HOMOSEXUAL WAY OF LIFE: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE USE OF SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

In the post-Freudian period, the tendency in Christian ethical discussions has been to approach the issue of homosexuality as a matter of personal sexual ethics. The presumption was that once the causes of homosexuality could be found in some psycho-sexual dysfunction in the individual's personal history, a focus on individual therapy offered the best promise for a change in behavior.[1] The moral dimension of the problem was ultimately subsumed under consideration of the purported sickness of the particular person under consideration.

What has happened in the last fifteen years is that a number of psychological theorists have challenged the prevailing approach which pictured homosexuality as a form of mental illness.[2] As a result, ethical positions which took this as an established fact have had to reexamine the nature of their moral argumentation. Is it possible that homosexuals can live relatively healthy and fulfilling lives? If it is, what difference might this make for the traditional Christian condemnation? Is cultural prejudice the main cause of psychological stress among homosexuals? If this can be proven to be the case, then perhaps we can envisage a long-range possibility of changing the cultural values and offering relief to afflicted homosexuals.

The most interesting switch in the recent ethical discussion is that, more and more, sociological data and theorizing have replaced the traditional reliance on psychiatric and psychological perspectives. This is the result of growing dissatisfaction with the methodology of classical psychiatric approaches.[3] Sociology seems to offer a readier access to a true cross-section of the homosexual world, because it is not restricted to a clinical setting.

[1] Contemporary representatives of this view of the problem would include: E. Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?* (New York: Collier, 1956); I. Bieber *et al.*, *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study* (New York: Basic, 1962); L. Ovesey, *Homosexuality and Pseudohomosexuality* (New York: Science House, 1969); C. Wolff, *Love Between Women* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); M. Oraison, *The Homosexual Question* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); and R. T. Barnhouse, *Homosexuality: A Symbolic Confusion* (New York: Seabury, 1977).

[2] The critics of the sickness theory include: G. Weinberg, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); C.A. Tripp, *The Homosexual Matrix* (New York: New American Library, 1975); T. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Haeber, 1964); T. Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); M. Freedman, *Homosexuality and Psychological Functioning* (Belmont: Brooks/Cole, 1971); and P. Ronsefels, *Homosexuality: The Psychology of the Creative Process* (Rsoly Heights: Libra, 1971).

[3] The main criticism is that only those individuals who are troubled by their homosexual orientation present themselves for therapy. As a result, psychological counselors tend to see a skewed sampling of the general homosexual population.

In this paper I intend to do two things. First, I will briefly review the methodological options that have been proposed for the use of social scientific materials in Christian ethical reflection. Then I will illustrate how some recent sociological studies can enhance the level of discussion about the morality of homosexual behavior, if their limitations are properly taken into account. Second, I will offer a description of what I call "the homosexual way of life." This picture is based upon a synthetic reading of a number of recent sociological studies of the homosexual subculture. It will not be ethical analysis as such, but the prior step to ethical analysis.

I. SOCIOLOGICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE HOMOSEXUAL SUB-CULTURE— METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A. The Interdisciplinary Approach to Ethical Analysis

The value of interdisciplinary work in Christian theology, especially in the subdiscipline of Christian ethics or moral theology, is presupposed in the methodological proposals of most contemporary theorists.[4] It is suggested that the prevalent deductive argumentation from first principles needs to be replaced by (or at least complemented by) a more inductive approach. What this would seem to require is a greater concern for the existential, developmental, personalist and social structural dimensions of lived experience. In order to gain access to this reality, it is asserted that the various branches of the social sciences (particularly psychology, anthropology and sociology) must form an integral part of any Christian reflection on the complex moral dilemmas of life in society.

Once it is acknowledged that a discipline like sociology might enter into some kind of effective dialogue with Christian ethics the obvious first difficulty is in portraying the nature of the relationship. From the point of view of the ethicist, the tendency is to look to sociology to increase one's data base and perhaps to offer a more precise range of descriptive categories. In this understanding, sociology plays an ancillary function in ethical considerations. However, some theologians, who have grown disenchanted with what they take to be the excessively abstract and untested claims of moral science, would prefer to adopt a more empirical approach. In this understanding, sociology would have a determinative and/or prescriptive function in ethical argumentation. I will look at each position in turn.

(1) The Ancillary Model. James Gustafson suggests that there are three basic questions which must be resolved if Christian ethics would keep its integrity in appropriating sociological perspectives.[5]

[4] Several recent examples can be found in: E. McDonagh, *Invitation and Response* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972), p. ix; C. Curran, *Issues in Sexual and Medical Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. xiii; and T. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (New York: Seabury, 1978), p. 8.

[5] Cf. J. Gustafson, *Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974), pp. 199-228.

(i) What data and concepts are relevant to the moral issue under discussion? The difficulty here is that there are various techniques for data-gathering and theory-construction even when dealing with similar social phenomena. There is a danger that certain materials will be "translated" without taking the research context into sufficient account.

(ii) What interpretation of field should be accepted? And on what grounds? This question recognizes the plurality of points of view ("schools of thought") within a particular discipline.[6] However, the rationale for choosing one perspective over another must be defensible on some grounds other than intuitive preference or the lack of acquaintance with other alternatives.

(iii) How does the moralist deal with the value biases of the studies that he uses? In the wake of the development of the sociology of knowledge, it has become progressively more problematic to speak of a "value-free" science. Each of the methodological options in the social sciences reflects a specific world-view and a sophisticated understanding of disciplinary competence and expertise. Care must be taken to look beyond the data made available to the kind of philosophical interests which generated the research in the first place.

In light of these questions, Gustafson conceives of the task of the ethicist as primarily a critical and value-oriented one. Christian ethics cannot be done in ignorance of the best social theory available. But the individual ethicist must assume responsibility for self-conscious choices about which social framework is accepted and what significance the consequent research will have in the evolution of ethical theory and moral judgment.

Gibson Winter has adopted a similar stance in his attempt to promote greater use of sociological material by Christian ethicists. He thinks that it is correct to say that human beings are "situated" by their environment (rather than "conditioned" by it). Accordingly, the problem of social science is how "to formulate the parameters of the intersubjective world in such a way that the self-transcendence of the intentional consciousness is held in tension with the structures of the social and cultural world."[7] The ethicist in turn must make full recognition of the importance of such pre-given structures, while at the same time exploring new values and responsibilities.

For Winter, ethics and sociology should have a critical relationship. Ethics is best conceived as "evaluative hermeneutics," that is, as a task

[6]Gustafson himself offers a threefold typology in his description of the diversity of approaches that exist in the social sciences. He calls them: genetic, functional and empirical. Cf. Gustafson, *op. cit.*, p. 200f. Gibson Winter, in a much fuller discussion of the same issue, discerns three main styles of social scientific methodology: physicalist, functionalist and voluntarist. Cf., G. Winter, *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1966). While the two descriptions do not exactly gibe, they reveal the sensitivity of these theologians to the complexity that pluriformity brings. One not only has to decide that sociology can be helpful for ethical analysis, but also which kinds of sociology and for what issues.

[7]Winter, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

superceding mere empirical research. Ultimately, the Christian ethicist will be informed by sociological data (since the human situation is constituted by enfleshed participation in social structures) but not restricted to its view of future potentialities (since human intentionality enables persons to transcend their pre-given social world and push the collectivity in unprecendented directions).

A third representative of this ancillary model is Wilhelm Korff.[8] He presumes that there will be underlying tensions anytime two discrete disciplines begin to assess the standard concepts and practical judgments of each other's fields. For example, sociology is tempted to proclaim that reality can only be known in some relativistic or positivistic frame of reference. But, on the other hand, theology is susceptible to an ideological attachment to non-experiential standards of judgment. What should take place is a cross-fertilization and a reciprocal calling into question of the very grounds of each other's discourse.

Korff favors a Weberian theory of sociology which pursues the "principle of moral neutrality" and avoids impugning the epistemological status of the normative disciplines. Within this view, Christian ethics has little to fear from a dialogue with sociology.

A final spokesperson for this moderate view is Robert Springer.[9] He admits that the concern with factual verification is subject to misemployment. It can turn into mere dillettantism or arrogant reductionism. It can also promote a categorical distancing from the rawness of concrete experience. Nevertheless, social science can be an effective critic of time-worn and no longer applicable ethical formulations. What is called for is not abandonment of inherited values and moral teachings but rather a nuanced re-examination of their adequacy for different social and cultural contexts. Springer concludes his interpretation with an encouragement to Christian ethicists to allow sociology to perform its proper function.

> The opening to behavioural science as a source of ethical values was dictated by Vatican II and the epistemology of moral science. This involves us in the relativity of the empiric.... The accretion will make moral norms more determinate. Greater relativity in the abstract will yield sounder moral conclusions in the concrete.[10]

Each of these theologians (Gustafson, Winter, Korff and Springer) has striven to picture the relationship between sociology and Christian ethics in positive terms. Yet they agree that Christian ethics must preserve its distinctiveness as a normative value-oriented field of study. At the descriptive level, sociology is indispensable. And it may help ethicists to test out their proposals for social amelioration. But sociology cannot determine what are the proper ends of human life in society nor can it overcome the limits of accumulated historical experience.

[8] W. Korff, "Empirical Social Study and Ethics," in F. Bockel, ed., *The Social Message of the Gospels* (New York: Paulist, 1968), pp. 7-23.

[9] R. Springer, "Conscience, Behavioral Science and Absolutes," in C. Curran, ed., *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), pp. 19-56.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

(2) The Empirical Model. Thomas Wassmer captures the spirit of this approach when he proposes an ethic of responsibility which is heavily weighted toward the inductive methods of the behavioral sciences. He says,

> Evidence plays both an ontological and an epistemological role. Empirically verifiable data not only *show* the rightness and wrongness of an act but they *constitute* the rightness and wrongness of the act.[11]

However, Wassmer's illustrations of this new ethic find him somewhat hesitant to push this perspective to its logical conclusions.

A more self-confident version of the empirical model can be found in the writings of John Giles Milhaven.[12] He propounds an ethical methodology that is pragmatic and empirical. The function of the social and behavioral sciences is to collate and analyze human experience. Only when this information has been processed and made available can ethicists begin their synthetic task. Yet, as such data becomes more important, it is likely that fewer and fewer people will have the competence to analyze it correctly. For this reason, the work of the "general" moralist will be taken over by ethical specialists who will have extensive training in the relevant social sciences.

In a bit of hyperbole, Milhaven summarizes his own position by saying, "Hopefully, preceding pages have made clear that for contemporary ethics the use of the behavioral sciences *is* morality."[13] What he seems to mean is that when the best wisdom of a social science has been ascertained, we have grounds for assurance that moral judgments based on this consensus are in tune with reality. The problem is that, as Gustafson made so clear, there is a plurality of viewpoints in every social science and we must find some criteria by which one approach is chosen over another.[14]

A third version of the empirical model appears in a less explicit fashion in the recent CTSA study *Human Sexuality*.[15] In the third chapter of the book, the authors present a working theory of how the social sciences should affect Christian ethical argumentation. The im-

[11] T. Wassmer, *Christian Ethics for Today* (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1969), p. 12.

[12] J. G. Milhaven, *Toward a New Catholic Morality* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970).

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 125. A typical response to Milhaven's intemperate statement can be found in C. Curran, *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 88f.

[14] This is vividly illustrated in Milhaven's own book. He says, vis-à-vis the morality of homosexual behavior, "According to the Christian who is moved only by love and relies on the experience of the community, homosexual behavior is wrong in that it frustrates the man himself. It fixates him at a stage far short of the full emotional and sexual development of the 'living man' who is 'God's glory.'" Milhaven, *op. cit.*, p. 65. He bases his position on what he takes to be the consensus among psychiatrists and psychologists on the matter. Yet not long after the book appeared, the American Psychological Association (in 1973) reclassified homosexuality and moved it out of the category of mental illness. While this change in classification can be interpreted as a political victory more than a new consensus on the issue, it does call into question the ethical legitimacy of Milhaven's judgment in terms of his own criteria.

[15] A. Kosnick *et al.*, *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (New York: Paulist, 1977).

plicit presupposition is that unless certain behaviors have been "proven" by social science to be always harmful, ethics can make no absolute moral claims about such behaviors. After reviewing the available evidence, they come to this conclusion,

> the behavioral sciences have not identified any sexual expression that can be empirically demonstrated to be, of itself, in a culture-free way detrimental to full human existence. On the other hand, neither have they to date eliminated the possibility that some day such identification and proof may be offered.[16]

The central question that the authors never address is: what would constitute such a proof? It seems that only by turning to the language of value and disvalue and by invoking some particular axiological configuration (whether rooted in religion, philosophy or culture) that one could begin to respond to this issue.[17]

(3) Conclusion. In any ethical analysis which utilizes sociological material, one of these two models is liable to be operative. The ancillary model looks to sociology for data and descriptive categories, but maintains the critical autonomy of Christian ethics. The empirical model avoids abstract theorizing and allows sociology to determine the nature of the problem and to test out various possible solutions. In the literature on homosexuality both of these approaches are present. Since I am convinced of the superiority of the ancillary model I will apply this understanding to the major studies on homosexuality which sociologists have already completed. But it should be kept in mind that other ethicists may choose to employ the second model and therefore arrive at different ethical conclusions than I do.

B. The Sociological Study of Homosexuality

Sociology has provided three main empirical tools in its examination of the homosexual sub-culture: statistical analyses, attitudinal surveys and ethnographic studies. Each of these approaches has its advan-

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[17] It seems that the primary function of social scientific data in the study is to debunk personal and group prejudice. They say, for example, that "while no ethical position is compelled by the empirical data, its very inconclusiveness should give pause to one who might otherwise too facilely assume that human experience confirms his moral persuasion." *Ibid.*, p. 77. I have a number of problems with the methodology of this book. For lack of space, I will simply list them here: (i) It confuses ethical analysis with pastoral strategy. (ii) It obscures the fact-value controversy by placing excessive confidence in the truth claims of the social sciences. (iii) It reviews the history of Christian teaching on sexuality in such a way that it becomes irrelevant for contemporary analysis. (iv) It continually describes the ethical alternatives by the use of typologies and then by choosing the "middle way" it seems to come out on the side of moderation and reason. (v) It replaces the "procreative and unitive" criterion with a "creative and integrative" standard for sexual behavior, but in the process it makes more precarious the possibility of correlating enfleshed experience with Christian values. (vi) It makes the absence of "negative moral absolutes" appear as indicative of a breakdown in the reliability of traditional Christian sexual attitudes. (vii) It presents a list of qualities of human relatedness which are drawn almost entirely from developmental psychology without any significant attempt to root them in Christian teaching and practice. Further, it leaves ambiguous whether these qualities can be organized in some hierarchical fashion and whether they all need to be present for a specific form of sexual relationship to be moral.

tages and disadvantages. I will attempt to assess these factors by focusing on some of the main practitioners of each method of research.

(1) Statistical Analyses. Alfred Kinsey, the Indiana University zoologist, was the first scientist to systematically survey the sexual preferences and practices of American males and females.[18] The combined effect of the two pieces was to call into question many tradition-laden presuppositions about how the so-called "normal" person experienced him- or herself as a sexual being. One of the most influential contributions of the Kinsey studies was what he called the "heterosexual-homosexual rating scale." This scale, which used a seven-point system, strove to represent a balance between the homosexual and heterosexual elements in a person's history, rather than their intensity or the absolute amount of overt experience. By comparing the angles of the sample population, Kinsey could then give some indication of the relative percentages that fell into the different categories.

In general, it can be said that the Kinsey statistics have borne the test of time. A study in 1970 by Morton Hunt, using the same methodology, arrived at approximately the same results.[19] A critical problem in determining the accuracy of these figures is the definition of "homosexual." According to the standard "exclusively homosexual throughout their lives" Kinsey estimated four percent of the males and two to three percent of the females. But, according to the standard "at least one overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm after puberty" the percentages takes a radical jump to thirty-seven percent of the males and thirteen percent of the females.[20] In fact, there is no way of knowing for sure since no means has yet been devised which can assure an accurate cross-section and truthful response to questionnaires or interviews.

The long-range question built into any analysis of statistical research is: what difference does it make? Would more people become homosexual if they thought it was less aberrant? Would homosexual activists be able to proselytize more effectively if they seemed to be on the cutting edge of the sexual revolution? Would the legal prohibition against homosexual activity be repealed if it seemed to affect a larger percentage of the population? These are all possibilities.

Yet my suspicion is that the use of statistics in the discussion of homosexuality serves two primary purposes. First, it penetrates through the aura of mystery which surrounds homosexual life and makes the issue more manageable for public discussion. By knowing approximately how many homosexuals there might be (although in most cases not knowing who they are in particular), we feel more competent in discussing the ramifications of public policy decisions. Second, it allows

[18] Cf. A. Kinsey *et al.*, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948); and A. Kinsey *et al.*, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

[19] Morton Hunt, *Sexual Behavior in the 1970s* (New York: Dell, 1974).

[20] For other opinions about how many homosexuals there are see: A. Karlen, *Sexuality and Homosexuality* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 456; R. Woods, *Another Kind of Love: Homosexuality and Spirituality* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), p. 29.

gay spokespersons and their opponents to either maximize or minimize the significance of such decisions. If twenty percent of the population is actively homosexual at any given moment, the effect on established sexual mores is more dramatic than if only four percent is. At one time it may have been possible for heterosexual persons to go through a lifetime without much personal exposure to the gay world. Now that that is less likely, there is some comfrot to the same people if the magnitude of the problem does not look overwhelming. On the other hand, homosexual activists would like to shock the public into remedial action and the bludgeoning use of statistics is one of their more effective tools.[21]

(2) Attitudinal Surveys. It is a relatively easy jump from asking people what they do as sexual beings and how often they do it to asking them how they feel about what they and other people do. The goal of the interview or questionnaire technique is to obtain a fair sampling of opinion about various issues related to sexual behavior. By concentrating on manageable slices of the population it is felt that the extrapolated figures will hold good, within some acceptable margin of error, for all people of the same type. And further, by taking such sample surveys periodically, it is hoped that historical records can be kept which will show variances from one period to the next and possibly indicate the future direction of cultural and/or religious norms.

Two major surveys of the homosexual population can serve as illustrations of the helpfulness and limitations of this particular tool. The first was undertaken by Martin Weinberg and Colin Williams.[22] It covered the years 1965 to 1970 and included homosexual males, most of whom were involved in the homosexual subculture. For purposes of comparison, four locations were chosen: Manhattan and San Francisco in the United States, Amsterdam in Holland, and Copenhagen in Denmark. In the United States, questionnaires were sent to members of the Mattachine Societies of New York and San Francisco and to members of SIR in San Francisco. In addition, every seventh person at 25 homosexual bars in San Francisco and 20 gay bars in Manhattan was given a survey. In Europe, the forms were given to members of major homosexual societies and to habitues of gay bars. The return rate was 1,117 out of 3,667 in the U.S., 1,077 out of 2,794 in Holland, and 303 out of 1,916 in Denmark. For comparative purposes, the questionnaire was also given to a random sample of 300 males from the phone book in Europe. In the U.S. a control group was gleaned from an earlier study of 3,101 males by Melvin Kohn.

The authors of the survey describe their sociological perspective as "societal reaction theory."[23] They operate with three key presupposi-

[21] It is important to make the point that any set of sexual statistics (whether Kinsey's or someone else's) cannot function as determiners of normalcy or appropriateness. Such descriptions are not designed to settle questions of morality. They were ascertained in such a way that it is impossible to tell how much guilt, regret and retrospective dissatisfaction was built into the various kinds of activity. In effect, they do not correlate the moral value schemes of particular individuals with their self-descriptions.

[22] M. Weinberg and C. Williams, *Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations* (New York: Penguin, 1975).

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

tions: (i) homosexuality is a variant of sexual expression (ii) there is no mandate to search for cures and (iii) there is no need to posit heterosexuality as a norm other than in a statistical sense. They are interested in three basic issues: how do homosexuals relate to the heterosexual world? how do they relate to the homosexual world? and what kind of psychological problems do they encounter?

Weinberg and Williams are aware that such an approach cannot overcome all of the gaps in information about the homosexual subculture.[24] Yet they believe that they provide a balanced assessment of the relative happiness and psychological adjustment levels of the homosexual population. It is in their practical considerations, however, that they move from scientific detachment to social reformism. For they say,

> The homosexual should in general re-evaluate moral interpetations which make him uncomfortable with his sexuality. If he values traditional religion, he should realistically consider the historical character of its pronouncements. He might also examine the moral frameworks provided by religious groups that are more accepting of homosexuals. . . .[25]

And further on they claim that "accurate information on homosexuality, introduced in a *non-moralistic* framework, and as a not uncommon form of sexual expression, would affect heterosexuals' attitudes in a positive way."[26]

Within the limits of their theoretical starting points and their sampling techniques, Weinberg and Williams have provided some extremely useful information on homosexual life in three Western countries. But their practical considerations turn out to be thinly disguised value judgments which are presented under the guise of scientific objectivity.

The second survey was sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health and Indiana University.[27] Published in 1978, it was the most extensive study yet completed of homosexuality in America. Approximately 5,000 men and women in the San Francisco Bay Area were recruited to participate. While acknowledging that the Bay Area is not representative of American society in general, it was thought that the sexual permissiveness that obtains there might well foreshadow future developments in other sections of the country. In order to perfect the testing procedures a pilot project of 450 white homosexual males was completed in Chicago in 1967.

The basic format was a face-to-face interview which involved 528 questions and took between two to five hours to complete. A control group of heterosexual men and women, chosen at random, was used to provide some comparative data. The interviewers were usually graduate

[24] "Our procedures obviously precluded our having obtained 'representative' samples. . . . We do, however, claim that through the use of *reasonable criteria* our findings provide the basis for conclusions *about a significant number of homosexuals in these societies*, and further, can warrant the modification of a number of hitherto unexamined stereotypes and hypotheses." *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 391-92.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 398.

[27] A. Bell and M. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

students from the local universities, but the field staff followed up with about half of the interviewees. The truthfulness of the oral response was accepted, but certain cross-check questions were used as a source of confirmation.

The goal of the study was twofold: first, to exemplify the existence of "homosexualities" (the numerous ways in which one can be homosexual) and second, to correlate various homosexual life-styles with levels of social and psychological adjustment. The implicit presumption was that some types of homosexual patterns are better than others.

It seems to me that the book can be criticized on a number of counts. First, by choosing the San Francisco Bay Area for its sample it skews the data base in a permissive direction for both homosexual and heterosexual populations. It is not clear that there is some kind of evolutionary progression from acceptance in avant-garde San Francisco to general permission in America at large. Second, it can be suspected that homosexual respondents in such a major study would be motivated to answer questions about adjustment in a positive way since the results were likely to influence American opinion for years to come. Whether or not one felt good about being a homosexual, it would serve a political purpose to say "yes" in the hope that it might come true. The absence of corroborating evidence from sources other than the respondents themselves leaves the question about the reliability of the answers unresolved. Third, while the researchers seem to have adopted a value-neutral perspective, the operative standard is a certain understanding of psychological and social adjustment. All sexual activity is taken to be of equal value or disvalue dependent only on the degree of integration and self-acceptance of the individual. This is surely one possible point of view, but it is not self-validating and it is never argued for in the course of the study.

The book, however, makes two great contributions. First, it provides a look at the most liberated components of the gay world. And the tendencies that appear there may tell us more about the homosexual configuration than we have heretofore known. Second, a convincing case is made that homosexuality is not necessarily pathological, i.e., not a mental illness. Therefore, the ethical analysis can be freed from the strictures of the disease model and reestablished in the value realm where it belongs.

Each of these attitudinal surveys has provided a wealth of data for ethical reflection on homosexuality. But due attention must be given to the sociological theories of the researchers, to the nature of the population sample, and to the validity of the conclusions drawn. The predisposition of most sociologists working in this field is to treat homosexuality as a variant form of sexual expression. As a result, they tend to resist any effort to make moral judgments on the basis of religious or philosophical convictions.

(3) Ethnographic Studies. Unlike statistical analysis and attitudinal surveys (where the honesty of the respondents is critical), researchers who engage in ethnographic studies rely to a large extent on their

own powers of observation. Martin Hoffman describes the participant in such a field study as "using the kind of data-gathering technique which a social anthropologist might use if he went into a foreign country in order to study a town or a tribe which was of interest to him."[28] The aim is to learn to understand this world from within. Laud Humphreys gives another look at the method employed. He describes his own work by saying, "My methods are those of field observation: the accumulation of documents, interviews, endless notes, and a great deal of first-hand experience."[29]

Because the homosexual world has its own articulate spokespersons, it is possible to check to some extent the relative accuracy of the material brought together by ethnographers. Glaring discrepancies tend to generate controversy and therefore a correction in errors of fact. But there are some problems of perspective that seem endemic to this research tool. First, total immersion in the gay world, with the consequent sense of identification that develops may make critical distance more difficult to achieve. This would be especially true if the researcher were a homosexual as well. Second, it is crucial that the social scientist experience a genuine cross section of either the overall homosexual population or else the sub-group which is being focused on. But this is more difficult once one moves away from the publicly structured and easily available gay society. The level of suspicion and/or danger increases among street hustlers, sado-masochistic types, and adolescent participants. Third, the ethnographer has in common with the undercover agent, the spy and the professional informer, that living in two different worlds simultaneously creates certain personal tensions in which questions of identity and value can make the determination of criteria for judgment more difficult. It can also mean that only a certain kind of person will undertake the work in the first place.

A good example of these problems is the study by Edward William Delph called *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters*.[30] Delph set out to observe homosexual behavior in public places (restrooms, public parks, beaches) over a period of two years in and around New York City. At times he did so covertly, but at other times he simulated availability or at least some interest in the possibility of a sexual encounter. As a result, he was able to see first-hand the places, types of people and rituals of performance that make up this component of the homosexual sub-culture. In his book he sets out to organize this material in such a way that the uninitiated reader can have a better sense of how it is structured and in what way the forms of interaction make sense to the participants.

While such a study would be offensive to many researchers, Delph has rather successfully achieved a kind of "sympathetic understanding"

[28] M. Hoffman, *The Gay World* (New York, Bantam, 1968).

[29] L. Humphreys, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. x.

[30] E. W. Delph, *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978). See also: L. Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).

of an elusive and largely alien world. He employs descriptive categories to portray the places, the codes and the players in this game of furtive sexual transaction. Throughout the work he deliberately expresses himself in non-judgmental language. He neither advocates nor condemns participation in this "silent community."

A second researcher, Evelyn Hooker, set out to explore the male homosexual community in the metropolitan Los Angeles area.[31] As a woman, she hoped to be able to achieve sufficient rapport with the participants in the male social cliques and informal friendship groups to complement the existing studies of the world of gay bars. Her findings have appeared in a number of anthologies.

Hooker was one of the first sociologists to counter the then prevailing consensus that homosexual males were generally incapable of long-term living relationships with other males. By picturing a gay world in which cliques, pairs and loose networks of friends were the prime forms of affiliation she enabled the scientific community to have a fuller sense of the complexities of gay life in America.

Both Delph and Hooker have shown themselves to be astute observers of the homosexual sub-culture. The information and categorization they provide can facilitate discussion of the entirety of the homosexual social world. But their work leaves open the matter of arriving at an ethical judgment about the appropriateness of various forms of homosexual relatedness. Delph's participants in anonymous sex and Hooker's relatively stable partnerships stand at opposite ends of the moral spectrum in terms of traditional Christian teaching. Yet, even the best description of either alternative does not resolve the difficulty of how it relates to Christian sexual values. While the work of the ethicist is considerably enhanced by such sociological findings, it must still be done according to a methodology which avoids empirical reductionism.

C. Conclusion

It is my hope that proper attention to the types of sociological studies on homosexuality that have been done up to now can prevent Christian ethicists from making exaggerated claims about the reliability of such material. I am convinced that we know more about the phenomenon of homosexuality today than we have ever known before. This is especially the case since the shift away from an exclusive dependence on psychiatric perspectives. However, much more research needs to be done (particularly on the world of the female homosexual). But even when all of this data has been collected, the task of the ethicist will remain—to determine whether, or to what extent, the various patterns of homosexual life can be reconciled with the Christian values of chastity, love and faithfulness to promise.

In the second part of this paper, I will offer a synthetic description of the "homosexual way of life" as gathered from a close reading of the

[31] Cf. E. Hooker, "The Homosexual Community," in R. Weltge, ed., *The Same Sex* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1969), pp. 25-39; and E. Hooker, "Male Homosexuals and Their 'Worlds,'" *Sexual Inversion: the Multiple Roots of Homosexuality* (New York: Basic, 1965), pp. 83-107.

sociological and psychological literature (as well as from other sources). It is intended as an indication of how I think accurate description of the homosexual world prepares the way for fuller ethical analysis. For the sake of convenience, I have dispensed with the scholarly apparatus.[32]

II. THE HOMOSEXUAL WAY OF LIFE

The homosexual way of life is the social fabric created by the interweaving of the diverse personalities who have come to identify themselves as homosexual. It is made up of both male and female members. Only quite recently has it been a self-conscious product of specifically focused energies. Prior to that, it was much more subterranean and discreet; the result of inevitable process of nurturance and support. In its female component it still inclines in this direction of inconspicuous affiliation.

Like the social organization of many other minority groups, the homosexual way of life remains a mystery to many who do not participate in it. It is always at a distance and safely ensconced beyond some ghetto boundary. And yet, it is very much a part of the observable world of contemporary society.

By lingering over some of its constitutive elements, it may be possible to construct a portrait of the homosexual way of life which will make analysis of its ethical status a bit easier.

(1) The Homosexual Way of Life is a matter of a self-conscious sexual identity.

I think that the Gay Liberation Movement is perfectly correct when it says that "coming out of the closet" is everything. Numerous homosexual escapades are not the equivalent for the individual of one act of self-acknowledgement of a confirmed homosexual orientation. Not that we are disembodied selves who can cavalierly make ourselves something just by declaring it. This is not what I take "uncloseting" to involve. Rather it is to look back at one's life and reinterpret it by a whole different value scheme. In this regard, the phenomenon of a change of name might best capture the reality involved.

Presumably one is capable of this degree of introspection only after passing into adulthood, although the passage does not take place in a moment. A whole period of profound confusion, increased anxiety, inarticulateness and attempts at avoidance will normally precede such turning points. Premature ventures into gay activism may seem to resolve the conflicts, but they are different from the intense looks into the solitary vistas of one's inner world. Only the individual can accurately

[32] In addition to the sociological works already mentioned, helpful material may also be found in: J. Hedblom, "The Female Homosexual: Social and Attitudinal Dimensions," in J. McCaffrey, ed., *The Homosexual Dialectic* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), pp. 31-64; P. Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (New York: Bantam, 1972): A. Karlen, *Sexuality and Homosexuality: A New View* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971); J. Rechy, *The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary* (New York: Dell, 1977); and H. Brown, *Familiar Faces/Hidden Lives* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

say to her- or himself that "I am a homosexual" and know that it is an honest appraisal of one's sexual possibilities.

The first and most critical step into the homosexual way of life involves a kind of personal monologue in which the only passage taken is one of self-interpretation. This person who was once indifferent or hostile or confused about his or her sexual identity is now confident that honesty is better than self-deception. To say the words to oneself (or to a trusted other) is to forge a new identity. However hesitant or afraid the person might be, from now on the world will be seen from a different point of view.

(2) The Homosexual Way of Life involves a public manifestation of one's self-conscious identity.

Most human beings have an innate sense of privacy about their innermost thoughts and feelings. Normally, the pre-established roles of society provide sufficient protection to allow this inner reserve to go unthreatened. With a trusted friend or a close circle of relatively intimate companions, a higher degree of self-revelation may take place. But a few bad experiences in this regard may be enough to shut off any but the most perfunctory forms of personal sharing. This seems to be why communication is so difficult even in the marital context.

For a person who has come to the conclusion that he or she is a homosexual, the majority of human instincts caution against public disclosure of that fact. There is a great degree of risk involved, even being cut off socially from one's family and peers. This accounts for the long tradition in American culture for gays to lead a two-sided existence full of role-playing and pretense. Within this mentality, one has two sets of relationships—one set includes family and work associates, the other homosexual acquaintances. Neither world interacts with the other, except by mistake. To perpetuate this dual existence requires a definite set of social skills and an ability to tolerate a certain amount of tension.

Nevertheless, another kind of dynamic is also present in each of us. We wish to be accepted for who we are, to be respected and loved for that combination of qualities which makes us unique. From this perspective, to live a lie, to seek to win recognition and acceptance on the basis of some concocted self, is the ultimate hypocrisy. It is this basic human desire that is being appealed to when gay liberation calls for homosexuals to come out of the closet, to assume adult responsibility for the shape of their lives.

The decision to say to another person "I am a homosexual," especially to a significant other, is another pivotal point in the process of entry into the homosexual way of life. It may be the intention of the individual so revealed to restrict this knowledge to one other person, at least for the time. In such a case, promises of secrecy and confidentiality will be imperative. But having been done once, there is always the possibility that the circumstances will be right again. Or one may find oneself caught up in a social circle where the level of threat seems minimal and so the secret is shared again. This slow and carefully

programmed scenario seems to be more common than the brash and often vitriolic public confessions of the instant revolutionaries in the gay movement.

However a person goes about publicly admitting his or her sexual orientation, the same temptation exists. This is the impulse to allow the sexual dimensions of one's personality to become the focus of one's identity. When this occurs, the most significant thing that can be said about you is that you are gay. Even those who resist the temptation do so with great difficulty. For the more one becomes immersed in a predominately, if not exclusively, gay subculture, the less possible it is to leave the sexual question behind. Therefore, it seems that the very environment which allows for the freest expression of personality (i.e., the homosexual world) is also the most restrictive when it comes to minimizing the significance of one's sexual identity.

(3) The Homosexual Way of Life is sustained by an interlocking network of social institutions.

There are six basic types of affiliation among gays and lesbians.

(i) *Sex in Public Places*. The underground world of anonymous sex is an almost exclusively male phenomenon. It has its own places, rituals and code of behavior. Some who participate in it would not identify themselves as primarily homosexual, but in most instances this does not affect the nature of the sexual exchange. Because of the potential danger and scandal attached to this hidden arena, some gays have never been attracted to it. Others know it as an occasional marketplace in times of sexual frustration or thrill seeking. But there is a third group, personified by the male hustlers and sexual outlaws of the urban scene, who express their gayness entirely within this ambit.

(ii) *The Gay Bath*. The gay bath, another all male institution, is one step up in structuring of interaction. Because membership is a prerequisite for admittance, a certain security from arrest and undesired intrusion is a positive feature. In addition, sheer physical presence is tantamount to admission of an interest in sexual activity. The desire for anonymity is preserved, and the potential for sexual pleasure-seeking is unlimited. The gay bath is a place where lust reigns supreme and the need for involvement in communication of personality is kept at a minimum.

(iii) *The Gay Bar*. The gay bar, although predominantly masculine, has its lesbian counterparts. It is the best established of the contexts of homosexual affiliation. It is first of all a sexual marketplace where a series of individuals look for partners for the night, or more unrealistically, for a lifetime. But beyond its immediate function of matchmaking, the gay bar also serves as a communication center, a locale for initiation into the gay world, and a rallying point for the grievances of the moment. Gay bars are multifarious and each type of bar has its own clientele and its own style of dress, of music, of communication and of behavior.

The stress on youth and appearance, coupled with the sustained consumption of alcohol, lead many gays to abandon the bar scene after a

certain point in their lives. Yet the concentration of gay bars in certain neighborhoods often leads to a special housing market for prospective gay buyers. Thus, whether individual gays involve themselves in bar life or not, they are still affected by the secondary repercussions of this social institution.

(iv) *Social Cliques*. With social cliques or friendship groups the focus is not upon a place, but upon the relationships among the members. Gathering together for meals, recreation and discussion, they tend to exclude non-homosexuals from the mainstream of their lives. In the intimate setting of a home, apartment or summer cottage, they derive support, encouragement and affection from others like themselves. There may be an active sexual relationship between different combinations of participants but this is not a prerequisite for belonging. In such circles, a distinction is made between "friends" and "lovers."

Such patterns of interaction seem to be the most common form of homosexual life among lesbians. The unobtrusive and contained quality of these arrangements have an appeal to those who wish to leave the hostile world behind. They provide sufficient diversity to make getting together interesting yet are manageable financially and otherwise.

(v) *Homosexual Couples*. With homosexual couples there may be a variety of understandings between the partners about the nature of their relationship and about the type of commitment each expects from the other. Some attempt to imitate the model of faithful, monogamous heterosexual marriage. Others consider this particular relationship the primary one among a series of affective and sexual unions. Still others see their time together as transitory and bound only by their mutual satisfaction in the relationship. Since there is no formal, publicly-recognized way of celebrating such couplings, the individuals are forced to determine for themselves what they mean.

The available evidence would suggest that lesbian couples are more stable and longer lasting that male couples. There may be many reasons for this. But the absence of children in both situations (except for recent efforts at adoption) is surely one of the causes. Whether civic approbation of such bonded relationships (with the concomitant change in tax and inheritance status) would increase their chances for survival is not clear. I suspect it would to some extent.

(vi) *Homophile Organizations*. With the Gay Liberation Movement has come the proliferation of cause-oriented groups that vary from the staid and conservative to the most revolutionary. Some sponsor social events like dances and parties and rest content with this improvement in the leisure life of gays. Other groups offer educational and counseling services as well. But the most significant change in the social climate has been the creation of activist groups who work for legal, economic and cultural transformation.

Homophile organizations are diverse enough to provide a conducive environment for the positive utilization of gay talent and energy. They provide a sense of belonging and the potential for satisfying involvement in the process of societal change. But their lack of structure

and inability to mobilize a common effort have been sources of disenchantment for some gays.

It is unlikely that a very high percentage of homosexuals will ever be actively involved in homophile organizations. But even those who are not can sympathize at a distance and draw encouragement from whatever successes they are able to achieve.

These six types of organization—the sex of public places, the bath, the bar, the social clique, the couple and the homophile organization—structure the range of possibilities for those who desire to live out a publicly gay life. The further along in this sequence that one goes the less possible it is to pull back and seek some other pattern of life. The ultimate forms of participation in the homosexual way of life is to not only *be* homosexual, but to *represent* all other homosexuals. This is what comes with active involvement in the gay movement.

(4) The Homosexual Way of Life severely limits one's ability to render negative judgments, on the basis of consistent criteria, about any kind of sexual behavior.

The most common accusation made by heterosexuals against homosexuality as such is that it is inherently promiscuous. The two main types of rejoinder are either: "so what?" or "that is not a fair description of the homosexual possibility." Now at this point it makes no difference whether some homosexuals live active sexual lives with one partner exclusively. What is critical is whether that is an acknowledged moral requirement for membership in the homosexual way of life. I think it is not.

The homosexual world is so decribed by its defenders that it necessarily must remain open to a wide spectrum of life styles and forms of sexual expression. While some gays may regret, or castigate, or abhor, what a certain percentage of other gays do, there are no grounds in the gay subculture by which they can dissociate themselves from these patterns of behavior. One-night stands, tearoom sex, sado-masochistic relations, dominance and bondage and similar manifestations cannot be ruled out without threatening the very freedom of sexual self-determination that has been so ardently advocated.

What I am suggesting is that the homosexual way of life includes more modes of sexual behavior than any particular gay might wish to include. Any argument about the immorality or inappropriateness of a specific expression seems to spring more from personal preference and personal values than from any perspective identifiable in the movement. If I am correct, there is a dynamic built into the call for sexual liberation which if carried to its logical conclusion would rule out only those behaviors which involve excessive violence against the non-consenting and corruption of the innocent.

In conclusion, I wish to argue that the homosexual way of life is a pattern of social organization that takes certain characteristic forms which find a common focus in the ultimate commitment to unrestricted personal sexual freedom. Whatever other values individual homosexu-

als may hold and pursue, this libertarian conviction is at the heart of their common identity with other homosexuals. To accept homosexuality as a way of life is to call into question any attempt to enforce sexual standards of a more restrictive sort, whether based on political, social or religious grounds.

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