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The Gay Identity in the Age of AIDS

by

Walter Neal Rybicki

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

San Francisco



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**For
My Parents
and
Gay Men Everywhere**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I will always be grateful to the gay men and medical professionals who permitted me to interview them for this research. All those who were persons with AIDS and a substantial number of those who were healthy at the time of the interviews are now dead of AIDS. Nor were the professionals interviewed — physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and dentists — spared. When we spoke with each other, we all believed we'd live through the epidemic — that medicine would be able to control it, if not cure it. Ten years later we know the bitter truth. The deaths of these friends, and the burn-out that accompanies all AIDS work, threatened to scuttle this research several times. But I persevered. Partly because I am a stubborn person; partly because I couldn't let the time they spent with me go unmarked. May this document serve as my very modest expression of gratefulness to all of them.

I want to thank my parents, Walter and Elizabeth Rybicki, for their loving and sustained support over the years.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation in sociology examines the processes involved in gay male identity formation, maintenance, and transformation. It analyzes changes and constants in these processes across the temporal boundary of the AIDS epidemic in the San Francisco gay male community.

The thesis argues that the major processes in the formation of the gay male identity are, in the order of their precedence: feeling different, closeting, coming out, cruising, experiencing community, and making ideology. Each of these processes is more complex, risky, and rewarding than its predecessor. A progression through the ordered sequence of these processes, or stages, leads to gay identity formation. This staged view of gay identity formation can be circumscribed by a metaphor, "The Ladder of Risk." In this metaphor, a man in any one of the stages — or "rungs" — of his identity formation faces certain options and risks. His conceptualization of the nature of the risks and the value of the rewards at this stage is the result of socialization processes, both within and without the gay community. He chooses among the options and manages its risks by using strategies and tactics chosen to maximize the chances of successfully maintaining a process stasis. Since process stasis is impossible, since he is lured forward along a trajectory through the stages because he is attracted by the greater risks and rewards of the next stage. Risk-taking becomes an inextricable aspect of the mature gay male identity.

By researching the changes in these identity processes across the temporal boundary of the AIDS epidemic, a clear idea of the changes in gay male personal and community identity induced by the social consequences of the disease emerged. The intimate linkage between risk-taking and gay male personal and community identity formation is elucidated: the habituation to risk-taking

that characterizes each stage of gay identity formation assures that casual sex and creativity will remain important dimensions of the gay identity, and that these dimensions will survive the challenge of the AIDS epidemic.

The data analyzed are principally interviews with gay male residents of San Francisco, both HIV-positive and negative. But research reports and monographs, secondary literatures, and histories were consulted for received theoretical constructs. The analytic perspective taken is symbolic interactionism. The qualitative method used is grounded theory.

Leonard Schatzman

2020-2021

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER I

A. GOALS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH:

The object of this research is to understand the processes involved in gay male identity formation, maintenance, and transformation and to study the changes in these processes due to the epidemic of AIDS in the gay community. As a result of analyzing interviews conducted according to the grounded theory methodology, the major dimensions of gay male identity were discovered to be, in the order of their precedence: feeling different, closeting, coming out, cruising, experiencing community, and making ideology. The experience of feeling different leads to closeting, coming out is followed by cruising, and the experience of community is invariably accompanied by making ideology, that is, constructing theories about the social needs and aspirations of gay persons and the structure of the gay community. Of course, the converse is true: closeting shapes the ways a person perceives his difference from others, cruising is a way to come out in new gay subworlds, and making ideology makes comprehensible the structure of community. While closeting necessarily precedes coming out, it does not always lead to it. And although the gay community is incomprehensible in the absence of cruising, cruising does not necessarily lead to the experience of community. The functionalist concept of feedback illuminates, but does not completely circumscribe, the complex interrelationship among these processes, which are so closely connected that they can appear — depending upon the context in which they are viewed — to be both independent and interdependent.

Finally, all the processes taken as an ordered sequence of processes leading to gay identity formation can be circumscribed by a metaphor, "The Ladder of Risk." A person in any one of the stages of gay identity formation — say, closeting — faces certain risks. The management of these risks, often treated as a game, entails using strategies and tactics chosen to maximize the chances of maintaining control of relevant events and audiences. For example, a closeted gay person wins "the game of closeting" as long as his duplicity remains undiscovered by these audiences. (It is assumed that all relevant audiences are known. If not, then the chances of losing the closeting game are increased by an unknown amount.) Options in closeting, say to choose a particular mode of information management for a particular audience (for example, this audience can be lied to but that audience must be convinced by actions), are the result of complex risk assessments, and the successful closeted person excels in such assessments and in the selection the most appropriate tactics for implementing his closeting strategy.

The gay person moves along a trajectory from being different to ideology making, lured by the greater risks and rewards of the next stage. His conceptualization of the nature of the risks and the value of the rewards at any stage is of course socialized. Initially, the gay person's socialization into the meanings of feeling different and the need for closeting is done by the institutions of the dominant heterosexual society. But with his progression to the stage of coming out, the gay person is socialized by the institutions of the gay community. While on his journey through these staged processes, the gay person cannot find a stasis. *A stasis does not exist because none of the processes are ever concluded.* The mature gay person will experience episodes of being different again;

perhaps his relationships in a gay subworld have soured, or he has serious differences with the agendas of other gay activists, or he contracts a sexually transmitted disease. He may then withdraw for a period of time from interactions in his old — one of the dimensions of the process called closeting — to prepare himself for re-entry in a new sexual subworld. He will then have to be socialized into the rules of getting sex, or cruising, appropriate to this new subworld. *Another factor that precludes a stasis is that each of the processes is more complex, risky, and rewarding than its predecessor.* That being the case, the gay person is naturally drawn from one process to its successor because of the pleasures of risk-taking.

By researching the changes in gay identity processes across the boundary of the AIDS epidemic, I hoped that a clearer idea of the meanings of personal and community identity would emerge. I also hoped to deepen my understanding of — if not get answers to — such questions as: What is personal identity? In this regard, what is special about gay male identity? How closely is gay male identity associated with casual sex, creativity, and risk taking? How do such social forces as discrimination, medicalization, and social control impact casual sex, creativity, and risk taking? Will the changes AIDS has wrought on gay identity endure? Finally, I hoped to further anchor the theoretical concept of a sexual identity in data.

1. Historical Background:

A certain amount of familiarity with the meaning of the terms *homosexual* and *gay* as well as the history of the gay community is necessary to understand the findings and the emergent theory. The modern homosexual male and the gay community trace their origins

to nineteenth century medicalization, during which the term *homosexual* was coined and homosexuality was declared an illness. The medicalization of homosexuality was grounded in the changes in family structure, the psychiatric profession, the criminal justice system, and the military that were the result of processes of urbanization during the Industrial Revolution, e.g., the shift toward industrial capitalism, the weakened link between procreation and sexuality as well as the government's takeover of insurance against disaster, thus obviating the "safety net of the family," which provided the social space for communities of homosexuals to develop (D'Emilio, 1983; Murray, 1984) and led to the emergence of a "class consciousness" in those individuals who perceived themselves as defined by their homosexual desires, which in turn permitted them to organize around their "illness" and assert their legitimacy through community building.

The term *homosexual* was invented in 1869 by Hungarian physician K. M. Benkert, who wrote under the pseudonym of the ostensibly Austrian Karl Maria Kertbeny in a tract arguing against legal repression of same-sex conduct contained in Paragraph 175 of the legal code of the German Second Reich (Lauritsen and Thorstad, 1974). Benkert described homosexuality as a condition acquired at birth; it was not a communicable disease. In the same year, Berlin psychiatrist Karl von Westphal published a case history of a young transvestite woman with a strong sexual attraction for certain other women. Westphal's treatment of this case is important in that it gave a certain degree of medical legitimacy to the topic of, as he phrased it, "contrary sexual feelings" (Conrad and Schneider, 1992). But the case histories of various "sexual abnormalities" in Richard von Krafft-Ebing's book *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886 had the greatest impact on both the

lay, legal, and medical conception of human sexuality. Krafft-Ebing defined Victorian standard of heterosexual procreative sex as the criterion of normalcy; sexual attachments between members of the same sex were considered totally abnormal. At the same time, he pre-empted the twentieth century fascination with variant sexuality in his willingness to address it openly and directly, if clinically. Krafft-Ebing's work "effectively broke [the] Western, Christian, and middle-class conspiracy of silence about unconventional sexual behavior" (Conrad and Schneider, 1992). He was also a pivotal figure in the medicalization of homosexuality. In his appearances to give expert testimony during the 19th-century criminal trials of homosexuals, Krafft-Ebing testified that homosexuality was caused by an irreversible "hereditary taint" that called for therapeutic intervention, not punishment.

Many other historical attempts to define gays have fallen out of favor, including "contrary sexual sensitivity," "invert," "spiritual hermaphrodite," and "Uranian" (Bayer, 1981). Inevitably, by the mid-twentieth century, the term homosexual became overburdened with clinical and pathological connotations. So the founders of the pre-1960s homosexual movement (or *pre-Stonewall* movement as it usually known, for reasons that will be made clear below), casting about for a replacement for the term "homosexual," coined the word *homophile*, derived from the Latin *philia*, meaning friendship, which was in turn from the Greek *philos*, which means loving. This word stuck, and the pre-Stonewall gay movement is still called the homophile movement.

In the middle of the twentieth century, gay community formation accelerated due to such factors as the Kinsey (1948) data, which revealed that 50 percent of adult males acknowledged erotic responses to other males, and that more than a third had engaged in homosexual activities that culminated in orgasm; homosociability during World War II and, with the war's end, the discharge of large numbers of men into urban centers from which those who had been labeled homosexual by the armed forces were reluctant to leave, and who became the nucleus of the emerging gay ghettos; the discovery of antibiotics and the concomitant reduction in anxiety about sexually transmitted diseases; political changes that permitted the postwar expansion of public settings for meeting others interested in homosexuality, especially the gay bar; the tradition of printing dissident views and a general valuing of freedom of the press, which permitted open public discourse about homosexuality; the emergence of a large number of ethnographic studies of deviant communities, which piqued public interest in underground social worlds; and a tradition of voluntary associations derived from religious pluralism, which led to the emergence of gay organizations throughout the country (Murray, 1984).

The beginnings of the contemporary urban gay community and the existence of a positive gay identity is grounded in the first American gay movement, the homophile movements of the 1950s and early 1960s. The main organizational expression of the homophile movement, the Mattachine society, was founded in Los Angeles in 1950 by men who were either former members of the Communist Party of the United States or left-wing socialists. The Communist sympathies of the homophile movement's leadership ultimately forced the Mattachine society outside the American political mainstream, but

not before an application of its Marxian theoretical foundations gave birth to the idea that homosexuals were an oppressed minority (D'Emilio, 1983). The minority view of homosexuals led the first gay activists, in the early 1970s, to craft a public strategy modeled on the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, using court challenges and small-scale symbolic public actions, called *zaps* (akin to the agitprop work of the early American Leftist radicals of the 1930s).

Before the late 1960s, the social life of homosexuals was not covered in the national mass communications media; neither was there news of homophile organizations, and those organizations had no effective means of proselytizing potential members. So there was little sense of a community among American homosexuals beyond their fragmented ghettos (Duberman, 1986). A limited nationwide sense of community arose during the great Halloween drag balls in Chicago and New York during the 1950s:

These huge drag balls were the only time people came out publicly. Homosexuals from all over the country made themselves known by visiting. The rest of the time they were closeted. They went their solitary ways to the bars in their ghetto to find someone to put the make on (Allan).

Also contributing to a national sense of community among gay men during the 1950s were a number of "Queen Mothers," influential drag queens who facilitated the meeting of homosexuals in the large cities in which they lived. These colorful figures formed a network of salons which gave the homosexual men of the time a sense of regional and national community. This is not to say that there were no other ways for gay men to meet. From the 1950s on, the gay ghettos of Los Angeles, New York and Chicago had hundreds of gay bars:

O'Hara's new neighborhood was bursting with gay bars, all named for different birds, that together were known as "the Bird Circuit." They included the Blue Parrot on Fifty-third street between Third Avenue and Lexington (about which Rivers had warned O'Hara in a letter to Ann Arbor, "The cops are making arrests at the Blue P every night these days"), the Golden Pheasant on Forty-eighth Street, and the nearby Swan — all in the neighborhood of Third Avenue El. The East Side bars tended to be dressy, and their customers were conservatively dressed in bow ties, blazers, or fluffy sweaters. The "bird bars" usually started coming to life between eleven-thirty and midnight when the plays let out. Often men in the bar could be found shoulder to shoulder, singing tunes from such Broadway musicals as *South Pacific* or *Kiss Me, Kate* in unison with the jukebox (Gooch, 1993).

But the modern, cosmopolitan "bicoastal gay," represented by several of the respondents whose mobility permitted them to cruise the gay communities of the United States — and, indeed, of the world — had yet to evolve. Greater civic tolerance, cheap air fares, and the national television coverage of gay liberation during the seventies were the social and technological facts that elevated the consciousness' of gay men to a national level.

On the night of June 27, 1969, the night after Judy Garland's funeral, a routine police raid on a small gay bar filled with drag queens at an emotional peak, the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, unexpectedly led to a series of riots that began the modern gay political movement. After the police had loaded arrested patrons into a paddy wagon, the crowd that had gathered in front of the Stonewall responded with catcalls — and then suddenly exploded, hurling bottles at the police, using an uprooted parking meter as a battering ram, blockading some of the police inside the bar, and then setting it afire. Reinforcements rescued the police, but the rioting continued for four nights, with street people and drag queens — long habituated to violence and with little to lose — in the vanguard, playing a crucial role that the later gay movement has been reluctant to admit and honor.

The riot that transformed every gay American's life began when Inspector Seymour Pine led a routine raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar during a mayoral campaign. But on the night of June 27, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn — an otherwise ordinary bar that featured go-go boys and catered to transvestites — gay people fought back. Customer Jack Buehler was at the scene that night, and remembered hearing a black drag queen say, "We ain't taking this shit no more," as she hurled a trash can through the window. The ensuing civil disturbance, which lasted several nights, involved an estimated two thousand gays and lesbians protesting openly and fiercely in the streets. Years of frustration over bar raids, entrapment, and other forms of harassment were suddenly vented and rose like a great smoke signal across the country (Timmons, 1990).

The Stonewall riot has acquired the aura of a mythic battle that eclipsed all previous gay activism. It marked a new public consciousness about gay people and is annually commemorated as the anniversary of the gay movement's "Boston Tea Party." The gay identity first postulated in 1950 by the theoreticians of the homophile movement was transformed by the Stonewall mythos into a social consciousness: "the gay movement had moved from 'I' to 'we'" (Timmons, 1990). Dozens of organizations sprang up in the riot's wake, and many still bear the bar's name.

As the nation's first large-scale gay media event, Stonewall met with indifference or hostility in the establishment press. The New York Times dismissed it three days later with an article on page thirty-three titled, "Four Policemen Hurt in Village Raid." In October 1969, Time Magazine ran a cover story entitled, "The Homosexual, Newly Visible, Newly Understood." The article portrayed gays as promiscuous, unstable, and inherently miserable. Prominently quoted was a line from Marc Crowley's dramatic and camp film The Boys in the Band: "Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse." Time suggested that there was a homosexual conspiracy to dominate the arts. The article ended with the optimistic pronouncement that homosexuality, according to "most experts," could be cured.

It is doubtful that the ideology of gay people as an oppressed minority could have been communicated if other factors had not contributed to the liberalization of the social climate in America. The 1960s saw the wide dissemination of the Pill, which made recreational sex possible between heterosexuals and destroyed the moral stance that heterosexuality was morally superior to homosexuality because the purpose of heterosexuality was procreation. The hippie phenomenon and the antiwar movement of the sixties made the challenge to moral and political authority and infallibility popular among youth, always the trend setting segment of American society. If political authority could be challenged, then so could medical authority, which had relegated homosexuality to its nosology of mental disorders. Were homosexuals ill just because psychiatrists said so?

The counterculture wave of the 1960s hit gay people in the 1970s, and the emerging gay communities that were precipitated by the Stonewall militant gay consciousness, became a melting pot of experimental roles and identities. During this period, old epithets like "fairy," "queer," "queen," and "sissy" were exhumed and tried out, along with new ones like "boychick" and "groovy guy." The rhetoric of gay activists bore witness to a fierce competition for acceptance among these words. In San Francisco, gays known as Sissies professed contempt for those they called *clones* or STIFs — straight-identified homosexuals. The so-called clone image — which has been popular since Stonewall — is an ideal type of gay male image that consists of gym body, close-cropped hair, multiple earrings, mustache, backward baseball cap, white T-shirt (or tank-top or plaid flannel shirt), leather jacket or sport jersey, loose-fit Levi's Silver Tab jeans, and running shoes or work boots. In the end, the most enduring proved to be "gay," a term that had been used

by homosexual men since the 1920s (Duberman, 1991), although among certain groups the more militant "faggot" found favor. *Genderfuck*, a type of costume combining exaggerated signals of male and female — for example, beard, bouffant hairdo, and glittering Kabuki-style eye makeup, all on one person — was employed as a guerilla attack on rigidly defined sex roles. As the decade of the 1960s turned, genderfuck groups like the Cockettes and the Angels of Light spoofed mainstream political events and personalities with camp, consciousness-raising spectacles in both San Francisco and New York. The mid-sixties saw +convergence of the emerging gay social worlds with the beat scene in nearby North Beach, and together these nonconforming, outcast groups shaped a distinctive, unapologetic consciousness that would, by the seventies, transform the gay sensibility into a social phenomenon of national scale.

New liberation movement ideologies were constructed on a foundation of the ideologies of the so-called New Left of this era and its first activists were often veterans of the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s. The new generation of gay activists faced the problem of creating a 1960s-style mass movement out of a social class that had long hidden its identity and activities from public view. The influence of the "Black is beautiful" rhetoric of the civil rights movement, translated into "Gay is Good," can be seen in the central emphasis gay liberationists placed on the affirmation of gay pride. But for gay pride to be a political as well as a personal achievement gay identity needed to be publicly affirmed. Hence the critical importance of *coming out* in public to the emergence of gay identity. The movement that placed coming out at the top of its agenda was largely a young person's movement, made up at least initially of people who had relatively little to

lose by broadcasting their sexual preference. The youthfulness of the gay liberationists and the bias toward youthism of American popular culture made gay activists into media darlings and accelerated the emergence of the great gay urban geographical concentrations (or gay ghettos, as they were popularly known) of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles by making them magnets for emigration.

As a consequence of the emergence of gay political power, police harassment of gay sex venues was curtailed by liberal political administrations. This was abetted by the success of antibiotics in treating sexually transmitted diseases, which fostered a non-judgmental attitude in the medical profession and among public health authorities. The institutionalization of gay sex as a for-profit business proceeded rapidly. The density of gay men in San Francisco catalyzed "gay capitalists" into building the bathhouses in which abundant gay sexuality flourished. Casual sex emerged as the *sine qua non* of gay political correctness, the foundation of gay identity, and institutional focus of gay urban settings. The visible and unique freedoms that permitted the existence of this abundant sexuality led, in turn, to a greater class consciousness between gay men and created a demand to export this brand of gay civil rights to other areas of the United States. Achieving these ends resulted in the emergence of a large cadre of gay activists who learned how to manipulate the media to their own ends, which is to say, defending gay interests and drawing new recruits.

The centerpiece of the ideology of the post-Stonewall, countercultural gay movement was centered on public self-disclosure as the key to psychological health for individual gay people and to the liberation from oppression for the gay community. From

the beginning there was conflict between the openly gay activists of the movement and the majority of homosexuals who remained *closeted*. The willingness of the gay movement to respect the privacy of closeting became increasingly strained until, as a consequence of the advent of AIDS in the early 1980s, the gains of the 1970s were halted by the association, in the American public's mind, of gay sexuality with a deadly plague. Indeed, AIDS so highlighted the modes of gay male sexuality that the most arcane details of homosexual practices became familiar to the public even as their popularity in the heterosexual community remained unrecognized. Gay sexuality itself was *outed* by AIDS. Moral entrepreneurs turned AIDS into a proof of a patriarchal God's punishment of homosexuals. Even in liberal institutionalized religions, the respondents were made to feel that their salvation was contingent upon their remaining closeted. This reactionary backlash and the revival of right wing conservatism during the administration of Ronald Reagan threatened to undo all the gains of the gay movement in the 1970s.

Prior to AIDS the closet of homosexual celebrities or public officials was sacrosanct. The anonymity of urban life permitted sexual liaisons across class lines and created conditions in which they could occur in an underground beneath public consciousness. That the privacy of homosexuals was respected by journalists was due to editorial homophobia (Shilts, 1990) and the perception that homosexuality was so shameful that extraordinary measures had to be taken to protect the innocent families of homosexuals. It also constituted a "heterosexist double standard" (Gross, 1993), since the sexual peccadillos of heterosexuals were considered fair game by society gossip columnists. Within the gay community, revealing a private person's or celebrity's homosexuality was to betray the

collective brotherhood and the right to privacy even if such people took public stands against homosexuality. All pre-AIDS gay men shared, as it were, the same closet, their job security and social well-being hinging on sexual privacy. Indeed, the secrecy of the closet contributed to community bonding (as to a secret fraternity or lodge) and motivated the emergence of arcane signs that enabled gay men to recognize one another without being identified by straights.

AIDS destroyed the fraternal secrecy of the gay lifestyle. In the early 1990s, closeted celebrities — elected officials and religious leaders who hid their homosexual conduct and maintained a strident antigay rhetoric to safeguard their careers — were systematically *outed* in the gay media. Once their closeted homosexual lives were made public, their ostracization by a scandalized straight community forced them to turn to the gay community for support; at the very least, it nullified them as opponents. A few radical activists went further, outing entertainment and media figures and sometimes private individuals. The reasons most often given to justify outing were that the vilification of gay people by closeted homosexual celebrities resulted in the federal government's poor response to the AIDS crisis and that young gays needed successful gay adults as identity models. Many of politically moderate respondents considered this argument specious except in the case of historical figures. They believed that any person whose gayness was public only because he was forced out of his closet was too dishonest and hypocritical to be emulated. On the other hand, they agreed that outing limited the effectiveness of the gay stereotypes that made passing easier. That is, the greater the number of closeted homosexual men passing as conventionally heterosexual that are exposed, the less impact

the common typifications of gayness (e.g., flightiness, misplaced femininity, and exaggeration) would have on the collective American consciousness.

2. The Importance of the Research:

There is a large and burgeoning literature on gay life by scholarly writers — for example, historians, psychologists and sociologists — much of which is presented in the media and popular literature and which is often not derived from systematic research. On the other hand, this writing is basically scholarly, and differs from other such writing in the perspective I give the emergence of gay identity in terms of six *in vitro* processes — or stages — grounded in interview data: the experience of being different, closeting, coming out, cruising, the experience of community, and making ideology. Each process in this sequence is fraught with greater behavioral risks than its predecessor, so we choose as a metaphor for traversing our ordered sequence of processes climbing a “Ladder of Risk.” During each process, success in taking risks is rewarded with progress toward the next stage (up the ladder); failure drives the person backward to the previous stage (down the ladder). To ascend the “Ladder of Risk,” say ascending the last rung corresponding to the experience of being different to the first rung corresponding to the process of closeting, the value of any reward associated with closeting must exceed any of the rewards of the previous stage, the experience of being different. (Rewards are positive, as in the case of kudos; or negative, as is the case when the lesser of two evils is chosen.)

To elaborate further, in order to advance from the stage of experiencing being different (the reward for which is a sense of uniqueness at being so labeled; the punishment, shame and shunning) to closeting, a person must judge that the reward of success-

fully managing the information about himself that certain audiences have exceeds that of being labeled different by these audiences. That might not always be the case: a young student's shame at being denigrated as a "sissy" because he is poor at sports may be less than the embarrassment at being ridiculed for wearing an ROTC uniform, if ROTC is substituted for gym. The primary consequence of ascending the "Ladder of Risk" is the acquisition of a gay male identity. *A corollary to the metaphor of climbing the "Ladder of Risk" towards a gay identity is that there is an increasing acceptance of, and habituation to, the personal risks associated with the gay lifestyle.*

Consequently, at the top of the ladder, gay men may not respond to messages to reduce risk simply because, like certain other human endeavors, being a gay male is defined and enriched by risk. (Hang gliders won't respond to messages that claim that their craft are too flimsy and dangerous and that they therefore ought to fly safer types of aircraft instead.) Moreover, the immediate gratifications of successfully negotiating risks wash out considerations of the negative consequences of tasking those risks, as the excitement of a successful seduction overwhelms worries about sexually transmitted disease. From this analysis of being gay we can see why safer sex programs, which are about risk reduction, are doomed to failures in the gay community. The rather more perceptive attempts to market safer sex as "hot sex" came to late and were tainted by the word "safer" and the ongoing association of the term "safer sex" with risk reduction. (These considerations do not apply to heterosexuals. The term "safer sex" undoubtedly resonates for heterosexuals, since it sounds like a form of birth control.)

Interactionists who do field research and interviewing generally do not formulate a formal, "a hard" research problem in advance. Early ideas about identity and community sensitized the author to the relationship between gay identity and community, and the research focused on these emergent processes before and after the temporal benchmark of AIDS. The data indicated that stigmatization theory alone was inadequate to understand the life of the respondents and their relationship to the gay community. Stigmatization theory seemed appropriate only for studying *individual* gay men in isolation (i.e., outside the gay community and its institutions) and the interaction of gay men in contexts and situations that has been distorted by the efforts at social control of the dominant heterosexual society.

The experience of *being different* is the subjective experience of the alienation of a person from his peers together with a social confirmation of this difference (often delivered in terms of gender-specific behavior) from significant others. Being different takes place within the larger heterosexual society in which the gay community is embedded.

Closeting can be active or passive. Passive closeting is the selective withdrawal from, or avoidance of, certain audiences in order to keep a person's homosexuality a secret. Active closeting is the management of information available to certain audiences with whom a gay person is vigorously engaged. Closeting shields and protects a person from the prejudice and discrimination associated with homosexuality.

Let us construct a fictitious example here for the purposes of illustrating the concept of the "Ladder of Risk." Consider the case of a closeted gay man, call him G. G admits to himself that he is gay, but has done nothing about it. But other people seem to

divine his secret. So as a result of the members of some audience labeling him "a faggot," he has the unpleasant experience of *being different*. G contrives to change his "image" to deflect such labeling. This process is called *closeting*. G knows that there are risks to closeting, but averting the catcalls of "faggot" makes taking the risks worthwhile. G has stepped onto the first rung of the Ladder of Risk. Time goes on. G's game of closeting becomes, if not more dangerous, then more boring or enervating. He has become habituated to the risks of closeting. G's frustration mounts as the limitations imposed on his freedom of action seriously limits his ability to communicate with other gay men. Further, G's rewards for successfully closeting himself are solitary ones: no one sees the winner at closeting, *that it its point*. Perhaps, G thinks, it is time to consider *coming out*.

Coming out is the affirmation of difference effected by ending secrecy and openly avowing homosexuality. It is bearing witness to the fact that an oppressive society, not faulty genes or bad character, is responsible for the disabling aspects of the gay lifestyle. Coming out increases the pool of publicly visible gay men who demonstrate that stereotypes of gay men are false and misleading and that gay men can contribute to American society. Coming out means confronting the norms of a society that sees itself as based exclusively on heterosexual family structure. All the definitions of coming out have in common the redefinition of the self from one of "us" to one of "them." "We" and "they" switch membership groups, and along with this change in membership groups is the rejection of one set of values and the adoption of another. Having come out, the newly minted gay man must contact other gay men.

Let us continue the example of G. To G, coming out is a new game, more exciting than the solitary management of information, because the payoff is freedom of action in the most compelling of realms: the sexual and the public. Maybe people won't call him "faggot" if he admits, "Okay. I'm gay. I'm a faggot." If the risks and the value of the rewards for this public disclosure are judged to exceed the risks and value of the rewards of closeting, then G (who, let us assume, is rational) will begin to abandon his closeting behavior to in favor of coming out.

G decides to come out. Now he must figure out which audiences to come out to and in what order, and how quickly. This is another complex problem of weighing risks and rewards, but G's experience in closeting has given him some experience in handling such problems. There are many audiences to choose from; some large, some small. In the beginning, the most productive ones are those that will positively reinforce G's new identity. He chooses to come out to a close friend. His plan is good; his friend, although straight, is supportive. A nasty scene might have forced G to retreat back into the closet. Emboldened, G musters his courage and walks into a neighborhood gay bar. The place is filled with exuberant men with whom he immediately identifies. A young man sees G enter and moves toward him, smiling: "Hi! I haven't seen *you* before!" G returns the smile and his first open conversation with another gay man begins. The "I" instantly becomes "We": G has come out. He ascends the next rung of the Ladder of Risk. Although there is nothing like the first time, coming out can be repeated indefinitely to different audiences. But after a while it becomes tiresome telling people, "I am gay." There are sweeter rewards than acceptance.

Cruising is the dominant process through which gay men make contact with one another. Cruising takes place within certain institutional venues that have evolved to make searching for sexual partners, socializing with like-minded men, making new friends, and finding long-term relationships as efficient as possible. The ability to meet other gays with confidence and ease may be the most important social skill a gay man can possess. But because cruising takes place in institutionalized contexts, cruising requires a talent for negotiating complicated social situations and great skill in interpreting context-dependent rules and norms. The best cruisers, therefore, are highly socialized and skillful observers of gay groups. Their successes are the reward of mastering a very difficult game somewhat akin to chess, but in which all the pieces are conscious and goal-oriented.

After coming out, **G** begins a career of sexual experimenting. He actively searches for sexual partners, or *cruises*. **G** locates and enters other gay venues, the most elementary expressions of the gay community. He finds that his risks, options, and rewards vastly exceed those of closeting and coming out. The games of "Hide and Seek" (closeting) or "I'll tell you a secret" (coming out) are quickly set aside for the schemes and pleasures of seduction. Even better, the rewards of the best players are public. **G**'s repeated interactions with other gay men and his ongoing explorations of the many gay subworlds of San Francisco give rise to his first experiences of belonging. He begins to understand what is meant by "gay community."

The construction of a person's gay identity reaches its final stage in and around communities of gay men. A certain density of gay residents in a geographical area is necessary for the emergence of the variety of gay institutions that are essential for the

development of complex gay identities. There is a special complexity to the urban gay identity not found among exclusively exurban and rural gays. The data of this research strongly suggest this, but are not sufficient to elaborate the details of a comparison. More research and a much larger interview sample space are necessary to examine the dimensions and ramifications of this hypothesis.

We conclude our discussion of the hypothetical gay man **G**. Assuming he lives in San Francisco, he will find gay people to room and many others who live nearby. He will continue to explore the subworlds of the world's most famous gay community and, in the process, differentiate and maintain his gay identity. He may or may not become a gay activist. **G** will probably volunteer some of his time to one of the hundreds of gay organizations in the City. He will stumble upon in his interactions with other gay men, or seek out, the history of the San Francisco gay community and perhaps that of homosexuality in the world. In that process, he will begin to articulate the symbolic meanings of being gay. **G** will find himself making ideology. Having gone through all these experiences in perhaps little more than a year or two, **G** will no doubt pause to take stock of himself. He will find himself a totally different person than the one who began his journey. Among other things, he will have a strength of character unthinkable to the boy who started his journey cringing at being different. Government, religion, family, career, and his fellow Americans will persist in trying to cow him back into the closet. But **G** — a symbolic representative of the San Francisco gay man interviewed — will hold on to his new identity and community and accept whatever consequences that has for his future.

B. GROUNDING THEORY:

Data collection for this research was guided by the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), a method of revealing the theory underlying research data. The principal strategies of grounded theory are comparative analysis and category analysis. The former process is a systematic method of forming conceptual categories from data by analyzing smaller and smaller units of the data and comparing these units with each other in order to discover new relationships among them. Category analysis is a method for assessing the analytic completeness of the conceptual categories built from the data and for sensitizing the researcher (Blumer, 1969).

Like the experimental method and statistical modeling, comparative analysis is a general method. It can be used with large or small units of analysis. Comparative analysis can be used for purposes of replicating facts based on comparative evidence, establishing their generalizability, and in specifying a concept by comparing its dimensions to other similar concepts or units (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Smelser, 1976). Comparative analysis can also be used to generate relationships among categories. These hypotheses are aimed at creating more theory, rather than verifying existing theory, although verification is embedded in the analysis. As relationships among categories emerge and are integrated, they form the central theoretical framework of the research.

Grounded theory is a way of describing and interpreting research data. The elements of a theory generated by comparative analysis are conceptual categories, their

properties, and the relationships among them. Both categories and their properties are abstracted from the data. Once conceptualized, constant comparison of categories with other categories and properties with other properties illuminates their similarities and differences. Although concepts may be borrowed from an existing theory if they fit the data, those that emerge from the data are usually more relevant, richer and are not forced (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; and Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

1. Theoretical Sampling:

Theoretical sampling is a process of jointly collecting, coding, and analyzing data with the emerging theory guiding what data to collect and where to find it. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to discover categories and their properties and to suggest relationships that will build a theory. Statistical modeling, in contrast, is done to obtain reproducible, error-bounded evidence on the characteristics of certain class members and used for descriptive purposes and/or for the verification of theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

With theoretical sampling, preliminary decisions about what interview data to collect are based on the sociologist's concept of the research problem and may include both sociologist-generated categories (e.g., identity, a primary category not used by the respondents in describing aspects of themselves) and concepts native to the data (e.g., community and work, two of the primary categories of this research, are native to the argot of the respondents). However, after the initial steps, theoretical sampling is concerned with selecting multiple comparison groups (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Comparison groups are selected on the basis of theoretical considerations rather than from structural conceptions of society. That is, the comparison groups are abstract and theoretically

relevant for furthering the development of emerging theory and for generating the properties of theoretical categories without regard to the social positions of the informants or their role-bound patterns of behavior (Blumer, 1969).

Minimizing and maximizing differences among comparison groups is one technique that I have used. Minimizing differences among comparison groups increases the probability of collecting similar data on a given category and facilitates identifying important differences not already discovered. For example, in order to map the dimensions of gay identity, comparisons were made between the responses of gay men who came out before and after the emergence of AIDS in 1981 (a maximum difference). Another comparison that illuminated the nature of gay identity was the response of gay men who cruised bars for sex and those who did not (a relatively minimum difference, since all gays cruise in one way or another). Maximizing differences between comparison groups then may highlight strategic similarities as well as differences.

According to Strauss, the criteria for deciding when to stop sampling is the category's "theoretical saturation." That is, a category is theoretically saturated when no additional data can be found to expand the number of dimensions or properties of the category. For example, consider the subdimension of community I call bonding, one of the links between community and identity. Bonding is a major category of community whose subdimensions are the varieties of belonging which, when taken together, gave the respondents their tribal sense of gay community. It is bonding that gave the respondents' identities their unity, stability, and orderliness (Blumer, 1969) through institutional participation. Disruptions of community institutions circumscribe the concept of bonding.

For example, in the first years of the epidemic, respondents diagnosed with AIDS were told by physicians that they could not to have sex with anyone. Then, in a move affecting persons with AIDS as well as healthy gay men, all San Francisco bathhouses were closed by public health officials. In both cases, those men whose primary sense of bonding arose from casual sex experienced alienation from community and identity disruption. Such concrete indicators of the conceptual dimensions of bonding appeared in the data over and over again, and when no additional properties could be discovered the category bonding was deemed saturated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

With respect to the depth of theoretical sampling, all categories are not of equal weight in the emerging theory. Thus, the amount of data to be collected in each category may vary. Initially, data on entire groups of categories may be gathered as the main categories begin to emerge. Then theoretical sampling requires that data collection focus on categories that generate properties and hypotheses. These are the "core theoretical categories," that is, those with the most explanatory power; these categories should be thoroughly saturated. As the theory develops and becomes integrated, the researcher learns which categories require more saturation, which require very little and which may be dropped (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Ordinarily data collection is emphasized during the beginning phase of the research process although preliminary coding and analysis also occur during this time. As time goes on, the balance gradually shifts and more emphasis is placed on analysis and less on collecting and coding data. Data collection, however, does not completely end until the final stages of theory development. During the final stages, specific data searches may

need to be made in order to pinpoint information, for confirmation, or for elaboration (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

2. The Analysis of Data:

Comparative analysis of qualitative data begins with coding. Coding is an operation aimed at identifying as many tentative categories and their properties as possible. One may examine words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs of text (field notes, interview transcripts, documents), then compare them to other indicators in the data which display similarities and differences (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As categories and properties emerge, some will be constructed by the analyst while others will be abstracted naturally from the text itself.

Coding notes and theoretical memos are written before proceeding to the next slice of data to be analyzed. As coding continues, the character of the analysis may change, for example, from comparing categories with one another to developing the properties of a central category, or to identifying relationships among them. More coding notes and more extensive memos are prepared, as well as diagrams of relationships. During this process, the theory begins to develop and become integrated. As new questions arise because gaps in the analysis open up, more data may be collected through theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Another stage in the analytic process consists of delimiting the theory. As a grounded theory develops, fewer major modifications occur. Those that do tend to be made in the interest of clarifying its logic: irrelevant categories or their properties may be omitted (Occam's Razor) while others are elaborated. Another way to delimit is by the

process Glaser and Strauss refer to as reduction, i.e., the discovery of underlying uniformities in the original set of categories or their properties that can be reformulated within a "smaller set of higher level concepts" (1967). This further delimits the theory since the next analytic sessions are more select and focused. Coding, memo writing, and analysis then proceed anew until core categories are saturated and a denser theoretical framework has emerged.

The organization of this research document contributed to the analytic process. The data on each of the processes — being different, closeting, coming out, cruising, and the experience of community and ideology making — were organized into conditions for, dimensions of, and consequences of the process for the respondents. The *conditions for* one of the processes, for example being different, were the structural conditions which shaped the dimensions of being different. A *dimension of* being different was an action that elicited negative labeling from the audience that witnessed the action. Now the conditions for, and the dimensions of, a process can sometimes present a kind of "chicken and egg" problem of priority. Was an aspect of a respondent's body image a condition for, or a dimension of, his experience of being different? This problem was generally resolved in the following way. If the respondent could do something to change the aspect in a reasonable time, it was considered a dimension of being different; otherwise, it was a condition for being different. For example, obesity was considered a condition for being different because it is difficult to modify it; flamboyant dress was a dimension of being different because it could be changed relatively easily. Of course there are exceptions: people who go on crash diets can modify their obesity rather quickly and paupers cannot

wear anything but rags. Similar issues occasionally arose in trying to decide whether a category was a dimension of, or consequence of, one of the processes.

3. Sources of Data:

The primary sources of data for this research were interviews with gay male informants living in San Francisco. I recruited these men through friendship networks; acquaintances made in connection with interviews for a Master's degree project at the California State University, Hayward; from persons with AIDS and hospital staff encountered during a period of participant observation at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and San Francisco General Hospital's Ward 5B for a graduate course in field research at University of California, San Francisco; and from gays met while cruising Oakland and San Francisco gay bars. By following out the links of friendship networks, I was able to interview a wide demographic range of gay men with varying lifestyles.

In this research, the term *person with AIDS* (PWA) means a person who has a medical diagnosis of frank AIDS (i.e., is HIV antibody positive and has been diagnosed with one of the opportunistic infections that is officially considered to be a marker for AIDS, for example, *pneumocystis carinii pneumonia*) or a medical diagnosis of an AIDS-related condition (that is, is HIV antibody positive and has been diagnosed with a disease that is associated with a compromised immunity but is not officially considered a marker for AIDS). The category *respondent with HIV*, however, in addition to covering respondents who were PWAs in the sense defined above, also includes the respondents who knew that they carried the HIV (that is, they knew that they were "HIV antibody positive") regardless of their health status. This last term is used when distinguishing

between those medically diagnosed with AIDS, those who were HIV positive, and the worried well, was irrelevant to the issue at hand. A respondent was considered healthy if that was his self-assessment while being interviewed.

The respondents were never directly asked for any personal health information or for details about their sexual lifestyles. All such information was volunteered. It was, after all, the factoring of AIDS into life decisions that impacted the individual and community behavior of the respondents, not their sexual activities, *per se*. If and when a respondent's diagnostic status is relevant, it is so stated. In that regard, the problems of persons with HIV appeared in general to be the same as anyone touched by stigmatized, terminal illnesses other than AIDS.

The thirty-five gay men I interviewed for this research were, at the time of the interview and for a period of at least three years preceding, exclusively homosexual, what Alfred Kinsey called a "five" or a "six" in his work Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (1948). Their ages varied from eighteen to sixty years. The respondents dressed conventionally and were normative in all but their sexual activities (i.e., they would not be easily identified as gay by their appearance or gestures) or their health status (i.e., whether or not they carried HIV, as ten of them did). None were in extended psychiatric or psychological therapy or had arrest records. Prior to entering a period of exclusive homosexuality, two had been married and had fathered children and one had extensive bisexual experience. The rest had only homosexual contacts that led to orgasm, although several mentioned having intense friendships with women (i.e., heterosexual friendships in which the possibility of sexual intimacy crossed their minds). At the time of the interviews, all lived

in San Francisco, but only five were native to the City. The respondents represented the geographical areas of the Castro, Polk Gulch, and South of Market, each of which support distinct gay subworlds.

Twenty-eight of the respondents were old enough to have experienced being gay before AIDS. All but five of the respondents had a college degree. Ten had postgraduate degrees. Of the five who did not, all but one had completed high school and had taken additional courses in specialized schools (e.g., art schools), junior college, or college. One person ended his formal education at the tenth grade. All the respondents were articulate. The high educational attainments of the respondents reflect, I think, the San Francisco gay community as a whole. But this skewing, while in principle was due to the interview tree built from respondent recommendations, the author's personal friends, and encounters with gay men in a variety of contexts, was useful for the following reasons.

First, I wished to explore the ideological consequences of the experience of a highly urbanized gay community; such consequences are accessible only to the formally or informally educated. Second, whenever a person contacts an urbanized gay community, he does so at a symbolic level. The meanings of these symbols are largely determined by media, legal, medical, and scholarly rhetorics — all of which are somewhat technical. I wished the respondents to be conversant with these rhetorics, so that the major issues of gay personal and community identity formation could be discussed with little or no prompting on my part. For example, words like prejudice, discrimination, career, identity, community, and even stigma were used naturally by the respondents (whether or not correctly).

Third, as one respondent with only a grade school education put it, gay life in San Francisco frequently involves the partnerings of an uneducated person with an educated one:

I went as high as the sixth grade, but everybody tells me I talk like a high school graduate at least. Most of the guys I tricked with and lived with were educated and they taught me a lot (Cliff).

There are empirical reasons for this. Hustlers (male prostitutes) are more often uneducated than educated; their johns are usually educated men with money. Older, educated men choose younger men as sexual partners. The cruise venues of the San Francisco area are populated with a large percentage of educated men and students. In my experience and that of the respondents, a person met in a San Francisco cruise venue is more apt to have some college education than not. Finally, the partnering of educated and uneducated gay men results in the educated person mentoring the unschooled person, so everyone in the end is "educated." This "leveling up" process of urban gay life is a well-known social fact.

I had little difficulty finding gay men willing to be interviewed, although I only used thirty-five. Over the course of my life I have, of course, spoken informally with many more, and have spent many hours in gay community social settings. This gives my theoretical generalizations even more force. I was able to gain entree to the respondents for interviews because I am myself gay and share a considerable empathy and consciousness with gay men. In addition, I have also dealt with a wide range of people as a nonresident member of Synanon during the 1970s (the origin of my interest in social groups and communities), as a rock club manager and band agent during the early 1980s (the source of an indispensable "telephone presence"), and as a counselor for the Pacific Center for

Sexual Minorities in Berkeley during the late 1980s (an invaluable experience in listening to others).

There were few problems in interviewing the respondents. I asked them leading questions whose exact interpretation was left to them. At times they remarked about this, telling me, for example, that they did not see where my questioning was leading. My stock answer to their need for structure was that I wanted them to lead and talk about what was important to them; I would follow and listen. Of course, the ability to obtain data that accurately described the respondents' lives was enhanced because they knew I was gay. We always found that we had a great deal in common, and that we enjoyed doing many of the same things. Also, I instinctively liked the men I interviewed. Knowing or sensing that, they were comfortable speaking to me openly both of their strengths and weaknesses, and felt assured that I would be nonjudgmental.

Because I am gay, I brought personal biases to the research. For instance, I was uncomfortable with certain modes of gay sexuality (e.g., bathhouse sex and sado-masochistic sexuality), though I was interested in hearing others' experiences with them. Having been a volunteer medic at a gay mens' health clinic where I assisted physicians in the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, I considered the bathhouses a source of great health risk. And of the leatherworld of sado-masochistic sexuality I knew little more than that it had cornered some of the most gorgeous men I had ever seen. Yet I was an avid bar cruiser, so my criticism of the level of raw sex and drug use at the bathhouses and in the leatherworld was, as some of my respondents good-naturedly informed me, no more than a case of the kettle calling the pot black. That I didn't have AIDS and some of my

respondents did occasionally make me feel guilty and occasionally self-righteous, but not for long. The specter of AIDS was so awful that none of us could live our lives as we wanted to; and we had all become somewhat afraid of each other.

The few problems with the respondents that occurred will be discussed. Once, some weeks after I had interviewed a young man with AIDS I ran into him quite by accident at a Castro Street bar on Halloween. Now Halloween in San Francisco is a big gay holiday, arguably exceeded only by Gay Pride Day in June. All Castro Street between Market and 18th becomes a vast block party: the bars are decorated, the balconies of the buildings that line the streets are converted to stages where there occurs all manner of boisterous and scandalous events, and almost everyone (except me, or so it seemed) was in costume or drag and in a partying mood. I was bar-hopping, hoping to visit most of the bars to see what was going on. He walked up to me as I was cruising one of these bars. He was costumed as a nun and acting with the typical bawdy insouciance of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. We exchanged small talk for a while, after which he moved away and was lost in the crowd. A short time later I went to another bar a block away and ran into him again. We said hello again and he asked me, smiling wickedly, whether I was following him to see what he would do. Somewhat taken aback by the serious tone behind his "cat who caught the mouse smile," I stammered a denial and we separated on a low note. It was an object lesson in how tense and volatile persons have become in the age of AIDS. And it was another variation on what appears to be a drawback of being a social scientist: many people are put off because they think they are being "studied" or "observed" rather than befriended. As I said, we had all become a little afraid of each other.

Many of the respondents were quite attractive and during a few interviews mild flirtations occurred. I suppose straight interviewers find themselves in the same predicament with alluring informants of the opposite sex. To avoid any breaches of professionalism, I always tried to schedule interviews during the day at public places, generally local restaurants over coffee. That worked. In any event, when badinage occurred, it seemed to have a positive consequence of breaking the ice and making the interviews freer and more productive. Persons with HIV almost always opened up when they found they were responded to like other gay men. Anyway, two gay strangers always have to deal with a strong sexual undercurrent; it is one way each senses the gayness of the other. Three of the interviews took place at the informant's home. These were all wide-ranging, productive interviews. It was in these circumstances that dealing with sexual attraction could temporarily disrupt the flow of conversation.

I am employed at a full-time job, so it was often difficult to find time for the interviews, their analysis, and the writing of this dissertation. Save for quarterly conferences with my dissertation committee chairman, Professor Leonard Schatzman, there was no time to spend on campus in collegial discussions that would have helped resolve or clarify many of the problems I encountered in this research. Occasionally I tried to accomplish some small research-oriented task during my regular work hours, but zealous supervisors and the press of salaried work assignments usually frustrated or interrupted such schemes. The interviews themselves took a great amount of time to transcribe and analyze. At first I tried auditing the interview tapes and selecting only what appeared to be relevant segments of conversation for transcription. But again and again I found myself

replaying the tapes to recapture data I had initially discarded as unimportant and later realized was important. So I decided to fully transcribe all interviews, an eight to sixteen-hour task per tape.

4. The Research Problem:

The focal interest of the research is the impact of the entry of AIDS into San Francisco gay life. This impact is significant in three major dimensions: identity, community, and work. One of the surprises of this research was that most of the illness issues faced by the respondents with AIDS were well understood and articulated by Strauss *et al* (1984). In that respect, AIDS is like all other chronic, stigmatized, terminal illnesses.

There was a problem in constructing the category *identity* from the interview data. *Community* and *work* were meaningful terms to the respondents; identity was not. But the respondents did talk about "me," "I," how they grew up, and how they became a gay person. Identity is taken to be all of these "attributions of self," personal referents, and "I/me" statements. Statements like "I'm gay," "I'm a social worker," "I have a lover," "I'm into leather," "I'm a bottom," or "I'm a father" are all identities. The respondents may not have been telling me about themselves with the concept of identity in mind, but that's what I was listening for. Even "I thought about the risk of AIDS, but decided to ..." is an identity statement representing the respondent as a decision-maker.

The interviews were focused, conversational, and open-ended. Focused interviews elicit certain preprogrammed types of information (or areas of discussion) from each respondent. Conversational interviews are formulated in terms that familiar to the respondents, who were free to frame and shape their responses naturally. In open-ended

interviews the order of issues discussed are sensitive to the respondent's priorities, his willingness to address certain topics, and the respondent is free to raise issues that might not be part the standardized interview outline. This strategy often opened up new categories (or subdimensions of a category) relevant to the conceptual scheme.

Each interview was arranged in advance, tape recorded, transcribed with the computer word processor WordPerfect for Windows, version 6.1, and indexed for key word searches by the specialized software product Eclipse FIND for Windows, version 1.1. Other helpful computer software products were Microsoft's CD-ROM encyclopedia Encarta, version 2.0, and The American Heritage Dictionary, Deluxe Edition, version 3.0. The interviews were held in places where the ambient noise levels were low enough to permit tape recording (parks [eight], professional offices [10], and restaurants [15]).

Appendix A provides a copy of the interview guide that was used in conjunction with these interviews. Data were gathered in eight general areas: childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences related to being gay; being in the closet; coming out; cruising and other ways of initiating relationships; images and constructions related to bonding and a sense of community; organizational affiliations; volunteer work; and career or work experiences. In each of these areas, the conversation was guided to highlight a period of the respondent's life before and after AIDS became an issue in his life.

Frequent quotations are used to present evidence, illustrate analyses, and to give the reader an impression of the respondents and their personal experience and the impact of AIDS on their identities and their relationship to the gay community. I have tried to balance the use of quotations with the presentation of my findings, so that the reader does

not lose the analytic thread and become lost in description. If the reader finds that description threatens to overwhelm theory, I beg his indulgence with two reasons. I wanted to convey the incredible richness and diversity of contemporary gay life. And I wanted this work to be accessible to the widest possible audience, in the tradition of the Chicago school of sociology that presided over American sociology's golden renaissance.

BEING DIFFERENT

CHAPTER II

A. INTRODUCTION:

Being labeled "different" in America is a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, individuality and uniqueness are prized in American society. So people are generally happy when others consider them special; indeed, they often search for additional ways to make themselves stand out. On the other hand, if they are *too different* or *different in the wrong way*, they may suffer negative labeling or stigmatization. All the respondents sought uniqueness; and they believed being gay contributed to their being so. Their gayness made them interesting to themselves and to others. But it also made them vulnerable to the negative opinions of others, so that the experience of being different was in some cases so painful that the respondents withdrew from interactions with others.

In many cases, the respondents' first experiences with such labeling occurred during childhood while interacting with significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers, and vocal strangers). As children the respondents did not realize the seriousness of having their gender-specific behavior watched and criticized by adults because homosexuality was seldom explicitly suggested as the reason that their actions intruded themselves upon their attention. They found that these significant others would attach labels to them whenever their behavior, health, or body images were considered non-normative. For example, they occasionally found themselves derided by their peers as "faggots" or "queers," the labels young boys fear the most, even though they hardly know what the terms mean.

In general, the labels applied to the respondents might be negative (for instance, being called a *faggot*) or positive (perhaps for being the *best student*), but they induced antagonistic responses from audiences with whom the respondents interacted. The respondents remembered the anxiety caused by labeling, but few understood why only they (seemingly) had been picked on. It was clear that others "didn't understand," and that a lack of empathy was the reason for their negative reactions: "I was just being myself, that's all it took" (Peter). These early episodes of labeling marked the respondents' first experience in regarding themselves as objects. Of course, they tried to defend themselves from a threat to what they saw as their real, authentic identities (or "real selves"). The threat they perceived was the alien or foreign identity others sought to impose on them.

Experiences of "being different" recurred throughout the respondents' lives. In looking for a common factor in such experiences, they usually focused their attention on their homosexual desires. Such desires, they knew, were deemed (by the moral entrepreneurs of the overarching heterocentric society into which they had been socialized) inconsistent with their gender identities as males and at variance with norms of Christian morality they had internalized early in their lives. They knew that any observable homosexual conduct would be stigmatized. And they discovered that the stigma of homosexuality could contaminate even the most praiseworthy of their differences from others. It followed that if others escaped censure for their differences, it was because they were straight.

The respondents' increasing awareness of their homosexual desires and of society's prejudice against gay men was the major reason why they began to systematically manage

the information about themselves that they would present to the audiences with whom they interacted, a process called *closeting* we will investigate in Chapter III. In this chapter we will elucidate the process by which the respondents' experiences of being different from others became the foundation of their gay personal and community identities and evolved into a *special view of the world* or *subjective career* (Scambler and Hopkins, 1983).

There are two ways that the respondents exhibited the state of being different from others: *feeling different* and *being different*. *Feeling different* is the subjective awareness that one's body feels different from the way it did in the past or feels different (responds differently) from the way others say their bodies feel to them. *Being different* is the objective, visible presentation of the appearance of being different, whether intended or not. There was no way to distinguish between feeling different and being different because one state invariably impacts the other; and they both can give rise to the imputation of negative (or positive) reactions and labels on the part of others. We will therefore speak only of the objective state or process of "being different."

We note here that, methodologically, a certain activity can be taken as a condition for, a dimension of, and a consequence of, "being different." So "being different" is behavior that is so labeled by others whether or not the actor is "just being himself." (A person who is "just being me" could label one of his own actions as "being different" by appealing to the norms of his social universe.) But when we speak of a condition for, a dimension of, or consequence of "being different" we mean the context for individual actions. It is the context (the social meanings that is an environment for behavior) or point of view (of an audience, generally, but also of a particular person) that places behavior in

one of these categories rather than another. This resolves many cases of ambiguity, but not all: a "chicken and the egg" dilemma.

The experience of "being different" we are concerned with here is not an organized, institutional identity. It is labeling based on a pattern of highly individualistic noncompliance with conventional expectations about normal gender-appropriate behavior. In some cases, an actor will react to being labeled by systematically attempting to align his behavior with the expectations of significant others. Here, "the expectations of significant others" are determined in the manner of Cooley's (1902/1964) "looking-glass self":

As he saw it, the looking-glass self involved three phases: First, we imagine how we appear to others. Then we imagine how others judge our appearance. Finally, we develop some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification on the basis of what we perceive others' judgements to be (Ritzer, 1983).

The respondents, in many cases, saw their experiences of being different as grounded in their homosexuality. Consequently, Goffman's (1963) interactionist approach to stigma — which has been summarized as "Nothing is stigmatized but naming makes it so" (Plummer, 1975) — is applicable. Stigmatized behaviors are actions that cause a person to be labeled by others as bad, diseased, inferior, or inhuman. In this theory, the experience of being different arises when certain behavior is stigmatized by significant others: parents, teachers, and peers, whose opinions are incorporated into the discredited person's identity via the looking-glass self process. The concept of stigma is used to augment that of the looking-glass self because in America being called "gay," "sissy," "faggot," or "queer" is a very grave accusation: it is heinous compared to the breaches of social etiquette Cooley had in mind.

Indeed, the respondents reported reacting to being labeled homosexual in words that suggested the label was a conflation of Goffman's (1963) *tribal stigma* and Scambler's (1984) *ontological deficiency*. As tribal stigma the respondents felt that because they were gay they were viewed as morally lesser beings, like animals and children, and that they were not considered fully moral agents. Their actions - whether sexual, gestural, social, or creative - were discounted by significant others as the efflorescence of an inferior moral state, rather than as distinguishing characteristics that placed them in a normatively positive social category. Ontological deficiency is a "failure to conform to ... norms pertaining to how people should be rather than how they should act." Such a failure "threatens the social order" by stifling interactions and undermining communication with ambiguity, leading to "stereotyped, inhibited, and overcontrolled experiences." Moral failure can be handled by normalization (coercing anomalous persons into becoming more like normal people) and defusing (quarantining deviants who cannot be changed). Ontological deficiency leads to shunning, which precludes normalization and obliterates community and identity.

This chapter we will organize the contexts of the respondents' behavior that is relevant to their reporting "being different" into the three categories mentioned above: conditions for feeling different, dimensions of being different, and consequences of being different. Now the respondents associated their feelings of being different with their homosexual desires. And there is a fundamental question whether homosexuality is essence or accident: is homosexuality a social phenomenon that waxes or wanes as society's norms and values change? To some degree, the chicken and egg problem of

whether homosexuality is nature or nurture grounds the confusion about whether a given context for behavior is a condition for, or consequence of, "being different." When such a confusion arises, we will place the context in *both* categories.

The experience of being different led the respondents to the conclusion that there were risks to behaving — openly and visibly — in particular ways before certain audiences. Using the metaphor of the Ladder of Risk, being different is the bottom rung. Now the origin of the respondents' experience of being different was usually their interactions with the audiences and institutions of the overarching heterosexual society. (Those experiences of being different that arose as a consequence of the respondents' interactions with gay institutions and audiences will be discussed in later chapters.) But the experience of being different was *not* the origin of the respondents' gay identities. Being different started the respondents examining themselves for the reasons they were so labeled and began their search for others like themselves. The process of constructing and shaping the respondents' gay identities began when they decided or discovered that the "others like themselves" for whom they searched were gay.

As discussed in Chapter I, we will analyze the experience of being different into three major categories: the conditions that gave rise to being different; the dimensions of being different; and the consequences of being different. The conditions for experience of being different are the reasons the respondents gave for feeling different. The dimensions of being different are the ways the respondents indicated to themselves and others that they were different in a normative sense. The consequences of being different are the

changes in the respondents identities that resulted from their being labeled because they exhibited one or more of the dimensions of being different.

B. THE CONDITIONS FOR THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING DIFFERENT:

The conditions for the experience of being different are the reasons the respondents gave for their experiences of being different.

1. Not "Fitting In":

"Not fitting in" was a common reason for feeling different among respondents of all ages. The respondents were picked on because they conformed to stereotypes that elicited negative labels from significant others. Of special concern was labeling that suggested homosexuality.

I could not fit in, either with my parents' generation or with my own. My parents worried that I lacked the masculine qualities needed to carry on the family name and genes and, perhaps, to share in the liberation of *La Patria* [Cuba]. My peers saw me as a nerdy bookworm who was undoubtedly queer and thus deserving of their constant harassment (Jesse).

I used to have an overwhelming fear of somebody suggesting I was gay. The word "faggot" was in my head all the time. I didn't know how a jock could be gay. You'd get razzed for any display of sensitivity. It was like sensitivity was totally foreign to athletes. It didn't mesh with the killer instinct you were supposed to have. And I certainly equated gayness with sensitive nellie stuff (John L).

The punishment for violating the norms of masculinity began with name-calling. If that did not extinguish the offending behavior, the harassment was escalated, sometimes to beatings. Even though the respondents who passed through adolescence in San Francisco enjoyed a unique freedom to display their gayness, being "picked on" for appearing "queer" was not that uncommon:

From junior high till high school I was always called a 'fag.' I was picked on and bashed by kids everyone says should have known better" (Harlan).

I was hassled by other guys for looking at them "the wrong way" while showering in the gym and because I hated everything that they liked to do: play football, camp out, hunt, or work on cars (Anthony).

In their childhood and pre-adolescence, a naive sense of risk, based on their observation of the opinion of the majority of heterosexuals about gayness, informed the respondents that they should display some interest in girls: They had learned a valuable lesson while listening to "faggot jokes," which they forced themselves to laugh at, as well as tell a few themselves, so they would not betray their uneasiness. And in forcing themselves to do their "masculine duty," they occasionally learned something else — that "girls are not so bad":

I dated because my friends were doing it. They sort of pushed me into it: "How-can-you-knock-it-if-you-don't-try- it?" And I enjoyed it as far as it went. No problem. But no thrill. No spark (Jack).

One respondent said that as a teenager he felt no compelling desire for the companionship of females, but he could not believe his straight friends did either — "their crude jokes about their dates proved that!" (Anthony) Thus, in many cases, a respondent's lack of interest in girls did not strike him as abnormal, although he was careful to justify his lack of interest in them. One respondent created a fictional girlfriend who lived out of town and to whom he was faithful. Another did not join his friends when they went out to drink and pick up girls: "I was afraid that if I got drunk the truth might slip out" (Jim).

Respondents who teamed up with insecure and hostile heterosexual men — for example, athletes and members of the armed forces who feared proximity to gay men in certain situations, e.g., on a sports team, in a shower, or a barracks — never felt that they fit in.

I was on the victory stand with my teammates, savoring our triumph in the freestyle swimming relay. But as the crowd of spectators cheered us, I felt a familiar twinge of isolation. It was very sad. I was a hero. But if people knew I was gay, they wouldn't be cheering (Paul).

This fear of being close to gay men is, in fact:

The fear of touching another male — unless it's roughly done as in a game of football or, at the other extreme, with deadly force as in war — undoubtedly derives not only from a powerful taboo against male homosexuality, but also the straight American male's difficulty or inability to distinguish between sensuality and sexuality. As the pundits have noted, without a game to play or war to win, men usually do not relate well together (Peter).

Nor did the respondents who grew up in an environment of religious fundamentalist sexual norms fit in. How could they when their institutions stigmatized homosexual activities as, to use Goffman's (1963) phrase, *abominations of the flesh*? In this regard, one respondent, who simply told his "sweet, God-fearing mother" that he was gay, found himself disowned and living on the streets the next day.

2. Philosophical, psychological, or political agendas:

It is difficult to convey the impact of ideologies on the respondents, beginning with their careers as young university students. One of the older respondents recalled that as a young student he felt guilty about his homosexual desires. As a result, he turned himself into an experimental animal which he subjected to an bizarre, extended self-conditioning. Acting on the behavioristic views of his social science professors, he tried to modify his homosexuality. He succeeded only in turning himself into stranger to himself.

I never doubted I was gay. But I thought I could train myself to be heterosexual. That human nature was malleable enough to mold through repetitious conditioning. So my sexual history through university and graduate school was one of determined sexual relationships with women. I was even engaged once! We have this myth that information and knowledge alone will change behavior (John).

Many such experiences with social science ideologies convinced the respondents that no one could be "conditioned" into heterosexuality:

People are simply straight or gay. I acted straight as a kid, but I couldn't stop thinking gay. This conflict revealed to me that my life at that point was a lie (Joshua).

Teenagers and young adults have the ability, desire, freedom, and opportunity to explore the nature of their sense of differentness. They can inductively use information about themselves that only they know and use it to reassess and reinterpret the experiences that gave rise to their feelings of being different. As mature adolescents and adults, the criteria for self-imputing gayness from personal data became paramount. What was suggested by significant others in childhood became a certainty upon introspective self-examination. It is difficult to say how the labeling of others influenced the respondents' self-imputation of homosexuality. It does not seem reasonable to take the position that it had no effect. Yet none of the respondents felt coerced into deciding that they were gay as adolescents and adults, regardless of childhood labeling experiences and same-sex desires. It was how they felt after their first homosexual experiences that counted: whether or not they found them pleasurable and felt that the experience defined who they were.

When the respondents entered college, they began to theorize about the meaning of being different and homosexuality. In this way they did, to some extent, meliorate their social anomie by dealing in abstractions. They recast their childhood and adolescent experiences of being different in terms of social constructionist or deterministic biological paradigms. Recollections of childhood were vague and colored by the respondents' subsequent personal histories, which made them of dubious methodological value in trying to establish the link between the respondents' experiences of being different and their gay

identities. Yet they were very interesting in that they could give rise to *a posteriori* justifications for being gay:

I can look back on my childhood *now* and find feelings of difference that I can *now* say were indicators of homosexuality. But that really isn't kosher because I didn't think that at the time. I was fat — in some ways worse for a kid than being gay. You're more of an outsider in school if you're fat than if you're gay. I was also a very good student, a veritable nerd, which also set me apart. To top it off, I gave impossible attitude. I saw my differences as something to be proud of, something to distinguish me from the herd. When some bully gave me a hard time — and they tried to! — I saw it as their problem. I mean, what could they do to a sumo-sized kid? (Joshua).

Some of the respondents' reviews of their personal histories led to the construction of a rhetoric that explained their gay identities to themselves in deterministic terms heavily laden with a conceptual baggage expressed in terms such as "fate," "predestination," and "genetic inheritance." Such beliefs are perennial in their political correctness and are consistent with the gay folk wisdom that holds homosexuality is an unchangeable dimension of human nature due to agencies beyond personal and social control.

Whether a respondent attributed his gayness to nature or nurture also determined whether or not he would fit in. Mainly, this attribution was determined by the respondent's moral, political, and scientific background. If the respondent was politically conservative, he favored essentialist or biological models of gayness, although if carried to extremes these arguments could inevitably lead to justifying forced "treatments" for the "disease" of homosexuality. Liberal respondents favored "constructionist" sociological theories which held that labeling processes made homosexuality into a self-fulfilling prophesy and a consequence of socialization processes. If they attributed their gayness to deterministic agencies (such as genetic predisposition), the respondents opened themselves to the possibility that other areas of their lives were outside of their control. In this regard, for

some respondents there was no end to the pervasiveness of sexual interpretations given as initiating or driving the events in their lives. No event, goal, or relationship was free of, or undisturbed by, homosexual content and meanings.

Many of the respondents were of the opinion that the contingency of a gay person's life in American society requires a constant assessment of risks and decision making. They grew up calculating odds, whether for playing games, analyzing the stock market, choosing careers, engaging in sports, or choosing a lifestyle. In particular, they grew up calculating the best way to present themselves and their gayness to other people and groups. Benefits and liabilities, profits and losses, wins and losses, gains and deficits — in a word, the bottom line — governed the final choice. It was this outlook on life, maximizing one's winnings or at least doing no worse than the minimax — *constrained by the belief that their homosexuality could not be "cured"* — that served as the ideological thrust to move up the Ladder of Risk. Most of the respondents believed that the odds favored their finding a meaningful life if they acted on their desires, regardless of the risks.

3. Conflicting Norms:

Being forced to act according to one set of norms while believing in another is a "potentially explosive situation that inevitably leads to feeling different" (Peter). As a teenager, one respondent thought about suicide and another told of about a gay friend who killed himself over just such norm conflicts. Most respondents dealt with such a devastating confrontation with *anomie* by affectively distancing themselves from their selves, a mental state expressed as a heightened sensitivity to acting and, simultaneously,

being able to observe themselves act. The respondents described this identity defense in different ways:

I pretended my life was a movie" (Jack).

One respondent, however, found his responses to coercion beyond his control:

I called it "the mask" It was a different set of personalities, instinctively acquired, to greet and relate to different people — and to substitute for my real, forbidden gay self (Anthony).

Note the use the term "instinctively acquired." Heavy-handed coercion may summon irrational actions directed at self-preservation from a threatened person. Where the ability to rationally weigh options and calculate risk has been disabled by a threat to the survival of the self, the behavior that emerges is neither calculated nor controllable. Hence the possibility of suicide.

4. Ageism and Youthism:

The respondents' socialization into American popular culture and their furtive contacts with the gay community. These understandings and contacts, whether in person or through the media, revealed the ageism and youthism rampant in American popular culture. They were socialized as adolescents into an understanding of the "generation gap" between older and younger men. Readings acquainted them with the folk wisdom that gay men are members of a "creative species" that enjoys a "sensitive, artistic, and imaginative temperament." Most of the respondents had at least considered careers as artists, actors, comedians, filmmakers, musicians, poets, playwrights, singers, and writers.

Most importantly, the respondents learned that heterosexual males do not relate their sexuality, which is taken for granted, to creativity in the way they did. They do, however, frequently associate their *gender* with a vocation (or "calling") to a particular

career. And they do make claims to inborn talent, more often, it seems, on the basis of the serendipitous support of others. The respondents, on the other hand, acted as if their talents were a taken-for-granted consequence of their sexuality.

5. The Discounting of Talent:

In a clear example of stigmatization processes, several the respondents learned as adolescents that any creative "gifts" or "talents" they demonstrated were discounted and belittled because they were suspected of being grounded in their homosexuality. Alternatively, they were discriminated against as unfit for certain occupations or careers, for instance, the military service and the ministry. Ultimately they may have been forced into choosing alternative economic careers: artist, fashion designer, hairdresser, interior decorator, playwright, studio photographer, and show business.

The talents of heterosexual males, by way of contrast, were considered displays of social uniqueness and given more opportunities to develop, although they might suffer also if their aptitudes did not highlight their masculinity. One respondent (Gary) recounted how angry his mother became when she learned that he had tried out for a part in a high school play. He thought it would be fun. But his mother shrilled "I don't want a son of mine becoming an actor, hairdresser, decorator, or florist." It did not take him long to make the connection between the tirade against these occupations and his mother's thinly veiled anxiety over his sexuality.

In this regard, several of the respondents found that hard work and high job performance ratings were discounted because their managers suspected them of being homosexual. Industriousness on the part of their heterosexual peers, by way of contrast,

was rewarded with opportunities for advancement. The belittling of the respondents' creative and occupational efforts brought home to them, in a deeply personal way, the nature of societal discrimination against homosexuals. This kind of rejection struck at the core of their personal identities, from which they inferred that American society ranked gays with criminals, the chronically ill, and the physically deformed.

C. THE DIMENSIONS OF BEING DIFFERENT:

The respondents enumerated many common reasons for being different: A childhood history of chronic disease; the experience of pain; a diminished sense of well-being caused by illness (including STDs), drug and alcohol abuse, poor diet, or "living life in the fast lane"; anxiety, depression, low energy, a lack of stamina, fatigue, lassitude, pessimism, or a vague feeling of being out of sorts; the absence of role models; a failure of creativity; defeat or failure in an important endeavor; anomie and normlessness; an intimate partner's infidelity; and a poor body image.

But it was the ways of acting that were specifically associated with homosexuality that were crucial to the experience of being different. The negative consequences of such behavior necessitated carefully monitoring themselves to watch for the telltale signs that triggered the approbation of others and finding ways to evade the scrutiny of others and thus enjoy freedom of expression. This constant self-observation endowed them with what others perceived as a cool detachment and made the respondents into habitual observers and calculators of advantage. The dimensions of cool detachment were variously described as constructing a "shell" about oneself by appearing, for example, stand-offish, aloof, reserved, withdrawn, disrespectful, a poor team player, or uncooperative; creating an

affective distance from the self through the utilization of camp, humor, and parody; steeling oneself to be insensitive to the judgments of others, a kind of emotional "poker face"; and echoing the norms of homophobic society when judging deviations from the conventionally masculine:

I thought of myself as a sissy. During middle school, I avoided fighting with my peers. Once, a kid I insulted on the playground followed me home from school, all the while daring me to fight. I could have beaten him; I was the bigger and stronger. I refused to fight, turned away, and went into my house. My father saw it all and tore into me. He yelled at me; called me a sissy. I felt like he had divined my soul (Charles).

As a result of their experiences of being different, it appears that most of the respondents consciously decided that they were homosexual; a few seemingly "let themselves become" gay.

In high school I was sexually excited by guys. I got erections. I felt nothing with girls. And always, whenever a guy with a girl walked by me, it was the guy I looked at" (John L).

One respondent watched to see — as if their emergent behavior was a TV sitcom — which of the antagonists warring in their psyches would win:

As a teenager I was being physically attracted to some girls — but that ended in my early twenties — I saw myself become more oriented to men then (Rand).

The two respondents quoted above never actually "decided" they were gay. They acted, and watched themselves. They let their sexuality emerge fully formed from a conflict — internal with themselves or external with others — that they passively spectated. But once decided, they were indifferent to the opinions of others: their sexual preference had been observed to percolate up from deep within them and had precipitated into a persistent desire, so they acted on it confidently.

A survey of the experience of being different among the respondents led to the construction of a list of its general dimensions:

1. Advocating Unpopular Agendas:

Advocating, through rhetoric or action, a tolerance for certain agendas (ideological, political, or career) or lifestyles (body building, bisexuality, homosexuality, drugs, and promiscuity) deemed non-normative. One respondent, criticized for speaking about tolerance for gays in a high-school public speaking class, came to see himself as different, and ultimately acted on his hunch that he was gay. Any person, by virtue of his having a different world-view than that of the audience with which he is interacting which, if expressed, might foster bad feelings that irrevocably spoil otherwise wide areas of agreement. Examples of contentious world views are: the nature of God, the nature of man, human sexuality, and the rightness of the Government's policies. World views can also be expressed by action, for example, by requesting library books on human sexuality kept out of general circulation or being obsessed by an unorthodox *idée fixe*, that is, modeling one's life after of some fabulous character.

Many respondents remember the indications from significant others that during their childhoods, their gender-specific behavior was inappropriate. One respondent (Michael) remembered that he aggravated his father by playing with his sister's dolls:

He would glare at me and shout "Only girls play with dolls!"

Activities that demonstrated a love of risk, that is, of "walking on the wild side" (Anthony) and cultivating an image of being "streetwise," almost always resulted in negative labeling. Living a "fast lane" lifestyle of partying, drug use, alcoholism, and casual sex, bragging about personal excesses (such as promiscuity) with the intent of self-aggrandizement; looking for risky sex with strangers in dangerous areas such as public

parks, peep shows, and alleys; a love of sleaze: dirty, noisy, malodorous, unsightly bars, public restrooms, sex clubs, orgy rooms, and bathhouse stalls; and being raped are other examples of censorious risk-taking.

Actions that might lead to labeling were joining the drama club instead of a social club or fraternity; enjoying the "wrong" hobbies (e.g., collecting opera or silent movie memorabilia); playing the "wrong" games (card games, chess, board games, arcade games, or pool instead of the stock market, football, or baseball); excelling at the "wrong sports," e.g., at running instead of baseball; being "gifted" with "suspect talents" (at, for example, art, couture, dancing, figure skating, drama, and interior decorating) or earning praise from the wrong sources (that is, from a ballet instructor rather than a soccer coach); displaying unusual or excessive piety, grooming habits, cloying charm, and parsimony; and exhibiting a lack of sportsmanship or generosity.

2. Non-Normative Body Image:

In America, negative labeling can arise because of age, clothing, illness, odors or other evidence of poor personal hygiene, physique (for example, presenting with anorexia, obesity, or acne), race, and sounds (e.g., a high-pitched voice or a lisp). Other differences from the normative male body image included, being "pretty," frail, or obese unless compensated for by a fiery or bullying temper. As a result of these ontological deficiencies the respondents suffered such labels such as "crip," "fatso," "four-eyes," "pizza-face" (i.e., suffering from acne), "orang" (i.e., *orangutan*, meaning hulking and hairy), "pretty-boy," "shorty," "spastic," and "sissy." For example, deliberately displaying such individualistic traits as dressing in the height of fashion or according to stereotype by displaying effemi-

nacy, hypermasculinity, or flamboyance in one's choice of clothing (for example, the *leatherman* look, e.g., wearing Levis, black construction boots, and a moderately heavy chain locked around the neck).

I enjoyed acting the role of an effeminate, limp-wristed, flamboyant sissy. When I did, my appearance and actions always inspired such horror and contempt among my straight friends (John).

Wearing clothes that, in the minds of peers, qualified masculinity or suggested effeminacy was another fault of body image. In high school, wearing an ROTC uniform suggested someone who wanted to avoid gym. Dressing extravagantly, for example, as a hippie, mod, skinhead, or in drag (and other forms of *genderfuck*). Such accidental or purposeful displays of individualism were taken as signs of being different in the sense of being peculiar, rather than as a desire to "stand out from the crowd" at a time and/or in ways that their peers were all trying to be alike.

The visibly aged, ill, and plain among the respondents treated experienced labeling. They were discouraged from, and in many cases presumed not to, penetrate the institutions of the gay male community:

Unattractive or sick guys should stay home. There must be sanctuaries where such people do not intrude; where only people who really feels great can go" (Frank).

In addition to the experience of being different, the respondents so discredited felt guilt also, and punished, because in their time they had acted on these prejudices themselves:

After all, they believed these people were outsiders before they fell from grace by joining them (Anthony).

Not all such discredibilities were cause for rejection. A good-looking young man in a wheelchair could have a good time. And blind or deaf gays were accepted. But, generally,

everyone knew who the players were, a belief that easily rationalized the underlying discrimination that inevitably punished those who overreached. Not that the respondents did not see the absurdity in judging people by in these demeaning ways; they saw it, but could not distance themselves from it:

Fag hags or fruit flies [women who hang around gay turf and who are obsessed with gay men], dykes [lesbians], and trolls [unattractive older men] aren't welcome here. Male beauty rules here: It's the prerogative of beautiful youngmen to be shallow and cruel to their inferiors. They can be philosophical and tolerant in their dotage (Anthony).

The respondents who violated the norms of body image were thrust into a shamed or degraded status, what Strauss (1959) refers to as *status forcing*. The end result of status forcing were informal, diffuse, elusive, and unstable feelings of social isolation, alien uniqueness, and lack of self-acceptance:

I felt I was born on the wrong planet (Jack).

I wondered if I was the only human being on earth and everyone else was an alien (Neil).

As the respondents found out to their sorrow, negative labeling of gay men was not the sole province of heterosexuals. Gay men relentlessly typing each other's body images. Besides the usual distinctions (i.e., age, height, weight, and race), gay men were distinguished by their physical attributes: build or physique; whether *cut* or *uncut* (i.e., circumcised or uncircumcised); body and facial hair; stylishness of clothing; hair and eye color; preferred sexual mode (i.e., whether primarily a *top*, that is, taking the traditional masculine role in sex, or a *bottom*, that is, sexually passive — sometimes the euphemism *versatile* is used for passive instead); sexual preference, i.e., whether predominantly *gay* or *bisexual* (common synonyms are *switch-hitter* and *AC/DC*); type of relationship (e.g.,

boyfriend, lover, ex, sister, trick, trade); status in the gay community (e.g., regular at a bar or well-known activist); and gay subworld membership (e.g., leatherman or hustler).

Some of the respondents abhorred *nellies* or *femmes*, i.e., men who appeared effeminate. Others felt being a bottoms was not "politically correct." Most pitied gays with cosmetic or physical flaws, i.e., "men who weren't pretty enough" (the familiar game in which other men are marked on a scale of one to ten is an example of this), "fatties," or "slobs" (e.g., tatterdemalions, men with a beer belly, the malodorous, or displaying other evidence of self-neglect).

The hypermasculine physiques of some of the respondents who were members of the bodybuilding and leather subworlds of the gay community, e.g., a hulking, hirsute, or sculpted body image, also led to accusations of homosexuality. There was also a negative evaluation to men who deviate from the norm of the proper gay body image who may have a difficult time becoming members of a gay community subworld. With so many distinctions, the respondents could effectively discriminate against other gay men at least as much as any other segment of American society does.

3. Acting on Homosexual Desires:

For one respondent, the early appearance of facial and pubic hair and other indicators of the onset of puberty triggered an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the criticism of his gender behavior by adults and peers. Another respondent recalled how, beginning at age thirteen, he became aroused by street, playground, and gym talk about "sissies," "queers," "perverts," and "faggots" and thought there must be some connection between his excitement and the meanings of these terms. Still another suspected that he was of

those condemned when, while attending church with his parents, he found himself thrilled and terrified by a fundamentalist preacher's fiery denunciations of "sodomites" in his sermons.

Several of the respondents reported that they knew that they were "sexually different" in elementary school:

The first time I really knew that I was sexually attracted to men was in the first grade. I got hardons for my first grade teacher (Harlan).

As far back as ten, I can remember experimenting sexually with guys my own age. I knew there was a difference. But it wasn't until I was twelve that I began to think I was gay. One time me and a friend were watching TV and something caused him to blurt out the word "faggots!" I identified with what was happening and the characters, so I knew as a "faggot" and would never be accepted. Yet I never felt ashamed or guilty. It was so natural to me (Pedro).

Such childhood same-sex experimentation, commonly referred to as "messaging around," was fairly common among the respondents. It was characteristic of the respondents to take their childhood and early adolescent "messaging around" more seriously than their heterosexual peers. Because homosexuality was seldom dealt with explicitly by parents or teachers while, at the same time, being constantly discussed in exaggerated terms by their peers, the respondents worried as adolescents about being caught doing "something wrong" with another boy. Obviously, what boys did with boys was so bad it could not be talked about.

On the other hand, parents and teachers were articulate and forthcoming about the norms of heterosexual behavior. Making do with this knowledge of heterosexual rights and wrongs and with some interpretive help from their peers, the respondents easily discovered the activities forbidden among boys. Two of the respondents, each from a large

family, enjoyed extensive experience in this regard and maintained that abundant adolescent homosexuality among males is normal. Because of this, they found it hard to pinpoint when they first began to see themselves as gay. Many of the respondents reported that a vague guilt tinged and ultimately destroyed these same-sex relationships, which contributed further to their feelings of being different.

Over half the respondents felt homosexual desires in high school:

In junior high and high school, when I stood in showers with other naked boys, or with my teammates in the locker room, I lived in constant fear of being stimulated and getting a hard-on (John).

In a neat illustration of Lemert's (1951) distinction between primary and secondary deviance, these respondents reported that anxieties about "messaging around" were not shared by their heterosexual peers:

None of my buddies who did these things thought they were gay, only me. And when I said they were too, they laughed!" (Anthony).

Clearly, the respondents' sexual interactions with other male peers had been symbolically organized at the level of their identities (*secondary deviance*) while those of their peers had not. Their peers rationalized their behavior as a casual "messaging around" that had only marginal impact on their identities (*primary deviance*).

As one teenaged respondent observed:

Some guys get away with a lot of homosexual activity and don't call themselves queers. They shrug and say 'all the other guys are doing the same thing (Anthony).

He thought that the reason for this was that their stereotype of how gays act differed so much from how they acted that what they did with their friends did not lead to a self-ascription of homosexuality. This respondent's observation is a clear illustration of

Schnieder and Conrad's (1983) statement that stigma is not an inevitable result of a discreditable attribute or performance, but only becomes so if it is perceived as such.

Of those respondents that did not act on their childhood or adolescent homosexual desires, one reported a severe disruption of his adult day-to-day activities by incidents of same-sex infatuations, romance, and love because their homosexual desires were not acted upon as children or adolescents:

At twenty-eight, I fell head over heels in love for the first time with another guy. I didn't know what I was doing. I was living through the experience for the first time. Things I think I should have lived through and gotten over in adolescence or early adulthood, but I never did. I was totally overwhelmed by the experience. My productivity at work suffered (Charles).

4. A Withdrawal From Interactions:

Perhaps in compensation for childhood handicaps, whether physical or social, the respondents withdrew to varying degrees from the rough and tumble of the "ideal boy's childhood life..." They read and took up serious hobbies. Feelings of guilt, shame, or failure followed the withdrawal from social interactions or other attempts at deflecting others' attention from what was seen as an unacceptable level of difference. A typical strategy to manage these feelings was *normalization* (Scambler, 1984), in which the respondents denied their own desires and, instead, acted as significant others deemed appropriate. The respondents tried to overwhelm what others saw as deviant inclinations in "normal" hobbies, sports, studies, or even (if they were sensitive to desires for other males) the dating of women, trusting that their differences would disappear in time as "only a stage they had to go through." Or they engaged in a frenetic pace of activities, hoping to force the feeling of being different out of consciousness.

C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING DIFFERENT:

1. An increase in sensitivity to the opinions of others:

The exacerbation of the respondents' sensitivity to the opinions of others threatened to overwhelm their "real selves." Having centered their attention on how others judged them, they expended valuable personal resources to figure out how to change the way others perceived them or make their differences invisible. The resulting loss of time and energy precluded their developing the more valued aspects of themselves:

If you're always being hassled about things others think important, there's little time and energy left to be creative and grow. Especially when these "others" are parents, teachers, employers, or other guardians of right conduct. You can't move for dodging their bullets, so to speak. And these assholes get off on the power that enables them to stunt your growth and keep you as little as they are. They're the ones who are the "disgusting perverts" (Anthony).

Moral entrepreneurs labeled and in other ways attempt to appropriate the meaning of, as well as to control, significant aspects of the respondents' lives. They overwhelmed and trapped the respondents with their judgments, preventing their social advancement. Their negative and sarcastic opinions manifested took many forms: They made the respondents the subject of gossip and whispering campaigns about their being gay, who they were seen with, and the places where they were seen; they labeled the respondents as unapproachable, withdrawn, or solitary; they called the respondents names, for example, "nerd," "prettyboy," "sissy," "mommy's boy," "teacher's pet," "faggot," "queer," "talented," "creative," "genius," "perfect"; and being subjected to medical or psychiatric evaluations and treatments or forced to participate in presumably masculinizing experiences:

Some Latino parents will go to any length to save their sons from a fate worse than death. I know a guy who was subjected to hormone shots, but they only turned him into a hairy, deep-voiced fairy [laughs]. My parents chose a less extreme measure. Every afternoon after school I would take karate classes, as if such contact with other guys would extinguish my

attraction to them. When that didn't work, my parents sent me to a psychiatrist, another waste of money (Jorge).

2. A Search for Others Like Oneself:

This was done by looking for role models to imitate and seeking information about the various gay lifestyles and subworlds. Important questions during this search were:

"What will I do if I cannot find people like myself? "What if there are no proper role models?" and "What should I do if I find them, but don't like them?" "What are the risks of the lifestyle that I find satisfies me?"

In high school, I found people with feelings like mine. We didn't use the word gay. It didn't exist in Midwestern rural schools. But we experimented! There wasn't much left to learn about the physical side of sexuality by the time I got to college! Some guilt, but not much after the first few times. I liked my experimenting and all the other things that made me different! I said to myself: You're okay. They're different! I wasn't going on a guilt trip anybody tried to lay on me (Joshua).

Several of the respondents — those living with or in other ways economically dependent upon their parents — were not allowed to contact and interact with other gay teenagers. Their isolation from others like themselves precluded any personal growth:

There were guys at Mission High who broke through my gay stereotypes. They could have provided me with an constructive example of masculinity, would have sympathized with my concerns about being gay, and could have introduced me to the gay lifestyle. But I had no privacy at home or school, no way to really get alone and close to them (Mark).

3. The Construction and Articulation of Stigma Theories:

Stigma theories explain and legitimate the claim that one has always been different from others ("I knew I was different as far back as I can remember"), and that becoming conscious of these feelings marked the beginning of their careers as gay persons. The theory that the cause for being different is organic, i.e., that gay men are born, not made (nature vs. nurture). Such theories are learned as part of the process of being socialized

into the gay community. Hence ubiquitousness may be due to an exercise of hindsight. One of the most interesting stigma theories had to do with the fact that the solitary but creative childhoods generally had the effect of making them into precocious students. This eventually won them the respect of their peers, metamorphosed them into dazzling self-creations, and gave each of them a unique, vivacious senses of style that would distinguish them from their contemporaries for the rest of their lives.

For example, one of the respondents became movie aficionado and the other a collector of sea shells. The movie buff had an encyclopedic knowledge of — as well as a talent for imitating their mannerisms and voices — many Hollywood movie icons; and the collector filled the shelves of his room with an incredible variety of laboriously catalogued exotic sea shells. Both were talented artists and enthusiastic readers. While their heterosexual peers enjoyed an exciting outer lives, these respondents developed colorful inner worlds.

I have always been fascinated by the diverse but curiously familiar stories of the childhoods of gay men. There is always a talent that accompanies their sexuality. Always a special creativity and humor. Is this an effort to compensate for their difference or a biological cofactor of homosexuality? I don't know (Peter).

E. THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING DIFFERENT AFTER AIDS:

I introduce this section with a quote from the book My Own Country, by physician Abraham Verghese (1994), who knew in his personal and professional life the many ways of being "different":

"No, I suppose I've known for some time now. One time he got in trouble with the law. I had to go bail him out. It had to do with something in the bathroom at J. C. Penny." At this point his face hardened and he looked at me and said, "All I can tell you is it was something disgusting. Just plain disgusting."

I could imagine how painful it was for the father to picture it.

"Plain disgusting. I mean, I more or less knew then but I just turned away from him. Well, even before that, growing up, he was always ... different. And maybe I was hard on him, tried to get him to do the things that his brothers were doing. He had his own friends, his own interests — still does."

He stared away now and was silent before he looked back at me, the tears pouring down his cheeks, the hankie quite ineffective. "Isn't it a shame for it to take a disease like this for me to be close to my boy again? The little baby boy that I carried and loved — he was the youngest — somehow got away from me. Now we're back loving again, but he's going to die, isn't he? That's the bottom line, isn't it?"

Over ten years after the outbreak of AIDS among gay men, a reconciliation between father and his gay son is not an unusual outcome of their lives having been touched by this disease. But just as often AIDS inspires fear, dread, and revulsion. AIDS fuels the content of myths that elicit extreme social antipathy. While in some cases the fear inspired by a disease may be disproportionate to its threat, a lack of precise knowledge about its etiology and its history of ineffectual treatment tend to be of great significance. In this process, the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, debility) are identified with the disease. AIDS then becomes a metaphor for this dread, and the name of the disease becomes an adjective imposed on other things (Sontag, 1978; 1989).

To understand the social reaction to AIDS, it is useful to enumerate the reasons for its being referred to as a kind of "ultimate plague" (Skinsnes, 1964). AIDS is disabling and deforming to a degree eliciting revulsion; causes progressive deterioration of the body and the mind, necessitating hospitalization or care beyond the capacity of lay persons such as family and friends; runs an unusually long course, the victims inexorably degenerating into "vegetables" requiring decisions about terminal care and life support; exposes the individual to a protracted experience of debility, powerlessness, and pain, ending in death;

necessitates specialized wards and equipment, high-level tertiary care, and experimental medical treatments that turn patients into "guinea pigs"; is associated with a censured lifestyle that is seen as an agent of social contamination and whose activities pose grave threats to the health of "innocent victims"; has an abrupt appearance, a mysterious etiology, a long incubation period, and subtle, idiosyncratic, or confusing symptoms; is incurable, leading to fears of a lifetime of banishment from family, friends, and society; is perceived as rapidly spreading, thus casually or "highly" contagious, resulting in excessive concerns of contracting the disease; results in unsubstantiated assumptions about the nature of the disease, thus facilitating imposing social sanctions and restrictions on infected persons; and is surrounded by legend and mythology that suggests that AIDS is a punishment from God for human sin, the result of a "violation of natural law," or the consequence of government policy.

1. Conditions for the Experience of Being Different post-AIDS:

AIDS forced the respondents to immediately come to terms with their mortality. They were forced to face the contingency of life at the point when most young men — seeing themselves as immortal — are making plans for their life's career and many older men are reaching the zenith of their careers. Occupations selected for their financial security suddenly became meaningless in a world in which men routinely died in their twenties and thirties. Even young, healthy respondents were overcome with regret at not having taken the risks of career changes, doing the things they really wanted to do, taking the time to travel, and grasping at opportunities for human intimacy.

Even though I'm healthy, like many other HIV-negative people AIDS affects my life every day. I've seen too many friends die regretting they hadn't taken more risks with their lives or

careers. With Mark I saw yet another life cut short by AIDS. All the premature death and unfulfilled ambitions I witnessed helped motivate me to take a chance and finally do what I'd been pondering for years — go to law school. At 37 it was a gamble: I gave up a good income, moved across the country, and left some wonderful friends. This past year I was immersed in my studies and not involved with any AIDS organization, but AIDS is still a part of my life — and it has taught me that life's too short not to take risks (Dennis).

I've gone to England five times in the last two years, showered gifts on friends and enrolled in a English literature course, even though the virus continuously "nibbles" at my nerve cells, making me walk more slowly, see "rainbow zig-zags" in my peripheral vision and constantly drop things. I charge everything. I won't be around to pay for it anyway (Scott).

The respondents' increased perception of the contingency and risk of living was probably the most important dimension of their experience of being different subsequent to AIDS. Having taken the first steps up the Ladder of Risk in seeing themselves as different from others and looking for others like themselves, they had to grapple with the real possibility of limits at precisely the time when, for most healthy men, possibilities were endless. One of the most daunting rungs on the Ladder of Risk is the gamble for a success one may not live to appreciate. When each step towards the goal might be the final one, the goal often transformed itself into the next opportunity, rather than the end of a systematic program of action.

The respondents discovered that their experience in dealing with societal prejudice against homosexuality had not prepared them for dealing with the stigmatization processes that resulted from their being at risk for AIDS. Occasionally they found themselves joining the chorus of hysterical denunciations of persons with HIV. This led to a precipitous decline in the tolerance for the gay lifestyle — among both gays and straights — in San Francisco:

The old stereotypes of gays were resurrected, the stigma of homosexuality increased, and jubilant homophobes called for a renewal of discriminatory practices against gays in the name of public health. The terrible thing is that gays believe it too (Peter).

The stigma of AIDS spread and contaminated the lifestyles of all gay men, healthy or ill. The epithet "AIDS bait," sometimes used to describe an especially attractive gay man, turned youth and beauty into a metaphor for death. The necessity of managing the risk of casual sex and the inhibitions resulting from attempts to practice safer sex limited the ways the body could be enjoyed by creating barriers between the respondents in their intimate interactions with others.

A new barrier to intimacy arose because of the need to use condoms:

The canons of safer sex mandate embarrassing preparations for sex that, together with the fear of contracting AIDS, stifles any attempt at physical closeness (Anthony).

The respondents with HIV recalled that in the first years of the epidemic that persons with AIDS groups wanted only men with frank (i.e., clinically diagnosed) AIDS in their organizations. Gay men in other diagnostic classifications were rejected because it was feared that, living longer than people diagnosed with AIDS, they would come to dominate PWA organizations. "These guys have paid no dues; their lives are not sufficiently threatened" (Jorge). As a result, early persons with AIDS organizations were ineffectual because of the turnover of their leadership.

Such attitudes and practices faded as advances in AIDS treatments made the lifetimes of all persons who carried the AIDS virus comparable and also as it became clear that only a united front could deal with the inertia of the federal government's response to the AIDS crisis. Although we might be at different stages in our illness, we learned we must all fight together against our common doom (Christopher).

Notable exceptions to the spread of intolerance and fear were the so-called stereotyped gay occupations, for example, art, interior decorating, dance, hair styling, and theater:

As far as the theatrical community goes, I don't think there's been a better place to work and be HIV-positive (John).

In general, AIDS stigma was attached to testing positive for the HIV virus and being diagnosed with, or suffering from, HIV-related illnesses. This stigma struck at the core of the respondents' gay identities, giving rise to especially tormenting sense of being different:

Ever since I learned I carried the virus, I have become a walking time-bomb. I have become upsetting, demonic, and alien to others (Paul).

I feel like I've been returned to my solitary adolescence, to a time when I felt strange about being queer. Masturbation has replaced intercourse. I don't love my body anymore (John L).

When I found I was HIV positive, all I knew was people who got HIV were bad and died quickly. And I was an honor student, captain of the baseball team, and president of the senior class. Good kids don't get HIV. That's what I was told (Pedro).

But because the official definition of AIDS has changes over time, there was confusion among the respondents with AIDS about exactly *what* made them different from others and *when* they became different from others.

What makes me different from other gay men. Low T-cells? My fear of death? Diarrhea? A ton of prescription drugs and frequent visits to doctors? Exhaustion? What is the line between normal and HIV? It constantly changes. At different times the CDC has added new diseases to the list of opportunistic infections that confirm HIV. By fiat, people who didn't have AIDS suddenly did. I didn't have AIDS until having a T-cell count below 200 became an official AIDS marker. Until that day I counted myself among the normal; after that I was a dead man (Joshua).

Especially important to the AIDS-related experience of being different were the physical changes due to HIV infection, for example, walking with a cane, the "Auschwitz hair-cut indicative of chemotherapy," the purple lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma, emaciation, and a slow, protracted death. The respondents complained about how tiring it was to have people staring at them, often with faces distorted by shock and fear. They wondered how they should behave during moments of human intimacy:

When I'm kissed, should I turn my head away and deflect the kiss to a mere peck on the cheek? Am I that afraid of other people's germs? (John)

Some of the respondents with AIDS were so afraid of a bout of uncontrollable diarrhea in public that they never ventured far from home. Most, being educated and thoughtful, were terrified of headaches, fearing they might signal the onset of dementia and the beginning of the end of their lucidity. The physical changes of AIDS caused the respondents great trouble at work, resulted in abandonment by friends and lovers, and were a rationale for people — especially other gay men — to act towards them as if they were already dead:

One day, in the shower, I finally really looked at my body. It was as if I had never seen it before. I'd had three lesions a year ago. Now there were dozens. I began to see myself as a dying man. In the prime of life I was becoming elderly and infirm. A chasm opened and separated me from other gays (Paul).

Since any physical lesion might be interpreted as a sign of AIDS, the sexually active respondents placed a great premium on an unblemished body image. A healthy-looking body was preferable to a beautiful one, the gay man admired at a distance preferable to intimacy with one nearby:

I became slowly aware that the former relaxed indifference I felt in close proximity of other gay men had been replaced by a need for a greater physical distance. I understand now why someone said that AIDS has transformed being gay almost entirely into an aesthetic thrill, a mere participation in style and beauty (Rand).

However, even a healthy-looking body was not enough for those in search of risk-free sex. The absence of *visible* physical changes due to AIDS did not guarantee a positive reception by others:

If people know or even suspect you have AIDS, you're written off as a zombie even when you feel well. Appearing fit is an advantage only with strangers (Joe).

On the other hand, not all the changes due to AIDS were viewed negatively by the respondents. Many of the respondents with HIV discovered that they looked better after

their diagnosis and were better able to pass as normals, primarily because they took take better care of themselves. One respondent with HIV was enthusiastic about the effects of AIDS because of the positive reaction of other men to him after his dramatic loss of weight:

I'm down from over 300 pounds to a slender 165 pounds as a result of repeated bouts of crypto. When I was at the Lily Street Fair the other day I was cruised repeatedly. Honey, I feel so alive! (Steve H.).

The respondents were forced to dress more shabbily because of AIDS. The stereotype of gays as clones, dandies, fops, and leathermen made the them feel that if they dressed brightly and at the height of fashion, they would make themselves into targets for homophobic "gay bashers" inflamed by irrational fears of AIDS. One respondent (Michael) was attacked and beaten up by a group of young toughs as he walked down a gay section of San Francisco's Mission Street one night in his "gayest outfit."

Now, if I'm going outside the Castro, I won't dress as "gaily" as I might: No leather chaps and vest. I won't wear my Pink Triangle button. Even if I'm with other gays I won't wear my red tennis shoes, white pants, pink tie, and blue sportcoat. I can't dress as brightly as I used to. I'll even dress in my three-piece suit so I won't appear obviously gay because I fear for my life (Michael).

Because of this danger of appearing "too gay" outside certain geographical areas of San Francisco or of "appearing too much a slut" within the City's gay institutions, a new fashion, called *counter-clone* enjoyed a brief popularity:

The pre-AIDS Castro Street fashion was "clone," a close descendant of the straight-identified faggot. Clones broadcast their masculinity by wearing a veritable uniform. They emphasized their athleticism with a gym-toned body, mustache, mirrored "cop" sunglasses, T-shirt, bomber jacket, tight jeans, and work boots. On the other hand, counter-clone hints at the wearer's androgynous nature while it proclaims, "I am smart, young, innocent, and healthy." It is reminiscent of the collegiate, preppie or "Wall Street drag" looks, but fits the body more closely (Peter).

The search for intimacy by the respondents with HIV was frustrated by their indefinite future, the desertion of former friends, and the difficulty of acquiring new boyfriends. Being different took on the dimensions of a fear of being conned into a relationship with a person with HIV, fears of abandonment and dependency, and a disruption of the rhythms and routines necessary to living due to the demands of health care.

As if this disease isn't bad enough, it isolates me from other men (Jack).

On the other hand, all the respondents believed that relationships enhanced both their survival and quality of life:

I belong to all kinds of groups. I know I'm dying and may not be around long, but these connections got me to feeling better and better. My mom really supported my being gay and having AIDS, once I told her. That was a big relief for me. I think that had a lot to do with my getting better (Toby).

At the same time, the healthy respondents dreaded being trapped into relationships with a person who might have HIV. There were rumors circulating about healthy-appearing persons with AIDS out get a "neggie," i.e., healthy HIV-negative boyfriend, who would outlive them and take care of them when they fell ill. (The label "neggie" suggests that healthy partners, while greatly desired by some persons with AIDS, are contemptuously devalued as having a defect of character.) Some of the respondents tried to avoid being "conned" into such a relationship by insisting that men with whom they desired sexual intimacy test negatively to the AIDS virus. Other respondents hotly debated the morality and rationality of such a condition (Norman).

The interview data shows that AIDS fundamentally restructured the rhythms and routines of gay relationships. When one of the persons in a relationship had AIDS and the

other did not, the person with AIDS tended to "drift away" from his healthy partner "into his clique of ACT UP friends and AIDS support group" as his health status deteriorated (Joshua). The "us versus them mentality" of men socialized into these groups added a new ferocity and stridency to marital quarrels with normal partners. Dying being held to be beyond the understanding of a healthy partner, a more empathetic lover was found from among those who carried the virus. The healthy respondents found themselves abandoned for not being ill.

The lives of the respondents affected by HIV were disrupted by the trajectory of the illness and the constant demands of health care. Three of the respondents had lovers with advanced AIDS. The healthy partner mothered his lover, i.e., experienced the intimate physical care of another person, unconditional love, the subordination of the self to another, and investment in an impending separation. The caring partner, who often worked full time, labored late into the night nursing a person too weak to feed, bathe, or change himself. He tried to rally his partner by telling him not to give up because he needed him. The fears of abandonment of the healthier partner were sometimes exacerbated by his knowledge that he too carried the AIDS virus and that there would be no one to care for him at the end.

But at other times, especially during the final months or weeks when they are alone together much of the time, there is little to talk about (except perhaps suicide) as the dying partner's identity dissolves in his trajectory towards death. The stress of obsessively listening for sounds indicating that his partner needs something, of seeing the person he once loved change beyond all recognition, may precipitate a crisis in which his own

identity is threatened. Ultimately, the dying partner is told, "Okay, you don't have to fight any more. Let yourself go."

Not all the identity transformations of AIDS are for the worse:

My lover's personality completely changed over the course of his illness. Before AIDS, he was an alcoholic; he had a long history of sexually transmitted disease; his body was literally falling apart. After his diagnosis he took control of his life. He stopped drinking, changed his diet, and began taking part in an AZT protocol. I'm not sure he's aware of the seriousness of his condition or how we manage to help each other. But his attitude is better, he's more articulate, and he's responsible (Robert).

The ill partner, unable to work, share household chores, or care for himself, experiences a life of increasing dependency. His body, once familiar, becomes alien: it smells different, is racked by pain, is cursed by a loss of control over basic functions, and is too weak to perform as it once did (Joshua). As his condition worsens, the ways he can express affection narrow or are transformed: touching may become limited to holding hands, communication restricted to expressive gestures or glances, physical intimacy is replaced by mere survival.

2. Dimensions of Being Different After the Advent of AIDS:

In this section we look at the ways AIDS altered the respondents' experience of being different. The self-image of the respondents who were HIV positive or had frank AIDS was especially vulnerable to the way they thought others saw them: Being different was closely linked to the social responses to the physical changes in *body image* due to the progression of the disease.

Before my AIDS diagnosis I wasn't really sure whether I was living my life or whether it was all a movie. Now I'm sure it's all a movie. The weight of the sense of unreality! When I was healthy, I didn't know anybody who was ill. Now that I'm sick, I don't know anyone who's well. The only thing I can talk about anymore is AIDS. I just don't have anything in common with "normal" people anymore. I've lost all my social graces! (Jack).

The respondents with HIV knew that they were different because of the way people react to them. They tried to escape this predicament through a semantic loophole:

If I can make people see AIDS as a "life-threatening illness" or even "usually fatal" not as a terminal diagnosis, they won't treat me differently. They'll know I have years to live. They won't act as if I was fragile; that any difficulty will break me (Jack).

The outré strangeness of the visible symptoms of AIDS — of being, so to speak, branded as a pariah — frequently gave rise to rage, a sense of unreality, spontaneous feelings of guilt, and helplessness. When on respondent's (Joshua) neurological problems impaired his memory and coordination, he reacted fiercely to his loss of independence and sense of control over his body. His roommate would find splashes of mayonnaise on the kitchen walls and cooking utensils thrown about the floor, where Joshua had angrily flung them in a rage over his inability to control his movements.

The respondents with HIV had to used to an altogether new body image. "My body even smells different than it used to" (Joshua).

Sometimes I am so tired I beat on the walls of my apartment. Then, I force myself go out to help on the PWA switchboard and I find I am too weak to walk up the one flight of steps to its offices (Jack).

After I got AIDS, my skin got worse and I had a lot of dental problems. My smile was that of a jack-o-lantern. For six months, until I finally got to see a dentist, I wouldn't venture outside and reveal a smile like that (Jack).

Those who had visible lesions used special cosmetics or gave themselves deep suntans. They monitored their attractiveness by keeping score of the appreciative glances other men give them as they walked the streets. They delicately alluded to their sense of power over these who desired them:

So far I can make myself look healthy. I'm still ogled at on the street. I'm one of those people who could go to the bars and pick up anyone. I'm always tempted to do so; old habits die hard. Fortunately, I have a lover, so I'm less likely to do this (Jim).

But to those who knew about a respondent's positive HIV status, it was also possible to look too good:

Physically, I look very well: fit and robust. Yet I'm very sick. I'm happy living this contradiction, but it does have its drawbacks. I feel at times nobody takes my illness seriously because I look so good. And I'm not just talking about my friends. Doctors give me the impression that to be really sick you have to look like hell (John).

I don't look like I have AIDS, at least I'm not emaciated or covered with lesions yet. Sometimes I have to convince people that I have AIDS before I can get special services. Once, when I was at an AIDS Walk, I tried to get a drink at a table set aside for persons with AIDS. I was shocked when the guy at the table refused me. Even after I showed him my AZT timer, I felt guilty. Sometimes I feel weird about looking good (Joshua).

As bad as looking too good was living too long with HIV. One respondent with HIV, a long-term survivor, occasionally felt he had to justify his AIDS diagnosis, especially when he was being, in some sense, "difficult":

The uncertainty about my right to claim that I have AIDS and that I am a genuine long-term survivor has caused me a great deal of pain. When I'm a "good patient," when I avoid sex and cruising, when I tow the touchy-feely party line of "emotional venting," then no one questions my representing myself as a person with AIDS. But when I'm a "bad patient," when I insist on talking about science or politics, when I make a pass at someone, then some people say I have no right to speak as a PWA. I can't imagine why anyone would pretend to have AIDS. There are easier ways to get your picture in the BAR (Michael).

Russell, another respondent with HIV, related an incident in which a minister, no doubt intending to comfort him, told him that his lesions were an "incredible gift." His long-lived rage at the minister's failure to grasp his pain was mixed with the memory of the elation he felt at the time:

He told me that every time I walked the streets I was teaching people. I didn't have to say anything. People had to confront their greatest fears just by looking at me. I marveled at his talent for making my shame into something transcendent. I loved myself a little more that day.

Many of the respondents with HIV were concerned about what would happen to their bodies after they died. Wills and other legal documents were very important. They wondered "who will handle my body after I am dead, or will I just lie somewhere and rot" (Jack). "Will my wishes to be cremated be respected?" "Will my possessions be distributed as I want?" As they lost control of their body in life, the respondents tried to gain some measure of control over it after their deaths.

For many years, the metaphor of war has been used for a host of social problems: the war against poverty, the war on drugs, and the war against AIDS. It is a well-known fact that since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, more Americans have died of AIDS than died in Vietnam. The NAMES Project quilt now covers an area the size of a battlefield, and still represents only a small fraction of those who have died. The respondents shared a sense of the overwhelming devastation brought about by AIDS.

All the respondents used the war metaphor to convey their sense of being different, of feeling like the refugees of a holocaust. It is clear that in either combat or the AIDS epidemic there is a fundamental denial of chaos, so that "order" remains and the self can be maintained and not be devastated by the situation:

To persons with AIDS there are psychological similarities to combat. It is a real, not abstract, confrontation with mortality. There is not only the association of mortality with death but with deterioration of the body, i.e., disability. I've seen persons with AIDS who came to the Vet Center who exhibited PTSD [post-traumatic stress syndrome]-like symptoms. The etiologies are dissimilar, but the symptoms and ideation are similar. A life-threatening illness gives rise to a fear of death by deterioration - the giving up of the body - and is similar to the fear of sudden violent death. In both cases the person is in the process of learning to accept the end. This is not to say that persons who are surviving are not hurt or devastated, but they've learned control. And we're back to PTSD. They cannot deal with it now, though they seemed to then. (Michael).

Burnout was a common response among those respondents actively confronting the AIDS crisis. But Michael makes the point that even those who appear to have been unscathed by AIDS eventually — perhaps years in the future — may pay the price of this plague with a PTSD-like depression. Another respondent said that being told that he was HIV-positive brought back nightmares of his service in Vietnam. He also qualified the analogy between war and the response of society or a person to AIDS:

Combat is life-threatening; the possibility of immediate death is always there. That's the common denominator between AIDS and combat. Everyone says "I guess I'm going to die." But the threat of death is really more proximate to the combat soldier than it is for a person with AIDS. For the soldier, it's right now as contrasted to next month or next year. Further, combat is chaotic and takes place in strange, unfamiliar lands; your buddies are all around you screaming for help, their mothers, and everything else. You maintain yourself and function in order to survive. You don't have time to come apart. But while AIDS is a charnel house, it takes place in a semblance of the familiar order of hospitals, home, and friends. After combat, a soldier can walk away when it's over saying "I survived." But he's doomed to repeat his confrontation with death until he's rotated out. The person with HIV never really knows whether he's survived, it may only be a brief honeymoon until worse happens. Still, survival is a relative term since all must die anyway. Years, months, even weeks mean something - the sweetness of surviving is not diminished. Survival is not indefinite. So as long as it lasts, it is right to think of the fight against AIDS as a war and not just some police action. Thus AIDS activism will be judged as wartime activism is: by its effect on the people fighting for their lives. It must improve the morale of the troops and those stateside for it to be allowed a place of honor. (Jesus B).

Feelings of being different were especially acute for the respondents who were in an AIDS treatment protocol. Their sense of identity became closely linked to protocol regimens and symptoms, hence radically different from the respondents who were asymptomatic and not as concerned with survival.

Frankenstein. I feel like Frankenstein. I hate doctors. I can't tolerate another pointless clinical interview. They pump me full of toxic drugs and then tell me to stay available for new treatment programs. Then they deny me the new drugs because of previous clinical drug involvement. They're sure to ask who's going to pay for this and do you have insurance, then after they've used you to collect their data, they throw you away like a used condom. They want PWAs who have no signs of disease for these tests. They want only those who are "good patients." Are they going to triage the rest of us? Now we all take AZT. Anyplace

there are gay men you can hear little electronic beeps going off as they pull out their neat little alarmed designer pill boxes (Joshua).

My life? My life: I tested positive in November of 1989 with no discernable symptoms except for swollen lymph nodes in my neck. Everything was going fine. I would go to the doctor for regular blood tests and everything was okay. Then in July of '91 I got a headache that lasted for 7 days. I finally went to the doctor and he ordered a Lumbar Puncture. It came back positive for Viral Meningitis but still no AIDS diagnosis. A few days later my doctor called me and asked me to come in. It seemed that there was a preliminary result of TB in my spinal fluid. Did I have any symptoms? No! Very strange, but lets watch it for a while. In the meantime my last blood test showed T-Cells of 290. AZT time, 1000mg per day.

In January of 1992 I went down to 500mg AZT per day. Bi-weekly blood tests for two months and then monthly. In October we got the results on the TB. Definitely MAI. I now had a full blown AIDS diagnosis. I went on Rifampin, Myambutol and Clofazamine for the MAI. Everything was going OK until May of '92 when I started losing my appetite and was becoming short of breath very easily and had coughing attacks that were so violent that I would end up throwing up. I reported it to the doctor, but he wasn't too concerned at that point. Over the summer the symptoms got worse. In July I had a Gallium scan which showed some infection. Then a Sputum test which came back negative, then a Bronchoscopy which also came back negative. I went to Puerto Vallarta for a week the day after the bronchoscopy because everything came back negative. The day I returned I went directly to the emergency room at Davies because I couldn't breathe. They had been looking for me because the bronchoscopy was a false negative and was actually positive for PCP.

Now things get interesting. I was in the hospital for three weeks on Pentamidine and Septra sick as a dog. When I got out I felt great and my mother came out from NY for a visit. After she left I started feeling bad. My blood pressure was going down. Adrenal Failure. Back in the hospital for 1 week and now on Hydrocortisone 60mg per day. Got out and felt fine. 1 week later I was back in the emergency room. This time I was anemic. I needed 3 units of blood. Where was I bleeding from? Nobody knew. I had a gastroscopy which showed a lump in my stomach. They biopsied it and it was CMV. My doctor didn't want to start DHPG yet because the symptoms weren't that bad, but I needed to go to the ophthalmologist every 6 weeks. No lesions yet.

In late October I noticed a sore in my mouth that I attributed to Thrush. It wouldn't get better with the Mycelex so I went to the doctor. He sent me to a Ear Nose and Throat guy who biopsied it. KS!!! On to the Oncologist who didn't want to do anything yet because it was only one lesion and it didn't really bother me, but come back in 6 weeks. I went to New York and St. Thomas for three weeks in November and early December. Three days after returning home I started feeling sick to my stomach and stopped eating and drinking. My blood pressure started going down. The doctor upped my Hydrocortisone and added a new steroid. Also, added Nizoral in pill form because I hate the Mycelex Troaches. That was Friday. Monday I went to see the Ophthalmologist. Oh No! A lesion. Back to the Dr. and now we definitely have to start DHPG. Do I want a Pas-Port or a Groschen catheter. I decided on the Pas-Port. But I was also severely volume depleted and needed to be hospitalized to get my fluid level up and so they could make sure I eat. I got out on December 19

and here I am feeling pretty good now. I just hope it stays that way. Oh! One bit of good news today. I went to the Ophthalmologist and she said that the lesion in my eye is definitely getting better and smaller. Yeah! One other thing. While in the hospital this last time I developed a second KS lesion in my mouth. I see the Oncologist on Dec. 27 and we'll decide what to do I hope. I also think I have one on my toe but I'm not sure if it is KS or just a fungus. Well, that's me and my life in a nutshell (Seth).

The respondents with HIV who survived constantly reminded themselves of the odds against them. They lived not knowing what infection will attack their weakened immune system next. They suffered pangs of terror and were often depressed. Yet the ones who had AIDS for more than five years appeared to lead normal lives, some with relatively few bouts of sickness. None expected to beat AIDS, but they were all determined to do what they could to stay alive. The respondents with HIV all agreed that times were better for them than when they were diagnosed years ago.

Social services are better and there is less irrational public fear of contagion. In 1985 it was so strange. They had the isolation wards, and everybody who came had to put on gowns, masks, and gloves. Visitors who came to see me looked like astronauts (Joshua).

A few the respondents with HIV admitted that AIDS had introduced excitement, suspense, and even humor into their lives, which had been threatened by the "mediocrity and banal pleasures of San Francisco gay life" (Paul). These men experienced a liberating sense of being different. The metaphor of "returning to adolescence" recurred, but in a positive context:

I feel like a different man now that I know I'm a positive. The danger is intoxicating. I have become a romantic again, flaunting my courage more pompously than I ever could when I was healthy. What I never dared, is routine now. Anyone not for me is against me; I am very selective in my relationships. At the slightest sign of stress, I break them off. I am heartless with people who annoy me. I no longer feel it necessary to be tactful and civilized to people who criticize my gayness (Bobby).

My diagnosis remade me into an adolescent for whom life is an enigma. AIDS is a rite of passage from which no adult has returned to help me pass the test (Tom).

Humor was introduced into the lives of the respondents with HIV by sharing mordant jokes and other attempts at dark humor:

I knew one guy who was sure he had AIDS. He went to the doctor and after a bunch of tests was ushered into the office to hear the results: "The good news is that it isn't AIDS. The bad news is that it's lung cancer. How do you feel about morphine?" The guy flipped out (Joshua)

Often such cynical bantering would pall and the topic of discussion would turn to suicide, which was discussed with a mixture of boredom and honesty:

The only thing I'll be remembered for is dying of a pop culture disease. I'll use pills. Pills are the only way to die on time. The trouble is that by the time I'm sick enough to want to die, I'll be so helpless I won't be able to get to them and nobody will have the guts to give them to me. Everyone will watch me slowly go down the drain, but they won't help me do it any faster (Bobby).

3. Consequences of the Experience of Being Different After AIDS:

The most significant consequence of the experience of being different after AIDS was the bridging of the generation gap between pre- and post-AIDS gay men. The respondents who were activists during the 1960s and 1970s were middle-aged at the time of the interviews. They were more prosperous than ever before in their lives. Many had steady partners and settled domestic lives. All agreed that *age had altered their sexual lives as much as AIDS did*. Many of the younger respondents discovered that their sexual behavior was not so different from that of the pre-AIDS generation of gay men. Several of their peers had contracted AIDS. As they began to comprehend their mortality, the primacy of community bridged the generation gap:

When you don't think you and your friends have a long time to live, you come out to everybody and zap like mad, hoping to accomplish something useful. I think we are beginning to exhibit the same resignation, despair, and premature wisdom as our older brothers do (Jorge).

CLOSETING

CHAPTER III

A. INTRODUCTION:

In America, there is little distinction between the public and the private, between the outer façade of social convention and a person's inner feelings. They are expected to be consistent. Although in many respects America is a country of double standards, or multi-standards, it is not acceptable (among other things) for a person to pretend to be straight to one group of audiences while indulging in homosexual behavior before other publics (to whom the person is said to be *out*). Such efforts to control who does and does not know about a person's stigmatized behavior, which is called *closeting*, is considered immoral and is censured — even though the routine existence of multiple roles and identities in America makes closeting relatively common (although not always with respect to homosexuality, as in the case, for example, when an atheist holds his peace in a stronghold of religious fundamentalists or an advocate of reproductive rights is cowed by an angry mob of anti-abortionists).

This chapter describes the process of *closeting*. The respondents' conceptions about closeting derived, initially, from their familiarity with the term's usage in popular culture as applied to homosexuals; later, as a consequence of understandings gained while closeted; and, finally, as a result of socialization processes that occurred after they became public about their homosexuality. Thus the respondents' understandings about, and

descriptions of, closeting tended to be similar. Their understandings about closeting were further homogenized by their common socialization into the San Francisco gay community. Initially, this provoked suspicions that there was nothing new to be learned by examining this process in their lives. But, in fact, several new things were learned about the process.

The respondents used the phrase *being in the closet* in several ways. The term was always used to describe the period in their lives from the time they initially associated their experiences of being different with homosexuality until they accepted their gayness and began the process of revealing it to significant others (that is, until they had *come out* or were *out*, which process will be discussed in Chapter IV). Second, it referred the attempts to manage the information about their gayness accessible to the various audiences with whom they came into contact. Third, it denoted — whether or not they were *out* — the existence of internalized homophobia (anti-gay fears, feelings, beliefs, and stereotypes they discovered within themselves or which were brought to their attention by others) that influenced their interactions with other people. Fourth, after they had come out to the gay community and other select audiences, it referred to audiences to whom they had not come out (thus, the respondents spoke of being closeted to their parents, employers, or other significant audiences even though they were *out* in the gay community). The basic issue of closeting was usually not the morality of employing secrecy, information management, and passing behavior in their dealings with other audiences. It was the social utility and risks of employing these tactics towards.

Several of the respondents believed that the type of public disclosures that could discredit them had little applications to either heterosexuals *qua* heterosexuals or to Asian, blacks, Latino, and women, whose body image usually revealed them for what they are.

Damaging disclosures do occur for heterosexuals, for example, for those whose extravagant practices of bondage or SM come to the attention of the authorities or the media. And minorities or women who play stereotyped roles are often accused by the politicized members of their respective communities of passing. Still, information disclosed by a straight person that would be considered commonplace might be considered shocking if divulged by a gay person. I'm thinking here of revealing a lover's name or talking about a favorite sexual activity (Andrew).

In fact, a few of the respondents did not feel that lesbians were in as great danger from public disclosures as gay men:

You can see how much more acceptable Washington's politicians find activist lesbians as "liaisons to the gay community" than gay men! And, hey, turn on the Playboy Channel! A lot of straight men get off on seeing women do it together. Macho straight men think all women are "queer" (Anthony).

The purpose of closeting is to minimize the risk of a person's homosexuality being discovered — at the cost of his freedom of action — by managing the information about his activities available to selected audiences. The selection of audiences and the means of information management chosen are crucial because the costs of maintaining multiple concurrent identities is great. To manage information about the self to an audience that does not care about a person's sexuality is a great waste of energy and time. To blurt a confidence or otherwise reveal one is gay to the wrong audience can end a person's closeting, leading to economic, personal, and social sanctions. For some audiences, the risks of closeting are mitigated to some degree because their indicators of homosexuality are quite stereotyped; other audiences may tolerate suspicions and gossip, but not facts.

All of the respondents reported being closeted at one time or another; none of them were closeted at the time of the interviews. They knew it was possible for people to remain closeted all their lives:

I know a guy, married, growing kids, who has always known that he has a strong desire for men. He has close ties to his family. He is struggling about whether or not to express his homosexual longing all the time. He will probably choose to live his life admiring and being sexually attracted to men, but never act on it (Peter).

B. CONDITIONS FOR CLOSETING:

The conditions for closeting are similar to those for being different but they derive more often from societal or political considerations and they are always linked to homosexuality. The respondents closeted themselves from a particular audience because they risked something tangible — something more than shame — if their homosexuality became known to that audience. Thus the conditions for closeting take the form of a fear of the social penalties for being labeled homosexual. In discussing a condition for closeting, the respondents spoke in terms of risk: about the chances for discovery and the odds of not being noticed in certain circumstances by given audiences.

Not all the conditions for closeting were represented in the interviews. No respondent seduced into his first sexual experience experienced panic, or was *coopted* (that is, gained money, power, or heterosexual privilege from closeting), or blatantly displayed internalized homophobia by retaining archaic social values that made certain types of closeting honorable (typical utterances of such people were "I am gay, but I believe as a Catholic that gay marriages mock the Church" and "Anal sex is dirty").

1. Fear of the Effects of Prejudice:

The most often cited condition for closeting was a fear of discrimination, stigmatization, and bodily harm. At some time in their lives, all the respondents were daunted by the threat of career, economic, and personal reprisals against themselves and significant others if their homosexuality became known to certain audiences. Because of prejudice against gay men, the respondents believed, and acted upon the belief by creating rationalizations for their closeting, that they would be extirpated from particular types of work.

In the normal course of teaching school discussing personal sexuality seems uncalled for, if not unprofessional. Most teachers do not talk about whether or not they are gay. Among those of us who know we are gay from outside activities, the word 'lover' becomes 'friend' or 'roommate' in our guarded conversations. It's sad when a person must be closeted in a city in which gays are supposedly accepted (Andrew).

They also expressed a related fear that significant others could not or would not understand their being gay.

I grew up in a town of 500 people near Tracy . In high school, I found a gay friend and we would drive around on back country roads and discuss the mysteries of sexuality. I was a wild kid who was always partying. I had girlfriends but didn't do anything with them beyond kiss them good-night. In a hometown like mine, it's hard to be yourself. You have girlfriends and get married. But I knew what I liked. I couldn't then — can't now — imagine telling the friends I grew up with that I am gay. They would consider me a faggot and nothing else would matter, despite our years together. I am becoming increasingly distant from my high-school classmates and am very unhappy about that. But they just wouldn't understand. With the one exception of my gay friend, none of them would ever understand (Donald).

That a respondent's gayness, if known, could contaminate the lives of his significant others is an example of what is known as *stigma contagion* (Scambler, 1984):

Coming out in my small hometown would have resulted in a calamity in the life of my parents, relatives, and friends. They might have found themselves suffering the same ostracization as I did. I borrowed as much as I could from friends, packed a suitcase, and hitchhiked to San Francisco (Mark).

A special problem of fear and repression existed for the respondents whose critical, moralistic audiences could not be escaped — audiences such as parents, sibling tattletales, and significant others. The natural state of the respondents was to be outgoing and optimistic, but that "love of life" was closely linked to the expression of their gay identities. They found it difficult to hide their sensuality and maintain an outward cheerfulness. There is great pathos in the fact that so few of the natural families, relatives, or other authority figures in the respondents lives ever saw them at their finest, most vivacious selves.

My parents told me how they could hear me laughing and joking with my friends on the phone. They knew I was popular with my friends. "How come you aren't like that with us?" they asked. "You don't understand," I told them.

As an example of the fear of discrimination, consider the respondents' employment histories. The respondents reported that San Francisco employers were quite progressive in their attitudes concerning the hiring of gay men. Even so, they worried that they could be subtly discriminated against either at the initial employment interview or afterwards, in decisions to retain or promote. Because of such risks, they avoided speaking about marital status (married men in the same circumstances always do) or living arrangements during job interviews. Since employers required information about marital status for tax purposes, permanently concealing such information was difficult. However, given the popularity of the single lifestyle and the high divorce rate among San Francisco heterosexuals, the respondents were not concerned about employers using marital status as a "gay litmus test."

The respondents generally successfully negotiated the initial hiring process and, on the whole, found that their sexual preference did not undermine their worth to San Francisco employers. But they knew that if these employers chose to discriminate, they would do so subtly. The Bay Area is a region where talent is abundant and the competition for jobs is fierce. Under these circumstances it is difficult for a gay employee to judge what factors might be responsible for what he regards as retarded advancement. All the respondents agreed that:

Persistent suspicions of discrimination are destructive of gay identity and affect job performance. They result in feelings of inferiority and guilt which estrange gay people from themselves and their tasks and lead to stagnation, boredom, and interactional impoverishment (Neil).

Information about gayness could be revealed to employers and coworkers over time, the rate it was revealed being contingent upon how previous revelations were received. Of course, living arrangements, friends, health, little interest in female coworkers, no talk about wife or children, style of dress, and general deportment were observable and could lead to speculation about gayness. The respondents were concerned that in competition for executive or managerial positions their gayness (like singleness) might be used as a negative indicator of "stability" and influence their advancement. But this was a concern they shared with single heterosexual colleagues, often stereotyped as "swingers," and who are common in San Francisco.

The respondents felt that the real concern of employers was their corporate image (i.e., public relations resulting from the opinions of insiders and outsiders about homosexual men, especially in corporations with a conservative constituency), and that this determined their tolerance for gays. Internally, management feared gay employees and

their health problems less than the disruption of the workplace or productivity losses of the co-workers who worked casually with them. All the respondents knew of gays who had been dismissed, transferred, or not promoted because of an employer's reactions to the views of outsiders such as customers, the public, and their board of directors. But the respondents believed that gays were even less a problem than management believed because of their ongoing, informal accommodations among employees. All the respondents worked in San Francisco and those who came out to coworkers were generally accepted. In this regard, one respondent told the story of a friend:

He was a guy who liked talking about the normal things: his lover, his sex life, his clothes, his furniture, and his future plans. He was always camping it up with his coworkers, and if any of the breeders tried to shut him up, he told them that if they could chatter about their lives, he could talk about his (John).

But occasionally accommodations took strange forms. Somewhat bemused, one respondent reported that straight male employees would try to "out-gay" him in knowledge about AIDS or other gay issues:

This straight guy lectured me for a half-hour about what gayness was, contentiously debating with me with canned psychobabble whenever I disagreed. 'Who's the gay here, him or me?' I wondered (Steve).

Asked why straights would try to "out-gay" him, the respondent shrugged:

San Francisco is full of weirdos. I guess blacks feel this way when confronted by those eager sycophants of tolerance, the young, white, college-degree experts on rap music or jazz (Steve).

Another respondent was not so sanguine. He saw "out-gaying" as "masking arrogant attempts to wrest the meanings of important aspects of identity and community from gay people" (Steve). Such occurrences have become more common as confidential information

about gays and their communities have been "attached" by the media as newsworthy and by researchers as scholarly issues.

In general, the respondents felt their chances for career advancement to positions of top responsibility and status in big business were small. They were convinced that they could, and did, compete on merit for positions in middle and upper management. But at the highest levels candidates were selected on the basis of intangibles and at the personal pleasure of corporate presidents and boards of directors. There was no way to demonstrate discrimination in such rarified selection processes, nor did the respondents who were contenders wish to do so — they did not wish scandal upon a company that, with the exception of its top billets, had treated them so well.

The respondents whose success depended upon the goodwill of a predominantly straight audience — (or clientele or customer base), e.g., actors, corporate executives, entertainers, politicians, religious, and teachers — considered high educational attainment, fame, or wealth ineffective in opening up high-visibility positions to men who were "too obvious" or "outspoken" about their homosexuality. Consequently, the respondents in such "sensitive" positions had to confront the possibility that exposure would end their careers or severely limit their careers by "typecasting" (that is, their work would be stereotyped and stigmatized as with the prefix "gay," e.g., gay actor, gay businessman, etc.). The "open secret," in which their gayness was tacitly accepted but not publicly declaimed — a *quasi-closet* — was considered an acceptable way to handle their gayness. The quasi-closeted respondent was out to his employers but did not discuss his sexuality with his

company's customers; or out to his colleagues but not to his students; or out to fellow professionals but not to his clients.

The respondents did not criticize themselves or others if they left their hometown in a state of ignorance about their gayness — parents, relatives, and childhood friends, especially if rural, might be spared unnecessary pain. The respondents not native to San Francisco said that if they had remained in their small hometowns, they would have had to maintain a low profile gay lifestyle. Their closeting, to paraphrase Becker (1963), was the result of a fear of the consequences of labeling processes instigated by "moral entrepreneurs" that would place them in circumstances which make it harder for [them] to continue the normal routines of everyday life:

No wonder I stayed in the closet so long, pretending desperately to be what I was not. I stayed to protect the people I loved, to maintain my career, and to support and sustain my family. When I got desperate, I would go out alone, frightened to death, for desperate, sleazy sex in public toilets, bathhouses, and alleys. That's all I knew about being gay then (Dennis).

On the other hand, closeted San Francisco gays were a problem. Their false consciousness made them "walking bombs" whose inner conflicts would surely destroy other gay men:

Closeted people often haunt the periphery of the gay community, making friends with gays, then dump them when they become "too intimate" (Neil).

And besides, in San Francisco, if the closeting was attempted, it wouldn't work anyway.

The City's top corporate executives were too "wise in the ways of men" to be fooled:

I guess even in San Francisco gay men take the "don't ask, don't tell" approach with their managers and supervisors. If you're a low-level employee or socialize very little with your management it probably doesn't matter. In any event, most gay men confide in the coworkers who they count as personal friends. Clients of mine who are managers have come out at work, taken their lovers to company events, and otherwise integrated their personal and professional lives, and they tell me they haven't suffered for it. To any gay man who aspires to the pinnacle of achievement in his company and thinks the closet is the answer I have this

advice: The higher up the corporate ladder you go, the more important personal chemistry is in determining who will get the offers for the top jobs. At the highest levels, if you're hiding something, depend on it, it gets noticed (Marc).

Therefore, San Francisco gay men must not engage in closeting, regardless of the consequences. The only acceptable alternative was total disengagement from a vulnerable situation, which is what this respondent did:

When I taught in a public school I felt it was necessary to be in the closet to work. Even in San Francisco, many parents disapprove of gay teachers and, despite their liberal posture, so do school district administrators and some of the members of the Board of Education. I stopped teaching after four years because I couldn't deal with pretending to be straight and working for a hypocritical system which discriminated against me (Tom M).

2. The Straight Denial of Homosexuality:

Many of the respondents found that straight people did not want to know about their sexuality, a sort of natural camouflaging.

Straights *aren't* uncomfortable with gay men, they just think our lives are irrelevant to theirs. Or maybe they're *so* uncomfortable with homosexuality that pretending disinterest is preferable to actually thinking about it or discussing it. Our existence is no longer the question. It's that most people would rather not have it in their homes, neighborhoods, or daily papers. It's our integration into the world at large that scares them (Neil).

One common example of natural closeting is the appropriation by straights of gay signs and symbols. In San Francisco, both gay and straight men affect such adornments as studs (single earrings worn on the left or right ear), colored bandannas, and keys. This makes closeting and information management easier. Another example were heterosexuals who said that all their friends — or members of their church or profession — were unquestionably heterosexual. Such people are blind to all but the most blatant, stereotypic images, which made it hard for them to talk about gay men, let alone communicate with them:

Most straights find it awkward to talk about gays; they haven't the vocabulary or it's limited to gross epithets. If they can't talk about them, you know they don't see them. They're embarrassed to talk about a guy having a boyfriend in ways they wouldn't be if they were talking about his girlfriend (Joshua).

This peculiar perceptual deficit of heterosexuals, essentially the rigid stereotyping of gays as flamboyantly effeminate, made closeting very easy:

Drag queens and effeminate men are blamed for giving the gay community a bad name. I'm grateful to them; they make being closeted simple because straights want to believe gays are very different from them (Anthony).

Since the San Francisco gay male image is masculine, actions, clothing, language, gestures, and mannerisms that broadcast stereotypic gay flamboyance effeminacy are rare. On the other hand, there is recognizable similarity, a "kind of Tweedledum and Tweedledee sameness," to Castro area clones and South of Market leathermen. This subscription to the same costuming, a mark of shared community as well as style, pegged men who dressed in certain ways as gay, especially if they were situated near a well-known gay area.

The heavy stereotyping of gays means that slips of the tongue and social gaffes that might suggest gayness are less likely to be damaging if the person is in other respects "straight-acting, straight-appearing." For example, when a conventionally straight-looking respondent accidentally dropped his cover, a nongay friend made excuses for him, saying:

Well, you're straighter than a lot of gays I know, so it's okay (Anthony).

In this regard, the habit of gay men to "camp it up" among themselves occasionally leads to embarrassing slips in public. One of the respondents, concerned he might so slip, closeted himself by not socializing with work-related audiences:

When I'm at a bar, I greet some of my oldest friends with an "Hey, girlfriend!" If I'm really in my cups, I'll camp it up and dish shamelessly. Not to mention giggle. But my straight acquaintances think I'm a prude and teetotaler! I never go to office parties. I just won't permit myself an opportunity to slip (Charles).

Another kind of invisibility, or natural closeting, occurs in international crossroads such as San Francisco, where residents strive to maintain the image of cosmopolitan sophisticates. Such a social posture makes overt discrimination a divisive and counterproductive event (but, if the discrimination is subtle and cloaked in legalese or medicalese, not an impossible event):

Liberal San Francisco heterosexuals are affronted if they are confessed to like moral judges. At the same time, San Francisco conservatives treat homosexuality as a troublesome and unwelcome complication of their lives that probably requires them to take a moral stand, with which some of their more liberal friends will either be uncomfortable or take umbrage. All find it more entertaining to voice suspicions and to gossip about the evidence for their inferences rather than deal with unadorned reality. Facts are dull, unless of course they are about catastrophes or the doings of famous people (Rand).

The suburbs and exurbs of San Francisco are bastions of conservative politics. But even as the residents of these outlying areas discriminate against gays in the name of "family values," they fear and resent the advancement of their civil rights in San Francisco, because it exposes the falseness of their own posturing as tolerant, sophisticated men and women (many exurbanites to San Francisco for work and snobbishly affect its cosmopolitan values at home).

My brother, a real fundamentalist, in what was for him no doubt a profound act of charity, told me, "You don't have to tell me you're gay. I've known it for years. I don't think much about it, you know? You're my brother to me. Gay might be what you do, but it isn't who you are." Can you believe it? Gay is what I do, but not who I am! (John).

3. Negative Gay Identity Models:

A negative reaction to the available gay male identity models or to the entire gay male community. The absence of positive role models is often the result of the fact that people who engage in only furtive acts of homosexual experimentation avoid major venues of the gay community where such role models can be found. It can also be due to igno-

rance, as when a gay person from Berkeley refuses to go to San Francisco's gay areas because "the City's gays are all depraved queens" (Jesse):

I was never happy with the excessive effeminacy, the heavy drug and alcohol use, the promiscuity, the backstabbing and catfighting, the gossip and the dishing, the internalized homophobia, and the need to pretend (Jesse).

Many Latinos think gay men want to be women — that they are women in men's bodies so to speak. And many unhappy, confused gay Latino kids take this stereotype literally and try to get as close to being women as finances and opportunities allow. Some go into female impersonation, an art form that flourishes in the Cuban ghettos of South Florida. Others go the whole route, becoming genital females through hormone treatments and surgery. Many of these saw a sex change as the only alternative to suicide. They should not be confused with true transsexuals, people who know what they wanted and usually got it (Jorge).

4. Gay Standards of Youth and Male Body Image:

Feelings of inadequacy about body image and the narrowing of opportunities for interaction as compared with those whose body image is closer to the gay standard of male beauty and youth. Such feelings are due to the coercive standards of male beauty within the gay community. The respondents learned to their consternation that, in spite of themselves, their feelings of physical adequacy mirrored (another example of Cooley's "Looking-Glass Self") how others felt about their bodies. It was easy to criticize the gay stereotypes that occurred in the dominant heterosexual society. But the gay community itself creates even more coercive stereotypes of gayness. One respondent's comments particularly reflects the effect of the rigidity of body image that was manifested throughout the gay community:

It hurts me to remember the ways I hid my body. It couldn't measure up to the images of male beauty pictured in the gay glossies. I wasn't smooth, or tanned, or have a "swimmer's build." I was hairy, pale, and overweight. I couldn't bring myself to wear shorts or go to the beach, and I always showered before or after others at the gym" (Mark).

A few of the respondents tried to escape the gay standards of male beauty, masculinity, and style, that they saw as "homosexual sexism" (Tom). One respondent, who had been heterosexually married, escaped to the company of women who, while they were not sexually attractive, were more accepting and who made him feel "more normal":

I often prefer the company of women to men. When I am with them, I am much more comfortable with myself. I don't have to worry if I am attractive enough, or masculine enough (Donald).

5. The Chronological Age of the Respondents:

When the respondents were children, they instinctively withdrew from the scrutiny of, and interaction with, significant others (usually parents and bullying peers) if they were taken to task for gender-inappropriate behavior or labeled with terms like "sissy," "queer," and "faggot." The sexual connotations of these epithets was only dimly understood, if at all, but they were greatly feared. It may be inappropriate to apply the concept of closeting, which implies the ability to construct images of the self as seen by others and to plan a strategy of information management, to childhood.

It was as adolescents that the majority of the respondents began to identify their sexual desires as homosexual. They needed the name of the concept that described, and gave meaning to, their attractions to, infatuations with, or sexual experiments with, other boys; their inability to find a girlfriend; their crushes on "straight" friends or male teachers; their greater erotic response to pictures of nude males than to nude females; and their fantasies of same-sex activity while masturbating or when involved in heterosexual activity:

I found out a long time ago that I was gay. When I was a teenager I realized it when I went to a bowling alley and saw good-looking guys in front of me bending down and bowling. Also I

had this incredible crush on a girlfriend's ex-boyfriend. I kept fighting with her to go back to him so that I could see him around. I wasn't having any sex with him. It was this strong feeling towards other men that made up my mind I was gay (Neil).

Finally, an event — perhaps they were told by peers (sometimes a female) that they acted or looked gay — or reading habits that led them to a book with a homosexual theme, crystallized and personalized the concept into the label "gay" so that for the first time they realized that they were gay.

And it was as adolescents that the respondents first came to understand the profound contempt in which they were held by a hostile heterosexually dominated society. They realized that their entire life might be spent coming to terms with this rejection and that they would have to greatly refine their methods of information management if their careers as adults were not to suffer.

Adolescents frequently endowed significant others with a prying omniscience. One of them (Anthony) recalled believing:

My mother, sister, and brother could read my sexual fantasies. They acted as if they could see me masturbating through the walls of my bedroom (Anthony).

Such feelings occasionally matured into a persistent suspicion that others possessed an infallible power to divine homosexual desire. This led to a characteristic, nagging fear:

I have to guard the way I look at guys. The way I feel when I look at them must be transparent. They glance at me and frown. Occasionally they grin. Or they grimace and move away. A few confront me and call me a faggot (Allan).

The extent to which the adolescent respondents were closeted depended upon how much they feared the consequences of significant others' knowledge about their sexuality. Some of them believed that they would be harassed if their gayness become known to their families or peers. Others believed their significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, and

peers) would be understanding. So their behavior ranged from being totally closeted to complete openness. When their openness was received with tolerance and sympathy, it nevertheless met with restrictions similar to those placed on the behavior of heterosexual adolescent males.

Those respondents who feared the reactions of significant others to their sexual orientation, or whose confidences were met with intolerance, systematically attempted to hide or mask their gayness by "lying a lot." In managing the information others had about them, these respondents were extremely self-conscious about the masculinity of what they said and did, and constantly monitored the success of their information management by being alert to the opinion of those around them:

I tried to be "Mr. Macho" so that I could fool my friends and be accepted. If I let down my guard and acted like myself, they would tell me, with a smirk for starters, that I looked -- or acted, or talked, whatever - like a faggot (Harry).

Their tactics did not always work:

When I started high school I tried to play the "Mr. Macho" role. But people were asking if I was gay after the first month, and in almost all of my classes, it was the topic of conversation. It wasn't as bad as it was in junior high, but I still felt bad. Even my mother hassled me: When I started dressing differently and wearing my hair in a pony-tail, she yelled, "*Te pareses a un pato!*" which means, "You look like a faggot!" I couldn't seem to fool anyone so I tried even harder to change myself. And that made me feel worse -- I was trying to get rid of my feelings and change the true person I am (Jorge).

The respondents found that controlling sexual desire became increasingly difficult with age. While the intensity of youth often permitted them to suppress their sexual desires in work or studies, the relative loneliness of adulthood and a seemingly implacable need for intimacy confounded their attempts to keep their relationships with other men nonsexual. The adult closet was characterized by refined, systematic attempts to pass as straight, some of which were learned in adolescence. The list of strategies employed in passing is a

long one: Avoiding or deflecting discussion of their private lives with certain audiences; bringing female (sometimes lesbian) companions to heterosexual social functions; fronting a heterosexual marriage and raising a family. Two of the respondents tried to stifle their homosexual desires by "social" heterosexual activity, including marriage. One of them said:

I always knew I was gay, though my friends weren't and we all played around with chicks. But when my buddies and I graduated from high school and they started getting married, I figured I'd better too, so we'd have something in common. I married a girlfriend who was hot for me, even after I told her I was gay. The marriage didn't last a year. But I found that being divorced allowed me to run around with gays and straights (Donald).

The greatest fear of the respondents, all of whom struggled to remain attractive after a certain age, were the inexorable changes in body image due to aging: thinning hair, loss of body tone, and obesity. These stigmata could be defended against, at least for a time, with greater effort and more time at a gym, crash diets, the strategic use of cosmetics, and youthful styles of clothing. These fears were exacerbated for the respondents who were athletes, dancers, flight attendants, and models; whose identity problems were burdened by dietary fads and sometimes by drugs. When the respondents perceived their body image negatively, they lost control over their interactions, which in turn profoundly damaged their gay identity, often forcibly closeting them. It was clear that aging could be as cruel for gay men as it could be for heterosexual women.

As they aged out of their twenties and thirties, the respondents were concerned that they had a limited future as sexy, beautiful, and healthy men (the gay equivalent of *normal*) unless they found a way to *pass* as younger. Even a droll sense of humor could not mask the fear of aging:

See these overhead spots? I look like a teenager under a pink gel. I'm going to kill myself when I reach thirty-five. It's the gay menopause. I like the quote, "Live hard, die young, and leave a beautiful corpse" (Christopher).

The more pessimistic of the respondents saw a future in which their opportunities for interactions constrained and narrowed with age and were doubtful they could be expanded, since the values which led to their anomie were internalized and central to the maintenance of their identities. They worried about being thrust into the same involuntary closet in the same way that aging women are cast by straight men and that they would end their lives bitter, solitary, and lonely. Eventually, shame at the deterioration of body image led to "cocooning," staying at home to watch TV, entertain a shrinking circle of friends, and face an narrowing of their interactional possibilities. Their relationship to the closet had come full circle: abandoned after coming out, began to appear attractive again, even inevitable. One older respondent found it difficult to think of himself as gay any longer.

After sixty, I didn't concern myself with gay issues any more; how can an older man be gay, in any sense of the word (Charles)?

It was with adulthood that the respondents realized that their would probably always be spheres of their lives they would have to conceal and thus compromise their identities.

So many of us have grown up hiding that we have a dual persona, a kind of schizophrenia. It's like wearing a mask, taking it on and off. I sometimes despair of gay life (Carlos).

C. THE DIMENSIONS OF CLOSETING:

The great energy that the respondents put into their period of closeting is a clear indication of the degree of stigma attached to effeminacy, let alone homosexuality, among American males. It is also an indication of some of the compelling aspects of closeting: the

exciting risks associated with managing information about one's homosexuality to disparate audiences, the thrills and danger of secret sexual adventures and experiments, and the close calls and escapes from moral entrepreneurs. Most of the respondents were closeted before they came to San Francisco; it is of that period of their lives that this chapter speaks.

The respondents' closeting was always instrumental, that is, it served some end (Schneider and Conrad, 1983). Closeting permitted them to avoid the negative consequences of being known as gay by prejudiced audiences and to interact freely with tolerant audiences while enjoying, with all audiences, what they saw as the advantages of the privileged heterosexual segments of American society. Thus closeting involved managing the presentation of, and access to, information about the self to different audiences. The respondents, during their closeting, used many strategies and tactics in their attempts to control the way information about their sexuality was presented to select audiences:

1. The Revolving Closet Door:

Some of the respondents engaged, and then — when the audiences that came to know of their gayness — withdrew from all interactions. This systematic engagement and withdrawal was called a "revolving closet door." If the respondents' sexuality was discovered or became a problem in a certain context, they would withdraw from the troublesome audience (not always permanently, but until the people who had known them had disappeared) and turn their attention to other audiences or activities, perhaps their studies or career. Later, after locating a new audience in which they were unknown, they would join it free of any of their old entanglements and labels.

I was pretty open about being gay in high school. Then when I got to college I was right back in the closet. In fact, I was dating girls and almost got married. I was so mixed up that my closet had a revolving door on it. I was out to a few of my friends, then not to others, then denying it, then being an activist. When tricking was fun, I was out; but if I had too many problems with my boyfriends or was bored with them, I chilled out. It took my relationship with my lover to finally get it all together" (John).

This ongoing pattern of engagement and withdrawal is one of the closet's most fascinating dimensions. It may express some of the repetitions and cycles that are part of identity construction (and, later, identity maintenance). Stasis is as impossible in the closet as it is in the persistence of identity.

Often, the problematic morals of being closeted to one audience were offset by being out to other audiences. For example:

There are well-know gay guys who use a pen name when writing for gay publications. They live the peaceful life in the suburbs. What is surprising is that these suburbs are near San Francisco, like Concord, Fremont, Sonoma, and Contra Costa, where fundamentalists and ultraconservatives are strong (Neil).

2. Deflection:

A popular information management strategy — and a clear-cut application of the looking glass metaphor — consisted of not revealing anything of a personal nature to others and thus avoid or *deflect* all attempts at a discussion of private affairs. In this regard, self-imposed isolation was the maximal tactic. Short of that, a few of the respondents preferred to keep certain audiences in the dark about important personal issues; they realized that their reservation would probably be noticed, affront, and thereby "alter the balance of power between me and others" (Jack). Therefore, all avoidance and deflection tactics are inherently risky unless the relevant audiences wish to ignore the basic issue of homosexuality.

The respondents could often make do with simple methods of information management involving selective disclosures to, and the emergence of *systematically developed personae* appropriate for, given audiences:

When I was in the closet I maintained an image. I was careful to refrain from public displays of affection, of reading or leaving gay magazines in the sight of visiting relatives, and from camping it up in front of breeders. If anybody straight was to visit me, I would mess up the two beds in my apartment so that visitors wouldn't know my roommate and I were lovers. I didn't subscribe to gay publications for fear of what other people in my apartment building might think. And I moved across the country to San Francisco so that my family would never hear about my lifestyle or friends (Joshua).

One day I might be a sensitive, isolated dreamer; the next, a team player; later, a know-it-all (Rand).

Trying to *compose the face* like a mask ("poker face") to hide feelings, looking away, looking out of the corners of the eyes, or otherwise being "cool," unapproachable, and inscrutable was another simple tactic:

When I was a teenager I learned to look away quickly when I was aroused by a guy. I didn't want to be outed by my stare. While other guys were ogling females and wisecracking about their merits, I pretended not to notice. But when I admired another guy's thighs or butt, I couldn't point or smile, let alone share my feelings with someone. Instead, I forced myself to look in the other direction and to think of other things (Neil).

This tactic was at best risky and a worst futile because it could be noticed and interpreted as nervousness or guilt at hiding something. If composing the face was not itself noticed, it might be sabotaged by involuntary actions such as "blurting confidences" or blushing.

Another elementary information management tactic was the *deflection* of questions about sexuality (for example, "Who's your girlfriend?" or "Why aren't you dating?") by engaging in time-consuming activities or fabricating affairs that implied heterosexuality:

When I was studying for my doctorate I was about 23. Life was unreal. I was immersed totally in this scholastic environment. I was taking five demanding classes and seminars a quarter. I told myself that I didn't have time for relationships. I had goals (Peter).

By 1984, I was working on three film projects. I suppose it's simplistic to say that I was taking on far more work than I could handle in order to divert myself from my homosexual longings. Anyway, I loved my work and found it gratifying. Whatever my motives, I was a resounding success (Brian).

Work was always a good excuse. The time it took me to do obvious work — weekend gigs, classes at UC, music lessons, practice — was a made-to-order excuse for my lack of girlfriends (John Z.).

An interesting type of deflection took the form of a *categorizing same-sex acts into those that were performed only by homosexual actors and those that were not*:

I never went down on him," Bruce told me. A familiar attitude. I had it once. I could have sex with as many men as I wanted, but if I remained passive, I wasn't queer, I was only getting my rocks off. With me it was the movies on Jones Street. A blowjob for a man was as easy to get as popcorn. all that time, I told myself I was straight and could stop anytime I wanted. But the thing is, I never wanted to. For two years. Until I became the blower (Anthony).

Two of the respondents' experiences of closeting involved appeals for the emotional support of others to mitigate the identity confusion and brooding that is a great part of closeting. This process of deflection may involve actual solicitation of advice about homosexual desires, with the result that the closeted respondent is treated tenderly as a person — struggling against the temptations that befall sensitives who live in a godless society — whose soul hangs in the balance:

The agony of my closet days at university, when I saw myself as a straight boy struggling against homosexual desires, was eased by a number of influences: the comforting presence of God's loving spirit on those long walks into Strawberry Canyon where I would meet other men walking alone on the more secluded trails, exchange brief searching glances, and hurry on; a schedule so full I had no time to mope; compassionate faculty members who invited me into their homes for dinner, who took me skiing or hiking, and who let me invade their privacy and fill up their spare hours with my endless doubts and questions; and my family's unconditional support (Jim).

One respondent, whose desire to become a minister was well-known to his straight audiences, deflected attention from his homosexuality by feigning religious scruples in order to justify his lack of contact with females and to limit interactions with them to the

nonsexual. In this regard, very religious and moral females were preferred as companions. Other mainstreaming tactics mentioned by the respondents were: pretending to be asexual or bisexual; dating females to avoid standing out; covering a lack of interest in female companionship with extra-curricular activities, studies and sports; attempting a heterosexual engagement or marriage, either to deceive others or in the hope that being married would "cure" the person of his homosexual tendencies; and appearing with "hired" female companions at social functions.

The parallel existence (really, *coexistence*) of these personae, some public, some private, all had compartmentalized social and behavioral characteristics linked to public and private appearances. When one of these identities was enacted, the others were suspended; the identity at the fore being context specific. From the perspective of the respondent, each of these parallel identities had its audience: There was the large, public audiences of people known and unknown who were ignorant of the respondent's homosexuality. And, assuming some interpersonal homosexual interaction, managed audiences who knew or suspected that the respondent was gay. Conflicts and resentment could and did arise among those who knew and those who did not. The respondents might react to the potential consequences of such conflicts by isolating themselves. Occasionally, they discovered that their fears were unfounded:

I wasted a lot of effort and energy monitoring my actions before people for whom my sexual preference was a non-issue. These efforts led to behavior that itself became the subject of gossip (Allan).

In spite of conflicts and despite the enactment of multiple identities and lifestyles, the closeted respondents experienced themselves as a unity, i.e., the differences in their

personae before different audiences were integrated and bridged into a unified sense of self over time.

In managing such a complex series of presentations of self, the respondents were constantly alert to the opinions of the audiences they staged themselves before. When friends or relations ostensibly ignorant of their sexuality should visit them in San Francisco, *temporary passing* was in order: the respondents dressed conservatively, avoided displays of same-sex affection, warned friends about "camping it up" in the presence of their visitors, hid their gay-oriented publications, and messed up their roommate's bed so that it appeared slept in.

Even in the best of circumstances, they learned to share personal information with discretion and tact, so that they could avoid unexpected homophobic responses:

Being gay, I am cautious of sharing my problems with other people. I say to myself: 'You've got to watch yourself. Nobody wants to hear a faggot's problems.' So to avoid trouble, I just keep my mouth shut. I listen to straight friends and acquaintances talk about their relationships, feelings, and fears; I listen and give what I hope is sincere, good advice. I never talk about my personal problems in any but the most general terms, no names or sexes. In short, I take the trivial problems of straights more seriously than I do my important concerns about being gay. I still gloss over how hypocritical this behavior is (Jack).

3. Sexual Experimenters and Homosexual Flings:

Another tactic, less frequently employed because of the consummate roleplaying skills necessary to bring it off, is blatant obviousness. Four of the respondents demonstrated how bold a person can be while being closeted. The first, a writer, found he could deflect attention from his homosexuality by presenting his homosexual activities as not especially discrediting "escapades" or "follies." He played the role of obvious nonconformist, sexual experimenter, or bisexual. He maintained an unchallenged heterosexual

status while publicly indulging in what he depicted as "rebellious homosexual flings" and "sexual experiments" (Peter).

The second, a college student, told his friends he was "experimenting with gay sexuality as a participant observer" (Mark). He legitimated his experiences by writing about them in papers for his social science classes. The third escaped stigmatization by claiming to be a bisexual, although he had no sex with women, because that was more acceptable to the sensibilities of his straight friends than an outright homosexual role. The fourth, an older respondent who preferred the company of young men, desired to forget his otherwise dreary life, sought to avoid the company of the women of his generation, and was nostalgic for the male bonding of his undergraduate years in a fraternity, justified his new young gay friends to his old straight ones by saying he "wanted to be cosmopolitan and see what gays were really like" (Charles).

4. Mainstreaming, Cooptation, and Assimilation:

Mainstreaming, or ostentatiously displaying certain dimensions of the lifestyle of middle-class straights in order to minimize differences and maximize tolerance. This is a relatively permanent form of closeting. This strategy is easy for those men whose studied or unstudied congruence with the American images of masculinity permit them to take enjoy the privileges of the heterosexual majority. It was problematic, especially among the politically conservative respondents, whether *mainstreaming* is a form of closeting. The activists among the respondents, typically politically liberal, asserted that since *mainstreaming* involved a public rejection of certain subgroups of the gay community, it was closeting; the moderates were equivocal; and the conservatives asserted it was not

closeting. The conservatives considered mainstreaming a form of *normalization* (Scambler, 1984), i.e., a minimization of *non-essential differences* that gave rise to stigma — hence a viable political strategy.

Mainstreaming is the central issue in conflicts about whether to include "gay" or "lesbian" in the name of a gay group:

Most vote against inclusion because it would be better for the organization now because gay law students' groups serve as a way for closeted men to get involved in the movement. Having 'gay' in the organization's name might scare these people off (Rand).

The concept of mainstreaming also covers cases of the self-censorship of homosexual themes from personal works. For example, the respondents who were filmmakers or playwrights were well aware that works with scenes involving homosexual intimacy, or gay characters who were not stereotypic (i.e., who were not portrayed as drag queens, pederasts, sado-masochists, or as effeminate), were taboo to producers and could not secure financing. These respondents said that the few gay actors willing to play homosexual men were discouraged from doing so by their often closeted managers. In this regard, there appears to be no criticism of the performance of gay characters by straights, any more than there is criticism of straight expertise on gay matters. So a subtle form of mainstreaming was to cast homosexual characters with heterosexuals with unimpeachable credentials. Another reason that casting straights in gay roles succeeds is that audiences are believed to prefer non-gays in gay roles, the folk wisdom being that they can then discount the reality of the performance and thus insulate their sexual mores from an unwelcome challenge.

There is little doubt that comedians serve as a bellwether of the prejudices as well as the tolerance of the American public. As an avocation if not an occupation, gay stand-up comics who use gay material are increasing, at least in San Francisco. They find non-gay audiences sensitive to gay-themed material, but the expression of prejudice is persistent and oblique — often taking the form of "it's okay to be gay, but why must you tell us about it" (Tom) — another instance of the general predisposition of heterosexual audiences to remain ignorant of all the manifestations of homosexuality around them.

Unlike black comics who sometimes make fun of blacks in front of racially mixed audiences — I'm thinking of Richard Pryor — gay comics have a problem with "reinforcing stereotypes in front of straights." Additionally, there are aspects of gay life that gay comics are reluctant to satirize for fear of aggravating anti-gay AIDS prejudice (Tom).

Cooptation occurs when gay people are lured into supporting the political *status quo* of the heterosexual moral majority through the offer of power and privilege was closeting. While the respondents universally held cooptation to be closeting, it was problematic whether *assimilation*, a strategy that seeks to gain recognition of individual gays as members of a disenfranchised minority and so to win civil rights under the law is a form of closeting. This homophile and early post-Stonewall strategy is based on the supposition that gay stereotypes (like racial stereotypes) are responsible for gay visibility, hence anti-gay discrimination and prejudice. Several respondents felt that assimilationism is more threatening to straights than conforming to a stereotype since "straights are more frightened by gay men who look like them than if they are recognizably different" (Neil).

5. Tactical Closeting:

The essence of tactical closeting is its temporary nature. Occasionally an activist respondent would visit a city where the agents of social control had forced gay institutions

underground and there were no known allies. Attempts by the respondents to come out in such areas — even if they scrupulously observed the expected gender-specific behavior of males — were treated as being part of "an insidious conspiracy to destroy fabric of American society" (Peter). In such a case, the respondent would typically "go underground" until he had obtained the support of local sympathizers, outlying gay communities, or national gay organizations. Indeed, not far outside the boundaries of San Francisco — in the suburbs and exurbs of the Bay Area — the tolerance for homosexuals diminishes considerably. The respondents' friends had warned them that people who "look gay" in these areas are shunned or bashed. But there was a simple formula for closeting: "Look straight; act straight: grunge is in" (Rand). The same need to temporarily closet to study local norms applies to dramatic changes of environment, for example, leaving hometown for college or migrating to a new (but relatively unknown) area of the country.

I'm not the first gay activist to put on straight drag in the line of duty. In 1988, in order to gain entry into a rally for Dan Quayle, who was stumping for Bush, I found Oxfords and khaki enough to make it through. In Oregon in 1992, where a number of local anti-gay ordinances have passed and voters have repealed antidiscrimination laws, I saw a poster that read "Death Penalty for Homosexuals." I wore straight drag there too. I made it to many anti-gay meetings undetected. I sat in the back and listened, noting their familiar strategy of stealth and scare tactics. An demagogic speaker capped the meeting by warning parents, "Gays don't want us. They want our children" (Neil).

6. Coming Out to the Self:

During the later stages of closeting, a *pre-socialization process* called coming out to the self occurs. This process involves a sometimes protracted private coming to terms with homosexual desires and culminates in self-recognition as gay. There is often an initial denial of homosexuality together with attempts to suppress homoerotic desires and fantasies. There may be a period of bargaining with the self by trying to develop romantic

and sexual feelings with females, by seeking counseling, or using religion to block feelings. This intensely private act was a prerequisite for the respondents' public coming out and invariably took the form of a subjective soliloquy that preceded, and was a rehearsal for, the public debut of their gay identities (this public debut is called *coming out*, to be discussed in the next chapter). This period of self-realization was a time of procrastination, soul-searching, and marshaling of courage. A feeling of inadequacy, of not being able to handle the problems associated with being gay led to considerable procrastination in coming out. A careful enumeration of all allies who would abet their public debut as gay and aid them in accepting the changes in personal and public identities that followed as a consequence speeded up the respondents' coming out.

During this period of coming out to the self, the respondents' continued their search for others like themselves begun when they discovered they were "different." To find these others they sought information about the gay community from the gay and straight media; medical, scholarly, and scientific texts; fiction and plays with gay themes; popular music, pornography; and gossip or conversation. Escalating the risks of compromising their information management strategies, the respondents sought gay institutions where they could try out alternative sexual identities before new audiences, experiment with new forms of intimacy, locate supportive people, assess the risks of retribution and discrimination, and explore the social worlds in which they could find sexual freedom. When the respondents succeeded in finding places to do this, they were poised to ascend the next rung of the "Ladder of Risk":

I found places where there was no need to pretend to be straight. No need to fake anything at all in the dives in San Francisco where I played piano on weekends. No one cared what I did

as long as I the audience liked me. At home in Berkeley I was still Mom's pride and joy, studying music at UC and practicing every spare moment. But on the weekends I abandoned all such pretense at the bars where I played (John Z.).

In their attempts at sexual experimenting, a few of the respondents found themselves unable to take engage in homosexual intimacy. This was due to a performance anxiety, they decided in retrospect.

I felt I had to be hot in bed. I had the image of the passionate [Puerto] Rican to maintain (Jorge).

This respondent's performance anxiety was fueled by the ethnic myth that Latino men are masculine and passionate lovers. Other cases were traced to the unrealistic media images of the hot, virile, endowed gay men portrayed in pornography and more generally, in the gay media. Still other cases were traced to a fear of non-aggressive sexual intimacy, that is warmth and affection.

I really like to kiss and cuddle. But it's hard to ask that of a someone you've taken home for the first time, and who's undoubtedly waiting for some hot, assertive sex and macho poking (Allen).

All the cases can be seen as conflicts between the respondent's image of himself and what he perceived as the instinctive risks and risk-taking required (as evidenced by the frequent use of the word "hot") of his new gay lifestyle. The respondents' performance anxiety led to groping, unsystematic, socially inept attempts to find a satisfying sexual experience that left in their wake many unresolved, unconsummated, and abruptly terminated crushes and affairs with other men. In one case, the respondents felt that their anxiety derived from other people being able to see through their actions to the desires that motivated them, but refused to satisfy them in order to manipulate them to their selfish ends.

D. CONSEQUENCE OF CLOSETING:

1. Shared Beliefs About Closeting:

Analysis of respondent interviews demonstrated the vagueness of the boundaries of the closet and indicated that such boundaries were related to the respondents' personal agenda for closeting, i.e., his strategies for information management and his tactics for implementing these strategies. Since each respondent's closeting proved to be a highly privatized, idiosyncratic process, there were as many boundaries of the closet as there were respondents. Yet there were shared beliefs about the nature of closeting:

The first shared belief was that closeting erodes the ability to communicate. To interact constructively with other gay men, a person has to be open about his gayness. Otherwise, he cannot identify other gays, achieve unobstructed communication with them, or make the important discovery that he is not alone. Too lengthy a closeting might result in unhappiness, alienation, and a rejection of all but the most superficial human contacts, both gay and straight. If and when a person who has been closeted an extended period of time decided to come out, it often proved difficult to relate comfortably with other gay men. A long period of closeting also lowered the respondents' participation in the gay community and portended a protracted conflict with, and a resistance to, the socialization processes of the gay community.

The second shared belief was that covert sexuality undermines itself. The closeted person's covert, furtive, sporadic, and non-systematic cruising and the strain of maintaining the facade of passing eventually sabotages information management. This happens because the person's guilt and shame escalates risky activities until the person's behavior

becomes so flagrant that even deep underground activities become visible. One respondent described his recurring need while deeply closeted to contact other bodies in the flesh.

This need was a very demanding one:

Lying alone in front of the TV one night I decided that no matter how dangerous it was, I had to go out to pick up someone. Watching porn videos was making me incredibly restless and excited. So I put on my jeans, t-shirt, and leather boots and I went to a bar on Castro. I just knew I would meet someone; being psyched up on porn is a high that makes me into an interesting and sexy person. I was right (John).

Attempts to control these impulses to "get sex" and thereby "deny instinctive needs" gave rise to a sense of being tough and self-disciplined:

David turned out to be straight. Nevertheless, as our friendship grew, I spent many nights with him, lying awake, watching him sleep, longing to hold him. And although they were long, miserable nights, I learned to discipline my adolescent desires while I was lying there. Those were my training days, my boot camp for the lifetime of conflict that awaits all gay men (Anthony).

This belief of having firm control of the self, of being able to maintain an invulnerable closet, occasionally proved illusory. It was at such times that caution was abandoned and the public visibility of actions increased dramatically.

The third shared belief was that closeting is a dynamic process in which personal growth is possible. Because of this fact, it is not too strong an assertion to state that *closeting is a necessary condition for coming out and is a necessary prelude to the emergence of the gay identities*. Closeting is a period of introspection, decision making, and solitude during which the energy for personal transformation is created. Since the decision to come out is made during closeting, it can never be a fully informed decision:

Living blind to reality has its drawbacks but also its rewards. While I was cut off from the rewards of open communication with other gay men, I was also blind to the deadly forms of homophobia. In this state of ignorance, I gained the confidence to come out. I was like a kid who decides to become a soldier. So he joins the Army. But he isn't a soldier until he's been tested in battle. Probably the kid would never have joined the Army if he had known what

battle was like. But once blooded, he can never regain the innocence he once had; he's a soldier for life (Rand).

For all the respondents, the closet served as a crucible for their emotions, firing and tempering within them a determination to bear witness to their sexual orientation. The experience of closeted isolation midwifed a stronger sense of their own identity and gave them an enduring sense of the importance of intimacy with other gay men and of a community of shared values:

I arrived in San Francisco a closeted refugee from the intolerant Midwest. I began to explore the Castro area bars and meet other gay men. I was reassured that what I had thought was important to me when I decided to come here would always be important to me. Beginning a new life, I discovered that I myself was my life; it had not occurred to me before; and now I knew it. It was a second birth (Tom).

2. The Habituation of Disguise:

The ability to effortlessly and instinctively assume a mask that made them appear less threatening to others than their stigma otherwise warranted was to become a major dimension of the respondents' gay identities. This facility went far beyond simple, calculated information management. Rather than making a secret of an aspect of the self, it disarmed the critical faculties of others with a charming display of attitude, humor, parody, and camp in the styling their language, body image, and gestures. The way the words attitude, camp, and mask as they are used here resonate with the historical meanings given them by the founders of the pre-Stonewall gay organization Mattachine, which was named after the Mattachine troupes of the thirteenth through fifteenth century France, that consisted of flamboyant, costumed and masked buffoons, clowns, jesters who ridiculed the pretenses of society and its rulers by their critical mocking cloaked in comic antics and graceful dances (Timmons, 1990).

E. CLOSETING AFTER AIDS:

The fear of AIDS caused the respondents at all levels of identity development to modify — or to at least contemplate modifying — their behavior. Among the sexually active respondents, any reassessment and change in their lifestyle was preceded by a period of withdrawal often described as "temporarily reentering the closet" (Rand). When, after several weeks or months, they finally decided how they were going to personally respond to AIDS, they would resume their interrupted socializing after explaining themselves to others and perhaps finding new membership groups to support them in their new lifestyle.

During the 1980s, there emerged from the interview data what can be called the *suspended gay identity*, a type of situational identity (Strauss, 1959) in which some of the respondents (those who did not turn to safer sex and those who did not change their sexual behavior at all) "restrained" their pre-AIDS sexual behavior "until the time AIDS could be controlled." During this time, they felt, in the interests of survival, that they could postpone being themselves.

A typical tactic for gay identity suspension was to avoid gay sexual venues, for example, the bars or bathhouses. If gay social problems were brought up during socializing, the subject would be quickly changed. "I learned from painful experience that you couldn't really be gay like this" (Peter). During this period, migration to a more hospitable urban milieu — where AIDS was unknown — was considered. Any casual sex was engaged in covertly and with a great deal of guilt. Three quarters of the respondents turned from sexual group membership and joined groups related to their careers, political

activism, and recreation, where cooperative activities replaced intimate sexual interactions. The remainder fulfilled themselves through sexual fantasy interactions that permitted them to express their sexuality through pornography, phone sex, SM, and voyeurism. Both groups retained a symbolic membership in the pre-AIDS gay community. All these tactics were, of course, a utilitarian form of closeting. But with the 1990s, the optimism that AIDS could be controlled faded.

1. Conditions for Closeting After AIDS:

In addition to the conditions enumerated above, the AIDS epidemic caused new conditions for closeting. The respondents who were active in the gay community before the AIDS crisis were in their late twenties or older at the time of the interviews. By virtue of their age alone, they exhibited a tendency to withdraw from youth-oriented activities of all sorts and expressed a greater need for privacy and the pursuit of career. They did not consider themselves closeted. They had established circles of gay friends and a tendency to entertain privately. They contributed to gay charities but were not active in gay organizations. The younger interviewees had few opinions about such gay men; they were glad for their contributions to activist organizations and happy they did not interfere in what they too saw as a youth-oriented community.

AIDS necessitates increased privacy. The rushing reality of the AIDS epidemic created a special need for privacy among the respondents. The deaths of friends, AIDS-related discrimination, fear of intimacy, media hysteria, and above all the collapse of the myth of eternal youth - motivated the respondents to "define a private place, somewhat larger than the closet" (Peter), which permitted them to periodically renew and protect

their personal identities. Being alone enhanced reflection that in turn heightened the symbolic aspects of being gay. As a consequence of pondering about their lifestyle and community, the respondents found that their interactions with other gay men became more a mutual human exchange of meanings and values rather than simply a brief sexual intercourse. This in turn, for many respondents, magnified the importance of individualism, diminished the importance of small in-group membership, and emphasized the gay community as a whole as the basic membership group, rather than a particular bar or other cruise hangout.

The respondents with AIDS were especially sensitive to privacy issues: they suffered invasive medical procedures, inquisitive social workers, intrusive media interviews, and frantic, judgmental relatives. Their vulnerability to these intrusions, politically and medically justified by the AIDS epidemic, gives rise to a sense of oppression:

My world suddenly became crowded. Privacy no longer seemed to exist: doctors, nurses, epidemiologists, the government, and TV cameras became a voyeurs, if not a partners, to all my intimacy" (Joshua, 1986).

The respondents who tested positive for HIV or were diagnosed with AIDS desired to avoid contagion and stress. Some antibody positive respondents desired more privacy (a degree of solitude, as they put it, that was reminiscent of the closet) in order to limit stress that might activate the virus latent in their bodies. They sought to avoid the not only the pressures incidental to their lifestyles and careers, but the deliberate pressure placed on them by homophobic adversaries who, sensing their vulnerability, might wish to stress them into AIDS.

Actually, maybe I'm not that paranoid. Most people are too stupid to ever organize such a devious and nefarious variation on *Arsenic and Old Lace*. But, believe me, employers are not people! (Jack)

They therefore reentering a temporary closet to reassess the lifestyle changes necessitated by AIDS and to locate audiences that would support these changes. In general, the respondents felt a need for more privacy subsequent to AIDS than they did before AIDS.

2. The Dimensions of Closeting After AIDS:

For a time, during the 1980s, it was thought that a cure or vaccine for AIDS would be forthcoming within a decade or less. Hoping to wait out the danger, some of the respondents stopped cruising for casual sex and retained a marginal, totally symbolic membership in the gay community that effectively suspended their gay identities. This state of affairs resembled nothing so much as closeting. Their sexual experiences were limited to masturbation aided by such technological innovations as video pornography, phone sex, and modem sex.

Closeting among the respondents with HIV took various forms. One denied he had a life-threatening illness. He pretended to himself, and told others, that the medication dispensed as pills were "vitamins." Another shunned other persons with HIV in more advanced stages of than he because they were perceived as harbingers of his own future. But often the seriousness of their illness brought reality crashing down on them:

However healthy I looked, I could not rationalize away taking pentamidine and Bactrim for *pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (Paul).

Nor could they deny their illness when familiar hygiene tasks such as brushing teeth, that they had disposed of briefly when healthy, became lengthy, tedious chores.

Respondents with AIDS lesions that they could not hide found they shared the stigma not unlike that of visible roseation (birthmarks). The use of cosmetics or a deep suntan solved this problem. Heavy foundation cosmetics come in so many tints that, straight or blended, any skin color can be matched, from the palest pallor to the deepest pigmentation.

The use of cosmetics let me out of my apartment and gave me a chance to talk about something other than AIDS (Paul).

3. Consequences of Closeting After AIDS:

As the AIDS epidemic continued with no end in sight, it became clear to the respondents that there was a problem with the secrecy of the gay closet. They expressed frustration with the slow pace of gay civil rights legislation and what they perceive as the government's indifference to the AIDS epidemic. They thought that if straight America knew how many gays there really were in positions of great responsibility, their indifference to the plight of gays and to the AIDS epidemic might be changed.

Most of the respondents agreed that the code of silence that had been respected prior to the outbreak of AIDS should be renounced and that closeted entertainers, politicians, and religious should be exposed. The tactic of *outing* was one way this could be done. Outing is the intentional exposure of the sexual orientation of a closeted gay celebrity or public official whether or not he is willing to have this information made public. People are usually outed by denouncing them in the gay print media. Outing broadcasts a person's sexual lifestyle; but where a person's gayness is already publicly known but not publicly acknowledged, as in the case of an "open secret," outing disrupts the codes of silence that protected the secrecy of the person's sexual identity:

Outing is not a violation of a person's privacy, since the information that is used to establish his gayness is not gotten through spying on the person's home or bedroom, stealth, or coercion, but rather from public signs. That is, the person may have been observed to have male companions in social situations where heterosexual men are accompanied by women, be a regular at gay bars or gay pageants, or have appeared in the gay media (Rand).

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COMING OUT

CHAPTER IV

A. INTRODUCTION:

Coming out is the open acknowledgment of a person's gayness before some public. Although the respondents spoke loosely of *coming out to themselves*, we associate this process of pre-coming out with closeting. Gay computer bulletin boards, phone sex, and other technological innovations in human interaction, while they are meaningful symbolic interactions, are not face-to-face interactions.

Coming out is letting your self-recognition as gay be known to others, face-to-face (Jack).

Goffman (1963) discusses the identification with a stigmatized group as a socialization process characterized by ambivalence and affiliation cycles. W. Simon and J. A. Gagnon (1973) define coming out as both a behavioral and self-definitional event. More recently, coming out has referred to a developmental process. In the usual covert-overt model in which private experiences occur before public experiences, coming out to self and others is not simultaneous. It is typically ordered into three stages: signification or self-identification; coming out, including involvement in the gay community as well as telling heterosexual friends and co-workers; and going public by being identified as gay in the media. In this research, signification and self-identification are considered a dimension of closeting since closeted homosexuals often acknowledge that they are gay.

Coming out in the sense in which the respondents used the term is a recent phenomenon. Historically, (post-Stonewall) gay leaders in the 1970s were faced with creating a mass movement out of a group that hid from public view. The influence of the

"Black is Beautiful" rhetoric of the civil rights movement — translated by gay activist Frank Kameny into "Gay is Good" — was manifest in the importance gay liberationists placed on the affirmation of gay pride. But for gay pride to be a political awakening as well as personal transformation, gay identity needed to be publicly legitimated. According to D'Emilio (1983), the entire gay liberation movement was founded on the importance of coming out as a public as well as an individual act:

Gay liberationists ... recast coming out as a profoundly political act that could offer enormous personal benefits to the individual. The open avowal of one's sexual identity, whether at work, at school, at home, or before television cameras, symbolized the shedding of the self-hatred that gay men and women had internalized, and promised an immediate improvement in one's life. To come out of the "closet" quintessentially expressed the fusion of the personal and the political that the radicalism of the late 1960s exalted. Coming out also posed as the key strategy for building a movement Visible lesbians and gay men also served as magnets that drew others in. Furthermore, once out of the closet, they could not easily fade back in. Coming out provided gay liberation with an army of permanent enlistees.

The term "coming out" is not as popular among heterosexuals as the word "closet" is. Nevertheless, straights do "come out" in a variety of circumstances. Telling significant others of a desire for a career in the celibate priesthood, the discovery of a person's transvestitism, miscegenation, sterility, the choice of certain occupations, revealing that one has a sexually transmitted disease, changing religions, and outré marriages can all lead to significant social crises. Revelations about such things must be carefully staged; the information certain audiences have about them carefully managed. In fact, any act that causes great disappointment or shock to significant others because it flaunts their norms or sense of propriety can be grounds for a coming out experience.

A most interesting case of coming out as straight is that reported by a thirty-year-old respondent native San Franciscan who was school teacher. He recounted how, at

sixteen, he and his closest friend unproblematically came out a gay together. But after graduation from high school his friend decided that he preferred heterosexual intimacy. In a matter of fact way, he dropped his homosexual associations, "came out" as straight, and later married and raised a family. This respondent reported no problems with being different or an extended period of closeting as a teenager and, according to him, neither did his friend. While it possible his friend did experience a one-time transition from homosexual to heterosexual, it is also possible he was bisexual. (Anecdotally, bisexuals do report a serial flip-flop of their sexual orientation: periods of exclusive homosexuality alternating with periods of completely heterosexual preference.)

I had this friend in high school. We came out at the same time. Everybody had thought of him as gay, and he assumed himself to be gay. But at eighteen he "came out" as straight when he found himself sexually aroused by women and no longer by men. I think he was bisexual. Maybe he was deprogrammed. I haven't seen him for years (Paul).

Coming out usually ended the respondents' rationalizations that they might not be gay. San Francisco's very visible and powerful gay community inhibited backsliding by provided them with institutional settings where they were accepted; peers who served as identity models to be emulated; sources of information about homosexuality, the gay lifestyle, and AIDS; the services of gay community organizations; and stigma theories (Gussow and Tracy, 1968), i.e., social and historical perspectives with which to confront the doubts of potential allies in their transformation and ammunition against the rhetoric of implacable homophobes. Since a gay person is said to be closeted until he comes out, how "out" they had to be to be "politically correct" was problematic among the respondents. This problem was compounded by the fact that even after they came out the respondents

continued to manipulate awareness contexts (Strauss, 1978) and engage in highly selective closeting.

Coming out gave dramatic expression to, and was a vindication and promotion of, the experience of being different. Thus, the respondents' comings out focused on how they had changed rather than on how they had remained the same. In this way, coming out turned the sense of being different into a definite social reality that could be perceived by others (the proof that others are aware of this difference was that they began to socially discriminate against the respondents). Even if coming out was not the answer to the feeling of "being different," being gay was, the respondents found, a life where the difference was shared by others and valued. The process of coming out usually ended with the respondents' self-acceptance, the integration of their homosexual desires and activities into their personal identities, and the legitimation of their social selves in the gay community. That is, coming out was the point at which the respondents began to "take for granted" that they were gay.

The ideology of coming out is remarkably congruent with the interactionist theory of personal identity, that is, while naming (that is, the self-attribution of gayness) is important during coming out, action is crucial. The person who comes out *must* make a move to associate himself with a gay subworld. (One of the weaknesses of *outing*, the public revelation of a closeted celebrity's homosexuality by gay activists, is that its usefulness is largely nullified if the outed person refuses to so associate himself, but remains antagonistic to the gay community or silent.) In so doing, the act of coming out *and* seeking membership in a gay subworld polarizes the person's interactions through an

"us versus them" social dichotomy that sequesters the person within a gay group and opens him up to socialization processes that can lead to the emergence of gay identity. The vulnerable experience of being different is thereby buttressed by the strength and camaraderie of a shared group difference promoted as a political difference.

The purpose of coming out is to maximize a person's freedom of action — at the cost of discriminatory penalties for his activities — by broadcasting his homosexuality to selected audiences. Unless a person is famous, then either by accident or choice, some degree of closeting exists even when he is out: there is some audience that remains ignorant. Again, as in closeting, the selection of audiences is crucial. Being out can range from foolishly dangerous to profoundly epiphic. But the risks of coming out exceed those of closeting, since rigid gay stereotypes or a tolerance for ambiguity can no longer protect the person about whom facts are known.

B. THE CONDITIONS FOR COMING OUT:

At a minimum, coming out presupposes and awareness that in America homosexuality is controversial and the object of social control by moral entrepreneurs. The chilling effects of this awareness manifested itself in many ways: the Catholics and fundamentalists among the respondents came out in their twenties and later, after they left home for university or career; while the respondents raised in more liberal denominations come out younger. One respondent made a perceptive point about the relationship of religion to coming out:

I think coming out is necessary in America because it is a Christian-dominated country, hence homosexuality is taboo. When I visited Japan, which is dominated by Buddhism — Buddha said nothing about homosexuality — I learned that homosexuality was ignored and coming out is almost nonexistent (Peter).

There were many dimensions that — alone or in combination — influenced the respondents' coming out. A few were elaborated upon, but many were only mentioned in passing as more or less obvious and not worth discussing at length. Further research could clarify the contribution of these not fully detailed dimensions to coming out, namely, age, education, employment, and temperament. *First*, coming out is easier for the young and beautiful. One reason it was easier was that it was easier for the younger respondents to partition their lives into periods of intense intellectual effort and social intimacy than it was for the older respondents. Thus, the older a respondent was when he came out, the more likely coming out as gay would involve a lengthy immersion in the gay community. On the other hand, since fame and talent could mitigate the consequences of a public revelation of gayness, one respondent waited to come out until the twilight of his career, when his renown disarmed the possibility of prejudice. *Second*, the respondents trained in the sciences needed the longest for solitary contemplation prior to coming out. In some cases, human intimacy was considered a real or potential disruptive threat to their concentration and focus demanded by their work. Those educated in the humanities found their interactions a part of the "experience of life" that matured them in their disciplines.

Third, the socially sophisticated, gregarious respondents who, before they came out, knew gay men and felt comfortable exploring their institutions had an easier time coming out than the loners among the respondents did. *Fourth*, it was easier to come out in some jobs than others. It was of course easiest in occupations stereotyped as gay and for self-employed artists, poets, and performance artists. But there are other jobs conducive to coming out:

When I was a college student on a work-study program, I had a job in the library. This helped my coming out process in two ways: First, the library carried gay-oriented books, all of which I read. Second, the library has a very cruisy men's room, which I frequented (John L).

The conditions for coming out listed here are the antecedents of coming out that were mentioned by the respondents during the research interviews. But there were respondents who said they were comfortable with their gayness from the beginning. They avowed that they did not care that others considered their sexuality discreditable. They disavowed heterosexuality as the standard of normalcy, concealed nothing about themselves, felt comfortable expressing their difference in appearance and their choice of friends. In a word, they refused to disguise their sexual preference in any way:

My father looked at my mother, then asked me point blank, "Are you a queer?" I laughed, "All day, every day, and through the night!" They were stunned by my attitude but impressed by my insouciance (Stan).

The point is that these respondents had to tell some others that they were gay, whether matter-of-factly or not — they could not rely on information diffusion to inform everyone. No one pantomimes their way to a full-fledged personal or community gay identity.

1. A Self Examination:

The respondents realized that because gay men are a stigmatized social class, those to whom they revealed their gayness would perceive the changes in their "character" as problematic. Therefore, their disclosures were often halting, vacillating, and testing. Each disclosure was a form of risk-taking: acceptance generally led to further disclosures; rejection suspended exploratory behavior and reinitiated information management (i.e., the respondent returned to — or at least thought about reentering — the closet). There can be

no doubt that rhetoric of the disclosure was of paramount importance. The disclosure had to be clearly thought out and its presentation rehearsed.

Therefore, coming out was invariably preceded by a period of asking rhetorical questions as "Who am I?" "Why am I different?" "Am I gay?" "What are the problems I would face being gay, where would they come from, and how could I overcome them?" "Who do I tell?" and "What do gay men do?" "Is sexual activity necessary in order to be gay?" "What are the differences between the signs of artistic sensitivity and the signs of queerness?" These questions technically occurred during closeting, since no deliberate public steps had been taken actualizing their sexuality. Asking and answering these questions prevented the respondents from needlessly *stumbling over a stereotypes*:

I was surprised to find myself interested in art, literature, and music. I knew that gays were said to have an affinity for the fine arts. I concluded (I still can't believe this of myself!) that I was finally finding my identity (Christopher).

Also, asking and answering such questions appeared necessary to initiate the processes that lead to the development of gay personal and community identities. When these questions were first asked during closeting they initiated an intense debate with the self about the nature of homosexuality that culminated in deviance disavowal, the construction of stigma theories that legitimated going public about sexual preference to others, and a *coming out to the self* that entailed an admission of attraction to same-sex others and gave the respondents an idea about what the term "coming out" meant. For example, after a period of hustling as "trade," that is, as a straight male homosexual prostitute, one respondent accepted his gayness:

I was twenty-three when I arrived in San Francisco and came out of the closet. Since I was fifteen I'd fooled around with men. Like a lot of other Christopher Street [New York]

hustlers I was trade at first. They could touch me all they wanted. But I'd never touch them. Then I became an active partner. After I started asking myself questions about who I really was and I just got tired of hiding my life (Greg).

Prior to coming out, in order to come to grips with the hunch that they were gay, to give meaning to episodic or persistent homosexual desires, and to determine the scope of their possible erotic choices, the respondents sought information in the analytical, biographical, and fictional literature of homosexuality: From this *received information* the respondents might discover that they "fit the definition" of a homosexual in a scholarly work or that their sexual desires were considered by experts as "signs of homosexuality" (Paul). Information about gayness was also obtained from the media. Although film, television, and recordings reach more people, it was the print media - with its cheap technology and the possibility of private consumption - that most impacted the respondents' knowledge about being gay in San Francisco.

I found out about being gay mostly by reading. I was a voracious reader (Jack).

Many respondents claimed that narrative or visual materials about the gay lifestyle created possibilities for action in their minds that instigated changes in them. Several respondents had read magazine or newspaper articles about San Francisco's gay community that encouraged them to migrate. Others, in reading a short story about an episode in a gay fictional character's life found their first homosexual experience eased because the story gave concrete form to unspoken, unacknowledged, and unexpressed feelings that they later acted on. Viewing gay pornography frequently led the respondents to exclaim, "That looks like something I might like to try!"

The powerful vignettes of realistic gay novels — which often present gay people, even nothing but gay people, struggling to understand what gay means to them as individuals prior to their relating to the concept of a gay community — work backward to create a reality or model for their readers to act from. For example, in George Whitmore's The Confessions of Danny Slocum even the question of what to do in a sexually oriented community when sexually handicapped is treated.

Only a gay writer would base a novel upon the need not only to get sex but to be good at it. Only gay writers have the consciousness to deal with a community that is mostly sex in metaphor (Peter).

Their subsequent experience was related casually and in an unpremeditated manner as if it arose from within them, but the data shows that most the respondents followed models from gay oriented reading materials, which they avidly perused. An interesting discovery in this regard was how the respondents used their reading, in particular *science fiction*, to find new perspectives in dealing with their sense of differentness, answers to problems of information management, and to resolve other difficulties relating to their normalization. Gay biographies invite imitation and engender the courage necessary put up with the stress of a public revelation of homosexuality. in certain contexts:

Gay biographies present the personal histories of genuine gay role models — journalists, physicians, professional athletes, military personnel — whose courageous lifestyles can be respected because they have gone through it before (Rand).

Professional and scholarly literature occasionally furnish ersatz role models: one respondent found out where to meet other gay men in the medical case histories of homosexual men. And gay pornography was considered an important part of the education of the respondents about the varieties of gay sex.

Clinical, scholarly, or sexological materials were considered bad sources of information about the gay lifestyle. The respondents felt "poisoned" by such information and feared that they might inadvertently fulfill some of the typifications of homosexual men derived from such sources:

I looked up homosexuality in a psychiatric text and found it in the chapter on deviance, along with auto-erotic asphyxiation, pedophilia, transvestism, and satyrisms. I read such books as if they foretold my future. Another book said that men like me were neurotics who had sex in public toilets. It seems crazy now, but I really believed what I read. After all, the book was by a doctor. It had to be true. Using its information about how to find others like me, I had my first homosexual experience with another man in a dirty restroom (Neil).

2. A Need for Interaction With Like-minded Fellows:

Coming out was motivated by a felt need for unobstructed communication with other gay men and, to some degree, a need to confide and confess. Obstructions to coming out reported by the respondents were a heterosexual marriage, homophobic significant others, an intolerant religious environment, being of an age where institutional support of the gay community was not well developed (that is, childhood and adolescence), not enough privacy (for example, not having their own apartment, room, or living with parents and relatives), and the suspicion or certainty that some social situation could get out of control leaving no choice in the circumstances or timing of coming out.

The respondents' experience of being different motivated their search for others — a "family" to replace the biological one which failed to gain their loyalty — facing similar problems and experiences. This search gave rise to their first intimations of the existence of a gay community and the possibility of at last belonging to a social group. Thus, coming out was done after reflection and for a reason; it was seldom accidental. The advantages and risks of leaving the closet were determined during the respondents' search for their

fellows. This search was effected by using *in vivo* resources (information obtained through interaction with, or participant observation of, gay persons and/or gay institutions) to learn about the gay life they eventually came out to:

When I was a sophomore at Berkeley there were a couple of guys in my fraternity that I had heard talk about, so I knew they were gay. I sought them out and really enjoyed being with them. They were witty and fun (Dennis).

We were sharing a cabin while working in a lumber camp during a summer break. There were no women during the week. Propositions were made on that basis: "There's nothing up here so we might as well" (Paul C).

I think I first recognized that I was gay during a Boy Scout jamboree one summer (Scott).

Being around company clerks in the Army — a lot of them behaved outrageously. I began experimenting with other guys on leaves — it was much more satisfying to me than sex with women. At one time I had both a girlfriend and a boyfriend. I found myself spending more time with him and less with her (John L).

The respondents who lived in San Francisco used gay telephone hotlines to get information about gay places to go, took advantage of gay counseling opportunities, attended meetings of gay organizations and gay studies courses in college, and joined gay teen groups where they could meet and talk to peers. At one time or another, all the respondents had "cased" the bars on Castro Street, most of which have large picture windows and open doors so the newcomers can see what is going on inside. The gay Metropolitan Community Church on Eureka Street has a traditional setting that invites religious people who are thinking of coming out to visit and share a Sunday service with a totally gay congregation. Universities have gay groups that make information available and prepare their members for coming out to significant others.

Because the gay community-wide emphasized the "sexual" in "homosexual," finding like-minded others was problematic for the asexual, abstinent, or sexually disabled

among the respondents, who found that their claims to gayness were weakly grounded (as they saw it) on their unrequited desires for, infatuations with, and sexual fantasies about, other males. Many of the respondents who came out as teenagers had never had sex with another male. The parents of these men held out some hope that their sons would grow out of their same-sex "infatuations." This was very frustrating to their gay children who felt their coming out trivialized by such old saws as "your homosexuality is only a stage you're passing through."

Sexual disability can lead to a crisis-type coming out:

It took becoming paraplegic as the result of a suicide attempt to lead me out of the closet. Now I speak to Bay Area students about my experience. I'm a member of a group of spinal-cord injured people. When we do outreach, substance-abuse prevention, suicide prevention, disability awareness, and self-esteem enhancement, I always talk about being gay (Greg).

On the other hand, another sexually disabled respondent (although he could get an erection, he could not ejaculate) accepted his situation when he found that he could compensate for his disability by presenting himself as sexually passive. He had a major coming out epiphany as a when, during one episode of casual sex, he ejaculated for the first time since he had become paralyzed. The major difficulty of the sexually disabled appears to arise from the fact that ejaculation is considered proof that gay sex is not "faked." This norm is rigidly enforced in gay pornography — far more a model for gay sexuality, hence a condition for the legitimation of gay male identity, than pornography is among heterosexuals — where sex scenes are always culminated by the so-called "cum shot" or "money shot."

If a guy can't get it up or come during the filming of a gay porn flick — and it happens to the best, let me tell you — then a "stunt dick" is summoned to fill in for him during the obligatory money shot (Scott).

3. A Favorable Geography:

Geographically, the respondents reported that coming out in San Francisco was easy. Those that grew up in the City had the fewest problems coming out: their liberal parents, who took their heritage from the sixties seriously, hid most of their misgivings and were generally accepting. They knew that their son could easily find support if they withheld theirs. A few of the respondents were disappointed that their coming out was not the big event it might have been elsewhere:

I was chagrined when I found that most people were uninterested in my sexuality: I came out. And after all the distress of anticipating that process, everybody says, "Oh yeah, you're gay. Big deal." I'm still invisible! (John).

When they arrived in the Castro, sometimes after significant migration, the respondents would typically head for a bar or a friend's home. There they would usually find a group that would support them in the first stages of their new lifestyle. Young respondents, if they had no place to stay, found that gay community service organizations would assist them in finding one (the older respondents did not report this problem). The important issue of being out to parents, brothers, and sisters could be postponed and the respondent could buy time to accustom them to his gayness and sidestep any guilt that might accrue to such procrastination.

Geographic location influences the availability of gay role models and the variety of audiences to come out to. Guided by the media, the respondents calculated that it would be wiser to migrate to San Francisco before coming out:

I moved to San Francisco because I wanted to be at the center of things, to know the gays who made things happen, to have a hand in creating a new world and, above all, to be myself. I wanted to learn about and live the gay life, party hard and have lots of sex in a place that had a large, visible gay presence. From all that I had read and seen on television

and magazines, I knew I would be comfortable here: I would be able to walk around arm in arm with my boyfriend and people would empathize with all my gay sentiments, from heartbreak when it turned out that my boyfriend didn't love me to exultation when hundreds of thousands of us marched down Market Street together (Mike).

The migration to San Francisco was followed by a search for a specific geographic location or *home turf* (e.g., a bar, bathhouse, area of a public park, or sex club) to come out at, and a *peer group* (e.g., a gay activist group, volunteer organization, social club, or friendship network) to come out to. The way the respondents found out about the place that became their home turf made a difference in their understanding and expectations of it. Sometimes, the respondents of necessity had to migrate to the San Francisco area to be able to change their group affiliations to institutions that supported gay interactions. This relocation of self into a *gay physical and social space* was accompanied by changes in the respondents' relation to social structures such as kinship, economic, career, sexuality, identity. It sometimes heralded a new work career linked to their sexuality.

Occasionally, the home base served as a staging where the respondents marked time until the right circumstances for coming out were satisfied. Several of the respondents waited until they had a lover (a gay man's lover is a domestic partner and the person with whom he shares his private, intimate life) or boyfriend before they came out. These respondents said they found coming out publicly relatively easy. Relationships compensated for the abandonment of the natural family. But there were dangers in pre-coming out relationships:

Two people might grow apart after one of them came out. While a person is coming out, he needs emotional support. Then, when he gains confidence, he may see his present relationship as transitional because he knows himself better. Relationships can grow apart because of the forces of self-determination set free by coming out. Maybe the next relationship will be better than the first, if the person has learned from his mistakes and has increased self-awareness" (Bob J).

There were many ways the respondents learned about their home base: Calling gay telephone hotlines or accessing gay computer bulletin boards for information or referrals; having it pointed out by straight friends as a place where "faggots hang out"; hearing about it on the TV or radio; reading about it in the gay press; being brought to it or told about it by more experienced gays who frequented it; being referred to it by gay college or university groups; and, finally, by serendipitously walking into it off the street to see what was going on inside.

The home turf was a specific place at which the respondents were comfortable socializing with others and to which they were quite attached. It allowed the respondents to succinctly characterize and identify themselves to other gay men. Being comfortable meant that the advice of other gay men who shared the home base could contribute to the respondents socialization into the gay lifestyle:

One Saturday night at the Stud a real hunky blond guy cruised me. Steve, a friend of mine who'd been around, signaled me with his eyes to drop him; but I was so horny and excited I ignored the warning. I went to the guy's apartment and things went downhill fast. When we got inside he was all over me, spanking me, pinching me, and playfully roughing me up. I told him to slow down a bit several times and I guess that turned him off because he threw me out, saying, "Get out of here! I want to play hard! I don't read Drummer for nothing!" I apologized to Steve the next day and learned about how listening to more experienced guys could help the younger ones (Ed).

A home turf was associated with a particular gay lifestyle, i.e., by characteristic modes of sexuality, erotic objects, and interactional rituals. Areas of San Francisco mentioned as home turfs were the Castro district, South of Market (SOM), Polk Gulch, bathhouses, discos, and certain "cruisy" public areas of the city. The nature of the home turf clearly influenced their coming out process and their conception of what is meant to be gay.

Most of the respondents said they came out the first time they deliberately sought out the company of other gay men, usually at a gay bar. Bathhouses, or one of San Francisco's huge, class-conscious, boy-boy mega-events at which hundreds of stylishly dressed, collegiate or professional young men gathered to dance and mingle were other coming out arenas. The coming out epiphany located their home base, a place they returned too often after their initial revelatory visit:

Here I was at this gay bar, actually talking to gay men as a gay man. For the first time in my life I felt like a gay man. Simultaneously, I felt stupid. I knew I was going to change radically in the next couple of hours, but I wasn't sure what to do! But it didn't matter. I was out of the closet! I was in a room surrounded by gay men just like me! (Mike).

From the late seventies through the early eighties (c. 1977-1982), giant disco clubs such as the Trocadero Transfer and the I-Beam, as well as the somewhat smaller venues where square dancing among gay men was popular, were the major venues for socialization into the San Francisco gay lifestyle:

I liked watching people who came into the Trocadero for the first time. There was a serious, tacit initiation process where the regulars would teach them how to party properly. There was an entire idea of having fun by dancing with hundreds, even thousands, of people at a certain space and time. The DJs completely controlled the audiovisual ambience and, along with the mega-party theme decorations, totally influenced people's trip. I never experienced anything like the size and scope of these events. Once the newcomers understood what was going on, they were hooked. They were there every weekend all night" (Patrick).

The peer group was a friendship network to whom a respondent came out.

Through interactions with this peer group the respondents came to know the meaning of being *gay*, the special meanings attached to such terms as "faggot," "queer," "pansy," or "fairy" when they were used defiantly as self-labels, and occasionally the ideologies of the *Queer Sensibility* and *Radical Fairie* movements (See Chapter VI). In this way, the respondents achieved a unity of shared meanings with significant others who characterized

themselves, therefore their identities, with these labels. Peer groups varied from a small groups of gay men (e.g., from a few friends in a gay bar to the many nameless but familiar habitués of a public park cruise area) to large anonymous groups (e.g., street fairs, marches, parades, and other mass spectacles). Whatever the size or temporal persistence of the group (the smaller groups persisting longer than the larger ones), the respondents reacted with great astonishment and relief at their first experiences among other gay men: their attractiveness and ordinariness outweighed the threat of stigmatization: "Wow!" I thought, 'If I'm going to be with guys like these the rest of my life, I'm coming out!' (Michael). Gathering with tens of thousands of gay men who come together for Gay Pride Day in San Francisco was another watershed experience in coming out: "There were thousands of us! I was giddy with joy. Why have I been afraid, I wondered" (John L).

4. Articulating An Ideology:

To fully come out, it is necessary to articulate an ideology — a *coming out ideology* — to justify the process to the self and others. This ideology must satisfy the need to declare that "gays men are as true to their country, ethnicity, religion, and social class as nongays" (Joshua). A previous coming out experience might prove relevant to the current one by making it easier and more comprehensible. For example, the coming out to the self that occurred during closeting was a valuable preparation and rehearsal for coming out to publics.

The construction of this ideology necessarily involved a calculation of the risks of coming out to each of the possible audiences. The object of such calculations is to determine "the right time and audience to come out." One way the respondents calculated

the risk of coming out was to "test the waters" in order to gauge the chances of rejection. This was done by dropping hints, discussing "hypothetical situations," and talking about sexual issues with potential audiences. In this regard, the more a respondent had in common with an audience to whom he is considering coming out, the less were his chances of rejection. A common place to come out, where risk was minimal and acceptance easy, was a gay institutional venue.

The coming out ideology colored the respondents' past histories in that they found themselves evaluating their past from the perspective of their emergent gay identity. According to Strauss (1959), such an evaluation, with its new meanings of self, others, events, acts, and objects would ultimately lead to an irreversible transformation of the respondents' perception and necessitate new stance toward social reality. The identification of themselves with a stigmatized mode of sexuality heightened their awareness of the impact of discrimination on life and career:

One of the important lessons of my coming out was an appreciation of my vulnerability. I learned how it feels to be defenseless in this society, and to recognize how biased it is toward certain classes of people. I needed a new way of thinking and ready answers to deal with the anxiety (Joe).

This "new way of thinking and ready answers," is a special case of what is referred to in the literature as a *stigma theory* (Gussow and Tracy, 1968). A stigma theory is an ideology that gives a measure of certainty or optimism to an area of experience that is markedly uncertain. One astute respondent recognized the ideological nature of coming out:

The fact that I felt that coming out was the answer was really secondary in importance to what I decided to do about it. Yes, getting sex is important to being gay. It can be end in itself. But ultimately being gay is a matter of style, of a self-conscious statement that my

choice of actions, of the way I dress and look, my speech, my preference in companions, and the groups I move in. All these choices speak of my sexuality (Peter).

The respondents' coming out ideology specified that coming out as a gay man:

First, relieved the loneliness and isolation of the closet and eliminated the conflicts and problems of information management inherent in passing. This meant giving up the habits of privacy and secrecy of the closet in order to open the self to interaction with the community of gay men, with whom the attainment of a more positive status (than that given to homosexuals in the heterosexually dominated American society) was possible. This "letting go" of the *loner* or *stranger* identity sometimes proved very difficult for some of the respondents, but it always preceded the disclosures to others and community socialization processes. The "letting go" process was aided by two important dimensions of coming out: First, a resolution of the negative feelings associated with being different while simultaneously becoming a member of a community whose members value difference:

For me, being gay is making a career of being different and scorning the people who acknowledge this by discriminating against you" (Anthony).

Second, coming out was loaded with hope and a desire for immediate gratification that is closely related to the American ideal of individualism and the popular ideologies of "personal fulfillment" and "self actualization" helped this process of "letting go":

I knew coming out would make my life richer and more interesting. It gave me more self-confidence than I ever had before. I could not imagine marching lockstep with other people, getting married and having kids. It's made me more sensitive to all oppressed people because I've learned firsthand what it's like to be an outcast (Neil).

Third, coming out unfettered the respondents' closeted sexual restraint. The respondents often found that liberated sexuality could be quite intimidating in its total lack

of rules (except the necessity for practicing safer sex). They confessed to being initially daunted by the immense importance attached to sexual performance, although a few understanding partners soon solved their problems (Sean). The respondents demanded respect for their newfound emotional attachments and sexuality:

I want respect. Like I can't stop people from saying things behind my back, but they'd better not tell fag jokes in my presence. I remember sitting silently while people did that while I was in the closet (Jaime).

Fourth, coming out entailed a responsibility to assist others in their comings out. Almost all the respondents found this easy to do. One respondent, however, perhaps with good reason, refused to help a friend who had remained in his hometown when he came to San Francisco:

My own coming out was unpleasant enough. I don't want to be responsible for anyone else going through it. At the same time, I saw a friend of mine at the crossroads. If he took the same road I had taken, I didn't want to be responsible for that. Too much shame and guilt were stretched along that road. On my sliding scale of values I believed straight was better than gay. In the world I lived in it would have been more accurate to say that straight met with approval and gay with disapproval, and whether one was better than the other really had nothing to do with anything, but that was a perception still awaiting me (Mark).

Mark's coming out experience was especially unpleasant because he lived in a small rural community that had access to only stereotypic identity models for gay men, for example that gay men had their sex in public restrooms. Only when he moved to San Francisco did he find gay identity models that he approved. His memories of his disastrous coming out abated with the passage of time, but never his fear of coming out in his hometown.

Before I came to San Francisco, I always avoided dealing with my sexual desires; but with time I knew it couldn't anymore, they were too strong. They tired me out. Though I had crossed the line between doubt and certainty about my homosexuality, I was paralyzed by my stereotypes of gays and the realization that I was one of them. For a time, I got by denying to myself that I was really gay. But I could not deny my desires. I give myself up to self-hatred. I haunted the toilets; it made getting sex easy. But I wanted none of this, so my relationships were shallow. I used and was used.

C. DIMENSIONS OF COMING OUT:

The respondents came out to gay, straight, and professional (ministers, physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists) audiences. To significant others: parents, relatives, teachers, friends, and peers. Their were some constants to the experiences of coming out recounted by the respondents.

1. Coming Out is a Major Status Passage:

The respondents perceived coming out — in the words of Danzig (1993) — as a personal epiphany and an important status passage. The respondents came out to proclaim and bear witness to their gay identities in a society where homosexuality is controversial and the object of attempts at social control. A decisive biographical event in the respondents' lives, coming out marked the point in time and place when their personal history as gay men began:

You know, coming out as a gay man is one of those events in my life when I was completely alone in the company of others. No one forced me to invite the problems of public gayness upon myself. I did it in order to be able to act freely, to educate the people around me about gayness, and make it easier for others to come out (Neil).

The respondents described coming out variously as a "conversion experience," a "coming of age," a "gay Bar Mitzvah," a "gay Confirmation," an "affirming and strengthening life experience," and as an opportunity to learn a new language. Some of these metaphors made coming out into an experience like "finding religion":

To have come out is to be free of the need for ongoing self-questioning, the sort that preoccupies the closeted: 'Why am I homosexual?' 'Is it an illness?' 'Is it inherited?' 'Should I see a shrink?' 'Was Michelangelo gay?' (Steve)

The analogy of coming out with the learning a new language (which views coming out as the emergence of a particular type of consciousness) is especially fruitful:

When you're learning a foreign language, you always think in your native language before speaking. In a like manner, before you come out, you think like a straight person about being gay. Then, one day, you find yourself thinking in this other language and, suddenly, it's no longer 'foreign' the way it once was (Claude).

The retelling of coming out stories and coming out to new audiences served to reinforce of the experience of the event itself, perpetuated the alteration of consciousness that is central to the emergence and maintenance of identity, and inhibited relapses into the heterosexual mentality from which the person fled.

The respondents' comings out, once begun, seldom ended: they were ongoing, repetitive processes of disclosure to an expanding gyre of public arenas. This research indicates that the repetitive nature of coming out is one of its most important dimensions. Repetition renews the vigor of the emergent gay identity and forestalls backsliding; it is therefore crucial to the maintenance of personal identity.

Unlike status passages (e.g., confirmations, graduations, or marriages), the respondents found coming out to be an evolutionary process that is never completed, although they took advantage of the fact that when they came out to others, these others would tell others, so that everyone did not have to be told directly. It proved to be a centripetal process that began simply with their initial debut, after which they felt impelled to declare themselves to an ever-expanding gyre of audiences, not necessarily restricted to gay people.

On a dimension of increasing public awareness of their homosexuality, a few of the respondents limited their coming out to the gay groups in which they socialized. Others insisted that straights, including their colleagues at work (linking their gay identity to their work), must know they are gay. Finally, there were several respondents who, because of

the media attention they received, enjoyed the widest possible distribution of information about their sexuality, which broadcast their gay identity throughout American society.

2. Continuing the Search for Like-Minded Others:

During the process of coming out, the respondents positioned themselves to find - others like themselves by emigrating to San Francisco to encounter the city's diverse gay subworlds. They selected a job or university near San Francisco and moved, sometimes with their employer's or parent's unwitting support, to accomplish their agenda coming out. Once away from the scrutiny of their parents, former employers, and other moralists, they found in San Francisco the accepting and tolerant atmosphere in which they could explore the gay lifestyle and achieve authenticity:

Once I got to San Francisco I ran into other gays without effort. I didn't have to wonder whether a guy on Castro Street was gay; I just assumed he was. What a difference from my hometown! In San Francisco, there are so many gay groups to join. With the support of my new gay friends, I was soon out to everybody, including my brothers and sisters back home (Brian).

Once found a place to live in the City, the respondents deliberately invited sexual adventures by going to known gay venues, where they easily found men with whom sexual experimentation gave new meanings and ends to their lives. Or perhaps they permitted themselves to be "seduced, in which case they came out to an audience of one, perhaps a hustler or experienced gay man and liking the experience, realizing they were gay, subsequently acted on that belief. In these ways the respondents became aware of coming out as an institution of the gay community that promised to shelter their emergence from secrecy and allay identity confusion. This knowledge offered a way out of the dissonant dual identity necessitated by passing and promised to meliorate the loneliness, shame, and

risks of being closeted. The respondents spoke of cruising gay institutions (See Chapter V) while they were closeted, but their cruising was interactionally impoverished and did not authenticate or legitimate their incipient gay identity.

At this point they began the processes of forming a gay identity by anticipating their coming out, secure in the belief that a community awaited to embrace them. They reacted positively to the vision of being a part of a network of likeminded fellows by moving, in a variety of ways, incrementally closer to the gay community to ground their coming out. Once begun, only dire physical disability or economic problems could halt this process. But while becoming aware of the dramatic aspects of coming out, the closeted respondents had little idea of how differentiated their gay identities and lifestyles would become once they were out and had learned to cruise.

Coming out often entailed leaving one's hometown:

As a gay man, I could never be reconciled with my hometown. I recently went to my older sister's second wedding. Many of my relatives were there, accompanied by their straight spouses and their children. Though my sisters and cousins have lifestyles very different from those of their parents — most of them are married to non-Catholics and many have been divorced — their views on homosexuality remain the same as the generation before them (Jack).

Leaving their hometowns gave the respondents' freedom of movement. After they moved to San Francisco, they could see the gay lifestyle free of the stereotypes they had been socialized to believe. Away from parents and family, coming out unfettered their sexual restraint and satisfied their desire for immediate sexual gratification, simplifying their socialization into the gay community:

When I first came to San Francisco I felt like a kid in a candy shop. I went out to the bars every night of the week. This is what I thought gay men did. Before I came out, I thought of intercourse as a special, loving act. But the guys I met while cruising called me provincial and taught me that sex was an end in itself. I went to the bathhouses where anonymous sex

was readily available and I could act out my sexual fantasies. I experienced the gay meaning of intimacy with another man (Mark).

Leaving their hometowns also made it possible for the respondents to:

Meet a lot of interesting people that I would not have met in my hometown, where I would undoubtedly married and had children. Being gay makes me feel liked. I learned to be social. I've got a lot of friends I share interests with. I've had access to people I never dreamed of meeting before I came out" (Charles).

3. Reading and Research:

The educated respondents did a considerable amount of research about homosexuality prior to and during their coming out process. This involved a calculation of the cost of coming out to various audiences, the health problems of gay men, cross-cultural perspectives of homosexuality, religious moral critiques of homosexuality, and theories of the origin of homosexuality.

Such research was not always easy:

When I was a senior in high school I remember looking up everything that had to do with homosexuality in the public library — all three books! You had to ask the librarian to get them.

I wasn't brave enough to do that when I was a freshman. The system conspires against your having information. I got really angry about the paucity of material at William and Mary College. Higher education is supposed to allow the opening of people's minds to new ideas (Paul).

4. Temporal Staging:

The process of coming out could be staged over time, through a sequence of planned interactions, or presented abruptly, all at once. An example of a temporally staged coming out is keeping a diary of gay experiences as a dialogue with self, by telling others, who would relay the message, so everyone did not have to be told directly, or coming out in small, hometown gay venues before attempting the big city:

Before I moved to San Francisco and came out with a vengeance, I enjoyed my hometown's lively but furtive gay scene, the hub of which was a few bars, beaches, and a number of private homes (Jesse).

Examples of abrupt comings out are being *outed* by circumstances, another person, or the media. In these cases, coming out is hastened by events, for example, the discovery of gay-oriented literature in a person's possession, through gossip, a media presentation (for example, after having been caught by a TV camera marching in a Gay Pride Day parade), or after having contracted a homosexual STD (that is, a STD of predominantly homosexual etiology, e.g., anal gonorrhea). Sudden, epiphic comings out were reported to have occurred while attending a Gay Pride Day parade or while adventurously exploring the gay community, e.g., during a planned vacation in San Francisco or a visit to a local gay venue.

The respondents came out overtly and verbally, subtly through changes in conduct or appearance (or both), and occasionally through confrontations, which were sometime planned, at times emerged naturally, and were occasionally unintentionally hastened by events. Coming out was often accomplished through changes in conduct and appearance, e.g., by acting stereotypically or dropping hints, e.g., an "accidental slip" in public that marks a person as gay, such as blurting "Hey, girlfriend!" to a gay acquaintance in the presence of others. Sometimes deliberately planned confrontations or discussions, at times naturally emergent, during which "Oh, by the way, I'm gay!" declarations are made.

Another type of temporal staging was a process of serial closeting, coming out, withdrawal, closeting, and a search for a new audience to come out to ("revolving closet door"). This type of behavior was reported to have been caused by relationships which had

become "too tedious." One respondent began a cyclic process of alternating reference groups in which he moved from groups to whom he was closeted to groups to whom he was out:

When I was really involved with a guy, I was out, telling everyone I was gay; otherwise, I feel lonely and don't brag about it. A couple of my lovers got so flakey and demanding I had to dump them. After I broke up with one, I avoided our old hangouts and began going to bars across town where I had a clean slate. Another relationship with an alcoholic made me so disgusted with my life that I returned to the closet over a year after we broke up. I played bridge, read a lot, and went to movies with straight friends (Mark).

A critical event resulted in Mark's going in and out of his "revolving closet door": His good or bad luck in his relationships had him leaving or entering the closet. Mark was not the only respondent who occasionally withdrew completely from participation in the gay community, although he was the only one who said that in doing so he was reentering the closet. Relationships gone sour, economic difficulties, ill health, periodic bouts of homophobic guilt, and professional demands often led to such withdrawals.

Another respondent, not as ambivalent as he was calculating, felt he could beat a hasty retreat anytime by claiming that his coming out was but a means to some end. This respondent hedged his bets by telling his family and friends that he wanted to initiate an extended period of debate and experimentation within and without the gay community. For him being gay was an exciting, iconoclastic experience: there was a heady sense of "bucking the system," an enjoyment in shocking staid relatives and friends, a delight in being a member of a brotherhood or fraternity, a serious personal study of the meaning of civil rights, a testing of the limits of tolerance, and the hide-and-seek game of passing to dodge the consequences of stigma. That he could easily have "recanted" his gay identity and regained his heterosexual status, a type of *delabeling* (as gay) *and relabeling* (as

straight) thought by some experts (Schacht, 1985; Weinberg, 1983) to be impossible because of the severity of the homosexual stigma, he attributed to the social moratorium given youth to experiment in America as well as the eagerness of homophobes for anecdotal proof of their theory that homosexuality is an acquired taste rather than an intrinsic or essential dimension of personality.

5. Utilizing Identity Models:

Utilizing identity models to assist the process of coming out. One way gay identity formation was operationalized for the respondents was by imitating the relevant aspects of the career of an authentic member of the gay community. That is, the respondents, when they began planning their coming out, searched for identity models and, if they found them, imitated and repeated the aspects of their behavior they deemed personally relevant when they rehearsed their coming out in the privacy of their closet. These private rehearsals became the basis for, and a justification of, their coming out performances. Obviously, success in finding a congenial identity model depends upon the size of the pool of potential identity models.

From other gay men I learned how to dress, to party all night, to hold my liquor, to cruise and deal with rejection. I learned about camp humor, and occasionally feigned a feminine pose and shrilled "Girlfriend!" at my friends in public. My new friends took me to all the San Francisco gay spots. I really got an education! (Anthony).

Geography has a lot to do with the availability of identity models, so being in or near San Franciscans means having access to many of them. Two of the respondents, who lived in rural areas, did not have gay identity models nearby and had to use the available gay stereotypes in deciding how they would act when they came out. So one of them became a hustler (i.e., a male prostitute) and the other experimented with "gender

bending," i.e., drag. As expected, the respondents living in San Francisco were free of such obvious stereotypes and, moreover, came out sooner than those had experienced their pre-comings out in small cities or rural areas.

During the 1970s, the period of ascendancy of the post-Stonewall generation, there were very few openly gay actors, musicians, filmmakers, painters, photographers, scientists, and other professionals; Therefore, there were few identity models. A generation later many successful gay artists were using their medium of expression to openly depict homoerotic themes. Also, during this time, there had been a great increase in the number of published books by gay fiction writers. These writers and, sometimes, the gay characters in their fiction served as identity models. The political controversy generated by this body of creative work made their originators into authentic identity models (i.e., gay men whose lives had been legitimated publicly by both their professional peers and the community of gay activists). The respondents knew that if they used such gay men as models for their own coming out, their own identity and career would not be based on homophobic stereotypes. They also knew, conversely, that if the identity models they imitated was not authentic, conflicts will arise that will subvert their identity formation.

I know a lot of gay authors are criticized for their preoccupation with sex in their books. As if their sexuality was incidental to their lives rather than the basis for their social lives, their romantic lives, their politics, and their identities. Gay fiction will present gay characters — perhaps nothing but gay characters — because the quality of the author's work depends upon his imagination and observation. Which is why characters in gay fiction can serve as role models. The author catches them while they are struggling to understand what gay means to them as individuals. He elaborates their existential development — who they are and what they want — as they pursue their day-to-day activities (Neil).

Since an important part of being gay is body image, the respondents' role models tended to be composite of the "hot guys" seen in everyday life, the media, and gay pornography. When such role models existed, they were so perfect they were inaccessible:

Bob and Rod Jackson-Paris are certainly positive role models. But it's hard enough to accept oneself the way you are without saying you must be successful, married, white, good-looking, and ripped (Peter).

The impact of gay pornography on the ideal gay body image cannot be overestimated. Because of the influence of gay porn stars on the ideal gay physique, gay self-image is seldom anchored in an accessible role model. Gay porn stars are picked for their beauty and "endowment," and their equals are few and far between.

I sent a letter to the editors of a porn glossy to complain about them always showing pictures of guys with huge endowments. Most guys I've seen don't have eight to twelve inch penises, even when they're erect! I told them to get real. Most of us are not Jeff Strykers (John).

To conform to their images of male perfection, the respondents strove to maintain a slim, tanned, fit, vital, sexy, and sophisticated appearances. Simultaneously, they desired the fresh look of adolescence: boyish, vulnerable, and innocent. To sustain these somewhat contradictory images was difficult, and an obsessive interest in health fads and the minutiae of the latest fashions, the standards of which are always in flux, was the result. To present a less than perfect body image — even if only in the respondent's mind — was to invite shame, with its negative impact on coming out and subsequent identity formation. The habit of comparing their bodies to perfect models of youthfulness and vitality is one of the main reasons for the intolerance for diversity that characterizes the gay male community.

Perhaps it should not be surprising in America, but it is interesting that a deciding factor in coming out as gay was said to be cost. Of course, the calculation of the cost of being gay or straight is based on available role models. A respondent's description of his bisexual friend's decision to settle himself into a gay identity demonstrates how money is factored into the choice of a sexual identity:

When he came to San Francisco, Bill hadn't decided which he liked more: men or women. In the end, he decided it was easier to be with other men. The *bottom line* was that they were less expensive than women. Gay men didn't expect to be taken to dinner and movies and to receive gifts. They were more likely to pay for an evening's entertainment. Nor were they as possessive of time; after all, the interesting ones had their own careers. Finally, they were more eager for sex, attached fewer conditions to it than women, and they didn't get pregnant (Allen).

6. Age:

None of the respondents came out as younger than sixteen, and these comings out are treated as adolescent. The respondents did not know of any legitimate institutional support for children much younger than that coming out. All the respondents were aware that there were very young hustlers (male prostitutes) on Polk Street, and had heard that some of these youths called themselves gay. Most of the respondents had visited the well-known places where these boys hung out and had occasionally talked with them. Several respondents spoke about their childhood sexual desires and experiences, which took the form of intense (occasionally sexual) relationships with other boys or crushes on adult males, often teachers. These respondents did not know what impact these experiences had on their comings out as gay, since most of the other boys they "messed around with" engaged in heterosexual behavior after puberty. A typical comment on childhood sexuality:

For me, sex with cousins and friends ended shortly after the onset of puberty. It's fairly common, in my experience, for males, both gay and straight, to have homosexual experiences in junior and high school. My high school years were exclusively heterosexual. My attraction to other guys never went away, but when my friends stopped messing around, I did too (Allen).

During their adolescence and while they were living with their parents, the respondents' gay identity development was problematic. Away from home, usually in college, coming out was an important aspect of their freedom of movement. Many of the adolescent respondents had little, if any, sexual experience before they came out:

After I came out, I dated, socialized with friends, and joined the gay teen groups in ACT UP and Queer Nation. For a time, these activities worked as alternatives to sex (Bob J).

Indeed, the adolescent respondents saw their being gay as a "lifestyle" that made them different beyond their sexual preference. Being gay was "not just about getting sex" (Bob J).

The respondents took different paths to coming out as adolescents. Three of the respondents, when they were teenagers, were led into a homosexual experience by an experienced gay man. The experience was pleasurable and was represented as signaling the emergence of "the real me." One teen-aged respondent "zeroed in on his gay identity" by alternating sexual relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends until he was sure of what he wanted. He began experimenting with homosexual and heterosexual intimacy in high school. His habit was to discuss all his experiences with his boyfriends and girlfriends, provoking a good deal of competition among them for his attentions. An intense affair with another boy in his senior year ended his ambivalence:

I finally decided I liked sex with men more than with women. Women make good friends and companions but boring sexual partners. Men are not as good at being companions because of their careers and because they enjoy playing around. Now I say I'm gay. It's me. I love it. I can't imagine being anything else. (John).

One respondent starred in a homosexual pornographic video at eighteen to revenge himself against a girlfriend who broke up with him. Playing much the same game as John, he came to the opposite conclusion. He found that he preferred heterosexual intimacy and married at twenty. But the easy lifestyle of the gay male sex industry appealed to him and since gay pornography paid better than the heterosexual variety, he maintained a public identity as a gay porn star and a (well-publicized) private identity as a heterosexual married man. That he was "really straight" excited his fans among the respondents; that he acted in gay videos and strip shows was accepted by his wife and Hollywood straight friends as the work he did for a living.

One young respondent had been a male prostitute on Polk Street for five years before he came out. During that time, he self-identified as heterosexual *trade*, i.e., as a straight, nonreciprocal sexual partner who took only active, dominant sexual roles with the gay men who were his "Johns."

I finally came out of the closet. For over five years I'd screwed around with gay men. Just trade at first. Like some of the other guys. They could touch me all they wanted. But I'd never touch them. Then I became an active partner. I just got tired of hiding my life. There's no doubt that living in San Francisco helped me along (Stan).

The teenaged respondents came out to others as often as they could. They kept diaries to record their experiences as gays. These entries served not only to record feelings, experiences, and impressions of their gay lifestyle, but also to connect them and engage them in symbolic dialogue with their "gay selves." Occasionally, adults would ask them why they belabored the issue of their sexuality as much as they did. The answer was that frequent comings out protected and fortified their identities, which were constantly threatened both by their peers and by significant adults, i.e., parents and teachers:

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Other kids threaten us with beatings. I can deal with that. But adults try to pressure us with their morality and religious values, threaten us with deprogramming, and terrorize us with AIDS. As legal children, we're quite vulnerable to such coercion. So we always go around with our gay friends, talk about our boyfriends to everybody, read the BAR and Sentinel, and attend the gay events that don't exclude us because we're too young (Roger).

The fifteen respondents who came out as adults invested their coming out with a rich ideological content. Coming out in San Francisco meant adopting a middle class standard of living and affecting upper class values. The respondents attained the requisite standard of living through education, professionalization, and talent. They became actors, comedians, physicians, lawyers, psychologists, producers, and social workers. All the highly educated respondents said that coming out made them more self-conscious about living their lives:

I watched myself after coming out. I kept a journal and lived an ongoing autobiography. I acted in my own movie. My existence was choreographed by my choice of clothing. My body became an instrument of becoming the star of my life. Gay places became audiences for my performances (John).

I'm for coming out with moderation, letting people discover that you are gay by being natural. If you come out in a 'by the way' fashion, it often produces a 'by the way' response, as contrasted with a dramatic announcement, which may catch people off guard and turns their response into a big deal (Peter).

As adults, the respondents could enter gay bars and disabuse themselves of their stereotypes:

I walked by the White Horse [an East Bay gay bar] several times that evening, but was afraid to go inside. I ended up in a crowded coffee shop across the street, beside myself with frustration. A guy came up and asked me if he could share my table. We got to talking and he asked me to join him for a drink at the White Horse. Despite my fears and apprehensions, I joined him. God, it was nothing like I imagined! I thought it would be dark, dingy, and full of old queens and effeminate swishes. The place was jumping! Music, disco lights, and friendly, good looking young men talking, dancing and having a great time! They're just like me, I realized. I was elated! (Norman).

One twenty-five year old respondent had a lover who was sixty-five and a publisher of gay fiction. The respondent himself had a master's degree in social work and

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was an administrator of a geriatric rest home. This respondent made an interesting point about aging and coming out:

Many of my lover's friends are his age. It's interesting how many of them, now well-known novelists, playwrights, and poets, came out in their memoirs. I know, it's a case of now that they've made it, they can do what they want. Not that they were closeted when they were young. Most of them, scions of wealthy families, were out to their friends as students in university. In the rarefied social circles they moved in, homosexuality was tolerated. Being out on a national scale was unknown in the 1950s. Now these men feel an obligation to the new generation of gays to serve as role models, especially since so many younger creative people are dead of AIDS (Allan).

D. THE CONSEQUENCES OF COMING OUT:

Coming out marked the beginning of the respondents' personal histories as gay persons, the point at which their sexual lives were normalized so that they could "take their gayness for granted." It ended their rationalizations that they might not be gay. It made them more self-conscious about living their lives, more aware of the expanding dimensions of their identities, and integrated their homosexual desires and activities into their personal identities. In general, the respondents' comings out give dramatic expression to, and a legitimation of, the experience of being different.

It must be said here that there were respondents who, while they were closeted, thought that only selected audiences knew that they were gay. But when they came out, they were surprised to find their revelation "old news" that most people had figured out for themselves. The respondents conceded the perceptiveness of San Francisco audiences:

People in San Francisco are not dumb. For a gay man to pass as straight for any period of time in this city requires great self-control or luck (Neil).

On the other hand, there was the feeling that San Franciscans also affect a sophisticated air of omniscience:

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A surprising disclosure is impossible to those who judge too quickly and themselves not at all (John).

1. Overcoming Gay Stereotypes:

Coming out was the respondents' public debut into gay community. The process gave them the experience they needed to overcome gay stereotypes learned growing up and taught them to realistically identify other gays:

I am amazed at how clueless I was before I came out that someone I knew might be gay" (Joe).

You know, other minorities are born of minority parents, but gays are born into straight families. It's a wonder we ever come to know ourselves and find each other" (Neil).

Coming out continued the respondents' socialization into the gay community that began while they were closeted. They learned that group solidarity outweighed individual choice in normative matters such as appearance and politics, resulted in a polarization of their interactions as a consequence of the gay community's "us versus them" social perspective (hence a radical realignment of their interactions with straight audiences), and it meant participating in the search for sexual partners, or *cruising*, arguably *the* primary socialization process of the gay community. In practice this meant that after coming out, the respondents hung out with gay friends, read gay publications, participated in gay organizations, learned gay history, explored the mode of gay sex, and auditioned San Francisco's gay subworlds.

Coming out led to a new set of questions which the respondents found had to be answered: "What is the source of my commitment to staying out?" "How strong is my determination to stay out?" Answering these questions helped forestall backsliding into the

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closet and suggested that repetitions of coming out before different audiences would prove essential to the maintenance of personal identity.

2. Finding Out How Out Is Out:

Coming out focused the respondents attention on the issue of what they had to do, and what audiences had to be told, to be considered "out enough." At a minimum, coming out realized the respondents' desires to give public witness to what they felt was a calling to be gay. This witness took the form of an immersion in what the more articulate respondents referred to as the *Queer Sensibility* (See Chapter VI). Suffice it to say that the Queer Sensibility is itself an ideology that renders the historical linkage (of post-Stonewall gay liberationist dogma) between *gayness* and "getting sex" problematic. Its central idea is that the meanings attached to *being gay* are the result of loose agreements among gay men and lesbians sharing similar values. In expanding the range of behaviors circumscribed by the concept of being gay beyond sexual behavior, the gay lifestyle became more like the calling or vocation than a biological necessity, which was more consistent with the meanings given the coming out process by the respondents. With the enunciation of the Queer Sensibility, which coincided with the emergence of the ideology of *outing*, the answers to the questions of "what to do and who to tell" went far beyond simple matters of personal conscience. The answers came, instead, from an ongoing dialogue between the respondents and their imaginative reconstruction of that generalized other, the gay community.

Whether a person is 'out' or 'closeted' depends on who is making the judgment. It is no longer a personal judgment: the gay community is involved. Not all outings are political actions. There are involuntary status changes dictated completely by events and beyond anyone's control: a positive HIV-antibody test or an AIDS diagnosis can out a person (Mark).

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3. Coming Out Is Not The Grand Panacea:

Coming out proved to be an imperfect means of personal redemption. It might resolve a respondent's problems with being different; it did not necessarily result a respondent "finding himself," and it did not mean that a respondent would progress to membership in the gay community. One respondent remained very alienated after he came out:

Lots of gay men say they knew they were different when they were kids. I did too, but my feelings didn't go away when I came out. I still feel like an outsider. Now I'm a gay who is not like other gays. I often feel I'm in an in between place where I'm too gay for the straight world and too straight for the gay world. I know I'm not alone in feeling I don't fit in (Arnold).

Another respondent, by nature taciturn and uncommunicative, resented the gay community's pressure to come out. Turning the event on its head, he saw coming out as driven by a compulsion to confess and expiate guilt, hence a manifestation of internalized homophobia, rather than as a personal epiphany!

The respondent himself was not necessarily at fault if he remained alienated after coming out. In some cases, the he was discouraged by the norms and ideologies of the gay community. A person who deviated to far from the gay ideal body image— because of age or a non-normative body image — usually found through no fault of his own that his participation in community suffered. Then, of course, so did his gay personal identity. A person whose politics were judged too conservative — perhaps because he militantly sought accommodation with heterosexual society rather than separatism — also suffered rejection in a community dominated by politically liberal social constructionists.

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Several of the respondents knew of apparently completely committed gay men who repudiated their gayness "with the ease that a chameleon changes his color" (Jack).

But, in fact, all of the respondents went through periods when:

Saying I was gay seemed untrue. Sometimes I got sick of the small talk, or I got disgusted with the shallowness of cruising bars, or I got tired of visiting doctor's office with another dose of something-or-other that I got from a trick. I would chill out of the gay scene and go sailing around the Pacific for a year in my boat. My mates and I never talked about sex at sea. The ocean, weather, and the boat were enough to contend with. When we went ashore, we separated and I went to the beach and surfed. I was just a guy (Ted).

It is clear that coming out did not end or preclude further episodes of closeting. Coming out transformed the closet into a new shape, opaque or transparent to new categories of people.

E. COMING OUT AFTER AIDS:

The respondents found that coming out in the age of AIDS was problematic, whether or not they had come out before, and whether or not they were HIV positive. All found themselves estranged from other gay men in new ways. Being healthy and deciding whether to take the HIV antibody test was a universal problem for the respondents and a variation on the theme of coming out. With their test result, the respondents found themselves normalized as negatives ("negs") or stigmatized as "positives."

Those who were HIV positive found that coming out had to be done in "stages" and took a long time. If they had come out as gay previously, they had to "come out again." Coming out to former sexual partners proved to be as difficult as coming out to parents. Coming out in the workplace, whatever their career, was seen as a lesser evil than the possibility of being eventually outed by the debilitation of AIDS. Hesitant about their health status and afraid of what others might not know or want to tell them about theirs,

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they found themselves re-isolated by the mistrust they thought they had left behind when they came out years before. They also found their experience in dealing with the stigmatization of homosexuality was little help in dealing with the stigmatization of the gay community because of AIDS.

1. Conditions that Impacted Coming Out After AIDS:

The respondents were concerned about the way the public response to the AIDS epidemic turned gay men, gay sexuality, and the gay community into a monolithic evil. Gay liberation was denounced as "responsible" for AIDS. Yet the epidemic forced the respondents into coming to terms with the impact of AIDS on the gay lifestyle. Their anger at the changes wrought by AIDS colored their comings out as much as their fear and sadness:

I really get pissed that I had to come out during the epidemic, which while I was finally free of the internal restraints, there was something else preventing me from having all the sex I wanted (Bill).

I came out, burned my bridges, and committed myself to the gay lifestyle. I had a great time. I really fit in and knew who I was, what turned me on, and what mattered most in life. Then, after it was too late to change my mind and be the nice straight boy my mother wanted (that's *not* who I am), I found that there were certain really big problems with that lifestyle: AIDS and pretending that sex was the answer to everything (Allen).

The AIDS epidemic made me see that deceit and betrayal of trust were much more common among gay men than I had realized. Coming out into the jungle of gay sex has to be a daunting process. I now understand the irrational fear of many gay men who believe they'll get HIV and die (Joshua).

The young respondents were frightened by the resurgence of AIDS among their peers, abetted by the reappearance of the sex clubs in the gay community:

I have had to rethink my hypothesis that casual sex is safe when I limit it to guys of my age. One of my best friends, who is nineteen, is HIV positive! I thought only older guys were stupid enough to get AIDS (Andrew).

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Not all the respondents were frightened of HIV. They had been furnished with a clear identity, perhaps for the first time in their lives. This was true for the lower class respondents. But the educated respondents with HIV found themselves writing articles, speaking to audiences, and appearing on television:

It's like, "Why should I be unhappy because I have AIDS?" My existence sucked before. Why would I want to go back to that? Those of us with HIV got some good things out of life. You know, recognition, television shows, lots of friends, people concerned about us. There's a lot of people who want that (Cliff).

AIDS decimated gay male identity models. The respondents' lives were punctuated not only with the deaths of their friends and lovers, but of many of the gay male identity models whose lives had made their coming out easier:

Patrick Cooley's death from AIDS in 1982 stunned me and left the community of gay dancers grief stricken. He was one of the most innovative and prolific electronic keyboardists on the disco scene; he created the music that became known internationally as the 'San Francisco sound.' For many of us who danced away the weekends to his music it was a personal loss, and the first loss of someone we knew to AIDS. The end of his life began the decline of disco in San Francisco and was a harbinger of the deaths of many of those who had danced to his music (Rand).

The concern with the public image of all things gay was especially acute for the respondents who carried HIV; they desperately wanted to see themselves as "people worth knowing and not as sleazy outcasts suffering divine punishment" (Paul C). The respondents with HIV often felt that there was a conspiracy to make them invisible:

Many people are willing to privately acknowledge me, but refuse to allow others to know that they do. They fear that they will not be able to control the spread of the information about their relationship with me once it is revealed that I have AIDS (John).

The respondent with HIV, above, when he was interviewed on national television, had to insist that his interviewer not to black him out or put his voice through a synthesizer so

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that "someone in the closet will be able to see a real person with AIDS, not a shadow with a strange voice hiding from the world.":

I decided, fuck the rest of the world. I have AIDS. If people don't like it, they can get out of my life because I don't need them. I'm not going to hide what's happening to me because it makes others uncomfortable or they find it difficult to accept (John).

Because of the decimation of the gay male population, lesbians have enjoyed an ascendancy in the affairs of the post-AIDS gay community quite at variance with their former marginal status. The respondents found themselves interacting with women in positions of power within the gay community more often than they did before the AIDS epidemic. These women more often dealt from the ideological stance of feminism than they did of gay male liberation ideology.

Certain coming out techniques employed before AIDS fell into disuse. For example, the respondents did not tell significant others that they was gay as a joke. They knew that they could not just take it all back because of the stake others might feel they have in the revelation of a life-threatening illness. Also, softening the revelation of being gay as something beyond one's control no longer worked as well as it did before AIDS.

In general, the respondents found that being out as a gay man, *per se*, was no impediment to working in San Francisco. But the AIDS epidemic led to problems at work, conflicts between job priorities and personal needs: Straight employers felt that their institutional needs should take priority over the personal issues in the lives of their employees. But when personal issues were life and death issues, the respondents reacted angrily to their employer's priorities:

Everyone at the network knew I was gay. I was out. There wasn't any problem with that. What was the problem was NBC's priorities and mine. I increasingly saw the work I was

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doing as pretty meaningless. I felt that if you were going to lead a large number of people in your work you should believe in it. I didn't. And what mattered to me didn't matter at all to the network. I was at work when a friend of mine died of AIDS. I got a call about 2:30 in the afternoon from one of a group of five of us that was taking care of him: "Tim just died five minutes ago; I knew you'd want to know." I hung up the phone and sat there a few minutes and thought, "I really don't want to be here; I want to be with the body of my friend and his mother, who was with him when he died." And so I walked out of my office, got my coat, and my boss walks out of an adjacent office and said, "What's going on?" I said, "A friend of mine just died fifteen minutes ago and I'm going to be with his family and friends at his house. And my boss said to me, "What about the Baker meeting scheduled for three o'clock?" I looked at him and said, "It's going to have to wait, I guess." When the elevator doors closed I thought, "The end of an era." My boss doesn't know to this day how stupid his question was and how angry I was that my feeling meant so little at the place I worked at (Paul).

With the passage of time, the respondents with HIV found it harder to make the **same** media impact as previous activists. The first persons with AIDS were the subject of **many** media events, which made the diagnosis glamorous to some respondents. For **example**, one respondent shopped for a physician who would diagnose his symptoms as **AIDS**. He found no takers, but he was right in asserting he knew his body and that his **failure** to get what he wanted did not mean he was misguided. By the 1990s there were so **many** persons with HIV in San Francisco that most died with no more than a small **obituary** in the Bay Area Reporter, a San Francisco gay newspaper. If a gay person's life **had** little meaning before he contracted the AIDS virus, the media would no longer help **him** find it after his diagnosis.

2. Dimensions of Coming Out After AIDS:

First, a coming to terms with the reality of AIDS. The respondents, tempered by **their** awareness of AIDS, found that their new lifestyles are praised as "brave" or "courageous" by non-gays. They were amazed at this response, which they mistook as a new

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tolerance for homosexuals. After some introspection, one respondent realized that it was because:

I am a white male who 'made it' in all other respects according to the rules. I was graduated *summa* and was the senior class valedictorian. The university community gave me, sincerely no doubt, a left-handed, liberal complement that amounted to an acknowledgment of my excellence without any support for my gayness (Ron).

This respondent realized that it was because his gayness was perceived as an idiosyncrasy and his only difference from the mainstream ideal of success through merit that he was honored. But he believed that his personal, limited acceptance would not lead to a greater acceptance of all gay men. His desire to conform to the expectations of the organization that showcased him was a conflict between the institutional and impulsive loci of his identity (Turner, 1981) that he shared with the other respondents who experienced mainstream success. He resolved this cognitive dissonance by wryly presenting his institutional success as a departure from his the gay person he really was and making it the subject of a rhetorical social critique.

Several of the respondents who were musicians or comedians, after discussions among themselves and some on-stage experimenting, began to use "gay-sex-in-your-face" lyrics or topics in their acts in the 1990s. Just as those who were ill because of AIDS felt free to express their true feelings to others, so these entertainers felt liberated from their inhibitions and the sensibilities of their audiences by the fact that their brothers with AIDS were dying. These lyrics or jokes were quite candid expressions about being gay and the effects of AIDS on the gay community:

The first time I got specific about making out with my boyfriend, I thought the audience was going to die. This woman came up to me and congratulated me but added, "It's so upsetting

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to hear about two men kissing." I said to her, "I'm sure. But the more you hear about it, the more you'll get used to it (Jamie).

If a respondent tested positive, even he was otherwise healthy, he sunk into depression and felt a profound alienation from himself and the gay community. He found he no longer trusted his body as the faithful executor of his will. His daily conversations became filled with descriptions of the symptoms and treatment of exotic diseases that he gave familiar, catchy nicknames, e.g., "PCP," "tox," and "crypto." He found himself doing a great deal of "telescoping" of the future and the past. He search the past for the contact most likely to have resulted in his contracting AIDS. And he was forced to acknowledge that his future was no longer open-ended, that is, goals, trips, and career changes that had been postponed became compelling interests to be addressed as soon as possible.

For the respondents with AIDS, coming out to other persons with AIDS was easier than coming out to normals. In simple, direct language, they began with a standard inquiry about the other's health. The responses are often disturbing:

I tried everything: faith healing, meditation, healing crystals, palmistry, group therapy, and nothing helps. I've developed parkinsonianism from all the drugs I've been taking. I black out occasionally. Medicine has nothing more to offer me, if it ever did. I feel shitty, just shitty (Jack).

Agreement on an emotional issue was often the beginning of a lasting friendship that sustained both their identities as HIV positives:

When he told me how he hated Louise Hay I knew I had found a soul-mate: "She walks around like a goddess. You'd think she could levitate. I heard she was an Avon lady before she realized there was a fortune to be made from us." I replied in kind: "I detest that Norman Cousins. I hate all those creeps who think disease gives their lives some meaning. Screw all that crap (Paul).

WHAT LIDYAH?

Second, the post-AIDS respondents came out younger than the pre-AIDS respondents did. The post-AIDS respondents came out as adolescents in their teens or early twenties rather than as adults in their late twenties and thirties. The new generation of gay men "do not hide in the closet as long as, do not ape gay stereotypes as much as, and do not buy the normalcy of straights as much as the pre-AIDS generation" (Neil).

There were many reasons for this: First, the parents of the post-AIDS respondents were more tolerant of diversity than those of the pre-AIDS respondents. Many of them had come in positive contact with gay men when they were the "flower children" of the countercultural generation of the '60s. Second, AIDS education in the public schools was, in a sense, an introduction to the homosexuality and the gay lifestyle, so the respondents had access to information about homosexuality that permitted their self-recognition and self-acceptance as gay to occur earlier in life. AIDS issues such as condom usage and safer sex could be used as a springboard to debates about being gay with significant others, - parents, relatives, and straight friends, paving the way for more personal revelations. Third, sexual activity was no longer the *sine qua non* of gayness, because the AIDS epidemic mandated caution in sexual encounters and because of the ideology of *queerness*, which institutionalized the non-sexual aspects of gayness. Fourth, for the respondents who grew up in San Francisco, there was the presence of the City's gay community, which could not be ignored since it appeared in so many contexts in the media. Fifth, the young pre-AIDS respondents lived in an area where anti-gay discrimination legislation is the strongest in America. This was enforced in the public schools by a sympathetic administration and Board of Education.

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Arguably the most important reason for this phenomenon was the deluge of information on homosexuality that became available subsequent to AIDS. Because of this glut of information, which was accessible to all, the isolation and ignorance that were the usual preludes to coming out are less common among the post-AIDS respondents. A series of groundbreaking gay novels published in the 1980s and 1990s made their authors, such as Christopher Bram, Christopher Davis, Robert Ferro, John Fox, Jesse Green, David Leavitt, Armistead Maupin, Felice Picano, Stephen McCauley, Peter McGehee, and Edmund White, several of whom have broken into the mainstream press, familiar to educated readers and, according to the respondents, the best sources of portraits of gay life that can be said to actually represent the way many gay men live and which do not suffer from stereotypic perspectives of homosexuality.

Coming out was made easier for the younger generation by such regimented events as "National Coming Out Week," a program of activities held across the United States that began in 1988. The participants in National Coming Out Week celebrate coming out, self-acceptance, and are taught "coming out skills," e.g., self-confidence, how to tell their employers, parents, teachers, and peers that they are gay; how to find a boyfriend, handle sexual issues, and deal with bigots; and how to manage such AIDS issues as safer sex, condoms, and "saying no." National Coming Out Week reinforces the drama and tribal aspects of the "rite of passage into gayness" with a "public witness" during which "the newly minted gays can tell the world, by speaking into a microphone on a stage, that they are 'gay and proud'" (Neil). This institutionalization of "gay epiphanies" resemble nothing so much as revivalist tent meetings in their dramatic pageantry, symbolism, and ritual.

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Additionally, giant social mixers ease conversation and casual encounters, showcase the **fraternal** nature of the gay community, and display the costumes, trappings, and gear of **the gay** subworlds.

3. Consequences of Coming Out After AIDS:

First, coming Out became a way of owning AIDS. Coming out "in the age of **AIDS**," whether or not they carried the AIDS virus, became for the respondents a public **witness** of owning AIDS. In this way they challenged institutionalized homophobia and **transforming** their acts of coming out into a political statements:

While AIDS may not faze gays coming out today, how to participate in the gay community remains a problem for them, although not as intimidating as it was for pre-AIDS men in the days of heavy sexuality. People who come out today without defining their relationship to AIDS are left without a sense of community, just as those who didn't define their relationship to casual sex were before AIDS (Peter).

The respondents felt that coming out after AIDS made them "more , serious, and **possessed** of greater self-confidence." One reason for this was that professional and **volunteer** organizations held "community meetings" during which their staffs coached the **respondents** in dealing with the problems they were experiencing in adjusting their pre-**AIDS** lifestyle with post-AIDS reality. These meetings often broke up into discussion **groups** that led their participants to an "understanding of the gay lifestyle, sexuality, sexual **practices**, feelings, and fears in the age of AIDS" (Jack).

Coming out as HIV positive allowed the respondents to regain the sense of control **over** their lives and the self-confidence they felt as healthy gay men. It was an act that gave **purpose** to their lives. As a consequence, they frequently found that the parties and casual **sex** that engrossed them before their positive test result no longer captivated them. Some

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joined an AIDS experimental drug protocol, a PWA organization, or became AIDS activists. Others quit their jobs to return to school, travel, or "do what I always wanted to do"

(Jack). One respondent found that his new activities catapulted him to fame:

AIDS has given me an incredible fear of dying. It's given me the most purpose I've ever had in my life. It's given me a reason for living. It's given me the opportunity to contribute to more people than I'd ever thought possible. It's made me a media star. It's given me the exposure to educate people about what it's like to be gay, what it's like to be a Shanti volunteer, what it's like to work with someone you morally don't believe in, and it's given me the opportunity to come to terms with my personal prejudices against blacks, Latinos, women, older men, and IV drug users. Working with all these people, I've had to reevaluate how I think about other people (Paul).

Second, gay artists come out in their work. The filmmakers, artists, and photographers among the respondents began using their medium to openly depict homoerotic themes during the 1990s. While it was often their orthodox pre-AIDS compositions that make them accessible to mainstream criticism and respected in their crafts, their post-AIDS works became part of an intense controversy about the legitimacy of the expression of homosexuality in art. This made them (and they were extremely proud of it) into superb gay identity models. These respondents were all aware of the great debate over the public display of some of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs (See Bolton, 1992), which some critics considered pornography rather than camp iconography, which controversy added a political dimension to the arts that both inspired and rekindled the determination of the respondents not to stifle their unique erotic vision.

There were very few openly gay musicians and no clear examples of homoerotic lyrics in rock or pop music before AIDS. There were groups and artists who pursued androgyny as a marketing strategy like The Village People and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, but if pressed by the media, their members denied being gay (Steve).

After AIDS, the importance of urban gay identity models diminished among the respondents from rural hometowns. The younger respondents, especially, found that AIDS

had diminished the importance of the urban gay man as the standard gay identity model.

As a respondent who had grown up in a rural setting (Billy) said:

Rural homosexuals meet. And they fuck without the say-so of urban gays. Maybe the closet, passing, and coming out are irrelevant when privacy is part of the geography. Anyway, because of AIDS, rural gays don't care about San Francisco: urban gay superiority is a relic. Maybe it's different for people who live in the suburbs. They often buy into big city prejudices and there are no places for them to hide. If a guy doesn't know to leave home under those circumstances, maybe he does need a big city role model.

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CRUISING

CHAPTER V

A. INTRODUCTION:

The term "cruising" was used by the respondents to denote any activity or constellation of activities whose goal was meeting other men. Cruising is a basic social process learned over time through interactions with other gays doing the same thing. Cruising could be, for example, ogling men on the street, "checking out the scene" at a gay bar, scanning a crowd for "the right guy to come onto," posing to attract attention, or "picking up" someone. Cruising was done to dispel loneliness, find someone to talk to, make friends, and locate a sexual partner or lover. The respondents' cruising experiences bore upon the development and shaping of their identities. As was the case with coming out, cruising was a nexus of activities around which the respondents' memories of the past were organized. Cruising structured (sometimes "killed") time with busyness, feelings of "being on go and on the make," and the necessity for constant vigilance. The bustling activity of cruising distracted the respondents from its repetitiousness, from the vulgarity and fetor of many cruise venues, and from dwelling on the possibility of being rejected.

Cruising is the institutionalization of seduction. To all involved, its activities need no explanation; they seem to flow from the nature of the situation and the conventional roles of the participants. The respondents who cruised found themselves in highly structured interactions laden with mutual expectations, which is the nature of behavior in institutionalized contexts. As action, cruising is a highly stylized face-to-face interactional ritual involving the mutual observation by potential sexual partners, generally strangers,

initially spatially separated and engaged in activities calculated to arouse interest (i.e., stake a claim to another person's attention). With experience, the respondents found gay cruising behavior to be uniform and predictable: it was organized around proffering a claim to another person's body and time, learned by imitating other gays who engaged in it, and conventionalized by the painful consequences that attend violations of the expectations of those involved. Indeed, it is because cruising activities are conventionalized that it was possible for the respondents to "instantly, effortlessly, almost automatically to read off the definition of a situation and all that the definition implies" (Strauss, 1959).

The respondents' cruising was a fitting together of lines of conduct through the dual process of definition and interpretation and, as such, was a classic example of the processes of symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969). This process of definition and interpretation rapidly became a habit devoid of innovation. A sign of this habituation was that the respondents treated cruising as a game to be played according to a taken-for-granted set of rules. Cruising became like a chess game played with living pieces, the cruiser himself also being a piece on the board. The cruiser gained his ends by successfully carrying out a series of relatively simple or elementary acts (or "moves") executed in concert with the concurrent acts of others in the same arena. And, like game players, cruisers had a favorite set of strategies and tactics that, when successful, resulted in an emotional payoff, if not a winning pickup. Since a group of men cruising each other gives rise to exceedingly complex patterns of interaction whose interpretation is difficult, the more experienced players have a decided advantage at "scoring."

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Many of San Francisco's cruise venues are the result of historical discriminatory processes. For example, the Castro and Polk Street gay bars emerged in the 1960's to shelter gays from arrests for solicitation on the streets. As they became popular, they were raided by police in response of morals crusades. Such raids of San Francisco gay bars were common until the mid 1970s (Shilts, 1982). The fear of such raids caused many gays to begin cruising public parks, which in turn became the object of police attention. Even large private parties of gays were sometimes raided. By the time police raids on gay cruise arenas were halted by the liberal administrations of Mayors George Moscone and Art Agnos, bars and parks had evolved into institutions with their own socialization processes.

As a consequence of this history, cruising became a constant interplay between the respondents' reaffirmation of gay identities, their desire to debunk the American ideals of heterosexual masculinity, and the tendency of cruising behavior to ossify into habit or compulsion. Thus, the respondents' militant cruising can be seen as a consequence of a personal need for intimacy and the result of the fear that they might capitulate to the discriminatory consequences of their stigmatized lifestyle. This is very much the conflict between the institutional and impulsive loci of the self discussed by Turner (1981). The institutional loci of the respondents' identities was their pursuit of status and success according to the economic and competitive standards of the American ideal; and the impulsive loci of their identities unequivocal rejection of the obligation to be heterosexual as a counterfeit issue of social control.

The only alternative to cruising engaged in by the respondents at the time of the interviews was the "somewhat retrograde activity of paying for sex" (Charles), i.e.,

soliciting male hustlers or call boys. A decision to do this involved being socialized into the underground subworld of male hustling:

The bars had lost a lot of their appeal for me after I turned forty. I still liked to dance, and I liked the good nights when some charming youngman would misguess my age, but I had little time and patience for leisurely drinking Perriers and idle schmoozing — especially since they usually ended with me dragging myself home at 2:30 in the morning. My huge libido and the demands of my business were in constant conflict. I didn't have the nerve to go to a hustler bar. So I called a friend who ran a call boy enterprise and asked him to tell me about sex for pay. I was shocked at the cost, but he told me that he might be able to do something for me at a more reasonable price when his wealthy clients were not available. I went through all kinds of intellectual contortions about this wrinkle in my sexual life. I decided male prostitution was not as exploitative as female prostitution was. Anyway, when I discovered that the world of hired sex was one of young men with gorgeous bodies and extravagant living, I tossed my scruples aside. (Charles).

B. THE CONDITIONS FOR CRUISING:

1. Demographics:

The interview data revealed a variety of demographic conditions that influenced their cruising. Some of these conditions were only briefly alluded to: Cruising requires a geographic density of gay residents sufficient to economically support institutional cruise venues. And the safety of institutional cruise venues depended upon civic tolerance of the gay lifestyle. In the absence of these conditions, the risks of cruising (for example, parks, toilets, and bus stations) increased sharply.

I've lived in New York City for short periods of time, I've visited Key West, P'Town, and other gay cities. But nothing compares to San Francisco. Gays are more tolerated here. It's a very liberal-minded city — there's always been a gay presence here. It's easy to get by here (John).

Other demographic conditions were elaborated upon: *First*, the respondents who cruised a great deal sought certain types of jobs. This was because cruising bars, bathhouses, and other venues is a demanding, time-consuming activity:

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When I left the provinces for the San Francisco, I couldn't help being swept away by the excitement of ghetto life. Cruising to find a trick for the night consumed me. Planning for the future fell victim to planning for the weekend. If there was a point to it all, it was experience. I was determined to get jaded (Mark).

Therefore, in order to spend their time cruising, the respondents favored employment in undemanding, fixed-hours jobs; insofar as they were not, they were forced to limit their cruising:

I worked for Pacific Bell as an engineer. My day typically started at 5:00 to 5:30 A.M. Lot's of twelve hour days. My life revolved around getting up, going to work, and coming home. Most nights I was too tired to do anything but have dinner and go to bed so I could get up at 5:00 A.M. the next morning. And then the whole thing over again the next day. My social life consisted of weekends. I would generally sleep until noon on Saturday, get up and run errands, do laundry, and have some big social event planned for Saturday night to make up for the rest of the week (John).

Second, cruising is predominantly an adult activity. As children, the respondents cruised naturally and clumsily, albeit furtively or unwittingly. As adolescents they were too young to cruise the sheltered, safe gay bars the traditional gay places because they serve alcoholic beverages. Their cruising was also made difficult by the watchfulness of parents, teachers, peers, and siblings:

As a kid, I didn't have the money and the freedom of action that's possible when you have your own apartment (Anthony).

Escape from such scrutiny was possible only in those cruise arenas that were specifically designed for adolescents, such as the gay youth group of Queer Nation. The respondents reported that the double meanings, duplicity, and artifice common to adult cruising were absent during their adolescence. They had yet to be socialized into the use of intrigue in their interactions:

My moral code as a teenager was pretty black and white: I had an honest, cards-on-the-table-approach like: "let's have fun." I certainly wasn't smart enough for the "cultural" and

"artistic," approaches. I hadn't yet learned the "you-are-a-bitch," "broken heart," impossible love," and "salami" techniques (Joshua).

For the adult respondents, cruising was complex, multi-dimensional behavior involving the whole person. Adult cruising could take place anywhere: It could be highly ambiguous when the contexts warranted caution or, in friendly territory, it could be blunt and direct. In uncharted territory, the respondents acted on the belief that they could recognize other gay men, usually through their responses to eye contact. (This belief does not contradict the argument made to heterosexuals that they cannot spot homosexuality in another person in an arbitrary context. No one can "scope" another man's gayness in the way the respondents claimed to be able to without being successfully socialized into the gay community.)

The respondents used to being the object of cruises found themselves forced to cruise for sex as they entered the third decade of their lives. Thus many of the respondents who cruised were neither young nor particularly handsome. Many of them were motivated to master cruising to compensate for some real or imagined discrediting attribute. Anyone who had not begun to cruise until their thirties felt a great desire to make up for lost time:

When I came out, I was suddenly one hundred percent queer and wanted to do something about it. So I cruised avidly for lots of sex and was much more compulsive than men who came out earlier (Charles).

Those who did not begin to cruise until their forties were usually more moderate in their behavior. Regardless of when they began to cruise, the respondents over fifty found cruising less enjoyable and rewarding than younger men; those that did cruise felt awkward. For example, an older respondent in his late fifties told of how he restricted his cruising to dark bathhouse orgy rooms and alleys or parks after twilight. The darkness hid

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the signs of aging and his embarrassment at invading the territory of younger men. (A similar shame afflicts older heterosexual men who seek young women at rock clubs.)

Two of the older respondents found cruising a way of "staying young by associating with energetic, young men" (Charles), limiting their conversations to small talk, and restricting intimacy to intense, noncommittal contacts. In this regard, social status or money, as always, legitimated the older cruisers to younger gay men. One of these respondents, in his late forties, said that after he became a "daddy," his gay identity was revitalized. Drummer, a gay SM/BD (Sado-Masochism/Bondage-Discipline) magazine, first exploited this image of the older, experienced "daddy," whose ability to perceive and respect limits makes him the top, or dominating partner (or mentor or disciplinarian) while the younger man, or "boy," becomes the bottom: a submissive student or, sometimes, a willing slave. The typical "daddy" has the look of:

A mature man with a dark beard with grey, dressed completely in leather, strong, masculine, trim, and self-assured. A man any gay leather boy will obey and might want to become. In the idea of daddy and boy there is the gay icon of male bonding, a hint of lechery, a suggestion of incest, and total generational confusion" (Brian).

The older respondents spoke of the time they discovered their interest in cruising, the demands of which began to nag at them like a bad habit, waning. They complained that they felt driven to prove themselves as good as younger gay men by repeating successful "pickups." The "consuming lifestyle and one-dimensional intensity needed to make cruising work" (Peter) were judged a wasteful expenditure of energy, especially if they had to attend to the demands of a career. Diminished enjoyment led to resentment, so that the morning after a successful pickup they would feel an irresistible urge to rid themselves of the men who had spent the night with them. When they were alone, they would leisurely

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reconstruct, elaborate, and embellish the previous night's experience in their imaginations. Interaction had ossified into a mere trigger for episodes of titillating fantasy and, later, self-aggrandizing storytelling. As a result, "tricks no longer became friends the way they used to" (Paul). Finally, even fantasy became boring and sex partners were degraded into "fuel for dishing and malicious gossip among jaded queens who revel in their mordant opinions of the gay lifestyle" (Jack).

Cruising was therefore self-limiting among the respondents. The respondents tended to decrease their cruising when it became tedious, when the drugs and alcohol that were part of that lifestyle began to extract too heavy a toll, when they contracted a serious sexually transmitted disease which temporarily incapacitated them and awakened them to the risks of casual sex, when they started feeling "too old for the bar crowd, all of whom look like kids to me now," or when "a trick turned into a boyfriend or lover" (Jack). Those who were successful in quitting "cold turkey" usually had a career or lover to turn their attention to. They sometimes returned to their old haunts when greatly depressed or lonely, but quickly left after "feeling the old hopelessness again" (John).

Only one respondent, a life-long gay activist, disparaged cruising. He did not see it as a viable socialization into the gay community:

It's the behavior of a bunch of poseurs whose lives are devoted to preening, hedonism, and one-upmanship. Their so-called gay identity is just a mindless shell or carapace, pretty enough on the outside but utterly shallow. They are forever *becoming*; they never *are*. Such men have common traits. "How do you live without Wagner" for instance. Their conversation is full designer clothing, black-tie dinners, opera, theater, investments, and their favorite charity. I hate the pretty bastards; they're so damn arrogant and slick (Jack).

This respondent's comment that gay men who spend their time cruising are "forever becoming and never are" is quite perceptive. Cruisers, like professional game players, can

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never win enough. A champion is champion until he is challenged again, as he will be.

Each new challenge eclipses all previous successes: another match in which the master's experience and skill parlayed against the challenger's youth and resilience.

2. Cruising is Context-Dependent:

The way the respondents cruised varied with the context in which it took place, that is, their cruising varied with the gay subworld (for example, Castro Street or the South of Market leather world) that maintained the venues that they cruised.

The context determined the strategy and tactical mix habitually employed by the cruiser, that is the argot/language used in conversational speaking, the style of clothing, and the degree of risk of an intimate encounter. Specific cruising tactics were decided by particularizations of the context, e.g., the site (e.g., specific South of Market leather bar or Castro area bar) where the cruising took place, the age of the cruiser, the types of persons targeted for seduction, and the choice of approach from among the idiosyncratic combination of actions (e.g., playing it cool or open, frank interest) and ploys (e.g., glances, smiles, and opening lines) that happened to "work" for a particular respondent. This welter of decisions — many of which were made instantaneously — determined the final payoff, that is, the "pickup" or the "kiss-off."

While not natural settings, the respondents could give up any pretense of being straight when they cruised institutional cruise venues. In bars there are many ways to pass the time, so that an evening without a pickup can still be counted a winner; there is no such compensation for a failed cruise in parks, lavatories, and streets. San Francisco gay bars are organized into distinct areas, each with its regulars: there is often a place to dance

to the background music; there are computerized arcade games; an area with pool tables; a section with tables or booths; sometimes a carpeted "front room" with a large fireplace, couches, and pillows; and bars, walls, or corners to lean against while surveying the crowd, chatting, watching TV, or listening to music. Yet the dim, theatrical gel lighting at the bar, the loud music, the strobes lights breaking up all motion into staccato patterns, the electronic noise from the arcade games, the percussive cracking of break shots at the pool tables, the din of shouted conversations, the moving patterns of lights caused by the huge spinning disco ball, and the constant motion of men cruising men is anything but relaxed.

But look at the dancers! On the dance floor the men dance not as singletons or couples but as a group organism. Every face on the dance floor is serene, lighthearted, and devoid of pretense. Everybody's movements are synchronized by the downbeats of the music, making them as one. Dance is the grand panacea here; it is only on the dance floor that the utopian vision of the gay bar as sanctuary comes anywhere near being true (Paul C).

The context often determined the type of cruising knowledge that was applied in a particular venue: whether general maxims or detailed, specialized techniques. If they were newcomers to a gay subworld, the respondents' would utilize their general knowledge about cruising — for example, maxims like "avoid making the first move and giving the appearance of need" and "cruising is time-intensive" — in one of its cruise venues. In practice, the former maxim often led to the oft-observed "coolness to the point of inactivity" at cruise arenas and the latter to the cruising of several men at once:

Cruising only one person, if it leads to a rejection, can cost a whole evening better spent splitting one's attention between several prospects and makes the cruise into a public spectacle at which it is impossible to save face if things go badly (Christopher).

Certain of the respondents had a very specialized knowledge of cruising, for instance, those who were regulars at cruise venues in familiar gay subworlds. There are

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er kinds of specialized knowledge. For example, the one blind respondent (Andrew) preferred to avoid intimacy with older men carefully listened for inconsistencies in r speech. He had discovered that many older men who cruised altered their voices to nd young (this phenomenon began during the "don't trust anyone over thirty" era of the O's). So rather than listen for a youthful cadence and tone of voice, he concentrated on r use of slang. The more slang-free a man's conversation was, the older he had to be. o, anyone who came across as too erudite and bookish, might also be dismissed as "old t." The one deaf respondent (Anson) discriminated in favor of men who could use sign uage. Knowing this, his boyfriend, who was hearing-normal, mastered the deaf sign uage before he seriously cruised Anson. A paraplegic respondent whose lower body paralyzed capitalized on his disability by presenting himself as sexually passive. This y cripp" as he called himself, was proud that he was a popular cruiser. On any given t his wheelchair-modified van could always be found in the parking lot of a popular Francisco cruise bar.

Cruising is Complex Learned Behavior:

To cruise, the respondents had to participate in the socialization processes that ht them the norms of cruising. They had to learn about casual sex. Depending upon respondent and the period in his life at issue, casual sex might mean serial affairs, brief current erotic relationships, having a lover with brief relationships on the side, or ing beyond the intensity and duration of the arousal of an otherwise anonymous ounter. There were several ways the respondents learned to cruise:

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The respondents learned to cruise through participant observation. For the most part, the respondents learned to cruise by watching others do it, usually in gay bars. It is problematic how experience is transmitted in an environment where there is little conversation and almost everyone stands around watching each other and emits subtle, face-saving cues. The answer is that the respondents looked for identity models and imitated what they saw these models doing. That they seldom acted spontaneously (except perhaps in impulsively choosing who to cruise) was due to their great fear of looking stupid; they could not permit themselves social gaffes. The respondents learned quickly that being gauche is a cardinal sin among gays. To avoid being classed as socially inept, which would threaten their identity, they approached each new social arena very seriously. They spent time in participant observation in order to understand the local customs and to judge who the most influential people were. The gestures, facial expressions, clothing, and friendship networks of regulars, special interest groups (e.g., other cruisers, pool players, dancers, or voyeurs), popular persons, and solitary individuals were carefully studied. Bartenders, invaluable sources of information and gossip, were quizzed. This welter of data was used to identify individuals and groups who were the friendliest and would welcome newcomers and assured the respondent that he would act appropriately when he presented himself for inclusion in their activities.

Other ways the respondents learned cruising were discussing techniques (e.g., opening lines, conversational ploys, body language interpretation, dressing for success) with others; reading readily available "how to cruise" books and gay fiction; and viewing gay films and pornography. Learning from common sources tends to make cruising

formulaic. Everyone knows where the cruising arenas are, wears special articles of clothing that conveys special sexual signals, uses the same one-liners that serve as disarming opening gambits to conversation, and categorizes gay men into the same classes based on the optimal methods of seducing them. In San Francisco, heterosexual women often swapped stories with the respondents about their sexual exploits. This is done in a spirit of camaraderie based on their mutual, generally noncompetitive, interest in men. In return for this exchange - which is enjoyed by both parties but whose utility to either is problematic - each is kept informed of the other's amorous successes and failures, the recounting of which are subjected to many good-humored critiques. A couple of the respondents got information about cruising from the media:

I read a delicious profile of hustling in last weeks' Sunday supplement. The article pretended to play to straight moral outrage but really it fed their desire for sleaze between respectable covers. There were many photographs and lots of quotes. I gobbled up the article (Anthony).

All these opportunities to learn the subtiles of cruising meant that the caveats of cruising were common knowledge among the respondents. Breaking any if these taken-for-granted standards of conduct or etiquette generally terminated a cruise. If the wrongdoer was incorrigible, the ultimate penalty was being "bounced" from the cruise venue. Lesser penalties for breaking the rules were the "cold-shoulder" and being taken aside and warned (as when a bartender cautioned a respondent that "A guy just told to me that you're bothering him; hey, cool it"). Any enumeration of the caveats of cruising would have to include the following:

First, except among youthful coequals, intrusive gladhanding, groping, or drunken propositions are against the rules and firmly rebuffed. *Second*, in conversations with

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ential pickups, especially in strange places, the cruiser is expected to present himself at lowest common intellectual denominator.

Small talk is *de rigueur* in bars. Superficial, facile, charming, interesting conversation. Never a hint of anything negative. If I talked to friends about something serious, they'd get away from me fast (Anthony).

vertheless, the respondents who cruised college bars found that Intellectual cruises can k really well. *Third*, barging in on someone else's cruise, e.g., by trying to insert self into the conversation, is considered sharp practice. Nor does a cruiser botch ther man's cruise with dirty tricks. One subtle dirty trick mentioned was for one cruiser position himself near another in an attempt to *eclipse* him, e.g., by quietly standing near other cruiser, hoping to shift his target's attention to oneself. "Aw, this is merely taking advantage of a competitive edge" (Anthony). And, *fourth*, a cruiser does not ask a person occupation. To some degree this rule is out of favor; being a holdover from the time en the closet was sacrosanct:

Asking a person about his job sometimes saves asking embarrassing safe sex questions. Educational or professional attainment may mean rational sex practices (Neil).

With gay-bashing more common than ever, a cruiser needs to be able to judge character accurately, and asking a person about his job is one way to do this (Stan).

v of the respondents believed education and career had anything to do with safer sex; e thought it relevant to the repudiation of violence.

I know educated professionals who are real sluts. Man, the doc who treats me today for KS [Kaposi's sarcoma, opportunistic infection that is a sign of AIDS] was on his knees with the rest of us during the heyday of the bathhouses (John L).

The respondents also learned the importance of cruising from gay folk wisdom veyed to them by other gay men. The most important of these beliefs was the sexual ure of the bond between gay men and that in America, homosexuality is defined in

ns of heterosexuality. Contact with these beliefs was indicated by rhetorical questions such as: "How can a person be gay without being sexual" (Neil)? and "What, if not how with whom we have sex, distinguishes us from straights" (Jack)?

In short, casual sex — and lots of it — is the gay thing to do. Many of the respondents considered gay men who preached sexual conservatism oddities. Shunned, such men would be forced to join the many disaffected, isolated men commonplace on the periphery of the gay community.

Being gay is being promiscuous. It was our epic amounts of sex that proved our virility and distinguished us from straights. The more sex, the gayer; it was numbers that counted. This idea was enforced by peer pressure and coerced by the sexual consumerism of gay community. Sex acts were the foundation of gay identity and politics. Our self-images were linked to consumerism by an equal sign. The identity we thought was born with gay liberation was actually an twentieth century invention of marketing, medicine, and technology (Tom).

Another folk belief was that the young and beautiful were more likely to profit from cruising than those with discreditable physiques, who were "condemned to invisibility" (Jack). The respondents' identities were shaped in the Darwinian crucible of a social world whose "laws of selection" were the coercive standards of male physical perfection. Of course, any person's beauty would ultimately be undone by the work of time and entropy, which would erode his youth and highlight all his discredibilities. Thus the respondents' gay identities — like those of athletes, entertainers, or models — were bound to their body image (or "figure"). Basically, the respondents felt good about being gay when they and others approved of their bodies. For most of the respondents, this body image was defined by the so-called "clone" style. This particular image of "urban heterosexual" — the casualness and ruggedness — became the gay gender paradigm and was *de rigueur* for respondents under forty years of age who were not leathermen or radical fairies:

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The glorification of clone was both a rejection of the stereotype of effeminate-looking homosexual men and an eroticization of the oppressor (Peter).

The clone image dramatically increased the fluidity of the respondents' sexual identities by highlighting their masculinity. For example, confident of their masculinity, the respondents were generally sexually "versatile," willingly switching between active or passive sexual roles. The only exception to this willingness was a Latino interviewee who insisted on an active sexual role — as defined by his ethnic, heterosexual norms — in his homosexual intimacy. It also made them confident in crossing the diverse class, ethnic, and social backgrounds of San Francisco gay men in their sexual liaisons. The resulting increase in their self-confidence led to experiments with both the active and passive modes of sexuality. The widespread diffusion of the clone image among gay men led to the disappearance of the heterosexual, hard-hat, blue-collar laborer (often referred to as *trade*) as the paradigmatic gay erotic partner. The ideal gay male sexual partner became other gay men.

A great deal of straight mens' fear of gay men arises from their conceited notion that gay men lust after them. That's a laugh! Lust after some red-necked, bigoted, slob? If I'm going to have sex with another man, he's going to be gay too (Rand).

Several of the respondents suggested that uniform-like sameness of the clone image made them sexually anonymous and interchangeable. Therefore, if they were to make an impression on anyone, the sex had to be spectacular. Spectacular sex was usually interpreted to be spontaneous, passionate, and risky.

Since I look like so many other gay men, I sometimes find a former trick has a hard time placing me. I work extra hard at sex to make sure that I'm remembered (Anthony).

It bears repeating: the appropriation of a standard of masculinity made gay men more desirable to each other than the alternatives of "effeminacy or flamboyant, foppish dandyism" (Jack). Female drag was not, however, a thing of the past. It was always appropriate for gala, festive occasions such as Halloween, when a campy parade of stereotypes before gawking straights was the order of the day. Their focus on masculinity did not preclude the respondents' awareness that roleplaying, high-fashion designer clothing, and effective posing also helped them in their pursuit of a beautiful body. They were rather caustic in their portrayals of their infatuation with style. The fashion-conscious among the respondents spoke of each other during their shopping expeditions for clothing in "precious, feminine, and belittling tones as girls, silly creatures on unimportant errands that they treat very seriously" (Charles). One respondent laughingly described his trips to Macys and Nordstrom as:

Running pell-mell among the display windows and counters, pausing here and there to giggle at merchandise and pose up a storm before onlookers (John).

While the wit of these portrayals, e.g., cleverly avoiding the use of the masculine except as mockery, turned many of their anecdotes into irony, there was an ambivalence among the respondents about their stereotype as fashion plates.

As the historically literate respondents pointed out, there were ironies in this shift to masculinity, *First*, as gay men began flaunting the powerful image of blue-collar working-class men during the countercultural years of the 1970s, their straight male counterparts were independently exploring their feminine traits by displaying the long hair, jewelry, and gaudy hippie costumes. And, *second*, the respondents — unlike the straight male youths among whom the look was a functional consequence of their work and

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recreational life — were not blue-collar laborers, but rather middle-class professionals whose leisure life centered around the cultured world of art, film, literature, opera, poetry, and music. But in their erotic life, the respondents were drawn back to "the sounds, odors, and brutishness of the common laborer's workaday world" (Anthony) that otherwise bored them so much. Because of contradictions such as these, the masculine image sought by the respondents had an elusive quality that frustrated their attempts to preempt natural ruggedness from heterosexual males.

The respondents learned that risk-taking is essential to cruising. To cruise competently, the respondents had to learn to take major personal risks and treat cruising as a game. Consequently, as they were socialized into cruising, most of them ascended a greater distance (stepped up on more rungs) up the Ladder of Risk than they had in any previous stage. The risks of cruising are due to many factors: *First*, the gang mentality of the lifestyle of partying and dancing (often through entire weekends) together with omnipresent opportunities for substance abuse:

I came out during the "disco days" into a fast-lane lifestyle of bars, dancing, getting high, and getting laid. Me and my friends traveled in packs like adolescent gangs (Neil).

Second, in San Francisco, cruising takes place within certain time limits set by law and safety. In the case of bars, cruising usually ends at 2 a.m. Other venues, such as parks and streets, are safe for cruising only during the day or twilight and when not patrolled by the police. A few venues in the City are licensed to stay open throughout the night; but alcoholic beverages cannot be served after 2 a.m. Thus limited, a many respondents found themselves forced to hastily select a sex partner or leave the cruise arena alone. The

respondents often found themselves nervously hunting for companionship with one eye on the clock, hence taking more than the usual risks in the selection of their partners:

If I haven't found someone to go home with by 1 AM I get anxious. I constantly check the time. Where's the guy who smiled at me but I dismissed as too plain? *Last call* always chills me into redoubling my efforts. No one who comes into a bar alone wants to be seen leaving with a "dog," but sometimes nothing is worse than leaving alone (Stan).

One respondent complained that waiting for the "optimal trick" could sometimes paralyze him into self-defeating inaction (Anthony). He devised various rules to avoid trapping himself: After a certain time, he would pick up the third person who caught his eye or would trick with anyone fifteen minutes before last call, which often meant picking up the last person he cruised, since the previous ones had gone or had by then been picked up by other cruisers. *The passage of time always increased the risks of cruising.* The problem with Anthony, paradoxically, was that he was an excellent cruiser: "I can charm almost anyone into bed; but I can also get too picky."

Third, a critical dimension of the risk of the respondents' cruising were the health risks of casual sex. Certainly before 1982, and in many cases until 1985, the respondents believed, and their physicians concurred, that antibiotics could cure or control the sexually transmitted diseases endemic in the gay male community.

Forth, risk-taking was encouraged by the respondents' desire to be on the cutting edge of social change. This view is not entirely one of self-aggrandizement. The main difference between gay sex before and after the Stonewall riots was that gay liberation gave a political meaning to sex. The respondents were very much aware — unlike their homophile predecessors — of how much sex, pleasure, and excitement informed their lives. They took pride in being streetwise and in surviving on the "wild side." It meant they

were free from political repression, free from sexual oppression, and free to do what they wanted, when and where they wanted:

We would sit together in a quiet corner of the bar indulging in conversations rich in "ich-schmerz" existentialism. A lot of talk about risk and "living on the edge" or "walking on the wild side." The conversations were lubricated with alcohol. Well-oiled on booze, we'd leave the bar to find sexual adventure (John L).

On the other hand, while their cruising was used to justify their glamorous claim of being "sexual outlaws" (Neil) that knew the streets, the respondents were not of them:

I was raised in the suburbs but know my way around cities. My street smarts come from cruising for sex in bars, lavatories, parks, and alleys. I instinctively know where to go for gay sex in any strange city. I love the rush of adrenaline as the sleaze washes over me. Bars. Sex shops. Peep shows. Hustlers. Tricks. Here, at the city's core, I feel at home (John L.)

Fifth, episodes of impulsive or compulsive sexuality among the respondents contributed to the risks of cruising. Anonymous was linked with highly charged sex in the respondents' minds:

Sex with a stranger can be totally uninhibited because you are never going to see each other again (Neil).

I occasionally give in to the impulse to have a fling, a memorable night of get-down, sweaty, pre-AIDS sex, when the right stranger comes along" (Anthony).

The reason I cruise is between my legs. My cock is demanding. There are fancy names for being dragged around by your dick. I call it my libido. It has an appetite only constant tricking can sate. I turn an endless number of chests, mouths, penises, trivial conversations and name swaps and nights in Castro apartments in bed with strangers. I wouldn't have it any other way (John L).

As an illustration of the kind of loss of control that can drive an episode of impulsive sexuality, consider the highly charged story told by one respondent about a cruise experience:

Then this guy walked into the bar. His presence was charged like a flash of lightning. All eyes were on him. He paid attention to no one, and was pursued by everyone. His body loved itself: The bulge in his crotch, well-groomed hair, white T-shirt that clung so flatteringly to his well-defined body. He was a walking, breathing, living, hypnotic, and intriguingly

corrupt symbol of queer sexuality. He touched his thigh, a quick brush by his crotch. Was he getting hard? His strong hand gripped the steel pole that he leans against. My palms started to sweat, I felt a yearning in my gut. I turn away from him. My loss of self-control mounted. I lit another cigarette. He started talking to someone. In one quick and indecisive move through the crowd, I moved closer to him. He spoke, gesturing with his hands, about earthquakes. I started shaking! I decided to leave. As my brain turned back on and my waking dream began to evaporate, I was left wondering where I had been (Joshua).

Sixth, another justification of risk-taking was the hoary rationalization among the respondents that people fated to be lovers are invulnerable and that courting danger is a necessary dimension of romantic love. The myths of romantic love, fate, and destiny color the folklore of cruising, for example in the idea of the existence of "Mr. Right," in the elaborate rituals of cruising, and in the great weight given to serendipitous chance meetings. From the point of view of the cruiser, the less he knows about the person he is cruising, the better. Thus friends are not cruised, nor do they have the fascinating possibilities as sexual partners that strangers do.

You cannot attract another person, especially a stranger, without showing him he's worth taking risks for and without demonstrating to him (and yourself) that he causes you to lose control (Michael).

The excitement of certain men is heightened by danger. When such a person's trick is a stranger, the sex is even more thrilling. The dingy places they meet electrifies their sex. Gay sex is not about sin and disease. Casual sex is joyous and life-enhancing. That was certainly my attitude when I began tricking at eighteen in 1973. I told my doctor about all my tricking and all the drugs I had taken, and he said I was suicidal. But casual sex isn't suicidal behavior. I don't want to die. I want to be like everybody else. I cut down on unsafe sex because of AIDS, but not cruising for sex. Sex is a great way to get rid of all the tension I feel (Tom).

The folk wisdom is that there is a "Mr. Right" for everyone. Searching for "Mr. Right" is a goal that mirrors the heterosexual norm that spurs a straight male's search for "the right woman." To locate this mythic person might entail considerable cruising. If "Mr. Right" cannot be found, then a corollary of the existence of "Mr. Right" is that

cruising may locate a *number of partial Mr. Rights*, the sum total of all of whom would produce the same impact as *the "Mr. Right"*:

Intellectually gratifying, emotionally stimulating, and sexually exciting, and at the same time a good friend. If I can't find all that in one person, I find pieces in different persons who together take the place of a single person (Rand).

But Mr. Right was seldom found. After all, he is a symbol; an ideal type: whatever his reification for a given person, he is an unattainable perfection tied to the respondents' most glamorous emotional and sexual fantasies. No small wonder that although "Mr. Right" was on the respondents' minds whenever they cruised, one-night-stands and friends more often than lovers resulted from successful pickups. Tongue in cheek we might say that the "symbolic interaction" of the respondents with the "idea of Mr. Right" rendered any possible reification impossible.

If one guy doesn't work out I'll always find another one who will be my dream come true (Allan).

Somewhere on the planned trajectory from "the first smile" to "the morning after" most respondents discovered that he and his trick preferred being "sisters," that is, confidants rather than lovers. Occasionally, for no reason the respondents could verbalize, after one contact the respondent and his trick would never be sexually intimate again. Such occurrences reinforced the respondents' belief that gay male relationships were destined to be short-lived and further fueled their risk-taking behavior. They came to believe that San Francisco's gay life worked against relationships rather than facilitated them. Constant cruising was the only way to defeat the turnover in partners.

Thus, cruising for Mr. Right impacted the respondents' relationships in several ways. It impacted the stability of their relationships. In general, the respondents who were

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inured to the heady combination of danger and sex cruised for sexual partners throughout their lives and had relationships of short duration; those who were averse to risk stopped cruising when they found someone interested in more than a one night stand.

I wanted a lover, but the San Francisco gay lifestyle didn't lend itself to monogamous bonding. I wanted to experiment also. I eventually accepted a kind of turnover in my sexual partners. It could either go along and enjoy it, or fight it and be unhappy (Carlos):

San Francisco is the worst place to find a lover! It's so hard to keep him! There are all those bars and bathhouses where he can be lost to someone prettier. But people didn't care. It's just sex, sex, sex, sex, sex! (Carlos).

The norms of adonism and ageism inherent in cruising invested supreme value in youth, courage, physical attractiveness, and self-indulgence and imposed rigid limits on face-to-face interactions, which are normally highly flexible. These norms tended to fix the respondents' relationships at the stage of infatuation and fantasy, what Tennov (1979) called *limerence* or "puppy love," in which fantasy constructions of the self and other dominate reality. Cooley's looking-glass has become a flattering, sycophantic fun-house mirror.

And, finally, the intimacy engendered by cruising was seldom lengthy. Sexual contacts were typically brief ("For me it's slam, bang, than you man, I hope you're satisfied") and there was an aversion to engaging the difficult rigors of lengthy interpersonal intimacy. Cruising permitted the respondents to publicly acknowledge their gayness without being encumbered by the demands of a relationship:

This lack of flexibility in gay socializing leads to instability, hence many gay relationships conform to the stereotype of being short-lived. There nevertheless persists in the minds of many gay men the somewhat paradoxical ideal of a mature, stable, enduring love of each other as tribal brothers, often modeled on vague notions of the statuesque "Greek culture" of antiquity (Peter).

While the terms "Mr. Right" and "lover" were frequently used and obviously represented the apex of gay relationships, not all the respondents were sure exactly what they meant:

I haven't figured out what a "lover" is yet. Rob and I have been together for thirteen years. But both of us have boyfriends. My boyfriend and I have been together for a year and a half. Rob and his friend have been together a year. Rob and I have never really defined anything between us. We don't have a lot of sex together. With my boyfriend, companion, friend, lover, whatever, we explore sex and find exciting things to do together. Rob and I and our boyfriends do things together, like camping trips. But as a rule, we don't spend a lot of time together as a foursome. It's only happened once that a boyfriend spent the night here when both Rob and I were at home. Usually, when my boyfriend stays overnight here, Rob spends the night at his boyfriend's place. And vice-versa. It works out just fine (John Z).

Seventh, the belief that entrapment by undercover police or "fag bashing" is rare in San Francisco worked in favor of risk-taking. It is true that institutional cruising, to some degree, circumscribes the risks of cruising. The risks of cruising are definitely greater in nongay arenas such as parks and lavatories. Finally, if a person was unlucky, he was, after all, a male and could rely on his strength to help him get away and warn others:

I left the bar with this cute blond guy. We walked to his house, which was not far away. We were sitting on his couch talking when suddenly he just hit me in the face! I couldn't believe it! Then he hit me again! 'Jesus,' I screamed, 'you're crazy!' I shoved him hard and he fell to the floor and I ran like hell out of there. He stumbled after me, calling to me to come back. He pleaded that he was only giving me what he knew I wanted. I ran back to the bar and told the bartender to warn other guys away from that nut. He must have been on drugs (David).

Eighth, the *role distance* (Goffman, 1961) inherent in treating cruising like a game insulated the respondents against boredom or rejection. The respondents' role distance from cruising came quite naturally. Afraid of gaffes and of missing anything, they often watched themselves do it:

I'm a spectator to my cruising and to my sex; I'm never cruising or being sexual, I'm watching myself cruise and observing myself being sexual (Neil).

Such self-observation leads to lists of strategies, tactics, odds, probabilities, caveats, and forced plays. That is the essence of gaming. Treating cruising as a game enhanced the excitement of the pursuit or hunt, the importance of success and failure, and the camaraderie of the brotherhood of cruisers. And no other institution in the gay community was so closely linked to the laissez-faire of the respondents' sexual appetites.

If an evening threatened to be empty or unpleasant, I could go to the baths and wander through an endless maze of rooms and corridors, picking up partner after partner to act out my erotic fantasies with (Allen).

C. DIMENSIONS OF CRUISING.

1. Locating a Place and Group to Cruise:

Among the venues the respondents cruised were bars, bathhouses (until they were banned by the San Francisco Department of Public Health), beaches, block parties, dances, gyms, health clubs, parties, political meetings, resorts, theaters, shopping malls, public restrooms, and truck stops. Highway rest stops, lavatories, parks ("the bushes"), peep shows, movie theaters, and truck stops were more perilous venues; places where "sleazy, high-risk sex" was the norm. The locations of "cruisy places" were easily available: the respondents had only to ask at any gathering of their fellows or to consult one of the many guidebooks that list the gay venues of every major city in the world.

Most cruise arena audiences are divided into distinct groups and areas, each with its regulars and less important members. For example, many bars have areas for dancing, playing pool, arcade games, hanging out, and watching TV. Outdoor venues such as beaches or wooded areas have their "gay spaces," "tearooms" (lavatories and toilet blocks), and "hideaways" where the players are not only the gay men cruising each other

but the active park patrols and roller bladers who inhibit their sex (Scott). Each of these areas may be further subdivided into (possibly overlapping) cliques whose membership is determined by friendship, skill, body image, interests, and other dimensions. Cruising familiar subgroups is efficient because their members have much in common with each other, which enhances communication. All the respondents had favorite bars where they cruised, passed time, and socialized with friends. It is at such favorite hangouts that the apotheosis of cruising as the quintessence of the gay lifestyle took place naturally and unproblematically. There the respondents practiced and refined their cruising techniques on each other until, to prove themselves as gay men further, they moved to test themselves at more difficult and feral cruise venues such as alleys, bathhouses, lavatories, and parks where cruising was both primitive and simple:

You hint, very indirectly. Never, never be explicit: eye contact - you know the kind, it's electric - and then you pause to study his reaction while looking elsewhere; a tentative smile leads to a chat in which you lead him on with a story about planning to go to a bar up the street; you're standing real close; your eyes are dropping to his crotch (Jaime).

Men used to have sex in parks because there was nowhere else to go. But now that there are all kinds of establishments that cater to my carnal cravings, why do I still continue to do outdoor sex? I like parks. I like the outdoors. The feeling of being out in the bushes with no clothes on is just wonderfully erotic for me. Sex is natural, and being naked is natural to me, and having sex out in the open is the best combination of both worlds (Scott).

Cruising bars, bathhouses, discos, and outdoor areas is simple in concept, but complex in execution. In bars, men advertise their availability for sex by arranging themselves in unspoken consensus along a particular wall or bench known as the *meat rack*. (The meat rack takes its name from the wild, lush, and undeveloped MEAT RACK — also known as the “Enchanted Forest” or the “Judy Garland Memorial Park”, the half-mile long National Park land between the gay communities of Cherry Grove and the Pines on Fire

Island, the famous gay resort off the southern shore of Long Island, New York.) The rank of men that constitute the meat rack can be quickly inspected, a smile exchanged, a brief *sotto voce* conversation, and a gesture suffices to retire a couple to a private spot. At bathhouses, which stay open all night, everyone is in principle available (although there are always people who act only as voyeurs) and, wearing just a towel about the waist (there are men who are too shy to undress), immediately open for casual sex in one of the many small, private rental stalls or in the dark, public "orgy room." In bathhouses and outdoor areas successful cruises are rewarded with instant gratification. Also, in the illuminated sections of the bathhouses, since potential partners who had retired to private rooms or stalls completely disrobed, they could be inspected, their temperament gauged, and if they proved unacceptable, could be easily dropped:

Perhaps because everyone going for sex was naked, hence more vulnerable, there was an informal rule in most bathhouses, unlike other cruisy places, that rejections be mutually handled as diplomatically and gently as possible. Scenes were abhorred. These niceties were usually observed (Christopher).

The giant disco clubs were major cruise venues and arenas of socialization into the San Francisco gay lifestyle. The respondents prided themselves on being able to manage exceedingly intricate social situations in which they were aware of the entire interactional context. To the uninitiated these mega-events appeared to be wild, structureless, spectacular pageants:

A guy could be laying a heavy cruise on someone standing at a distant corner of the disco hall while shouting and gesturing to several other men with whom he is participating in a complicated swirl of sweaty activity on a dance floor that is being blasted by a disco sound system cranked up to the max. Yet everyone in the know knows what is happening (Anthony).

While all the respondents instinctively recognized "a cruise," the nuances of, say, cruising in a South of Market leathermen's bar was seen as distinct from those of cruising in a gay bar on Castro Street. The respondents experienced in cruising knew that their approaches and expectations had to be tailored to each cruise venue. To complicate matters, cruising is typically a brief encounter, requiring consummate judgment in the immediate application of social competence and great resources of interpersonal skills. Becoming sensitized to such differences required socialization.

2. Body Image:

By their own admission, the respondents who considered themselves good at cruising were not particularly handsome or given to rating themselves with superlatives. This implied that cruising was to some degree a skill learned to compensate for some real or imagined discrediting attribute, e.g., age, disability, plainness, or deficient social status. Good cruisers gained control over interactions, though sometimes they were not sure how, nullifying their personal deficits in both their own eyes and the eyes of others.

Getting cruised meant I was hot, and if that wasn't taking place ... I'd do anything to get attention — give attitude, wear tight pants, camp it up loudly with friends (Joshua).

Certain things about the way they looked, their posture, tone of voice, choice of words, gestures, and attitude persuaded others to respond in ways appropriate to their designs on them (Strauss, 1959). Good cruisers were excellent "confidence men." They were energetic, persistent, creative in the use of time, and free to act in their own interests. They had "spending money, a talent for small talk, imagination, gamesmanship, self-control, a gift for staying cool, a flair for role-playing, discretion, tact, and taste" (Rand, John L, Joshua).

Cruising introduced the respondents to new ways of viewing their bodies. "The pretty need only stand and pose (like a flower) to cruise" (Anthony), was a common point of view; conversely, the plain had to make things happen (hence they act more like bees than flowers, to complete the analogy), that is, they had to cruise actively. The polar terms "top or bottom," "active or passive," "master (or *daddy*) or slave (or *boy*)," used to describe preferred modes of sexuality, often corresponded to specific body images. In must be said that in spite of the negative, coercive aspects of conforming to a gay ideal type of body image, the respondents confessed to a great sense of pleasure and excitement in dressing up in high fashion in preparation for a cruise.

I get ready for another night of cruising. Wash my face with Laszlo. Tone with Clinique. Perfume by *Kouros*. Mousse, style, blow and bend my hair into shape. The diamond stud on the left ear. Into a pair of enzyme-washed twill pants. Slip on a new Tuscano sweater and a set of military dog tags for effect. Now the pair of Olympia hiking boots. Finally, the gorgeous Tutankhamen jacket from International Male. All within forty-five minutes. I'm ready for the night. I look in the mirror and it's All Systems Go (Jorge).

There was always the hope that a flair for style, whether expressed by dressing in the height of fashion, being at the proper places, knowing the right people, or possessing a deadly wit, could make up for a deficit in physical attractiveness. And rarely, the age, or at least an unequal endowment of beauty, of the cruiser complemented the youth and ideal body image of his partner so that the image of both was synergistically enhanced.

All the respondents groomed and dressed themselves carefully in preparation for a cruise: "I must be dressed *impeccably*; otherwise my actions become ludicrous" (John). Learning how to select clothing was one of the many details of being gay that the respondents learned as they gained experience in cruising:

From Tom I learned how to look at a clothier's stock, how to appraise the care of an item's construction by feel, how to judge how well it fit my body, and finally, if it passed all these tests, how it looked. Tom told me that the thing to care about was how an article of clothing looked on me, not how I looked in it (Christopher).

Such is the tyranny of beauty in the gay social world that even the "average body" (the so-called "boy next door look") is narrowly defined and those that possess it seek to enhance its prospects:

I'm an ordinary guy with an average body. I know I appear more attractive when I'm with a striking partner (Joe).

While every respondent's body image was responsible for a considerable portion of his sense of self-worth and was frequently their only certain control over other people, they were shocked when other people acted toward them on this basis alone. Focusing on the parts of a person that "turned them on" was rather common among cruisers. In doing to, a body part became a symbol for the identity of a whole person and the focus of the cruiser's erotic response — a type of fetishism.

A friend of mine complained that other guys looked only at his ass. Another that they never talked to him; they only spoke to his crotch. Okay, maybe he presented his crotch as a surrogate for his face. Is it any wonder that we suspect that our bodies are all we are (Brian)?

Several respondents worked out at gyms to align their physiques with that of the gay ideal. They labored ferociously at the gym machines so that their bodies would elicit the admiration of their peers and enhance their chances while cruising. Gyms were considered fun to cruise:

My gym is a haven for the straight men of the neighborhood, and you never knew if you were making a play for a straight guy or one of your own. It was that hint of mystery that made it exciting.

When at the gym, the respondents habitually and minutely compared their builds with those of other bodybuilders. The competition gave them a psychological boost in their

constant efforts to maintain "the Calvin Klein look of the perfect, fat-free queer boy"

(Joe). To maintain their social distance from the less endowed, they displayed a body-builder's typical *attitude*:

Since I'd started working out at the gym and gotten a build and definition, I found many guys there who appealed to me. I used to be turned on by all sorts of men, but after hanging around the gym I got used to fantastic bodies and Ferrigno-sized pecs, and ordinary guys don't cut it anymore (Joe).

The habit of comparing his body to the ideal model of gay youthfulness and vitality was responsible for considerable frustration and anguish for one of the respondents:

Comparing our bodies to those of really hot men robs us of our souls. When you're a man, you should be comfortable just being masculine; insisting on a perfect body is pointless (Bruce).

Nevertheless, the respondents thought cruising or having sex with a person whose body was "out of shape" revolting:

The sight of a balding, overweight, older naked man probably would make me barf (Stan).

I was about to leave this bar when this guy sitting on stool close to where I was standing pointed his bottle of Red Dog beer at me and called out, "Hey, c'mere pretty boy!" He was fifty if he was a day. Wore a head wrap, leather vest, no shirt, a Gothic pop cross round his neck, torn Levis, and high logger boots. His belly spilled over the edge of a Harley-Davidson belt buckle like a painting by Salvatore Dali. I felt like a chicken leg in a KFC commercial. "I was just leaving," I told him as I beat a retreat out the door in horror. The laughter of my friends followed me down the street (Jorge).

Note the exquisite description and camp metaphors of the respondent Jorge. This quick, detailed "sizing up" is typical of the experienced cruiser. The importunate man is dismissed as a "grotesque pop buffoon." An exception to this aversion to intimacy with older men was a thirty-year-old respondent whose lover was sixty-five.

3. The Cruise:

The respondents initiated a "cruise" by glancing or staring at another person until he responded. If he were nearby, the glances might be accompanied by a conversational gambit, often a timeworn phrase such as "Do you come here often?" After such an exchange the cruiser might coolly turn away, feigning indifference. Visual contact would eventually be reestablished, after which each person's carefully choreographed routine, frequently a pantomime because of the loud background music, would encourage or discourage further advances. Many interactions of this sort made the experienced respondents into authorities on gestural communication. Indeed, several of the respondents described themselves as master voyeurs, some since childhood, with a lifetime of experience watching and staring at strangers, absorbing their shortcomings, weaknesses, and habits, and reconstructing their motives for doing the things they did.

If the attraction was mutual, the two men gradually moved closer together and engrossed themselves in a period of intense eye contact, appreciative scanning of each other's bodies, ingratiating small talk, verbal probing about health concerns ("what do you think of those safe sex posters in the MUNI underground?"), and negotiations concerning sexual activities ("let's decide who does what before we get to your place"). All of this dialogue because many of the respondents were constrained, or possibly frightened, by being powerfully drawn to the other man in a public place: "It's not easy, when you're attracted to a guy, to figure out what they want; what you'd do together" (John). In this regard, street cruising was very demanding:

You're walking quickly by and barely glance at him. A second or two is all you get. A glance held and broken, very fast — rejection or acceptance, so quick that you don't have time to

decide whether you really want the guy. You lose guys you later wish you'd picked up (John L).

For respondents who disliked "incremental pussyfooting around" (Anthony), there were many venues (e.g., bathhouses, public parks, private sex clubs, and restrooms) where sexual propositions were summarily fulfilled.

There were two major ways the respondents cruised. There was the spontaneous, instinctive cruise and the calculated, systematic cruise. The spontaneous cruise was a kind of "love at first sight" flirting:

I remember the first time I saw Jim. I was at a party and I noticed this guy looking at me, smiling. It took me a minute, then I smiled back. A little later, he walked over and introduced himself. He said he followed my column in the BAR and wanted to tell me how much he liked it. I wondered if he was flirting with me. I asked him what he did. He said, "I'm a retired financial analyst." I said he looked too young to be retired. He bluntly informed me that he quit his job when he found out he was seropositive. Paul walked by and handed me a drink, taking Jim and me in with a knowing smile. Jim asked me if Paul was my lover; I told him he was my ex-lover. "You're still together?" Jim asked me. "It took some doing, but we're friends," I told him. There was a pause, then Jim asked, "So, maybe I could take you to dinner some time?" "Sure. When?" I said. "How about tonight?" he said. *Bingo!* We both laughed. "What are we waiting for? Let's go." I said (Greg).

In this brief but typical exchange between two experienced cruisers, an enormous amount of information was exchanged in a short time. In a few moments each knows the other is responsible, honest, experienced, and very interested in the other. They waste no time in leaving together for a more private trysting place.

The respondents' systematic cruising focused on a particular "type" of physical appearance or body image. Indeed, the most important consideration for a cruiser in deciding a basic cruising strategy were the body images and body parts that elicited his arousal. The class of body images and body parts that stimulated a cruiser's is referred to as his *type* (as in "He's my type"). The analogous process in rhetoric is called *synecdoche*,

an example of which is referring to a *sailor* as a *hand*. A very few visible aspects of a person's body are made to carry the entire weight of his identity.

Gays are like their heterosexual counterparts; they are not enthralled by every man who passes by any more than straight men are aroused by every woman. But once in a while you see someone who meets all those mysterious criteria that makes your heart beat faster and your mouth dry with excitement (Peter).

When I cruise it's physical appearance or looks that count. I don't like getting into personality - what they do for a living, the movies they enjoy, all that shit. But if someone not my type comes up to me, and he has a really nice personality, I'll talk to him for a while and we might make a date for dinner sometime. But I wouldn't trick with him that night (Jeff).

Thus the decision to cruise a particular person depends upon a subjective judgment of whose body image among those being observed caused the greatest spontaneous arousal. The sexual arousal referred to by the respondents was instinctive and non-volitional, a reason often cited for the attributing the operation of fate in cruising; on the other hand, the inevitable habituation of arousal conditioned by "how good the sex was with a particular *type*" resulted in a fairly narrow range of possible partners. Differences in social status did not enter into this calculation. The egalitarianism of cruising is considered one of its most charming and politically correct dimensions.

Generally, the youngest and most attractive men are the cruisers' targets. The young respondents frequently found themselves the center of an admiring crowd of jostling, affable men and the object of hard-eyed scrutiny by other men on the periphery.

The competition for their attention was generally friendly:

Cruisers, like stags in rut, know the doe chooses whom she will. The losers smile, shrug, and look elsewhere. In San Francisco there are always other pretty boys to cruise" (Rand).

Paradoxically, while they are the most sought after, the young and beautiful may not be in control of the cruising process. They are constantly being manipulated by those they see as the envious and less endowed:

A hot man can't spurn everyone or he'll get a bad rep for attitude. Others will retaliate against him for his attitude. They will snipe loudly about him to their friends when he is nearby or gossip mercilessly about him when he is absent (Jack).

It therefore came as no surprise that the best-looking respondents admitted to sometimes being quite forlorn in spite of their many admirers. If these men actually become aware of the possibility that they may not be in control, they are beset by anxiety attack as their reality does flip-flops. If consciously done, such testing of social reality represents a mastery of cruising seldom attained:

I was in this gay bar. I thought I knew exactly what I was doing and why I was there. Suddenly, I looked around and asked myself, "What am I doing here? Am I really in control of the situation, or am I an acting out someone else's script?" (Anthony)

All of the respondents found calculated cruising problematic. They demonstrated their discomfort by *giving attitude* to combat the threat of rejection or to dismiss someone deemed inferior who had shown an interest in them. Giving attitude is acting in an belittling, insulting, or humiliating manner to other cruisers:

The guys who give attitude are humorless and thoughtless to the point of cruelty toward those they finger as losers because they don't conform to their drastically enforced standards of gay beauty (Paul).

In bars or discos they pose and flex under a spotlight, look away when you smile at them, and make it obvious that they think "I'm hot and you're a piece of shit." I'm sorry to admit that when I heard that a couple of those guys bought AIDS, I was glad (Anthony).

"Giving attitude" is epitomized by the cutting, spiteful bar talk and demeaning gestures. It underscores a negative, cynical attitude about gay lifestyle that invariably turns those who practice it into "sexually competitive, acid-tongued bitches who systematically erode the

supportive function that gay bars were intended to fulfill" (Rand). Of course, accusing another person of attitude prejudices his motives:

You can't always tell whether someone is just shy, or offended by your actions, or is giving you attitude, because they look similar (Jorge).

Getting attitude was one way the respondents, experienced as they were, lost control of their cruises. There were other ways. If a respondent misinterpreted another's gestures (for example, by thinking that enticing actions intended for another were directed at him) or refused to accept their meaning (perhaps arrogantly disregarding an obvious denial of interest) and responded inappropriately, the other would avert himself, employ ridicule, or resort to invective to unambiguously show his displeasure and end the encounter. If these negative actions did not stop the undesirable cruiser, an appeal might be made for outside aid (e.g., to friends or, if in a bar, to a bartender) and the offender publicly chastised. For example, one respondent's ardent approaches were brutally extinguished when the other man loudly called him a "puppy dog always following me around" (Rand).

Gay cruises are sometimes unwittingly initiated by the actions of straights who wander into gay territory, where their gestures have other than the intended meanings. In the humorous anecdote related below we see an example of such an event:

Certain parts of Dolores Park are drug zones. In these areas, drug dealers often carry their stash in the crotch of their pants where they hope the police won't look for it. Of course that's the first place they do look, but old habits die hard. To advertise their wares the clever dealers draw the attention of potential customers to their crotch and then smile or wink.

This behavior has an entirely different meaning among gay men, among whom it indicates sexual interest. It implies an invitation altogether different from the transaction offered by the dealer.

So one day I was walking with a gay friend in the gay section of Dolores Park and a dealer who had strayed a block or so into this gay zone looked my friend over, grabbed his crotch with both hands, and smiled broadly. My gay friend, polite even when he isn't interested, smiled and checked the dealer out.

As they passed each other by, they suddenly realized their common error. Each had been interpreting the other's behavior on the basis of the rules governing the territory he believed he was in. When the dealer realized he'd been offering himself as gay-bait, he fled. My friend, alarmed that he had almost concluded a drug purchase, hurried home, afraid the police would bust him any moment (Rand).

D. THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRUISING:

Cruising had many intended and unintended consequences. The experience determined the participants "type," that is the body images necessary to elicit their arousal. *Cruising structured the respondents' time:* It was a nexus of activities around which the respondents' memories of the past were organized.

1. Socialization into Community:

The respondents' cruise venues, to which they established feelings of belonging, were incorporated symbolically into their sense of identity and were the places where ongoing and future relationships with other gay men were expected to continue and be experienced in predictable forms of interaction. Cruising socialized the respondents into the gay community and legitimated their gay identities. It also blinded them to the San Francisco gay community's shortcomings.

Cruising is such a frenetic activity. It overwhelms the stifling ambiance of the gay community's dim, noisy bars, bathhouses, and discos packed with arrogant pretty boys, cliques of exclusive friends, and furtive, uncommunicative voyeurs (Jack).

Indeed, in spite of the bustling camaraderie of cruise arenas, there was a great deal of furtive, uncommunicative behavior. This was blamed on "a persistent fear of rejection and a simultaneous need to spurn other gay men" (John L).

I knew what the evening of cruising would be like: I'd lean against a wall, watch the DJ and listen to his music or stare at the TV suspended above the heads of a few regulars who'd be having fun at one end of the bar. The place would be packed with men clustered in tight little knots looking at the TV, sitting at the bar, playing the arcade and video games, and shooting pool. As if that's what they came for. A few lucky guys would be busy making out. Everybody else would be copping quick fish-eyes at one another. Everyone swears that if they find a cure for AIDS tomorrow, they'd all be gregarious and friendly (Anthony).

Many important dimensions of the respondents' personal and community identities emerged as a consequence of being socialized into getting casual sex by following the rules of cruising. By interacting with other gay men also engaged in cruising for casual sex, many but not all of the respondents reported the emergence of a common set of meanings established about what it meant to "be gay":

Although I acted as if it was true, I wondered whether cruising and experiencing the varieties of human sexuality were the foundation of gay liberation and community. Becoming 'streetwise' as a consequence of sexual adventuring is not, it seems to me, the same as a new consciousness (Rand).

Cruising made the most avid of its practitioners among the respondents into authorities on gestural communication and, hence, superlative "confidence men." They could instantly, effortlessly, and almost automatically read off the definition of a situation and all the definition implies" (Strauss, 1959). To these experts, cruising activities seemed to flow from the nature of the situation and the conventional roles of the participants. Certain things about their posture, tone of voice, choice of words, gestures, and attitude coerce others to respond in ways appropriate to their designs on them.

The respondents' sexual contacts frequently led to ongoing interactions that added to their understandings of the gay community and to the complexity of their community identity. Because the respondents' cruising involved dramatic, intense, "here and now" interactions, most negative internalizations shaped by their experiences of discrimination,

stereotyping, and self-loathing were at least temporarily suspended. This had the effect of opening them up to the socialization processes that shaped their identities and increased the intensity of their experiences of community. Further, complexity was increased by the contingency of the situational contexts in which the respondents' cruising took place.

As the respondents cruised, their communal behavior fed back and modified the symbolic content of their identities, modifying the meanings they gave "being gay." As a consequence of this process, in addition to creating within them some degree of a sense of community, cruising transformed the respondents into "particular kinds of gays," the type depending upon the distinctive actions and styles of the gay subworlds and venues that they cruised. Further, the political, cultural, and ethnic contexts of the respondents' cruising gave a distinctive symbolic content or meanings to their cruising that was an expression of the subworld's or venue's place in the overarching gay community.

Depending upon the range of their exploratory behavior, cruising introduced the respondents, to varying degrees, to the diverse cruise arenas of the pluralist gay community and to the multiple ways of being gay. These social and geographic contexts of cruising constantly shaped the respondents' identities, i.e., it modified their interpretation of events, the significance of their gestures, their use of language, and their presentation of self through body image. In addition to adding complexity to the gay identity, cruising socialized its practitioners into the gay community.

The cosmopolitan socialization of cruising led to one of the most fundamental changes in the respondents' identities. This change took the form of their use of language and its meanings. Words (e.g., "faggot" and "queer") and stereotypes (e.g., the drag

queen) that had formerly terrorized them were redefined and became the source of a rich, new, almost ethnic kind of humor. This respondents called this new language *camp*.

Learned in interacting with other gays, this language of irony and self-deprecating wit permitted the respondents to take upon themselves the names and stereotypic roles with which they had been labeled and use them to parody the labelers. In this way the respondents manifested an implied realization of that language could reshape identity and even consciousness itself:

A group of eighteen of us in Queer Nation went to Concord to cruise and zap its malls. A couple of us had those "I'm the person your parents warned you against" T-shirts, which said it all. There was clone, leather boy, skinhead, military, and sissy drag. Something to turn every one of those latent suburban boys. The breeders on the BART train we rode were pop-eyed, especially since we kept up a steady barrage of singing punctuated by cheers, "We're queer and we're here! Get used to it!" I can't describe the high. Wherever we went, people reacted to our noise as to the tolling of Big Ben. One moment they were struck dumb; the next, all nervous, shocked smiles (Christopher).

Cruising further shaped the respondents' identities by focusing their attention on certain dimensions of their behavior and providing these dimensions with meanings that gave continuity to their identities and linked them to the gay community. These meanings depended upon their context, i.e., the specific social and geographic contexts in which they occurred; the gestures and signs that were used to mediate these activities; rules of conduct or etiquette; and the success or failure of their endeavors. Since cruising is a means to an end, it may seem surprising that it is also a socialization process. The answer to this paradox is that the rich contexts of meanings that have grown up around cruising are a consequence of the means themselves becoming more interesting and compelling than the ends (Strauss, 1959).

It cannot be overemphasized how important seemingly trivial or serendipitous events are to the outcomes of cruising and, consequently, on the sense of gay community:

Cruising offbeat places — bus stations, sleazy bars, lavatories, alleys, parks — tempts fate and, at the same time creates indelible images — sights, odors, and sounds — of community in memory (Neil).

Words like "destiny" or "fate" recurred in the respondents discussions of cruising and were a mark of the myths common to the socialization processes that created their identities. (The word *fairy*, comes from the Latin *fata*, meaning fate, and is associated with the naive belief that gay men are living realization of the *fairie* legends.) The meanings given to chance events were cumulatively incorporated into, and depending upon their outcome acted to reinforce or degrade, the self-concept and bonding of the respondents to community. Further, the *rhetoric of fate* served to mask the compulsive aspects of cruising by elevating habit into destiny. Even those respondents who claimed not to believe in fate or luck confessed to being astounded at the serendipity that enveloped the beginnings of their relationships and the evolution of their lifestyles.

2. Bonding:

The socialization processes of cruising *bonded* the respondents to each other and to the gay community in several ways. First, the respondents came to believe that no gay person would knowingly do anything harmful to another gay. This belief *operationalized* trust; it made cruising work. The accompanying high incidence of sexually transmitted disease and substance abuse were rationalized away as a lifestyle hazards, not the result of the ignorance, stupidity, irresponsibility, and selfishness of some gay men.

Cruising created community identity by binding the respondents to the groups of gay men with whom they interacted during the pursuit of this activity. As the respondents learned and appropriately used the terms of cruising and played its complex game more skillfully, their behavior was incorporated symbolically into their identities, reinforced them, and expanded the scope of the influence of sexuality over their lives. This is congruent with the symbolic interactionist perspective, which sees *doing* as *being*. Cruising augmented the bonding of the respondents to the gay community by binding them concurrently to many gay subworlds and cruise venues. In order to cruise a subworld's institutions, the respondents had to be socialized into the activities of the groups that owned the institution as their turf. This meant that the respondents had to come out to the members of these subworlds before they could cruise them. Seen from this perspective, cruising is a more open manifestation of the coming out process. Coming out to the regulars in a new cruise venue was relatively simple because regulars extend a sense of family to newcomers:

I've been coming here since day one. This place feels just like home and the bartenders are great hosts. The atmosphere here is different. There are some people who come here to cruise, but people come here to dance and have fun too. The cruise doesn't take precedence. It's a great place for making friends and meeting lovers (Jack).

This feeling of family — especially intense in ethnic minorities — occasionally restricted the exploratory behavior of the respondents. This is why one Latino respondent reported difficulties in cruising beyond the ethnic gay bars he usually frequented:

I feel comfortable cruising gay Mission Street bars. That connection was missing when I cruised Castro Street bars. Even though I was always welcomed on Castro Street and Anglo guys made repeated attempts to include me in their activities, I felt something was missing. I just didn't feel I belonged (Jorge).

Of course, if acceptance is sought but denied, then there can be no feeling of belonging, hence no successful cruising. In this regard, one respondent who lived in Berkeley recounted his first cruises of San Francisco gay bars:

I got a lot of attitude. When I didn't get attitude, the acceptance was equivocal and superficial. When my cruises were returned, the guy I cruised always went off with someone else. I got too many mixed messages. I went back to cruising East Bay bars (Allen).

Successfully or not, as the respondents cruised new subworlds and venues, they became further socialized into the gay community, and their personal identities evolved to become more complex, distinctive, and differentiated. This was interpreted to mean that although the mature gay identity is stable, it is always in the process of *becoming* through cruising. Indeed, every instance of cruising fortified and reaffirmed the respondents' gay identities: picking up and reading the gay newspapers available at cruise venues, dancing to disco music with other men, social interactions conducted in the urban gay argot, and sexual bonding. Incidental to cruising, but also fortifying their identities, was costume (e.g., T-shirts with gay logos, purple articles of clothing, leather outfits, or stylish clothing picked out to wear while cruising), jewelry (e.g., earrings, pink triangle pins, or keys displayed on the left or right as signs of gayness among the initiated), and the immense effort put in to developing a "killer physique." (Wearing signs of gayness has a long history. Early pre-Stonewall homosexuals, who referred to themselves as "that way" and to their vague community as "others like ourselves," wore red neckties or used purple handkerchiefs.)

Conversely, the result of abandoning cruising was a diminishing of bonding to the gay community. This separation from the substantive features of the gay lifestyle ex-

pressed itself in anomic feelings that led to feelings of unreality while cruising and diatribes about the shortcomings and shallowness of being gay:

I was hanging around a bar looking for some young guy to come on to when suddenly I thought, 'What the hell am I doing here? I'd rather be at home with Brian.' Cruising no longer meant as much to me (Joshua).

I found myself thinking that there must be more to life than looking for sex: "I'm a human being with a lot of experiences. I can't reduce myself and everyone else to a trick." Cruising became like acting in a role in which I spoke only one word. It was the most inane, barren exchange between people imaginable. I lost interest. I finally said, "This is getting me nowhere" (Bill).

3. The Habituation to Risk:

Cruising results in a constant intimate traffic with relative strangers, sometimes in perilous surroundings. This deliberate exposure of the self to danger proved the respondents' courage, give them a heady feeling of being adventurers endowed with the necessary "street smarts" to pick up compatible, safe sexual partners, heightened the thrill of sex, and proved to them that their lives were *fated*. This feeling of invulnerability was a reification of the feeling of being different, special, and unique. In this way cruising brought a zest and vitality into the respondents' lives that canceled "the daunting and emotionally draining task of working the dark, sleazy places we meet each other" (Jack).

Some of the respondents who cruised gained a heightened awareness of the role of chance (or fate) in their lives and their vulnerability to it. For them, cruising became a way to deliberately introduce chance in their lives (and some would say, "control" or "master" it) with the *calculation* of the gambler. In this way, their cruising became a way to create an interesting pattern in their lives — of making their lives inseparable from the technique they used to structuring it through the operation of chance. Their lives became creative

accidents in much the same way as certain artists created paintings from random splashes of color and brush strokes.

There was a consensus among the respondents about *why risk-taking and fidelity did not mix*. The theory was that the ideal types *the perfect lover* and *the best sex* arise from the constant comparison of potential partners that is a characteristic of cruising:

Nobody can survive comparison with evolving standards of perfection for long. Your lover shows signs of aging. Or sex with him gets boring and repetitious. And the risk-taking so dear to the hearts of cruisers goes against the conservative impulse of homemaking. A cruiser's lover will eventually be dumped, depend on it" (Neil).

E. CRUISING AFTER AIDS:

For several years after the onset of the AIDS epidemic among gay men (c.1982-1986), the respondents feared that cruising for casual sex would disappear, destroyed by safer sex, abstinence, and monogamous relationships.

1. Conditions that Influenced Cruising After AIDS:

The main risk of cruising subsequent to the AIDS epidemic was the danger of contracting AIDS through unsafe modes sexual activity. There were other AIDS-related risks: an increase in the incidence of gay-bashing that made late-night walks, even in gay territory, increasingly risky and the existence of rogue HIV-positive gay men who cruised anonymously.

A common reason of rejecting safer sex was the suspicion that the concept itself was homophobic. In this view, safer sex was an essentially negative program aimed at "cutting out gay sex" (John L):

I am simply not convinced that the present alternatives to pre-AIDS sexuality are anything but homophobic contrivances (John L).

Nothing but frottage [body rubbing] and petting is left after hacking out those practices forbidden by the official safe sex guidelines (Paul).

Michael, a respondent with HIV, found safer sex antithetical to his idea about being gay:

Soft drinks, bright lights, and networking; no oral sex, no anal sex, no poppers, no attitude. Can the person who abides all this be called "gay"?

The lack of unity of the medical profession about what constituted safer sex — which was based on the changing definition of AIDS itself — compounded such suspicions:

Safer sex prescriptions, with their ever-changing lists of risky, probably risky, possibly risky, and safe sex modes, enshrines all gay sex in arcane, but nonetheless accessible and prurient, scientific terminology. Safer sex education, often intentionally I think, turns gay men into non-persons and object lessons of contaminated, dirty, poisoned, or tainted gay sexuality. Safer sex promotions destroy the gay identity by making those who cruise into people with nothing to lose who prowl at night like vampires searching for victims (Jorge).

The acceptance of safer sex was also limited by the proliferation of gay fiction known and gay pornography as "pre-AIDS nostalgia," which depicted unsafe sexual practices in highly charged, arousing ways.

Stories circulated in the gay community about irrational, rogue HIV-positive gay men who sought revenge or suicide because of their predicament and compulsive men who could not control their need for rampant, anonymous sex. The existence of such "loose cannons" made risk assessments of casual sexual encounters problematic.

Sometimes I really miss fucking without a rubber and resented guys who were still doing it, either because they were both negative, or knew or assumed they were positive and/or just didn't care. After my lover and I broke up, I considered taking the test and if I'd come up positive, going to a sleazy sex club and fucking my brains out, saturating myself in anonymous sex for whatever time I had left. But that would have been too soul-destroying. Even if I was doomed, I'd rather not spend my last years remembering what it had been like having a bunch of crazed guys mauling me in a black, sticky-floored, popper hellhole at two in the morning (John L).

None of respondents with HIV who cruised were sociopaths. They cruised to "laugh in the face of death" (John L.) and to affirm their identities as gay men in the way they knew best:

I see AIDS as a life-threatening illness, not as an automatically terminal diagnosis. That's very important to me. I don't want people to treat me differently, as if I was very fragile and would shatter right in front of them. I don't want to act differently either. I continue to cruise. To do otherwise would be to give up to despair, a bigger killer than AIDS (Jack).

It bears mentioning here that men with HIV who cruised risked encountering a person (with or without HIV) from who they could contract a lethal opportunistic infection. And, according to a respondent also a physician, an unsafe sexual contact between to men with HIV could exacerbate both their conditions.

Another condition that influenced post-AIDS cruising was the search for the mythic "Mr. Right." This search was driven by two facts: decreased cruising among middle-aged respondents and the enactment of San Francisco's generous domestic partner legislation. Both factors made coupling — often called "monogamy" — a popular goal among the respondents. In fact, many of the respondents legitimated their post-AIDS cruising as a search for "Mr. Right."

"Mr. Right" was recognized by the special interactional "chemistry," or unusually intense mutual, erotic attraction. The desire to immediately experience sex with this person — the kind that overpowers performance anxieties — precludes rational risk assessment :

I'll know him instantly. We'll be irresistibly drawn to each other. He'll make me hard just looking at him. He'll make me lose control of myself (Anthony).

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The search was chilled by the two nagging fears. The first that the longer it took to find "Mr. Right," the more likely a casual encounter would lead to contracting AIDS. Needless to say, all the respondents who cruised hoped that their next casual encounter might be the beginning of a lengthy commitment, a view that justified the risks of cruising and was more "identity-enhancing" than the mere satisfaction of lust (Peter). The second reason was that a potential "Mr. Right" might develop AIDS, demand months or years of care, and then die.

The AIDS epidemic also led to an escalation in the demand for greater perfection in "Mr. Right." This demand went far beyond the previously acceptable pre-AIDS criterion of physical beauty and guaranteed a long, risky search:

I want a man who will stick by me during Armageddon. And a man for whom I would do the same. I am always on the lookout for him. When I'm at the Rawhide, I lean against a wall and watch men. I scrutinize their faces, their eyes, their mouths, and of course their bodies. Sometimes the man I was studying will come over and talk to me. I recall a few conversations, and usually the men seemed fairly smart, and I often felt it was too bad that they would probably not be among those to repeople the earth after the apocalypse (Steven).

This is not to say that the AIDS epidemic diminished the attraction of the youthful male body to gay men. It remained compelling, but the number of excuses for not approaching and engaging multiplied (another reason the search for Mr. Right would be a long one):

The AIDS tragedy has made beauty more enchanting and the ways the body can be appreciated have multiplied, giving new importance to male couture, body-building, pornography, and cuisine (Tom).

2. The Dimensions of Cruising After AIDS:

Before AIDS, the Castro and South of Market districts were hubs of bustling social worlds of bathhouses, bars, discos, and parties at which the sexuality was electric and cruising was ubiquitous. But subsequent to AIDS:

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and the addresses are given in full, including the street, city, and state.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names and addresses of the members of the committee who have been elected to the office of chairman. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and the addresses are given in full, including the street, city, and state.

Gay men display a curious reticence to make a move, any move, toward someone else. The community has been split into "HIV positive" and "HIV negative" camps, the latter of which try to keep the former out of their bedrooms, if not their lives (Allan).

Our common language has blurred and unraveled, like our sex (Jorge).

The Castro sometimes seems like a medieval hamlet during the plague: it's a place where people shun each other. And guys available for sex either don't know or don't care that they carry the virus (David).

A dimension of cruising frequently mentioned by the respondents was the linking of casual sex and safer sex. As the search for a "cure for AIDS " passed five years, then a decade, the numbers of gay deaths mounted, the resistance to safer sex waned. Condoms, however inconvenient for those who had known sex without them, became *de rigueur*. The younger respondents, all of whom had never known a time when condoms were not recommended, used them rather matter-of-factly (but not always consistently). Also, the acceptance of condoms among the respondents increased as technological advancements made them less a barrier to sensation and pleasure.

The acceptance of condoms diminished the fear of sexual intimacy and the respondents began, enthusiastically, to cruise again. Even so, post-AIDS cruising did not lead as frequently to a one-night stands (Stan). The fervent hope of the respondents that they would find "Mr. Right" remained, but all of them were aware that each episode of unprotected casual sex increased the risk of contracting "The Big A," forcing them to deal with desperation and fear.

But if the condom was accepted it was not loved. None of the respondents thought safer sex was as exciting and pleasurable as pre-AIDS sex was remembered to be or made out to be in pre-AIDS fictional nostalgia and pornography. Indeed, safer sex was not al-

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring the integrity and reliability of financial data. This section also highlights the role of internal controls in preventing errors and fraud.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the implementation of effective internal control systems. It provides a detailed overview of the various components of such systems, including segregation of duties, authorization procedures, and regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms. The goal is to ensure that all transactions are properly authorized, recorded, and reviewed.

ways an option for the respondents who had experienced "the real thing, hot sex with no holds barred" (Mark). They would rather do *nothing*. Thus the number of respondents who spoke of not having any sex (other than masturbation) for six months or more increased in later interviews with the original respondents. One respondent (Anthony) spoke for a majority of those who knew pre-AIDS gay sex:

I really hate how the experts hype safer sex as satisfying. That's bullshit. We pigged out, and now it's over. Safer sex just trying to make the best of a losing situation. Trying to sell it as hot is pitiful.

Many of the respondents feared that the condom had become "the sole symbol for gay sexuality, eclipsing the myriad colored handkerchiefs that bespoke its variety and vitality before the age of AIDS" (Anthony). Most, nevertheless, accepted the necessity of using them to "reduce the risk of some really gay sex practices" (Neil).

This meant practicing safer sex and always using condoms. Suddenly, time-tested cruising strategies for getting and holding another person's attention had to be burdened with tactful discussions of safer sex, itself a potential "turn off" that could spoil an otherwise good cruise. In fact, any mention of AIDS usually ended a cruise. The only exception to this rule was a ritual reference to safer sex in response to a sexual "come-on." For example, an acceptable answer to the question "What are you into?" might be: "I'm into body rubbing, tit play. Safe stuff" (Joshua). The gay pornography industry aided in eroticizing safer sex by having all its actors wear barely visible thin-skinned condoms that did not "bunch in and out like an accordion during close-ups and spoil everything" (Anthony).

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and the addresses are listed below each name. The list includes the names of the members of the committee, the names of the members of the sub-committee, and the names of the members of the advisory committee. The addresses are listed in the same order as the names.

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One of the most important reasons that safer sex could be billed as "hot" was that it more or less forced the playful aspects of sex to be emphasized:

What I love about safer sex is that the foreplay can go on forever (John).

Learning safer sex also enhanced verbal communication skills, a notorious shortcoming of pre-AIDS cruising. The respondents found themselves trying to learning sensitive ways to say "No," from "Telling a guy in a nice way that you are not interested in him sexually" to "Telling him you are HIV positive." A few of the respondents relearned dating:

Before AIDS, going out on a date meant 'getting laid'; now it often means genuinely getting to know someone (Paul).

The least enjoyable dimension of safer sex was the necessity of carefully inspecting a prospective partner's body for telltale lesions, which could only be done when naked:

In a bathhouse, where everyone walked around with only a towel around their waists, you and your partner could get naked fast. You could check him out. Now that the bathhouses are gone, you have to take a guy home with you to get naked. Then if you find out he's bad news (or he decides you are), it's a real pisser (Anthony).

In all of this, there was no moralizing: casual sex in the context of safer sex was okay, even hot. Even abstinence was in. But contriving elaborate fictions of one's sexual conquests for purposes of self-aggrandizement was definitely out. An embellished or extensive sexual history provoked suspicion and fear, not interest and arousal:

I no longer brag about my episodes of risky sex, like I did before AIDS. Values have really changed ... for those still around (Carlos).

Another dimension of post-AIDS cruising was having sex with friends. Prior to the AIDS epidemic, the folk caveat that made sex with friends among gay men a taboo was popular. There were many rationales for this taboo. Many of the respondents' friends were persons with whom they had never had sex because they had discovered that they were

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"sisters," that is, both were tops or bottoms; men whose companionship they desired but with whom sex "didn't work out"; men with whom they had never had sex because they feared impotence; and men with whom they had never thought of having sex. The overarching reason for not having sex was simple application of the stereotypic piece of folk caveat that "gay sexual relationships are short-lived." :

If I fuck up the sex, I might screw up the friendship. So it's *safer* [italics mine] not to have sex (Joe).

This changed after AIDS. Friends could become "fuck buddies" — men with whom the respondents were friends, ranging from one-night stands that grew into affairs and matured into friendships to old friends who became sexual possibilities because of the dangers of cruising. This restricted the sexual activities of the respondents (hence their risk of contracting AIDS) to smaller social groups of men with whom they had non-exclusive sexual relationships:

I found fuck buddying the ideal relationship. Fuck buddies belong to each other but don't possess each other. They are favorite partners in a perennial engagement. A lover may be ideal, but good friends and a fuck buddy will get you through. There is no daily routine, no hidden agendas, no alienated affection. He has his friends, I have mine. Sometimes we'd see each other twice a week, sometimes not for a month or two. If one of us had a new boyfriend, we always knew when the freshness of passion had worn off; that's when he'd call me or I'd call him. This sort of relationship works because gay men are used to investing different partners and acts with different levels of intimacy and meaning (Anthony).

The respondents often found "tricking with friends" a novelty that astounded them. A friendship was supposed to be a long-term affair *sans* the volatility of infatuation:

God, I was horny. I went into this bar with an 'anything goes' feeling. I met a real nice guy but couldn't bring myself to go home with him. A sudden thought about AIDS gave me a real chill. I went home, called up a friend, and ended up having sex with him. He wasn't really sexually attractive to me, but it was satisfying. We were amazed friends could get it on!

Sometimes these lifestyle changes were too late to forestall AIDS:

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I stopped going to the bathhouses as soon as I realized my life was at stake, and I settled down in a relationship. I gave money to the AIDS Foundation. I went to benefits, candlelight marches, and rallies. But I didn't become a Shanti volunteer and look after the ill. I didn't look the horror in the eye, so the horror came to me (Joshua).

Just "partying together to socialize" or "dating" became another typical goal of post-AIDS cruising. As a result of the AIDS media coverage and panic that resulted in the closing of the bathhouses in San Francisco, the respondents came to see other cruise venues as dangerous places to be avoided:

One of ironies of AIDS is that it's the positives who are out cruising. The negatives have taken themselves out of circulation. Well, ironic from an moral perspective, not a human one (Peter).

The cruise venues that remained after the closure of the bathhouses and sex clubs suffered from the absence of gay men too frightened to cruise and the men who died of AIDS: It became very difficult for the respondents to find unattached men with whom to relate, which of course impeded the search for "Mr. Right" and decreased the likelihood of gay men coupling:

The bars are crowded with friends who talk only to each other and avoid the cruises of strangers. If you find someone you like, he's unavailable because he's got a lover or something. Cruising can get pretty depressing (David).

Unattached men who were perceived as promiscuous were viewed warily. For example, anyone seen leaving a bar with different men over a period of time was quickly labeled a "slut," "AIDS bait," or a "danger penis":

I noticed one guy's comings and goings with other guys all night for several weekends at the Rising Sun. What's with this guy, I asked someone I'd seen him leave with once. "Oh, we just went out and smoked a joint," he told me. I didn't think of that. I automatically thought he was a slut. AIDS gets to you one way or another (Rand).

But not all HIV positive gay men played the role of a slut. Circumspect gay men might be HIV positive. Anyone infected by HIV could appear normal. One respondent

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was shocked when he discovered how suddenly HIV could manifest itself in an apparently "healthy" gay man:

I had been hanging out at this bar for a month, trying to get the bartender into bed. Then, one weekend night, we started talking and we hit it off. He plied me with freebies and I put the make on him. He suggested we get together after he got off work. I could hardly wait. Then things began to go wrong. 'No sucking. No fucking.' he told me once. Other guys at the bar, who were following our moves, laughed, 'No sucking? No fucking? What's left? A massage. Yeah, he likes massages.' Did they knew something I didn't? Was I being dumped? Anyway, to make a long story short, I eventually got disgusted at his hedging and left. I didn't come back to the bar for a month.

When I did, he started talking to me about his health. Little lumps all over his arms and one on his neck. 'I have Burkitt's lymphoma,' he told me. Not for nothing do I know a few things about AIDS. 'Burkitt's?' I said, 'isn't that associated with AIDS.' 'It is? My doctor said I don't have AIDS,' he told me. I nodded, detecting the panic in his voice, and wished I'd kept my big mouth shut. It was another month before I visited again. He didn't look good at all! A lump on his neck was real big now. We talked a while and he was really scared. He still said he didn't have AIDS, but I figure that was just to keep from scaring customers away.

It was another two months before I came around again and he wasn't there that night. I asked around and nobody knew anything. I asked the owner as he walked by. 'Didn't you hear? He died last month. AIDS. We kept him on almost to the end. He didn't have a family he could go home to. Big bash after the funeral. He wanted that. Sorry you weren't there.' That's it, man. If we had gotten together that night several months ago. He must have known something was wrong. He saved my life. This is the second time this sort of thing has happened to me. I wanted somebody and they kept me away because they were moral. I'm not going to try for the killer charm" (Norman).

In such a climate of fear, even successful cruises often, a one respondent put it, "self-destruct the morning after":

The guy I slept with left before I woke up and does not want to have sex with me again. All my devious schemes to get him into bed succeeded, but still I'm left with the empty feeling of having flunked" (Bobby).

Although there were always rumors of HIV-positive men cruising indiscriminantly, in fact men with similar HIV status' usually restricted their cruising to each other. That is, the respondents with HIV preferred cruising other positives and the respondents who tested negative for HIV preferred "neggies" as sexual partners. The respondents with HIV

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felt that everyone was watching them (in truth, they *were* watched and the subject of constant rumor-mongering) and eager to spoil their cruises. One respondent with HIV (John L), related how, while he was cruising a well-known alley, a stranger handed him a note, telling him that he was in a place where only "safe" people should be. "As if I would do something more dangerous than he would."

Cruising other PWAs cuts down the potential for rejection, of someone telling me, "I don't want anything to do with you.". PWAs can talk with level heads about AIDS, which is very much the major influence in our lives. Let me give you an idea of how it is. A few weeks ago I was at a North Beach fair with some friends and a very attractive young guy started following me around. Eventually he came up to me and introduced himself and we chatted for a few minutes. He gave me his business card and asked me to call him for a date. I put his card in my pocket and one of my friends asked me if I was doing to call him. I said, "Of course I'm not." "Why not?" I said, "Well, think about it, I call this guy and say, 'Yeah, you thought I was real cute on the street. I have AIDS. Do you still think I'm cute?'" My friend said, "You don't have to tell him that right off the bat!" And I said, "You're right. I'm not obligated. But he needs to be aware of it. I'm not going to lead him on and wake up in bed with him the next morning and say, 'Oh, by the way, we had safe sex and there's really nothing to be worried about, but I probably should tell you that'" Or maybe when he asks me what I do I say, "Well, I'm on long-term disability and spend two days a week at the AIDS Foundation." Or, "I was an art student but I had to quit because I got very sick as the semester started." Even if I could avoid all kinds of personal conversation, I couldn't spend more than four hours with him without my pill-box alarm going off and having to take medication which, I guarantee you, would require some sort of explanation. My life and my AIDS diagnosis are all mixed up. I find it easier not to socialize with negatives (John).

But socializing among persons with HIV, or "positives," was not a simple matter.

Conversational gambits between them generally opened quite edgily:

We positives recognize each other, having met at SFGH, medical offices, pharmacies, and encounter groups. Besides, we've all got "the look" and can spot each other across a crowded room. We don't want to hear about another PWA who is doing badly; but we also don't want to hear that everyone is doing better than we are. Each of us imagines himself as the sole survivor, which puts a damper on conversation. We're tend to be poker-faced (John).

And there was the possibility of making the kind of cruising error familiar to persons with

HIV:

"The Look" is the well-known emaciated appearance of advanced-stage HIVers. This gauntness is, sometimes, confused with the dry, thin "look" often seen in junkies. Passing

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through the intersection at 16th and Mission, I am often approached by drug dealers who mistake the signs of my HIV infection for those of addiction. They rarely persist after I refuse their services, but it wounds my self-esteem (Rand).

In spite of safer sex education, taking risks remained as important a dimension of post-AIDS cruising as it was of pre-AIDS cruising. While AIDS changed all the respondents' perception of the risk of casual sex, the impact was contradictory. Most of the respondents abandoned all or some of their risky casual sex. One respondent, however, used AIDS to justify taking greater risks in cruising and sexual encounters:

As the number of ill and dying increased, I asserted my own body and sexuality more strongly against death. I spent all my free time at a gym. After nine months of working out, I was in excellent shape, and ready to take risks. To spit in the face of AIDS. To give my fullest moon to the Christian guilt mongers. I met guys who carried the virus while cruising. I fuck buddy one of them. Totally safe sex. But you never know. If the stories that some of the guys who bought AIDS told me are to be believed, they were almost virgins when they were diagnosed. I get the feeling AIDS is easier to catch than the so-called experts let on or know. While I was cruising Polk Street one night, I met a eighteen year old kid whose "lover" kicked him out onto the street when he was diagnosed with AIDS. I took him in and when he became ill, nursed him until the day he died. Impossible kid, but I have no regrets. I found a leather master to introduce me to SM [sado-masochism] and BD [bondage and discipline], just to sample its pleasures, if any. The experience [kisses his fingers] turned me into a leatherman. I can't say I do everything I want or am able, but AIDS has not made me into a closet case. If anything, I'm gayer than I would have been otherwise (Bruce).

An especially interesting dimension of post-AIDS cruising were its specialized technological innovations. Several new modes of cruising arose to deal with the problems of AIDS. *First*, geographical cruising, that is, cruising areas where AIDS is not a public health problem. This type of cruising depended upon accurate epidemiological information about the incidence of AIDS in gay populations. Such information could be found in specialized journals, but was routinely available in the gay press. *Second*, "technological cruising," that is, modem cruising and phone sex; and institutional innovations in cruising, for example, JO clubs. JO means Jack Off or Jerk Off, that is to say *masturbation*. JO

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clubs are venues where group sex takes place and safer sex guidelines are enforced: "Lips above the hips or else" and "Keep your jizz to yourself". Third, hospital cruising, in which hospitalized respondents with HIV cruised other persons with HIV.

The geographical innovations were short-lived. In the first years after the AIDS crisis began, a few of the respondents desperately began cruising areas outside San Francisco. They visited East Bay bars and bathhouses. As AIDS became a problem in the entire Bay Area, a the two who could afford to traveled great distances to cruise reputedly safer areas in California or the United States. During the 1980s, there was a great deal of talk about cruising the Hawaiian Islands, Latin America, and Europe.

The proliferation of technological sex venues was an adaptive response to the closing of the bathhouses:

What were, prior to AIDS, merely technological curiosities or alternatives for those who didn't like people or who enjoy kinky sex, became instant commercial successes. After all, the telephone has always been compatible with intimacy. And videotaped porn is more personal than letters, which have been forms of erotica for centuries. Just as important, they're a boon for older gay men, people with sexual dysfunctions, and for solitary individuals who enjoy being alone (Tom).

For the respondents with pre-AIDS sexual experience, the technological and institutional innovations in sex venues were exciting because they permitted safe ways to act out risky behavior: they simulated pre-AIDS sexuality, casual, anonymous, and abundant. Cruising men on phone sex exchanges and computer bulletin boards lent a futuristic ambiance to cruising. These venues proved valuable to those respondents who found that safer sex diminished their sexual spontaneity, enthusiasm, arousal, and humor:

Dial a phone number advertised in a local gay newspaper, give credit card information and the particulars of your sexual fantasy or kink, and someone will call you back and get me off. I can turn on my computer, dial onto a gay BBS and cruise over the modem. I cruise the racks of gay videotapes at a local store, find a tape I like, and take it home (Jorge).

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The success of the erotic atmosphere of JO clubs depended on the willingness of their patrons to participate in dramatic forms of mutual masturbation and other non-penetrative activities. Voyeurism was quite common. One San Francisco JO club dealt with this problem by turning masturbation into a pageant with such evocative themes as "Hat Night," "Toga Night," and "Jack Off for Literacy Night." The ambiance of these institutions proved reminiscent of that of the forbidden bathhouses

The lighting is very dim, there's the loud beat of disco music, and the pungent smells of grass and cum. Jars of lubricant are all over the place. Two guys fondle each other, are joined by others, all focused on feeling and giving pleasure (Jorge).

Some gay entrepreneurs claimed to teach "ecstatic safe sex." This was a obvious attempt at eroticizing safer sex. One respondent with HIV (Jack) told of how he and another gay man attended a "rebirthing session" and experienced the power of "erotic touching":

There was massage, talking out garbage, structured breathing, and a background of soft music. It was two hours long but seemed like five minutes! It was ... oh, so interesting! I was so high afterwards. I felt like dancing all night!

The respondents' hospital cruising was a natural response to being in a milieu with other gay men. It was also a very risky enterprise, a hasty ascent up several rungs of the Ladder of Risk and, possibly, a fall:

Some of the guys hospitalized at San Francisco General's AIDS ward were absolutely stunning. I mean knockouts! Hunks! There they were, strolling down the corridor pulling their IV poles behind them, their butts peaking out through their gowns. Then there were some of the young docs, another source of thwarted libido. If these possibilities didn't pan out, you could always have sex with your roommate, with your visitors, or your roommate's visitors. If things got too hot — there were stories of patients being kicked out of the hospital for attempted rape — you could try another floor (John L).

Volunteerism among the respondents increased dramatically as a result of the AIDS epidemic. The respondents "sublimated" (their term) their sexual impulses by

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engaging in such non-sexual team enterprises as volunteer work, political activism, and recreational activities. Cruising took place in new venues peopled by this new class of volunteer gay male activists. AIDS fund-raisers, college campuses, professional organizations, and the workplace augmented the familiar pre-AIDS cruise arenas. Over half of the older respondents tried fulfilling their need for risky cruising with nonsexual activities such as taking part in the confrontational zaps of activist groups ACT UP or Queer Nation, becoming volunteers in AIDS organizations, or (if they carried the AIDS virus) participating in a treatment drug protocol. This redirection of risky sexual activity indicates that the modes of risk-taking behavior can, to some degree, be resocialized. Fearful of contracting AIDS or of transmitting it to others, five of the respondents eschewed casual sex altogether for over a year. Having abandoned the frenetic pace of promiscuity, they often found that quality was a satisfactory replacement for quantity. As one respondent (Jack) observed:

A lot of us have stopped cruising for sex at the old places, even though we can do it safely. Maybe that's because we're looking for quality in our sexual partners. For people who can make a difference in our lives. But there's still a lot of unsafe sex out there. Anybody who practices unsafe sex today has a compulsive gambler's addiction to risk or a suicidal's death wish.

3. The Consequences of Cruising After AIDS:

The respondents remarked on their discovery that the trust they had placed in other gay men during casual sexual encounters lead to betrayal much more frequently than they had ever imagined:

HIV infection exposed the deceit and betrayal of trust that happened every day during sexual encounters with ignorant and irresponsible gay men (Peter).

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The decrease in the mutual trust of gay men together with the fear that, whether out of ignorance, stupidity, or malice, gay men could infect each other with the AIDS virus, had a very important sociological consequence. The *biological* bonding of gay men to community through casual sex was forced to compete with their *symbolic* bonding to community as operationalized through volunteerism and other forms of grassroots activism.

The sense that they might be betrayed in casual encounters with other gay men led the respondents to "make do" with their current relationships. The eroticization and romanticization of current relationships in order to lessen the need for sexual contact with new men.

I think gay relationships after AIDS are longer-lived. It's like POW! AIDS! Fear keeps relationships going (Carlos).

On the other hand, the respondents' cruising led to the disruption of their existing sexual relationships, especially if they were not *open relationships*. Because it favored open sexual relationships, cruising was responsible for the institutionalization of "open gay marriages," in which partners committed to a life together were expected to tolerate outside sexual activities, as long as they were not secret.

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COMMUNITY AND IDEOLOGY

CHAPTER VI

A. INTRODUCTION:

University of Chicago sociologists Robert E. Park (1928) and Louis Wirth (1928) introduced the term *ghetto* to describe any geographic area or neighborhood inhabited by a people socially segregated from the larger society and who possessed a distinctive lifestyle. Following Park and Wirth, sociologist Martin Levine (1979) characterized a *gay ghetto* as a geographic area dense with gathering places and commercial establishments providing a wide spectrum of social supports and institutions; the presence of a conspicuous and dominant lifestyle not found in the larger society; and a predominantly gay residential population. In the sense that Levine uses the term, the gay community of San Francisco consists of several gay ghettos. In the discussion that follows, the term *social world* (discussed below) replaces ghetto.

University of California, San Francisco, sociologist Anselm Strauss (1978) introduced the term *social world* as the fundamental "building blocks" of society and the principle upon which social life is organized. His structural interactionist (Strauss, 1985) perspective is concerned with the nature and structure of the organization of various group affiliations and their dynamics. Shibutani (1955; 1962) consolidated these insights into the concept of *reference groups as perspectives* which form the basis for individual and collective action.

As the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement matured, its ideology that gay sex was a political statement and an end in itself led to the construction of a complex, multi-

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2. The second part of the document contains a detailed description of the research methodology used in the study. This section outlines the procedures followed, the data sources, and the analytical techniques employed to conduct the research.

layered community in San Francisco. The tangible manifestations of this community were its bars, newspapers, community centers, bathhouses, support groups, magazines, cruising venues, health centers, newsletters, political organizations, and legal services that served to promote sexual pleasure. Its intangible manifestations were the friendships, socializing, relationships, social services, and sense of security that this sexual pleasure facilitated among their members. Sex was the *sine qua non* of gayness and the reason for the existence of the gay community. Sex brought gay men together, gave their lives a focus, and sustained their identities. Sex bonded them to community, provided a rational basis for an egalitarian sense of equality, and led to the emergence of community identity.

Many of the respondents — the self-described politically left-of-center members of the research sample who came out from 1960 to 1980 — described their experience of community as tribal. The gay tribe was largely hidden from heterosexuals and was navigated by initiates using arcane signs, gestures, and language. Community bonding was effected by the institutionalization of casual, often anonymous sex, the fraternal secrecy of the gay sexual lifestyle, and cruising in a carnival atmosphere of recreational drugs and obligatory excess. Casual sex was the *sine qua non* of being gay and cruising took up a great deal of the respondents' free time. All this took place with the tacit complicity of the medical profession who, in their technological hubris, believed that antibiotics could control all the negative biological and social consequences of rampant promiscuity.

Frances Fitzgerald (1986) provides an excellent description of San Francisco's Castro District during this halcyon period:

... the neighborhood was like other neighborhoods except that on Saturdays and Sundays you could walk for blocks and see only young men dressed as it were for a hiking expedition

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Even at lunchtime on a weekday there would be dozens of good-looking young men crowding the cafe's tables, hanging out at the bars, leaning against doorways, or walking down the streets with their arms around each other. The sexual tension was palpable The Castro was a place where most young gay men came. Fifty to a hundred thousand came as tourists each summer, and of these, thousands decided to settle, leaving Topeka and Omaha for good

A relevant concept to introduce the that of *social worlds* — social groups with shared resources, constraints and work of some kind by participants within the tradition. Social worlds describe the subcommunities of the gay community better than reference groups. Specifically, Strauss (1978) notes:

In each social world, at least one primary activity (along with related activities) is strikingly evident ... There are sites where activities occur: hence space and a shaped landscape are relevant. Technology (inherited or innovative modes of carrying out the social world's activities) is always involved ... In social worlds at their outset, there may be only temporary division of labor, but once underway, organizations inevitably evolve to further one aspect of the world's activities.

Social worlds are highly fluid phenomena; they may intersect and segment into two or more worlds (e.g., Becker, 1982; Bucher, 1962; Strauss, 1978, 1979; Bucher and Strauss, 1961).

The San Francisco gay community is a mixed social world (Gerson, 1983; Kling and Gerson, 1977, 1978) whose primary activity is servicing, with great technological efficiency, the sexual and social needs of its members. It is both a *social movement* of interacting individuals whose activities are focused on shared commitments to alter the larger heterosexual world in which they are embedded and a *communal world*, that is, a social world of activities that have as their focus the establishment and/or maintenance of communities of people committed to each other and to their shared goals. In agreement with the writing of Bucher and Strauss (1961), there are also social movements and communal movements *within* San Francisco's gay subworlds that are aimed at changing

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the gay community itself and providing communal experiences for certain specialized lifestyles. In these intra-community social movements, gay men act deliberately to change the institutional and organizational structure of the social worlds that shaped their identities and in which they are embedded, a truly interactive linking of micro, meso, and macro sociology.

Examples of communal movements within the San Francisco gay community are the *radical fairie* movement, the gay disco dancing movement of 1977 through 1987, and the leather movement discussed above. The Radical Fairie movement, briefly, is a communal, spiritual, homosexual, back-to-nature movement begun by the gay activist and guru Harry Hay in the early 1970s (Timmons, 1990). The radical fairie movement has much in common with the hippie commune movement of the same era, and it assured gay men that they had a place in the countercultural "paradigm shift" to the New Age. The aim of its members was "to separate themselves physically from the dominant heterosexual culture and to seek alternatives for body, as well as soul, in isolated rural areas" (Thompson, 1987) or, as founder Hay put it in his invocation at the first Radical Fairie circle, to "throw off the ugly green frog skin of hetero-imitation to find the shining Fairie prince beneath" (Timmons, 1990). Radical Fairie conferences have no "workshops," only fairie circles. During a fairie circle, spontaneous themes emerge, invocations are offered to pagan spirits, and chants and dances rise and fall. An oversimplification with, nonetheless, a rhetorical germ of truth, was their characterization as "hippie idealist pagan gay liberationists."

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Somewhat akin to the Radical Fairie movement in its spiritual ramifications for the elect, but thoroughly urban, was the decade of the *gay disco dance movement* (Diebold, 1987). The great San Francisco dance halls of this era — the Trocadero Transfer, Dreamland, and The I-Beam — became the weekend gathering places of thousands of gay men, who from Friday evenings until Sunday morning would dance shirtless and sweating, in Dionysian abandon, to the disco music of, among others, Patrick Cowley, one of the few gay musicians ever to achieve great success in crossing over to the straight music market.

The respondents experienced the gay community as a parallel society with its own special *argot* or "language." The principal language of the gay community is a form of humor called *camp*.

Camp is something of a secret code and is one of the mainstays of an almost ethnic humor which has been used for defense purposes over the years (Neil).

Because camp seeks to comfort and is largely a generous rather than a selfish feeling, it also aids people in forming images with which they can feel comfortable in a hostile heterosexual society. Camp is based on a cluster of gay images from stage and film:

Famous Hollywood stars of the thirties and forties figure importantly, especially if the roles they play are campy or treat of tragic love. Stars such as Mae West, Bette Davis, and Carmen Miranda are mimed along with some of their famous scenes or routines probably because they exaggerate the various stereotyped roles that women play in society. There is thus the gay idea of "acting within acting." Mimicking the tone, diction, rhetoric, and speech mannerisms of these camp heroines would seem to show a social world's perception of how seriously the dominant society takes the language by which it maintains rigid images of sex stereotyping.

At the very core, camp is the art of the put-down, especially of one's self and social world. Behind the irony of camp, however, is the awareness of the roles played outside the gay social world as well. By pretending to be a vamp or a sexpot, gay men manifest an implied awareness that language may be used as a means to reshape attitude and social roles.

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Through camp, stereotyped behavior is revealed to be nothing more than another form of playacting (Hayes, 1981).

Other languages are those of the SM/BD and leather subworlds. These languages also developed in the context of homophobic discriminatory processes so that they — like camp — contributed to a class consciousness among gay men and, concomitantly, enhanced the physical bond between them through the creation of distinctive meanings. The interview data was rich in the dimensions of class consciousness among the respondents, hence in the dimensions of their perception of community. For example, a major contribution to the respondents class consciousness was the process of *coming out*, which endowed the them with a sense of vocation — that is, of "being called to be gay" (Tom) — and an "us versus them" ideology that was used to justify the attribution of a kinship relationship among gay men.

Another dimension of the respondents' gay class consciousness were the media messages, ideologies, and other symbolic discourses that were constructed for the consumption of the dominant heterosexual society, concerned as they are with legitimizing the humanity, identity, community, and ideals of gay men. Among such discourses were theoretical studies of homosexuality, its etiology, history, and expression. From such studies emerged the stigma theories such as the myth that gays are especially sensitive and creative and the gay liberationist idea that sex was a way of surmounting the barriers of race, class, and culture. Apropos of this theory a respondent recalled reading an essay written in 1969 titled "The Politics of Being Queer" by Paul Goodman, American poet, novelist, lay psychotherapist, and teacher, who argued that the "queer life" could be "profoundly democratizing, throwing together every class and group. He wrote:

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I have cruised rich, poor, middle class, and petit bourgeois; black, white, yellow, and brown; scholars, jocks, Gentlemanly Cs, and dropouts; farmers, seamen, railroad men, heavy industry, light manufacturing, communications, business, and finance; civilians, soldiers, and sailors, and once or twice cops.

San Francisco is famous as the "gay Mecca" and preeminent "gay melting pot."

The City's gay community enjoys a renown that draws men from many different social strata throughout the United States and socializes them into its complex of interlocking gay subworlds. But while the end of the Second World War and San Francisco's tolerance for diversity initially triggered the development of its geographical concentrations of gay residents, it is doubtful that they would have grown to their present size and importance in the absence of the "Chicago school" of sociology. The media brought the gay social worlds of the nation's most famous cities to the attention of the public because its reporters and editors were very much aware of the popularity of the Chicago sociological tradition's concern with groups and communities.

B. CONDITIONS FOR THE EXPERIENCE OF GAY COMMUNITY:

Not all gay people who come out necessarily experience community. Many of the respondents did. The research indicated that there are certain conditions that predispose to this experience. The experience of community is predicated upon:

1. A Dense Population of Gay Men:

The existence of a core population of gay men geographically dense enough to support gay institutions and a metropolitan area with a civic tolerance for diversity are prerequisites for the emergence of gay community. Escaping from homophobia was a common reason for migrating to San Francisco and so a major reason for the density of gay men there:

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Homophobic stereotypes are so entrenched in my hometown that it doesn't matter how much they are challenged. There was this gay minister, very respected until his congregation found out he was gay. Once it was public knowledge, everything changed. The minister was seen as "merely a faggot." He wasn't the sensitive, caring minister the way they had thought of him before. He became "the one who likes to suck cock," as someone described him. Just that (Anthony).

Further, the emergence and maintenance of community institutions are predicated upon the following conditions:

The members should have few ties to the straight community and be publicly out (Neil).

Autonomy, weak bonds to relatives, and lack of parental responsibility is what allowed gay men the geographic mobility to migrate to San Francisco. New members must have irreversible reasons to migrate, like escaping home town homophobia, job discrimination, and work stereotyping (Peter).

2. Geographic and Ideological Boundaries:

The establishment and maintenance of geographic and ideological boundaries between the gay community and the overarching heterosexual society. San Francisco's gay subworlds lie in certain sections of the City and are defined by geographical boundaries, common norms and behaviors, shared institutional settings, and technologies that have enough in common that their members can be socialized into an interlocking network of subworlds that act together to their mutual advantage, gain social legitimation for their members, and present a variety of claims making activities related to the special interests of each subworld.

Very important activities within the gay community, as well as its subworlds, are establishing and maintaining boundaries between "our world" and other worlds and gaining social legitimation for the social world itself (Strauss, 1982). Each ghetto within the San Francisco gay community is a subworld, or segment of a larger community, with highly specialized types of cultural, health, political, recreational, and sexual interests.

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Establishing and maintaining boundaries includes the social construction of the subworld and a variety of claims making activities related to its special interests (Becker, 1960, 1963). Hereafter, the more value-free term *subworld* will be used instead of the term ghetto. The respondents' awareness of these boundaries arose in several ways:

Through media definition, that is, one respondent defined the boundaries of the gay community as "a geographic area perceived by the media as gay territory" (Allen).

Another (Benjamin) believed that:

The gay community is only as strong as the media makes it.

The gay community's norms of youth and male beauty. These norms constitute a powerful orthodoxy that is very efficient in defining the social boundaries of the gay male community. Attractive persons are consistently evaluated based on implicit halo effects (Kaiser, Freeman, & Wingate, 1985), which exact a claim on others to act deferentially toward them. Indeed, the good-looking respondents found themselves able to control interactions without effort. Extending the concept of halo effects, the respondents realized that youthful good looks, white middle class demeanor, and dramatic staging made gay events the subject of gratuitous media coverage, which in turn defined the scope of the gay community as it attracted new recruits:

People may call us 'pretty-boys' to denigrate us, but their evaluation is accurate. It's something we're quite proud of, and one of our best draws (Mike H).

The gay community enjoys considerable tolerance from heterosexuals and attracts others to its causes because its spokesmen are young, male, and good-looking (Paul C).

The norms of gay male body image subworld costuming help maintain the boundary between the gay community and the overarching heterosexual society by

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guaranteeing the exclusivity of the gay community's social institutions. Every gay person who conforms to these norms becomes a representative of, and recruiter for, the gay community. For example, gyms, the ubiquitous institutions of the gay subworld of health clubs and body-building, are popular cruise arenas because their members have attractive physiques:

All the members of Gold's gym have a proper ratio of fat to body weight (Joe).

The gym, like the leather bar, is an insulated social institution where regulars are expected to possess definite physical attributes, knowledge, and be of a certain age. Only peers can interact successfully in gyms or leather bars. (Newcomers must prove their mettle before they are accepted.) Other gays may "visit" these places, but they will generally suffer a "dilemma of status," that is, they will find themselves "gay in a gay place but nonetheless outsiders" (Joe). This process of shaming or degrading is what Strauss (1959) calls *status forcing*. It is one of the dimensions of what the respondents called *attitude*.

One of the most ubiquitous social boundaries of the gay social world of the respondents was the *generation gap*. The younger respondents saw their supremacy as natural. They rationalized their ageism with an abundance of stereotypes:

Older men have little to show for their lives except decline (Ed).

All the older guys want to do is reminisce. They bore you to death with their smarmy chatter about the people, the parties, and the abundant sex of their era (Anthony).

Half the men on Castro Street are old queens, balding, flabby, decrepit creatures whose fleshy complexion is pocked with pores. Those whose bodies are tolerable are disfigured by the rapacious expressions on their faces (Sean).

All older guys want to do is settle down, hobnob with straights, and make themselves into perfect neighbors (John L.).

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and the addresses are listed below each name. The list includes the names of the members of the committee, the names of the members of the sub-committee, and the names of the members of the advisory committee. The addresses are listed in the same order as the names.

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Older gay men were accused of "ghettoized mentalities" ("they spend their lives in Castro Street bars"), being promiscuous ("they grew up having sex with strangers"), trivializing relationships ("they see someone for a week and they say they have a lover"), and being "elitist" ("they live only for the self-indulgent lifestyle of attitude, opera, expensive clothes, classy apartments, parties, and travel"). Older activists were denigrated:

They are nonconfrontational accommodationists, assimilationists, and gaycrats. They have allowed themselves to be coopted by the government, the medical profession, and straights. They fell for all the double talk about gay civil rights, by which is meant that only white, middle-class, heterosexual males are given the chance to choose their values (John L).

A few of the older respondents, waxing wroth, retaliated for the hostility, or the indifference, of young gays towards them by heaping unflattering labels on them. All "youngmen" were callow, lacking sexual experience, emotional sophistication, and career: "they are more fascinated with each other than anything else" (Harry). But, in general, the young respondents were abetted in their arrogance by the older ones who also bought the idea that youth and beauty rule the gay community. Certainly most of the older respondents preferred young companions, and had no trouble finding them:

Most of the gay men I know are younger than I am. They're between twenty-six and thirty. I don't really know why this is so — young guys must be my type. My lover is six years younger than I am; my boyfriend is ten years younger than I am. A lot of times in a crowd of younger men I feel like an outsider. I definitely come from a different time: they come out at thirteen. When I was thirteen I was having a sexual relation with my best friend but we didn't talk about it. I didn't think I was gay. We didn't kiss. It was pure sex. And the companionship that went with it: best friends (John).

In summary, the norms concerning gay male body image are very potent and coercive because they describe a community of images of perfect men, not a community of ordinary people:

I've been duped. Erotic vitality is narrowed and limited by the images of sexuality put forth by our community: young, mostly white, hard, well-endowed, smooth men. Anything but

ordinary guys. We see them everywhere: on posters, flyers, magazines, bus stops, videos. They sell us phone sex, relationships, video porn, dance clubs, vacations, everything. These images create a kind of desire, a hormone-driven, psycho-sexual frenzy which makes the ordinary guys that surround us incapable of satisfying us or invisible. We've become addicted to thinking that life should consist of only perfect men, addicted to a type of false consciousness. And all the while the images goad us on, so that we become partly these images ourselves, imitating the properties of images as we surround ourselves with images. Unfortunately, images make poor candidates for the guy next door, with whom we usually try to form relationships (Greg).

Several respondents wondered about the stability of gay bonding in a community in which the norms invest supreme value in youth, physical attractiveness, and self-indulgence. Such values, they thought, tended to fix gay relationships at the stage of infatuation or *limerence* ("puppy love") and fantasy. Adonism and ageism impose rigid limits on face-to-face interactions, which are normally highly flexible:

This lack of flexibility in gay socializing leads to instability, hence many gay relationships conform to the stereotype of being short-lived. There nevertheless persists in the minds of many gay men the somewhat paradoxical ideal of a mature, stable, enduring love of each other as tribal brothers, often modeled on vague notions of the statuesque "Greek culture" of antiquity (Peter).

Another social boundary between the gay and heterosexual communities was due to the clustering of gay men within certain occupations and with certain employers. The research data indicate that the reasons for this phenomenon are diverse. There is little concrete data on the position of gay men or the gay community in American economic life. This accounts for the persistence of the stereotype that gays cluster in "frivolous occupations on the fringe of the GNP or female-dominated, white-collar careers" (Anthony), e.g., airline steward, caterer, fashion designer, florist, hairdresser, hospital orderly, interior decorator, librarian, fashion model, makeup artist, nurse, office secretary, telephone operator, and waiter.

Although the range of income and prestige in these stereotyped occupations is broad, highly profitable careers are rare. Certainly, the respondents and their friends did not fit the stereotype. They were concentrated in the arts, banking, computer programming, fashion, entertainment, law, medicine, public schools, social services, and word processing. There were more respondents in social services than service occupations; more in banking and finance than entertainment and the arts; and more working with computers than in the fashion industry.

Respondents with the geographic mobility to defeat job discrimination and work stereotyping in their home towns by migrated to San Francisco. They desired jobs that required limited commitments in terms of time and after-work duties, leaving large amounts of time that could be devoted to "getting sex."

I moved to San Francisco because I wanted to be at the center of things, to know the gays who made things happen, to have a hand in creating a new world and, above all, to be myself. I wanted to learn about and live the gay life, party hard and have lots of sex in a place that had a large, visible gay presence. From all that I had read and seen on television, I knew I would be comfortable here: I would be able to walk around arm in arm with my boyfriend and people would empathize with all my gay sentiments, from heartbreak when it turned out that my boyfriend didn't love me to exultation when hundreds of thousands of us marched down Market Street together (Mike).

But they were often so inexperienced that they were forced to enter one of the "ghettos" in entry-level retail and service jobs (Andrew). In Castro Street businesses where gays are responsible for hiring, gays clustered because of the operation of friendship networks or as an expression of the business' solidarity with the generalized audience of the gay community. In spite of this, none of the respondents in retail and service jobs wanted to leave San Francisco, which suggests another reason for gay occupational clustering.

Still another cause for gay occupational ghettos was the knowledge, expressed by the respondents, that there were powerful adversaries barring gay men from entering particular types of work. This knowledge was an important motive for choosing occupations or work with employers known to be tolerant or sympathetic to gays. Several respondents said that they would not consider occupations like military service, police work, or professional sports (even in San Francisco) because they anticipated limited career opportunities, if not severe discrimination.

The respondents who performed as comedians in local clubs, wrote and directed gay plays, or showed their art in galleries felt that trying to support themselves with straight work would force them into self-censorship and compel them to remove homosexual themes from their product or "bury their identities under layers of pseudonyms" (John). And one respondent who moonlighted as an actor in gay porn videos believed he would be fired if a *gay* coworker saw one of his films and reported it.

Some Bay Area corporations were well-known among the respondents for their support of gay employees. They had gay employee groups which negotiated with management, provided health benefits to gay domestic partners, and gave classes in "diversity training" to make their nongay workers comfortable with gays (Benjamin). Almost all the respondents would rather take a job in one of these companies than a more prestigious or higher-paying one with a less progressive employer.

3. Ways of Knowing Community:

An obvious but very important condition for the existence of gay community are the ways of hearing about it. The way the respondents heard about the San Francisco gay

community or the perspective from which they understood it made a difference in their understanding of it. Among the sources for the respondents' information about the gay community were telephone "hotlines" that they called for help or referrals; queer jokes by straight friends that pointed gay institutions out: "Fags hang out there"; others heard their friends slur an institution as a place where "queers" and "faggots" hang out, unwittingly tipping them off to the location of the institution; TV or radio; high school and university classes and associated texts; visits to the Castro district and its venues with peers; libraries, where words "gay" and "homosexual" could be looked up to find leads on where to go.

The respondents whose body image conformed to the gay ideal experienced community differently from those whose does not.

It does not take long for the unattractive learn their place in the gay community: it is always elsewhere (Tom).

Examples of such adonism were numerous. The youthfulness of gay organizations was perpetuated by scheduling meetings, especially of executive committees, during weekdays, when somewhat older persons had to work (Mark). The older members whose work hours were flexible enough to allow them to participate were disproportionately professional (e.g., accountants, dentists, lawyers, and physicians), students, and retired. One respondent, proud of his youthful good looks, delighted in testing the limits of his attractiveness by seeking entrance to exclusive gay clubs while inappropriately dressed:

I like trying to "crash" upscale gay disco halls and leather bars in the wrong drag. Frowning doormen try to ignore me and let me be jostled aside by better dressed men who were waved inside with smiling banter (Brian).

Another respondent, endowed with a poor physique, met with smirks and sniggers when he dared wear other than loose-fitting cut-offs and T-shirts at local gay beaches. A respon-

dent in his fifties complained that he was ridiculed as being "too old to be gay." An obese respondent said that he was given left-handed compliments like "you have a gay mind but a straight body."

The respondents who came out during the 1970s — and were exposed to the countercultural ideologies of sexual liberation — came to see the gay identity as based on casual sex and the cohesiveness of the gay community as based on physical bonding. This view, and the gay capitalist movement that arose during the zenith of the Stonewall gay movement, led to the construction and proliferation of commercial cruising venues throughout the gay community. This, in turn, led to the simplistic view of the gay community as a "sexual community" whose members were bonded together solely by their sexuality.

Post-Stonewall gays are preoccupied with their senses and emotions, emphasize participation and sharing, and have constructed an open-ended and experimental community totally opposed to the dominant and constricting straight values of rationalism, puritanism, and materialism (Rand).

An alternative view is that the institutions of the gay community facilitate gay people meeting each other. And any institution that facilitates people meeting will also facilitate sexual relationships even though it has other institutional goals. So seeing gay venues only as cruising venues is to miss the point that all gay institutions can, and did in the respondents' experience, contribute to nonsexual intimacy.

Intimate nonsexual relationships involve a deep sense of mutual respect that comes from common experience and the need to be needed. Can you cruise a gay bar and get these things? The starting point is asking yourself what's important: socializing, recreation, sports, sex, political activism, or volunteering. Then find places where such people with similar interests gather. The gay community has all kinds of organizations. If you don't know what's important to you, you might as well go to a bar. You'll learn a lot from cruising, and maybe the experiences you have will result in your setting priorities and goals (Michael).

Working with other gays is a way to learn about and experience community. The question arises: can a gay man experience community working for a straight organization that does not discriminate against gays? All the respondents with such experience said no:

I was out when I worked at Bechtel, which employs many gay people. But the only thing these other gay employees did for me was to make me see what I would be like in five years. All the gay people there were pretty frustrated. They were trapped by mortgages, debts, and their efforts to get the next promotion. I didn't see happy gays. From the first day I started, I didn't want to be there; I was there only for the money (Benjamin).

Everyone at work knew I was gay. I was out. No problem. What was a problem was NBC's priorities and mine. I increasingly saw the work I was doing as meaningless. As an account executive, I felt that if you were leading a large group of people you should believe in your work. But I no longer believed it mattered. I quit. I originally planned to take a year off and then get back into the broadcasting business. I volunteered at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, Shanti, and the Gay and Lesbian Speakers' Bureau. I was out in the gay community addressing issues that really matter to me: AIDS and the lifestyle of gay men. The "sabbatical" from work ended last September. I realized then I had no desire to return (Paul).

The reason for the respondents' unhappiness with straight employers was twofold. First, a good salary was little more than a trap leading to debts and obligations that kept the employee tethered to his employer. To a single employee, this was a restriction of freedom tantamount to imprisonment. Second, many straight businesses see their employees only in terms of the bottom line. This point of view often justified the discrimination the respondents found most hateful:

I once worked in a broadcast media situation where I was the only gay person except for a secretary. Out of fifty employees. One of the reasons why I worked there, and stayed on, was that I thought it was important for some out gay people to work in broadcasting and be perceived as competent. But when I interviewed hundreds of people for sales jobs at the station, only one was clearly gay. My goal was important, but frustrating to implement. Then I realized my presence was funding the very organizations who acted as if we didn't matter. The media saw me only as a way to make money (Paul).

The respondents who worked at straight jobs where there were no other gay employees had fewer opportunities to get information about and experience community.

To be gay and be planning a career also impacted the trajectory of the respondent's interaction with the gay community. One particular stereotype of the gay lifestyle that influenced the contact with the gay community was that being gay meant sacrificing career goals:

I was in college when I came out. I had little to do with the gay liberation movement. I lived in West Virginia, far from New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the places where gay communities were forming. And I wasn't willing to forego career goals simply to be gay. Being gay is an overriding, all-consuming passion, one which dominates home, family, and career. I wanted to finish graduate school first, and then teach, perhaps travel. Later, there would be time to lead an intense gay life (Paul).

The amount of leisure time, which depends upon occupation, also makes a difference in how community is experienced. Gay community institutions and subworlds take time to explore and intimacy thrives on the kind of attention only the unhurried can give.

That's a problem. It takes time to experience community. Leisure time. We just started this store, and I haven't had much time to socialize. The bookstore itself furnishes many opportunities for socializing, like talking with customers and readings by authors (Neil).

C. DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY:

The respondents experienced community in many ways. Some of the dimensions of community were spoken about at length — a testimony of their importance — while others only briefly mentioned. Some of the factors briefly alluded to were the mechanisms of social control that created real and psychic boundaries of the gay community beyond which the respondents felt physically vulnerable and stigmatized as outcasts, the emulation of gay role models such as political activists, professionals, entertainers, and sports figures; and gay-oriented mass communication, which provided a means of continually

redefining, hence maintaining, gay identity through novels, pornography, and the performing arts.

1. Stumbling Over Stereotypes:

Stumbling over stereotypes, several of the respondents were alienated from the gay community even before they had any contact with it. One respondent refused to visit the San Francisco gay community because of what he perceived as:

The regimentation and shallowness of living in the San Francisco gay community. So much of gay life there is dominated by a faddish and artificial behavior that sets gays off as aliens. Such ghetto living is dehumanizing and oppressive. It's all campy humor, trivial interests, and small-minded dishing. A San Francisco gay man's gestures and way of talking are as recognizable as the speech of ghetto blacks (Mark).

Another respondent felt he did could not abide the gay male image of being artistic, creative, tasteful, and elegant. He rejected identifying with the gay community or choosing some gay subworld for membership because he was

Logical, rational, and sloppy; not artistic, intuitive, and prissy. I'm homosexual, not gay (Steve).

This respondent chose to identify himself with heterosexual social norms: he styled himself "straight-acting and straight-appearing." His homosexual relationships were with men of the same type; gays who acted otherwise were dismissed contemptuously as queens who had "capitulated to the [gay] stereotype."

Another respondent, after ten years absence from the leather scene to pursue career, began to cruise South of Market bars again. In his opinion, the South of Market leather scene had changed for the worse:

I went to several so-called leather bars of Folsom Street. No one wore leather. Just because everybody takes off his shirt in a bar doesn't make it a leather bar (Norman).

I spoke about his reaction to another respondent who identified with the South of Market leather community. This respondent agreed that the norms of San Francisco leather bars had indeed changed over time; the variety of possible leather identities had increased. These changes might be unacceptable to someone who viewed them across a generation gap:

He's right that most of the guys in the leather bars today are shirtless. They're proud of their buffed, ripped bodies. But they have the "leather" look: Levis, black construction boots, and stainless steel chains and studs. The guy you talked to sounds like member of the old guard. Maybe unhappy that things have changed and because the leather movement has become more accessible. There's nothing monolithic about the leather scene today, though some bars still have rigid dress codes. Instead, today's leather subculture is composed of rugged individuals with highly individualistic preferences, manners, and fetishes (Anthony).

2. The Experience of Community:

Common dimensions of experiencing community were a feeling of kinship with other gay men, of security within the boundaries of the gay community, and of belonging to a family. This dimension of the experience of community emerged as a consequence of the shaping of the identities of the respondents through socialization.

The respondents' sense of security — hence the stability of their identities and family bonding — depended upon their living in the proximity of the large number of other gay residents. Such "ghetto life" was enhanced by being able to find a majority of amenities and necessities within a limited area. For example, San Francisco's predominantly gay Castro district community had a local commercial area for those who operated gay enterprises; a residential neighborhood where those who lived could shop for necessities and could comfortably "act gay"; a territory with many venues to cruise for casual sex;

the locus of political, social, and religious life; a place where there was abundant social space to come out; and places for entertainment and recreation.

There were also a large number of professionals — licensed clinical psychologists, lawyers, physicians, and social workers — who located their offices in or near the ghetto and naturally developed specialized gay practices. These men contributed to the sense of security among community residents by making gay-sensitive services available to them (Peter).

Ghetto live facilitated the experience of kinship because of the proximity of large numbers of friends the respondents could know intimately, casually, or just by sight. Being "a member of a family" was one of the most anticipated benefits of those who emigrated to San Francisco. As one respondent (John) put it:

Months before I migrated to San Francisco, I was thinking of its gay people as my tribe. As far as I was concerned, when I arrived, I was home at last.

Any subset of the geographic and non-geographic subworlds of the gay community could constitute the social world of a respondent. This was the reason for the uniqueness of the respondents' community identities. For example, the circuit of San Francisco's gay bars was the social world of one respondent:

I almost always went to the Rawhide on Friday or Saturday night. I met most of my friends there. Sometimes I'd see a few of them at the pool tables and that's how I'd spend the night. Or I'd play the video games while cruising the crowd for someone new. If I met him, we would dance or sit at the bar chatting for a while. Maybe we'd go home together. Or maybe a Freund would tell me about a party at someone's house or something interesting happening at another bar and we'd go there. There was always something to do or someone to talk to. When I didn't wasn't at the Rawhide, I'd go to dinner or a movie or whatever with someone I had met there. That bar was my world for five years (Paul).

These subworlds often presented a united front on important issues to all gay people. Since the San Francisco gay community can be considered as the sum of its geographic and non-geographic subworlds, a united front is interpreted by the media as a consensus within the gay community.

The basic friendship among the respondents was the shared household, commonly known as "rooming" with other gay men. Greg, a twenty year-old respondent, lived with four other gay men that he considered his family and image of community. He found, as did most of the other respondents, that communal living was a consciousness altering environment:

My roommates are the persons I love most in the world. I extended my faith in them to the gay community at large. Out there were people with whom I could be intimate. This defines community for me.

Other friendship groups were to be found in the large socializing networks organized around clusters of activities of their members (e.g., cruising, dancing, shopping, socializing, worshipping); sites where these activities occur (e.g., bars, churches, community centers, discos, parks, retail businesses, sex clubs, and the streets); technology for implementing the activity (e.g., books, computer terminals, costumes, films, light shows, magazines, newspapers, telephones, sex paraphernalia, sound systems, and video tapes); and organizations to further the special interests of the particular social world. It was at the level of small groups that the respondents were socialized into the gay community. Some of them never achieved a larger perspective. Only those who had friendship networks that extended beyond the Bay Area, were activists or professionals with extensive contacts across the nation, or persons who had need of specialized institutional assistance such as representation by an attorney from a national gay rights organization, had a perspective on the institutional scope of the gay community.

Friendship groups also depended on the respondents' activities in the gay community. As these activities varied, so did their friendship groups and their ideas about what

constituted an expression of *communitatis*. Insofar as activities overlapped, the respondents' community ideologies became complex and hybridized. Overlapping memberships in more than one of the community's geographic and non-geographic subworlds was another way the respondents experienced community. The non-geographical subworlds of the San Francisco gay community are its bars, bathhouses, disco halls, retail stores that employed gays and sold gay-oriented (sometime subworld-specific) products, theaters presenting gay films and plays, political and social clubs, sex clubs, sports teams, gay social service organizations, gay religious groups, the subworld of gay performing and fine arts, volunteer service organizations, professional organizations, and a plethora of special interest groups. The gay community's social movements — whose activities are focused on shared commitments to alter the dominant heterosexual world in which they are embedded — and communal worlds — whose activities have as their focus the establishment and maintenance of communities of people committed to each other and to their shared goals — such as the *Radical Fairie* movement, the gay disco movement of 1977 through 1987, and the leather movement, are also non-geographic subworlds of the gay community.

The respondents' cruising of familiar venues augmented their sense of tribe, family, and community. This is consistent with Schutz' (1945/1964) view that the association of familiar venues with a way of life — in this case of cruising arenas with the gay lifestyle — is a dimension of the experience of community. Cruising led to sexual *bonding*, the term the respondents used to describe the "sexual glue that ties gay men to each other and to their community" (John L). This bonding was described in terms of as an animal attraction

or electric recognition between gay strangers cruising each other and the extraordinary intensity of the immediate, face-to-face interactions that followed.

The respondents' sexual bonding arose from shared modes of sexuality, socialization processes that accompanied the respondents' participation in the institutions of the gay community, the solidarity of a stigmatized minority seeking protection by banding together, the sense that their casual relationships were "fated," that gay sex was a seditious action against the dominant heterosexual culture, and, above all, the affinity of like-minded social beings who share common norms and values. This is consistent with Blumer's (1969) interpretation of George Herbert Mead's thought about what holds social groups together.

Asked about the meaning of "the gay community," the respondents became very self-conscious. They were confused about its nature and their relationship to it. A majority saw the gay community as a political entity, more symbolic than real. If there was an "experience of community," it arose from volunteering time or assuming a leadership role in a gay organization. As a result, many felt something was missing from their lives:

I'm a gay person. I feel totally comfortable with myself as a gay person. But I don't feel connected to the "gay community." I go to the Castro and feel I belong, but I'm not a member of an organization that might make me feel a part of the gay community. I go to protests and marches and things like that ... that's my only real connection. Still, I feel a need to do something, especially when I have time on my hands. That's why I've been thinking of becoming a Shanti volunteer. I don't feel guilted into doing this; I feel a need for it (John Z).

Six months ago I thought I was playing an important role in the gay community. Now I think I'm just a salaried employee of a gay organization and that my relationship to the gay community is that my job is to answer the telephone and allocate and schedule MCC's facilities to gay groups. That's a positive role, but not an important one. Everything else is my life. In my private life, I don't always feel I have a relationship with the gay community or even want one (Benjamin).

These respondents did not consider their friendship networks a dimension of community. Nor did they see their daily lives as shaped by it. It was as if they had been asked what it was like to be a citizen of the United States and had replied that the only politicians are real citizens; everybody else simply lives and works there.

This may be partly due to the charismatic leadership of the gay community. Its leaders are seldom elected; rather they are self-appointed. They hoist themselves to prominence by their own bootstraps. Their roles are not legitimated by votes, but by snippets of media coverage. It is hard to relate to such a leadership, or to the community the leadership portrays itself as representing (Peter).

The San Francisco gay community supports a large number of gay performing arts venues. The performing arts were frequently mentioned as a good way to understand the historical and contemporary gay identity and to enlarge the scope of the concept of the "gay family." In this regard, the respondents mentioned viewing comedy, film, and musical productions on the "gay TV networks" or attending gay dramatic productions such as Tim Miller's *My Queer Body*, David Drake's (1992) *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, and Paul Rudnick's (1994) *Jeffrey*.

An interesting dimension of the experience of community was the decoration of personal spaces — such as apartments, homes, and offices — a trend that was enthusiastically responded to by gay capitalists with the creation of new markets. The decoration of personal spaces could very precisely demarcate the respondents' gay family in a variety of ways:

Tom of Finland's leather-fantasy drawings are available as frameable works of art costing between \$2,000 and \$6,000. Bruce Weber's *übermenschen* have graduated from *GQ* to the walls of apartments. Sexy, all-male calendars from *Colt* and *Up Front* sell like Swatches. Poster photographers and artists proliferate (David Morgan, Naomi Stanley, Michael Roberts, Mikonos, Anthony Crickmay, Tank, The Hun), while previous generations of eroticists are disinterred (Baron Von Gloeden, Herbert List, George Platt Lynes, George Quaintance, Bob Mizer, Etienne, Bruce of Los Angeles, Arthur Tress). San Francisco's gift

shops, poster shops, and frame shops are awash in tasteful, male nudity, while mail-order catalogs whiz through the postal system to more provincial — or more daring — customers (Charles).

3. The Differentiation of Identity:

The interview data indicate that the following processes differentiated and complexified the respondents' identities: The *eroticization* (giving erotic meanings to) of *fetishes* refers to the sexual meanings given to material objects and social facts that are shared by all members of a given subworld (and not necessarily by members of another: wearing a leather dog collar would be an affectation in Castro Street bars; but it conveys important interactional cues in South of Market leather bars). Such fetishes gave the respondents' identities a unique expressiveness, in agreement with a point made by Blumer (1969) in a general discussion of community identity.

The respondents could, and often did, move freely from one subworld to another, shifting their identities as they did so. The identity shifting was mediated by the use of specialized fetishes, unique costuming, colorful and distinct collective efforts (e.g., Castro area block parties and political meetings as contrasted with the South of Market "slave auctions" and "jock strap contests"), and institutional ambiance (e.g., of the leather cruise bars of Folsom Street versus the hustler bars of Polk Gulch). These subworld identities always intersected what might be termed a *core gay identity* whose meanings were centered around cruising and sexual bonding.

The respondents' experienced identity differentiation through participation in the special interests of their social world, which special interests generally competed with those of other subworlds. Since prior to coming out, the respondents' gay identities were undif-

ferentiated, the observed variety in their mature gay identities must have arisen from this plurality of special interests and institutions into which they were socialized. Each subworld furnished an institutional framework for cruising and other gay-related activities, the respondents' socialization into the distinct lifestyle of a subworld (or mix of subworlds) contributed to the uniqueness of their identities. Complexity of community engenders complexity of identity. The respondents enjoyed a "tremendous variety of experiences that precluded getting bored with being gay" (Jack) and believed that the existence of a plurality of subworlds "raises gay consciousness and gives everyone a glimpse of the many possible alternative realities" (John L). The existence of this diversity contradicts "the straight world's view of homosexuality as a monolithic evil that is radically binary, exclusive, and intolerant of diversity" (Neil).

Additionally, the respondents' gay identities were differentiated by the pace of their activities within the gay community and its subworlds. Some respondents cruised, partied, or otherwise took part in community activities seldom, others every weekend, and a few (seemingly) around the clock. For some of the respondents, the gay community meant frenetic weekends of loud music, dancing, cruising, parties, street fairs, and political zaps. For others, it consisted of quiet little bistros where they could "escape from it all." In all cases, the respondents' identities reflected the tempo of their activities. The more a respondent participated in the subworlds of the gay community, the more likely he was to make statements like "gay is good," "something important is happening in my life," and "there are possibilities for sexual gratification on a scale that permits everyone to explore their needs" (Peter). Conversely, the less a respondent participated, the smaller his

friendship networks, the less his satisfaction with the gay lifestyle, and the less complex his gay identity (as indicated by his understanding of gay issues beyond those related to his personal needs).

Each respondent had a primary subworld that defined his *community identity*, i.e., he oriented himself to a particular subworld, which he used as a locus of attachment and an image of self-characterization (Hummon, 1986). It was to this subworld that the respondents professed allegiance and from which they derived their aspirations, attitudes, and standards (Strauss, 1959). Their primary subworld provided them with all of the identities in their lives, including their work, if that took place in the gay community. The primary subworld was also the source of ideologies that engendered political action, i.e., mass action directed towards publicly challenging the gay community's differences with the dominant heterosexual American society:

Soon after I came out I realized that I wanted to affiliate with a gay political organization. Such a commitment might lead to other areas of self-discovery and give me a sense of mission (Neil).

As the above respondent acknowledged, political ideologies contributed, directly or indirectly, to the expression of his personal identity. (Although not always positively.) Directly if the respondent was a community activist or volunteer, indirectly if he was not. Hence, all the respondents exhibited a strong identification with geographic location, a sense that their identities were "biographically and politically embedded" in a particular subworld.

The reasons for not affiliating with a movement organization were varied: sexual and emotional entanglements, a disinclination to forming closer ties with the gay movement than were actually felt, or a fear of losing independence:

I haven't joined any political organizations because I am afraid that in the name of achieving common goals and fighting homophobia, such a group would curtail my individuality. To participate fully in political protest, people must, at least in public, downplay their own subjective desires in order to present a solid political front (John).

4. Ideology Making:

The making of ideology has always been a crucial dimension of the experience of community. The respondents' most basic formulation of post-Stonewall gay ideology was that "Gay is Good," that sex bonded gay men to each other and gave them a focus, namely the pleasure principle, and that the gay community was the foundation of a millenarian society or utopia. A cult-like belief system supported this vision of the future gay community, which served to shield the respondents from the harsh realities of AIDS and its associated homophobia, prejudice, and violence. At the same time, the vision sustained a symbolic link between the one of the utopian promises of a capitalist consumer economy, liberated desire, and the respondents' idea of the gay community as a tribe of men bonded together by sexual intimacy.

The respondents' utopian community was peopled with gay men and women of youthful spirit, trusting, and innocent. It was a pluralist society of ideological tolerance and liberated sexuality. Camaraderie and solidarity were maintained through play and the free practice of sexuality in a carnival atmosphere that celebrated homosexuality and in which identities were constantly in flux and fantasy dominated. A trend-setting creativity

was the social currency and product of this "magical world" and the connection to the mundane economic and political world of straight America:

I like believing that gays are generally stronger, smarter, more innovative, and more sensitive than non-gays. My gayness separates me from the rest of the world and makes me feel unique and mysterious. I like knowing I'm a member of a select community of individuals who had to build themselves from scratch, whose lives are an ongoing experiment, and who pioneer their relationships, sexuality, and morality (Neil).

The citizens of this world-wide community, the gay men and women who survived AIDS, would be bound together by the "loving, shared consensus of sex" (Jack). One respondent saw the gay utopia as:

A classless, "rational anarchy" of people free to express any emotions that feel natural despite taboos, a people come to terms with their homosexuality, and who possess an existential outlook that will make the old claustrophobic ghettos and their bizarre subworlds obsolescent (Peter).

Another respondent saw the millennium as an independent gay city in California like West Hollywood or, at best, a nation-state, like Israel. Although it placed them at variance with gay activists whose urban civil rights orientation downplayed human differences, all the respondents advocated that the millennial community be separate and distinct from straight society. Paradoxically, they hoped that the gay utopia would be accepted by the dominant heterosexual culture to a greater degree than present gay communities are.

These visions of a gay utopia are not new. Their origins lie in the visionary writings of gay authors such as Harry Hay (Thompson, 1987a) and are practiced in a simple form by the contemporary Radical Fairie movement. The Radical Fairies are a nationwide, grassroots movement of mostly rural gay men with a:

"We-are-different-than-strights attitude" seeking "spiritual awakening and rural, tribal alternatives to urban gay social structures and to straight society at large" (Donald).

While the complex gay business and social institutions of San Francisco's gay social worlds — the result of the gay liberation movement of the 1970s — submerged the individuality of their members in a "uniform clone-like identity" and internalized the dominant society's stigmatization of homosexuals, the radical fairies were reinventing the paradigm of gay men as individualists of positive self-worth who were nurtured by their isolation from urban chaos, proud of their self-reliance, and exhilarated by their contact with raw nature. At the same time, this "revolution from the inside or personal evolution" had to avoid the unflattering labels of "mere anarchic neopaganism, Whitmanesque individualism, or atavistic 1960s alternative-culture sentimentalism" (Donald).

The respondents believed that AIDS accelerated the emergence of a common symbolism and set of meanings among gay men and forced the gay community to emerge from its "narcissistic cocoon of isolationism" into an active community building: "AIDS has made us aware of our history and reshaped our identities and our community" (Jack). Indeed, the sobering effect of AIDS has resulted in greater cohesiveness, genuine caring, and emotional expression in the interactions of gay men; a "search for commonalities beyond the sexuality" (Neil); a "return to the countercultural ideals of gay liberation" (John); the "extirpation of internalized homophobia" (Peter); and the gay community's "emergence into manhood from adolescence" (John L.).

The advent of the millennium, all the respondents agreed, cannot precede the control of AIDS, the announcement of which will be responded to "like a siren that signals an 'ALL CLEAR' after the air raid that sent everyone underground" (Rand). As the epidemic becomes "nothing but a bad dream, the new community will emerge" (Jack). The

reemergence of rampant sexuality in this new community is not precluded, so the familiar problems of casual sex would have to be dealt with anew because "monogamy and safer sex isn't to everyone's taste" (Jorge). The bonding between utopian gay men was problematic to the respondents:

What will our sexuality be like when the epidemic is over? Whatever it is like, the answer will be couched in terms of an unchangeable human nature: Some people will behave like there's no tomorrow; others will probably be cautious all of their lives (John L.).

In this regard, what the respondents referred to as the *gay sensibility* is the symbolic meaning of being gay communicated among gay men themselves. It is not directed at the dominant straight society at all. Although its artifacts may be seen by heterosexuals, they frequently consider them subversive of their culture. The gay sensibility does not drive the day-to-day affairs of gay men, it is concerned with gay creative endeavors, the nurturance of a Whitmanesque "adhesive comradeship" among gay men, a utopian view of gay community, and the future of the "gay tribes."

The earliest modern statement of this view, advocated in the 1950s by gay activist Harry Hay and which found expression in the founding of the countercultural group known as the Radical Fairies in the early 1970s, was that gay people have a hidden history, an unbroken chain of gay creativity waiting to be reclaimed by them (Timmons, 1990). While this pretentious concept has been dismissed as a "misunderstanding of history" (Altman, 1988), it remains compelling because it echoes a deep conviction among gay idealists that straight society is morally bankrupt, that gay communities had been seized and transformed into restless materialist markets by both gay and straight entrepreneurs, that urban gay men had lost their individuality in their mindless, clone-like conformity to

style, and that (most importantly) gay people are *different beyond their sexuality* (an idea that had been sacrificed to the sexual revolution that swept America in the 1960s) and constitute a special tribe of humanity:

A community of cooperation without competition, of non-warlike men and non-domestic women. A community of profoundly spiritual people who cannot live an unexamined life (Neil).

The post-Stonewall gay liberation movement surrendered these ideals with its capitulation to the market forces that dominated heterosexual society, that is, by transforming the gay community into a sexual community of cruise venues:

During the late sixties, I, and others, glimpsed Utopia for a moment. We saw that the world for what it was, not someone else's interpretation of it. Our destinies, and ourselves, were our own. We saw that life was the fulfillment of itself, not the subject of the invisible machinations of heterosexual, religious fanatics and bigots. All the rules whose price was our emptiness; they seemed to disappear in a burst of laughter. This revolutionary idea possessed a generation as sexual liberation, and America has never been the same. For me, my new identity as a gay man meant sexuality. We, I and my fellows, created a mental and geographical terrain in which we could know and be known to each other; in which we could recognize gestures and share meanings. Our sexuality gave us the power to transcend the society that shunned us, dissolve the meanings they imprisoned us with, and realize our newfound selves.

Entrepreneurs packaged this vision into a kaleidoscope of fashions, urban hot-spots, and sexual venues that fed on the long-suppressed fantasies of the newly liberated gay clones.

But this mutation, or gay gift, leads to the emergence of a different consciousness — behavioral and perceptual differences — that could introduce new ideas necessary for human survival and thus become a political justification for the existence of gays. Some gay historians say that the homosexual community's creative and spiritual contribution to society derives in part from the pressures of the oppression of straight society; and that if these pressures were not there, the creativity would dry up. This is why some radical gay

activists are against assimilation into the dominant heterosexual society. A few of the respondents made the point that creativity, paradoxically, is in conflict with rampant sex, *i.e.*, the gay lifestyle of casual sex is creatively enervating. An example of this view is that abstinence (voluntary or accidental) can fuel creativity:

The unrequited pangs and failed loves I knew so well, which guaranteed me 'no little innocent bliss,' could always be used as fuel for a poem" (James).

One respondent described the queer sensibility as "a certain flamboyance and taking of risks. A high-style self-seriousness" (Ed). Another respondent was not so sanguine:

If one were to find a queer sensibility in, say, a painting, it would only confirm the worst clichés of the medium — that the artist took his theme and turned it into eye candy. It would extend the stereotypic image of the artist as a promiscuous gay man not only sexually but visually (Rand).

That gay creativity springs from outrageousness and risk was the consensus of most of the respondents:

I think there is an outrageousness in gay creative work that would not be dared by a straight man. Straight men don't live the kinds of lives that encourage them to come out with these kinds of ideas (Anthony).

Maybe because gays do not have to support a family we are free to take more chances with our careers. Maybe that's why I have so little tolerance for domesticated gays (John).

Another popular view was that the gay sensibility was forged in the closet:

The closet has taught us to be excellent actors because they have had to do two roles, one for the straights and the other for other gays. It is one source of our remarkable dual sensitivity. But the theory of gay creativity springing from oppression is basically a straight liberal idea. There's probably some truth to it. But I think it's an oversimplification that permits them to stereotype gay creativity. It is also a subtle justification for continued discrimination (Jack).

The gay sensibility "goes beyond the debate about whether homosexuality is due to genetics or social conditioning. The gay sensibility is an ideology that allows gay men

and lesbians to become part of the ongoing gay community effort to construct and disseminate stigma theories that explain and legitimize gayness, deny their imputed inferiority to straights, and expose the fallacies inherent in the dominant heterosexual perspective. It is about self-creation, both individual and social" (Peter). It is "is a vision that informs the political goals of the gay community rather than an *ad hoc* reaction to social problems and the religious right" (John L.). Clearly, public disclosure of gayness is an important dimension of the gay sensibility. Coming out, as an instance of the dimension of public disclosure and "the most important way an individual can shape society" (Rand), clearly conforms to the idealistic spirit of the gay sensibility. It is debatable whether outing, as a reaction to social problems, so conforms.

D. CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNITY:

The respondents' basic community reference was their network of friends and their primary subworld of membership — not the overarching gay community, which is largely a symbolic entity. The "gay community," like the "U. S. Government," had its positions, but they are more properly considered the positions of a majority of its subworlds. The major consequences of the respondents' experience of community were:

1. The Construction of Significant Loci of Identity:

The loci of the respondents' identities were the signs of their biographical, social, and temporal identities such as residences and their membership in geographic and non-geographic social worlds. Since all the respondents lived within the boundaries of one of San Francisco's gay geographic subworlds, their residence served, in Hummon's (1986) words, "as a significant locus of self and a sign of biographical, social, and temporal

identities." Equally, if not more, important as determinants of the respondents' identities were the non-geographic subworlds. The network of social relations that supported all these interlocking subworlds, as well as the meanings, symbols, norms, and values that were learned during socialization into these subworlds, created the communal identities of the respondents. In addition to being organized around common symbolizations, San Francisco's gay subworlds socialize their members into sharing special kinds of gayness which, as Strauss (1959) points out, is what makes joint activity possible:

Group life is organized around communication. Communication consists not merely in the transmission of ideas from the head of one person to that of another, it signifies shared meanings. "Shared" means more than that terms are used in ways sufficiently alike so that persons understand each other; it also means that terms arise out of and in turn permit community action.

E. THE GAY COMMUNITY AFTER AIDS:

AIDS connected sexual pleasure and death with an equals sign. Sex became a morality play that ended in death, the gay community a necropolis of dead and dying men. HIV was evidence of the corruption of the gay lifestyle. Gay life, the new ideologues proclaimed, was about not having sex. New homophobic theories were advanced about why less sex was good: the 1970s were the adolescent phase of the gay community. Gay men were not immortals. They were as human as heterosexuals. So they had to be mature, caring, and monogamous. HIV had given the gay community the opportunity to be more responsible. Sex and pleasure were, as the Christian fundamentalists and other proponents of a conservative social agenda had always held, vices.

These ideas had a very brief life among the gay men in general and the respondents in particular. In the 1990s it became clear to the respondents that gay men were not going

to be forced underground by AIDS, and that gay bonding was to remain a sexual bonding. But perhaps not only sexual. The problem of the post-AIDS was not how to be gay without sex, but how to take sexual pleasure in a time of restricted sexual freedom. The answer, as we shall see, was to engage in a gay life not only through sexual intimacy, but with all the resources at a person's disposal. The risks of being gay, before AIDS restricted to sexual intercourse and to a clique of other gay men, had to encompass and include all society. The young respondents came out breathtakingly early in their lives — to their parents, teachers, and public school classmates. The maturing college graduates and professionals came out to their professors and colleagues oriented their careers toward service to gay men. Creative artists abandoned sexual symbolism in their work for in-your-face realism. Formerly secret associations of gay physicians became vocal special interest groups of the AMA. Gays in the military put their careers on the line by coming out in public. The myth of gay creativity, a reality for only a select few, was reworked into the much more accessible ideology of the queer sensibility. If life was to be short, then there was much less time to live a lie.

1. Conditions for the Gay Community After AIDS:

The respondents who came out post-AIDS discovered a need for greater personal privacy. A byproduct of this necessary solitude was the enhancement their introspective, reflective capacities. This, in turn, heightened the importance of the symbolic aspects of being gay, for example ideology and community. As the interactions of the respondents with other gay persons became more a mutual exchange of meanings and values rather than a series of brief sexual episodes, the significance of fraternal, tribal sensibilities based

on sexual magnetism and the opinions of cliques at bars or other gay hangouts diminished. This focused the attention of the respondents on the importance of the overarching gay community and its ideologies as the basic reference from which personal values and goals were to be derived.

A reaction against the excesses that led to the AIDS epidemic led to the explication of the non-sexual ideology of *queerness*, which is concerned with that which can be considered "gay" regardless of sexual gender identifiers. The articulation of ever more symbolic rhetoric of gayness that was linked to a need for privacy is an important reason for the emergence of the ideology of queerness. This concept, which had its origins in Queer Nation's meaning of the term as a position that is politically radical and "in your-face," paradoxically demanding recognition by straight society while at the same time rejecting this society:

Queerness is being extravagantly, flamboyantly, outrageously different. Queerness is naturally offensive and offensiveness is naturally queer. Older gays want to reassure the straights that homosexuals are just like them. We want them to believe that we are worse than they imagine. We defy everything they hold dear (Anthony).

The meaning of the term has been considerably deepened by gay and lesbian scholars in mass communications (especially film and television) using a theoretical tool called *textual deconstruction*:

Queerness is something that is beyond gender — it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or, limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of gender binarism.... Queerness is a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or ant--straight.... This range of nonstraight expression includes specifically gay, lesbian, and bisexual expressions; but it also includes all other potential (an potentially unclassifiable) nonstraight positions.... Therefore, queer describes the nonstraight work, positions, pleasures, and readings of people who either don't share the same sexual orientation as that articulated in the texts they are producing or responding to, or who don't define themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (or straight, for that matter) (Doty, 1993).

San Francisco's gay community assimilated the problems due to the AIDS epidemic because it was already well organized when the disease first appeared. One respondent, an AIDS activist, summarized this view of the efficacy of a pre-existing organizational infrastructure :

The central trauma of San Francisco was not the AIDS crisis but the assassination of Harvey Milk in 1978. That was when our community faced its greatest threat. By the time AIDS hit we were tougher than the rest of the country. We overcame our collective trauma and were able to mobilize (Tom).

Yet before the 1990s, the deaths and flight of gay men from San Francisco threatened to disenfranchise the City's gay subworlds and destroy the gay community.

The human devastation translated into a business and attitude slump. Homes in the Castro stand vacant, while others rent or sell for half of what they once commanded. The bars and bathhouses, where once hundreds of gay men met for casual sex, are all but empty. Many have abandoned sex altogether in fear (Neil).

But the respondents attested to a rebounding of San Francisco's gay men from the tragedy. The existence of an organizational infrastructure — which permitted mobilizing the gay community to deal with the many social problems associated with the AIDS epidemic — was an important reason for the community's resilience. Jeremiads predicting an end to the gay community lost ground to an optimistic program of contesting the gay community's rigid definition of gayness and gay sexuality, developing outreach programs to gather in gay men who had been alienated from the pre-AIDS gay community, and ending the fatalistic view that there were limits on who or what a gay person could be. Public expressions of solidarity and hope contributed to the survival of the gay community:

When the plague began, I thought the gay community would wither away. If men could not sleep with each other, why would they go out? I was wrong. We will always need to be together. Gay is more than politics and more than sex. It is helping one another. We are discovering the strength and goodness of people we knew only as faces at the bars, bathhouses, or discos. (Tom).

The vacancies created by the gay men dead of AIDS and the media interest in the gay community heralded an invasion of the gay community by heterosexuals. The intense media coverage of the gay community after AIDS broke out also contributed to the mobilization of the community. The respondents were among the first AIDS activists, organizing a grassroots response to the epidemic on a variety of levels. They became media heroes; their fame in turn spurred other gay men to assume leadership and create more social service organizations.

Radio and TV talk shows regularly featured gay teenagers, parents, and spouses. Newspapers had articles on gays in the church, in the Boy Scouts, and the military. After AIDS broke out in the gay community, the code of silence began to break (Rand).

This phenomenon fueled the age-old debate about gay isolationism versus assimilationism. About half of the respondents preferred the gay of cruisy venues and dance spaces where gay men first felt the exhilaration of community in the 1970s:

Last Saturday I was really pissed at seeing straight sweater boys hanging around at the White Horse. And I wasn't alone in my loathing. I asked the bartender to do something to get the fucking straight people out of there. The regulars devised ways to scare them away. We have our bars and discos and turf to get away from straight oppression, to have a safe place to live. Inside gay spaces, queers can be queer. We can dance, touch, and kiss without fear, and with joy and celebration. So it's not surprising that we get ugly when straights invade our space. Straights steal our hair-styles, our clothes, our slang, our music. They slum in our clubs, feeling sophisticated and terribly liberal as they dance next to a couple of tongue-happy boys. But then they vote down gay rights and AIDS funding. They shake their asses at our discos and then laugh along with their friends' fag jokes on the squash court or around the water cooler the next day (Jack).

But the remaining respondents, many of which came out in the late 1980s to 1990s, looked favorably on *mainstreaming or assimilationism*, a reintegration into heterosexual institutions in which the lifestyle of middle-class straights is assumed in order to minimize differences and maximize tolerance. In the 1970s, many gay people separated from the heterosexual social structure into which they were born when they came out. The

respondents' mainstreaming took many forms as they sought to combine their sexual orientation with their other interests and identities:

While many gay men still migrate to large coastal cities like San Francisco, more and more gays are trying to improve gay life in their home states. A growing number of cities and states have openly gay elected officials, and national associations of gay and lesbian doctors, lawyers, and journalists have become increasingly vocal about discrimination in their professions (David).

2. Dimensions of the Gay Community After AIDS:

The AIDS epidemic created new ways to experience community, but they did not influence all of the respondents. Despite the fact that AIDS had caused them to stop cruising, several of the respondents continued to identify with the pre-AIDS community of rampant sexual opportunity:

I came out in the seventies. I cruised all the bars and bathhouses in San Francisco. My whole life was centered on partying and sex. When AIDS became a big problem, I withdrew from that scene. My god, I haven't had sex in a year! But I still think of myself as a cruiser and so do many of my friends (Anthony).

At the other end of the spectrum, the critical respondents eager for change saw AIDS as opening up the community to the possibility of change for the better:

AIDS made a mockery of the materialist, anonymous society of sexual athletes and resurrected the idea that gay people are different beyond their sexuality, which is the essence of the gay sensibility. Gayness is like a mutation — difficult for the individual because he is at odds with home, school, and society — but ultimately beneficial to the group (Tom).

Reading obituaries in the gay and straight press — “obituary cruising” — was a popular pastime among the respondents and represented a real, if macabre, connection to the gay community at large. And embedded in every obituary was further proof that gay men worked at a wide range of jobs, contrary to popular stereotypes. Obituaries include the age, marital status, and occupational data about the deceased:

In reading obituaries in the straight papers, if the deceased were female, old, married, or worked where no one I knew would, I skipped to the next. I looked at who bought the notice, and what was said in it. When an AIDS-related condition was not given as the cause of death, I looked for coded half-truths: cancer, pneumonia, meningitis, after a long struggle, after a short illness. The dead giveaway, so to speak, was to whom contributions could be made in lieu of flowers. The obits in gay papers like the BAR [Bay Area Reporter] and [San Francisco] Sentinel were more personal and dangerous. These were men I knew and with whom I might have had sex. I read the obits for anything that might connect me to someone of the past (Rand).

In the first several years of the AIDS epidemic, there were few persons with AIDS (PWAs) in San Francisco and these had little contact with each other except for chance meetings at the San Francisco General Hospital AIDS outpatient clinic (Ward 5B). Some of the respondents with AIDS were responsible for the creation of the first alliances of persons with AIDS (PWAs) circa 1985. These organizations pioneered new ways for persons with HIV to experience community. It was the leadership of the PWA organizations insisted that the media refer to gay men ill with AIDS them as "persons with AIDS," not "AIDS victims." (The term "person with AIDS" was coined by New York AIDS activist Michael Callen, diagnosed in 1982. When he died in December, 1993, he was one of the longest lived of the "long-term AIDS survivors.") The original PWA organizations spawned many other AIDS groups. As more and more PWAs participated in these groups, their collective actions created a subworld of PWAs. This subworld, in turn, maintained and legitimated their gay personal and community identities.

Increased AIDS activism, according to the respondents, led many organizations to focus their resources on the creation of symbolic messages aimed at new groups: formerly disenfranchised classes of gay people (for example, gay people of color and apolitical gays) and the dominant heterosexual society that broadcast the humanity, legitimacy, and

ideals of gay men. Their sexual lives truncated, activism among the respondents increased dramatically because of the AIDS crisis. For many of the respondents, this was their first contact with the non-geographical social world of gay men and lesbians whose relationship with the gay community went beyond membership in cliques and the satisfaction of their personal needs. In fact, for more than half of the respondents with HIV, their diagnosis precipitated their entry into AIDS activism, at which time they were socialized into the political ideologies and historical antecedents of the AIDS social world.

The place to be is at an ACT UP meeting or demonstration. When sex is dangerous, activism becomes very sexy. I never realized the political ramifications of being gay until I joined ACT UP (Mike H).

Of course, the contribution of AIDS activism to the respondents' personal and community identities also increased. This was reflected in the respondents' emphasis on ideology and street activism as contrasted to sexual activity when they discussed issues important to themselves. The pre-AIDS generation of respondents resolved conflicts between their sexual and political lives in favor of sexual adventure much more often:

I remember being invited to a political zap in New York in the 1970s. My boyfriend and I had a date for dinner the same night which I felt I couldn't break.. I wistfully told the guy who invited me to the zap that I was hopelessly mired in the mush of love and that the GAA [Gay Activist Alliance] would have to wait: "I envy your being part of history," I told him (Charles).

Another aspect of the post-AIDS political scene needs to be mentioned. While there has always been a certain amount of antipathy between gay male and lesbian activists, it has become especially bitter since the advent of AIDS:

Lesbians taking over AIDS organizations founded by and for gay males with AIDS. They feign a sorrowful acceptance of the burdens of leadership to fill the void left by their dying brothers. But they really only want to further their own selfish ends by taking over our organizations to benefit their sisters. A Lesbian community built on our graves? Their hubris is so outlandish. We die laughing (Anthony).

The formation of many grassroots volunteer AIDS organizations and the emergence of the phenomenon of *volunteerism* added a new dimension to the experience of community:

All of San Francisco's volunteer groups began as grassroots activities that expanded from social clubs of persons with a common interest to collective efforts in solving problems associated with the limitations of public agencies in serving the gay community (Paul).

The AIDS epidemic changed working for volunteer organizations, a gay lifestyle option since the 1970s, into a career possibility. The respondents volunteered their time to AIDS social service organizations such as the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and Shanti, to community health groups, to campaigns against anti-gay initiatives, to drives to elect politicians with a progressive AIDS agenda, to provide AIDS services, enact civil rights legislation, to campaign for the acceptance of homosexuality by Christian denominations, for the goals of gay professionals, and to organize gay sports teams. Collective efforts found expression in neighborhood meetings, professional seminars, referral services, speakers' bureaus, and in financial assistance programs for persons with AIDS and other gay indigents. In return for their efforts, the respondents discovered an atmosphere of extended family support in which they flourished, information sources, tasks and goals that would legitimate their gay identities, a vehicle for coming out, a way to "bear witness to the epidemic" (George), and (for some) ways to mesh their personal and work lives. One respondent summarized the need that volunteering filled:

Once you've seen AIDS, you're never the same. Most of my friends, caught up in their own fears, avoided talking about AIDS. I didn't want to sit passively on the sidelines as the epidemic raged on, I wanted to make a difference. I needed to know that somebody else knew what I knew. Becoming a Shanti volunteer was the answer (Bill).

Volunteer activities also helped the respondents forget their losses to AIDS and improved the quality of their lives and their social interactions:

After the weekend Shanti Project training, I suddenly realized I hadn't thought about Allen once (John L).

I became a volunteer when absolutely every friend I had was dead of AIDS. I told myself that if I didn't do something, I'd kill myself. I met a better quality of person at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, much different than the ones I used to take home from the bars (Jack).

An important characteristic of the volunteer AIDS organizations during the time of the interviews was their selection for a uniformity of temperaments in their volunteers. For example, there was a "type" of person selected as a Shanti volunteer (Ed). This person had to have a personality that could accept close supervision; would not clash with the often volatile, charismatic leaders of the organization; and was amenable to the organization's "touchy-feely" sensitivity training and client relationships. Therefore, the range of clients that are comfortable with Shanti volunteers is perforce limited:

If you want to let go and die or are in a crisis situation and need consolation, they are excellent; but if you are a fighter hanging on to life and angry at the world, forget them (Joshua).

The leadership of volunteer organizations were generally suspicious of professionals, who they perceived as insensitive and materialistic (Joshua). The derogation of professionals buttressed the volunteers' sense of worth and, to a degree, protected the volunteer organization from their defection to professional training programs. Genuine partnerships between professionals and volunteer organizations were therefore rare: the volunteer professional was often manipulated into a socially isolated role as a figurehead who lent his credibility to the organization by, for example, sitting on its board of direc-

tors, but who otherwise has little power. This anti-professional ideology became a part of volunteer training:

Volunteers boast of how many hours they were able to 'touch' clients that professionals couldn't or wouldn't by giving more hours of direct, one-on-one contact. Professionals were stereotyped as believing that, for example, Shanti volunteers were one-dimensional therapists whose help is not cost-effective and who lack the training that gives clinicians the ability to assess a client's relative needs on a variety of dimensions (Peter).

The volunteer respondents described their motives as selfless and charitable, but their "concerns for their community" and a sense of empowerment through action were more characteristic of the social justice motives of civil rights activists. Initial contact with volunteer groups was made during fund-raising events, social "mixers," or after a crisis drove a respondent to seek the consolation of group activity. The respondents hoped to find with volunteer groups an atmosphere of extended family support, information sources, tasks and goals that would legitimate their gay identities, a vehicle for coming out, a satisfaction of the need to "bear witness to the epidemic," (George) and ways to mesh their personal and work lives. One respondent summarized the need that volunteering filled for him:

Once you've seen AIDS, you're never the same. Most of my friends, caught up in their own fears, avoided talking about AIDS. I didn't want to sit passively on the sidelines as the epidemic raged on, I wanted to make a difference. I needed to know that somebody else knew what I knew. Becoming a Shanti volunteer was the answer (Bill).

Another respondent found that his volunteer work permitted him to forget his losses to AIDS:

After the weekend Shanti Project training, I suddenly realized I hadn't thought about Allen once (John L).

A respondent with HIV told of how the quality of his life changed when he abandoned cruising for casual sex for volunteering with the San Francisco AIDS Foundation:

I became a volunteer when absolutely every friend I had was dead of AIDS. I told myself that if I didn't do something, I'd kill myself. I met a better quality of person at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, much different than the ones I used to take home from the bars (Jack).

Another young man (John), after a fast-lane lifestyle until twenty-six, during which he contracted AIDS, became a PWA Hot Line volunteer with the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. While this was not a paying job, it kept him busy and gave a renewed sense of the value of his gay identity.

Some of the respondents volunteered to do "good works" as a kind of desperate bargain with reality. Thus one respondent admitted he volunteered to be a Shanti counselor of persons with AIDS because he was afraid he might have contracted AIDS:

I was trying to bargain with AIDS. I thought that if I became an AIDS volunteer, I be spared. In my case, as with many other such one-sided pacts, AIDS didn't keep its part of the bargain (George).

Occasionally, a respondent who joined an AIDS volunteer organizations (or in any way publicly associated themselves with AIDS activism or research) found himself stigmatized and *outed*. The immediate question on everyone else's mind was why they had chosen to spend their time in this way:

The question behind this question became apparent when my stock answers about knowing people who had died and were currently ill or that I found the problems associated with AIDS intellectually challenging did little to erase the expression from their faces that I was not being honest. They "knew" I *had to be gay* to be interested in AIDS. To associate myself with AIDS was to make my gayness and "open secret" (Neil).

The stigmatization of an AIDS volunteer is demonstrated in the case of one respondent's story of cruising a Castro Street bar:

I got a come-on from a real handsome guy. After talking with him for a while, I could see us leaving together and going to my place. But when I mentioned I was a Shanti volunteer, he suddenly turned off and left me with a quick excuse (Ed).

Ed felt the man was frightened off by a "totally unexpected and unwelcome confrontation with AIDS in the person of a guy who aroused him." Another respondent, commenting on this episode, felt that running away from Ed was the result of a correct, if cynical, risk assessment. He felt it was healthy to act on the inference that:

People who associate with people with AIDS have probably had sex with a person with AIDS. Anyway, who needs this kind of worry before, during, or after sex? (Jorge)

Indeed, all the respondents who acted as volunteer "buddies" and counselors of PWAs (persons with AIDS) had to come to terms with their sexual attraction to clients. In order to interact constructively with clients, the respondents had to allow themselves to feel deeply and compassionately for their clients, knowing that they were dying. The depth of their feelings opened them up to the possibility of incorporating within their personal identities the life force of sexual arousal and its negation, death. This conflict illuminated, and forced them to come to terms with, the values central to the maintenance of their identities:

How I dealt with my desire for sex with a client was one of the watersheds of my development as person and as a Shanti volunteer. I found myself fantasizing about how I would do it. Maybe I should wear two or three rubbers at once, or not do this or do it that way, or I would stay in control, and so forth. When the situation arose, it was certainly not as simple as "just saying no." If I said "no" I knew I'd feel like a shithead; if I did it, I was sure I was a dead man. It was a no-win situation. I knew I would have to grit my teeth to salvage whatever shreds of dignity remained, whatever I did (Ed).

After a period of volunteering, usually one to two years, the respondents found that their volunteer tasks had become all-encompassing and seriously interfered with their regular employment. It became impossible to distinguish between volunteer work and play, with their salaried work suffering from lack of interest because it alienated them from the AIDS crisis by locking them into a world of superficial and mundane trivial values:

My job stinks. It's absolutely trivial compared to the life-and-death issues I am concerned with as a volunteer AIDS counselor. My supervisor doesn't consider my AIDS work a legitimate excuse for absences. I'm required to have a doctor's certificate for all my sick leave (Toby).

I worked a sixty to seventy hour work week as an advertising exec at a local TV station. I made a fair amount of money. But it was a lot of "love your hair," "love your shoes," "let's go to lunch," and "have your people call my people." It was a pretty shallow business. I felt that I was being forced to become a true yuppie, concerned about whether I drove a Mercedes or not. My friends with AIDS and my work at Shanti contributed to my sense of estrangement from this job. I saw that there were more important things than selling commercials. A lot of Shanti volunteers changed their occupation as a result of AIDS work (Paul).

A few respondents resolved the conflict between their job and their volunteer work. For example, one of them who worked in a corporate secretarial pool took early retirement. He broke the Victorian building he owned into rental units, keeping a good-sized apartment for himself. While he lived on a tight budget, he could spend all his time volunteering. His language is rich with indicators of a strong identity:

I serve meals on holidays in various dining rooms for the indigent. I deal with people no one else wants anything to do with, real skid row types. I feel I have a wonderful, meaningful life (Harrison).

A "burnout" was common among the respondents who volunteered for AIDS organizations. It resulted from their contact with the many gay men whose lives had been destroyed by AIDS and the failure of the medical establishment to find a means of controlling or curing AIDS. One common reason for burnout occurred when the respondents came to realize that they could not be a full-time volunteers without giving up their jobs. They found that they could not become professional health care providers without costly training and official legitimation. One respondent (Richard) decided that he could not afford the considerable up-front investment of time and money that a career change necessitated. He bitterly resented the professions for "weeding out" good people such as

himself with their "initiation rites" and become angry at Shanti for raising his hopes for a more meaningful career. Other respondents choose to reeducate themselves at university, gain new expertise and certifications, and legitimate the change in their careers.

As the volunteer AIDS organizations of San Francisco matured they grew increasingly professionalized and bureaucratized. They become chic philanthropies and vehicles for career advancement for their leaders. These key decision makers begin to express the view that their volunteers should work adjunctly with staff, rather than as staff, as they do in grassroots organizations. Most of the respondents saw this as a move to decrease their importance by pushing them to the institutional periphery. A few believed that they could still have an effect on policy through a volunteer hierarchy; they believed (as they were told) that full-time staff were better situated to make day-to-day decisions:

In general, restricting the scope of volunteers on organizational decision-making limited the outreach of the volunteer organization but permitted a more coherent approach to services; but it also generated resentment among those volunteer respondents whose impact in the organization is diminished (Ed).

Further, volunteer organizations experienced an economically and politically motivated process called *degaying*. While San Francisco AIDS organizations seldom went so far as to disavow their gay beginnings, they moved from their offices in the Castro to offices in the metropolitan business district, drop the word gay from their press releases, and take a neutral stance in gay community issues. Needless to say, the volunteers considered degaying as a betrayal.

The organizational leadership sees its past identification as a gay community organization serving white, middle-class gay PWAs as a liability in future funding by government agencies. Within the organization, this is perceived as a pragmatic response to a documented epidemiological shift in AIDS risk classes: from white, middle-class, urban gay men to minorities, intravenous drug abusers, and women. The organization's outreach to racial

minorities and women with AIDS is made the focus of media campaign and new salaried staff are hired with scrupulous attention to equal opportunity quotas (Ed).

And, as the AIDS epidemic matured, the influx of inner-city intravenous drug abusers, female prostitutes, and bisexuals discouraged some of the gay clients and also some of its volunteers of AIDS organizations. One respondent volunteer claimed that:

The new clients are aggressive, dirty, foul-mouthed, and incorrigible. I quit because many times I felt physically threatened and frequently I was insulted by their homophobia (Bill).

Sooner or later, AIDS-related problems impacted the respondents' employment duties and their productivity. The respondents with HIV often wanted to leave their routine jobs for other, more meaningful careers. For example, one respondent with HIV immediately quit his job and joined Theater rhinoceros (a San Francisco gay and lesbian theater group) and acted in several plays in order to tutor himself in stage directing and writing. He later wrote two plays that were produced by Theater Rhinoceros and enjoyed a brief vogue in the gay community.

Two of the respondents with HIV returned to college for advanced degrees in studies they rejected as young men because they had thought that they could not have earned a living. After their positive HIV test, the risk of embarking on these careers was not so overwhelming. With their life span truncated, they wanted to fulfill their dreams of being an art student, playwright, sculptor, or writer. Federal, state, and local entitlements to the medically indigent permitted them the financial resources to do so. Of all the "positive aspects" of AIDS, this was the one universally mentioned: the periods of remission during the course of the illness were times to do what they had always wanted to do, but postponed (John).

All my life I've wanted to visit Disneyland. But no matter how much money I made as a street hustler, I didn't. Too childish. But now that I'm dying, being childish doesn't matter anymore. The chance to be the kid I never was after I was kicked out of my parent's house for being gay — that does matter (Bill).

One respondent who remained on at his job after his AIDS diagnosis found that continued employment required "pretending I didn't have AIDS in order to keep working" (Steve).

With the progression of the disease, comparisons of past and present performance eventually became an issue with his supervisor. But in San Francisco, the consequences of an AIDS diagnosis were not draconian:

I was a career hospital nurse. When I told my supervisor I had AIDS, she made me spend a part of the work day resting in her office. I was paid for full-time work. As I got worse, the amount of time I rested increased. When I finally quit, I wasn't doing any work at all. I'm very grateful to her for her compassion. I couldn't have made it otherwise (Adrian).

3. Consequences of the Gay Community After AIDS:

The AIDS epidemic led to a multiplicity of gay community organizations. As one respondent put it, "there has been a kind of rampant, polyglot pluralism: the political landscape of the gay community is more wide open than it has been for decades" (Randy). Political action groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation were denounced by gay "right-wingers," who expressed outrage at the power and coercive tactics of the "national gay liberal establishment."

While some activists criticize the lack of a single overarching movement strategy, there's action everywhere. Gay men are coming out in great numbers, and younger; organizing against right-wing initiatives; running for high-level political office; winning battles with drug companies and government agencies to get access to AIDS treatments; marching and shouting and stopping traffic in the streets; establishing basic protections for gays from hate crime; doing legal work around domestic partnerships, gay marriage and family rights; and advancing the cause of lesbians and gay men in the military (Bruce).

This fragmentation was accompanied by an extreme refinement of AIDS organization. For example, there is an organization specifically for the care of the pets of persons

with AIDS (PAWS - Pets Are Wonderful Support), other organizations that focus on certain demographic categories, such as the Asian/Pacific AIDS Coalition, Bay Area Young Positives, Most Holy Redeemer AIDS Support Group, and the San Francisco Black Coalition on AIDS.

As also reported by the respondents, the AIDS epidemic led to profound changes in the demographics of the San Francisco gay community. The bathhouses disappeared. Police vigilance at outdoor cruising venues increased. The population of the San Francisco gay male community decreased because of deaths due to AIDS and the flight of worried well to other areas of the country. According to the respondents, more of their friends remained in their hometowns rather than migrate to San Francisco. As a consequence of this, gay life in the rural, small towns began to improve due to the activism of the gay men who stayed to come out there. Thus to some degree — at least until the 1990s — AIDS slowed the expansion of urban gay communities. The vacuum caused by the loss of gay men has been filled by straights, lesbians, and vagrants:

I used to see lots of friends on the way to the laundry or market. Now the old Victorian houses they restored are owned by young, straight yuppie couples. Disagreeably aggressive young women push babies in strollers up and down Castro Street, a tribute to the success of AIDS education but awkward for me. I would rather be jostling in a crowd friendly, good-looking men. The neighborhood has changed (Jack).

There was a dramatic increase in anti-gay violence in San Francisco:

The friction between gays and straights arises because out-of-town young people motivated by AIDS-hate come to San Francisco's to prowl the streets where gays socialize and live in their cars, looking for trouble. There is now a mix of gay and straight businesses in the Castro, so that we cannot avoid straights as we come and go. Plus the straights don't like the sex clubs which returned after the post-AIDS decline of the bathhouses (Neil).

On the other hand, because of the quality of AIDS treatment in San Francisco, a large number of gay men with HIV migrated to the City. A significant number of these, pauperized by their illness, become street people and vagrants:

San Francisco has become an "AIDS Lourdes." The city is known as a good place to be for a person with an AIDS problem. On their own or on the advice of their doctors many person with AIDS emigrated to the City for up-to-date treatment and enlightened social services. Some were aided by friends who already lived there who found them jobs and places to live. Others became the panhandlers who hawk hand-made trinkets or beg for small change on Castro Street, making me very aware of the cracks in San Francisco's vaunted AIDS social service programs (Joshua).

Because of the AIDS deaths of many gay male activists, the emergence of middle-class lesbians as the spokespersons for gay community organizations. This was not always well-received development:

I think of it as the gay version of the battle of the sexes. Lesbians are seen as accomplishing nothing without piggybacking on gay mens' accomplishments and as cynically taking advantage of the AIDS epidemic to further their own ends. Gay boards of directors cop out to both the homophobia of politicians and funding administrators, who can tolerate dealing with women but not gay men, if that is their only choice and the feminist agenda, with which gay liberationists of the sixties and seventies had an historical, if uneasy, alliance. Lesbians insinuate themselves into leadership positions by claiming that otherwise sexist discrimination will be seen as prevailing among gay men, which would damn any chances for funding by straight lawmakers. And tax-exempt, publicly funded gay organizations especially must not be seen as discriminating against women, otherwise the stereotype of gay men as women-haters will result in a backlash (Toby).

Lesbians taking over AIDS organizations founded by and for gay males with AIDS. They feign a sorrowful acceptance of the burdens of leadership to fill the void left by their dying brothers. But they really only want to further their own selfish ends by taking over our organizations to benefit their sisters. A Lesbian community built on our graves? Their hubris is *so* outlandish. We die laughing (Anthony).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER VII

A. BEING DIFFERENT:

The experience of being different is the first rung on the "Ladder of Risk." As a result of being labeled or stigmatized for their differences by audiences with whom they interacted, the respondents became aware that their actions were constantly monitored by others and that they could have negative consequences. They learned to prioritize their actions according to the risks of discovery and the degree of censure that they elicited from audiences of significant others. They discovered withdrawal, fantasy, and secrecy as effective means of thwarting observation and had their first experiences of control over others through information management.

The *conditions for the respondents' experience of being different* were discovered to be a felt sense of "not fitting in" that generally arose from labeling processes, the impact of certain schools of thought about homosexuality, being forced to act according to one set of norms while believing in another, the ageism and youthism of American society, and the discounting of talents suspected of being grounded in homosexuality.

The *dimensions of the experience of being different*, that is the ways the respondents indicated to themselves and others that they were different were the advocating of unpopular agendas, non-normative body image, acting out homosexual desires, a withdrawal from interactions, and the management of information about themselves accessible to others (*closeting*).

The *consequences of the experience of being different* were an increase in sensitivity to the opinions of others, a search for others like themselves, and the construction of stigma theories. The increase in the respondents' sensitivity to the opinions of others led them to waste valuable resources trying to change themselves according to the dictates of others, at the cost of developing more valued aspects of themselves. The search for others like themselves and identity models became a leitmotif of the respondent's lives led them to the discovery of community. The articulation of stigma theories furnished the respondents with rhetorics to justify and legitimate their homosexuality to themselves and others. In finding others like themselves and in articulating stigma theories, the respondents acted to justify the risks of being different.

The conditions for, dimensions of, and consequences of being different that operated before the onset of the AIDS epidemic continued to do so afterwards, sometimes more intensely, occasionally less so. As regards the conditions for feeling different subsequent to AIDS, the stigma of AIDS as a deadly sexually transmitted disease had the greatest impact. The AIDS epidemic supported the American public's view that being gay was to lead a very contingent life; a life of risk in which the wrong choices carried heavy, even lethal penalties. However, the view that the gay life was dangerous had unexpected consequences: it made it more attractive to young men. The epidemic acted to chill gay relationships: at the outset, prospective partners faced an uncertain future; it restructured the rhythms and routines of relationships; and led to corrosive suspicions about the motives for intimacy.

Further consequences of AIDS are that young gay males became aware of their mortality at a younger age. No longer immortal, they viewed themselves as marked for death, much like the youth of draft age during wartime. In fact, the metaphor of the war against AIDS became a familiar reprise in the media, with the casualties not dead turned into medical guinea pigs. The countercultural death wish had been actualized: a glamorous and exciting youth terminated by death before old age took hold. But one of the ironies of AIDS was that it made its young victims look old before their time.

AIDS fundamentally altered the way gay men viewed their bodies. Sexually active, attractive men found themselves labeled as "AIDS bait." Some of the respondents feared that the sexual response to the male body would be transformed by AIDS into a predominantly aesthetic one. While before AIDS, sensitivity to deficiencies of body image (with respect to the ideal of youth and beauty among gay men) were sufficient to elicit a feeling of difference, subsequent to the AIDS epidemic whether or not a gay man was healthy took precedence over his natural endowments. A significant percentage of the respondents, afraid of AIDS and hopeful that they could exercise their immune systems into health, bought memberships in gyms and entered a bodybuilding program. Thus more gay men appeared to have "ripped" bodies than ever before; in this way the range of acceptable gay body types was narrowed by the AIDS epidemic.

The physical manifestations of prejudice such as "gay bashing" increased after the AIDS epidemic. The respondents were forced to dress much more conservatively (or more like straight men) outside the gay ghetto, lest they mark themselves as gay. The range of

acceptable gay costume narrowed because of the AIDS epidemic. All this adds up to a severe constraint on the possibilities for eroticizing the male physical form.

As important a dimension of being different in the "Age of AIDS" were the respondents' attempts at normalization, especially those with HIV. The respondents diagnosed with HIV during the 1990s have much longer life expectancies than those diagnosed during the 1980s. This led to their increased participation as AIDS activists and kept them at their professions for a much longer period of time. Humor and laughter replaced isolation and terror as the American public found reassurance in the health professions' assurance that AIDS was not transmitted casually. The respondents felt less like interstellar aliens and more like human beings, regardless of their HIV status.

The experience of being different did not "cause" the respondents' homosexuality. The consequences of being different — for example, labeling and stigmatization — had to be linked in their minds with their homosexual desires before the experience impacted on their gay identities. At first widening it, AIDS ultimately bridged the generation gap between the post-Stonewall and the post-AIDS generations of gay men as the younger generation found themselves also losing their lives to the disease. As gay professional men focused their careers on the gay community, fewer gay men saw advancing age as problematic to their gay identities. At the very least, they were survivors. And the younger men, while still the envy of the gay community because of their glorious bodies, began to see the older professional men not only as survivors, but as identity models.

B. CLOSETING:

In general, closeting arises from a fear of the consequences of being different, that is, discrimination, stigmatization, and bodily harm. The damage done to a person who is perceived as *different* can spread to significant others, a form of stigma contagion. In particular, closeting is withdrawal from interactions with audiences, groups, and social worlds, whose homophobic labeling can have lethal aftermaths. In San Francisco, most adults suffer relatively few insults related to their sexuality. Indeed, the City's heterosexuals freely appropriate gay signs and symbols for adornment, a social fact that makes radical closeting unnecessary. But in outlying suburban and exurban areas the problems of a known homosexual can be severe.

Among the respondents, closeting of a temporary nature arose from problems associated with geographic isolation, a narrowing of opportunities for interaction due to real or imagined deficits of body image, a negative reaction to available gay role models, the presence of moralistic audiences from which there was no escape, a need to gauge the temper of audiences in a new geographical area, and the inability to take responsibility for homosexual intimacy.

The major dimensions of closeting include information management, cyclical engagement and disengagement from audiences, appeals for emotional support, blatant obviousness, mainstreaming, cooption, assimilation, and the self-censorship of homosexual themes from personal work. The strategies of closeting factored in the nature of the audience and the rewards of choosing a particular information management for that

audience. The rewards and payoffs for closeting were found to be: a sense of controlling social situations and making fools of others, especially those who would punish if they knew the truth.

Closeting includes the process of coming out to the self as well as a restricted pre-socialization into the gay community. Coming out to the self is the culmination of realistic self-examination and episodes of sexual experimentation that can be a prelude to the next stage of gay identity formation, *coming out*. Or they can lead to more closeting. If the perceived rewards of broadcasting their sexuality were perceived as outweighing the problems associated with closeting, the respondents tended to come out. Otherwise, they remained closeted. With the exception of the respondents native to San Francisco, the rewards of coming out had to factor in the problems of moving to San Francisco, while the problems of remaining in the closet had to factor in the rewards of leaving the audiences which had forced closeting.

Closeting destroys the integrity of identity. It does this by eroding the ability to interact with others honestly; hence by supporting only superficial relationships. Closeting ultimately undermines the information management upon which it is based, so that either the identities presented to the audiences to whom a person is closeted — or the audiences themselves — must be constantly changed. On the other hand, as a temporary stage on the way to coming out, closeting supports dynamic personal growth and self-knowledge through the experimental assumption of disparate masks and roles, which gives rise to a capacity to deal with complex and contradictory meanings. In other words, temporary closeting serves as the introspective crucible of highly complex identities.

As a consequence of AIDS, the age at which the respondents emerged from the closet declined. Also, the problems of body image associated with comparing themselves with a gay ideal of male physical beauty diminished to the extent that a healthy body became more important than a beautiful body. The reality of AIDS created a special need for privacy and stress-free living that, while resembling the closet, was not closeting. That is, closeting is neither privacy nor stress management; it is a withdrawal from interaction or information management based on a fear of the social consequences of being known to potentially homophobic audiences. The post-AIDS gay respondents actively sought — and in some cases was forced by catastrophic events into — periods of thoughtful, introspective solitude, unlike his pre-AIDS counterpart, who prided himself on a “fast-lane” lifestyle of relentless, shallow socializing. The closeting that had preceded the respondents’ coming out proved to be useful insofar as their closeting taught them to value solitude as a time to think out problems and course of action.

To some degree, AIDS reduced the amount of sexual activity among the respondents. Direct personal intimacy was replaced by masturbation and a reliance on technological innovations such as phone sex, modem sex (sexual encounters mediated by networked personal computers), and video pornography. Also contributing to this phenomenon was the fact that while the pre-AIDS respondents perforce discovered the gay lifestyle primarily through direct interpersonal encounters, the post-AIDS respondents learned a great deal about the gay lifestyle through safer sex education courses in public schools and colleges, gay fiction writing, and the media. A form of closeting, here referred to as identity suspension, occurred among a few of the respondents who were out at the onset

of the AIDS epidemic. These men, hoping for a quick medical solution, withdrew from the gay community to "wait the epidemic out." When their hopes for an AIDS "cure" were not realized, some reentered the gay community while others — usually older men — opted to remain sexually (though not spiritually) isolated from the gay community.

In terms of their discussion of the issue, one of the more significant impact of AIDS on closeting discuss was that the traditional code of silence about other gay persons' sexuality — one of the cornerstones of the efficacy of closeting — was abandoned by some activists. Certain activists argued that the war ethic of the battle against AIDS justified revealing closeted persons who used their influence to undermine gay causes. The phenomenon of *outing*, in which closeted public figures were denounced in the media was based on this war ethic that "fifth columnists" would not be tolerated.

C. COMING OUT:

Coming out is a face-to-face public event before a gay audience during which a person, by interacting with other gay men, accepts himself as gay and signals to other gay men that he accepts them as well. The respondents perceived coming out as a personal epiphany and an important status passage: it was their debut into the gay community, the beginning of their histories as gay persons, the start of a *career of being different*, the point at which their homosexuality was normalized, and the end of their rationalizations about not being gay. Coming out inevitably led the respondents to a new set of questions that had to be answered about the source of their commitment to the gay lifestyle.

The term "coming out" encompasses revealing sexual preference to heterosexual audiences, with whom the respondents' relationships were radically changed. But the

acceptance of heterosexual audiences is not crucial to coming out; the acceptance of gay audiences is. Coming out was always preceded by the process of "coming out to the self." This was the period during which the respondents came to terms — in their own minds, utilizing *in vivo* and received information about the gay lifestyle — with their homosexuality *and* rehearsed their comings out to prospective audiences. Comings out could be staged over time, through a series of staged interactions, or presented in an abrupt *fait accompli*. Finally, coming out was the culmination of the process of searching for others like themselves that began with the respondents' first experiences of being different and continued during their closeting.

In coming out, the respondents ascended further up the "Ladder of Risk." Therefore the perceived rewards of coming out had to exceed those of closeting. The rewards of coming out were freedom of action, a dramatic reduction in the fear of discovery that attended closeting, the normalization of interactions with other gay people, an unfettering of sexual restraint, the debunking of gay stereotypes, and the location of accepting audiences. Occasionally, such novel reasons as the cost effectiveness of boyfriends and revenge upon a girlfriend were given. Some degree of personal support was necessary to coming out because the security of the closet had to be abandoned to open the self to the processes of socialization necessary for the emergence of personal and community identity. This personal support usually from a gay man with whom the respondents had an ongoing relationship or from gay men with whom they shared periods of intimacy. In fact, few respondents came out without some sort of gay relationships to support them. These relationships were begun while closeted, a positive dimension of

closeting. Once begun, comings out continued to new audiences. At some point, the novelty and rewards of coming out to various audiences would pall, at which time the respondents would begin searching for sexual partners, and their lives would become dominated by the process here called *cruising*.

In terms of acceptance by gay audiences, coming out entailed fewer risks for the young and beautiful. In this regard, it must be noted that certain physical disabilities — blindness, deafness, and paraplegias — are tolerated within the gay community and do not necessarily diminish a person's attractiveness. But ageism definitely reduces the institutional options of the older respondents even when they possessed a "good body." To fully come out, the respondents found it necessary to articulate an ideology that explained their being gay to themselves and gay or straight others, especially relatives and employers. An well thought out coming out ideology simplified the task of explaining homosexuality to others. Since the respondents occasionally found themselves serving as identity models, their coming out ideology was also of use in motivating uncommitted gay persons to come out. Coming out ideologies were constructed naturally as the respondents were socialized into the institutions of the gay community or — as was the case for the intellectually inclined — as a result of a creative effort to explain homosexuality in terms of received knowledge.

As a consequence of the AIDS epidemic, the respondents found themselves repeating the coming out process anew. Whether or not they were out, AIDS further estranged the respondents from both gay and straight audiences. Gay sexuality was turned into a disease both contagious and deadly. The gay population was dichotomized into

those who tested negative for HIV and those who did not. Because of the decimation of gay males, lesbians began a political ascendancy in the gay community. On the other hand, the glut of information about gay sexuality that became public in the name of safer sex education made homosexuality familiar to a large segment of the American people which, curiously, led to greater acceptance of gay men. As gay creative and performing artists made the (formerly symbolic) homoerotic content of their works manifest and the mediagenic activities of the youthful, radical activist groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation were broadcast by the media, coming out became attractive to a large number of gay men who had heretofore remained closeted because they could not locate authentic identity models to imitate.

The respondents who came out in "the age of AIDS" had to come to terms with the reality of the epidemic. This was no easy task for the respondents: The HIV test became an important dimension of their coming out experience. AIDS required substantial modifications to their sexual practices, which often impacted their identities in unforeseen ways. As a consequence of grassroots social activism and community-wide changes in sexual behavior, the straight mass media praised the gay community as responsible and mature. In some cases, this media legitimation was incorporated into the respondents' coming out ideologies. In other cases, it was decried as a subtle tool of social control. More importantly, collectively and individually incorporating the reality of AIDS into their lifestyle permitted the respondents to reassert control over themselves and their community. Additionally, the emergence of a large number of AIDS social service organizations made coming out as a gay activist attractive to conservative gay respondents. A national

event called "Coming Out Week" attempted to popularize mass comings out, thereby making the process somehow accessible to a greater number of gay persons, but met with very limited success because it was perceived as regimenting and ceremonializing a highly personal event. Coming out remains a mostly personal event.

D. CRUISING:

As children, the respondents were limited to furtively ogling teachers or peers they had crushes on. As adolescents, they enjoyed more freedom of movement, but were limited by their economic dependence on their parents and guardians. Sensitive to the stereotype of being pederasts, the gay male community has few adolescent cruise venues; the most popular among the respondents was the gay youth group of San Francisco's chapter of Queer Nation. Gay youth groups are often peer groups facilitated by accredited gay teachers, which adds to their legitimacy.

For the adult respondents, cruising was a complex, multi-dimensional behavior that could, and did, take place anywhere. It is the major socialization process through which gay men become members of the gay community and its subworlds. To continue the metaphor of the "Ladder of Risk," the respondents ascended a greater distance up this ladder than in any other process connected with identity construction. There are several reasons for making this statement: The focus of cruising on picking up strangers endows the process with special risks. The gay prime directive of not acting gauche or playing the fool entails taking special risks to look good. The demanding time- and money-consuming nature of cruising. The respondents' risk-taking behavior was further increased by the gang mentality of gay male partying, the temporal limits on cruising set by the hours of

operation of cruise venues, the loud music played at many cruise venues, easy access to recreational drugs, the respondent's age, their ignorance — and occasionally denial — of gay health issues, a preference for transient relationships, a desire to prove themselves streetwise by tempting fate, compulsive sexuality, and a disregard for personal safety.

The respondents who came out later than thirty-five years of age often reported a desire to make up for lost time that contributed to their engaging in high-risk activities. While the respondents in their late teens to early thirties were cruised as often as they cruised, older respondents — or respondents with discreditable body images — more often cruised than they themselves were cruised, which contributed to their desperation and to the risks they took while cruising. Beyond forty years of age, the respondents' interest in cruising waned because the time it took to "score" increased, the single-mindedness required to cruise lost its appeal, the repetitiveness of the cruising process bored them, and the ambiance of cruise venues depressed them. At this point they had ascended the "Ladder of Risk" as high as they ever would as gay men.

Cruising was done by watching others do it, discussing technique and swapping stories with other people engaged in it, reading "how to" books, and in other ways learning the caveats and folklore of the pursuit. The basic winning strategy of cruising was to consider it a game and to take personal risks. The rewards were both biological and social, an overpowering combination that exceeded the value of any successful ruse while closeting or well-received coming out revelation. The most important asset to cruising was body image. All the respondents spent considerable time grooming themselves in

preparation for an evening of cruising. Even a "grunge look" had to be staged carefully, lest it degenerate into a parody of a person who lived on the streets.

Some of the respondents were motivated to numbers of episodes of casual sex in a day to compensate for some real or imagined personal deficit. Since cruising was look at as a game, the number of successful cruises became an ego-enhancing score. The strategies and tactics employed in cruising varied with the subworld and venue, hence experience counted to the point where age became an overwhelming obstacle to success. The most important criterion for the cruiser in selecting a "target" was his degree of arousal at the target's body image. Most of the respondents had experience with losing control of a cruise, for one reason or another. It was remarkable how these disasters were remembered, even when many successes, perhaps taken for granted, were not.

If the cruise worked, the two men would engage in a sequence of activities that brought them closer and closer together in a way that permitted both, ideally, to terminate the cruise without loss of face. Eye contact, gestures, small talk, if successful, are culminated with detailed negotiations concerning who does what and where.

Cruising socialized all the respondents into the gay community and legitimated their identities. If they were regulars at a venue, cruising contributed to their sense of belonging, their successes and failures being incorporated symbolically into their identities. The respondents' episodes of casual sex added to their understandings of the gay community even when the amount of time shared with a partner was relatively short. Incredible amounts of information can be conveyed, at a deeper level, in a short time, between two people who have temporarily suspended their defenses against the other. The

transient sexual bonds to other men became symbolic representations of the gay community.

Since cruising involved risk-taking behavior, cruising habituated the respondents to risk and made the ongoing maintenance of their identities dependent on, if not ever-increasing levels of risk-taking, at least not decreasing levels. No other process in the ladder of gay identity formation, feeling different, closeting, or coming out, were so pervaded by risk. The feeling of having won the game or beaten the odds overwhelmed, temporarily, the respondents' negative internalizations of their homosexuality. Risk-taking is also tied to the respondents' belief in the operation of fate in their lives, of the existence of "Mr. Right." The sense of "rightness" that arose between the two participants in a successful cruise confounded their rationality. It is small wonder that, like high risk competitive sports, only the young survive long; the aged are forced to retire and live with their memories.

Cruising opened up new venues and subworlds to the respondents. It created community identity by binding the them to the gay men with who they interacted, and thence to the subworlds which served as a context for the interaction.

The advent if AIDS, and the inability of the medical profession to control AIDS, severely impacted the respondents' cruising. There was great resentment at the forced ending to pre-AIDS sexuality. The old and new generations of respondents eyed each other with hostility across this metaphorical line of their differing sexual backgrounds. Members of the same generation spoke cynically of their fear that a friend found through cruising might develop AIDS, and it would fall to them to care for him. Sexual betrayal

was prevalent, paranoia was pervasive. The search for "Mr. Right" became all-important: risk cruising for as long as it takes to find him, then leave the game, hoping both were healthy. Dating, monogamy, and safer sex were discussed during the first five years after AIDS became a problem (in 1982). These ideals, especially safer sex, required preternatural clarity during the most muddled of times, cruising and sexual intercourse. The messages of safer sex fell on eyes and ears blinded and deafened by habituation to risk.

Nevertheless, condom use, aided by technological innovations which diminished its capacity to deaden sensation and marketing ploys such as color and flavor, took hold. New alternatives to cruising sex venues emerged as gay organizations proliferated. The sexual bond as the basis for gay male identity became grist for activist's and scholar's rhetorical mills. While backsliding was not uncommon among those respondents who practiced both safer sex and cruising, it was followed by a resolve to try again, lest the personal AIDS odds change unfavorably.

E. COMMUNITY AND IDEOLOGY:

The way in which the respondents came to know the gay community made a difference in their understanding of it. Prior ideologies influenced the time it took the respondents to engage the gay community. Once the respondents came out, they were socialized into community by the eroticization of fetishes unique to the subworld they came out to, the special interests of the subworld of affiliation, the pace of activities within the subworld of affiliation, and the norms of the particular venue chosen (or home base) for their cruising and routine interactions. Besides the institutional socialization of the

respondents, they derived a feeling of security and a sense of community from living in geographic proximity to many other gay men, living rooming with them, bonding sexually with them, and emulating them as role models.

As a consequence of socialization into the San Francisco gay community, the respondents achieved a substantial complexity of identity and loci for their biographical, social and temporal identities. The gay community, as a result of its members participation, achieved regional and national stature as a center for gay activism, elaborated from a monolithic network of cruising venues to a pluralist complex of institutions for mediating the goals of gay men and the overarching heterosexual society, became an economic and political bloc of considerable impact in San Francisco politics.

The AIDS epidemic caused traditional cruising venues such as bars to lose some of their influence on the respondents to volunteer AIDS service organizations, militant activist groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation, and other grassroots organizations. This led to a type of cruising not mediated with drugs, an important difference from traditional cruising venues.

There has been an extreme refinement of AIDS organizations, as indicated by the organizations the respondents affiliated with. Volunteering for AIDS service organizations such as Shanti led to conflicts between the allocation of the respondents time to volunteer work and their jobs. The decimation of the gay male population by AIDS led to the takeover of many gay organizations by lesbians, a source of conflict when their militant feminism clashed with the ideologies of neoconservative gay men.

Because of AIDS activism, the gay community has enjoyed an unprecedented role in the allocation of the nation's resources to AIDS. The respondents' volunteer work defined a new type of "illness activism" that now serves as a model for other illness-related grassroots organizations throughout the United States. The respondents who were members of ACT UP ultimately caused the FDA to change its regulations concerning the amount and type of testing a potential AIDS drug had to go through before it could be used in clinical trials.

Ideology making is a crucial dimension of the experience of community and the final stage in the development of a gay personal identity. Prior to the AIDS epidemic, ideology making was generally utopian, an egalitarian nation-state of liberated desire, creative art, capitalist consumerism, and renaissance cultural traditions. Not many of the respondents believe in its possibility (West Hollywood is no utopia), although the idea shielded some of the more intellectual from the harsh realities of homophobia and AIDS.

AIDS imposed a harsh reality upon the respondents. It taught that gay men are not immortals; they are human beings very much in need of the institutions of American society. Ideas of separatist, utopian gay communities fell into disrepute as "narcissistic cocoons of isolationism." At first, moral entrepreneurs remonstrated that there must be a non-sexual gayness. A man could be gay in spirit without being homosexual if fact. During the hysteria of the 1980s, their were serious gay (in the old-fashioned way) advocates of this ideology. This foolishness fell into disrepute when, during the 1990s, the young men who had come out into the new gay world of condoms, monogamy, abstinence, and virginity suddenly burst into sexual activity. Out of all this activity, new ideas, actually

hybrids of the folk wisdom that gay people are the creative and spiritual mentors of human society and the modern biological model of homosexuality as genetically determined, fomented and led to the ideology of gay people as the source of *modernism*.

Modernism is linked to what has been referred to here as the gay sensibility. That gay creativity springs from outrageousness and risk-taking and is therefor the top rung on the Ladder of Risk. The risk taking was initially seen as creativity that derived from, and subtly ridiculed, the political oppression of gay people by straight society. The converse of this argument is telling: *if the straight oppression was absent, there would be no gay creativity*. That could not be right. Homosexuals have been creative — gloriously so — in tolerant cultures. Therefore gay creativity was not a (to use a psychologism) sublimation of repression. If not, what is it? Perhaps the gay sensibility springs from the closet, the crucible of plural, concurrent, irreconcilable identities. This ideology has much in common with the political one: they both view gay creativity as a dialectical phenomenon.

AIDS of course brought gay sexuality into question, spoiling the argument that gay creativity springs from unfettered sex or cruising experiences. It is true that much of pre-AIDS gay fine and performing arts is a highly symbolic form of homoeroticism. But post-AIDS is *not*. Post-AIDS fine and performing arts are as far removed from symbols as is post-modernism in literary criticism. It is very much in-your-face homoeroticism; as post-modernism is in-your-face grounded analysis. Enormous personal risks are taken in presenting it to the public. That leaves one source for gay creativity. Since the fine and performing arts (here taken as examples of the creative process) are acts of self-creation, what process or stage in gay identity formation is as dramatic an expression of self-

8creation? Of course, *coming out*. Public disclosure is the foundation upon which the gay personal identity, the gay community identity, and the gay sensibility are constructed.

Coming out shapes identity; it shapes community. The source of gay creativity springs from the energy liberated by unifying all the energy that formerly went into being different, closeting, and cruising. It springs from the joy of finding others like oneself. It springs from human intimacy.

F. A FINAL WORD:

This is the conclusion of this dissertation: The processes of gay identity formation have survived more or less intact across the temporal boundary marked by onset of the AIDS epidemic. Being different still entails coming to terms with heterosexual labeling, the shock of discovering one's homosexuality, and beginning the search for others like oneself. Lengthy closeting, at least in San Francisco, *is* an unmourned casualty of AIDS. Few desire to remain closeted when gay men die young, there are conflicts with the straight bigots to be fought and won, and the gay community encompasses the only social worlds that truly accept gay men. Coming out, still every gay man's most memorable personal experience, is much more inclusive: The respondents came out younger and to everybody who will listen. Universities offer majors in gay studies, doctors and lawyers come out in their professional schools, gay soldiers fight to continue serving their country, and gay artists address homoeroticism directly in their works — all of which makes authentic gay identity models more accessible than they were before AIDS.

Cruising is enthusiastically practiced by the respondents, but volunteerism and activism have expanded the ways a person can be socialized into the gay community.

Cruising still leads to casual sex but, being AIDS-aware, the respondents used condoms more often than not. And their cruising did not end in a one night stand as often as it did before AIDS. Many interesting technological adjuncts to sex emerged post-AIDS to add to the variety of cruising venues. Thus the gay community has survived and is more pluralistic and vibrant than ever before. Ideology making proceeds apace, generating new lifestyle models to replace the negative ones that arose from the fear of being different and the Dionysian abandon of anonymous sex. The post-AIDS gay male is as sexual as his predecessor; but unlike his pre-AIDS predecessor, he has integrated his sexuality into a much more productive life.

Of course, the battle against AIDS is not over. Far from it. Momentous changes are probably still in store for gay men and their community on that account. But gay men, having come together in all their variety to mount the struggle against AIDS and the entrenched homophobia of American society, have gotten to that point most aptly summed up in a paraphrase of Winston Churchill's memorable summation of D-Day: "While we cannot today mark the beginning of the end; we can celebrate the end of the beginning."

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**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
APPENDIX A**

Background Information

This information will be kept completely anonymous, will only be presented in aggregate form, and will not be associated with you personally in any way.

1. Gender: M F (Circle One)

2. Age:

3. Which category describes you best? (Circle One)
 - A. Black/African American
 - B. Chinese American
 - C. Filipino American
 - D. Japanese American
 - E. Other Asian
 - F. Latino
 - G. Native American
 - H. White
 - I. Other

4. What is the highest level of education you completed?

5. What is your occupation?

6. What is your annual income? (Circle One)
 - A. Under \$10,000
 - B. \$10,000 - \$14,999
 - C. \$15,000 - \$19,999
 - D. \$20,000 - \$24,999
 - E. \$25,000 - \$29,999
 - F. \$30,000 - \$39,999
 - G. \$40,000 - \$49,000
 - H. \$50,000 - \$59,000
 - I. \$60,000 or more

7. How many people are supported by this income?

Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

These categories represent areas for interview probing. No HIV-status questions will be asked. Each interview category can be phrased in at least three ways: personally; in terms of hypothetical others; and before and after the respondent's first awareness of the AIDS epidemic among gay men. Any one of these questions can trigger responses that lead to new questions. Don't be a slave to the schedule. If the respondent wants to talk a lot about one thing, let him.

A. Gay Personal Identity.

1. First knowledge and experiences of being gay.
 - a. Are you totally gay, or are you bisexual?
 - b. Do women play a significant role in your life?
 - c. Who was important in defining your sexuality? How?
2. Typifications and stereotypes of gay men.
 - a. How do you recognize other gay men?
 - b. How do straights recognize gay men?
3. Sexuality and gay subworld.
 - a. Is sex necessary for self-conception as a gay man?
 - b. What is queerness?
 - c. What about safer sex? What is it? Do you enjoy it?
 - d. Have you ever had unsafe sex? Do you like it better than safer sex?
4. Closeting experiences.
 - a. When were you first conscious of being closeted?
 - b. What do you mean by closeting?
 - c. Did you enjoy yourself while you were closeted?
 - d. Is closeting a game? How do you play it?
 - e. What are the risks of closeting? The rewards?
5. Coming out experiences.
 - a. When and why did you first come out? To whom? What happened?
 - b. Did you migrate to San Francisco before you came out? Why?
 - c. How many audiences have you come out to? Were they all supportive?
 - d. What are the risks of coming out? The rewards?
6. Cruising experiences and venues.
 - a. Do you cruise or are you mostly cruised?
 - b. How have your cruising experiences changed since you came out?
 - c. Where do you cruise? How do you dress?
 - d. What are the risks of cruising? Do you use drugs? The rewards?

B. Gay Community Identity.

1. What gay subworlds are you aware of?
 - a. How many different subworlds are you a member of? Describe them.
 - b. How many different subworlds do you cruise?
2. Have you ever been discriminated against because you are gay?

- a. How many different audiences have discriminated against you?
- b. In what ways have you been discriminated against?
3. What do you mean by "gay community"?
 - a. Are you a member of the gay community?
 - b. Do you volunteer your time to gay organizations?
 - c. Are you a member of a group like ACT UP or Queer Nation?
 - d. Do you room with other gay men?
 - e. What are the boundaries of the gay community?
4. What is the relationship between gay sexuality and gay community?
5. How does the gay community change the risks and rewards of closeting, coming out, and cruising?

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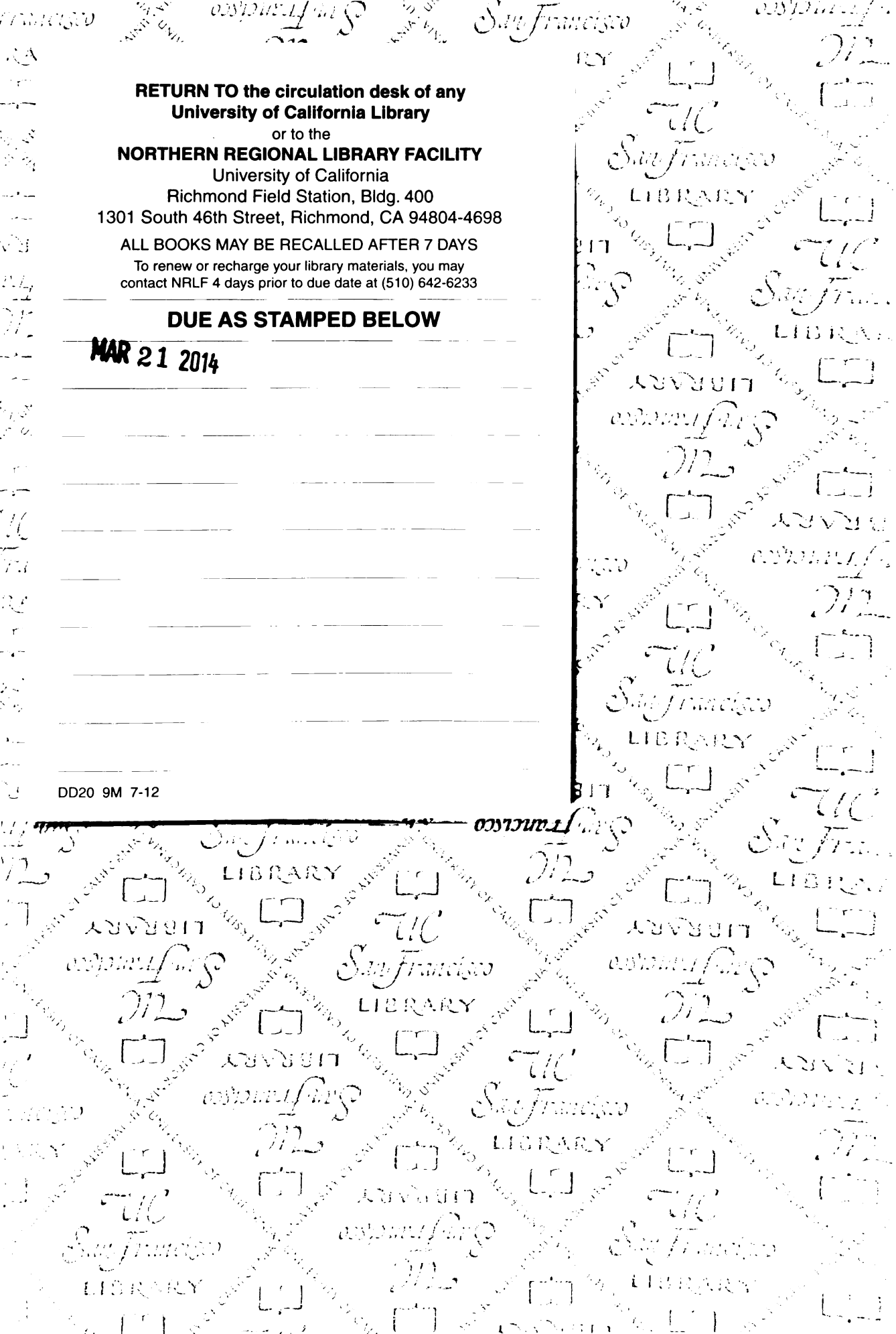
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