

PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATING RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL  
ASPECTS OF LIFE WITH SELF--SEXUAL  
ORIENTATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY  
OF HOMOSEXUALS' EXPERIENCES

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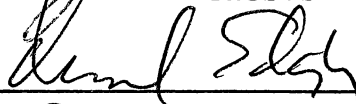
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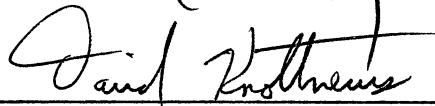
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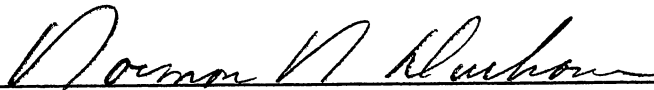
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Four Areas of Research.....	7
Limited, But Increasing Studies About Lesbians.....	14
The Homosexuals' Everyday World.....	16
Homosexuality Studies Within the Sociology of Religion.....	19
Religious and Social Science-Based Studies.....	21
III. AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	23
The Judeo-Christian Tradition.....	23
Homosexual Behavior Over Time.....	26
Modern Construction of Homosexuality.....	29
IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	32
That Which Is Sacred.....	32
This Thing Called "Self".....	34
Stigmatization, Deviance and Social Control.....	37
Neutralizing Dissonance.....	41
V. METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF SELECTED DATA...	43
One-to-One Interviews.....	44
Written Testimonies.....	46
Personal Observation.....	49
VI. ANALYZING THE DATA.....	52
Separation from Society and Religious/ Spiritual Traditions.....	52
Homosexuals Are Sick and Perverted People.....	53
Homosexuals Can not Be Christians/ Jews/Spiritual.....	54

Chapter	Page
Managing and Remanaging Self.....	58
I've Got A Name!.....	58
All Of Me, Why Not Take All Of Me?.....	59
You Make Me Feel Like A Natural.....	60
VII. CONCLUSION.....	63
NOTES.....	68
REFERENCES.....	69
APPENDIX.....	74

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For centuries upon centuries upon centuries, humans have wondered, philosophized, speculated and debated the idea of "GOD". Our ancestors practiced rituals, fought wars because of religious beliefs and meditated upon the concept of a "power/entity beyond ourselves". The early (social) scientists recognized the importance of the struggle of persons in understanding the "meaning of life". Emile Durkheim was one of the first "social" scientists to study religious/moral beliefs and practices. Previously, studies had focused on the individuals' struggle. Durkheim began looking at "societies' struggle" as well (Coser, 1971:129; Nisbet, 1965:25).

In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life Durkheim states, "a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite in single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (1954: 47). Durkheim recognized the extreme importance religion plays in society. Likewise, Max Weber believed religion provided the ultimate answer to the problem of meaning by working out problems related to

"sacred things" (as opposed to profane things which involve the everyday aspects of life). According to Weber, religion addresses questions concerning human destiny, suffering and death, morality and the evils of injustice (O'Dea, 1966:11).

Concepts, notions and beliefs about religion, morals, etc. have taken up great amounts of time, activity and thinking by persons since the beginning of time. If there is such a moment or concept. Today, is no exception. One aspect of "sacred things" has to do with the self-sexual orientation of persons in this world. Within society as a whole, and within religious/spiritual entities in particular, there exists great debate around sexuality. Issues concerning sexual activities and "sexualness" dominate our societies' mind in a vast number and variety of ways. These issues permeate our lives within family and communal relationships, how we socialize children, and who we think we are as human beings.

Within the social sciences numerous studies have been conducted looking at various kinds of sexual-related issues and practices. This study looks at issues surrounding sexual orientation and how it relates to religion or moral/spiritual beliefs and practices. More specifically, this study provides a qualitative look at how self-identified homosexual's experience their religious/spiritual beliefs and practices in general, and how they experience these beliefs and practices within society as a whole.

Over the years there has been great discussions and



disagreements on what homosexuality actually is or who constitutes a homosexual. There have been biological, religious and social definitions. Many questions have included theoretical debates centering partially on behavior vs. traits or types. In the first section of the article, "Making History: The Challenge of Gay and Lesbian Studies" (1988), Will Roscoe discusses what he calls, "the dilemma of definition" (2). He proposes homosexual behavior is not so much a question as is what and who constitutes modern gay and lesbian studies.

Taken from Homosexual Behavior (1980: 5), Marmor says: "I would characterize the homosexual person, therefore, as one who is motivated in adult life by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually (but not necessarily) engages in overt sexual relations with them". This definition implies an on-going pattern of behavior and/or thinking. It also emphasizes the sexual aspect of relationships.

A more holistic definition involves the homosexual person "being" homosexual through psychological logical and emotional means, as well as through sexual means, is reflected by the use of the term "self-sexual orientation". Once again we can turn to Will Roscoe to confirm this more holistic approach when he states, "a multidimensional analysis is much more sophisticated than the simple pigeon-holing of data into sexual categories" and suggests those interested in gay and lesbian studies look at numerous

"sociological specializations" (21).

Another vital element in defining "homosexual" that coincides with self-sexual orientation is that of "self-identity". Again, the definition(s) can be disputed, however, the focus of this study is not on the definition or existence debates of homosexuality, or on what causes homosexuality. All the persons in this study consider themselves to be homosexual. This paper focuses on their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, and how they deal with their self-sexual orientation in relation to their religious/spiritual beliefs and practices within society. Because of this focus, a more holistic approach is desired in studying the issues of religious/spiritual beliefs in relation to homosexual orientation and vice versa. The method of study is qualitative. Specific methodologies used will be presented later in a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

A great deal of research has been conducted over the past twenty to twenty five years on the subject of homosexuality. Perhaps with the influence of the Gay Liberation Movement and the expansion within social sciences concerning the everyday life of certain members of society, social scientists have expanded areas of study to include what is considered today to be the homosexuals' world.

Anthropologists, sociologists and others in the social sciences' have studied homosexuality from various perspectives covering both broad and specific topics.

Even more than the studies conducted within the social sciences are the greater number of books and articles having been written about organized religion and homosexuality by religious leaders and scholars. Various denominations have shown renewed interest in discussing homosexuality as well as other "social" issues, i.e. abortion, divorce. Just one example of this renewed interest is reflected in a collection of essays edited by Robert Nugent entitled, A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church

(1983). This renewed interest is perhaps less out of general intrigue and more out of a felt need to respond to society's concerns and their congregations' concerns about the subject in particular. Many of these writings have been from a biblical perspective concerned with moral questions. Historians have also written treaties over the centuries as to the relationship of organized religion and homosexuality. A great deal of their focus has been on recording the churches responses to and the treatment of the person thought to be engaged in homosexual behavior.

There has been a recent increase of magazine articles and other "accounts" from the homosexuals' perspective about gay life which have sometimes included issues concerning religion and religious experiences. A few of these accounts include: On Being Different, Miller, 1971; "The Double Life of Finis Crutchfield", Yoffe, 1987; "When Gays Keep the Faith", Kelly, 1985, and; "Homosexuals and the Churches", Tivnan, 1987. Many of these writings have been in direct response to a denominations' stance on homosexuality. Persons in these writings have debated the anti-gay stances by going intellectually toe-to-toe to challenge the basic premises and biblical interpretations of the anti-gay viewpoints.

One of the primary areas of study within sociology not only over the last couple of decades but since the beginning of what we know to be sociology itself, is the sociology of religion. Emile Durkheim and Max Weber led the way to the

study of religion as a social phenomenon. Recent studies looking at religion and homosexuality have included a variety of topics like the intolerance of and attitudes toward homosexual groups, and issues attempting to define homosexuality within religious, social and moral frames. More about the sociology of religion and how it relates to homosexuality will be discussed later in this review.

The overall study of homosexuality has had far reaching bounds even with limited attention being given to it. In today's society, a look at homosexuality and sexuality in general invariably includes issues of morality and religious beliefs. As well, studies within religion(s) many times explore the morality of conduct, of which homosexual behavior and homosexuality are sometimes included.

#### Four Areas of Recent Research

In looking at recent research in sociology and the social sciences in general, a greater number of studies are being conducted and the topics of research are expanding. Risman and Schwartz in their article "Sociological Research on Male and Female Homosexuality" (1988:126) reflect this change. They write:

in the past two decades, the field of inquiry has expanded considerably. Researchers have challenged the sociological validity of categorizing people according to their sexual orientation and have begun to investigate gay culture and same-sex relationships. Research in the past two decades has addressed many new questions...[in our review] we concentrate on four topics that have dominated the research: 1) the essentialist/constructionist debate, a descendent of the inquiry into what causes homosexuality; 2) the

relationship between sexuality and gender, an inquiry into whether sexual preference is or is not inherently linked to gender-role nonconformity; 3) studies of intimate relationships; and 4) studies of the gay community and AIDS.

The essentialist/constructionist approaches look at how and why homosexual orientation develops. This inquiry presupposes the existence of a "homosexual" person and is concerned with how the person got to be homosexual (126). Much of the first research in this area looked at causality within a pathological frame. Freud was one who engaged in this approach. Risman and Schwartz see today's authors however looking at the etiology of homosexual behavior with "new rhetoric, searching for predispositions rather than causes" (127). The essentialist model perceives each individual as having a true (essential) sexual core self, which is basic to the person and does not change. Within the essentialist argument, researchers looked at variables such as early family experiences, adult hormone imbalances and prenatal hormone imbalance. More recent studies have shied away from these factors, "recent theories have focused more on cross-cultural consistency within gay culture as possible evidence of a biological basis" (128). Based on Risman and Schwartz's review, it appears the recent essentialist's argument has emphasized a biological influence more out of a lack of ability to show non-biological influences than actually finding a biological connection. This thought is but one among many criticisms of the essentialist's frame discussed in Risman and Schwartz's article.

In contrast, however, Risman and Schwartz write, "the constructionists suggest that homosexual behavior is something which some individuals DO: it is not who they ARE. Constructionists argue that social opportunities and meaning systems rather than core personality traits influence choice of sexual partners" (127). The constructionists' argument is based on the "social" aspect of homosexuality. More recently this viewpoint is concerned with "how individuals come to identify themselves and label themselves as gay men and lesbians" (130).

Some of the variables or topics studied from the constructionist perspective include homosexual behavior and self-identity, homosexuality as a social role, gay male-lesbian differences in "coming out" processes, and sexuality experiences based in personality, social opportunities and cultural norms. K. Plummer and J. Weeks are reported to suggest that "the very possibility for homosexuality to become a master status is the result of urbanization and industrialization...freed from compulsory family membership by the possibility of productive labor outside their kin group, men at least could seek identities from their personally chosen relationships" (130). This viewpoint certainly supports a more "social" basis for homosexuality.

The constructionists are criticized for not effectively addressing identity formation, but rather stopping short of explaining attraction development. They instead appear to

deal more with social management of the homosexual identity (131). Both perspectives (essentialist and constructionist) remain "causal" in their assumptions and approach, although the constructionist viewpoint is the least so.

The second area of study that Risman and Schwartz discuss is that of gender conformity as it relates to homosexuality. Two questions are focused on here: a true correlation between gender nonconformity and sexual orientation, and, if a correlation is found between these two, why does it exist? Studies have emerged looking at lesbianism and non-gender masculinity traits as well as gay male and non-gender femininity traits (132). The gender nonconformity aspect is criticized for ignoring the most recent research. Over the past decade and a half, a great deal of the gender-related research indicates masculinity and femininity are not biological predispositions, but result from the organization of "sex/gender systems". This more recent perspective suggests feminine and/or masculine traits are social constructs for heterosexuals, bisexuals and homosexuals alike, thus establishing doubts as to biological determinisms found in gender nonconformity.

Risman and Schwartz discuss M.W. Ross' studies which look at effeminacy among male homosexuals, suggesting societies with stricter gender role segregation have more effeminacy among gay men. Although Ross has not included lesbians in his research, the results of his studies with various societies and gay men are supported and also place



doubts as to a gender nonconformity rationale for femininity and masculinity development (133).

The research in Risman and Schwartz' third concentration deals with the nature of same-sex relationships. Topics on relationship satisfaction and stability are explored as well as more recent efforts being made to use homosexual relationships along with heterosexual relationships to develop "theories of intimacy, power, and dyadic interaction" (134). Research concerned with the later has been focusing on the division of labor among couples and the interaction of gender and power. Research in this study area is said to be especially important in understanding couple relationships in the post women's liberation era. Equality and equity issues appear to now be especially important in all couple relationships whether heterosexual, gay male or lesbian (135).

Using homosexual relationships to study relationships in general is a key change in how research on the topic of homosexuality has traditionally been conducted. Using homosexual-heterosexual comparison studies to look at "general" social phenomena is also a recent development.

The fourth area identified by Risman and Schwartz deals with homosexuality as group-identity and social movement. Studies have emerged which look at homosexual's interacting within "community": socializing, politicizing; assisting each other; and interacting with the non-gay mainstream--as a group. Differences in role-playing, self-acceptance,

political philosophy and gender expression are noted (138). Also, the meaning and effects of HIV/AIDS is a recent phenomena within the gay male community especially. Risman and Schwartz write, "...it is clear that AIDS has changed the sexual lifestyles of gay males" (140). During the 1980's, numerous studies were conducted concerning social norms and behavior change because of the spread of HIV/AIDS among gay men. Risman and Schwartz point out that future studies should also look at the effect of HIV/AIDS on American society overall. Issues such as blood testing, increased homophobia and the process of social change in relation to the AIDS epidemic should make for interesting and worthwhile study (142). Risman and Schwartz conclude their review by saying:

...we believe the evidence that homosexuality is a social construction is far more powerful than the evidence for a widespread organic predisposition toward homosexual desire. Instead of continuing to study homosexuals as certain kinds of people, we would prefer to see development of a sociology of sexual desire...if sociology is to contribute to our knowledge of sexual desire, the construction of identity, the maintenance of relationships, and the rationale and order of community, then all of sociology needs to consider homosexuality an interesting topic... the ghettoization of homosexuals need not be paralleled by the ghettoization of the study of homosexuality (143-144).

Risman and Schwartz' review of research on homosexuality over the past twenty-five years is quite helpful. Not only do they provide an excellent review, but also provide a frame for looking at recent studies on homosexuality by categorizing the areas of study. This

researcher concurs that the majority of recent studies fall more or less within the four areas of concentration that they outline. One study which fits within one of Risman and Schwartz' four categories is the article "Sappho Was A Right-On Adolescent: Growing Up Lesbian" (1989) by Margaret Schneider.

Ms. Schneider goes beyond lesbian identity formation and writes "the present research differs in that it examines coming out in the context of the developmental process and describes experiences once lesbian identity has been established" (112). Although Schneider does not look at gender identity formation per se, she does take her cue from the gender identity formation arena described in Risman and Schwartz's article as reflected in her statement, "in summary, identity issues for these young lesbians are somewhat different than issues for their female predecessors or their gay male peers" (121). This summation shows a continued theme of identity development as an important aspect in studies concerning homosexuality.

A second example of research which falls within Risman and Schwartz' four concentrations on homosexuality is David Greenberg's work presented in his book The Construction of Homosexuality (1988). Greenberg takes a social constructionist approach to understanding the prohibition of homosexuality among some cultures over time while discussing why some societies have not rejected homosexuality or homosexual behavior. He distinguishes between forms of

homosexual behavior found in some ancient societies and a construction of modern homosexuality. He shows how homosexuality has not been a consistent, uniform phenomenon across time, but has changed in concept, definition, description and even in "existence" (5).

Greenberg uses cultural information from numerous societies and primitive groups to cross study the social organization of sexual behavior in general, homosexual behavior in particular and how the concepts of homosexuality and homosexual identity have developed in modern times. Greenberg's contributions in constructionist theory regarding homosexuality are vast. His work may also have many implications beyond constructionism and/or the single topic of homosexuality. More will be said about Greenberg's research and conclusions later as part of an historical perspective.

#### Limited, But Increased Studies About Lesbians

Like Risman and Schwartz, and many other researchers including Katz, 1976; and Schneider, 1989; this researcher found the majority of studies on the topic of homosexuality having focused on the male homosexual. During the 1980's, more studies about lesbians and lesbianism were conducted. Risman and Schwartz included the following studies on lesbianism in their review: The Lesbian Community, Wolf, 1979; Lesbians, Women and Society, Ettorre, 1980; and Women-Identified Women: An Anthology, Darty and Potter,

1984. Two new studies on lesbianism include Lesbians Over 60 Speak For Themselves, Kehoe, 1988, and; Schneider's article about young lesbians mentioned already. Although the beginning of the 1990's shows a continued imbalance in the total number and types of studies on the female homosexual, the 1980 studies concerning lesbians have been significant.

E.M. Ettorre worked six years studying over 500 "social lesbians" in London. She lays the foundation in Lesbians, Women and Society for a social theory of lesbianism and feminist lesbianism, and provides insight into how lesbians live. Ettorre states "my ultimate argument will be that the social emergence of lesbianism is rooted in the organization of power rather than in individual lesbians" (157).

And in The Lesbian Community, Deborah Wolf describes "the texture of life in a contemporary lesbian community...it examines the lives of single women, women in partnerships, women developing new kinds of relationships, and --an even more significant group, one about which too little is known--lesbian mothers and their children. It focuses on actual behavior, attitudes, mythology and future goals of groups of women who feel they are forging a new direction in personal and communal life" (2).

These recent efforts may have a long way to go toward catching the male counterpart in volume of research, but increased volume may not be all that is necessary to balance the empirical scales. As evidenced from these and other studies, a beginning toward better understanding the female

homosexual has had an excellent beginning.

### The Homosexual's Everyday World

Also recently, a large domination of research has developed which is concerned with identifying and describing the overall nature of the homosexuals' world, including both male and female homosexuals. These studies include many aspects of the homosexuals everyday life in order to gain a broad perspective of gay life. Blumenfeld and Raymond in Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life (1988) explore sexuality, prejudice, lifestyles and culture, and socialization. In Living the Spirit (1988) edited by Will Roscoe, homosexuality among American Indian peoples from the pre-white colonization era to recent times is discussed. Writers in this book especially look at the role of the "berdache" among Indian tribes.

Jonathan Katz's book entitled Gay American History, Lesbian and Gay Men in the U.S.A. (1976) looks at homosexual oppression resistance and love. Katz states, "the focus of these selections is away from purely theoretical formulations; the emphasis is on those documents which reveal some aspect of the American homosexual experience as it was actually lived" (3).

Young homosexuals are the focus of Martin and Hetrick's article "The Stigmatization of the Gay and Lesbian Adolescent" (1988). They include issues concerning isolation, family relationships, violence, education and

sexual abuse. They show a great deal of concern with how a young gay male or lesbian deals with adolescent development issues within a stigmatized frame.

The common thread found among these works seems to be their emphasis on describing and detailing the nature of homosexuality in its wholeness as experienced and described by the homosexual. Although these studies discuss some of the same issues brought up in the research reviewed by Risman and Schwartz such as self-identity and the gay community, the approach to these studies and/or the basic assumptions within these studies differ enough to warrant a fifth category of research within Risman and Schwartz' review.

Studies like Katz's and Blumenfeld's, et al. accept the homosexual's existence almost "as is" and attempt only to understand the nature of homosexual life. Some studies cited by Risman and Schwartz (in particular, Ettore, 1980 and Wolf, 1979) take a similar approach. These recent efforts supply a large volume of studies similar in methodology. For one, they are more holistic. Whether by design or by sociological trend, more qualitative-type accounts of the "whole" homosexuals' world such as the studies mentioned above have emerged over the past ten or so years. An increased wave of historical research appears to show this trend as well as evidenced by what Duberman, et al. discuss as the concerns of the new "social historians" (1989:2).

To further this point, in his article "Making History:

the Challenge of Gay and Lesbian Studies" (1988), Will Roscoe not only supports a more holistic approach to studying homosexuality, but redefines the study of homosexuality and calls for a "multidimensional model" for describing evidence. He writes:

this paper addresses a central problem of gay and lesbian studies; how is the subject to be defined? Current essentialist and constructionist positions are ultimately ahistorical and reductionist, reflecting the residual influence of the medical model and its sexual definition... Six dimensions of social and sexual variation are reviewed (1).

Roscoe provides an in-depth critique of both the essentialists and constructionists' positions. He criticizes the essentialistic position for being antihistorical and biologically deterministic. Likewise, he says the constructionist position downplays the actors and their experience in order to look to society and "social regulations"; calling this approach functionalistic and not too unlike the "causal" approach of essentialism (9).

After identifying the essentialist and constructionist shortcomings Roscoe outlines a new definition of gay and lesbian studies hoping to "allow for the inclusion of cross-cultural and transhistorical data without violating the principle of cultural relativity" (14). He does this by proposing a "correlation of behaviors, roles, beliefs and social perspectives" (19) and describes a sociosexual specialization where these acts, roles, status, etc. are considered together. Roscoe states "when one asks the questions of these data and seeks patterns and correlations



among them, various 'dimensions' of sociosexual specialization become apparent" (20). He goes on to propose these dimensions be analyzed within multiple continuums encompassing (at least) sexuality, subjectivity and identity, gender status, social roles, economic roles, and religion and spirituality (21).

Within the dimension of religion and spirituality, Roscoe believes a large field of evidence exists and could be conducted asking the questions "what are the religious roles and functions assumed by sociosexual variants? How does sociosexual specialization appear in rituals and myths? And, how do religious roles relate to social organization and daily life?" (32).

Again, Roscoe looks to a multidimensional frame. He proposes the multidimensional strategy is helpful in several ways: 1) conceptually--"a new way of thinking about gay life"; 2) methodologically and theoretically--having "heuristic, strategic and formal value", thus avoiding reductionism and relativism ("a multi level model...with a conceptual unity independent of the methods and assumptions of positive science")(33). Roscoe's holistic and comprehensive approach to the study of homosexuality is certainly worth exploring further.

#### Homosexuality Studies Within The Sociology of Religion

In looking closer at homosexuality and religion, one thinks to look at the sociology of religion. Because

religion and religious beliefs have shaped how homosexuality has been perceived and responded to over the ages (Greenberg, 1989; and Boswell, 1980), one can find a variety of research on the topic. Certainly social scientists have provided a number of studies on homosexuality including topics with religious influences. Some of these include "Attitudes of Fundamentalists Toward Homosexuality" (Maret, 1984); "Religious Orientation and Prejudice: A Comparison of Racial and Sexual Attitudes" (Herek, 1987); "Orthodoxy and Attitudes of Clergymen Towards Homosexuality and Abortion" (Wagenaar and Bartos, 1977), and; "Inventing the Homosexual" (Rosenberg, 1987).

Homosexuality has not appeared to have played a significant role in the sociology of religion thus far however, or more accurately it has been lumped together into the study of sexuality in general. Why the apparent void?

Perhaps homosexuality has not been seen as a viable topic when looking at religion overall. Perhaps conceptualizing various aspects of homosexuality and religion have been limited by definition, methodology, "problem" identification or trends in the field? Even sexuality's role in studies of religion/spirituality and religious beliefs have been considered limited in the modern treatment of sexuality in general. Even with the recent "sexual revolution" our society has had a continued longstanding tradition of not discussing sexuality or dealing publicly with the issue. Although recent trends have

opened the discussion, we are at least in America still antsy when the subject is broached including the topic of homosexuality (Hargrove, 1979:158-175 and Brystryn and Greenberg, 1982:520).

#### Religious and Social Science-Based Studies

Despite what appears to be a void within the sociology of religion concerning homosexuality and religion, vast numbers of articles have been written on the subject over the past twenty-five years from within the religious and general social science community. Some of the studies coming out of the religious community in recent years include: "Sin, Crime, Sickness or Alternative Lifestyle: A Jewish Approach to Homosexuality" (Matt, 1978); "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Issues of Concern" (Scanzoni, 1984); "Homosexuality and the Churches" (Hiltner, 1980), and; "Sex, Sin and the Church: The Dilemma of Homosexuality" (Berliner, 1987). As evidenced in these articles, our society, especially the religious world, is continuing the discussion, debate and controversy of homosexuality in general, and homosexuality and religious beliefs and practices in particular.

In the book Is Gay Good?, Oberholzer (1971) offers various stances and beliefs about homosexuality and theology. He includes concepts on how ethics and morality are dealt with and defined. Likewise, in Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual (1966), H. Kimball Jones

offers a "practicable Christian ethic" and is one of the first religious scholars in recent times to provide a non-condemning approach to dealing with the homosexual. His encouragement to do so from within the church is progressive today and was especially so in 1966.

And, John McNeill in The Church and the Homosexual (1988) addresses the traditional issues surrounding homosexuality and religion including moral theology, scripture, human nature and human sciences, and then goes on to propose a positive approach to homosexuality including ministry to and the inclusion of the gay community in the church (25). These three modern works come from an approach which is non-condemning of the homosexual as a person even if not totally supportive of homosexuality in general. This is a recent change in perspective from within the religious community.

There remain many works on the topic which take a negative and condemning stance toward the homosexual and homosexuality. Some of these works include: "Sodomy is a Crime", Rice, 1986; A Christian View of Homosexuality, John Drapeford, 1977; Homosexuality, A Biblical View, Baker, 1978, and; Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics, 1961. Again, the debate continues. So many of the arguments on both sides of the religious perspective continues to center on the definitions, causes and beliefs about homosexuality.

## CHAPTER III

### AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### The Judeo-Christian Tradition

Looking at how homosexuality has been viewed, shaped and dealt with within religious and spiritual realms in the past may certainly add depth to and shed light on the topic today. Most of the literature speaks to the Judeo-Christian tradition and homosexuality (Jones, 1966; Bailey, 1975; Bullough, 1979; Brown, 1976; Jay and Young, 1977, and; Martin, 1984). One source states,

the homosexual has found little understanding or sympathy within the Judeo-Christian tradition. From Old Testament times to the present he has found himself labeled a criminal by the law and a sinner and moral outcast by the prevailing ethico-religious standards. The rationale for such attitudes lies largely in the biblical tradition which has served as the cornerstone for both the ethical and legal traditions concerning the homosexual in Western society (Jones, 1966:66).

The Judeo-Christian tradition finds its beginnings in the interpretations of the biblical teachings. First in the Hebrew Torah (Matt, 1978:1), and then in the Christian Old and New Testaments (Jones, 1966:67-70), that is to say it is found in the Divine Revelation attributed to them, the tradition found in a belief in the literal truth of the Bible (Martin, 1984:340).

Of course the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is the most cited story found in the homosexual-condemnation debate. It illustrates the patristic attitudes of the early church adding fire to a growing negative perception of homosexuality. Much of this attitude grew out of the belief that paganism bred sexual lust including "shameful acts against nature, such as were committed in Sodom..." (Bailey, 1975:83).

Bailey (64) attributes Roman Law to the time of Justinian with influencing western European systems of civil and criminal practices, including the pre-beginnings of homosexual criminalization. Bailey also describes small "watch groups" in the early church (known as councils and synods) and later the Penitentials (the moral "conductors" for the priests) with developing new rules of conduct. The codes for homosexual behavior were not lenient, but likewise homosexual behavior was not unexpected. Bailey explains that more emphasis was placed on the penance for the acts than on the elimination of the behavior altogether (109). Finally, Medieval opinions and teachings by theologians and pastors are explored by Bailey as the final contributor to modern Christian views towards homosexuality. Bailey believes nothing much has changed these views since their synthesis during the 13th century (121).

In Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality (1980), John Boswell believes that religious beliefs of the early church did not "cause" oppressive attitudes toward

homosexual behavior. He contends that homosexuality was not singled out derogatorily as unnatural until the 13th century when it became associated with heretical acts (11). Boswell is attributed with a new "definitive work" on homosexuality because of his different perspective on the cause of prejudice and intolerance. He takes a more historical and less monocular view than the primary Judeo-Christian tradition outlined by Bailey (and others mentioned earlier, plus Hunt, 1977; Embree, 1986, and; Horner, 1981).

David Greenberg's exploration in The Construction of Homosexuality (1988) of homosexual behavior from ancient primitive societies through early civilizations on to modern times is very helpful in providing another historical perspective to homosexuality. In beginning his cross-cultural and transhistorical journey, Greenberg first looks at how homosexuality studies have most recently been approached through one of several perspectives: deviance/social conflict theories, functional theories, cultural transmission (implying a mostly static view of values and customs), psychoanalytic theory and/or social structure.

Greenberg presents problems with each of these approaches and goes beyond these conventional strategies "by attempting to root beliefs about sexuality in the structures of everyday life" (18). People struggle in society to understand, define and justify sexuality. They develop ideas and concepts about what it means and what people should do

in relation to their own and others sexuality. Greenberg goes on to say:

social differentiation complicates things...over time, the social arrangements that give structure to our lives evolve...evolving social structures and ideologies also change sexual socialization and create or close off sexual opportunities, thus transforming sexual practices...[including] beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality (18-19).

#### Homosexual Behavior Over Time

In presenting his notions of the social organization of homosexuality, Greenberg first looks at early societies in what he ascribes to be "before homosexuality". He first explores homosexual relations within primitive kinship-structured societies in which he identifies transgenerational; transgenerational and egalitarian relationships.

Next, he looks at archaic civilizations where "political leadership of a state is formalized, and concentrated in personnel who are distinct from the rest of the population..." (89). Greenberg describes male cult prostitution, sodomy in male initiation rites, homosexual behavior among warriors, early lesbian relationships and class-structured homosexuality involving master-slave relations and castration. He then discusses that as early civilizations grew, variations of homosexual (and non-homosexual) themes emerged. Greenberg looked at early Mesopotamia; Egypt; the Hebrews; Classical Greece; Pre-Christian Rome; China; the Mayans, Incas and Aztecs, and



Hindu civilizations. Of these early civilizations he writes, "that there should be some differences in the way homosexuality is organized and perceived in civilizations separated by long distances and great spans of time is hardly surprising. What is more striking in the comparisons...are the similarities" (182).

Third, Greenberg closely explores sexual asceticism in the ancient world and the development and eventual demise of feudalism. Issues within these two developments began to change the focus of beliefs, values and opinions along with the changes in economics, customs and religions, etc. Five major changes are attributed with the new, emerging views of sexuality: 1) trade expansion encouraged the spread of monotheistic religions and dualistic ideas of right and wrong, good and evil; 2) as civilizations grew and cities became larger, the agricultural and fertility themes of the polytheistic religions became meaningless; 3) catastrophic wars and conquests took more and more attention away from "propriety and sexual pleasures"; 4) as the gap between the poor and the wealthy became bigger and bigger, the poor became less tolerant of the wealthy's indulgences, and; 5) as less emphasis was placed on bodily/sexual pleasures, stoicism emerged to squelch sexual tolerance (185).

A look at social responses to homosexuality in feudalism reveals according to Greenberg, variations among feudal societies. Those feudal states with high numbers of militaristic endeavors (the knights in Europe and the

samauri's in Japan) had a higher tolerance of homosexual behavior. This tolerance is again attributed to the belief that homosexual behavior was more common among warriors.

On the other hand, the Medieval Church maintained a higher level of antagonism toward homosexuality as established in the early church (261) which was intensified in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when heresy and homosexuality were associated together (268). The first legislation concerning sodomy grew out of this period. The definition of sodomy sometimes referred to only homosexual acts, but could also include anal intercourse in heterosexual marriage (275). This period also shows a resurrection of the use of defining some sexual behaviors as "unnatural". Eventually this definition focused less between heterosexual and homosexual behaviors and more between sex that was potentially productive and sex that was not. Procreation was the prevailing theme (277).

Greenberg traces the increased repression of homosexuality in the late Middle Ages to two related, yet separate sources: class conflict and church-state conflict (280). Greenberg writes, "thus the municipal campaigns against sodomy of the 13th century were part of a much broader, class-based program of social reform. The repression of sodomy was justified by reference to the early Christian interpretation of the story of Sodom, but the energies that drove the campaign were those of class hatred" (298).

## Modern Construction Of Homosexuality

In the second section of his book, Greenberg lays the foundation for the modern concept of homosexuality. He indicates the centuries following the 1200s were greatly unchanged to the antagonistic stance towards homosexuality. Repression was rampant, yet Greenberg also describes the emergence of various subcultures during this period, including groups of homosexuals (302). What is known as Molly houses and taverns in Great Britain are an example of meeting places for homosexuals during this time. No record of a subculture in North America during this time period exists (346). Strict legislation abounded yet varied based on religious beliefs, erratic law enforcement and popular apathy. Beginning with the 19th century, Greenberg identifies three developments he believes important to "the modern response to homosexuality: 1) the growth of competitive capitalism (also discussed by Altman, 1982:104); 2) the rise of modern science, and; 3) the spread of bureaucratic principles of social organization...The effects of these developments were contradictory, but their net effect was to strengthen antihomosexual beliefs and attitudes" (Greenberg, 1988:347).

Capitalism encouraged self-restraint and an emphasis on the family grew (thus placing another renewed emphasis on procreation), and gender stereotyping developed. New laws protecting workers and children sprang out of the Industrial Revolution including the expansion of sodomy laws to include

oral sex and masturbation (400). This new found emphasis on protecting children from "homophiles" remains with us today. Along with economic growth came new found understandings of the sciences including the birth of psychology and sociology--modern science was used to explain behavior. Homosexuality became "medicalized" (400-433 and; Bullough and Bullough, 1977:211).

Also, bureaucracy (first identified by Max Weber) developed during this time and effected homosexuality as well. Impartial, universalistic, impersonal, mega-organizations developed. Now impersonal employee's of a large law enforcement agency "do their jobs" by raiding homosexual establishments. Although raids may happen, in some ways bureaucratic structures can help people hide their sexual behaviors as well. In modern times, bureaucracies effect people in many ways, including the homosexual (Greenberg, 1988:434-454).

Lastly, Greenberg describes the development of Gay Liberation. He states that through the development of subcultures and in response to social repression, a homosexual identity began to emerge. This identity differed from the religiously-based, scientifically-based and/or criminally-based explanations previously stressed. It rose out of a long period of economic growth, women joining the labor force, the move away from Victorian thoughts about sexual behavior and sexuality, the political and social revolution of the 1960's, the development of technology

which bring more people together (cars, satellites, etc.) and several other factors (459).

Opposition to homosexuality remains, Greenberg explains, "in survey research, respondents from the South, from smaller towns, and rural areas, who are older, poorer, and less well-educated, are more likely to think homosexuality is morally wrong and are more likely to oppose gay rights, but religion is a more powerful predictor than any other individual trait" (468).

Although the emergence of a homosexual identity and gay liberation have made strides toward "liberating homosexuality", Greenberg concludes his presentation with a not-so-optimistic view of the future of homosexuality. He believes continued bureaucracies and social pressures from the lower class will remain obstacles against homosexuality and the gay movement (476).

Greenberg ends by saying "the precepts and sensitizing principles found useful here are potentially relevant to the study of social construction of other deviance definitions and conceptual categories and should have broader applicability in historical sociology" (499). Truly Greenberg's contributions here to the understanding of homosexuality over time is masterful and worthy of a place in sociological study. His historical and cross-cultural comparisons are vast and well done.

## CHAPTER IV

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the most part, the theoretical approach to this study is from a symbolic interactionist perspective. Almost all of the concepts presented are found within "interactionist" theories. Interactionist theories support the idea that humans are social beings that are distinguished as a species by their capacity to develop and use language as the primary basis of their social behaviors. Humans relate to one another primarily in terms of commonly shared meanings which greatly facilitates social interaction. The social environment is operationalized and given meaning through an exchange of symbols (Chess and Norlin, 1988:162-3). The first concept listed below, however, comes from a functionalist perspective.

#### That Which Is Sacred

The Enlightenment regarded religion for the most part as little more than superstition and an outdated, overbearing activity. It was felt to be a part of the past and irrelevant to the scientific study of modern issues regarding economy, government or thought (Nisbet, 1965:74). Emile Durkheim believed, however, that religion was key to

those things essential to individuals. He saw religion as one of the forces that gives the individual moral motivation for adhering to societies' demands. He believed religion to be of pure social origin and the act of keeping a society together pointed out a strategic social function of religion.

Durkheim also saw religion "presupposing a classification of all human experience into two opposing categories, the sacred and the profane" (O'Dea, 1966:20). He states that the sacred is superior to the profane and "the most significant property of the sacred is its capacity to evoke awe; from this capacity it derives its constraining power over human behavior and its consequent reinforcement of the moral values of the group" (Vernon, 1962:87). For Durkheim, religion is a form of society which functions to preserve the norms and values of its members.

Max Weber, like Durkheim, evolved in the late 19th century as an important scholar. He too was concerned with the subject of religion and throughout his life studied ancient and modern religions. He wondered how religious values influence individuals and society, and in turn, how other variables are influenced in the exchange. Weber believed he could show the causal factors of human action in varied spheres of human activity (O'Dea, 1966:11). Weber, like Durkheim, leaned toward functional explanations of religion within society.

The primary aspect that brings Durkheim and Weber

together in their approaches to the study of religious phenomena, is that both scholars perceive there to be social characteristics of religion. Neither scientist believed religious aspects to be exclusively psychological or biological phenomena, or even non-existent, which was the norm of the day. They looked at society's purpose in having religion and looked at social interactions that were primarily religious in nature. Although the 19th century was dominated with thoughts that religion was outdated and being replaced by new rational endeavors, both men saw religion as a major part of society. They both saw religious phenomena as falling within the realm of "that which is sacred". First, they recognized the importance of religion within society, and then they emphasized studying religion within the social context. Although debates about the "content" of religious themes continues, the importance of studying religious phenomena has not really been refuted since Durkheim and Weber reintroduced it to the social science world.

#### This Thing Called "Self"

From a pragmatist perspective, the individual operates in the most fundamental sense from a practical stance in meeting the demands of existence. This differs from a behaviorist or functionalist view which proposes an internally driven or deterministic operation. Social structure is constantly being created, modified, and



sometimes terminated through social interaction. Likewise, a person's sense of self is also a social interaction phenomena which is being created and changed constantly (Chess & Norlin, 1988:163).

Charles Cooley spent the greatest amount of his work concerning himself with the self and society. He wrote,

A separate individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society when regarded as something apart from individuals... 'Society' and 'individuals' do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same thing... a person's self grows out of a person's commerce with others. The self is not first individual and then social; it arises dialectically through communication (Coser, 1971:305).

Another aspect of Cooley's notion of self is that of the self as "object". Cooley attributes this perception to the works of Mark Baldwin and William James (Coser:321). By looking at the self as described by Cooley, several items are brought to bear including notions about the socialization process of humans. Chess and Norlin (1988:168) supported this view in Human Behavior and the Social Environment when they wrote, "(1) the sense of self is socially acquired, it is a learning outcome; (2) selfhood is acquired from multiple sources, not one, and these multiple sources have different valences (power) in the formulation process; (3) just as there is no single source from which the notion of selfhood evolves, the same sources will convey different and conflicting meanings to the person at different times; and (4) the notion of selfhood is based on

a social process and that process is active throughout one's life" (1988:168).

Besides Cooley, George Mead contributed greatly to the notions of "self", especially in conceptualizing how the self develops. Mead distinguished the "I" from the "me" within the social self by defining the "I" as, "the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the "me" as the organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes" (Cosser, 1971:338). The "I" is the internal, more spontaneous part of the self, while the "me" is the external, social part of the self. By growing up within society, a "Generalized Other" emerges which is a group perspective of behavior. This Generalized Other also helps shape the self. According to Lewis Coser (339), Mead proposed that "the self as a whole, as it appears in social experience, is a compound of the stabilized reflections of the generalized other in the "me" and the incalculable spontaneity of the "I". These concepts support Cooley's view of the self as "object" and forming out of social interaction.

Another important notion in Mead's concept of self is that of conflict and cooperation, and "role-taking". Mead perceived social acts not only involving cooperation within interaction, but also conflict within interaction. For Mead, the two existed hand in hand. While persons share common meanings and interests, they also are in conflict relative to the many other interests they have. The concept of "role-taking" or the taking of the attitudes of others

toward oneself shows Meads "insistence that individuals always be considered under the angle of their relations to groups of significant others" (340). Whether in conflict, in cooperation or another state of being, persons must be considered within the context of their social interactions and within the interplay between the self and society; the "I" and the "me".

In addition to Mead's "role-taking" concept, the interactionists' perspective on roles in general includes: "the evolving notion of how people expect to act in a given position (role-making) and also imaginatively viewing themselves as they like to think of themselves being and acting in a given position (role identity). No "role structures" pre-exist that persons simply 'fit into', like some waxwork effigy...the actual process of role construction is an emergent, unstable, constantly negotiated activity" (Plummer, 1975:18).

#### Stigmatization, Deviance and Social Control

There have been volumes and volumes written on the concepts of stigma, deviance and social control. These three concepts are often considered aspects made of the same cloth. Once again, in the interactionists' perspective, these concepts are seen to emerge out of social interaction rather from internal drives or motivations. Erving Goffman is of course considered to be the "father" of the nature of stigma. He writes of stigma,

society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of these categories. Social settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered there. The routines of social intercourse in established settings allow us to deal with anticipated others without special attention or thought...Evidence can arise of a person possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind. Not all undesirable attributes are at issue, but include only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be. The term stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting (1963:2-3).

Goffman goes on to explore the complexities of stigma and describes three types. The first type of stigma relate to physical deformities. Items such as body height and weight, skin complexion, and size, shape and condition of body limbs, etc. fall within this first category. A second type are items related to race, religion and nation. Those things passed on genetically or through lineages. The third type of stigma pertain to "blemishes of individual character such as mental illness, dishonesty, unnatural passions or political behavior" (4). The stigmatized person possesses undesired differentness from what society anticipates. Society believes the stigmatized person is not quite human.

If the stigmatized person grows up in the general society, he/she tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that the general population does. The norms an individual has incorporated from society helps him/her to be aware of what others perceive to be shortcomings. No matter how defended or comfortable the individual is with the

"difference", he/she agrees, even if only for a moment, that he/she falls short of what he/she "should" be (6). The stigmatized person may attempt to correct the stigma or may choose not to at any given time. Goffman describes several adaptations that the stigmatized can attempt. Goffman also distinguishes between stigma which, for the most part cannot be hidden (skin color) and those that can (religion). He calls these actual social identity (provable attributes) and virtual social identity (nonprovable attributes) (2).

Adaptation techniques used by stigmatized persons that Goffman identifies can include stigma denial, which would most likely be impossible for the visibly stigmatized. He describes a process by stigmatized persons that he defines as "passings". Passing, according to Warren (Marmor, 1980:127) involves acceptance of the stigmatized identity, but concealing it from the potentially hostile "normals". Another adaptation notion of Goffman's is "covering". One type of covering involves "an effort to restrict the display of those failings most centrally identified with the stigma" (Goffman, 1963:103). For example, a Jewish person who purposefully rejects opportunities to gain material items and/or money because of the stigma of "always the frugal or wary Jew".

Deviance is viewed from the interactionist perspective within the context of interaction between social groups and individuals. H.S. Becker is probably to date the most known sociologist to explore the nature of deviance, at least from

an interactionist viewpoint. He writes of deviance (1963:9),

social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the 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 successfully been applied; deviant behaviour that people label.

In his book Sexual Stigma, Kenneth Plummer discusses the nature of deviance and stigma. He writes that deviance is viewed from an interactionist perspective as a subjective (rather than absolute) reality; as process and as a consequence of self as well as societal reactions. He is quick to point out that persons do not have to actually "act" towards a deviant for stigmatization and labelling to be successful. The individual can react towards himself as well (1975:21). Plummer argues in looking at the case of sexual deviance, it is "not official labelling that matters, but rather the self-labelling that takes its cues from an externalized, reified stigma label" (23).

Throughout the process of defining and discussing deviance and stigmatization, most of the theorists who have studied these concepts believe them to be (not exclusively) forms of social control. Interactionists' perceive deviance within the context of perpetual change, and that deviance includes at one level or another, attempts at controlling others and/or the self (28).

## Neutralizing Dissonance

Dunford and Kunz in their article, "The Neutralization of Religious Dissonance" (1973) explore the concepts of dissonance and neutralization techniques when they look at how persons within a religious community manage or neutralize the importance of going against certain religious rules under certain circumstances. Taking Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Sykes and Matza's concept of neutralization, they look at religious deviance and the problem of control of members by a religious organization.

Festinger suggests persons with opposing psychological or cognitive messages feel uneasy and attempt to reduce dissonance through various means (2). In this same vein, Sykes and Matza theorize that dissonance reduction is accomplished through a variety of rationalizing techniques which neutralize the dissonance effect(s). These techniques include: 1) denial of responsibility, 2) denial of injury, 3) denial of the victim, 4) condemnation of the condemners, and 5) appeal to higher loyalties (13). By neutralizing the dissonance, the individual is able to begin or continue the dissonance "causing" behavior [Sykes and Matza recognize "deviant acts may precede and/or follow dissonance resolution" (5)].

Dunford and Kunz's application of these theories to a certain religious rule and norm shows that there may exist "commonly shared and acceptable justifications for the violation of religious tenets" (6). Their research suggests

that: 1) the commonly held assumption that religious values and institutions function as controlling agents, at least on some issues, is faulty; 2) neutralizing techniques are "analytically useful" (6); 3) although persons or bureaucracies establish rules and norms, the rules and norms may be belied based on the individuals' processes (9).

Again, most of the theories and concepts reviewed here are from a social interactionist perspective. The exceptions are Durkheim's notion of "that which is sacred" and the more social psychological stance of cognitive dissonance and neutralization theories. These two exceptions are still helpful in looking at the homosexuals' experiences with religious and spiritual beliefs and organizations.



## CHAPTER V

### METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF SELECTED DATA

Put simply, qualitative research methods are used to gain what Weber termed "Versthen". Weber used this term in speaking of sociology in general, but Coser describes what he believes Weber to mean when he wrote "the grasping of subjective meaning of an activity, Weber argued, is facilitated through empathy and a reliving of the experience to be analyzed" (1971:220). This seems to be the essence of naturalistic, qualitative research.

In order to gain some kind of "Versthen" into the lives of homosexual persons who express some level of religious/spiritual beliefs, a qualitative study was conducted. Data was collected from three sources. In their book, Linking Data, Fielding and Fielding (1986:25) relate Denzins' four types of triangulation methods for collecting qualitative data. The first method they describe, data triangulation on the "person" level, was used in this study. Triangulation is described by Fielding and Fielding (24) as:

data-source [triangulation] involves the comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the fieldwork, different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting, or... the accounts of different participants

(including the ethnographer's) involved in the setting.

The data collected in this study reflects the "accounts of different participants involved in the settings" by including: 1) one-to-one interviews with fifteen people who identify themselves as homosexual and claim religious/spiritual beliefs; 2) over eighty written testimonies by persons who identify themselves to be homosexual and claim religious/spiritual beliefs; and 3) over ten months of personal observations by the researcher at a church attended predominately by self-identified homosexuals.

#### One-to-One Interviews

Fifteen individuals were interviewed following a general outline of questions (interview outline is included in the Appendix). Demographic information on the fifteen is as follows:

1. 14 females; 1 male
2. Race-all 15 persons are caucasian
3. geographical locations--2 persons in northeast U.S.; 1 person in the southwest U.S.; and 12 persons in the midwest. All fifteen persons live in towns/cities of populations less than 500,000.
4. The youngest person is 21 and the oldest is 41. The mean age is 31.93.
5. Educational levels of respondents are: Non-highschool graduate-1; some college-2; Bachelor's degree-7; some

- graduate work-2; Master's degree-2; and Unknown-1.
6. Religious denominational breakdowns when persons were growing up: Disciples of Christ-4; Baptist-3; Methodist-2; Pentacostal-2; Judaism-1; Catholic-1; and None-1.
  7. Current religious denominational breakdown: Judaism-1; None-4; Assemblies of God-2; Non-denominational-4; and Undecided-4.

Obtaining interviews was done by way of word-of-mouth. Potential interviewee's were identified by the researcher and then contacted personally. Individuals were told about the type of study being conducted and then asked if they were willing to be interviewed. The nature and extent of the study was explained, along with details about how the identities of each person were being protected. The researcher tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed each interview.

Each interview lasted between thirty minutes and one and one half hours. They were conducted in a home-type setting. Most of the respondents were at first nervous about the tape-recorder, although they had given the researcher permission to use it. After a few minutes of questions, each respondent appeared to not be so aware of the recorder. The researcher found herself nervous at first also. The nervousness had less to do with the recorder and more to do with feeling anxious about asking such personal questions (invading the boundaries of social space and inquiry). After

the first few minutes, both parties relaxed more. All fifteen interviews were basically "completed" from the perspective of the researcher. No one seemed to terminate the interview prematurely although more data could have been gathered with each and every respondent.

The researcher confirmed with each interviewee that he/she identified him/herself as homosexual. When asking about the interviewee's religious/spiritual beliefs and practices, the researcher purposefully used the terms "religious/spiritual" initially and then asked the interviewee which, if either of the terms, he/she was comfortable using. Some of the respondents used the term religious or religion, while others used the term spiritual. A few persons used the term "higher power". Some of the respondents used all the terms interchangeably. The researcher felt it important to discuss with the interviewee what term(s) he/she wanted to use and for what reasons, because the meanings of these terms can vary tremendously. The researcher then proceeded to use the term the respondent identified as preferring throughout the remainder of the interview. All respondents said they believe in a "god-type or greater-than-humans, universal entity". The notions about who this might be or what they believed that entity to be, varied.

#### Written Testimonies

Eighty-two accounts of nonfictional, personal stories

were read and analyzed by the researcher. The testimonies were taken from five sources. From books they were: Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence (1985); But Lord, They're Gay (publishing date pending); Nice Jewish Girls (1982); and Our Right to Love (1978), and; from a written transcript of the Oprah Winfrey Show. All of the persons in these stories self-identify themselves as homosexual and deal with issues of their self-sexual orientation and their religious/spiritual beliefs.

As far as the researcher knows, all of the persons in the written accounts were from the United States. Most of the persons referred to experiences of being in America (U.S.). Non-U.S. citizens may exist among the respondents, however, few non-U.S. issues were brought up. Some cross-cultural issues within the United States were mentioned, though minimally.

Seventy-six of the persons in the written accounts are female and six persons are male. Race, age and educational level of these persons are unknown. The persons giving written accounts did so in relation to their homosexuality and religious/spiritual beliefs. At the time of the "accounts", their religious denominational breakdowns included: Catholic-49; Judaism-25; Non-denominational-5; and Unknown-3.

The book Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence (1985) includes accounts from both nuns and ex-nuns of their experiences in discovering their self-sexual orientation of

homosexuality, their life prior to, during and for some time after the convent, and what their self-sexual orientation means within their religious life. Some of the persons remain in religious life and maintain celibacy while others who remain are not celibate. Many persons left religious life in what was described as the "mass exist" during the late sixties/early seventies, yet still continue to identify themselves as Catholic. Many left their order and do not now claim Catholicism, but consider themselves to still be spiritually involved and/or struggling.

Similar to Lesbian Nuns, the editor of Nice Jewish Girls (1982) deals with the issue of breaking silence by pulling together and publishing stories of Jewish lesbians. Homosexual Jews are not recognized in the Jewish race/religion. Yet, this editor pulled together over twenty anthologies about Jewish lesbians. The issues these lesbians deal with range from Jewish-homosexual identity to anti-semitism to family preservation issues to self acceptance. Each story contributes something to understanding what it is like to be homosexual, female and Jewish.

Sylvia Pennington tells the story of her changing ministry to gay males and females in the last two and one half decades. She includes in But Lord, They're Gay (publishing date pending), the personal stories of five persons who identify themselves as homosexual and what being gay means in their Christian journey. Most of the five

individuals are now ministers themselves.

The final book from which personal testimonies were taken is Our Right To Love (1978). The majority of this book is a resource guide for lesbians and does not focus on religious/spiritual issues, however, two accounts are given concerning the topic of religion and are therefore included in the research data.

Finally, written accounts were taken by the researcher from the transcript of the Oprah Winfrey Show aired on November 13, 1986. The topic focused on homophobia and with the discussion, the notion of homosexuality as "a sin" was presented. Three self-identified homosexuals spoke on that program and shared their views about religion and homosexuality.

#### Personal Observation

The researcher attended an open-to-the-public church made up of predominately self-identified homosexuals. The researcher attended for approximately ten months. The researchers' attendance was not for the purpose of conducting this research, but observations made while in attendance were included in the study. The researcher attended on a fairly regular basis, primarily attending on Sunday mornings and participating in a few non church-service activities.

The congregation included about 100 people. Approximately 75%-85% of those attending were estimated by the

researcher to be self-identified homosexuals. Sunday attendance (primary service) was attended by approximately 35-50 people on any given Sunday. Typically more women than men attended, with an approximated split of 30% men & 70% women. From the researchers observations, well over 50% of the attendee's were "coupled". Less than about 30% were "single".

Racial breakdowns appeared to fit typical breaks for the general population in the area (town, state, region) where the church resides. Educational levels were unknown. The ages of members seemed to fall predominately in the early to middle adulthood range. Very few people were over 55 years of age (maybe 6 or 7 persons). Most of the attendees were between the ages of twenty and forty-five. A few teens and children attended. The congregational members appeared to be mostly middle-lower to lower-middle class as determined by the researcher using some socio-economic factors, i.e. location and budget of church; dress and types of transportation vehicles of attendee's; location of many members' homes within specific areas of town.

There appeared to be three basic attendance groups: one group was the "in-group" who were regular attendees. They participated in leadership roles within the church or had "functions" to perform, ie. financial manager, deacon, fellowship host/hostess, organist. The second group were fairly regular attendees, but missed occasionally as well. Some of these persons helped with some tasks, but usually



only when asked to do so. These people were not seen as often as those in the "in-group". The third group of persons were those who attended only for a short period of time (2-6 weeks) and did not return or were persons who attended only on rare or special occasions. The researcher believes herself to have fallen into the second group.

The particular activities within the church services themselves were fairly "ecumenical" -- pulling together rituals from mostly Protestant and Catholic traditions. For example, the traditions centering around the processional included the carrying of the cross with Jesus nailed to it and the selection of hymns to sing reflected a great deal of Baptist influence. No Sunday or church school was conducted while the researcher attended. Three worship services were held during the week, two on Sunday and one on Wednesday. The congregation celebrated typical Protestant and Catholic holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYZING THE DATA

A great many themes emerge from the data collected in this study. Many of the persons communicating their stories deal with similar issues as other persons. Issues relating to self-sexual identity and orientation, as well as issues centering around religiosity and society tell of persons struggling as individuals, as members of one or more perceived minority group and as members of the larger society. The researcher presents the themes under one of two categories: Separation from Society and Religious/Spiritual Traditions; and The Managing and Remanaging of Self. These two categories were chosen because the researcher believes many of the themes are interrelated and seem to fall within one category or the other.

#### Separation from Society and Religious/Spiritual Traditions

Every person interviewed by the researcher, as well as evidence in the written testimonies and television program indicated feelings of alienation from society at large. They also indicated alienation from many traditional religious organizations found within society. For this reason, the researcher divides this category into two primary themes.

### Homosexuals Are Sick and Perverted People

One respondent discusses how society over time has stigmatized certain groups of people when she said, "I think we have had a tendency throughout history to try and make everyone fit our lifestyles. I was thinking about this in looking at the early days of the founding of this country with the black slaves. We justified how we treated them because we decided that blacks did not have souls. So if they didn't have souls then they were not real people so we could treat them however we wanted to". This statement surely describes Goffman's partial definition of stigma which talks about how "the person with a stigma is not quite human" (Goffman, 1963:5).

A qualitative study by Chafetz (1974) found that female homosexuals reported traditional sources of support such as economic institutions, family, the media and the church were lacking for them. Two-thirds felt their jobs would be in danger if their homosexual identities were known. A person in this study expressed the same sentiment when she said "It's irritating to me when I'm around 'straights', including my parents, and they're talking about their husbands or wives. I can't talk about my relationship because we're the same sex". Or the respondent who stated "I grew up in a church. Knowing how the official church feels about us and wants to kick us out is very hard. I don't have a spiritual community or home anymore. It's important in who we are as human beings and for our social and spiritual

well-being that we are included in society and in the church". These sentiments seem to show the results of social distancing. Based on observations at the predominately gay church, a great deal of time was taken up with people talking individually and as a congregation at large about separation, stigma and discrimination that they felt from the straight world, including mainstream churches.

Several of the persons interviewed expressed great concern about the well-being of other homosexuals who might be feeling the same alienation and separation that they do. One person explained, "homosexuals are very oppressed. I think it goes beyond the oppression of the general social population and it is particularly bad in this part of the country--being in the bible belt. I think because of being in the bible belt we have a very oppressed community of gay". Perhaps these individuals have taken on a sense of "minority status" and gain some comfort from sharing a stigmatized position.

#### Homosexuals Can Not Be Christian/Jewish/Spiritual

A discussion was presented in the theoretical framework chapter of this paper which focused on deviance and neutralization. There are those who are stigmatized and responded to oftentimes as deviants. It is understood in these concepts that if you are considered deviant then you typically cannot also be "normal", at least when viewed by the stigmatizing body. Several of the persons in this study

are aware of a perceived "deviance" which includes being seen as an outcast. They feel society believes even God has abandoned them and thus they are "not worthy of being accepted by the Holy One".

A respondent said, "anyone who talks of religious beliefs and at the same time lists who they hate probably needs therapy. Just writing off people based on a category I don't think is ok. At least it's not what God would do". Another person states, "I'm very sad or saddened that people teach that homosexuals cannot be Christians, that they cannot follow a faith, that they cannot be quote unquote 'saved'. Another respondent says, "You could be a Jew and people would recognize that as a religious or ethnic affiliation or you could be a lesbian and some people would recognize that as an 'alternative lifestyle'...but if you try to claim both identities...you are exceeding the limits of what was permitted". All these statements indicate felt notions from the larger community or from traditional religious organizations that gays are not worthy of acceptance into the realm of "that which is sacred" as defined by Durkheim. That their "sin" separates them from society and from God is the commonly felt belief. Most of subjects in this study appear to feel a great deal of emotion at the assumptions they feel are being made about their abilities and capacities to take advantage of their place in religion and/or the "sacred" realm.

A final consideration of the idea that the homosexuals

in this study perceive traditional religions as cutting them off or pushing them out of church, can be found in the many justifying statements made by several respondents. Here the respondents stated, "I feel God knows I'm gay and it's ok"; "I believe a person can be a Christian irregardless of sexual orientation. God's love accepts everyone"; "I've done alot of soul-searching and don't feel I'm wrong to be a lesbian. God judges my heart, soul and intent, not my being female or gay"; "I'm not condemned in God's eyes...my God loves me no matter what"; "The Almighty being wouldn't condemn you for eating pork or expect you to give everything up. So, you need to do what's best for you while being aware of other's too". One person said, "people who say homosexuality is a sin and that I cannot be of God really piss me off. Who are they to judge my relationship to God"? This and the other statements above appear to address Sykes and Matza's concept of dissonance neutralization, especially reflecting the "condemn the condemner" neutralization technique.

Almost all, if not all, of the persons included in this study want a religious/spiritual aspect to their life. Feeling cut off is extremely frustrating and troublesome for the persons in this study, at least at moments in their lives. Many of the respondents see religion in general as a means of social control. As previously stated, they also perceive the responses of most non-gays to their being homosexual (whether the person comes across as being

religious or not) as further attempts to control more than their religious life. One young man said about the institution of religion, "Organized religion is man's way of explaining things around him that have no explanation (Durkheim's definition of that which is 'sacred'). It is natural for humans to try to understand everything. Traditional religion is used to brainwash people. To question is to question God and your parents". Or another person stated, "organized religion seems to be just for controlling the population or people. They tell ya what you can and cannot do. It's so legalistic--dress, foods, etc. No logical reasons for some of those things".

These views seem to run contrary to Dunford and Kunz' findings that religion is a faulty controlling agent. Here the subject interprets antigay stances by religious organizations as ways of attempting to control gays. Perceptions of accomplished control and attempted control may be the distinguishing factors in comparing the stances found in Dunford and Kunz's study and some of the stances made here.

The issues of stigma, status, deviance, social control, dissonance and alienation are major items of concern for those who identify themselves to be homosexual. The tasks of everyday life can become a focal point for the gay person, including their desires to deal with that which is "profane vs. that which is considered sacred".

## Managing and Remanaging Self

Within the context of the previous category, notions about a person's "self" has significant meaning. General ideas on what the "self" is, and how it develops from an interactionist perspective, have already been highlighted. Information from the research supports many of the already mentioned concepts about this thing called "self". In presenting the respondents view and understandings, the researcher finds it particularly helpful to use the titles of popular songs to identify the various themes centering around the "self".

### I've Got A Name!

Almost every interviewee said that they had felt "different" even as a young child. They expressed an unawareness as to why they felt different for a significant period of their life, until they later "discovered" their homosexuality. A woman said, "I had always had relationships with women where I was more involved with them than they were with me. Once I realized why, it made more sense".

Many of the respondents also talked about the difficulty they had at first using the words that denote homosexual until they got more used to it. They indicated that it took awhile for them to say, "I'm gay, lesbian, etc." The process of "naming" themselves was slow, but once the process of self-identity became more solidified, the terms used to label their "self" were important. One person



stated, "I hated the word lesbian for a long time, but the more I've gotten comfortable with myself and being homosexual, the easier it has been to hear and use the word lesbian. I still prefer 'gay' or even 'queer' but 'lesbian' is ok now".

Many of the respondents were adamant about using one term or another when referring to their homosexuality. Some of the females insisted on using the word lesbian instead of using the generic term of "homosexual". When asked, "Are you homosexual?" on women responded by saying, "I'm gay. Some people call it lesbian because I'm female. Homosexuals are males". There seemed to be a "correct" and "incorrect" language base depending on who you were talking to, so correct labeling appeared important to self identity.

#### All Of Me, Why Not Take All Of Me?

Respondents were concerned with notions about roles. Not only the role they felt society had bestowed upon them as "deviant", but that some of them felt they wanted to be considered as a "whole" person--one who is appreciated for their many diverse selves. One respondent said, "I don't just want to be looked at as a person who simply commits sex acts. I have a social self, a spiritual self, an intellectual self, an emotional self and so on. They are all of me rolled up in one". Another subject stated, "When people find out, they treat you different. I'm still me. I haven't changed, except now they know I like women, but they

don't want to know that part".

At the same time respondents identified a desire to be seen as a whole person, there was also concern about being "out" or known to others. The desire to be free from the stigma was tainted with great concern about disclosing all of one's self. One woman said, "it is sort of a Catch 22. I feel fear of being rejected by other people I care about. I feel stuck because I'm not able to share who I am". This dilemma is part of where Goffman finds the reason(s) for adaptation behavior. "Passing" as a "normal" or "covering" are adaptive measures Goffman identifies. The same person who just described their fears, went on to say, "In some places I'm out and some I'm not. My job doesn't constitute being out and yet I know the people that I work with and my bosses know I'm a lesbian. If we don't talk about it, we don't have to deal with it". Another interviewee stated, "self-acceptance is the key to coping with the crap society tries to dish out. If I didn't have self-acceptance, I'd probably be in big trouble".

#### You Make Me Feel Like A Natural...

The final look at the self concerns Meads concepts of the "I" and "me" and once again Sykes and Matza's neutralization theory. Many of the respondents indicated that their homosexuality was "natural" for them, as opposed to what they felt society had labeled "unnatural". A subject spoke of this when she said, "being gay is natural for me.

People say the bible says homosexuals' behavior is unnatural. Only time I felt unnatural was when I was with a man. If I had to be straight to go to heaven, I'd be going to hell because its unnatural for me".

The researcher perceives the "natural" self that the respondents report as that part of themselves that Mead calls the "I"--the more spontaneous side of the self. On the other hand, the "unnatural" self that many of these people perceive society to see in them, is what Mead refers to be the "me"--the portion that "appears in consciousness is always the self as object" (Cosser, 1971:338).

One of Sykes and Matza's neutralizing techniques for reducing dissonance is appealing to higher loyalties. Several of the research subjects talked of living out their homosexuality in order to be true to themselves. They seemed to reduce dissonance by being true to their "nature" and calling on God's acceptance to override what society tells them is wrong. One woman said that she turned to God for answers on whether she was to live her life alone after a divorce and God answered by helping her discover her homosexuality and getting involved with a woman in a long term relationship. She said, "when my brother found out I was gay he said I should turn to God. What he doesn't know is that I already had, and look what God's answer was"! So by believing that being true to oneself is more important than conforming to societies rules, many respondents call on God as a higher authority than society. By doing this, these

respondents seem to reduce the often felt dissonance of contradicting most of societies' messages about sexual orientation.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Conducting a qualitative look at very personal concerns of people as described in this study provides a unique view and experience. It is apparent from this researchers perspective that exploring aspects of society from within a naturalistic and interactionist perspective offers insights to the inner workings of social behavior, interaction, interpretation and experience that many other sociological approaches ill afford. At times the researcher found it quite difficult to maintain a strictly analytical, sociological perspective. The pain heard in the subjects' voices, seen in their eyes and read in their stories, which in part stems form coping with a society that as a whole opposes them and which includes various religious or spiritual entities that condemn them, quickens the heart and mind.

Many of these people are concerned with the plight of other homosexuals and want not to become condemning and persecutive of those who counter them. They are angry at the non-acceptance of who they are, of not having legal rights and for being violated in numerous socially sanctioned ways. Most of these people have spent days and weeks questioning

their feelings and behaviors; denying their sense of self and acting the "normal/heterosexual" part. Many are attempting to fight back. Some still struggle with acknowledging their homosexual orientation and remain frustrated. They have "passed" and "covered" as Goffman would identify. Most of the subjects fall somewhere in between peacefully knowing who they are and feeling a sense of quiet self-pride, while at the same time wanting to take part in an explosive revolution to turn the societal tide of hatred, indifference and pity. Just how to interpret the insights and experiences gathered here is a big task indeed.

Carol Warren writes of interviewing homosexuals in her book, Identity and Community in the Gay World (1974:177),

interviews also serve to get a sense of the unique individual, with a unique biography, experience of the world, and conception of self...such data always, however, present an ultimate problem of interpretation. We know that people reinterpret their biographies from the standpoint of their (new) present selves; thus we can never be sure of the reality base of the biographies of identity that people give us. Perhaps, though what is important is the reconstructing itself, and the way it organizes past, present, and future of the self into a coherent identity.

I would dare say that David Greenberg would agree with Warren's last statement concerning the importance of the process of reconstructing the self. But, he would undoubtedly extend the analysis to the construction and reconstruction of homosexuality at the macro--social organization level as well. Certainly there is evidence within the data presented that these individuals experience a whole societies construction of who and what they are

about that is different from other societies and/or from past historical accounts of experience. Greenberg explains his version of the present-historical debate when he states, "these questions implicitly assumed that homosexuality is entirely presocial, a biological given, constant in different periods of history and in different societies. Being the same everywhere, one could simply see how attitudes toward it changed as society changed" (1988:484).

The interplay between these individuals, religious organizations, the gay community and society at large seems so apparent and vital to understanding the qualitative nature of the homosexuals' world as well as notions about each of these entities. This group of persons is yet another group to be considered deviant, sick and/or sinful. Social, medical and religious stigma's remain.

Social mores and laws are taken very seriously by communities and nations because they offer a sense (however flimsy) of social orderliness and control. The persons in this study feel they are somehow set apart from society and although seen as different, believe themselves to really be just like everyone else.

Religious issues of right and wrong are relevant to those who are religious, including religious and spiritual homosexuals. The religious bureaucracy is alive and well and dealing with the homosexual within its institutions--as the individual parishioner, and within the roles of clergy,

priest, Sunday school teacher, youth director, etc.

Likewise, the religious and spiritual homosexual is dealing with the churches felt condemnation. The play continues.

Personal convictions and values are considered vital to us because they offer a sense of self, purpose and direction. What one believes about oneself is vital to how one lives and manages one's life. Although the medical and psychological fields have attempted to "demedicalize" homosexuality, these entities remain a part of our world and continue to effect how the homosexual is viewed and/or perceives him/herself.

Among other social sciences, namely sociology, important notions between the research subjects and the study of homosexuality remain as well. Warren writes, "at first, I discounted as irrelevant, dead data the long stories members gave me about 'how they got that way'...soon, however, I realized that the tales had considerable uniformity, and they tallied well with all kinds of deterministic social science theories. It occurred to me that these social science rhetorics were being put to good use in the construction of members' current identities and commitments" (1974:176).

Likewise, this researcher felt at times to be spinning in a web of theoretical explanations and interpretations made by the research subjects. The field of sociology appears to not be immune to the society in which it finds itself no more than the individuals in this study.



If nothing else, this study has hopefully contributed to understanding the real problems that homosexual persons encounter, especially when looking within a religious or spiritual context. Being recognized as an equal partner in studying, interpreting and most importantly in experiencing that portion of our lives which we consider to fall within the "sacred" realm is the most critical insight gained from this study in the researchers opinion. Being denied access to what is interpreted by many to be the most important aspect of life seemed blatantly crucial. The fight between the homosexual and organized religious belief systems seems to a key issue for those attached to both entities. Additional research in this area, especially in looking at the importance of the "sacred" within groups considered deviant and the significant number of religious bureaucracies' who prohibit homosexuality, is highly recommended.

## NOTES

1. The term homosexual is used generically to include both gay men and lesbian women who identify themselves as homosexual. See the introduction section for the definition of homosexual used in this study.
2. Each book included in the written testimonies analysis was written to address religious/spiritual issues and homosexuality. The Oprah Winfrey Show dealt with the topic of homophobia. Three of the guests on the show identified themselves as homosexual and addressed religious/spiritual issues as well as the issue of homophobia. They were included as data because of their religious/spiritual statements.
3. By "coupled", the researcher means the persons identified themselves to be together as evidenced through conversations with the researcher or observed by the researcher over time through behavior such as holding hands, receiving communion together, arriving/leaving together, etc.
4. By "single", the researcher means the person self-identified themselves to be "not with someone", as evidenced through conversations with the researcher or as observed by the researcher over time through behavior such as arriving/leaving alone, sitting in the church service alone, etc.

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

#### I. Preliminary Questions

- A. Age
- B. Educational Background
- C. Gender
- D. Ethnic Background
- E. Permission for interview and study/written paper

#### II. Primary Questions

- A. You consider yourself to be homosexual?
- B. Do you consider yourself to have a religious faith and/or to be spiritual?
- C. Please tell me about it.
- D. Did you grow up in or are you now a part of a church/religious organization?
- E. Please tell me about it.
- F. How does your religious faith fit in with your self/sexual orientation? And vice versa?
- G. How did your church/religious organization perceive or deal with homosexuality?
- H. How does your present church/religious organization perceive or deal with homosexuality?
- I. Do you consider yourself to be "out" in general?
- J. Are you "out" at your church/religious organization?
- K. Do you consider homosexuality to be "sinful" or "unnatural"?
- L. What do you think "God" thinks about your homosexuality?



- M. Have you experienced harassment, rejection or violence because of your self/sexual orientation?
- N. Have you experienced harassment, rejection or violence because of your religious/spiritual faith?
- O. How are your relationships with others in regard to your self/sexual orientation?  
Religion/spirituality?
- P. How do you and your partner/lover deal with religious/spiritual matters?
- Q. What am I leaving out? Is there anything else you would like to say about your self/sexual orientation or your religion/spirituality?

Thank You!

VITA

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