

# **Young gay men and social control in modern Britain, 1967-2001**

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## ***Abstract***

### **Abstract**

This thesis is an exploration of young gay identity and it argues for a varied experience over time and across place, which was also affected by methods of social control during the era of partial decriminalisation, between 1967 and 2001. These differing experiences have not previously been explored when looking specifically at gay men under the age of 21. It is therefore a much-needed addition to the dearth of historical scholarship on young gay men. The thesis has two focal points. Firstly, it explores the differing experiences of a hidden minority group, looking to uncover their different identities as gay teenagers. The scope is between 1967 and 2001 because it represents the legislative boundaries in place during changes to the age of consent for homosexual relationships. Secondly, it incorporates major mechanisms of social control within the analysis to determine that youth homosexual identity is affected by imposed social restrictions, including the age of consent, Section 28, the AIDS Crisis, and parental control. It argues against previous scholars who have determined that there is an absence of the young gay voice in the available evidence during this period. Using a varied source base, including public and private written documents, oral histories and personal written testimonies it explores young gay identity across three decades.

## *Acknowledgements*

### **Acknowledgements**

The first thanks must go to my primary supervisor, Dr Ciara Meehan, who has helped me to develop this project from an initial proposal to this final thesis. I must also thank my supervisory team, Professor Owen Davies and Dr Emma Battell-Lowman, for their comments which have helped enhance this thesis by exploring concepts outside of the main focus. As part of the research process, I have encountered some very helpful archives, and particular thanks must go to the staff at the Bishopsgate Institute, a small, but incredibly friendly and useful archive. At an early stage, the archivist, for whom I mistakenly did not get the name of, fuelled my interest in this project by pointing out that scholarship on this topic is long overdue. I can only hope somewhat that this thesis does the topic justice. I must also thank my parents, cliché as it may be, because I would not have been able to undertake this Masters without their assistance. They have also taken time to read various drafts, to which I am grateful. I must also thank Jamie, who thoroughly read the final draft. On a final note, I must thank the countless numbers of gay teenagers, who, at a time of prejudice, discrimination and illegality, spoke out about their experiences. I can only hope that these largely anonymous people live far more comfortable lives in their adulthood than some of them experienced in their teenage years.

### **Abbreviations**

BL	British Library
CHE	Campaign for Homosexual Equality
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
HCA	Hall-Carpenter Archive, London School of Economics
HCOA	Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive, British Library
JCGT	Joint Council for Gay Teenagers
LAGNA	Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, Bishopsgate Institute
LGCM	London Gay Christian Movement
LGTG	London Gay Teenage Group
LSE	British Library of Politics and Economics, London School of Economics
NUT	National Union of Teachers
YLGCG	Young London Gay Christian Group

## *Introduction*

### **Introduction**

This thesis exists due to the current lack of scholarship available on young gay men in modern Britain during the era of partial decriminalisation. The period of exploration roughly spans from the introduction of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 up until when the age of consent equaled that of heterosexual relations in 2001. Whilst predominantly exploring a previously under-researched group, it argues, not only for a clear presence of the young homosexual during this period, but also for the variety of experiences that these young gay men had. It is a study of the lives of gay teenagers, focusing particularly on their identities, and how they were affected over time and in different places. Whilst time and place were significant factors in shaping the lives of young gay men, this thesis also focuses on the ways in which mechanisms of social control acted as an additional barrier to young gay identities. It therefore argues wholeheartedly for the clear presence of the gay teenager, whose experiences varied due to time and regional differences, but also for the fact that experiences were affected by imposed methods of social control in the period of partial decriminalisation. These are both concepts which previous scholarship have not explored, particularly when exploring youth. The impact of social controls on youth identity is not as clearly defined due to the largely impersonal nature of the evidence available, but this thesis argues that some imposed restrictions were more significant than others when considering their impact on a young gay identity.

The concentration is on young gay men, mostly aged between 15 and 21, and their experiences of being gay. This is significant, because it was a period in which homosexuality was effectively illegal for this age group. Therefore they are largely hidden. Due to the evidence available, it is a study which is largely confined to England; it explores different locations, namely regions in the North and London. Although, occasional reference is made to Britain, over that of just England. Whilst location is important, it is more in terms of historical geography than penetrating theories of space and place. Therefore, rather than being based on critical theories, it concentrates on where experiences differed between an urban environment, compared to a rural environment. This difference across time and place is then used to explore the various young gay identities, which is coupled with an investigation into the impact of methods of social control.

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### Context

The scope of this thesis has been dictated by a legal restriction concerning the age of consent for homosexual men. This legal framework existed in an era which varied significantly by individual decade. Changes over time were occurring in the backdrop to this thesis, alongside contemporary spacial differences. Chapter one explores the lives of young gay men across the three differing decades between the end of the 1960s and the turn of the new century. It also focuses on the issue of place. As is addressed below, scholarship on modern British society is vast. This means that studies of the social, political and cultural settings which frame the lives of these young gay men is well trodden ground. Indeed, these young gay men were not living in isolation. It may have been a significant part of their identity that they felt isolated, either from the community or their family or friends, but their existence was within a wider community, even if they did not feel part of it. The many lives encountered in this thesis occurred against an oscillating economic downturn, with early 1970s austerity being somewhat repeated in the early 1980s. This was alongside political and cultural shifts with changing governments, and a slow, but general move to a more liberal society. Moreover, as is highlighted both in chapter one and chapter two, major events occurred which drastically affected the lives of gay men, and in turn the young gay community, namely the AIDS Crisis being a significant example. These events serve as a timely reminder that the period as a whole did not simply represent linear progress to a liberal society. The 1980s AIDS Crisis was a significant turning point for the gay community as a whole, because homosexuality shifted from something the public either sided with, or ignored, to something which people began to actively fear as a public health risk. In fact, whilst the end of the 1980s saw government intervention to reduce the stigmatisation surrounding homosexuality and AIDS, the association has never disappeared since. Whilst the AIDS Crisis was closely tied to the gay community, events in the wider British society did not necessarily have the same effect.

The political landscape of the UK did however have an impact on the experiences of gay teenagers. Some political details are shared within the testimonies available, but wider understanding still suffers from the formulaic nature of the testimonies provided, which is analysed in more detail later. Nevertheless, the political angle is briefly worth explaining. When partial decriminalisation was agreed in 1967, it promoted a left-wing rise of radicalism in the early 1970s, most famously

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encompassed in the Gay Liberation Front. The left-wing behaviour arose often as a form of direct opposition to the growth of moral consciousness on the right. There was public antipathy to partially decriminalising homosexuality, including, but not limited to, Mary Whitehouse and her campaign for upholding the moral status quo. For this reason, many openly gay people found themselves on the left of the political spectrum. Some of the testimonies available from young men highlight how they joined Labour groups campaigning for gay rights.<sup>1</sup> When a conservative moral right disliked the presence of open homosexuality, young testimonies confirming homosexuality almost served as a political protest. Whilst the adult homosexual community was highly politicised in some circles, it is unclear if this filtered-down to the younger teenagers. Despite this, politics fluctuated across the era. The aforementioned Conservative government intervention into the AIDS Crisis in an attempt to reduce stigmatisation, was swiftly reversed by the introduction of Section 28, which is explored in far more detail in chapter two.

It is no secret that homosexuality became more publicly 'tolerable', particularly when comparing the 1990s to the 1970s, but, as with the fluctuating economic backdrop, public opinion shifted also. Although this is statistically difficult to confirm, there was more openness surrounding conversations about homosexuality later in the period, to the point where the age of consent for homosexuals became an election manifesto commitment for Labour in the late 1990s. This thesis focuses heavily on personal testimony, and due to this, wider contextual issues are sometimes substituted in favour of the personal experiences of young gay men, some of whom wrote with very little appreciation for the wider world. It is obviously the case, however, that external factors had an impact on those who were young and gay.

## ***Historiography***

Previous scholars have argued that the voices of gay teenagers were difficult to uncover in the period since 1967; they noted how these same voices were almost completely absent before this. This thesis argues against this previous assessment, illustrating the clear presence of young gay men in this period, and their varying experiences. In her recent study of youth in modern Britain, historian Melanie Tebbutt

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<sup>1</sup> London School of Economics (LSE), Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA), Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (JCGT),7,5, Gay Teenager Statements, MB12, Edward Bell.

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dedicates a subsection of a chapter on youth sexuality to homosexuality, arguing that evidence of it is difficult to untangle.<sup>2</sup> This is a similar conclusion to the earlier work of the sociologist Ken Plummer who offers his similarly defeatist conclusion: that it is difficult to access young lesbian and gay voices.<sup>3</sup> This thesis therefore fills the gap, arguing against the current beliefs that are available on gay youth during this era. This gap appears more prominent, because significant works exist both on adult homosexuality since 1967, and youth more generally, yet the dearth combining the two suggests that homosexuality amongst young teenagers was non-existent until it became legally equal — in terms of the age of consent — in 2001. It is also a timely addition to scholarship as this thesis was conceptualised in 2017, the year of the half-centenary of partial decriminalisation, and this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act; two major focal points for this thesis. To say that young gay teenagers were non-existent is simply incorrect, and this thesis therefore offers to rectify this problematic scholarship gap whilst presenting the unexplored young gay experiences of this era.

This thesis fits into three key historiographical strands, even if only indirectly. At the very top level, there is the umbrella of histories of sexuality, in particular queer history. Although at this level, it does not contribute to the theoretical strands of scholarship sitting under this umbrella, rather being a cultural study of specifically gay youth. Beneath this, it situates itself within broader studies of youth culture, modern British history, and cultural studies. Because it is comparatively recent history, cultural studies is a useful strand of scholarship, and some issues affecting the gay community still persist today. It does not draw on any one specific historiographical strand because very little work has been done on young homosexuals, particularly as a topic for historical study. Perhaps the main reason for this is the belief that homosexual youths in this period are difficult to access and it is difficult to relate the experiences of gay youth directly with adult homosexuality, particularly after 1967, because it was not legislatively restricted in the same way. The scholarship for the three strands is explored briefly below.

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<sup>2</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Making Youth: A History of Youth in Modern Britain* (London, 2016), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Plummer, 'Lesbian and Gay Youth in England', in Gilbert Herdt (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Youth* (New York, 1989), pp. 195-225, pp. 195-196.

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Scholarship on modern British culture and society is vast. Some studies have tried to offer a thorough social, cultural and political analysis of all aspects of British life since 1945, whilst others have devoted their time to particular decades, particular years, particular themes or particular people. This thesis fits into the social and cultural histories, largely covering the late 1960s and the proceeding three decades. It fits more specifically into studies of cultural identities, as well as regional cultural studies. Of course, the young homosexual did not live in a secluded bubble, and was therefore affected by social and political turmoil which faced the rest of British culture. Historian Alwyn Turner astutely intertwines 1970s high politics and lower social and cultural themes to serve as a reminder that contemporaries were dealing with both throughout the era. Indeed, that high politics and lower social culture were intertwined in the lives of homosexuals is certainly true.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in their reassessment of the 1970s Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane conclude that the social climate was plagued by social and moral panics which were exacerbated through media representation.<sup>5</sup> This moral panic plagued the lives of homosexuals into the 1980s due to the AIDS Crisis and Section 28 as this thesis explores later. Alternatively, the introduction of the activist group Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners, as well as the association of Greenham Common protesters with lesbianism illustrate how intertwined British culture was with wider homosexual issues, and vice versa. Although, on this topic, historian Daisy Payling's recent article addressing the portrayal of Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners in the film *Pride* highlights how the nostalgia now present in British memory was perhaps not contemporarily representative.<sup>6</sup> Particularly noteworthy studies on modern British society include those on the so-called permissive era, as this was arguably responsible for the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967. Both Frank Mort and Lesley Hall determine that the countercultural boom, relaxed sexualisation as seen with changes in contraceptive legislation and abortion reform, and a general relaxation of traditional values played a

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<sup>4</sup> Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?: Britain in the 1970s* (London, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Daisy Payling, 'City limits: sexual politics and the new urban left in 1980s Sheffield', *Contemporary British History*, Vol 31, No. 2 (2017), pp. 256-273, pp. 257-258.

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key part in the eventual shifts of homosexual legislation.<sup>7</sup> The permissive society, encompassing much of the long 1960s has been nostalgically seen as the cause of attitude changes across society. Arthur Marwick explores the cultural revolution of the long 1960s arguing that many new ideas occurred at the end of the decade and into the 1970s as there was new willingness among society to accept them.<sup>8</sup> Matt Cook argues however that the changes that occurred towards the end of the 1960s cannot be quite so simply attributed to the permissive era, as the ideological shift did not reach everywhere.<sup>9</sup> The debates surrounding this argument are important context for the beginning of the era this thesis explores. It does not necessarily contribute anything new to the debate, but an appreciation of the idea that decriminalisation was not just a result of a newfound liberal society is important. Nevertheless, as a thesis based on exploring identity, it does not directly contribute to arguments based on the politics of modern British society.

As a topic of historical study, youth culture has mostly been confined to the modern era, and has mixed with cultural and anthropological studies. This is due to the emergence of the teenager, who in earlier societies was not so prominent. There has previously been a reasonably sudden change between childhood and adulthood, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Studies of these eras have therefore looked at childhood, and this, as a term, is different to the boundaries of youth in the mid-twentieth century. This emerging teenager happened as a result of changes in the school-leaving age, and the introduction of conscription, which meant that youth as a phase of life became more distinct. This therefore explains why it became a topic for historical and anthropological study more recently. Youth culture has also tended to focus on the emergence of youth subcultures, leisure time and the economised teenager. Nearly all surveys of modern youth cover Teddy Boys, Mods, Rockers and the emergence of a number of subcultures who were influenced into

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (London, 2010), pp. 200-222; Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 132-48.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Marwick, *A History of the Modern British Isles: 1914-1999* (Oxford, 2000), p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Matt Cook, 'AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 2017), pp. 239-272, p. 242.

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fruition by the permissive sixties and rising counterculture.<sup>10</sup> However, nearly all neglect the role of sexuality within youth culture, and specifically homosexuality. Penny Tinkler explores the teenage girl, and therefore explores elements of sexuality through courtship and marriage, but this is arguably more of a study of gender than sexuality.<sup>11</sup> As noted, Melanie Tebbutt has mentioned sexuality, particularly focusing on the extra-marital activities of young couples and the moral panic of the VD campaign in post-war Britain.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, her work on same-sex activities, despite devoting a subsection to it, is notably lacking.<sup>13</sup> Equally, in defence of the scholarship that has occurred, teenagers were seen as a political and economic entity, and it is only more recently that sexuality has been explored as part of a social history of the group. It is therefore unsurprising that most work focuses on the new monied or politically active young person. Importantly, scholarship on youth has also assumed a shared group experience. It assumes that all teenagers of the same class shared the same experience, in a uniquely heterosexual community. For this reason, the study of youth homosexuality does not directly relate to this, as the variety of experience is a fundamental facet of the life of gay teenagers. Moreover, a sense of community is less common for gay teenagers around school-leaving age, due to a lack of awareness of other available gay people.

Despite virtually no work covering the young homosexual experience in modern Britain, broader homosexuality is reasonably well researched. Although homosexuality was effectively illegal until 1967, it has been studied outside of the twentieth century, looking at both the early-modern period and the eighteenth and nineteenth century homosexual experiences. Of course, this was confined to adults.<sup>14</sup> As a term,

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<sup>10</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Youth*; David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain* (Oxford, 1995); Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, 1998); David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain c.1920- c.1970*, (Basingstoke, 2008); Selina Todd and Hilary Young, 'Baby-Boomers to "Beanstalkers": Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2012), pp. 451-467; Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (Basingstoke, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Penny Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood: Popular Magazines for Girls Growing up in England, 1920-1950* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 35-38.

<sup>12</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Youth*, pp. 111, 118-119.

<sup>13</sup> Tebbutt, *Making Youth*, pp. 120-122.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800* (Basingstoke, 1997); Rictor Norton, 'The Gay Subculture in Early Eighteenth-Century London', *The Gay Subculture in*

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homosexuality was initially referred to simply as the sexual act of sodomy, and it was rather common for so-called 'sodomites' to identify as heterosexual men. The story of the Earl of Castlehaven, whose seventeenth-century court trial made it into popular print was an example of a heterosexual man, with a wife, who had sexual relations with his servants. For the seventeenth century, this was an abuse of power, and that was viewed to be as much of a problem as the act of sodomy itself. Historian Cynthia Herrup argues that the sensationalism surrounding the act of sodomy was merely a scapegoat for this abuse of power.<sup>15</sup> This argument partially transpires into the twentieth century, although the twentieth century encompassed this with increasing concerns about morality. This idea of an abuse of power emanated with the trial of Lord Montagu, Peter Wildeblood and Michael Pitt-Rivers in 1954. The Wildeblood trial has been well documented and analysed by most scholars of modern homosexuality, and Wildeblood even wrote a memoir of the ordeal.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, most studies of homosexuality include this trial, as well as the trial of Oscar Wilde at the end of the nineteenth century. The common theme between the studies which mention both trials is that they survey homosexuality across the twentieth century. Historian and sociologist Jeffrey Weeks' survey of homosexual identities from the nineteenth century to present day is an example of this, though, perhaps problematically, charts the centuries as a story of progression. Weeks argues that the progress from 1950 to 2000 was a transition from 'one of the most illiberal societies...to one of the most liberal'.<sup>17</sup> Whilst arguably correct, this interpretation is somewhat simplistic. Moreover, Hugh David, who offers a social history of homosexuality in the twentieth century struggles to get past the glorified homosexual trials. Even in his section on 'ordinary people', he still heavily utilises big names, newly emerging celebrities and famous peers, namely Lord Montagu and Pitt-Rivers. They may have been 'ordinary' at a time when they were up and coming, but he slightly strays from the notion of ordinary or everyday. David's account lacks the experiences of the average British man and therefore is lacking a "typical" voice for homosexuals, let alone young homosexuals, if there was

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*Georgian England*, <http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/molly2.htm>, accessed on 20 November 2017

<sup>15</sup> Cynthia Herrup, 'The Patriarch at Home: The Trial of the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven for Rape and Sodomy', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 41 (Spring, 1996), pp. 1-18, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Wildeblood, *Against the Law* (London, 1955).

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: The Emergence of LGBT Identities in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present* (London, 2016), p. 251

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such a voice. Of course, this thesis understands the variety in voices, but the testimonies and accounts that this thesis utilises are far more “ordinary” than what David relies upon.<sup>18</sup>

The adult orientated scholarship on homosexuality is very apparent. It is interesting that even in his most recent survey release in 2016, Weeks has not adjusted his scholarship to involve young homosexuals. This is particularly more striking as essays from Weeks in the early 1990s were heavily concerned with identity, yet it is apparent that youth homosexuality does not feature.<sup>19</sup> Like historian Sebastian Buckle, who has produced work on homosexuality in modern Britain, they both mention the rise of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), and the impact of the 1960s liberal and activist movements, but do not focus on the younger generation.<sup>20</sup> Buckle recognises that the GLF came about as a youth-based counter-culture, and describes it as part of the wider youth-led protest movement.<sup>21</sup> As a survey charting the major cultural developments of homosexuality across three decades, it is perhaps unsurprising that Buckle does not focus in on particular youth identities, in the same way that this thesis does. Weeks also describes the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), a less radical activist group, and acknowledges their sex-education and youth activities wing but does not investigate this further.<sup>22</sup> Buckle recognises the role of the young homosexual more explicitly. He argues that there was segregation between the ‘youth-orientated counter cultural gay identity’ which developed in the 1970s, and that of the middle-aged and older homosexual counterpart.<sup>23</sup> However, it clearly was not intended to include homosexual youth as part of the studies on modern British homosexuality. In addition to this primarily adult focus, scholarship explores the legal and moral issues surrounding homosexuality, and its popular portrayal. This thesis fits into this, but with the focus shifted to the impact on young homosexuals, who were legally restricted for much longer. Indeed, morality, and the wish not to deprave or corrupt youth was a key part in the legal decisions which were taken on the age of consent. A number of

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<sup>18</sup> Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997), pp. 152-190.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on history, sexuality and identity* (London, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Buckle, *The Way Out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain* (London, 2015), pp. 74, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Buckle, *The Way Out*, p. 221.

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historians have explored these, including Patrick Higgin, Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter and Jeffrey Weeks.<sup>24</sup> It therefore seems odd that the youth experience has not been covered as a consequence, but this thesis fills that gap.

Where youth homosexuality differs from adult homosexuality, is the fact that the narrative of progression to liberation is less direct. Matt Cook, through his use of oral testimonies, refers to this progression narrative. Cook notes that there were a few deviations from the path to liberation, but almost assumes that from 1967 onwards, it was a whiggish story of how things 'got better'.<sup>25</sup> In more recent work he has focused on the 1980s AIDS Crisis, where this progressive stance is less defined.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, unlike their adult counterparts, it would be difficult for young homosexuals to view 1967 as a landmark event. Moreover, even if there was an element of progression to a 'better' way of life, it was ideologically reversed with the introduction of Section 28 in 1988, which restricted the 'promotion' of homosexuality as an alternative to normal family life. Whilst this affected all local government, it arguably most affected education, which had a direct impact on the lives of young homosexuals. Part of this thesis aims to situate young homosexuals within this restriction to explore how far this perception was reflective of the truth.

## **Methodology**

In 1967, homosexuality in England and Wales (Scotland, 1980; Northern Ireland, 1982) was decriminalised between consenting adult men, in private, over the age of 21.<sup>27</sup> The age of consent was not equal with the heterosexual age of consent, at age 16 (17 in Northern Ireland), until 2001; prior to this the homosexual age of consent was lowered to 18 in 1994.<sup>28</sup> However, the age of consent did not apply for lesbians and this is why

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Post-War Britain* (London, 1996); Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers & Commons: The Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the Present* (London, 1991); Weeks, *Coming Out*.

<sup>25</sup> Matt Cook, 'Capital Stories: Local Lives in Queer London', in Matt Cook and Jennifer V. Evans (eds), *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (London, 2014), eBook, no pagination.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, 'AIDS, Mass Observation' pp. 239-272; Matt Cook, 'London, AIDS and the 1980s', in Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham (eds), *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c. 1859 to the present* (London, 2016), pp. 49-64.

<sup>27</sup> For a study into the shifting age of consent legislation around the UK see Matthew Waites 'Equality at Last? Homosexuality, Heterosexuality and the Age of Consent in the United Kingdom', *Sociology*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2003), pp. 637-655.

<sup>28</sup> Waites, 'Equality', p. 639.

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this thesis largely ignores women and lesbians. It is not because they did not experience prejudice or discrimination, or that their experiences were any less important, however they did not experience legal discrimination, as being lesbian was not restricted within the same legal framework. Nevertheless, where their experiences are valuable to the analysis, they have not been ignored. This legal framework meant that in a period in which some gay men enjoyed liberation, the young were still legally restricted. This thesis therefore contains its exploration within these legislative boundaries, of 1967 up until 2001, although briefly explores the immediate years before 1967. Although this thesis has not set a lower age limit, evidence of young gay people under the age of 13 or 14 is rare.

It would, however, be wrong to suggest that the experiences of those aged 14 were comparable to those men who were legally the age of majority, at 18, or legally homosexual and adult, at 21. The case stands, despite the fact that very few of the details available about young gay men in this period were about, or came from, the younger teenagers. More prominent for the analysis is the fact that experiences for the different ages which this thesis explores were subject to variety across the three decades under exploration. In the late 1960s, the school leaving age was 15, however this was later raised to 16 in 1973. For most of the period that this thesis explores, young people could, and more often did, leave school at 16 rather than stay on, up until the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the leaving age was affected by the economy, as the 1980s economic downturn, and a subsequent lack of jobs meant that more young people stayed until they were 17. Throughout this era of study, young people stayed on past the age of 16 in increasing numbers up until the late 1990s where data this thesis has used ceases to be recorded. In 1980, twenty-four percent of teenagers aged between 16 and 18 were in full-time education, increasing to fifty-seven percent in 1996.<sup>29</sup> It is no secret, and is well replicated in contemporary society, that school-based homosexuality was a different environment than in the 'adult world'.

In chapter one's exploration of the 1990s, evidence is used from 16-year-old school teenagers, where hostility towards the young gay community amongst their

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Bolton, 'Education: Historical Statistics', *House of Commons Library* (November, 2012), available at <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04252/SN04252.pdf>, accessed 15 June 2018. These statistics are for young people generally, not just young men. Gendered figures are unclear for this period.

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peers was more heightened than in the wider society. Now, in 2018, the charity Stonewall focus much of their attention on countering school-based homophobia rather than in wider society. This means that there was potentially a differing of life stage between a school-leaver at 16, who went into work, and a school-stayer, who may have went to University past the age of 18, when considering how they identified with their homosexuality. It could be speculated that this difference in school-leaving age would have been linked to class differences, although class-based evidence was difficult to uncover within the sources that were used.

Moreover, it is likely that class decided the type of schooling an individual received, namely whether education was state funded or private. One early study of life in boarding schools briefly explored the sexualised culture of the environment, which seemed to be largely encompassed in the unwritten rule of 'don't be a homosexual, but do not boast about heterosexual achievement'.<sup>30</sup> This culture appears to be decidedly different from the predominantly heterosexual environment of a state school. However, this thesis is unable to confirm that with personal testimonies, as none of the documented experiences available come from boys who were in the private schooling environment, and the study mentioned above was published in 1968. There has not been a more recent study covering the three decades of this thesis in which comparisons could be drawn. It is still worth noting this potential differing of experience. Irrespective of this, a number of the testimonies offered in this thesis are highly individual, so they do not immediately suggest that the difference between remaining in education at age 16 or 17, putting aside the school-type differences, resulted in a significantly different homosexual lifestyle to those who left school. This is likely due to the fact that the young men this thesis has drawn upon did not write their testimony based on how someone else wrote theirs. It therefore means there is little comparison within individual testimonies, and it would be difficult for one person who left school at age 16, to know how different their life would have been if they left at age 18. For this reason, this thesis utilises testimonies from 16-to-20-year-olds, but largely assumes that the young men were at a shared life-stage. Ultimately, it was still illegal for them to engage in homosexual acts, and many of the young men had identified with their sexuality by this stage.

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<sup>30</sup> Royston Lambert and Spencer Millham, *The Hothouse Society: An exploration of the boarding-school life through the boys' and girls' own writings* (London, 1968), p. 226

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It is also important to note the caveats within this thesis. Firstly, the language used to describe sexuality across this period is not constant. 'Homosexual' or 'gay', as chapter one explores, have exclusive meanings for some people, as well as being synonymous for others. This thesis, unless explicitly stating otherwise, uses the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' interchangeably, as in the modern use of the words, and not in their exclusive ways. For some of the analysis, the language is essential, and this is explained where it is relevant. In the interest of maintaining the authenticity of the sources, some terms are now unfavourable or outdated, but these have been used where applicable. Interestingly, some of these unfavourable terms were a key part of the gay identity in the earlier periods. The second caveat is the understanding that the sources utilised by this thesis can in no way, be considered representative of the whole of the young gay community. The source base is broad, because accessing the individual voices of young gay men is vital to aiding the exploration of young gay identity and understanding the variety of experiences. As is continually reinforced throughout the thesis, the voices that are explored are part of an extremely marginalised group. If adult gay men, after 1967, were considered a marginal group, young gay teenagers up until 2001 were on the very fringes of society. To access even a handful of these voices is invaluable to our historical understanding of their experiences, but it is not possible to engage with everyone.

Looking at a group who were at the fringes of an already marginalised minority has meant that coherent bodies of sources are limited. Indeed, a large proportion of the surviving written documentation that has been utilised is ephemeral, or *ad hoc*. It comprises of newsletters and weekly or monthly pamphlets; of letters saved by now defunct organisations; of administrative files for notably small homosexual youth groups. Even the magazine *Gay Youth*, changing later to *Lesbian and Gay Youth*, which lasted several years and reached numerous volumes was not a glossy magazine which one would preserve. It was not a *Jeremy*, or an *Oz*, but rather distinctly amateur in comparison. For this reason, with the intention of gathering as full of a view as possible of the homosexual youth, this thesis has utilised sources which have largely survived by chance. It is because of the ephemeral nature of the source base that the widest variety possible has been used. Unfortunately, single ephemeral sheets are not particularly useful in isolation.

The intention behind using a wide source base is to pose new questions towards existing and under-utilised archival material. The aim was to use the available

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archival material to study homosexuality from a new perspective: youth. It was also the intention to use the existing material as a way of arguing against previous scholars who have decided that the evidence available was not present. The project therefore utilises written testimonies which were produced by young people at the time as well as existing oral histories, from now adult men. There are no new original oral histories conducted as part of this project. It was never the intention of this thesis to conduct new oral history interviews. Rather, it wanted to determine whether evidence of young gay men existed during this period, using contemporary archival material, albeit using existing oral histories as part of this evidence base. This is because, a key part of this thesis is understanding whether this area of study has been previously under-researched as a result of a lack of evidence. It is clear, however, from conducting archival research, that there was indeed evidence available which supported this exploration of young gay identities during the era of partial decriminalisation. Therefore, the reasons for this area to be under-researched are unclear. Future research could involve undertaking new interviews to widen the evidence base, but it would be just as difficult to uncover any form of viable statistical sample from conducting a limited number of interviews amongst a hidden minority community. It was therefore felt, for this thesis, there was enough archival material available to determine the differing identities of young gay men, where new interviews would only offer a handful more individual experiences, which would not have enhanced the thesis any further.

Nevertheless, problems exist by using these existing oral histories, as this thesis acts as a voyeur into the lives of now adult men, speaking about the whole of their lived lives for the purpose of a different topic of study. As a result, this can be problematic for this thesis, particularly as the existing oral histories focus heavily on the men's adulthood, although they followed a formulaic approach, which involved the respondents talking what they could remember of their early lives, so useful information is still available. Where oral histories spoke about their experiences as a teenager, the interviews were often two decades later, and this is always an issue when working with oral testimonies. Indeed, conducting new oral histories would have resulted in an even greater gap. Although, many of these testimonies were conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which meant that the period this thesis tackles was closer to the date of recording, and it is undoubtable that valuable information was available within these oral testimonies.

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Although homosexuality did not occur in isolation, the public availability of private testimony as part of a topic of study mean that it is difficult to determine the contemporary public nature of homosexual experiences. Despite this, the testimonies that are available have enabled personal experiences to inform, confirm or contrast with the ephemera and written material in archives whose readership and popularity is also difficult to gauge. They help to establish a more communal experience, or equally highlight the experiences that were more individual. They certainly contribute a more intimate element to a broadly anonymised group. As chapter one addresses briefly, before looking directly at the testimonies available, this thesis has not determined any testimony to be any more, or equally any less, significant than each other. The philosopher Jennifer Lackey has explored the epistemological issues of testimony, including what constitutes a testimony. It is safe to say, with the personal experiences that are conveyed in this thesis, the young gay men do indeed testify about their lives, which includes offering knowledge of themselves.<sup>31</sup> Whilst the majority of testimonies were provided as a result of sociologists requesting information, the individual experiences that they offer help to increase the knowledge of what life was like within the testifiers personal sphere, even if the readership for such testimonies was limited. For this reason, all the testimonies are deemed to be valid, regardless of whether they accurately reflected life. It would also be unfair for this thesis to assume that any of the personal testimonies were inaccurate, because of the individual nature of experiences. Moreover, a significant focal point for this thesis is the young gay identity and how these continued or changed, and therefore each testimony is reflective of an individual personality.

In addition to personal testimonies, a few published books by youth groups exist, which surveyed and documented responses from anonymised young homosexuals. Unfortunately, however, these texts are comparatively short for published texts, and are largely ephemeral also. The studies completed for the London Gay Teenage Group by Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, published in 1983 and 1985, relied on gay youth groups, Gay Switchboard, and other pro-homosexual groups

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<sup>31</sup> Jennifer Lackey, 'The Nature of Testimony', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 87 (2006), pp. 177-197, p. 182-185.

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to advertise the ordering form for their text.<sup>32</sup> It seems that they certainly did not reach it to a trade-level book. One study conducted in 1979 seems to exist as a single copy in the archive, with an additional copy in the British Library; this suggests that it was likely not widely available. Despite this, the collection of testimonies was useful. The testimonies gathered were mostly written in Liverpool and its surrounding suburban towns. The main reason for this is presumably because the 1979 survey relied on youth groups for young gay men to find sources of information. Whilst this is not explicitly stated, one commonality between the testimonies is the fact that they all mention the extent to which a youth group has helped them at their current life-stage; Liverpool and Merseyside FRIEND being commonly mentioned.

Regional variations were therefore present in these sources as some testimonies from the 1979 collection came from London, which were written on headed London Gay Teenage Group (LGTG) paper. These were particularly notable in a collection of testimonies predominantly from the North, and it can be assumed that, in order to get more information, testimonies were gathered from youth groups further away, and London was an obvious place to start. It is also likely that evidence of young gay teenagers in rural environments is available, potentially in call logs for support services such as the Gay Switchboard, where gay people of all ages sought help, but these documents are closed. Moreover, Gay Switchboard was initially a London-based helpline when it was founded in 1974 but became a national helpline as it developed, so this would help this thesis fully explore Britain. It is quite possible these call logs would be very revealing, because phoning a support service would likely offer different information to that provided in surveys which approached gay youth groups, containing presumably open young gay teenagers. The call service is also beneficial because gay men were able to call from any location, and these should therefore contain useful information. Unfortunately, whilst these archives remain closed, it is difficult to engage with a wide range of people from different environments although this concept and that of different places is explored further later.

It was the aim to explore modern Britain, which meant exploring differing regions. Indeed, this thesis utilises sources from different locations, and the north-west of England, and London are particularly covered. Unfortunately, due to the sources

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<sup>32</sup> Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, *Something to Tell You* (London, 1983); *Talking About Young Lesbians* (London, 1985); *Talking About Youth Work* (London, 1985); *Talking About School* (London, 1985).

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available, most testimonies are from people who were in, or near, urban spaces. Admittedly, the voices of those in urban spaces, perhaps with the exception of London, were difficult to uncover, but those from more ruralised areas exist almost completely by chance. Additionally, contemporary studies often relied on gay youth groups to provide participants for the study, and these were largely located in urban environments. This explains why this thesis lacks rural testimony, because the experiences this thesis has been able to access materialised as a result of being part of a gay youth group. This is significant in itself, however, as these exclusively homosexual youth groups were safe spaces for young people, clearly to the extent where they were willing to participate in studies of their experiences as homosexual teenagers. Moreover, in this period, particularly during the late 1970s when the survey occurred, new youth groups emerged, although these occurred in larger urban environments and cities, rather than small urban towns. This also offers the explanation as to why the sources that this thesis utilises are weighted slightly towards London, where there were notably more youth groups and support services for young gay men.

Whilst most of the sources used could be deemed to be less public sources, or at least sources which were not thrust into the mainstream limelight, there were also occasional stories in the popular press concerning young homosexuals, and the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive has been particularly useful in identifying these. These, alongside media representations, which increased during the era, were examples of where homosexuality was more present in the public sphere. The public nature of these sources, as chapter one highlights, meant that people were able to directly respond to these pieces of information, which forefronts the notion that homosexuality did not exist in isolation. Nevertheless, the press ebbed and flowed in its treatment of homosexuality from largely negative to largely indifferent. It cannot be said that the press in this period were ever overtly favourable to homosexuality, let alone young gay men, although the frequency of press articles concerning homosexuality did increase across the period. Indeed, as chapter two explores in more detail, the moral right dominated the press so that they frequently upheld moral righteousness in their attack of homosexuality, preaching the risk that homosexuality could be corrupting for young people. It is therefore unsurprising that they were not particularly forthcoming in representing the homosexual youth. Despite this, across the period, it was not an all-negative portrayal either.

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Admittedly, it is also difficult to immediately relate the majority of the contextual issues to the gay men which this thesis explores. Through using already available material, even the written testimonies which are incredibly valuable, it is the case that these testimonies were often written in the immediacy. By this, it means that often they followed a framework, writing only about their lives as a young homosexual teenager, normally at a single moment in time. It is incredibly unfortunate that no study exists which charts the development of these teenagers lives over the course of time. The testimonies from 1979 are particularly significant for this, because they are written with very little contextual background. The young gay men, for example, did not comment about how the economic backdrop affected their lives. The social impact is clearer, namely how the public reacted to homosexuality, but the intermittent snapshots available, as well as the regional differences, make gauging the change or continuity over time problematic.

This thesis is an empirical study split into two chapters: the first is a chronological exploration of identity from the 1960s to the end of the century, exploring the changes and continuities of different young men's identities. It closes with a more general look at the significance of the city and urban environment on a young gay identity, compared to that of rural experiences, but this sub-section is not split chronologically. It explores the varieties around how young gay men identified with themselves and how they related to the lives around them. The second chapter focuses on the issue of social control with particular attention being paid to a sample of four methods. It looks at the age of consent legislation, the key boundary for this thesis; the AIDS Crisis; Section 28 of the Local Government Act; and parental control. There are other methods of social control, namely policing as a key part, but police records for this period are mostly closed, and mostly concerned with adult men. The methods of social control have therefore been selected as a way of exploring whether they contributed to a sense of restricted identity amongst the young gay men. It is the aim to acknowledge the experiences of these marginalised teenagers, and to ensure that their experiences are recognised as historically significant. Adult homosexuality for this period is widely recognised and has been well researched. Therefore, this thesis gives the same recognition to gay teenage men through the exploration into the methods of social control used to restrict them.

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This is a history of teenage identity, of youth experience, of restrictions, of public pressures, and of community. This thesis highlights the variety involved across these areas. Unlike other histories of homosexuality, this is not a history of crime, or sex. There are no open police records for this period for young gay men and this history is not reliant on men having been convicted for gross indecency. For much of the period, and much of the age range, it is not a sexual history. In order to prosecute adult homosexual men, details of their gross indecency was often documented, and this meant that histories of adult homosexuality were also sexual histories. They document cruising spots, underground clubs, and *agent provocateurs*, which are less applicable to the young gay sphere.<sup>1</sup> This chapter introduces the legislative restriction, and the problems of working with a community of this kind. Moreover, it analyses the types of voices that this thesis has utilised; a quietly confident, but fundamentally anonymous group. It then briefly looks at the issues of identifying as gay in this period, before going on to exploring the variety of young gay identities across three decades. It splits this exploration into early youth identities, between the 1960s and early 1970s, then looks at the post-initial-radicalism stage up until the AIDS crisis, roughly spanning a decade from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, and then it explores young gay identity from Section 28 in the late 1980s, up until an equal age of consent. It also explores how the city environment affected these young gay men, in comparison to a more rural setting. This chapter looks at personal testimonies from young gay men, recollections from now adult men, and accounts talking about young gay people, although not necessarily from a personal perspective. It looks at youth groups, and their changing popularity, and also explores how space and location contributed to a differing young gay identity. Fundamentally, it focuses on individual cases rather than assuming a shared experience, as this is a crucial part of arguing for the presence of gay teenagers who had a variety of experiences. It also utilises what is actually available to the historian, rather than trying to plug the inevitable gaps of working with a community of this kind.

Firstly, it is notable that a specific youth homosexual identity does not exist. There are many differing experiences and ways in which young gay men viewed

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<sup>1</sup> Leif Jerram, *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 309-11, 325.

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themselves, from how they accepted their sexuality, how openly they showed it, and also how the wider environment may have prevented this from happening. Nevertheless, there is also commonality between all the sources available to the historian. For nearly all these young men, their sexuality was effectively illegal due to their age. Depending on how heavily they identified with their sexuality depended on how far they experienced difficulties with the illegality. Due to the questionably illegal nature of their identity, countless young gay men are non-identifiable. Therefore, the striking commonality between all the voices that are presented in this thesis is that the young men involved have actively provided them and put their testimonies forward. This therefore means that the voices which historians can access come from young gay men who were comfortable enough to discuss their experiences as an illegal young homosexual. Undoubtedly, this requires some levels of confidence, and also a level of openness highlighting that the young man was not afraid to come out of the shadows. This thesis recognises that this results in a skewed voice. It is a quietly confident and comfortable voice, which is perhaps not reflective of the community as a whole. With young gay men on the very fringes of society, those who did not wish to be identified could simply remain hidden.

It is important to note at this stage, however, that *being gay* was not directly punishable by law; it was not illegal to 'exist' as a gay man. It was a punishable offence to engage in homosexual activities, particularly in public. As the 1956 Sexual Offences Act states: 'It is an offence for a man to commit an act of gross indecency with another man, whether in public or private'.<sup>2</sup> This was amended to only being an offence if it was in public and/or partaken by men under the age of 21 in 1967. This was then further amended to age 16 in 2001, although it was only after 2003 that committing homosexual acts stopped being an offence, even if they were not prosecuted in the interim. It was therefore not until 2003 that homosexual acts were dictated by the same law that governed heterosexual acts. The legislation however, is specifically confined to *homosexual acts*, and this therefore meant that it was never illegal to be attracted to the same sex. Young gay teenagers were therefore not illegally *existing*, but it was assumed that those who *existed* as gay men partook in homosexual activities, which was illegal. Indeed, as one testimony which is explored later highlights, the presiding thought amongst the gay community was that it was illegal to

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<sup>2</sup> UK Legislation, Sexual Offences Act 1956, Ch. 69, A4.

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be gay, particularly before 1967.<sup>3</sup> The illegality surrounding homosexual acts versus that of public and private homosexual existence was a blurred area. As far as public perceptions were concerned it was largely unpopular to *be* gay, and not something one would admit lightly, even if not strictly illegal.<sup>4</sup>

It is understandable, then, why young gay teenagers existed on the fringes of society, because they existed on the fringes of legality. It is therefore unsurprising that the voices which this thesis presents cannot be seen as a thorough representation of the community, simply because it is impossible to access every young gay teenager's voice. The voices and experiences that are portrayed come from those members who pushed their way in from the outer fringes where the majority of the young homosexual community resided. This explains the overall lack of voices in comparison to the community as a whole. It also means that those who were confident and overt in their sexual identity may have faced different experiences to their hidden counterparts, particularly when considering the presence of a general disapproval or antipathy towards homosexuality. The variety across the community is important, but it is impossible to uncover the complete variations of experiences due to this. This also introduces the caveat that the experiences that are available are not necessarily reflective of true lives. Often, testimonies are anonymised. Some sources are provided with a only first name, age and location. Unless the young man was from a very small village, there is anonymity in a written testimony. This means that testimonies could be used to create an image of their lifestyle, and identity. It might emphasise emotional moments, or highlight key events, whilst also being a fabrication of what the testifier wanted life to be like. Where testimonies were overtly negative, it could have been a result of hyperbolising negative experiences, because the effect of a particular event altered the testifiers outlook. Nevertheless, anonymous testimony also allows the public to access them without fear of repercussions for discussing experiences. This could therefore mean their testimony is likely to be true and reflective of their actual experiences, even if some moments were enhanced in order to construct a particular narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Andy, by Clare, *Speak Out London*, <http://www.speakoutlondon.org.uk/oral-histories/andy>, accessed 6 October 2017.

<sup>4</sup> For ease of expression, later in this thesis, homosexuality is referred to as being illegal as a shorthand explanation. It means homosexual acts, but as outlined, public perception expected homosexuals to be engaging in homosexual acts.

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Furthermore, as the introduction outlined, the personal voices on offer occur largely in isolation to one another. Whilst there are multiple testimonies which document brief lived experiences that were even part of the same edited collection, there is no inter-personal connection between testimonies. As an external viewer, being able to see the collection of testimonies together allows for links and variances to be seen, but for these individual young men who wrote their experiences, this was not the case. The young man writing their own testimony was writing it without knowing the experiences of other young gay men like them, particularly if they were not part of a youth group. Moreover, these isolated written testimonies were simply collated together for presentation purposes; there was no clear dialogue between a testimony, and the collator. In this respect, there is no clear backstory to these young gay men. They are not the infamous homosexual men of the 1950s, like Peter Wildeblood and Lord Montagu. Rather, in their testimonies they are hidden members of a community, providing a name and age to make their experiences more personable, rather than looking to become identifiable. This means that, for this thesis, the presentation of these men can be little more than a name, age and location, and then making assumptions based on their testimonies. They did not provide abstracts to their testimonies, nor were any follow-up questions asked. For the collection of testimonies from 1979, which this thesis draws upon, they followed an outline of around 12 questions which testifiers could base their testimony on, but even with these, not everyone answered all of them, instead writing what they, as teenagers, felt was appropriate. For this reason, understanding the background to these individual testimonies is problematic, outside of understanding that someone wished to collate anonymised individual experiences together. Crucially, these young gay men provide snapshots into their lives, as a result of responding to testimony requests from their youth groups, who were approached for this collation effort. They mostly have this in common, but outside of their page-long testimony, they disappear into the hidden community once more, and do not obviously feature in the archival material again. Indeed, the snapshots are revealing, and have been particularly useful in revealing the young gay voice, and has allowed this thesis to explore variety. However, the young men were, and remain to be effectively anonymous.

It is also the case, as outlined in the introduction, that these testimonies were not completely public. Whilst some were published, actual readership for these surveys would have been decidedly limited. Those who read the testimonies would

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have been interested parties, and it is incredibly unlikely that a member of the public would read about young gay experiences simply to disapprove of what they were reading. The reliance on gay youth groups to publicise these particular testimonies highlights how, even with an anonymous but public testimony, there was relative safety in testifying to a mostly like-minded audience. Importantly, even if creative license was exercised within the testimonies, as the introduction noted, none of the personal experiences are being treated as any less valid than another, and they have all been valuable in constructing a varied portrayal of this outer-most fringe of society.

### **Identifying as gay**

Identity is a complex term and homosexual identity is even more so. According to sociologists, *gay identity* is not the same as *homosexual identity*. There is also disagreement on what is meant by 'identity'.<sup>5</sup> The official definition, as provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is:

Who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others.<sup>6</sup>

This incorrectly suggests that identity is singular. This thesis is arguing for the fact that there was not a singular gay youth identity alongside its exploration, therefore the definition does not allow for the nuances that exist within young teenage identities. The difference between *gay* and *homosexual* is the difference between belonging to a community and identifying as a sexual orientation. For 1980s sociologists, *gay* meant the scene, the community and the feeling of being part of a group. Of course, one would still be a homosexual, but in this sense, one could be homosexual, without being gay. Nevertheless, Jeffrey Weeks makes this more complicated by highlighting that there were, in fact, members of the gay community who did not engage in

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<sup>5</sup> Vivienne C. Cass, 'Homosexual Identity: A Concept in Need of Definition', *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1984), pp. 105-126, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> 'identity' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (January 2018), accessed on 24 January 2018.

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homosexual activity, illustrating the difficulty in terms, particularly in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The definition in terms of its use by sociologists is therefore far more fluid than the dictionary provides. It is this complexity, however that makes it problematic to pinpoint a person's identity, particularly with such conflicting interpretations, although it does support the idea that there were variations to a young gay identity. In a similar way to how sociologists constructed conflicting identities for a term that is now interchangeable, contemporaries battled with this idea in practice rather than theory.

'Homosexual' was the seemingly impartial and unloaded term given to men who were sexually attracted to other men. Due to the public perception of homosexuality, particularly up until 1967, the word had negative connotations. It was the rise of gay liberation which saw the homosexual community adopt the word 'gay' as a descriptive term for identifying within the new community. Conservative Britain (with a small 'c') both politically and ideologically, was unimpressed with the appropriation of the new word which initially meant jolly and happy. A letter to the press said that homosexuals assuming this word as their own completely destroyed the meaning of 'a once beautiful word'.<sup>8</sup> However, the fact that it increasingly became the recognised word to describe homosexuals, meant that it became part of a sexual identity and community. It was reactionary and revolutionary to identify as 'gay' from the early 1970s, as epitomised by the new Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Initially, it was not widely adopted outside of the gay sphere, with press reports, even in the 1990s, still referring to homosexuals. The divide was still present in 1992, when a local newspaper complained of 'gay supporters' campaigning for the 'age of consent for homosexuals'. This juxtaposition within the same sentence of the article highlights how adopting 'gay' as a term was not universal; there was a clear 'us' and 'them' approach, and the use of 'gay' in this instance also suggested radicalism like in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, initial self-identifications as gay rather than homosexual signified a sense of confidence and subtle revolution as members of the community finally identified with words they felt comfortable with. Indeed, as Jeffrey Weeks also highlighted, when one could 'choose' not to identify with a gay community, doing so was a 'political choice'.<sup>10</sup> This meant

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on history, sexuality and identity* (London, 1992), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> 'Murder of a word', *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 December 1977

<sup>9</sup> *Scarborough Evening News*, 4 June 1992

<sup>10</sup> Weeks, *Against Nature*, p. 83.

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that there was even a variety in experiences between those who identified within a 'gay' community and those who restricted their identity to just 'homosexual'.

As the popular press identified, there was early outrage at the appropriation of the word gay to describe homosexuality. The prejudice present in these testimonies is useful in understanding why gay people may have struggled with their identity. After Gay Liberation, one letter to *The Guardian* questioned the use of the word in a reply to an earlier article:

Homosexuals having appropriated quite enough of our communal words already, surely anyone would be satisfied with "queer", "pervert", "invert" and "poof". I am amazed they have the ingratitude and audacity to think of picking and choosing their own.<sup>11</sup>

This ideology was certainly not confined to individual thought. It was further shared within a number of local papers, by letter writers who insisted that homosexuality was nothing like the definition for 'gay'.<sup>12</sup> Even as late as the early 1980s, a time when 'gay' and 'homosexuality' were almost synonymous, one letter to the *Glasgow Herald* emphasised the antipathy:

Homosexuals are the very antithesis of the true meaning of 'gay'...  
By all means let them organise themselves but they should put a sock in it in relation to ramming their views down normal throats.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to suggest how representative these two articles are in terms of national popular opinion as one letter was written to a Scottish paper, and one to a paper with greater readership. Despite this view being presented within a national newspaper, it is not confirmation that this thought was widely shared. Nevertheless, other letters were also written to much smaller local papers, so the ideology clearly existed. However, it was not the case that letters expressing these sentiments were appearing on a daily

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<sup>11</sup> 'The gay way — better a fuzzy word than a narrow mind?', *The Guardian*, 8 March 1974.

<sup>12</sup> 'Dear Sir', *Liverpool Echo*, 17 December 1974; 'Bizarre gays', *Bradford Star*, 25 August 1982; 'Not so gay...', *County Express*, 15 July 1983.

<sup>13</sup> 'Manipulating the word "gay"', *Glasgow Herald*, 6 March 1982.

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basis. The Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive holds copies of articles which disapprove of the use of 'gay' in place of 'homosexual', but they are not as extensive as articles on the AIDS crisis, law reform, or Section 28. Whilst therefore recognising that these responses may not be representative of a widely held popular opinion, it is significant that newspapers printed these responses, readable by a national audience. Moreover, the argument asserted by the reader who suggested that homosexuals should be content with "queer", "pervert", "invert" or "poof" encompasses the reason why the homosexual community sought their own term for their new-found liberation from old legislation; the traditional vocabulary describing homosexuality was negatively loaded.

Equally, it would be unfair to say that the press were against homosexuality. In many of the articles referring to homosexuality, they were careful to use that term, which is decidedly impartial. Furthermore, some letters were sent to the press defending the use of the term 'gay', and the fact that these were printed alongside those criticising its use highlights a relatively impartial stance. Dudley Cave, a press officer for a Gay Bereavement Service, which is itself significant for adopting the term 'gay', wrote to the *Hendon Times*:

I cannot recall any protests at the use of other useful short words to mean gay. There were no protests at the use of pansy, fairy or queer and I believe that often the protesting at the use in this meaning is because it is a non-condemnatory word and gives gays equality with the heterosexual majority. It erodes the sexuality differential.<sup>14</sup>

Dudley Cave puts forward a good case, and it was indeed, the positively loaded 'gay' - in its traditional meaning - that clearly riled some of the conservative population. Significantly, Cave was clearly an open and outward facing adult homosexual. In addition to these press reports defending the language for gay people, his life story was also recorded in *Walking After Midnight*, highlighting the active role he played in the homosexual community.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, writing in 1982, it was likely a bit early to be speaking of 'equality with the heterosexual majority', but there is grounds for his

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<sup>14</sup> 'Meanings of Gay', *Hendon Times*, 9 September 1982.

<sup>15</sup> Hall Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Group, *Walking After Midnight* (London, 1989), pp. 21-39.

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assertion of the benefits of adopting a 'non-condemnatory' term, particularly for individuals' identity. Then, in a far less common occurrence, one letter criticised the use of 'gay' as an American term, alongside 'hooker', 'take-out', and 'zap' - military jargon taken from the war in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> In this unique case, a few people were clearly looking to preserve the traditional English language. This is in stark contrast to the many letters who protested the case, instead with a distinctly anti-gay, rather than anti-American tone. Nevertheless, for the newly liberated homosexual community, which only included adult men over the age of 21, adopting 'gay' was an attempt at claiming their identity for themselves. It is however quite surprising that debates over the use of the word gay continued to extend into the 1990s and beyond. It certainly seems that this became a minority debate, with only a handful of letters continually questioning the use of the term. Despite this, the language issue was an important part of gay and homosexual identity throughout the period, and young people identifying as gay rather than homosexual was significant for this purpose. It was quiet activism.

### **Early youth identities**

This section explores early youth identities — those from the early 1960s up until the end of the short-lived GLF in the early 1970s. The experiences for these young gay men are often concealed. With homosexual acts being illegal until 1967, it was partial decriminalisation which caused an obvious surge in activity into the early 1970s. Nevertheless, young men were living as homosexuals before this, even if they were difficult to uncover. Notably few previous scholars have focused on youth homosexuality for the past four decades. Ken Plummer notes that, despite plentiful scholarship on youth and youth culture, this is not the case for young people who desired the same-sex.<sup>17</sup> He states that it is 'hard to find a single lesbian or gay voice', extending this to say that the voices were virtually non-existent before 1970.<sup>18</sup> Whilst they are somewhat difficult to uncover, the defeatist tone suggests they were not available at all. This is not the case, as this thesis highlights. Unfortunately, due to this assumption, Plummer's account of gay youth in England is very impersonal, offering a general sweep of youth groups and most of his evidence concerning young gay people

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<sup>16</sup> 'Spade Calling', *Southampton Evening Echo*, 17 July 1982.

<sup>17</sup> Ken Plummer, 'Lesbian and Gay Youth in England', in Gilbert Herdt (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Youth* (New York, 1989), pp. 195-225, p. 195.

<sup>18</sup> Plummer, 'Gay Youth', pp. 195, 200.

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was produced by people talking about how to help young gay people, rather than being produced by the young people themselves. The personal voice in his account is therefore lacking. Nevertheless, part of his assertions are true; the early 1970s was a period of revolutionary youth and revolutionary sexuality. The GLF emerged in 1970 formed by a radical group at the London School of Economics. Couple this with the infamous trial of *Oz* issue 28, the *School Kids Issue*, youth and sexuality were certainly cementing their marks at the turn of the new decade. Despite this, it is simply not the case, as Plummer has asserted, that evidence of homosexuality amongst the youth was not apparent until the 1970s, as some of the accounts in this section highlight.

The Hall-Carpenter Oral History Project conducted a study into the lives of gay men in the late 1980s and early 1990s. John Fraser, who was born in Liverpool in 1947, spoke about his experiences as a homosexual. He was at his prime schooling age at the very beginning of the 1960s, before going to Bristol University in 1964. This is notable in itself, because it is clear he stayed on at school past the school-leaving age, and went to University at a time when it was far less common. This suggests he was likely from a middle-class background, and it appears he had more opportunities available to him than other voices within this thesis. This is incredibly interesting, because he refers to himself as working-class, yet his access to University, in a city a considerable distance away disputes this idea. In this light, Fraser's testimony is an example of the ways that people saw and testified about themselves differently than perhaps was more accurately reflective. Fraser admitted that he was aware of his sexuality from age twelve or thirteen, but that he was also 'very hung up about it'.<sup>19</sup> For Fraser, being a 'working-class masculine man' was important.<sup>20</sup> As will be seen later in this chapter and in the next chapter when looking at parental control, upbringing was significant in determining how young gay men identified with themselves. For Fraser, however, identifying as both working class and masculine did not combine well with homosexuality. Throughout his schooling and university experience, which he would have nearly completed by the time of partial decriminalisation, he spent his time 'equat[ing] homosexuality with weakness'.<sup>21</sup> This clear division between *himself* and the homosexual side of his identity was further confirmed during his first encounter

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<sup>19</sup> British Library (BL), Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive (HCOA), F2133-F2134, Interview of John Fraser by William Pierce, May 1987.

<sup>20</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

<sup>21</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

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with a 'really effeminate gay'. 'He was my first fear', Fraser said, 'I think I know I am homosexual but I am not like that. I don't behave in that way, I am not overt in that way'.<sup>22</sup> Fraser spoke in 1987, in an interview about his life as a gay man. At this time, homosexuality was legal for him as an adult. He states however, that he could not see himself as homosexuals 'were supposed to be – and, indeed, are still thought to be now', which highlights how the stereotype of a feminised homosexual still followed him into adult life, and into the late 1980s. Nevertheless, his use of 'thinking' that he was homosexual suggests that it clearly took him time to consider it part of his identity. His identity during the 1960s, at a time when homosexuality was effectively illegal, was heavily focused on his class and his attitude. He was careful not to attract unwanted attention to himself, and struggled during this period to identify as a gay man. Moreover, in his testimony, he referred to the effeminate stereotype as 'gay', but himself as a 'homosexual', and he is speaking about a time where 'gay' as a term did not exist. At the time of speaking, over twenty years later, the terms were blurred, but there is still a notable and interesting separation between his use of the two terms. This is perhaps illustrative of his difficulty in identifying as a radical, or identifiable 'gay', which he assigns to an effeminate stereotype, as opposed to himself, who he was very careful to keep separate. Nevertheless, in his interview in 1987, he notes how 'it seems odd now...that I should ever have felt strange about being gay', which shows how adulthood and community has helped shape his experience, but he did not have this as a young teenager.

Andy had a rather different experience. His testimony is captured as part of the *SpeakOut London* project currently being carried out, and this means that he offered his own experiences to the London Metropolitan Archive, with the intention of sharing personal histories of LGBT Londoners. This, in itself, means he is very confident in his adult sexuality, and indeed, it seems from his testimony that he was comfortable when he was younger as well. At age eighteen or nineteen in 1965, he was only slightly older than Fraser. He was also in London, which, as will be explored later, had a more prominent scene for the gay community. Andy recounts his experience of being introduced to the capital's gay scene. Indeed, Andy was obviously more overt in his identity; he notes that during this time it was 'strictly illegal, of course, to be gay, to

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<sup>22</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

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have gay affairs', but that did not seem to stop him.<sup>23</sup> When he was introduced to an underground gay club in London, The A&B, he felt far more comfortable with his homosexuality; 'the main thing was that I felt that I was part of a kind of, slightly, underground, well actually underground gay community'.<sup>24</sup> For Andy, the newly emerging gay scene was a big part of his identity as a homosexual. He felt a sense of belonging to the group, through their shared experience on the commercial gay scene, despite it still being illegal. Interestingly, in contrast to Fraser, Andy refers to himself only as 'gay' and never as 'homosexual', despite him, again, speaking of a time where 'gay' was non-existent. Andy was, indeed, more open and comfortable with himself. It is also clear that he associated more with the gay community as he adopted the term as a complete replacement for homosexuality, rather than using it synonymously. The year 1965, however, is important to this feeling of belonging to the gay scene. The effective illegality of homosexuality, regardless of age, meant that it was a significant feat to admit one's homosexuality. Moreover, undoubtedly the scene Andy belonged to included older adults, who, were it two years later, began to show animosity to those under 21, through fear of repercussions under the new age of consent law. In some ways, there is a difference between homosexuality being effectively illegal for everyone, rather than only for younger people. This certainly explains why adult homosexuals began to show animosity to the homosexual youth after 1967. Nevertheless, whilst Andy's testimony alone cannot conclude that early youth identities were slightly more reserved than their more recent counterparts, this tends to be the trend with homosexuality more generally, as Fraser's testimony highlights. Historian Sebastian Buckle suggests that the early period, or the five years surrounding the 1967 partial decriminalisation were comparatively reserved.<sup>25</sup> It took the GLF to incite a radical burn into homosexual identity, and even this was short-lived.

With the arrival of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (initially Committee) (CHE) in 1971, came an interest in ensuring there was no difference between heterosexual and homosexual ways of living. This included the issue of the age of consent, and a sub-committee which focused on that, as well as forming a CHE Youth committee. Many quasi-official responses existed, such as those from these

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<sup>23</sup> Andy, *Speak Out London*, <http://www.speakoutlondon.org.uk/oral-histories/andy>.

<sup>24</sup> Andy, *Speak Out London*, <http://www.speakoutlondon.org.uk/oral-histories/andy>.

<sup>25</sup> Sebastian Buckle, *The Way Out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain* (London, 2015), pp. 90-91.

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committees, which provide an insight into how identity was perceived amongst young gay men, from an impersonal perspective.<sup>26</sup> A leaflet produced by the CHE's youth information services in February 1975 highlights how negative portrayals of homosexuality produced anxiety for young gay people. It stated that, a 'lot of nonsense is talked about protecting Young People from sexual experience. The efforts of parents to prevent their sons and daughters from having homosexual relationships can be psychologically and emotionally damaging'.<sup>27</sup> This leaflet is aimed at youth workers and interested parties, rather than the young people themselves, hence the impersonal tone. Nevertheless, it implicitly suggests that it was the duty of the youth services to reverse the negative images, which sometimes arose from parents themselves, due to the harm they cause to young gay men and the subsequent effect on their identity. It also highlights the damaging effects of non-accepting parents, and these parents are common throughout this period, as will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Early advice to youth workers and counsellors was also restrictive; this will be expanded upon slightly more in the next chapter. In 1974, Trevor Locke, a leading member of the CHE, wrote an information pack about counselling gay people under the age of eighteen. Whilst this early period was still restricted by the concern that homosexuality would corrupt young people, Locke highlighted that:

Counsellors are...severly [sic] limited in what they can do for young homosexuals. It does not at this stage seem sensible to set up gay youth clubs where young gay people can meet each other socially; it could be argued that this could lead to sexual contacts and it is within the power of the law to prosecute anyone running a gay youth club either for conspiracy to corrupt or for procuring. Yet, such facilities would be of great value in helping confirmed homosexuals (of which there are a large number) to lead a happier and mentally more healthy life.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> It would not be correct to define these groups as *official*, although they were more authoritative than the individual.

<sup>27</sup> British Library of Politics and Economics (LSE), Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA), Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), 9, 50, Youth Services Information Project, CHE Young Gays Homosexuality Leaflet, February 1975.

<sup>28</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE, 9, 50, Trevor Locke, 'Counselling Homosexuals Under 18', 6 October 1974.

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Indeed, mental health and homosexual identity was at the forefront of thought within this leaflet, but it recognises just how restrictive the legal environment was regarding young gay people. It was even too risky to provide a social environment for young gay people, where they could escape emotionally damaging sentiments, without potentially facing criminal conviction for allowing sexual contacts between young homosexuals. This therefore reflected how the early period of young homosexual identity stood in the early 1970s. There was both an inability, and therefore a reluctance, to help nurture a young gay identity. Additionally, at this early stage, an openness with one's homosexuality was still not widespread. It took far more confidence in oneself to admit their homosexuality openly in the immediate aftermath of partial decriminalisation, than in later decades where public opinion became slightly conditioned to the idea that a gay identity was present and acceptable.

### ***Identity after radicalism and before crisis***

Once gay liberation, or at least the GLF, effectively disbanded in 1973, there was a temporary lull in radical homosexuality. Adult homosexuals had been granted a partial concession for their sexuality, although it was still illegal in public. However, young gay people received no such benefit. This period is where youth groups emerged and the young gay struggle began. The end of GLF, and the end of the so-called long sixties, supposedly closed off the era of the permissive society with a new wave of liberal attitude, although this interpretation is a significant oversimplification. This was alongside the harsh socio-political environments of Britain in the early 1970s. As the introduction highlights, it is difficult to directly link any of the problems that faced workers to the homosexual community, but a number of testimonies recall miners strikes and the three-day weeks as something that was at least lived through, even if it was not related to homosexuality. Nevertheless, for the young gay men of the mid 1970s, compared to a decade earlier, both gay as a word and a community had been more firmly established. Support groups and youth groups for young homosexuals sprung up in a number of larger urban spaces, and there was a more definitive young gay presence.

The London Gay Teenage Group (LGTG) was founded in 1976, run for and completely by young people under the age of 21. This in itself highlighted a change from two years prior, when running a youth group risked prosecution. The group

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eventually commissioned three studies in the mid 1980s about young homosexual experiences.<sup>29</sup> The existence of a group of this kind, and simply the fact that it was run by minors under the law, illustrates a sense of rebellious attitude that arose due to gay radicalism and a heightened homosexual presence. Moreover, it also highlighted the need for groups which supported like-minded young people in a uniquely homosexual environment, which suggests that the young gay presence was increasing.

Unfortunately, the archive for this group is not currently available, but it is believed to appear in the future in the National Archives.<sup>30</sup> Despite this, limited amounts of material exist from the group in other archives, including the surveys which are utilised later in this chapter and in the following chapter. The group also produced their own magazine, *Metro*, although this was a rare find. Within this magazine, it documented seemingly personal experiences of young gay men. The benefit of the magazine, instead of an oral history, is that the testimony is virtually anonymous. Though it has a name attached to it, it does not have the physical voice which can be heard in an oral history. This means that even a named author can hide behind text in a way that the interviewee in an oral history cannot. This perhaps means that the author can provide a more honest testimony because even as a public source, the author can remain anonymous. Even if its readership for an amateur magazine did not extend much outside of the youth group and its immediate connections; one perhaps does not feel the pressure of a face-to-face interview. As historian Matt Cook observed whilst interviewing men for his study on gay squatters in the 1970s and 1980s there was, what Michael Frisch has termed a “shared authority” for some interviews, meaning this affected how the conversation progressed.<sup>31</sup> This idea particularly resonates for the interview featuring John Fraser mentioned above, because the interviewer noticeably had a prior relationship or shared experience with him. Alternatively, a testimony in the magazine was arguably not at risk of this sway to the same extent. Although editing could skew personal experiences within a magazine, it was unlikely

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<sup>29</sup> Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, *Something to Tell You* (London, 1983); *Talking About Young Lesbians* (London, 1985); *Talking About Youth Work* (London, 1985); *Talking About School* (London, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> ‘London Gay Teenage Group’, *LGBT Archive*, [www.lgbtarchive.uk](http://www.lgbtarchive.uk), accessed on 1 February 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Matt Cook, ‘“Gay Times”: Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970s London’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2013), pp. 84-109, p. 86.



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clearly does not affect Alfred in the same way, because he still states that ‘I love him’. Equally, the clear difference between Fraser and Alfred is the presence of a teenage gay group. This social space likely exposed the variety of the young gay community at a younger age than in the mid-sixties, where many young men were not exposed to a gay community until much older.

It is also significant that throughout the early periods of homosexual radicalisation and movements, virtually all testimonies from young people began with the fact that they thought that it was wrong to be gay. This reveals the social prejudices and how young people self-identified as being different or wrong, despite a more openly gay presence in the outside world. Steven Power, who was the young chairperson of the LGTG up until 1979, recalls his coming out experience. He notes that it took him nearly an entire day to tease out enough confidence to tell his mother, despite talking for nearly six hours. Steven’s name often appears on papers in the archive from the LGTG in this period, and he also took part in an interview with Jeffrey Weeks in 1977. Interestingly, he went on to counsel young gay men as he got older, but in Weeks’ interview he recounts his father’s unpleasant reaction to his own homosexuality. This part of the interview is reproduced below in full, due to the value of the testimony. This is the case for a number of testimonies in this thesis. A number of primary testimonies are reproduced quite extensively in the attempt to offer the never-before-heard voices. Steven told his father:

“I like boys.” He was a bit confused, he sort of said, “so what, what do you mean, everybody goes through it, a lot of people go through it.” I said, “yeah you don’t understand, I like boys more than girls, in fact I don’t like girls at all.” Immediately he stood there, sort of shocked, horrified, this expression on his face, and he said “no son of mine’s a poof.” He just exploded, he really did. I just ran up the stairs. I couldn’t talk to him, and my mother tried to calm me down. “What the bloody hell is he going on about.” I mean it just continued and he started, “I’ll get the bastards that made him queer” ... and he was going to call in the police and everything. I just put my coat on and I said, “if I can’t

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confide in even my dad then I can't confide in anybody", and I just slammed the door and ran out.<sup>33</sup>

The explosion from his father was perhaps common. The fact that he was sure 'no son of mine's a poof' highlights the prejudice that young gay men faced in society. Steven also certainly came from a lower-middle or working-class background, because he notes how his dad would come in at six in the evening and was reluctant to talk at first, because he only wanted his 'tea', which indicates that he had just spent the day at work. Notably, his mother was clearly at home for the day that he plucked up courage to eventually tell her, highlighting a traditional family set-up for the mid 1970s. Steven does not say what his father did, but there is the impression that they were a seemingly typical family. This typicality and tradition in family life was also likely the reason for his father's outrage. Whilst Gay Liberation and decriminalisation of homosexuality had occurred prior to this, it was not a sudden switch for the majority of the population. Long-held views determining homosexuality as negative did not change overnight, and it is clear Steven's family was not going to be a poster-family for gay rights and having a gay son anytime soon.

Importantly, as is becoming an increasingly common theme, Steven was also reluctant to admit his sexuality to himself. The effeminate stereotype clearly penetrated all areas of society. He began his interview with Weeks highlighting this:

SP: I think by the time I just reached the end of sixth form, maybe really late, I think I realised that maybe I'm homosexual and what do I do about it. But I never really wanted to think of myself like that...

JW: Why didn't you?

SP: I always thought of it being effeminate, god, you know, liking other boys was silly because it's...you're playing the woman and you're not supposed to do that

JW: Where did you get stereotypes like that from? Was it just other boys talking?

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<sup>33</sup> Steven Power, int. Jeffrey Weeks, 1977, Open University, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plQJh8kYaUc>, accessed on 2 February 2018.

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SP: I think, you know, from opinions and mother and father. From watching telly and things like that

JW: Stereotyped on telly?

SP: Yeah the guy with the hand on the hip and the handbag. I just didn't want to put myself in that position and say that's how I'm like, because I'm not.<sup>34</sup>

Steven notes how these stereotypes were reinforced by both his parents and television. It was the case that gay people were being introduced to popular culture, although some representations were not particularly sympathetic. Sebastian Buckle notes that there was a gradually increasing homosexual presence in popular culture from the 1970s to the 1990s, but that this actually created more hostility to homosexuality.<sup>35</sup> His father's response is therefore perhaps unsurprising, because he based his impression of homosexuality on the often negative and hyperbolised homosexual in popular culture, as well his long-held views which were not helped by the emerging presence on television. These would have simply reinforced the non-reflective stereotypes. Therefore, Steven's father was likely given that impression when his son admitted his sexuality.

This stereotype was then further emphasised within a youth social work journal, in an article written by Trevor Locke. As the chair of the youth services information project, he clearly accessed a number of young people's experiences. He recorded that 'I have seen many teenage homosexuals who do not have a remotely effeminate physique displaying the typical 'camp' style of the homosexual stereotype.[It is] only because they feel that gay men must behave in this way, because it's part of what they have been lead to believe being homosexual is all about'.<sup>36</sup> Whilst it is perhaps not the most elegantly written article, it highlights the overtly feminised perception of homosexuality which the young gay community simply could not resist comparing themselves to.

Despite all of these clearly more open young gay men sharing their testimonies, it is strictly unfair to say that suddenly, the late 1970s arrived and young gay teenagers

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<sup>34</sup> Steven Power, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plQJh8kYaUc>, accessed on 2 February 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Buckle, *The Way Out*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Trevor Locke, 'Young Homosexuals' *Youth Social Work Bulletin*, Vol 2, No. 4 (June-July, 1975), pp. 2-4, p. 3.

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started emerging everywhere. As the CHE Teenage Movement highlighted in 1976, 'the movement has made a mistake of thinking that a few talks to local CHE groups would do the trick and that teenagers would come pouring in. Things just don't happen that way so we remain just as small, if not smaller than...last year'.<sup>37</sup> It was also not particularly helpful, that the CHE appeared to be a bureaucratic nightmare, because the Teenage Movement was separate to the Youth committee and the youth groups. These many splinter organisations likely created confusion among the groups as a whole. Indeed, Jeffrey Weeks concedes that the CHE 'became notoriously concerned with "structure"', and continually revised its constitution. Moreover, it became increasingly concerned about *how* it underwent activities, rather than *what* those activities were. This certainly gives the impression that it was weighed down with bureaucratic red tape, which likely complicated matters and distracted from the goals concerning young people.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, as Brian Robertson, the author of the Teenage Movement report suggests, there was not suddenly an unstoppable wave of interested gay teenagers joining youth groups and exposing themselves to the wider community. Robertson goes on to highlight that his group had too many 'chiefs, and not enough Indians' illustrating that his group's leadership, presumably comprised of confident young gay men, significantly outnumbered other group members.

Moreover, whilst this thesis has always been aware that it would be impossible to access all the voices of youth homosexuality, it appears there was also a contemporary problem in doing so. It was clearly difficult to attract more young gay members to the youth groups in the mid 1970s. However, just because they were not actively joining youth groups, it did not mean that young gay men were not identifying with their sexualities. One gay youth paper, in preparation for a conference in 1975, noted that 'It appears that all telephone services offering help to gay people are experiencing a marked increase in the number of young teenage gay people contacting them – i.e. people aged about 14-16'.<sup>39</sup> This would include services such as Icebreakers and Gay Switchboard, although these were mostly based in London at this time; they did reach a more national presence later in the period. Nevertheless, whilst it

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<sup>37</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE, 9, 48, CHE Teenage Movement, Minutes and Papers, Brian Robertson, 'CHE Teenage Movement Report (May, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: The Emergence of LGBT Identities in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present* (London, 2016), p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE, 7, 14, B, Gay Youth Papers, Proposal for one day conference on young gays [c. 1975].

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has not been quantified, the 'marked increase' emphasises the emergence of a group of young gay people who were, at least, identifying within the homosexual community to seek support, even if they were not confident with their convictions.

For understanding young gay identities in this period, 1979 is a uniquely useful year in terms of evidence available to the historian on young gay men's identities. The Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (JCGT) released a collection of statements provided by gay teenagers around Britain, who were part of gay youth groups. A number of statements come from the north-west of England, including Liverpool and its many surrounding towns, although testimonies exist to a lesser extent from the rest of Britain. They were published as *Breaking the Silence: Gay Teenagers Speak for Themselves*, although full copies of the text are seemingly rare to come-by. Indeed, the presence of this study highlights how there was attempts to address the hidden nature of young gay teenagers, but this book was not widely available. At only 58 pages, with a blank cover design, it was more like a pamphlet, than something which was worth preserving, and it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the voices have not been used by historians. Nevertheless, the original statements, before editorial, as well as spare sets which did not make it into the final draft, are held as part of the Hall-Carpenter Archive. These offer an unparalleled insight into the life of gay teenagers, of varying ages and backgrounds, with a particular focus on the mid 1970s. If simply for no other reason than the number of statements, of well over one hundred (which admittedly is not a lot, nor representative of youth homosexuality) it provides a useful snapshot of gay teenage identity. The published text has not been widely referenced by historians, and it seems that Ken Plummer was the only scholar to obviously refer to the text, although simply to acknowledge that it was a survey conducted by the JCGT.<sup>40</sup> This top-level reference is, however, in line with his theory that little evidence existed for young gay teenagers. Evidently, as the statements gathered from this survey highlight, there were set questions that were being asked of the participants. However, some responses also included more detailed information. As part of the guidance for writing a case study, there was a recommendation to write one-thousand-word testimonies, and one testifier wrote nearly three thousand, providing additional anecdotes.<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>40</sup> Plummer, 'Gay Youth', p.198.

<sup>41</sup> LSE, HCA, Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (JCGT), 5, 5, Case Histories Planning, Questions to consider asking for Case Histories; LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, ED01, David.

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questions alone still provide a useful construction of young gay identity at this time, but the anecdotes in more detailed responses are revealing.

Similarly to Steven Power's account of his coming out experience, non-supportive parents were common. As outlined above, the testimonies from these young men are effectively anonymous, with very little background about the individual people. For this reason, the age, location and experiences are key to the analysis, due the lack of other information available about these teenagers. Martin, from Glasgow, who in 1979 was 17, wrote about how his twin brother panicked after finding copies of *Gay News* in his room and told both his school and his parents; he says 'mother was shocked and disgusted'.<sup>42</sup> Steven, from Leeds, who was 21 at the time of his statement recalls a similar experience. He wrote that his 'mother balled her eyes out', whilst his father bellowed "how could you do this to your mother".<sup>43</sup> Indeed, parental rejection was commonplace, although plenty of parents were accepting. Steven from Leeds hinted how his parents' reaction may have had an impact on his identity, as he went on to write that his parents refused to have any pictures of him and his boyfriend, whom they had known for 3 and a half years. He wrote, simply, 'things like that are small, but they do hurt.' This admittance of hurt due to the lack of parental acceptance undoubtedly affected him as he identified as a gay teenage man, even if he does not explicitly state that.

Other teenagers were reluctant to even tell their parents. They were used to growing up with their parents making negative remarks about homosexuality, and therefore decided it would not have been sensible to reveal themselves to their parents. The impact of this on gay teenage identity is more subtle, but one testimony calmly states 'I do mind the implication that all 'queers' were child molesters'. If this was the message that his parents were providing him though, it certainly is not a productive environment to positively identify with oneself. This testimony came from 18-year-old David in Yorkshire, and was one of the most thorough case studies provided at over two thousand words. He stated:

I have so far not told my parents about my being gay, mainly because we are not really that close but also as the only reference to gay people my parents

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<sup>42</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT,7,5, Gay Teenager Statements, MB01, Martin.

<sup>43</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, SA01, Steven.

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ever made to me was warning me at age 12 about “queers” lurking around parks trying to pick up young boys.<sup>44</sup>

It is quite easy to understand why he chose not to tell his parents at the time he wrote his statement. This rhetoric about homosexuality was repeated by parents around the country as well as morally conservative institutions. It is also very interesting, how it was a parental (or generational) trait to refer to homosexuality as queer, even though many young teenagers would identify themselves as gay. This highlights the language issues which this chapter opened with. He also states that ‘I do mind the implication that all ‘queers’ were child molesters’, highlighting a further generational and moral difference.

One interesting question that a number of case studies answered was whether gay youth groups and scenes helped these young gay teenagers. There was not a unanimous response to this, but something that was common was the sense of surprise teenagers had when they attended gay youth groups for the first time. Given the overtly effeminate stereotype which penetrated public opinion, some gay teenagers were reluctant to attend youth groups because they could not relate to that lifestyle. Martin, aged 20 from London, joined the LGTG, and he notes how the presence of a support group were helpful for him:

Since fully accepting my sexuality and meeting other homosexuals and bisexuals of my age I have gained confidence and enjoy life a lot more than before. Coming to the London Gay Teenage Group has helped me to overcome introversion, pretending not to like my own sex and feelings of guilt that dogged me before. When I attended my first event meeting with other gay people at the LGTG I was very nervous but also very pleasantly surprised that the other people at the group were relaxed and I could say ‘straight’ looking, (not young Larry Grayson stereotypes).<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the realities of the situation for young people, within or without the city environment, are best summarised by a simple advert. It effectively confirmed the

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<sup>44</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, ED01, David.

<sup>45</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, SP01, Martin Denerby.

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death of gay radicalism at the end of the GLF, and the unrealistic expectations within the young gay community. In an advert for a theatre workshop, received by the Gay Christian Movement in 1985, it talks of change in the gay community. More importantly, it recognised the lack of place for young gay men, who were entirely restricted due to the age of consent law. In a theatrical way, it is aptly blunt in tone:

Much has changed since the Gay Liberation movement in 70s. Clubs have sprung up all over the place and the 'pink pound' finds fame and makes relative fortunes. But what of the world itself?

All very well having a nice club to go to but you can still get queer-bashed on the way home. And of course if you are 17/18 years old and on the dole or on a low wage, where do you get the money from in the first place?

OK you find the money somewhere and visit the 'Gay Scene'. The barman decides to serve you after all. You stare at the other people in the room and they stare back. What now? You're 'chicken' or 'jail bait' and you would be breaking the law. Then the whole world starts screaming AIDS. Parents still recoil in shock as their children come out. Schools still ignore the needs of young gay people.

This workshop wants to explore the lives of young gay people using theatre as a means of enjoying and understanding ourselves and hopefully telling others.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, the advert was not particularly appealing. It is actually the case that many advertisements aimed at young gay men were modestly designed. Some displayed the recognisable pink triangle, as the gay community adopted this motif to highlight their fight from oppression, but others were reasonably plain. This is perhaps due to the need to stay under-the-radar, particularly the advertisement above, which offered a workshop for young gay men who were still legally ostracised from society. The silver lining, however, is that the workshop aimed to attract the young gay men, who presumably knew exactly what the advert felt like, in an attempt to form a social group through the effective ostracisation of these young gay men on the fringes of legal adulthood. It is difficult to know from the ephemeral nature of the advert how

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<sup>46</sup> LSE, HCA, London Gay Christian Movement (LGCM), 4,4, Circular for Gay Youth Theatre Workshop, 1 October 1985.

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successful it was, but the advertisement had to be at least relatable to its audiences. For young gay men in the eighties, they were 'chicken', to use the language of the advert, with recoiling parents and the world screaming of AIDS and schools ignoring their needs. It was over a decade since partial decriminalisation, but the positive effects had not filtered down to the young gay community in beneficial social ways. However, if gay teenagers thought that schools ignored homosexuality in 1985, it was not to the same extent that discussing homosexuality would effectively be banned from 1987.

### ***Youth identity in the 1990s***

As the 1990s unfolded, homosexual identity was caught between a relatively established and acceptable way of life, and the newly emerged challenge to it. The introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1987, brought to assent in 1988, meant that it became illegal to actively promote homosexuality as an alternative to family life.<sup>47</sup> This will be addressed to a significant extent in the next chapter. Much like the previous major piece of legislation in 1967, the law once again introduced a clause which restricted the life of homosexuals. In 1967, the partial liberation for adult homosexuals was almost a method of appeasement, and then 1987 turned back the clock. Importantly, it looked at curtailing youth homosexuality, as one of the major Local Government facilities which was affected by the legislation was the schooling system.

Despite this, being young and gay in the 1990s appeared to be a much more open experience than three decades earlier. As Paul from Edinburgh recalls, in the late 1980s, around 1988, being gay was still not that popular.<sup>48</sup> This is unsurprising given the introduction of the new legislation. Paul's testimony exists as part of a study of men living with HIV/AIDS, to which Paul contracted later in life. In the late 1980s, Paul had not yet contracted the disease, but the openness of his testimony when the interviews were carried out in 2007, highlights how the stigmatisation of AIDS Crisis is less prominent in modern society. This is addressed further in chapter two. In 1988 Paul was, perhaps surprisingly, open about his sexuality. He said that 'we didn't care' about 'problems in the street'. Paul was 19 or 20, and 'called a poof', but notes that

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<sup>47</sup> Local Government Act, 1988, c. 9, IV, Section 28.

<sup>48</sup> BL, HIV/AIDS Testimonies, C743/54, Interview of Paul (Edinburgh) by Barbara Gibson, 12-13 July 2007.

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was 'about all the abuse I got'. 'I used to love that I provoked a reaction from someone...they called me a fag or poof in the street and it was great'. Paul thinks the abuse was good because it allowed him to take ownership of his own identity. He commented how he was part of a 'gay clique' and this was good for him. Indeed, a unique identity surrounding a 'gay community' seemed to be important to a number of young gay people. This is due to the sense of belonging that it created amongst the groups, particularly as it was a very individual and isolated experience throughout much of the earlier period of youth.

It is definitely the case that even in the 1990s, experiences were still individualised. Moreover, it was often not until young men reached their late teenage years that they were comfortable with themselves, and this seemed to be a constant theme throughout the decades. It was not the case, that as the law relaxed in the later part of the 1990s, suddenly teenagers were "becoming" gay earlier and earlier. Lee Botham highlights this; he was born in Manchester in 1984, and is therefore one of the much younger people to share his experiences. This is useful because his testimony offers experiences about the 1990s, which is currently the most under-researched decade of the era of partial decriminalisation, largely due to an absence of evidence compared to the 1970s and 1980s. His testimony also exists as part of a study on HIV and AIDS. He notes that he knew he was gay from when he was 13, but that he 'tried to hide it, and hid it well until [he] was 18'.<sup>49</sup> Lee's older brother was also gay, and he knew this when he was in his mid-teens, but despite this, he still told himself 'just forget about it, it's wrong, it's wrong'.<sup>50</sup> Lee's case is very interesting, and encompasses the individuality of experiences even within the same family. His family accepted his older brothers homosexuality, commenting that they had already known for a long time and were not surprised. Unfortunately for Lee, in his incredibly personal and brave testimony, he recalls how when he was finally 'outed' by his family at 18, his other older brothers physically abused him for it. His older homosexual brother never saw such abuse, although Lee's outing came at a time of heightened emotions due to his mother's illness and subsequent upsetting death. Lee's mother commented to Lee, alone, when he was 14, that, even though he had a girlfriend at the time, that she knew he was gay. Lee declined to comment, although wished he had admitted it then, with

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<sup>49</sup> BL, HIV, C743/59, Interview of Lee Botham by Barbara Gibson, 10 July 2007.

<sup>50</sup> BL, HIV, C743/59, Lee Botham

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the benefit of hindsight. Therefore, his family were somewhat aware, and his unfortunate abuse at aged 18 was likely due to the heightened emotional state of the family, given that his older brother had a far easier and simpler time. In this sense, Lee actually therefore acted as a microcosm for society. Homosexuality amongst the youth became scapegoated at the time of a heightened emotional state in the public sphere, and this is where people directed their frustration, for example during the AIDS crisis, but instead was for reasons closer to Lee's family.

An interview with one 'liberal-minded' heterosexual young person in the mid-1990s highlighted how young heterosexual boys perceived the homosexual community. This interview was useful for this thesis, as it is one of a very limited number of available questionnaires conducted about homosexuality within schools in the 1990s. In their study of, mostly, 16-year-old school boys across the mid-to-late 1990s, sociologists Mike O'Donnell and Sue Sharpe produced a questionnaire for 262 young men and interviewed 44 of the respondents across several different schools. It was not a survey of homosexuality, rather just young men more generally, which, through no surprise, featured almost exclusively heterosexual respondents. Harry, whose name was changed for the purpose of the survey, stated that homosexuality had become less taboo in the 1990s, but that 'people still are pretty discriminative and narrow-minded about it'.<sup>51</sup> This is then highlighted through other respondents, as O'Donnell and Sharpe stated that half the respondents strongly disagreed to the statement "'these days it should be acceptable for a young man to be gay (homosexual)'"'.<sup>52</sup> Even O'Donnell and Sharpe's inclusion of '(homosexual)', to clarify that that was how 'gay' was to be interpreted in this situation highlights how language issues continued into the 1990s, and it was still not wholly synonymous with homosexual. More important, however, was the respondents strongly disagreeing, at no insignificant number. This thought existed in varying secondary schools and this highlights how difficult it would have been to have been openly gay at fifteen or sixteen in the mid-1990s. This therefore highlights how young gay teenagers' peers were as problematic as their family in some instances, and anti-gay rhetoric continued to affect society right up to the twenty-first century.

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<sup>51</sup> Mike O'Donnell and Sue Sharpe, *Uncertain Masculinities: Youth, Ethnicity and Class in Contemporary Britain* (London, 2000), p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> O'Donnell and Sharpe, *Uncertain Masculinities*, p. 120.

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### The lure of the city

A common theme throughout the period is the extent to which homosexual identity was enshrined within the confines of a city environment. Indeed, there has long been an association with homosexuality and the city, and numerous historical and sociological studies on homosexuals *in* the city and the effect of homosexuals *on* the city. Robert Aldrich offers a useful literature review on the scholarship related to studying cities as homosexual spaces as well as offering a reason why the city occupied a significant role in homosexual identities. He stated that ‘cities offered a larger selection of partners than smaller towns and villages. Crowds provided anonymity and, where homosexual acts remained illegal, a measure of safety’.<sup>53</sup> This is particularly the case for those young men migrating towards London and other big cities. In Frank Mort’s study of masculinity and homosexuality in London, he interviewed one young newcomer to the city in 1987 and concluded that his testimony illustrated ‘a confined early life spent in the provinces [which] was dramatically transformed by escape to the metropolis. Generations of homosexual men have celebrated this journey as a form of symbolic home-coming — a sense of finding oneself on arriving in the capital’.<sup>54</sup> Matt Houlbrook has explored, what he has termed as, the ‘queerness of the city’, an intrinsic link between the homosexual identity and the environment. He argues that the modern city, speaking of London in the mid-twentieth century, has given homosexuality its contemporary characteristics.<sup>55</sup> Leif Jerram has also explored the importance of the cities throughout Europe on sexuality. He argues that the ‘spatial’ nature of homosexuality was the authorities biggest fear; the modernity within big cities made people anonymous, and technology and infrastructure changed the sexual tone of the city.<sup>56</sup> In an interesting interpretation, Jerram concludes that undergrounds and public transportation were almost designed for cruising after people would spend prolonged periods of time simply sitting and staring directly at people across from them.<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to say that this would have

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Aldrich, ‘Homosexuality and the City: An Historical Overview’, *Urban Studies*, Vol 41, No, 9 (August, 2004), pp. 1719-1737, p. 1721.

<sup>54</sup> Frank Mort, ‘Cityscapes: Consumption, Masculinities and the Mapping of London since 1950’, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 35, Nos 5-6 (1998), pp. 889-907, p. 902.

<sup>55</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (London, 2005), pp. 3-4, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Jerram, *Streetlife*, p. 329.

<sup>57</sup> Jerram, *Streetlife*, p. 309-310.

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been a conscious action for the majority of those in the city, but it would allow those aware of the tactic to cruise in this way. Indeed, the gay communities thrived based on being the only people aware of certain practices. Of course, all this was directed towards the adult homosexual community, but the city was still attractive to the young.

John Fraser, who featured earlier in this chapter, moved to London in 1967, at twenty years old. He recalled, simply and plainly, 'I moved to London because that's what you did'.<sup>58</sup> The capital city was considered a place of opportunity. Within two years of being in London, Fraser became politically aware, and what he describes as 'stronger'. Unfortunately for this thesis, by this time, Fraser was a legal homosexual adult, but it is easy to infer that London radicalised his outlook in a sense. Also, contrary to being an ordinary Londoner, Fraser was very much influenced by the permissive society, the anti-Vietnam rhetoric and the underground prints of *Oz* and *IT*.<sup>59</sup> He was clearly aware of his surroundings, and openly chose to be a part of it. Pete Webb, who was interviewed as part of the same project that Fraser was, echoes Fraser's sentiments. It is unclear where Webb was born, but he was a similar age to Fraser when he moved to North London in the early 1970s. He would have been on the very fringes of legal adult life when he moved, but he noted that London had a very different atmosphere; there were all day clubs and a very promiscuous attitude in the air.<sup>60</sup> No doubt Webb found himself involved in this atmosphere as he reached legal adult life, but he moved just before this. This was certainly not the case for all new young migrants to the area.

The city as a homosexual space was well recognised by contemporaries. At the time of the AIDS crisis, in the mid-1980s, in an article in the *Observer*, one doctor commented that London would likely become the centre for most of the AIDS cases in Britain. He stated that "It will be an epidemic and I think most cases will be found round London which is the main centre of gay activity in Britain".<sup>61</sup> Indeed, whilst the city presented opportunity, anonymity, and a greater sense of community, in the midst of the AIDS crisis it also represented the problems of being an attractive place to migrate to. This lure was further recognised later in the period. In 1987, one newsletter

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<sup>58</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

<sup>59</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

<sup>60</sup> BL, HCOA, F1627-F1630, Interview of Pete Webb, by Margot Farnham, 30 October - 13 November 1990.

<sup>61</sup> 'London gay plague alert', *The Observer*, 22 May 1983.

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attempts to justify the fact that their organisation, despite being called the Young London Gay Christian Group was, in fact, not simply based in London:

One thing I want to tell those of you outside London; contrary to how it may appear, this group is not London based at all, in the sense that despite the meetings taking place here, the enthusiasm for the group lies elsewhere.

Judging from your letters, you are all very much behind us in what we're doing, and the YLGCG seems to be a help to many of you - which is great!

In London, (and I'm speaking generally) there is often an apathy - after all, lots of homosexual people flock here, we have lots of places to go, and in any ways, we're lucky! Those of you outside London aren't so lucky - and that's why we seem to be wanted more by you! So don't feel 'left out' at all - you are all very important, and vital to the continuing existence of the group. Please, though, write to us with articles, it's everybody's newsletter!<sup>62</sup>

Andy Booth, the editor of the newsletter, provides a useful explanation for why the city was such a lure for people. He admits that many homosexuals 'flock' to the city, because there are lots of things to do and places to go. He also admits how, for city based young gay people, they were lucky to have such options. However, from his tone, appealing to the detached readers, it is clear that those outside of the city struggled to feel involved with a youth group newsletter produced in a different homosexual environment. It simply did not match the realities of life outside of homosexual hubs of the capital city.

Indeed, clear differences between a city environment and a more suburban community were apparent throughout the period, particularly in terms of what was not available in some of the young men's hometowns. As part of the group of testimonies completed in 1979, John, a 20-year-old from Flint, a town near Liverpool, recorded that he saw a 'FRIEND Merseyside sticker on a window' when he was 16.<sup>63</sup> After his friends made jokes about it, he noted that he memorised the number and called them later in the evening. They suggested he came to them, in the centre of Liverpool. Flint is nearly an hour away from the group, and he also noted two reasons which made it

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<sup>62</sup> LSE, HCA, LGCM, 4, 4, Young Gay Christian Group, YLGCG Newsletter, c. September 1987.

<sup>63</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 1, TR02, John.

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difficult: 'I didn't feel ready for it at the time. I couldn't think how I could explain visits to Liverpool to my parents and friends'. For a young gay man, it would have been understandably difficult to explain away a trip to the city centre over an hour away, on a semi-regular basis, alone. It can be assumed there was no similar group near John, at least not that he knew of, which meant he was not immediately close to a gay community. This was the case for a number of smaller towns. Slightly later in life, after he had been to college he joined a CHE group in Chester, a larger town which was much closer, and began embracing involvement in a gay community. Interestingly, John's testimony, had 'working-class background' handwritten at the bottom, and this also offers an explanation as to why he could not easily access Liverpool, particularly at the age of sixteen, as disposable income was unlikely to be plentiful. Nevertheless, only shortly before his testimony, he joined the Liverpool Gay Youth Group, began going to gay clubs, and even joined one.<sup>64</sup> At this stage he was 20 years old, more open with his homosexuality, and had greater access to the benefits of the city, which his small-town community certainly did not offer. It is significant that he looked to Liverpool, his nearest city, for the opportunities it possessed and it is clear that what was available helped shape his identity as a 20 year old man.

A significant draw of the city environment is the commercialised areas of homosexual activity. This has attracted numerous scholars' attention, both in Britain and internationally, often focusing on big cities such as London, or 'gay villages' such as San Francisco.<sup>65</sup> Much of this work is based after the millennium. This was the time when, as David Bell and Jon Bimmie state, the gay spending power became "“sexy”" for commercial ventures.<sup>66</sup> It would not be correct to state that this same commercial attractiveness was present in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly still with public hostility directed towards the gay community, but there were, nevertheless, still commercialised areas for homosexuals. Trenchard and Warren, in their 1984 London based survey, highlight how important the so-called 'commercial gay scene' was for young gay men's first encounters with the community. They also state how the

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<sup>64</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 1, TR02, John.

<sup>65</sup> See: Lawrence Knopp, 'Sexuality and Urban Space: Gay Male Identity Politics in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia', in Ruth Fincher and Jane Margaret Jacobs (eds), *Cities of Difference* (London, 1998), pp. 149-177; David Bell and Jon Bimmie, 'Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 9 (August, 2004), pp. 1807-1820.

<sup>66</sup> Bell and Bimmie, 'Queer Space', p. 1814.

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majority of places for young homosexuals to go were commercial, in the fact that they were out to make money. They far outnumbered youth groups and non-commercialised areas. 84% of the respondents noted they went to gays clubs, pubs and discos.<sup>67</sup> However, these spaces were not directed at young gay men; as a commercial business, they were looking for high spending power and ultimately, adults. Indeed, one comment which was repeated by respondents of the survey was how expensive going out to these places was.<sup>68</sup> The expense was not unique to gay clubs, but many members of the young gay community felt they needed to pay for the experience, because it was a fundamental way of meeting like-minded people. As Trenchard and Warren astutely highlight, whilst heterosexual clubs were equally expensive, it was not necessary for straight people to attend them in order to meet other straight people.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately it is difficult to draw parallels for commercial scenes outside of city environments, because no comparable study exists for smaller, less-urban communities — although this in itself illustrates a potential difficulty in accessing respondents. It is clear, however that the ‘scene’ was a significant part of these young gay men’s lives, because it was a crucial method of social interaction, even in a commercialised setting. Indeed, this scene only expanded further, particularly in London, until the point at which the commercial nature of the gay community became ““sexy””.

### **Conclusion**

Without exploring the methods of social control, which are to come in the next chapter, it is easy to see continuity across the three decades. There was clear separation within the gay community: be it the avoidance or embracing of an effeminate stereotype; a divide between the young and old; and a split of those in the gay scene and those who could not access it. It was very much a case of where the young gay teenagers grew up as to how well exposed they were to the gay community. Moreover, it was also dependent on how confident they were in themselves as to how much they wanted to be a part of the gay community. It appears that there were a number of young gay people who felt more comfortable in their identity once they had discovered a gay youth group, or gay scene.

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<sup>67</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something To Tell You*, p. 117.

<sup>68</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something To Tell You*, p. 119.

<sup>69</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something To Tell You*, p. 120.

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What is perhaps most key, is the enormous variety that occurred in gay teenage identity. The snapshot of testimonies in 1979 highlighted how different many of the gay teenagers were, despite sharing some common experiences. Their lifestyles outside of the sexuality were very different, their religious upbringings varied, their politics - where mentioned - fluctuated, and this all had an effect on their involvement within the gay community. Indeed, one commonality seems to be found in negative parental responses. This was not only unique to the 1970s, but even up to the 1990s, and beyond, parents were continually reacting negatively to their children identifying as gay. There was then a clear split between parents who would eventually be accepting of their children, and those who seem to have severed all ties. Crucially, whilst there were shared experiences, the variety is important, and highlights the lack of a singular gay voice. Rather, as this chapter noted from the outset, there were many gay voices throughout this period, even if they were hidden from the mainstream. This chapter has therefore explored these voices, the continuities and differences across three decades, and the experiences of being young and gay during the period where it was effectively illegal. It has provided valuable testimonies which numerous scholars have previously struggled to uncover, and offers a useful introduction to the field which would greatly benefit from more exposure.

## **Chapter 2: Social Control**

This chapter explores the methods of social control which may have had an impact upon youth homosexual identity. It establishes whether some methods were as significant as their legislation would suggest them to be, based on people's real experiences. It also questions the significance of major and controversial legislative actions such as the introduction of Section 28, and also the gradual lowering of the age of consent. Moreover, it looks at other ways young gay people were potentially influenced or controlled, in various ways depending on how the individual reacted, as mechanisms of social control are not simply limited to legislation and the law.

Perceptions of stereotypes and open hostility to homosexuality also acted as a way of controlling and restricting gay identities. Whilst it is harder to pinpoint this on a day-to-day basis, the 1980s AIDS Crisis is an example where gay men endured social restrictions. Additionally, for young gay men, particularly those at home, parents could also be an effective method of social control, and this, arguably more than any other mechanism, had significant effects on some young people's identity. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these methods of social control, and to question whether they affected young gay identity. It argues that some methods, such as Section 28, were more of a theoretical issue than a practical restraint for young people, whilst others, such as imposed parental restrictions were more significant in forming, or restraining, young gay men's identities. Four methods of social control have been focused on: the age of consent, the AIDS Crisis, Section 28, and parental control. These are explored in their individual sections but are briefly introduced below. This is only a sample of the methods of social controls which affected young gay men in this period. They are intended to show, much like the varying experiences young homosexuals had, that the methods of control also had differing effects upon their identities

Gay men have been legally restricted for the whole of the twentieth century. It was not until 1967 that they were offered some respite, where homosexual acts for men over the age of 21, in private, were decriminalised. This came with the caveat of being in private, and this did not include at home if the accommodation was shared. Historian Clare Langhamer has explored the home in postwar Britain using evidence from Mass Observation. She notes how a number of respondents considered 'freedom, peace and privacy' a fundamental aspect of what *home* was. One

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commentator noted that home was the 'spot where I can keep my family safe, sheltered and private'.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist Matthew Waites argues, however, that the meaning of *private* was specifically changed regarding the homosexual age of consent, ensuring that nothing could be private where any third party was, or could be, present.<sup>2</sup> The home was therefore not private for some people, and this was discriminatory against gay men. This caveat in the legislation which partially decriminalised homosexuality was an indication of the methods of social control which gay men would continue to endure for the rest of the era. Indeed, in historian Matt Cook's study of Brixton squatting amongst the gay community in the 1970s, it is revealed how gay communal life outside of the restricted space of home, which was dictated by private landlords or family boundaries, was valuable to some gay men and lesbians, despite still not being strictly private.<sup>3</sup> Due to this privacy caveat, newly legal homosexuals remained on the fringes of society, and the relaxed law did not extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland. For this thesis, the legal restriction of youth homosexuality is at the forefront, and this was maintained until at least 1994. Equality, in terms of age of consent, was achieved in 2001, and young gay men were finally able to live free from the legislative restriction which effectively outlawed their sexuality. Before this, gay men under the age of 21 faced socially imposed restrictions on their identity for three and a half decades after partial decriminalisation. That is certainly not to suggest that adult gay men did not face imposed social controls on their lives. Indeed, the moral anxiety produced by the 1980s AIDS crisis resulted in public antipathy towards a gay lifestyle, which had the rhetoric and public perception of being promiscuous and carefree. This was assumed to be unique to a gay community, although of course this is not true. It was not helped, however, when people in positions of authority, such as the chief constable of Greater Manchester, referred to gays during the AIDS crisis as people who were 'swirling around in a human cesspit of their own making'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a gay lifestyle was perceived to be self-inflicted trouble, even if this was not reflected in reality. This is part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Clare Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April, 2005), pp. 341-362, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Waites, 'Sexual citizens: Legislating the age of consent in Britain', in Terrell Carver and Veronique Mottier (eds), *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship* (London, 1998), pp. 25-35, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Cook, "'Gay Times": Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970s London', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2013), pp. 84-109, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> 'Police chief in AIDS fury', *Daily Mail*, 12 December 1986.

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reason why Section 28 was later introduced in 1988, although this is covered in more detail below.

Additionally, the 1980s also saw the introduction of a legislative discussion about the age of consent which finally came into effect in 1994. For around a decade, this discussion divided public opinion, particularly at a time when much of Europe was discussing similar issues and even lowering their ages to 14 in some instances. Matthew Waites highlights that the most common age of consent in Europe was 15, but fifty-one percent of European states would not punish consensual relations at age 14.<sup>5</sup> He also states that, at the time of the age of consent debate in the UK, twenty-one of the twenty-eight European member states had an equal age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual relations; of course this was not the case in the UK.<sup>6</sup> This debate then continued until the end of the century, where the age of consent was lowered further, and this meant that gay issues were mooted around the press and public perceptions with varying degrees of commitment behind them for much of the second half of the twentieth century. This illustrates, however, how very little had changed since the Wolfenden Report in 1957. The Wolfenden Report has been well studied by historian Patrick Higgins, at a time when some secret documents concerning the report were still unavailable.<sup>7</sup> The report was the early catalyst for the initial partial decriminalisation, even if it did not happen for a further decade. Historian Hugh David finds fault with the report, stating that it was 'just a report; its recommendations were just...recommendations'.<sup>8</sup> This pattern of recommendations continued throughout the century, as the age of consent debate began in the 1980s but it took over a decade to get it to the Parliament floor and pass it through. Nevertheless, these age of consent issues were also important for adult gay men and not just those who were restricted by the law, because they risked accusations of paedophilia. Therefore, despite their legal status being of majority age, adult homosexuals still had their lives restricted to some degree by the age of consent legislation.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Waites, *The Age of Consent: Young People, Sexuality and Citizenship* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Waites, 'Sexual Citizens', p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Post-War Britain* (London, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Hugh David, *On Queer Street: A Social History of British Homosexuality 1895-1995* (London, 1997), p. 190.

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The introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act also served to unite a gay community, who was previously fragmented. Introduced by the Conservatives late in 1987, and received for assent in 1988, it restricted the promotion of homosexuality as an acceptable alternative to family life. The Act was quite specific in its wording, although this also meant that it was possible to evade it. It stated that 'local authorities shall not: (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.<sup>9</sup> For one of the first times, according to historian Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, the introduction of the Act gave lesbians and gay men a common enemy.<sup>10</sup> Prior to this, it was not felt that gay men were battling the same fight as lesbians, who were not restricted by legislation. In fact, this legislative difference is the main reason that this thesis has focused almost solely on gay men, rather than lesbian women. For some of the gay community it was illustrative of stripping them of their limited rights, returning instead to pre-1967 values and homosexual illegality, which served to threaten the existence of homosexuality and the gay sphere. Section 28, however, was aimed at the young community. Whilst it was imposed upon local authority activities, it was to be mostly acted upon in the classroom, or rather, ensure homosexuality was intentionally avoided. As will be expanded upon later in this chapter, the specific language of the act was also the likely reason for it not to have been as effective in ensuring the non-promotion of homosexuality within schools.

As was explored in the previous chapter, a young person's identity could be influenced by their parents. For this reason, parental care is arguably one of the most significant methods of social control. It was also likely influenced by the moral panic surrounding the AIDS crisis and the introduction of Section 28. Indeed, the age of consent was significant for some parents. Importantly, it was recognised from early on that this thesis would not offer a criminal history due to the lack of available police records. It is therefore difficult to estimate the extent to which police acted as a method of social control for gay men after 1967; undoubtedly homosexuality was heavily policed prior to this. With the focus on young people, parents were able to

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<sup>9</sup> Local Government Act, 1988, c. 9, IV, Section 28.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Jeffrey-Poulter, *Peers, Queers & Commons: The Struggle for Gay Law Reform from 1950 to the Present* (London, 1991), p. 243.

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effectively police their children, and therefore should be explored within the guise of a method of social control.

### **Age of consent**

When homosexual acts were partially decriminalised in 1967, it was consciously decided that it would only be for men over the age of 21, in private. The 1967 Legislation drew upon recommendations from the Wolfenden Committee a decade earlier, where the age of consent issue was briefly discussed. As Jeffrey Weeks explains, the 1967 law reform came about due to changes in public perceptions about the contradictions for homosexuals compared with heterosexuals. This was arguably due to the increased sexual openness of the 1960s, and a number of Acts were relaxed in this decade. In Weeks' own astute judgement, the law changed because of 'inherent instability in the more relaxed social climate of post-war "affluent" Britain'.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, however, whilst this may have been true for the adult community, there was still a determination to maintain the innocence of youth. In the debates surrounding the law reform, it was the interest of many MPs and Peers that an age of consent at no lower than 21 would prevent the 'corruption of youth'. The argument was defended by some Peers, but only on the premise that 21 would be adequate to prevent so-called 'corruption', irrespective of the fact that corruption itself was unlikely.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the early 1970s, as the moral conservative Mary Whitehouse's campaign was rife, it was the requirement to protect the young which occupied the majority of her focus. For many scholars, Whitehouse represented the moral right, and she is therefore illustrative of one ideology which permeated against the rise of permissiveness and liberation. According to the historian Tim Newburn, for Whitehouse, the overwhelming concern amongst all debates surrounding a more permissive society was the 'welfare of children'.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that the issue surrounding the age of consent was perceived as a protection issue, both for moral preservation, and from the abuses of adult men. However, it was an issue continually debated by legal, normally heterosexual, adults

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: The Emergence of LGBT Identities in Britain from the 19th Century to the Present* (London, 2016), p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> Hansard, Sexual Offences (No. 2) Bill, House of Lords, 13 July 1967, Vol. 284, pp. 1283-1323, pp. 1305-6.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Newburn, *Permission and Regulation: Law and Morals in Post-War Britain* (London, 1992), p. 47.

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with an agenda against a rising tide of homosexuality, rather than an interest in equality — a term that early on in the era was not of interest to anyone. It was a case of adults speaking for young people, without widely consulting them on the issue. In an article in 1981, perhaps typically representative of the *Sun*'s sensationalism, there was criticism of any talk of a reduction in the age of consent. It stated:

A Home Office study group is expected to recommend that the age of consent for homosexual acts should be lowered from 21 to 18.

The Sun says: No, no, no!

We know that youngsters can vote, marry and serve their country at 18.

*But the decision to live as homosexual is surely in a different class.*

There is today an increasing tolerance of homosexuals. Yet their path is still lonely and difficult.

It often leads to ostracism and not infrequently to tragedy.

We think it is in the youngsters' own interests to wait until they understand themselves a little better. [emphasis in original]<sup>14</sup>

With few redeeming qualities about the article, it is a case of adults deciding the fate of young people, without direct consultation. There is a clear distinction between a 'normal' life and a homosexual one, and the homosexual choice is clearly inherently negative. As was very common, however, the treatment of the issue of the age of consent was a facade which supposedly put the interest of the young person first. Where there was 'increasing tolerance' of homosexuality, as the article rightly stated, there was a complete reluctance to say that parties did not want a reduction in the age of consent due to a fear of homosexuality. For the *Sun*, as for many others, homosexuality was an unhappy life, 'lonely and difficult', and it was not something which young people should be subjected to and this was the perceived risk if the age of consent was lowered. This rhetoric likely had a detrimental effect on how young gay men identified with themselves. They were being encouraged, through articles like the one above, that they were likely to lead miserable lives if they identified as homosexual. Moreover, the *Sun* was not the only daily newspaper to exhibit this

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<sup>14</sup> 'Too Young', *The Sun*, 7 April 1981.

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ideology. The *Daily Express*, one day before the *Sun* article shared a similar outlook on a proposed reduction in age. It reported that:

Young people's sexuality is often unformed in their teens. Most develop naturally. Should the law not encourage them to do so, rather than giving them freedom to try homosexuality and perhaps become permanent members of a sad twilight world?

The suggestion is irresponsible and naive. The Government should reject it...<sup>15</sup>

This same rhetoric also reinforced the perception of illegality surrounding youth homosexuality, by advocating a higher age of consent, even though it was not illegal to be young and gay. It was believed, at least by members of the press, that lowering the age of consent would open the door to allow young people to practice homosexuality, and therefore encourage the lifestyle. The shared sentiment of a 'sad twilight world' or a 'lonely and difficult' path would not have been a confidence boost to a young man's identity, and risked damaging the self esteem of particularly susceptible young people. Overall, the disparity between the heterosexual and homosexual age of consents was used by those who wished to uphold the difference as a moral fight, protecting young people and ensuring their best interests. The rhetoric, therefore, could have restricted young gay men from fully identifying with their sexuality, although, as will be explored shortly, perhaps the issue of the age of consent was not as restrictive as it aimed to be.

It was said at the outset to this thesis that this is not a sexual history, nor sexological in approach. This fact remains, although it should be acknowledged that the age of consent refers to sexual acts, and this act, in itself, is a fundamental part of a young identity. An age of consent at 21 or over meant that it was illegal to engage in homosexual acts under this age. As is perhaps understandable, this is difficult to police. Nevertheless, if the age of consent was an effective piece of legislation, it would, or should, be expected that young gay men would wait until they reached the age of majority to engage in homosexual acts. In turn, this inability to experience a key 'coming of age' moment until the age of majority, at 21, would have likely had an adverse impact upon a young gay identity, being unable to fully engage with their

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<sup>15</sup> 'What age for consent?', *Daily Express*, 6 April 1981.

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sexuality. It appears that this may have been common in the 1960s, where homosexual acts were illegal for everyone. John Fraser, born in Liverpool in 1947, recounted how his first sexual experience was not until he was 21 or 22 years old.<sup>16</sup> He would have just become a legal homosexual shortly before his first sexual experience as he turned 21 after 1967, although it is unclear if the illegality of the sexual act restricted him from partaking in it earlier. He notes how he considered himself 'reborn' at the age of 18, when he attended Bristol University, and he recalled that sexuality, both generally in his new environment, and his own, became prominent there. Despite this, his first sexual act was not until he had moved to London after 1967. He recalls, however, how he 'fell in love with somebody, a straight person', at University. Fraser says the straight man was very understanding after Fraser's 'fairly drunken and emotional outburst', and 'didn't go get off you pervert'. Although, he recalls how this realisation was Fraser finally accepting his own homosexuality at aged 18, and knowing he 'had to get on with it'. But his method of 'getting on' with it, was simply 'doing nothing for a couple of years'.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, it is possible that Fraser waited until he became a legal homosexual adult before he partook in sexual activity, although, in 1964, it was not clear that the law would be partially relaxed in 1967. It is incredibly difficult to say whether the partial decriminalisation contributed to Fraser's sexual confidence, or because he had given himself enough time to accept homosexuality as part of his identity. Either way, he clearly battled with himself to determine that admitting his homosexuality in 1964 was perhaps not pragmatic.

Of the number of testimonies available which document early sexual practices, Fraser was one of the only young men who waited until he was 21 to engage in homosexual activities. This in itself illustrates that most young gay men did not let the legal restriction of the age of consent interfere with their sexual lifestyles, and therefore not inhibit their identities. It appeared to be far more common to have first sexual experiences as early-to-mid teens, although some of this is considered experimentation, rather than forming part of a gay identity. Indeed, Pete Webb, who featured in the previous chapter, was born in 1952 and recalled his first sexual experience at 12 or 13. However, he put it down to the sexual culture of the school, in a competitive sense, which he astutely describes as 'pubescent boys saying dirty

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<sup>16</sup> British Library (BL), Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive (HCOA), F2133-F2134, Interview of John Fraser by William Pierce, May 1987.

<sup>17</sup> BL, HCOA, F2133-F2134, John Fraser.

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words and being men of the world saying they've done everything'.<sup>18</sup> This early sexual encounter, however, was not the same as identifying as a gay man, which seemed to arise as a result of sexual acts borne out of an interest with a prospective partner. The two scenarios are very different to each other, with the experimentation of young schoolboys likely best termed as, "schoolboy exploration".

Accounts which explicitly reference the age of consent issue are available from the 1979 study of gay teenagers by the Joint Council for Gay Teenagers. Steven, from Leeds, rather uniquely expresses his experience of the age of consent legislation. He wrote about his relationship with his new boyfriend, and whilst at the time of writing he was 21 and legal, three years prior, he was not. A significant section has been reproduced below; he recounted:

The guy I now live with, David, I met in December [19]76, 3 months after coming out onto the Leeds gay scene. I was 18, he was 22, on either side of the age of consent (21). The trauma of coming out was now behind me, and on looking back would have been done differently, but I was still at school, and David was cautious about having sexual relationships with a 'schoolboy' when he was 22, especially when the only place to meet totally alone, was in his car on a disused railway line at night.

It seems I had moved from a secret relationship to problems of age of consent, both living at home in straight suburbia. Had I to wait until 21 before obtaining true freedom within the gay world?<sup>19</sup>

For a historian exploring the potential problems of the age of consent, Steven's testimony is invaluable. He explicitly mentions the problems the age of consent caused him and his relationship. This was particularly the case for a relationship, where both members were adult gay men, but 'on either side of the age of consent'. It is, however, interesting that the age of consent dominated more than the requirement to be in private, the secondary clause of the legislation, although it is likely that a 'disused railway line at night' was about as private as the couple could get. It suggests that

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<sup>18</sup> BL, HCOA, F1627-F1630, Interview of Pete Webb by Margot Farnham, October - November 1990.

<sup>19</sup> British Library of Politics and Economics (LSE), Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA), Joint Council For Gay Teenagers (JCGT), 7, 5, Gay Teenagers Statements, SA01, Steven.

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Steven's parents were not open to them meeting at his own home, as he refers to it as 'straight suburbia', a place in which he saw as separate from the 'freedom within the gay world'. The age of consent, then, was clearly problematic for the couple to truly experience the 'freedom' which they believed was given to an adult gay identity.

Steven was not unique in experiencing the illegality of his relationship. Paul, who was also part of the 1979 testimonies, was from Fazakerly in Liverpool and shared a similar experience of dating an older man when he was only 17. In a similar way to Steven's experience, the age of consent was of more concern for the older man than the younger. Paul writes:

Eventually I met Jeff at the Gay Link Centre. He's 27 and repairs televisions. We've been going out for about a year now. We've talked about getting a flat together. He's met my parents but they don't know I'm gay and I've no intention of telling them before I'm 21. The fact that it's illegal means they could make things difficult for Jeff. They are very conservatively minded. As far as they are concerned gays are queers.<sup>20</sup>

As Paul noted, it is the older male who faced difficulty over the age of consent issue, although, like Steven, it was clear that the parental home was unlikely to be the appropriate place for an 'illegal' relationship to flourish. Indeed, Paul is acutely aware of the power his parents hold, as he noted how they 'could make things difficult', illustrating both his dependence on them for the time being, and their influence over his ability to properly engage with a free homosexual identity.

For both Paul and Steven, and their older male partners, it was significantly more problematic for older boyfriends. This was due to the fact that much of the argument and debate over the age of consent was to ensure the protection of young men. To transgress this border was potentially problematic for the older man, even with only three years difference, and when they were both adults. Steven's question about waiting until 21 highlights how the legal restriction imposed on homosexual acts under this age affected his identity as a gay man, and Paul 'had no intention' of revealing his sexuality whilst it was considered illegal, and it is likely that the withholding of a key part of his life could have had a similarly adverse effect on his

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<sup>20</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 1, Statements (Spare Set), RL03, Paul.

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identity. As Steven notes, even at 18, he simply could not integrate fully with the 'gay world' due to the legislation in place.<sup>21</sup>

Other testimonies featuring an older and younger man are very matter-of-fact, with little concern about the legislation. Peter, from Widnes in Cheshire, was 16 when he began dating a 21-year-old man. Peter said:

He was 21, a real bastard. Anyway after the holiday he asked me to go and live with him in Abersoch. It only lasted 6 weeks. Then I found him in bed with someone else. I made a fuss. We had a real fight about it – well he beat me up actually and I came home.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Peter was too occupied with his mistreatment from his boyfriend to concern himself with the illegality of the relationship, or perhaps the relationship itself was never sexual, but unlike Steven and Paul's testimonies, the age of consent issue does not appear to matter too much. The fact Peter states that he found his partner in 'bed with someone else', suggests that they had likely engaged in sexual activity together, as the partner was clearly not worried about engaging in sexual acts with other people. Peter confided in his twin brother after the incident, and there was nothing to suggest that his brother was concerned about the relationship with an older male, something which Steven and Paul highlighted that their parents would likely have had issues with.

There are a number of testimonies within the selection from 1979 which equally show little regard for the age of consent. It is, however, significant because many do not mention the age of the other sexual partner. Some could be considered 'school boy explorations', but it could also be assumed that a lot of these teenagers were engaging with people their own age. In this respect, age was not a significant factor because they did not choose to document it in their testimonies, whereas in the relationships where the age of consent may have been a concern there seemed to be a commentary on the age-gap. The lack of age provided by some testimonies therefore highlights, even though the acts were illegal, that this was of little concern.

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<sup>21</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, SA01, Steven.

<sup>22</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 1, RL06, Peter.

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In a statistical study by the London Gay Teenage Group, carried out in 1984, surveying both lesbian and gay teenagers, they revealed that 83% of their respondents who had engaged in sexual activity had had sex with a member of the same sex before their eighteenth birthday.<sup>23</sup> The survey responses were limited to just those in London, whereas the testimonies above were spread across Britain, even if the examples were predominantly northern. In a very recent article historian Helen Smith argues the case for noticeable regional differences between how northern towns and London (and other big cities) experience sexuality and the wider sexual environment, with a particular focus on four criminal trials in 1954, although her evidence for this assumption is perhaps not wholly representative.<sup>24</sup> Despite these regional differences, 348 respondents answered the question on their first sexual encounter from the London survey. This rare statistical insight, even with a limited sample that also included lesbian respondents, highlights how the age of consent was not an obvious deterrent for many young people. Although, the regional differences that this thesis is very aware of, could have meant that a significant proportion of young homosexuals which featured in the London survey had sexual encounters because of the availability of other young people. Indeed, London's gay community was more likely to be visible than in rural areas, particularly in adulthood. Although, as has been outlined at points throughout this thesis, London based youth groups were more common than those in more rural areas. This meant that there was a greater availability of other young gay men in the local community in London, than in rural surroundings. This highlights how, for some young people, engaging in sexual activity before they turned 18 may have been less about choice, and more about a lack of opportunity in accessing other young gay people. Very interestingly, when considering the respondents that had engaged in sexual activity under the age of 18, 42% of the 222 gay male respondents revealed that their partner was over the age of 21. 12% of these revealed that their first homosexual intercourse was with men over the age of 30.<sup>25</sup> The anonymity of statistics perhaps helped these young gay teenagers reveal this, without concern for the illegality of their actions, but over 50% of the respondents transgressed the age of

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<sup>23</sup> Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren, *Something to Tell You* (London, 1984), p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> Helen Smith, 'Working-Class Ideas and Experiences of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Britain: Regionalism as a Category of Analysis, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2018) p. 74

<sup>25</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, p. 133.

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consent boundary, highlighting the clear fact that it did not bother some young people as much as it bothered others. Moreover, as part of this survey, excerpts of written responses were recorded. One anonymous 16-year-old male said ““For God’s sake sort out the age of consent! It bothers a lot of people, particularly parents””, and another 18-year-old male noted that ““the legal situation puts a great strain on our relationship””.<sup>26</sup> These are both significant testimonies, highlighting how some young gay men were still affected by the age of consent in the mid 1980s, alongside limited statistics which offers the opposing view. This illustrates a clear separation of young gay experiences, partially dependent on location, and also individual reactions to the legislation itself. Notably, some young gay men simply did not let it bother them. Nevertheless, although a similar survey does not exist for the 1990s, it could likely be assumed that a similar trend continued, with more young people not letting the age of consent legislation affect them, particularly as the age of consent was lowered to 18 in 1994, although statistical evidence for the end of the century is not available. Despite this, the fact that 83% of respondents in the mid 1980s engaged in sexual activity before reaching the age of 21 highlighted how there was a seeming disregard for the legal restriction. Although, this figure, as mentioned, features lesbian respondents, and their age of consent was the same as heterosexuality, at the age of 16, which perhaps slightly skews the statistics available in regards to young gay men.

As was noted at the beginning of this thesis, there is immense variety in young gay men’s experiences, and it is difficult to paint this broad picture without recognising that the variations still existed. However, there appears to be a common theme amongst gay teenage men who had a disregard for the age of consent where it is likely that both parties were under the age of 21. This then returns to the issue of it being difficult to police. In this sense, the rhetoric of the age of consent as a barrier to sexual activity was arguably a more ideological threat for people who worried about it, their parents who the young men perhaps relied upon, and heterosexual moralists concerned with preventing the rising tide of homosexuality, rather than a practical restriction. Despite this, the concern felt by the older men in the relationship arose due to potential complications, although these were exacerbated either by the perception that parents would respond badly, or by the fact they did. As Paul highlighted in his testimony, complications arose due to parental animosity towards their child’s

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<sup>26</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, pp. 137-138.

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sexuality and relationship, and this is how they acted as a method of social control. Broadly speaking, however, the age of consent was perhaps a more rhetorical threat for most young gay men, and therefore did not hinder their ability to identify as young and gay. This rhetoric is, to some degree, similarly encompassed within the AIDS Crisis of the mid-1980s.

### **AIDS Crisis**

The AIDS Crisis arrived in Britain in the early 1980s. Initially defined as GRID from the USA, which meant Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, it was immediately associated with homosexuality and, particularly, a promiscuous lifestyle. A number of sociologists have classified the crisis as a moral panic due to the immense press sensationalism. This classification will be explored shortly. Needless to say, however, to determine the crisis as a moral panic was likely to have had an adverse effect on the ways young gay men identified with themselves. As a virus which was associated with sexuality early on, it arguably ostracised those over the age of sexual consent more than minors under the law. Of course, with 83% of young gay people in London engaging in sexual activity under the age of 18, it was not a uniquely adult concern, particularly when a small percentage had relations with significantly older men. The purpose of this section, then, is to determine whether the AIDS Crisis and its associated negative rhetoric, even with its status as a moral panic, actually penetrated a young gay identity. It is difficult to measure this in any quantitative sense, and it is certainly not possible to offer a comparable measure with the adult gay community. It is therefore a qualitative exploration, which determines whether the crisis interacted with young gay men's lives, rather than measuring the extent this was or was not the case.

AIDS was attributed 'moral panic status' early on in its existence in the United Kingdom. Jeffrey Weeks splits the AIDS outbreak into three periods, from its initial introduction to Britain, up to late in the 1980s where the government were attempting to medically tackle the issue. He decided it became a moral panic in 1982. He notes that AIDS was a 'symbolic bearer of a host of meanings about contemporary culture', including racial, sexual and moral issues.<sup>27</sup> Of course, AIDS, and the virus which causes the illness, HIV, have not disappeared. It has, however, lost its element of

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<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on history, sexuality and identity* (London, 1992), p. 115.

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moral panic which was prevalent in the 1980s. By the end of the decade there was a greater awareness of the issue, to the extent that its moral panic status went into decline as it became increasingly less sensationalised. The sociologist Kenneth Thompson highlights that the moral panic was due to the overlapping narratives of morally dubious homosexuality and promiscuity and the resulting illness which threatened a stable society.<sup>28</sup> This analysis is largely in line with moral panics more generally, which are due to the perception of a threat on a morally conservative and stable population. Even more so for the AIDS Crisis, it also served to threaten the family unit, due to its association with homosexuality, and this was the symbol that the moral-right upheld with great vigour. As with any moral panic, the sensationalism from the mass media was essential to ensuring it was upheld. Stanley Cohen notes that it was the mass media, particularly the press for earlier moral panics, that provided 'a main source of information about the normative contours of society... about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes the devil can assume'.<sup>29</sup> This utilised symbols such as the family and other morally essential and stable units and then ensured their subsequent instability and breakdown by often sensationalising and stretching the limits to what people could irrationally believe.

It is difficult to ascertain the direct impact of AIDS on the young gay community, mostly because of its association as a sexual disease. Douglas Feldman attempted to bridge this gap in his 1989 chapter on youth and AIDS but uses his chapter to point out the knowledge gap of youth and AIDS, rather than exploring the impact of AIDS on young people. Despite his reasonably sound context around AIDS in the 1980s, he notes that at the time of writing at the end of the decade, there had been no systematic study of youth and AIDS, and that young people tended to be grossly uninformed.<sup>30</sup> It is perhaps fair to note that a study still does not exist nearly three decades later, although information is more readily available to young people. There is therefore a gap in the contemporary evidence available, which is perhaps due to the illegality of the sexual act, concerning young gay men under the age of 21, and therefore a reluctance to disclose sexual information.

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<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (London, 1998), p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London, 1972), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas A. Feldman, 'Gay Youth and AIDS', in Gilbert Herdt (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Youth* (New York, 1989), pp. 185-193, pp. 189, 191.

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Despite this, occasional references to the impact of the crisis exist. Steve, a 17-year-old from Herefordshire, began his rather lengthy article in *Lesbian and Gay Youth* magazine stating that 'being a gay teenager in 1987 is far from easy'. With this in mind, he perfectly explains his interpretation of the impact of AIDS on the teenage community, and therefore the following extract is worth reproducing in length:

Realising and accepting that you are gay has never exactly been a bundle of laughs, but with the arrival of AIDS we are now unintentionally the victims of a barrage of confusing and scary government advice and information, press propaganda and various self-righteous and pompous bigots. Of course none of this is aimed specifically at us teenage gay men, for we are under 21, & as we all know homosexuals do not exist until the age of consent when (at last) we are allowed to indulge.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst overlooking the facetious tone of the extract, Steve highlights how the AIDS crisis filtered down to the young gay community, without directly being aimed at them. He notes further, that 'AIDS has added to the normal problems of coming to terms with gayness', which offers an explanation as to how the rhetoric negatively affected the identities of young gay men.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the author also believes that what the press offered, was 'frightening (distorted?) figures of the number of virus carriers and deaths from the disease'.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, by saying this, Steve points out that he was aware of the potential distortion and misrepresentation of the AIDS figures which were aimed at scaring people. He also shows how the moral panic was whipped up by 'the petrified straight community', which meant that gay teenagers were being struck with 'anti-gay hysteria, making us feel isolated, guilty or ashamed, and certainly very upset'.<sup>34</sup> It would potentially be incorrect to place too much significance on a single article, in a non-professional magazine, however it does importantly highlight the fact that the AIDS crisis, and particularly its negative rhetoric, did penetrate the young gay community. It is even more significant that Steve is based in Herefordshire, not even in

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<sup>31</sup> Steve, 'On Sadistic and Selfish Pleasures', *Lesbian and Gay Youth*, Issue 21 (Summer, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Steve, 'Sadistic and Selfish Pleasures', p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Steve, 'Sadistic and Selfish Pleasures', p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Steve, 'Sadistic and Selfish Pleasures, p. 7.

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the supposed hub of AIDS problems, London, yet he still recognises the adverse effect on the community. This illustrates how penetrative the negative rhetoric was, even for members outside of the centres of activity. Indeed, it was arguably due to this negative thought that the government decided to take limited action to curtail homosexuality by the end of the decade with the introduction of Section 28.

Unfortunately, however, other explicit references to the AIDS Crisis from a young person's perspective are difficult to locate, although as mentioned, the sexual nature of the disease meant that it was unlikely to be a topic of discussion for young people who were not engaging in sexual activity. A potential reason for the lack of evidence is because the press were reluctant to give a platform to portrayals of the crisis which were not negative, or conformed to the typical moral panic narrative. As Steve noted, however, he was aware of the potential distortion and inaccuracy of what was being reported, so presumably others were too.

### **Section 28**

In 1988, Clause 28, now better known as Section 28 received royal assent. It was introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. It was an amendment to the Local Government Act, and it stated that local authorities were not allowed to promote homosexuality. More specifically, it said that no maintained school could suggest that homosexuality was acceptable as a 'pretended family relationship'.<sup>35</sup> Despite a vagueness which overshadowed the Act regarding what the promotion of a sexuality actually meant, it was clear that homosexuality was not part of the stable family unit, and the 'pretended' element reaffirmed previous anti-gay legislation. This section assesses whether the legislation restricted a young gay identity, through the active non-promotion of homosexuality, or whether it was, like other legislation, less applicable, or at least less restrictive, to the young gay community. Unlike the AIDS Crisis, but similarly to the age of consent legislation, Section 28 was aimed to restrict the promotion of homosexuality for young people. This is in contrast to the AIDS Crisis, which appeared to be far more significant for adult homosexuals, only having an indirect effect on young gay men through its subsequent stigma. Unfortunately, unlike the age of consent issue, there are very limited, if any, testimonies from young gay

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<sup>35</sup> Local Government Act, 1988, c. 9, IV, Section 28. The Section of the Act was reproduced in full at the beginning of this chapter.

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men which directly mention Section 28, and therefore the experiences of the legislation on young gay men is difficult to unpick. This in itself is revealing as it indicates that the impact of Section 28 on teenagers was perhaps not widely felt. With this in mind, understanding its effect on the identity of young gay men is achieved through analysing more impersonal sources, such as circulars and official correspondence, rather than with direct personal testimonies.

Although the introduction of Section 28 was not considered a moral panic akin to the AIDS Crisis, it was similar to the age of consent which could still be classed as a moral issue. Jeffrey Weeks notes that the amendment to the Local Government Act was an attempt by Margaret Thatcher to restore the esteemed Victorian morals — at least nostalgically if not truly practically. In his earlier essays, he also argued that ‘Clause 28 can be seen as a crystallisation of anxieties about the stability of the family which had been growing over the previous decades’.<sup>36</sup> Raphael Samuel also highlights how Thatcher’s desire to return to the nostalgic Victorian period was a key part of her election campaign in 1983. Despite not looking to the past, Thatcher spoke of ‘Victorian values’ almost by accident, as a way of maintaining traditional values in a ‘climate of permissiveness’ and what many Conservatives perceived to be ‘moral anarchy’.<sup>37</sup> This was indeed the culmination of a political shift to the right, which began with the introduction of the Conservative government nearly a decade prior.<sup>38</sup> For Thatcher, this meant the attempt to restore the family as the fundamental unit, and as the Act laid out plainly, homosexuality did not fit in with this idea of a family unit. In some ways, the introduction of the Act was a culmination of the moral panic of the AIDS Crisis which threatened the stability of society. Moreover, it was targeted at young homosexuals, both young lesbians and young gay men, because it restricted the way homosexuality was taught in schools. It also restricted other Local Authority services, such as libraries. However, the language of the Act was significant. Despite the inflammatory classification of homosexuality as a ‘pretended’ lifestyle, its language arguably made it less effective as a piece of legislation. It referred to the non-promotion of homosexuality within ‘maintained schools’, which meant those that were under the control of the Local Authority. Nevertheless, an increasing number of

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<sup>36</sup> Weeks, *Against Nature*, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> Raphael Samuel, ‘Mrs. Thatcher’s Return to Victorian Values’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 78 (1992), pp. 9-29, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, pp. 237-238.

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schools were regulated by their own governing bodies, rather than the Local Authority, and thus the number of schools which were directly affected by the legislation was not as far-reaching as the text of the Act may suggest.

The limited reach of the Act was realised early on by the national press and even by teachers within schools. Guidance issued by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1991 ensured that awareness was raised about the duty of teachers, including those under the influence of Section 28. It stated that, even without promoting homosexuality, teachers were required under an earlier Act to “contribute towards spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community”, and also the need to “have due regard [for] moral considerations and the value of family life”. It was also stated under another Act, however, that “pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents”.<sup>39</sup> This therefore highlights how teachers were restricted by held moral values before the introduction of Section 28. The guidance also highlighted that it was important for the Act to be ‘understood for what it actually says’, which was limited, and decidedly unclear, ‘even though it may have been motivated by the highly prejudiced moral philosophy of some of its protagonists’.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore clear that the NUT were largely against the implementation of the Act, based on the tone of its guidance. Nevertheless, the guidance issued sought to ensure that teachers did not act illegally in their position, as it reaffirmed recent Government reports which stressed that “There is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the “norm”, or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils”.<sup>41</sup> Teachers therefore occupied a difficult position under the legislation. Whilst the tone of the guidance highlights a general distaste for the Government’s introduction of the Act, it was also clear that teachers were heavily restricted. This in turn suggests that the topic of homosexuality was nearly avoided, due to the risk of ‘promoting’ it, and this lack of speaking about the topic would likely have affected a young person’s ability to confront their sexuality.

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<sup>39</sup> LSE, HCA, Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), 2, 9, 24, Gays and Education, National Union of Teachers, ‘Lesbians and Gays in School - An Issue for Every Teacher: NUT Guidance on Lesbian and Gay Issues in Education’, Issue 53 (July, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE2, 9, 24, ‘NUT Guidance’, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE2, 9, 24, ‘NUT Guidance’, p. 8.

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Whilst Section 28 was likely most prominent within schools, its reach also extended to council run youth groups. As one 1995 letter from Shropshire County Council to a lesbian and gay youth group based in Deercote highlighted, it was vital youth groups complied with Government legislation. The letter reported the temporary suspension of the youth group, due to its non-compliance with Section 28 as part of the non-promotion of homosexuality.<sup>42</sup> The council stated that it would not support the youth group, exclusively reserved for young gay people aged 14-21, because its constitution did *not* confirm that it was *not* promoting homosexuality. The council wrote that the ‘important condition of such support is that such groups supported in this way should not promote homosexuality’, a requirement which the group decidedly did not meet. It is unclear from the single letter whether the youth group continued to occur without official backing, but it could be assumed that this would not have been financially viable without council support. Whilst this one example from Shropshire County Council is perhaps not reflective of the country as a whole, it illustrates how councils actively suspended exclusively homosexual groups, due to the expectation that they were unable to run without promoting homosexuality, or at least presenting it as an acceptable life choice — which would directly contradict the Act. The suspension of youth groups limited the social places available for young gay men under the age of 21, as well as their ability to engage with like-minded people their own age, particularly in places like Deercote, which were clearly not central hubs of homosexual youth activity. Indeed, it is likely that rural councils, away from urban centres could have been damaging to young homosexuals, where they restricted the availability of safe spaces for a young, and no doubt limited gay community. In this respect, where councils could not offer their support to these youth groups due to Section 28, it would have seriously limited the ability of young gay people to fully explore and engage with their gay identities.

It is actually the case that once the Act was introduced in the late 1980s, it relatively swiftly dropped from the mainstream media, with only the occasional article mentioning its effect into the 1990s. It was not until very late in the decade, when Stonewall published their first report on homosexuality and homophobia in schools that the press became concerned with Section 28, after its place in the public eye

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<sup>42</sup> LSE, HCA, CHE2, 9, 47, Young People, ‘Letter from Shropshire County Council Education Services to James Edgell of The Gay and Lesbian Youth Group at Deercote’, 9 March 1995.

## **Chapter 2: Social Control**

diminished. In 1998, *The Guardian* wrote about the report from Stonewall, highlighting that bullying of gay pupils was common but more than half of the teachers surveyed felt they could not address the needs of gay pupils due to the restrictions imposed by Section 28.<sup>43</sup> The Department for Education (DfE) countered this view, saying any bullying should be dealt with, because Section 28 only applied to local authorities, so schools were not affected. This was a new stance by, importantly, a new government. Homosexual equality was quite firmly on the New Labour's agenda, so this statement from the DfE reflected this new stance, and it is very unlikely that the same statement would have been issued earlier in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the fact that half of teachers responded saying that they felt they could not meet the needs of gay pupils highlights how restrictive the legislation may have been for young people. It can be assumed that there was an active and conscious non-discussion, in order to prevent the risk of contravening the Act. Of course, efforts to repeal the legislation began as the decade, and century, came to a close, and Section 28, after a decade of absence from the headlines, became significant again, with many right-wing papers stating 'Labour will let schools promote homosexuality', 'School curb on promoting gay lifestyles to be axed' and 'New Labour's insidious love affair with the gay lobby'.<sup>44</sup> From the tone of these headlines, it is clear the new left government were looking to change the place of homosexuals in society, although it was still unpopular with conservative Britain.

Importantly, despite Thatcher introducing Section 28 as a way of restoring the supposed moral sanctity of society, its significance quickly fell out of public view. It is very difficult to truly appreciate the effect of the legislation on young gay men, because virtually no personal testimonies exist which document the experience of living under the legislation. This is a problem for the 1990s more generally. However, where personal testimonies lacked, the press could fill the gaps, yet even their articles were limited throughout the 1990s. It is possible that the flaws with the language of the Act, as well as the limited scope to who was actually restricted from promoting homosexuality meant that its significance was likely overstated. Clearly, some schools and teachers felt unable to offer support to young gay pupils, which would have

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<sup>43</sup> 'Bullying of gays "rife in schools"', *The Guardian*, 13 March 1998.

<sup>44</sup> 'Labour will let schools promote homosexuality', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1999; 'School curb on promoting gay lifestyles to be axed', *The Express*, 30 October, 1999; 'New Labour's insidious love affair with the gay lobby', *Daily Mail*, 3 November 1999.

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adversely affected their ability to develop freely at crucial times in their life, and some local councils openly refused to sanction gay youth groups. However, the lack of uproar into the 1990s highlights its potential insignificance as a legislative Act. Whilst the legislation may not have been truly effective at restricting homosexual identity, it appears that restrictions would be imposed by a group much closer to the young gay men in question.

### **Parental control**

It was noted at the outset to this chapter, that a much-overlooked element of social control is the parenting of young gay men. This method of control is different to the legislative restrictions such as Section 28 and the age of consent. Similarly to the AIDS Crisis, parenting is based on social perceptions and prejudices, which occasionally resulted in sensational approaches to dealing with perceived issues. Unlike the AIDS Crisis, however, where Government intervention could reduce sensationalism and bolster public understanding of the condition, parenting is almost exempt from outside intervention. In this respect, arguably, parenting is one of the least regulated methods of social control, yet parental reaction to their child's homosexuality was absolutely fundamental in formulating their identity as young gay men. This argument should delve far deeper into sociological and psychological understandings than this thesis explores, so this section is a strictly top-level approach in the interest of historical understanding. It does not attempt to analyse different parenting styles, or reasons why parents behave the way they do, rather to simply explore how young gay men reacted to parents who did or did not accept their sexuality.

It was not uncommon for teenagers to exhibit antipathy towards their parents. As one 16-year-old, Chris, from South London, noted in an issue of *Lesbian and Gay Youth* magazine, 'parents are and can be very old fashioned about their children'.<sup>45</sup> He wrote this before he even related it to his experience as a gay teenager, going on to state that it was common for many teenagers to want to move out before they were 18. He looked to move out the following year, at age 17.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, as the introduction to this thesis noted, this magazine was not a professional product, and whilst it survived a number of years, its quarterly issues did not reach into the 1990s.

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<sup>45</sup> Chris, 'Children: Do they have a say?', *Lesbian and Gay Youth*, Issue 21 (Summer, 1987), pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Chris, 'Children', p. 8.

## **Chapter 2: Social Control**

This particular issue was authored by school children, or at least those of school-leaving age, so is useful in portraying the thoughts of young people in a more public setting than some of the previous testimonies. It did not create the same controversy caused by Oz's infamous School Kids Issue, but that only further highlights both the liberal changes in British society and also the fact that the magazine was not a professional product in the same way. It is also the case that the magazine was less explicit than the earlier Oz edition. Nevertheless, it was still a public magazine, presumably with a small readership, but irrespective of this marginally more public testimony, Chris cannot be said to be a spokesperson for all the teenagers with antipathy towards their parents. He states, however, that people in their mid-teens had 'very little' say when it came to discussions with their parents.

Despite this supposedly widespread idea that teenagers and parents simply struggled to get on, a key theme within the personal testimonies that this thesis uses is the issue of parents, and more specifically their reaction to their child's 'coming out'. As chapter one explored, many testimonies documented either an awareness of how their parents may react to being told about a gay child, or a reaction that has already taken place. Parental support was important for constructing positive young gay identities, and this therefore explains how a negative reaction or an adverse prejudice would have had an impact on the subsequent identities of the young gay men, and lesbians in this instance. As with the variety of testimonies, there was also a variety of parental responses, and these different responses illustrate how much control the parents had over their children, based on the outcomes, and the resulting relationships. As Lorraine Trenchard and Hugh Warren note in their analysis of gay youth in 1984, 'the institution of the family has a powerful influence on young people's views. Society is geared towards the family, in which everyone is assumed to be heterosexual'.<sup>47</sup> This idea has been present throughout this chapter, but it is particularly visible when exploring parents as a method of social control. Trenchard and Warren went on to state, in a way that is a well-suited explanation of parents and children for this section, that the complex parent/child is very significant to every young person's development. They highlight that there is a desire from most young

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<sup>47</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, p. 37.

## **Chapter 2: Social Control**

people to want to please their parents, and, importantly, ‘many feel that it would upset, disappoint or hurt their parents to know that their child was lesbian or gay’.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, the responses which Trenchard and Warren analyse as part of their survey have the same problem as the other testimonies this thesis has explored. By responding to a survey about one’s sexuality, the respondents were at least comfortable with themselves, and this may have translated into being more comfortable with parents and other family, regardless of the threat of an adverse reaction. This is represented by the fact that, of 416 individuals, 70% of the respondents were open about their sexuality to at least one member of family, although not necessarily their parents. This is quite a large proportion of respondents who were partially open with their sexuality, and therefore the experience within their family circle may not be totally representative of the variety of family views, including those with more traditional moral views. As Trenchard and Warren also simplistically note, ‘many parents lack even a basic understanding of homosexuality’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this much is obvious even a few years earlier, when a number of earlier testimonies highlight inherent prejudices existing amongst some parents. For many parents, it was not the fact that they were unaware of homosexuality existing, only that homosexuality existed “‘out there” — someone else’s son or daughter, someone on the television’.<sup>50</sup>

Importantly though, feelings amongst parents could also change as they adjusted to accepting their child’s homosexuality. The immediate response from parents was often hostile, negative, or confused, but this could adjust overtime. Unfortunately, not all personal testimonies can confirm this, largely because little time had passed since the young men told their parents and wrote their testimonies, but in others, it is clear parents could, and did, adjust to accepting their child. It therefore meant that hostile parents may have only been a temporary method of restricting a teenager’s identity. Nevertheless, there is also the argument that an initial hostile reaction would ensure that the teenager would never fully be open with himself as a young gay man, so always have the parental hostility hanging over them. This is the case with Steven from Leeds, whose testimony from 1979 featured earlier in this chapter. He recounted that his parents were hostile to his initial coming out, and then, even three years later, did

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<sup>48</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Trenchard and Warren, *Something to Tell You*, p. 39.

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not discuss homosexuality 'unless forced to'.<sup>51</sup> They were aware of his new long-term boyfriend, and it should be assumed that his parents had seen them both together, because Steven noted that it 'hurt' that his parents still did not have a picture of the two of them together. This suggests that Steven and his partner were present enough in the family home for the possibility of his parents to even consider a photo on their mantelpiece, but it also appears from his testimony that it was an unspoken taboo. His parents were therefore not openly restricting his identity, they just were not forthcoming in accepting his full sexual identity into their lives. Steven noted, before he had come out three years prior, that he was sure he was going to be thrown out, although that did not happen.<sup>52</sup>

Another article in the *Lesbian and Gay Youth* magazine highlighted the variation in parental responses to their child's sexuality. Philip, aged 16, from Suffolk, highlights how he came out at school, but he was pleased his parents did not know yet. He noted that he thought it would 'break my mother and father's heart', even though he had an 18-year-old friend who experienced no problem coming out to his parents. He revealed that he thought his parents 'might be worse, but it only shows how much your parents care for you — or do they?'.<sup>53</sup> It is difficult to determine which response he felt illustrated parental care, as he offered the closing caveat, which suggests that parents would believe they cared through their opposition to homosexuality; of course, this would not be seen as caring for the young person, and it is likely that this is the opinion Philip adopted. Nevertheless, his mention of a friend who received a positive response, alongside his expectation of breaking his parents' hearts, highlights the variations in experiences amongst gay teenagers.

One way of overcoming parental control, however, was to go against their wishes. In Matt Cook's exploration of squatters in London, he interviews a number of gay men, who at the beginning of their lives as out homosexuals utilised the squatting communities to directly oppose their parents' wishes. One testimony highlighted that the squats represented an "alternative to everything; alternative diet to my parents, alternative beliefs to my parents, alternative sexuality to my parents", as the young man chose his own path in life.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, another testimony highlighted how

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<sup>51</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, SA01, Steven.

<sup>52</sup> LSE, HCA, JCGT, 7, 5, SA01, Steven.

<sup>53</sup> Philip, 'Out at School, *Lesbian and Gay Youth*, Issue 21 (Summer, 1987), p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Cook, 'Gay Times', p. 92.

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squatting and homosexuality, as a combination, was “very disappointing [and] frightening” for one person’s parents, whilst it represented a liberation for himself.<sup>55</sup> It is likely these men were just transgressing the boundary of adulthood, as their parents’ disapproval, and the deliberate decision to go against their wishes suggests they were dependent on them relatively recently. However, as discussed above, a younger gay man would potentially struggle to break free from the parental guard due to the support that he may have required from them. This potentially only became possible as the young man came closer to legal homosexual adulthood.

Parents had a number of ways which kept their children controlled. Indeed, the financial dependence these young gay men had upon their parents meant that it was in their interests to not exacerbate a potential conflict between themselves and their parents. Whilst some young men were unsure about the ways their parents would respond to their sexuality, it seemed common from the testimonies provided that they erred on the side of caution, deciding it was often not sensible to disclose their sexuality when they assumed a negative reaction. Other testimonies recalled how parents responded positively, and then there were some such as Steven in Leeds, whose parents clearly accepted his sexuality, but would not allow full openness. In this respect, parental control had varying degrees of impacts upon young gay men. However, it is clear that where it was not allowed for young men to be fully open in the family environment, some of their identities as young gay men was being restricted through the control parents had over their lives.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has not been able to explore all the ways and means of restricting youth homosexual identity, and therefore has prioritised just four. It has argued for the varying impacts that these methods of control had upon gay teenagers. Indeed, the method of control which is clearly absent is policing, although the reason for this was made clear in the outset to this chapter. In this period, the age of consent issue was often contentious, and was continually ongoing from 1967 until it was eventually made equal in 2001. It was perhaps unclear, before viewing the testimonies, the extent to which this affected youth homosexual identity. It is, however, quite apparent that the age of consent was a real issue for the young gay men who were in a relationship

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<sup>55</sup> Cook, ‘Gay Times’, p. 93

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where they transgressed the consent boundary. This was not, by any means, a problem for all young gay people, which is illustrated by the lack of mention in some testimonies concerning age of consent issues.

Perceptions surrounding gay teenagers were not helped by the AIDS Crisis and Section 28. As this chapter has highlighted, the impact of the AIDS Crisis on young gay teenagers was more indirect, as scapegoating adult homosexuals filtered down a hostility towards homosexuality in general, including teenagers. The limited testimonies available on both subjects, however, illustrate two things: the first is the suggestion that the importance of both issues did not truly affect young gay people to the extent that it was worth including in a testimony. Secondly, is the fact that it also highlights the inevitable lack of available voices, which this thesis has always admitted. Working with the sources available, it appears to be likely that teenagers were theoretically restricted by these issues, rather than practically, as in the cases of the age of consent and parental controls.

This variation of responses is also apparent when parents are considered a method of social control. There was not a singular approach to parenting a young gay teenager. Outside factors, such as public prejudices, pressures and the need to uphold morals meant that parents were not always best equipped to assist their child in a supportive way. One commonality between many testimonies was the initial hostility and confusion which came with finding out a child is gay. This however, was sometimes overcome with time, although equally, there was every possibility it would not be.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis is to explore young homosexual identities, and to explore whether social control had an impact on the way young homosexual men identified with themselves. Through the preceding two chapters, it has argued for a clear but varying presence of a young gay community, differing over time and across different places. It has also explored the changes and continuities associated with young gay men during the period of partial decriminalisation. This goes further than previous scholars, as identifying the young homosexual voice was something which they have struggled to disentangle. Instead, this thesis has identified a number of young gay voices and explored their differing experiences. This confirms the presence of a group which previous scholars have struggled to reveal. As mentioned, it would be incorrect to suggest that this thesis has identified a significant sample of young gay men to carry out any quantitative studies on them, but it has delved into a few accessible members of a hidden and minority group, which is enough to reveal their varied experiences and differing identities. It is due to the fact that many wished to remain hidden, that even the limited number of testimonies this thesis offers provides valuable insight into a previously under-explored group.

Additionally, this thesis has interweaved relevant external factors which have had an impact upon on the lives of young gay men during the era of partial decriminalisation. It then linked this youthful community to the mechanisms of social control, which have typically been reserved for the adult homosexual community. Much of the scholarship already available focuses on adult homosexuals, but it is unnecessary for the young gay community to be under-researched. Deliberately, this thesis has not utilised any newly available sources. It has not conducted any new oral histories, or created a new body of evidence. It has utilised what has been available in archives for many years, as a way of determining whether this topic has been overlooked due to a lack of evidence; it appears however this is not the case. Admittedly, evidence was not always easy to access, but it exists. Though these voices have often gone unnoticed, or in some cases, may have been completely disregarded, this thesis presents these voices which have previously been omitted from previous work, consciously or otherwise.

A key theme of this thesis has been the recognition of the variety of experiences which young gay men encountered from the 1960s to the end of the century. Quite

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simply, there was not a singular gay youth identity, rather, a multitude of identities. The only way in which it would be possible to have a uniquely homosexual identity, was if homosexuality was the only thing that defined the young men. Of course, this was not the case, even if sexuality was a key part of ones' identity. Instead, regionality as well as changes across time dictated identities and the gay community to the same extent that sexuality alone did. Due to these variations, it was never going to be possible to measure the young gay community in a sociological or anthropological sense with the existing evidence. This has always been an historical exploration, using a limited source base, but with the intention of presenting the varying experiences of this marginalised group. It was also the intention to portray this group as both fragmented and homogenous in different areas and at different times. Splits between adult and youth were apparent, such as those where adult homosexuals had antipathy towards younger gay men due to the legal risks. This is in addition to divides across the young gay community in terms of internalised stereotyping; something which was apparent with John Fraser in the early 1960s, and again with Steven Power in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is clear that being young and gay was not, and is not, always the easiest of lives to lead. Divisions within the group itself, ranging from antipathy towards each other, and a general lack of understanding of homosexuality, meant that individuals battled with their identity, even before succumbing to the pressures of revealing themselves to the outside world.

Equally, this thesis explored a few mechanisms of social control in the attempt to understand whether or not they actually had an impact on the identities of young gay men. Life was made more problematic for some young gay men when these issues were introduced. Indeed, it was clear within some testimonies the impact that the unequal age of consent legislation had on a person's ability to live comfortably with themselves. Therefore, if homosexuality was not complicated enough for a young person, legislative restrictions added further issues to contend with. This was not the case for all young people, and this thesis has highlighted how these mechanisms of control did not have a consistent effect on all young gay men. Indeed, for some gay teenagers there is a distinct lack of concern for the age of consent, whilst for others, it significantly affected their relationship, where the boundary was transgressed. Nevertheless, as Trenchard and Warren pointed out, it was clearly of little concern for the seemingly large percentage of London-based gay teenagers who had engaged in sexual activity before the age of 18. These varying experiences were all a key part of

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growing up as a young and gay, and the way the young men responded to these restrictions helped shape their identity.

On the other hand, other imposed restrictions, such as the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, appeared to be more of a theoretical restriction rather than imposed practically, with notably little contemporary evidence of it posing a significant restriction on identity. This limited evidence illustrates the potential narrow breadth of the issue. Due to the fact that evidence is quite readily available for other methods of social control, it suggests that Section 28 did not feature so prominently as a concern for young people. However, theoretical restrictions and those that relied on public perception to uphold them were somewhat effective in ensuring that youth homosexuality was not widely accepted by the wider society. This, in turn, had an indirect impact upon a gay teenage identity because it altered the wider environment, by promoting a generally negative rhetoric about homosexuality. Therefore, although it appears that the effect is limited, notably due to a lack of evidence stating its prominence, it was likely the case that the penetrating rhetoric was not a positive environment to live among. Indeed this was particularly the case for the AIDS Crisis, where it achieved a moral panic status.

Nevertheless, the testimonies of the countless young men are what this thesis has relied upon to offer a snapshot into the lives of these teenagers on the very fringes of society. Indeed, for some of the young men in this thesis, their sexuality was a central element of their persona, using it to encourage involvement in activism, or fair treatment for others, whilst for some young men it was more of a fact of life. For John Fraser, one of the first testimonies which this thesis introduced, homosexuality was a weakness; it was part of his identity which he attempted to conceal, but not all that he was as a person, although he accepted himself in a more positive light later into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Whilst variety was therefore omnipresent, one issue arising from these testimonies is the fact that many of them have a uniquely gay focus, due to them being written within the homosexual scene, or for a survey of homosexuals. It is therefore easy to falsely conclude that being gay was the only important thing in these lives, due to the inability to portray any alternative elements of personality within the confines of a testimony on youth homosexuality. Despite this, some young men managed to offer

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<sup>1</sup> British Library (BL), Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive (HCOA), F2133-F2134, Interview of John Fraser by William Pierce, May 1987.

## **Conclusion**

valuable insights into their lives, their work, friends, class and other factors of identity, which helped reveal the importance of sexuality within their lives. Therefore, despite the difficulty, sexuality was more apparent for some people than others. This, then, only further adds to the fact that there was a variety of experiences which existed for young gay men in the period since 1967.

This thesis has offered an exploration into these experiences. It has done this, utilising primary material over that of previous scholars' writing, due to the fact that scholarship focusing on young gay men is extremely limited. There is still, undoubtedly, much to explore. Now the thesis has illustrated the availability of evidence for this period, it could be useful to develop research further by carrying out newer interviews, particularly for the 1990s, as the current available evidence is not as strong for this decade. This should hope to offer a far more rounded view of experiences. As noted from the outset, this thesis did not conduct any new interviews, because it was careful to utilise material which has been available, despite some scholars saying it was difficult to find. Young gay men did however appear as topic of conversation throughout this era, particularly for the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, the Joint Council for Gay Teenagers, and the many other organisations which put homosexual teenagers to the forefront. This was often in terms of working to lift the unequal legislation in place, and they offered an impersonal view, but the presence of young gay men as a minority group was apparent for some people.

It should also be revealing in the future when newer archives arrive, such as that expected of the London Gay Teenage Group, and when call logs from Switchboard become openly available. Importantly, the young gay men, whose voices come across in this thesis were, until now, understudied, under-researched, and largely undervalued within the history of homosexuality. Indeed, Stonewall, began exploring young people in school, and of school-leaving age only in the past two decades, and it was not until far more recently that youth homosexuality has been utilised as a topic of study for social sciences. This means, for the historian in thirty-years-time, there will be good material available on post-millennial youth homosexuality, but it would be wrong to suggest that it was not just as present before this, therefore this thesis has illustrated that.

In terms of these organisations, this thesis has only scratched the surface, preferring instead to favour the individual's voice, and individual identity as opposed to the quasi-official voice of an organisation, which often spoke as if the group was

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homogenous. Of course, this argument of homogeneity is insensitive to the many individuals who experienced very different realities. In this light, there is more work to do, and more experiences to reveal; more methods of social control to explore, and more identities to piece together. This has hopefully sowed the seed to view youth homosexuality, in the period since 1967, as a topic in need of further exploration. It also confirms that young gay men did, indeed, exist with varying identities and experiences, differing over time and place before 2001.

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