

A boy's own story - book review

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Running head: Book Review Thomas Meyer SOCWK 330 Book Review Brief Summary A Boy's Own Story is the story of the author's, Edmund White, own self discover of his homosexuality in the 1940's and 1950's in America. A Boy's Own Story is the first autobiographies in a three book series pning the author's latechildhoodthroughout his adulthood. Edmund experiences a brief sexual relationship with Kevin, a slightly younger friend. Kevin and Edmund's intimacy is presented as natural and untroubled, untouched by the internalized homophobia that will later plague young Edmund's life. I was aware of the treacherous air vents above us, conducting the sounds we were making upstairs. Maybe dad was listening. Or maybe, just like Kevin, he was unaware of anything but the pleasure spurting up out of his body and into mine. " (White, 1982, pg. 17) Edmund's father does not serve as a good role model. Edmund's father was an adulterer, who later abandons Edmund's mother for another woman. Edmund's father abandons his responsibilities leaving thefamilywithout his financial support. Edmund acts on his desires and has sex with Mr. Beattie, an older schoolteacherof Edmund.

After society pushes the ideals of homophobia on Edmund he decides to turn in Mr. Beattie, thus turning his back on someone who has shown him affection just like his father did to him and his family. A Boy's Own Story ends with Edmund still unable to achieve a positive gay identity. His struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality is not over. Character's Behavior Edmund's evolution from adolescence evolved his understanding and acceptance of his homosexuality. He starts his first noted homosexual experiences with a younger male whose family was living with them.

He does not seem conflicted with the guilt and internalized & externalized homophobia that latter plagues him. Book Review “ I suffered now. I felt isolated to the point of craziness, but with a faint recourse to melodrama, to a potential audience and attendant end to loneliness, for if I imagined complete despair I pictured it as an emptying of the theater, a feeling that the stalls and boxes would never be peopled again...” (White, 1982, pg. 136) Edmund desire to fit into his perceived norms of societies forges into him a conflict of character.

He begins to seek out others for sex and affection. He hides his desires from everyone that knows him including a good friend of his because he fears rejection. In the end of the book Edmund is questioning the morality and position of religion and society on the issue of homosexuality. Theoretical Analysis One of the best known and accepted theories of homosexual identity development is by Cass. Cass developed a six stage identity development model. Edmund progresses through the stages in this first volume of his autobiography to the third stage.

At the end of the book Edmund seems to be still struggling with his homosexuality but has come to the realization that he is not the only one that has homosexual tendencies. (Cass, 1984) A psychoanalytic view of Edmund's homosexuality would focus on his relationship with his father and mother. This approach may question if Edmund suffered from gender identity issues. Edmund calls himself a sissy and girly. Edmund compares himself to his sister who he sees as the athlete in the family that wins his father's approval. Furthermore, Edmund states that when he was younger he had romantic feelings and desires for his father.

Edmund tries to gain the affection of his father and later approval of his father. In conjunction to having an emotionally distant father he also had a mother who seemed more interested in being a socialite over being a mother. These issues can be looked at using classical Freudian techniques. Book Review I personally do not like the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective because I feel the theories are not properly tested. I am also interested to see how Edmund's childhood being raised in an affluent family may have had an impact on how he developed as an individual. I will need time and further study to get a better gripe of this issue.

It was suggested in a Sociology class that there is a socioeconomic factor difference between the new rich and old money when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. According to the professor new rich like Edmund's family where less tolerate because they do not feel as secure in their economic status and feel a need to seek approval from society whereas old money may just see homosexuality as a form of eccentricness and they do not need the approval of society. I am still seeking a theory to support her statement. Summary Edmund story is an interesting look into his mind. The book has the flow of a common thought processes.

The story changes focus and direction at times to explore the story deeper. It is difficult not to be drawn into the story as I am sure was the intent of the author. I am interested in how Edmund further developed his personal identity and came to terms with his homosexuality. I will be continuing to read the next book of the series as I am sure it will be just as fascinating. I have grown in my understanding of the psychosis of guilt and homophobia. I feel a bit more at ease with myself and feel for others who have suffered

from society's concept of normal behavior. In many ways I saw myself in Edmund's story.

Book Review Reference: Cass, V. (1984, May). Homosexual Identity Formation: Testing a Theoretical Model. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 20, 143-167. Elizur, Y. , & Ziv, M. (2001, Summer). Family Support and Acceptance, Gay Male Identity Formation, and Psychological Adjustment: A Path Model. *Family Process*, 40, 125-144. Linda, G. , & Kimmel, D. (1993). *Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Male Experiences..* New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Troiden, R. (1979). Becoming Homosexual: A Model of Gay Identity. *Psychiatry*, 42, 362-373. White, E. (1982). *A boy's own story.* New York: Penguin Books.