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**THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE SECRET: TECHNIQUES FOR THE
NEUTRALIZATION OF STIGMA AMONG MALE HOMOSEXUALS**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1984

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE SECRET: TECHNIQUES
FOR THE NEUTRALIZATION OF STIGMA
AMONG MALE HOMOSEXUALS

by

JANET HENKIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York.

1983

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE SECRET: TECHNIQUES
FOR THE NEUTRALIZATION OF STIGMA
AMONG MALE HOMOSEXUALS

by

Janet Henkin

Adviser: Professor Michael E. Brown

This is a study of secrecy. It is an examination of behavior and modes of adjustment implemented by members of a highly stigmatized group. This research is a study of the strategies by which secrecy is implemented and sustained by a deviant population. Specifically, we are concerned with the responses of adult male homosexuals to the demands of a stigmatized identity. We are involved with the analysis of structural and behavioral adjustments that enable a group of culturally and legally deviant persons to lead relatively anonymous and publicly acceptable lives.

The study will focus on the ways in which secrecy is used and maintained to neutralize the effects of public stigma. We examine the consequences of secrecy maintenance upon both the secret keeper and those whom are deceived. The research deals with "secret" homosexuals, those persons

whose homosexual life style is not known or disclosed, and to whom others relate as heterosexual. Thus, this is an examination of the functions and the effects of secrecy as it is used by adult homosexual men,

Although the secret is value-neutral, by necessity, secrecy is generally employed by persons for whom control over information concerning their lives is necessary for their acceptance by the dominant culture. Their organizing their lives around their deviance is a predictable consequence of the pressures of negative societal reactions. For the secret homosexual, the concealment of a deviant identity by a variety of strategies keeps viable his access to the world of the socially acceptable.

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CHAPTER I

SECRECY AND SOCIAL STIGMA

"When a person keeps one part of himself secret, it becomes the most important part of all."¹

This is a study of secrecy. It is an examination of behavior and modes of adjustment utilized by members of a highly stigmatized group. This research is a study of the techniques by which secrecy is implemented and sustained by a deviant population. Specifically, we are concerned with the responses of adult male homosexuals to the demands of a stigmatized identity. We are involved with the analysis of structural and behavioral adjustments that function to enable a group of culturally and legally deviant persons to lead relatively anonymous and publicly acceptable lives.

The study will focus on the ways in which secrecy is used and maintained to neutralize the effects of public stigma. We are dealing with "secret" homosexuals--those persons whose homosexual life style is not known or disclosed, and to whom others relate as heterosexual. Thus, this is an examination of the uses and functions of secrecy

¹Merle Miller, On Being Different: What it Means to be a Homosexual (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 46.

as a response to the negative sanctions often caused by public knowledge of homosexuality. Although, as Simmel indicated, the secret is value-neutral, by necessity it is generally employed by those (homosexuals, ex-convicts, drug addicts, Jews passing as Gentiles, etc.) for whom control over information concerning their lives is necessary for their acceptance by the majority culture.² Thus, the organizing of one's life around one's deviance is, as Lemert indicates, a predictable response to the pressures of societal reaction to a deviant identity.³ For these people (as distinguished from the population of "normals" who also are at times selectively secret) the concealment of a deviant identity by whatever means keeps viable some access to the world of the social acceptable.

The Consequences of Stigma

One of the most commonly implemented societal responses to those persons and groups who have violated social norms and expectations is the withdrawal of acceptance and approval. Public awareness of deviance quite often results in a degree of social liability that affects the deviant in many aspects of his interpersonal relationships. The intensity and scope of this response is highly variable and may range from mild disapproval to severe social ostracism.

²Kurt H. Wolff, ed., The Sociology of Georg Simmel (New York: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 338-344.

³Edwin M. Lemert, Social Pathology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951) pp. 75-81.

To have a stigma is to possess traits or behaviors that differ from existing norms in an unacceptable way. Thus, the attitudes and reactions of "normals" reinforce for the stigmatized the relevance of the discrediting attribute he possesses. To have a stigma is to possess traits that have been defined by society as unacceptable. Goffman distinguishes between three different types of stigma.⁴ He refers to those "abominations of the body"--or physical deformities. Secondly, Goffman characterizes those behavioral or personality traits that violate strongly held cultural norms. These include homosexuality, drug addiction, alcoholism etc. Finally, there exists stigma that is attached to one's race or religion, a "tribal stigma" that serves to contaminate all members of a family or group.

For this study, we have chosen to examine the responses to stigma by homosexuals. In addition to the obvious social liability that generally accompanies a stigmatized identity, or other serious aspect of non-conformity, normal day-to-day living is often impossible, resulting, as it may, in a variety of negative responses, insults, and rejections. When one's deviance is able to be concealed, however, as is often the case with homosexuality, the potentially stigmatized person is then in a position to alter and/or possibly

⁴Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 4.

control the negative responses to himself. Thus, equal protection under the law, a concept that includes equal treatment in housing and employment has generally been enjoyed only by those homosexuals who conceal their sexual preference from those around them. Perhaps of greater consequence, however, in the societal and family rejection experienced by those homosexuals who have chosen to "come out" and reveal their sexual preference.

Legal Protection of Homosexuals

The legal status of homosexuals in the United States appears to be evolving unevenly. In the last ten years, there have been several state level proposals for legal protection some of which have been voted into law while others have been rejected.

Overall, an anomic quality tends to characterize official responses to homosexuality. For example, until 1978, homosexuals were routinely excluded from military or government service. In 1980, several women accused of lesbian activity were discharged from the United States Navy. Yet this same year, a federal judge prevented the Air Force from discharging a serviceman thought to be homosexual. In addition, while the State of California has legalized all private sex act between consenting adults since 1975 and former Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. signed an executive order for state employees prohibiting job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, in 1977, Arkansas and Idaho

reviewed seldom used laws against private homosexual behavior between consenting adults. Currently the status of official and non-official attitudes remain clouded, even though over 120 major corporations including IBM and AT&T have announced new non-discrimination policies for homosexuals. More recently a California Assembly bill prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals was defeated in the State Senate.⁵

Known and visible homosexuals are very often the object of public ridicule and censure more often than not. Religious groups have generally condemned same-sex preference and have used as their rationale the argument that homosexual behavior is a direct threat to the survival of the family unit.

Until recently a single parent who admitted homosexuality was usually deprived of custodial rights of his (or her) children, even if such a person had exhibited a stable home by living permanently in a committed relationship with another person. The courts still consider a homosexual home an improper environment for children. Here again, however, there is evidence of some degree of social change and these cases are characterized by extremely individual considerations not necessarily based on established legal precedents.⁶

A large percentage of homosexuals in the United

⁵Los Angeles Times, 24 March 1983, Sec. II, p. 1.

⁶See Ann Fadiman, "The Double Closet," LIFE May 1983, pp. 76-84.

States seem able to avoid the risk of public censure. For it is impossible to know how many persons in this country are actually homosexual. Kinsey suggested that 4 percent of adult white males in the United States are exclusively homosexual throughout their lives. He further estimated that 37 percent of the total male population has had some overt homosexual experience.⁷

There still exists much disagreement concerning the accuracy of these and other available statistics. More recently the Institute for Sex Research funded by Kinsey estimates that homosexuals constitute 10 percent of the U.S. population.⁸ This figure generally refers to 5 percent of females and 13 percent of adult males in the U.S. Moreover, leaders of the gay community still consider only 1 or 2 percent of these to lead publicly homosexual lives. It is believed that these official figures represent but a small fraction of the homosexual activity that exists within American society. Most experts appear convinced that there has been some increase in recent years in the incidence of homosexuality although as Schur points out, it is extremely difficult to be sure that such apparent increase is not primarily a reflection of greater research in the area and

⁷Albert C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia: Saunders Press, 1948).

⁸Time, 23 April 1979: 72-76.

a possible focus of attention on sexuality in general by the public at large.⁹

The Legal Consequences of Stigma

All societies experience the need to codify into law those actions or prohibitions believed essential to its survival. Human sexual expression has in particular been regulated by strongly held cultural attitudes and severe legal sanctions. However, several Western countries have, within the last decade, questioned both their laws and their cultural dread of homosexuality. Although the legal sanctions against homosexuality are only haphazardly enforced, their existence in the statutes serves as both a reminder of what sanctions are legally possible as well as a reinforcement of public attitudes concerning homosexuality. Thus, for persons leading a socially unacceptable and highly stigmatizing life style, the existence of highly punitive laws reinforces their need for secrecy. The fact that the law is a significant vehicle of social change does not, for the deviant, negate important problems of social interaction and personal survival in an alien milieu.

The existence of laws concerning homosexuality greatly increases the consequences of being identified as a homosexual. These laws reinforce the social ostracism and

⁹Edwin M. Schur, Crimes Without Victims (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall 1965), p. 75

condemnation that exposure of one's identity entails. The existence of legal sanctions serves to reinforce the need for secrecy among those whose behavior is in violation of these laws.

Strangely, nowhere among the nations of the Western hemisphere is there an overriding and all encompassing set of legal and/or social norms concerning homosexual behavior. Within the United States, penalties range from a possible sentence of life at hard labor in Georgia to legal acceptance of privately enacted homosexuality in the states of Delaware, Connecticut and Illinois. In New York City, there has existed since 1966 a permissive policy toward enforcement of laws concerning homosexuality. Dating from the election of John Lindsay as Mayor in 1965, New York City has altered its policy of entrapment and harassment by making it mandatory for any complaint to be signed by a private citizen. The existing laws are rarely enforced. However, even with the benign view presently held by city officials, homosexuals are often subject to repressive action by law enforcement personnel.¹⁰

A brief survey of the legal status of homosexuality in European nations also indicates vast fluctuations in the

¹⁰For a critical review of changes in the New York laws concerning sexual behavior, see Morris Ploscogue, "Sex Offenses in the New Penal Law," Brooklyn Law Review 32 (1966): 274-86; For a discussion of homosexuality and the law see Gilbert Geis, Not the Law's Business? (Rockville, Md.: National Institute of Mental Health, 1972).

public and legal reactions to homosexuality. For the most part, the laws seem to be concerned not so much with the practice of homosexuality itself, except in West Germany, where all homosexual acts between males are illegal, but upon offending the public interest and sense of decency. Thus, in effect, these laws focus on the use of force, seduction of children, or public display. Subsequently, the application of laws concerning homosexual behavior is almost non-existent in Western Europe, regardless of the severity of the laws themselves.¹¹

Responses of the Stigmatized

Research into the social consequences of stigma has produced insights concerning the responses of the stigmatized to a stigmatized identity.¹² The variety and scope of these responses seem to contain varying degrees of ambivalence. More important, however, is that these responses to stigma are often attempts to neutralize the social and personal liabilities that so often result from possessing unacceptable traits. Situational and personal variables often function to channel the type and degree of response of socially discreditable. These responses do, however, share a common

¹¹ Clellan S. Ford and Frank A. Beach, Patterns of Sexual Behavior (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

¹² Goffman, Stigma, pp. 105-125; also see R.H. Turner, "Deviance Avowal as Neutralization of Commitment" Social Problems 19 (Spring 1972): 309-321.

social reality. They are all implemented to alleviate the negative consequences of stigma that include not only the high possibility of social rejection but also anxiety, ambiguity, and tensions in one's interpersonal relationships. These responses include: (1) deviance disavowal, (2) deviance avowal, (3) altering behavior to conform with societal norms, (4) re-education of the public concerning their attitudes towards the deviance and (5) the use of secrecy and information control. These techniques may operate independent of each other or as mutually reinforcing responses to stigma.

Because of the liabilities and negative implications of a deviant role, the disavowal of deviance is a common and usual response to deviance. Disavowal to a great extent reinforces the role of the deviant as an active participant in the interactions that lead to his identification as either deviant or normal.¹³

In yet other instances, deviance avowal is a preferable response not only as public acceptance of the deviant label but as a response to what is perceived as a forced

¹³For a discussion of the functions of embarrassment in the re-affirmation of interpersonal expectations and definitions, see E. Goffman, "Embarrassment and Social Organization," American Journal of Sociology 62 (November 1956): 264-271; also see, F. Davis, "Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visibly Handicapped," Social Problems 9 (Fall 1961): 120-132.

choice between group loyalties.¹⁴ Thus, if a homosexual can, from mannerisms or other symbolic cues, insure that others recognize his true identity, he may protect himself from the embarrassment of possible disclosure. By using discretion in his social interactions, he may opt for toleration of his deviance. This serves to emancipate him from the problems of misrepresentation and secrecy. Thus, by eliminating ambiguity of social roles, he may experience a freedom from social pressures and expectations. Deviance avowal as a response to stigma is a means of using the deviant label "neutralizing many performance demands and escaping situations that are made difficult by an otherwise ambiguous identity."¹⁵

Other deviants implement quite different patterns as a means of coping with societal responses to their deviance. Some deviants feel it necessary to both resist and reject public stigma through a variety of techniques of manipulation where interpersonal situations arise. The public disavowal of one's deviance through role-playing, deception, or changing localities, etc., is a commonly observed response to stigmatizing situations when one either cannot or will not disassociate himself from his stigmatizing social role.

¹⁴Turner, "Deviance Avowal as Neutralization of Commitment." 309-21.

¹⁵Ibid. p. 316.

Stigmatized persons may also respond to societal condemnation by eliminating the discrediting traits. Avoidance of stigma through alteration of one's homosexual behavior is problematic at best. Certain types of socially disapproved behavior patterns may be given up by the stigmatized themselves as a response to the social liabilities that the behavior in question generates. Thus, the unemployed may find work, the political radical may moderate his commitment and public activities. In some cases, homosexuals have entered psychotherapy to be "cured" of the undesirable sexual preference.

For the most part, however, the stigmatized rarely are able to choose not to have the social identity or traits that they in fact possess. For social condemnation of the deviant ultimately permeates a person's total identity. Stigma does not only apply to unacceptable or discrediting properties. For the drug addict, the ex-convict, as well as for the homosexual, there remains a stigmatizing label that endures even when the deviant behavior no longer exists. What then becomes discredited is the person himself and not the behavior. In effect, he becomes one with the social label.

In some instances, deviants, through formal organizations work toward the de-stigmatization of their social roles through public re-education programs, social and political militancy and various consciousness-raising

techniques.¹⁶ As an attempt to neutralize stigma, one may try to change the social meaning of his behavior. Groups such as the Fortune Society, an organization of ex-convicts, attempt through the use of public avowal and voluntary discussion, to change societal attitudes towards them. A variety of homophile organizations such as the Mattachine Society, Gay Activist Alliance, and the Gay Liberation Front are openly declaring their sexual preference not only to avail themselves of the freedom that deviance avowal creates, but, in addition, to illustrate to a rejecting public that being homosexual does not necessarily make them unacceptable in other roles and in interpersonal relationships not connected with their homosexuality. Thus, the eradication of the inevitability of social condemnation has become a recognized goal of deviant groups and organizations.

For persons who are different from the majority in a way that is not immediately apparent, the neutralization of stigma through the use of information management and secrecy becomes a truly viable possibility as an alternative life style. In the course of all social interactions there exists a need for varying degrees of secrecy and disclosure of information concerning ourselves. In many ways, all persons operate a selection process whereby we can exert some

¹⁶See Edward Sagarin, Odd Man In: Societies of Deviants in America, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

measure of control over the information that others acquire about us. It is on the basis of this information that a wide range of personal judgments and attitudes are based.

The availability of identifying facts about the lives of others is one of the primary supports of human social systems based as they are upon social roles and their corresponding statuses. The necessity for the control of social information has become a critical element of interpersonal situations in mass society. In normal social processes, the closeness of friends and acquaintances can often be measured by the degree to which they are given access to personal information and knowledge concerning ourselves. What is appropriate disclosure of information in one situation may become a violation of informal social distance codes in another. Cooley's analysis of the functional prerequisites of primary and secondary relationships reinforces the measurement of social distances through varying degrees of intimacy, disclosure, or indifference.¹⁷

In his analysis of the management of a "spoiled identity," Goffman distinguishes between a "discredited" person and one who is "discreditable."¹⁸ This distinction is vital to this analysis. Essentially, this notes the

¹⁷C. H. Cooley, Social Organization, (New York: Scribners, 1909).

¹⁸Goffman, Stigma, pp. 42-43.

difference between a person whose deviance is known to others and one whose deviance is not immediately apparent. For the deviant who has the option of passing as normal (physically deformed persons do not generally have this alternative) the concealment of discreditable facts becomes central to the maintenance of a "normal" identity. For this person, then, secrecy and concealment become indispensable responses in their interpersonal relationships. To the person for whom disclosure will reveal the presence of unacceptable and stigmatizing traits, the problems of secrecy and information control are critical for the maintenance of primary as well as secondary interpersonal relationships.

This, then, is the central issue here. For there exist persons who are in no way distinguishable from others in the society yet who have an unacceptable and highly stigmatizing social trait. They are homosexuals. For these people, public knowledge of this fact may lead to social condemnation as well as to economic and occupational liabilities. In order to interact as normals, these persons must incorporate into their everyday social relationships those techniques of secrecy and information control specifically designed to conceal those facts which might produce undesirable social consequences.

The need for secrecy is one of the most essential issues in the life of covert homosexuals seeking a satisfactory way of life. Passing as straight (heterosexual) means the concealment of one's homosexuality. Those who

chose this response do so in anticipation of the negative sanctions that so often accompany disclosure. For the secret homosexual, passing creates a degree of social and occupational anonymity that allows them to function as normals. Secrecy and its preservation become incorporated into the secret homosexual's life style as an institutionalized response to the problems of social acceptance. Secrecy may become a means of both adaptation and control over social situations encountered in normal living.

Secrecy as Normative Social Process

The voluntary withholding of realities by a variety of techniques is a fundamental element of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Even when one party in a relationship is unaware of the existence of a secret, the behavior of the concealer and therefore the entire relationship is modified and structured by the secret's existence. To the secret deviant, the use of secrecy as a sociological technique is essential to the attainment of certain personal and social goals. For this person, secrecy is a strategy of survival upon which much of his life is structured. Its existence provides him not only with a sense of being different; it becomes a commodity owned by the person and from whose possession outsiders are excluded. Thus,

the secret gives one a position of exception; it operates as a purely socially determined attraction. It is basically independent of the content it guards but of course is increasingly effective in the

measure in which the exclusive possession is vast and significant.¹⁹

The fear that one's secret will be discovered provides both a sense of excitement and an everpresent anxiety for the secret holder. For a secret can be betrayed. This tension is an intrinsic part of every secret. In the consequences of betrayal rest the possibility and even the temptation of betrayal. One may be discovered and may also be his own betrayer by giving one's self away.

Fear of disclosure and the anticipation of ensuing social sanctions create for the secret homosexual a heightened consciousness of his discreditable identity. The meaning of secrecy is intensified when its disclosure might produce an irreparable rupture in the person's network of family and social interactions. To those with a secret to keep, the natural curiosity of others is a constant source of anxiety. The tension of secrecy maintenance may be a counterproductive force upon the individual's capacity to keep the secret. The secret homosexual, as well as other secret deviants, has chosen the social pressures created by the existence of his secret. This represents his own adjustment to the problems created for those who live within a society that had defined their life style and, indeed, to some extent, their very existence as a moral affront.

The secret should not be confused with either privacy

¹⁹Wolff, ed., Georg Simmel, p. 332.

or the right to privacy. In fact, the principles of privacy, secrecy, and public knowledge are not mutually supportive. Secrecy is privacy made compulsory.²⁰ Secrecy implies the deliberate withholding of information often reinforced by the possibility of negative sanctions upon disclosure. There appears to exist a strong element of coercion within the secret. By way of contrast, privacy has been defined as the voluntary withholding of information reinforced by a willing indifference.²¹ Thus, secrecy becomes more than an extension of privacy. It is "privacy with higher more impossible barriers." Paradoxically, Shils sees secrecy as the "enemy of privacy." For they both co-exist within a delicate equilibrium that is in constant threat of disruption should others become threatened and therefore distrustful of the right of privacy to exist. For Shils, the fear of secrets may culminate in the denial of the rights of privacy. Thus, denial of the right of privacy may ultimately provide the necessary motivation for even greater compulsory withholding of information.²²

²⁰ Edward Shils, The Torment of Secrecy, (Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1956), p. 26.

²¹ Ibid., p. 201.

²² Shils' analysis of organizational and governmental secrecy reveals his belief in the relative intolerance of Americans for those with a secret. Americans are, according to Shils, extremely suspicious and uneasy when confronted with persons who appear to be concealing something. Ibid., pp. 41-45.

Truthfulness, lies, and deceptions are all essential elements of human social interaction. They can all be used for purposes of personal and/or political expedience. Indeed, acceptable discretion and privilege are an essential component of political maneuvering and organization. That these same elements exist in interpersonal relationships is quite clear. They acquire greater meaning for those for whom disclosure would prove untenable. The secret homosexual depends upon secrecy and techniques for its success to provide access to the world of "normals." The secret homosexual's need for secrecy provided for the sociologist an opportunity to study and analyze techniques and strategies of information control as these techniques represent an essential element in the lives of secret deviants. A study of the use of secrecy by deviants may allow us a better understanding of the functions of secrecy as a general social process.

Preliminary Propositions

Secrecy as a technique of social manipulation is an essential element in both organizational and interpersonal structures. The power contained in the control over truthful disclosure may, in the case of the secret homosexual, effectively operate to establish him in the minds of others as an acceptable member of the society. A certain amount of information is essential to all social interactions. The disclosure to others of aspects of one's self and one's biography is virtually a necessity in all but the most

superficial relationships. For the deviant, the ability to conceal information that would be discrediting becomes a technique for the manipulation and control of a potentially hostile social environment. In order to study the use of secrecy as a response to the social liabilities of stigma, the following areas of inquiry become useful.

1. To what extent is one able to use secrecy to disguise deviance? Can secret homosexuals not wishing public knowledge of their sexual orientation structure their lives to produce normal social selves for those whom they fear disclosure. How is this secrecy implemented?

2. Does secrecy maintenance as an integrated aspect of social interaction necessitate a compartmentalization of self? Segregation of roles requires an awareness of the appropriate rules and expectations in the various groups with which one associates. For the secret homosexual to be reasonably successful in his double social identity, he must be sensitive to the social requirements of both the gay as well as the straight worlds. In leading a "double life," the secret deviant takes advantage of the fact that he is not simultaneously in contact with both groups.²³ Thus, one plays the approved role in each and may ignore one group's expectations when in contact with the other. Roles demand particular responses by setting up

²³Jackson Toby, "Some Variables in Role Conflict Analysis." Social Forces 30 (March 1952): 323-327.

norms which prescribe certain acts and forbid the acting out of others. Thus, one vital element in secrecy and deliberate deception is an awareness of the role expectations of others. Are role conflicts exacerbated by the use of secrecy? What role conflicts are avoided by the careful control of public image and behavior?

3. Rarely are secret deviants totally secret.

There are usually some persons to whom the secret homosexual discloses his secret. This strategy of "selective disclosure" affords the secret homosexual the luxury of being accepted by those heterosexuals to whom his sexual orientation does not represent a moral or ethical issue. In addition, persons with a secret generally feel a great need to share it. One can dissolve some of the tension of secrecy maintenance by its disclosure. Secret homosexuals are never entirely covert. At the very least, their sex partners and lovers know of their deviance. Perhaps more significant, however, is that specially selected others in the straight (heterosexual) world are allowed to share the secret. How and under what conditions do secret homosexuals select to whom they will reveal their deviance? On what basis are these disclosures made?

4. Persons passing as heterosexual must take special precautions against disclosure. The secret homosexual must constantly protect himself from revealing his secret or from dropping inadvertent clues regarding his deviance. His

reality is structured to provide maximum protection against disclosure.

Lyman and Scott have indicated that secret homosexuals require heightened perceptions and awareness in order to avoid disclosure. They indicate that due to the danger of discovery, "passers must develop a more heightened awareness and sharper perspective on ordinary affairs and everyday encounters than those for whom concealment is not an issue."²⁴ Our study suggests the following questions in this regard. How do secret homosexuals respond to the necessity of being constantly aware of the anticipated responses of others? What strategies are used to facilitate this awareness?

5. The major function of the homosexual subculture lies in its psychological and social supports. It is within this social context that the homosexual is accepted as such. While functioning within this subculture, anxieties and tensions about disclosure lose their importance. However, unlike the overt homosexual who tends to immerse himself within the gay community, the secret homosexual operates in several social realities. He tends to form small cliques generally comprised of other homosexuals with whom he shares

²⁴Stanford M. Lyman and Marvin B. Scott, A Sociology of the Absurd. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970). p. 41.

common interests and friendship.²⁵ He does not operate within the homosexual world on an everyday basis. From this research, we may see if these more loosely integrated social groups provide an alternative need-oriented structure for the secret homosexual. What is the nature of his commitment to these social groups?

Some Theoretical Considerations

In recent years, the labeling approach to deviance has emphasized the effects of public response to deviance as a primary factor in the creation and maintenance of the deviance itself.²⁶ Although as Becker suggests, there are several social conditions that must be met before a person is treated as a deviant, Becker, and others emphasize the role of societal response to deviance as essential to its definition. In this regard, Kitsuse has defined deviance as

. . . a process by which members of a group, community, or society (1) interpret behavior as deviant, (2) define persons who so behave as deviant, and (3) accord them the treatment considered appropriate to such deviance.²⁷

²⁵Maurice Leznoff and William A. Westley, "The Homosexual Community," Social Problems 3 (April 1956): 257-63.

²⁶See Howard S. Becker, The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1963). John I. Kitsuse, "Societal Reactions to Deviant Behavior," Social Problems 9 (Winter 1963): 247-56, Edwin M. Lemert, Social Pathology, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), Goffman, Stigma.

²⁷Kitsuse, "Societal Reactions to Deviant Behavior." 247-256.

Thus, whether behavior is regarded as deviant or is not depends upon the response of others to the behavior. We do not question the validity or the contribution of labeling theory to the sociology of deviance. It does appear, however, that this focus upon the responses of others in both defining deviance and initiating social sanctions towards the deviant might be reconsidered when applied to secret deviants. The public does not respond to the secret deviant as a norm violator if his deceptions have been successful. His deviance exists independent of public response to him insofar as he is aware of the norm violation. When analyzing secret deviance, the reaction of others might well appear as a contingent property rather than the primary ingredient of the deviance.²⁸

Social rules create deviance by defining what is acceptable behavior. For many deviants, secrecy then becomes a strategy for the avoidance of negative social typing. Through an analysis of techniques of secrecy and information control we will see how some male homosexuals avoid the social liabilities that are incurred by those who violate strongly held social norms.

²⁸For an analysis of the ingredients of deviant behavior, see Jack P. Gibbs, "Conceptions of Deviant Behavior: The Old and the New," Pacific Sociological Review (Spring 1966): 9-14

CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE
STUDY OF A SECRET AND
DEVIANT POPULATION

Truly "secret" populations are beyond the realm of the researcher. Homosexuals passing as heterosexual are difficult, if not impossible to distinguish from the rest of the adult male population. Although this factor has provided the secret homosexual with the anonymity he requires for successful interaction with straights, this same lack of visibility presents unique methodological problems for the study of this population.

Due to the general invisibility and inaccessibility of most secret homosexuals, this group has been largely ignored by the social researcher. At the same time, the secret homosexual has been culturally labeled and stereotyped according to the available data relating to overt and known homosexuals. The homosexual population presents a complex structure of concealed social relationships. Until quite recently, however, the only source of information concerning homosexuality has, by necessity, been obtained from:

1. Overt homosexuals--those persons who are obviously and visibly homosexual. These persons are usually easily

identifiable by both the gay and the straight communities.

2. Homosexuals in prison--although homosexual behavior is generally a predictable phenomenon in most one-sex communities, the "jailhouse turnout" has been an important source of prison tensions as well as a major factor in maintaining the delicate equilibrium characteristic of institutions of this type. For the researcher, the prison homosexual has been an available source of information concerning homosexuality. This has led to the proliferation of generalizations and stereotypes of homosexual relationships that are not applicable outside the structure of a prison.¹

3. Homosexuals in therapeutic settings--Much of the classical analysis and professional information about homosexuals has been provided through the work of psychiatrists and psychotherapists. Quite predictably, these data are based upon case histories of those homosexuals who have sought psychological assistance. Indeed, until January 1974, the official view of the psychiatric establishment had been that homosexuality was psychologically abnormal and did constitute a mental illness.²

¹See Edward Sagarin, "Prison Homosexuality and its Effect on Post-prison Sexual Behavior," Psychiatry 39 (1976): 245-257.

²Edmund Bergler, Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life (New York: Collier Books, 1956).

To study those homosexuals for whom the use of secrecy prevents their identification as such by others necessitates research among those who, for the most part, have not been included nor accurately defined in these available categories.³

Means of Access

The search for secret homosexuals to comprise a sample population was clearly problematic. The primary interest was in obtaining data from "successful" secret homosexuals. These were homosexuals who had adequately maintained a secret deviance while simultaneously functioning within the heterosexual world in a well-integrated and "normal" way.

As was the case in at least one other study of the homosexual community, the original access to the world of secret homosexuals was an accidental result of what had been casual friendships.⁴ In the instance at hand, this researcher had developed, over a period of several years, trusting personal relationships with two adult males not known to each other. Each was (and is) a well-respected

³For an overview of the secret homosexual milieu, see Martin Hoffman, The Gay World (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

⁴Evelyn Hooker, "The Homosexual Community," in John Z. Gagnon and William Simon, eds., Sexual Deviance (New York: Harper and Row, 1967): 167-196.

successful professional generally assumed by others to be heterosexual. It was several years after their disclosure to me that they were indeed homosexual that the researcher expressed interest in studying their strategies for dealing with the heterosexual world. The researcher was assured that each could provide an adequate sample for the study that was being proposed. This sample would be taken from the sizable network of friends and acquaintances enjoyed by each of these persons.

These interviews and observations were collected during the years 1972-1982 inclusive. They represent both formal interviews and observations of several homosexual populations and were obtained in three large American cities, namely New York, Los Angeles and Miami. The total number of formal respondents was one hundred and thirty. It is impossible, however, to accurately estimate the thousand or more gay men observed informally during the participant-observation phases of this research.

The first interviews were with these two friends. After then interviewing their closest associates, it naturally became essential to extend the number of available respondents. This was done with the cooperation and assistance of those already interviewed. Thus, further contact with prospective respondents was initiated by those who

had already been interviewed.⁵ A respondent would telephone a person appropriate to the study, i.e., an adult male homosexual who generally did not reveal his homosexuality to others. The contact would inform the prospective respondent as to the nature of the research. Questions concerning the identity and credibility of the researcher were also discussed. He would then be asked to participate, the conditions and other details to be decided at a later time.

The exact motives for an affirmative response were probably mixed. Some granted the interview out of curiosity. Others did so as a favor to the friend who had initiated the contact. Still others later revealed that they did not want to be considered "uptight" or defensive about their homosexuality by the friend who had contacted them. Only two of all those contacted refused to be interviewed. This surprisingly low refusal rate may be in part due to an informal selection process whereby only those thought to be receptive to the idea were contacted.

The Concern With Confidentiality

The question of confidentiality is always a serious concern in research of this nature. The one hundred and thirty men who agreed to be respondents required varying

⁵A similar technique was implemented by Leznoff. See Maurice Leznoff, "Interviewing Homosexuals," American Journal of Sociology 62 (Summer 1956): 202-204

degrees of assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their identity and responses. This assurance was given by the intermediary at the initial phone contact. After this, a followup phone call was made by the researcher. This served to acquaint the prospective informant with the researcher herself and to arrange a time and place for the interview. Assurances of confidentiality were given both by phone contact and at the time of the actual interview.

These assurances included the following safeguards:

1. Real names would never be used or revealed.
2. Extreme care would be taken so that any and all identifying information would be screened and altered (without changing the nature of the information).
3. The tapes and written interview notes would not be available to anyone other than myself.
4. Upon completion of this research, these tapes and notes would be destroyed.

The greatest number of these interviews took place at the home of the various respondents. Two were conducted in the privacy of the researcher's office. Several others were held at the respondent's office or place of work, and still others were recorded at the home of the intermediary, someone previously interviewed. All were interviewed in a private setting. No friends or acquaintances were allowed to be present when the interviews took place. A tape recorder was used in all but one instance. The respondents

were amenable to speaking for a recorded account.⁶

The greatest source of additional respondents were the respondents themselves. After each interview, the respondent was asked if he knew of some people who would consent to be interviewed. Invariably, names and phone numbers were volunteered. In some instances, names were not mentioned until after a preliminary phone call had been made, thus assuring anonymity even to those who might decline to be interviewed.

The researcher never made initial contact with prospective respondents. This was avoided in order to:

1. respect the privacy of those who did not want to be interviewed, and
2. assure to those who would later be interviewed that confidentiality as well as sensitivity to their situation were among the primary considerations of this research.

Interaction and Rapport

As contacts were expanded beyond the original networks of friends and their closest associates, the professional role of the researcher became of greater importance, separated and defined, as it now was, from past loyalties. For this reason, as well as for purposes of professional

⁶The one exception occurred when a widely known and easily identifiable news broadcaster insisted that the tape be turned off while he was discussing situations and responses he felt might betray his identity.

ethics, all respondents were given some information about the nature of the research in which they were participating. The respondents were informed that their interviews were to be included in a doctoral dissertation concerning secret homosexuals and their life style. Specifically, they were aware that the research was interested in adjustments of those homosexuals and their life style. Specifically, they were aware that the research was concerned with adjustments of those homosexuals who were not publicly recognizable as such. It is perhaps worth noting that the interest of the research with "normal" appearing homosexuals may have served as a support of self-image for the original respondents, as well as contribute to the successful recruitment of others.

Nature of the Interview

The method of data collection used at this juncture was an in-depth focused interview. The interviews were conducted from a prepared interview schedule in which both open and closed questions were included. The atmosphere was informal and the respondents were allowed elaboration and digressions at their pleasure. The flexibility of a partially structured interview proved useful in revealing the affective aspects of the subject's responses as well as helping elicit the personal and social context of attitudes and feelings.⁷

⁷Claire Sciltis, et al., Research Methods in Social Relations (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1951), pp. 241-268.

Most of the interviews were accomplished with a tape recorder which was always within plain sight of the respondents. A small number of interviews were handwritten to accommodate the fears of disclosure not uncommon among a sample of this nature. The interviews lasted between one and one and one-half hours depending, as they must, upon the verbosity as well as the temperament of each respondent.

Because of the sensitive nature of the research, the requirement of confidentiality was, of course, a primary consideration in obtaining the interviews. Once the interview was in progress, however, the vast majority of the respondents appeared relaxed and often enthusiastic. Many volunteered far more information than was actually requested. Most respondents obviously enjoyed their role as participants, transferring their enthusiasm to those whose future participation was being requested. For a great many of these secret homosexuals, the interview afforded an unusual inclusion of an "outsider" into their well-guarded world and identities. Most had never discussed or even acknowledged the fact of their homosexuality with persons whom they did not know well. The fact that the researcher was a woman was helpful in establishing and reinforcing the professional aspects and objectives of this research. For the homosexual subculture is highly sexual in its orientation. The sexual neutrality of a woman relating to them as they in fact are, i.e. homosexual, served to nullify the usual expectations of role conflict so often inherent in the problems of "passing."

Nature of the Sample

The sample population of male homosexuals interviewed evolved through a complex network of friends, associates, and in some cases, personal relationships of the original respondents. Although subsequent participant-observation did serve to produce a wider cross-section of covert homosexual life in New York City, the interview sample was, due to the confidentiality of the subject matter, somewhat limited by the backgrounds and life-styles of the original respondents. The intrinsic biases of this sample are thus directly related to the nature of the research as well as to the problematic aspects of sampling among deviant groups. For these reasons, it is necessary to take cognizance of the following areas of possible sample bias:

1. All respondents were, at the time of the interviews, residents of New York City, Los Angeles or Miami. The strategies and techniques cited by these persons as responses to public stigma are specific responses used within an urban environment. These strategies operate within the greater anonymity provided by large urban centers. The research does not necessarily assume that similar techniques of neutralization are implemented in smaller and more closely-knit environments.

2. Due to the fact that the main source of these respondents was a series of extended friendship networks

within the city, these respondents represent a predictable but unavoidable homogeneity of economic and social statuses. In addition, other social and demographic factors might possibly have minimized the percent of black and Puerto Rican respondents available.

3. There is no claim here that this is a random sample. As so often is the case in the study of deviance and deviant populations, our respondents are very often limited to a nonprobability sample of volunteers. Although the rate of refusal to be interviewed was extremely low (less than 2 percent of those contacted declined to be interviewed) there may have been selective factors at work prior to initial contact which served to choose and direct just which friends and acquaintances would be asked to participate. Thus, it seems reasonable that the persons contacted by primary respondents might be those whose past actions and known attitudes would not indicate an unwillingness to participate.

4. It was necessary for both the researcher as well as the primary sources of the sample population to make subjective evaluations concerning the suitability of prospective respondents for inclusion in the study. Since this was to be a study of "secret" homosexuals, those persons who, in the judgment of the researcher were clearly identifiable as homosexual, were, regardless of their self-image, excluded from consideration as respondents.

This judgment was made solely for the purpose of

the taped interviews. Subsequent participant-observation taking place as it did within the gay community included not only some of the more visible homosexuals but also those whose role behavior seemed to vary with the expectations and permissiveness of the immediate social environment.⁸

The Use of Participant-Observation

Research among deviants includes an added risk factor of trust and cooperation. In some cases, the respondents engage in behavior that might lead to legal sanctions and is clearly in violation of law.⁹ More important perhaps, sociologically, is the need for the researcher to both maintain and communicate a value-neutral attitude while at the same time surrounding himself with those whose life style is quite alien to him.

Earlier research among homosexuals has evaluated the relative advantages and disadvantages of covert vs. overt research. The critical question of self-revelation is essential in structuring any participant-observation in which the researcher is engaged. While participating in the taped

⁸In some instances, respondents regarded as "normal" appearing homosexuals altered their behavior and appearance in the relative safety and immunity of a totally gay community.

⁹See Jack D. Douglas, ed., Research on Deviance (New York: Random House, 1973); also see Laud Humphreys, Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places, enlarged ed., 1975 (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1975) and Ned Polsky, Hustlers, Beats, and Others (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1967).

interviews, the respondents were aware both of the general area of the research and of the researcher as sociologist. Subsequent participant-observation at gay bars, exclusively gay parties, restaurants, and private homes presented somewhat different problems of self-presentation.

A woman doing research among homosexuals generally has the option of assuming either a homosexual or heterosexual identity.¹⁰ Even if the research is not covert and the subjects of the study know who she is, she will be generally thought of and related to as a "fag hag" if she presents herself as heterosexual. The "fag hag" is a unique ingredient of the male homosexual community. It is the term reserved for those heterosexual women who socialize a great deal with male homosexuals. When questioned about the application of this label, the homosexuals did not agree as to the meaning of this phenomenon. C. A. Warren indicates that the usual interpretation is that the woman in question is asexual, frightened of straight men, or is perhaps herself a "latent" homosexual.

Independent of the reasons given for the presence of the researcher within the gay community was the acceptance and cooperation enjoyed by the researcher as a participant-observer. Although never called a "fag hag" (the term

¹⁰Carol A. Warren, "Observing the Gay Community," in Jack D. Douglas, ed., Research on Deviance (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 139-163.

"fruit fly" is the West Coast equivalent) the researcher was naturally aware of the designation and the benign reaction to this label. Thus, the researcher did not experience any prejudice or negative responses towards "fag hags." On the contrary, general response was positive. In some situations, particularly small private dinner parties and the like, great attention was directed towards the researcher which, in part, seemed to reflect the desire for some limited social interaction with women on the part of these homosexual men. In addition, it should be noted that a guarantee of no sexual advances from a straight woman produces a relaxed and congenial atmosphere in which a heterosexual woman may be related to in her own right rather than as the object of expected sexual advances.

The role of a heterosexual woman within the homosexual community is problematic at best. A heterosexual woman engaged in participant-observation research, may, if she is at all reasonably attractive, be the object of sexual propositions. This situation is in no way contradictory to the homosexuals' sexual orientation. Many of these men had been married at one time while others had experienced normal heterosexual relations for various periods of their lives. Although they strongly prefer sexual relations with men and are, at this point in time, committed to homosexuality, many have had, and continue to engage in, sexual relations with women. The non-threatening nature of the interaction between the researcher

and the subjects may have been a factor in these responses, Warren states:

For a female to become a significant other in a community in which maleness is the main status criterion is not easy, and the researcher should be aware that she may have to put considerable effort into becoming the type of person that the community will value. She need not necessarily be attractive--but she must have some sort of noticeable personal style, make a suitable conversational contribution, and refrain from public sexual overtures to committed homosexuals.¹¹

Participant Observation in Public Places

Several of the respondents were willing to have the researcher accompany them to gay bars and other public meeting places. Many such visits were made by the researcher, always accompanied by one or two male homosexuals who were known within the community. This arrangement proved functional for all concerned. For the researcher, it provided access to homosexual meeting and "cruising" places not visible to those outside the homosexual community. Most of these bars allow women to enter, but the task of participant-observer would have been made more difficult, if not impossible, without the immediate acceptance enjoyed through association with members of the homosexual community. In addition, male escorts provided an element of protection in going to and from these locations. This was of some concern, as some of these bars

¹¹Ibid., p. 152.

were located in out of the way areas as well as in the more affluent East side of Manhattan.

For those secret homosexuals whose cooperation made participant-observation possible in this research, the presence of a woman also served its function. It became apparent that occasional public appearances with a woman served to enhance and reinforce the very masculine features that are so highly prized among male homosexuals. Being in the company of a woman does not call into question the sexual orientation of those who are known to the gay community. To the contrary, friendships with straight women are generally accepted and often prized among male homosexuals.

The Role of the Wise

During and following the privately arranged interviews, the professional character of this research was stressed. The role of the interviewer, however, was made more effective by communicating a genuine interest in the problems of maintaining a secret, and in the unique situation of the respondents themselves. Generally for these reasons, the researcher was accepted by most respondents as a non-threatening outsider albeit on the periphery of this secret homosexual world. Goffman's label for this type of interaction is to play the role of "the wise." He suggests that there are

. . . persons who are normal, but whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and

sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan.¹²

For more than two years of interviewing, observation, and participant-observation, the researcher was accorded the status of "the wise." Although perhaps prompted in part by the very natural need to reveal aspects of their secret life to a sympathetic outsider, the final result was that the researcher was able to move rather freely and often by invitation within a variety of social interactions of secret homosexuals. It was in the capacity of "the wise" that both the private and public milieux of secret homosexuals were available for study.¹³

Neutralizing the Hawthorne Effect

The use of participant-observation both as a means of data collection and as a test of data collected by other means may introduce legitimate inquiry into the role and effect of

¹²Goffman, Stigma, p. 28.

¹³My sense of acceptance by these men was validated only after months of participant-observation and other research. By this time, I could freely engage in the self-depreciating slang often used among homosexuals themselves. When asked by a gay acquaintance my opinion of a shirt he was contemplating buying, I responded without hesitation, "It's too faggotty." Although gays use this term frequently among themselves, the term "faggot" is almost never used by straights except as a slur or stigmatizing label. The researcher's use of the term reflected awareness of the courtesy membership the group had extended. A similar case has been recorded by Goffman. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

the presence of the researcher herself upon the social milieu under investigation. In particular, research among deviants may produce unique problems of rapport and communication as well as those of professional ethics. The use of participant-observation in the study of deviant populations may serve to create additional questions concerning the implementation of this methodology as a research tool. Specifically, participant-observation requires that the researcher himself does not, as far as is possible, become an additional variable in the situation under study. Much has been written concerning the techniques of participant-observation as well as concern with the methodological necessity of neutralizing, as far as possible, the presence of the observer.¹⁴

The interaction and lowered visibility of the researcher in this study was aided by the availability of an existing subcultural role which she could assume and through which she might relate to the group. This, of course, is the aforementioned role of "fag hag," a general category reserved by homosexuals for straight females who constantly seek out their company. Although assuming this role did not make the participant-observer less visible, it did serve to alter perceptions concerning her motivation for being there. In addition, since these women constitute a fairly common

¹⁴See W. J. Goode and P. K. Hatt, Methods in Social Research (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952); C. Selitz, Research Method, E. J. Webb, et al, Unobtrusive Measures: Non-Reactive Research in the Social Sciences (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1956) pp. 112-171.

occurrence this created assurances among those in the population not personally acquainted with the researcher. In this way, covert as well as overt research could be carried out. In addition, the researcher minimized any attention her presence might have caused by avoiding the use of a tape recorder, questionnaire form, and note taking while assuming the role of participant-observer. The use of these and other artificial aids during participant-observation tends to direct attention to the researcher in a way that might, among persons cognizant of their discrediting social identity, constitute a threat. In all cases, however, it is clear that a degree of sensitivity and verstehen by the sociologist is essential to the successful and appropriate assumption of his role within the environment.¹⁵ In this way, minimal involvement in the social situation functions to prevent substantive alteration of observable interactions and phenomena. Common sense dictates that unobtrusive behavior is mandatory for successful field work of this type. It may well be that a person becomes accepted as a participant-observer more because of the kind of person he turns out to be in the eyes of the field contacts than because of what the research represents to them.¹⁶ It is equally clear that successful participant-observation

¹⁵Polsky, Hustlers, Beats and Others, p. 124.

¹⁶John P. Dean, "Participant-observation and Interviewing" in John T. Doby, ed., Introduction to Social Research (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole, 1954) pp. 229-39.

is based as much upon the ability to neutralize the presence of the researcher as it is upon the establishment and maintenance of rapport with field contacts.

Ethical Problems in the Study of Deviance

The discipline of Sociology has long been aware of the ethical and moral concerns involved in doing research. In particular, research among deviants has raised several questions concerning the situation in which the sociologist collects his data. Due to the sensitive nature of this material, the researcher endeavored to scrupulously follow the guidelines of professional ethics during the course of this study. In particular, the following general areas were considered:

1. Problems of misrepresentation--There has been concern over the methods used by sociologists to gain admission to generally unavailable social situations in order to do investigatory and analytical research. The identity and purposes of the researcher may, in some instances, impede, and possibly destroy any meaningful field work. Erikson has proposed two guidelines in this regard.

- a. It is unethical for a sociologist to deliberately misrepresent his identity for the purpose of entering a private domain to which he is not otherwise eligible.
- b. It is unethical for a sociologist to deliberately misrepresent the

character of the research in which he is engaged.¹⁷

In this study of the use of secrecy by a deviant group, the role of the researcher as both interviewer and participant-observer was entirely known to the subjects of the study. All of those interviewed had been informed as to the nature and purpose of the interview. Subsequent participant-observation was carried on with the knowledge and full cooperation of persons and groups being observed. All "private domains" were entered with the groups' full awareness of the nature of the researcher's presence.

2. Problems of confidentiality: All data obtained through the variety of available research techniques has been held in strictest confidence. Great precautions have been taken to assure the anonymity of all respondents. Names and addresses, as well as other identifying symbols, have been concealed to provide maximum protection against disclosure.

The methods used to assure confidentiality are in accord with the guidelines adapted by major psychological and sociological organizations. These groups have concurred on the need to provide for discretion and anonymity for the subjects of social research. Strict requirements concerned with safeguarding the identities of subjects have been set

¹⁷Kai T. Erikson, "A Comment on Disguised Observation in Sociology," Social Problems 14 (Spring 1967):p. 373.

forth and have been adhered to in this research.¹⁸

3. The right to privacy: Sociologists have not yet resolved questions concerning the right of a group not to be studied.

Possible ethical positions include rationales focused on the benefits of the research, thus justifying intrusive probing in the pursuit of knowledge.¹⁹ In contrast, other social scientists including Kai Erikson, Edward Shils and the late Margaret Mead reject covert inquiry as a violation of both the professional integrity of the researcher and the rights of those being studied.²⁰ This position concludes that

Learning about people's private even intimate behavior and emotions without their consent is very much like surreptitiously listening in on their telephone conversations or looking through their keyholes. Such acts are no less intrusive for being done in the interests of research. The same barriers ought to protect us from these forms of invasion of property.²¹

¹⁸See Edward Sagarin, "The Research Setting and the Right not to be Researched," Social Problems 21 (Summer 1973): 52-64.

¹⁹See Jack D. Douglas, Investigative Social Research (London: Sage Publications, 1976).

²⁰See Edward Shils, "Social Inquiry and the Autonomy of the Individual," in D. H. Lerner, ed., Human Meaning of the Social Sciences (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 136-157; also see Margaret Mead, "The Human Study of Human Beings," Science 133 (Jan. 20, 1961): 163.

²¹Judith Jarus Thompson, "The Right to Privacy," Philosophy and Public Affairs 4 (1975): 295-322 quoted in Sissela Bok, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 204-205.

Even in cases where value-neutrality on the part of the researcher can be assured, it has been suggested that any group, other than a publicly accountable one, has the right to deny access to researchers and can legitimately withhold information from investigators.²² Deviant groups would be even more likely to regard as threatening any research focused upon them. The motivation for this research is not to precipitate social change in the area of homosexuality. The principal interest is in the analysis of normal techniques of information control utilized to preserve a secret. In addition, we are studying the applicability of this social process in other areas of interpersonal relationships.²³

This group was not studied primarily because they were homosexual. Rather, the research focuses upon techniques utilized by those with the need to control information about themselves. This is a normal social process and a recognizable need of human interaction.

The ethical issues raised above are legitimate concerns in social research. They take on an added dimension in the study of deviant groups. This research has been conducted with full awareness of possible ethical pitfalls.

²²Sagarin, The Research Setting, p. 58. We are not suggesting that value-neutrality is always possible nor always preferable.

²³For a philosophical discussion of surreptitious observations, see Sissela Bok, Lying, pp. 192-213.

The safeguards have been thorough and many. In the judgment of the researcher, high standards of professionalism have been observed and maintained throughout this study.

The Use of Multiple Methods

The research techniques utilized in this study are a combination of methods designed to avoid the weaknesses inherent in each. Interviews, no matter how expertly carried out, are still vulnerable to sample bias, interviewer bias, and the fact of their intrusion into a social setting. By reinforcing the data collected by interviews, the researcher hopes to overcome the drawbacks of using a single method of data collection. The use of participant-observation as a supplementary but certainly equal research technique provides an additional analytical tool.

The problems of quantifying data collected among deviant groups is a well recognized dimension of the sociology of deviance. The highly selective sample of this study tends to lend itself far more to qualitative analysis. It appears inappropriate at this time and given the nature of this data to quantify through statistical validation the results of this research. For this reason, we have chosen the use of interviews, self-accounts, and participant-observation.

The use of accounts as an analytical tool in research among deviants is a well-utilized method for securing added insights into behavior. As Lyman and Scott have suggested,

"the study of deviance and the study of accounts are intrinsically related, and a clarification of accounts will constitute a clarification of deviant phenomena. . . ." ²⁴ Self explanations and motives are often best learned and understood by listening to the meaning ascribed to the actions by the individual himself. This has been particularly effective in the study of deviance where intent and meanings may often be misinterpreted. For purposes of analysis, these accounts, as well as other types of social responses will be categorized into qualitatively distinct groupings. In this way, we will be better able to know and understand the techniques and strategies by which these secret deviants remain secret.

²⁴Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, "Accounts," American Sociological Review 33 (1968): 46-62.

CHAPTER III

THE EFFECTS OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION UPON STRATEGIES OF SECRECY MAINTENANCE

Deviance is more than a violation of culturally held rules. Deviance is a social process that extends beyond the violation of commonly held beliefs. Deviance is a social process that includes the responses of people within a society to that act. It is this response of others to the social act that does, in part, create the deviance. Becker has stated that,

. . . deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather, a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an offender. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.¹

When we view the problem of how one acquires a deviant identity, we are reminded that one takes on a deviant identity through much the same process of social interaction that enables all of us to acquire our general social

¹Howard K. Becker, The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, (Glencoe, Ill. The Free Press, 1963). For a similar approach to deviance and its creation, see John Kitsuse, "Societal Reactions to Deviant Behavior," Social Problems 9 (Winter 1962): 247-256.

identities. More simply put, we define ourselves by the responses that others have to us.² Our concepts of ourselves are inextricably dependent upon the responses of these others, whose opinions we take on as our own. The work of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, as well as modern reference group theory serves to reinforce the role of the other in the construction of ourselves and our identities. The social process by which one internalizes the attitudes of others towards himself and his behavior is precisely the same process by which he will ultimately perceive himself as acceptable to the dominant culture or at variance with its expectations and definitions.

Societies differ greatly in both their cultural definitions that define acceptable behavior and in what constitutes rule violation. In the area of homosexual behavior, the range of possible definitions as well as the possible societal responses is quite varied indeed. To understand the strategies and techniques of response to being homosexual and having a homosexual identity, it is necessary to focus on homosexuality as a social role, rather than as a "condition" or behavior pattern. The process of accommodation and adjustment to this role are understandable only through awareness of the particular

²The process is referred to as consensual validation in the work of Harry Stack Sullivan.

meaning that the social label "homosexual" implies in American life. The social role of the homosexual is not universally condemned. In addition, the homosexual is not necessarily labeled and defined as such in many cultures throughout the world. Indeed, even the definition of what constitutes a homosexual is not consistent. It is the implication of the American definition and its corresponding negative sanctions that most strongly affect the responses of homosexuals in the United States to the fact of their own homosexuality.

American culture has defined homosexuality as sexual activity with members of the same sex. This label is decidedly cultural and not clinical.³ Outside of Western culture, however, there is strong evidence that a large number of societies condone and, at times, even encourage homosexuality for at least some members of the population. In 64 percent of some seventy-six having been studied, homosexual activities of a variety of types are considered psychologically normal and culturally acceptable among certain persons and groups.⁴ These persons are often regarded

³This research is not concerned with the psychodynamics of homosexuality nor with the etiology of homosexual behavior. Rather, it is focusing on the effects of a homosexual identity and life style, and the use of secrecy as a response to the stigma and negative social consequences related to being a known homosexual.

⁴Clellan S. Ford and Frank A. Beach, Patterns of Sexual Behavior (New York, Harper, 1951).

as shamans, and may enjoy considerable prestige. They often hold positions of power within the community, although they may simply be regarded as different, yet, not stigmatized, as a consequence of their sexual orientation. Among the Koniag, it is common for select male children to be socialized from infancy into the female role, a procedure which includes the learning of women's crafts and the wearing of female clothing. Persons so selected usually "marry" males of considerable prestige and are often respected and powerful influences in their own right. Even today, in parts of the Eastern and Arab world, male homosexuality is generally ignored or treated with amusement, although violating the religious and legal codes of these societies.

Societal definitions and responses to homosexuality greatly determine the adjustments utilized by homosexuals to the fact of their homosexuality. As observed by Schur, as well as noted in the studies of Scheff and Scott, "Definitions of the situation held by those reacting to the deviation, definitions that are often shaped primarily by stereotyped beliefs, can indeed have so overwhelming an impact that the deviating individual may find himself unable to sustain any alternate definition of himself."⁵ In society in which homosexuality is highly stigmatized, homosexuality becomes far more than a deviant sexual orientation,

⁵Edwin M. Schur, Labeling Deviant Behavior, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 51

It is an identity. It creates a social role that directly or indirectly enters most areas of one's life. This is a fundamental aspect of all social relationships. Our constructs of ourselves depends upon the response of others to us. It is this essential social process that creates much of the problematic aspects of rule violation within a society.

Thus, the attitudes of the general culture, the commonly held beliefs within a society towards homosexuality become essential not only to the homosexual's view of himself as he shares elements of these social realities, but also in determining the homosexual's way of responding to the management of a stigmatizing identity. The social label provides the structure through which the homosexual interprets and defines his own behavior. Thus does the social order create the problem by defining and responding to the deviance in a particular way. For the individual so labeled, the process of response takes on an additional dimension. The approval or disapproval of others becomes a part of the self image. In so happening, these social definitions function as a mirror through which we assign social meaning to ourselves and our identities

Mead's view of the construction of a social self and the interaction between the individual and his society reinforces this process of internalization. Some aspect of society enters the person with every social experience and interaction. As Mead states,

We are more or less . . . seeing ourselves as others see us. We are unconsciously addressing ourselves as others address us. We are calling out in the other person something we are calling out in ourselves, so that we . . . take over these attitudes.⁶

The penetration of commonly held beliefs into the attitudes of individuals creates for those who violate social norms the need to restructure social reality through the new meanings assigned to his social role. This process becomes operational only when one begins to see himself in the focus of societal definitions of his behavior and, in the case of homosexuality, his self. At this point in one's development, the meaning of one's behavior to one's self becomes the primary motivational force in the internalization of a deviant identity and creates the homosexual role.

Initial Meanings and Responses

Sexual self-identification is usually not problematic if it conforms to societal expectations. It creates difficulty for the homosexual because he knows that he is different. He learns to interpret his own behavior and life style through the eyes of previously internalized cultural attitudes. Often, however, this process of self re-evaluation requires additional acceptance and the restructuring of one's self-image and life space. At the outset there is

⁶George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, Charles H. Morris, ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1934), p. 135.

often confusion, and for some, great doubt and pain. This confusion and doubt are quite evident in the following as a 33 year old college professor recalls his first homosexual experience:

I must have been around thirteen at the time. It was with a classmate of mine, same school, same age, same class. I didn't think about it as a homosexual experience, but I knew it was not "normal" (quotation marks his) and not socially sanctioned or called desirable . . . I always felt that this was something I would outgrow. I felt, how horrible, I'm different than anybody else.

The age at which a person's first homosexual experience takes place does not necessarily affect the responses one has to it. In the following a 37 year old stockbroker discusses his own responses to behavior that he interpreted as homosexual while a graduate student at the University of Tennessee:

. . . his wife and my wife became best friends. He was always kind of distant to me but I wanted to get to know him--to be seen with him on campus. He was a great football hero, and this was a big thing to me. We'd go out drinking . . . and we both got drunk. He said he'd take me out to the car. He kissed me and hugged me and--I felt, O my god, I'm queer, I'm queer. He kissed me . . . it turned me off, too, and I avoided him for a few weeks.

The internalization of the social label of homosexual occurs with changes in the meaning assigned by the homosexual himself to his actions. Although the two respondents quoted above had also engaged in a variety of boyhood sexual experiments within their peer groups, they differentiate between this sort of sexual behavior and

the experiences that they themselves define as homosexual. The distinctions are quite apparent in precipitating the rite de passage between the straight and gay worlds. A particular sexual experience, often with an older man may also initiate the young man's changed view of his own sexual identity. Changed definitions are illustrated by the following:

I felt I was gay when I started looking for it. I would let myself be picked up by older guys for sex. I wasn't hustling them . . . I knew it was what I wanted. I started to hang around more and more.

It is this type of changed perception of one's relationship to the world of normals that ultimately makes necessary the restructuring of his life style. He first, however, must reinterpret his sexual activities as both deviant and homosexual. It is this realization of changed status that will eventually produce the need for techniques and strategies of secrecy and deception. The following seems to illustrate this developmental process whereby a homosexual identity is acquired:

. . . classmates of mine were attracted to me, and when I went to camp, I had a sort of unrequited thing . . . Somehow, when it was with a contemporary, it would not have a dangerous aspect for me. It did not frighten me. The first experience I had with someone who was clearly older than me was a frightening experience.

I felt I was homosexual when I found it sufficiently pleasurable. Well, the whole idea of romantic attachment entered into it. Before then, I was not aware that men loved other men. I was aware from camp, school, men's rooms, etc. that they obtained sexual release from each other, but I wasn't aware that there was even such a thing as a relationship.

This suggests that self-identification as a homosexual might necessitate a rejection of some commonly held beliefs concerning homosexual life. In the above instance, one's personal experiences and observations enable him to refute commonly held stereotypes of homosexuals and substitute a more positive and personally acceptable image. The development of a more positive and self-accepting attitude toward one's self as a homosexual will ultimately be reinforced through exposure and contact with the homosexual community and sub-culture.

The Homosexual Role

The acting out of a particular form of behavior does not necessarily produce an altered identity. Behavior must first be defined by the actor as constituting a condition or state of being that is, of itself, subject to definition. Thus, a person cannot regard himself as a homosexual if he has no awareness that such a category exists. Although, as has previously been observed, the general culture is highly influential in defining actions and structuring social meanings, it is the meaning assigned to the behavior by the actor that will determine how he deals with altered realities as they present themselves.

The role of knowledge in the creation and maintenance of a deviant identity has long been an important dimension in that area of sociological inquiry known as the

sociology of deviance. The work of Lefland and Lemert and, more recently, of Dank, has reinforced this perspective. As Dank states, "If significant others or the actor himself do not know of the existence of the deviant category, the subject's experience cannot be interpreted in terms of that category."⁷

For a person in the process of reinterpreting his sexual orientation, the process of awareness constitutes a gradual yet measurable change in self-definition, that will determine subsequent changes in life style. In addition, a re-focus of self-identity may serve to set into motion forms of accommodation and adjustment previously considered unnecessary or not applicable. Some persons may go for periods of time with strong homosexual orientations and be sexually active with persons of the same sex and still not develop a homosexual identity. In time, however, a person will tend to identify as homosexual by equating his own behavior with that which he has associated with homosexual. Although the age at which this self-awareness becomes manifest varies widely, the stigmatizing character of a

⁷Barry M. Dank, Symbolic Interacting and the Homosexual Identity, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, August 26-29, 1974. Also see John Lofland, Deviance and Identity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969) and Edwin M. Lemert, Human Deviance, Social Problems, and Social Control (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967). Also see Barry Dank, "The Development of a Homosexual Identity: Antecedents and Consequences," Ph.D. dissertation. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1972).

homosexual identity in the United States may often precipitate the need to prevent public disclosure of this discrediting label. There is evidence that the mechanism of secrecy becomes activated simultaneous with changing awareness and definitions of one's own behavior and sexual orientation. This is, however, a preliminary adjustment. Most often, it is directed towards preventing disclosure of one's homosexuality to the immediate family and peer group. It does not constitute an institutionalized response in the sense of being an organized way of acting. At this very early point in the homosexual experience, one has not yet availed himself of the reinforcement and supportive socialization that occurs through subsequent contacts and interactions with the homosexual community. Thus, the immediate concerns appear to be those of avoiding disclosure of actions that would be stigmatizing. It appears that preliminary strategies take a variety of forms. The following have been repeatedly observed and reported:

A. Acting "normal". As we attain physical and emotional maturity, all of us are aware of the acceptable patterns of behavior as well as the expectations that others have of us as males or females. The process of socialization serves to teach members of a culture the shared definitions and role expectations that govern public behavior. At an early age, we become aware that males and females are expected to act differently, walk and talk in ways agreed upon as appropriate to each, and to display culturally acceptable

signs of "normal" sexual orientation. Those who deviate from these norms may find themselves discredited and in serious danger of public re-assessment of their social identities. Thus, the athletic girl, as well as the boy who excels at dancing or other "inappropriate" skills may find himself placed in the unenviable position of defending his, or her, normalcy. For those homosexuals who prefer to keep their sexual orientation a secret, awareness of culturally approved behavior is essential for the concealment of his secret. In response to the threat of disclosure, he becomes even more aware of the importance of traditional sex roles and behavioral expectations. He has an important stake in acting in an inconspicuous and socially approved manner. This somewhat altered perception of social reality is illustrated by the following interview with a successful stockbroker previously married for five years:

When I realized I was gay was when I began to try to get picked up. I was married and I was hiding it.

Q. How did you hide it?

A. I would not do anything that might be construed as effeminate . . . like taking an interest in certain things. I wouldn't go in the kitchen . . . wouldn't help with the cooking. I wouldn't help with any decorating if she wanted me to. Any fluff I would dislike . . . I liked supermasculine things.

A similar strategy was recounted by a 40 year old college professor who stated,

I didn't want to look different. I tried to hide it by doing what everyone else did . . . I would decide which was more conservative in clothing and stick with that.

At this point in the homosexual man's life, he responds to culturally acceptable definitions of normalcy much the same as heterosexual men and boys do. The difference lies in the significance and importance assigned to these traditional sex roles and the greater sense of threat attached to being different. Indeed, it is this sense of being "different" that so strongly reinforces the person in his homosexual orientation thus providing the need for the homosexual community. Feeling different when the unique trait or identity is defined in negative terms both the general community and the actor himself serves to create a sense of social isolation that is exacerbated by the absence of acceptable others with the traits with which one can identify. At this point in his biography the homosexual is, so to speak, on his own. The strategies and techniques of concealment have not yet become part of his everyday knowledge. For many persons, identification with homosexuality is problematic at best, and anxiety producing at worst.

B. Deliberate misrepresentation. The moral and ethical issues involved in lying and untruthfulness have been an integral part of the history of philosophical inquiry. The writings of Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Kant up to and including more contemporary considerations such as the debate on the ethics of Watergate and the Nixon Administration probed deeply into this ethical dilemma.

All have been concerned with the issue of moral choice in both private and public life.⁸

The range of philosophical reflections on lying and deliberate misrepresentation is vast. The sweeping and inflexible views of Immanuel Kant in which all lies are by definition immoral and, therefore, unacceptable may be contrasted with more practical views of the ethics of lying. For Kant, honesty was an absolute. Lying had absolutely no moral or ethical defense. "To be truthful in all declarations, therefore, is a sacred and absolutely commanding decree of reason limited by no expediency."⁹

The more realistic view as Bok observes is that there are times when a lie is clearly justified. One such time is where life is threatened and where a lie might avert danger. Certainly Kant's rigid and single-minded support of truthfulness in all human encounters serves to nullify the use of lies for survival and self-defense. Bok observes that most major religions including Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism leave room for a rejection of the absolutist prohibition of all lies and regard certain lies as not being sin.¹⁰

⁸See Sisella Bok, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁹Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy," ed. and trans. Louis Beck. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 346-50.

¹⁰For a detailed comparison of religious interpretation of lying, see Bok, Lying, chapter 3.

For persons whose lives are concerned with keeping a discrediting secret, the imperative nature of the situation is directly linked to their definition of the situation. Specifically these are threatening encounters, and lying is both utilized and justified as a survival strategy. Lying to those you perceive as enemies is a technique of survival avite normalized within the homosexual community. Those heterosexuals defined as potential enemies often include employers, wives, co-workers, landlords and those who are perceived as in positions to impose economic and social sanctions.

Those lies are very often continuous. With this type of usage, the lie is maintained as long as one sees one's environment as presenting prolonged threats to survival.

A crisis may be acute, as in the lifesaving cases, but a state of crisis can also become chronic. The same elements are present--great danger and no escape--but the time frame is entirely different, and there is no one critical turning point. The threat may be continuous, so that one lie after another barely staves off disaster, or it may recur over and over again, each time posing the issue of deception.¹¹

Telling lies and misrepresenting facts are commonly used responses to conflict situations. Most of us respond in this way when our assessment of a situation indicates that the truth would create a situation with which we are

¹¹Bok, Lying, p. 117.

unwilling and/or incapable of managing. The secret homosexual, often must rely on this unsophisticated though functional response in order to avoid conflict and prevent rejection and disclosure of his sexual orientation. Misrepresentations undertaken at this early stage of identity development are generally intended to preserve a heterosexual sexual identity and are initiated primarily for reasons of expedience. There does not appear to be any restructuring of life space at this time. In addition, there is the absence of long range patterns of accommodation. Rather, the lies and misrepresentations are acted out in haphazard fashion as the situation dictates. At this juncture, secrecy has not been incorporated as an integral element of a deviant life style. Rather, the use of secrecy appears to be a normative response to situations that are inherently threatening. An example may be cited from a formerly married salesman from Mississippi:

When I was married, I'd tell my wife I was going out for a walk or something and I'd go out on the highway and get picked up. I used to sneak away . . . I began lying a lot in the last year of the marriage. I would go to a truck stop and would say I'm going to talk to the boys.¹²

¹²The "truck stop" mentioned here refers to one of the thousands of truck and auto rest areas that are ordinary facilities on interstate highways. Although generally used for the purpose intended, some truck rest areas acquire reputations for the availability of anonymous homosexual encounters. The usual procedure is for quiet sexual negotiations and contact between "straight" truck drivers and homosexuals who frequent these areas for sexual encounters. For an analysis of transitory homosexuality at public rest

C. Preliminary Attempts at Impression Management.

Among the early responses to the need to prevent disclosure of the fact of one's homosexuality is often the use of acceptable others, particularly girls, to create a public image of sexual and social "normalcy." For most boys in late adolescence and young manhood, acting normal generally involves appearing in public either in groups, or in couples, with girls. This is a rather universal response among boys who, at this point, are generally not exclusively homosexual (nor may ever be). More important, however, are the social aspects of being in a "dating" situation. For most persons, the social and public life of the communities peer group is inextricably tied to a series of heterosexual interactions where actual sexual activity may be considered inappropriate. One's popularity and thus, one's status of social prestige are to a great extent the results of successful encounters with members of the opposite sex. Teenage and youthful dating patterns, particularly as they are structured by schools, neighborhoods, and other norm enforcing institutions have traditionally offered no alternative to heterosexual dating, although, in the last several years, homosexual groups and alternatives have appeared in some urban parts of the country.

stop, see Richard R. Troiden, "Homosexual Encounters in a Highway Rest Stop." in Erich Goode and Richard R. Troiden, Sexual Deviance and Sexual Deviants, (New York: William Horan and Co., 1974), pp. 211-223.

Still, dating girls provides several advantages for the young man not yet identified with the homosexual community. First, it is an acceptable and not unpleasant way to be part of the group and thus avail oneself of the social activities of the community. In addition, public interactions with girls provides public affirmation of one's heterosexuality as it creates an appearance of normalcy. Finally, for those not yet certain of their deviant sexual orientation, social and sexual interactions with girls provides at least the option of a viable alternative. In describing his high school experiences, a presently exclusively homosexual professional recalls the following:

I was going out with girls at the time. . . . trying to be a normal, regular high school boy . . . I was dating girls in college too, but I didn't have sex with girls until I was a junior in college. I was dating and was very popular, always in demand, and outgoing, could always get a date . . . that kind of thing, never had any problems.

Interestingly, the somewhat lower sexual interest in girls that has predictably been reported by homosexuals did, in some instances, increase their popularity with girls. Younger girls, those who were traditional in their sex behavior, did at times find it perfectly acceptable when social encounters did not require or necessarily entail sexual advances. Indeed, several respondents have conjectured that part of their popularity was the non-threatened feeling they may have given their dates at a time when casual sexual encounters were highly problematic. The following illustrates

the social value of a somewhat sexually disinterested escort:

. . . no, I never had sex with girls when I was dating . . . not in my hometown. I don't know if anybody did. It wasn't expected. These were considered "nice girls" and you just didn't do that kind of thing.

In some instances, planned heterosexual social occasions were an expression of the norms and expectations of the community. The young man with little or no sexual interest in girls could nevertheless assure his social acceptance by appearing at these functions. In many instances, adult supervision and the group nature of these encounters relieved the young man of the obligation of even preliminary sexual advances. Charles B., a 30 year old attorney who has always been exclusively homosexual comments on the nature of his high school social life:

I didn't really go out with girls in high school. I would . . . organize a dance and then I would be able to invite one of the girls that I worked with to go to the dance and that was the kind of social life that I would have. Whenever I had a date, it was for a planned occasion, and I wasn't called upon to relate in any emotional sense and certainly in no physical sense.

These accounts suggest that the commonly held view that premarital sex is unacceptable provides support for those who are actually disinterested or ambivalent. The community may create structural supports as well as provide positive social definitions for those who do not violate these mores.

D. Moving away. Another much used response to anticipated public disapproval is to move to a less

threatening environment. For many deviants, the anonymity of a large city serves as a preliminary and at times a permanent response to the problems of maintaining secrecy and preventing the disclosure of discreditable facts.

The move to a large urban center does more than provide the anonymity necessary to maintain a secret deviance. The urban milieu serves to reinforce the deviance by providing access to the appropriate deviant sub-culture. In the case of the secret homosexual, the environment of a large city provides him with acceptable and positive role models. He can identify with other homosexuals in a way that provides a more positive view of himself as a homosexual. He is exposed to categories with which he can identify, and definitions which he can accept and relate to. In addition, the homosexual subculture provides a shared perception of reality, a shared cognition, that meets many of the needs of those with a strong sense of social isolation. It is from within the sub-culture that the secret homosexual learns about being gay. Not only is he now aware of the existence of other homosexuals; he learns the strategies known and shared by those for whom secrecy maintenance has become a way of life.

The Secret Homosexual and the Process of Secondary Deviance

Prior to any analysis and discussion of the secret homosexual and his relationship to the homosexual community,

it is perhaps necessary to comment briefly on the process of secondary deviance as this process relates to the development of a homosexual identity. As we have seen, identity is essential to the assimilation of attitudes norms, and Weltanschauung of a community.

The concept of secondary deviance is a critical element of any analysis of the strategies or accommodation used by deviants. In the study at hand, homosexual behavior may be regarded as the primary deviance, behavior that violates culturally held norms and attitudes. Although primary deviance is seen as unacceptable behavior by a consensus of persons in a community, it does not directly affect the status or alter cultural definitions and perceptions of the deviants themselves. Secondary deviance, however involves the response of the deviant to the reactions of the community to his deviance, he is, in effect, responding to the label of homosexual.

In Lemert's original discussion of the etiology of secondary deviance, he strongly suggests that it is the stigmatizing and degrading aspects of a deviant public identity that creates and reinforces the need for secondary deviance.¹³ For Lemert, secondary deviance is a syndrome of culturally defined responses and actions acted out by deviants as they

¹³Edwin M. Lemert, Human Deviance, Social Problems and Social Control (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962, pp. 62-92).

internalize the deviant role. These responses may become incorporated into a deviant life style in which one's identity is focused upon the deviant role. Lemert further states,

Actions which have these rules and self attitudes as their referents make up secondary deviance. The secondary deviant as opposed to his actions, is a person whose life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance.¹⁴

For many homosexuals, however, the awareness of self as a homosexual, as well as the learning of techniques of secrecy maintenance and impression management are shaped and reinforced through personal interactions with other homosexuals. Whether as an overt homosexual or as one whose sexual preferences are kept a secret, the homosexual community teaches responses and sub-cultural definitions that facilitate a commitment to a homosexual identity.¹⁵ By providing a social context within which homosexuals can find positive reinforcement and acceptance, the homosexual community operates as a powerful agency of socialization through which homosexuals learn how to live as a homosexual.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁵For an analysis of identity development in prostitutes and the effects of positive referent others, see Nnette J. Davis, "The Prostitute: Developing a Deviant Identity" in James M. Kenslin, ed., Studies in the Sociology of Sex (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971), pp. 297-332.

CHAPTER IV

LEARNING TO BE A HOMOSEXUAL: THE SECRET HOMOSEXUAL AND THE HOMOSEXUAL COMMUNITY

The process of organizing one's life around one's deviance implies the existence of a reality structure qualitatively different from that shared by non-deviants. It suggests the sharing of this altered reality with others having similar social labels. In so doing, however, the reinforcing aspects of the homosexual sub-culture socializes the newcomer. He discovers not only a new identity through this sub-culture but, in addition, he acquires those techniques and strategies for survival to use while interacting with a potentially alien and hostile straight world. It is this knowledge that ultimately aids in the restructuring of the lives of those who have a secret deviance. The preliminary social process which permits one to internalize the values and shared knowledge of the homosexual sub-culture is generally referred to as the process of "coming out."

The Process of Coming Out

In the jargon of the homosexual world, "coming out"

is the result of defining oneself as a homosexual. One comes out, so to speak, when he no longer requires excuses and rationalizations to explain to himself his homosexual encounters. Rather, he accepts the fact that he is a homosexual. It should be noted, however, that self-awareness even when accompanied by self-acceptance does not provide for a lessening of conflict should this fact be disclosed to the straight community. In addition, self-acceptance as a homosexual need not include any assumption of acceptance by others. Strong conflict and personal crisis are experienced by some persons when they arrive at this serious conclusion about their sexual orientation. Self-identification does facilitate interaction with other homosexuals as well as with the homosexual community. For this reason, coming out is an integral part of subsequent interaction with the homosexual sub-culture and is necessary to those for whom this community serves as a supportive and need-oriented reference group.

Coming out may occur in different ways. By far the least frequent but the most dramatic is a public statement declaring oneself to be a homosexual. In the past several years, there have been several instances of this public acknowledgement, most notably that of a high ranking New York City Health Department official. On a less sensational level, groups such as the Gay Activist Alliance encourage their membership to publicly declare their homosexual

orientation rather than to continue to live under the strain of secrecy and deception.

For most homosexuals, however coming out does not necessarily guarantee liberation from the necessity of continuing deceptions, lies, and secrecy. To the contrary, coming out may exacerbate one's need to control information concerning his life style since, at this juncture, one's participation in the homosexual community generally increases. Coming out implies the onset of active participation in the sub-culture of the gay world. It is a process that combines self-realization with changed behavior patterns in a way that creates the mutual reinforcement of both factors. Thus, one becomes a homosexual not only because he says he is, rather, he identifies as a homosexual by spending more time with homosexuals and absorbing many of the commonly held beliefs and definitions of the homosexual community. Self-acceptance makes possible the search for others of a similar orientation; these others then offer a degree of acceptance and support not readily available among heterosexuals.

The process of coming out was discussed with a 40 year old professional whose analysis included the following account.

. . . You start participating actively in the counter-culture . . . It's sort of in admitting it to yourself. You can also admit it to others. But I don't see any point in doing that generally. In spite of what they say about liberation and all that, it (homosexuality) is still not socially acceptable to a majority of people.

For homosexuals as well as for others with a deviant identity, the problems of public admittance are usually preceded by those of personal realization. In addition, feelings of isolation and alienation often reinforce to the recently self-avowed homosexual his marginal status in the social world. To many, the conflict and strain of coming out help motivate his receptivity to the homosexual community. For many, coming out is a lonely and unhappy time of life, beset by the problems of personal adjustments as well as by fears of disclosure and public stigma and rejection. Discussing this aspect of his adjustment to a covert homosexual life style, a well known media person recounted the following experience from his own development of a homosexual identity. In the following account, the respondent is referring to remembered experiences from his undergraduate days at a college in Atlanta, Georgia.

The two of us thought we were the only two people in the world. We didn't realize that there was such a thing as a gay society or gay movement. The point is we were both students. We had our social life which was strictly confined to the campus as most people's is. Again, we thought we were the only two guys in the world who were in love . . . and we thought that most guys who were in love were . . . who might live together . . . would probably be terribly effeminate, and (we) didn't identify with what we know now as a gay society at all. We didn't realize there was such a thing . . . We were still dating girls at this point . . . There was absolutely no one to tell. When it broke up, I got very distraught and I did tell a couple of friends, both of them were good friends and I thought, suspected, they were gay, but we never discussed it, never mentioned it, and it turns out they were gay, and it sort of helped me through

one of the traumatic, very emotional crises. I've always identified with Catcher in the Rye because I did more or less what that boy did.¹ I got on a train and came to New York, packed all of my bags and planned to stay here for the rest of my life and never go back to school. I stayed three days and went back.

Finding the Homosexual Community

In a city the size of New York, access to the homosexual community is rarely difficult. Rather, the young homosexual generally finds himself caught up in a stream of social and sub-cultural structures conducive to even stronger identification with a homosexual identity. For many, chance encounters generally serve to socialize as well as introduce the neophyte into the sub-world of homosexuality. He quickly learns of the existence of a totally gay life. The availability of gay bars, clubs, bookstores, movies, and baths soon becomes apparent. The homosexual can, should he prefer, completely submerge himself in the world structured and defined by the gay community. For many, however, the gay bar serves as an agency of socialization into the gay world as well as representing a viable alternative to the very real problems of social isolation. It is important to note however, that the advent of the gay bar as a social institution has been, until quite recently, confined to larger cities, with

¹The reference here is to the classic study of a troubled adolescent boy by J. D. Salinger.

relatively few similar meeting places readily accessible in less populated places. For many homosexuals, frequenting the gay bars represents an aspect of his formal entrance into gay life. Finding the gay community is illustrated in the following account. The respondent is a teacher living on Manhattan's West Side and leads a totally homosexual life in his sexual orientation.

I didn't know about the subculture or any of that business. I didn't know there was a whole scene. I thought it was one of those lone wolf things . . . I thought I was the only one in the world.

I didn't go to any gay bars at first, I met people in the street. I had a couple of numbers (i.e. casual sexual encounters) that led to meeting somebody else.

I didn't do the bar scene right away. But then I started going. I became a real bar fly. That was the social circle. That's where you met people. You met your friends and you met "numbers."

For this person and many like him, the homosexual bar provides an accepting social environment as well as serving as a source of reference group support.

For some homosexuals, the discovery of the gay community and subsequent participation in the social life serves as a rite de passage in their social and sexual biography. Identification with homosexuality as a life style rather than as an occasional encounter is both suggested and reinforced by the existence of a homosexual community. The following account is taken from an interview between the researcher and a salesman and suggests the types of subjective meanings associated with participation in the gay community:

Q. How did you meet other gay people?

A. I would go to the business library in late afternoon and learned to go to the bathroom and get a blow job. I felt anyone who stayed around in men's rooms . . . there was something wrong with them.

I learned when I was in graduate school that there was such a thing as a gay bar. It was told to me by a straight guy, at least I think he was straight. I had never heard the word "faggot" before, until I was in graduate school.

Q. Did you spend a lot of time in gay bars?

A. I began to spend more and more time in the (gay) bars and met some people. I felt comfortable with the attention I was getting. It made me feel good. I would think up ways to get away and go there. I met Javier (the respondent's lover) there and that was it, as far as my marriage was concerned. I knew I was really gay.

It might be well to note that the use of accounts in these instances is structured within the guidelines and limitations of this specific methodological tool. Thus, the meanings and interpretations attributed to past behavior by the actors themselves reflects current circumstances and ego needs.

For many homosexuals maintaining a secret identity, the social acceptance and collective support of the homosexual community serves to alleviate some of the strain and anxiety of secrecy maintenance. For the younger homosexual, gay bars and places of similar social meaning serve as a meeting place for both social and sexual purposes. In addition, these institutions provide the group reinforcement so strongly lacking in their interactions with the

heterosexual world.²

Compartmentalization and Strain:
The Need for Honesty

Interaction with the gay community helps the secret homosexual reduce the strain of maintaining a secret. Secret homosexuals generally find themselves more comfortable in the presence of persons who know they're gay and with whom they do not have to maintain a false social self. The efforts one must make to avoid the social stigma that generally accompanies disclosure make even more attractive the openness and sexual honesty of the gay community. For secret homosexuals passing as heterosexual while at work and in most of their social interactions the homosexual community provides a needed relief from the problems of secrecy maintenance. In addition to the much needed though obvious social supports, free and unproblematic sexual access can only take place within this structure. One need not worry that the object of his sexual interest might be "straight." Although rejection anxieties are present (as they are in heterosexual contacts) one need not be concerned with the embarrassment or inadvertent disclosure that could result from sexually approaching a heterosexual.

²For an analysis of the psychological functions of the homosexual community see, Maurice Leznoff and William A. Westley, "The Homosexual Community," Social Problems 3 (April 1956): 257-263.

The problem of mistaking a heterosexual person for a homosexual is, of course, always a possibility. However, most homosexuals usually refrain from making sexual advances when there exists doubt of the other's sexual orientation. Thus, the problem is generally minimal, though it does persist.

Sexual interest and desire for subsequent contact are generally quite subtly communicated in a way usually unrecognizable to a heterosexual. The ability to detect just who is or is not homosexual has several functions. First, it helps protect the homosexual from surveillance and entrapment techniques that have often been implemented by police. Although this practice has ceased to be a serious problem among homosexuals in New York City, a healthy respect for the possibility of vice squad personnel is reported by those who rely upon street "cruising" for most of their sexual encounters.³ A second function of this nonverbal communication is that it provides for continued face-saving and

³The term "cruising" generally refers to the homosexual practice of showing public availability and interest in persons whom one meets by chance in public places. Cruising may take place in any public place, but most often occurs on the street, in shops, libraries, parks, etc. See Lauch Humphries, Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places (Hasthorne, New York: Aldine Publishing Co., 1975). The respondents of this study report little and infrequent cruising in public restrooms. The art of cruising incorporates the techniques of symbolic cues and nonverbal communication by which sexual interest is expressed through eye contact and body language. In addition one can make known his sexual availability simply by being in a particular place at a time commonly known among homosexuals to be "appropriate" to a sexual encounter.

anonymity by the parties involved when there is no desire for reciprocity.

It is a strongly held belief that homosexuals have a "sixth sense" that enables them to know and identify other homosexuals otherwise indistinguishable from the rest of the general population. This myth is in no way verified by observable fact and is unsupported by the behavior as well as the beliefs of homosexuals themselves. For the most part, secret homosexuals agree that they can detect another homosexual only if that person wants to be recognized as such. They are aware that voluntary disclosure is generally based upon a degree of trust and emotional rapport usually not generated through the casual relationships one experiences in business and chance encounters. Homosexuals generally operate on the assumption that the men one meets in the course of day-to-day interactions are heterosexual. The homosexual's behavior and sexual interest (should there be any) are generally carefully circumscribed by what are considered acceptable standards of heterosexual male behavior.

Socialization into the Gay Life

In interactional terms, the life of an overt homosexual is less problematic than that of secret homosexuals. For easily visible and/or known homosexuals, social and professional encounters are defined and structured through

others' awareness of his sexual orientation. Although this fact does not entirely rule out the possibility of rejection open disclosure does serve to alleviate the ambiguity and tensions that pervade the interpersonal relationships of those who are guarding a secret. At the least, an open avowal of a deviant identity seems to liberate the deviant from the burden of secrecy maintenance. Although he may still face rejection, he is not concerned with the strategies of evasion so necessary to those for whom the risk of disclosure is a viable possibility.

In contrast, the secret homosexual generally formulates a life style that is directed and controlled by his desire to emotionally and sexually relate to members of the same sex while simultaneously keeping this need a secret from significant persons in his life. He must thus learn to compartmentalize his life so that his actual social identity is made known within the homosexual community but is unknown and hopefully not suspected by the straight world. This need to compartmentalize results in strong dependence upon the gay community and gay friends for the emotional and social support he is unable to attain from the heterosexual world. Actually living in two conflicting worlds appears to increase alienation from that system that provides the least need-fulfillment while simultaneously reinforcing the significance and influence of the gay community as an agency of socialization.

For the most part, secret unmarried homosexuals do not spend a great deal of their leisure time in the company of straight people. Exceptions are made that provide inclusion of "wise" straights into their social milieu. Most of one's leisure time and voluntary associations are spent in the company of other homosexuals. This social pattern provides a great deal of access to the socialization and reinforcement processes within the gay community. It is here that these persons emotionally "live" and feel comfortable. It is here that they are accepted as "normal." Perhaps of greater significance, however, is the fact that only within the gay community can the secret homosexual find relief from the tension of perpetual impression management so necessary for interactions with the straight world. The secret homosexual does not have to worry about miscues or misinterpretation while among other homosexuals. He is secure in his identity as a homosexual even though he is still subject to the usual problems of social interaction and social life.⁴

There exists an even sharper dichotomy in social roles when one observes the secret homosexual in predominantly homosexual resorts and vacation areas. Within the security of geographic as well as cultural isolation many

⁴Goffman distinguishes between virtual social identity traits which we impute to the individual and actual social identity, traits the individual does in truth possess. See Erving Goffman, Stigma, Chapter 1.

other indistinguishable secret homosexuals may at times become somewhat effeminate in several ways act as to parody women in general. This is usually referred to as "camping." Camping is best defined as an acting out of the stereotyped expectations of a social role. It contains elements of both humor and self-depreciation and is often a source of great amusement among homosexuals. Camping combines a gentle humor with a sometimes biting burlesque of homosexuals and homosexuality. For secret homosexuals, camping is by necessity restricted to encounters and social interactions in which all parties are aware of the sexual orientation of the person who is camping.⁵

Camping usually involves a variety of effeminate gestures and exaggerations. It serves as an outlet for anxiety as well as being an established and accepted norm within the homosexual subculture.⁶ Many otherwise discrete homosexuals will camp when within the safety of the homosexual community. This behavior is most noticeable in gay bars, private homes and parties, and, of course, gay vacation resorts. Camping is also noticeable at the gay baths, although the highly sexual nature of the baths usually

⁵See ch. 2 for a discussion of the role of the "wise" in research among deviants.

⁶For a discussion and analysis of the psychodynamics of camping, see, Esther Newton, Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

precludes prolonged social interactions of a nonsexual nature.⁷

In the following account, a highly successful trial lawyer discusses the phenomenon of camping:

When I have a drink, let's say occasionally when I have a drink, then I loosen up, then I'm no longer logical . . . Well, at a dinner party and I'm among gay people and I have a couple of drinks then I'll just relax. I'll start to loosen up and camp. I'll sometimes even assume a camp role, not queen, but campy. . . . All the homosexuals that I know at one time with the possible exception of Ron occasionally let down and do something silly. That silliness might be just the everyday human being's reaction to a very unpleasant world, or it might be because you're part of the gay world. I don't know. The way I look at it is occasionally to camp or to posture or to make some grotesque gesture or something of that sort.

Learning Alternatives to Effeminacy

One of the most valuable supports that the homosexual community gives to its members is an awareness of the existence of an acceptable role-model for adult homosexuals. The homosexual community provides an alternative life style to those who are homosexual yet whose natural appearance

⁷At least one gay bath in New York City has become acceptable to more sophisticated straights for a Saturday evening out. General nightclub entertainment and refreshments are offered, as well as a chance to mingle with a homosexual group. However, those gays preferring anonymity have mostly moved on to less commercial establishments, thus presenting to the straight world's "in-crowd" access to only overt, effeminate homosexuals.

and inclinations are, by the standards of our society, masculine. Through contact with other homosexuals, the gay man becomes aware that he does not have to be effeminate or highly visible to lead a homosexual life style. To the contrary, masculinity and a masculine appearance are highly regarded within the gay community. He becomes aware that there are many other "normal" appearing persons whose sexual preference parallels his own. He can now more realistically choose the life style that is appropriate to him and with which he is comfortable. He learns that sexual interest in other men does not necessarily mean that he is effeminate or less of a man. He learns respect for men who are homosexuals and in so doing may increase his respect for himself.

The problem of public appearance and impressions is often highly problematic to homosexuals who are just discovering their own homosexuality. Some secret homosexuals presently indistinguishable from other men report a period of "limbo" in which they felt that they should be effeminate and "swishy" since they were gay. These young men had no awareness of homosexuality other than that of the straight world. Prior to contact with homosexuals within the homosexual subculture, many report negative reactions as well as highly rejecting attitudes towards those they knew were homosexual. In adolescence and often into early manhood, they had not been aware of homosexuals being other than highly visible and strongly effeminate. In some

reported instances, homosexuals were social pariahs. For many, upon their adapting a homosexual identity, the existence of "normal" appearing persons who were homosexual provided a positive role-model as well as helping reinforce one's own sense of worth and masculinity. The absence of positive role-models is discussed by a homosexual social worker:

Q. Did you know any homosexuals when you were a kid?

A. Well, I grew up in a small town, you know and there were one or two guys who people would talk about. I never had anything to do with them. My mother was always warning me not to get picked up by strangers like that.

A few of the guys on the football team used to talk about letting some guy blow them. It was all very exciting but I didn't know how to go about it.

Q. Were you aware of local attitudes about homosexuals?

A. Sure, they were seen as degenerates, perverts. I really couldn't believe I was like that. I thought all homosexuals were old and effeminate.

It is from within the homosexual community that a homosexual can learn to be a homosexual without necessarily acting in ways generally ascribed to homosexuals. Alternate patterns of self-presentation and life style become possible and highly viable. One learns that he may live discretely as a homosexual. In addition, he comes to regard homosexuality and masculinity as compatible rather than mutually exclusive states of being.

The Secret Homosexual and the "Queen"

Some homosexuals are both visible and flamboyant in their public behavior. These are persons who are easily identified as homosexual by both the straight and the gay communities. For many, they are the personification of all homosexual traits and stereotypes. Their clothing, mannerisms, voice, gestures, and general demeanor make them instantly recognizable as homosexual. These persons are generally referred to as "Queens."

For heterosexual men, social contacts with "queens" are highly limited. These contacts generally are structured by the necessity of business dealings or other highly controlled interactions. In some ways, heterosexual men are more comfortable dealing with homosexuals of this type. Interactions by flamboyant homosexuals with the straight world are generally less problematic. This observation suggests the following explanations.

1. People generally experience minimal anxiety when the persons with whom they are dealing are acting out the behavioral expectations and typifications usually ascribed to their social role. To meet straights, the "flaming queen" is behaving in a way that conforms to many of our commonly held beliefs concerning homosexuals. Most heterosexuals expect homosexuals to exhibit these traits.

2. Dealings between straights and flamboyant homosexuals generally evoke feelings of superiority and/or

amusement. The obvious deviant identity of the "queen" serves to reinforce the strongly held social stigma connected to homosexuality as well as creating feelings of moral superiority and masculinity in heterosexual men.

In marked contrast, however, are the reactions of secret homosexuals to these highly visible and clearly effeminate homosexuals. At the very least, the queen is a source of embarrassment to the secret homosexual. He neither wants to be identified with him nor to be seen in his company. Their stereotypical behavior is most often viewed with great hostility and anger. There is a personal sense of threat as well as a strong fear of public association with a person whose homosexuality is apparent to all. Great anxiety concerning the possible disclosure of their own secret identity appears to motivate the strong sense of embarrassment and hostility experienced by secret homosexuals when confronted with persons of this type. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a homosexual college professor. It is representative of attitudes strongly held by secret homosexuals.

Q. What are your feelings about very overt homosexuals?

A. I think they offend me. It's almost as though they are protesting too much that they're homosexual. They know very well that society doesn't look too favorably on homosexuals and they go out of their way to flaunt ... You can be homosexual without flaunting it. I think they kind of do more damage to homosexuals and homosexuality. They cause unwarranted attention and negative ... by offending people. I think they offend public sensibility.

- Q. Are you threatened by them in any way?
- A. Yeah, in the sense that they are stereotypes. It offends me simply because people would think you dress like they do, you talk like they do, you walk like they do, and you might attract the same gestures and posturing and so forth that they do. In that sense, it does bother me, because it brings unfair publicity and unfair hostility against everyone who happens to prefer men sexually.
- Q. Do you have any friends that could be considered Queens?
- A. No. I don't think I would be friends with a real "swish."
- Q. Have you ever known anybody who was like this?
- A. Oh, yes.
- Q. What would be your feelings if this person unexpectedly dropped in at your office?
- A. I'd be terribly embarrassed. A flaming faggot? Oh, yeah, no doubt . . . If he had the rings and everything, the proper colored clothing, swishing, and the hip movement and everything. I would probably be very much embarrassed.

In much the same vein, a young journalist expressed the following opinions:

I don't like swishy people. They're all rather silly. I know that some people find them creative, but I don't particularly . . . I find some of them amusing . . . None of my friends are swishy. I don't like them. They're weak people. I find them phony . . . I resent their posturing and foolishness. I don't like people to think that that's what homosexuals are.

There are indications, however, of changes in attitude towards effeminate homosexuals. Although a great majority of persons interviewed as well as those contacted in less formal circumstances reacted quite negatively to the public impression made by "queens," there was some

indication of the development of a more benign reaction.

There is evidence that some secret homosexuals are adapting a more permissive and certainly less rejecting attitude towards very overt homosexuals. This may, perhaps, reflect the influence of the relatively new homosexual rights movement which encourages the development of a sense of identification among all homosexuals. Current emphasis on the oppression and minority group status endured by homosexuals seems to have developed in some a consciousness of kind that transcends the more practical considerations of secrecy maintenance. A discussion with a successful Manhattan attorney illustrates the strong ambivalence that he experiences when confronted with highly visible homosexuals:

Q. What is your attitude towards highly visible homosexuals?

A. I like them. I have no negative feelings towards any group of people that are readily identifiable within a homosexual world.

Q. Some persons such as yourself feel threatened by them.

A. I used to pass judgment on people saying, how can that boy allow himself to look like that, what the hell is he trying to prove, why doesn't he act like a man. I mean, why the hell should he, who am I to say. He's perfectly happy and once you get to know him, he turns out to be a very bright, and perhaps a really good person. He is a human being, and not some kind of burlesque. So, I learned very quickly that you treat people like people and not take them as groups.

Q. When you were working on Wall Street, and someone like this came by your office, what would your reaction be?

A. Well, that I wouldn't like. No, that I certainly wouldn't like. . . . I wouldn't allow that. If they just popped in, though, I would be as cordial as I could.

Q. What's your gut reaction?

A. My gut reaction is that I don't like it. I would be quite embarrassed.

Q. Do you have . . . ?

A. (Interrupting) Incidentally, I'm not particularly proud of that, but I thought I ought to say to you that my attitude may be different in the future when I have a chance to straighten myself out better than I have . . . I'm too concerned with what people think . . .

The obvious conflict illustrated above is indicative of a series of changes that are affecting the interaction between secret homosexuals and the homosexual community. There seems to be an increasing feeling of com-
maraderie, of a sense of shared realities that is causing some secret homosexuals to re-evaluate the circumstances of their life style. Included here is a most graphic illustration of this metamorphosis are the taped remarks of a high salaried newscaster:

Q. How do you feel about highly effeminate homosexuals?

A. My attitude towards anybody is that they should do damn well what they feel like doing. I'm a liberal politically and philosophically, and I don't feel as though I'm in any position to judge what other people do. I know that a lot of my homosexual friends are turned off by swishy gay people because they say they are giving us a bad name, that they don't represent us, and that they're just reinforcing the stereotype. But, it seems to me that that's a very selfish position to take. If a person is by nature feminine, if he enjoys doing, acting that way, then let him do it.

Q. Do you feel threatened by these people?

A. No, I don't feel threatened by them. I think that there are a lot of homosexuals who are threatened by them . . . I know that they are threatened by them, and I disagree with them. First of all, we're not leading totally honest lives in the first place. If I was leading a totally honest life, I would make no bones about my homosexuality, and I would go in and tell my boss or whatever . . . Well, I may not do that, but I just wouldn't make any attempt to cover it up, which, as I've already told you, I do.

I think when it comes down to human relationships, what is left? Where is the honor? Where's the morality of judging? Who the hell am I to judge? I'm queer. I'm homosexual, and for me to judge or to ostracise or to refuse to associate with some of my brothers who are homosexual and happen to be more obvious than I am, to me it's terribly hypocritical.

In the wake of the increasing militancy of gay activist organizations, it may be difficult for secret homosexuals to continue justifying their life styles, life styles that by definition, necessitate a degree of rejection of other homosexuals. Their close emotional and cognitive ties with other homosexuals as well as with the gay community in general makes it highly possible that the shifting focus away from denial and secrecy towards open disclosure is raising serious practical and ethical questions.

Among these secret homosexuals who are well integrated into the economic and social structure of the larger society, the risks of disclosure present a strong rationale for what appears to be a growing moral dilemma. Knowing the nature of this interaction within the larger community is vital to understanding the relevance that techniques of secrecy and deception play in the lives of these men.

CHAPTER V

THE USE OF LEGITIMATE AND DEVIANT INSTITUTIONS IN THE MAINTENANCE OF SECRECY

It is now openly recognized that having a homosexual sexual orientation and being in a heterosexual marriage are not mutually exclusive life styles. Indeed, it is estimated in at least three different studies that 20 percent of all homosexual men have been married at least once.² It is not the intention within the scope of this study to assess the "success" of these marriages. Rather, the data suggest that for at least some homosexual men, marriage provides the acceptability and legitimacy that will possibly counterbalance the social liabilities of being homosexual. One need hardly point out that in the last ten years, there has been a marked change in public attitudes towards remaining single. No longer are men and

²Harry M. Rank, "Why Homosexuals Marry Women," Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality 6 (August 1972): 13-23; Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg, Homosexualities (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Also see Frederick W. Bozett, "Heterogeneous Couples in Heterosexual Marriages; Gay Men and Straight Women," Journal of Marital and Family Therapy (Jan. 1982): 81-84; E. L. Ross, "Modes of Adjustment of Married Homosexuals," Social Problems 18 (1971): 385-392.

women in their twenties, the age category with the highest probability of marriage, stigmatized by their families and peers for postponing marriage and childbirth. Even a cursory overview of the demographics of American society reveals the increased substitution of work and career goals for traditional family patterns. For many, homosexual and heterosexual alike, being unmarried and/or childless has become a viable alternative to the more familiar patterns of adult social organization.²

In this research, a large majority of the respondents were over 40 years of age. Most, it would appear, had internalized their attitudes towards marriage and family long before current alternatives were legitimated by changing social norms. For most of these homosexual men, both married and unmarried, marriage had been considered to be the only acceptable and possible life style and one's life 'script' generally included the inevitability of both marriage and children. For many of these homosexual men, the fact of their homosexual orientation did not alter this belief, that the only acceptable way to go through life was in a relationship with a woman. The following account illustrates this attitude:

² See for example, current discussions of singlehood and childlessness in Thomas E. Lasswell and Marsha Lasswell *Marriage and the Family* (Oxford, Miss.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1987).

I never really thought about not (emphasis his) getting married. Everyone did. I was always attracted to men, but the thought of not getting married was just not part of me, not then, anyway.

The following is again typical of the responses of many homosexual men, some of them married, and some formerly married.

I guess I've been gay since I was 15. I dated in high school and in college like all my friends did. I had sex with men in men's rooms . . . secret places--but I always dated. I knew I wanted to get married. I wanted a family. But, I had no choice. I felt it was expected of me.

Q. Who expected it of you?

A. I was very close to my parents and had a good relationship with them. They would talk about when I married and had a family. They expected me to set up a practice with him (respondent's father) and live close by. It was all planned for me.

Among lesbian mothers, recognition of one's homosexuality is reported to have often taken place after years of marriage. Although this research deals only with male homosexuals and does not deal with strategies of secrecy prevalent among gay women, it is useful to note both the similarities as well as the differences in responses. Accounts by middle-aged lesbian women generally reveal their own denial of alternatives to marriage, particularly during their early twenties. It is only approximately within the last five years that women are realistically able to identify with sex-role models who are engaged in nontraditional work and who may not be married. This lack of acceptable alternatives for women might very well account for the

extremely high percentage of lesbian women who have previously been married.³

In chapter Three, we discussed the process by which a person acquires and internalizes a deviant identity. Among homosexuals, it often occurs that this self-awareness does not fully emerge until well into adulthood. The availability of casual sex with members of the same sex is, for men, rather commonplace in both large metropolitan centers as well as smaller size cities. Such encounters do not necessarily signal to the participants the possible reality of a homosexual orientation. Indeed, Kinsey points out that close to 40 percent of American males have had homosexual experiences during their lifetime.⁴

Why Homosexuals Marry

A married homosexual is considered an oddity in both the homosexual and heterosexual communities. Yet, the large percentage of homosexual men who do marry suggests that the function of marriage to some homosexuals more than compensates for the burdens of secrecy maintenance.⁵

³Barbara Ponce, "Secrecy in the Lesbian World," (typewritten) University of Southern California, 1978. Ponce also reports more than 10 percent of her respondents had married homosexual men.

⁴Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948)

⁵Poss, "Modes of Adjustment" 335-393.

Traditional research that addresses itself to the subject of marriage and the family generally cites several commonly recurring situations that motivate persons to marry. These include the desire for children, the desire to lead a domestic life style, the love of the person one marries. Additionally, for some people, marriage may represent a response to the expectations of others, as well as a strategy of dealing with the fear of loneliness and of old age. More than 50 percent of the previously married homosexual respondents reported combinations of these factors as seriously contributing to their decision to marry a woman.⁶

In addition to these motives for marriage commonly shared with the heterosexual community, some homosexual men are attracted to marriage and the life style it suggests for a combination of additional factors and considerations. For these men, marriage provides more than a socially approved response to family and public expectations. Marriage is, for some, a functional use of "impression management" and as such is deliberately entered into to neutralize the possibility of social disapproval. Kitcuse has pointed out that public responses to norm-violating behavior generally remains rather neutral unless and until

⁶Dank, "Why Homosexuals Marry Women," 13-23.

there is occasion to activate the official labeling process.⁷ Thus, although rumor, gossip, and informal name-calling may occur, these social sanctions may often be neutralized or even reversed by the seemingly simple symbolic act of getting married.

The following account by a formerly married New York stockbroker is reflective of the conscious effort to alter the responses to him by his occupational peers. This account is typical of those homosexuals for whom marriage represents a viable strategy for dealing with possible social and occupational sanctions that disclosure of one's homosexuality might evoke.

When I applied for a job at Bache and Co., I knew damned well that I had to be seen as a married man.

Q. What made you so sure.

A. Because I've been in this business a long time, and, Honey, they sure don't want any faggots. So, I falsified the resume and said I was married. I figured to get away with it . . . it's a big company. But after 6 months, I knew it wouldn't work.

Q. What had changed?

A. Well, I kept getting invited to dinners, and a lot of bullshit like that, you know. It seemed that everyone in the place wanted to meet this wife that they thought I had. After a while, I ran out of excuses. In this business, even being a divorced man for a long time has its drawbacks.

⁷John I. Kitsuse, "Societal Reaction to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method," Social Problems 9 (1962): 247-256

Q. What did you do then?

A. Well, there's this woman that I've known for a couple of years . . . about 35, attractive, a good friend . . . and she knows the story (that the respondent is homosexual). She's met John (his lover). We spend a lot of time together, and know a lot of the same people. I really like her. She's a great woman. I care about her a lot. She knows the story . . . and still wanted to get married.

Q. Were there any other alternatives besides getting married?

A. I didn't think so at the time. And it seemed it might just work. She knew, and I felt it would be a good thing.

Q. Do you know any gay men who marry and their wives don't know?

A. Are you kidding? I could name half a dozen.

Q. Do you think those marriages work?

A. Not really. Some have been real disasters.

Q. Did you see any change in the way others related to you after you got married?

A. Well, it's like a union card for those guys. It makes them more comfortable with you . . . one of the boys (smile). At any rate, I feel better about things at work. And Anita (his wife) did her own thing. Actually, it's funny . . . her parents had been bugging her about being single. "It shuts them up too."

Marriage as Cure

Despite the fact that since 1973, The American Psychiatric Association no longer includes homosexuality in its listing of mental disorders, the vast majority of Americans continue to regard homosexuality as, at best,

an unacceptable life style.⁸ Indeed, the public statements of singer Anita Bryant in 1977 popularized an anti-homosexual movement so influential that Miami voters repealed the five month old gay rights ordinance by a 2 to 1 margin. Part of the campaign rhetoric at that time regarded homosexuals as "in the same category as murderers."⁹ The anti-sodomy laws of several states still refer to homosexual acts as "the abominable and detestable crime against nature with mankind or beast." Research with deviant populations strongly suggests that identification with a strongly devalued group often creates a temporary crisis of self-loathing and self-rejection.¹⁰ In the case of a homosexual identity, those negative feelings often initially lead to denial of one's homosexuality as a permanent condition.

⁸See, for example, S. F. Marin and E. M. Garfinkle, "Male Homophobia," Social Issues 34 (1978): 29-47; E. E. Levitt and A. D. Klassen, "Public Attitudes Towards Homosexuals," Journal of Homosexuality 1 (1974): 29-43; J. L. Simmons, "Public Stereotypes of Deviants," Social Problems 13 (1965): 223-229; Kenneth Nyberg and John P. Alston, "Analysis of Public Attitudes Towards Homosexual Behavior," Journal of Homosexuality 2 (1976): 99-107.

⁹Lindsay Van Gelder, "The Lessons of Dade County," Ms. Magazine (Sept. 1977), 75ff.

¹⁰See, for example, Norman R. Jackson, et al., "The Self-image of the Prostitute," Sociological Quarterly 4 (April, 1963): 150-161; John Lofland, Deviance and Identity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969); David Matza, Becoming Deviant (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), and Gresham Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," American Sociological Review 22 (Dec. 1957): 664-670.

Rather, a common response is that their homosexual orientation is a temporary condition and would possibly be cured with strong effort.

The following is typical of the respondents interviewed:

- Q. What were your feelings when you felt you were homosexual?
- A. I was 17 at the time, had been dating, but no real sex, just school stuff, you know. And I realized I was gay.
- Q. How did you know?
- A. Actually, I was seduced by a guy much older than me. But I don't blame him. I liked it. It was what I had wanted all along, I guess.
- Q. How did you feel about it?
- A. Well, for a while I denied it, at least to myself. I thought it was a stage I was going through. I thought I'd outgrow it. I prayed a lot. God, I don't want to be gay. I actually thought I had a curse on me, and that I had to control it. I wanted to be like everyone else. I'll tell ya, if I could have taken a pill or something then and become straight, I would have.

Close to 75 percent of the respondents in this research reported serious and sometimes dangerous levels of self-hatred and self-denial. The prevailing view of their homosexuality was that there was indeed something seriously wrong with them. They were not only different, they were, in their own eyes, abnormal, perverted, and essentially sick. Although for many, these problems of self-loathing were resolved without the assistance of professionals in the mental health field, none the less, the fact of their own

evaluation and the responses to their own discredited identities created for a large number of these men the need to change. For some, this meant that their definition of their own sexual orientation followed a medical model. It was an illness that could be "cured." Having a homosexual orientation was, initially a temporary state of illness, similar to "having the measles."

Of the 130 respondents interviewed during the course of this research, 42, or 31 percent reported having previously been married. This figure representing close to one-third of the total respondents can only be interpreted as reflecting the population at hand. There is no way to determine if this is typical of the homosexual population in general. Getting married, however, has sometimes been a legitimate life style for men who experience anxiety about their sexuality.¹¹ In addition, the decision to marry is not only understood, but often respected within certain segments of the homosexual community as an occupational necessity for certain gay men. Among many homosexuals, however, the fact that one's lover or sex partner had been married at the time of the sexual encounter only serves to enhance the sense of masculinity so highly prized within the homosexual community.

¹¹Gregory R. Lehne, "Homophobia Among Men," in *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, p. 200, D. David and R. Brannon, eds. (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

Not all homosexual men accept the option of getting married as a viable alternative for a gay man. Among younger, more militant, and open homosexuals, there are strong negative feelings about the use of any and all strategies that are intended to deny, both publicly and privately, the fact of one's homosexual identity. For these men, at least, the strategies of secrecy observed and analyzed in this research, are not considered appropriate ways of dealing with the fact of one's homosexuality. The newly emerging emphasis on gay pride and homosexual identity precludes for many of these men the need to activate strategies of secrecy and information control. Their response to the homosexual who has, either by marriage and/or fatherhood demonstrated his ability to operate in traditional sex roles vis-a-vis women is often tinged with bitterness, and often contempt. Labels such as "traitor" and "who's she kidding" are used as terms of derision, and one can scarcely avoid recognizing the hostility with which this type of life style is regarded.

Homosexuality and the Mental Health Community

The data suggest that there has been little change in the value-laden perspectives of homosexuality to which so many gay men in therapy have been

exposed.¹² In particular, both research and self-accounts suggest that denial of the patient's homosexuality is a very common response of therapists. This approach is perhaps significant in that for some homosexual men, this evaluation by a trusted clinician was instrumental in their decision to marry. In some cases, marriage, and, as quickly as possible, was the suggestion of the psychiatrist or therapist. Interestingly, the following account is from a successful academic who is also a practicing psychotherapist:

. . . By then, I was 19. I was very aware that my homosexuality was out of control. It was a serious thing. When I was younger, I thought it would go away and I would be attracted to girls like everyone else is. (pause)

I was in a situation where it (therapy) was possible. I was in a College community, which had its own medical school psychiatric clinic. I could afford it. It cost me \$1.25 an hour. Hysterical when I think about it now. I was assigned a psychiatric resident . . . third year of psychiatric residency. Apart from anything else, he was gorgeous, and I felt uncomfortable in the beginning to talk about it with him. Gradually, I realized that every time I talked about it (the respondent's homosexuality) he'd change the topic . . . squirm around. I got the message that he did not want to hear it. And I realized that my homosexuality was not only a problem for me but very much a problem for him.

¹²See, for example, J. Fort, C. Steiner and F. Conrad, "Attitudes of Mental Health Professionals towards Homosexuality and its Treatment," Psychological Reports 29 (1971): 347-350; Gerald C. Davidson and Terence G. Wilson, "Attitudes of Behavior Therapists Towards Selected Issues in Human Sexuality," Behavior Therapy 4 (1973): 686-696; Ira B. Pauly and S. G. Goldstein, "Physicians Attitudes in Treating Male Homosexuals," Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality 4 (Sept. 1970): 27-47.

One day, I was talking about my homosexuality and speculating on whether one of my professors was (gay) and he indicated to me that this was a very dangerous thing, that I had to keep my thoughts and identity secret. He made a big deal out of it. And that's when I said to myself, "shit," I'm here to talk about my homosexuality and I can't even talk about it.

More than half of the respondents reported some contact with mental health professionals. This figure might, in part, reflect the cultural patterns and alternatives available in large urban centers, from which this sample was obtained. Almost all, after either psychotherapy or psychoanalysis believed that the therapist or analyst did not understand their homosexuality. In addition, they felt that heterosexuality was being encouraged as the appropriate life style for them. Particularly, psychiatrists tended to direct their patients away from a homosexual life style towards situations and events that would provide greatest exposure to heterosexual interaction. This almost always meant social and sexual encounters with women and strong encouragement to marry. The attitude almost universally reported was a variation of the "try it, you'll like it" theme popularized in recent commercials. One respondent reported the following typical account:

I could always tell that this guy would nod in approval when I mentioned a woman that I knew . . . any woman. I don't think he knew what homosexuality was all about . . . like some phase I was going through. I could never convince him that I really couldn't relate to a woman emotionally. Just getting it up is not enough.

Q. Did the psychiatrist ever suggest that you date women?

A. Date!!! He kept telling me that what I was going through was common in young men today and that I would marry and all this would be behind me.

Q. Did you believe him?

A. Part of me did, I think. But as time passed, I knew that I was gay.

Q. What happened with the psychiatrist?

A. I left therapy soon after that. I didn't feel he was helping me. I'm not really sure why I went, anyway.

The traditional position of the mental health has served to reinforce and encourage the homosexual's attempts to "cure" and deny his homosexual orientation.¹³ Although this approach has met with minimal success, marriage continues to be strongly suggested to homosexual men as a therapeutic tool of "recovery." Heterosexual mental health professionals also present marriage as a possible alternative and as a priori proof of the patient's masculinity and heterosexuality.

Marriage by homosexual men continues to be both a functional albeit problematic life style. Research indicates that these marriages are rarely successful, by whatever criteria of success one is using.¹⁴ Nevertheless,

¹³See Fort, Steiner and Conrad, "Attitudes of Mental Health Professionals," 347-350; Pauly and Goldstein, "Physicians Attitudes in Treating Male Homosexuals," 27-47.

¹⁴Bozett, "Heterogeneous Couples in Heterosexual Marriages - Gay Men and Straight Women," 81-89.

the issue of marriage is often discussed among homosexual men and the feelings on both sides of the issue run strong. Most homosexuals do not consider marriage as a viable strategy of secrecy. Others have considered marriage and ultimately rejected the idea as imposing intolerable conditions upon their lives. Yet, for some, particularly those for whom homosexual identification occurs later in life and who are not certain just what their sexual orientation is, marriage appears to be the primary way of achieving the social acceptability that for heterosexuals is a matter of everyday life passage, while at the same time allowing the participants to experience family life while avoiding social pressures.¹⁵ The following is a typical account:

I thought about getting married from time to time. When I was in my mid-twenties it really made sense to me. I can make it with a woman. I like women . . . and I know that they find me attractive. I don't think I'd have any trouble finding someone to marry. But really, who am I kidding? I'm gay, and I don't want that kind of hassle.

Q. Would you ever consider marrying a gay woman?

A. Well, several of my friends have. Sometimes it works I suppose. I guess I just don't want children that badly.

¹⁵This research deals with those men whose self-image is homosexual. Although the existence of bisexuality, both as an identity and a social label, is recognized. These observations do not necessarily apply to attitudes toward marriage by those who consider themselves bisexual.

- Q. Do you think that's why your friends got married-- for children?
- A. Partially. That (children) and the fact that being married is a great cover. If that's the way you want to go. It solves a lot of problems. But there are too many other problems . . .

The Assumption of Heterosexuality

Passing as heterosexual is often facilitated by the assumption of heterosexuality that characterizes most social encounters. Unless there are strong cues, both given and received, to the contrary, day-to-day interactions between heterosexuals and homosexuals generally occur without one's sexual orientation being in question. All are assumed to be heterosexual. In this way, the assumption of heterosexuality may be used as a particular technique of passing. The heterosexual assumption means simply that parties in most interactions in heterosexual settings are presumed to be heterosexual unless demonstrated to be otherwise. The strength and pervasiveness of this assumption, in addition to the prevailing norms of social interaction which a priori represent an agreement to accept a person at face value, make it highly improbable that one's sexual orientation will be in question. The heterosexual assumption is a "truism" in the gay community and its obvious benefits (as well as its drawbacks) are well known and often experienced by secret homosexuals.¹⁶

¹⁶Ponce, "Secrecy in the Lesbian World."

Thus, marriage and other normalized social interactions within the heterosexual world provide by their very "normalcy" a cover for secret homosexuals in heterosexual settings. One may then consciously choose not to disrupt the social definitions being activated and applied.

The assumption of heterosexuality appears to be more pronounced within certain professions and occupations. For not only does American society define certain jobs, such as hairdresser and interior decorator, as more likely to attract homosexuals, we also strongly expect that other occupations, arbitrarily defined as "masculine," e.g., police work, professional sports, the military, will not be engaged in by homosexuals.¹⁷ Quite often the responses of those in authority when these social rules are violated, that is, when homosexuals are "discovered" in jobs generally considered inappropriate, reflect horror as well as a sense of betrayal.¹⁸

¹⁷The disclosure in 1982 by Glenn Burke, a former outfielder with the Los Angeles Dodgers that he was an active homosexual during his major league career, from 1976 through 1979 created a small, though, brief uproar in West Coast sport circles. In addition, the public disclosures of homosexuality of other former professional athletes, such as Dave Kopay and Dave Megessey add to the visible list of exceptions to the rules. See, Los Angeles Times 4 Sept. 1982, Sec. 3, p. 2.

¹⁸See Colin J. Williams and Martin S. Weinberg, "Being Discovered: A Study of Homosexuals in the Military," Social Problems 18 (fall 1970): 217-227

The commonly held assumption of heterosexuality within the general population provides a repeatedly used cover for secret male homosexuals. This assumption makes "passing" an often simple and common situation occurring as it does with the full approval and expectations of the heterosexual community.

More importantly, this strategy is consciously implemented by many, if not most, secret homosexuals in situations where disclosure would result in responses of disapproval, rejection, or in some situation, loss of job, or worse. Awareness of the way in which the dominant culture perceives and defines one's sexual orientation provides both the arena as well as the mechanisms for these deceptions. The following account illustrated this process.

Q. Do people at work know that you are homosexual?

A. No. They have no reason to . . . and I make damned sure that they don't.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Well, I'm careful about the way I dress and what I talk about. I know some really great looking women . . . and I always have a "date" when it matters.

Q. When does it matter?

A. I feel I should be seen with a woman from time to time. After all, I'm 38 and single. But it's never been a problem for me. I'm a big guy . . . like sports . . . and that helps.

The following recollection from a New York City Police Officer.

On the job, there is never any sense that I might be gay. I've been a cop for 12 years--a good one and they know it. I'd really have to fuck up

royally to blow this. It just never occurs as far as I know. But I'm always careful, and I watch what I say and how I act.

Another ingredient of the heterosexual assumption appears to be linked to phenotype and body image. Specifically, the assumption of heterosexuality is far more likely when the person in question conforms most closely to our culturally agreed upon stereotypes of masculinity. Thus, large, muscular men are rarely thought to be anything but heterosexual unless cues and/or information to the contrary are present. Conversely men with slight builds report greater difficulty in utilizing the a priori assumption of heterosexuality. A former all-America football player from the University of Tennessee reports:

Unless they know me, people always think I'm straight. I know I don't look like a faggot . . . not what they think a faggot is. I mean, I don't exactly have a limp wrist. I get a kick out of it, though. Even when I'm walking with Gary (his lover) we don't come across as a "couple" necessarily.

Q. What does Gary look like?

A. He's a little taller than average . . . dresses casually. He plays a lot of tennis and looks strong. Of course, it depends where we are.

Q. What do you mean?

A. Well, if we're on Madison Avenue, that's where I work, we tend to look like two businessmen going to lunch. I think it's different nearer to where we live.

Q. Are there other gay men in your neighborhood?

A. Are you kidding? We live in one of the gayest neighborhoods in Manhattan--wall-to-wall gays. It's totally different.

A highly visible television news broadcaster had a similar response to these questions.

I've never been taken as gay unless I want to be. Which is just as well, considering there's a morals clause in my contract. I just don't look gay . . . and I certainly don't want to change that.

Q. Do you think the fact that you're a big man has any effect on the way others respond to you?

A. That's a good question. I've never really thought about it. But, now that you ask, it makes sense. I know in college, I played varsity baseball--I was a real jock. It's easier to be accepted when you do what other guys are doing. I mean, they expect gays to mince about talking about draperies and crap like that.

There is some evidence that many secret homosexuals deliberately avoid those occupations that might bring their sexual orientation into question while at the same time gravitate towards those work situations with stronger assumptions of heterosexuality. The feeling is a typical response from a successful Los Angeles attorney:

I really wanted to be a professional artist. But, my family always wanted me to go into law. I paint a lot still, but only in my spare time. Being an artist had some risks for me, so I went the other way.

Q. What kind of risks?

A. Well, obviously, it's a lot harder to make a living but I was thinking more about being gay. That's all I would have needed, being in an art colony somewhere. My family would have died.

In a similar vein, a Los Angeles dentist recounts the following:

I don't have a gay practice. I know some dentists and doctors do. I don't advertise that I'm gay, and no one has even thought about it as far as I know. Not in my office.

- Q. Would it bother you if your patients knew you were a homosexual?
- A. (pause) I don't know. I might lose some of them, but why take the risk? It's not necessary and I don't think a person at the dentist is even thinking about it . . . I'm not an interior decorator, you know. (laughter)

Simon and Cagnon indicate that passing as heterosexual is easier for women than for men.¹⁹ They point out that the heterosexual community rarely assumes that two single women living together might be in a sexual relationship. Indeed, present economic conditions often preclude other alternatives for single women, gay or not. Having a roommate has become an economic necessity for a growing number of adults. In addition, although there have been important changes in the way we perceive and define the sexuality of unmarried women, there still remains in many parts of the country the acceptable social role of an "asexual" single woman. This social role is both believable and possible within the dominant heterosexual community. The same range of flexibility is not as easily applied to men who, in American society, are generally still thought of as the more sexually active of the two sexes, a behavior expectation that remains in the face of a myriad of research in human sexuality that seems to contradict much of these

¹⁹Simon and Gagnon, Sexual Deviance, p.218.

cultural stereotypes.²⁰

The ease with which many homosexual men can "pass" as heterosexual suggests a number of possibilities. Passing includes the conscious presentation of a heterosexual self for a social audience. Everyday face-to-face interactions within the heterosexual world create for many homosexual men the necessity of constructing and maintaining a heterosexual identity. Thus, one's homosexual identity becomes even more strongly experienced, reinforced as it is by the constant threat of unwanted disclosure.

Most heterosexuals assume gays to be heterosexual until public actions or new information creates room for doubt. In instances of this nature, when the general community is forced to reassess its assumptions of "normalcy", reactions vary from mild surprise to absolute rejection and appear to activate previously undisclosed attitudes and feelings about sexuality. The following account is a graphic example of how additional information, forcing a restaurateur to redefine a long-standing customer's sexual orientation, drastically altered previously established interactional patterns. The following was told to this researcher with a sense of outrage, and bitterness. The

²⁰See, for example, Robert R. Bell and Shelli Balter, "Premarital Sexual Experiences of Married Women," Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality 7 (Nov. 1973): 111-113; John F. Kanter and Melvin Zelnik, "Sexual Experiences of Young Unmarried Women in the United States," Family Planning Perspectives 4 (October 1972): 9-18.

respondent was a successful academic:

Saturday night, I had a first hand experience with hatred. I've been eating at this Indian restaurant for five years. I go there with Bob when we work late. Never have any problems. Bob is straight and the owner always thought of us as two ordinary college professors. Bob is married, has kids, and the people at the restaurant have met his family. The owner (of the restaurant) loves us . . . always comes over to the table and talks, a super nice guy, right? Well, last night, Elio and I (the respondent's lover) took two of his friends, both gay, to this place. I'd given it a big buildup and I've never been so embarrassed in my life. Here I had been raving about how nice it is, the food, the service, and that the owner knew me and always came over, how nice I was always treated. He always told me that I looked like his son. Well, now, we walk in, the four of us, and the whole thing changed.

Q. Was it obvious to the owner that you all were gay?

A. I'm sure he knew, four men, no women, on a Saturday night. Elio and I were dressed casually, but nice and his friends were very dressed up--elegant business suits. And we were all talking at once, really having fun, laughing a lot. Anyway, I'm sure he picked it up right away.

Q. What happened?

A. What happened is that not only did he not come over to the table; we were totally ignored. We were served, but I've been going there for five years, and I knew all the waiters. It's a small place. Last night, it was as if I had never been there before. I was treated like a stranger. We all were.

Q. What did you do?

A. Nothing. I was in a rage. I knew what was happening. I didn't tell anyone, not even Elio. But, now I know how blacks feel. Living in New York I'm not used to being treated differently if someone figures out that I'm gay, and most people don't know I'm gay. I don't advertise. Now I'm really feeling terrible conflict about coming out, even once in a while. It was terrible. I'm so angry and there isn't a thing I can do.

While secrecy is maintained, it is possible for the secret keeper to avoid a great many negative consequences of stigma and public disapproval. Yet, the necessity of passing as a critical ingredient of everyday face-to-face interaction appears to increase the sense of being different as well as feelings of alienation often observed among devalued and discredited groups. Paradoxically, successful passing makes meaningful and emotionally intimate relationships with heterosexuals increasingly difficult. For, the very act of defining a situation as threatening and dangerous in that not passing would bring personal and social discredit, reinforces one's awareness of homosexual identity and of being in effect, an outsider. Successful concealment does not necessarily insure successful personal relationships.

Using the Homosexual Subculture

In most major cities, there exists a network of homosexual clubs, bars, baths, restaurants, and other institutions specifically intended to service the social and sexual needs of the homosexual population.²¹ Those homosexual men who reside in or near these areas are, of course, well acquainted with their offerings. For many homosexual men maintaining a public heterosexual identity, even sporadic

²¹ See Hoffman, The Gay World.

participation provides a safe and welcome haven for the necessity of secrecy maintenance. It is here that the secret homosexual can avail himself of social and sexual interactions without the risk of unwanted disclosure. It is within these structures that he can temporarily deactivate those mechanisms of control so essential to his passing within the heterosexual world. In effect, these structures provide an emotional oasis, a respite from the demands of secrecy maintenance and constant vigilance, and as such provide an important link with both his homosexual identity and his homosexual needs. The following account reflects this process:

I'm at the baths at least once a week. It's one of the only places that I can really let down. As much sex as I want . . . all anonymous. No one cares who I am. I really need that, you know. It's not coincidence that 11 to 2 (in the afternoon) are the busiest hours at the baths. Just guys like me, businessmen, a lot of them married, I would think. But no one asks and unless you want to tell something about yourself, it's perfectly safe.

An interview with an insurance salesman reinforces this view:

I met my lover at the baths. (smile) I don't generally let anyone know that. He is the manager of a very exclusive men's shop, and used to go there all the time. I stopped going now. We are living together and I don't need it as much. But for a long time, the baths were an important part of my life. I didn't have to risk cruising on the street. I was there for sex, and that's what the baths are all about.

Q. Did you ever reveal anything about yourself to the men you met there?

A. Well, [] (emphasis his) did, but I think that's not

usual. Certainly you don't have the fear of being recognized. Everyone at the baths is gay so, we're all in the same boat, or, pardon the pun, in the same tub.

Attendance at exclusively homosexual facilities provides assurances of anonymity so greatly sought by the secret homosexual population. Sharing and circulating information about these facilities is an essential need-oriented function of the homosexual community as well as of the many publications it supports. Any homosexual in or near a sizeable city should have little difficulty in locating gay bars, baths and other facilities within the homosexual network that are an essential component of the homosexual community. Although interactions in these situations involve a cross section of the homosexual population, for those homosexuals maintaining a heterosexual public identity, they provide the only available opportunity to engage in interactions as a homosexual with minimal risk of disclosure. Thus, one's deviant social identity is safeguarded.

The social rules that prevail in social and sexual interactions within these predominantly gay institutions generally provide the opportunity for anonymity and safety for the secret homosexual. Real names are rarely used, and there exists the assumption that one may lie about occupation, marital status, and other personal facts. Misrepresentation is a common occurrence and is generally accepted within the framework of the particular encounter.

Conversely, however, other homosexuals feel safe enough within these situations to reveal truthful and identifying facts about themselves and actually welcome the opportunity to relate on a more truthful basis. For example,

Everyone knows me at _____ (a gay bath). I'm there several times a week. I meet friends there . . . and cruise. But it's a separate world. It's my real world. I don't have to pretend to anyone. If I didn't have that, I'd go crazy. Remember, I teach all day, and although I know there are other gay guys at school, we're all very careful to just do the job like anyone else. I'm used to it now, but I need the honesty of the baths. It's just as important to me as the sex (smile) well, almost.

- Q. How would you feel if someone you knew showed up at the baths?
- A. Well, if he's at the baths, he's a faggot too, right? So what can he do to me? Actually, that happened a few years ago . . . a guy I knew from college. I always had a feeling he was gay. He wasn't too surprised to see me. No big deal.

The data suggest that for large numbers of homosexuals, movement in and out of the homosexual community may be accomplished with relative ease. For those who want or need to assume the burden, the strategies of secrecy appear to work. The opportunities for anonymity that large cities provide are of obvious benefit to those persons who want to conceal personal information about themselves. Within the heterosexual community, participation in culturally approved social interactions provide successful concealment and cover for the homosexual wanting to keep his sexual orientation a secret. Within the homosexual community, the available institutions provide an important

source of social and sexual interaction and may also be seen as an important source of identity and emotional support.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We have studied the ways in which secrecy is used and maintained to neutralize the consequences of public stigma. Secrecy in this instance has been examined as a response to the negative sanctions often activated by public knowledge of a person's homosexuality.

The use of secrecy to prevent the disclosure of devaluing traits appears to be a cultural regularity. The need to conceal information about oneself reflects the culturally defined need for social and personal acceptance. Indeed, the ability to utilize secrecy in social life has long been regarded as "one of man's greatest achievements."¹ For many, the enlargement and fullest enjoyment of life is made possible through the ability to create and maintain a subterranean world that co-exists alongside the more visible world of publicly agreed upon values and behavior. Thus, the discrepancy between what we essentially are and how others perceive us to be can be controlled and managed to a great extent with the ability to

¹Wolff, Georg Simmel, p. 330.

prevent discrediting information from being part of public knowledge. Taking an active role in influencing the way others perceive us often enables the individual to control, to a great extent, the type of public responses and interactions one will experience.

Secrecy, the Individual, and Society

Secrecy in social relations is a necessary ingredient of individualization. Although tolerance of non-conformity and norm-violating behavior varies greatly from culture to culture, serious known violations of social norms are generally punished. Although the severity as well as the form of societal responses to deviant behavior varies greatly, the violator of strongly agreed upon social patterns generally takes personal and social risks. Secrecy becomes an imperative for those whose life style, attitudes, and/or social identity is held in disrepute or represents a serious departure from accepted modes of conduct.

Social conditions of strong personal differentiation permit and require secrecy in a high degree, and conversely, the secret embodies and intensifies such differentiation.²

Simmel suggests that in small and homogeneous social groups, the formation and continuation of secrets is extremely difficult to achieve, for the intimacy and frequency of social interactions provide many possibilities for disclosure.

²Ibid., p. 354.

In addition, however, secrecy is often unnecessary as well as difficult in small, face-to-face social groups. For it has been observed that there exists a structural conflict between intimate social group interaction and deviant and/or peculiar and extraordinary behavior. As Simmel observed, the type of non-conforming behavior that creates the need for secrecy to exist and be maintained is incompatible with a gemeinschaft social organization with its tendency towards shared norms and mutuality that generally characterizes small, intimate communities.

In sharp contrast, American society emphasizes the imperatives of mass society and culture. As the nature of social organization has changed from gemeinschaft to gesellschaft the nature of human interaction has also undergone strong redirection.³ Characteristically, impersonal and anonymous relationships provide far greater opportunity for diverse groups and behaviors to proliferate. Modern American society has greatly re-defined the capacity as well as the inclination of the person who is different, and for whom, public knowledge of this departure from culturally agreed upon norms would result in strong social and economic sanctions. Modern industrial society, by its very complexity, provides greater opportunities for individuality and

³For the classic analysis on the changes in social relations that resulted from the transition from rural society to urban society, see Nicholas S. Timasheff, Sociological Theory: Its Nature and Growth (New York: Random House, 1967) 3rd ed., pp. 99-101.

personal freedom. Its very structure makes possible the concealment of discrediting and personal information about people. Paradoxically, it appears that both the need for concealment as well as available opportunities for this concealment are both functions of the growing diversity and anonymity that characterizes American society.

Secrecy is neither good nor evil. Although much has been written about the evils of governmental, organizational, and political secrecy, the morality of personal secrecy and the privacy that it both creates and supports does not easily conform to existing concepts of morality and ethics in human behavior.

All deception in both public and private life involves secrecy. However, the motivation behind some types of secrecy is clearly not to deceive, but, as we have seen, to protect, to insulate, and to enable the secret keeper a greater degree of freedom and control over many facets of his life. Secrecy is an indispensable component of the social order, and as such, it becomes a necessary yet, often feared and abused, social tool. Used prudently, secrecy can enhance and protect the quality of life and in so doing, can provide the freedom of thought and action so often sought after but absent in social encounters. However, the use of secrecy can also run amok, uncontrolled, as it were, until it creates an all-consuming force and a private social reality around which one's life becomes organized.

Merton observed that most conflicts over secrecy, whether between husband and wife, homosexual and heterosexuals, or occurring between a citizen and his government, are conflicts concerning power. Specifically, this is the power that results from one's ability to control information about one's self or other events.⁴ Goffman, too, reminds us that although one's self-image is greatly dependent upon the responses of others to us, we nevertheless do not play a totally passive role in this critically important social process. We can, and do, control and sometimes re-direct others' responses to us in part by what we reveal about ourselves and how successfully we monitor the information that we allow others to obtain about us.⁵

In this research, we have focused upon the ways in which secrecy is used and maintained to neutralize the effects of social stigma. The men in this study whose homosexual identity and orientation was not generally known are people for whom secret keeping became a critical aspect of most of their social encounters. The many strategies of secrecy utilized by these men reflects in some measure their ability to exercise power, the power to withhold or channel personal and biographical information that

⁴Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1949), p. 363.

⁵See Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1959)

might become available to others. The absence of this control severely limits the personal and social power of the individual "To have no capacity for secrecy is to be out of control over how others see one; it leaves one open to coercion."⁶

The study of devalued persons can be understood as a conceptual and analytical tool by which other social interactions can be understood. Most people need and use secrecy at some times in their lives. It is the way in which people can enjoy positive social responses while at the same time, engaging in behavior or occupying social roles which are in violation of social norms and practices. Secrecy provides a realistic strategy by which a limited degree of norm violation may be both enjoyed by the actor and tolerated by the community without confronting the necessity of social sanctions. The student who doesn't disclose a failing grade, the ex-convict who perhaps relocates and falsifies occupational and personal information on a job application; both are utilizing techniques of secrecy in an attempt to prevent the disclosure of discrediting personal information. To the extent that one can control information about himself, he exerts power over his life, and indirectly, of course, over others.

⁶Bok, Secrets, p. 19.

Secrecy and the Role of Others

How total is a secret? Can the secret keeper be certain that others remain unaware of the facts he attempts to conceal? We do not suggest that answers to these questions are possible within the scope of this research. Absolute knowledge of this type remains generally unattainable. However, certain interactional patterns begin to emerge from the data and through participant-observation and informal discussions.

The role of others in both allowing and reinforcing the secret appears as an emerging pattern in the sociology of secrecy. In some cases, and under certain conditions, the maintenance of secrecy is actually joint behavior, mutually entered into and mutually agreed upon by both the secret keeper and those "others" who supposedly are not privy to this information. The deceived, in effect, sometimes play a participatory role in their own deception.

Both the secret keeper and those from whom the secret is to be kept use available opportunities to affirm the social and moral order. The rules of conduct so essential in binding participants in all social interactions are sometimes orchestrated role-playing, the observance of which is guided by ceremonial obligation and expectation, all intended to reinforce a "normal" social identity. In this way, a secret homosexual who publicly voices appreciation of an

attractive woman or deliberately shows an interest in activities considered masculine is utilizing a ceremonial reinforcement of the social identity he wishes to occupy and significantly one that others wish to accept.

For some secret homosexuals, these deceptions are in fact allowed to be played out by those who are supposedly deceived. The parents of a homosexual, or his employer may relate to the homosexual as a heterosexual if that is his choice of social identity. In part, this support of secrecy functions as much to protect the deceived as the deceiver, even if they privately have suspicions about his sexual orientation. The process of reinforcing the secret keeper's definition of the situation even though one holds an opposing view of social reality is quite often a strategy of self protection and defense. In this way one can avoid, sometimes indefinitely, the unpleasantness and disruption of normal interactions that acknowledgement of the "new" information might necessitate. Thus, the parents of a 35 year old unmarried homosexual renew their son's subscription to Playboy Magazine while the employer of a skilled and needed employee ignores obvious cues that reveal the employee's homosexuality. Both benefit from accepting what the secret homosexual presents as his sexual identity. By not revealing their alternative views and perhaps known discrediting information about the secret keeper, they minimize the risks of serious and perhaps permanent disruption of the relationship. In addition, the secret

homosexual is spared the necessity of activating even greater strategies of concealment. In many instances, this unspoken but strongly adhered to pattern of interaction is the basis for a mutually beneficial policy.

Goffman observed that "the process of mutuality sustaining a definition of the situation in face-to-face interaction is socially organized through rules of relevance and irrelevance."⁷ To allow the secret keeper to maintain the public image he chooses to portray involves the process of mutually sustaining a definition of the situation not necessarily agreed with by the social audience. Moreover, often the ordinary rules by which people manage their daily interactions and without which social life would indeed become both disorganized and extremely difficult are strongly dependent upon such everyday social forms as etiquette, manners, and courtesy. In the case of secret homosexuals, these social graces may function to conceal from the homosexual himself an additional deception; the secret is known to others. Thus, secrecy begets secrecy when one's sense of social and personal needs are better served through avoiding disclosure that the secret is known.

There are other consequences to being exposed to

⁷Erving Goffman, Encounters: Two studies in the Sociology of Interaction (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), p. 86.

new information that is both painful and inconsistent with one's reality constructs. It sometimes occurs that the person or persons being lied to must themselves need to believe the lie. Social psychologists are well aware of the processes that are often activated when people are confronted with "uncomfortable" information about the environment, the self, or others.⁸ Persons in this situation may experience what is referred to as cognitive dissonance.⁹ This may occur when inconsistencies appear between one's strongly held opinions or needs and the introduction of contradictory new social facts and information.

The data suggest that in some instances, particularly among the families and close friends of secret homosexuals there is initial and sometimes extended denial of the possibility of the person's homosexuality. Significant others may then facilitate for the secret homosexual the maintenance of a heterosexual social identity. The obvious inconsistencies that present themselves are rationalized in an attempt to neutralize their implications. Thus, cognitive dissonance appears to be a strong possibility as a

⁸See, Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 38 (1943): 417-452; Kurt Lewin, A Dynamic Theory of Personality, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), and G. Swanson, T. Newcomb, and E. Hartley (eds.) Readings in Social Psychology (New York: Henry Holt, 1952).

⁹Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 3.

reaction to a reality that is undesirable and for many, unacceptable.

The fact that inconsistencies are emotionally painful generally encourages the person to reduce the dissonance. An observed strategy of this process is the avoidance of both information and situations that increase the dissonance. This, in effect, facilitates the keeping of certain types of secrets. Often people want and need to believe a lie, as the consequences of accepting the truth are too difficult. In some instances, the distress that is caused by knowledge of a son or husband's homosexuality is avoided by the refusal to accept this social reality. For many families of gay men, acceptance of the illusion of heterosexuality offered by their homosexual sons or husbands is preferable to dealing with the fact of the person's homosexuality. Thus, same-sex roommates persisting over many years, the absence of relationships with women, and even overt effeminacy are deliberately disregarded as possible indicators of homosexuality. Instead, the heterosexual public identity presented by the son or husband is not questioned, and the observed inconsistencies are neutralized to achieve consonance.

As noted before, Festinger observes that when one is experiencing inconsistency between strongly held opinions and contradictory new information, the person will attempt to protect himself from the new information in an effort to

avoid emotional strain and pain.¹⁰ It is, of course, well known that people define and interpret information to fit what they need to believe. In this way, emotional pain may be reduced and often, confrontation is avoided. And, for the secret homosexual, the presentation of a public identity of "normalcy" becomes considerably easier as the need to believe and the need to deceive form complimentary components of the same interpersonal role-set.

Dangers of Habitual Concealment

Secrecy is an integral part of society and social interactions and functions on both interpersonal and organizational levels. To have an inner life and to be an autonomous functioning adult often necessitates both having secrets and exerting control over what others can know about you. Yet, when keeping a secret becomes the central area of a person's life, issues of stress and emotional health cannot help but be raised. The greater the fear of disclosure, the greater the amount of energy that seems to be expended in guarding the secret.

When, as in the case of secret homosexuals, the secret in question is the issue of the person's sexual identity, the enormity of the burden and the consequences of involuntary disclosure become increasingly clear. In

¹⁰Festinger, Cognitive Dissonance, p. 153.

American society the homosexual, defined as he very often is, as a threat to others as well, as in some instances to himself, is constantly aware of the attendant consequences of an active homosexual life style.

If he chooses not to reveal his sexual preference, he generally must and does become skilled at using those techniques and strategies of secrecy we have identified and discussed. Yet, while his skills at secret keeping may increase, he nevertheless is simultaneously forced to deal with the burdens that secrecy imposes.

This researcher interviewed a middle-aged writer concerning his responses to the need he felt to keep secret the fact of his homosexual orientation. He wrote the following account which is included in its entirety.

The secret is like poison. It is with you always and creates a new reality for the person --and a new way of life. The fear of others finding out, of knowing, is a terrible thing. And your own shame is so terrible.

I have always hated them for what they made me feel about myself. That's what's really destructive. I really did share their opinion of me, and what they thought of people like me. This self-loathing was not confined to the secret. It became part of all I did, all that I was. And no matter where I was, or who I was with, "IT" (emphasis his) was always with me. For a very long time, I believed that I would never be free of it.

One day, I made a deal with God, that if he'd fix things up and it would all go away, I'd be good and never do it again. I'd study hard and be a better person. I even promised to give up sex. I had a feeling that my life would be over if people found out. I fantasized about suicide but I guess I'm not a suicidal type. My dreams were full of this--ever my daydreams. I became totally obsessed with the deception, and

how I would pull it all off. I devised all kinds of contingency plans.

The craziest part is that I needed desperately to tell someone. I needed to share it, and know that the sun would still shine. Life would still be possible if others knew.

I did tell several people. But only after I felt very close to them. The people I told, I felt they loved me and valued me. So I felt safe telling them.

I no longer feel the compulsion to tell. It's been over 25 years since then and being homosexual is not the central point of my life at least, not so much as before. But, it took all those years for that to happen. And those years were terribly painful. I was scared, very scared much of the time.

Looking back, I wish I had been a little easier on myself. But, as I said before, I believed the same things about myself that the others did. And, it's only in the last several years that I can like and accept myself. In fact, I don't think I could have written this until recently. . . .

When concealment becomes an all consuming fact of life, as in the above account, judgment and definitions of reality may become affected. The keeper of the secret often has a tendency to filter out and disregard ideas and realities not considered compatible with one's safe, i.e., secret world. The data suggest that some secret homosexuals become fixated in dysfunctional and stereotyped beliefs concerning themselves vis-a-vis heterosexual society. The fact that secrecy has the potential for moral and ethical corruption seems less significant than the demonstrated danger of distorted and flawed judgments that often accompany the organization of one's life around a secret and deviant identity. In this research, the concern is with the concealment of a discrediting sexual orientation. It is

this very concern, and perhaps, in some, obsession, that appears to create far greater stress and unhappiness than the actual reality of the secret itself.¹¹

The Impact of AIDS Upon
Strategies of Secrecy

It is still too early in the recent discovery of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) to fully assess its implications for both the homosexual community and secret homosexuals. The relevance, though, cannot be ignored. As of July, 1983, there were more than 1500 cases of AIDS reported in the United States. Of these, current AIDS victims, 72 percent are considered to be homosexual.¹²

The seriousness of the problem has resulted in the U.S. Public Health Service labeling the disease their number one priority. In addition, the National Institute of Health and the federally funded Center For Disease Control have pledged in excess of 17 million dollars for research in 1983. Another \$16.5 million has been promised for 1984.¹³

The increasing anxiety over the mode of transmission of this as yet unchecked disease has created both fear and

¹¹For a philosophical discussion of obsession and secrecy, see Bok, Secrets, pp. 25-28.

¹²Another 17 percent are intravenous drug users, 4 percent are hemophiliacs, and 1 percent are Haitians.

¹³"The AIDS Anxiety," New York Magazine, June 20, 1983. p. 28.

apprehension among both homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. This fear is not only directed towards the possibility of contracting AIDS, though there have been significant decreases reported in attendance at gay baths, and in general, a new wariness towards promiscuous, anonymous sex that is characteristic of certain aspects of the homosexual community.

Of greater significance, perhaps, is the danger that is beginning to emerge within the framework of unlearned historical lessons of group hatred and prejudice and the collective acting out of these strategies of discrimination and harassment. There is increasing fear among many homosexual men that the public fear of contracting AIDS will turn a medical issue into one of moral and political judgment. The dislike of homosexuality and the belief that homosexuality is a sin is a long standing and well reinforced position among fundamentalist religious groups. The increasing influence of organizations such as the Moral Majority is reflected in both widespread media coverage and the political access enjoyed by its spokesman and leader, Jerry Falwell. Falwell's position is clear. AIDS is God's way of punishing those who "break the laws of nature and the laws of moral decency. The Scripture is clear. We do reap it in our flesh when we violate the laws of God."¹⁴

¹⁴Los Angeles Times, 13 July, 1982, sec. 1, p. 14.

Although none of the medical community presently studying the AIDS situation has suggested that casual encounters or social interactions will transmit the disease, nevertheless, there have been an alarming number of verified accounts of discriminatory and perhaps, irrational responses being directed towards AIDS victims and those persons in the community whom others arbitrarily define as potential AIDS victims. For many, this category includes all homosexuals. As yet, these reactions have been generally confined to those cities where there are large homosexual populations and where the majority of AIDS victims have been diagnosed, notably New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. During the week of June 15, 1983, the association of morticians of New York City publicly considered refusing to embalm any AIDS victims. This threat, it should be noted, was quickly defused by the Mayor's office and was strongly attacked by several leading Church figures in New York City.¹⁵ The media abounds with reports of the AIDS situation, as well as preliminary attempts to analyze the fear and superstition that apparently is increasing. AIDS sufferers have lost their jobs, evicted from their homes and abandoned by their families and friends.¹⁶

¹⁵"Fear of AIDS," U.S. News and World Reports 27 June 1983, p. 73.

¹⁶"The Panic Over AIDS," Newsweek, July 4, 1983, pp. 20-21.

Conjecture and preoccupation with the issue of AIDS is rapidly becoming a topic of conversation at casual social encounters and in various places of social contact and interaction. The general community is fearful, and at the present time, the medical profession has little new information or hope of an immediate breakthrough.

This current medical impasse may seriously affect homosexuals as well as their choices to prevent others from knowing of their deviant sexual orientation. The most recent accounts from homosexual men indicate increased fear of disclosure and a growing anxiety about the possibility of becoming the target for anti-homosexual attitudes so deeply ingrained in American culture. A middle-aged salesman revealed the following:

. . . My God, I'm scared to death of AIDS. I don't fool around. Paul and I are faithful. That's the way it is. But what really scares me is what people are thinking. Remember, it all happened like this in Nazi Germany--Gays, Jews, socialists.

I don't like to think about where this country is going. People are just looking for a reason to go after us. I don't know where it will end.

This account of anxiety is typical of recent responses within the homosexual community to public agitation and fear. Sometimes, it is expressed as a mixture of fear and resentment, as the following illustrates:

Now that a few straights have gotten AIDS, you can bet that they'll find a cure for it. They found a cure for herpes, didn't they? Well, I'm glad in a way that some straights have come down with it. That'll make them move their asses.

As the AIDS situation introduces the possibility of new and stronger social sanctions directed against known homosexuals, the possibility increases that faced with new and increasing threats of rejection and social liabilities, more homosexuals will choose to keep the fact of their homosexuality a secret. In the judgment of this researcher, there may very well be an increase in the scope and intensity of strategies of secrecy as homosexuals respond to the perceived new threat to their sexual orientation and life style. The issue suggests the feasibility of additional research and sociological inquiry.

Involuntary Disclosure

The breakdown of secrecy may take several different forms and often is the unintended result of seemingly unrelated events. For example, the fear of actual inadvertent disclosure may become a reality when control over information is temporarily relinquished. At these times, disclosure occurs because others are made aware of additional and revealing information not previously known. This is a very real and constant fear among secret homosexuals. Their lives reflect a constant vigilance aimed at preventing inadvertent and accidental disclosure. For example:

I never know what will happen at work. I play it straight, say and do all the right things. But I'd be lying if I didn't say that at some level it's always on my mind. I've learned to live with it. Sometimes, I think I'd be better off just doing my thing and, "screw 'em."

Or, the following account of involuntary disclosure and anxiety:

For a long time, my parents didn't know I was gay. They live in Indiana, and so I don't see them much. And when I do, I never bring Jesse (his lover) home with me. But, after their last visit to New York, they began to ask questions. I think they might have seen something in my apartment when I was out . . . Or maybe it was a phone call that happened.

They visit once a year, and it's really a strain on me when they're here. I try to keep it short. But I'm sure now that they know.

Q. Have they said anything to you?

A. Not in so many words. But, let's face it, I'm almost 30 years old, no girlfriend, no prospects of getting married, and a lot of guys around when they visit. I know they know, but they haven't said anything. I know it's bothering them.

Voluntary or Selective Disclosure

When a secret is being kept, it is generally kept imperfectly. For, as we have seen, there are unforeseen dangers of inadvertent disclosure and unwanted revelation. The greatest threat to the maintenance of a secret, however, is the secret keeper himself. There exists, paradoxically, both the need to keep the secret and the simultaneous need to disclose.¹⁷ The burden of secret keeping generally produces strong pressure to tell someone and to share the hidden information. For secrets of great magnitude, having

¹⁷See, Theodor Reik, The Compulsion to Confess (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959).

great importance in the lives of people are often focused around prominent events or discrediting personal facts. Not being able to share the secret creates both a symbolic and cognitive gap that sets the secret keeper apart from those who do not share the secret. This personal and social isolation is particularly acute for those for whom disclosure would initiate strong social and personal liabilities. Thus, other categories of social outcasts, such as ex-convicts, former mental patients, and herpes sufferers ironically share, along with most homosexuals, the mutual fear of social contempt.

For secret homosexuals, the problem of a norm violating sexual orientation does not end with self acceptance. It would seem that although most homosexuals ultimately face the reality of their sexual orientation, the personal decision as to whether or not to "come out" and if so, to whom, and under what conditions becomes a critical aspect in the management of one's life and subsequent social interactions.

Younger homosexuals, particularly those who reside in large urban centers, do not so readily hide their homosexual identity and many live openly gay life styles.¹⁸ Yet, although some homosexual writers and spokesmen

¹⁸For an informed analysis of current issues in homosexual visibility, see, Dennis Altman, The Homosexualization of America: The Americanization of the Homosexual (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

celebrate the increased visibility of the homosexual community the vast number of homosexual men, and we suspect, women, do not feel able to socially and publicly reveal their sexual preference. What often occurs is the process that we have referred to as "selective disclosure."

Selective disclosure defines the decision-making process by which people keeping secrets choose certain persons with whom to share the secret. In the case of secret homosexuals, the nature of the secret is an important determinant of individual identity. As we have seen, one's homosexual orientation often becomes a central focus of social identity in a society that devalues and strongly condemns homosexuality. Thus, the burden of secrecy and accompanying fear of disclosure is further affected by anxiety over voluntarily revealing the fact of one's homosexuality to the wrong person, or under the wrong conditions.

Still, the need to share the secret often prevails, and even those homosexuals who lead rigidly compartmentalized lives often disclose the secret at certain times and under special conditions defined as presenting minimal risks. The following account illustrates this dilemma by a 28 year old executive:

I've been gay since high school, but when I was in a small college in Idaho, it's the last thing I'd tell. I had two separate lives, Even in a place like Idaho (laugh) but now I'm still friendly with several of the guys I went to school with. And just this year, I told one of them I was gay and that I had been gay when he knew me in college.

Q. How did he react?

A. Well, he told me he sort of suspected it from time to time, but since we double-dated a lot, he didn't think about it seriously.

Q. What do you think he thinks about it now?

A. Well, I think he accepts it all right. He's a close friend, and a social worker, and I guess he's used to dealing with a lot of different types. (laugh)

Q. Why did you select this particular friend to tell?

A. I'm not sure. He's a really good friend. I like him a lot. But I felt that if we were going to remain good friends, he'd have to know. It's part of what I am, and to accept me is to accept that I'm gay.

Q. Do your parents know you're gay?

A. They're both dead, but, no, I never told them or led them to believe anything like that. They just couldn't have handled it. I never would have told them.

The above account illustrates several critical factors in the process of selective disclosure. The process of selective disclosure serve as a barometer of social distance. Additionally, the decision of being able to reveal a devaluing fact of one's identity to heterosexual friends serves as its own indicator of social acceptance. Revealing the secret is rarely a spontaneous action or decision. Disclosure generally takes place only after serious assessment of the relationship as well as of the personal risks involved. The specific style and form of selective disclosure varies with the way one perceives and defines the social situation. Some homosexuals reveal their sexual orientation to a very few intimate friends. Others may share this secret with their parents and other

family members but not with friends. Others may disclose their homosexuality to a variety of family members as well as to close personal friends, but expend a good deal of energy maintaining a heterosexual public identity among fellow employees. This continued need for concealment within the work situation is cited by several respondents as a source of great stress. The following account is from a homosexual whose close friends know he is homosexual:

I know it sounds corny, but I feel like I really lead two lives. Once I'm out of here (the office) I can relax. I've worked here for six years and no one knows I'm gay. Actually, there are a few gay guys here, but we don't talk about it and don't socialize.

Q. Do these gay men know that you're gay?

A. Of course, but like I say, I don't socialize with them. We all know we'd be out of here if they (management) knew. So everyone plays it cool.

Some Further Considerations

Although there exists a limited repertoire of techniques of secrecy, the myriad of responses to devalued social status reflect the abundance of coping strategies available and used by secret homosexuals. However, just as individuals differ greatly in their responses to dangerous situations, so too do secret homosexuals vary as to the degree and direction of social sanctions they will tolerate without activating appropriate mechanisms of concealment and secrecy. The data suggest that people differ greatly in their response to the danger of public mortification and shame. Douglas observes that:

Individuals get on warily . . . by managing the shame feelings they cannot evade through secrecy or deception. Just as individuals differ greatly in their ability to inhibit flight in the face of danger, that is, in their degree of courage so do they also differ greatly in the degree to which they can bear shame without deception, withdrawing, submitting, hiding, going back to traditional ways, conforming. There are probably actual differences in the ability to put up with shame. Some people have more . . . moral fortitude, ability to resist the moral demands of others through shame and ridicule.¹⁹

The data show a significant absence of observable patterns by which decisions over secrecy are arrived at. It appears that factors such as closeness to family may act to reinforce the need for secrecy in some homosexuals, while emotional distance from the family is reported by others to account for the lack of disclosure and the activation of elaborate strategies of concealment. Thus, although the particular strategies may be shared with others who occupy devalued social roles, the decision by which a situation is defined as requiring concealment is by no means a subcultural regularity. Rather, the decision appears to be both a function of the individual's personal definition of social reality as well as the unique circumstances of his social biography.

The burdens of a devalued social identity are very often more than matched by the energy necessary to lead a life of concealment and secrecy. With the changing and

¹⁹Jack D. Douglas, "Shame and Deceit in Creative Deviance," in E. Sagarin, ed., Deviance and Social Change (Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1977), p. 79.

uncertain attitudes towards homosexuality, a great many homosexual men continue to use secrecy as their way of avoiding and neutralizing stigma. Some appear to handle this survival strategy better than others. The data suggest that for many homosexuals some compartmentalization of life styles and strong and continuous control over personal information has become a functional necessity of economic and social survival. It is, after all, a choice, but a choice based upon a multitude of personality and environmental factors that are outside the scope of this present research.

In addition, the consequences of a lifetime of secrecy maintenance may also differentially affect those who keep secrets. The need to deceive, or to protect oneself from a social environment defined as hostile and threatening sets the secret keeper apart from those whom he deceives. The process of secret keeping creates for many the principal strategy of dealing with most social reality. Secrecy, then, becomes the norm. Disclosure, or the simple act of temporarily relinquishing control over personal information becomes a rare luxury, usually reserved for intimate associations or anonymous encounters.

As occurs within the heterosexual community, the secret homosexual also uses labels and social categories as a determinant of acceptance or rejection. Secret gay men often perceive the heterosexual world in terms of "who

knows" and "who does not." These categories become for many a critically important way of defining interactional procedures and serve to limit the choices available to them within the heterosexual world.

Secrecy and Social Definitions

When people share a secret or have similar secrets, there often arises strong elements of collusion between them and as they interact with others. For secrecy reinforces for those who share the secret a sense of mutuality and shared cognition. At one level, this social process serves to reinforce the consciousness of kind and creates informal self-help and supportive groups. Mutual secrets tend also to create a dichotomized view of social reality. The social world becomes divided between insiders and outsiders, often with rigid and stereotypical images becoming the emotional basis of these distinctions. Those who share the secret help shape and define the cognitive boundaries of the social reality of the secret homosexual. In addition, it is doubtful that most secret homosexuals would consider a person with whom they could not reveal their sexual orientation to be a friend. Not having to keep up the public role of heterosexual appears to be a critical necessity for friendship with secret homosexuals. One may interact on a superficial level with many persons in the course of a standard day, but the luxury of honesty appears reserved for those who are trusted and whom one will

interact socially during leisure and recreational times. For the secret homosexual, as for most people, trust and friendship are inseparable. A friend is to be trusted; only those whom you can trust can be considered as true friends. A simple but eloquent explanation of this process follows:

I have gay and straight friends, but I don't really think of straights as friends unless they know I'm gay. If they know, I can relax, and if they accept that about me, it's fine. If they don't know I'm gay, and I don't feel right about telling them . . . well, that's really a drag. Who needs that bullshit? I have enough of that shit at work.

The data suggest that selective disclosure is applied in a rather pragmatic way to the variety of social interactions that secret homosexuals experience with non-gays. For many, almost all social encounters become automatically classified according to which type of social role, gay or heterosexual one will be called upon to play. Most secret homosexuals prefer not to feel obligated to "be oneself," i.e., not have to worry about others knowing or caring you are homosexual, appears to be a growing concern among most homosexuals in this study. The burden of secrecy creates for many an increasing pressure towards exclusivity, that is, the immersion of oneself and identity within the homosexual subculture. The tendency towards exclusivity is not totally a function of secrecy. Exclusivity is often a response to devalued social status as well as among secret homosexuals, a manifestation of

the need to temporarily avoid the role playing that characterizes so many of their daily social interactions. As Peter Berger so aptly stated, "birds of a feather flock together, not because they want to, but because they have to."²⁰

The tendency to define a large portion of social reality according to insider-outsider distinctions has been observed among other deviant groups for whom a specific occupational or social identity may create undesirable social responses. Among police, for example, in-group secrecy is often used as a shield against all those who are defined as hostile and unsympathetic to their mutually shared definitions of proper conduct and police behavior.²¹ For the police, the category of those not to be trusted generally includes the press, the public, and the judiciary, as well as most members of the criminal population. More importantly, however, for our purposes, here are the latent functions of this police "code of secrecy" sharing as it does similar consequences within the homosexual community. For both groups, the mutually agreed upon need for secrecy appears to be a strong sense of identification felt with others who are identified as group members. In

²⁰Interview with Peter Berger. The New School for Social Research, June 2, 1968.

²¹William Westley, "Secrecy and the Police," Social Forces 34 (March 1956): 254-257.

these instances, secrecy functions as a reinforcing social bond by creating among those persons a sense of shared cognition and a feeling of mutual identity, although, in many cases a devalued social identity. Secrecy, then, helps reinforce and strengthen group bonding, and, as in the case of ongoing deviant subcultures, may be a casual factor in the maintenance of group identity.²²

Empirical evidence of this social process has become more visible. Most major American cities have fairly stable and recognizable homosexual communities, both cognitive as well as geographic, in which secret homosexuals move about with relative ease and from which they withdraw when the functional imperatives of social interactions make it necessary to do so.

Due to its commonly held attitudes about homosexuality American society has helped create the need to deceive. Repression and fear of social liabilities quite generally result in the creation of secret populations. This population of secret homosexuals includes many of those whose adult lives have been organized around fear of disclosure and the ensuing social disgrace. This fear of social disapproval and sanctions appears to be an integral part of the social interactions as well as a

²²See Albert K. Cohen, Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang (New York: The Free Press, 1955); also see Howard S. Becker, The Outsiders (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

powerful determinant of many of their life's choices and decisions.

At best, the use of secrecy provides the world of "normals" an erroneous sense of security that devalued and nonconforming behavior is either nonexistent or is confined to known areas, stereotypically visible participants, and even perhaps, a cultural oddity.

At its worst, the strain of perpetual concealment and deception creates and reinforces the very instability, unhappiness and socially dysfunctional behavior that has become virtually synonymous with the homosexual. In this way, prevailing social attitudes contribute to the continued need of secrecy. The future of concealment and secrecy for the male homosexual appears irrevocably linked to the direction and magnitude of any changes that might occur in our cultural attitudes towards homosexuality.

It is impossible to predict whether the recent openness concerning homosexuality that is apparent in the media as well as within the public schools will substantively bring about social change in policy and attitudes towards homosexuals in American society. The increase in official nondiscriminatory policies towards gays is perhaps reflective of some measure of attitudinal change. For the present, it appears predictable that homosexuals and other deviant groups and individuals whose sexual orientation produces ridicule and rejection among a sizeable portion

of the American population and who occupy a severely discredited social role will continue to utilize strategies of secrecy and concealment necessary for successful social interactions. More than necessity, however, these strategies are presently considered by many who use them as mandatory for self-protection and social survival.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The following inclusion is intended to provide additional information concerning the sample population of this study. Because of the methodological and ethical complexities that exist in the study of deviant and secret populations, some of the data that often comprise traditional sociological categories were not available.

A serious priority in this research was the development and maintenance of rapport and trust with the 130 respondents. Because of this, not all respondents were asked identical questions, particularly where it was believed that the question itself might create defensiveness and possibly interfere with the trust and spirit of confidentiality so critical in research of this type. Within this framework, however, the following information represents additional biographical and sociological data provided by the respondents and the researcher.

AGE. The interviewer did not ask for the respondents' age in any of the interviews. Observation and reinforcing secondary sources, however, strongly suggest an age category of 30-60.

RACE. By observation, it could reasonably be determined that the racial backgrounds were as follows:

White	-	111
Black	-	12
Hispanic	-	5
Oriental	-	<u>2</u>
Total	-	130

RELIGION. For reasons of privacy and confidentiality, no respondents were asked their religious preference.

OCCUPATION. In order to assure anonymity and minimize any risk of inadvertent disclosure, direct questions concerning occupation were avoided. However, middle-class and upper-class life styles were apparent. Some of the occupations that were informally revealed include:

Lawyer
 Psychotherapist
 College Professor
 Commercial Artist
 Police Officer
 Dentist
 Businessman
 Stockbroker
 Media Person
 Newspaper Reporter

MARITAL STATUS. Thirty-one percent of the respondents had previously been married. Only two were married at the time of the interviews.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS. All of the interviews and participant-observation took place in the following cities.

New York City	-	95 interviews
Los Angeles	-	20 interviews
Miami	-	15 interviews

Interview Schedule

An important tool of the data collection included 130 taped private interviews. These tended to be lengthy, generally averaging around two hours each, and although there were general areas of specific interest and direction, the general pattern was open-ended and loosely structured. The lack of formality it is felt, was more than compensated for by the openness, cooperation, and the wealth of personal data and accounts that were shared with the researcher. The focus of interest for these interviews included the following areas:

1. How and when the respondent "discovered" his homosexuality.
2. His initial and subsequent responses to this "new" information.
3. Specific changes in life strategies and choices that resulted from realization of his homosexuality.
4. Self-evaluation of the success of his strategies.
5. His own attitudes towards the heterosexual community as a homosexual.
6. His feelings about being a homosexual.
7. Self-assessment of interactional patterns on the job, with family and significant others and with the outside community.

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