

Université de Montréal

**Social Rejection of Minority Groups and its Impacts on the
Individual's Identity and Perception of the Self: Exploring
Homosexual and Racial Identities in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's
Room* and *Just Above My Head***

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Résumé

Ce mémoire examine la question de la formation de l'identité en tant que procédure compliquée dans laquelle plusieurs éléments interviennent. L'identité d'une personne se compose à la fois d'une identité propre et d'une autre collective. Dans le cas où l'identité propre est jugée sévèrement par les autres comme étant déviante, cela poussera la personne à, ou bien maintenir une image compatible avec les prototypes sociaux ou bien résister et affirmer son identité personnelle. Mon travail montre que l'exclusion et la répression de certains aspects de l'identité peuvent causer un dysfonctionnement psychique difficile à surmonter. Par contre, l'acceptation de soi et l'adoption de tous les éléments qui la constituent conduisent, certes après une longue lutte, au salut de l'âme et du corps. Le premier chapitre propose une approche psychosociale qui vise à expliquer le fonctionnement des groupes et comment l'interaction avec autrui joue un rôle décisif dans la formation de l'identité. Des éléments extérieurs comme par exemple les idéaux sociaux influencent les comportements et les choix des gens. Toutefois, cette influence peut devenir une menace aux spécificités personnelles et aux traits spécifiques. Le deuxième chapitre examine la question des problèmes qu'on risque d'avoir au cas où les traits identitaires franchiraient les normes sociales. Nous partons du problème épineux de la quête de soi dans *Giovanni's Room* de James Baldwin. L'homosexualité de David était tellement refusée par la société qu'elle a engendrée chez lui des sentiments de honte et de culpabilité. Il devait choisir entre le sacrifice des aspects de soi pour satisfaire les paradigmes sociaux ou bien perdre ce qu'il a de propre. David n'arrive pas à se libérer. Il reste prisonnier des perceptions rigides au sujet de la masculinité et de la sexualité. Mon analyse se focalise essentiellement sur l'examen des différents éléments théoriques qui touchent la question du sexe et de la sexualité. Le résultat est le suivant :

plus les opinions dominantes sont rigides et fermes, plus elles deviennent une prison pour l'individu. Par contre, plus elles sont tolérantes et flexibles, plus elles acceptent les diversités de l'identité humaine. Dans le dernier chapitre, j'examine la question de la représentation des relations entre les caractères masculins dans *Just Above My Head*. L'homosexualité est présentée comme un moyen sacré pour exprimer l'amour. Les caractères révèlent leurs sentiments implicitement à travers les chants spirituel tel que le gospel ou bien explicitement à travers la connexion physique. Dans ce roman, Baldwin montre que c'est seulement grâce à la sincérité et à l'amour que l'individu peut atteindre la libération du soi.

Mots-clés : identité, intégrité, normes sociales, homosexualité, masculinité, James Baldwin

Abstract

The present thesis examines the construction of identity as a complex process in which many factors interact. A person's identity comprises both the personal self and the collective self. Having an aspect of identity that is judged as deviant or devalued will lead to the individual's confusion between maintaining an image that fits social prototypes or embracing his personal identity. My work demonstrates that the exclusion or repression of certain aspects of identity may lead to disconnection from one's inner self. Yet, it is only through self-acceptance and the embracing of all elements of the self that one manages to resist hostility and gain the liberation of the soul and body. In the first chapter, a social psychological approach is employed in order to explain group functioning and the role that group interaction plays in shaping one's identity. External factors like social ideals influence people's behaviors and choices. Therefore, they represent a threat to personal differences and unique traits. The second chapter examines the implications of having an identity that transgresses social norms by exploring David's quest for the self in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. David's insecure identity because of his homosexuality fills him with destructive feelings of shame and guilt. I maintain that sacrificing aspects of the self to satisfy social paradigms may cause the loss of the individual's integrated self. David fails in freeing the self which remains imprisoned in fixed internalized perceptions of manhood and male sexuality. I analyse theoretical views about sex and gender that vary from rigid and traditional opinions to more tolerant and universalizing ones that accept possibilities of diversity in human identity.

In the last chapter, I will examine Baldwin's depiction of male's bonding in *Just Above My Head*. The characters confront their emotions. Homosexuality is portrayed as a sacred way of expressing love. The characters' feelings are revealed both in gospel singing and in bodily connection. In this novel, Baldwin demonstrates that it is only through sincerity, disclosure and love that one can attain the liberation of the self.

Keywords : identity, self-integrity, social norms, homosexuality, masculinity, James Baldwin

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For my mother, my father and my brothers

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Introduction

Collective values are necessary to our existence in social communities. We can't live in society without them. In this sense, they are what make our life with others possible. They are effective and strong because they are built over time. They are not easy to remove because they are historical phenomena. But while these common values are essential for our life in society they may play a decisive role in destroying our search for an authentic self.

Collective values control people's choices and define the line between acceptable behaviors and those perceived as violating the norms. Individuals are supposed to fit certain roles constructed by these values in order to gain social acceptance. The more we succeed in performing our roles as prescribed by society, the more we develop an image of the self that is in harmony with the world surrounding us. However, people's adoption of social attributes which are not compatible with who they really are may lead to alienation and frustration. Who we are is not always a product of our personal decisions but depends on the degree of our compliance with social and moral values. Indeed, identity construction is a complex process in which many factors interact. While many people prefer to assimilate to social standards in order to satisfy the demands of the larger community, others remain committed to their personal choices and behave according to their own principles.

Finding one's true self depends on resisting externally imposed existent models. This resistance is one response to a tragic human situation, one tackled in various literary works which focus on man's search for his authentic self. James Baldwin is one such writer who decided to resist. His novels portray the fight of minorities and repressed groups against established values.

Belonging to both black and homosexual communities, the author experienced marginalization and social rejection. His works aim to embody the struggle of members of a doubly-oppressed minority group to achieve an understanding of the self and to find a place in society.

This work will focus on one aspect of identity, a sexuality that is disapproved of and regarded as deviant. This disapproval often bases itself upon a common and culturally structured belief in the direct interrelationship between gender and sexuality. Thus, biological givens are thought to be responsible for determining people's sexual preferences. Any breaking of the rule would be threatening to a secure zone of gender conformity. Butler affirms that "heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms." (Butler 23) The connection between gender and sexuality will be discussed for its importance in shaping public views about normative sexuality and provoking hostile reactions towards deviant behaviors. By rejecting others and assigning to them attributes that are judged as degrading and evil, people protect their own self-image and their perceived safety within the sphere of social conformity. In a dialogue with Nikki Giovanni, Baldwin says "White people invented black people to give white people identity... Straight cats invented faggots so they can sleep with them without becoming faggots themselves." (Baldwin 1975, 88-89) It is through classifying people and favoring certain groups over others that people create privilege for their ingroups. Inventing categories limits people's right to make free choices and restricts them to certain images and roles. Jim Foratt expresses his rejection of social definitions categorizing people and serving oppressive systems by writing:

Homosexual. I find the word hard to relate to because it puts me in a category which limits my potential. It also prescribes a whole system of behavior to which I'm supposed to conform which has nothing to do with the reality of my day to day living.

I feel the same way about the word heterosexual. Our culture has created these artificial categories defining human sexuality, to protect and perpetuate the institutions and systems in power whose end result is only to dehumanize life. I reject the word homosexual. I reject a category that defines my central life thrust in limiting terms. I am a human being. (Foratt 16)

Foratt's statement resonates with Baldwin's valuing of humanity and the liberation of the self. Known for his valuing of authenticity and self-integrity, Baldwin chooses to appear as an openly gay writer who is not ashamed to declare his sexuality or to struggle against social labelling and stigmatization whether in his interviews, essays or works of fiction.

My thesis will examine the different ways in which people respond to having an identity that is socially rejected or that violates the rules of one's community. Normally, the individual faces two choices: either to accept all the 'deviant' aspects of his personal identity and thus to grapple with social rejection, or to deny those aspects in order to maintain a socially acceptable image and consequently to betray his inner self.

The first chapter will provide a theoretical approach to category construction from a social psychological angle. People's attachment to particular groups and the holding of stereotypes about different "others" will be explained. While it is important to understand what leads to hostility towards others and how that could affect relationships between individuals and groups, it is even more important to understand the impact this has on the individual's self-image. In particular, I will study the concept of masculinity as conventionally defined around maintaining the traditional gender role of feeding the family and exercising dominance in the heterosexual act. Those who transgress these ideals of manhood as prescribed by society are perceived as a threat to the stability of the community.

The second chapter will examine Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* and its depiction of the protagonist's quest for the self. David is a white American struggling with his homosexuality. Growing up with internalized beliefs of what a man should be, David has a negative perception of himself and constantly attempts to reject his sexual orientation and live up to social expectations. I will show how rejecting aspects of the self may lead to identity denial and a damaging effacement of personal identity. Through David's character, I will show to what extent social norms can influence one's behavior and the perception of self and others. In this novel, the protagonist's sexuality is portrayed as a source of shame provoking feelings of guilt and self-hatred. Approaching the theme of escape embodied in David's flight from America to France, Baldwin emphasizes the importance of freeing the self from all constraints and remaining loyal to one's self integrity.

In the third chapter, I will study Baldwin's novel *Just Above My Head*. Here, Baldwin depicts male relationships that attest to the unity and support that black men provide one another as they face the tensions and violent conditions of racism in America. Their love and solidarity become a refuge and a spiritual asylum for them. Male homosexual encounters are explicitly depicted in this novel and same sex desire is portrayed as a sacred practice that enables the characters to achieve spiritual transcendence. Exposing erotic desire through religious music and bodily connection, the characters manage to challenge traditional definitions of masculinity and blackness. The depth of male bonding in this novel attests to Baldwin's belief in love as a major power uniting mankind.

Through his fiction, Baldwin attempts to give voice to the voiceless by investigating the troubles of their inner selves. In doing so, he emphasizes the danger of denying our common humanity and the right to exist and be different. For Baldwin, humanness is more important

than all other considerations, and having different aspects of identity should not be a reason to stigmatize one another. He declares in an interview "no label, no slogan, no party, no skin color, indeed, no religion is more important than the human being." (Baldwin 37-47)

According to Baldwin, self-acceptance is crucial in establishing a genuine sense of the self and a harmonious connection with the world we live in. One is not supposed to sacrifice aspects of the self to maintain social survival. Baldwin adopts a vision that encourages the rejection of all oppressive authorities which function as obstacles to the individual's creation of an autonomous and free self. For example, in writing about religious authority, he states that "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him." (Baldwin 47) This declaration demonstrates Baldwin's spirit of revolt and his belief in the individual and man's free will. According to the author, nothing is more sacred than the human being.

Chapter One

The impacts of social identification on individuals' psychological and behavioral processes

When discussing the issues that minority groups face like prejudice, discrimination and social rejection, it is useful to frame them within the field of social psychology to better appreciate the influence that society has on people's behavioral and psychological responses to events around them. Individual identity cannot be studied in isolation from the social identity which is also part of one's self-image. This social identity is based on the categorization process which participates in the formation of one's identity and the determination of one's position within the larger community. Therefore, to understand the implications of having a stigmatized and marginalized identity that transgresses the expectations of a social group, one has to examine group structures and the influence of group memberships and social processes on people's behaviors and perceptions of the self and the other. This chapter will attempt to employ some of the important principles of the social identity approach to explain group functioning and the way it affects individuals, with a focus on people with stigmatized identities.

According to social psychologist Henri Tajfel, social identity is defined as "an individual's knowledge that he belongs to a certain group together with the emotional and value significance of this membership" (Tajfel 1981, 255) This definition presents the individual as part of a larger group that influences his self-concept defined by DuBay as "that collection of ideas we have about ourselves."(DuBay 14), his perception of other groups and

his behavior towards them. Group membership suggests that individuals belonging to the same group share a common social identification. This identification may be represented in physical attributes characterizing an individual such as race or gender, cultural elements like the values and norms distinguishing one culture from another and social roles that individuals acquire, whether in the family, in social institutions or through interacting with other group members.

The importance of group interaction in shaping one's identity is expressed in Shaw's definition of the group as "two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person." (Shaw 11) Thus, similarity is an important criterion for group membership, where individuals are supposed to be linked by common attributes. This idea seems in accordance with Tajfel and Turner's definition of a group as

a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and their membership of it. (Tajfel & Turner 1979, 40)

So, group belonging implies an individual's cognition of his position within the group and its distinctiveness from other groups, an understanding of the emotional involvement that this membership requires, and adopting the criteria used by the group to evaluate other groups. Each member mirrors the image of the whole group: "The individual member is a hologram of the category." (Wilder & Simon 34) This suggests that one can form an image of an individual by knowing his category, and infer as well the general characteristics of a group from an individual who belongs to it. Mutual interaction and influence are important factors in the construction of a group. According to the Social Cohesion Model, members of a group are

linked by their attraction to each other and to the group. This commitment limits an individual's choices and exert pressure on them so that they conform to group rules.

However, this model has been challenged. In research by Tajfel et al. (1971), subjects were divided arbitrarily into two groups and were asked to decide about the distribution of monetary rewards for anonymous members of the ingroup and the outgroup. The result was that subjects discriminated in favor of ingroup and against outgroup members. This demonstrates that cohesiveness is not necessary in group formation. Even when ingroup members do not have any similarities or common interests, they tend to favor members of their own group and discriminate against outgroup members. In other words, merely belonging to a social category is sufficient for encouraging group behavior, even if that belonging takes place under arbitrary conditions. (Turner 1989, 75)

This research shows how people's attitudes toward others are based on their group membership and how it leads them to classify people into distinct categories. Social categorization, as developed by Turner and colleagues, is strongly related to social identification since recognizing one's belonging to a group will lead to perceiving others accordingly and to judging them in terms of group standards. Social categorization proposes that individuals are defined according to their group membership. Therefore, personal differences and unique traits are of no importance compared to social identities, even if these may represent a threat to one's uniqueness. People are evaluated in terms of their adherence to the shared values and common goals of the group. They usually accept the group's common rules as prescriptions for behavior. Sherif asserts that "Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact collectively or individually with another group or its members in terms of their group identification, we have an instance of intergroup behaviour." (Sherif 1967, 12) Indeed, social identification accentuates the importance of collective identity at the expense of the personal one so that people's identities are derived from their group belonging and positions in

society. Once a person is identified as an outgroup member, he will not be treated the same way as ingroup members. According to Turner, "people come to see themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their differences from others" (Turner 1985, 122) Turner refers to this process of categorizing oneself and others solely at the collective level as depersonalization, a concept that will be explained later in this chapter.

Social Identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) explains how people discriminate in favor of their own groups and against outgroups. It assumes that a person's identity comprises both the personal self and the collective self. These two elements constitute the self-image, that is one's understanding, and defining, of one's identity. Personal identity includes an individual's unique attributes that make a person different from other group members such as bodily attributes, tastes and psychological characteristics whereas social identity refers to the shared traits characterizing the whole group like sex, religion, nationality. Accordingly, social identity may be defined as "the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a social group." (Turner and Oakes 237-252) From a social identity approach, an individual's behavior is related to social contexts. To explain why people do not behave in the same way when they are in interpersonal settings and in intergroup situations, we should study their motives and the influence of social categories on their perceptions of the self and the other. For instance, in the absence of whites, two black men define themselves as independent entities and accentuate their differences, whereas in group situations, that is in the presence of different others, they define themselves in terms of their social identity, and consequently similarities are maximized and distinctions disappear. Turner outlines the connection between people's attitudes and the social reasons behind them stating that "The general implication of the identity model is that we need to assume a

continual causal loop between psychological and social processes in the determination of group members' attitudes and actions." (Turner & Giles 27)

As already mentioned, intergroup cognition, represented in one's awareness of one's social identity and the categorizing process resulting from this knowledge, regulates intergroup behavior. Once the individual recognizes that he belongs to a certain group, he tends to distinguish himself positively from other groups by developing stereotypes that justify his attitudes. Thus, similarities between members of the same group are highlighted and differences with other groups are accentuated. One can affirm that the mere act of classification leads people to construct stereotypes about themselves and others. Stereotypical judgments are usually unreasonable and irrational and are generally acquired even before meeting the group or the member of the group. These stereotypes taking the form of simplified and generalized mental images of a category are inflexible and difficult to change and generally become transformed into prejudices that represent people's emotional response to these stereotypes. "Prejudices are usually negative and have both cognitive and affective dimensions. The former including beliefs and stereotypes, the latter active dislike and aversion". (Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture 2) Once prejudices are activated, they are reflected in people's discriminatory behaviors. Individuals tend to evaluate their own groups more positively than other groups and behave according to such favoritism. An instance that supports this idea is research done by Sagar and Schofield (1980) in which they tried to examine the influence of stereotypic expectations on the activation of judgmental and behavioral discrimination. They tried to know how people would interpret a child poking another child with a pencil and how they would react to it. The research demonstrated that it all depends on the race of the child. If that behavior is done by an African American, it is considered as hostile. However, if it is performed by a white child, it is regarded as playful.

This attitude develops into discrimination if the African American child is punished while the white child is not. (Bodenhausen, Macrae and Garst 319).

Therefore, when stereotypes are activated, they influence people's interpretation of others' actions and may turn into prejudice, which is the expression of feelings of hostility towards a group.

Characterized by dogmatism and intolerance, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination are all related concepts. Stereotypes are viewed as the cognitive component, prejudice as the affective one and discrimination as the behavioural component of prejudicial reactions. (Fiske 1998, 357)

When people embrace stereotypes associated with their group membership, and identify themselves and others in terms of that group belonging, they participate in the depersonalization process that turns them into a product of the social group. While the creation of groups simplifies the social world, it risks excluding personal motives in deciding how to behave. When persons are perceived only as members of a group, there will be a loss of individual or personal information about them and they will be regarded as representative or exemplary of the whole group. Group-level perceptions are not concerned with an individual's uniqueness and can lead to judgments that do not always reflect the reality about people. According to Turner and colleagues, depersonalization does not mean a loss of the self, but a "change from the personal to the social level of identity". (Turner et al. 1987, 51) It occurs when people categorize themselves according to their group belonging. They become prototypical and their differences fade away. This has an influence on people's attitudes especially as their perception of other groups becomes dependent on their ingroup belonging. Aspects of the self that are acquired at the collective level become guides for behavior. Actually, what allows for the shift from interpersonal to intergroup behavior is the transition in one's self-concept from interpersonal to intergroup identity (Brown and Turner 1989, 38)

Depersonalization could threaten people's identities if it leads to deindividuation. Deindividuation occurs when people become submerged in their social groups to the point of rejecting other, more personal aspects of their identities. Thus, individual selves transform into collective ones. Some researchers propose individualism as an alternative to group identity. They view it as the only psychological reality and a way to avoid discrimination and group favoritism since people will be perceived as individuals and will behave as independent persons. It has been argued that individuality consists of the independence component, that is getting free from the constraints imposed by the group and its restrictive behaviors, and the differentiation component represented in the acting out of differences. (Kampmeier & Simon, 448-462) Also, individualism suggests that individuals will not have to give up their own interests and preferences in order to satisfy the group. This view has been criticized for many reasons. It has been claimed that it disconnects the individual from social reality. Allport declares

There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals. Social psychology must not be placed in contradistinction to the psychology of the individual; it is a part of the psychology of the individual, whose behaviour it studies in relation to that sector of his environment comprised by his fellows. (Allport 1924, 6)

By this statement, Allport stresses the connection between the group and the individual and the importance of studying them as related notions.

Following the social identity approach, a secure identity is maintained when the individual fits perfectly into group norms "much as the fit of a puzzle piece is determined by how well it locks into place with other pieces." (Wilder and Andrew 1998, 35) One's positive self esteem depends on achieving social influence and becoming similar to one's fellow ingroup members. This, of course, may lead an individual to exclude or repress aspects of the

self. Otherwise, he will experience uncertainty about his identity since his uniqueness and the aspect or aspects making him different are perceived to be illegitimate and unacceptable.

Group membership limits the individual's possibility to make choices that are not in accordance with specific expectations or prescriptions dictated by the social group and internalized by the individual. Two elements are responsible for one's secure status. The first one is the existence of favorable comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroups. If a person belongs to a group that is dominant, he will evaluate himself positively. The second element is the individual's matching with the ingroup members. In the absence of these two elements or even one of them, the individual will experience uncertainty about his identity. To illustrate this, I will focus on gender nonconformity as an example of how a person transgresses the rules of his group. As Toni Lester argues, masculine and feminine traits are not only biological but influenced by society (Lester 3-4) Society does, in fact, create gender roles and expect individuals to adhere to them. The image constructed by society is usually that of the nuclear family in which the sex roles are defined by traditional stereotypes. These stereotypes indicate a set of behaviors and traits that are typical of women or men. Thus, sex role norms provide instructions about how the sexes should behave and what they should be. According to Pleck, sex role identity is

the psychological structure by which it is thought an individual psychologically 'validates' or 'affirms' his or her sex group. By developing sex role identity, an individual goes beyond the simple cognitive awareness of his or her biological sex to psychologically identifying with it. (Pleck 12)

This identification with one's sex includes accepting its attributes as dictated by social stereotypes. The more a man has masculine traits in physical appearance, behavior and interests, the more he is judged as having an adequate sex role identity. As discussed by Pleck (Pleck 19), one of the important elements that sex role identity derives from is identification-

modeling, that is the existence of a model influencing one's behaviors and decisions. This model is usually the father for the male child, and the mother for the female child. The individual is supposed to follow and adopt attributes attached to that model so that they become a part of the self. This model usually reflects culturally defined gender roles. One of the identification modeling theories that Mussen discusses is defensive identification deriving from the theory of the male Oedipal crisis. Feeling a strong emotional attachment to his mother, the child fears that his father will "castrate" him and represent a danger to his position. Consequently, he tends to become similar to his father and distance himself from his mother through the "identification with the aggressor" process. (Pleck 53)

The identification with a model is part of the socialization process which is responsible for deepening people's awareness of their sex role identities. There are several other ways of developing this awareness, such as adhering to culturally transmitted norms. To make it clear, Mussen refers to the cognitive learning theory which assumes that part of the individual's sex typing is the cognitive internalization of the culture's sex role norms. Thus, cultural beliefs determine people's characteristics and behaviors. (Pleck 62) Also, the reinforcement process contributes to instilling sex appropriate behaviors. Mussen explains reinforcement as the incentive that encourages children to behave in one way and not in another. It is achieved through many forms like rewarding children for sex appropriate behaviors and punishing them for inappropriate ones. It may also be represented in the expectations of parents that the child internalizes from an early age, like encouraging boys to play certain games while avoiding other that are thought to be liked by girls. Also, boys are encouraged to perform certain roles that the girls are not supposed to do. The reinforcement process does not only occur within the family but is performed by many reinforcing agents including teachers, relatives and social institutions. They all collaborate to define what a boy or a girl should be. The restriction of sex identity to a specific image suggests that normality would be achieved

only if the individual assimilates these collective values. Goffman's description of the ideal image of an American may be taken as an example, An American is regarded as

a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective, this constituting one sense in which one can speak of a common value system in America. Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself during moments at least as unworthy, incomplete and inferior. (Goffman 128)

These restrictions on what an American man should be reflect collective expectations and put pressure on people since they will try to fit the image even if it contradicts some aspects of their inner selves.

According to the Male Sex Role Identity paradigm explored by Pleck, sexual preference is a manifestation of the sex role identity. Accordingly, holding a sexual preference that does not fit the social norms would be considered as a violation of prescribed sex role identity. Here, it may be relevant to refer to homosexuality as a transgression of sex role identity in terms of sexual preference. Homosexuality has been treated by identity theorists as "a sex role identity defect." (Pleck 73) If this choice is acted out by the individual, he will be socially condemned and self devaluated. Deutsch and Gilbert assert that "if sex role stereotypes do not correspond with what people think of themselves, with what they think others want them to be, or with what they ideally would like to be, then... psychological conflict results." (Deutsch and Gilbert 373) Since traditional social norms are based on heterosexual views regulating male behavior, any transgression of this image would not be accepted. Gender is usually discussed through a 'heterosexual matrix'. Thus, homosexuality is perceived as threatening to one's masculinity. As Judith Butler highlights:

heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms... Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed or otherwise abjected gender to homosexuals, that is, calling gay men 'feminine', or calling lesbians 'masculine', and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender, it seems crucial to retain a theoretical apparatus that will account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and the shaming of gender. (Butler 23)

Gender and sexuality are profoundly interrelated and codependent. A safe gender identity demands an adherence to conventional sexuality. Butler illustrates:

Gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, and threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization... There is no subject who is 'free' to stand outside these norms or to negotiate them at a distance; on the contrary, the subject is retroactively produced by these norms in their repetition, precisely as their effect. What we might call 'agency' or 'freedom' or 'possibility' is always a specific political prerogative that is produced by the gaps opened up in regulatory norms, in the interpellating work of such norms, in the process of their self-repetition. Freedom, possibility, agency do not have an abstract or presocial status, but are always negotiated within a matrix of power. (Butler 16-17)

According to Butler, an individual's gender is governed by pre-established rules. Gender performance is informed by culturally and discursively constructed conceptions. Therefore, gender does not have a stable or fixed definition but depends on systems of power. Any transgression of the norms presenting heterosexuality as the only natural form of sexuality would be a threat to one's gender. Feelings of homosexual desire may then, cause fears from losing one's safe gender identity and being feminized.

Sexual inversion, a notion that dates back to the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was once used to refer to homosexuality. According to this theory, same-sex desire is an expression of one's inversion causing him to look to the opposite sex for gratification. Brown (1975) defines the invert as: "a psychomatic misfit having the body of one sex and the personality of the other sex." (Pleck 21) Therefore, homosexuality has been associated with femininity and gender deviance. However, masculine homosexuals are more disliked since they do not conform to the expectations that their masculinity demands. Homosexuals are subject to stereotypes that portray them as weak and that devalorize them. In a study by Gurwitz and Marcus (1978) on stereotypes attributed to homosexuals, male homosexuals were described as "less aggressive, more passive and less religious than heterosexuals." Taylor (1983), Freud (1922/1955), and Mac Donald & Games (1974) suggest that stigmatizing homosexuality is a way of reducing sex role confusion (Taylor 1983, 42). This explains the fact that conservative attitudes toward homosexuals usually come from people with great adherence to traditional sex roles. Those prescriptions are supposed to be as stable and inflexible as social norms about gender and sex roles. In order to maintain a positive self concept, nonconformist males might compensate for their lack of security in their sex role identities and their failure to live up to masculine aspects through hypermasculinity in which men try to prove their masculinity in an exaggerated way by overconforming to aspects that are perceived as masculine. This may reflect itself in violent behaviors like rape and criminal acts or practicing activities like body building etc... It is also echoed in negative and conservative attitudes towards women. Aggressive behaviors towards women could be interpreted as a way of allowing men to practice their dominance and superiority and consequently to protect their identities. Also, men tend to protect their masculine identities by adopting homophobic attitudes. These attitudes are performed even by

homosexuals themselves. According to Pleck, "... a male with insecure sex role identity defends against it by repressing it and this repression generalizes to a more global intolerance of softness, weakness and sexual deviance, an identification with power and psychological rigidity." (Pleck 104) Social pressures further contribute to individuals' repression of their true selves in order to satisfy the collective self. Some cultures have more rigid attitudes about homosexuality. They perceive it as a threat to the stability of the community. It is thought among scholars that black communities are less tolerant of homosexuality than whites. It is viewed by ministers of the black church as "unnatural" (Staples 93) Considered as the most influential institution which contributed to empowering black people during and after slavery, the church is an important source of homophobia.

Homosexuality was also opposed by militants such as Elridge Cleaver, the former minister of information for the nationalist Black Panther party. He declared in the late sixties: "Homosexuality is a sickness, just as baby-rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors." (Cleaver 110) Homosexuality was regarded as an obstacle to black nationalism, preventing the building of the nation. Homophobic beliefs reject homosexuals' abilities to participate in the building of the nation and engage in social movements and black issues like anti-racism. In his attack on Baldwin, Cleaver accuses him of betraying his race by hating his blackness and adopting homosexuality that is regarded as "a disease of the white man". He declares "There is in James Baldwin's work the most grueling, agonizing, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the whites that one can find in the writings of any black American writer of note in our time" (Cleaver 97) Cleaver and other conservative black critics relate homosexuality to slavery and submission to whites. Homosexuals were blamed for allowing whites to deprive them of their masculinity through being subject to a castrating sexual practice. Cleaver explains: "The white man has deprived him of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning

skull, and when he submits to this change and takes the white man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on "whiteness" all the love in his pent up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against "blackness"--upon himself, what he is, and all those who look like him, remind him of himself." (Cleaver 101) It is clear that Cleaver confines homosexual desire within an interracial context and sees it as an act that reinforces white dominance. This attack on Baldwin has been interpreted as Cleaver's attempt to mask a repressed desire. Former Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton announced in an interview in PlayBoy Magazine

I think Elridge is so insecure that he has to assert his masculinity by destroying those he respects... Baldwin is a homosexual, and Elridge finds it necessary to make a vicious attack upon him for this reason. It has always struck me that a male who attacks another male because of his sexual relation must have a psychological fear that , he, too might not be so masculine." (Newton 1973, Johnson 55-56)

In the same interview, Newton recounts his witnessing a passionate kiss between Baldwin and Cleaver when they met at a party immediately after Baldwin's return from Turkey. Newton proclaims that Cleaver asked him not to tell anyone about the kiss. This hypocritical behavior indicates that Cleaver's homophobic statements are a means to impose his own masculinity and blackness through attacking what he fears in order to protect himself.

One famous radical doctrine that links homosexuality to black submission is the Cress theory of Color confrontation (Cress 1991) in which the African American psychologist Frances Cress Welsing discusses strategies practiced by white minority groups to ensure their supremacy. Cress argues that homosexuality is one of the "tactics used to oppress black men." (Welsing 83) She considers homosexual behavior as a form of passivity and weakness allowing the white to suppress the black. She affirms "All black children should be protected by black people from being alienated against any of their genes." (Welsing 91) This statement

stands in accordance with social identity theory asserting that the individual is a product of his social environment, which makes his choices restricted to those approved by the larger group. Homophobic views encourage the transmission of heterosexual norms that restrict the male's role to impregnating women and participating in the proliferation of the race. John.E.Bruce, a new York journalist and supporter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association claims that "the home and the church must be the Man-factories" where generations "must be equipped and prepared to take up the work of their fathers." (Bruce 7-89; Summers 28) Even in families where the male model is absent, women were supposed to transmit male sex-role expectations by telling children how to behave adequately as men. Actually, homosexuality is considered as a betrayal not only of one's sex but also of one's race, especially within the black community where so much importance has been given to the concept of masculinity as a crucial element in blacks' struggle for equal rights with whites.

Traditionalists like Cake and Haughton link homosexual practices among Africans to the depopulation of the race since homosexuals do not fulfill their primary role of participating in the reproduction of children. From these views, one may infer that maintaining a socially approved masculine identity is very significant for the black community. It is symbolically part of the black man's struggle for his position in American society. For poor black men, the ability to have heterosexual relationships and produce children is the only way to impose their self-image and compensate for their lack of money and respectable social status. Carbado illustrates:

Straight black male strategies to avoid homosexual suspicion could relate to the racial aspects of male privileges: heterosexual privilege is one of the few privileges that some black men have. These black men may want to take comfort in the fact that whatever else is going on in their lives, they are not, 'sissies', 'punks ', 'faggots'. (Carbado 199)

Actually, homosexuals have been rejected in most communities and regarded as a threat to the traditional male image. Men who do not conform to sexual stereotypes may suffer from psychological disorders. They may feel torn between satisfying their social groups and satisfying their inner selves. This may result in feelings of hatred towards society but also towards themselves. Rejected minorities will blame themselves and may suffer from guilt. This suffering is much more exaggerated when the individual has a multiple marginalized identity that includes more than one aspect that does not conform to the ideal norms of society, for example being both black and homosexual. The individual in such a situation will experience both racism and homophobia. As reported by a black male homosexual, in San Francisco's gay bars black gays are asked for three pieces of photo whereas whites are not. (Staples 92) Thus, the black homosexual feels racial isolation even within the group sharing common aspects with him. Similarly, he will also feel isolated within the black heterosexual community.

Some people will choose to sacrifice aspects of the self to satisfy the social group and conform to its aspirations. This assimilation of minorities into the dominant majority will cause them to lose their integrated personalities. Ralph Ellison's statement is relevant here "Here's to integration, the only integration that counts: that of the personality." (Lester 84) Personality integration encourages the embracing of all aspects of the self. This helps the individual to achieve psychological well-being, since he will not be ashamed of anything that is part of his personality. It pushes him to explore his inner self by facing its hidden aspects and thus to conquer his weaknesses. To make this more clear, Freud's metaphor about the conscious and subconscious mind could help. One may be aware of some aspects of the self and unaware of others or choose to neglect them. This in term may be compared to an iceberg. The smallest part of the berg is the part that is easily visible, while the other part remains hidden underwater. If people have the courage to face all these aspects, as in psychotherapy,

for example, they will overcome the psychological barriers that prevent them from reconciling with their true selves. Carl Jung identifies the hidden thoughts of the person as the shadow self. Individuals are usually not conscious of this self, or are too willing to reject it. The encounter with the shadow is necessary in the process of individuation in which one's distinctiveness is brought to the surface. The individual develops into an integrated and unique personality that is different from the collective one. While personality integration demands that the individual exposes himself to aspects of his personality that he fears, many people find it difficult to achieve this because of social constraints. Instead, they prefer to perform elements which are already approved by society. The image that the individual exposes does not always reflect his true self. Butler affirms

In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender; performance as bounded act is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's "will" or "choice"; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. (Butler 20)

Holding an identity that does not live up to social expectations puts the individual in a difficult situation. Is he supposed to obliterate aspects of the self to satisfy society even if this will cost him his identity, or to defend his uniqueness and differentiation and so face the social rejection that results from his acceptance of his inner self? This dilemma has been portrayed in many literary works that transmit the experiences of alienation that fictional characters with marginalized identities experience. These can either make the stigmatized individual or group of individuals stronger and capable of reconciling with the self, they can cause them feelings of self-hatred and lack of self-confidence.

Baldwin's belief in love as the hope for mankind is represented in the novels I will discuss in the following chapters. While David in *Giovanni's Room* is haunted by social conventions and the ideal of masculinity preventing him from performing his true sexuality, Arthur in *Just Above My Head* manages to attain self-acceptance and the freedom of the soul and body by performing his sexuality. In *Just Above My Head*, love functions as a vehicle that helps the characters to establish a connection with the self and with others. It is another form of expression, just like music. This is consistent with Baldwin's ideas about the necessity of achieving a genuine sense of the self through complete acceptance of one's inner feelings. Repressing one's true feelings or perceiving them as shameful can only lead to self-hatred as in the case of David. Yet, expressing love may be a source of empowerment no matter what the object of this love is. In *Just Above my Head*, Baldwin explores the universal meaning of love and portrays it, whether homosexual or heterosexual, as the most important redemptive power. Choosing a character who is black and a gospel singer to represent homosexual male bonding is revolutionary. It has a symbolic significance since it breaks with the conventional image of the black male.

Chapter Two

David's exploration of the self in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

A journey towards self denial

Published in 1956, in an era of stubborn intolerance towards homosexuality, *Giovanni's Room* is considered a controversial novel since it openly depicts same-sex love and desire that could not be accepted easily at that time. Far from the issue of racial identity that is the focus of Baldwin's other works, *Giovanni's Room* exposes the complexities of sexual, national and gender identity and the psychological and emotional troubles that one may face when the authentic self does not fit the dominant ideal of national identity. Thus, the novel marks Baldwin's transition from racial issues that are mainly addressed to a specific community he belongs to, to wider issues of human identity regardless of race differences. Baldwin would later assert that "American writers do not have a fixed society to describe. The only society they know is one in which nothing is fixed and in which the individual must fight for his identity." (Baldwin 1964, 11) This chapter will follow the protagonist's struggle with his sexuality in *Giovanni's Room*. It will show that in his quest for the self in which he rejects aspects of his identity, the main character, David will ironically lose his true self . His attempts to match pre-established codes that will guarantee his status of being a white American male contribute to deepening his alienation. Leading the life of an expatriate in France, just as Baldwin did at the time of the novel's publication, David is exiled from his homeland as well as from his inner self.

The novel begins with David facing the window of a rented house in the South of France contemplating his past and the events leading to what he calls "the most terrible morning of my life." (3) Baldwin's choice of the window as the site for the protagonist's confessions is significant; it implies that a total confession requires an honest connection with the past, symbolized here by the act of facing the window while evoking past events. But the window also serves as a surface on which the self is reflected, reminding David of his origins and a dark past filled with guilt and sinfulness. He states "... my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains , until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past." (3) Unlike Baldwin's other novels, the protagonist in *Giovanni's Room* is a white American character. The issue of white American identity is raised from the beginning of the novel for its importance in influencing, but also echoing, David's self. It is an identity that suggests superiority. This will be explained further when discussing David's attempt to remain in the safe sphere of pure and innocent white Americanness, thus rejecting all that he perceives as "other". Also, David's dark past and sense of guilt is in conformity with his ancestors' history, marked by destruction over "death-laden plains" in order to construct American identity.

Through the use of flashbacks and first person narrative, Baldwin takes the reader on a journey of self-discovery in which we are introduced to the complexities of the protagonist's inner self. This journey is David's attempt to "find myself" (31) as he puts it, an expression related to the American eagerness for self invention and which suggests that "something has been misplaced." (31)

This may also recall Baldwin's own situation of being black and gay in a white American society which makes him a "misplaced" individual and a stranger in his own country.

David flees to France searching for the self and escaping a family from which he feels alienated. He grows up with a father and an aunt who are trying to instil in him values of masculinity, as encapsulated in his father's declaration "All I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher." (22) It is clear from the image that David's father expects his son to achieve that he associates manhood with the notion of virility, patriarchal power and all the qualities he believes a woman cannot acquire. This is also obvious in the way he addresses his son in a letter. He calls him "butch" (131) which further emphasizes the ideal of masculinity that he embraces and tries to dictate to his son. Yet, his aunt seems to disagree with this definition of manhood, affirming that "A man... is not the same thing as a bull." (22) She believes that he must provide a model of the righteous man to his son and keeps criticizing the father's corrupted behavior. A respected man, for her, should not spend his money on drink and women and come home late. David's family tries to implant in him an image of what a man should be, that is a model of masculinity which they expect him to follow.

This valuing of raising children as being male or female and establishing a safe gender identity for them is reinforced by theories viewing social influences as necessary in forming one's gender identity. Until the mid 1970s and according to available data, the individual's sense of being male or female, known as his core gender identity, was held to be mainly influenced by postnatal psychological and social interactions rather than by prenatal hormonal ones. Studies carried out at John Hopkins University by Dr. John Money and collaborators (Money & Ehrhardt 1972) held that gender identity is mainly influenced by the sex a child is reared as. Studies were based on hermaphrodites and people with chromosomal anomalies. In such cases, what the individual learns during childhood determines his core

gender identity. Many investigations sought to show the association between gender identity disturbances in childhood and the development of homosexuality during adulthood (Bell, Weinberg&Hammersmith 1978, 1981; Bieber et al. 1962; Green 1985, 1987...) According to Richard C. Friedman, this correlation seems to be the only way by which homosexuality could be viewed as psychopathological. (Friedman 35) Yet, queer theorists who came later like Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick offered new visions that rejected the traditional view of exclusive binary oppositions that could not be altered. They restrict all possibility of freedom in human behavior and establish stereotypes of what is normal and what is not. (Sedgwick 1990)

Generally, even critics and psychoanalysts who claim to have tolerant views about homosexuality remain anxious about its development among children and adolescents. Institutions and psychologists try to cure them rather than helping them to accept and adapt to their sexual orientation. Freud was among the few psychologists who did not view homosexuality as a disease. His views on homosexuality are mainly visible in a letter he wrote in the 1930s as a reply to an American mother worried about her son's sexual orientation. He assured her that there is no need to worry since her child's condition is natural and he named famous people like Plato, Leonardo Da Vinci, etc... who have been homosexual, which means that one's sexual orientation does not affect one's mental health or ability to be a talented or successful person. He affirms: "What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains homosexual or gets changed." (Freud 786) Freud believed that homosexuality is an inborn drive that is difficult to change, and he saw no need to change it since it is not a sickness. But he acknowledges the importance of helping homosexuals to be more comfortable in their

condition and be socially integrated. He also rejects the view that psychoanalysis should be influenced by social standards of morality. Freud declares:

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. (Freud 786)

Unlike the dominant views of his time, Freud's account is more tolerant and universalizing, refusing all types of discrimination on the basis of one's sexuality.

In *Giovanni's Room*, the vision of masculinity presented to David prohibits all possibility of making free sexual choices and will haunt him and influence the decisions he makes throughout his life. His masculinity will function as a restriction on his behavior and his individual choices. David recounts his first love affair as a teenager with his friend Joey. It is an experience that gives both of them feelings of joy but is followed by overwhelming shame and humiliation as expressed by David "I could have cried, cried for shame and terror... how this could have happened in me." (13) David internalizes a fixed perception of manhood that makes it impossible for him to accept a romantic relationship between two men. Thus, the image drawn by his father unconsciously becomes his own. This is obvious in his statement: "It was borne in me: But Joey is a boy." (12) David's feelings stem from his awareness that such a love is not accepted and does not conform to social norms or to the expectations of his father. He feels that his masculinity is threatened in such an encounter. He says " That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I will be tortured till madness came, in which I will lose my manhood." (12) David's fears may be caused by a stereotypical idea attaching masculinity to the sexual encounter between a male body and a female body. In the widespread belief that one's biological sex determines the object of his sexual desire, men are

meant to have sexual encounters exclusively with women. Otherwise, their masculinity would be questioned. According to this view, sexuality is related to gender identity and is shaped by it.

In the late nineteenth century, leaders of the homosexual emancipation movement in Germany advocated the theory of the third sex that was defended by the German homosexual lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1864-1879) in his attempts to win equal rights for homosexuals. According to this theory, homosexuality is an inborn, biological drive. Therefore, it is unjust to condemn homosexuals for a condition that is neither chosen nor acquired, but is natural. Yet, this theory presupposes that a female soul inhabits a male body, and this is what directs towards people of the same sex. This implies that homosexuals are biologically distinct and viewed as an exception to the rule of nature according to which people are born either male or female with inborn gender identities that restrict their sexuality. Although Ulrichs' purpose in defending this claim was mainly in favor of the homosexuals' emancipation, he maintains the axiom that sexual desire must be directed towards a different sex and that those with same sex desires are having gender troubles. Homosexuality was explained by the individual's psyche and feelings that were thought to be different from his biological sex. This view was criticized by many thinkers such as James Mills Peirce who states in a letter from 1891:

There is an error in the view that feminine love is that which is directed to a man, and masculine love that which is directed to a woman. That doctrine involves a begging of the whole question. . . . The two directions are equally natural to unperverted man, and the *abnormal* form of love is that which has lost the power of excitability in either the one or the other of these directions. It is *unisexual* love (a love for one sexuality) which is a perversion. The normal men love both... (Peirce 273–275)

Peirce rejects the dominant view that sexual love is naturally focused on the opposite biological sex and asserts that homosexual passion is a natural and pure love just like the heterosexual love is. He adds:

I clearly believe . . . that we ought to think and speak of homosexual love, not as “inverted” or “abnormal,” as a sort of colour-blindness of the genital sense, as a lamentable mark of inferior development, or as an unhappy fault, a “masculine body with a feminine soul,” but as being in itself a natural, pure and sound passion, as worthy of the reverence of all fine natures as the honourable devotion of husband and wife, or the ardour of bride and groom. (Peirce 273–275)

This view paves the way for Freud's theory of the original libido that gradually develops and becomes directed to a particular sex. Freud believes in an initial free-floating, or 'polymorphous' desire. He proposes a universalizing vision based on the idea that every human being is bisexual and that sexual desire is characterized by mobility. He thinks that all people are capable of making a homosexual object choice whether in their sexual activities or in their unconscious. For Freud, homosexual attraction is normal and he rejects all theories perceiving homosexuals as sick and in need of psychotherapy, or those ideas that regard homosexuals as a distinct sexual species like the third sex theory discussed earlier. He declares:

It has been found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object choice and in fact have made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. (Freud 145)

This view separates gender from sexuality and disagrees with the views articulated by the inversion model that supposes that homosexuality is the result of a mismatch between the individual's biological sex and his psyche. For Freud, homosexuality does not imply the

existence of 'a third sex'. In fact, every human being is born bisexual and the sexual orientation he settles upon is determined by many factors. This view was supported by the scale proposed by the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey and his collaborators (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin 1948) that accounts for diversity in human sexual behavior. The study is based on interviews with a large number of persons belonging to different social categories and aims at describing individual's sexual experiences using a scale from 0 to 6 , with 0 being exclusively heterosexual and 6 exclusively homosexual. The study shows that a large group of participants was exclusively heterosexual in interest and activity, a small group was exclusively homosexual and a large group was mixed in varying degrees. Even among those who claimed to be heterosexual, many experienced same sex desire whether in their sexual activities or in their fantasies. The results of this investigation were important to legitimizing diversity in sexual orientation and to countering social classification and discrimination. As stated by Kinsey

Males do not represent two populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behavior, the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex. (Kinsey 639)

Here, Kinsey observes that sexual experience is organized by the human mind and so are categories that are mainly a product of society. As opposed to the axiom claiming that people are either heterosexual or homosexual, Kinsey believes that the sexual histories of individuals are variable and may contain a combination of both heterosexuality and homosexuality and that sexuality is characterized by diversity.

He summarizes his standpoint by declaring that

If all persons with any trace of homosexual history, or those who were predominantly homosexual, were eliminated from the population today, there is no reason for believing that the incidence of the homosexual in the next generation would be materially reduced. The homosexual has been a significant part of human sexual activity since the dawn of history, primarily because it is an expression of capacities that are basic in the human animal. (Kinsey et al 666)

Kinsey's study attests that homosexuality is not an abnormal condition and homosexuals should not be viewed as an outcast group since a great number of people experience a degree of homosexual arousal throughout their lives, even those who present themselves as heterosexual.

Asserting that sexuality is variable and not fixed or restricted by any rules leads us to the discussion of David M. Halperin's article about the history of sexuality in which he shows that sexuality, unlike sex, is a cultural product rather than a natural attribute. Sexuality "represents the appropriation of the human body and of its physiological capacities by an ideological discourse. Sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect." (Halperin 416) Halperin argues that sexuality is influenced and controlled by society. Actually, he agrees with Foucault's claim that sexuality is not a natural and fixed element. Foucault argues that

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (Foucault 105-106)

It is clear that Foucault regards sexuality as a socially constructed fact. It is shaped by the social or cultural discourse that determines people's understanding of things. Foucault provides a historical approach to sexuality which ties it to social and cultural considerations and not a separate field. Halperin supports this perspective by giving the example of ancient Athens where sexual intercourse was seen as "an action performed by a social superior upon a social inferior" (Halperin 418) rather than a mutual act. Therefore, sex is a representation of social relationships of domination and a reflection of hierarchical arrangements. As Halperin puts it:

What an Athenian did in bed was determined by the differential in status that distinguished him or her from his or her sexual partner; the male citizen's superior prestige and authority expressed themselves in his sexual precedence—in his power to initiate a sexual act, his right to obtain pleasure from it, and his assumption of an insertive rather than a receptive sexual role. (Halperin 419)

This example is meant to show that in classical Athens, participants in sexual intercourse are not determined by their biological sex but are subject to the organization of social roles. The act of penetration becomes a way of practicing domination and power. Sexuality may be regarded like any other institution that mirrors and reinforces social relations of power. This case clearly shows that sexuality is not a fixed, natural attribute but is part of a social and political hierarchical structure. All types of sexual relationships are acceptable for the adult male citizen who takes the role of penetrator in sexual relationships with his inferiors in social status including "women of any age, free males past the age of puberty who were not yet old enough to be citizens, as well as foreigners and slaves of either sex." (Halperin 418) Sexual encounters are not based on mutual love or desire but are manifestations of social inequality since they could only occur between persons belonging to different social categories so that one is superordinate and the other is subordinate. Sexuality is influenced by Athenian public life. Sexual object choice is determined by the social

articulation of power, which means that if a man has sex with another man, his masculinity would not be questioned and this would be legitimate as long as the other man is of inferior social position.

Returning to the novel, sexual connection with a male body is for David a risky and threatening act. As an act of self-protection, David decides to leave his friend and invent stories about girls he dates. These attempts at escape indicate his unwillingness to face his true self. This is about more than a sexual encounter. It underlines the beginning of his encounter with the self he tries to hide. It is his awakening to his homosexuality, a reality that does not fit his father's model and that he perceives as "a cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern." (12) The cavern pictured by David is associated with darkness, narrowness, dirt and doubts. David predicts his fate right from the beginning and feels that a dark future is awaiting him. His flight from Joey is an attempt to escape the cavern and protect himself. Yet, by doing so, he gets detached from his true self. David tries to satisfy his father and live up to his expectations, but he is not able to confront him with his true self. He does not want his secret to be uncovered. As he puts it "I was in full flight from him. I did not want him to know me. I did not want anyone to know me." (23) David fears revealing his inner feelings since he knows that would disappoint his father. Instead, he fabricates an illusory image of himself that he wants his father to believe and to which he tries to conform.

Feeling uncomfortable at home and with his family, David chooses to flee to Paris in the hope of finding the self that he does not find in his homeland. Sharon Patricia Holland declares: "escape to another country is an imaginative 'out' for those who, like David, fear their queer acts will somehow divest them of their whiteness." (Holland 276) David wants to

preserve his status in the white American community but his feelings of alienation drive him to escape his roots and family in the hope of finding a space for his self. As explained in the preceding chapter and according to Tajfel's social identity theory, the individual's belonging to a social group seems to be part of his self concept and has many implications including the necessity of fitting into the larger group he belongs to. This "group membership" becomes a sort of commitment that demands the individual's loyalty so that he remains "within". This requires the person's congruency to the shared norms which constitute the pride of a particular group. Therefore, one's self-perception becomes dependent on how much one fits the social paradigm, and possibilities of distinction are very limited and risky. Trying to construct an image that allows the person to remain within the social circle leads to denying the importance of an individual's identity and replacing it by another identity from which the person may feel alienated. In the case of David, this alienation starts as a feeling of disconnection from his community and develops into a feeling of separation from his inner self. Whether by fleeing his family and country or by escaping his inner self, David is in a constant search for freedom. According to James Darsey,

The theme of escape or flight in Baldwin's life and work represents a refusal of constraints, an urge to freedom. Escape derives from the garment in which those fleeing persecution or prosecution would cloak themselves- denial of the self as a condition of freedom. And flight, too, is a form of release- from pedestrian limitations, from the law of gravity, from the boundaries imposed by the weight of color or sexual orientation or homeliness or physical frailty. (Darsey 195)

When David conjures the memory of an important event in his life, his meeting with the Italian bartender Giovanni in a gay bar and his affair with him, he insists on claiming that he was only trying to get money from his friend Jacques. He keeps rationalizing his visit and distancing himself from the friends he knows in Paris who are considered as belonging to "le

milieu", a French term used pejoratively to refer to the socially exiled. David's friends are part of this despised category. He keeps repeating that he is not one of them, as if he is trying to make himself believe it. He says "I was intent on proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company." (33) He tries to convince himself that accompanying them does not threaten the safe sphere he remains within. David acknowledges that he is endangered and under suspicion do long as he frequents these places and knows such people. Repeating that he is not one of them is an act of self-protection by creating a distance between himself and what he fears he is.

Inside the bar, David still tries to protect himself by rejecting what he truly wants. When Jacques asks him to invite Giovanni for a drink, he answers "I'm sort of queer for girls myself... I don't spend money on men." (45) David is lying to himself and to others since he is incapable of facing the truth about himself, and Jacques seems to understand. He assures him "I was not suggesting that you jeopardize... that immaculate manhood which is your pride and joy."(45) Jacques recognizes the ideal of masculinity that David is trapped by and tries to make him feel secure by asserting that his "pride" would not be threatened. Meeting Giovanni and spending time with him fills David with excitement and happiness in spite of his fear of the consequences of this "ferocious excitement" that he likens to a "storm". As he states, "I could only drink, in the faint hope that the storm might thus spend itself without doing any more damage to my land." (62) The land he mentions may be interpreted as a symbol for his manhood and the safe zone he tries to protect by refusing to respond to his instincts. David knows, that night, his attempts at resistance are unsuccessful. He admits his failure in remaining above suspicion and in hiding his excitement. He confesses that he loses the game with Jacques: "we had, in effect, been playing a deadly game and he was the winner in spite of the fact that I had cheated to win." (62)

In a moment of truth, David admits his lying to Jacques which he likens to cheating in a game. David's pretensions are proven false and he is now exposed before Jacques, who already knows the truth about him.

Evicted from the hotel since he has no money to stay there, David moves to Giovanni's room. He describes it as small, dirty and disordered with two windows that are kept closed most of the time. Giovanni separates his room from the external environment by obscuring "the window panes with a heavy, white, cleaning polish." (124) When David arrives, Giovanni is making some changes in an attempt to make things better. A wall which "was destined never to be uncovered."(124) bears the picture of a man and a woman walking together and surrounded by roses. The picture hangs like the shadow of a heterosexual romantic relationship following David and Giovanni and reminding them of their guilt. It contributes to creating an unsettling atmosphere. Baldwin's depiction of the space foreshadows David's future in this room, which is as chaotic as Giovanni's life. We know that Giovanni left his wife and homeland after their baby was stillborn. Thus, the disorder of the room is a sort of punishment he inflicts on himself. From the very beginning, David is aware of the implications of such a space and that it is not an ordinary disorder that could simply disappear. He comments "It was not the room's disorder which was frightening, it was the fact that when one began searching for the key to this disorder one realized that it was not to be found in any of the usual places... It was a matter of punishment and grief." (126) The room becomes the space that embodies David and Giovanni's pain. It witnesses their forbidden love that survives in this dark and private sphere. The arrival of David makes things even worse since the disorder becomes more apparent, as if it were a projection of Giovanni's inner disorder and confusion. The room comes to contain all of David's emotions and internal suffering and his struggle with his sexuality. Even the description of the yellow light hanging from the ceiling "like a diseased and undefinable sex in its center" (127) may be considered an

allusion to David and Giovanni's homosexual relationship which does not adhere to the ideal of a socially accepted relationship. The room seems to imprison the characters. By facing the disorder of the room, David is forced to face his confusion over his own sexuality. All of David and Giovanni's efforts to make things better fail, just like their attempts to handle the confusion of their lives. David feels entrapped with no hope of escape : "If I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost." (94) Yet, David refuses to admit, or perhaps ignores, that what he seeks to escape is actually inside him and that he is projecting it onto every place he visits.

David is overwhelmed by claustrophobic feelings that accompany him wherever he goes. In the bar, when Jacques comments on how he is getting on well with Giovanni, David has a strong desire to escape "I wanted to get out of this bar, out into the air, perhaps to find Hella." (60) Thinking of his fiancée, Hella, in that moment shows how David perceives heterosexual relationships as a way of affirming his masculinity . Women are, for him, the secure refuge he resorts to whenever he feels threatened, and the danger is always in relation to homosexuality.

When David goes to the apartment of Sue, an American girl he meets in Paris, he describes it as dark. After their sexual encounter, described by him as " a job of work" (146), David again feels eager to escape a relationship that does not satisfy him and provokes feelings of hatred inside him: "it was ending and I hated her and me, then it was over, and the dark , tiny room rushed back. And I wanted only to get out of there."(147) His reaction illustrates that he thinks lowly of himself when engaging in sexual encounters with women. His feelings after the sexual act mark a confrontation with the self, since he cannot pretend that he feels satisfied .

The presence of women causes David to feel entrapped and uncomfortable. This seems obvious in his encounter with his fiancée Hella after her return from Spain. David feels engulfed by her body which he likens to a "strong, walled city" (181) This city is a place that David perceives as both a shelter as it protects his image of American masculinity and a prison since it confines his feelings and restricts his possibilities of freedom.

The woman's body remains a mysterious and frightening secret for David. His childhood memories of his dead mother appearing in his nightmares remain engraved within him. He can see her: "straining to press me against her body... that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive." (15) The mother also symbolizes the image of the woman ingrained in David's subconsciousness. He feels endangered by her and pictures her as a terrifying figure, an abyss leading him to his tragic end. Baldwin's depiction of David's mother and her symbolic presence as powerful and frightening may derive from the predominant view that a particular family pattern characterized by an overly controlling mother and a detached father was a cause of homosexuality. In *Male Homosexuality*, Richard C. Friedman discusses some of the most important psychoanalytical findings since the 1930s that support this idea. (Terman & Miles 1936; Jonas 1944; West 1959...) Those studies examine family histories of homosexual men and compare them to heterosexual men. The results showed a dramatic difference between the two groups since the prototype of an intense mother-son relationship and a distanced father-son relationship appeared more frequently in the backgrounds of homosexual men. Friedman comments:

A characteristic type of mother-son interaction was more commonly reported in the childhoods of homosexual men than heterosexual: the mothers of homosexual boys appeared to be more closely involved with their sons, more anxiously overcontrolling, and more discouraging of autonomy. (Friedman 58)

Although David's mother is dead, she appears significantly in his dreams and plays an overly controlling role in his unconscious. Yet, David actually feels discomfort in the company of both males and of females. What stirs his fears is something located deep inside him and that he projects onto the physical places around him. Staying with Giovanni threatens the image he wants to preserve whereas staying with women threatens his true sense of the self.

Throughout the novel, David refuses to be associated with gay men. He uses pejorative words when talking about feminized men that he calls "les folles" , which is a French slang term used to refer to effeminate gays. He describes how they dress and behave in a way that portrays them as inferior and less than human beings. David distinguishes himself from this group of people and allows himself to make judgements about everyone but not about himself. He despises Jacques for his life of pleasurable relationships with men, and associates homosexuality with dirt and darkness. According to Harris, "He ascribes what he considers slime and filth onto someone else, just as the 'pure', socially elite." (Harris 25) Baldwin employs such a register for a purpose. Although the novel is not about race, the words David uses to refer to the homosexual "other" are the same words used by the white Americans to talk about the black "other". However, the other that David despises reflects the image of himself. It is an image that he refuses to face and prefers to replace with a fake image that would fit the traditionally masculine identity prescribed for him and that satisfies his white supremacy. Harris explains

In describing despicable actions, therefore, David, without specific reference to black people, or any encounters with them, uses the terminology of the cultural myths attached to them, to define what he envisions as being outside, filthy and dirty. (Harris 24)

In this case, the homosexual becomes the black "other" representing for the white American all that is inferior, evil and threatening. And according to the Social Identity Theory, the sense of belonging and commitment to a particular social group causes the person to glorify his own group and hold feelings of hostility towards the "other". David internalizes homophobic tendencies and prejudices developed by society and which make him fear the "other" that is, actually, no more than the mirror in which his true self appears. He cannot imagine a future with a man and keeps repeating that "people have very dirty words for- for this situation." (118) He continues, "it is a crime in my country." (118) This vision controlling David's thinking reflects conditions in which homosexual behavior was largely criminalized. Moreover, it was socially reprehensible since the accepted image of the family consisted of a dominating bread-winner husband and a submissive stay-at-home wife, a vertical relationship that determines gender roles and to which Hella perfectly conforms. David's fiancée repeats on many occasions that all she wants is a family and " a man to come home to me every night." (180) Hella's presence in his life keeps him in the safety zone and their relationship appears as no more than an interest-based one. It guarantees a stable social status for both of them.

David is struggling with his homosexuality. He believes that being a white American requires him to be above the "other". His American identity shapes his choices and makes him obsessed with preserving the values of cleanliness and innocence of his Puritanical heritage. Whenever he is in reconciliation with his true self, he is trapped by the necessity of maintaining and remaining loyal to the white American national paradigm that controls his thoughts. He declares "Voices deep within me boomed. For shame! For shame! that I should be so abruptly, so hideously entangled with a boy." (92) These voices are mainly the voices of his ancestors but also of his father who wants him to settle down and have a family. Wherever

he goes, David is followed by expectations which he cannot meet and he remains imprisoned by the cultural and social forces that are not limited to a single geographical space. In the house where he lives after Hella's departure, the caretaker, an old Italian woman, asks him to settle down and marry, thus taking on the same role performed by his father. She values the conventional family: "it is not right for a young man like you to be sitting alone in a big house with no woman".(100) She declares "your Papa will be very happy to see bambinos from you." (104) The reader feels as if the voice of David's father is echoed in many of his other encounters. All these external voices put pressure upon David and force him to merge with a socially valued image. Baldwin's statement may be relevant here "...we are rarely what we appear to be. We are, for the most part, visibly male or female, our social roles defined by our sexual equipment." (Baldwin 1998, 828)

Giovanni realizes David's willingness to maintain a pure image and accuses him of being unable to love anyone when he addresses him angrily: "You love your purity, you love your mirror - you are just like a little virgin... You want to be clean." (206) David appears as egoistical since he makes decisions based on his own interests and does not think twice before destroying others in order to preserve his "mirror image". As Baldwin argues, the image of the American boy is the image of

someone who is kind of a cross between the Teuton and the Celt... It is an image which suggests hard work and good clean fun and chastity and piety and success... and there is not much point in discussing the virtues it suggests... The point is that it has nothing to do with what or who an American really is. (Baldwin 1964, 130)

This seems to be the case for David who, in order to fit that idealized model of American identity, lies to everyone around him but also lies to himself. He pretends to be a person he is not. When he decides to leave Giovanni to assert his masculinity in a

heterosexual marriage with Hella, Giovanni confronts him with his reality "You lie so much, you have come to believe all your lies."(206) He also accuses him of being immoral. While morality, for David , means remaining within the social sphere of normality, for Giovanni, it is a commitment to integrity and sincere love that is not based on what you love, whether it is a man or a woman, but who you love. Giovanni describes David's engagement to Hella as a "comedy" (204) David is actually playing a role and trying to identify with it and this places him in a situation of psychological segmentation .

David fears that staying with Giovanni could feminize and emasculate him since he starts to play the role of a housewife when Giovanni is at work, and this is a direct threat to his masculinity. The role of domesticity that David performs should normally be attributed to the woman according to the model instilled in David's mind. David wants a secure social status. He explains: "I wanted children. I wanted to be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned". (152) Staying in the room would restrict him to an isolated and suffocating space of darkness causing feelings of shame and humiliation.

As a witness to David's true feelings embodied in his love affair with Giovanni, the room may be interpreted as a metaphor for the homosexual closet. It is situated in the outskirts of Paris, separated from the outside society as if it serves to shelter socially rejected outcasts. David feels imprisoned in the room and is looking for freedom: "I want to get out of this room, I want to get away from you, I want to end this terrible scene."(207) Paradoxically, it is only by staying in the room that David manages to come out of the closet and embrace his true self. And in spite of the physical restrictions imposed by the room, it is ironically a space of freedom for David's true emotions. David suffers from alienation and a disconnect between his inner identity and the outer identity he fights to maintain. This leads him to a state of social paranoia and an overwhelming fear of losing his status within the community. He fears

being in constant conflict with himself and thinks lowly of his desires. His views on his individual identity are influenced and determined by shared values and social codes that put pressure on him. As long as David follows a dominant discourse that alienates him from himself, he will never find peace with his identity and achieve self acceptance. His rejection of aspects of his identity will cause him to lose his self integration and remain with no identity.

When David escapes his homeland, he claims that he wanted to find himself after feeling an emotional rupture with his background and his inner desires. Yet, his departure does not connect him to his self since he keeps fleeing and denying the truth about himself. After a long journey of lies and illusions, David recognizes that there is no way to escape that frightening self because it is inside and is not related to his physical location. During his meditations about his life, he affirms: "if I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home. But again, I think I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat for France." (31) David knows right from the beginning that this search for the self would be a failure and nothing more than another lie he tries to believe. Actually, the real home and safe shelter is the place where the inner self resides. He would remain homeless as long as he rejects traits that are part of his self. David's emotional well being is smothered by his obsession over being condemned by the American community he flees, but that is still shaping his views. He is dishonest when he associates home with the socially accepted sphere of white patriarchal masculinity. He is truly at home when he feels a connection with his inner feelings, and his sexuality is a truth which he cannot avoid or exclude. David is faced with the threat of losing both homes since he can neither fit into the national image nor accept his sexuality. He is faced with the threat of losing his identity while

trying to gain his place within the "inside" sphere of accepted behavior. All of this drives David to his downfall. We find him at the end of the novel, lonely, desperate and tortured by guilt. He is incapable of involving himself in a heterosexual marriage with Hella, but also unable to accept his desires and stay with David.

Hella represents both a protection for his masculinity and a threat to his identity. At the end of the novel, David moves away from the window and faces a mirror which signifies his attempt to come to terms with himself. The mirror serves as a reflection of his identity and standing in front of it indicates that David will be set free only through knowing himself and accepting it. He declares "I look at my body, which is under sentence of death". (247) With this sentence, the reader feels as if David is deciding his fate and punishing himself. He is unable to get rid of his feelings of guilt for abandoning Giovanni and indirectly causing his involvement in murdering the bar owner and being sentenced to death. This again alludes to the idea of the white man's guilt for having constructed a nation through destruction.

The tragic end that Baldwin chooses for the book symbolizes the fate that homosexual relationships faced in that era. David realizes at the end that it is not possible to maintain his false state of innocence. In order to get free, he must destroy his false mirror image, grow in integrity and embrace his authentic self. He says "I long to crack that mirror and be free". (247) This freedom is what Jacques, his sexually self-accepting friend, urges him to attain while asking him to come out "Come out, come out, wherever you are." (83) Baldwin employs a register associated with homosexual liberation to indicate that David's freedom could be attained only through coming out.

At the end of his journey, David acknowledges the need for revelation in order to get free. Constructing the self and defending one's identity is not an easy process. It demands

making sacrifices and having the courage to accept possible consequences. Yet, David chooses to sacrifice his integrity in order to satisfy the community. The cost of seeking social acceptance is his inability to achieve personal gratification.

It may be relevant, here, to mention psychologist Vivienne Cass's theory known as the Cass model which explains the different stages of identity development that the homosexual person goes through. In her book *Homosexual Identity Formation: a Theoretical model*, she demonstrates that identity formation depends on external factors. Thus, dealing with one's homosexuality may differ from one person to another and going through these stages is not a fixed operation. The Cass Identity Model consists of six stages. First, the person endures Identity confusion in which he discovers his sexual orientation and experiences turmoil in dealing with it. This stage may lead to self denial, as is the case with David, or self esteem depending upon the individual's environment. Second, he goes through Identity Comparison in which the individual becomes aware of his sexuality but still tries to convince himself that he can build heterosexual relationships. This results in his feelings of social alienation. Third, Cass suggests the Identity Tolerance stage in which the individual starts to get connected to people with whom he shares the same sexual orientation. They serve to help him to feel less isolated within the gay and lesbian community but his social alienation continues to increase. Fourth, the homosexual moves to a more developed stage which may take more time to be reached for one person than for another. This is the stage of Identity acceptance in which the person identifies as a gay or lesbian person and starts disclosing it to some heterosexuals. More than tolerance, self acceptance is a step towards total coming out. Then we find the Identity Pride stage in which the individual integrates into the gay and lesbian community and starts to defend its shared issues and learns how to respond to heterosexual attacks and homophobia. And the final stage mentioned by Cass is Identity Synthesis where the homosexual identity becomes a part of the overall identity and only one aspect of it. Thus, one

is no longer defined by sexual orientation. This helps the person to overcome the fears of being identified as only gay or lesbian and encourages him to lead a normal life. This may increase his self confidence and well being. (Adapted from *"Handbook of Affirmative Psychotherapy with Lesbians and Gay men 2002"*)

In Baldwin's novel, one can deduce that the development of the protagonist David stopped at the second stage. He experiences confusion and sometimes awareness of his sexual desires but attempts to deny them and to prove his heterosexuality. But David never does feel self-acceptance or tolerance towards homosexuals and towards himself. His grief and tendency for punishing himself accompany him everywhere, and the disorder in his life never ceases to exist. According to Cass, external factors may influence identity development, but they do not apply to all people in the same way. And in this case, David's background and white American roots disrupt his self acceptance and make it impossible. Although Baldwin's novel was published more than twenty years before the Cass Identity model theory, one can clearly see Baldwin's awareness of the psychological state one may go through when discovering one's homosexuality. It is a state that Baldwin represents through many of his fictional characters. And certainly, Baldwin's own homosexuality allows him to understand the suffering of being rejected and being defined as "other".

This novel not only attests to the homosexual character's struggle to find a place and be at peace with himself and with society. Rather, it extends its insights to the suffering of various minority groups throughout history. Prejudices often allow majorities to exert oppression over minorities since their position of power allows them to make judgements and classifications according to their standards of normality. The standard on which acceptance is based in this novel is that of American masculinity. As Baldwin explains

The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggots, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden- as an unpatriotic act- that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood. (Baldwin 1998, 815)

This statement points to the sacredness of the American ideal of manhood that is pictured as a simplistic, fixed model that must be followed. But it also exposes the issue of how classification is used by dominant groups to stigmatize minorities. The tendency to categorize intensifies intolerance between people and legitimizes the oppression and negation of minorities. This oppression is embodied in making judgements and attributing names that the majority creates but may also be reflected in physical violence . This creates divisions which result in "insider" Americans and "outsider", despised "others" . Feelings of hatred towards particular groups allow majority groups who are often constituted of white, straight and masculine men to maintain their superiority and define themselves by negating the different "other".

Through *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin shows that invisibility and excluding aspects of the self may lead to negative consequences. It can cause the individual's devaluation of himself and subsequently of his humanity. While this negation appears here in David's identity denial, it may be understood in broader terms if we relate it to Baldwin's claim that one must know oneself in order to demand one's rights as a human being. Baldwin , actually, does not attribute so much importance to individual distinctions and values humanness above all. He asserts

that argument... as to whether or not homosexuality is natural seems to me completely pointless- pointless because I really do not see what difference the answer makes... How to be natural does not seem to me to be a problem quite

the contrary. The great problem is how to be- in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word- a man. (Baldwin 1961, 157)

Baldwin's belief in human diversity is obvious. Homosexuality is only a part of an individual's overall identity, and *Giovanni's Room* is not only about the homosexual, but is a universal call for human equality, acceptance and love.

Chapter Three

The intermingling of the erotic and the spiritual in *Just Above My Head*: attaining the emancipation of the soul through the freeing of the body

Published in 1979, James Baldwin's *Just Above my Head* is narrated by Hall Montana who tells the story of his brother Arthur after he was found dead in a men's room in the basement of a London pub. The novel chronicles the life of two black families and a group of friends who rely on one another in difficult moments. Different types of relationships in the black community are depicted including love, friendship and brotherhood. In this chapter, I will examine Baldwin's portrayal of male bonding in *Just Above My Head* and focus on the author's conflation of male sexual encounters with holiness, as embodied in religious songs, to produce a positive power that allows the characters to face all their troubles. Just as Baldwin makes of his homosexuality a source of empowerment and succeeds in establishing a reconciliation between his black heritage and his sexual orientation, in *Just Above my Head* the author shows the possibility of combining homosexual desire with spiritual and religious expression.

Throughout the novel, the reader follows the life of a group of friends who start out singing in Harlem churches and are later separated when most of its members go to fight in the Korean war. Called the Trumpets of Zion, the gospel singing quartet consists of Arthur, Crunch, Peanut and Red. The quartet offers a deep experience of male bonding in the black community, and provides a safe and secure family for its members to share their stories,

sufferings and troubles. For example, Crunch tells Arthur about his unstable family conditions and suffering. Being the oldest of five siblings, Crunch has no father and is forced to see his mother pushed into being "a whore" as he describes her (196) in order to earn money to raise her children. He recounts his story with pain and tears since he cannot help his mother to have a better life. He reveals to Arthur his desire to make her happy and treat her "like a beautiful woman" (196). Arthur tries to offer comfort to Crunch by listening to him and sharing his suffering: "his own tears will begin to fall." (197) The friends derive strength from each other and create a world of their own where they find the power they need to move forward in life.

The narrator recounts:

They cannot stop looking into each other's eyes. They have discovered something. They have discovered how much each cares about the other.. Crunch looks at Arthur endlessly, very, very gravely, as though he has never seen him before, and Arthur stares at Crunch, blinded by his beauty, by the revelation of his beauty. Deep, deep within him, an absolutely new trembling begins. He does not know if this is happiness, no words are in his mind, but he has never been so high and lifted up before. (197)

In this passage, we can see how Crunch's suffering is transformed into a joyful moment through love. By sharing the pain, the friends attain emotional transcendence. Each of them has access to gratification only by entering into the other's private space and breaking their isolation. This maybe consistent with Cathy J. Cohen's statement that "being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are. It means everyday fighting oppression, homophobia, racism, misogyny, the bigotry of religious hypocrites and our own self-hatred." (Cohen 33) The sincere revelation and opening to the other causes feelings of delight described by the narrator as "a wonder of joy rising in them like a flood, a wonder of sunlight exploding behind their eyes, everywhere, a great new space

opening before them." (198) This new space is probably the secure world the characters create through their union and the new family it comes to represent.

These male characters survive difficult conditions and a hostile environment not only through opening up to each other but also through music which is represented, here, in gospel singing. The gospel is of great importance for the group of friends but also for black community. It evokes feelings of cultural unity and conveys a collective memory.

The narrator describes Arthur and Crunch's performance of a gospel song during one of their tours in the South in a passage that anticipates the sexual encounter that will take place later in the novel. The narrator evokes the call and response taking place between them in terms that have sexual allusions, as if they were engaging in a sexual act:

Crunch's guitar began, as Arthur's voice began,
Take me to the water
Crunch moaned,
yes! Take me to the water!
He heard Red's witnessing falsetto, but he answered Crunch's echo,
take me to the water/ to be/ baptized.
He paused, and closed his eyes, sweat gathered in his hair; he listened to
Crunch, then he started again.
He paused again...trusting every second of this unprecedented darkness,
knowing Crunch and he were moving together, here, now, in the song, to some
new place. (206)

The reader can clearly feel the harmony between the characters and their relying on one another for salvation. The water and the reference to baptism have meanings of renewal, purification and the washing away of sins. The friends manage to attain purification only by sharing emotions and "moving together" as the narrator puts it. Again, there is a reference to their moving to a new place. Thus, gospel singing is a way of breaking one's isolation and

immersing oneself in the other. It is inspired by a powerful emotion that connects the two characters and will enable them to establish an erotic connection that frees the soul. Carson argues that "Only by freeing the emotion and emptying that emotion through song is there any salvation for the soul." (Carson 220) In this novel, gospel singing is the space in which characters convey their feelings and reach salvation. This is confirmed by the narrator's own declaration: "Music, wave upon wave, rolled from the church and I tried to baptize myself in it." (456)

A clear foreshadowing of Arthur and Crunch's sexual encounter is present in the narrator's description of how the song ends: "they had never sung together like this before, his voice in Crunch's sound, Crunch's sound filling his voice... Crunch and he ending together... Crunch and Arthur wiped their brows carefully before they dared look at each other." (207) The intermingling of their voices may symbolically refer to the bodily connection that will take place in their sexual encounter and their "ending together" is a reference to their coming simultaneously at the end of their lovemaking. The characters' homoerotic feelings are, thus, exposed in these religious songs. Just like sex, music serves as a vehicle for emotional satisfaction and freeing the soul. It provides the characters with a special language through which they can encode and deliver the feelings they have for each other. Arthur and Crunch transcend their circumstances through music and achieve their full state of being through their unity.

In this novel, religious songs are often used to express human desire for love and freedom. They fill the characters with optimism and the hope for a better future, as expressed in the following lyrics performed by Peanut and Crunch :

I woke up this morning
with my mind
stayed

on freedom (419)

Music may also be a way to please god and achieve connection with him. According to Glen Hinson:

In the eyes of the saints, song reigns as the chosen channel of celestial expression. [...] For the saints, pleasuring the Lord is the frame within which all sacred song falls. Whenever one joins the choruses of a congregation, sings as a performer before a church audience, hums melodic praises in a moment of privacy, or simply listens to sacred songs on the radio, one enters a sphere imbued with associations of celestial agency and godly delight. Engaging with song thus entails more than just engaging in praise. It also entails...partaking of the holy. (Hinson 110)

Here, music appears as a sacred practice. It is a way for showing one's sincerity and devotion to god through sharing feelings of love and discovering the deepness of the other. As Hayward affirms: "In knowing one another through our senses, feelings, and intelligence we come to know God." (Heyward 93-4) In *Just Above My Head*, the characters manage to have access to sacredness not only through religious music but also through the language of the body that, by connecting two individuals, enables them to connect with god. Both gospel songs and sexual desire are portrayed as acts of worship.

Following their performance in Atlanta, Arthur and Crunch have their first physical experience. Baldwin's depiction of it is at once explicit and highly metaphorical. The sexual act is described like a journey that takes the couple to a special space. It allows both Arthur and Crunch to surpass fear and uncertainty in order to attain the cultivation of the self and the freedom of the soul. The physical act of sex becomes their road to emancipation.

The events take place in a rooming house in Atlanta. Right from the beginning, when Crunch enters the room that he and Arthur share, we are introduced to an atmosphere of

darkness. Its depth becomes more and more visible as the events move on " the room was half dark ... the room grew darker", " his dark body glowing in the darkening room" (211-212). This idea is intensified by Crunch's closing of the door but also his request that Arthur get "under the covers" (212). The context suggests a moment that demands privacy and intimacy. By looking in the mirror, Crunch dares to have his first confrontation with his naked black body, the first step in freeing his emotions through freeing his body. Arthur, however, does not have the courage that Crunch has at the beginning of their encounter, and is unable to make a move. The narrator comments: "He hated being naked in front of anyone." (212) His body is like a secret that he fears to confess. Like any important confession, bodily confession represented in nakedness demands strong and sincere emotions so that one is able to get rid of one's fears, but as the narrator describes it, Arthur is experiencing disruption and confusion: "Arthur was frightened, then, he wasn't frightened; but he found that he could not move." (213) He has mixed feelings of fear and security: "a kind of peaceful terror." (213) Arthur's fears may be explained by what he has been taught, that a sexual encounter with a man is a sinful act. Arthur's feelings, together with the darkness of the setting, evoke the idea of the closet and the feelings of shame and distress that come from hiding one's desires from oneself and from others. Both characters share these feelings but together, they try to overcome them by allowing their true sensations to emerge. Arthur's first step in coming out of the closet is his ability to look at Crunch's naked body and examine its details as if he were discovering a secret or a mystery for the first time: He watched as "the face, and the eyes in the face, and the neck and the chest, and the nipples on the chest and the ribs and the long flat belly button and the jungle of hair..." (213) This confrontation with Crunch's body marks the beginning of the adventure and anticipates the transcendental elevation of souls through the bodily intermingling of the lovers . Crunch continues to control the situation in order to achieve what he calls progress. As he undresses Arthur, he comments on the stages they are gradually

achieving together. He states: "That's called progress...That's enough progress". (213) We have the impression that his fear of receding from the stage they have reached together leads him to assert the progress they are making whenever possible as a sort of guarantee of their advancement. While this "progress" implies increasing physical contact, it is a progress that exceeds the sexual sphere of fulfilling physical satisfaction. Indeed, it is a term that is usually used in the history of African-Americans who make constant progress from slavery to gaining their civil rights. In this context, the use of the term is ironic and connotes that the process of coming out of the closet is one of fulfilling one's emancipation. Both Arthur and Crunch are aware of the risk-taking and audacity that this process requires. They cannot reach the light if they do not escape their inner prison. George Kent's assertion may be relevant here: "Sex, for Baldwin, is obviously a metaphor for the act of breaking one's isolation and properly experienced, responsibly entering into the complexity of another being." (Kent 22) Thus, sex is presented as a responsible choice involving the consent and willing participation of two beings. It is a shared experience with all its dangers, sacrifices and unknown outcomes. This idea recalls Sedgwick's claim about oral sex, which she views as a practice affirming equivalence between partners since it is something that each can offer to the other.

Arthur and Crunch, however, are initially filled with feelings of confusion and turmoil. They fear the unknown. As the narrator puts it: "They really did not know where another move might carry them. Arthur was afraid in one way, and Crunch in another." (213) Yet, they do not withdraw nor lose this precious moment that took so much effort and "energy" to be attained. Different considerations mark their fear, as the unconventional and socially unaccepted nature of their sexual encounter burdens the experience. Feelings of shame, degradation and uncertainty accompany the couple. They are faced with the threat of being unable to confront each other afterward and of losing the love that joins their souls and is embodied in their physical contact. The thoughts filling their minds are highlighted by the

narrator: "They might look at each other, miles from now, when the train stopped at some unimaginable place, and wish never to see each other again. They might be ashamed, they might be debased: they might be forever lost." (213)

Crunch, in particular, fears rejection because of the darkness of skin." Crunch is the darkest.", the narrator tells us, and his outward conformity to the notion of black masculinity makes him more anxious and lacking in self confidence. This feeling is caused by a dominant patriarchal discourse imposing limits on sexuality which is supposed to be a practice that contributes to the proliferation of the race and ensures group survival through heterosexual relationships. All types of relationships taking place outside the circle of conventional sexuality are condemned and viewed as a threat to black masculinity and the black race. Also, gay males violate the image of black men who are usually perceived as hypersexual.

Elridge Cleaver criticized Baldwin's openness as a gay writer and his treatment of homosexual issues in his novels. He defended ideas of conventional black masculinity and viewed homosexuality as a betrayal of black nationalism and of the black struggle against discrimination. Being a gay black man was also sometimes seen as a betrayal of the politics of black respectability which demanded an adherence to an ideal image imposed by the larger group. Kali Gross says:

Historically, as a form of resistance to the negative stigmas and caricatures about their morality, African Americans adopted a 'politics of respectability'. Claiming respectability through manners and morality furnished an avenue for African Americans to assert the will and agency to redefine themselves outside the prevailing racist discourses. Although many deployed the politics of respectability as a form of resistance, its ideological nature constituted a deliberate concession to mainstream societal values... This strict adherence to what is socially deemed 'respectable' has resulted in African American scholars' confining their scholarship on African Americans to often the most 'heroic', and the most successful attributes in African American culture; it has

also resulted in the proliferation of analyses which can be characterized as culturally defensive, patriarchal, and heterosexist. (Gross 1997)

In this view, homosexuality is seen as incompatible with the model that a certain black conservatism required. Even Baldwin was not immune from internalizing these social norms. In a television interview on the Dick Cavett Show in 1973, he stated "... you want me to make an act of faith risking myself, my wife, my woman, my sister, my children on some idealism which you assure me exists in America which I have never seen". Baldwin, here, appears as representative of the black man who offers protection to his family. As McBride observes:

In black antiracist discourse, when all difference is concealed what emerges is the heterosexual black man 'risking himself, his wife, his woman and his children.' The image of the black man as protector, progenitor, and defender of the race is what Baldwin assumes here. The truth of this rhetorical transformation is that in order to be the representative race man, one must be both heterosexual and male. (McBride 77)

In this novel, Arthur and Crunch both experience feelings of fear resulting from internalized homophobic attitudes, but the more attenuated these feelings become, the more they advance in the sexual act and feel accepted by one another. Crunch is "... becoming more naked, praying that Arthur would receive his nakedness." (214) Perhaps the fact that Crunch is older and more experienced than Arthur makes him more aware of the dangers of the situation and its potential consequences, and therefore more frightened. With this encounter, Crunch learns to love his body and accept his blackness, while Arthur manages to recognize himself through discovering the other's body. Arthur moves from an adolescent lack of knowledge about himself and about the other to the mature experience of discovering "the mystery of geography, of space and time while running his fingers up and down the barely tactile complex telegraph system of the spine." (216) This description emphasizes the universal and holy aspect of the male body but also stands as a metaphor for the communication taking

place between the two men's bodies. This tracing of the male body's details may reflect Arthur's expectations from a body that will become his shelter and his world. The lovers' harmony and union emerges as they become more involved in the sexual act and give space to their feelings. The bodily expression experienced by Arthur and Crunch reflects their eagerness for emotional freedom. The narrator says: "Crunch's sperm shot out against Arthur's belly, Arthur's shot against his, it was as though each were coming through the other's sex." (214) This moment resonates with the earlier account of the two men ending their song together during the gospel performance. In consummating their desire and allowing themselves to experience sexual pleasure, the lovers are liberating their bodies and most importantly their souls.

As Arthur and Crunch go deeper into the experience, it is the inexperienced Arthur who takes the lead when he suggests: "Maybe we should make some more progress". (215) He declares his willingness to make more sacrifices and advance further: "I'd do anything for you." (215) Unlike the beginning of the encounter when Crunch took the initiative and undressed Arthur and touched his body, now Arthur seems to be more self confident and intuitive. He sounds more courageous and ready to overcome fear and take risks, whatever they may cost him. He becomes the one who offers safety to Crunch who "was beginning to feel at peace." (215)

Warren J. Carson comments that in Baldwin's novel "sex is presented as a new route to empowerment, an act that makes them stronger and more sensitive to the fuller dimensions of manhood" (Carson 220). Therefore, the sexual encounter transcends physical gratification and fulfills a spiritual one. Throughout the novel, we see how each of the friends becomes a refuge for the other. This is obvious through the metaphor of spooning which is repeated twice in the text: "They curled into each other, spoon fashion, Arthur cradled by

Crunch."(215) This same position ends their sexual encounter: "They went to sleep, spoon fashion." (218) This image makes the reader think of the couple as inseparable, each man complementing and offering protection to the other. It is not easy for Arthur and Crunch to reach this stage. It is, rather, a gradual process and a risky journey that they go through together. Their disclosure and success in overcoming feelings of shame and guilt is an emotionally charged experience that takes them to the way of emancipation. The American psychoanalyst Jack Drescher offers a clear definition of the process: "Coming out to oneself is a subjective experience of inner recognition, one that may be charged with excitement, trepidation or both."(Drescher 21)

Here, the friends go through a process of coming out, each to himself but also to the other, and with the help of the other. Within the narration, the reference to the train and the journey occurs constantly and carefully takes the reader through the development of the events toward the sexual act: The narrator is carefully depicting the train's movement and the journey's development: "the train was boarded...the engine ready to roll", "a journey had begun", "the train began to move" (213). The metaphor of the train may also allude to a historical moment in the nineteenth century when African-Americans escaped slavery with the help of abolitionists. Passing along the underground railroad, a secret network of routes, some managed to arrive in free states or Canada travelling by train and boat. Just as their journey was dangerous and required a lot of courage, Arthur and Crunch's journey is difficult as well. The result of the two journeys is also similar since the couple arrive at a feeling of happiness at the end of their adventure: "a moment came when Arthur felt Crunch pass from a kind of terrified bewilderment into joy." (217)

One of the most important aspects of Baldwin's depiction of the sexual encounter is the sacralization of the male body and of the sexual act, as in this depiction: " Arthur's tongue

licked his sacred balls." (217) The sacred aspect of their love is also emphasized by the use of religious terms. During their emotional and physical union, "nothing moved in the heaven"(218) The holiness of the two men's fusion is conveyed through religious references on several occasions, for instance, when Crunch's fear is described as "the terror of someone in the water, being carried away from the shore" (217), an expression that directs the reader's attention to the quest for salvation. This terror originates in Arthur and Crunch's internalized religious guilt that regards their encounter as offensive and sinful. The couple challenges community and religious judgments. The homosexual act which is not supposed to be sacred becomes a holy practice. Also, Arthur's joy is described as "peace like a river" (218) , a phrase alluding to a gospel song with the lyrics: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll....It is well, it is well with my soul." The sexual experience is thus associated with the peace and well being of the soul. Baldwin also employs religious diction in his description of their lovemaking by borrowing an expression from the spiritual "You must come in at the door". The narrator says "Arthur rose, again, to Crunch's lips. So Wide. You can't get around it. It was as though, with this kiss, they were forever bound together. Crunch moaned, in absolute agony, and Arthur went down again. "Little fellow. Baby. Love." You must come in at the door." (208)

At the end of the journey, the lovers are more comfortable and able to confront their desire and accept their inner emotions. Thus, Arthur "dared to look into Crunch's eyes."(218) The triumph and safety they finally feel in each other's company is similar to the triumph one feels when coming out from imprisonment to freedom. Arthur and Crunch's baptism is achieved by love and sex. Their happiness confirms John Lynch's claim:

that the search of man for self-realization comes ultimately to a point of genital cognition, that a morality and an ethic gonadic in inception are instinct in the bodily intercourse of man with man, that in the naked moment of sexual

confrontation between man and man are to be found truth stripped of hypocrisy and deceit, self-fulfillment beyond the necessity for proof and measurement, peace and security reuniting the male and masculine flesh and spirit (Lynch 48).

Examining this excerpt closely, the reader can obviously notice Baldwin's revolutionary representation of a sexual relationship involving black males who break the conventional rules by challenging their binary prison of black masculinity. Moreover, choosing the South as a setting for the events is also revolutionary since the area is known for its oppression of blacks, especially in the period of segregation and Jim Crow when the story takes place. Therefore, the sexual encounter becomes a challenge to space and history, and the lovemaking serves as a way of revealing the characters' oppression and tragic experiences. Their physical encounter is, actually, the bridge taking them toward the path of liberty.

Although it is not the focus of this chapter, it will also be useful to refer to the friendship of Peanut and Red, who are also members of the Trumpets of Zion. Just like Arthur and Crunch, they share all. As Peanut says about Red: "he was still being a tap dancer and a boxer and all that, when he was still making all those discoveries, and coming to me with them." (436) Peanut and Red were best friends and shared all their secrets. As in the case of Crunch, Peanut comes from an unstable background. His mother died bringing him into the world and he never meets his father. Peanut was raised by his grandmother and is lacking the warmth of the family. Peanut and Red also use sexual pleasure to overcome their distress. When Peanut is feeling sad and lonely, he searches for relief in Red's company. He asks him to share pleasurable moments: 'Hey, I'm nervous. You want to help me relax? I know a great way to relax.' Red is talking about the act of masturbation as a means of comfort that they each can offer the other. Again, sex serves as a path toward emotional satisfaction. Their friendship provides them with feelings of relaxation and consolation. Red describes Peanut as

being "as trusting as a baby, and I watched the way his legs moved, like all of him was new that night... I held him tighter, as tight as I could, and I watched as his dick shot and shot, against the darkness, against the sky, and I was very happy." (437-438) With the act of shooting, Peanut gets rid of his anxieties and achieves well being. Love and sex function as a remedy for male characters.

In *Just Above My Head*, both love and music uplift the characters and help them through difficult situations. When the quartet breaks up and its members enlist in the Korean war, Arthur seeks shelter in music and remains symbolically connected to his friends through singing: "He was singing for Crunch-to keep Crunch safe, and to bring Crunch back: he was singing to hold up the world... he sang to their love and their worry; he sang to their hope." (274) Music is portrayed as salvational and as a source of hope and life, just like love. Baldwin's voice can be heard through the narrator's conclusion to the novel: "It is a love song to my brother. It is an attempt to face both love and death." (529)

Just Above My Head is intended as a song deriving from human suffering that transforms it into a new hope for a better tomorrow.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that achieving a satisfying personal identity requires the maintaining of an authentic sense of the self. Having positive self-esteem enables the individual to reconcile with his inner self and to connect with others. One's self perception is of great importance in determining the way one judges oneself and others, but it cannot be studied in isolation from the context of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, my work has discussed group belonging and the construction of categories in order to show how social values and superimposed conceptions are of great importance in the building of the human personality. Certainly, many aspects of people's identities are socially constructed, including those elements that were once thought to be innate givens such as gender. In this sense, the self is forged by external influences. Yet, defending personal choices is necessary in the formation of one's unique identity and it is a form of resistance for surviving in a hostile society. When communal values become a threat to personal uniqueness, one has to fight for one's existence.

In my study, I explained that values and social norms are not fixed. They differ from one community to another and throughout history. This is consistent with Baldwin's valuing of the human being as the only reality that should be defended. The quest for the self is a unique experience that involves one's present and past and the different personal and interpersonal influences shaping one's life. For example, in *Giovanni's Room*, even though David leaves behind his family and his country in order to find himself, they keep haunting him and shaping his choices. He never manages to get rid of his father and his aunt's cues about how to be a good man. David is always imprisoned in conventional conceptions about morality. He never succeeds in liberating his inner desires because he is tormented by feelings of guilt and self-hatred for being a homosexual. Since freedom starts inside and is not related

to geographical location, David's geographical displacements do not liberate him. The individual has to resist by performing his free will and shaping his own destiny. As stated by Baldwin "Freedom is not something that anybody can be given; freedom is something people take and people are as free as they want to be." (Baldwin 1961).

On the other hand, in *Just Above My Head*, Baldwin presents characters who manage to reach their genuine identity through sincerity and love. Homosexuality, which is for David a source of sin, is portrayed in *Just Above My Head* as a sacred way of expressing human unity, much like religious music is. Choosing a black American gospel singer to express homosexual love whether implicitly in religious songs or explicitly through bodily connection is of great symbolic significance in the novel. Arthur's self emerges in a revolutionary way by rejecting the conventional values that may repress him.

Authenticity and genuine feelings are amongst the concepts that are valued in Baldwin's writing. The individual's truest self is attained through love. As stated by Baldwin:

Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace- not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. (Baldwin 95)

Through love, people face their inner selves and embrace sides of their human nature which they perceive as less worthy. Love should start from the self. Baldwin attests to the importance of love as a power that unites mankind and establishes universality.

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