The Contagion of Stigma: Fieldwork Among Deviants

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ABSTRACT

Noting the emergence of ethnographic or fieldwork methods as the pre-
ferred methodology of many researchers in the sociology of deviance, this
article focuses on a particular problem which occurs when such methods
are adapted to the study of deviant groups, namely the strains that develop
in researchers' relationships with professional colleagues and significant
others, particularly family and friends, outside of academia. The article is
based on the authors' observations of others' reactions to their research on
the homosexual or gay subculture, informal conversations with sociologists
who have done fieldwork among stigmatized groups, and more general
observations of the ways in which sociology is practiced. The authors seek
to increase awareness of the problem, especially among those who will do
similar studies in the future; and to offer practical suggestions that may be
employed to reduce the possibility of labeling and its accompanying
problems.

During the 1960s and 1970s, interactionist perspectives
achieved preeminence in the sociology of deviance (Gibbs
and Erickson, 1975).[1] Simultaneously, there was a change in

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the preferred methodology of many researchers. The earlier focus on rates of deviants and deviance was replaced with a concern for understanding deviants' views of the world and their position in it. For this latter purpose sociologists and others have employed ethnographic or fieldwork methods, especially participant observation, to gather firsthand information through sustained contact with members of deviant groups (Delph, 1978; Douglas, 1972a; Douglas, Rasmussen and Flanagan, 1977; Humphreys, 1975 [1970]; Spradley, 1970; Warren, 1974).

When fieldwork methods are adapted to the study of deviant groups, researchers are confronted with problems somewhat different from those involved in studies of respectable members of society. Among those discussed in the literature are the establishment of rapport, impression management, involvement in illegal activities, and protection of subjects' anonymity (Berk and Adams, 1970; Douglas 1972b; Humphreys, 1975 [1970]: 167-232; Polsky, 1967:109-143; Warren, 1974:167-179). This article discusses a different type of problem: the strains that develop in researchers' relationships with professional colleagues and significant others, particularly family and friends, outside of academia. The source of these strains is the "guilt by association" that occurs when actors approach the edge of the moral boundaries surrounding deviance (Matza, 1969). Researchers who step over the line separating the respectable from the stigmatized often find their motives questioned and themselves labeled as members of the group under study.[2] The potential damage to the person's self image, work, and career are obvious but usually overlooked (for exceptions, see Henslin, 1972; Warren, 1977; Weinberg and Williams, 1972).

This article is based on the authors' observations of others' reactions to their research on the homosexual or gay subculture (Corzine, 1977; Corzine and Kirby, 1977; Kirby, forthcoming; Kirby and Corzine, 1972), informal conversations with sociologists who have done fieldwork among stigmatized groups, and more general observations of the ways in which sociology is practiced. Our purposes are twofold. First, we wish to increase awareness of the problems discussed, especially among those who will do similar studies in the future. (Increased awareness may also change the attitudes and behaviors of members of the profession who have contributed to the problems of researchers.) Second, we wish to

offer practical suggestions that may be employed to reduce the possibility of labeling and its accompanying problems.[3] Our primary focus is on the problems *currently* faced by researchers who study stigmatized groups. Following a brief description of our past research, we discuss these problems and coping strategies employed to ease them.

RESEARCH IN THE GAY WORLD

The authors' research on the gay subculture began in 1972 as a field project for a graduate course in deviant behavior. Fieldwork was undertaken in a section of a Midwestern city known for the homosexuals, prostitutes, drug users and pornography consumers who frequent its bars, hotels, restaurants, and theaters. As the study progressed, it focused on a gay bar that served as a "home territory" for many of the area's residents and customers (Kirby and Corzine, 1972). Later research has included a joint study of a "sexual marketplace" involving male homosexuals and long-distance truckers (Corzine and Kirby, 1977), and separate studies of the gay press (Corzine, 1977) and female impersonation (Kirby, forthcoming). The primary research technique in all studies except that of the gay press has been participant observation.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

While problems have stemmed from our guilt by association with deviants, the particular reactions and their effects have varied between nonacademics — family, friends, and employers — and academics — colleagues and administrators. In addition, because of differing degrees of knowledge about the profession of college teaching and research activities; and the obvious need to disseminate the products of research within one's discipline, particular strategies useful among academics are less feasible with nonacademics and vice versa. Therefore, these two groups are discussed separately.

Nonacademics

As most sociologists realize, it is usually not possible (nor particularly wise) to maintain all social contacts within the

university. Like others, we experienced rewarding relationships before deciding on academic careers and have striven to preserve associations with family and friends. While it is sometimes difficult to explain the utility of sociology to representatives of other disciplines, it is even more of a problem when talking with members of the general public. Discussing research on a highly stigmatized group further increases the burden. Past attempts to talk about our fieldwork in the gay subculture have produced awkward situations, including long silences, hasty departures, and abrupt changes of topics. Other reactions have been more to the point: "You study queers!" "Why do you want to do that!" "How can you stand to talk to those people!" The resulting awkwardness has proven embarrassing to the authors and others, especially in small groups. Initial shock and surprise is usually followed by disclaimers intended to remove any hint of personal accusation. "Of course, I don't mean that you are." "I didn't mean to imply that." "What I mean is." At best, such efforts meet with only partial success. From our experience, few members of the general public view sociologists involved in researcher-subject relationships with deviant individuals and groups as legitimate candidates for "courtesy stigmas" (Birenbaum, 1970).

Although there are social worlds, such as the theater and the arts, where affiliation with homosexuals for research or other purposes is not a significant barrier to developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, they are a minority. With those whose views are more traditional, responses are limited. One possibility is to adopt the goal of increasing the public's understanding of the goals of research and the injustices faced by gays in our society, and thus run the additional risk of being seen as a "crusader" for gay rights. Or, with those unlikely to read research reports, the stigmatization surrounding research activities can be avoided by *talking about something else* (Weinberg and Williams, 1972). During the last few years, we have gradually adopted a pragmatic position by shifting from the first approach to the second, except with those individuals who are thought to be somewhat receptive to enlightenment. Because of the public's lack of familiarity with sociological work, a reply such as "I'm teaching social problems courses" satisfies most inquiries about current activities. Although highly effective, this type of evasion places strains on relationships. Feeling ill at ease in

discussing work that is a source of self-satisfaction produces resentment and a tendency to avoid particular individuals as well as particular topics. Of course, these problems are aggravated when those involved are family members.

More serious difficulties can occur if one is employed outside academia. As a graduate student, the job duties of one author working at a state mental hospital included one-to-one therapy with male teenagers. During the early stages of the bar study, routine requests to take adolescents into the community were denied without explanation. Therapy sessions were interrupted by other employees looking for lost pens, asking if the room was in use, and acting surprised that the author was working that day. Aroused suspicions were confirmed when another staff member explained that the author had been seen leaving the gay bar by other employees. As a result, most staff had cast him in the stereotypical role of a predatory homosexual intent on seducing the hospital's young male patients. Because it has general relevance to the problems under discussion, the strategy that resolved the dilemma by restoring the author's "normal" identity is discussed below.

Academics

The labeling that occurs in academic settings is usually less direct than that in the larger society. Norms of collegiality and tolerance for diversity prevent most direct, face-to-face accusations that a fellow sociologist is a "queer" or a "whore." In addition, the research relationship is such that those who affiliate with deviants for academic purposes are frequently granted "courtesy stigmas" (Goffman, 1963). While they thus avoid the acquisition of a fullfledged deviant label, the courtesy stigma often sets the researcher apart as someone different (Birenbaum, 1970) and produces a search for psychological explanations such as latent homosexuality on the part of colleagues (Weinberg and Williams, 1972).[4] This conflict between the moral injunctions of the larger society and the standards by which academic research is to be judged is well illustrated by a reviewer's comment on this paper:

> But in a way, I tend to agree with the folk belief that when there is smoke there is probably fire of one kind or another. When I read that

issue of _____ (journal name) devoted to sex studies—which
sounded like an X-rated pornographic magazine—I wondered about
the editor and thought she must be somewhat (what shall I say?)
unusual, odd, creepy.

The labeling of researchers within academia sometimes
causes problems more serious than amateur psychologizing.
A woman teaching at one author's university was invited to
lecture on lesbianism, her dissertation topic, before a course
on the women's movement. During the class period following
her lecture, the instructor warned the students that the valid-
ity of many studies of deviants is questionable because it is
often later discovered that the researcher is a member of the
group. Because of this experience and similar accusations by
others inside and outside the sociology department, the
woman was widely labeled as a lesbian within the campus
community. The resulting problems were a major reason for
her choice to leave a tenure-track position at a major
university after one year.

Further problems are encountered when researchers pre-
sent findings from fieldwork studies of deviants. The publica-
tion of this type of research has produced some of the most
vocal arguments within sociology during the last decade.
Laud Humphrey's *Tearoom Trade*, first published in 1970,
provoked a national debate (Humphreys, 1975 [1970]:167-232)
that still elicits strong opinions from many social scientists.

. . . look what we get: papers on "Watch Queens" and homosexuals
diddling one another in public toilets! When we gave the C. Wright
Mills award for that trivia, one had to begin to suspect that it was all
over for the Society [SSSP]. . .(Alvin Gouldner, quoted in Aurbach et
al., 1976).

In addition to theoretical, methodological, and substantive
criticisms, charges concerning the morality of fieldwork
among deviants and the motives of the researchers are fre-
quently voiced (Gouldner, 1968; Liazos, 1972; Sagarin, 1973).
Most of these fall into two categories: (1) that such studies
pose the danger of harming subjects through exposing their
activities to the police and other officials, and (2) that the
researchers are voyeurs who are titillated by the subjects' exo-
tic behaviors.[5] At best, these criticisms are derived from mis-

taken assumptions about the social control of "victimless crimes" in the first case, and the nature of participant observation in the second. At worst, they are moral expressions disguised as ethical concerns.

The issue of exposing subjects to harm through publicizing their activities is premised on the assumption that if the police know of violations and violators of "victimless crimes" statutes, they react by making arrests. While we know of nothing in the sociological literature to support this belief, there are several studies by sociologists and journalists that show other factors, including the local political climate, public pressure, payoffs, and organizational priorities, to effect the zeal with which drug users, homosexuals, prostitutes, and other deviants are brought to justice (Achilles 1967; Geis, 1972; Gerassi, 1966; Hooker, 1967; Humphreys, 1975 [1970]; Rose, 1974; Winick and Kinsie, 1971). To assert that these groups' invisibility should be maintained by placing them off limits to researchers is to facilitate their continued exploitation by the police and other officials.

In fact, there are at least two ways in which fieldwork studies have been beneficial to deviant groups. The first has been to focus attention on the relationship between individual problems and social structural factors (Mills, 1959). That many of the problems faced by deviants are not intrinsic to their alleged "conditions," but are created and shaped by societal reactions, is a basic tenet of interactionist perspectives (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1962; Lemert, 1972:62-92). To the extent that deviants become aware of sociological studies and shift perceived responsibility for their problems from themselves to the larger society, their self-concepts and overall mental health can be expected to improve (Dank, 1971). Second, ethnographic studies have benefited stigmatized groups by providing descriptions of their lifestyles that contrast with those offered by police, psychiatrists, clergy, and others with vested interests in traditional policies (Hooker, 1956; Waldorf and Reinarman, 1975; Warren, 1974). In contrast with images emanating from official sources, ethnographic accounts have more often emphasized the essential humanity of deviant individuals and groups.

The second charge, that researchers are aroused or titillated by their research on deviants, ignores the sustained contact with subjects that is a major feature of participant observation. Such studies are not momentary excursions into

others' social worlds, but involve months and sometimes years of extensive contact with subjects in a wide range of settings. One of the first things learned is that behaviors which make deviants social outcasts comprise, in most cases, a very small part of their everyday activities (Simmons, 1969; Simon and Gagnon, 1967). The waking hours of most deviants are primarily devoted to eating, working, shopping, talking to friends, and similar mundane pursuits, a fact which accounts for the ease with which many deviants pass as "normals." When a study focuses on an activity that is exotic to the general public, any initial titillation on the part of the researcher will rarely last throughout a study. Familiarity leads to a sense of sameness and sometimes boredom. The twentieth "drag show" one watches is quite different from the first. The unusual becomes the routine.

Probably the most serious academic problem faced by those who have done fieldwork studies of deviants is the effect of their research on job opportunities (Hooker, 1963; Weinberg and Williams, 1972). One author's experience as a new Ph.D. on the job market for the 1978-79 year confirms that such research is a liability, if only at particular institutions. The administration of a large public university cancelled the sociology department's invitation to visit the campus because of the author's work on homosexuality. At a private university, an hour's meeting with the dean was devoted to discussing scenarios of research-related problems that might arise if the author joined the faculty. On the other hand, approximately a dozen invitations for personal interviews were extended and three of four schools visited followed with job offers. Considering administrators' greater concern with public relations, it is not surprising that they are less tolerant than sociologists.[6]

The tactic of avoiding discussions of research on sensitive issues, which avoids stigmatization in nonacademic circles, is largely unworkable among one's colleagues. Our major strategy for coping with labeling in academic as well as other settings involves the management of personal fronts (Goffman, 1959). There are stereotypes of stigmatized groups that are shared by many academics and members of the general public (Simmons, 1969), and the probability of a researcher being labeled partially depends on the existence and visibility of personal traits associated with the public stereotype of the studied group. Managing fronts to present traits inconsistent

with the public stereotype decreases the risk of labeling and the chances that the label will "stick." Thus, one of the authors who is married makes a point of taking his wife to departmental social functions and prominently displays pictures of his wife and children in his office. Likewise, someone studying alcoholics would be advised to drink socially, but not to abstain or imbibe freely as these behaviors are widely believed to indicate, respectively, past and present drinking problems. In all cases, the successful manipulation of fronts depends on a knowledge of the stereotype of the stigmatized group under study. This will have frequently been learned as a part of growing up in our society.[7]

After a study has begun, the researcher should remember that at least some of the individuals met in the field are, from everyday experience, experts in avoiding the stigma attached to their status. After the trust of subjects has been gained, the strategies they use to avoid and counteract labeling can be learned through questions and observation. The removal of the homosexual label acquired by one author while working in a state hospital was accomplished through following the advice of gay bar patrons who were research subjects. Although the nature of the problem was known, its solution was not evident. Openly insisting on one's heterosexuality is not a useful way of reestablishing claim to the identity. One night, after the author outlined his predicament to a group of regulars at the bar, their amusement was interspersed with suggestions on how to regain a "straight" identity. A plan which included sending a girlfriend to pick up paychecks, arranging for female friends to call at work, and being less discreet in asking student nurses for dates was immediately implemented. Within a few weeks, the author was relabeled as "normal." It was later learned that the employees who witnessed him leave the gay bar had reinterpreted the episode as involving somene who closely resembled their fellow worker.[8]

While the skilled management of personal fronts provides some protection from imputations of a spoiled identity, it is a strategy that involves certain costs. For those social scientists who are members of a stigmatized category, engaging in purposeful actions to mask their actual identities may easily contribute to the guilt feelings frequently suffered by those who feel they are "living a lie." There is a related political question for those who are dedicated to achieving legal

and/or social equality for gays and similar groups. Denying a gay identity, for example, is in one sense to reaffirm the correctness of society's decision to treat homosexuals as an outcast group undeserving of full acceptance. As with many decisions faced by members of minority groups, choosing a course of action for short-term personal advantage may produce greater long-term disadvantages for both oneself and one's group.

Our suggestions also involve important ethical issues. One reviewer, in rather strong language, challenged the ethics of researchers using techniques of identity management in general, and one author's past use of student nurses as "ploys" in particular. In retrospect, we agree with the last objection. While the author was single and actively dated student nurses before the attempt to reestablish a normal identity was made, making overt passes while others are present is exploitative because it uses women to display male sexual prowess for self-advantage. We do not, however, agree with the first objection which, at best, shows little understanding of social life, including that in academic settings. The management of personal fronts, as depicted in much of Goffman's work and recognized by many successful job applicants in sociology, is a pervasive and situationally necessary component of social interaction. As long as it involves no direct harm to others, we question the legitimacy of any sweeping moral objection. (The measurement of "harm," direct or indirect, is a philosophical question that cannot be addressed in the present context.) Others will disagree with our position, and those who adopt techniques such as we suggest will have to make and be responsible for their own moral judgments.

Finally, the experience of being labeled as a member of the group under study does offer the potential for learning *firsthand* about deviants' ways of coming to grips with problems resulting from their status. More specifically, the researcher is to a degree faced with the same situations that deviants encounter in their daily lives, including the need to develop strategies for "passing" if one is unwilling to bear the burden of a publically spoiled identity. But even though the potential for developing insight into the experiential worlds of deviant groups is immense (and largely untapped), we do *not* recommend managing personal fronts to purposefully invoke labeling by others. The interpersonal and employment problems that can result are not completely controllable and are poten-

tially disasterous. We *do* recommend that only those who are mature and secure in their own sexuality should undertake studies of homosexuality or other stigmatized sexual minorities. It is likely that most researchers who maintain an active research involvement with stigmatized groups determine, through trial and error, how to manage their public identities to minimize labeling of themselves. Increased discussion of these problems and strategies should help those who decide to begin work in these areas.

DISCUSSION

The question may be raised as to whether the authors' experiences are typical or, for some reason, unusual. From discussions with other sociologists who had done fieldwork among street addicts, lesbians, alcoholics, and other deviant groups, we are certain that the problems discussed above are common. Negative reactions from others are, however, shaped by the nature of the particular group under study and the chosen methodology. Goffman (1963) distinguishes three types of stigmatized groups: (1) those with physical abnormalities, (2) racial and religious minorities, and (3) behavioral deviants. While the motives of doing research on the first two types may be questioned, it is unlikely that the researcher will be *incorrectly* labeled as a member of the group. It is usually visually apparent when a person possesses a handicap or is a member of a racial minority.[10] Fieldwork among the third type, those groups stigmatized because of actual or alleged behaviors that may not be obvious to others, is more likely to call the researcher's identity into question and produce the full range of problems we have outlined.

While the furor surrounding the release of the Kinsey studies shows that quantitative researchers are not immune to these negative reactions, their use of a more impersonal method seems to provide some insulation against challenges to their identities. If studying deviant sexuality is immoral per se in the minds of some people, to do so through participant observation involves the additional stigma that arises from personal contact.

Since we have emphasized negative aspects of doing fieldwork among homosexuals, it needs to be added that the same research has also brought benefits including papers, publica-

tions, degrees, and positive responses from colleagues. These varying reactions reflect a lack of consensus on both methodological issues and proper areas of study within sociology. In practical terms, this means that those doing similar research may expect responses ranging from active support to hostile opposition. Therefore, an awareness of the attitudes of others in one's department toward sensitive topics is necessary to construct the most supportive environment possible for such research. It is also essential for academic survival, especially for graduate students and junior faculty.

One issue we have ignored to this point is whether researchers on homosexuality should declare their sexual orientation. The reasons given for them doing so center on the issue of bias. Namely, how can the reader interpret the findings of such studies without knowing if the sexual preference of the researcher has created distortions and misrepresentations. While proponents of this position are sometimes motivated by different reasons, it does make theoretical sense. Researcher bias is a recognized problem of long standing in fieldwork, and it is reasonable to believe that membership in a group or collectivity that one studies is a potential source of bias. However, the argument is not proven, and it ignores the current climate in sociology (and the other social sciences). In the real world, such challenges "to come clean" are almost always leveled at those who study controversial or disreputable topics. Researchers in the area of stratification are rarely if ever called on to divulge their class standing or that of their parents. In addition, the risks accompanying public disclosure of homosexuality are great and, in our opinion, outweigh the need of professional audiences for knowledge of *all* potential sources of bias of which the researcher is aware.[11] This question also misses what should be the central concern for all sociologists — the production of unbiased research. While this goal is not likely to be obtained, it can be approached through the further development of "team field research" (Douglas, 1976:189-225) and similar approaches to qualitative work. The best that can be achieved through calling for public disclosure of sexual preference is the partial resolution of doubt concerning a few selected pieces of research.

Although it lies outside the scope of the present paper, the contagion of stigma has an effect on the overall level of research on homosexuality and other sensitive topics.

Sociologists have been concerned with outside forces, such as funding (Galliher and McCartney, 1973) and federal human subjects' regulations (Wax, 1977), limiting their research freedom, but have paid little attention to the dominant moral sentiments of the discipline restricting their colleagues' activities. Yet, there are numerous cases of graduate students and faculty being dissuaded from doing research on homosexuality, and the increasing tolerance of homosexuality in the larger society has undoubtedly played a role in the recent increase of sociological interest in the area. The effects of moral pressures on the form and content of social research is a neglected topic worthy of further attention.

As a final note, there are several indications that homosexuality *is* becoming an accepted area of sociological research. Responding to initiatives of the recently formed Sociologists Gay Caucus, both the American Sociological Association and the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) passed resolutions supporting research on homosexuality during 1977.[12] The inclusion of sessions on homosexuality at national and regional meetings in recent years, the founding of the *Journal of Homosexuality*, and the creation of the Sexual Behavior Division of the SSSP have greatly expanded contacts between researchers and opportunities for publishing findings. There is an excellent chance that "gay studies" will emerge as a new specialty area within sociology during the next decade.

Of course, the removal of stigma from research on homosexuality will not mean the disappearance of the problems we have outlined. The only permanent solution, that sociologists and others evaluate research *only* on its own merit is a desirable but, in our opinion, unobtainable goal. Moral boundaries are an invariant feature of social life. When the boundaries shift, once controversial research topics will become routinely accepted and vice versa, but there will always be some areas that are "out of bounds." Forming a community of scholars only partially separated from the larger society, academics will continue to enforce some of its moral judgments, and, in doing so, sanction those members who transgress the line between the accepted and the stigmatized in their research activities. The best that can be expected is increased acceptance of the idea that there are no areas of social life that are unfit for scientific study.

NOTES

[1]The term "interactionist perspectives" refers to the ideas and writings of a group of sociologists including Becker (1963), Erikson (1962), Kitsuse (1962), and Lemert (1951, 1972). Although not completely congruent, these works share a basic allegiance to the symbolic interactionist view and are also referred to as "labeling theory," "societal reaction theory," and the "neo-Chicago school." We accept the argument of Becker (1973) for rejecting the more popular term "labeling theory."

[2]We should emphasize that because our focus is on imputations of deviance as responses to researchers' study of deviant groups, the question of actual identity is ignored. It is reasonable to assume that those who are secret members of the stigmatized groups they study are more likely to be labeled, and labeled successfully, than others. Because of the need to hide biographical facts, it is more difficult to maintain a false identity than a true one, once suspicions are aroused. But on the other hand, experienced deviants often have access to subcultural strategies for maintaining "normal" identities in precarious situations (Goffman, 1963; Simmons, 1969).

[3]Previous advice has been more philosophical than practical. Warren (1977) suggests that researchers may transcend stigmatization by achieving fame and fortune. Weinberg and Williams (1972:183) propose that researchers "...be willing to disregard conventional attitudes toward sensitive topics and have the courage to remain unshamed." While we agree with these statements, they do little to resolve the everyday problems encountered in such research.

[4]Why the negative reactions should differ in degree between academics and nonacademics is an interesting question. Besides the somewhat greater tolerance of academia we speculate that the basis for the difference lies in commonly held role definitions of college professors in the two audiences. The general public tends to see professors as "teachers," persons who perform the same tasks as their counterparts in primary and secondary schools, while the role of professor as researcher is normative in higher education, especially in university settings. The study of deviant groups first-hand thus involves a wider departure from clearly defined role requirements for the general public than for academics, and is seen as providing more potential information about the researcher's personal characteristics (Jones and Davis, 1965). However, even if colleagues accept research as such, studying deviants instead of other social categories is viewed as an intentional choice which triggers the process of seeking explanations through attributing dispositions to the actor(s).

[5]As an example, our paper on sexual encounters between gays and long-distance truckers was read at the meetings of a regional sociology association. Following the presentation of papers, the organizer who was doubling as discussant carefully weighed the merits of other papers while saving comments on ours until last. He then briefly concluded that our research was probably more fun to do than the others (which were statistical studies) and was of no benefit, except that it would help the police stamp out such behavior.

[6]This is supported by the written account of another recent job seeker in sociology (*Sociologists' Gay Caucus Newsletter*, 1977).

[7]The strategies adopted will vary according to the nature of the stigmatized trait or behavior. See Becker (1963:59-78) for a discussion of those tactics employed by marijuana users.

[8]It is uncertain if stigmatizing labels can usually be shaken off so easily. It is probable that the relationship between the labelers and the stigmatized, problems maintaining

the label poses for the labelers, the ability of the stigmatized to create problems for the labelers, and other factors are important influences on the labelers' willingness to accept accounts or explanations that remove the stigma. In these terms, the return to normal working relations on the adolescent unit should have been a powerful inducement for the reinterpretation of the problematic episode outside the gay bar. Informal conversations with several gays support the hypothesis that the ease of allaying others' suspicions of one's sexual orientation varies according to details of the situation.

⁹There are many other specific techniques of impression management that might be productively used in specific situations. Thus, job applicants may omit articles, papers, and other information indicating a research interest in homosexuality or other controversial topics from their resumes. Other possibilities include spreading counter rumors about one's accusers, telling stories disassociating oneself from the stigmatized identity, and adopting what Humphreys (1975 [1970]) calls the "breastplate of righteousness." We prefer not to attempt a cataloging of techniques or to speculate on the usefulness of those with which we have no personal experience for two reasons. First, those techniques we do discuss *have proven useful* in the past and can be potentially modified for use in a wide variety of problematic situations. Second, several techniques of which we have heard of that have been suggested by reviewers and others, such as keeping accusers "titillated by stories," seem morally indefensible and likely to cause greater rather than fewer problems. Hopefully, those who have been successful with other approaches will make them public in the future.

¹⁰The situation of researchers who study stigmatized religious groups, such as snake-handling cults (Gerrard, 1968), is unclear.

¹¹We respect and support the *personal* decisions of gay researchers who do come out to academic audiences.

¹²Founded in 1974, the Sociologists' Gay Caucus is an organization whose members are interested in the study of homosexuality. Including both gay and straight sociologists, the group has pushed for recognition of the problems faced by researchers in the area and support of gay civil rights efforts.

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