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**GAY FATHERS: THE CONVERGENCE OF A DICHOTOMIZED
IDENTITY THROUGH INTEGRATIVE SANCTIONING**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in the

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To My Sons Robert and Evan

and

To All Gay Fathers Everywhere

With Love

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Unfortunately it is not practical to acknowledge all of the persons who, over the years, have supported and influenced me in my educational and personal endeavors. Hence, I shall only acknowledge those persons with whom I have been most recently involved. However, I want to say that I am impressed by the unusual commitment I have witnessed in the nursing faculty at the University of California, San Francisco. All of the faculty members with whom I have had contact have expressed a dedication to their students which is impressive. I extend my sincere appreciation to all of you.

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I love you all.

GAY FATHERS: THE CONVERGENCE OF A DICHOTOMIZED
IDENTITY THROUGH INTEGRATIVE SANCTIONING

Abstract

Frederick W. Bozett

The problem addressed in this research is: Given the two identities of homosexual and father, which normatively are regarded as contradictory, how do gay fathers resolve this apparent conflict to achieve integration? The two identities in question are contradictory to the gay father's counter-macrosociological worlds: Gays are unacceptable to the larger heterosexual population, and gay fathers are unacceptable to the larger homosexual population.

The data on which the analysis is based include in-depth interviews of 18 gay fathers; participation in a gay-father support group over a 3-year period; and over 200 analytical memos. A systematic analysis of the data was made according to the method for discovering grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss. This approach focuses on generating theory to explain action in the social scene, rather than on verifying preconceived theoretical formulations. The general sociological perspective in this research is that of symbolic interactionism.

Disclosure and sanction emerged as the core variable. It consists of a set of interrelated concepts and subprocesses. The implementing

subprocesses involved in the achievement of integration are disclosure of homosexuality to heterosexuals and of father identity to homosexuals, the response (sanctions) of others, and the father's reaction to others based upon their response.

Means of disclosure are complete and direct, when the father verbally states his gay or father identity to others, or indirect, when his behavior indicates his homosexuality, or children's pictures or artifacts identify him as a father. Partial disclosure, admitting only to past homosexual experiences, has the effect of denying ongoing homosexual desires. Secondary disclosure is disclosure of his identities by someone other than the father himself.

Integrative sanctioning is others' acceptance of the man as both a homosexual and a father. Means of integrative sanctioning are verbal, which is acceptance by the spoken word; behavioral, in which others participate with the father in his gay or father world; and secondary, in which others support the father to someone other than the father himself. Nonintegrative sanctioning is disapprobation by others and is likewise verbal, behavioral, and secondary.

By participating over time in both the gay world and the father world, the gay father gradually discloses both identities and receives mostly integrative sanctions. These have the effect of certifying and confirming his two identities as compatible and acceptable. Gradually he is able to convert his negative stereotype of homosexuality into a positive value and accept himself as a gay father. Nonintegrative sanctions deter but do not subvert the process of self-acceptance. The

gay father evolves close relationships with persons who provide integrative sanctions and distances himself from persons who do not.

Integration is a state in which the gay and father identities are congruent. Both identities are appropriately overtly manifested or not masked, and both identities are accepted by the father himself as well as by his proximate intimates. Integrative sanctions coupled with the gay father's active participation in both of his worlds promotes integration. Integration is complete, partial, or absent depending upon whether the father accepts his homosexuality, to whom he discloses it, and how central each identity is to him.

The theory of integrative sanctioning may be applied to broader social concerns by extending it to formal theory or by applying it to other substantive areas. Uses of the theory for nurses and other health workers are suggested, and recommendations for future research are made.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND GUIDING PERSPECTIVES

How does a man who is both a homosexual and a father resolve what appears to be incompatible identities? The focus of the present research is on the gay father's disclosure of both identities and on the responses of others to that disclosure.^{1,2} Its purpose is to develop a grounded, substantive theory that explains the social-psychological processes by which the two identities, gay and father, are integrated through the process of disclosure and sanction. Theory refers to the way in which processes can be conceptualized and described in order to explain and predict phenomena. This study is intended to explain and predict the process by which the two identities, gay and father, can become integrated by disclosing each identity to, and receiving the sanctions of, others. The theory will provide some baseline knowledge upon which to structure nursing practice and will assist in the education and practice of other health professionals. It will also contribute to nursing and sociological theory.

Problem Development

The stimulus for the present research evolved from my own experience as a gay father, as well as that of a close friend who had been married to a man who was gay. During my friend's 4th year of marriage

and after having had 2 children, her husband was arrested in a park and tried in court for homosexual soliciting. My friend went to a priest in an attempt to get the marriage annulled, but she was told to "go home and be a good wife." "I thought I could do it," she told me, but after 3 more years her relationship with her husband became totally incompatible. They separated and divorced. Initially, she tended the children, but, after 18 months, found it too difficult to work full time and also be a full-time mother. She relinquished the children to her former husband, who, by this time, was openly gay and living with a lover. She shared her experiences with me over a 10-year period, a time during which I was in the process of accepting my own gay identity. My friend's experience, plus my own, created a desire to conduct research in the substantive area of gay fathers.

Homosexual men marry for many and varied reasons. These include intense family pressures, the desire for children, and love for a woman. Some gay men enter marriage fully aware that they are homosexual; others do not. Some men consciously admit to themselves their sexual attraction to men but suppress the desire and deny its significance. Others may convince themselves that they are genuinely bisexual, which helps them to justify a heterosexual relationship. Yet others may repress their homosexuality, allowing it to emerge only after years of marriage, or sometimes only after they have been divorced. No father in the present research entered marriage for the purpose of putting up a heterosexual front. Though most, but not all, had had sexual experiences with men prior to marriage, they all entered marriage desiring and intending to achieve contentment within the

context of the typical nuclear family. Most had wanted children, and all wanted to provide for, nurture, and sustain both their children and their wives. This is the case even for those fathers who were fully aware of their gay identity prior to marriage.

A man who is both gay and a father has many options open to him. He can keep his homosexuality hidden and have fleeting and anonymous homosexual encounters, while outwardly appearing to be a happily married heterosexual family man. He can be divorced and gay; in this case he can continue to play the role of parent or he can relinquish his fathering responsibilities. He can sometimes even be openly gay and live with his wife and children. But initially the gay father is not aware of these options. He does not know that he can be gay and simultaneously be a father. He enacts one identity, or he enacts the other. He has no experience upon which to draw, nor does he know other gay fathers to whom he can turn for advice. He often sees himself caught in an irresolvable dilemma.³

The gay father proceeds through a series of social-psychological and social-structural processes whereby the two identities become compatible and are appropriately manifested. This series of processes is referred to as the gay-father career. Career refers to the movement of an individual through a social structure. Objective careers are movements through statuses and positions and can be thought of as public. Examples are movement into and out of the work force or into and out of marriage. Subjective careers, which are manifested internally, are the changes in self-conception that accompany the objective career

and lead to changes in self-identity (Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1977, pp. 431-432).

The gay-father career refers to the social and psychological processes through which the man proceeds to arrive at an integrated gay-father identity. In the objective gay-father career, the subject moves through various social positions. This career is characterized by five major benchmarks. The first benchmark is the period before marriage, when the man is dating women and contemplating marriage. The second is marriage, whereby he assumes the role of husband. The third is becoming a father. The fourth is an alteration in the marital relationship, usually separation and divorce. The last benchmark is the free activation of a homosexual life-style. The highly privatized, subjective career consists of a gradual transition from unawareness or unacceptance of homosexual identity to acceptance of that identity, culminating in acceptance of the fused gay-father identity.

It is especially difficult for gay fathers to achieve congruence of both identities and to articulate both because each of their separate worlds rejects the other identity. Homosexuality and gay life-styles are unacceptable to the larger society in the United States. Evidence of this can be found in the recent reversal of gay-rights ordinances: since June 1977 gay-rights ordinances have been overturned in Miami, Florida; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; and Eugene, Oregon. Homosexual parenting is even more of an anathema if not inconceivable. The homosexual community, too, often rejects gay men with children. For many reasons, gay men often have a low tolerance for children and do not want to become involved with a gay father.

But as life-styles in the United States vary considerably, so too does tolerance for variance. Some people are able to understand and accept others whose life-styles, beliefs, and behavior differ from their own. It is these people who provide the solution to the gay father's dilemma, for it is they who, through their positive sanctioning, certify him and become his significant others (Mead, 1934).⁴ Positive sanctioning confirms his identity as acceptable, at least to his micro-sociological world. Acceptance by his two macrosociological worlds, heterosexual and homosexual, is not essential. By developing a social network of significant intimates who sanction him positively for both his homosexuality and his father status, he can simultaneously enact his dual identities. In this way he can achieve an integrated gay-father identity and life-style. The final stage in the gay-father career is integration in which there is a meeting of the objective and subjective careers as opposed to maintaining two distinct identities in separate social contexts. The man freely enacts his homosexual identity and father role and he accepts both identities as congruent. However, integration is not an inevitable or universal process. The benchmarks previously described were empirically demonstrable for most of the fathers in the present study, but were not so for all. The levels of integration are discussed in chapter 7.

Because of the stigma and consequent secrecy surrounding homosexuality, its actual incidence is unknown. Estimates of the total number of American men who are homosexual range upward from at least 4,000,000 (Hoffman, 1968, p. 31). Stern (1961) estimates that one out of six American males is homosexual. Estimates of the number of homosexuals

in San Francisco, a city with a population of less than 675,000, range upwards from 70,000 or slightly more than 10% (Levering, 1978). The most informative statistics in the United States were obtained by Kinsey in 1948. He found that 37% of the total white male population between adolescence and old age had had at least one homosexual experience to the point of orgasm; that between the ages of 16 and 55, 25% of the white male population had more than incidental homosexual experience for at least 3 years during their lifetime; that of all men, 10% are more or less exclusively homosexual for at least 3 years between ages 16 and 55; and finally, that 4% of white men are almost exclusively homosexual throughout their lives.

Kinsey (1948) also found that 10% of married men ages 21 to 25 had had homosexual experience. He concluded that "the true incidence of the homosexual in married groups is much higher than we were able to record" (p. 289). Hunt and Hunt (1977) state:

Throughout the country, some hundreds of thousands of formerly married men and women have joined the gay community rather than the world of the formerly married; according to several surveys, one out of every five men and four women leading a committed homosexual life has been married. (p. 22)

Bell and Weinberg (1978) report that approximately 20% of homosexual men have been married at least once. They state:

The actual incidence of heterosexual marriage among homosexual men and women is, of course, impossible to determine because investigators' samples are probably not representative and presently married homosexuals are probably less likely to participate in such surveys. (p. 160)

In short, although accurate statistics on male homosexuality are impossible to obtain, it would appear to be fairly common in the United States. And, since approximately one-fifth of the male homosexual

population has been married, it is likely that there is a significant number of gay fathers.

Although some men who are predominantly homosexual do remain happily married, these men are probably the exception. The sexual drive is powerful, and most married homosexual men will seek out at least occasional homosexual experiences. Most wives are unwilling to remain married under these conditions. As Hunt and Hunt (1977) report:

A blue-collar woman said her marriage broke up because, "I came home one night to find my husband engaging in a sexual act with another male." She had never suspected this tendency in him nor had she ever felt there was anything wrong with the marriage. But from then on, she occasionally learned that he was having other homosexual experiences and she became enraged; when, after five years, the anger was too great for her to bear, they separated. (p. 22)

Most gay fathers I have known, whether they are divorced or not, are deeply attached to their children and sincerely want to care for them and support them. They want to maintain their father role. Yet, at the same time they want to live as gay men and have a circle of homosexual friends. How to achieve this is the source of the dilemma that was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

It is the father's struggle with his gay identity and the problems he has exposing that identity that may lead him to seek assistance from health professionals. But health professionals such as psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners, family and adult health nurse practitioners, clinical psychologists, or psychiatrists have no specific guidelines for helping the gay father. The process by which gay fathers actualize and integrate both identities has never been studied. It was partly to fill this lack that the present study was undertaken.

Specific Problem

Because there was no previous research on the subject, it was necessary for me to discover the basic problems of the gay father and the social-psychological processes which enhance or inhibit integration. The specific problem addressed in this study emerged only after I had interviewed many gay fathers and examined the data. This problem, and the processes used to resolve it, explain the various patterns of behavior that gay fathers manifest in their multiple social scenes.

No specific theoretical framework was used as a guide for this research, since none exists. However, I prepared myself to collect data by enrolling in formal classes and engaging in independent study. In so doing, I became knowledgeable in the areas of fathering, homosexuality, social psychology, and family theory and therapy. This knowledge helped me to analyze some of the data as I was collecting it, and as I did so, concepts began to emerge.⁵ These concepts, grounded in the data, were linked to preexisting theory only if they were directly relevant to the emerging theory. I did not attempt to force the data to fit preexisting theory.

Data for this research were collected through interviews with gay fathers. My purpose was to talk with fathers who identified themselves as gay to discover how they managed both identities. I sought to learn what problems they faced and how they dealt with or solved them. The problem of disclosure and of the sanctioning of both identities arose in the initial interview and in every interview thereafter. Ongoing analysis of the data revealed this to be the only problem common to all

of the fathers. Only after it had appeared consistently in every interview did I accept disclosure and sanctioning as the primary problem for research.

The specific problem in this research is: Given the two identities of homosexual and father, which normatively are regarded as contradictory, how do gay fathers resolve this apparent conflict to achieve integration? The problem is examined through an analysis of the data that describes disclosure and sanction of both identities and also describes the implementing processes. Integration is defined as a state in which one's identities and behaviors are congruent with one's social environment. Specifically, for the gay father, integration is a state in which his gay and father identities are congruent, so that both identities are appropriately overtly manifested or not masked, and so that both identities are accepted by the father himself as well as by others in his proximate social world.

Disclosure and sanction together form one dyadic interactional unit. This unit consists of action (the father discloses), response (the other sanctions), and reaction (the father increases or decreases the level of intimacy of the relationship based upon the sanction). Disclosure and sanction is the central and transcending variable in the present research. The analysis of this variable is achieved by analyzing the properties, dimensions, conditions, problems, patterns, and strategies that occur in the gay father's social scene. The result is a proposed theory that explains the action. The process by which the father achieves personal and social integration is threefold. It consists of disclosing his gay identity (primarily to heterosexuals), of

disclosing his father identity (primarily to homosexuals), and of managing the sanctions (integrative or nonintegrative) that others bestow.⁶

Four general sets of questions can be asked:

1. What conflicts does the gay father have in being both gay and a father? How does he resolve them? What are the consequences for him if they remain unresolved? Does he perceive one identity as being incongruent with the other?

2. How is the father's life affected by being both gay and a father? Does being a father interfere with being gay? Does being gay interfere with being a father?

3. Since the gay father is managing two hidden identities, he has control over identity disclosure. How does he inform others of his dual identities? When does he disclose and to whom? Why does he disclose? Under what conditions does the father disclose only one of his two identities while concealing the other? What are the consequences of revealing only one of the two identities? Under what conditions does the father disclose both identities? What are the consequences of revealing both identities?

4. How does the gay father manage the responses of others to his disclosures? What effect do others' responses have on his own beliefs and feelings about his dual identity? His own self-concept? How do the responses of others affect his actualization of each identity? Whose responses are important to the gay father and whose are unimportant?

These questions are addressed in the present study. The focus of this research is on the father's disclosure of each identity and on the effect that other people's reactions to the disclosure have on the father. Individual cases provide for an analysis of the data as well as for variations in the pattern.

Theoretical Overview: Role Theory, Disclosure, Social Sanctions

Although the present research was not founded on any preconceived theoretical notions, various extant theories and research helped

sensitize me to the social-psychological processes underlying the career of the gay father. I attempted to locate previous research on the major topics of the present study but found none. Specifically, there is no published research, to my knowledge, on gay fathers, disclosure of gay identity to intimate others, or intimate others' reactions to that disclosure.⁷ However, I have included research writings in the areas of self-disclosure and social reaction to deviance that seemed relevant to the present study. I have also included reports on role theory and the perspective and conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism.

The symbolic interactionist point of view is based on the original formulations by George Herbert Mead (1934) and on the more recent ones by Herbert Blumer (1969). It stresses that our actions towards objects and other people are based on the meanings that these objects and people have for us. These meanings are derived from our interactions with other human beings, and when we deal with objects and people, the meaning we give to the interaction is managed through an interpretive process. Symbolic interactionists view meaning as arising from the process of interaction between human beings and their environment. Blumer (1969) states:

Symbolic interaction involves interpretation, or ascertaining the meaning of the actions or remarks of the other person, and definition, or conveying indications to another person as to how he is to act. Human association consists of a process of such interpretation and definition. Through this process the participants fit their own acts to the ongoing acts of one another and guide others in doing so. (p. 66)

To understand symbolic interactionism, it is necessary to understand that interaction with either objects or persons is significant

only in terms of the meaning that the interactant attaches to it. The interactant interprets the interaction, and further action is based upon that interpretation. Symbolic interactionism is a process-oriented sociological framework for analyzing human interaction and the meaning of the interactions. The interactionist point of view provided me with a useful perspective for analyzing and providing substantive meaning to gay fathers' interactions with their relevant others.

Role theory is also pertinent to the present study. Role refers to a "collection of patterns of behavior which are thought to constitute a meaningful unit and deemed appropriate to a person occupying a particular status in society" (Turner, 1956, p. 316). According to Thornton (1975), role is a "set of expectations impinging on an incumbent of a position" (p. 872). Role prescriptions are the expected behaviors to be found in role enactment. These expectations are derived from society at large, from other members occupying the same role, from people acting reciprocal roles, and from the incumbent himself. The content of expectations is not solely behavioral but may also be attitudinal and cognitive. Expectations may be implicit or explicit. However, as Turner (1962) points out, role is more than a set of prescriptions inherent in a position. Role is also the actual behavior of the occupant of a status. For example, though there is a set of societal prescriptions for the role of father, prescriptions have meaning only when they are expressed in the actual behavior of any given father. In practical terms, then, role refers to the actions of an individual in any given status, which in turn are formed out of situational meanings and consequent interactions.

Role expectations help to define the limits of acceptable behavior; they are specifications for adherence to group norms. Role specifications may be inexact or very specific, depending upon one's reference group and one's commitment to its norms. Through societal prescriptions, role expectations have an "evaluative character" (Sarbin, 1968, p. 501). Incongruity between the role performer's own expectations of his role and the role expectations held by others lead to a lack of clarity in role expectations; others may perceive the incumbent's role behavior to be improper or inappropriate. Role expectations define the limits of tolerated behavior. Thus, the gay father's heterosexual others may perceive his gay role as improper, while gays may perceive his father role as inappropriate to being gay. These dual merged or intersecting roles create role conflict, which will be discussed later.

All individuals occupy many positions in the social system (Linton, 1945). Frequently one person will enact several roles successively during the course of a single day. One person may also enact several roles simultaneously. Thus, role behavior is often the consequence of a merging of more than one role. The gay father is an example of enacting multiple roles; e.g., he may merge his age and sex roles with his gay and father roles. When only one role is enacted at a time, the other roles are considered to be latent (Linton, 1945).

Sarbin (1968) suggests a triad, not a dyad, as the analytical unit for role theory. He believes that refined analysis of role theory includes not only the role performer and the complementary role actor--for example, father-son--but also a third party--the audience who

observes the process of social interaction. This does not mean, however, that all three parties must be physically present during role enactment. According to Sarbin (1965) the third party or audience "designates any social situation in which role enactment of one or more persons is the object of attention of one or more other persons whose presence may be real or imagined, contemporary or remote" (p. 529). Hence, the gay father may selectively enact his father role, whether or not his children are present.

Turner (1956) writes that "a desire to conform to the other's expectations or to appear favorably in the other's eyes may shape the self-behavior into conformity with the other" (p. 322). Initially, this is exactly what the gay father attempts to do. He appears to conform to both the heterosexual and the gay world's expectations by behaving in such a way that heterosexuals do not suspect his gay identity, and gays do not suspect him of being a father. His behavior conforms to third-party norms or to the norms of each of his two reference groups. However, this, too, creates role conflict because the father continues to have difficulty either in coordinating the two roles or in maintaining two separate identities in two distinct worlds.

This type of role conflict Sarbin (1968) calls "interrole conflict." It arises when there is "simultaneous occupancy of two or more positions having incompatible role expectations" (p. 540). Sarbin (1968) uses as his example the "marginal man," one who simultaneously belongs to two subcultures but is not fully accepted by either. Many gay fathers are in this position, being fully accepted neither in their heterosexual nor in their homosexual worlds.

Several modes of managing or eliminating role conflict have been proposed (Sarbin, 1968). One method is to segregate conflicting roles in time and place so that only one role is enacted at one time at one place. For the gay father this method may occasionally be effective, but it often poses great problems, and in the long run it is nonintegrative. Another technique is to change others' beliefs relevant to the role they perceive as incompatible. "Through the process of belief change, a different meaning or interpretation is placed on the ecological event, making them compatible" (Sarbin, 1968, p. 543). The beliefs in question may be the occupant's own beliefs concerning role expectations and role enactment. They may also be the beliefs of significant others regarding role behavior. Thus, through the process of belief change both the gay father and his heterosexual and gay others may come to view his gay and father roles as compatible. As they do so, conflicting roles merge into a single, new, compromise role, further eliminating role conflict. As Turner (1962) points out, role is an interactive process through which social integration occurs. The gay father and his relevant others (his "audience") merge their roles and modify their beliefs, thereby promoting the father's integration of his gay role with his father role. Of course, this kind and degree of change is often difficult to negotiate.

Research on self-disclosure is also relevant to the present study. To disclose means to make known, to reveal. Self-disclosure is the act of revealing one's identity to others. Self-disclosure is achieved by means of words, facial expressions, gestures, and behavior. It is also achieved by means of omissions, by what is not said or done. Sidney

Jourard, a clinical psychologist, considers self-disclosure a legitimate subject of scientific inquiry. He believes that the aim of self-disclosure is

to be known, to be perceived by the other as the one I know myself to be. . . . If we resolve to be known, . . . we simultaneously choose to experience the other as a person rather than as a concept. . . . If he is a person-for-us, and we are a person-for-him, there is no effort to predict or control action on either part. If we choose instead to misrepresent or conceal our being to him, then we are indeed reducing him in ontological status from person to a manipulable being--we are striving to manipulate his perception of us to some expedient range, and we are concealing our true being from him. Thus, to disclose oneself to another is the expression of one's granting to him and willing for him the status of a person with freedom, rather than the status of an object with an essence, with predictable and controllable behavior. (Jourard, 1971a, p. 181)

Jourard (1971b) believes that it is not possible to know oneself except through disclosing the self to another person. He states, "When a person has been able to disclose himself utterly to another person, he learns how to increase his contact with his real self and he may then be better able to direct his destiny on the basis of this knowledge" (p. 6). Jourard believes that one characteristic of mentally healthy persons is the ability to make themselves known to at least one other human being, while maladjusted persons do not disclose themselves to others and thus do not know themselves.

However, evidence concerning the relationship between mental health and self-disclosure is inconclusive. Many variables affect the appropriateness of self-disclosure; these include the degree of intimacy of the information disclosed, the age of the other to whom the disclosure is made, and whether the other is a stranger or a close friend. Relating these variables to self-disclosure, Chaikin and

Derlega (1974b) found that nondisclosure is more appropriate than disclosure to any person except a peer (a person of the same age). They also found that disclosure and nondisclosure to peers are equally appropriate. Disclosure to younger persons is more inappropriate than disclosure to older persons, and disclosure of content on sexuality is more inappropriate than disclosure of other intimate content.

Cosby (1972) found a curvilinear relationship between disclosure and liking. He concludes that the "low-discloser," a person who discloses a minimal amount of information about himself to others is too distant, and the "high-discloser," one who readily shares data about himself is too close to others for their personal comfort. Thus others react negatively to both. However, Cosby's study has limited applicability in that the subjects were all females who were strangers to one another. Using both male and female subjects, Chaikin and Derlega (1974a) found that "a norm prohibiting intimate disclosure to a stranger does exist. The high revealer was evaluated less highly, and was seen as more inappropriate and unusual than the low revealer" (p. 126). On the other hand, Jourard and Lasakow (1958) studied the extent to which both male and female college-age students disclosed themselves differentially to mother, father, male friend, and female friend. In this same study, they attempted to ascertain if the subjects tended to disclose certain categories of information about the self more fully than others. Their results indicate that the highest self-disclosure is to mother, and that self-disclosure is progressively lower to father, male, and female friend respectively. They also found that females are higher self-disclosers than are males. Two clusters

of disclosure appeared: (1) a "high-disclosure" cluster comprised of Tastes and Interests, Attitudes and Opinions, and Work, and (2) a "low-disclosure" cluster comprised of Money, Personality, and Body.

On the basis of a study of men's self-disclosing behavior, Jourard and Landsman (1960) conclude that men follow their role definition of keeping themselves to themselves, confiding in another person only after they know him sufficiently well to trust him. This corroborates other research findings (Jourard, 1961; Jourard & Richman, 1963).

Writing on manliness and low self-disclosure, Jourard (1971b) states:

Since men, doubtless, have as much "self," i.e., inner experience, as women, then it follows that men have more secrets from the interpersonal world than women. It follows further that men, seeming to dread being known by others, must be more continually tense (neuromuscular tension) than women. It is so if being manly implies the necessity to wear neuromuscular "armor." (p. 35)

From the foregoing research, it appears that disclosure by gay fathers of their homosexual identity is counternormative on the basis that (1) high disclosure is viewed by others as inappropriate, (2) men tend to be low disclosers, and (3) aspects of personality--of which sexual orientation is a part--tend to be facets of oneself that are revealed only to one's closer friends. Also, since high disclosers are liked less well than moderate disclosers, the rejection of a homosexual after disclosure may be due not only to the content of his disclosure but also to its high level.

Disclosure always involves risks, as Jourard (1971a) and Derlega and Chaikin (1975b) point out. These risks include rejection, ridicule, and misunderstandings. The recipient of disclosure may also use the knowledge to the discloser's detriment. Thus, according to Jourard (1971):

We seek to have a true being in the experience of others under two conditions: when we experience it as safe thus to be known; and when we believe that vital values will be gained if we are known in our authentic being, or lost if we are not. (p. 181)

Jourard's statement is supported in the present study: Gay fathers usually disclosed when they perceived disclosure as safe, or when they felt that they would gain by it, or both.

Nondisclosure of a hidden identity is referred to by Goffman (1963) as "passing" (p. 73). Discussing the stigmatized person, Goffman (1963) differentiates between those who are obviously different and those whose differentness is not readily apparent to others. The former he calls "discredited" persons, and the latter "discreditable." Homosexuals belong in the second category and thus can pass, that is, can intentionally (or unintentionally) appear to be heterosexual. The person who passes leads a double life, and "the informational connectedness of biography can allow for different modes of double living" (Goffman, 1963, p. 76). The married gay father who maintains one biography as a married family man and another as a single homosexual constitutes an example. This maintenance of a dual identity and a dual biography was a stage in the process of achieving a gay-father identity for most fathers in the present study. Goffman refers to this as leading a "double-double life," one in which an individual moves in two circles, with others unaware of the existence of the other.

Homosexuals who pass sometimes feel unexpectedly obliged to disclose discrediting information about themselves. For example, parents who regularly ask why their son has not married (or in the case of divorced gay fathers, remarried) create the desire within the son to respond without evasion by disclosing gay identity. The more time one

spends with another person, and the closer the relationship, the more difficult it is to withhold discrediting information. As Goffman (1963) points out, "every relationship obliges the related persons to exchange an appropriate amount of intimate facts about self, as evidence of trust and mutual commitment" (p. 86). That disclosure begets disclosure has been amply demonstrated (Gouldner, 1960; Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard, 1971a,b; and Derlega & Chaikin, 1975b). Jourard refers to this phenomenon as the "dyadic effect," while Derlega and Chaikin call it "disclosure reciprocity."

For the purposes of the present study, Goffman (1963) hits the nail on the head when he states:

The passer will feel torn between two attachments. He will feel some alienation from his new "group," for he is unlikely to be able to identify fully with their attitude, . . . and presumably he will suffer feelings of disloyalty and self-contempt when he cannot take action against "offensive" remarks made by members of the category he is passing into against the category he is passing out of--especially when he himself finds it dangerous to refrain from joining in this vilification. (p. 87)

The gay father unquestionably feels torn between his homosexual feelings and his attachment to his wife and children. He also feels that he does not fit into the homosexual world because he is a husband and a father. He must fend off offensive remarks by the group he is passing out of and also by the group he is passing into. He may have difficulty managing discrediting remarks about his homosexual identity by straights or about his father identity by gays.

The homosexual may choose to make his stigma known by voluntarily disclosing his gay identity. This is referred to by Sagarin (1975) as "going public" or in homosexual argot as "coming out" (Dank, 1971). Sagarin believes that making one's deviance visible to others serves

the purpose of coping with a problem or of advancing an idea and proselytizing for it. Specifically discussing homosexuals, he writes:

By ceasing to conceal their activities and propensities, they feel better able to lobby, to advance their organizational struggles, to propagandize for their way of looking at their own activities and at themselves, to counteract shame and to disarm the hostile world. (pp. 280-281)

Though this analysis may be valid for homosexuals collectively, it ignores the reason for individual disclosure of gay identity to intimate others: to be known as an individual person (Jourard, 1960).

The first step in the self-disclosure of gay identity is coming out to oneself, identifying oneself as gay. Morgado (1976) defines coming out as "identifying oneself as a homosexual; a voluntary, willful affirmation of one's gay identity" (p. 4). Once one has identified oneself as a homosexual, the process of sharing this information with others (disclosing) follows. Hooker (1965) writes that very often coming out occurs when the homosexual "identifies publicly for the first time as a homosexual in the presence of other homosexuals by his appearance in a bar" (p. 99). However, this is not necessarily the case. Homosexuals may frequent gay bars and baths for many years before they finally identify themselves as gay. A man's presence in a gay social setting does not necessarily signal his self-identification as gay.

Gagnon and Simon (1968) mistakenly combine self-identification and public identification in their definition of coming out when they state that coming out is "self-recognition . . . and a first major exploration of the homosexual community" (p. 237; italics mine). Correcting this misconception, Dank (1971) asserts that self-identification as gay "may or may not occur in a social context in which other gay people are

present" (p. 190). Hence, it is possible to come out to oneself without having had sexual or social homosexual experiences, and it is possible to have both without identifying oneself as gay. Finally, Morin and Miller (1974) do not conceive of coming out as a single event, but rather as "a process that repeats itself many times for each person" (p. 1). This is so because homosexuality is not visible; hence, disclosure of one's gay identity is an ongoing activity, repeated many times during one's lifetime.

Studying the relationship between self-disclosure of sexual orientation and psychological well-being, Pinka (1974) found that gay males with adequate psychological functioning were highly disclosing of their sexual orientation to significant others in their social environment and moderately disclosing to other people. Pinka also found that subjects with inadequate psychological functioning were either totally disclosing or nondisclosing to virtually everyone in their social environment. These findings support the research previously discussed, in which (1) both high and low disclosers were seen as counternormative by others, and (2) persons who disclose intimate content to anyone but a close friend were viewed as maladjusted. Further evidence of the "abnormality" of high or low disclosure is provided by Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, and Shaw (1975) and Mayo (1968), whose findings indicate that neuroticism is related to inappropriate over- or underdisclosure. As Derlega and Chaikin (1975b) state, "Indiscriminate self-disclosure to everyone one encounters may constitute deviant behavior in our society" (p. 23). These authors believe that positive mental health is related to appropriate disclosure "which suits the time, the occasion,

and the listener and discloser" (p. 11). Inappropriate self-disclosure --that which is too intimate or insufficiently intimate--is related to neurosis or maladjustment. Further, they state that "in general, disclosure is inappropriate when it conflicts strongly with the prevailing norms concerning the time, place, and context for disclosing various matters" (p. 12). In an exploratory study comparing self-disclosure of gay identity and self-esteem (Bozett, Glover, Morgado, Venegas, & Winslow, 1977) it was found that male homosexuals who score high on self-disclosure of sexual orientation also tend to score high in self-esteem, indicating a positive relationship between disclosure and psychological functioning.

Writings on the reactions of individuals and society to homosexuality may be found in the literature on deviance. Though homosexuality may be considered variant behavior, it becomes deviant behavior only when society reacts against it (Clinard, 1968, p. 356). As Simmins (1969) points out, "There is nothing inherently deviant in any human act; something is deviant only because some people have been successful in labeling it so" (p. 4). Hence, defining any act as deviant is a judgmental social process (Kitsuse, 1962). By uniting itself against deviance

the community not only revives and maintains common sentiments but creatively establishes moral rules and redefines "normal" behavior. . . . Deviance establishes the point beyond which behavior is no longer within acceptable reach of the norm and in this way gives substance and authority to the norm itself. (Coser, 1962, pp. 172-181)

The interactionist perspective enables one to focus on the social interaction between the people who label the homosexual as deviant and

the homosexual himself. Social definitions of the homosexual result in stereotypes around which people organize their responses. These stereotypes include a description of the homosexual (his mode of dress, his speech, and so on); an evaluation (according to the evaluator's set of norms); and a prescription (the evaluator's expectations of the homosexual's behavior) (Rubington & Weinberg, 1978, p. 5).

Societal reactions to homosexuality (and other forms of deviant behavior) vary over time, place, and circumstance. Lindesmith et al. (1977) believe that in the United States "homosexuality is recognized and tolerated with amusement, sympathy, compassion and only mild disapproval" (p. 519). These authors point out that homosexuals are accepted in many segments of society, especially by persons who have had close contact with them. It is my opinion, however, that while close contact with a homosexual may result in tolerance, this tolerance is probably dependent upon the role relationship. For example, it is easier to accept a friend's homosexuality than it is that of a husband, since the latter's homosexuality threatens the maintenance of the family system.

Theoretical categories by which potential individual or group responses may be systematized have been proposed. Mizruchi and Perucci (1962) identify four types of group reaction to what they refer to as "normative strain." These are (1) retrenchment, in which the deviant is cast out of the group; (2) regeneration, in which there is an attempt to revitalize the norm through a cultural renaissance; (3) rational-scientific innovation, which is an attempt to adopt new normative patterns to the preexisting cultural system; and (4) permis-

siveness, which allows group members to determine their own behavioral limits. Rubington and Weinberg (1978) identify four ways in which individuals may respond to known deviance. They may optimize, that is, assume that the deviance is only temporary. Wives who encourage their gay husbands to be "cured" would fall into this category. They may neutralize, that is, disregard the deviance as insignificant, or normalize, that is, regard it as a normal variation of behavior. In the present study, many of the fathers' relevant others responded in these two ways. The fourth method of response is to pessimize, that is, to regard the deviance as permanent. Though the term "pessimize" has a negative connotation, all of the fathers and most of their relevant others would fall into this category of response, though few of them actually responded in negative terms. According to this system, an individual's response could be included in more than one category. For instance, a person who responds could be included in both the normalize and pessimize categories.

Of course, individual responses to deviance vary with what Erikson (1962) calls the "social audience" (p. 308). Schur (1969) points out that the meaning of "audience" is twofold:

In one sense . . . society at large constitutes the audience. But on another level, the more specific agents of control are the critical audience, for they implement these definitions in ongoing social action. . . . They are among the most significant of the direct reactors and labelers. Their actions constitute an important part of what Erikson calls the "community screen"; the filtering processes through which certain individual members of society are selected out for designation as deviant. (pp. 309-322).

The gay father's critical audience is his wife, his children, and other relevant intimates; they are his "agents of control." Their reactions

to the disclosure of his sexual identity or his father status determine the course of his action. It is these people who determine the extent to which he can fully and simultaneously actualize both of his identities.

Studies of individual reaction to homosexuals have generally demonstrated negative sanction. Rooney and Gibbons (1966) in a San Francisco study, found that 60% of 353 respondents favored preventing homosexuals from joining organizations that would promote gay rights, and almost all viewed the homosexual as "sick." This study also indicated that men are more tolerant of homosexuals than women; tolerance decreases only slightly with age; and adults with less than high school education are less tolerant than those who have completed high school or attended college. Also, individuals who disclose their homosexuality are less well liked than low disclosers or "conventional" high disclosers (Derlega, Harris, & Chaikin, 1975). Studying attitudes toward various forms of deviant behavior, Simmons (1969) found that the persons his subjects considered most deviant were homosexuals, who were categorized as "sexually abnormal," "perverted," "mentally ill," "mal-adjusted," and "effeminate."

Kitsuse (1962) interviewed 75 undergraduate college students who had knowingly had contact with homosexuals. His findings indicate that there is no uniform response to the discovery that a person is homosexual; rather, there are four types of reactions. These reactions are explicit disapproval and immediate withdrawal, explicit disapproval and subsequent withdrawal, implicit disapproval and partial withdrawal, and no disapproval and relationship sustained. Evidence from this study

indicates that "the model reaction is disapproval implicitly rather than explicitly communicated, and a restriction of interaction through partial withdrawal and avoidance" (pp. 247-256). Kitsuse concludes:

Reactions to homosexuals in American society are not societal in the sense of being uniform within a narrow range; rather, they are significantly conditioned by subcultural as well as situational factors. Thus, not only are the processes by which persons come to be defined as homosexuals contingent upon the interpretations of their behavior by others, but also the sanctions imposed and the treatment they are accorded as a consequence of the definition vary widely among conventional members of various subcultural groups. (p. 256)

It is this wide variation of sanction and thus the unpredictability of response that makes disclosure of gay identity a problem for the homosexual. To the extent that the findings of research on disclosure and reaction to homosexuality can be extrapolated to the gay father, most potential disclosures are "unsafe"; that is, the potential for varying degrees of rejection would appear to be high. On the other hand, it is the cultural and subcultural variations in response to homosexuality, as well as the behavior and personality of the individual homosexual himself, that, as Tripp (1975) points out, allow many gay people to live openly and comfortably in cosmopolitan centers as well as small towns.⁸

Kitsuse (1962) states that

it is not the fact that individuals engage in behaviors which diverge from some theoretically posited "institutionalized expectations" or even that such behaviors are defined as deviant by the conventional and conforming members of the society which is of primary significance for the study of deviance. A sociological theory of deviance must focus specifically upon the interactions which not only define behaviors as deviant, but also organize and activate the application of sanctions by individuals, groups, or agencies. For in modern society, the socially significant differentiation of deviants from the nondeviant population is increasingly contingent upon circumstances of situation, place, social

and personal biography, and the bureaucratically organized activities of agencies of control. (pp. 247-256)

The present research is an attempt to add some understanding to the body of knowledge of the sanctioning of homosexuality by individuals and the management of those sanctions by one specific segment of the homosexual population--the gay father.

Footnotes

¹This research was approved by the Committee on Human Research, University of California, San Francisco, on 10 March 1977; assigned number 933404-01.

²In homosexual argot, gay refers to homosexuals and straight refers to heterosexuals. For gays, however, the term gay implies more than the term homosexual. Whereas homosexual refers only to an individual's erotic desire for members of the same sex, the term gay includes the sexual aspect but also implies the thoughts, feelings, desires, motivations, and life-styles that are particular to the homosexual. In this writing, I use both terms in order to provide for some variation in style. The etymology of the word gay is interesting. According to Cordova (1975), it

"comes from the French word 'gai,' which became popular in France in the Middle French burlesque theater, as it was used to describe mock feminine . . . roles. Because women were not allowed on-stage, all the mocking and burlesque was done by gai men. Later the term came to be applied to any and all men who appeared feminine, on or off stage. The word was never meant or used to describe lesbian women. . . . Society lumped gay men and lesbian women together as 'homosexuals.'" (pp. 16-17)

³Two reports on gay men in heterosexual marriages (I. Bieber, 1969, and H. L. Ross, 1972) suggest that most such marriages are sexual disasters, and that those few couples who remain together do so for companionship and status and to combat fears of loneliness and ostracism.

⁴To improve the readability of the present study I use various terms to indicate the gay father's relationship with his significant others. These terms, which are synonymous, include significant other, significant intimate, intimate other, proximate other, proximate intimate, and expressive intimate. Persons in these categories are people with whom the father has a meaningful association, the relationship is likely enduring, and it is one in which there are mutual disclosures of substance.

⁵The methodological approach used in this study is discussed at length in chapter 2.

⁶A number of excellent books provide accounts of gay experiences in general and of disclosure in particular. Brown (1976) discusses coming out, disclosure to parents, and the experiences of married homosexuals. Though most of Brown's book consists of personal narratives, it is informative and well written. The novelist Laura Hobson (1975) focuses on the point of view of the homosexual's family. Don Clark (1977), a Bay Area clinical psychologist and gay father, writes

specifically for gays and their friends and families. His book is intended to increase their understanding of gay people and gay experiences.

⁷Though there is no published research on gay fathers, research into gay parenting is being conducted by P. Schwartz and P. Blumstein at the University of Washington, Seattle, and by R. Greene and his colleagues at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. The latter group is concerned with lesbian mothers and their children. Published research on lesbian mothers includes writings by R. Greene (1978), M. Kilpatrick (1976), and L. Leick and J. Nielsen (1973). Research in progress includes that by B. Hoeffler at the University of California, San Francisco. Discussions concerning the experiences of lesbian mothers can be found in the writings of B. Hoeffler (1978), C. Klein (1973), and D. Martin and P. Lyon (1972).

⁸The chapter by C. A. Tripp (1975) on "The social shapes of homosexuality" (pp. 127-149) contains an excellent discussion of how homosexuals manage their homosexuality in both large cities and small towns.

Chapter 2

THE STUDY: BACKGROUND, DESIGN, AND METHOD

Background

My interest in the issues addressed in this research stems from two very different sources. The first is my career in nursing, which spans a period of 27 years. Experience as a medical corpsman in the U.S. Navy whetted my appetite to pursue professional nursing, which I did at Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing for Men in Chicago. After graduating, I practiced for 1 year on a general surgical nursing unit while attending night school. I then entered Teachers College, Columbia University, emerging 2 years later with a bachelor's degree in nursing and a master's degree in nursing education. After this, I taught medical-surgical nursing for 6 years in an associate degree nursing program, which I also directed during the last 3 years. For the past 11 years I have taught medical-surgical nursing in a baccalaureate degree nursing program. During this time I have also had practice in general medical-surgical nursing, medical and respiratory intensive care nursing, nursing supervision, and in-service education.

In the course of my career in nursing I became disheartened at the tendency of medical-surgical nurses to disregard the psychosocial components of care. I was especially concerned over what I perceived to be their neglect of the families of hospitalized patients. This

concern strengthened my interest in nursing the whole family, regardless of the identified patient or of the setting.

The second source of my interest in this research was my personal experience as a gay father of two sons. After my wife and I separated I became fully responsible for the daily care of my boys, who at that time were 5 and 7 years old. I was abruptly faced with the problems that most single parents face: housekeeping, cooking, all of the daily caretaking functions, and, most difficult of all, finding adequate child care services, which in my case meant baby-sitters. Also, it was during this time that I accepted myself as gay and became comfortable with that self-definition. This experience provoked in me an intense interest in the field of family health care nursing, with emphasis on the role of the father.

My varied experiences both in nursing and in fathering led to my interest in doctoral-level study. I was prompted to enter the Doctor of Nursing Science program at the University of California, San Francisco, after consulting with several members of the nursing faculty who expressed interest in the subject of gay fathers as my dissertation topic.

Design

The research approach used was that of field study directed toward generating grounded substantive theory. I chose this methodological approach because there was no prior research on the subject under investigation. I believed that to discover relationships, conceptualize them myself, and develop theory would be more fruitful than to attempt

to test, or otherwise work from, preexisting theory, which might or might not fit the world I was observing. By using this approach, I intended to discover the processes by which the gay father achieves (or fails to achieve) congruence between his two identities. Process research differs from unit research, which describes sociological units such as social class, age, or sexual orientation. Process research is concerned with the movement of life--activities and identities--through time, whereas unit research tends to be static. Social process research transcends the unit studied.

All social situations have identifiable social-psychological and social-structural processes, which are basic to the unit under study. An example of a social-psychological process is becoming or certifying. An example of a social-structural process is bureaucratization or formalization. Once the basic social process is discovered, it permeates the data, gives them meaning, and explains events and variations in the social life of the individuals or group under study.

To illustrate, the present study examines the social-psychological process by which gay fathers integrate the two identities gay and father, when both identities are, to some extent, socially unacceptable or incompatible in the father's heterosexual and homosexual worlds. The man must disclose both his gay and father identities to his relevant heterosexual and homosexual intimates, and they, in turn, must respond to the father either positively (integrative sanction) or negatively (nonintegrative sanction). Through the social processes of disclosure and integrative sanction, the father develops a network of

relevant intimates with whom he can simultaneously be both gay and a father and thus achieve integration.

In any research the study universe must necessarily be delimited. Thus, I chose to exclude fathers who had adopted children without ever having been married, since I thought the boundaries of their gay-father career would vary too widely from the pattern of the married or once-married father. My original research design called for interviewing not only gay fathers, but also their adult children and their lovers.¹ However, after completing most of the interviews, I realized that the data I was obtaining were sufficiently rich in both depth and breadth, and to include adult children or lovers was unnecessary in order to answer the research question. However, I did include lovers in two instances; once because two of the fathers in the study were coupled in a lover relationship (although I interviewed each of them separately), and once because the father's lover happened to be home at the time of the interview. Fortunately, I had a consent form prepared for just such an eventuality, and he signed it readily. I found his participation helpful, for he asked penetrating questions and sometimes requested or provided clarification.

Negotiating Entry

Locating fathers to be interviewed was surprisingly easy. I belong to a group of gay fathers that meets monthly to socialize and discuss common problems.² At one of these meetings, I explained my status as a doctoral student in nursing and said that I intended to write my dissertation on gay fathers. I requested the names and telephone

numbers of fathers who would be willing to be interviewed. At that meeting 10 men volunteered. By making individual requests at subsequent meetings, I had no difficulty in obtaining a sufficient number of respondents. However, I felt that there might be characteristics of which I was unaware that were unique to the fathers who attended this group. I therefore decided to include nongroup members in my study. The high concentration of gay men in the San Francisco Bay Area made it easy for me to locate additional respondents. Colleagues and friends who knew of my research provided me with names, as did fathers whom I interviewed. My pool of potential respondents eventually totaled almost 100. The final sample consisted of 18 men, two-thirds of whom were recruited from the gay-fathers' group and one-third from other sources.

I contacted each subject in person or by telephone. I explained my student status and the purpose of the interview. I also mentioned that the interview would be tape recorded, that it would take up to 3 hours, and that a signed consent form would be required. I discussed these conditions ahead of time so that if they were unacceptable, the father could refuse then, rather than back out at the time of the scheduled interview. In fact no father refused to accept these conditions. I also assured each father of anonymity and confidentiality and explained that the tapes would be erased after they had been transcribed. My qualifications were never questioned; I never had to sell myself as a researcher. Being known as a gay father, as well as a doctoral student, was apparently all that I needed to make me credible.

The Interviews

Before I conducted the interviews, I read in the general areas of fathering and homosexuality in order to have a "handle" on the topics. However, I deliberately limited my preparation to avoid biasing my approach. As I read and thought about my own experience as a gay father, I developed ideas and hunches, which I recorded, so that I could determine if they were substantiated by the data. As my theory began to emerge through an ongoing analysis of the data, I began to concentrate more in the later interviews on disclosure and sanctioning and less on peripheral topics.

Before being interviewed all of the subjects were required to sign consent forms that identified them as gay fathers. This was necessary in order to meet the ethical and legal requirements of informed consent by research subjects.

All of the interviews were held in the fathers' homes, except two, which were held in mine. I conducted the interviews in a conversational manner, exercising relatively little control over them, as recommended by Schatzman and Strauss (1973). This method is referred to as an unstructured interview. Becker and Geer (1969) describe it as follows:

In this kind of interview, the interviewer explores many facets of his interviewee's concerns, treating subjects as they come up in conversation, pursuing interesting leads, allowing his imagination and ingenuity full rein as he tries to develop new hypotheses and test them in the course of the interview. (p. 323)

To begin the interviews, I mentioned some of the general areas of information that I was interested in, such as why the subject had married, what his married life had been like, and why he had separated

and divorced. This open-ended approach enabled him to begin the discussion in those topic areas where he felt most comfortable. On several occasions fathers began talking about their marriage or their children before I had formally begun the interview. To avoid losing these data, I turned on the tape recorder, allowing the interview to flow naturally from the subject the father had initiated. At the beginning of the interview, several of the fathers seemed nervous, conscious that they were being tape recorded. However, within 5 to 10 minutes most of them had become so engrossed in telling their story that their self-consciousness had disappeared.

Much of the content of the interviews was emotionally laden, consisting as it did of the father's problems in accepting himself as gay, disclosing his gay identity to his wife and children, and dealing with the subsequent divorce. As we discussed these and other subjects, I would probe by asking additional questions or by asking for clarification. Occasionally, I would probe deeper by asking, "But why?" or by saying, "I still don't understand; can you explain it further?" At these times, I often used a soft, gentle voice to reflect understanding and empathy. By probing and modulating my tone of voice, I almost always obtained depth responses. My experience as a nurse interviewing patients certainly helped me in this regard.

Only once did a father become overtly disturbed. When one subject discussed disclosing his gay identity to his children, he broke down and wept. I turned off the tape recorder and patiently waited. The man received a telephone call, which helped him to regain his composure. Though he hesitated to proceed with the topic, he was willing to do so

at my request, and he did not break down again. Because I knew that I might encounter fathers whom I thought could benefit from psychological counseling, I provided each subject with the names and telephone numbers of two mental health centers in San Francisco that cater to a gay clientele. I also gave them my name and telephone number.

The researcher who uses the technique of interviewing must determine whether the respondents are telling the truth. Dean and Whyte (1969) outline four factors that may influence the informants' responses in the interview situation. Each factor is stated in the form of a question, as follows:

- (1) Are there any ulterior motives which the informant has which might modify his reporting of the situation?;
 - (2) Are there any bars to spontaneity which might inhibit free expression by the informant?;
 - (3) Does the informant have desire to please the interviewer so that his opinions will be well thought of?;
 - and,
 - (4) Are there any idiosyncratic factors that may cause the informant to express only one facet of his reactions to a subject?
- (pp. 107-108)

On the basis of these criteria I judged all the fathers, without exception, to be honest in their responses. All of them were willing to be interviewed, and many were eager. They wanted other people to know why they believed that their homosexuality had no bearing on their ability to be responsible parents. Although most of the interview centered on the father as a husband or as a gay man and not as a parent, the subjects were equally responsive in all subject areas. Fathers who were not committed to their role as a parent were no less responsive than fathers who were. Actually, I was surprised at these men's willingness to divulge the most intimate details of their lives. A field note I wrote after several interviews suggests one reason for this willingness:

Several of them have told me they don't want other gay fathers to go through the hell they've been through, so they're willing to tell me anything, hoping I will publish my findings. They want closeted gay fathers to know that it is possible to be openly gay and happily a gay father. (Field notes, 6/29/1977)

To my knowledge, none of the fathers tried to please me, except by providing detailed answers to my questions. Since I was a member of the group I was studying, they probably felt less need to please or prove themselves to me than they might have felt had I been heterosexual. One father who did not know me asked if I were gay. I answered affirmatively, but asked if it would matter. He replied that in that case he could be more open with me than he could have been otherwise.

As for idiosyncratic factors, such as mood, the wording of questions, and outside interruptions, these were certainly operant in each interview. At no time, however, did I discern that they prevented me from obtaining honest, complete, and detailed responses.

Because I was a member of the group I was studying, I felt a special obligation to avoid a subjective, myopic point of view. I intentionally phrased questions so that they did not reflect my own values or ideas. I asked subjective or value-laden questions only to clarify what the father had said. For example, I said to one father, "It sounds to me like you're ashamed of being gay. Am I correct?" Occasionally, a father would ask me about my experiences, which I readily disclosed, knowing that disclosure often begets disclosure. This technique was effective in increasing the breadth and depth of the content I obtained. Sometimes the father would contrast his experiences with mine, which helped me to obtain variations in a pattern of responses.

Method

Data Collection

Data collection and analysis. This study employed the research approach of discovering Grounded Theory using the constant comparative method of analysis as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this method the processes of collecting and analyzing data occur simultaneously, in contrast to the linear method, in which the steps of the research process are separate and consecutive. During each phase of data collection and analysis, ideas that are generated by the data are recorded so that the researcher can follow them up as he collects and analyzes subsequent data. Some of these ideas prove to be rich sources of information, while others are found to be peripheral or totally inapplicable. Analysis consists of conceptualization, defining of categories, and linking of categories. This is a continuous process throughout all phases of data collection, but the level of conceptualization increases as the analysis progresses. Gradually, a theory emerges, and additional data are collected in order to augment and circumscribe it. This latter process is known as theoretical sampling. Although the research processes of data collection, recording, and analysis occur simultaneously, they are discussed separately in the following sections for the sake of clarity.

Sources of data. The theory generated in this study is grounded in data obtained from 18 men, each of whom was interviewed for about 3 hours, for a total of approximately 54 interview hours. In two instances, I contacted respondents a second time to obtain additional data. On one occasion a father contacted me to provide information

that he had forgotten during the interview. Data were also informally gathered from the monthly meetings of the gay fathers' group. These meetings often included discussions that centered around the emerging theory of the present study. The problem of disclosing one's gay identity to one's children was often discussed, as was the problem of being rejected by gays because one had children. After these meetings, I would record the fathers' comments and any ideas that these comments generated. This enriched the data I was obtaining from my interviews. Using varied techniques for acquiring data and obtaining data from more than one source gave different perspectives from which to understand the categories that were emerging. Data from different viewpoints is referred to as "slices of data" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 65).

Demographic data. I collected demographic data on all the fathers. All of them lived in or near San Francisco, though only one was a native San Franciscan. The remainder were from other parts of the United States. All of the fathers were Caucasian. Their educational level tended to be above the national average; three fathers had doctoral degrees, and five had master's degrees. With one exception, the remainder had bachelor's degrees or postsecondary technical training. Occupations varied from nurse, physician, and clinical psychologist, to janitor, poet, and respiratory therapist. Five of the fathers were public school teachers, and several were part-time college students. Three owned their own businesses, and one was a career military officer. Only one of the fathers was a churchgoer; religions represented were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, with Protestants predominating. The fathers' ages ranged from 28 to 51; over half were in

their 30s. Ages of their children ranged from 2 to 25 years. Number of children per father ranged from 1 to 4, with a total of 25 children, 6 of whom were adopted. Two of the fathers were grandfathers, each having one grandson.

The household composition of the fathers varied widely. One father lived with his wife and daughter. Four fathers lived with their lovers but without their children. Another man lived with his two children and his lover. Two fathers, both of whom are custodial parents, lived together as lovers with their children. One man lived alone with his daughter, while another lived with his daughter and a male and female friend. Three fathers who do not have child custody lived with male friends, and another father, who coparents his daughter 40% of the time, lived with a male friend. Finally, four of the men lived alone. All told, one-third of the fathers lived with their children, one lived with his child approximately half of the time, and the remainder lived apart from their children.

One of the men was married, ten of the men were divorced, and five were separated. All but two of the separated fathers were in the process of obtaining a divorce. The wife of one man had been killed 3 years earlier in an automobile accident, and another wife was permanently institutionalized due to irreversible brain damage.

Recording the data. All of the interviews were tape recorded, with the exception of one during which I took notes. At first, as each interview proceeded, I attempted to remember questions that were suggested by what the father had said. I found that this distracted me; yet, if I interrupted to ask questions, I interfered with the father's

train of thought. Eventually I developed the technique of using a notepad and pencil to jot down questions. This enabled me to listen intently to what the father was saying without forgetting what I wanted to ask, and I was not obliged to interrupt so often.

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, by either myself or a professional typist. Two copies of the interviews were made; one copy remained intact, and later, as my theory had emerged, the other copy was cut apart and reorganized into designated categories. I made notes regarding theory (TNs), methodology (MNs), and observations (ONs) according to the system formulated by Schatzman and Strauss (1973). These notes were also typed and classified.

Data Analysis³

The present study generates substantive theory using the analytical method of constant comparative analysis. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967):

Comparative analysis can be used to generate two basic kinds of theory: substantive and formal. By substantive theory, we mean that developed for a substantive or empirical, area of sociological inquiry, such as patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations. By formal theory we mean that developed for a formal or conceptual area of sociological inquiry, such as stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility. (p. 32)

The constant comparative method is "concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (not provisionally testing) many properties and hypotheses about a general phenomenon" (Glaser, 1969, p. 219). This analytical approach requires the researcher to identify conceptual categories and their properties, the dimensions of these categories, strategies by which action in the social scene is managed or implemented,

and conditions under which this action takes place. To do this, the researcher compares data to data, concept to concept, and category to category. He also compares concept to category and concept and category to data. The researcher is attempting to understand the social-psychological processes in the social setting. He does this by ascertaining the dimensions of action, the conditions under which various processes occur, contributing processes or properties, strategies that bring about or inhibit certain processes, and the consequences of these strategies.

As various orders of data are compared, interrelationships among them are identified. Conceptual categories emerge that explain either the effect of interaction on the interactant (social-structural processes), or their meaning to the actors (social-psychological processes). From the interrelated conceptual categories, the core variable or key linkage emerges. The core variable is grounded in the data and explains most of what is happening in the social scene. Most of the data can be integrated and understood by the core variable's explanatory power. The constant comparative method is used to discover

multiple and varied relationships between and among concepts rather than to prove a linear causal hypothesis between two concepts. Such an approach is designed to yield "molecular" rather than linear theoretical models and is in essence what Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 118) mean by a "dense" theoretical scheme. (Wilson, 1977, p. 109)

Constantly comparing theory to data also prevents the grounded theorist from formulating explanations that appear logical at first but in fact may not be. It also helps to prevent an analytical bias; this was especially important in my case, since I was a member of the group under study.

Generating categories. Categories are generated through a system of coding. Open coding is the initial step in the analysis of data. From the data, the researcher develops substantive codes, which are usually words used by the actors themselves. For example, "fronting," "hiding," and "advertising" emerged as three of my substantive codes. Codes are noted in the data next to the action that they indicate. Next, the researcher attempts to link the substantive codes logically to one another. From these linkages, sets or categories are established.

The next step is to develop theoretical codes. While substantive codes are words directly derived from the data, theoretical codes are the words the researcher uses to explain the interrelationships among the substantive codes. Examples of theoretical codes are "contexts," "consequences," and "degrees." Theoretical codes are concepts that relate variables to one another at a higher analytical level than do substantive codes, yet are grounded in the data. They are derived by constantly asking of the data, "What is going on here? What does this action mean? What are the consequences of this action?" Diagrams that illustrate relationships among substantive codes are often useful in analysis. By constantly comparing all of the incidents in a given category, the researcher begins to discern common properties among them. The properties of one category are compared with the properties in other categories to locate common but interchangeable indicators. For example, under certain conditions, "sanctioning" is "integrative," whereas, under others, it is "non-integrative."

Saturation of categories. When no new data are being added to the categories, or when no new categories emerge, saturation is said to have occurred. Saturation occurs when additional data will not further explain the action in the social scene or further broaden or delimit the theory that has evolved from analysis of the data. Saturation occurs through the process of theoretical sampling mentioned above. In theoretical sampling the researcher attempts to identify all of the properties of each category and to extend each category's dimensions to their opposite extremes. For example, the dimension of disclosure extends from the one extreme of concealing gay identity from everyone to the opposite extreme of disclosing it to everyone. Through theoretical sampling, I intentionally located fathers toward each end of the disclosure continuum. To extend dimensions by theoretical sampling, the researcher must also search for the negative case. To illustrate, since most of the fathers in the present study were highly committed to their responsibilities as parents, I attempted to locate fathers who were less committed. Seeking the negative case also helps the researcher to avoid obtaining a sample with a single viewpoint.

When additional descriptive events only support the theory that has emerged but do not further qualify it, the researcher knows that he need not collect more data. This does not mean that further data collection could not yield additional properties and categories that would extend or modify the emerging theory. What it does mean is that, for the researcher's study, saturation has occurred.

Selective coding. The function of selective coding is to delimit the theory to the smallest possible number of higher-level concepts.

This is achieved through the process of reduction. In this process various substantive variables are subsumed under a single concept. For example, the strategies of "verbal support," "permission giving," and "ménages à trois" were initially separate categories, but with further analysis they were seen as a class of indicators manageable and useful under the category "integrative sanction." Selective coding delimits the theory's terminology so as to explain the process with as few variables as possible.

Emergence of the core category. The core variable of disclosure/sanctioning emerged through the process of reduction. This core variable seemed to me to answer the social-psychological question of this research. That is, it is through disclosure and receipt of integrative sanctions that the gay father appears to achieve identity congruence and integration. I avoided premature closure by attempting to view the data from different perspectives; however, these attempts were not fruitful. I discussed my emerging theory with nurse and sociologist colleagues, and they concurred with my analysis.

Memo writing. The function of memos is to record an idea about the data before it is lost. As data were collected and coded, ideas--usually in the form of relationships between categories or general theoretical notions about the data--came to mind and were recorded. Ideas will occur at most any time of the day or night and must be recorded when they occur, since they are easily forgotten. I always carried a pen and notepad with me and also had them on my nightstand, so that at all times I could easily record any idea about the data that came to mind. Even though the memos may be ideational, they are

grounded in the data. When writing memos, I would often include the reference in the data which sparked the idea. Memos can take many forms: they may be a single word or sentence, they may be several pages long, or they may be a diagram or paradigm showing relationships. Not all memos are used ultimately, since some may not fit. However, they are retained for possible use in further study. The memos were typed on pieces of paper and were then sorted into categories. This method helped me both to integrate the theory and to organize my material for the final writing. Much of the content of memos becomes part of the final manuscript.

Writing the Theory

The theory of the present study is based upon 856 coded pages of interviews and over 200 analytical memos. During the writing phase, theory continued to emerge as it had done previously during the analysis. I have developed concepts and their dimensions using illustrations from the data in an attempt to support the theory put forth. The present study is an attempt to chronicle and clarify the social-psychological process of the gay-father career. It is not, however, intended to be the final word on the subject but rather a beginning which, I hope, will stimulate further thought, study, and research. The final manuscript integrates theory, findings, and discussion so the reader will be able to understand the world of the gay father.

Footnotes

¹The term lover is used in homosexual argot to imply a spousal-like relationship. Though less commonly used, the term committed partner is more edifying and has the same implication.

²For further information on this group, contact Gay Fathers Unlimited, 256 Post Street, Box 283, San Francisco, California 94109.

³The methodological approaches used in this study were derived from the qualitative analysis seminars conducted by Professors Leonard Schatzman, Virginia Olesen, and Anselm Strauss of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, School of Nursing, University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Phyllis Stern of the School of Nursing was also invaluable in helping me to learn the inductive process.

PART II

FINDINGS: THE CONVERGENCE OF A
DICHOTOMIZED IDENTITY

Chapter 3

THE GAY-FATHER CAREER: AN OVERVIEW

The career of the gay father is one of "becoming" (Maslow, 1962, p. 43). It is a social-psychological process that occurs over time. Early in the father's career he is either unaware of or does not accept his gay identity. He conforms to social norms by marrying and having children. However, during the marriage his homosexual desires become sufficiently intense that he seeks out homosexual liaisons. As his experience in the homosexual world increases, he gradually begins to identify and accept himself as gay. At the same time his marriage deteriorates. As he "becomes" more homosexual, he is less able to maintain a heterosexual life-style. Most fathers in the present study found that they could not live a dual existence. As the homosexual identity became dominant, the marriage failed, ending in separation or divorce. The father was then free to actualize his gay identity fully. However, he had to penetrate the gay world as a father, and other gay men were not predisposed to develop close attachments to men with children. Conflict occurred between his gay role and his father role. During his marriage he had enacted each role separately, but once he accepted himself as a gay father, he needed to enact both roles simultaneously. By fulfilling this need he was able to become the man he knew himself to be.

The first part of this chapter describes the evolution of the gay and father identities, culminating in the converged identity of gay-father. The second section discusses the history of the gay father's marriage. Though each father's marriage was unique in some respects, a modal pattern of marriage evolved, and that pattern is presented here. The final section of this chapter presents the disparities between the gay world and the father world. These differences are what make it difficult for the father to enact his father role with gays.

Part 1

Evolution of the Gay-Father Identity

Identity development is a complex psychosociological phenomenon. I do not intend to analyze the psychological, intrapsychic forces that "caused" the fathers to become homosexual. After briefly describing the development of the self, I shall discuss the social-psychological process of achieving each identity--gay and father--and the social-structural conditions and dimensions that surround the development of each. Finally, I shall discuss the process of achieving the gay-father identity itself.

The acquiring of both the gay identity and the father identity is an active process and one that requires conscious effort. Identity development occurs within a cultural and social milieu. For most individuals this milieu facilitates the process. However, this is not the case for homosexual men, for they are reared in the social context of heterosexuality and antihomosexuality. They must not only rid

themselves of society's heterosexual expectations, but also must reverse their negative stereotype of homosexuality.

Because fatherhood is culturally accepted and respected, achievement of the father identity is easier. When children are born (or adopted), fatherhood status is a *fait accompli*, but the role of father is achieved through active participation in child rearing. And identity as a father is achieved by carrying out the role, that is, by participating in the acts of fathering. However, acceptance of the father identity may be fraught with difficulty due to the overlay of the gay identity. The gay father may believe that fatherhood and homosexuality are antithetical.

Thus, the gay father has two identities that are at the opposite extremes of social acceptance: homosexuality at the negative extreme and fatherhood at the positive. The task of the gay father, then, is to achieve convergence of the two identities so that cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is eliminated. Cognitive dissonance refers to "psychological incompatibilities between two or more items of knowledge or attitudes of the individual" (Lindesmith et al., 1977, p. 99). Initially, there is disparity between the gay father's feelings (homosexual) and his behavior (heterosexual). When cognitive dissonance is eliminated, the gay father's feelings and behavior are consistent with his self-definition. He can then simultaneously enact both his gay and father roles.

Evolution of the Self

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, the self is a product of social interaction. According to Mead (1934), the child comes

to know who he is by internalizing the attitudes that his parents hold toward him. By internalizing these attitudes he develops his sense of self; his self-concept. The parent defines certain behavior as good or bad, and the child then structures his behavior according to parental expectations. Self-esteem is developed through parental approval of acceptable behavior.

Mead also stresses the importance of language. Children pick up adult vocalizations and imitate them. They begin with single words, progress to complete sentences, and eventually learn to rehearse entire conversations, ascribe motives to actions, and put words to other people's reactions to their own behavior. At this point the child can take the other person's attitude and judge that attitude in relation to himself and his own response. Through this process the child begins to think of himself as a person. He can separate himself from others, and he has conceptions of himself similar to the conceptions that others hold of him.

According to Lindesmith et al. (1977), "selves do not exist except in a symbolic or social environment from which they cannot be separated. . . . 'Self' therefore implies 'others' and is inseparable from them" (p. 322). As Mead (1934) said, "No hard and fast line can be drawn between ourselves and the selves of others, since our own selves exist only insofar as the selves of others exist" (p. 164). Thus, "The self is an organization or integration of behavior imposed upon individuals by themselves and by societal expectations and demands" (Lindesmith et al., 1977, p. 324).

Evolution of the Gay Identity

Achieving a gay identity is often a long and complex process. It involves becoming consciously aware of feelings of sexual attraction toward men, acting on these feelings, and identifying oneself as gay both to oneself and to others. This process is highly individualized. Although all of the fathers in the present study were aware that they felt attraction toward men no later than their middle teens--and usually by the age of 12--the meaning of these feelings and recognition and acceptance of themselves as homosexual came later, most commonly between 30 and 40 years of age.

Young boys who are homosexual have no one they can share their thoughts and feelings with. Their anticipatory socialization (Merton, 1957) is in reference to heterosexuality, which is epitomized by their parents' role modeling. The Judeo-Christian ethic--that homosexuality is unnatural and immoral--also permeates the culture and is part of the growing boy's enculturation process. So are the institutions of the family, church, and school, as well as the politico-legal system, all of which are decidedly antihomosexual. The homosexual boy knows that he dare not share his thoughts or feelings about his sexuality for fear of rejection, hostility, ridicule, punishment, or some other unknown horrible fate. Thus, he has no reference points or reference group by which to facilitate his evolving sexual identity: no role models to assist him into the gay world, no vocabulary to explain his homosexual feelings, no information on homosexuality, and no social milieu within which he can begin to identify with others of similar sexual orientation (Dank, 1971). So he goes it alone, and often he is lonely.

Though he recognizes his sexual feelings and may even have occasional homosexual experiences, he has probably introjected society's negative view of homosexuality. He may feel guilty and suppress or deny his sexual desires. He may also have developed a negative self-image. The young homosexual may begin to question society's antihomosexual stance yet have no means of facilitating a positive sense of self: no means by which he can learn how to become happy, self-fulfilled, and well adjusted--yet gay.

The age at which a gay man begins to have regular homosexual sex varies widely. It depends upon the availability of other homosexuals as well as upon his acceptance of homosexual acts. At some point, however, the homosexual intentionally or unintentionally places himself in social situations where he meets other homosexuals. He may intentionally seek out gay bars or baths, or he may unintentionally meet homosexuals in one-sex settings such as military service or in his college dormitory (Dank, 1971).¹ In settings such as these, the homosexual gains knowledge of homosexuality and homosexual life-styles, learns a vocabulary, and has sexual and social experiences. He begins to learn that society's negative stereotype does not fit most homosexual men, who are neither effeminate nor limp wristed; he learns that redefinition of the self is not required. He realizes that he can be homosexual just as he is without changing his affect or behavior. He can then place himself in a new cognitive category (McCall & Simmons, 1966), that of the homosexual.

It is through various sexual and social homosexual experiences over time that the gay man learns to accept himself as gay. However,

it is not mandatory for men to accept themselves as homosexual before having regular homosexual sex. As one father in the present study put it:

I justified sex with men as therapy. I was still thinking of myself as straight. That this was not something that was in the core of me. That it was some sort of phase, or some sort of thing that if I could expatiate it, it would be gone. If I could just relieve myself, every now and then. That I was still essentially straight. I mean, look at me; I was a married man, a father, you know. (Albie, 1/9/78, pp. 6-7)²

The dimensions of self-acceptance range from complete acceptance to nonacceptance. Exemplary of self-acceptance is Starr (7/7/77), who for many years "denied the feeling of being attracted to men" (p. 9). After several years of marriage, he realized he could no longer compromise himself:

I basically realized that I was going to be on this earth for about fifty more years and I didn't want to continue the compromise that we had in our relationship . . . which was me needing men in my life and her needing a monogamous marriage. (p. 1, 3)

Starr is now comfortable being gay: "I've accepted my sexuality. Over and above my sexuality, I've accepted myself, where I'm at at this point" (p. 8).

Some gay men never accept themselves as gay. Paul (2/16/78), who is 48 years old, said he knew that he was gay at a very young age. He is divorced with four teenage children, and he has lived with his lover for 7 years. Though he says he does not believe that his homosexuality is "bad," he has not disclosed his sexual orientation to his significant others because "I guess I'm ashamed of it. And I shouldn't be after all this time. But if you want to come right down to it, I guess that's what it boils down to. That I'm ashamed of it" (p. 30).

Nonacceptance is also demonstrated by the homosexual who seeks psychotherapeutic assistance in order to be "cured."

Homosexual sex may be more acceptable if the man can convince himself that he is also sexually attracted to women. Some of the gay fathers in this study entered into marriage considering themselves to be bisexual. One father stated: "I identified myself as bisexual for a long, long time, and I guess it was maybe only in the last two or three years of the marriage that my subconscious would allow me to identify as being gay" (Chad, 2/7/78, p. 9).

The period between the onset of the marriage and the initiation of homosexual relations varies considerably. Most fathers in the present study abstained for several years, though a few had open or clandestine homosexual encounters from the beginning. The decision to begin having homosexual liaisons depends upon many factors. These include the man's awareness of his homosexuality, the strength of his homosexual desires, his acceptance of sexual acts with men, his opportunities, his ability to handle the guilt that ensues, and the sexual satisfaction he experiences with his wife. But although these factors varied widely among the fathers in the present study, most of them had at least occasional homosexual relationships during marriage.

Achieving a gay identity was a difficult and often painful process for most of the fathers. As one father put it: "A long, difficult awareness. Trying to understand, you know" (Blaine, 6/28/77, p. 22). The problem is compounded by another difficulty, one that is unique to the gay father. To identify himself as gay to his wife and children has unforeseen consequences for the marriage itself as well as for his

relationships with each family member. He cannot predict what his family's reaction to his disclosure will be, nor what effect it will have on the family as a unit.

Self-acceptance as gay can be achieved without disclosure, but it is difficult if not impossible to achieve inner peace without disclosing to relevant intimates. Without disclosure, guilt remains a constant and unpleasant companion. Without disclosure, a psychological distance is always present between the father and his relevant others, making integration impossible to achieve. By disclosing, he becomes known to these others as the person he knows himself to be. However, because the potential for negative sanctions seems so great, disclosing is a very difficult but essential step in the process of achieving a gay identity.

Evolution of the Father Identity

The father identity does not occur automatically as a result of the biological act of fathering. Rather, it evolves over time and is achieved only through active participation in child rearing. Reciprocal role theory helps to explain this phenomenon:

Within the ideal framework which guides the role-taking process, every role is a way of relating to other-roles in a situation. A role cannot exist without one or more relevant other-roles toward which it is oriented. The role of "father" makes no sense without the role of child; it can be defined as a pattern of behavior only in relation to the pattern of behavior of a child. . . . This principle of role reciprocity provides a generalized explanation for changed behavior. A change in one's own role reflects a changed assessment or perception of the role of relevant others. (Turner, 1962, p. 23)

A primary condition for the development of the father identity is active participation in parenting; one dimension of this condition is

the degree of participation. Most fathers in the present study were highly involved in the care of their children. They tended to be nurturant and expressive, and they did not hesitate to feed, diaper, hug, kiss, hold, or play with them. As one father said, "I really enjoyed Gloria. I was always the person she came to when she was hurt, when she was upset. I was always the person that read her bedtime stories" (Lucas, 9/22/77, p. 10).

A second condition necessary for the development of the father identity, a corollary of the first, is that the father must be in consistent and frequent contact with his child. A father who is separated or divorced may not live with his children, but he may still maintain enough contact to retain his father identity. Physical distance is not necessarily a deterring factor. One father who is separated from his son by a distance of 600 miles visits him monthly, calls weekly, and sends occasional postcards. This provides sufficient contact for him to maintain his parental role and thus his father identity. Another father's 2-1/2-year-old son lives 3,000 miles away. This father visits his son for several weeks, four or five times a year, and he feels more like a father now than he did when the family unit was intact:

I identify more as being a parent today than I did there in those nine months. The first four months I was off from work, so I was an equal parent to my wife. And yet, I never identified as a father because the term father didn't really have a lot of positive energy for me. I didn't know what the word meant. There was no frame of reference from my own father or uncles that I wanted to portray. (Starr, 7/7/77, p. 5)

Yet Dana (6/19/77), who was divorced but saw his children several times each week, worried because he did not have daily contact with them:

My only concern was that I wanted to be able to fulfill my role as a father so they would develop into healthy, normal human

beings. I wanted them to be healthy and be intellectually inquisitive and sensitive, and at the same time physically and mentally strong and responsible. The only disadvantage or difficulty was the fact that I wasn't with them all the time. (p. 42)

Hunt and Hunt (1977) confirm this concern when they state:

Even the outside parent who sees the children regularly often feels belittled and frustrated by the loss of influence over them. There was so much of yourself that you meant to pass on to your children, so many ways in which you meant to mold them and help them develop into admirable adults. But you can't do it on a once-a-week schedule, you have to be there, live with them; an outside parent is more like an uncle, an aunt, a friend of the family, than a parent. (pp. 181-182)

Coparenting, whereby the child's time is divided between the two parents in separate households, is one means of providing the child with access to each parent while facilitating each parent's involvement with the child. Though coparenting is an effective means of maintaining father identity, it may also create identity problems. Marc (7/6/77), who coparents his daughter 40% of the time, put it this way:

It's almost a schizophrenic thing having Sue almost half the time. I just get used to being a full-time single parent, and then I go back to being a single person. There are two opposites going on when she's not around. One, that I have a break, I have some freedom, and yet at that same time some mourning because she's not here. Those two things keep going at the same time. Having gotten into the routine of being a full-time parent and integrating my work life with being a full-time working parent and doing all that integration, and then the next moment, all of a sudden in a sense, being a single person. It's almost like an abandonment feeling. (pp. 29-30)

A father who has little or no contact with his children, and thus no reciprocal role relationship, may have difficulty maintaining a father identity. Lucas (9/22/77), who has had minimal contact with his 15-year-old daughter for 8 years, exemplified this when he stated, "No, I don't feel like a father to Gloria. Not really, because of the length of time" (p. 39). Two other fathers have not seen or heard from

their children for 3 and 5 years, respectively. They maintain identity as fathers by participating in a gay-father support group. Associating with other gay fathers, participating in group activities that involve fathers and their children, and discussing their feelings of estrangement from their children all help these men to maintain some sense of father identity.

The extent of the gay father's participation in child rearing was found to depend upon two conditions. The first was the degree to which he enjoyed it. Most of the men in the present study derived much pleasure from fathering:

When my children were young, I spent a lot of time with them. They were the one most important thing to me. They came first. Not that I doted on them or protected them or anything like that, but they were uppermost in my mind. Having them be happy and turn out to be well-adjusted adults was the one thing that was more important to me than anything else. And I worked at night, so I was around in the daytime and I spent a lot of time with them. (Derrick, 11/27/77, p. 7)

The second condition that determines participation is the father's acceptance of the restrictions and obligations imposed by the role. As one father said:

I'm not going to have my children over every Saturday afternoon just to have them. I refuse to be a Saturday afternoon father. If I had them every Saturday, they might interfere with what I want to do. I might want to read a book or write a letter and I wouldn't want them to interfere with that. (Horace, Gay Fathers' Group, field notes, 2/12/78)

This father has abrogated his parental responsibilities. Though he may maintain a parental relationship with his children, he has given up the responsibilities of the father role.

Thus, the gay father balances the pleasures against the burdens and arrives at a hypothetical pleasure:burden quotient that determines

the degree of his commitment and participation. One father exemplified this balancing when he said:

It's a rough row to hoe, being a parent. It consumes your time, it consumes your energy, it consumes your life for many years. And being a responsible person, I've had to sacrifice a hell of a lot, frankly. But they're really an embellishment to me in my life. . . . I recall holding my children when they were little, which is the most complete feeling I've ever had in my life. . . . My children sustained me in my marriage, because I really loved the kids. The feeling level is exquisite, just exquisite. (Dana, 8/19/77, pp. 27-28, 31, 32)

Fathers who participated heavily in child rearing did not necessarily enjoy the parental role, however. This was particularly true of fathers who were rearing their children alone. For these men, the restrictions and responsibilities often outweighed most of the pleasures: "I don't particularly like being a parent, but I do see it as a responsibility. She is my child, I love her and all this good stuff. But the everyday hassles of being a parent I don't particularly enjoy" (Alex, 12/11/76, p. 9). If Alex had a mate with whom to share child-rearing responsibilities, he might find parenting more rewarding. As one father said:

Obviously it's easier when there's two--when there's an intact family that's getting along because it's time consuming and effort consuming to raise a child, and we're only human. So if there are two people around to share the responsibility, it's that much easier. (Marc, 7/6/77, pp. 40-41)

Xavier (11/9/76) has a lover who shares in the parenting of his two children. Though Xavier also believes that children are restricting, he sees it as a "healthy restriction" (p. 10), and all in all he enjoys the role.

Achieving and maintaining the father identity is contingent upon performing the role of father. As role performance diminishes in

intensity, frequency, or both, the sense of father identity diminishes as well. As role performance increases, father identity grows stronger.

The various conditions and dimensions I have described are not specific to the gay father. Rather, they are applicable to all fathers, regardless of their sexual orientation. What, then, is unique to the development of father identity for the gay father?

Evolution of the Gay-Father Identity

The extent of the gay father's experience in the homosexual world directly determines the degree of difficulty he has in evolving a gay-father identity. The more extensive the experience, the easier the evolution.

Gay fathers who were homosexually active before marriage reconciled their gay and father identities more readily than did those who were not. Their experience of the homosexual world had taught them something about the varieties of homosexuals and homosexual lifestyles. Varied homosexual experiences had reduced cognitive dissonance in these men and had helped them to begin the process of internalizing homosexuality as positive. They put themselves more readily in the cognitive category of homosexual. They may even have met homosexual men who were fathers. Thus, a new cognitive category of gay father seemed plausible to them, and the gay-father identity was much easier for them to achieve. Illustrative of a man who was homosexually active prior to marriage and who had no difficulty reconciling being gay and father is Starr (7/7/77) who stated, "I don't see that as a

contradiction or conflict at all. My sexuality has nothing to do with me being a father" (p. 24).

Gay fathers who first began to act on their homosexual desires after marriage had considerable difficulty resolving what initially appeared to them to be an irresolvable identity conflict. They perceived their gay identity as hopelessly incompatible with their father role. The result was serious role conflict and inner turmoil. This turmoil was due to these men's internalized negative stereotype of homosexuality. Their entire socialization had been within the heterosexual context, and they had no role models as referents by which to facilitate a gay-father identity. These men went through the process of beginning to achieve a gay identity while also having the identities of husband and father. They not only had to reverse their negative stereotype of homosexuality so that they could put themselves in the cognitive category of homosexual, but they also had to evolve an identity such that they could place themselves in the new cognitive category of gay father. For these fathers, being gay was initially unacceptable, but being a gay father was so preposterous as to be out of the question. It is not unlike the homosexual who is first becoming aware of his gay identity and is certain that he is the only one in the world. The father whose gay identity is emerging may feel this singularity:

I thought that I was probably the only married gay in the whole world and that all I would accomplish by being gay was that I would alienate myself from both the straight and the gay societies, and I was amazed as I uncovered more and more married gays. So that was quite a revelation to me and made me feel more comfortable. I thought I would really be unique: be looked upon as a freak, you know. (Chad, 2/7/78, p. 47)

Initially, the gay father may have no one with whom he can share his feelings, worries, or concerns. Cognitive dissonance is at its peak, the man not knowing how his homosexual feelings and behavior can be resolved with his father identity. Albie (1/9/78) was such a father. He had never had a homosexual relationship before marriage. However, his homosexual desires became overwhelming after 2-1/2 years of marriage and the birth of his son. He began having sexual relations with men. This satisfied his sexual needs but created massive internal conflict, culminating in two attempted suicides:

I was going through all sorts of guilt about being a bad father, and I felt "Oh, I'm a terrible father; I can't hack it as a father." That was one of my biggest, worst fears. I didn't know how to be a gay father. I didn't think it was possible. Seemed like a contradiction of terms to me. I thought, "I can't." . . . I was really hating myself for being a gay, because I thought that it wouldn't work. I thought they were anathema. (pp. 17, 62)

Resolution of this conflict comes about through a variety of social and sexual experiences in the homosexual world. These experiences eventually enable the man to place himself in the cognitive category of gay father. It is also crucial for him to discuss the conflict with others and to receive their support for both identities.

As the father comes to accept his gay identity, he becomes more comfortable with himself, and more self-accepting. This in turn leads him to become more open, responsive, and receptive to his children.

One father stated:

I think that I've accepted myself more, and so therefore I feel more comfortable with myself. I don't feel so guilty. I don't feel like I have to put on as much. The more a person loves himself, the more love he can give out to somebody else. . . . My wife feels that I'm a better father now than I was during the marriage, and that's probably because I'm more me now. I feel better about myself. I feel more comfortable, and so I may both

just put more of my wisdom into my kids and be more assertive with them, share with them more, identify with where they're at in various relationships and development and things like that. (Chad, 2/7/78, pp. 32, 42)

In short, as the father accepts his identity as gay, he becomes better able to actualize the expressive functions of the father role.

Gay fathers who have accepted their gay identity find no incongruence between being gay and being a father. Rather, the incongruence lies in the converged identities of gay father and husband. One father explained it this way: "The incongruence comes from being married. Living with a woman seems incompatible with being gay, but not living with children, not being a father" (Derrick, 11/27/77, p. 35).

The conditions necessary to achieve a gay-father identity are self-acceptance of both identities coupled with participation in fathering and sociosexual experience in the homosexual world. Disclosure of both identities to significant intimates, both heterosexual and homosexual, is also necessary. Other people's support (integrative sanctions) confirm the father and help him to merge the two identities.

The next section of this chapter describes the gay father's marriage. Most fathers in the present study found it difficult to accept themselves as gay, and marriage compounded the difficulty. Marriage is an attempt at integrating into the mainstream of American life. For most fathers this attempt proved unsuccessful. It inhibited, but did not halt the development of their homosexual identity.

Part 2

The Natural History of the Gay Father's Marriage: An Attempt at Integration

The Cultivation of the Marriage

Reasons for marrying. As I mentioned in chapter 1, gay men marry for many reasons. These include family pressure, the desire for children, and honest love for a woman. As one father put it, "I fell in love with my wife. It's just that simple" (Xavier, 11/9/76, p. 5). At the time of marriage, the degree of awareness of their sexual attraction to men varied considerably among the fathers in the present study. Some men were fully aware of this attraction, others were totally unaware of it. The desire for home and family was sincere, in either case. Gay fathers, in fact, are much like other men. They marry, have children, develop a career, establish a social network of intimates, and have hopes, fears, and aspirations for themselves and their families. Gay fathers are different in only one major respect: They are sexually attracted to men.

Awareness of homosexuality. The gay father's gradual awareness of his homosexual desires, or their recrudescence after he has denied and suppressed them, creates an ever-increasing inner conflict. The desire to achieve happiness within the family context conflicts with the father's concealed homosexual desires. This poses a serious problem. Unless the gay father has his wife's permission to have sexual relations with men, which most fathers in the present study did not, he tries to solve this problem by engaging in clandestine homosexual liaisons. This solution satisfies both his homosexual needs and his

desire for a heterosexual family life-style. It is usually temporary, however, because his need to activate his identity as a homosexual eventually overpowers his desire to maintain his heterosexual-appearing life-style.

Though most of the fathers in the present study had been homosexually active before marriage, after marriage several conditions inhibited the continuation of homosexual sex. One was the expectation of monogamy. A second condition, which parallels the first, was the degree of sexual satisfaction obtained with the wife. Many of the fathers did find heterosexual sex sufficiently gratifying to abstain from homosexual sex, at least for a time, and thus to maintain a monogamous relationship. Usually, however, homosexual abstinence lasted only during the early years of the marriage. One father who has been married for 12 years (he is still married) is typical: "Since I had been feeling guilty about going to bed with men, I just stopped it after I got married. Just stopped doing that for six years. Did not have any relationships with a man" (Larry, 8/4/77, p. 10). Likewise, another father stated, "In the first several years of our marriage, I didn't do anything with men. Very straight" (Paul, 2/16/78, p. 4). But since basic needs continue to recur regularly, most fathers could not deny their homosexual needs. At some point they began having sexual encounters with men, and they continued to have these encounters with increasing frequency.

Not all fathers, however, could admit to their homosexuality nor act on their sexual impulses. Those who could not entered marriage with few if any prior homosexual experiences. Stanley (Gay Fathers'

Group, field notes, 1/9/78), age 46, married at age 24, having had only one homosexual experience at age 14. During his marriage, he had only one homosexual experience. He was divorced at age 38 but did not identify himself as gay nor seek out homosexual liaisons until the age of 42, and then only after several months of psychotherapeutic help.

Likewise, even though Lucas (9/22/77) said he knew that he was gay by the age of 8, he did not have his first homosexual experience until the age of 29 during his 6th year of marriage.

Justifying clandestine sex with men on the basis of need rather than emotional or affectional attraction is a common rationalization gay fathers employ. This rationalization helps to relieve or prevent guilt: "I justified it as therapy" (Albie, 1/9/78, p. 6). Another father stated:

It didn't really occur to me that I was gay. This was just something I was doing because it was eliminating frustration, and I rationalized the fact that it was just strictly casual sex, and it was with a man, and there was no romantic thing, and I wasn't cheating on my wife, and blah, blah, blah. (Chad, 2/7/78, p. 6)

Most fathers felt guilty to be engaging in homosexual sex during marriage. The guilt stemmed from two sources: (1) the belief that homosexuality is unnatural and immoral (the Judeo-Christian ethic) and (2) the belief that monogamy is synonymous with marriage. Frequently the father resorted to lies to explain why he had come home late, where he had been, and whom he had been with. Then he felt guilty about lying, as well.

As a result of all these factors, the marital relationship deteriorates over time. Usually, though not always, the marriage ends in

separation and divorce. The deterioration is evidenced in one of two ways: either by sharp conflict or by gradual distancing.

Deterioration of the Marital Relationship

The major condition that appears to determine how marital deterioration occurs is the extent of the father's experience in the homosexual world. Men who have had little or no homosexual experience undergo a severe identity crisis, which causes intense inner turmoil, as explained above. The father expresses this turmoil by creating sharp conflict within the family. Fathers whose marital breakdown occurs in a relatively calm, gradual manner have been able, through their exposure to the gay world, to reverse their internalized negative gay stereotype and to begin to put themselves in the cognitive category of homosexual. These men do not experience the same degree of turmoil as the first group.

Sharp conflict. In cases where sharp conflict occurs the father had had few if any homosexual experiences. During marriage his homosexual urge has become intense and his awareness of it has increased. Eventually, he begins to have occasional clandestine homosexual liaisons, which he usually feels obliged to conceal. This, in turn, makes him feel guilty. Over time his guilt increases, as does his frustration at not being able to actualize himself fully. The father acts out this frustration against his family. He is consistently angry, argumentative, and hostile. Usually, he gives up all or most sexual activity with his wife. Wife and children become scapegoats upon which the father heaps his frustrations. The entire family agonizes.

Albie (1/9/78) exemplifies severe internal turmoil as well as the turbulence in his life which his concealed homosexual behavior created. He had his first homosexual experiences after marriage and the birth of his son. He attempted suicide twice after becoming homosexually active and before disclosing to his wife. He narrated the following:

I couldn't tell anyone. It was like I was living in two worlds. I felt very schizophrenic. I felt really divided up. And it got even more crazy as time went on. I quit my job and went back to school simply because I didn't know what else to do. I just decided to go back to school but I didn't know why really or anything. I went into the ROTC program too 'cause I decided that since I was doing this gay stuff, I should go back into the Army 'cause this was real male identity. Guilt was the feeling. I thought it was really wrong. Even though I repudiated Catholicism I didn't repudiate it emotionally 'cause I just was so estranged from my feelings. That was my way of surviving, of coping with my homosexuality. I couldn't talk to anyone about it. I couldn't tell anyone. I had this heinous secret, y' know. I was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. And Dr. Jekyll during the day and Mr. Hyde when I'd go out and I felt disgusted by this ugly creepy Mr. Hyde. I couldn't stand Mr. Hyde. That was disgusting to me; it was revolting. But I had to do it. Things were starting to get kind of hairy 'cause I was having sex at the baths. At night my wife would go to bed early 'cause she had to get up early and I would leave after she was asleep and she would never know. She never knew the whole time. I'd come home before she woke up. So, what happened then was it sort of was really getting crazy and I dropped out of school and I went back into school and I was going crazy. The relationship was getting rocky. It really got nuts. I mean it got rockier! We were arguing more and more and finally it was just too crazy. And my son during this whole time was unfortunately catching the negative parts of this. Maggie and I started to really not get along sexually 'cause I was so torn up inside myself and I finally came out with her in the springtime. (pp. 8-12)

Another father described it this way:

In the eight years that we were married I'd say that I had half a dozen . . . relationships: hit and run, stranger in the night. And I was becoming more and more frustrated and more and more unhappy with myself. I know that Rita suffered, and I'm sure that Ben suffered because of it too. My frustration would build up to anger, and I'd stomp around and bitch about one thing and another, and I'm sure they suffered because of that. Temper tantrums. And sometimes not even knowing why I was so uptight. I blamed it on

my job. Rita spent a lot of money, and I blamed it on that.
(Kevin, 6/21/77, pp. 5-6)

This same father explained that he felt hostile toward his family because "I wasn't expressing myself as a whole human being. I was denying an aspect of my personality that was very real and needed fulfilling, and I never fulfilled it" (p. 6). These fathers were not necessarily aware of the reasons for their behavior (and, of course, neither were their wives), but eventually the situation became unbearable. It was at this point that most fathers who experienced sharp conflict disclosed their homosexuality to their wives.

One function of marriage is to provide the opportunity to meet sexual needs (Glick, 1974), and Minuchin (1974) writes that "a family is subject to inner pressure coming from developmental changes in its own members" (p. 60). The gay father is in a state of change, being uncertain of or resisting his homosexual identity. At the same time he is experiencing increasing sexual frustration. Nonresolution is a constant stressor. The longer the frustration lasts, the greater the pressure. There is a reciprocal psychological distancing of the marital pair, communication breaks down as the conflict sharpens, and the relationship crumbles.

This kind of marital disintegration is common between gay fathers and their wives. It is the first stage of marital disruption which Bohannan (1970) calls "emotional divorce." Bohannan states that emotional divorce

occurs when the spouses withhold emotion from their relationship because they dislike the intensity or ambivalence of their feelings. They may continue to work together as a social team but their attraction and trust for one another have disappeared. The

self-regard of each is no longer reinforced by love for the other. The emotional divorce is experienced as an unsavory choice between giving in and hating oneself and domineering and hating oneself. The natural and healthy "growing apart" of a married couple is very different. As marriages mature, the partners grow in new directions, but also establish bonds of ever greater interdependence. With emotional divorce, people do not grow together as they grow apart--they become, instead, mutually antagonistic and imprisoned, hating the vestiges of their dependence. Two people in emotional divorce grate on each other because each is disappointed. (p. 34)³

In some instances the couple seek marriage counseling, but counseling is ineffective, since the father's need to actualize his gay self is stronger than his ability to achieve harmony within the heterosexual family context. Eventually either the father or his wife stops trying to make the relationship work, and finally the other one gives up, too.

Gradual distancing. Some couples experience a gradual psychological distancing in which relatively little overt anger is expressed. The men in this category were active sexually with men prior to and throughout their married lives. Because of their varied sexual and social experiences in the gay world, which spanned a period of many years, they no longer held negative views toward homosexuals or toward their own homosexuality. Extensive experience in the gay world had resulted in the reduction of cognitive dissonance. These men were able to place themselves in the cognitive category of gay father without the identity crisis characteristic of those fathers in the sharp conflict category. Because they fulfilled their homo-social-sexual needs on a regular basis their frustration over unmet needs did not build up to the point of sharp conflict. Rather, the man and his wife gradually grew apart, which created a psychological distance between them. Bohannon (1970) puts it this way:

All marriages become constantly more attenuated from the end of the honeymoon period probably until the retirement of the husband from the world of affairs. That is to say, the proportion of the total concern of one individual that can be given to the other individual in the marriage decreases, even though the precise quantity (supposing there were a way to measure it) might become greater. But the ties may become tougher, even as they become thinner.

When this growing apart and concomitant increase in the toughness of the bonds does not happen, then people feel the marriage bonds as fetters and become disappointed or angry with each other. They feel cramped by the marriage and cheated by their partner. A break may be the only salvation for some couples. (pp. 41-42)

When gradual distancing occurs, the changes in the relationship are less traumatic and more subtle. There is little overt conflict, and the couple outwardly appear to be compatible. The father maintains respect and concern for his wife, but he feels cramped by the marriage, since he cannot fully and openly actualize himself as a gay man. Over time, as a result of these stresses, the relationship becomes less intimate. Eventually the man discloses completely and the marriage dissolves.

Separation and Divorce

Whether the marriage disintegrates through sharp conflict or gradual distancing, one reason it disintegrates is because the father cannot achieve full life satisfaction within the framework of a heterosexual marriage. Yet, even though the father wants to dissolve the marriage, he feels torn. He has loved his wife, he may still love her, and he loves his children. He cherishes both the history he has developed with his family and the material possessions they have accumulated over time: "The history is something I've thought a lot about and that

I miss. I feel a loss of that history that I shared very, very deeply with Pat" (Starr, 7/7/77, p. 14). Another father said:

That was my place. I built it with my hands. I did the work around that land. I had to spend a bit of time breaking myself away from that property before I could break myself away due to the divorce. And I had a lot of anger around the fact that I'm the one that lost everything. (Charles, 5/12/77, p. 50)

Also, it is frequently difficult to give up the internalized stereotype of the ideal nuclear family:

We recognized that we couldn't grow anymore together, yet it was very, very hard for both of us to give up this model. This acceptable model. It took us almost five years consciously knowing that the chances were that we wouldn't stay together. (Marc, 7/6/77, pp. 3-4)

To alter the security of a known relationship for an unknown and unpredictable future is also difficult, especially if it involves leaving the children. As Paul (3/1/78) said, "It was my feelings for my children, not Kathy, but my children. That's the thing that was the most difficult. Kathy I could have left in a minute, but my children I found very difficult to leave" (p. 26). It is easier for the gay father to separate from his wife if his children are grown and are living away from home.

It should be emphasized that the father's homosexuality is not necessarily the only cause of the divorce. The cause of most divorces is difficult to pinpoint:

There is far less known about the cause of divorce than appears on the surface; what we read in the newspapers or learn from other popular media is a report on what people swear to in the divorce courts--and people cite as causes whatever the law allows as cause for divorce. As laws change, so do the complaints.

Sociologists, unlike the courts, can tell us a great deal about the real causes of marital breakdown, but in terms of probabilities rather than the specifics of any one couple's woes. Sociologists tell us which sociological and economic changes cause

the divorce rate to rise, but they do not tell us why some marriages fail and others remain intact under the same conditions. (Hunt & Hunt, 1977, pp. 18-19)

Indeed, it would be easy to accept the premise that of course a marriage would deteriorate if the husband were homosexual. But it is not as simple as that. One father remained married for 27 years and was relatively content until his children left home. Though he is now separated, he has no intention of seeking a divorce unless he falls seriously in love. One other father managed to be openly gay and yet to remain married. Why some gay fathers remain married for many years while others seek divorce much sooner is unknown.

It should be emphasized that the deteriorating marriage involves two people. One man said that his wife realized while in psychotherapy that she was no longer physically attracted to him. She sought out other men for sexual purposes while he was abstaining from homosexual relations and was content in the relationship. Another father reported that his wife had

gone out and had this love affair that I didn't know about. I found letters from her to him that she'd never mailed. What I read I couldn't believe. What I found out was that she loved him. She really did, and maybe had never really loved me. It was a worse sham than what I'd pulled on her. (Blaine, 6/28/77, p. 28)

In short, gay fathers' marriages, like other marriages, deteriorate for a variety of reasons. The father's homosexuality, though undeniably significant, is not necessarily the sole cause.

Separation and divorce is another transitional stage in the career of the gay father. It carries the process of identity achievement, and thus of integration, one step further. Though financial and emotional

attachments to his wife and children may remain, the gay father is now free to seek another life-style of his own choosing.

The next stage in the career of the gay father is his entrance into the homosexual world. He enters this world without the bonds of marriage, yet with the identity of father. The last section of this chapter describes the gay world and the problems the gay father faces in developing meaningful gay relationships.

Part 3

Gay Fathers and the Gay World: Two Worlds in Collision

Properties of the Gay World Versus Requirements of the Father Role

It is difficult for a gay father to gain acceptance from gays. This is because the requirements of the father role conflict with certain properties of the gay world.⁴ These properties are the gay world's single orientation, the transiency of gay relationships, and the gay world's emphasis on youth.

The gay world: a single world. Gay culture is oriented towards single people. Though there are exceptions, most gays are not intimately attached in a spousal type of relationship.⁵ They have no definitive or long-term commitments or obligations to another person. Nor do they have financial restrictions or obligations; their income is all their own to spend as they please. Neither is their time restricted; they can come and go without considering others. This independence also allows gay men to be transient. They can easily move

from one city to another, or they can change their living arrangements without considering anyone else's needs.

The gay father does not have this kind of freedom, unless his children are adults. He is restricted economically by his financial obligations to his children. Responsibility for his children also circumscribes the gay father's time. Most fathers in the present study, whether or not they were the custodial parent, set aside time for their children on a regular basis. The father's living arrangements must take his children into account, especially if they live with him. Thus, many gay fathers are distinguished from other gays by their relative lack of independence.

The gay world: transient relationships. Because gay marriages are not institutionalized by church or state, a gay man's commitment to a partner can readily be broken. Gay men move easily in and out of relationships, which makes it difficult for them to learn how to maintain a long-term commitment.⁶ Discussing intimacy in gay male relationships, Hoffman (1968) states:

The most serious problem for those who live in the gay world is the great difficulty they have in establishing stable paired relationships with each other. . . . They are continually looking for more permanence in their socio-sexual lives and are all too often unable to find it. (p. 164)

The gay father, on the other hand, has had at least some experience with a committed relationship during his marriage, and even after he is divorced, he usually retains a lasting commitment to his children. I believe that this gives him a better sense of the meaning of commitment in relationships and a greater willingness to put effort into making a potential long-term relationship work than most other gay

men possess. One father in the present study put it this way:

Gay men who have been married know a lot more about what I call the stuffing of relationships than just plain gay men. The marriage contract demanded a certain kind of experience and experimentation within the confines of the relationship that you do not get in a gay relationship. I feel that some gay people don't have any imagination beyond the immediacy of just what's happening. They don't plan or work at it, and a relationship is hard work at best. It takes a lot of consistent work. (Dana, 8/9/77, p. 33)

However, further empirical research is needed in order to verify this point of view.

The gay world: youth orientation. Finally, the gay world is youth oriented. This is true of the straight culture, too, but the tendency is accentuated in the gay world. Finding sexual partners, even for one night, may be difficult for a gay man who is over 35 (Hooker, 1965, p. 100). Most of the fathers in the present study were over 35, and this made it harder for them to form long-term relationships.⁷

In short, the gay father has commitments that other gay men do not share. Many gay fathers admit that these may be healthy restrictions. But they also recognize that these commitments--and often their age--inhibit their social success in the gay world.

Fatherhood and the Gay World

Though having children is a status passage (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) in the heterosexual world, it is often a stigma in the homosexual world. Parenthood is outside the purview of most gay men, and often gays do not comprehend how important his children are to their father. Mager (1975), himself a gay father, writes that

gays in general should be more open and understanding of the special problems of gay parents (both faggot and lesbian). Children are not, after all, pets or toys, and I have grown weary of the attitude of some of my gay friends that it is cute that I have children--cute, but not very important. (p. 132)

Further illustration is provided by Xavier (11/9/76):

For me one of the most important aspects of my life is that I'm gay and another of the most important aspects is that I'm a father. And aside from a number of other interests, those are the things around which my life revolves. And I think, and I suspect this is true of many gay fathers, that there is a significant alienation from other gays because of the fact that you're a father. And I suspect, once again, that it arises from the idea of responsibility for another person. There is a tremendous restrictive, and I think almost a healthy restrictive, condition that arises from having to be responsible for another human being. And this marks you off from other gays. Because the primary mark of the gay world is that, essentially, people can be as unattached as they wish to be. And they can escape virtually every relationship they wish to escape from. And that makes my kind of life very different from the lives of most other gays. (p. 7)

Though many kinds of relationships exist in the homosexual world (Tripp, 1975), being a parent in the parent-child relationship is not considered to be one of them. Most gay men have given up the notion of having children (if they ever had it in the first place), and have adjusted to living without them. Though a gay man may long for a lover, he does not pine for a man with children. Though he may accept the restrictions that commitment to another man would impose, he is seldom willing to accept the burdens of being a second parent. Mager (1975) observes that "many adults who have not lived intimately with children have a low tolerance for them" (p. 129). And he adds: "For a short while, I lived in a group living situation with other gays, and discovered that their low tolerance really meant that my children's presence was a nuisance to the other members of the household" (p. 129).

The gay father who has child custody has to penetrate the gay world with his children. That is, his gay intimates must not only accept him as a father but must also accept his children. If a gay man accepts the father as a father but rejects his children, this has the effect of a negative (nonintegrative) sanction, and the father will distance himself from that man. Both the father's identity as a father and his children must be sanctioned positively for an intimate relationship to evolve. This is especially true if the father is the custodial parent. However, it also holds for fathers who are separated from their children, but who have continuing obligations to and feelings of attachment for them. Gordon (8/1/77) exemplifies this position:

Everyone in my life that's close to me must welcome my son or they're not my friends. It's as simple as that. I can go to their house for a day, but they're not in my inner circle if they don't get along with my son. They would stay there on the periphery, and it would be their choice how far on the periphery they remained. (p. 4)

The only exception is the father who has minimal commitment to his parental role.

Occasionally, gay fathers will develop expressive relationships with men who do reject their children. To my knowledge, this always creates conflict. One father had a gay friend who frequently refused to talk to the father's 17-year-old son. The son reacted by not speaking to his father's friend. This created conflict between the father and his friend and also between the father and his son. Another man who is coupled has two children who live with him 6 months each year. During this time the lover is exceedingly resentful of his attention

to the children, which creates considerable family conflict. Because of this conflict, the couple has temporarily separated.

Even though a gay man may feel deep affection for a gay father, he may break off the relationship because the children interfere with the relationship. Or he may reject the father outright when he discovers his father status. As I have already pointed out, many gay men have a low tolerance for children. But the problem is more complicated than that. Many gay men who are seeking a lover relationship want and expect to come first in their lover's life. They do not want to be required to vie for their lover's attention. Therefore, many gay men are unwilling to couple, or even to consider coupling, with a gay father. This may be the case even if the father's children live with their mother or are adults and live independently. To illustrate, Charles (6/4/77), who lives alone, has three grown children, one of whom lives in the same town as he. He stated:

There have been some situations where I have been with somebody and my daughter . . . has called for some kind of help, and it's been help that calls me to be concerned. And while that's happening less, it's true that should anything come up, it might take priority. Now that makes a difference to some men. But it's always going to be true, and it may be somewhat of a barrier for me to get together with somebody. (p. 61)

Another father, who has child custody, said:

I know of one man who was frightened off by my daughter. He had a bad experience with a father, and in fact the children didn't even live with this guy that this fellow was seeing. But he didn't want to take up anything with me just because of it. (Alex, 12/11/76)

That the needs of children would in fact come first was affirmed by Chad (2/7/78):

I bring up that I'm a father in the conversation because I think it's important. My son has gotta come first, and I think that

anybody that wants a relationship with me has to know this. It's not fair to them if they don't know it. Because it's one of the few things I'm gonna demand, and they should have a choice about whether they want to accede to that or not. It isn't fair to me or to them otherwise. (p. 29)

However, Chad's son is only 10 years old. When children are independent adults, the father may consider the lover's needs first. For example, Dana (8/9/77) said that he could "foresee the possibility of a lover coming before my children. That's possible. Absolutely. Because they're independent of me now, and I want it that way" (p. 40).

Nonetheless, most fathers, at least those in the present study, are strongly committed to their children and will respond to their needs or requests. For an intimate relationship to evolve and to be sustained, other gays must accept the father's commitments to his children. This is true even if the father is not the custodial parent, or if the children are adults.

Summary

The gay fathers in the present study seemed destined to actualize their homosexuality, though at first most of them resisted it. Either they could not accept themselves as gay, or they were not consciously aware of their gay identity. Coupled with this denial was a desire to conform to societal expectations, which they did by establishing a heterosexual life-style with a wife and children. But eventually their homosexual impulses became sufficiently potent to compel them to seek sexual and social gratification in the homosexual world. As their homosexual drive became increasingly intense, their marriage

deteriorated, they disclosed their homosexuality, and usually separation and divorce ensued.

During marriage, the gay father was developing his gay and father identities. This development was facilitated by active participation in both worlds. Through active social and sexual participation in the gay world, the father gradually reversed his negative gay stereotype. This eventually enabled him to accept himself as a homosexual. He stopped pretending to be heterosexual, separated from his wife, and entered the gay world as a father.

However, because the gay world is oriented primarily toward single youth, the father had difficulty establishing intimate relationships with gay men. He was restricted by his various obligations to his children, and he found that many gay men are unsympathetic to children and parenthood. This often made it difficult for the father to establish intimate gay relationships.

The end point of the gay-father career is integration. Integration is achieved by the gay father disclosing his gay identity to heterosexuals and his father identity to gays, and by fostering close relationships with those persons who provide integrative sanctions. Disclosure, sanctioning, and integration are the subjects of the following chapter.

Footnotes

¹Gay baths, also referred to as steam baths, are hotel-like accommodations where homosexuals gather for social-sexual purposes. Physically, baths consist of private rooms, each with a bed, hook for hanging clothes, and a lock on the door. There is also a large open area with beds, frequently referred to as the "orgy room." Other areas are shower room, bathrooms, and steam room. Lounges with televisions are common. Frequently there are two lounges, one with commercial television and the other for pornographic films. There may also be other accommodations such as a workout room, restaurant, and swimming pool.

²I have used fictitious names throughout this study in order to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents.

³Bohannon (1970) identifies six different overlapping experiences of separation. They are: (1) the emotional divorce, which centers around the problems of the deteriorating marriage; (2) the legal divorce, which is based on grounds; (3) the economic divorce, which deals with money and property; (4) the coparental divorce, which deals with custody, single-parent homes, and visitation; (5) the community divorce, which deals with changes of friends and community; and (6) the psychic divorce, which deals with the problem of regaining individual autonomy. (p. 34)

⁴I use the term world to mean a subculture or community whose members share the same values, beliefs, and perspectives.

⁵In the most recent published study of homosexuality, Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that out of a total sample of 686 male homosexuals, 67 were "close-coupled" in a quasi marriage with a male partner, and 120 were in an "open-coupled" relationship. The two groups were differentiated by several criterion measures, primarily by their standard scores on number of sexual problems, number of sexual partners, and amount of cruising. The "close-coupled" standard scores were low, whereas the "open-coupled" scores were high. (pp. 132-133)

⁶Much has been written on the problems of promiscuity, intimacy, and long-term relationships between gay men. I have found the chapters on this subject by Hoffman (1968, pp. 164-177) and Tripp (1975, pp. 150-170) particularly helpful.

⁷The G-40 Plus Club in San Francisco is a social club for gay men over 40. Its purpose is to provide an opportunity for these men to make friends with men their own age. This reduces the need for them to compete with younger men in the sociosexual marketplace of the gay world. For information on this organization, contact the Gay Community Center, 330 Grove Street, San Francisco, California 94102.

Chapter 4
DISCLOSURE, SANCTIONING, AND
INTEGRATION: THE THEORY

The point this study makes is that convergence of the two identities gay and father cannot occur without integrative sanctions from the father's heterosexual and homosexual intimates. Integrative sanctions have the effect of giving the father permission for simultaneous and active involvement in both roles. He can then actualize each identity in both heterosexual and homosexual contexts with both heterosexual and homosexual intimates. He need no longer conceal his father identity from gays or his gay identity from heterosexuals.

Integration is attained through the interactional process of disclosure and sanction. The father must disclose both his gay identity and his father identity to his significant intimates, and he must receive positive sanctions for both identities from these intimates, in order to achieve integration. He develops close relationships with persons who reinforce both identities, and he distances himself from persons who do not.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the various aspects of disclosure of both identities. The second part describes how others sanction the father's disclosure of these identities. The third and final section describes the integrated gay father.

Part 1

Disclosure

Functions of Disclosure

Disclosure is requisite to achieving an identity that is authentic both to the gay father and to his significant others. A major function of disclosure, then, is to help define the self to others. By disclosing, the gay father informs others of the person he knows himself to be. Disclosing gives others the opportunity to know him as he is, to respond to him as he is, and to nourish and sustain his identity. Gay fathers need identity validation from both their proximate heterosexual and homosexual intimates: from the former that they are acceptable even though they are gay, and from the latter that they are acceptable even though they are fathers. Other people's support of their identity strengthens their sense of self, which helps to confirm and solidify a positive self-concept. And the act of disclosing itself has the effect of certifying identity and promoting self-acceptance. As one father stated:

The main reason a gay person tells other people is for the gay person's sake. I think it reinforces othe gay person's self-worth, even if he gets the rejection. I think he's better off if he felt that he wanted the other person to know. (Derrick, 11/27/77, pp. 27-28)

One's identity is so closely related to one's daily activities that when one hides one's identity, one cannot communicate freely about one's daily life and feelings. One can only talk about "safe" topics, and when the topic becomes too personal, one must deflect the conversation. Concealing one's identity from others also consumes enormous amounts of energy. In the present study many fathers had homosexual

affairs without their wives' knowledge. They went to great lengths to concoct excuses and to evade their wives' probing questions. As this suggests, concealing one's identity is also a distancing maneuver. It creates a perpetual gap in relationships, and keeps people on the periphery. It is ultimately isolating.

Disclosure, on the other hand, allows intimacy to develop. For this to happen, there must be open and honest sharing of the self with others. This function of disclosure is illustrated by the experience of Lucas (9/29/77), an elementary school teacher, who disclosed to his principal and three other teachers only after many years of collegue-ship. He describes the difference in his communication with them since his disclosure:

[Now] anything I'm experiencing in my life as far as the gay world is open for discussion, and we spend a lot of time talking about it. [Before] it was really uncomfortable. I've known these people for about 15 years, and we would spend hours talking about school problems and personal problems. But until I had told them I was gay, I always had to use the wrong pronouns. I could never say "he." So I could not really go very far into my discussion. It felt like whatever I wanted to say, I had to edit first. There was this constant editing of this tape before I could say anything. I had to know what it sounded like in my head--if it could give me away. And there was always a pretty big gap in terms of what I was talking about and what was really going on. And after having broken the barrier, there has been a big change. It's a lot easier. It is really miserable to feel like every statement must be pre-edited as to what it may sound like, how somebody might interpret it. That they might get the wrong idea, or get the right idea, depending on how you look at it. It's like everything has to be filtered through a screen, and that screen is between you and other people. That's how it felt. Everybody was out there far enough away where there was personal communication only up to a certain point, and then that's where the wall was. And it's very nice not to have that wall there now. (pp. 27-28)

By disclosing his homosexuality the gay father frees himself of the fetters of self-concealment. He no longer has to confine himself to himself. After disclosure he can be open with his friends and allow

them to share in the gay facets of his life without fearing their negative reactions. Disclosure allows the man to converge his two identities and to be gay and a father at the same time.¹ With these friends, Lucas has achieved integration.

Selective Disclosure

Disclosure is always selective. It is selective with respect both to persons and to situations. The gay father has many daily interactions with persons, such as salesclerks or bank tellers, who are not sufficiently significant to him to make disclosure important. One father put it this way:

I don't hide it, and I don't make a point of telling people. It depends on the person. Sometimes there might be a person who you really want to be comfortable with, so you let them know. Other times there are people who, in terms of your life, you have just nothing to do with them. You wouldn't bother telling them that or any other thing about yourself. (Xavier, 11/9/76, pp. 23-24)

The more intimate the father becomes with another person, the greater is his need to disclose.

Too, the father's physical appearance or behavior is no clue to his homosexuality. As Clinard (1968) points out, "A common myth is that male homosexuals can be readily recognized as physically effeminate persons. Most of them are indistinguishable from other people" (p. 353). In heterosexual contexts others naturally assume the father is heterosexual and by nondisclosing he gives them no reason to believe otherwise. Moreover, he can intentionally choose to disclose his fatherhood in order to give the impression of heterosexuality--referred to as "straight-fronting" (Young, 1975, p. 197)--since, for most people, being a father rules out being gay. Although this is a nonintegrative

tactic, some fathers in the present study used it in circumstances where they did not want their homosexuality known or suspected. For example, even though Charles (5/12/77) has disclosed to many friends, he does not disclose in all social situations. He stated:

The world is very heterosexually and couple oriented which means that you sit in a conversation and either acknowledge that you're gay and start talking as a gay person or you just sit silently and listen and ask them questions. I have an easy out in that I can make reference to my children and that helps some. (p. 63)

Charles manages a straight image through his children. By discussing them he not only portrays himself as not gay, but intentionally purports a false heterosexual identity.

Conversely, in the gay world, the father's behavior is no clue to the fact that he is a father. Thus, he can choose to be known as a homosexual or not a homosexual, or as a father or not a father. By not disclosing he "passes" as heterosexual or childless maintaining two fictional biographies, each with a separate identity.² The only way either of his identities becomes known is by disclosing.

The father may disclose to one significant intimate but not to another. For example, he may disclose his gay identity to his former wife but not to his parents, or he may disclose to all his significant intimates except his children. The possibilities are almost endless and depend solely upon the individual father. The social-structural conditions that encourage or inhibit disclosure to significant intimates, and the social-psychological processes that typify the process, are discussed later in this chapter and in succeeding chapters.

Disclosure is situational. In the present study it was found to be contingent upon occupation, residence, and social setting. The gay

father may believe that disclosing his homosexuality at work would threaten his job security, so he chooses not to disclose. For instance, five of the fathers in the present study are public school teachers. Two of them have disclosed their homosexuality to one or two close faculty friends, while the others have disclosed to no one. This latter choice is understandable, given the uproar that might ensue from students, parents, and school boards if they were known to be gay. In addition, the national antihomosexual campaign by Anita Bryant, a world-renowned entertainer whose thrust is to "save our children" from homosexuals, makes it even more threatening for homosexual teachers to disclose. Another gay father is a career naval officer who lives on a military base. He, too, keeps his gay identity hidden in order to avoid possible discharge. The father may also choose not to disclose because he believes that to do so might jeopardize his future occupational plans. Disclosure is more likely when it does not threaten job security. For example, several fathers in the present study who own their own businesses have disclosed their gay identity to their employees.

Disclosure is also related to place of residence. It is easier to disclose in an area that has a high tolerance for homosexuality. Although disclosure is often difficult, many of the fathers said it was easier to disclose in San Francisco, which is known to be the gay mecca of the United States, than it would be in cities in other parts of the country that the fathers had lived in. Too, it is easier and safer to disclose in social settings where heterosexuals and homosexuals accept one another. In settings such as these integrative sanctions are

almost assured. For instance, one father explained, "It's really very easy to be gay at church, because the church has enough homosexuals in it now. We really mix with the heterosexuals, and we're supported by each other. It's a good atmosphere" (Charles, 5/15/77, p. 38). Another father, who was in a halfway house for drug abuse, said that

there were a lot of other gay men there at that time, so I told most everyone. I didn't make any effort to conceal it. I didn't care. It was a nice, safe place. Nobody cared. By the time I left, everybody knew I was gay and I didn't care. (Chad, 2/7/78, p. 13).

The presence of other gays who are accepted by nongays reassures the father that he will not be rejected after his disclosure.

Disclosure and Risk

Disclosure is always risky, since it is impossible to predict other people's reactions. The gay father must often weigh the safety factor in deciding whether or not to disclose. Public disclosure through the news media or other means is safe only if the father is comfortable with his identity, and if he believes the disclosure will not be deleterious to him or his family.³ Private disclosure to professionals such as psychotherapists is usually considered safe. However, private disclosure to intimates is often risky. If the gay father does not know whether his intimates understand or accept homosexuality, he risks rejection, ridicule, and hostility.

Disclosure is especially difficult because the gay father has two invisible identities which require disclosure to two separate worlds which are both potentially hostile and rejecting. He has to disclose his homosexuality to the heterosexual world. The possibility of rejection is very real. Second, he has to disclose his father identity in

the homosexual community. Though disclosing to gays poses less threat, the possibility of rejection is also a reality. The gay father is faced with potential rejection of the two most important aspects of himself which are central to his identity.

Dimensions of Disclosure of Gay and Father Identities

Dimensions of disclosure of gay identity. The dimensions of disclosure range from complete or full disclosure to absolute nondisclosure. Between these two extremes is partial disclosure. Complete disclosure is not just reporting past homosexual experiences. It is a full disclosure, direct or implied, of the father's sexual and affectional preference for men.

Partial disclosure leaves something out that reduces the significance of what is disclosed. The father may disclose past homosexual experiences but not current ones. He may admit to current homosexual sex but deny an affectional component. He may disclose feelings of sexual attraction for men without admitting to gay sexual activity. Fathers who disclose only partially usually do not intend to engage in subterfuge. Because self-realization and acceptance of homosexual identity is often a gradual and difficult process, the gay father who discloses only partially may honestly believe that he is not gay, that he can control his homosexual impulses, or that his sexual attraction for men will subside.

Fathers who never disclose their gay identity to anyone are referred to here as absolute nondisclosers. Though they may have fleeting homosexual encounters, these men make certain to ensure their

anonymity. They falsify their names or do not use names at all. They conceal other personal data such as occupation or place of work. Out-of-town business trips and conventions offer these men the opportunity to achieve anonymous homosexual liaisons. Though many of the fathers in the present study had been absolute nondisclosers in the past, none were at the time the study was conducted.⁴

Dimensions of disclosure of father identity. Disclosure of father identity also ranges from complete disclosure to absolute nondisclosure. However, no father in the present study ever directly denied being a father. Some fathers did, however, deny their father identity indirectly by denying that they were married.

Composite of dimensions of disclosure. There are four possible dimensions of disclosure for the gay father. These dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Dimensions of Disclosure of Gay-Father Identity

	G a y	
	Disclosure	Nondisclosure
Father		
Disclosure	Gay father	Father only
Nondisclosure	Gay only	Neither father nor gay

The upper left-hand box represents the father who is a complete disclosure. He fully discloses to his intimate others both his gay and

his father identity. This father has achieved integration. The upper right-hand box represents the father who does not disclose his homosexuality to heterosexuals but does disclose his father identity to gays. He may also disclose that he is married. This man probably remains anonymous in the gay milieu in order to prevent his homosexuality being found out by his family and friends. The lower left-hand box represents the father who selectively discloses his homosexual identity but keeps his father identity hidden from gays. This is a common strategy in the initial stages of a relationship between a father and another gay man. The lower right-hand box represents the absolute nondiscloser. This man discloses neither his gay identity to heterosexuals nor his father identity to gays. He remains anonymous, maintaining two fictitious careers, one with gays and the other with heterosexuals. None of the fathers in the present research fell into this category, since they had to be sufficiently disclosing to be available for study.

Progressive disclosure. Disclosure was found to be progressive in one or both of two ways. Most fathers gradually disclosed to an increasing number of persons. In addition, some fathers would begin by disclosing partially or indirectly to a given person and would later disclose completely and directly to the same person. In both cases increased self-acceptance led to increased disclosure.

Means of Disclosure of Gay Identity

There are four means of disclosing gay identity. These four means are direct disclosure, indirect disclosure, accidental disclosure, and secondary disclosure.

Direct disclosure. Direct disclosure, the most common tactic, is self-explanatory. The father simply tells the other person that he is gay.

Indirect disclosure. Indirect disclosure is also a common tactic, but here disclosure is usually brought about by nonverbal means. For example, the father may have gay newspapers or magazines lying around the house; he may be affectionate with a man in the presence of others; or he may take intimates to a gay restaurant or event. Verbal means may also be used, as when the father uses the strategy of hinting, anticipating that the other will pick up on his cues. Verbal means of indirect disclosure were rarely used by fathers in the present study.

Accidental disclosure. Accidental disclosure usually occurs when the father is in a gay social context, such as a gay bar, and meets an acquaintance who did not know he was homosexual. Albie (1/9/78) related the following incident, which exemplifies accidental disclosure:

One of the people I wanted least to find out about my activities was my brother. He's a year younger than me, and he's married, too. I was at the baths one time, and I ran into my brother. He came around the corner, and my god, he was there with Marv, his friend whom I'd known for quite a while. They worked together, and they'd been having an affair for a couple years, and I'd never suspected. . . . I couldn't believe it. It blew my mind. (pp. 13-14)

Secondary disclosure. Secondary disclosure is disclosure of the father's homosexuality by someone other than the father himself. For example, the man's wife may disclose to his parents. When the wife of Chad (2/7/78) explained the reasons for the divorce to his mother, she mentioned Chad's homosexuality. Chad said that "my mother mentioned to me that my wife had told her in a telephone conversation. I just

said yes, and she changed the subject. But we've talked about it since" (p. 17).

Fear of secondary disclosure is a common reason for nondisclosure. Lucas (9/22/77) has never disclosed to his daughter, fearing that she may disclose to her mother (his former wife), who in turn may, out of vindictiveness, inform the board of education in the community where he teaches fifth grade.

Means of Disclosure of Father Identity

There are two means of disclosing father identity. One means is direct; the other is indirect.

Direct disclosure. Direct disclosure, again, is the most common tactic. The father simply tells the other person.

Indirect disclosure. Indirect disclosure of father identity occurs when the gay father's household contains pictures of his children or children's toys and clothes:

If anybody knows me for a very long period of time, they'll discover I'm a father. The pictures of my children are on top of the TV, and I don't take them down if I bring someone home. And often they'll ask, "Who are those people in the pictures?" And I tell them. (Charles, 5/12/77, p. 41)

Accidental and secondary disclosure of father identity are possible, but they did not occur in the present research.

Conditions and Timing of Disclosure

Conditions and timing of disclosure of gay identity. The conditions and timing of disclosure of gay identity are directly related to the gay father's awareness and acceptance of his homosexuality. Early in his career he may not be aware of or may not accept his homosex-

uality. Therefore he does not disclose it. Over time, however, various conditions arise that create within the father the desire to disclose. First, of course, he must become aware that he is homosexual. Most of the fathers in the present study were aware of this before they married; however, they did not accept their homosexuality and therefore disclosed to few if any others. They may also have remained anonymous in the gay social milieu. After marriage, as their homosexual needs intensified, they began having sexual liaisons with men, and the internal conflict that resulted caused the marriage to deteriorate, as described in chapter 3. The deterioration of the marriage was the condition that induced several of the fathers to disclose their homosexuality to their wives. As the father gradually learns to accept himself as a homosexual, his self-acceptance becomes the condition that promotes disclosure, since he wants to be known and accepted as the man he is, not as the man he has appeared to be in the past.

However, this desire alone is usually not sufficient to provoke disclosure. In most instances, an external, social condition serves as a motivating force. The desire to disclose may be great, but the gay father usually needs a medium for his disclosure, and an external, social condition provides both a medium and a rationale. The disclosure of his gay identity, then, becomes part of a larger topic, rather than being the topic itself.

For example, in 1978 the antihomosexual crusade by Anita Bryant and Senator John Briggs prompted several gay fathers in the present study to participate in the gay-rights movement.⁵ The external event became personalized and was the precipitating factor which explains

several of the fathers' disclosures. Larry (8/4/77) exemplifies this. He is proud to be gay, has publicly exposed himself as gay, and is active in the gay community. Discussing disclosure to his parents he said:

I felt when I talked to them or wrote them I couldn't tell them about my life. And for a whole month, I was working day and night on the gay benefit and I'd call them on the phone or they would call me on the phone and say, "Well, how are you? What are you doing?" And I'd say, "Well, I'm real busy." And they would say, "What are you doing?" And I'd say, "I'm real busy." I could never talk about it. And after the Anita Bryant thing I just felt it was time to come out to as many people as I felt comfortable with coming out to. People that I wanted to know. People that I loved and that I felt loved me. I wanted them to know that I was gay. So I sat down and wrote them a four-page letter. (p. 4)

At that time much of Larry's life was centered on his gay activities which he could not share with his parents without disclosing. He personalized Anita Bryant's antigay campaign which prompted his disclosure.

Sharing one's gay identity is usually not for the primary purpose of explaining sexual orientation. The paramount reason for disclosure is that it helps explain the father's social and personal world to others. By disclosing he can take his relevant intimates symbolically or literally into his gay and father worlds. He can then share with his family and friends many facets of his everyday life as well as his thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs, and values without the constant editing of his communication which nondisclosure demands.

Disclosure occurs, though less commonly, under other conditions. The father may be specifically offered the opportunity to disclose and will do so if he believes that it is safe. One father disclosed when his employer specifically offered him the opportunity:

One time when I was having a private conference with my boss, who was the administrator, he said, "You know, we've been building

this team for over a year now, and is there anything you want to share with me that you haven't shared with me?" And I said, "Yes, I'm homosexual." He asked some basic questions about what it's like to be a homosexual. Learning for himself. Questions he's never felt free to ask other people. We had a very nice conversation. It had absolutely no effect on our working relationship except maybe to strengthen it. But I knew that. The time was right. (Charles, 5/12/77, p. 36)

Another father was asked by a close friend if he would ever remarry. He took this opportunity to disclose his gay identity to her. These disclosures would not have occurred at these times if the other person had not given the father the opportunity, and if he had not felt comfortable taking it. Occasionally, the gay father will disclose without any sort of provocation, but in the present study, this was the exception to the rule.

For the gay father to disclose he must, in most instances, have begun to accept his gay identity. As he becomes more self-accepting, he gradually lets down his guard and discloses to more and more persons. The more often he discloses, and the more integrative sanctions he receives, the more he develops self-acceptance and confidence--confidence in the courage to disclose (and initially it does take courage) and confidence that he will not be rejected. At first he may disclose only partially, but over time, as he grows more self-accepting and comfortable with his gay identity, his disclosures to relevant others become complete and direct.

Conditions and timing of disclosure of father identity. Disclosure of father identity was also found to be progressive over time and was directly related to the extent of the father's experience in the gay world. The more limited his experience, the less likely he was to disclose.

Several conditions determined disclosure of father identity. The first of these conditions was marital status. If the man was married, he usually maintained anonymity with gays, and this included hiding his father identity. If he was separated or divorced and feared that other gay men would reject him because of his obligations to his children, then he would hide his father identity. The significance of his children to him was another factor: The more significant, the more likely he was to disclose his father identity. Men who cared less about their children were less likely to disclose. Proximity of his children was another condition; fearing rejection by other gay men because of his parenting responsibilities, the father was less likely to disclose if his children lived with him, whereas if his children lived elsewhere he was more likely to disclose.

Another condition that determined disclosure both during and after marriage was the fathers' beliefs regarding their sexual attractiveness as fathers. Some men believed that being fathers made them less desirable as sexual partners. These men used nondisclosure as a strategy to improve their sexual desirability. Other fathers believed that being fathers made them more sexually attractive to other men; therefore, they always disclosed. Two fathers will be used to illustrate these two positions. Gordon (8/1/77) specifically used disclosure to screen out gay men in whom he was not interested:

I might choose to screen people out simply by saying, "I think there's something you need to know about me right away, and that is that I have a son." And that would rightfully screen out the people that I wouldn't be interested in. Men that I was interested in I wouldn't tell them that I had a son. At least not right away. (p. 3)

Albie (1/9/78) used just the opposite technique:

When I'm cruising, I've found a lot of gay men who would respond more to me if they knew I was a father. I found out very soon that if I told them I was a married man and had a child that they would be more readily turned on than if I was just another gay guy. Somehow, that would right away make me more marketable. It's a good come-on to a lot of gay men. I usually make a point of saying it. (pp. 57-58)

The nondisclosing father is more likely to disclose when he believes that there is potential for a long-term friendship with another gay man. Disclosure becomes safer as the friendship evolves and the relationship deepens. Even so, in the present study, disclosure of father status usually occurred early in an evolving relationship, usually no later than the third time the two men met. This was especially true if the father was divorced and had custody of his children.

As the father gradually accepts his homosexuality and becomes comfortable in the gay milieu, he becomes more secure in disclosing his father identity. This confidence resembles the confidence the father achieves in disclosing his gay identity to heterosexuals. As both forms of confidence develop, the man grows more assured of himself as a gay father in the gay world. He also becomes more assured of his acceptability as a gay father by other gays in that world.

Part 2

Sanctioning

Sanctions are other people's verbal and behavioral responses to the gay father's disclosure of each identity. Two categories of sanctions emerged in the present study. The first are integrative; the second are nonintegrative.

Integrative Sanctioning

Integrative sanctions are responses that confirm, reinforce, or indicate acceptance of the gay father's two identities. Integrative sanctions have several effects. One effect is to affirm the acceptability of the father's two identities. From the interactionist perspective, other people serve as reflectors of identity, so that identity is achieved by perceiving others' perceptions. Other people's confirmation of the father's identity reinforces his self-concept, enhancing his self-acceptance and self-esteem.

Integrative sanctions also have the effect of permission giving. Other people's positive sanctions permit the father to be simultaneously gay and a father, rather than requiring him to enact each role separately. To achieve integration, the father must be accepted as gay and as a father by his heterosexual and homosexual intimates. An illustration of integrative sanctioning is provided by Derrick (11/27/77) who reported that after he disclosed to his 25-year-old son, the son

looked at me and he just burst out crying. He's a very sensitive, emotional boy. . . . And he just threw his arms around me and hugged me and he cried and he cried and I started to cry because I didn't know what was comin' off. And so finally he calmed down and I said, "What are you crying about?" And he said, "Because I'm a part of this culture that has suppressed you all these years." My stomach fell right down into my shoes. Can you imagine. He's so beautiful. And I assured him that he couldn't help it any more than I could help what I did or didn't do when I was bringing him up. And he has accepted it very well. (p. 24)

Acceptability of integrative sanctions. If integrative sanctions are to benefit the gay father, he must accept them. To accept the sanction, he must first accept the identity that is being sanctioned. If he rejects that identity, the integrative sanction becomes nonintegrative, since it is incongruent with the father's self-concept. When

Chad (2/7/78) was in group therapy, the therapist told him, "For Chris-sake, if you're gay, be gay" (p. 10), but this sanction was not helpful to Chad "at the time, because that's not what I wanted to be" (p. 11). Even when integrative sanctions have a nonintegrative effect, they help the gay father to analyze his feelings regarding his homosexuality. If others sanction him positively, then possibly it is acceptable for him to be gay. The more reinforcement a father receives for each of his identities, the more acceptable each identity gradually becomes to the father himself.

Rarely in the present study were sanctions found to be neutral, that is, neither confirming nor rejecting one identity. However, the occasional neutral responses had an integrative effect, since they did not reflect a negative judgment. An example of neutral sanctions is the psychotherapist who maintains a "therapeutic distance," acting as a sounding board and a reflector for the father without judging him.

Nonintegrative Sanctioning

Nonintegrative sanctions are responses that do not confirm, reinforce, or indicate acceptance of both of the gay father's two identities. The effect of nonintegrative sanctions depends upon the father's acceptance of his homosexuality. The less accepting he is, the greater the effect negative sanctions will have. When the father himself rejects his homosexuality, rejections from others reinforce his negative self-image. The more nonintegrative sanctions a father receives, the more difficult it is for him to achieve a positive gay self-image. It is noteworthy, however, that nonintegrative sanctions had no long-term effect on identity acceptance for father in the present study. They

hindered, but did not permanently prevent the father from identifying himself as gay and achieving integration.

When the father accepts himself as gay, nonintegrative sanctions usually have the effect of creating a psychological distance between the father and the person who provides the negative sanction. The relationship is not always discontinued, but it usually becomes less intimate. If the relationship is discontinued, the father usually accepts the loss fairly easily. For example, one father discloses to a close friend, and

that really freaked him out. He just doesn't understand it at all. It's just beyond his comprehension. And the relationship's not as close as it was. He used to call a lot, but he doesn't anymore, and that bothers me a little. But it's been kind of drifting apart anyway. It's okay. (Chad, 2/7/78, p. 27)

The effects of nonintegrative sanctions also depend upon the level of intimacy of the relationship. The more intimate the other person is, the greater the impact of the negative sanction. This is especially true if the gay father does not accept his homosexuality. For example, rejection by the wife might be very destructive, while rejection by a casual acquaintance would be almost meaningless. Illustrative is a father who, after 3 years of marriage, disclosed partially to his wife, relating a past homosexual experience. Two years later he disclosed his ongoing homosexual relations. He said that his disclosures

really upset her, really disturbed her because I guess I didn't satisfy her imagery as a man. That this was an abnormal act. That I was sick. In fact, that was the whole premise that she operated on the rest of the time that we were together: that I was very sick, very mentally disturbed. All of her interest went to the children. I was just left out. The input was that this can be cured, this is something wrong, it's immoral, it's very abnormal, it's nonproductive of children, it's lewd, vulgar,

dirty; that I was ill, that I was sick. The whole social stigma that is typical of the kind of brainwashing that we get in this country of ours. All wrong concepts. It worked beautifully. It was extremely destructive. Oh, it was painful. Painful to live with her because of that kind of silence. I felt a lot of guilt via her; that I was ugly. This disturbed me because I didn't feel I was sick. I did feel I was sick after a while. I felt that I ought to have this resolved. I couldn't tolerate the non-communication because there was nothing but silence. For about five years she was noncommunicative verbally. Anything except children and food, because her main interest was nutrition. Those were the only two subjects she would discuss. Anything personal, even chitchatting, was out of the question. She was just silent, like a stone wall. That was her means of getting back at me; the silent treatment. (Dana, 8/9/77, pp. 1-3, 8, 26)

Though Dana's wife tolerated his presence, she rejected him as a husband and a father. The effect she desired was achieved by his feeling dirty, ugly, immoral, and guilty. At his wife's suggestion, Dana did seek psychiatric assistance which was of some benefit in helping him accept his gay identity. This couple eventually divorced.

While nonintegrative sanctions of homosexuality by significant intimates may have considerable impact, nonintegrative sanctions of fatherhood by gays seldom do. This is because gay fathers enter gay relationships with their father identity firmly established. They usually disclose this identity very early in the relationship. If a father is rejected because he is a father, he is not devastated, though he may be disappointed. The difference in his response is attributable to the difference in meaning between the two kinds of relationships. Fathers have a much greater emotional investment in their wives, children, and close friends than they have in a relatively new, and thus superficial, gay relationship. Because the latter is less significant to them, nonintegrative sanctions by gays have much less of an impact.

Nonintegrative sanctions of the father role become significant (and thus constitute a problem) when the father's children interfere with his gay relationships. For example, one father's two children live with him 6 months each year. During this time his love periodically becomes hostile toward him because of his attention to the children, and because of the restrictions they impose. This nonintegrative sanctioning, however, has no effect on the father's identity as a father. Rather, its effect is to put a strain on his dual role of father and lover. As Goode (1960) points out, "The individual may face different types of role demands and conflicts, which he feels as 'role strain'" (p. 484). In this case, the lover's demands conflict with the father's need to enact his father role. Under these conditions integration is difficult to maintain.

The effect nonintegrative sanctions have on the gay father is dependent upon his acceptance of both identities, the level of intimacy of the other, and the particular identity which is negatively sanctioned. The less self-accepting the man is and the more intimate the other, the greater their impact will be.

Means of Sanctioning

There are three means of sanctioning. These means are verbal, behavioral, and secondary.

Verbal sanctioning. Verbal sanctioning consists of a direct, verbal response to the father's disclosure. Almost all sanctioning has a verbal component. It is difficult not to use spoken language in response to a disclosure. Verbal sanctioning, like other means, can be integrative or nonintegrative.

Behavioral sanctioning. Behavioral sanctioning is correlative behavior that reinforces a verbal response. For example, after Dana (8/9/77) disclosed to his children:

They wanted to see what Dad's life was like. So we'd go out dancing in gay bars. All three of us. They would dance, and I'd dance with each one of them separately. I'd dance with my son. He's very understanding. He thinks it's fine. (p. 11)

Another, more subtle, example of behavioral sanctioning occurs when an intimate relationship remains the same after disclosure. If an intimate other distances himself from the father after disclosure, this is an example of nonintegrative behavioral sanctioning.

Secondary sanctioning. Secondary sanctioning is sanctioning of the father by another person to someone other than the father himself. The wife who continues to sanction the father positively in the role of father with their children, even though she may reject him as husband, is engaging in secondary sanctioning. One father, whose 6-year-old daughter lives with him 3 days each week, said that he and his wife

made a pledge that we weren't going to knock our life-styles to Mary. Because just as she has this level of nonacceptance of something about me and my life-style, I have the same for her. There are things about her life that I'm not crazy about. But we both felt we weren't going to get anywhere, especially for Mary, if we were going to put one another down to Mary. There really is no putting down of each other's life-style, and there is a fair amount of support. (Marc, 7/6/77, pp. 13-14)

Nonintegrative secondary sanctions can be detrimental. The example cited previously of the father who does not disclose his homosexuality to his daughter for fear his former wife would find out and inform his school district suggests the potential effect that nonintegrative secondary sanctioning can have.

Dimensions of Sanctioning
of Gay-Father Identity

There are four dimensions of sanctioning of the gay-father identity. These dimensions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Dimensions of Sanctioning of Gay-Father Identity

	G a y	
	Integrative Sanction	Nonintegrative Sanction
Father		
Integrative Sanction	Gay and father both sanctioned	Gay not sanctioned; father sanctioned
Nonintegrative Sanction	Gay sanctioned; father not sanctioned	Neither gay nor father sanctioned

The upper left-hand box represents integrative sanctioning of the man's gay and father identities on the part of both homosexual and heterosexual intimates. The upper right-hand box represents sanctioning by those persons who accept the man as father but reject him as gay. This combination occurs most commonly among heterosexuals. The lower left-hand box represents just the opposite--sanctioning by those persons who reject the man's fatherhood but accept his homosexuality. This is a common response on the part of homosexuals. The lower right-hand box represents sanctioning by those who reject the man as both gay and father. Though this combination did not occur in the present research, it is possible. For example, a wife may reject the man as both

husband and father and take legal action to separate herself and their children from him.

Part 3

Integration

The final stage of the gay-father career is integration. Integration is achieved when there is congruity between one's identities and behaviors with one's social environment. The integrated father has accepted both his homosexual identity and his father identity and has found them compatible. He has converged the two identities into one cognitive category of gay father. He has also disclosed both identities to most of his heterosexual and homosexual intimates. The type of sanction he has received has determined the extent and degree of intimacy he maintains with them: He cultivates close associations with people who supply integrative sanctions, and he discontinues relationships with, or maintains a physical or psychological distance from, people who do not accept him as both a gay man and a father.

As the father increases his disclosures and receives integrative sanctions, he gradually develops a social network of heterosexual and homosexual intimates who accept him as both a gay man and a father. These intimates constitute his "critical audience (Schur, 1969, p. 313). They affirm his two identities as acceptable which gives him permission to enact both roles. The father can take these intimates symbolically or literally into his daily life. His straight intimates may participate with him in various gay activities, such as going to gay restaurants or attending gay parties. As one father stated:

I have these very good friends, straight, that have two boys, and we do a lot of things together. They have a more open kind of look at my being gay. And it isn't only that they have a more open look, it's what they're willing to do. There are some things in the gay subculture that really very few nongay people can relate to, but this straight couple can easily relate to all these things. We go to gay bars and restaurants and to the zoo and Great America. So you see, we can have all that fun. Whereas, the average straight couple doesn't ordinarily tend to want to do the gay thing. They may give an intellectual openness, but in terms of the nitty-gritty participation in the gay world, that doesn't happen. (Marc, 7/6/77, p. 31)

The integrated father can also freely discuss his children with his homosexual intimates. He and his children have close associations with heterosexual families, and often with other gay fathers and their children as well. As Marc (7/6/77) said:

Another reason why the gay fathers' group is important to me is that I really need to have other kids for my daughter to play with, and it's important for some of these kids to be children of other gay fathers. (p. 22)

In short, when he is with his significant others, the integrated gay father does not have to juggle his two identities, enacting one role while he conceals the other. Role conflict has been resolved through an interactive process whereby the father's two roles are merged by others who give the father permission to enact both roles simultaneously.

Summary

Most gay fathers in the present study developed a social network of intimates who accepted both their gay identity and their father identity. They did this by disclosing both identities to heterosexual and homosexual intimates and by receiving their integrative sanctions

for both identities. Others' integrative sanctions helped the fathers achieve congruence of their two identities.

Disclosure serves to define the self to others. By disclosing to others the father also confirms his identity to himself. Even so, disclosure is selective since the father's two identities are irrelevant in many social situations. Too, disclosure is unsafe in some circumstances such as at work where disclosure might cause him problems. Disclosure always involves the risk of rejection but in practice the fathers in the present study found that they were rarely rejected.

Nondisclosure is self-denying and keeps others from knowing what Jourard (1971) refers to as the "real self" (p. 10). Nondisclosure demands that the gay father maintain his two identities separate. The nondisclosing father must constantly be on guard to avoid being discovered. By nondisclosing he maintains a psychological distance from others.

Disclosure is complete, partial, or nonexistent depending upon the amount of information the father supplies. It is also progressive; the father may disclose partially to completely to the same person and he discloses to more and more people. The four means of disclosure--direct, indirect, accidental, and secondary--serve to inform others of either of the gay father's two identities.

In most instances the gay father does not disclose solely to inform others of his gay identity. Rather, he needs a more specific reason to disclose and various events in the father's life, such as marital breakdown, provide him with the reason.

Most sanctions which fathers in the present study received were positive. These sanctions were integrative by confirming the man as both gay and father. However, for integrative sanctions to be of benefit they needed to be congruent with the father's self-image. The man who does not accept himself as gay may not benefit immediately from integrative sanctions, but in the long run he does since acceptance by others helps him eventually to accept himself. The effect of nonintegrative sanctions depends upon the father's acceptance of both identities, and the significance of the other person to the father. The more secure he is with each identity, the less impact nonintegrative sanctions have, whereas the more intimate the nonintegrator, the greater their impact.

Most of the fathers in the present study became integrated. The integrated gay father had disclosed both identities to his heterosexual and homosexual intimates and had received integrative sanctions from most of them. Through the interactional process of disclosure and sanction, the father was eventually able to actualize both identities simultaneously. When the gay father accepts his two identities as congruent, and when his significant others accept both identities so that the father can be and act like both a gay man and a father, then he has achieved integration.

Footnotes

¹All persons occupy many positions in the social system. Often, many roles are enacted successively and two or more may be enacted simultaneously. Linton (1945) provides the following example of a hypothetical individual's successive role enactment on a given day: employee, age, sex, kinship, husband, father, and Grand Imperial Lizard (a lodge role).

²The term "fictional biography" was originally coined by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in their book Awareness of Dying (1965). In this context hospital staff construct a fictional future biography for terminal patients in order to keep them unaware of their terminality.

³I know of gay fathers who do not want to be publicly exposed, yet who march annually in San Francisco's Gay Day Parade. They expose themselves physically without identifying themselves publicly by wearing greasepaint, masking their faces and hence their identities.

⁴I could easily have located absolutely nondisclosing fathers and "interviewed" them informally just by spending enough time in gay bars and conversing with the men around me. However, such a procedure is antithetical to informed consent and therefore would have been unethical.

⁵Senator John Briggs is a conservative Republican from Orange County, California, who, through the initiative process, attempted to ban from the public school system teachers or other employees who openly admitted their homosexuality or publicly supported homosexuals and homosexual life-styles. On November 7, 1978, the initiative was defeated by a two-to-one majority.

PART III

FINDINGS: DISCLOSURE, SANCTIONING:
APPLICATION OF THE THEORY

Chapter 5

DISCLOSURE/SANCTIONING: THE GAY FATHER'S WIFE

This chapter describes the gay father's disclosure of his homosexuality to his wife and the wife's sanctioning. The first part discusses his disclosure to his wife before marriage. This part also describes the future wife's sanctioning. The second section describes the gay father's disclosure during marriage and his wife's response to that disclosure. Fathers who partially disclosed before marriage eventually disclose completely and usually receive integrative sanctions. The wives of men who initially disclose after marriage are usually rejecting of their husbands as homosexual.

Part 1

Disclosure/Sanctioning Before Marriage

Disclosure

As I explained in chapter 3, not all of the gay fathers in the present study were aware of their homosexuality prior to marriage. However, the one condition common to all the fathers who disclosed before marriage was that they were aware of homosexual desires, which were powerful enough to have prompted them to seek out sexual experiences with men. From this exposure to homosexuals these fathers had begun the process of evolving their homosexual identity.

Although they were not yet able to identify themselves as gay, these fathers felt impelled to disclose their homosexual inclinations. Their reasons for disclosing varied. Some did so out of an underlying sense of honesty. As one father put it, "I have to be honest with myself. That's why I have to tell people things" (Larry, 8/4/77, p. 38). Other fathers disclosed because they believed that their future wives were tolerant of sexual and social variance: "I thought Sue was the loose, free person. She looked like she could accept a more open system of living, and I am not only talking about sexual orientation" (Marc, 7/6/77, p. 8). Regardless of whether the disclosure is partial or complete, the father discloses because of his sense of honesty and because he believes his future wife will continue to accept him even though she knows of his past homosexual experiences.

Partial disclosure. Most fathers who disclosed before marriage did so only partially. Partial disclosure reduced the significance of the gay father's homosexuality. This was not an intentionally evasive tactic, however. The extent of the disclosure was based upon the father's own degree of awareness, understanding, and acceptance of his sexuality at the time.

For example, one father disclosed by saying "that I had been with men, but it was presented more as a history rather than a current event thing" (Starr, 7/7/77, p. 2). This father's disclosure was couched in such a way that homosexuality did not appear to be a current problem. His future wife was understanding, and their intimate relationship was maintained.

Several fathers who thought they were bisexual disclosed their bisexuality. Four days prior to marriage, Gordon (8/1/77) explained that he would maintain homosexual relations during the marriage. He told his fiancée that he

couldn't be totally heterosexually involved with her and never be monogamous. . . . I informed her because to have someone living intimately in our home and maintaining a secret like that would have required a degree of secrecy and a loss of intimacy I felt would have made a great strain in the relationship. I tell to avoid keeping secrets--to avoid telling lies. Saying I was at work when I wasn't. . . . I told her that I was prepared to limit my homosexual activities to one night a week. That what I wanted was one night to go out with no questions asked. I didn't want to burden her with it. I'd thought a long time about whether I could tolerate marriage or not, and what I'd come down to is that if I had one night a week I could function in the marriage situation. (pp. 6, 15, 42)

Men who disclosed partially before marriage indicated to their future wives their homosexual inclinations. Their disclosures implied that their sexual attraction for men was not so overpowering that it would interfere with a satisfactory sexual adjustment during marriage.

Complete disclosure. Complete disclosure before marriage was rare, since fathers who disclosed before marriage did not accept their homosexuality and did not identify themselves as gay. However, one man who had had homosexual relations for 4 years and had even had a lover, yet rejected his homosexuality, disclosed completely to his future wife: "I told her that I was gay before we were married . . . but I don't even know that I had to tell her. I mean I was in the theater; she could tell" (Larry, 8/4/77, pp. 10, 38).

The Future Wife's Sanctioning

All of the wives of men who disclosed before marriage sanctioned them positively. However, positive sanctioning was directly related

to the information given. If the partially disclosing father had disclosed completely, his future wife might have given further consideration to the depth of the relationship and might have rejected him as a husband. The one man who disclosed completely stated that his wife preferred gay men. In any event all of the relationships progressed to the stage of marriage, regardless of the father's apparent or not-so-apparent homosexuality.

All of the wives of men who disclosed before marriage sanctioned them verbally, and some provided behavioral sanctions as well. For the purposes of clarity, verbal and behavioral sanctions are discussed together below.

Several of the future wives turned out to prefer gay men. After disclosure to his wife, one man state that she was

just turned on something fierce, because she really liked gay people and I didn't know that. She said, "Oh, fantastic! I have a lot of gay friends." I would say that Rita more or less helped bring me out into the social aspects of homosexuality, due to the fact that she did have a lot of gay friends and we'd go to gay parties. And I found out that I wasn't the only one in the world. (Kevin, 6/21/77, p. 5)

This father had had only a few isolated homosexual experiences before marriage and no exposure to gay social settings. His future wife sanctioned his gay identity positively and facilitated his movement into gay social contexts, which gave him the opportunity to meet other homosexuals. Her approval ultimately helped him to accept his own gay identity.

Another father who said that his wife preferred gay men reported that "somehow [my being gay] was okay with her. She loved gay men, so it probably made her like me even more" (Larry, 8/4/77, p. 10). A

father who disclosed his bisexuality said that his wife "preferred me to be interested in men rather than going after other women. We had an open relationship. We both dated other men" (Kris, 11/2/76, p. 1). This woman, like Kevin's wife, not only accepted her husband's homosexuality but actually promoted it, although for different reasons.

These examples all illustrate positive sanctioning by the future wife as reported by the fathers. It appears that each of these women continued to love and accept the man much as they had before his disclosure, believing that as a couple they could still achieve marital happiness and satisfaction.

One effect of disclosure before marriage is that without her knowledge it prepared the wife for the eventual alteration in the marital relationship. This usually, though not always, was separation and divorce. However, neither partner was aware that the premarital disclosure would have that effect, and the father did not disclose with that purpose in mind. All of the fathers in the present study had entered marriage with the intention of remaining married permanently.

Another effect of disclosure before marriage was that it helped to reduce the father's guilt at the time of complete disclosure. It took away some of his responsibility for the marital breakdown, since his wife had been willing to marry him even though she knew he had a history of homosexual relations. A third, somewhat similar, effect was related to those wives who supported the fathers' gay identity or gave them permission to have homosexual experiences. Permission giving by significant others, allowing the father further exposure to the homosexual world, increases the acceptability of homosexuality: If it's

acceptable to others, then it becomes more acceptable to the father himself. And the more homosexual experience the gay father has, the greater the likelihood that he will begin to reverse his introjected negative stereotype, reduce his cognitive dissonance, and gradually accept himself as gay. By supporting the father's gay identity, the wife unknowingly contributed to the dissolution of the relationship.

Part 2

Disclosure/Sanctioning During Marriage

Conditions Predisposing to Disclosure

During marriage the father's disclosure of his homosexuality was most commonly made to his wife. Men who had disclosed partially to their wives before marriage disclosed completely during marriage, as did most fathers who had not previously disclosed. Two conditions were found to precipitate disclosure during marriage. The first was sharp conflict; the second was change in family structure. Sharp conflict resulting in family crisis was discussed at length in chapter 3; it occurs as the result of internal conflict brought about by the need to engage in homosexual behavior. Change in family structure is discussed below.

Change in family structure. When family change is the precipitating factor, disclosure occurs at one of two stages in the life of the family. The first stage is that point at which the couple contemplates having children. The second is the period after the children are grown.

Disclosure precipitated by a change in family structure was manifested by a gradual distancing between the spouses. Fathers in this category had had homosexual relations both before and during the marriage and thus were better able to accept their homosexuality than were fathers whose disclosure was precipitated by family crisis. Also, several of them had disclosed partially to their wives before marriage. Partial disclosure before marriage and separation by gradual distancing tend to correlate positively as do disclosing for the first time during marriage and separation as a result of sharp conflict.

The father who discloses when the couple are contemplating having children does so in order to give his wife the option of separation from him if she wishes. For example, Starr (7/7/77), who had partially disclosed before marriage, said that

when we started talking about having a child, I opened up with her completely and told her that I was still in ongoing relationships with men--just sexually, not emotionally. I felt I wanted her to know. I didn't think it was fair to talk about having a child without her knowing. This gave her the choice of having a child or even of leaving me. But I felt I had to be fair with her.
(p. 2)

Even after this disclosure, Starr's wife was sufficiently tolerant not to seek either separation or divorce. Later they had a son.

Another father disclosed at age 50 after 27 years of marriage. He had initially enjoyed his wife and children and their family life together. However, at the time of disclosure he was bored with his family life. Both his sons were married and living on their own. He disclosed because he could no longer suppress his need to actualize freely a gay life-style. He stated:

I just couldn't picture myself spending the rest of my life living the way I was living. Aside from living a lie, I just had kind of a miserable life otherwise. Boring: work all day, have dinner, sit down, watch TV, fall asleep, get up and have a dish of ice cream, look at TV a little more, and then go to bed. It was this syndrome day in and day out. Practically no social life, practically no friends, not really enjoying my wife's company, although not hating it, but not enjoying it. It's really just like being out in space and just doin' nothing. Just stupid to waste my life like that. One day I was staying home, and we were talking about some subject over the lunch table, and I said, "Well, I'm gay y'know." Just like that. It had absolutely no forethought about it at all. And after I said it, I thought, "Oh, my god, what have I said?" (Derrick, 1/27/77, pp. 18-19)

In the present study, two general conditions were found to precipitate disclosure to the wife. The first was family crisis manifested by sharp conflict between the spouses. The sharp conflict was due, to a great extent, to intense frustration brought about by the gay father's inability to activate freely his homosexuality. The guilt which secretive homosexual liaisons brought about also contributed to the frustration. Eventually, the man could no longer tolerate himself or the continuing conflict at which time he disclosed.

The second condition precipitating disclosure was a change in family structure. Men in this category disclosed at one of two points in the life cycle of the family. First, disclosure occurred when having children was contemplated which gave the wife some choice as to whether or not to start a family, knowing that her husband was gay. Second, disclosure occurred after the children were grown and living on their own. These fathers had fulfilled their responsibilities to their children. They were no longer willing to hide their gay identity. They wanted to be free to live life as a homosexual without the restrictions imposed by a marital relationship.

The Wife's Sanctioning:
Integrative Sanctions

Most gay fathers in the present study achieved integration, and for many the passage was made easier by the wife. During marriage the wife may give the father permission to have homosexual liaisons, believing that if he is periodically allowed to satisfy his sexual need for men, his relationship with her, and thus their marriage, will remain intact. However, the type of sanction the wife provides is directly related to the timing of the husband's first disclosure. The father who disclosed partially before marriage usually continued to receive integrative sanctions after marriage when he disclosed completely. The father who first disclosed after marriage was more likely to receive nonintegrative sanctions. The wife who is not forewarned is much less likely to tolerate her husband's homosexuality.

Many fathers in the study sample reported that their wives provided integrative sanctions. Though their wives were not necessarily pleased or fully accepting, they were tolerant and understanding. Indicators of the wives' integrative sanctions include permission giving, verbal and behavioral acceptance, intellectualizing, *ménages à trois*, and mutual permission giving and rule making. Upon separation, rejection of the maternal role by wives who allow the father child custody has the effect of an indirect integrative sanction.

Permission giving. The wife may give the father permission to engage in regular homosexual liaisons. One father reported that "we had an arrangement where I could go to the baths once a week. That arrangement developed into twice a week" (Starr, 7/7/77, p. 2). Another

wife, who agreed to marriage even though she knew her husband considered himself bisexual and had a male lover, continued to give him permission to continue his homosexual affairs. Though the father reported she was jealous of his lovers, he said that she was "gradually accepting as my lovers would be nice to her. They would take her on shopping trips to buy her things at cheap prices" (Gordon, 9/1/77, p. 15).

Verbal and behavioral acceptance. The wife may continue to accept the father just as she had before his disclosure. The wife of Albie (1/9/78) was such a woman:

I was so torn up inside myself that I finally came out to her. And she said that it's okay. She says, "Fine; no problem." She was accepting, but she didn't understand it. Her response was simply "I don't understand why you have so much trouble with it. How come you just can't accept it?" She was very blithe about it. (pp. 12-13)

Albie's wife accepted his homosexuality, even though he did not. Her acceptance did not have an integrating effect at the time because it was not congruent with his self-image. But over time her continued support and approbation helped Albie to accept himself as gay.

Intellectualizing. Intellectualizing helps to promote the wife's understanding of homosexuality. This is exemplified by the wife of Derrick (11/27/77) who was initially shocked by his disclosure. She obtained books on the subject, which both she and Derrick read and discussed. According to Derrick, this helped her to accept the situation.

Ménages à trois. A ménage à trois is three-way sex among the wife, the father, and another man. The wife's willingness to engage in a ménage à trois epitomizes behavioral integrative sanctioning. For example, Gordon (9/1/77) had male lovers throughout his marriage, and "we even had three-way sex together. It made her feel accepted and

that that person was not trying to steal me from her" (p. 15). However, *ménages à trois* are not always successful, as this father's experience indicates:

So one night we decided we were going to have a three-way. And both of them just froze. I was very excited about it. I was having a wonderful time just lying there. Another time it sort of happened spontaneously with another friend. And what happened is the other friend started fucking my wife, and I got sort of jealous and upset, so I left the room. Those are the only three-way incidents. It just hasn't worked for us. With the right person it might, but we decided that it doesn't work. Not for us. (Larry, 9/4/77, pp. 14-15)

Whether or not *ménage à trois* is a successful means for both spouses to achieve sexual gratification, it does indicate to the husband in a very powerful way the acceptance of his homosexuality by his wife. And, because of the deeply intimate relationship the gay father has with his wife, all means by which she indicates her approval has a significant impact on his eventually accepting himself as gay.

Mutual permission giving and rule making. In mutual permission giving, the gay father and his wife give one another permission to have extramarital affairs. In all probability this reduces the likelihood of marital breakdown, since each partner can express himself fully and openly. Mutual rule making is establishing family rules so that each member's sexual needs can be fulfilled while the stability of the family is maintained. For this strategy to succeed, the partners must love one another and must want very much to maintain the family intact. At least this was the case as reported by the one father in the study sample who remained married.

"Rules have to do with the concept of should" (Satir, 1972, p. 96), while Foley (1974) writes that "The term refers to the way

business gets done in the family. . . . The issue of rules involves the question of values. Rules always express a value system by which the family operates" (p. 100). Giele (1975) describes the nonexclusive marriage and clarifies rule making regarding sexual behavior:

The nonexclusive marriage . . . emphasizes self-realization and personal growth through expansion of marital boundaries. Nonexclusive access to sexual partners is held out as a means to growth. . . . Rules and regulations surrounding sexual expression are symbolic of the type of commitment made between partners. In the case of the expanded marriage, non-monogamous sexual activity is not so threatening because the participants themselves have defined the situation as being experimental, transitional, or therapeutic. (p. 84)

Mutual rule making as defined in the present study expresses the married couple's values regarding monogamy and the morality of homosexuality. The couple who used the strategy of mutual permission giving and rule making were able to clarify their value system and mutually agree as to what that value system was. The two partners had similar values regarding homosexuality and nonmonogamous sexual behavior within the family context, and their relationship had functioned effectively for many years. A nonexclusive marriage will probably fail if the partners' values conflict, or if they disagree over the family rules, since

the process of working out a satisfactory marital relationship can be seen as a process of working out shared agreements largely undiscussed, between the two people involved. . . . conflict in marriage is brought about when there are disagreements about the rules of living together, disagreements about who is to set those rules, and attempts to enforce rules that are mutually incompatible. (Glick, 1974, p. 17)

Larry (8/4/77) and Llana provide an example of mutual permission giving and rule making. Larry fully disclosed before marriage, and he reported that his wife accepted his homosexuality. After 6 years of

marriage she began having an extramarital affair, and he resumed homosexual relations. Over time family rules were established. He gave the following account:

So she found a boyfriend and I met him, and we'd go out together and we'd all have a good time. . . . Though the relationship goes up and down, it's very open. She was always the leader. Now this is coming from me. Probably if it came from her she would say that I was always the leader in what we could do and what we couldn't do. Like there was a point when it was okay to come home at two in the morning because we knew the bars close; so that was fine. Then it grew, and it was okay to come home at four in the morning. Then it was okay to come home at six so long as you were there when the sun came up. Then it was okay to stay out all night. Then it was okay to bring tricks home. And it slowly developed. . . .

I was not always happy when she was fucking in the other room with someone, and she was certainly not happy when I was fucking with someone in the other room. But slowly we realized that the only way to have a relationship was to not tie the other person down, especially since we weren't having an active sex life with each other; that limiting the person makes both of you unhappy. If one person is being limited, then both of you are unhappy. So now it's a very open, free relationship; when we're together, you know, we're together, and we go out together and do things together, and when we're not together, we're not together. . . .

We do have a couple of rules, because we've discovered certain things don't work. Like going out dancing in gay bars together doesn't work. It's like she's cruising and I'm cruising, and both of us are uncomfortable about it. If I took someone home she might be unhappy, or if she took someone home I might be unhappy. So we don't do that anymore. We socialize with a lot of people together, and we're very close; we're very warm, we're very open. But we do bring tricks home. Sometimes it's very funny. She has a trick in one room and I have a trick in another room, and we all have breakfast together. But it works. (pp. 11-14)

This couple sanctioned one another positively. Each allowed the other to fulfill his sexual needs within the structure of the nonexclusive marital relationship. Mutual rule making and mutual permission giving were the distinctive strategies that maintained this successful marriage. A relationship like this presupposes a high tolerance for social variance and an acceptance of each other's individuality. Larry

reported that his wife preferred gay men, and such a preference may also be necessary for a marital relationship like this one to survive.

Rejection of the maternal role. Eventually, all but one of the couples described in the present study did separate, and most were eventually divorced. Usually, the wife gained custody of the children.¹ However, three wives rejected their maternal role by relinquishing custody to the father.²

Rejection of the maternal role has the effect of an integrative sanction. Decreased visibility and involvement on the part of the mother allows the gay father to evolve his role with his children without her interference. It intensifies his active participation in fathering which further solidifies his identity as a father. At the same time, by eliminating the role relationship of husband-wife, her absence gives him freedom to penetrate the gay world, to participate in gay social settings, and to establish a social network of gay friends unencumbered by a heterosexual relationship. Furthermore, the three fathers who reported that their wives rejected the maternal role said that their wives believed that the father's homosexuality was not detrimental to their children. Thus, the man's opportunity for evolving a converged identity as a gay father is considerably increased by wives who relinquish child custody.

Louise, the wife of Blaine (6/28/77), is a wife who rejected the maternal role. Blaine reported that Louise did not seek child custody because she felt that he was better equipped both emotionally and financially to care for the children. This reasoning is not uncommon among women who decide to leave their families. In a study of such

women, Todres (1978) found that "most of the women felt that it was in the child's best interest to remain in the relatively more stable and financially secure home environment of the father" (p. 21). As Blaine (6/28/77) said:

She and I still feel I'm the best parent, because I can do more with them, and I get along better with them. They don't annoy me as much. I've been able to work and still be a parent to them. She could be a parent pretty well until she started going to work. Then she just totally withdrew from them. She just can't stand to be bothered by children when she's doing anything. Even now when she takes them on the weekend, she gets pretty nervous. She can't take a lot of pressure from kids, and she sees that I can. (pp. 5-6)

Another father reported that his wife

told her parents not to interfere. That I was the better parent. That I was a parent and that she wasn't. . . . She calls once in a while. She has written him only once in a year. But that's the kind of person she is. (Kevin, 6/21/77, pp. 8, 15-16)

Many wives of fathers in the present study provided integrative sanctions. They did so by verbally accepting their husbands as gay and by indirectly sanctioning their husbands' homosexuality. Even relinquishing child custody had the effect of an integrative sanction since it gave the father complete freedom to experience both the father world and the gay world. Integrative sanctioning by the wife was significant since it enhanced the father's acceptance of himself as a gay father. It also advanced the father's transition toward integration.

The Wife's Sanctioning: Nonintegrative Sanctions

Nonintegrative sanctions have an inhibiting effect on the achievement of gay-father identity. This is the case since other people are a symbolic reflection of the father to himself. The wife's rejection

of him because of his homosexuality makes him feel that he is unacceptable because of it. Her negative sanction makes it more difficult for the father to accept himself as a homosexual since, to some extent, he introjects her point of view. Under these conditions, acceptance by the father of his gay identity is more difficult to achieve.

The effect of nonintegrative sanctioning by the wife is illustrated by the case of Randy (3/10/78), who first began having homosexual experiences 3 years after marriage. Randy's case also illustrates the crisis that occurs in the family under these conditions. He disclosed to his wife when she was 7 months pregnant with their second child. Their relationship had gradually deteriorated, and they had separated on two different occasions, but they were living together at the time of his disclosure:

It was just one pain after another. I couldn't live a lie so I finally tried to get around to it. I said, "Carrie, you know how I've always been. You know that I've always been a gentle man. I've always had these things about me that . . . you know." And what I wanted her to get was that the reason why I was the person that she loved was because I had a feminine side. What I told her was that I'm capable of loving men. She didn't know how to take that. She told me she never ever dreamed that that was what was going on with me. She never dreamed that. She wanted to know why I hadn't told her before. And she was pretty shocked. Pretty shocked. And I said, "Because I couldn't face it." Well, at first she accepted it. But it was only a day or so before she couldn't accept it. She told me that she thought I'd lied. That I had lied at the beginning of our relationship. She also said to me, "I wish that I was a lesbian; then I would know what you're going through, but I have no idea from experience what it's all about."

So she couldn't accept it. She couldn't accept it at all. It made me feel frustrated. It made me feel that she wasn't accepting who I was, and that all along I was in other ways trying to tell her that I was a feminine man. That in other ways I was trying to tell her that in a lot of ways I was like her. And that the reason why I was such a gentle man, the reason why I wasn't macho, was because I was different. . . . We stayed together because I was afraid that she couldn't make it, and I was afraid for myself. I was beginning to feel the need to make a life of my own

at that time. And I kept telling Carrie, "I feel like I want to do something. I feel like I should go to school." And I wanted to find out who I was and experience the man that I was, not who I thought I should be all that time. And so Carrie kept saying things like, "I wish you'd stop talking about it and just do it." She was fed up! It was crazy. And I remember thinking things like, "I wish I had never come out." I hated myself for coming out. I hated myself. I tried to deny in myself that part of me again. I tried, and it was too late. I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it. I hated myself for being gay because of the effect that it was having on Carrie and the effect that it was having on our relationship. I just didn't know what to do. There was no place to go. Nothing to do. I was frightened to death of leaving. Afraid of what would happen to me. Afraid of what would happen to Carrie. I didn't know what to do. . . .

And the night before I was going to start school, I made myself upset over the cat or something. Carrie started getting angry and I stood up and I said, "Look," and I wanted to do this really bad, really bad! "I can't take you and go to school also. I just can't do it." And I walked out. I walked out. And that was it. What I was really doing was saying, "I have to be myself. I have to live my life." It was a chickenshit way of doing it, but I did it. It was the only way I could at that time. I guess I wanted to step out of their lives so I could continue to discover myself, because I felt like they were getting in the way. My relationship with Carrie was getting in the way of me discovering who I was and becoming a whole person. I'd never gotten in touch with who I was. And I had a lot of anger and still have a lot of anger. Anger, frustration, and resentment toward Carrie, toward the children, toward myself, because I never expressed it. . . .

So two months later she gave birth to our second son. She went to the hospital alone, and she named him a different name. Another last name. And when I first came to see him, she said, "Well, he's not yours," and then she told me why. She said, "I couldn't put your name on his birth certificate. In order for me to give birth to this child, I had to feel the child was totally mine, totally mine. So I gave him another name." She just tried to feel that the pregnancy was hers; that I wasn't any part of it. She had so much hatred for me. I was really crushed, but I didn't admit it. (pp. 26-27, 29-30, 33, 37)

Randy saw both of his children several times within 6 months after the birth of his second child, but he has not seen either of them for the last 3 years. This example illustrates both the family crisis that occurs when a gay father first begins having homosexual relations after marriage and the effects of nonintegrative sanctioning by the wife.

Nonintegrative sanctioning by the wife can have a forceful impact on inhibiting the gay father's transition toward integration. And the more intensely negative the wife is, the greater the impact. As illustrated above, the wife who rejects the man in both of his roles as husband and father can cause intense guilt and anxiety for the father. Her negative sanctioning makes the man's self-acceptance immeasurably more difficult to achieve since he also has a sincere concern for his wife and children. The father is often torn between his need to achieve homosexual satisfaction and his desire to maintain his family ties. The wife who is negative toward the man inhibits him from achieving these two objectives. In such cases it seems as though the wife forces the gay father to make a choice and he chooses a homosexual life-style. The wife wields considerable power and, though her nonintegrative sanctioning may only deter the father's self-acceptance as a homosexual, she can prevent the man from participating actively in his parental role as was the case with the wife described above. Thus, the wife who provides nonintegrative sanctions can effectively block the achievement of integration by the gay father.

Summary

All fathers in the present study were unaccepting of their homosexuality before marriage. During this time some of them disclosed partially to their future wives who were sufficiently understanding to maintain the relationship. However, during marriage, the father began to have secretive homosexual liaisons which gave him more exposure to

the homosexual world whereby he gradually began to accept his gay identity. An inverse relationship was found between intensity of homosexual desires and marital stability: As the father's sexual drive for men intensified, his marriage deteriorated. The marital breakdown was evidenced either by sharp conflict or gradual distancing. As the couple grew apart, the relationship failed and the man usually disclosed completely. It was found that partial disclosure before marriage reduced the negative effects of complete disclosure during marriage. Wives who had some forewarning were more accepting, whereas wives who had none were rejecting. Though, by a variety of means, several wives gave their husbands permission to activate their homosexuality during marriage, all of the marriages but one still failed. The exception was a marriage in which the spouses agreed to maintain a mutually nonmonogamous relationship.

Some wives provided integrative sanctions while others provided nonintegrative sanctions. The wife who is approving reflects to the father that he is acceptable to her in spite of his homosexual disposition. Wives who are disapproving mirror a negative reflection which he may introject. In such cases, the wife's disapproval makes self-acceptance a slower and more arduous process. However, because of the wife's rejection, the father seeks out sexual and affectional satisfaction with men which increases his exposure to the sexual and social aspects of the gay world. Therefore, no matter what posture she takes regarding her husband's homosexuality, the wife in effect promotes his transition from a heterosexual to a homosexual life-style. Hence, from

the point when the father discloses partially or completely to the time of separation and divorce, most wives are enablers of the father's transition to integration.

Footnotes

¹In custody decisions today, the mother still has the edge over the father. Ninety percent of all cases are decided in the mother's favor, as are about half of the cases in which the mother is the defendant. Fathers who contest must prove that the mother is unfit for parenthood (Aberg, Small, & Watson, 1978).

²The amount of research on women who relinquish custody of their children to the father is limited. In his article on this subject, Todres (1978) cites only five references, and only one of these is a research study. Todres's findings show that the "deserting" mother is of high socioeconomic status and is relatively well educated. Her decision to leave is not impulsive but is reached after considerable deliberation. The father has been informed at least once of her intent to leave, and rarely does she leave for another man. In the present study, four wives left the family, but in only one instance did the wife desert with no forewarning. Only one wife was of high socioeconomic status, and two were well educated.

Chapter 6

DISCLOSURE/SANCTIONING: FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Though most fathers did disclose to one or two close friends before separation, most disclosures to family and friends occurred after the father had separated from his wife. This was because most of the men did not accept their gay identity until they had had considerable exposure to the gay world, most of which occurred after separation. Therefore, two conditions were extant before the gay father began to disclose to his family and friends. The first was that he usually was separated from his wife. The second was that he had at least begun to accept himself as gay. This disclosure followed no discernible pattern otherwise, and family and friends were informed in no particular order.

Disclosure had a snowballing effect. As the father gradually risked disclosing to others and received their integrative sanctions, he began risking disclosure to more and more people. As he continued to receive their integrative sanctions, he also became more self-accepting. The fathers in the present study found from experience that, in most instances, they would not be rejected. Gradually disclosure felt safe, their confidence level rose, and they disclosed with greater ease to increased numbers of persons. As one father said, "Now, I believe in coming out to people. I don't believe in hiding" (Albie, 1/9/78, p. 23). Even though the fathers were not able to conjecture the other person's response, they wanted to affirm their gay

identity with others and so they did. Gradually, the need to disclose overpowered their fear of rejection. They knew that they might be rejected. However, their need to affirm themselves with their relevant others was a more powerful motivator than was their fear of rejection. Negative reactions by others did not have the impact which they did earlier in the gay father's career. Gradually, the father did less evaluating of others' potential reactions. He was less analytical regarding what their probable reactions to his disclosure might be.

The first part of this chapter describes the gay father's disclosure to his children. The second section discusses his disclosure to his other relatives and friends. The third and final section describes the gay father's disclosure of his father identity to gays. In each section the discussion of disclosure is followed by a discussion of sanctioning on the part of the relevant others.

Part 1

Disclosure/Sanctioning and the Gay Father's Children

It is difficult for the gay father to achieve integration if he does not disclose his homosexuality to his children. This is because of the extreme importance of his children to him and because the father-child relationship is an enduring one. Because his children are so important, the gay father risks more by disclosing to them than he risks by disclosing to most other people. Even so, most fathers in the present study felt impelled to share the fact of their gay identity with their children.

The more significant an identity is to an individual, the greater is his role enactment of that identity. Sarbin (1968) describes the degree of role enactment as

organismic involvement. At the low end of the continuum one finds enactments with minimal degrees of effort and visceral participation. . . . Interaction is minimal. . . . At the high end of the continuum one finds enactments which involve great degrees of effort. (p. 492)

Most of the men in the present study indicated a high degree of organismic involvement in their role as a father. They cared for their children physically, played and vacationed with them, disciplined and taught them, and nurtured them in many other ways.

However, it is often difficult to remain active in the role of father after divorce. LeMasters (1977) writes:

The father's parental role in the United States is peculiarly tied to the success or failure of the pair-bond between himself and his wife . . . if anything happens to the marriage of the American male he may find himself separated from his children and partially cut off from them--and this may happen in spite of his honest desire to be a good father. In other words, it is difficult in our society to be a good father if you are not also a good husband. (pp. 123-124)

In the present study five fathers were rearing their children as single parents, and one was coparenting his daughter 40% of the time. With only two exceptions, the remainder of the fathers maintained high visibility and continued to be salient in their children's lives. They continued to be good fathers by maintaining a high degree of organismic involvement. It was obvious that their children were exceedingly meaningful to them.

This was further borne out by the fathers' attempts to foster an expressive relationship with their children by communicating as openly

and honestly as possible. One father, whose children are adults, described his relationship with them as

extremely close. It's just an incredible kind of experience and warmth we have for each other. And they have confided in me in everything they have done. And I know a lot of the details of their personal lives which are in the strictest of confidence. And I think that's quite an honor. How many fathers have that--truly have that? For a daughter to confide in her father what she does in bed, or a son to confide it is very unusual. And vice versa. (Dana, 8/9/77, pp. 11-12)

It is this kind of intimacy that often makes disclosure necessary, as I shall explain below.

Most of the fathers in the present study recognized that the father-child relationship is permanent. Indeed, it may well be the most permanent relationship the gay father has in his lifetime.¹ As one father put it, fathering is

showing the kids you care for them. I think that's it, and I guess that's forever. I mean, even when they're in their thirties, if I can still let them know that I care for them. No matter what they do. If they're in prison and if I can come see them, I'll still be fathering then. (Blaine, 6/28/77, p. 62)

The permanent, expressive intimate relationship that many gay fathers have with their children demands disclosure, since consistently hiding gay identity from expressive intimates is the antithesis of integration. If his children live with him or are part of his proximate social world and the father does not disclose, he must keep his gay identity and life-style hidden, which prevents open and honest communication and makes integration impossible to achieve. If the father and his children visit one another only on occasion, nondisclosure poses less of a problem for the father, since he has to hide his gay identity only for brief periods. Even so, he cannot achieve integration unless he discloses.

Nondisclosure has other destructive effects besides blocking integration. Don Clark (1977), a gay clinical psychologist, writes:

Generally speaking, it is important for the Gay person not to hide Gay identity from offspring, because they are too close to keep in ignorance. To hide it is to give yourself the message that you are ashamed and that there is some cause for shame. To hide it is likely to give them the same message. And it is not such a good feeling to have a parent who is ashamed. (pp. 133-134)

In addition to sending covert negative messages, nondisclosure also causes a psychological distance to be maintained between the father and his children, which often inhibits the development of an expressive relationship. Disclosure, on the other hand, improves communication and understanding between the father and his children and enhances the expressive nature of their relationship. Thus, disclosure to intimates not only fosters integration, but fosters further intimacy as well.

Preparation for Disclosure

Many fathers in the present study prepared their children to accept their homosexuality. Two preparatory strategies were employed. The first was teaching tolerance for others. The second was serving as a role model for the child. However, they did not necessarily use these strategies in order to ensure their children's acceptance of them as gay. Rather, they were values which the fathers held dear and which they wanted to inculcate in their children.

Research in the study of prejudice supports the fathers' use of these strategies. This research demonstrates significant correlations between the attitudes of parents and those of their children:

The predominant effect of the parental family on the acquisition of ethnic prejudice--or for that matter most early learned attitudes--is extraordinarily well established. . . . The research

literature of social psychology shows moderate to high correlations of attitudes between husband and wife, between parents and children, and among brothers and sisters . . . the family provides not only a locus for early attitude development but a supporting social network for attitude maintenance. (Ehrlich, 1973, p. 121)

Children who are reared by parents who accept gays and other minority groups usually develop a similar tolerance.

Teaching tolerance. Most gay fathers taught their children to accept people who were different from themselves, whether the differences were racial, ethnic, or behavioral. They did not want their children as adults to discriminate against any minority group.

To illustrate, Kevin (6/21/77) taught his son

that all people are unique and due the respect of their uniqueness. They have a right to be who they are, to be what they want to be. If a person is black, brown, yellow, male, female, they're due the respect of their fellow man. (p. 34)

Dana (8/9/77) intentionally taught his children to respect differences in sexual orientation as well as ethnicity:

I had very slowly introduced the concepts of sexuality as they were growing up. Here are all these people with a variety of expressions: the straights, the gays, the bisexuals--and that all this was permissible within human experience. I slowly introduced them to the concept that everyone has the right to be what they want to be. I pointed out people who were different and that it was okay; that it was great. And that they were different from these people and yet could still have a respect for them and still honor them as people being individuals who are different. I pointed out the racial differences in people and how unique that is. How beautiful that is rather than ugly. (p. 12)

Modeling. Tolerance can also be modeled. For instance, the father who has black friends is modeling acceptance of persons of other races. One father relayed the following: "Some of my friends are black, . . . and probably that helps [my children] pick up that it's

all right. That they shouldn't exclude somebody from their friendship who is a bit different" (Xavier, 11/9/76, pp. 17-18).

Another father who is aware that environment influences the formation of his 6-year-old daughter's values intentionally models as a gay parent:

Also, I think as a gay parent you want to show your kids, as any parent wants to show their kids, good role models. As a gay parent you'd want to show your kids good gay role models to reinforce to your child that what you're doing is okay. And not only is it okay for you, but that there are also other gay family units out there that it's okay with. Because as a gay parent I do have to think in my mind that my child is seeing something that is not the ordinary. And I want to have the obligation for her to at least see that this not-ordinary thing is okay. And not only okay with me, but with enough people so she knows that although it may not be ordinary, it's out there. It's happening. And to see that, to make it easier, for whatever the future holds in store for her. And she sees it. I really have no idea exactly how she's computing it, but she's seeing it, you know. (Marc, 7/6/77, pp. 32-33)

Many fathers used modeling to teach their children to accept social and personal variance in others. The gay father gradually prepares his children to accept his gay identity by teaching them tolerance and by modeling tolerance.

Most fathers in the present study wanted their children to know that they were gay. They disclosed their gay identity either directly or indirectly. The mode and context of their disclosure depended on the age of the children. The older the child, the more direct the disclosure.

Indirect Disclosure

Many fathers informed their children about their homosexuality and enculturated them into the gay world by means of indirect disclosure

strategies. Indirect disclosure strategies were used more frequently than direct strategies with children under the age of 8. The notable exception to this rule was Starr (7/7/77), who disclosed directly to his son only minutes after the boy was born. He said that the first time he held his son

I told him I was gay. Of course, it doesn't internalize in a 2-minute-old child, but for me it was real important. It started the relationship on a base of sharing an intimate feeling and honesty, and that's the kind of thing I'd like to continue.
(p. 27)

Fathers who disclosed indirectly did so in one or both of two ways. The first was to be overtly affectionate with men. The second was to expose their children to their gay social world. These were not simply deliberate disclosure strategies, however. Rather they were facets of the fathers' normal behavior; they deliberately chose to behave normally in front of their children.

Overt affection with men. Many of the fathers were openly affectionate with men in their children's presence. They demonstrated affection primarily by kissing, hugging, and holding hands. For example, one father whose son was 4 years old said, "We don't change when he's here. We're as affectionate as ever. We hug and kiss each other" (Albie, 1/9/78, pp. 34-35).

No man in the present study disclosed by having sexual intercourse in the presence of his children, nor did any of them believe that this would be appropriate. As Albie (1/9/78) said:

We're just like straight people. They don't have sex in front of children and we don't either. I don't think that's right. We're physically affectionate with each other, but we keep our sexual activities confined to the bedroom. (p. 34)

Exposure to the gay social world. Another indirect strategy some fathers employed was to take their children into their gay social world. They believed that this would encourage the children to develop acceptance of gays as a group and of their father in particular. For example, one father and his daughter regularly dine in gay restaurants. Another father and his daughter march in San Francisco's Annual Gay-Day Parade. This same father lives with his wife, who, he said, prefers gay men. Their home is often frequented by their many gay friends. Several fathers also socialized with other single-parent gay fathers and their children.

Several gay men subscribed to gay newspapers and magazines, which were readily available for their children to peruse at their own discretion. This material was not forced on the children, nor was it hidden away. As one father said, "Yeh, the gay newspapers are out. Everything's out. I don't hide it, but there's no pornography" (Larry, 8/4/77, p. 21)

Many of the men in the study sample used indirect disclosure strategies. However, most of them were unaware of their children's understanding of their behavior since they had not questioned them about it. As Albie (1/9/78) said, "I don't know what little Jack thinks of [my kissing Greg]. I ought to ask him sometime" (p. 35). All of the men were, however, discreet in their affectional behaviors with other men, and none of them believed in exposing their children to sexual activity, either their own or through pornographic literature.

Direct Disclosure

Although most fathers in the present study wanted their children to know that they were gay, they needed an external event to serve as the vehicle for direct disclosure. They were unable, or found it unnecessary, to disclose directly until some social condition obliged them to do so. In several cases the father's lover relationship served as the vehicle for disclosure. For example, Kevin (6/21/77) lives with his 9-year-old son, his lover, and his lover's three children. Kevin and his lover were affectionate with one another in front of the children. He felt the need to explain his relationship with his lover to his son. He disclosed when an opportunity arose:

He'd been given a test by a psychologist and there was a word test on it and he was asking me about some of the words he didn't understand. And I thought, this is the perfect time. I explained the words he didn't know on the test and then I said, "Do you know what the word homosexual is?" And he said no. He knows about sex between men and women and I didn't go into any graphic detail about the actual act between two men. I told him that I was homosexual and that meant that I liked men and that I could even love a man. He said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that. I love you and I'm a boy and I'll be a man and I'll love you." And he said, "Sam loves granddad," that's his uncle. And Bruce and Roger, the lover friends of mine that have been together years, he knew they loved each other and he'd never really thought about it being bad or anything. He hadn't really thought about it, you know. And I said, "Well, the thing is, Ben, that when two people love each other they want to get as close as they can. And one way or the best way to get as close as you can is take all your clothes off and hold each other in each other's arms." And that's as far as I went. He kind of thought about that and said, "Well, that's okay for some people, I guess, but I don't want to do that." So I said, "Well, that's fine. You shouldn't have to do it if you don't want to. But if you want to there's nothing wrong with it." And I said, "Someday, if you feel that way about a girl, that's the closest you can get to a girl." And I said, "To get even closer is when a man enters his penis into a woman's vagina." And Ben knew all these terms. We'd always been straightforward and open with him. And I said, "That's the closest." And then I thought if he wants to start inferring anything from that about two men, he can, you know. (Kevin, 6/21/77, pp. 24-25)

Occasionally separation and divorce serves as the vehicle for disclosure. One father had concealed his homosexuality from his family during his entire 27-year marriage. He wanted to separate from his wife so that he could become openly gay and evolve a gay life-style, but he felt that he could not do so honestly without disclosing. His disclosure to his wife and their planned separation was just the vehicle he needed to induce him to disclose to his children.

Sometimes the child himself provokes the opportunity for direct disclosure. One father's adult daughter initiated the subject by saying:

"Dad, there's something I'd like to ask you and I don't know if I should." And I said, "Okay, I think I know what it is, but go ahead and ask." . . . She said, "Well, okay. When you were getting a divorce, Mom had written to the attorney when I was 12, and the letter indicated that you were a latent homosexual. I read this and at the time it didn't mean very much to me. And then later I began to question and wonder about it." I said, "Well, yes. First of all don't get upset. I am a homosexual, a practicing homosexual and prefer this kind of life to the kind of heterosexual life that I experienced. Heterosexual life is beautiful for those people who want that kind of experience, but it's not the kind of experience I want anymore." And I explained to her that I had dated women after the divorce, but I did not find that satisfactory to me. That I found men to be much more exciting to me. And a particular man as opposed to a wide variety. I explored also in that area. Lots of activity. I explained all this to her. And at the time I was single. I was not attached to anyone. (Dana, 8/9/77), pp. 12-13)

Direct disclosure informs the gay father's children of his homosexuality. By disclosing to his children he no longer requires himself to hide a significant aspect of his identity from them. Direct disclosure gives the father the freedom to be gay within the context of his father role.

Sanctioning

Based on the findings of the present study, gay fathers need not fear that their children will react negatively to disclosure of their homosexuality. With only one exception, all of the children in this study responded positively regardless of their age. This is to be expected, since most of them had been taught to accept social and personal variance. Also, children are unlikely to perceive their father as bad, ugly, or dirty, since this is contrary to their perception of him as a loving, caring human being.

It is not a specific aspect of the father's identity which is sanctioned; rather, the father is sanctioned in the role of father. The man's sexual orientation does not alter the father-child relationship. The bond between father and child is too tightly knotted for it to become undone by the father revealing one previously hidden aspect of his whole personality. Several examples are cited below to illustrate children's sanctioning.

Integrative sanctioning. One 9-year-old child indirectly indicated acceptance of her father's gay identity by writing Anita Bryant a letter during the peak of her antihomosexual campaign:

Last week she sat down and wrote a letter to Anita Bryant, which I found on her bed. I don't know if she's finished it, but it was wonderful. Where she was up to in the letter ended with, "God made gay people just like he made every other person, and if he didn't want them here or if he didn't like them, he wouldn't have made them." I think it's fabulous, just fabulous. (Larry, 8/4/77, p. 20)

Another type of integrative sanctioning is a business-as-usual attitude after disclosure. The child's behavior towards the father does not change. One father said, "I don't see any animosity from the kids

directed at my being gay. They've just been very loving and accepting. Everything's the same as it always has been, really" (Blaine, 6/28/77, p. 3).

The 15-year-old son of Stanley (Gay Fathers' Group, field notes, 10/9/77) responded to his disclosure by saying, "Yeah, I know. It doesn't matter to me. You're still my father" (10/9/77). For this child it was the role relationship and not his father's sexual orientation that was significant to their relationship.

Integrative sanctioning by children often intensifies the father-child relationship which increases both its breadth and depth. It helps to create a level of intimacy that may otherwise be difficult to achieve. For example Dana (8/9/77) described his daughter's reaction to his disclosure this way:

She said, "I thought you'd been fighting it all this time. And I've been holding it in all these years. I feel so relieved." And she reached over and grabbed my hand, and she just cried with great relief. She was feeling for me. Being compassionate with me--for my feelings. And it was just the most beautiful reunion. We held hands and talked for quite a while. And it was very rewarding. Extremely rewarding. I didn't have to hold anything back. (p. 13)

After Dana disclosed to his son, the son "put his arms around me and said, 'Gee, Dad, that's okay. It doesn't make any difference to me. You're my dad, you're the most. Well, tell me about it.' So I told him where my life was at" (pp. 14-15).

The children's approbation of their father after his disclosure further reinforces his self-acceptance as both a gay man and a father. Children's acceptance has a powerful effect on confirming and certifying the man's two identities as acceptable since it is they who are

juxtaposed in the role relationship. Children's positive sanctioning clearly enhances integration.

Nonintegrative sanctioning. Only one example of nonintegrative sanctioning was reported by fathers in the present study. After Charles (5/12/77) disclosed to his 21-year-old son, the boy replied:

"Well, I don't think I am," which I thought was kind of a strange response. But that was his response. He didn't seem to be bothered, and he liked Raymond, whom he knew. One thing he'd said to me that made me feel like rejection was, he said to me, "You weren't that close to me anyway. You weren't that much of a father." Something like that. (p. 29)

This son's negative sanction was directed toward the father's role as father rather than toward his gay identity. Since identity as a father becomes firmly established over time, an occasional nonintegrative sanction of that identity has no long-term impact on the man's identity as a father. Nonintegrative sanctions such as the one above may, however, influence the closeness of the relationship; it may make it more distant, or it may ultimately bring the two persons closer together.

Part 2

Disclosure/Sanctioning: Parents and Other Intimates

Disclosure to Parents²

Disclosure to parents is often difficult for the gay father, for he may already be experiencing conflict with them:

Intergenerational conflict is almost unavoidable in our mobile changing culture--so, to some extent, is conflict with other relatives. Since each family member can choose from a pluralistic array of life-styles and central values, kinfolk will often be at odds. (Callahan, 1974, p. 111)

Levinson (1978) states that the men who served as subjects in his study of adult male development "do not differ markedly from their parents in income or class level. The big difference is in values and lifestyles, and in most cases the discontinuity is enormous" (p. 77).³

These intergenerational differences may lead the gay father to believe that his parents will not be able to understand, or even to accept, his homosexuality. Many parents do in fact have negative stereotyped views of homosexuals. They may never knowingly have had contact with a gay person. Lacking direct experience, they base their images of homosexuals on their own preconceived negative stereotype. Writing on disclosure of homosexuality to parents, Brown (1976) states, "Undoubtedly, like most of the older generation and many of the younger, parents accept the stereotype of the homosexual man; thus, if their son is not effeminate, he cannot be homosexual" (pp. 70-71). Brown goes on to say that "just as most homosexuals go through a prolonged period of disbelief and denial, so, too, do many parents, some of whom take the ultimate step of disowning their son. 'If you're queer, you're no son of mine'" (p. 69). Most gays have read or heard personal accounts of parents who disowned their children because they were homosexual. Knowing this, the gay father may well be afraid to disclose to his parents. It is noteworthy that only half of the fathers in the present study had in fact done so.

Disclosure to parents usually occurs when there is an external event which cannot be explained easily without disclosing. One condition that precipitated disclosure was the father's need to explain why his marriage had broken down. The condition that precipitated

disclosure by Kevin (6/21/77) was his former wife's attempt to regain legal custody of their 9-year-old son. Kevin had coupled with another gay father, and one of his wife's formal complaints was that he was exposing the boy to homosexuality. Disclosing to his mother was relatively easy for him. But when it came time to disclose to his father, he said:

I just didn't know how to tell my dad. I really didn't, 'cause he's a macho, big, straight, super stud. And he said, "Well, I guess this whole thing's got something to do with Rita taking you to court." And I said, "That's right. She wants custody of Ben." And he said, "Why?" And I couldn't tell him. He said, "Well, you know that Rita told us a long time ago that you were queer. Is that what she's saying now?" I just couldn't answer him. I somehow totally changed the subject. Later I worked around back to it, but I didn't have to answer him that "yes, I am a queer," because that set very bitter with me. So I said, "I'm not queer, I'm homosexual, or gay as some people put it. I guess some people like the term queer, but I don't necessarily." So then they knew. (p. 20)

When the gay father discloses to his parents, the disclosure is usually part of the topic that precipitated it, rather than being the topic itself. Thus, Kevin's disclosure was part of a larger topic, that is, his ex-wife's attempt to regain child custody.

These men could not (or at any rate did not) disclose solely for the purpose of identifying themselves as gay. In all instances a specific social condition led them to disclose. The social condition created the need to disclose, and they used that condition as the vehicle for the disclosure.

Sanctioning by Parents

No parents of fathers in the present study completely rejected their son. Some parents had suspected their sons of being gay, but had

not felt free to ask, while others were astounded by the disclosure. All fathers and most mothers provided integrative sanctions. However, several mothers' sanctions were nonintegrative.

Integrative sanctioning. Several parents of fathers in the present study suspected that their sons were gay. These parents, both mothers and fathers, sanctioned their sons positively after they disclosed. Again, this illustrates how some forewarning--even if it is only a suspicion--makes the gay father's disclosure easier to accept. The response Larry (8/4/77) received is typical: "They were very open about it. They said they sort of suspected that I might be gay because I had so many gay friends. . . . They said they still loved me, and that it was okay" (p. 4). Responding to the disclosure by Kevin (6/21/77), his father said, "That doesn't make you any less my son. I still love you" (pp. 20-21). Parents who were unsuspecting were also supportive. The mother of Lucas (9/29/77) replied with:

"Oh, that comes as kind of a shock you know." Then we talked about it some. . . . The following day when she was on her way back home, she gave me a hug, which is the first time she had ever done that that I can remember. . . . That was in August, and I went home for Christmas, and we talked a great deal. Anyway, she was very supportive. (p. 30)

Another example is the father of Starr (7/7/77) who initially reacted neutrally by making no response to Starr's disclosure. Starr said that he and his father

always related through fights which I could almost predict as a child and my early teenage years. I used to get beat up by him a couple of times a week. That was one way of relating to him. He was just totally withdrawn into the newspaper or the TV. About three weeks after I told them he called me and he's never in my entire life called me. It had always been he would get on the extension phone and my mother would call. Then he'd send his regards and then goodbye. Real token. Well, he called me and my mother didn't know about it. She was sleeping. And he said,

"Look, Starr, just make sure you know what you're doing and whatever you do--and nobody can tell you what to do--but whatever you do I will still love you." And I almost cracked up. He still loved me which must have meant that he had always loved me. And I really felt the sincerity behind it. And it wasn't stimulated by my mother. It was very obvious because my mother couldn't give me that kind of acceptance much less have the strength to convince him to. It really blew me away. I never regretted sharing it with him. (pp. 16-18)

Disclosure often brings the parent and the gay father closer than they had been before. Lucas's mother hugged him, and the word love predominated. This is further evidence that disclosure does bring the gay father closer to his intimate others which enhances integration.

Nonintegrative sanctioning. Parents may reject their son as gay yet not reject him as son. The most negative response by a parent came from the mother of Starr (7/7/77):

"If I come out to California and find you with a man, I'll either kill you or kill myself." That's a direct quote. She started blaming it on the therapist that I had been seeing about 4 years ago. She said, "That's when you started changing." I told her that I had been involved with men for over 10 years. And then she told me in the same breath, "Then go to a psychiatrist and have him cure you." A lot of contradictions and a lot of double statements. Blaming herself. I told her that this isn't something that I feel good about or bad about, it's just something that is. What I tried to explain to her is, I don't want to put a value judgment on it. But she couldn't hear any of that. She said, "Don't tell my children," meaning that I'm no longer one of her children. Another quote was, "At age 40 you're going to kill yourself," and then in the same breath she said, "And at age 50 you're going to be alone." Irrational. A lot of fear, a lot of anxiety. She said, "Oh, my god, you're going to lose your job" and "Couldn't you change for me?" . . . Since then she said she was beginning to accept it, but I don't buy it. And now with this Anita Bryant thing she's saying, "Now I have to hear this 'gay.' Gay, what's so gay about it? All over the radio and I'm so ashamed. When someone cracks a joke, I crawl into a shell." She's worrying about me losing my job, about me being hurt, being beaten up, killed. . . . When I was home in New Jersey, a friend of mine called me from California telling me that he wanted me to do the advertising campaign for a gay benefit. I was so thrilled and proud; just pleased as punch. And my mom came in, and I shared it with her, and she said, "This is the pleasure you're

giving me!" So certainly my pleasure cannot be shared with her, and I knew that, but I was just sort of overwhelmed by it.

Gay fathers who receive nonintegrative sanctions from their parents cannot fully integrate them into their lives, even though they may want to do so. Parents such as these require their sons to expurgate from their communications those aspects of their lives which center about their gay identity. However, because of intergenerational differences and because parents often lived at a distance, integration of parents was found to be less important than integration of other intimates.

Disclosure/Sanctioning:
Other Intimates

Disclosure is progressive. As the gay father gradually accepts his homosexuality, he discloses to more and more of his intimates. Several fathers in the present study became sufficiently comfortable with their gay identity and with disclosing that they no longer required an external event upon which to hang their disclosure. They disclosed to their friends solely to inform them of their gay identity, thus affirming the self to others as well as to themselves. Most fathers did use the breakdown of their marriage as the vehicle for disclosure to their siblings, however.

In-laws' sanctions depend in large measure on the sanction of the gay father's wife. If she accepts the father, the in-laws will accept him, too. As the mother-in-law of Larry (8/4/77) said, "I love Larry and you're my daughter, and if that makes you happy it's okay with me." As for his father-in-law, Larry said, it was "okay with him. Llana's

his daughter, and he liked me, and it doesn't make any difference. I'm not saying they understand it, but it hasn't caused any major commotion in our life" (p. 5).

Disclosure does not usually damage longstanding relationships. Often it intensifies them. When there is integrative sanction, it is almost impossible for the relationship not to deepen, since the father has trusted the friend with an intimate and vital element of his personhood. When Chad (2/7/78) disclosed to a straight friend, the friend replied:

"Well, I'm so glad, because you seem to be a lot happier. A lot more adjusted now." It's been a really close friendship. He and his wife have had me over for dinner, and his wife had me over one time when he was out of town, and I've had him over. We're really close. So I think in that case it actually enhanced the friendship a little bit. (p. 26)

Though the gay father's friends may reject him to varying degrees after disclosure, nonintegrators were not common. The following example of negative sanctioning also illustrates how impossible it is for the gay father to predict what another person's response to his disclosure will be. When Albie (1/9/78) disclosed to an Army friend:

He had a hard time with it. I thought he wouldn't have any problem, 'cause he was liberal and educated. But he couldn't handle it. He said he didn't know if he could trust me quite as much as he did before. (p. 24)

Self-definitions do not develop in a vacuum, but are the result of multiple and varied interactions with others in various social contexts. Disclosure to significant intimates and their integrative sanctions constitute the major social variable which facilitates the integrative process. Disclosure identifies the father to others and their integrative sanctions reinforce his own sense of identity, mirroring

a positive self-image. As the father gradually discloses and receives integrative sanctions, others' permission giving has the effect of increasing his self-acceptance. And increased self-acceptance gives him more confidence to disclose. Through this process he is able to merge his gay and father identities.

The gay father discloses to his parents and other intimates when a social event becomes personalized. With increased self-acceptance, he will occasionally disclose solely to affirm himself to others. Because he usually receives integrative sanctions, occasional rejection does not damage his feelings of self-acceptance.

But as yet the gay father is not home free. He must penetrate the gay world as a father and receive integrative sanctions from gays before full integration can occur. How he achieves this is the subject of the following section.

Part 3

Disclosure/Sanctioning: The Gay Father in the Gay World

It is easier to disclose father identity to gays than it is to disclose gay identity to heterosexuals. This is because fatherhood is acceptable in our society whereas homosexuality is not. However, the gay world is both single and youth oriented, and for this reason gaining integrative sanctions of his father identity from gays may pose a serious problem for the gay father.

The process of disclosing father identity to gays is similar to the process of disclosing gay identity to heterosexuals. It is

progressive, based upon self-acceptance and experience in the homosexual world. As the man gradually learns to accept himself as gay and as a gay father, he increases his disclosure of his father identity to gays. Their integrative sanctions help to affirm him as acceptable in the gay world. This in turn enhances his self-acceptance as a gay father.

Initially the gay father is a nondiscloser. During his marriage he is having encounters in the homosexual world. These encounters are brief, clandestine, and anonymous, as I have explained. The married gay father has several reasons for using nondisclosure strategies. Often he believes that his married-father status makes him less socially and sexually desirable. If he is less desirable, it may take him longer to find a man for a sexual encounter, and his time is often limited. Another reason for not disclosing is that other gay men may be seeking to establish a long-term lover relationship. If they know that the father is married, they may write him off.

Nondisclosing Strategies

During marriage the gay father may use various nondisclosing strategies to keep other gay men from knowing his identity as a husband and a father. One strategy was for the father to remove his wedding ring. Another was for him to deny his marital status and, by implication, his father identity. For example, Derrick (11/27/77) said:

I have denied being married. If someone would say, "Are you married?" I'd say, "No." I have done that in the past. If they say, "Oh, you seem like a married boy; are you married?" I'd say, "No," thinking foolishly that they'll like me better if they think I'm single. So then, naturally, having a child would never come up. So that's kind of a roundabout way of denying that you're a father is denying that you're married. (p. 32)

However, no man in the present study, either during marriage or after separation and divorce, denied his father identity by directly denying that he had children.

Another strategy is denial by topic avoidance whereby the father denies his family status by avoiding the topic altogether. (However, because disclosure is always selective and situational, there is often no logical reason to bring the subject up.) Topic avoidance is a very common tactic, used mostly in short-term relationships. It may also be used in extended relationships if conditions make this easy to do. For example, one father had an affair for 2 months when he was away from home on an extended business trip. He avoided mentioning his family identity in order to prevent rejection. He did, however, disclose shortly before it was time for him to return home in order to explain why the relationship had to be permanently discontinued. Another father practices topic avoidance for several reasons. He explains it this way:

The one thing I've sort of learned is when I'm out and I'm visiting people and making new connections, I'm learning not to talk about my children. It's an important thing not to talk about. I have a natural tendency to talk about them if children come up in the conversation. But I find it's helpful to hide the fact that I'm a father because a lot of people are younger than I am that I see. And they have a hard time accepting the fact. I'm seeing a man who's only five years older than my son, and he has a hard time dealing with that, and it doesn't help him for me to remind him of it. And that's happened a number of times. . . . When I'm meeting new gay people or with gay men, having children as old as mine are distracts from a relationship, since I look more 35 than 49. People are assuming I'm younger and . . . they don't assume any parental relationships. Being known as a father is particularly difficult in the early stages of a relationship because it seems to kind of bother some people, and also it kind of turns the relationship away from us onto the children, and that interferes with finding out whether or not I want to develop a relationship with that person. Or whether that person wants to develop a relationship with me. (Charles, 6/4/77, pp. 41, 61)

Charles finds that having children makes it difficult to develop new relationships. Divulging the ages of his children, the oldest of whom is 21, would tend to disclose that he is older than he appears. He also avoids discussing his children because it would deflect the conversation away from himself and the other person. The "ghosts" of family members (Minuchin, 1974, p. 134) not uncommonly interfere with relationships, and Charles avoids this problem in the formative stages of a relationship by avoiding the topic of his children altogether.

Gay fathers who use denial strategies make the assumption that they will receive nonintegrative sanctions from gays if they reveal their marital or father status. In this they may well be correct. However, even though the man does not disclose his father identity, he is gaining experience in the homosexual world. He is gradually developing a sense of what it is like to be homosexual and to live life as a homosexual man. As his social and sexual experiences in the gay world increase, he gradually begins to accept himself as gay. As he comes to accept his homosexuality, and as he becomes comfortable as a gay man in the gay world, he more readily discloses his father identity.

Disclosure/Sanctioning

Some gay fathers will experiment with disclosure to discern if their father identity affects their acceptability as a sociosexual partner. Larry (8/4/77), who is married and lives with his wife and daughter, provides an example:

When I would meet someone, I would want to tell them. I don't have to tell someone, but I feel I have to be open with people; otherwise I'm not comfortable. So in the course of the evening or afternoon, I would tell them. And I found that this would really influence our relationship a lot. Some people would back

off and never call me again, realizing that I'm involved with a woman and a child. Other people really get off on married men and would be excited about that. There was one person I was going with that refused to come to my house at all, whether anyone was there or not. He just felt really uncomfortable knowing I was married and that he would maybe be in the same bed that my wife had slept in or my daughter had been in. And I realized that as soon as people found out I was gay and married and had a child, they treated me totally different. I'm not saying they treated me better or worse, but it was different. Rather than just treating me as a gay man, it was I'm gay and something else.

So then for a while I stopped telling people, to see what would happen. I told them only when I really had to. And I found I was very uncomfortable because, although I wasn't lying, I'd have to start editing my conversation all the time. I'd have to keep editing. And it'd be real difficult for me to do that--to suddenly change words. Like if I'd want to say, "I went to a restaurant with my wife last night," I couldn't say that. I'd have to say, "I went to a restaurant with a friend."

So what I've done now is gone back to my original thing that if I feel some warmth toward them, I generally will tell them. And if they can't handle it, then it's their problem. If they freak out by it, then it's probably better that I don't see them again. But that hasn't happened. In fact, the opposite has happened. I met someone who's dying to meet my wife and daughter. I can't really predict what a person's reaction's going to be. . . . I don't know whether being married and having a child turns people off or not. Sometimes you meet someone you like and they say they like you, that you're great in bed, and they say they'll call you, and then they never do. Or I'll call them and they become real cold. Is it just me they don't like? Or is it because I'm married? Or is that just the gay community--we say all these things: "Gee, you were great in bed. Thanks. Give me your phone number. I'll call you." And then never do. I don't know. (pp. 8-9, 47)

Larry discovered that disclosure was probably irrelevant to the establishing of gay relationships. Some men sanctioned him positively and some negatively. Sometimes he was uncertain how he was being sanctioned since some men broke off contact after a single sexual liaison but gave no reason for their unresponsiveness. This may or may not have been due to Larry's husband and father status. There are many possible reasons for avoiding further contact with a man obtained solely for a sexual encounter.

Some fathers made no attempt to conceal their father identity. Indeed, they sometimes made a point of mentioning it when they were in a gay bar, steam bath, or other gay social milieu. They disclosed for a variety of reasons. Some fathers disclosed because they believed that being a father made them more rather than less sexually and socially desirable. For example, one father explained that disclosing his father identity "makes me more of a man . . . and it makes me look more butch, too, right? Some men are fascinated by it. It makes me more mysterious . . . gives me depth" (Randy, 3/10/78, p. 51). Most fathers, however, had more substantial reasons for disclosing. Usually they disclosed because of the significance of their children to them and to their identity as a man. To deny that they had children would have the effect of denying an essential aspect of themselves. For example, one father said:

I've never hidden the fact that I'm a father. . . . I love my kids. I'm proud to be a father. I always brought it up. I wanted it known. I would not deny my children for any reason. They're a part of me, and I'm a part of them. Even if it turns someone off, that's fine. If he's that easily turned off, he's not much of a man. He's not the kind of person I want to be with. If his value system is so shallow that he couldn't understand that my previous life was my previous life and included other human beings which I helped to beget, boy, that's his problem. He's very shallow. I haven't encountered someone that narrow. Most gays are amazed when they find out I'm a father. And when they meet my children, which many of them have, they're really excited about it--me having the kind of rapport I have with my kids. And they're envious. (Dana, 8/9/77, pp. 30, 35)

Disclosure and integrative sanctioning. Acceptance of the gay father as a father by other gay men had the effect of promoting the father's acceptance of himself as a father even though he was gay. Other gays' acceptance helped him to put himself in the cognitive category of gay father. As one father stated:

When I was first coming out I never told anyone that I was a father 'cause I thought I'd be ostracized. But I started telling guys that I'd meet and they were really accepting. And then I gradually realized that it was okay to be gay and be a father too. That I could be both. But at first I didn't think I could. I really thought I'd be rejected. But I wasn't. So now I really feel comfortable being a gay father. And boy is that a good feeling. (Albie, 1/9/78, p. 37)

Another father said:

Usually when I tell guys that I meet that I'm a father they don't seem to care. It's me that they're relating to, not my kid. But men that I really get involved with, well, I want them to know my kids and like them. And most of them do. And it's really neat to be able to take my kids out with my friends and do things together. It's sort of like a family and I miss family life. (Lewis, Gay Fathers' Group, field notes, 2/13/78)

Integrative sanctions promote the father's self-acceptance. As he becomes more self-accepting he discloses more easily and to a larger number of persons. Eventually he fully accepts himself as a gay father. Integrative sanctions are more readily given, however, if the father's children do not live with him as is the case with the two fathers quoted above. If the man is the custodial parent integrative sanctions are more difficult to obtain.

Disclosure and nonintegrative sanctioning. The gay father may receive nonintegrative sanctions. In the present study, nonintegrative sanctions were given primarily to fathers who had child custody. Gay men may sanction a father positively as a father yet reject his children. Because the father considers his children an extension of himself, this rejection has the effect of a nonintegrative sanction. The father's children, too, must be sanctioned positively for the father to feel accepted. If they are not the other man or the father himself will discontinue the closeness of the relationship or terminate it altogether.

As I have explained, many gay men do not want children in their lives. They also want to come first with their mate. Fathers who have custody of young children must necessarily consider their children's needs. Like heterosexual parents, gay fathers do not always consider their children's needs first, but other gay men may not believe that. One father who has custody of his 10-year-old daughter said:

Most people will say, "No, it doesn't matter." But I think way down deep it does in the fact that you can't just take off and go any time you want to. Whereas, they're footloose and fancy free. And this is one of the main problems for me. I had one man who said, "You know there's going to come a time when there's going to be conflicts between what she wants to do and what I want to do, and you're caught in the middle, and how are you going to choose? You're always going to choose with your daughter, which is the way it should be." He didn't take up anything with me because of it. I kind of find it hard that someone would put you in that position. (Alex, 12/11/76, p. 17)

Alex was not rejected because of his father identity as such, but was rejected because of the potential conflict his daughter would cause in the relationship.

Another father reported that

I had two lovers, or pseudolovers, who were not at all interested in being part of a family. They wanted another kind of life, and that's why they didn't work out. I wanted them to be able to accept my kids, and one of them would not even come and see them. He said he really liked me, but he didn't want to have kids around him. Kids made him nervous. . . . The other one said that if he ever lived with a man who has kids, he wanted them to be little kids. (Blaine, 6/28/77, pp. 12-13, 52-53)

If the children live with the father, the father's gay friends must not only sanction him as a father but must also accept his children. Otherwise an intimate relationship does not develop, though the father may not break off relations entirely.

All fathers in the present study eventually risked rejection from gays by disclosing their father identity. While the risk is certainly

genuine, the odds favor disclosure for a number of reasons. First and foremost, most gay men will not reject a gay father because he is a father. Those who do will probably not be the kind of people the father will want to cultivate friendships with anyway. Second, disclosure makes it unnecessary to edit communication, lie, and use other evasive tactics, which are self-denying as well as uncomfortable. Third, disclosure initiates relationships on an open and honest basis, providing substantial ground upon which to evolve intimate friendships.

Summary

By disclosing his gay identity to his children, parents, and friends, the gay father repenetrates the heterosexual world, this time as a homosexual. He reintroduces himself to his heterosexual intimates as the man he knows himself to be. He gradually unweaves the intricate tapestry of his former identity, which has required much effort to sustain, and reweaves a new and genuine identity. As he learns to live comfortably as a homosexual in the heterosexual world, he symbolically or literally takes his heterosexual intimates into his gay world. Now he can openly share his life with most of them. But the gay father must also penetrate the gay world with his father identity. He must be confirmed as a father by gay men in order to achieve integration.

Initially, many gay fathers conceal their marital status or their father identity. They believe that these identities render them socially or sexually undesirable. Eventually, most fathers in the present study did disclose their father identity. When they did so, they

found that gay men would sanction them on grounds more substantial than their family status. They gradually gained confidence in their ability to achieve both sexual and social satisfaction in the gay world as gay fathers. The man who receives nonintegrative sanctions from gays because of his father identity, or because of his role requirements relative to his children, distances himself from those gays. He develops intimate relationships primarily with men who provide integrative sanctions. By this means he achieves integration, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Footnotes

¹In a somewhat different context, Therese Benedek (1970), in the classic psychoanalytic text on parenthood, writes:

"Parenthood as a psychobiologic process ends only with the death of the parent. This statement, evocative as it is, might call for a second thought in the minds of many readers who . . . accepted parenthood as a developmental process and expect its reciprocal psychobiologic involvements to end with the maturation of the children. Such an assumption is a fallacy, however, probably based on the experience that children appear to outgrow their parents when they become parents themselves. The fact is that their parents just then begin to relive the memories of their early parenthood as these memories become revived by the parental behavior of their children and in the developmental responsiveness of their grandchildren. Even after that period, in their old age, parents cling to the status that parenthood gave them, since it helps them to maintain their self-esteem. Thus, parenthood, supplied by memories of past experiences, is timeless." (p. 185)

²George Weinberg (1973) offers an excellent chapter on communication with parents (pp. 91-118). This chapter includes a list of suggestions for discussing one's homosexuality with one's parents as well as a list of tips for the parents themselves.

³Levinson's sample consisted of 40 men: 10 executives, 10 biologists, 10 factory workers, and 10 novelists.

PART IV

FINDINGS: INTEGRATION

Chapter 7

RESOLUTION

This chapter describes the means by which the gay father resolves the apparent contradiction between his gay identity and his father identity. The first section discusses the integrated gay father. Men in this category have disclosed both identities in both worlds and participate actively in both worlds. The second part describes the partially integrated gay father. Men in this category have disclosed their father identity to their homosexual friends and their gay identity to some of their heterosexual intimates, but because they fear rejection or recrimination, they have not disclosed their gay identity to their children. The third section discusses the nonintegrated gay father. These men maintain nonintegration by not disclosing their gay identity, by relinquishing their father role, or both.

Part 1

The Integrated Gay Father

Both identities are central to the integrated gay father. He accepts himself as a homosexual and has disclosed his sexual orientation to his heterosexual intimates. He has also disclosed his father identity to his gay intimates. He actively participates in the gay world and in his role as a father. He has eliminated cognitive dissonance,

and he readily puts himself in the cognitive category of gay father. Larry (8/4/77) expressed the feeling that integration can induce when he stated:

I feel so lucky--so fortunate in my life at this point. I'm gay, and I feel good about that. I have a wife that is open about that and feels good about me being gay. I have a daughter that knows and is very supportive. My parents know, and now my in-laws know. I have a business that's working, and the people that work for me know. It's just like everything is turning to gold. (p. 23)

The integrated gay father achieves a converged social identity through the implementing process of disclosure. The integrative sanctions he receives gradually enable him to perceive his dual identities as acceptable to others as well as to himself. As the father progresses along his biographical continuum, his behavior gradually becomes consistent with the man he knows himself to be. He freely actualizes both his gay and father identities in both heterosexual and homosexual social situations.

Former Wife's Role in Promoting Integration

The wives of fathers in the present study were highly significant to the transition process, and after separation and divorce their sanctioning often promoted integration. For example, the wife of Blaine (6/28/77), who relinquished child custody to him, continues to approve of him as a gay father rearing their three children. Blaine is coupled with another gay father who also has child custody, and the two families live together. Blaine stated:

When we separated, my wife's sister said to her, "How could you leave those kids with him; he'll make them all queer, you know." And she really put her sister down right away. She said, "It's

not true. I think it's the best home for them. He won't do that with them." So she came to my defense about that. . . .

It's almost as if Kevin and I are concerns to Louise now. Our well-being is very important. Just like the rights of all gay people are very important to her. She doesn't want us to be really up front with them, though. But she knows we won't. She wouldn't want us to take Russell, who's 14, to bed, you know. Nothing indecent. As long as we raise him as we are, she's very happy. And she'll defend that. She thinks it's wonderful. We're still good friends. . . . And she really likes Kevin. They get along really well, and we're kind of like three friends when we sit down together. . . .

You have some special problems being gay with kids, but I don't know if it's all that much worse. If Louise was against it or was homophobic, I could see terrible problems. I guess it must be very difficult for men who have wives like that because the kids are getting it from both sides. But since she's supportive, it makes it very easy for me. And I think it makes it easy for Kevin, too. (pp. 10, 28, 60)

Blaine's wife continues to validate him as a father while at the same time refuting the suggestion that his homosexuality could have negative effects on the children. Her continued support clearly helps to promote Blaine's integration. Another father whose son lives on the East Coast said that his former wife

really feels good about the fact that I've been able to really experience myself, feel good about myself, be more together in every situation in my life. I feel her support completely. . . . Since the separation she's nourished the father-son relationship, even though it's been a 3,000-mile distance. I've been there four times in the last year. Whenever I'm there, I have complete access to him. It's been that way each time I've been there. It's an open-house policy completely. (Starr, 7/7/77, pp. 3-4)

These examples illustrate how the former wife can promote and help maintain integration by supporting the father in his father role.

Through her positive sanctions, she continues to confirm and certify the man as father.

The former wife also promotes integration by not denigrating the father to the children. Family therapist Virginia Satir (1974) states:

It is very easy for the remaining parent (usually a woman) . . . to give negative messages about the departed male, particularly if the reason for the departure were divorce, desertion, an illegitimate pregnancy, or, in any case, was the cause of great pain for the woman. She will have to work pretty hard not to give messages to her children about the "badness" of the male. (pp. 170-171)

Mothers who refrain from denigrating the father make it easier for him to sustain a positive role relationship with his children. He is not constantly obligated to demonstrate his worth as a father to them. For example, Dana (8/9/77) was divorced when his daughter was 10 years old and his son was 7. According to Lynn (1974) at these ages children are highly susceptible to denigration of their father by their mother. Though Dana's wife was intensely negative toward him because of his homosexuality, she did not denigrate him to their children. He stated:

The thing I liked about the divorce agreement was, I had mutual ability to see my kids; mutual agreement to see them any time I wished. And that was the important thing. The kids were the important thing as far as I was concerned. Our kids came first. And she felt the same way in terms of the children. She was never destructive with the children verbally about me. Never. And I admire her for that. She never has been. She says absolutely nothing. Nothing good, nothing bad. Again, total silence, like I received during my marriage. Total silence. So the kids were able to determine their own role in relation to me. (p. 4)

This example illustrates that the wife's neutrality with the children allows them to determine their relationship to their father, and that it also enables the father to maintain an effective role relationship with his children. The man in the example cited above had his children visit him twice a week, he kept them overnight on occasion, and he took them on periodic hunting and fishing trips. In this way he maintained high visibility as a father. The children are now adults; he has fully disclosed to them both, and he has an impressive intimate relationship with them.

Nondisclosure and the Integrated Gay Father

Integration is selective, even for the integrated father. In many situations he need not implement either his gay or father role. Also, many people are not part of the father's proximate social world. Disclosure to these people and sanctions by them are not essential to achieve integration. As Xavier (11/9/76) said, "Most of the time I don't go out of my way to tell people, because there's just no need to" (p. 23). The integrated father easily adjusts to not disclosing either or both identities in situations where they are irrelevant, since he knows he can implement them in appropriate circumstances with his proximate intimates. In such cases he is not concealing either his homosexuality or his father role. Rather, he is implementing his other roles such as his work role, and his gay role and father role are latent. All roles are implemented selectively, depending upon the social circumstances. Hence, the integrated gay father selectively implements his gay role and his father role.

Part 2

The Partially Integrated Gay Father

Some fathers in the present study were partially integrated. Partially integrated fathers had disclosed to some of their significant intimates and had received their integrative sanctions. However, they wanted to disclose to other intimates but had not done so. Two conditions emerged in the present study that help to explain partial integration. The first was intense fear of rejection by persons of extreme

significance to the father. The second was fear of vindictiveness on the part of the former wife.

Intense Fear of Rejection

The gay father may fear rejection by a significant other so intensely that he cannot force himself to disclose his homosexuality, even though he badly wants to do so. The consequence of not disclosing under these conditions is intense inner turmoil. Chad (2/7/78) provides an example. Chad has disclosed his homosexuality to many of his friends, and his mother also knows that he is gay. Yet he cannot disclose to his 10-year-old son and his twin 18-year-old daughters. Chad became emotionally upset when he discussed disclosing to his children:

They don't know 'cause I'm terrified to tell them! I'm afraid they'd reject me. I would like them to know, because when they're around I have to conceal part of me from them. And I have to lie to them. And if I cry, I hope you'll forgive me. (pp. 16-17)

At this point in the interview, he did cry. Later he continued:

Well, I know what I'm afraid of with the kids is that they'll reject me, you know, and I don't know what I'm gonna do about that. I really don't. There is no pat answer. I wish there were. The girls are 18. They can deal with it, I'm sure. One way or another they can deal with it. But Buster's 10. Can he deal with it? Very high-strung, very sensitive, very bright. . . . I hope that my kids would find out and accept it and still love me. . . . I've never been down on any particular ethnic group or anything like that, and this of course I passed on to my kids, and they've never said anything ethnic, and they have Korean and Mexican friends. And I know they're not homophobic, so why I'm fighting it I don't know. It's an unrealistic fear, but it's there. If I were living with somebody as a gay couple, I wouldn't be uncomfortable having my kids come over, and if they found out just by figuring it out, I think that would be the way I would like for them to know. To just figure it out. They would really see that I'm not any different than I ever was. I think I could deal with it on that basis, but just to call 'em up one day and say, "Hey, come to lunch I've got something to tell you" and then say, "Hey, I'm a fag"--that doesn't seem like really the right way to do it. Now if they were to ask me, I would tell them. I wouldn't lie.

If they asked me point blank. When they ask me how my love life is coming, I lie in that area, but if they asked me specifically, "Are you gay?" I wouldn't lie. (pp. 23-24, 34, 48)

Chad also avoids indirect disclosure: "I feel like I have to hide my gayness when Buster comes over. I've got that gay calendar which I take down, and I have to hide my gay newspapers" (p. 22).

Considerable inner turmoil typifies the partially integrated gay father. Wanting to disclose his homosexuality, yet concealing it by using tactics such as lying, cause psychological distress. Yet, if he were to disclose, the pain of rejection would be even greater. Thus, he keeps his homosexuality hidden. Nevertheless, until the fathers in this category disclose they must maintain separate gay and father identities with their children. They can never achieve integration with them. The assistance of mental health professionals would probably be of benefit in helping fathers, such as the one described above, manage their dilemma.

Fear of Former Wife's Vindictiveness

The second condition that prevents the partially integrated gay father from becoming fully integrated is fear of his former wife's vindictiveness. A father may believe that if his ex-wife knew he were gay, she would use the knowledge against him. Fathers in this category have not fully disclosed to their former wives and do not disclose to intimate others whom they want to inform for fear of secondary disclosure to their ex-wives. Two fathers in the present study represent this position. Though both have disclosed to many significant intimates, neither has disclosed to his children, though they both want to. Chad (2/7/78) claims that he does not disclose to his grown daughters

because he believes that his former wife might restrict his visitation rights to his young son:

I'm not so sure that she knows I'm as openly gay as I am. If I told the girls, I don't think they'd tell their mother out of any meanness or anything. They might do it because they'd need somebody to talk to about it. I don't think they'd do it out of any desire to hurt me or destroy me or anything like that. They might just need somebody to talk to. But if they told their mother, she might fight me over custody of Buster. I don't know that she would, but that's certainly not beyond the realm of possibility. (p. 28)

Lucas (9/29/77) has not disclosed to his 16-year-old daughter for fear his former wife will inform the board of education where he teaches elementary school. As Lucas (9/29/77) said:

I can't really tell my daughter where I am at this point. I don't trust my ex-wife if she should find out. So it feels like within that relationship I've had to keep that wall. And that's been part of the difficulty in our communication. I'd like not to have that wall. Some day when she's old enough, and if I feel that she would understand, I will tell her. But I don't feel like I can right now. So I have to put on. I have to be a role that I'm not, to a certain extent. (p. 34)

The degree of stress not disclosing causes is directly related to the personal closeness of the relationship between the father and his children. Chad and his children had lived most of their lives together as a family and they had a reciprocally close relationship which is maintained even though he is divorced. On the other hand, Lucas has been only minimally involved in his fathering role for the past 9 years since his divorce. Though he is concerned about his daughter he does not feel particularly close to her nor, as he said, does he feel like a father. Hence, the more intimate the relationship, and the more central the father identity is to the man, the greater is the need to disclose, and the greater the stress nondisclosing causes.

Part 3

The Nonintegrated Gay Father

The nonintegrated gay father maintains role separation by compartmentalizing (Goode, 1960. In compartmentalization, the gay role and the father role are never enacted together; they never intersect. In the present study, three means of maintaining compartmentalization and thus nonintegration emerged. The first is nondisclosure. The non-disclosing gay father never discloses his homosexuality to his heterosexual intimates. Though he does disclose his father identity to his gay friends, it is difficult for him to actively integrate them into his father role, since he has not disclosed his gay identity to his children. He maintains two separate and distinct identities; his homosexual identity is activated only in the gay milieu, and a seemingly heterosexual identity is activated in most other circumstances.

The second means by which the gay father compartmentalizes and remains nonintegrated is by relinquishing his father role. The father in this category rarely sees his children, and they have minimal significance for him in his daily life. Because these fathers rarely enact their father role, there is no complementary role interaction, and their father identity becomes diffuse and ill defined. However, they are openly gay and do disclose their homosexuality to their significant intimates.

The third means of maintaining nonintegration is a combination of the first two. The father neither discloses his homosexuality to his significant intimates nor actively participates in his parental role.

Three fathers in the present research illustrate these three respective means.

Nonintegration by Nondisclosure

There are probably many gay men who have been married and have fathered children and have never disclosed to their families. Bruce Voeller (1978), former coexecutive director, National Gay Task Force, and a gay father of three children, writes:

In my experience, the majority of gay fathers, as well as gay parents in general, whom I meet are, in fact, still married, and their spouses do not know that they are gay. They feel that they're locked in and have a responsibility to their children, to their wives. (p. 152)

In the present study the principal factors influencing nondisclosure of homosexuality were lack of self-acceptance as a homosexual and fear of rejection by others.

A major consequence of nondisclosure was found to be suspicion on the part of the gay father's wife. The wife becomes suspicious when her husband engages in regular homosexual liaisons during marriage. The father must lie about where he has been, what he has been doing, and whom he has been with. He may make slips of the tongue, which he must quickly correct or explain away. Other ill-explained events or behaviors also may occur to arouse the wife's suspicion.

When the gay father is aware of his homosexuality and others suspect it, a suspicion awareness context obtains. A suspicion awareness context is one in which "one interactant suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his own identity, or both" (Glaser & Strauss, p. 270, 1964).¹ Successive interactions tend to change the context. For example, if the father were to disclose his homosexuality

to his wife, the suspicion awareness context would change to an open awareness context, in which both parties are aware of the father's homosexual identity.

The nondisclosing gay father operates at first within a closed awareness context, in which he is aware of his homosexuality but his wife is not. However, as conditions that sustain the closed awareness change, the wife begins to wonder about her husband's behavior. Once her suspicions are aroused, she attempts to confirm them. To prevent her from doing so, the husband uses various tactics, such as lying. If, however, the wife does not believe him, her suspicions are maintained, and she may employ countertactics to elicit the truth. Three outcomes are possible. The wife may finally believe that the father is telling the truth, which again changes the context to one of closed awareness. The wife's suspiciousness may be maintained, which sustains the suspicion awareness context. Or the father may disclose his homosexuality, which changes the context to one of open awareness.

The case of Paul (3/1/78) illustrates the suspicion awareness context. After two years of marriage Paul began having occasional secret homosexual liaisons. Originally he timed them to occur when his wife was out of town or on evenings when he was not expected home early. Thus, his wife's suspicions were not aroused, and a closed awareness context was maintained. Eventually, however, events occurred that caused her to begin to wonder. For example, a gay friend, using his own name, charged some clothes on Paul's account. When the bill came, his wife opened it and asked him who had charged the clothes. Paul lied because he felt that "if I had said yes, this is somebody I know,

that would have been the end of it. She would have suspected. So that was the first inkling that she had that maybe I was not totally straight, even though I did lie" (p. 15). His wife was not satisfied with his explanation, and she became suspicious.

Over time, as Paul's evasive behaviors continued, his wife's suspicions increased, and she began to use countertactics. These consisted of her own detective work to find out if his friends were gay, hiring a private investigator in an attempt to obtain proof of his homosexual activities, and surveilling his apartment after their separation.

Paul now lives with his lover, Olin. His four children, ages 17 to 19 years, visit him regularly, yet he does not disclose to them because

I don't think they can accept it. Or accept me as that. And I have too good a relationship with them now and always have had to want to change it. And I know that it would change. . . . I don't want them to know at all, any more than I want anybody else in my family to know. I don't think the kids could accept it or handle it at this point. . . . I think that they've gotten to the point now that they're older that they respect my privacy. They don't say anything about it, and I'd just as soon keep it that way. I'm not about to say anything about it. . . . I like them to be around Olin. I like Olin to be around them. I'm not gonna rub their faces in it. But perhaps if the time comes when my sons, not my daughters--and I'm closer to my daughters than I am to my sons--that if they say to me, "Look, are you two lovers?" I would probably have to say yes. It'd stick in my throat for awhile, but I'd probably say yes. And then let them handle it from there. . . . I don't think that there's ever gonna be a need for me to say yea or nay. I think first of all that they've figured it out by now and they're gonna let it pass. Because my relationship with them has never changed. The only change has been the day I left the house. (pp. 27-28, 36, 38-39)

Paul does not accept his homosexuality, and he believes that his family would not accept him as a homosexual. Therefore he is more comfortable maintaining a suspicion awareness context than he would be

maintaining an open awareness context. Even though he has to deflect his children's occasional questions, he seems fairly comfortable not disclosing. He believes that his children do know that he is gay, yet he also believes that if he disclosed completely, they would reject him. This may seem contradictory, but it is not contradictory to Paul. He maintains psychological comfort by not disclosing the obvious.

Paul contributes an excellent example of nonintegration by nondisclosure. In fact, he has disclosed his gay identity only to other homosexuals at work. Disclosure to others based upon their sexual orientation is confining and it continues to sustain nonintegration. The assumption that other gays will accept the gay father because he is gay is as fallacious as the assumption that heterosexuals will reject him because of it. As has been shown in this study, acceptance is usually grounded on more substantial data than sexual preference. Disclosure only to other homosexuals also automatically screens out heterosexuals who might become expressive intimates were the gay father to disclose.

Though he will never achieve a converged gay-father identity unless he discloses, this fact does not seem to trouble Paul. He sees his children regularly; they have a warm relationship; his lover and his children like one another; and he and his lover attend family events that include his former wife. Paul believes that disclosing would upset the balance of his relationship with his family. Therefore he does not disclose. Even though both his homosexual and father identities are important to him, he apparently does not want or need to activate both identities simultaneously or to achieve integration.

Much of the stress a gay father experiences by being homosexual is controlled by disclosure. If he experiences considerable stress not disclosing and believes he will be accepted after disclosure, then he discloses to reduce or eliminate the stress. However, the lack of self-acceptance and the fear of rejection may be so overwhelming that to disclose and be known as gay would cause, rather than relieve, stress. Hence as in the case just described, stress is reduced by not disclosing. (It is doubtful that the stress is eliminated since the man knows that others may discover his homosexuality by secondary or accidental means.) Gay fathers who do not disclose their homosexuality, even though both of their identities are central to them, learn to manage two different biographies with considerable ease. It appears that this causes few psychological problems even though integration is not possible to achieve under these circumstances.

Nonintegration by Relinquishing the Father Role

Some men who do not wish to enact both their homosexuality and their father roles choose the former over the latter. These men have minimal commitment to their children, and they give their role as father low priority. They reduce or eliminate role strain by eliminating role relationships (Goode, 1960). Because they are not actively involved in parenting, their father identity is also ill defined. However, this causes no special problems for them since their children mean so little to them anyway.

Randy (3/10/78) exemplifies the gay father who has relinquished his father role. He has not seen his 5- and 6-year-old sons for 3

years; he does not communicate with them; and he reluctantly provides financial support only when his ex-wife requests it. He told me that he does not feel like a father, and that he cannot

hang on to "Oh, I remember how wonderful they were, and I have this burning need to be a father." I don't have a burning need to be a father. . . . It has been so long. I gave up clinging to the idea that some day I would share my life with those children. That's not true, you know. (p. 43)

At present Randy does not appear to be suffering any negative consequences as a result of giving up his father role, since he neither intends nor desires to activate it. He prefers to live as a single gay man, unencumbered by any parental responsibilities. Identity as a father is not central to men who abrogate all responsibility for their children. Hence, integration as a gay father is irrelevant.

Nonintegration by Nondisclosure and
by Relinquishing the Father Role

It is also possible for a man to keep his homosexual identity secret from all but his homosexual friends and to relinquish his fathering responsibilities. Chandler (3/6/78) is such a father. He lives in San Francisco, while his children live in the South. He visits them once a year and writes and phones them at intervals, but they do not participate regularly in his life. Chandler has disclosed his homosexual identity only to a few close gay friends. As he says, "I don't have a need to tell my parents. I don't feel a need to tell anyone. If people ask me, then I will be very honest with them" (p. 33). Though others may suspect that a man is gay, it is not a question that people ask, and Chandler knows that. Concealing a vital element of his personhood is thus a part of Chandler's daily

existence. Even so, he seems comfortable maintaining two distinct and separate identities. He activates his gay identity with his few gay friends, and when he visits his children, he activates his father identity. Chandler uses two techniques to reduce role strain. First, he compartmentalizes his roles so that they never converge. Second, he eliminates close role relationships with his children. Though his two roles never converge, this apparently is not a source of stress to him. There would be considerable stress, however, if his family were to know of his homosexuality. In this instance, role strain is reduced and anxiety is prevented by nonintegration.

Summary

Integration of the gay father's two identities is not necessarily essential to achieve or maintain the man's mental health. The need for integration is highly individualized and depends upon two conditions. The first condition is the degree to which the man's gay world and his father world intersect. Fathers who have child custody or whose children are an important part of their lives have a much greater need for integration than do fathers who rarely participate in parenting. It is much harder to hide one's homosexual identity from persons with whom one is in consistent contact than it is to hide it from persons whom one rarely sees. The second condition is the degree to which the father recognizes the disparity between his gay identity and his father identity and the degree to which he suffers from maintaining the separation between the two. If the gay world and father world frequently

intersect, and the father is disturbed by maintaining the dichotomy, he discloses to his heterosexual and homosexual intimates. He receives mostly integrative sanctions; the contradiction between his two identities is resolved; and integration is achieved. When the gay world and the father world seldom intersect, the need for integration is minimized or absent. This is also the case when the two worlds do intersect but when the father does not feel that any contradiction exists.

Gay fathers who are acutely aware of the dichotomy between their two identities, and who want to disclose to their intimate others to eliminate it, but who cannot do so for fear of rejection or recrimination, suffer stress. Findings from the present study indicate that neither the integrated nor the nonintegrated father appears to suffer mental health problems that are attributable to his socially incongruent identities. It is the partially integrated father who needs the assistance of mental health professionals.

Footnote

¹For an excellent discussion of awareness contexts and the dying patient, see Glaser and Strauss, Awareness of Dying, 1965.

PART V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Every person has multiple identities, and every person enacts multiple roles. These roles are selectively enacted, depending upon the social circumstances. Work roles are enacted at work, parental roles are enacted with children, and lover roles are enacted with lovers. However, each role overlaps other aspects of a person's life. Men discuss their work with their wives, their children with their friends, their love life with people who are not their lovers. Hence, though roles may be enacted in special milieus, the identities congruent with these roles, amalgamated in a single individual, can be enacted at almost any time and in many different social situations.

All persons need others in whom to confide, in whom to find nurturance, support, and acceptance. All actors need confirmation of their acceptability by their interactants. This confirmation strengthens and solidifies the person's sense of self-identity and self-acceptance. Specifically, gay fathers need confirmation of the acceptability of their two identities as congruent and compatible. The present study has examined the interconnected processes whereby gay fathers managed to achieve congruence of identity, in spite of the fact that each identity was unacceptable in each of their counter-macrosciological worlds.

Integrative sanctioning emerged in this study as the basic social process whereby the gay father was able to converge his two identities and ultimately to become acceptable to himself. Integration, the literal or symbolic actualization of both identities in heterosexual and homosexual social circumstances, was achieved by the gay father receiving from intimate others their approval and acceptance of him as both a gay man and a father. Through others' integrative sanctions the father evolved an identity that was noncontradictory both to himself and to others. At the end point of the gay-father career--integration--he could readily activate either or both identities with his intimate others, regardless of their sexual orientation or the social circumstances.

The processes that contribute to the core variable of integrative sanctioning, which moves the father from a state of nonintegration to the integrated state, and the processes that prevent him from becoming integrated have been analytically discussed. The grounded substantive theory discovered in this study gives direction to the achievement of the integration of two identities that are generally thought to be incompatible. However, the theory does not predict in an absolute sense. The concept of integration is highly privatized, and it is probably that no one gay father is totally integrated or totally nonintegrated. Total integration would imply disclosure of both identities to all intimate others and receipt of integrative sanctions from all of them. Total nonintegration would imply that both identities always remain hidden in the father's countersocial milieu. In fact, as has been pointed out, integration is both selective and situational, depending

on the social circumstances, on the intimacy level of the other, and on the type of sanctioning the other provides.

Integrative sanctioning has broad applicability to the world of the gay father. It explains how he can simultaneously activate both of his identities with both heterosexual and homosexual intimates, rather than activating only one or the other identity depending upon the social circumstances. It also helps to explain how the father himself develops an internal sense of self-acceptance by introjecting other people's positive confirmation of himself as a gay father. The present chapter reviews the theory of disclosure and integrative sanctioning and stresses the social-structural and social-psychological processes through which the gay father simultaneously proceeds in order to achieve integration. Partial integration and nonintegration are also described. The applicability of the theory for gay fathers and a broader application of the theory are then discussed. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

The Theory of Integrative Sanctioning

The theory of integrative sanctioning is a set of interrelated concepts applicable to the achievement of acceptance of his gay and father identities by the gay father, and to simultaneous activation of both identities so that integration is achieved. It encompasses three social-psychological processes. The first is the gay father's disclosure of both identities to his significant intimates. The second is the significant intimates' integrative or nonintegrative response to the disclosure. The third is the father's reaction to the intimates

based upon their response. These processes penetrate the social-structural processes of marriage, achieving fatherhood, separation and divorce, and the evolution of a new life-style.

Disclosure and integrative sanctioning occur over time. In early adulthood the gay father is either unaware of or does not accept his homosexuality. Even though he may have had various social and sexual experiences in the homosexual world, he clings to the belief that he can find contentment within the heterosexual nuclear family. But in time he discovers that his sexual drive for men overwhelms his ability to sustain a monogamous heterosexual marriage, and secretive homosexual liaisons usually result.

A variety of homosexual experiences over varying lengths of time are required for the gay father to overturn his feelings or beliefs that homosexuality is immoral and that living his life as a homosexual is inappropriate for him as a viable alternative life-style. With increasing exposure to the gay world, he meets many different homosexuals, some of whom may have been married and fathered children. This exposure gradually enables him to eliminate the disparity between his feelings--that in spite of his sexual attraction for men, homosexuality is immoral--and his behavior--sexual activity with men. This cognitive dissonance is eliminated through two processes. The first is varied experience in the homosexual world. The second is integrative sanctioning as both a gay man and a father by his significant others.

Integrative sanctioning, however, cannot come about unless the gay father discloses both identities to his heterosexual and homosexual intimates. Initially, he is usually nondisclosing, since he is unaware

of or does not accept his homosexuality. Before marriage, however, some gay men partially disclose their homosexuality to their future wives. They do so out of a basic sense of honesty and because they believe that the wife-to-be is tolerant of social variance. Partial disclosure does not fully imply the man's sexual preference for men. It is not, however, a deliberate attempt to deceive. Rather, it is the man's explanation of his homosexuality to the extent that he understands and accepts it at the time. Partial disclosure takes various forms; for example, it may be limited to disclosing only past homosexual experiences, or it may represent the man as bisexual. In any event, partial disclosure is couched in such a way that the man's homosexual predispositions will not interfere with the marital relationship. After marriage, all of the men in the present research eventually began having homosexual liaisons. Men who had partially disclosed before marriage disclosed completely and directly during marriage. Complete disclosure consists of a verbal explanation that the man's sexual orientation is in fact homosexual.

The shape of the marital disruption is strongly influenced by the timing of the gay father's disclosure. Men who disclosed partially before marriage and completely during marriage tended to experience a gradual psychological distancing from their wives followed by a relatively peaceful (albeit emotionally distressing) divorce. It appears that some forewarning softens the blow for the wife, so that she accepts the eventual complete disclosure with less overt difficulty. Men who first disclosed completely during marriage tended to experience an

abrupt and painful separation from their wives who were much less accepting.

Men who completely disclose to their wives for the first time during marriage usually have had few homosexual experiences before or during marriage. Because they lack sociosexual experience in the gay world, their cognitive dissonance is high; they are retaining their introjected negative stereotype of homosexuality. The inability to express themselves freely as gay men creates severe frustration, which is manifested by overt hostility toward their wives and children. Disruption in the family is manifested by sharp conflict between the husband and his wife, and the children may be caught in between. Eventually, these men can no longer tolerate themselves and their behavior, and they disclose completely.

Regardless of whether or not the man discloses partially before marriage, most couples separate and divorce after complete disclosure. It is impossible for most gay men to find self-fulfillment and contentment within the confines of a heterosexual marriage. However, in an attempt to maintain the integrity of the marriage, many wives in the present study provided integrative sanctions. These sanctions gave the man permission to activate his homosexuality and yet remain married. They took the form of verbal and behavioral acceptance, permission giving, and ménages à trois. The effect of these sanctions, however, was to permit the man increased exposure to the gay world, which in turn gradually enabled him to accept himself as gay. The wife's integrative sanctioning helped to reduce her husband's guilt, and this, too, gradually enabled him to place himself in the cognitive category of gay

father. Intellectualizing, in which each spouse read and discussed authoritative literature on homosexuality in order to understand homosexuality better, also indicated the wife's acceptance. Some wives left the household but let the father have custody of the children. Though this rejection of the maternal role indicated rejection of the man as a husband, its ultimate effect was integrative, since it gave him permission to participate freely in both the gay world and the father world.

One couple in the present study remained married. The distinctive characteristics of this relationship were a mutual agreement to a non-monogamous relationship and the development of family rules regarding sexual liaisons. I have used the terms mutual permission giving and rule making to explain at least partially the success of this couple's marriage. Complete disclosure before marriage, a mutual love and respect, and the wife's preference for gay men were probably also contributory factors.

The wives of most men who disclosed completely and for the first time during marriage responded by providing nonintegrative sanctions. This turned the man away from his wife and further motivated him to seek social and sexual satisfaction in the gay world. This in turn increased his exposure and helped him to view homosexuality and homosexuals as positive, thus eventually enabling him to accept himself as both a gay man and a father. Although nonintegrative sanctions by the man's wife may be introjected by the father, causing him to feel ugly and immoral, they do not permanently subvert the process of his self-acceptance as homosexual. Hence, whether the wife sanctions her

husband positively or negatively, the ultimate effect in either case is to increase his exposure to and sociosexual experience in the gay world. By this means his negative homosexual stereotype is inverted into a positive value, cognitive dissonance is eliminated, and the man is able to put himself in the cognitive category of gay father.

By introjecting other people's perceptions of himself as acceptable, the gay father gradually evolves an acceptable self-image. With increasing self-acceptance, he gradually discloses to an increasing number of his significant intimates. These may include his children, parents, and friends. Disclosure may be direct or indirect. Direct disclosure is verbally communicated. Indirect disclosure may take the form of expressing overt affection towards men in other people's presence, or of taking others literally or symbolically into the gay world. Disclosure may also be accidental. Accidental disclosure consists of unintentionally informing others of one's homosexuality, for example, by inadvertently allowing oneself to be seen in gay social settings.

Disclosure, however, depends upon the intimacy level of the other and the other's proximity to the father in his daily life. The more intimate and proximate the other, the more likely the father is to disclose. Only half of the fathers in the present study have disclosed to their parents, for instance, since most parents live at a considerable geographical distance from them. Intergenerational differences may also account for nondisclosure to parents. Disclosure is also directly related to various events in the father's life. Most disclosures do not occur simply because the father wants to be known as a homosexual. Rather, external events arise that are related to his

gay identity and that are important enough to him that they create in him a strong desire to disclose. Under these circumstances nondisclosure becomes painful. Examples of external events that may precipitate disclosure are a marital crisis, the development of a lover relationship, and participation in gay political activities.

Gay fathers must also disclose their father identity to homosexuals. Because the gay world is characterized by independence, transience, and a youth orientation, gay fathers may have difficulty being accepted by other gays, who are not often predisposed to form attachments with men who have parenting responsibilities. During marriage the gay father may use various nondisclosing strategies. He may remove his wedding ring, deny that he is married (and by implication that he is a father), or avoid the topic of marriage and children altogether. However, with increased experience in the gay world he gradually comes to realize that his father identity need not be a barrier to establishing gay relationships of substance. Because of their parenting responsibilities, fathers who have child custody are likely to have more difficulty than others in developing such relationships, however.

Nevertheless, the gay father cannot enact his father role with gays without disclosing his father identity. At no time did any of the fathers in the present study directly deny being a father; they denied their fatherhood only indirectly by denying their marital status. Their father identity was extremely important to most fathers in the present study. None of them were willing to deny their fatherhood to their significant gay intimates. Disclosure of father status was found to be direct (verbal) and indirect. The man disclosed his father

status indirectly by leaving pictures of his children, children's toys, and other similar objects in full view in his household.

Most of the fathers in the present study achieved integration. That is, their feelings of homosexuality were enacted by their homosexual life-style, their behavior being consistent with their feelings, while at the same time they played out their father role. Integration was achieved by two means. First, the gay father's significant others, both heterosexual and homosexual, provided integrative sanctions whereby they gave him permission to be both gay and a father. Second, the father himself accepted both identities as being compatible in themselves and equally congenial to him.

A few fathers remained nonintegrated. These fathers were unable to disclose their homosexuality to their heterosexual intimates, either because they feared rejection, because they did not accept their own homosexuality, or both. Nonintegration requires the man to maintain each of his identities separate in each of his separate social worlds. Though homosexuals may know that he is a father, he cannot include his children (or other heterosexual intimates) in his gay world. Nonintegration was also found to characterize the father who relinquishes his father role, having little or no contact with or responsibility for his children.

Partial integration characterizes the gay father who discloses his homosexuality to some of his heterosexual intimates but not to all of them. He wants to disclose but does not do so for various reasons. In the present study, it was found that the partially integrated gay father wanted to disclose to his children but did not do so for fear that

they would reject him or for fear of secondary disclosure. In the latter instance, the father feared that his children would disclose his gay identity to his former wife, and that she would use the knowledge against him.

The degree to which the gay father experiences mental health problems is determined by two factors. The first is the centrality of each of his two identities to the individual man. The second is the degree to which the man can adjust to living an apparent contradiction. If both identities are central to him, and he has difficulty enacting each identity separately in separate social contexts, then it is essential for him to disclose and to receive integrative sanctions. Otherwise severe internal conflict results. If the father identity is not central to him (the gay identity was central to all of the fathers), or if he has little difficulty living a double existence, then disclosure and integrative sanctions do not appear to be essential, nor does the man seem to experience mental health problems. However, mental health problems do arise when both identities are central, yet the man cannot bring himself to disclose his homosexuality. The desire to be known as the man he knows himself to be, combined with the inability to let that self be known, is intensely distressing. These gay fathers would benefit from mental health nursing intervention.

Implications and Uses of the Theory for Gay Fathers

Implications of the Theory

The theory of integrative sanctioning is grounded in the real world of gay fathers and is thus directly applicable to their circumstances. It speaks to the actual problems of achieving an identity that, though incompatible with the normative expectations of two separate and distinct segments of the population, is acceptable to the gay father himself and to his significant others. It stresses the process of becoming: becoming integrated from the state of a dichotomized identity. Though all of the subjects in the present study were recruited from the white middle class, it is difficult for me to conceive that the theory would not apply to gay fathers in all social strata and of all ethnic backgrounds. Further research is needed, however, to bear this out empirically.

The present study is only a beginning. Further research may identify additional processes and means whereby the gay father achieves compatibility of his dual identity, and it may further extend or delimit the theory of integrative sanctioning. However, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), a given piece of research is brought to a close when the conceptual framework forms a systematic theory; when it states the subject studied in a reasonably accurate form, a form that others can use in studying a similar area; and when the results can be published with confidence. The present study satisfies these requirements.

Uses of the Theory

Gay men in a heterosexual marriage are in the untenable position of being required to act one way, that is, act like heterosexual family men, yet feel another way, that is, feel sexually attracted to men. This incongruency of feelings and behavior is the antithesis of integration. On the basis of findings from the present research, the gay father who discloses his homosexuality to his loved ones will usually obtain their support and goodwill. Yet time and again, the fathers in the present study (and the fathers in the San Francisco Gay Fathers' Group) expressed an intense fear of disclosing their homosexuality for fear of rejection, especially from their children. But, almost always that fear was found to be illusory.

Understanding. This report has been written so that it can be read and understood by gay fathers. It is also intended to be used by professionals other than nurses.

Generality. The concepts described in this research are sufficiently broad that they apply to the subjects under study. They are applicable to gay fathers living in various types of social-structural relationships, and they are also useful over time. Whether a gay father is married, separated, or divorced, lives with a lover, friends, or alone, whether or not he is the custodial parent, and regardless of his own or his children's ages, the theory of integrative sanctioning is applicable.

Application of the Theory for Health Professionals

The theory of integrative sanctioning provides nurses and other health professionals with a basis for helping gay fathers to accept both identities, and to disclose both identities to their intimate others. The two problems are concurrent, and they must be resolved concurrently. As the gay father becomes more self-accepting, he discloses more readily, he receives more integrative sanctions, and these in turn further his self-acceptance. In order to reduce cognitive dissonance, the gay father needs to be counseled regarding the compatibility of the two identities. The counselor should emphasize that the father needs to participate in both worlds. It is also essential to emphasize that gay fathers do not have to choose one role or the other; that both roles can be enacted simultaneously; but that to achieve congruency of roles, the gay father must disclose. Knowing that disclosure rarely results in rejection by significant others will encourage gay fathers who fear being rejected, especially by their children, to disclose. However, the real or not so apparent risks of disclosing must also be considered. The father's ethnic and socioeconomic background, his place of residence, and other factors must all be evaluated. For example, the likelihood of rejection may be greater for ethnic persons of color, for men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, or for men who live in rural regions. Further research is needed, however, in order to bear this out.

Mental health professionals also need to assess the centrality of each identity to the father. If one or the other identity is

determined not to be central, disclosure of that identity may not be essential to the father's mental health. Even so, the counselor needs to explore with the father the problems associated with living with a dichotomized identity. As I have explained, it is the partially integrated gay father who is most in need of mental health assistance. This father must be helped to develop his self-acceptance to the point that he can disclose his homosexuality to all of his significant others.

The present study also suggests that marriage between gay men and heterosexual women need not end in separation and divorce. Health workers need to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and problems of the spousal relationship before they advise either spouse.

Peer support groups can also be extremely valuable in helping the "fledgling" gay father to accept both identities and to disclose them both. During my participation in the Gay Fathers' Group in San Francisco, I have heard many men discuss their fear of being rejected, especially by their children. In most instances, after considerable discussion, the entire group will encourage the man to disclose, since the experienced fathers know that rejection is rare. Without such encouragement and support, many men might never disclose at all. Counseling and mental health centers would be well advised to establish gay-father support groups to provide both professional and peer assistance to such men. To my knowledge, there are no such groups in most communities at present.¹ In order to reach more gay fathers, the Gay Fathers' Group in San Francisco should also make its existence known by publishing its post office box address in local newspapers.

Courses in family health care nursing, family courses for other health professionals, and sociological courses that center on the topic of the family need to present the homosexual family as a viable alternative. Homosexuals need not abandon their desire for children because of their sexual preference. Neither should they have to deny their homosexuality in order to become parents. There is no evidence at present to suggest that homosexuality in and of itself is antithetical to parenthood. It is assumed here that health professionals who work with gay fathers or their spouses have resolved their own conflicts, if any, regarding homosexuality and homosexual parenting. Otherwise their own prejudices may conflict with the assistance needed by the gay father.

Extension to Formal Theory: Broader Implications

From the analysis in this research the theory of integrative sanctioning has been derived which explains the basic processes whereby gay fathers achieve self-acceptance and integration through the acceptance of both identities by their significant heterosexual and homosexual intimates. The theory emerged from the substantive area of gay fathers. However, it may be extended to apply to other groups, the members of which have identities or beliefs that are unacceptable to the population at large or to subcultures within the larger society. Except for lesbian mothers I am unable to conceptualize or identify another group that, like gay fathers, has, and takes pride in, two identities each of which is largely unaccepted in one of the two worlds in which both

identities must be activated. Hence, it is possible that the theory of integrative sanctioning may be extended to apply to the substantive area of homosexual parenting.

The theory of integrative sanctioning can be extended to the general area of patient care. Upon entry into the health care system all persons acquire the identity of patient or client, an identity which, of course, is acceptable to health care personnel. However, the patient may have an identity, such as homosexual (which may become known by means of a sexual history or by other means), that some nurses may find unacceptable. Thus, the patient has one identity which is acceptable and one which is not. Negative sanctioning of the patient as a homosexual will likely interfere with the nurse's role relationship with the patient, which, in turn, will jeopardize the quality of care the patient receives from that nurse.

Nurses must separate their judgments and prejudices from their role relationship--nurse-patient--if they are to provide quality care. Nurses are taught from the outset of their education to "accept the patient as he is." This adage does not imply agreement with the patient's attitudes, beliefs, or behavior but acceptance of the patient as a person is required if "comprehensive nursing care" is to be delivered to all patients. In the case of the homosexual patient, it is not necessary for nurses to sanction homosexuality positively. Rather, it is the nurse's role to meet the gay patient's needs, some of which may relate specifically to his sexual identity. For example, if a homosexual patient is confined to an intensive care unit in which only family are allowed to visit, the patient's lover should be permitted to visit

and should be given the same rights accorded other patients' families. By giving the lover family status the nurse is not approving homosexuality, but rather is meeting the patient's need for his family during a period of crisis. In an instance such as this, the nurse is acting in his/her role relationship with the patient and not on his/her beliefs regarding homosexuality. Nurses who would not allow the homosexual patient's lover the same privileges accorded other patients' families would be acting on his/her judgmental attitudes (negative sanctioning) rather than his/her role relationship to the homosexual patient.²

Patients who are known to be gay by health care givers are integrated into the health care system when their homosexuality is only one part of their total health history and when the service of health care providers is based solely on their role relationship to the patient. Lack of full integration occurs when health care givers allow their negative judgments to interfere with their role relationship with the homosexual client. When this occurs it is likely that the quality of care provided is diminished.

The concept of negative sanctioning interfering with role relationships can be applied in other instances, such as with the unwed mother or the black client. It can be applied to other occupational groups as well, such as to lawyers or to the clergy.

I believe that the theory of integrative sanctioning is relevant to many individuals and groups. However, in order to elevate the theory from the substantive area of gay fathers to a formal theory which has broad applicability, further research involving systematic

comparative analysis of groups to generate core categories and their properties would be required.

Suggestions for Further Research

The present study is only an introduction to the world of the gay father and to the ways in which the theory of integrative sanctioning may be applied. Suggestions for additional research are made in the following recommendations:

1. The present study was conducted in San Francisco, a city which has a tradition for tolerance for social variance, including homosexuality. In order for the theory of integrative sanctioning to be more generalizable to the gay father population, additional studies of gay fathers in other regions of the United States and in cities of various sizes is recommended.

2. It would be fruitful to study gay fathers in lower socioeconomic groups and gay fathers of varied ethnic backgrounds in order to extend or delimit the theory of integrative sanctioning, thus increasing its usefulness.

3. All of the men in the present study chose to attempt a heterosexual life-style by marrying and begetting children. The need to actualize themselves as homosexual caused all but one of these men to separate from their families, and most of them were eventually divorced. Further research is needed to discover the multiple variables that induce the male homosexual to attempt marriage and fatherhood. Identification of these variables might ultimately help to reduce the number of "mixed" marriages, and thus the number of broken homes and

the almost inevitable pain that all parties to such mixed marriages suffer.³

4. One couple in the present study remained happily married even though the husband was overtly homosexual. What little research exists on couples such as these describes their marriages as unsatisfying.⁴ Further research is needed to identify the variables that contribute to a satisfactory marriage between a gay man and a heterosexual or homosexual woman. The larger question might be "What are the variables that contribute to a successful marriage when the husband is gay?"⁵

5. Lesbian mothers probably have a problem of integration similar to that of the gay father. Research in the substantive area of lesbian mothers would further extend or delimit the theory of integrative sanctioning, thus increasing its applicability and its credibility.

6. Three of the fathers in the present study lived with their children and their lovers. These families are not unlike stepparent or blended families, in which only one of the two adults in the household is the biological parent. It would be beneficial to determine whether research on stepparent families is applicable to homosexual families such as these. For example, the findings of Stern (1976) on friending and discipline in stepfather families would probably be applicable to and useful in understanding the coupled gay family.

7. Research which focuses on the substantive area of the wives and children of gay fathers to obtain their opinions of and perspective on the man as a gay father would most likely further refine the theory of integrative sanctioning, and thereby increase its applicability.

8. The theory of integrative sanctioning might be applied to the broad area of sexual variations, such as transsexualism. The theory is probably sufficiently generalizable to be applied in many social conditions where the problem of identity acceptance and integration exists.

Summary

This chapter has summarized the theory of integrative sanctioning as it applies to the gay father. It is clear that gay fathers have difficulty accepting the compatibility of their dual identities of gay and father and that acceptance of the two identities as compatible lies in disclosing both identities and receiving sanctions which have an integrative effect. For the man to put himself in the cognitive category of gay father requires that cognitive dissonance be eliminated whereby there is congruence of feelings and behavior. This occurs only over time whereby the man's experience in both the homosexual world and the father world concurrent with disclosure and integrative sanctions combine to promote both congruence of the two identities and integration. The chapter contains suggestions for the use of this theory by health professionals, and it has included a discussion of the theory's broader implications. Finally, suggestions for further research in areas in which application of the theory may prove fruitful have been proposed.

Footnotes

¹For a list of gay-parent organizations in the United States, write: Growth & Support for Alternative Life Styles, P.O. Box 548, Columbia, Maryland 21045.

²Hospitals and other institutions which establish rules to regulate visitors should take into account the gay client. The meaning of the term "family" must be defined so that it includes persons other than those related by blood or marriage.

³I believe that the advent of the gay-rights movement will result in fewer such marriages as the increasing publicity on homosexuality in general informs young gay men in large and small communities that it is feasible to live as a single homosexual.

⁴See footnote number 3, page 30.

⁵In the San Francisco Bay Area there is a group comprised of married gay men who meet monthly to discuss their common problems and concerns. Many of their wives also meet regularly for the same purpose.

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