the aspect of the self being addressed at the time. In addition, the narratives were often disjointed in their temporal-clause sequences and thematic development, reflecting their function of managing a level of identity *incoherence* rather than simply re-telling linear progressions and giving clear explanatory consequential sequences.

In order to demonstrate some of these features, namely, this type of frequent and progressive re-orientation, I have excerpted just a few clause-sequences from Mark’s life

narrative (for sake of brevity). (9.27a.) is drawn from the narrative opening and beginning segment, and (9.27b.) is drawn from the narrative's concluding portion.

(9.27a.) AP: <after final introductory demographic question with respect to religious background> Mm. OK. All right, and, well, I guess, and you'll tell me where you are now, so that'll just bring me to your story.

Mark: Yeah, I <laughing>, **where do we begin? Oh, um, well, I-I, it, uh, since this is about sexuality and-and faith, um, as I said that, uh, faith is probably one of the very first, most powerful impressions that I can, uh, think about for my early life.** Um, we attended a church that was built block by block by Polish immigrants as a replica of European cathedrals –and just absolutely gorgeous frescoes and, and, uh, marble statuary. Uh, I-, later in life, I, I discovered that the frescoes that I grew up staring at were actually replicas of frescoes from the Vatican. [...]

Um, um <clears throat>, I think as I, um <sigh>, **right early on as well—I'm switching over to talking about the, the early impressions about sexuality—I** would have to say that I'm one of those people that early on I can remember looking at some of the bigger boys in the neighborhood and looking at men like when we'd go to the beach swimming, and really just being fascinated with the male physique and having kind of a deep longing, um, that was kind of, uh, as a little boy it was sort of like a daddy longing, you know – I-I-I-I really, boy, I'd like this guy to take me home, you know, I'd like that to be my daddy.

(9.27b.) Um, where I am as far as sexuality is that through that collapse of the evangelicalism in my r-, e-, the rebuilding of my Christian beliefs really brought me to the belief that God – **if there is a God, though He's, well, let's go back a couple of years when I was still believing in God and talking in those terms.**

I will conclude this subsection with one final aspect of the iconic narrative encoding of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay life experience, namely, the narrative reflection of the processual nature of such life experiences. Coming out stories are said to be “processual” and not a one-time type of identity event. With respect to this processuality, coming out stories have been shown to have numerous evaluative clauses that reveal a negotiation of identity that precedes acceptance, yet with an on-going resolution as that self is revealed to others and is continually re-created as “gay” through the coming out story and process (Liang, 1997).

As I have shown, the life stories that ex-gays and ex-ex-gays tell bear clear resemblances to coming out stories and represent a type of identity work that is processual and most often described as a “journey.” While there is a teleological progression in both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, both are generally resistant to codas and telic resolutions, but differ in what remains primarily processual. My data show that ex-gay individuals’ embrace of traditional evangelical Christianity mirrors the discrete “before” and “after” resolution of spiritual beliefs such as that found in conversion narratives (followed by, as we have seen, a progressive story of “growth” and “sanctification” thereafter). However, most ex-gay narratives contained a continued, processual account of transformation, and often struggle, with respect to sexuality, as in (9.28).⁹³ For ex-ex-gays, an acceptance of homosexual identity parallels coming out stories in having a distinct resolution to sexual identity, but is accompanied by an account of transformation, and often struggle, with respect to spirituality and religious beliefs, as in (9.29).

(9.28) Bart: It’s not who I am, and it’s not who I’m going to be. <i.e. homosexual> [...] But realistically, I think it’s a healing process. And I, I think that God is using this as my testimony, to let the people know that do struggle that-that there is hope, that they are not called to be that way.

(9.29) AP: So, so tell me about when did the, w-, what was the process or when did you come to the place where, I mean, instead of going to <ministry> and saying, “I’m struggling with my, with homosexuality,” I mean, when did it become for you just “This is, you know, this is a non-issue, and God, you know, either is, you know doesn’t care about it or He’s pleased with it, and this is actually the way I’m supposed to be”? I mean what was your conclusion, and how did you get there?

David: Well, I don’t know that I’m entirely there. I mean, you know, there, there are times when I wonder <pause>, I mean, there are times when I wonder if it’s d-you know, if I’m totally b-, b-, have bought into this whole rationalization thing,

⁹³ My data were certainly primarily drawn from those in the “midst” of the process by the large number of individuals who were *active* participants in ex-gay ministry at the time of the research.

and I know that I have friends – I know my friend <name> would probably just like “Oh my God, he’s totally lost to us” –as far as this thinking goes. I mean, I don’t think that she would ever think I’m going to go to hell because of it, but I think that she would think that “He’s so misguided.” Um, so I don’t, I mean, I’m not, I mean, there are times when I wonder, “Uh, maybe I shouldn’t be so confident about this, because do I really know?”

With respect to these processual aspects and struggles, the narrators of both stories often engaged in “side-shadowing” (Bernstein, 1994; Morson, 1994; discussed in Ochs and Capps, 2001), where narrators voiced their considerations of alternate, hypothetical paths and possibilities with respect to their life experience. In (9.30) below, Beth had been commenting on the potential of a life of singleness, at the conclusion of which she paused to consider what might have been, but stated that she would never know the answer to those questions until “it’s all over and done with.” In (9.31), at the conclusion of recounting his spiritual journey and gay Christian identity resolution, Ricardo offered two possible interpretations to his life experience, but also stated that he would never know which interpretation truly fit until his life’s journey was completed.

(9.30) Beth: You know, were there missed opportunities? Sure. <...described two marriage proposals, one while she was “in the lifestyle”...> Do I look back and go, “Was that my missed opportunity?” Those are the would’ve, should’ve, could’ve, that you’ll never get an answer until it’s all over and done with, you know. [...] If it <i.e. marriage> happens, would it be wonderful? Sure. Do I have a regret? No. ‘Cause I don’t want to live with regrets. I really don’t. If I had to do it again, if I, you know, it’s kinda that, “If I had to do it again, how differently,” I mean, I can see significant points in my life, would I have made a different decision with the wisdom that I have now? Certainly. And I think that’s true of any-anybody that-that grows, you know, and comes to different in their points in their life, to say, “Golly, if I had,” but will I have regrets? No.

(9.31) Ricardo: Whether I’ve gone over to the dark side, or you know, or I, or-or a truth has been revealed to me, I’m not sure which, but you know, someday I’ll know. Someday I’ll know, but it’s, it’ll be after I die I think, that I’ll truly find out whether this is God’s will for me or not. How do you know? I just don’t know how you know really.

A fewer number in both the ex-gay and ex-ex-gay identity categories report complete resolution, but only after a processual account. An example of a claimed full sexuality resolution is seen in (9.32) below, whereas a claimed full spirituality resolution is given in (9.33).

(9.32) AP: Do you ever ex-experience same-sex attraction? <i.e. currently>

Ranni: No, it's all gone. 100% gone, it's great, I mean, I-I wish I had a dollar for everyone who says that, though, I'd really not need to work anymore <laugh> and my kids could all go to school so—It is always the question, because when you're in it, you never can think how you can not be in it.

(9.33) Alex: I went and I enjoyed it, but I had a hard time inside reconciling that this was really even possible to be gay and Christian. I mean, I heard it all the time at church, but I wasn't to the point where I believed it yet. [...] So that was a, it was a long journey, even when I moved to <city> in 2- in 1990, I still was struggling, and the pastor <i.e. at MCC>, he knew that I was struggling. [...] Like I said, little by little, trying to-to integrate, and you know, I-spiritually, I'm to the point where I have no, there are no conflicts between-about being a Christian who happens to be a gay person.

In conclusion, this section of commentary on the structural features of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives is of course not a final or exhaustive treatment. On the contrary, it is intended to be only the beginning. However, I hope to have demonstrated some of the actual linguistic structures and features through which these narratives manifest and encode the life experience of the selves they seek to both create and represent.

9.4 FEATURES

In this section, I highlight two salient features of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay identity transformation processes and the language and identity interactions these features involve. In section 9.41, I address the critical role of literacy and literate behaviors with respect to both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay life experiences, which are thus significantly reported on in the narratives themselves. In the same way, in section 9.42, I discuss the multi-voiced and dialogical nature of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives and report on

dialogism as it relates to the specific genre of ex-gay narratives in particular. Due to length considerations, this discussion is brief and is intended only to foreground these issues and establish a basic starting point for the fuller investigation that these prominent aspects of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives warrant for future research.

9.4.1 Literacy

Here I will briefly discuss the importance of literacy with respect to identity transformations of both ex-gays and ex-ex-gays. Literacy is clearly intrinsic to the use of written texts as sources for shaping identity. During the course of this research, I have found that for the people I interviewed, understanding the self was a significantly text-centered practice and that language acquired and shaped through literate behaviors was central to both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay identity processes.

With respect to sexuality, especially for older individuals, Leap (1999) discussed the importance of written sources to the establishment of gay and lesbian identity. His work emphasized language gained through literate practice as a major resource for young men's understanding of their experience of same-sex attraction and construction of gay identity during adolescence. To demonstrate this fact, Leap included many coming out narratives that established the search for information through texts as a highly common theme. For an example of this text-based search, recall excerpt (9.6), where Trevor used the dictionary as a source to understand and define his identity through the acquisition of the term "homosexual."⁹⁴

Ex-gay individuals use textual resources to gain new understandings of homosexuality and alternative identity possibilities. As seen in chapter 4, the reference to

⁹⁴ The crucial nature of written texts being discussed here has clearly changed. While these sources are still significant, the increasing presence of homosexuality in the popular media and discourse, in addition to the prevalence of the Internet and its offerings, has led to a much wider array of potential sources of language and conceptions of homosexual identity; thus, written texts are now examples of some among many resources, whereas in previous generations, such texts were the primary resource.

a search for language and the need for names and words to understand, and thus subsequently transform, one's experiences is a common theme among ex-gay narratives. The source of this new language is found primarily in written texts and text-centered interactions. For example, in excerpt (9.34) below, Beth described "grabbing everything that [she] could" from the Christian bookstore and reading for about eight months, prior to her hearing about formal ex-gay ministries.

(9.34) Beth: Um, I was in the church, I was getting instruction in the Word, but I was struggling with my sexuality on my own, um, because again, I didn't know about <ministry>. I went to a Christian bookstore, and there were actually books on the shelf talking about homosexuality. I was grabbing everything that I could. I was grabbing it, and I'd take it home, and I'd read it, um, and probably for that first eight months...

Similarly, ex-ex-gay Christians also employ textual resources. However, having accepted (or being in the process of accepting) homosexuality, their search is for new understandings of spiritual and religious ethics, Biblical interpretation, and their spiritual identities. Thus, Alex narrated his experience in almost identical language to Beth's excerpt above, as he referred to "reading every single book [he] could get [his] hands on," as in (9.35) below.

(9.35) Alex: That's when I started doing a lot of study on homosexuality and the Bible, um, reading every single book I could get my hands on. You know, I got to the point where I needed to take a chance on God again, and slowly, you know, I started going back to church to um, this church called [...<name> and church description, "primarily in ministry to gay and lesbian people"...] I went and I enjoyed it, but I had a hard time inside reconciling that this was really even possible to be gay and Christian. I mean, I heard it all the time at church, but I wasn't to the point where I believed it yet.

In Beth Daniell's (2003) work on the spiritual practice of women in Al-Anon, she demonstrated how these women in recovery employed their private, literate practice, from reading to writing, as a means of self-formulation and empowerment. Interestingly, for both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay Christians, text and literacy provides both the identity

crisis and the cure. Individuals are led on a journey of self-reformulation and negotiation as they work out and wrestle with the Biblical texts that, at least initially, they felt set the metanarratives of their faith and sexuality at odds. Thus, text-centered practices in the lives of these believers provide not only the means of identity transformation, but also the demand that propels them into more literate practice to resolve the text-induced conflict.

The re-negotiation of textual meaning and a re-formulation of the self in relation to the text are demonstrated from an ex-gay perspective and one from an ex-ex-gay perspective in the excerpts given below. For the sake of brevity, these excerpts will not be analyzed in detail, but both represent narrative descriptions of significant turning points in the story and conception of the self. These turning points involved the narrators coming to new understandings of the problematic Biblical passages, after which they claimed to have a new understanding and acceptance of the self and a new concept of “freedom” with respect to their own identities. I begin with the ex-gay excerpt in (9.36).

(9.36) Peter: I didn't know what “Lord” meant. And, uh, and so I'm praying about that, and, and the Lord interrupted me, kind of like when I was driving, and the next thing I know, I have this vision in my head of me and my first lover, not my sixteen-year-old experience, but a couple years later when I had actually met a-a man that I really felt like I loved and cared for and gave him my entire being, heart, mind, and soul. And, in this vision, I'm with him in our bed, and the Lord is standing beside our bed, and He's crying. And, you know, and I felt in my soul this overwhelming sense of grief. Um, and I started crying, and I hope I don't start crying now. But, He, He was weeping over us, and He said, um, and I don't, it wasn't like a voice in the room or anything like that, I just know it was Him, and He said, “Peter, what is this sin?” And I'm like, and I remembered Leviticus, I mean, I didn't remember the exact verse at that time, I'm only a two-month-old Christian, and it was the only Scripture I knew, because that's what they held up at all the gay pride parades, Leviticus 18, whatever, 18:22 now, but, um, it says, “When one man lies with another as a woman, it is an abomination before the Lord.” And I was like, you know, “Lord, I hate that Scripture. If I were, if I were able to be like Thomas Jefferson and cut out everything I don't like,⁹⁵ that would be the first one to go.” And He said, “Peter, what is the abomination?” And I

⁹⁵ Peter's statement here is an allusion to historical accounts that Thomas Jefferson's religious faith and worldview was basically a Deistic one that did not allow for the miraculous or supernatural; thus, he literally removed all of the references to supernatural occurrences from his copy of the Bible.

don't know, I'm not a very grammar type of person, and I'm not doing this for your benefit. This is on record, I share this every time I share my testimony, um, I broke down the sentence, and "When one man lies with another as a woman, it is an abomination before the Lord." "It," and I got hung up on the word "it," and the Lord asked me, "What is 'it'?" And I was like, "Uh, a gender neutral pronoun." He said, "Exactly." And right then, it was like this starburst of revelation, of "I'm not what He hates," it's what I was doing, and that's why He's weeping over our bed instead of beating us to death or stoning us to death, because, and I really felt like the Lord said, "I have created you and him to know My love in a whole different way, and neither one of you knew Me, and that broke My heart." And I thought, "If God can interrupt me and tell me something like that, that I have never heard before, never, ever heard before. I had heard pro-gay theology; I had heard the condemning Christian voice, um, which I don't necessarily think is Christian, I'd say culturally Christian, um, but I'd never heard that, and it messed me up, because, and then, to add to that, um, I really felt like the Lord said, "And I was weeping for Nick," because Nick died a year after we broke up of HIV, and He said, "I didn't, I don't have anything to do with that." And I'd heard that AIDS was God's curse on, on homosexuals, and, and now I believe that it's not – it's the res-, it may be a result of sin, but it's because of the fallen world, not God's will. And it, I was just floored and amazed and, um, and when I got up from that prayer time, I knew that homosexuality was, was sinful, but the whole definition of what sin meant, and, completely changed me, and it, it was like He wouldn't, a loving God would tell us what's good and what's not good. He wouldn't be loving if He didn't tell us what wasn't good.

In (9.36) above, Peter claimed to have a vision from God in which God clarified the Old Testament verse that Peter most hated. Peter claimed that God instructed him and helped him to realize that "it" is a gender-neutral pronoun and hence could not apply to him in terms of his personal self. Hence, in a claimed Divine instance of "transformational grammar," Peter stated that he realized God had always loved him, but "it," i.e. his homosexual behavior, was what God rejected. Peter also constructed the voices that were not truly representing God, i.e. "pro-gay theology" and "condemning," "culturally Christian voice" in opposition with his own personal revelation from God in this encounter. Thus, Peter claimed that by the end of the "prayer time," he had a new understanding of what the verse and sin meant and who he was in relation to both God and the text.

Excerpt (9.37) displays an ex-ex-gay textual transformation, taken from Dee's life narrative (cf. (8.5) for surrounding context).

(9.37) Dee: I thought, well I'd been reading the M-Message and I thought I'm just going to read it, I'm just going to read Romans. And so, well, my-my-my plan was to read Romans 1, and just see what it says, 'cause I love what it says all—well, Sandi's husband preached out of the Message Sunday morning that we were there, and so and I just loved it, and he said, "I love it." He already had it in leather and everything and he said, "This is so great because it's just today's language and, but it's tr-translated right from the Greek," and, you know, and-and Hebrew now, but at the time it was the Greek, and um and it was just, you know, so great. And so when I got home I got my-my Billy Graham, I got my-my Billy Graham version, my little paperback version and uh read Roman's 1. My intention was to read Roman's 1. Well, I ended up reading the whole entire book, and I realized because of the way it's written in paragraph form, like a story, Romans is not about homosexuality. Romans is about the law and grace is what it is, and Romans 1, all Romans 1 is, is a picture of the downward spiral that mankind, you know, humankind, uh you know, ended up in and the reason why we needed the law and grace. That's all it is, it's not about homosexuality, and I would just love to tell a-uh-uh-a uh right-wing preacher that, you know because and what was so neat was that in the-in the Message and you read it for yourself, when it talks about homosexuality, it talks about cheap loveless sex, those are the words that Mr. Pe-that Dr. Peterson uses in-to describe homosexuality, cheap, loveless sex. Well, Amy, what I have with Karen is not cheap, or loveless or just sex. And that set me free. It was like that's what it says. And I wrote out to the side of that-of that page even, and I wrote out to the side, "Praise God, this is not me, this is not who Paul was talking about—me."

In (9.37), Dee discussed how her viewpoint had been changing and her emerging belief that God had created her gay. She then described how she decided to re-visit the troubling text of Romans in a new contemporary English paraphrase version of the Bible. In so doing, Dee also gained a new understanding of what the text meant and who she was in relation to God and the text. Consequently, Dee claimed that Romans was not about homosexuality and that what she saw in the new version of the text did not describe her life or her relationship with her partner. As a result, Dee claimed a new release and sense of freedom, saying that she wrote "Praise God" to the side of the verse because she no longer located herself in the text, i.e. "This is not me. Paul was not talking about me."

It should also be noted that in this excerpt, Dee mentioned journaling and things so private and personal that she couldn't even write them down. Thus, not only reading but also writing is an important part of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay transformations. Similar to many 12-step or support-group-based settings, journaling is a highly valued and encouraged practice within the ex-gay communities I studied. This practice of literacy through journal writing was poignantly referred to in Brad's life narrative, as in (9.38).

(9.38) Brad: Um, I, uh, I've made maybe three journal entries in the last three months, and, uh, I guess the biggest step was really getting it out and having it on my dining room table, because it was a symbol of my relationship with the Lord, where I would just talk to Him and, honestly, scribe down what He was saying back, and, um, it'd, you know, it's like intimidating just to see the thing on the table now. But it's like I know I'm supposed to leave it there, you know. If for no other reason, it's a symbol that He's still there, you know, and waiting, I guess, for me to <sigh> open the dialogue.

At the time I interviewed Brad, he was somewhat of an identity itinerant. As noted in chapter 6, Brad had left the ministry at Liberty because he "was not ready to make the change," which to him meant giving up homosexual sex and pornography. Excerpt (9.38) records Brad's discussion of his journal being a "symbol" of his relationship with God. As many individuals do, ex-gays in particular, Brad saw journaling as dialogical and interactive, here, with the Divine. It is interesting to note that this symbol was not his Bible, thus marking the importance of the journal to him. As a result, Brad stated the journal was hard to even look at, because at that time Brad perceived distance between him and God. These data exemplify the fact that, whatever is happening in ex-gay and ex-ex-gay transformations, it happens largely through both individual and collective literate practices.

9.4.2 Divine dialogism

In the final excerpt (9.38) of the above section, Brad's mention of God "waiting for [him] to open the dialogue" brings up the final aspect of these narratives that I wish to

point out here, namely, the dialogical and multi-voiced nature of the narratives themselves. With respect to dialogism, the ex-gay Christians I researched believed in and explicitly focused on the constitution and completion of the “true self” as occurring through dialogue with God (Payne, 1981/1996). While all prayer is in essence dialogical, involving a human participant seeking to come into “communion with the divine” (Ochs and Capps, 2001), ex-gays in the ministries I studied were taught to wait and listen for the divine *response*. Such expectations of hearing “the Spirit in the inward self” and the subsequent reporting on what was heard is not uncommon among certain groups of evangelicals and reflects the focus on the individual believers’ life with God and individualized experience of the divine (e.g. Titon, 1988; cited in Keane, 1997). It should be noted that, not surprisingly, the ex-gay ministries also explicitly taught that all of one’s individual “hearings” must be filtered through and “checked against” the Bible, as individuals are admittedly subject to errors in discernment.

During the course of my research, I heard someone using the phrase “journey out of monologue” in reference to Ranni, so when I conducted her interview, I asked her about this phrase. She explained that said phraseology had come from Leanne Payne’s writing and teaching and was aptly applied to her journey. During the course of her narrative, Ranni then used this terminology explicitly to describe her process. In (9.39), Ranni was describing the “before” of her spiritual and sexual conversion, invoking the “monologue versus dialogue” distinction we had discussed earlier in order to claim that at that time in her life, she was not appropriately interacting with God and others. Interestingly, in (9.40), Ranni spontaneously returned to this characterization at the conclusion of her interview to contrast herself “now” with the way she was “then” and to claim a healthier life and more “peaceful” present life, while still referring to an ongoing process of coming “out of monologue” with respect to self-hatred.

(9.39) Ranni: I mean talking about living in monologue as opposed to dialogue, it was a monologue of just me and who I was. And I could not hear the voices of other people and I could not hear the voice of the Lord even though I could hear Him and knew what was right and wrong, I could not receive any type of objective word from other people or from the Lord because I could only reflect it off of who-of me. I was just talking to myself, basically. And what other people saw was me projecting myself, had nothing to do with who they were and how we reflected off each other. There was no dialogue in terms of give and take, there was no dialogue in terms of speaking truth into each other and receiving truth from each other, none of that. It was just me.

(9.40) Ranni: But my identity is very much posited in the Lord right now. I'm fully in dialogue, I know when I'm not in dialogue because I can tell, there's no peace there. Um one of the areas in my life that I'm currently working on right now is self-hatred. And self-hatred is all monologue, it's all a reflection of who I think I am. It's got no objectivity whatsoever, and that-it's been a very pernicious thing for me to work on.

As has already been well demonstrated throughout this dissertation, both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives evoke the multi-voicedness of all conversion and spiritual life narratives, as actual quotations of text from the Bible and multiple allusions to and metaphors from it scaffold the recounting of individual experience. In addition, ex-gay narratives invoke voices from the past in terms of descriptions of the past "gay self," while ex-ex-gay narratives invoke past voices of religious and ex-gay experiences. Both types of "past voice" invocation serve to strengthen the current identity position by reflecting on the former identity with a transformed and more "enlightened" perspective. Thus, both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives clearly demonstrate what Lindholm (2000:63) discussed from James Porter's (1986) work, namely, iterability, which Porter described as a form of intertextuality within discourse communities referring to "the repeatability of certain textual fragments, to citation in its broadest sense, explicit allusions, but also unannounced sources and influences, clichés, phrases in the air, and traditions" (35).

However, as I have shown from Ranni's description above and numerous others throughout, ex-gay narratives in particular have many recountings of claimed individual interaction with the Divine voice (and recall that these narratives frequently incorporate and report not only on God's voice, but the voice of "the enemy" (cf. chapter 5, section 7). I close with an interesting example of this dialogical multi-voicedness, an excerpt in which Bart invoked the voices of the distinct persons of the Christian Godhead.⁹⁶ This excerpt, (9.41), is drawn from Bart's one-year follow-up interview. Bart was about to graduate from the Liberty program and was telling me about his experiences within the ministry that year. In so doing, he described how early on in his time there, "shortly after I left" the year prior, he had seriously considered "giving in" and embracing a homosexual identity. However, Bart proceeded to claim that his individual dialogical encounters with God kept him from doing so and helped him to embrace his "true self," which for him was not homosexual.

(9.41) Bart: I know that I have issues. I know that there's these deep wounds that need a lot of healing. There's been a lot of salt poured into them, and, but God had to come, and He had to show me my weaknesses, show me how, h-, well, how bad I really needed Him, you know, and when He started to do that, shortly after you left, that night that I was just weeping before God, He started just showing me how lovely I was, knowing that I have issues, that He did not look at my issues, He wasn't looking at all my struggles, He wasn't looking at all that, but He was looking at me with the Father's eyes, looking at me, saying He loved me, and I've never had that perspective. I always thought God was this supreme being, ready to tear me up, to destroy me, and that Jesus was the one median between me, "Please, Lord God, don't hurt him," and it was just like my relationship with my father and my mother. My dad was the supreme being. He was there financially. He provided for me, but he was ready to tear me up, if I did something wrong. And my mom was there, being the median, trying to protect me –and trying to guard me, and in that God saying, J-, Jesus telling me, come a-

⁹⁶ Traditional orthodox Christianity theology is monotheistic, but teaches that God exists in a union of three distinct but consubstantial persons, i.e. the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ochs and Capps (1996) discussed this belief to illustrate "theological narratives" that "present deities as distinct and at the same time treat them as parts of one being and one's self. For example, the Christian Bible holds that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are at once a trinity of distinct entities and a unity and that this trinity/unity inhabits the souls of followers" (22).

bringing me, because I knew He was the Lord of Lords. I knew He was my Savior, I knew He was the one that died for me. J-, Jesus had to come to me and reveal to me, through the Holy Spirit, “Bart, God, My Father, was the One that sent Me. He was the One that loved you so much. He was that One that cared about you so much that He sent Me to die for you, and I came willingly, because I knew that I wanted to please the Father. I knew that I loved My Father. And now, Bart, I want to introduce you to My Father.” <sigh> And so, coming to terms with having a relationship with God the Father, the Father I never had, the Father that almost every single one of the people that struggle with homosexuality did not have there, every single person that is struggling with alcoholism and all those other things that they’re dealing with, the Father they didn’t have there, the mom they could not trust, the mom that was dumping on them all of her emotional stuff – all of those things that the G-, the Father God, the One who is so much better than any of the natural father, any natural mother, or anything, was there. He loved me. He sent Christ to l-, to die for me and to love me. And, and now, <sigh> there was so much that has happened this year, it’s so hard to put everything in words, you know.

As (9.41) above shows, Bart was claiming to have had dialogical interactions with “Jesus, through the Holy Spirit” in order to correct his wrong perceptions of “God the Father.” In this excerpt, Bart clearly linked the claimed divine revelation to both his understanding of the evangelical Christian metanarrative of salvation and relationship with God with the new metanarrative coherence system concerning homosexuality, his own childhood, and “struggles” he had gained during his time at Liberty. Thus, Bart was re-voicing his religious metanarrative and ex-gay ministry coherence systems at several levels, both invoking and applying these systems to structure his individual life narrative and validate his personal life choices, all through the claimed revelation of his dialogical encounters with the Trinity.

In closing, I have emphasized these examples of “dialogism” simply to acknowledge that the multi-voicedness and intertextuality of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives merit further study and a much deeper treatment, and a hoped for next step of inquiry with respect to my own work would be to conduct a Bakhtinian analysis (e.g.

Bakhtin, 1981; 1986) on the abundant data that I have only summarily and cursorily addressed here.

9.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this chapter I have highlighted some of the core aspects of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives with respect to their genres, structures, and features. Ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives are textually layered, multi-voiced, and processual in complex ways. For both sets of narratives, identity is being discursively re-created through the interaction of the metanarrative coherence systems and the individual life narrative, which for most has been and is mediated through literate practices and dialogism with respect to the Biblical text, God, the self, and others. The next chapter (10) is the final chapter of my analysis of these narratives of identity, in which I address the issues of language, gender and sexuality.

Chapter 10: The language of gender and sexuality

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The current chapter represents the final chapter in my analysis of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives, and here I explore the ways religious beliefs about the nature of gender impact and affect both language and linguistic practice in the ex-gay ministry settings I researched. Specifically, I demonstrate how the inextricable links made between sex, gender, and sexuality within ex-gay evangelical theology allow transforming expressions of gender to be interpreted as transforming sexuality as well. While some of the changing gender expressions are predictably toward more of what could be considered those linked to traditional cultural norms, interestingly there is also the creation and reception of a new freedom of gender expression within the ex-gay community, as concepts of masculinity and femininity are constructed that resist certain dominant cultural stereotypes, reframing what manhood and womanhood look like for these Christian men and women in particular. I also denote clear differences exhibited in ex-ex-gay narratives with respect to the references to and beliefs about gender found therein.

First, in section 10.2, I establish that the ex-gay ministry group functions as a community of practice (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eckert, 2000). Second, in section 10.3, I demonstrate that gender and sexuality are inextricably linked in both the ex-gay theology and psychology of gender identity, which forms the basis for interpreting transforming understandings and expressions of gender as evidence for transforming sexuality as well. In section 10.4, I demonstrate how ex-gay Christian beliefs about gender affect both the language and linguistic practice within the ministry as a whole and of ex-gay individuals themselves. Next, in section 10.5, I discuss ex-ex-gay narratives

and the markedly different references to and understandings of gender they represent. Finally, in section 10.6, I offer brief concluding remarks to the chapter.

10.2 THE EX-GAY COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:95) defined a community of practice as an “aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor.” Thus, “a community of practice differs from traditional community by being defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages” (174). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet also stated that the community of practice concept helps researchers overcome reductionist assumptions common in language and gender research, such as gender’s being seen as independent of other aspects of social identity relations and an assumption that gender means the same across communities. The ex-gay ministry setting provides an excellent opportunity to apply the concept of a community of practice and to note the ways in which understandings of both gender and sexual identity are reconstructed through language and practices emerging from “shared belief and symbolic systems,” especially because, as we have clearly seen, for ex-gay individuals, these understandings are primarily determined by their concurrent membership in another identity category: namely, their religious identification as evangelical Christians.

The Liberty ministry shares the distinctive features of a community of practice as delineated by Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999); namely, it involves a group of members who share a set of required practices and the same social goal, define and construct membership internally, and have an active awareness of the inter-dependence of their personal and group identities. Wenger (1998) listed three dimensions of a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire of

negotiated resources over time. Recalling the description of the ministry setting given in chapter 3, the community at Liberty experienced mutual engagement and regular interaction in that both men and women had separate study and support groups that met for two hours weekly, and members participated collectively in Bible studies and other ministry functions on other nights. Also, the members of the residential program lived in a community setting in one of the three ministry group houses, and all members attended the same non-denominational evangelical Christian church. Additionally, group membership indicated participation in an active and situated social process of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as the participants moved towards their goal of sexual and spiritual identity transformation. As previously noted, individuals in the ex-gay ministry may seek a range of differing outcomes within that goal; however, again, all members shared the primary goal of “growing in their relationship to God” and in obedience to their understanding of sexual morality. Thus, recall that this shared overall goal was captured in the key Liberty ministry slogan: “You are not here to overcome something; you are here to be overcome by Christ.”

The notion of community is crucial, and I argue that within the ex-gay ministry setting, the process of identity transformation is not only individually experienced, but is also actively and collectively created and jointly produced through the group dynamics and discourse. This joint discourse production is illustrated in the interchange given below. The context of (10.1) was the women’s group at which I obtained signed consent forms from the women to record the subsequent sessions. The excerpt below resulted from Lori’s response to my requesting the women to choose a pseudonym for purposes of confidentiality.

(10.1) Lori: Just use my name. I feel like I have the word “homosexual” written on my forehead. It’s like everyone knows I am. <all said in a resigned tone>

Morghan: Don't say that about yourself. That is not the truth of who you are. You are not a homosexual.

Thus, in (10.1), the identity dilemma being expressed individually was collectively reshaped through interactions and exchanges with another group member. Ranni made an explicit reference to community and its importance in her life narrative, as in (10.2).

(10.2) Ranni: That was the benefit of being in a community that understood Leanne's <i.e. Leanne Payne> teachings, in that they would not engage in dialogue with my false self. They wouldn't feed that wounded, neurotic part of me. Being in community where God has placed you, not only just speaking truth all the time, but just speaking. You grow, you learn through dialogue with others and that helps bring you out of that monologue place where you only hear your own thoughts about yourself and who you are.

In addition, within the ex-gay ministry setting, it is not only the dialogue of what is said, but also what is *not* said that shows member competence in the community. For instance, consider the excerpt in (10.3) below, which was drawn from a recording of an impromptu group discussion with Deborah, Larry, and Felix at the Liberty ministry office, in which I asked them to describe their impressions of the ministry and their own experiences there.

(10.3) Deborah: We have to be sensitive to where others are in their process. It's a sensitive situation to talk and that's why, even graduating from here,⁹⁷ I have to make sure that I say certain things in code so I won't affect someone else's process at the moment. Like instead of me saying how the relationship was, as far as how I felt about the relationship, me spending time with her, or doing this and that with her and how it doesn't bother me anymore to talk about the past. Well, me talking about the past, somebody else could be dealing with the same issues that I used to deal with and what I could be doing is taking their minds or their thought patterns back to where they're vulnerable at. I might not be there anymore, but this person could be, so it's kind of like difficult and you have to be careful in what you say.

With respect to Deborah's comments, there were numerous shared anecdotes of group members learning the above-described concern and conscientiousness for others

⁹⁷ At the time of this recording, Deborah had just completed and "graduated" from the program, as discussed in chapter 3.

and making many mistakes of giving “too much information” during personal testimonies (i.e. when group members share their individual life stories) and having to be guided by the group leader in what level of detail was appropriate or inappropriate to be shared. While providing the intimacy of laughter and inside jokes, these anecdotes also clearly served to socialize and teach other group members the shared group norms as well.

The above are a clear example of Wenger’s (1998) assertion that every community of practice involves situated learning. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) referred to this “learning” as the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence within the community. Thus, as has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, becoming a member of an ex-gay community of practice clearly involves mastering the discourse related to the traditional evangelical Christian belief system and the ex-gay understanding of sexuality. However, mastering this understanding of sexuality is inseparable from understandings of gender, as I will now demonstrate.

10.3 EX-GAY THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER

The ex-gay evangelical religious beliefs concerning sex, gender, and sexuality operative within Liberty specifically and ex-gay ministries more generally were fully discussed in chapter 5. Recall that these beliefs are primarily drawn from the evangelical understanding of the Biblical account of creation found in Genesis chapters 1-2, natural law-based arguments with respect to procreation, and passages within Scripture that are interpreted as prohibiting homosexual behavior. Here I would like to briefly revisit a few of the excerpts previously given (the excerpts are in truncated form from three given in chapter 5) in order to highlight and establish that their references address beliefs not only about sexuality, but also gender, and thus demonstrate the implicational relationship of these two aspects of human identity within the ex-gay worldview. For example, consider Henry’s excerpt in (10.4) below (cf. excerpt (5.3)).

(10.4) Henry: **God created me to be a man. I don't believe that God made people homosexuals.**

In the excerpt above, Henry linked being “created to be a man” with his belief that God did not “make people homosexuals.” In so doing, Henry set up a contrastive sequence emphasizing his belief that being “made” a certain biological sex is inextricably bound up with the existence of a complementary opposite sex as the only appropriate and intended direction for sexual expression. Bart directly invoked the creation story and his understanding of it in his life narrative, as in (10.5) below (cf. excerpt (5.2)).

(10.5) Bart: I'm not in denial, that I've ever struggled, but I was born a heterosexual. Christ called me from the very beginning, **God called me from the very beginning to reproduce with a woman, that He saw E-, Adam alone, and He sent Eve, a woman.**

As seen in excerpt (10.5), Bart stated that he was heterosexual from birth, thereby aligning himself with what he viewed as God's objective intent for him (i.e. “God called me”), despite his subjective experience of same-sex attraction. (Note that this statement also indexed the ex-gay ministry tenet that homosexuality is not an innate or genetically encoded trait.) Thus, while Bart acknowledged having “struggled” with homosexuality, he chose to define his sexuality in terms of what he viewed as the intrinsic design of creation, which in his understanding is a potentially procreative union with a woman.

In terms of Critical Discourse (Fairclough, 1995), both Henry and Bart naturalized heterosexuality and biological sex via an oppositional denaturalization of homosexuality, thereby reflecting their theological worldview. A final example of such is given in (10.6), where Deborah denaturalized her experience of same-sex attraction (i.e. “anything that seems to be natural”) in light of an objective “way it's supposed to be” that she claimed emanates from the Creator (cf. excerpt (5.14)).

(10.6) Deborah: **Well, I would say to any-anyone who says I'm naturally attracted to women, anything that seems to be natural, when God touches, it's the way it's supposed to be. I used to think that I used to be naturally**

born homo-homosexual, but God showed me something different, God showed me the right way to live.

Thus, in (10.6) Deborah reported a relinquishment of her previous thoughts about being “naturally born homosexual” and the authority to self-define, claiming to have sought the One who knew her true identity and would tell her “the right way to live,” which for her encompassed sexual identity, attraction, and behavior.

Andy Comiskey, a prominent ex-gay ministry leader and author of several books used at Liberty, clearly laid out the ex-gay theology relevant to the discussion here in the following quote, where both sex and gender are ontologically rooted in the being of the Creator and therefore have an origin and nature that transcend human beings. (I have bold-faced certain items in order to emphasize the recurrence of relevant terministic screens within the text.)

God’s intention for humanity is represented by the **harmony of man and woman together**. But that freedom to be for another requires **security** in one’s **personal identity as male or female**. Thus **gender security** matters profoundly. In paradise, that security was a given. But in the **post-garden reality of a child’s development**, one can either **grow or fail to grow** into that confident posture. Whereas **biology determines one’s physical sex**, **gender identity** involves the **more complex process of acquiring a sense of oneself as a male or female**. And that **process can go wrong**. Still, it remains true that security in one’s own **identity as a man or a woman** precedes the freedom to be for another. The compelling nature of the “**otherness**” perceived in a member of the **opposite sex** results from the clarity and **security** one experiences in his or her own **gender identity**. **The image of God, then, involves gender identity and complementarity**. **God created gender in its duality as male and female**. And he created us as his representatives to discover that **duality**. In order to be true to the divine command, a person must reckon forthrightly and concretely with his **maleness or her femaleness in relation to the other**. The “**true self**” always includes one’s **gender identity and its relation to the opposite sex**. (2003:25-26)

As seen in the above passage, ex-gay evangelicals accord ontological status to male and female because of their belief that the human dimorphism of biological sex was

intentionally designed by God to reflect His image.⁹⁸ With respect to sex and gender, while these variables are not entirely conflated, they are inextricably bound together in an implicational relationship that involves a one-to-one mapping of biological sex onto the traditional correspondent gender and gender onto heterosexuality. In addition, there is a binaristic understanding of gender, where men and women are seen as “dual” and “complementary,” having intrinsic and fundamental differences. Relatedly, there is a heterocentric understanding of sexuality that inherently links sexuality with biological maleness and femaleness and an intended pairing with the “other,” as in the quote above, where one sex is never mentioned without a collocation or reference to a connection with its “opposite.”

Comiskey’s comments also reveal ex-gay beliefs about the psychology of gender and sexuality. Whereas a biological determinism is expressed concerning physical sex, gender identity is seen to involve a “more complex process” of development and coming to a secure “sense of oneself” that corresponds with being male or female. “The post-garden reality of a child’s development” alludes to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, loss of perfection, and subsequent expulsion from the garden;⁹⁹ in short, ex-gays believe that all now live in a “fallen world,” one that is marred by sin and in which children can either “grow or fail to grow” into a “secure gender identity” and the development process “can go wrong.”

Crucially, the attainment of a “secure gender identity” is seen as directly related to the development of what ex-gays would consider healthy heterosexuality; as above, “gender security” is said to precede the ability to perceive the “compelling nature” of the “otherness” of the opposite sex. Hence, the ex-gay worldview characterizes

⁹⁸ This belief is based on their interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27: “...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” (NASB)

⁹⁹ As noted previously, this story is recorded in Genesis chapter 3.

homosexuality as a result of “gender confusion”¹⁰⁰ and most often attributes same-sex attraction to some type of disturbance in the process of child development. In a recent ministry newsletter, Liberty was self-described as “a ministry for the man or woman who is gender confused, has same-sex attraction, and wants help due to the call of Christ in their lives.” Reflecting all of the beliefs described above, “healing homosexuality” has commonly been referred to as “restoring the broken image”¹⁰¹ (Payne, 1981/1996).

10.4 THE LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC PRACTICE OF GENDER IN EX-GAY DISCOURSE

In an article on indexing gender, Elinor Ochs wrote that “gender ideologies are socialized, sustained, and transformed through talk, particularly through verbal practices that recur innumerable times in the lives of members of social groups” (1992:336). However, in this work, Ochs described how there is relatively little direct linguistic indexing of gender in terms of purely referential forms; thus, she posited that there is a “constitutive relationship between indirect indexical relations” and other categories of social meaning, which can include “conversational acts, speech activities, affective and epistemological stances, and participant roles” in the construction of gender meanings within any given community (342-343). In this section, I demonstrate how the ex-gay metanarrative beliefs about both gender and sexuality affect the language of its holders in profound ways. These effects are seen on both the direct referential indexing of gender and the indirect indexing through multifarious facets of social behavior and comportment as Ochs described. Consider the excerpt in (10.7) from Ranni’s life narrative, where she described aspects of her behavior when she was self-identifying as lesbian and involved in same-sex relationships:

¹⁰⁰ For example, Mick referred to this belief and used this specific terminology in chapter 5, excerpt (5.8).

¹⁰¹ Recall that evangelicals believe all humans are “broken” from sin. For example, Payne wrote: “Homosexual behavior is merely one of the twisted paths this fallen condition in man takes. . . . We are all fallen, and until we find ourselves in Him, we thrust about for identity in the creature, the created.” (Payne, 1981/1996:125).

(10.7) Ranni: Oh yeah, I wore only black, I was really into **the scene**, you know, I had my hair spiked and I'd write really bad introspective poetry. I would drink my coffee only black and I'd smoke imported cigarettes, and I was **acting out** what, if you even look at right now in the gay lifestyle, especially in the lesbian **lifestyle**, you-you see a lot of these **women acting out their false masculine**, and it was really **tough**, and it was a **refusal to be anything “quote-unquote” that a woman is** in the eyes of society or in the eyes of God because really it's the eyes of God because society reflects that. Some of it's good and some of it's bad, some of it is caricatured and stereotyped; it's not a full understanding of it. But, you know, **a woman is a woman** because that's **who God created her to be**. And I think you could see that across the cultural. It has nothing to do with how Western society mirrors it. There are some things that a woman is, period, and in **dressing up** the way I did and in **acting out** the way I did, I was basically saying “no” to all of that—of-to **being a woman** because I **refused** to be victimized, and I **refused to be like my mother**, weak and passive and indecisive and paranoid, fearful, and uh emotionally a train wreck, and I couldn't go there.

In (10.7) above, Ranni's language clearly reflects the ex-gay Christian worldview concerning both gender and sexuality. First, phrases such as “the scene,” “lifestyle,” “acting out,” and “false masculine” invoke images of performance, of an enactment of an identity or a role that is a false characterization rather than an emanation from her true identity. Notably, in this section of her narrative, Ranni's description is not made in terms of sexual involvement, but gender comportment, as she referred to the semiotics and style markers of her self-expression at that time, such as stereotypically “tough” behaviors, (i.e. drinking only black coffee, smoking imported cigarettes) and dress styles (i.e. a “spiked” hairstyle and wearing only black).

In characterizing her behavior as a “refusal to be anything quote-unquote that a woman is,” Ranni set up both a volitional choice and an oppositional contrast. First, Ranni described herself as having chosen to “say ‘no’...to being a woman,” which implied a volitional rejection of her true gender identity. Second, Ranni stated that her “dressing up” and “acting out” was in opposition to “some of the things that a woman is—period.” Thus, while stating that there can be societal distortions of what women are (e.g. “some of it's good and some of it's bad”), Ranni indicated her belief that there are

some characteristics of a woman that are essential and that transcend culture based on “who God created her to be.” Hence, with a twist on Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity, Ranni constructed her gender identity as having an essential reality, and then discussed both her performance of gender and expression of sexuality in terms of whether she was acting in accordance with, or in opposition to, this reality.

Finally, Ranni linked her “refusal to be a woman” with a “refusal” to be like her mother and enumerated several of her mother’s negative traits and characteristics (e.g. weak, passive, indecisive) with which she would not identify (i.e. “I couldn’t go there”). In so doing, Ranni referenced one of the most common themes that has been previously demonstrated with respect to ex-gay narratives, namely, the etiology of same-sex attraction. Thus, as we have seen, with respect to developmental influences, the failure to bond or identify with the same-sex parent is seen to inhibit attaining a “secure gender identity” and is frequently discussed within ex-gay ministries as a partial contributor to the development of homosexuality. For example, in *Healing Homosexuality*, a book studied at Liberty, Payne (1985/1996: 61) stated: “For a young boy to seriously reject his own father (even with “good reason”) is often to find that, as an adult, he has rejected his own masculinity” (from a chapter entitled, “The Problem of Gender Identity”).

Ponticelli (1993) described the ex-gay belief in God as the perfect parent and Father who can heal traumas and make up for deficits experienced in childhood to bring people into their true identities, including gender identity¹⁰² (also noted by Wolkomir, 1999; Erzen, 2002). This belief is clearly reflected in the following quote from Payne:

A man, unaffirmed in his masculinity, can fully integrate with it as he learns to come into the Presence of God, the Father, the Master Affirmer. There, listening to Him, he begins to “taste,” as it were, the divine Masculine that resurrects his own. (1985/1996:58)

¹⁰² For a particularly explicit expression of this belief, see Bart’s follow-up interview excerpt (9.41).

Thus again, gender is believed to be transcendent and can be called out by the God of whose image it is a reflection. However, sex and gender are not entirely conflated within the ex-gay worldview, as shown in the following, drawn again from the most read author at Liberty, Leanne Payne. The book, *Crisis in Masculinity*, was part of the required reading curriculum for men involved in the ministry:

Our Creator, holding all that is true and real within Himself, reflects both the masculine and the feminine, and so do we. The more nearly we function in His image, the more nearly we reflect both the masculine and feminine in their proper balance—that is, in the differing degrees and aptitudes appropriate to our sexual identities as male and female. [...] In fact, there is profound ontological significance in this matter of the essential polarity of the sexes and of the masculine and feminine genders. To disregard their complementarity, out of which issues fullness of being on the natural plane, is finally to strike a blow at the true self in every man—indeed, at *being* itself. ...Gender participates in the mystery of *being* itself. (Payne, 1985/1995: 86, 95, 96)

And due to ex-gay beliefs about sexuality, there is an implicational relationship that to receive affirmation in their gender will have an effect on ex-gays' sexuality as well. Consider Ranni's post-narrative interview, during which she reported that she no longer experiences same-sex attraction to any degree. In a follow-up question about emotional attraction, she claimed again that she had been "healed," as in (10.8).

(10.8) AP: Do you ever have to watch yourself with emotional intimacy with women?

Ranni: No. I don't anymore. That part has been healed. I don't and that's amazing. **That stemmed from not being affirmed by my own mother, I think, and having that area affirmed in my life through the Lord has really helped me.**

In this excerpt again, Ranni related aspects of her struggle with women to "not being affirmed" by her mother, and claimed that receiving God's affirmation in those areas "really helped" and led to "that part" being "healed."

Ex-gay narratives often describe a process of accepting one's sex and gender in the journey of coming out of homosexuality; hence, the linguistics of self-reference

(Ochs' (1992) direct indexical relations) is often described as changing with respect to gender identification from a more neuter position¹⁰³ to one of embracing either male or femaleness uniquely. Recall again the book the women at Liberty studied entitled *Out of Egypt: Leaving Lesbianism Behind*, in which the author recounted such a process and concluded with the following statement:

No longer would I refer to myself as a Christian person, as I had for the past several years. From now on, out of obedience to God, I would call myself a Christian woman. (Howard, 1991:178) (Cf. chapter 6, section 6.4).

In excerpt (10.9) below, Justin described his process of laying aside a gay identity in the gendered terms of learning “how to act like a man.” Similar to previous examples, he associated his manhood with God’s creative action, to which he was then responding. Also, at 39 years old, Justin’s statement of “I haven’t learned that yet” implied that there had been some disruption in the process of his male identity development and maturation.

(10.9) Justin: I’m a man, God created me a man, and I’m going to learn how to act like a man. I haven’t learned that yet. That’s what I’m doing. You can say I’m gay, acting like a man. But that’s not what I’m saying, you have your perception, and I’ll have mine.

Thus, due to the intertwined understanding of gender and sexuality in ex-gay theology, transforming expressions of gender can be interpreted as evidence of transforming sexuality as well. Consider the following excerpt from Beth’s narrative, which is given as (10.10) below.

(10.10) Beth: I was learning not to identify with “gay,” but I didn’t see myself as a Christian woman <laughs>, and probably at that time as a woman maybe, you know. I really, it was like I couldn’t put a label on it. I was in that wilderness in my own personal identity, and that was probably part of that growing and that

¹⁰³ I use “neuter” here to indicate feeling and/or identifying as neither male nor female and to reflect the usage of this term that I have seen evidenced in the language of ex-gays themselves. For example, Howard wrote: “Feeling more like a ‘third sex’ than male or female...I was a gender-identity itinerant, migrating somewhere between the masculine, feminine, and neuter” (1991: 177). Also, see Beth’s excerpt, which follows in (10.10), where she struggled with wanting to say “it” as a stage of identification preceding her identification as “woman.”

painful process, because I was just kind of – I don't want to say an "it," but I didn't, you know?

In the above excerpt, Beth described going through a "wilderness¹⁰⁴ in [her] own personal identity" where she did not identify as a "woman" and yet did not know what to identify as, being in the process of "learning" to relinquish a gay identity. Notice once again that Beth set up an opposition between "gay" and "woman," not "gay" and straight, indexing her belief that acceptance of a certain gender identity implicated a non-gay sexuality. Beth then went on to describe a process of becoming more comfortable with herself as a woman and spoke of changes in hairstyle and dress that took place slowly over time. Regarding these external gender expressions, Beth said, "When the healing happens on the inside, you'll see the reality on the outside."

Not surprisingly, many of these transformations move toward what would be considered a more traditional gender expression. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) argued that it is through our membership in various communities of practice that gender is both produced and expressed, using both the symbolic and linguistic repertoires associated with that group. Morrish and Leap's (2003) article addressed the close interrelationship of the social identity categories of gender and sexuality. In this discussion, Morrish gave an anecdote of a conversation between two lesbians and a third unidentified party, a conversation in which references to dress, hairstyle, and resistance to traditional gender norms helped identify the third party as lesbian without a formal coming out. In the ex-gay settings I studied, the women not infrequently discussed modifications of their own gender expression, which they viewed as "growth" and an index of progress in their sexual identity transformation.

¹⁰⁴ "Wilderness" is a Biblical allusion to Israel's journey out of slavery in Egypt, as recorded in the Old Testament. Howard's book title, *Out of Egypt: Leaving Lesbianism Behind*, also clearly is an explicit allusion to this journey as well.

For example, Naomi was a member of the women's support group at Liberty, though she was not part of the residential program. In her life narrative, Naomi reported that she was the only girl out of a family of twelve children. Thus, with eleven brothers, she had been surrounded by males and had often been dressed in her brothers' hand-me-down clothes. As Naomi participated in the support group and ministry over a period of time, she expressed her belief that God had "created her to be a woman," but due to her upbringing and life experience, she felt she had not been able to embrace that. Thus, Naomi reported a deep desire to become what she felt was more in line with her "true self," which for her involved embracing more traditional feminine attire and expressions.

Professionally, Naomi had worked in construction and carpentry for seven years. Thus, as part of this gender identity process, Naomi told me how she had shared with the group that she felt her life was too "masculine" and that she desired to find other employment as one means of expressing more of her "natural femininity." It is important to note that this was Naomi's expressed desire, and was not a result of anyone from the group saying to her that "women should not be carpenters." As a result of Naomi's sharing her desire, group members encouraged and supported her in her pursuit. While I was at Liberty, Naomi was still giving occasional reports during group sessions on her progress with respect to potential new jobs, her "more feminine" attire, and so forth. Thus, through their mutual engagement in the joint enterprise of creating a new identity, these women formed a community of practice that both facilitated and re-affirmed their identity goals, in which both gender and sexuality are equally important facets.

While Naomi's example above represents a shift in gender compartment toward more traditional gender norms, within ex-gay discourse, there is also often discussions of receiving a new freedom of gender expression that does not necessarily have to

correspond with societal or cultural definitions of what a man or woman should look like, as seen in excerpt (10.11).

(10.11) Beth: Sometimes I find it hard to relate to a woman who's very, maybe exudes the feminine as prissy or something, because I'm **not that kind of woman**, but I've come to a place in my life at forty-eight and forty-nine that **I'm content with who I am, and as long as I'm continuing to grow in Him, and I'm the person and the woman that He made me to be, that I'd be content with that**, because for a long time, **I've tried to be what everybody else wanted me to be** –and so, that's that **performance**, and, and you can perform and perform and perform, but you'll never make everybody happy and satisfy everybody. For me, **I'm content with who I am, and I'm not the quote unquote very feminine – I'm not the woman who walks on air**, you know. I'm a little bit more – uhn, uhn, uhn <claps hands 3 times in sequence with short, abrupt sounds>, <laughs>.

Thus, in excerpt (10.11), Beth contrasted herself with a “prissy” or “very feminine” woman, stating that she was “not that kind of woman.” She claimed a contentment and freedom with her gender identity with respect to not living up to certain “feminine” standards or stereotypes and stopping trying to “perform” for everybody else to be what they “wanted her to be.” Again, Beth referenced identity and affirmation as coming from God, and stated that as long as she was “the woman that He made her to be,” she would be “content with that.”

During a men's focus group discussion, I asked participants about their concept of masculinity and where it came from. This question led to the following interchange in (10.12), in which the group members set up a contrast between what they viewed as contending concepts of manhood, namely, masculinity according to God versus “the world.”

(10.12) Bart: I feel that God needs to show me who He wants me to be. And His Holy Spirit needs to convict me and show me. I want Him, through His Holy Spirit to show me what masculinity is, you know? Because the world says a man should be sittin' back, you know, holdin' his crotch, watchin' TV, you know, you look at, what's the guy's name that, you know? Watch TV, (???)

Simon: “Married with Children.”/

Bart: /["Married with Children"] you know what I'm saying? He sits there in back [with his hand in his pants],

Jon: [that is no:t a good]/

Bart: /drinkin' a beer, watchin' pop porn, [you know what I'm sayin'?]

Simon: [that's my dad].

Bart: or, you know, and/

Simon: /that's my role model/

Bart: /bein' rude to the mo-you know, the wife, or you know [just bein'] real passive.

Simon: [Controlling.]

Bart: You know, I mean just all these different things, you know, that the world does./

Simon: /[Degrading.]

Bart: [And then] then the worl-the-a male watches football. A male does this, a male does that./

Simon: /Yeah./

Bart: /Not necessarily. [You know what I'm saying? A male]

Simon: [Not every single one.]

Bart: does not have to be a "hrooo hooo hooo." <i.e. Neanderthal-ish sounds>

Simon: And you're made to feel if you don't, then you're not a man.

As excerpt (10.12) shows, Bart first stated that he wanted "God to show him" what masculinity is. He then began describing what "the world says" a man should be and illustrated this via a negative TV image of manhood from the sitcom *Married with Children*. Bart listed several features of the stereotypical insensitive, boorish male and

described the male protagonist on the show as a beer-drinking, TV-engrossed, passive, rude man “sitting back holding his crotch” and watching “pop porn.”

After Jon agreed that the TV show and image was “not a good” thing, an interesting sequence occurred where Simon began a cooperative series of latches and overlaps to both agree with Bart and identify the image with his own father. Simon’s statements of “that’s my dad,” “that’s my role model” are a reminder of the ex-gay belief in the importance of gender identification with the same-sex parent, but the “worldly” image being constructed here is negative and one with which Simon clearly did not wish to identify and did not value. Simon’s overlapping negative attributions of adjectives such as “controlling” and “degrading” further indicted this construction of masculinity.

Bart then vied against a monolithic concept of manhood by referring to stereotypes such as “a male watches football” that are “not necessarily” the case, which Simon agreed with by his overlap of “not every single one.” The interchange culminated with Bart’s statement that “a male does not have to be” followed by his vocalization of ape-like, grunting noises, thereby performing the Neanderthal-ish stereotype he had been constructing from the TV show. Simon ended with the critique of American culture that if one doesn’t fit certain stereotypes (e.g. watching football), “you’re made to feel like you’re not a man.”

As seen in this excerpt, Bart and Simon collaborated and displayed several key beliefs about gender from an ex-gay perspective. Clearly, Bart and Simon would reject stereotypical “fraternity”-type masculinity and heterosexuality such as that described by Kiesling (2002). Thus, these men believe that while there are different concepts of manhood according to “the world,” many of them are undesirable, distorted, and not what God intended. Bart believed that God could reveal to him “who He wanted him to be” and “what masculinity is,” and similar to Beth’s narrative about femininity, this

masculinity does not necessarily correspond with or live up to certain cultural stereotypes.

A final example of the transformation of linguistic practices related to gender and sexuality comes from the same focus group session above. Recall that in the previous discussion on ex-gay beliefs about identity, I briefly mentioned the fact that Liberty has a ministry rule that prohibits camping,¹⁰⁵ a stereotypical gay male speech performance, among the ministry participants (cf. chapter 5, section 5.6).¹⁰⁶ The men's extended discussion of this rule is given in (10.13-10.15), ellipsed greatly for the sake of space.

(10.13) Bart: Well, why is camping not allowed in the program I just feel is that, um, it's just because of the fact that it's-it's glorifying the old man, you know. [...] I just feel that the reason why the program is set up for not camping is just because of the fact that all of us, either been in the lifestyle or not, **have led lives to have feminine qualities, which is not bad like you said**, 'cause I thought about it a lot since I talked to him,¹⁰⁷ you know, **it's not bad to have a, you know, compassionate, you know, heart, you know, like a woman would**, you know. **Because God has called us to be compassionate. But for us to have mannerisms, you know, and for us to glorify the old man, the old man is dead, the Bible says, you know what I'm saying?** And we're not supposed to be part of the old man. The old man is part of that, you know.

As mentioned in chapter 5, Bart succinctly explained the reason for the ministry rule by identifying camping with "the old man," which is again associated with the "sinful nature." But as in (10.13) above, Bart continued his discussion and drew lines

¹⁰⁵ In his review article on gay and lesbian language research, Kulick (2000) discussed "camp" at length: "Parodic trivialization, and the use of female names and feminine forms to refer to males, is one of the hallmarks of camp. ...The word itself, which may derive from the French *se camper* ("show off," "engage in exaggerated behavior") was used in English at the turn of the century to mean "actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis" and "pleasantly ostentatious or affected" (254). Here Kulick stated that camp became associated with homosexuality on a wide and more generalized basis around 1945.

¹⁰⁶ With respect to commonalities across ex-gay ministries, note that Erzen mentioned this "no camping" rule as operative within the ex-gay ministry she studied. In addition, she mentioned that the *Crisis in Masculinity* book was also used at that ministry. (2002: 218, 229).

¹⁰⁷ Note: This group discussion involved five participants: Bart, Justin, Mel, Jon, and Simon, in addition to myself as the researcher. In Bart's comment of, "which is not bad like **you** said, 'cause I thought about it a lot since I talked to **him**," Justin is the referent of both pronouns. Thus, in the course of talk, Bart acknowledged Justin as the source of his comment/thought from a previous conversation, and then addressed the group in saying that he had "thought a lot" about that particular conversation with Justin after it had occurred.

between appropriate and inappropriate “feminine qualities” that men can have and should display, and he linked camping with displaying inappropriate “feminine qualities” and “mannerisms” that he considered to be “part of the old man.” Bart’s reference to such “qualities” and “mannerisms” correlate with Ochs’ (1992) above noted concept of indirect indexing of gender through stances, acts, and activities. After some more discussion, Mel responded with the excerpt in (10.14).

(10.14) Mel: And, you know, I’ve just come to the conclusion that if I’m going to get out of this <i.e. homosexuality>, **I’m gonna have to start acting like a man.** Using my brain and thinking of different ways-because we react, like we’re in conflict or whatever, and we react that way. And it’s like, instead of using our heads and thinking, “Uh, ok, how would God do it, how would” you know, I’m not there yet, but, **“How would God settle this conflict without one, backbiting, snapping their heads off, or anything like that, or going the other way and just totally ga:y it out, you know. And we do, we do it. And I’ve seen it at my own house, it’s like, we just snap our fingers and we turn our heads, and it’s like, “Are we women or are we men?”** you know? And you know, what are we going to do? **Are we going to be what God wants us to be, settle conflict the way God wants us to settle it, or are we going to just stay in our old ways?**

As the above excerpt shows, Mel stated that to get out of homosexuality, he was going to have to “start acting like a man,” thus again fluidly linking gender expression with sexuality. Mel then described behaviors such as “gay[ing] it out,” “snapp[ing] [their] fingers,” and “turn[ing] [their] heads,” as being exhibited at times during conflicts in the ministry house, behaviors which Mel clearly considered negative by his contrasting them with “God’s ways” and associating them with the men’s “old ways.” Again, gender was referenced in order to index sexuality in Mel’s rhetorical indictment of these behaviors (i.e. “Are we women or men?”). After further exchanges, Jon returned to Bart’s initial observation and then gave his own thoughts, as in (10.15).

(10.15) Jon: I mean, I think Bart said it very well, you know, it does glorify the old man. And that’s not why we’re here. And, you know, **I think it’s easy to have the mannerisms and-and um you know, talk like we used to talk in the lifestyle, but that’s what we’re growing out of. And it’s all a process, it**

doesn't happen overnight, it's not something that we just change, it's something that we're walking out of, finding who we are, and discovering our own identity and giving us feet to stand on, and I think that, uh, is where camping has come from. [...] **I think in the lifestyle, I learned to act gay. I learned to act like a woman; I learned to play the woman's part; I learned to be gay.** And, just as, what I would say to them is that, **I was born straight. I learned to be gay.** And now **I'm growing straight.** Because that's where God called me. And that's my destiny. You know, I'm **not acting a part anymore.** I am **living my life now, the way, and my identity the way God told me to, and He wants me to, and the way He shows me in His word that I am.**

Thus, (10.15) shows that Jon voiced agreement with Bart and discussed a process of “growing out of” certain mannerisms and speech styles that were from “the lifestyle,” some of which were described in the discussion as being inappropriately feminine. In this excerpt, Jon provided a particularly salient display of both naturalization and denaturalization through language. First, Jon denaturalized homosexuality with respect to his own identity by using phrases such as to “learning to act” or “playing a part” or “acting” six times in reference to the identity variables of both sexuality and gender (i.e. “gay” and “woman”).¹⁰⁸ Jon concurrently naturalized his new identity as a man with a “straight” sexual identity by using organic terms such as “born,” “growing,” and “living my life” (as contrasted with “acting a part”). Thus, as this exchange shows, the men at Liberty were cooperatively encouraging one another to lay aside camping as part of their “old ways” and be transformed in their identities, hence in their expressions and performance of those identities, in terms of both gender and sexuality.

10.5 GENDER AND EX-EX-GAY NARRATIVES

With respect to ex-ex-gay narratives, not surprisingly, gender comportment and transforming expressions of gender are not discussed in any way corresponding to that described above. As I have demonstrated, the ex-ex-gay narratives in my study typically

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that Jon's reference to “play[ing] the woman's part” was a literal one, as he described having assumed an alternate female persona during his time in the “lifestyle.”

have resolved into a coming out trajectory, and the embracing of a homosexual identity has necessarily severed the intrinsic connection and one-to-one mapping between sex, gender, and sexuality that is core to the ex-gay evangelical worldview. Further evidence of this disconnection is provided through references to acceptance with respect to transgender issues in a number of the ex-ex-gay narratives I collected, including those individuals reaching a gay Christian resolution. Martin (1993:279) described coming out narratives as narratives that “point to unsanctioned discontinuities between biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality” (quoted in Bacon, 1998), which captures well the core trajectory difference between ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives to which I am referring here.

This having been said, ex-ex-gay narratives, not surprisingly, do include specific references to gender and gender comportment. However, in my data, these mentions almost always came in the initial segment of the narrative to report perceived “discontinuities” or discomfort with respect to gender identity in the early life experience.¹⁰⁹

In order to briefly demonstrate this pattern, I give two excerpts below (out of numerous possible). First, excerpt (10.16) is the very beginning of Anne’s life narrative, from opening statement on.

(10.16) Anne: **Well, I um probably knew about my sexuality when I was fifteen. Um, I had probably grown up most of my life as a tomboy, and as a small child, I had fervently wanted to be a boy.** Um I remember telling my friend one time, well actually, I must have- must have been all of seven and I took off my shirt in the middle of the summer because it was hot and we were playing and they said, “Oh little girls can’t do that,” which really made me mad and um so I decided that what I needed to do uh was become a boy because boys could do that, and my one little friend said, “Oh well if you’re going to become a boy you know you have to do all this stuff.” And I said, “What-what do I do to become a

¹⁰⁹ Examples of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives are seen to exhibit these types of openings, bearing similarities from common life experiences.

boy?” and he said, “Well, you have to eat a lot of hot dogs.” And I hated hot dogs, and it happened that later that week, my grandmother, she was who raised me, was making hot dogs, and she knew I didn’t like them, but I gobbled down as many hot dogs as I could that night, and so she grabbed me and said, “What’s going on, you hate hot dogs, what are you doing?” And so I told her my story, and very kindly she never laughed at me, but told me that it would never happen, no matter how many hot dogs I had, I would never ever be a boy. I was devastated because I had eaten all these hot dogs now and um so **as far back as I can remember there was a desire to at least do or be what the opposite sex was and when I was fifteen, I had a-a re-I started a relationship with my best friend** and so we were together actually as uh as best as you can be together when you’re in high school um, and in Montana for all-for all of that, for about four years.

In the excerpt above, Anne described “want[ing] to be a boy” as a young child and continued a common lesbian coming out story trajectory with respect to gender, namely that of being a “tomboy” growing up. Thus here, in an interesting counter-pattern to ex-gay narratives, Anne fluidly linked and interwove the story of her gender “discontinuity” with her experience of same-sex attraction and homosexuality. Excerpt (10.17) below is drawn from the opening segment of Mark’s narrative, in which he made explicit reference to his “early impressions about sexuality” and linked these impressions to his experience of feeling “shut out of the world of boys and men.” However, with respect to gender identity, Mark clarified that he did not necessarily identify with the women in his life either.

(10.17) Mark: **The, the r-, ruling legend in the family is that because my brother was such a hellion and he was four years older than me, that my father felt like he had to, you know, give all of his time to my brother, so I was kind of left with my mother and her sister and these Polish women. Um, although I’d have to say that, um, I, I didn’t really identify with them. Um, when I began to—uh, getting ahead of myself, so m-, but I, I, I’ll hold on to that thought, but, um, I felt like I was just being shut out of the world of boys and men, that I was just being left out, it wasn’t like, “Oh good, well, I’ll, you know, I’ll put on an apron, and, you know, go Nancy here.” Um, so it was really, I, and it just built this deep longing or maybe it, you know, became part of something that was already there, I don’t know, because along with the early religious memories, my early sexual memories were of looking at, at older boys and men, and, of course, not having anything, you know, it’s, it**

wasn't like, you know, wi-, at that age, you know, it, it, the thought dropped down below the waistline. It was just in my heart, you know, just deep in my chest I would feel this pain, this, this wish, this want.

Thus, the above data show that while gender is an important component of ex-ex-gay narratives, this component is correspondent to the discussion of gender identity most commonly seen in coming out narratives. In ex-ex-gay narratives, currently working on transforming gender expression is not discussed or constructed in the same way due to individuals' changed spiritual beliefs and acceptance of a homosexual identity. For the sake of completeness, I will close with the fact that there was a single example from all of my ex-ex-gay data in which transforming gender expression was discussed in a manner similar to the ex-gay narratives; namely, Dee¹¹⁰ discussed her "rejection of [her] femininity" and changing gender compartment at several points during her life narrative. For example, in (10.18) below, Dee described her "trying to be butch-but" and joked about her manner of dress at the time. Dee referred to eventually "embrac[ing] [her] femininity" several times during her story, and she laughed and clearly took great pleasure in the fact that she was an independent beauty consultant and salesperson for a large cosmetics corporation at the time of the interview.

(10.18) Dee: **Because for a long, long time, you know, I-I didn't embrace my femininity, and I think it probably had a lot to do with my mother. [...] I think probably, I wouldn't be surprised if um if my rejection of my femininity-femininity** <i.e. false start repetition> **and trying to be butch-but** <i.e. reduplication for emphasis>, all my gay friends just laughed at me, um <laugh> **walk around with my wallet in my back pocket, cowboy hat and cigarettes in the-** <pointed to indicate place where front shirt pocket would be; laughs> **in the, with my breast size, you know, I got cigarettes extending out t' here like this** <arm extended and hand placed far out in front of chest>, um and it was just uh, but um, anyway, but, you know, but I was just trying to find out who I was, you know, I did not know who I was, and-and I didn't find out who I was

¹¹⁰ Recall that Dee had retained an extremely close affiliation with evangelical Christianity. Dee also expressed a positive attitude towards her past ex-gay ministry experience in a Living Water program, during which she claimed that she experienced "healing" with respect to her relationship with her mother and her femininity.

until-until, you know, I found out who I was in Christ and then I was able to accept, you know, who I was.

10.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this chapter I hope to have demonstrated how the ex-gay ministry functions as a community of practice in which both sex and gender are granted elements of an essential and transcendent status. Due to the direct implicational relationship accorded between sex, gender, and heterosexuality in the ex-gay Christian worldview, the modification of gender expression can be interpreted as evidence of change and healing with respect to one's sexuality as well. While shifts towards more traditional cultural norms of femininity and masculinity often occur, interestingly there is a significant resistance to certain cultural stereotypes as well. Ex-gay men and women search for and discover alternate constructions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity, which in some ways approximate cultural norms, and in other ways directly resist or repudiate them.

The ex-gay ministry becomes a community of practice in which participants encourage each other with respect to their linguistic enactments of both gender and sexuality, all flowing from what they believe to be an ontological truth about their identities as men and women made in the image of God. Regardless of the actual source, whether from ontological reality or social construction, ex-gay narratives and discourse lend themselves to performance analyses (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1997), as ex-gays enact what they see to be their true self through both their life stories and quotidian linguistic practices. Religious beliefs about gender profoundly affect the way ex-gay individuals talk in, talk about, and live their lives, and gender and sexuality are both directly indexed via referential language use and also indirectly indexed through a nexus of language and acts or comportments with their attendant social meanings (Ochs, 1992).

With respect to ex-ex-gay individuals, gender and sexuality are clearly key themes in ex-ex-gay narratives, but these aspects of identity are for the most part discussed in different ways due to changed beliefs about the relationship of gender to sexuality and an acceptance of gay identity.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

In conclusion, I will now give a brief recapitulation of what the study has shown and why it matters, as well as specify some of the implications for future research. To begin, in this dissertation, my first task has been to describe the language of both the metanarratives and individual life narratives of ex-gays and ex-ex-gays through as broad and substantial data collection and analysis as possible. I have also sought to make this description in terms of the worldviews and perspectives of the communities and individuals themselves, seeking as much as possible to understand their lives from their point of view, rather than my own *a priori* assumptions or presumptions about them. It is upon such a foundation of substantial description and well-grounded understanding that all ensuing analyses and critiques must be based if they are to be truly worthwhile and accurate.

With respect to where we have been, the reader will recall that in chapter 2, I presented a review of the relevant literature. As part of this review, I motivated the above intent of the analysis through demonstrating the relatively little amount of research that has been done on ex-gay issues, especially highlighting the near non-existence of such from within the field of linguistics proper. I also showed how the current project was influenced by studies on narrative and identity in general, but especially by research done on narratives of identity conflict and self-transformation. In addition, I discussed the relevance of the recent research on language, gender, and sexuality, and I ended with brief comments on studies of language and religion. In chapter 3, I described and outlined the research design and methodology for the study, discussing in detail the complexities involved with participant selection and the data gathering process.

Having established the background and design of the study, I began the actual analysis with a discussion of ex-gay narratives and discourse. Specifically, in chapter 4, I explicated aspects of the language and discourse employed in the ex-gay ministries I studied. In chapter 5, I delineated the ex-gay evangelical Christian religious metanarrative that provides the frame and much of the content of ex-gay individual life narratives. Finally, in chapter 6, I discussed the language ideology that became apparent as I studied both the ex-gay narratives and the ex-lesbian support group discourse from the ex-gay ministry setting.

In terms of the ex-ex-gay narratives, in chapter 7, I delineated the central elements of the new or modified metanarratives and belief systems through which the ex-ex-gays narrated a deproblematized embracing of a homosexual identity. In chapter 8, I discussed the transformation of both terms and tropes in, as well as specific features of, ex-ex-gay narratives of the transition from an ex-gay to an ex-ex-gay identity position. I then returned to addressing both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives in chapters 9 and 10.

In chapter 9, I considered and analyzed specific aspects of both of the narratives' genres and structural organization, and I ended the discussion by highlighting two salient features of these narratives that warranted further study. The final component of my analysis was given in chapter 10, where I applied the concept of a community of practice to the ex-gay ministry setting and then discussed matters of language, gender, and performance within that setting. I also demonstrated the fact that in ex-ex-gay narratives, gender is addressed in very different ways from the ex-gay narratives. This discussion concluded the body of the analysis for the current project.

Within these seven chapters, I hope to have demonstrated the answers to the primary research questions that this study sought to address. First, with respect to the role that overarching metanarrative beliefs play in individuals' attempts to negotiate

conflicts between their sexual and religious identities, I have shown that metanarrative is absolutely central to and pervasive in the lives of those in this study. There is simply no way to understand ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives without accurately understanding the evangelical beliefs and worldview that motivated the initial desire for sexual identity transformation in both groups. The evangelical metanarrative provides the frame and the terministic screens as well as much of the actual content of not only the individual ex-gay narratives, but also the many ex-ex-gays who retain some form of Christian identification as part of their spiritual resolution as well. Crucially, the metanarratives of both groups provide coherence systems through which the individual life narrative trajectory is explained, interpreted, and justified.

Second, as I have discussed, narrative is a critical use of language that is universally employed in the human endeavor to make sense of life and self. As stories of the management of deep identity conflict, this study of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives has allowed us to examine the linguistic structures that result when challenges to one of the primary narrative functions of achieving a coherent sense of self have been intrinsic to the life experience. As I have shown, this conflict is encoded in the narratives in numerous organizational and structural ways.

In addition, from recounting quotidian encounters to major life events, a key component of all narrative involves moral stance and a desire for self-justification. In that both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives are focused around a moral dilemma that is experienced as central to and dominant in the life and identity of the self, these narratives highlight this component in ways that are particularly salient through numerous evaluative clauses and overt discussions of the moral status of the protagonist's beliefs and actions. And finally, as we have seen, the narratives of both groups are largely processual ones, and individuals obviously experience different stages and differing

degrees of satisfaction with their life narrations as they seek sexual and/or spiritual identity transformation.

With respect to why the present study matters and what has been gained from this in-depth examination of the language of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives and discourse, recall that these narratives are of theoretical importance because they provide a salient opportunity to test the limits of performativity (e.g. Butler, 1990) and the potential of narrative to transform membership in what have come to be viewed as relatively fixed identity categories. As I have shown, the individuals in this study are performing and creating new identities of sexuality and spirituality through narrative—identities that they contend they ultimately become and that fundamentally change their self-conception and the course of their life experience. Regardless of whether these identities are merely phenomenological productions or are expressions of a self with an ontological source, as most participants in this study would claim, the individuals here *are* narrating new selves and using language and linguistic practice to transform their membership in both sexual and spiritual identity categories.

In addition, this work is particularly relevant to recent discussions of whether language and sexuality research should be conducted with a primary emphasis on social identity categories or should be focused more on desire. Due to the variation in the degree of concord between the variables of sexual identification and sexual desire exhibited in ex-gay narratives, these narratives clearly cannot be accounted for by a desire-centered approach alone. As Bucholtz and Hall (2004:469) wrote, identity is most productively “understood as the outcome of intersubjectively negotiated practices and ideologies.” Thus, this study demonstrates the need for addressing *both* identity and desire and the interaction of these with other social identity variables—specifically in this case, religious identity and its attendant practices and ideologies, which both shape

identity and direct desire. Finally, these narratives are highly relevant to the study of language and gender. Due to the inextricable links made between the variables of gender and sexuality within the ex-gay community of practice, to transform the identity or expression of one is interpreted as necessarily affecting the identity or status of the other.

Even in this post-modern era of thought, when metanarratives are viewed with suspicion and the self is conceived of as largely constructed and fragmented, everyday individuals continue to use narrative to find coherence, frequently employing the trope of a “true self,” which they view in essentialist rather than constructivist terms—as discovered, not made. The ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives studied here inherently represent identity as a site of struggle with respect to a nexus of selfhood, religious beliefs, and conceptions of both gender and sexuality; thus, they reveal the language and linguistic practices that emerge connected with each element of this nexus and as part of the endeavor to unite them into an integrated whole.

If, as we have seen, the life story can be described as an icon of the self, then the stories of ex-gays and ex-ex-gays are in one very real sense narratives of iconoclasm, where the conflict between the experience of same-sex attraction and religious beliefs has split the self between two deep and seemingly irreconcilable identity demands. These narratives are also primarily stories of individual responses to the breaking—the embarking on a journey of narrative repair and iconographic re-making of the self and its story through either sexual or spiritual identity transformation, and many times some degree of both. The individuals represented here did not celebrate their fragmentation; rather, they went to great lengths to achieve integration. For both groups, despite the specific identity resolution, language is the mediator that helps to bring the self in line with the lived experience and overarching spiritual beliefs. Thus, the study of ex-gay and

ex-ex-gay life stories can teach us much about the language of identity transformation and the extent of the power of narrative to bring a new self into being.

In terms of implications for future research, throughout the dissertation, I have mentioned several aspects of ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives that merit further study and a fuller treatment when my time permits. First, ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives demonstrate a complex conception of individual agency and moral culpability that interacts with and is both empowered and constrained by forces and beings both interior and exterior, natural and supernatural. The narrative negotiation of expressing this agency and the language associated therewith definitely warrants a deeper investigation. Second, the centrality of literacy to the process of both ex-gay and ex-ex-gay identity transformations deserves to be explicated. Finally, considering that ex-gay and ex-ex-gay narratives contain not only the voice of the protagonist as the divided self, but also crucially involve the reported voices of the Divine, the supernatural enemy, the Biblical text, the church, the past identity (whether gay or ex-gay), and so forth, the multi-voicedness of these narratives cry out for a Bakhtinian analysis, which promises to be both fascinating and complex. These are just a few of the many directions a “next step” of in-depth study could take as a progression from the foundation laid by the present project. Having surveyed the land, I can now begin to dig.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

The following are lists of all the ex-ex-gay participants and their basic demographic background information obtained at the time of the interview. For ease of reference, the lists are subdivided for sex within each group. Quotation marks indicate that I have used the participants' own words to describe themselves in the cases of less discrete categorizations. The information given in the descriptions for each participant is arranged as follows:

Pseudonym: Ethnicity; Age; Marital status; Education level; Occupation; Geographic region of origin/upbringing; Religious background/affiliation growing up; Current religious affiliation.

Ex-ex-gay women: Six total participants

Anne: White; 49; Divorced, in committed relationship for one year; Master of Fine Arts; Teaches art at the college-level; Northwest; None, had “spiritual encounter with Jesus” at age 21 and became a “born-again Christian”; Theistic spirituality, does not have “to be within the persona of Christianity”

Dana: White; 43; Single, in committed relationship for two years; Master of Social Work; Social worker/psychotherapist; Southwest; Church of the Nazarene; Gay-affirming charismatic/non-denominational

Dee: White; 49; Twice divorced, one child, in committed relationship for several years; Junior-level college; Professional nanny until recently, now home-based make-up consultant business; Deep South; Southern Baptist; MCC

Elaine: White; 44; Divorced, in a committed relationship for several years, two children; Master's in marital and family therapy; Works with a psychotherapist; Southern West Coast until age eight, then moved to Northeast; Christian Missionary Alliance; Episcopal

Maggie: White; 28; Single; Bachelor of Social Work; Social worker; Southwest; Southern Baptist; Christian—spirituality “in progress”

Olivia: White; 43; Single; Bachelor's degree in early childhood development, "one semester away from graduating with Master's in Theology"; "Part-time administrator for women's clinic that provides abortion care," studying to be an MCC minister; Deep South; Southern Baptist; MCC

Ex-ex-gay men: 14 total participants

Alex: Mother was Puerto Rican, father was white; 37; Single, previously in committed relationship with partner for six years; Bachelor's degree with language certificate; Works in international development with a focus on democracy in civil society; Northeast until age six, then Central Southwest; Methodist, Independent evangelical, and Assembly of God; MCC

Brad: White; 31; Single; One year of college; Fast food and personal escort service; Southwest; "Conservative, traditional Christian church" (did not want to specify denomination); Christian

Brandon: White; 26; Single; High school graduate, some community college; Teacher's aide in junior high multi-handicap class; Southwest; Church of Christ; "I'll use the label 'Christian' just for lack of a better term, it's more of a spiritual process than a religion per se."

Bruce: White; 42; Single; Some college; Children's entertainer-puppeteer/graphic artist/ animator; Southwest; Southern Baptist; MCC

David: White; 39; Single; Bachelor's degree, some graduate work; Picture editor; South West Coast until age eight, distant Northern region until age 14, and then Midwest; Baptist; "Non-denominational, ecumenical"

Ed: African American; 41; Single, in committed relationship for two years; Law school graduate (J. D.); Attorney; Southern West Coast; Mother's family Pentecostal, father's family Presbyterian, received influence from both, but from sixth grade, attended American Baptist church, conversion experience while last half of college; Disciples of Christ

Frank: White; 47; Single, in committed relationship for seven years (with Ricardo); Bachelor's degree; Works for a company that negotiates between health insurance companies and providers; Mid-East Coast; Presbyterian; MCC

Jim: White; 40; Single; High school; Computer specialist; Midwest; Independent Baptist; Christian, currently attends Unity Church

John: White; 28; Single; Bachelor's in MIS; Currently studying to become MCC minister; Southwest; Southern Baptist; MCC

Laurent: White; 50; Single, currently in relationship; Master's in Public Administration, recently completed a second Master's in Urban Planning; Previously director of Christian counseling ministry for 10 years—left upon coming out, currently looking for work in Urban Planning field; Lived all over due to father being in the military; Various denominations, but all “evangelical in the traditional sense,” “not fundamentalist, but definitely mainstream, conservative evangelical”; No longer evangelical, “follower of Christ” apart from institutional church, spirituality is following the “light and life of God within”

Lee: White; 46; Still legally married (for 26 years), but has been separated for the last six years, one child, lives with partner in committed relationship; Bachelor's degree in piano performance; Musician; Southwest; Independent Baptist; MCC

Mark: White; 47; Married for 23 years, three children; Bachelor of Journalism; Full-time writer; Northeast; Raised “Polish Catholic,” but had evangelical conversion experience in high school; Agnostic

Ricardo: White; 41; Single, in committed relationship for seven years (with Frank); Bachelor's degree; Supervisory Information Technology specialist; Primarily Mid-East Coast (from age six); None until began attending Southern Baptist Church in 11th grade; Non-denominational evangelical and MCC, transitioning to primarily MCC

Wayne: White; 49; Divorced (for 13 years), four children, in committed relationship for over four years; Master's in Business Administration; Certified Public Accountant; Disciples of Christ; Disciples of Christ

APPENDIX B

The following are lists of all the ex-gay participants and their basic demographic background information. The lists are arranged and presented as in Appendix A.

Ex-gay women: 17 total participants

Anna: White; 47; Single; Bachelor's degree in education; Elementary school teacher; Midwest; Assemblies of God; Non-denominational

Beth: White; 48; Single; Bachelor's in Sociology, other technical degrees; Retired military aircraft mechanic, currently customer support manager for software company; Northeast; Catholic; Non-denominational

Deborah: African American; 31; Single; Junior-year of college; Bookkeeping/customer service position; Mid-East Coast; Raised being “taken to a Baptist church,” but did not have evangelical conversion experience until college; Non-denominational Christian

Elizabeth: White; 41; Single; Completed half a Master's degree in special education; Former special ed teacher, currently catalogue manager; Southwest; Presbyterian; Bible church

Jayna: Hispanic; 36; Single; High school graduate, some technical school; Missionary; Midwest; Christian church; Non-denominational church

Lori: White; 19; Single; One year of college; College student; Mid Central; Assemblies of God; Christian

Melissa: Hispanic; 43; Single; Master of Social Work; Social worker; Midwest; Catholic; Non-denominational

Morghana: White; 20; Single; High school graduate; Part-time office worker; Mid-East Coast; Assembly of God; Non-denominational

Nina: White; 49; Single; Bachelor's degree in structural design; Engineer for an aircraft company; Midwest; Church of God; Non-denominational

Ranni: Chinese Indonesian; 37; Married for five years, two children; Law school graduate (J. D.); Information Technology specialist for large technical corporation until recently, currently full-time mother; Family immigrated to Midwest when she was age four; Reformed Church; Anglican Church

Renee: White; 32; Married for over four years (to Thomas), expecting first child; Associate's degree; Legal secretary; Midwest; Methodist; Non-denominational

Rosa: Hispanic (Mexican); 31; Single; Some college; Secretary/administrative assistant; Born and raised in Mexico, immigrated to U.S. Midwest at age 10; Catholic; Non-denominational

Ruth: Hispanic (mother is Puerto Rican and father is Mexican); 23; Single; High school graduate, some technical business school; Secretary/clerical work; Midwest; Christian; Non-denominational

Sadie: White; 52; Divorced, two children; Bachelor of Social Work; Certified life care planner; South; Christian; Non-denominational

Sarah: White; 35; Divorced (married 11 years, divorced for seven years), two children; Currently a college student, third year; Professional carpentry before returning to college; Midwest; Mennonite; Non-denominational Christian

Selah: Chinese Filipino; 28; Single; Philippines; Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications; Worked in advertising agency, for father's company in Philippines, but volunteers now due to green card issue; Evangelistic church; Non-denominational

Zoë: White; 38; Married almost four years, two children; Master's in Christian counseling; Public school teacher for 10 years, currently full-time mother; Lived overseas from age three until seven due to father being in military, Southwest upon return to U.S.; Protestant (father strong Southern Baptist, mother not really religious, church attendance varied due to parent's divorce); Non-denominational

Ex-gay men: 18 total participants

Bart: White; 23; Single; Some college; Director of marketing research; Deep South; Baptist; Non-denominational

Bill: White, but Native American heritage from father, significant in growing up and identity; 37; Married for 10 years; College graduate, now a doctoral student in social work; Prior history of work in retail, then in various social and human service settings, currently a research associate/graduate student; Southwest; Southern Baptist; Relatively recent convert to Catholicism from Episcopal church

Caleb: White; 25; Single; Master's of Divinity; Associate director over residential program at Liberty; Midwest; Southern Baptist; In process of converting to Orthodox Christian church

Dan: White; 50; Married for 23 years, five children; Bachelor's degree; Owns dry cleaning business; Southwest; Presbyterian; Southern Baptist

Felix: North Indian (Tibeto-Mongolian race); 30; Single; Master's degree, working on Ph.D. prior to coming to U.S. for ex-gay ministry; Worked as assistant professor of economics prior to coming to ministry; North India near Tibetan border; Baptist (second generation); Christian

Henry: White; 46; Single; Some college; Previous long military career, building maintenance manager; Southern West coast and Southwest; None, conversion experience through contact with Christian relatives around age nine; Non-denominational Christian

Jacob: White; 36; Divorced; High school graduate, some community college; Training to be an optician; Father was in military, moved to Southwest at age 12; Catholic; Non-denominational

Jeff: White; 40; Married for 20 years, two children; Bachelor's degree in Computer Science; Works in computers for an oil company; Midwest; Presbyterian; Methodist (but "evangelical and conservative")

Jon: White; 33; Separated, soon to be divorced; Nursing and business associate's degrees; Nursing (LPN); Midwest until age 10, then moved to Southwest; None until junior high school, attended Baptist church with school friends; Non-denominational Christian

Justin: White; 39; Single; Master's in counseling; Retired from military for one year, rehabilitation specialist for the mentally ill before coming to Liberty (newly arrived, looking for employment); Lived many places (including overseas) due to father being in military, significant periods in Deep South and Midwest; Pentecostal/Assemblies of God; Pentecostal

Larry: Hispanic (El Salvadoran); 24; Single; One semester away from completing Bachelor's degree in Pastoral Counseling; College student; Born and raised in El Salvador, family immigrated to U.S. at age 10; Catholic; Protestant

Mel: White; 22; Single; High school graduate; Optical technician; Southwest until age nine, then Southern West coast; Non-denominational and Baptist; Non-denominational

Mick: White; 53; Married for 26 years, three children; Three years of college; Pastor, ex-gay ministry director; Midwest; Various denominational churches, described a conversion from a religion of "good works" to "salvation through Jesus" in early thirties; Non-denominational

Paul: White; 35; Single; Some college; Previously worked for large technical corporation, now on disability due to health complications from AIDS; Midwest; Lutheran until junior high, then Evangelical Free Church; Non-denominational

Peter: White; 33; Single; Two years of college; Director of ex-gay ministry; Southwest until second grade, then Deep South; None; evangelical Christian

Simon: White; 38; Divorced; One year of college; Bank branch manager for seven years, other customer service work; Southern East coast; Baptist (conversion experience not reported until age 26); Pentecostal/Assembly of God

Thomas: White; 27; Married for over four years (to Renee), expecting first child; Associate's degree in culinary arts and Bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management; Manager of collection agency; Midwest; Church of Christ; Non-denominational

Trevor: African American; 48; Single; Two years of college; Delivery department supervisor for a flower shop, church worship leader; Lived many places due to father being in military (including overseas), significant periods in Deep South, family settled in Midwest; African American Baptist; Non-denominational charismatic

APPENDIX C

Post-narrative Interview Question Modules

A. Demographic information

Age

Sex

Ethnicity

Siblings?

Marital status

Education level

Occupation

Mother: Education level; occupation

Father: Education level; occupation

Religious affiliation

B. If not mentioned or covered in life narrative telling:

Describe journey regarding faith and sexuality

Religious upbringing or conversion experience

First awareness of sexuality

First experience of a conflict between understanding of sexuality and understanding of faith

Where did understanding of faith and sexuality come from? Internal, parents, church teaching?

Process of deciding how to resolve conflict

How did you hear about ex-gay ministry?

C. Relevant to both groups:

Ministry involvement

How long have you been/were you involved in ex-gay ministry?

How important has ex-gay ministry been to your journey? How/in what ways has it helped? Any ways that it has hurt? Do you think this is true for everyone?

What do you think of the term “ex-gay”?

What is/was your goal of being involved in ex-gay ministry?

What would count/counted as evidence (of lack of evidence) that you are/were reaching your goal?

D. Primarily relevant to ex-gays

Current understanding of sexuality

How would you describe your sexuality now?

For you, is homosexuality an identity or a behavior (or something else)?

Do you still experience same-sex attractions? If so, does that cause you to experience any sense of identity confusion?

Did orientation shift happen for you? If so, was that your goal? If not, is that your current goal (or one of your goals)?

What would you say about the idea that you might simply be repressing or denying your “true self”? Are you being authentic?

What does living authentic to your ‘true self’ look like to you?

How would you describe your spirituality?

E. Primarily relevant to ex-ex-gays:

Decision to leave ex-gay ministry

What prompted your decision to leave ex-gay ministry?

What do you think of ex-gay ministry now, as opposed to when you were involved in it?

What is your current understanding of your faith?

Are there any negative effects you feel you carry from being involved in ex-gay ministry?

Do you see anything good having come out of your experience in the ministry?

How would you describe your spirituality now, as compared with when you were involved in ex-gay ministry?

How would you describe your sexuality now?

How resolved are you with respect to the prior conflict you perceived between your faith and sexuality?

APPENDIX D

The following is a reproduction of the advertisement seeking ex-ex-gay research participants as it appeared in the “Statewide Announcements” section of *The Texas Triangle* classifieds section. The ad ran in the July 11, 2003 and July 18, 2003 editions.

EX-EX-GAY?

PLEASE TELL ME YOUR STORY.

Narrative research project on sexuality and spirituality from UT-Austin. Ever attempted to change your understanding of identity due to perceived conflict with faith/homosexuality, but now no longer? Willing to participate in a confidential 1-time “telling of your story” and interview?

Please contact Amy Peebles at

apees@mail.utexas.edu

or 817-790-5359

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Vita

Amy Eilene Peebles was born in Dallas, Texas on April 17, 1970, the daughter of Barbara Ann Peebles and Billy Charles Peebles. After completing her work at Arlington Heights High School, Ft. Worth, Texas, in 1987, she entered the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. She received the degree of Bachelor of Social Work from the University of North Texas in December 1990. During the next two years she was employed as a professional social worker, working for six months as a client assistant with Denton County Mental Health and Mental Retardation and then working for a year and a half as a social worker for a long-term care facility, Jarvis Heights Nursing Center, in Ft. Worth, Texas. In January 1993 she entered the Graduate School of the University of North Texas. In August 1994 she completed her Master's program coursework at the University of North Texas and entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin. In May 1995 she received the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language from the University of North Texas. In August 1997 she received the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin. During the following academic year, August 1997-May 1998, she was employed in University Residence Life as a full-time professional-level Hall Coordinator at the University of Texas at Austin. During the summer of 1999, she studied Indonesian at the South East Asian Summer Studies Institute at the University of Oregon. In the Spring of 2000, she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to Indonesia, under the sponsorship of Dr. H. Yus Rusyana of IKIP-Bandung and Universitas Siliwangi, Tasikmalaya, West Java. In October 2000, she began her Fulbright year, during which she lived both in Tasikmalaya

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