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**SENIOR SEMINAR**

SOCL 598, Section 001  
CRN: 10242  
1 Credit Hour  
Fall 2015  
Owens 209  
Wednesday 12:30-1:20

**COURSE GOALS**

The senior seminar is a course that assembles a cohort of sociology majors in their final semester before graduation. The goal is to present students with issues, trends, research, and research methods in contemporary sociology. This course acts as a capstone for the Sociology major. Additionally, this course participates in the **Global Learning Initiative** by its very nature. Many reading have international global orientations. Students will be exposed to some important works in sociology as identified by the sociology faculty. Students will be required to direct a class utilizing a set of readings. The seniors are expected to display the skills acquired in the sociology major and touchstone program, such as communication and critical thinking. Such capabilities are essential for success in a variety of work settings and acquiring advanced degrees. Students will be exposed to the professional attitudes that we demand of all our graduates, such as respect, responsibility and common courtesy. Students will be exposed to career and graduate opportunities. For example we have had FBI representatives, graduate school directors, and alumni inform the students about opportunities after graduation. Students will experience the administration of program evaluation instruments. Such feedback is used to strengthen our program.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES IN SOCL 598**

Successful students in SOCL 598 will:

Majors who complete the sociology program will be well prepared for continued graduate study in the social sciences or appropriate employment (guest alumni speakers, mock interviews, resume writing, mentor interviews and social networking).

Majors will develop the ability to communicate effectively (both orally and written) about the basic concepts and theoretical premises of sociology (group presentation, written final)
Majors will be able to apply social theories to frame social reality. (group presentation and analysis of Paris Burning).

Majors will develop an understanding of how they present themselves to others (mock interviews, group presentations).

Majors will “develop the analytical tools to understand an ever-expanding body of knowledge and students will develop insights...and a critical examination of existing social arrangements (dynamic of class seminar discussing articles).

DEPARTMENTAL GOALS

This course supports our departmental mission statement as students will develop the Analytical tools to understand and ever-expanding body of knowledge about the dynamic of social relationships, the nature of power and influence in complex societies, and the roles of age, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other social phenomena that affect viewpoints and life chances.

http://www.winthrop.edu/cas/sociologyanthropology/default.aspx?id=10128

SOCL 598 AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL COMPETENCIES ADDRESSED IN THE TOUCHSTONE PROGRAM

SOCL 598 helps students make progress towards the following University Level Competencies:

Competency 1: Winthrop graduates think critically and solve problems.

Method: Students will carefully read assigned materials, and will complete assignments that encourage higher level comprehension.

Assessment: Students will be graded on writing assignments and tests that challenge both understanding and application of terms, concepts, and theories.

Competency 2: Winthrop graduates are personally and socially responsible.

Method: Students will be prepared for class by reading assigned materials, arriving to class on time, and participating in course discussions and lectures.
Assessment. Participation in discussions and timely arrivals will influence students’ grades. Professionalism is one component that their presentations are graded.

**Competency 3: Winthrop graduates understand the interconnected nature of the world and the time in which they live.**

Method: Students will learn to identify multiple perspectives on sociology and will be able to apply them to diverse situations in our social world.

Assessment: Along with a comprehensive final examination, students will also complete writing assignments that examine sociology in application.

**Competency 4: Winthrop graduates communicate effectively.**

Method: Students will read and discuss the research relating to sociology.

Assessment: Students will be graded on writing assignments, participation in class, as well as leading the class in discussion. Many times the students will see videos of how they appear as presenters and listeners.

http://www.winthrop.edu/academic-affairs/secondary.aspx?id=15731

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

*All readings that do not have a web address listed below them will be available on Blackboard.*

**Classroom Standards**

1. **Be respectful** of all individuals in the classroom whether or not you agree with them. This is essential for creating an environment in which all students feel comfortable expressing themselves.
2. **Cite ideas** that are not your own. Please come to me with any questions on how to cite.
3. **Type all assignments** unless otherwise specified.
4. **Be on time.** Consistent lateness will significantly reduce your participation grade.
5. **Do the readings** and be prepared to discuss them. Evidence to the contrary will adversely affect your participation/preparedness grade.
6. **Do not be rude.** Ringing cell phones, private conversations, sleeping, studying for another course, and text messaging are inappropriate in class. Such actions will adversely affect your participation/preparedness grade.

7. **Be professional.** Failure to give a presentation on your assigned day will result in a zero unless you have a documented emergency. You will still have to complete the presentation however to receive credit for the course.

**GRADING AND CLASS POLICIES**

I expect students to take the exams and provide presentations on the dates scheduled and during the allotted time period. Make-up exams are available under dire circumstances (EX: student is hospitalized.) If you will not be at the exam during its scheduled time you must notify me in advance, we will then determine an appropriate course of action. I reserve the right to give a make-up exam that is different from the original exam.

*All dates given, and material covered can be changed at the instructor’s discretion, therefore it is your job to keep informed via attendance, and getting make up material from friends in class.*

Take pride in your own work and personal preparation for exams. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. Any student caught cheating on exams or plagiarizing their paper will receive a final course grade of “F.”

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- All member (in assigned groups) will direct a discussion of a set of readings for one session.

- Attendance, if you miss more than four classes, you will fail the course. Less will significantly impact your grade.

- All assignments, participation expectations and evaluation instruments must be completed for a passing grade

**Class Leadership (40pts):**

You will direct a discussion of a set of readings for the entire 50 minute class. Your presentation will display your ability to think critically about the readings assigned. A grading matrix (that we will create together) will be available on my website/blackboard.

A group evaluation form needs to be completed by all group members before I will allocate a grade. Each attendee will grade you project. Your classmates will grade your project. I will average their scores with my own to determine grades.
What do I want in the presentations?

1) I want to see that you have read and understand the readings.

2) I want to see that you can summarize the readings for the class and structure an interesting class discussion.

An interesting class discussion can critique the articles (theoretically and methodologically), can tell the implications of the articles for current events, can compare and contrast the pieces, can expand upon them through film, speaker or other artistic means. This is your opportunity to teach, I want you to create an informed and dynamic presentation. I want you to get the class involved.

**Participation and Preparedness (20pts):**

If you miss more than four classes, you will fail the course. Less will significantly impact your grade. All assignments, participation expectations and evaluation instruments must be completed for a passing grade. I expect students to read the selections and participate in all presentations. If you do not provide concrete evidence through informed class involvement in the group presentations, you will not receive a passing grade for the course. The seriousness that you show in evaluating your classmates' presentation will also be considered here. I or the presenter reserves the right to give pop quizzes to access if readings are being read. Performance on these tests will enter into my evaluation of "informed" class involvement. If you have to miss a speaker, I need to know why. If you are late, if you leave early, if your cell phone rings, or you display other rude behaviors such as talking when others are talking, then you may have points subtracted from your total points. I also expect that a formal apology will be made before I or fellow presenters return to the instruction. Chronic or severe acute violation may result (at my discretion) in the allocation of an "N" or "F" for the course.

**Final Exam (30pts):**

The final exam will be a several general essay questions that relate to the assigned readings and an application to the film. I will evaluate critical thinking skills.

**Departmental Assessments (Pass/Fail):**

All students will be required to participate in measurements of departmental assessment. Students who do not participate will receive a “Fail” and have 10 points deducted from their grade.

**Informational Interview (5pts):**
Students are responsible for calling and interviewing a professional in their area of career interest. Further information will be provided in class.
Mock Interview (5pts):

Unlike the informational interviewer, where you do the interviewing, this time, you will be on
the end of interviewee. In this interview, you will be evaluated on a scale of 1-5 across various
indicators. Your scores on these indicators will be averaged and this point value will be added to
your final exam grade.

5 – Excellent: Would excel in a job interview

4 – Good: Just a few minor corrections

3 – Average: Nothing outstanding, but not bad

2 – Below Average: Needs improvement

1 – Poor: Needs considerable attention

0 – Not Acceptable: Poses a serious problem if not addressed

COURSE GRADES

A = 90-100
B+ = 87-89
B = 80-86
C+ = 77-79
C = 70-76
D+ = 67-69
D = 60-66
F = 59 and under

COURSE SCHEDULE

8/26 Week 1:

- Syllabus & Expectations
- Informed Consent and Questionnaire

9/9 - Week 3: Career Speaker- Tom Injaychock  
Career Service: Resume & Linkedin Overview  
KINARD 216

9/16 - Week 4: Sociological Imagination (Class Leadership #1)  
C. Wright Mills.  
“The Promise of the Sociological Imagination”

Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels. “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (pgs. 11-32)

http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=s2iEeCJAlsC&oi=fnd&pg=PA12&dq=++Karl+Marx+%26+Friedrich+Engels.+%22Manifesto+of+the+Communist+Party%22&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=Jv7wq7vftg&sig=clSgXzwG2iydvpEjINs_P2OtiSE#v=onepage&q=y=false

9/23- Week 5: Social Construction of Reality and of Identity (Class Leadership #2)  
Jeffery Victor. “The Social Dynamics of a Rumor-Panic” (pgs. 27-56) (reader)


9/30-Week 6 Guest Speaker: Alumni Dr. Matthew Phillips. Dr. Matthew Phillips is a criminologist who teaches courses in Drugs, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System, Research Methods, Intelligence Analysis and Terrorism at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Prior to joining the faculty at UNC Charlotte, Dr. Phillips served as an analyst and methodologist for the US intelligence community

10/7- Week 7: Guest Career Speaker: Jonathan Gilbert
Fort Mill Police Department
Career & Practicums Opportunities

10/14 Week 8: The Construction of Social Structures (Class Leadership #3)

George Herbert Mead. "The Self" (pgs. 135-191)
%22The+%22&hl=en&ei=Uh50TNSaMsL78AbxKCyBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=res
ult&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false

Arluke, Arnold. “Managing Emotions in a Animal Shelter” (READER)-

10/21-Week 9: Mock Interviews-Presentation Career Services

10/28 Week 10: Sexuality (Class Leadership #4)

Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy and Clyde Martin. “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male” "
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447861/

Robert Michael, et al. "Sex in America" (READER)-
J.M. Carrier "Homosexual Behavior in Cross Cultural Perspective" (READER)-

11/4 – week12 John Elite Alumni, Talent Acquisition at Wyndham Capital Mortgage.
John had had several jobs that have involved hiring undergraduates

11/11-8 - Week 11 & 12: Paris Burning Film
• Informational and Mock interviews DUE (11/24 by 5:00 pm))

12/2-Week 13 Focus Group Kinard 306

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, December 9, 11:30AM
Students with Disabilities

Winthrop University is dedicated to providing access to education. If you have a disability and require specific accommodations to complete this course, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 323-3290. Once you have your official notice of accommodations from the Office of Disability Services, please inform me as early as possible in the semester.

Phone and Texting Policy

There will be absolutely no usage of phones or mp3 players in this class. If your phone rings, do not answer it. Everyone forgets every now and then so, first time offenders will not be penalized. Multiple time offenders will be asked to leave the class. Students who answer phone calls will be asked to leave class for the day. Likewise, students caught texting during class will also be asked to leave. If a person is caught texting a second time they will have 10 points taken off of their FINAL GRADE. Failure to comply with these regulations will result in failure in the class. Should you have a personal/family emergency and need your phone to remain active, talk with me before class and we will come to an arrangement.

Student code of conduct

As noted in the Student Conduct Code: “Responsibility for good conduct rests with students as adult individuals.” Additionally my attendance policy is the same as is listed in the student handbook. Both the attendance policy and the policy on student academic misconduct are outlined in the “Student Conduct Code Academic Misconduct Policy” in the online Student Handbook:

http://www2.winthrop.edu/studentaffairs/handbook/StudentHandbook.pdf

Attendance Policy

The attendance policy is for this class is the same as the University policy: If a student’s absences in a course total 25 percent or more of the class meetings for the course, the student will receive a grade of N if the student withdraws from the course before the withdrawal deadline; after that date, unless warranted by documented extenuating circumstances as described in the previous section, a grade of F or U shall be assigned.

http://www.winthrop.edu/majors/default.aspx?id=9242&ekmensel=db97ad6c_546_548_9242_1

Winthrop’s Academic Success Center

Winthrop’s Academic Success Center is a free resource for all undergraduate students seeking to perform their best academically. The ASC offers a variety of personalized and structured resources that help students become effective and efficient learners. The services available to students are as follows: peer tutoring, academic skill development (test taking strategies, time
management counseling, and study techniques), group and individual study spaces, and academic coaching. The ASC is located in University College on the first floor of Dinkins Hall, Suite 106. Please contact the ASC at 803-323-3929 or success@winthrop.edu. For more information on ASC services, please visit www.winthrop.edu/success

The Office of Victims Assistance Syllabus Statement

The Office of Victims Assistance (OVA) provides services to survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking as well as educational programming to prevent these crimes from occurring. The staff assists all survivors, regardless of when they were victimized in obtaining counseling, medical care, housing options, legal prosecution, and more. In addition, the OVA helps students access support services for academic problems resulting from victimization. The OVA is located in 204 Crawford and can be reached at (803) 323-2206. In the case of an after-hours emergency, please call Campus Police at (803)323-3333, or the local rape crisis center, Safe Passage, at their 24-hour hot-line, (803)329-2800.

For more information please visit: http://www.winthrop.edu/victimsassistance/
Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct: What ordinary men are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live; their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.

Underlying this sense of being trapped are seemingly impersonal changes in the very structure of continent-wide societies. The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.

Yet men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, or biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them.

Surely it is no wonder. In what period have so many men been so totally exposed at so fast a pace to such earthquakes of change? That Americans have not known such catastrophic changes as have the men and women of other societies is due to...
historical facts that are now quickly becoming "merely history." The history that now affects every man is world history. Within this scene and this period, in the course of a single generation, one-sixth of mankind is transformed from all that is feudal and backward into all that is modern, advanced, and fearful. Political colonies are freed; new and less visible forms of imperialism installed. Revolutions occur; men feel the intimate grip of new kinds of authority. Totalitarian societies rise, and are smashed to bits—or succeed fabulously. After two centuries of ascendency, capitalism is shown up as only one way to make society into an industrial apparatus. After two centuries of hope, even formal democracy is restricted to a quite small portion of mankind. Everywhere in the underdeveloped world, ancient ways of life are broken up and vague expectations become urgent demands. Everywhere in the overdeveloped world, the means of authority and of violence become total in scope and bureaucratic in form. Humanity itself now lies before us, the supernation at either pole concentrating its most coordinated and massive efforts upon the preparation of World War Three.

The very shaping of history now outpaces the ability of men to orient themselves in accordance with cherished values. And which values? Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis. Is it any wonder that ordinary men feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted? That they cannot understand the meaning of their epoch for their own lives? That—in defense of selfhood—they become morally insensible, trying to remain altogether private men? Is it any wonder that they come to be possessed by a sense of the trap?

It is not only information that they need—in this Age of Fact, information often dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacities to assimilate it. It is not only the skills of reason that they need—although their struggles to acquire these often exhaust their limited moral energy.

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality, I am going to contend, that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination.

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.

The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one. We do not know the limits of man's capacities for supreme effort or willing degradation, for agony or glee, for pleasurable brutality or the sweetness of reason. But in our time we have come to know that the limits of "human nature" are frighteningly broad. We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society, that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.
The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst. It is characteristic of Herbert Spencer—turgid, polysyllabic, comprehensive; of E. A. Ross—graceful, muckraking, upright; of August Comte and Emile Durkheim; of the intricate and subtle Karl Mannheim. It is the quality of all that is intellectually excellent in Karl Marx; it is the clue to Thorstein Veblen's brilliant and ironic insight, to Joseph Schumpeter's many-sided constructions of reality; it is the basis of the psychological sweep of W. E. H. Lecky no less than of the profundity and clarity of Max Weber. And it is the signal of what is best in contemporary studies of man and society.

No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey. Whatever the specific problems of the classic social analysts, however limited or however broad the features of social reality they have examined, those who have been imaginatively aware of the promise of their work have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how do they relate to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?

2. Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanisms by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves? And this period—what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?

3. What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of “human nature” are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for “human nature” of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

Whether the point of interest is a great power state or a minor literary mood, a family, a prison, a creed—these are the kinds of questions the best social analysts have asked. They are the intellectual pivots of classic studies of man in society—and they are questions inevitably raised by any mind possessing the sociological imagination. For that imagination is the capacity to shift from one perspective to another—from the political to the psychological; from examination of a single family to comparative assessment of the national budgets of the world; from the theological school to the military establishment; from considerations of an oil industry to studies of contemporary poetry. It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. Back of its use there is always the urge to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being.

That, in brief, is why it is by means of the sociological imagination that men now hope to grasp what is going on in the world, and to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society. In large part, contemporary man's self-conscious view of himself as at least an outsider, if not a permanent stranger, rests upon an absorbed realization of social relativity and of the transformative power of history. The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of this self-consciousness. By its use men whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar.
Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summations, cohesive assessments, comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again. They acquire a new way of thinking, they experience a transvaluation of values: In a word, by their reflection and by their sensibility, they realize the cultural meaning of the social sciences.

Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure." This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science.

Troubles occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others; they have to do with his self and with those limited areas of social life of which he is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, the statement and the resolution of troubles properly lie within the individual as a biographical entity and within the scope of this immediate milieu—the social setting that is directly open to his personal experience and to some extent his willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: Values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieux into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life. An issue is a public matter: Some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it. This debate is often without focus if only because it is the very nature of an issue, unlike even widespread trouble, that it cannot very well be defined in terms of the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary men. An issue, in fact, often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements, and often too it involves what Marxists call "contradictions" or "antagonisms."

In these terms, consider unemployment. When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals.

Consider war. The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honor; how to make money out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieux and within it to survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; with what types of men it throws up into command; with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganized irresponsibility of a world of nation-states.

Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them.

Or consider the metropolis—the horrible, beautiful, ugly, magnificent sprawl of the great city. For many upper-class people, the personal
solution to "the problem of the city" is to have an apartment with private garage under it in the heart of the city and, forty miles out, a house by Henry Hill, garden by Garrett Eckbo, on a hundred acres of private land. In these two controlled environments—with a small staff at each end and a private helicopter connection—most people could solve many of the problems of personal milieus caused by the facts of the city. But all this, however splendid, does not solve the public issues that the structural fact of the city poses. What should be done with this wonderful monstrosity? Break it up into scattered units, combining residence and work? Refurbish it as it stands? Or, after evacuation, dynamite it and build new cities according to new plans in new places? What should those plans be? And who is to decide and to accomplish whatever choice is made? These are structural issues; to confront them and to solve them requires us to consider political and economic issues that affect innumerable milieus.

Insofar as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. Insofar as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless—with or without psychiatric aid—to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposes upon him. Insofar as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution. Insofar as the overdeveloped megalopolis and the overdeveloped automobile are built-in features of the overdeveloped society, the issues of urban living will not be solved by personal ingenuity and private wealth.

What we experience in various and specific milieus, I have noted, is often caused by structural changes. Accordingly, to understand the changes of many personal milieus we are required to look beyond them. And the number and variety of such structural changes increase as the institutions within which we live become more embracing and more intricately connected with one another. To be aware of the idea of social structure and to use it with sensibility is to be capable of tracing such linkages among a great variety of milieus. To be able to do that is to possess the sociological imagination.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Mills argues that personal troubles can be understood in terms of large-scale patterns that extend beyond individual experience and are part of society and history. Identify an issue that you think would be a personal trouble for an individual, and then identify the societal influences that you think impinge on the individual's experience. (Hint: you might think of such things as divorce, violence, or school failure.)

2. C. Wright Mills identifies the central task of sociology to be grasping the relationships between history and biography. To do this, identify two large-scale historical events that you think have most shaped your biography.

Now ask someone of a different generation that same question. What does this tell you about how sociologists think about the relationship between individuals and society?

3. Sociologists sometimes distinguish between micro-level and macro-level theories. Both study social influences on human lives. Take a topic (such as terrorism, divorce, or illness) and, using the perspective that Mills articulates, how might someone using a micro-theoretical approach study this topic? How would that differ from how someone using a macro-level theoretical approach would study the same topic?
INTERNET RESOURCES

Suggested Web URLs for Further Study

http://www.ac.wwu.edu/~stephan/timeline.html
This Web site contains a basic timeline of important people and papers in sociology beginning from its basis in philosophy.

http://www.sociweb.com/~markbl/sociweb/
Independent guide to Sociological Resources on the web.

InfoTrac College Edition

You can find further relevant readings on the World Wide Web at
http://sociology.wadsworth.com

Virtual Society

For further information on this subject including links to relevant Web sites, go to the Wadsworth Sociology homepage at
http://sociology.wadsworth.com
Chapter Three
The Social Dynamics of a Rumor-Panic

From the dawn of civilization onwards, crowds have always undergone the influence of illusions. . . . The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy illusions is always their victim.

Gustave Le Bon, The Crowd

The Community Panic of Friday the Thirteenth
In the spring of 1988, rumors about a dangerous Satanic cult spread throughout the rural areas of western New York, northwestern Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio (see Figure 1). The rumor stories made claims about secret ritual meetings, the killing of cats, dogs, and other animals, and the drinking of animal blood, and they predicted the imminent kidnapping and sacrifice of a blond, blue-eyed virgin. The stories focussed upon specific, local circumstances from town to town, yet they carried remarkably similar symbolic content. These rumors began to appear in different, distant locations at about the same time during mid-winter, and evolved to a peak of emotional extreme in a rumor-panic on Friday, the thirteenth of May.

The panic was driven by fearful and angry behavior, in
Locations shown are places where rumor activity was most intense according to newspaper reports. The shaded area on the map is the area where a saturation rumor panic occurred during May 1988.

Figure 1: The 1988 Rumor Panic in Jamestown, New York.
response to a threat which people perceived to exist concealed in their communities. There were abundant examples of such behavior in Jamestown, New York, where I collected most of my research information. Many parents held their children home from school out of fear that they might be kidnapped by "the cult," as they called the threat. Absences from elementary school were three to four times greater than average, according to school attendance records. Over one hundred cars showed up at a wooded park, rumored to be a Satanic cult ritual meeting site, where they were stopped by police barricades awaiting them. Some of the cars had weapons in them, such as hunting guns, knives, and clubs. At another location rumored to be a "cult" meeting site, an unused factory warehouse, about $4,000 damage was done to the musical equipment belonging to bands which practiced there and to the interior walls of the building. Several teenagers rumored to be members of the supposed "cult," perhaps because of their countercultural appearance, were victims of anonymous death threats and other types of telephone harassment. Groups of young thugs with baseball bats were seen wondering around in the downtown area during the evening hours.

The police, the youth bureau, and school officials received hundreds of telephone calls reporting bizarre incidents attributed to "the cult." People reported seeing things which did not exist, such as dead animals hanging from lamp-posts or robed figures in ritual meetings. They reported having advance knowledge of planned events which did not then occur, such as the kidnapping of particular persons. A great many people traded bits and pieces of these rumor stories on that day during passing encounters with friends and neighbors, in stores while shopping, over the telephone, at community meetings, and especially at school. The Jamestown police spent hundreds of man-hours of work investigating these allegations that day and during the preceding weeks, without finding anything to verify the great numbers of rumor stories.

The rumor-panic was a rather curious event for several reasons. A great many people were emotionally over-reacting to a perceived threat, yet there was no concrete evidence of any threat in their immediate experience. How could this happen?
On the surface of it, the behavior of many of the people might mistakenly be regarded as having been "irrational"; at least in the sense of their having no practical reason for emotionally over-reacting to the situation. There was something which seemed to rob people of their intellectual individuality, in the sense that so many people, thousands in Jamestown proper and hundreds of thousands over the entire rumor region, seemed to be bereft of their critical faculties and personal judgment.

A rumor-panic is a rather rare outburst of dramatic collective behavior. We have something more to learn from these transient social phenomena than the foibles of human behavior. An understanding of the inner social dynamics of rumor-panics teaches us about the limits of individuality and critical intellect in the face of strong social forces. Few rumor-panics have been studied in any depth, and fewer still have been studied by behavioral scientists on the scene as they emerged.

The Research Questions
I began my research immediately after the day of the rumor-panic with several fundamental questions in mind. These questions were directed toward three basic aspects of the phenomena. First, I wanted to understand the rumor development process. How did the rumor stories about a dangerous Satanic cult get started? What social forces led the rumors to promote a fear with such emotional intensity? Second, I wanted to understand the rumor consensus. How did the rumor stories gain widespread credibility in the absence of any visible evidence to confirm people's fears? In other words, why was the perceived threat taken so seriously by so many people with such diverse personal conceptions of reality? In order to answer this question, I needed to understand the symbolic cultural meanings embedded in the rumor stories, meanings which could join people together in a shared explanation of what was happening to them. Third, I wanted to understand what "hidden" sources of shared social stresses could account for fears evoked by the rumor stories. This last question was prompted by my knowledge that collective behavior of such intensity usually arises from commonly shared anxieties which are reflected as metaphors in the rumor story imagery.
The Research Methods

In pursuing my research, I interviewed a wide variety of community authorities who would normally be aware of events in the community, including police investigators, school officials, youth group social workers, ministers, psychotherapists, and newspaper reporters. The Jamestown Police Department was exceptionally helpful in providing me with non-confidential information regarding their investigations of the many different rumor stories. Students from one of my courses conducted interviews with forty-nine local teenagers, parents, and informal authority figures, such as teachers and ministers. They conducted these interviews immediately after the panic erupted, while people’s memories were still fresh in their minds and before they could be distorted by later circumstances. Two students did independent research studies for me. One of them interviewed a sample of thirty teenagers from the local high school to investigate whether conflicts between teenagers in different subcultures functioned to promote the rumors. The other student, who was a minister, interviewed ten fundamentalist ministers in depth concerning their beliefs about the rumor stories and about any actions they took in response.

In addition, I conducted telephone interviews with reporters from newspapers in towns distant from Jamestown, where I learned that similar rumor-panics had taken place simultaneously with the one in Jamestown. My first surprising finding was that very similar rumor stories and community panics had taken place at the same time, over a rather large section of the country.

How a Rumor-Panic Develops: The Rumor Process In One Community

In order to trace the rumor stories back to some point of origin, I decided to construct a chronology of events and rumors leading up to the Friday the thirteenth panic in Jamestown. I collected these reports from the interviews. This enabled me to have a broad picture of relevant circumstances happening in Jamestown over many months. These events were circumstances
which were associated with the evolution of the changing rumor stories and the eventual community panic.

This chronology makes clear one important finding of my research. Rumor-panics are the dramatic end product of a gradual evolution of symbolic meanings embedded as metaphors in rumor stories. Rumor-panics are not sudden outbursts of contagious hysteria, as much popular wisdom and some past sociological theories assert.

**Chronology of Jamestown Area Events**

**Oct. 31, 1987**

*Event.* A Halloween party takes place at the “warehouse,” an empty factory which is used by rock bands to practice their music. About sixty people attend, some of whom wear Halloween costumes, including those of witches and wizards. This becomes the subject of gossip among teenagers who are not invited to attend. Many of the teenagers who attend have a “punk” style of hair and clothing, which is something new and is seen as strange. (Note: One of these bands, “The 10,000 Maniacs,” later became internationally well known among youth.)

*Gossip.* Gossip circulated among many high school teenagers that the “punk” kids were using drugs and having sex orgies at the “warehouse.”

**Mid-Winter, 1987**

*Rumors.* Rumors circulate in Jamestown High School about supposed teenage suicide attempts in the area.

**Nov. 19, 1987**

*Event.* The “Geraldo” TV show offers a national television program titled: “Satanic Cults and Children.” The program features the plight of parents whose children have been victimized by purported Satanic cults.

In his introductory remarks, Geraldo makes the following sensational and ominous claims: “Esti-
mates are that there are over one million Satanists in this country. The majority of them are linked in a highly organized, very secretive network. From small towns to large cities, they have attracted police and FBI attention to their Satanic ritual child abuse, child pornography, and grizzly Satanic murders. The odds are that this is happening in your town."

Jan. 4, 1988

Event. Several worried parents call a Catholic priest about their concerns that Satanic rituals may be taking place at the "warehouse." They also express their concerns about alleged teenage suicide attempts and about the strange "dark clothing" of the "punk" kids. The parents ask the priest to "find out what is going on" at the warehouse. The priest calls the police and school officials to relate the parents' concerns. A few of them refer to the "Geraldo" show as evidence for the importance of their concern.

Jan. 1988

Rumors. Rumors circulate widely, asserting that the police are investigating "a list" of high school students for some unknown reason. The "list" supposedly includes all of the "punk" teenagers who go to the "warehouse." (Several parents go to the police to inquire why their teenage children are being investigated.)

Jan. 12, 1988

Event. 1) An article appears in the Jamestown newspaper, about the nationally reported Tommy Sullivan case. The first line of the article states: "A youth obsessed with Satanism committed suicide after stabbing his mother to death . . . . officials said." (See Chapter Eight for information about the Tommy Sullivan case.)

Event. 2) On the same day, the Jamestown police receive the first telephone call claiming that "punk" teenagers are involved in Satanism at the "warehouse." Over the next five months, the police receive hundreds of similar telephone calls.
Feb. 1988  

Rumors. Rumors circulate widely that the “punk” kids are involved in Satanism at the “warehouse.”

Early Mar. 1988  

Rumors. The rumor intensity increases as more parents express a worried search for information about “what is going on” among teenagers in the community.

Late Mar. 1988  

Event. A fundamentalist minister writes in his church newsletter, which circulates widely to other churches, that Satanic practices among local teenagers should be taken very seriously.

Early Apr. 1988  

Rumors. Rumors circulate widely about the ritual killing of cats and about secret Satanist ritual meetings.

Event. The Jamestown Youth Bureau begins to receive telephone calls from worried parents about the rumors that local teenagers are engaged in Satanic practices. These calls increase greatly over the next weeks.

Apr. 16, 1988  

Event. The Humane Society begins to receive telephone calls claiming that cats are being killed. Over the next four weeks, similar calls are received every day in increasing numbers. However, no evidence is found of any deliberately killed cats or dogs.

Apr. 16–17, 1988  

Event. 1) Two out-of-town religious “experts” on Satanism speak at a local fundamentalist church, where they were invited to speak to teenagers in response to concerns of several parents about teenage Satanists in the area. One of these “experts” claims to have been a former member of a Satanic cult.

Event. 2) The two “experts” on Satanism are taken by some church youth to be shown a purported ritual meeting site, in a wooded area called “the hundred acre lot.” While there, they are stopped by police, who are also there investigating the rumored “ritual site.”
Event. 3) The Jamestown police investigate the rumored “ritual site.” The site consists of a campfire, surrounded by trees which are spray painted with the words: “Get Stoned,” “High Times,” and “ZZ RATT,” and symbols including a flower and a five-pointed star. (Note: High Times is a drug-oriented magazine and ZZ RATT is the name of a heavy metal rock band.)

Apr. 18, 1988

Event. College custodians go to the “hundred acre lot,” in back of Jamestown Community College, after learning about the police investigation. There, they find twenty-five pamphlets in plastic envelopes around the alleged “ritual site.” Some people who learn about the pamphlets assert that they were left there by the Satanic cult as propaganda. (These pamphlets were actually cartoon gospel tracts, published by a fundamentalist press and having an anti-Satanist message.)

Mid-Apr. 1988

Rumors. A rumor spreads that the police found evidence of a Satanic cult ritual meeting site in the college’s “hundred acre lot.”

Apr. 26, 1988

Event. The Jamestown Youth Bureau hosts a meeting between some community authorities and some of the “punk” teenagers, in order to open lines of communication. The adults are representatives from the police, schools, human service agencies, and youth clubs. The teenagers tell the adults that they feel threatened by the growing hysteria in the community, and the police tell the youth to report any potentially violent harassment to the police. (Some “punk” youth had been victims of threats and physical assaults.)

Apr. 30, 1988

Event. An article appears in the newspaper of nearby Warren, Pennsylvania, about potential violence among students at Youngsville High School (in Pennsylvania), between supposed Devil worshippers and others students. The article cites rumors about threats made with a knife and gun on
a school bus. The story is retold by word of mouth in Jamestown.

**Early May 1988**

*Rumors.* Rumor stories of various threats multiply greatly. Their transmission becomes intensely active in conversations and one version or another is heard by most people in the community. These threat rumors include stories about some kind of impending violence planned by “the cult” or by some kind of vigilante group against members of “the cult.” The most common rumor is that “the cult” plans to kidnap and sacrifice a blond, blue-eyed virgin on Friday the thirteenth of May.

**May 10, 1988**

*Event.* The Jamestown Police Department and Youth Bureau offer to let teenagers who fear harassment because of the rumor threats have a party in the community room of the City Hall on Friday the thirteenth, under protection of the police.

**May 12, 1988**

*Event.* An article appears in the Jamestown newspaper reporting about the rumors and citing the police as saying that no evidence has been found for any of them.8 (This article was misinterpreted by many people to mean that the rumors actually had credibility, and that the police “were hiding something, because they didn’t want to cause a panic.”

**May 13, 1988**

*Community Panic.* A rumor-panic occurs in Jamestown and much of the surrounding area. Afterwards, rumor activity rapidly declines.

**May 12–15, 1988**

*Event.* Articles appear in newspapers across western New York, northwestern Pennsylvania, and northeastern Ohio, reporting very similar rumor-panics in rural areas. All of these news reports focus upon their own local areas, with no mention that similar rumors and panics are spreading over a very large region of the country.
The Origin of the Rumors
The most common question that people have when rumors circulate, and especially when they cause a panic, is, Who or what caused the rumors to start? However, specialists in the study of rumors don't regard this question as being a central concern. The reason is that most rumors are not simply started by any person or group, nor are they a product of any single incident, no matter how distorted perceptions of that incident may be. A great many rumors arise out of impersonal social dynamics.

Jean-Noel Kapferer, a French social psychologist specialized in the study of rumors, has written the most extensive compilation of research about rumors in his book, Rumors: Uses, Interpretations and Images (1990). Kapferer suggests that there are three kinds of rumor origins among those rumors which are not deliberately provoked by some person or group. Some rumors have their origin in some kind of ambiguous event which affects many people in a stressful situation, such as a war, ethnic conflict, or a natural catastrophe like an earthquake. A second kind of rumor arises out of common, ongoing activity, when many people begin to take notice of some facts or details to which they didn't previously pay much attention. For example, people living near a nuclear power plant may take notice of the numbers of people dying from cancer in the area and speculate in conversations, that the plant has been leaking radioactivity for a long time. The combined anxieties and uncertainties about cancer and nuclear power may be enough to generate persistent rumor stories.

The third kind of rumor origin is that which gave rise to the rumor process leading to the rumor-panic about dangerous Satanic cults. Some rumors have their origin in a contemporary (or "urban") legend—one of a number of stories which continually circulate in societies and arise here or there, in one form or another, when conditions are ripe. These conditions are ones which combine ambiguous incidents with shared anxieties, which in turn become translated into the symbolism embedded in the legend. The collective behavior process is similar to what used to happened when anti-Semitic rumors about Jews kid-
napping gentile children for religious sacrifice circulated in Europe and caused violent pogroms during times of social and economic stress. The anti-Semitic rumors arose from centuries long anti-Semitic legend stories.

The rumors in Jamestown about a dangerous Satanic cult and the resultant rumor-panic could not have originated in Jamestown; similar rumors arose simultaneously over a vast area. Moreover, the Satanic cult rumors could not even have had their origin anywhere in the region at the time they began to circulate. The reason is that similar Satanic cult rumors had been circulating in many rural areas of the country and giving rise to other community panics since as far back as 1983 (as we will see in the next chapter).

Nevertheless, the chronology is valuable because it points to several "catalysts" which helped to activate the Satanic cult rumor stories. One of these "catalysts" was the "Geraldo" show on November 19, 1987, and another was the widely reported news accounts of the Tommy Sullivan case. These mass media events reached an audience across the whole area simultaneously, but they did not cause the rumors. Instead, they provided symbolic imagery which shaped the direction of the rumor process. In a sense, the Satanic cult legend simply "piggybacked" onto the evolving stream of pre-existing rumor stories. Those pre-existing rumors about teenage suicide, teenagers with strange clothes, and clandestine gatherings at "the warehouse" paradoxically arose from parental anxieties (in response to the gossip of teenagers) and promoted even more anxieties about what was going on in the community.

Anxiety and Belief in Rumors
There is much research evidence gained from experiments which shows that fear-provoking rumors both satisfy the need to reduce uncertainty and provoke even more anxiety. The rumors about a dangerous Satanic cult served the convenient function of focussing rising collective anxieties upon a seemingly specific threat, even though that threat was a purely imaginary one. When people suffer from anxiety due to stressful situations in their lives, they seek explanations for that anxiety.
If the reasons for people's anxiety is not quite clear to them, they are particularly likely to grasp at explanations in rumor stories which suggest that something specific in their environment is threatening their security.

The most famous rumor-panic, the "War of the Worlds" panic on October 30, 1938, illustrates these principles about anxiety and rumor in a dramatic real life situation. A brief sketch of the facts of the incident goes as follows. On the eve of Halloween in 1938, Orson Wells narrated an adaptation of H. G. Wells's story, "War of the Worlds," on a radio broadcast over the CBS network. The adaptation was set in the present and was presented as if an invasion of Martians was actually taking place, this impression being created by the device of dramatized news bulletins during the hour-long program. It is estimated that as many as a million people panicked in response to their misperception of the radio show. (Many people tuned in late and didn't hear the initial disclaimer that the program was only a dramatization.) The panic was most pronounced in the mid-Atlantic states, near the fictitious first landing site of the Martians in New Jersey. In New Jersey, many families fled to their basements to avoid poison gas attacks. In Philadelphia, women and children ran screaming into the streets. Highways in the area were jammed with fleeing motorists. Hospitals were crowded with people seeking help, some of whom were in shock.

The panic was not simply an automatic response to the radio program, no matter how dramatic it might have been. The Martian invasion story, presented in the form of on-the-scene reports, certainly provoked fear, but it also built upon pre-existing anxieties. Real events in Europe, with the rising aggression of Nazi Germany, seemed to be leading to a second world war and, as a result, many people were worried that another major war was imminent. (The Munich Pact had just been reached on September 30, 1938.) In actuality, of course, events were building up to the Second World War. It started less than a year later. It is also important to recognize that the metaphorical similarity between a "War of the Worlds" and a world war made the Martian invasion story more believable.
The possibility of war with Martians was a creation of pure imagination, but possibility of war with the Nazis was no illusion.

The Cause of Panic
Most past studies of panics have explained episodes of collective panic in terms of psychiatric mental illness notions. Because the behavior appears to be so out of the ordinary, or abnormal, in the course of everyday life, these incidents are simply regarded as being “irrational.” People are seen as being caught up in some kind of temporary mental disorder which is spread, like a disease, through some process of “contagion.” Therefore, rumor-panics have usually been labelled incidents of “mass hysteria.” However, I have deliberately avoided such mental illness terminology. In recent years, sociologists have moved toward the conclusion that the “mass hysteria” explanation of collective panics is inadequate, because it simply doesn’t fit the sociological knowledge of group behavior.11

During the Jamestown rumor-panic, people in the community acted quite rationally to a threat that they believed to exist in the community. When parents held their children home from school, especially girls who were blond, they were acting quite reasonably in response to a threat they thought “might” possibly exist. Their perceptions of a threat arose from distortions of real events and from supposed “facts” heard from a “friend-of-a-friend,” but their fears did not arise out of any kind of internal mental disorder. There are many times for all of us, when we misperceive what is happening, when what we believe is simply unfounded in the verifiable facts of the situation and we act in ways that are inappropriate to the situation. It sometimes happens in our work relationships, for example, after we learn some distressing “office rumor” through a friend-of-a-friend.

If we shift our focus of attention away from the extraordinary behavior and expression of emotion to the beliefs held by people, the cause of panic is easier to comprehend. The panic was a reaction to the rumor stories. Threat rumors became assimilated into local gossip in a process of collective storytelling. Research on threat rumors, as previously noted, indi-
cates that they have the paradoxical effect of satisfying the need for information in matters of uncertainty and also of increasing people's collective anxiety.\textsuperscript{12} The rumor process in Jamestown gradually increased community tensions, like a generator accelerating energy.

A central social mechanism which escalated the fear was a vicious cycle of distorted communication between parents and their children. Children brought home from school bits and pieces of schoolchildren's gossip about suicide attempts, secret rituals, and cat killings. These stories served to aggravate parental worries about dangerous influences upon their children. The parents then talked about the stories with other parents, who confirmed the worries of parents by telling them that they also heard versions of the same stories. Back home again, the parents expressed their now exaggerated fears to their children, who then took their parents' fears as evidence that the stories were indeed true and not mere gossip.

Collectively held anxiety alone cannot produce a community panic. The anxiety has to be transformed into fears of something specific.\textsuperscript{13} That catalyst was the mass media stories about dangerous Satanism, in the "Geraldo" show, and newspaper reports about the Sullivan case. The fears of a dangerous Satanic cult became increasingly focused in rumor storytelling, until finally another event functioned to trigger off the panic. As silly as it might seem, that precipitating event was Friday the thirteenth, encumbered with all its ominous symbolism. As if it were a poetic metaphor, the ominous thirteenth fit perfectly into the evolving collective story-telling about dark dangers of the occult. (Not surprisingly, the horror movie, \textit{Friday, the Thirteenth}, was playing in movie theaters throughout the region. It seems that movie agents play close attention to the symbolic meanings attached to particular days.)

The community panic served a useful social function. It enabled the rising collective anxieties to be released in a kind of shared catharsis, a purge of growing community tensions. It didn't really matter that no dangerous Satanists were found and no confrontation of "the cult" and vigilantes occurred. The rumor-panic functioned much like a nightmare, which gives
symbolic expression and emotional release to underlying tensions in a person’s life. In the days after the rumor-panic, people could laugh at all the silliness, enjoy trading stories about what had happened that day, and go on with the normal activities of everyday life.\(^{14}\)

**Why So Many People Believe Bizarre Rumors: The Rumor Consensus**

The simultaneously shared belief in a frightening story among thousands of people cannot be explained on the basis of personality characteristics of individuals, such as personal motives like the desire to impress others with bits of interesting gossip, or personality traits like gullibility. The thousands of people who took seriously the threat of a dangerous Satanic cult had a multitude of differing individual motives, personal beliefs about reality, and personality traits. A consensus of belief, or shared belief between thousands of people, requires some kind of unifying bond between people. The most basic bond between human beings consists of symbols (usually verbal ones) which people come to share. Communication is the link between people while the content of shared symbols is the bond, whether between husbands and wives in marital relations, or in work organizations, or in communities. Therefore, in order to understand why so many people can believe a frightening rumor story, we must first understand the process of communication and then the contents of that communication.

One young woman’s experience illustrates how the communication process operated during the rumor-panic in Jamestown. Marcie was a psychology major at Jamestown Community College and seemed to me to be a very rational and reasonable person. She also happened to be a very attractive, blond, blue-eyed nineteen-year-old. On the morning of Friday the thirteenth, Marcie overheard people at the office where she worked discussing the rumor that “the cult” was planning to kidnap and sacrifice a blond, blue-eyed virgin. Her initial reaction was one of skeptical amusement. Later that day, at
home, her mother repeated the same rumor story to her, angry that dangerous criminals could be on the loose in the community. The story was no longer silly and amusing gossip for Marcie. She began to seek more information and called some of her girlfriends. They too had heard the story about "the cult." Marcie then became increasingly anxious and tense. When her parents went out for the evening, Marcie asked to know the whereabouts of the family gun ("just in case something happened"). Later that evening, as her fears mounted to near panic, Marcie called me to ask if I had any facts about the rumor stories. When I answered the telephone, she was so ashamed by her unsubstantiated fears, that she immediately hung up.

Social Forces Which Influence Belief in Rumors
Marcie's reactions illustrate several principles found in research about people's belief in rumors. The communication of the rumor story from a source of authority, her mother, who took the story seriously, lent credibility to the rumor for Marcie. The consistent repetition of the same story, from clients and friends, increased its credibility. The rumor story was personally quite relevant for Marcie, because she happened to be blond and young. (I found, for example, that the rumor did not provoke much concern among Black people in the town because it was obviously not as relevant for them. On the other hand, I found evidence that it was particularly relevant for parents of young girls. In one case, for example, a mother dyed her blond daughter's hair brown.)

In addition, it is important to note that Marcie held only an ambivalent belief in the rumor story. Most people's belief in frightening rumor stories is a kind of "half-belief." I found over and over in my interviews, the aphorisms "Where there is smoke, there must be fire" and "It is better to be safe than sorry." It is an attitude of suspended skepticism that is most commonly held by people who take threat rumors seriously, rather than certainty of belief.15

In summary, the rumor stories about a dangerous Satanic cult were believed by so many people for several reasons. 1) The rumors were conveyed by some sources of authority, including
parents, school teachers, and ministers. 2) The rumors were repeated over and over from numerous different sources. Social psychologists call this process "the consensual validation of reality," which means that people seek to validate their beliefs about reality by using what most others say is "true" as a guide to confirm their own perceptions of reality. 3) In stressful social conditions, many people readily believe that bizarre tragedies can easily happen. A key reason why bizarre threat rumors are so often taken seriously is that many people feel that it is unwise to disregard the rumors, just in case there is some truth in them. ("Where there is smoke, there must be fire.") 4) Finally, the rumors were relevant, in some ways, for a great many people. (Why the Satanic cult stories were relevant is a question we will examine in some detail shortly.)

Understanding the social process of belief formation during rumors also provides insight into the reasons so many millions of Americans are caught up in the national Satanism scare.

Communication Networks and Belief in Rumors
What accounts for the difference between people who heard the rumors and believed them and people who did not take them seriously at all?

Research on rumors has found that the rumors travel through particular communication networks and not others. People in receptive communication networks are those people most likely to believe the rumor stories, or at least, to regard them most seriously.16

In order to identify some of the receptive communication networks through which the rumor stories travelled, I tried to locate the school neighborhoods in Jamestown, where there was greatest reaction to the rumor stories. Parents of elementary school children in small towns commonly participate in neighborhood communication networks of similar parents, in which a common topic of shared concern is children. I reasoned that the parents who took the kidnapping rumor most seriously were also those who were most likely to keep their children home from school.
Therefore, I checked the statistics on the increased absences from schools on Friday the thirteenth at the six different elementary schools in Jamestown. Some of the elementary schools had a much higher percentage of children absent than did other schools. The highest percentage of school absences was about four times greater than the average (of previous weeks) and the lowest percentage was about two times greater than average. When I placed a map of the elementary school districts over a map of census neighborhoods, I was able to determine the socio-economic characteristics of those neighborhoods where the rumor stories resulted in greater or lesser school absences.

The parents who were most likely to hold their children home from school came from the neighborhoods disproportionately composed of families with low incomes and little education. In social class terms, these neighborhoods had high proportions of poor working class families, families which were struggling to get by financially and whose members held jobs that require little skill.

These economically stressed parents are those parents for whom it is most difficult to hold young children home from school. Most of them can’t easily afford to take the day off from work to care for their children. Many of these less prosperous parents are single-parent mothers, who desperately need each day’s pay. Therefore, these parents must have taken very seriously indeed, the possibility that their children might be kidnapped by “the cult.”

What these findings indicate is that Satanic cult rumors are most likely to be believed and circulated by parents who are economically stressed and inadequately educated. In Jamestown, these parents are blue-collar workers, whose jobs are fast disappearing, and whose incomes have not kept up with inflation over the last twenty years.

Some past research on rumor-panics has found that poorly educated people are more likely to uncritically accept and believe in bizarre threat rumors than are well educated people.17 The greater skepticism about threat rumors among people with greater education is partly a product of having more
accurate information about a broad range of matters. However, poorly educated people are skeptical about rumors if they happen to have special knowledge about the matter of the rumor story content. In the case of the cattle mutilation rumors, for example, experienced ranchers were found to be less likely to believe the bizarre explanations of the cattle deaths than were people who knew little about raising cattle. 18

More important to a person's skepticism about tales told by a "friend-of-a-friend" is the acquisition of critical thinking skills. Poorly educated people, for example, may have been more likely to believe Satanic cult rumors that Satanist teenagers drank cat's blood in rituals or that Satanic rituals give people some kind of special, occult power.

My research did not directly test this question, but my interviews led me to the conclusion that an inadequate education did cause many people to uncritically believe the Satanic cult stories, even though some well educated people, such as school teachers, also accepted the rumors without much skepticism.

Another communication network I investigated was that of fundamentalist Protestants. These people are disproportionately drawn from the same socio-economic level of less prosperous, working class people. As previously noted, one of my adult students, who was a Methodist minister, interviewed a sample of ten fundamentalist ministers. 19 Eight of the ministers believed that Satanic cults were "common" in the United States and these eight also believed that Satanic cults were operating in the Jamestown area. What they meant by a "Satanic cult" ranged from a group of teenagers engaged in Satanic practices to a secret organization with as many as 150 people in it in the local area.

Six of the ministers reported that they had responded to the Satanic cult rumors in some active, public way, but only in the context of their own congregations. These responses included: organizing a special prayer meeting, giving a sermon about Satanism, showing a videotape of a "Geraldo" show about Satanism to members of their congregation, writing about their
concerns regarding Satanism in their church newsletter, organizing a youth group meeting concerning Satanism, and inviting special out-of-town "experts" on Satanism to speak to their congregations. Even if it was not the personal intent of the ministers to do so, these activities lent credibility to the rumor stories about a dangerous Satanic cult.

However, all the ministers indicated that they were simply responding to the concerns brought to them by members of their congregations. They were seeking ways of serving the needs of their congregations. Some of the ministers even mentioned that they felt that some members of their congregations were over-reacting to the rumors.

This information indicates that the grass roots communication networks of Protestant fundamentalists are highly receptive to belief in Satanic cult rumors and highly active in transmitting them, at least between their co-religionists.²⁰

**The Underlying Sources of Shared Stress**

Past research suggests that rumors usually arise in groups of people who are experiencing anxiety due to some source of stress they share.²¹ We also know from past studies of rumors that suddenly increased economic stress has very commonly been a source of threat rumors which blame scapegoats for life's problems. The key is to find rapid changes in many people's lives which cause misfortune and frustration.

Rapid Economic Decline

Economic stress has increased sharply in small town and rural areas of the United States since the late 1970s. According to research published by the Population Reference Bureau in 1988:

... the poverty rate for the 54 million Americans who live in rural areas has climbed to 18 percent—50 percent higher than in urban areas. By 1986, one out of every five young rural
families was living below the poverty line. . . . Almost one-third (32 percent) of rural families headed by someone between the ages 18 to 29 were poor in 1986, up from 19 percent in 1979. It is important to realize that this new rural poverty falls particularly hard upon young parents with children, many of whom have inadequate educations (high school or less) to find decent jobs. These parents are precisely the ones who were most likely to take the Satanic cult rumors seriously and communicate them to others.

The region where the rumor-panic took place is part of the economically declining “rust belt,” where industries that used to pay good blue-collar wages are rapidly disappearing. Much of the employment in western New York and northwestern Pennsylvania was in small manufacturing companies which no longer exist. Comparatively little of it was in agriculture, so the economic problems of this region are not due to the disappearance of the family farm.

The extent of rapid economic deterioration is evident in regional economic studies. One such study of the “southern tier” counties of New York done in 1988 indicates the speed of the economic decline in the area. It found that:

1) The per capita personal income in the region dropped from 74% to 70% of the state average, between 1976 and 1984.
2) The number of people in the region receiving public assistance almost doubled between 1974 and 1985.
3) Chautauqua County [in which Jamestown is located] lost about 9% of its work force between 1979 and 1987, because of its lack of adequate job opportunities.

County economic studies indicate that the area is losing well-paid manufacturing jobs very rapidly. It is true that many of these jobs are being replaced by so-called “service jobs” (like those at new fast food restaurants), but those jobs offered only about half the average salary of the skilled manufacturing jobs lost. The meaning of this change, on the personal level, is that many young, poorly educated blue-collar parents can’t find the kind of jobs which offered their own parents at least a comfortable living. Moreover, many older adults have lost well-paid jobs
and now have to work at much lower wages. As a result, many young parents and some older adults are very frustrated and angry. This is the foundation for the widespread, free-flowing anxiety in the region.

The Breakdown of the Family

Economic stress is a common cause of family problems. Therefore, it is not surprising that an additional source of stress over the region where the rumor-panic took place is the increasing breakdown of cohesive family bonds. The family has been the central source of security, stability, and continuity in people’s lives, in traditionalistic small town and rural areas of the country. It was a mutual-help and problem-solving group, which people could rely upon for emotional support and financial assistance. No longer. Over the past twenty years, small town and rural families have experienced a rapidly increasing rate of disintegration. The pressure of economic stress, on top of changing sex roles, has caused increasing marital conflict and divorce, increasing parent-child conflict, more single-mother parenting, and the increasing departure of youth seeking jobs in distant places. In addition, problems which used to be primarily ones of urban areas, such as teenage drug abuse and unwed motherhood, have battered stable family relationships.

Data from Chautauqua County’s Department of Social Services, for example, provides evidence of rapidly increasing stress upon family relationships. Since the early 1980s, there has been a substantial increase in the caseload of children’s services, including that for child abuse, foster care, juvenile delinquency programs, and institutionalized youth. The extent of divorce is indicated by data from the Jamestown Public Schools. As of March 1986, 43 percent of the children in the city’s high school were not living with both of their natural parents.

It is not possible to prove that sharply increased economic and family stress formed the foundation of anxiety in people’s lives which gave rise to the Satanic cult rumors. However, in the light of past research on threat rumors and scapegoating ru-
mors, it is reasonable to conclude that it is the shared source of social stress.

Interpreting the Hidden Meanings in Rumors: Rumors as Metaphors
Now we can return to the question: Why were the seemingly bizarre threat stories about Satanism “relevant” (meaningful) to the lives of so many thousands of different individuals? In order to find answers to this question, we need to recognize that there are metaphorical meanings “hidden” in rumor stories beyond any literal meaning they hold. Rumor stories need to be translated in order for us to understand their more powerful meanings.

In his survey of research on rumors, Jean-Noel Kapferer puts the principle this way:

Behind its apparent content, a rumor bears a second message. It is the latter that gives intense emotional satisfaction as the rumor circulates. In fact, we essentially spread hidden messages of which we are unaware.²²

Rumors need to be interpreted for their symbolic meanings, much like myths, legends, folk tales, and poetry. However, the symbolic interpretation of persistent rumors is a tricky task. It is necessary to seek the symbolic meanings of rumors in the real-life social context of a particular culture in particular social conditions.²³ It is also necessary to recognize that there may be different frames of reference for rumors having different kinds of content. For example, rumors about contaminated foods in restaurants need to be interpreted using a different frame of reference than rumors about strange monsters in the forest. It may be quite misleading to seek universal symbolic meanings in rumors, that is, meanings which apply for all times and places. Finally, it is also important to recognize that complex rumors can have several levels of symbolic meaning, so that there may
be several different but equally valid interpretations of rumor metaphors.29

The Collaborative Story-Telling Process
If we follow the analogy of comparing threat rumors and rumor-panics with nightmares, we find an appropriate framework for interpreting the Satanic cult rumors. Many psychologists believe that nightmares give symbolic expression to underlying sources of anxiety in a person’s life. These anxieties are most often ones that arise from problems that a person is trying to solve but can’t. In a sense, nightmares are problem-solving explorations of thought. Threat rumors, such as the Satanic cult rumors, can be interpreted as being a collaborative symbolic expression of people’s shared anxieties about some threat to their well-being and their attempt to seek a solution to the problems causing those anxieties. Therefore, in interpreting the symbolic meanings hidden in the Satanic cult rumors, we need to identify shared cultural symbols (of a particular time and place) which refer to actual threats to people’s well-being.

We need to see rumors as being a kind of collaborative story-telling process which constantly evolves rather than as being a fixed narrative. Therefore, when interpreting these rumors, we need to find the overall meaning in the changing flow of story-telling development.

Rumors of Teenage Suicide
The rumors about a dangerous Satanic cult built upon pre-existing rumors about teenage suicide. I found this to be true in Jamestown and in many other communities in the region.30 Stories about teenage suicide seem to reflect the anxieties of parents about uncertain and dangerous “outside” influences upon the minds of their adolescent children. However, beyond this, the rumors can be interpreted as cultural metaphors for the loss of the family’s ability to protect its children. In American society today, rumors of teenage suicide may be interpreted as omens for the failure of families to provide a protective shield against a dangerous world outside of the
family, a failure to be a haven in a heartless world. These rumors arise not only from collective worries, but from collective guilt.

Rumors about Killing Cats
The rumors which followed and built upon those of teenage suicide concerned stories about the killing of cats at secret ritual meetings. These rumors added another level of symbolic meanings to the evolving metaphor.

Why did these rumors concern the killing of cats, rather than dogs, or perhaps chickens? Euro-American folklore associates cats, especially black ones, with the practice of witchcraft. In medieval Europe, cats were often burnt during times of witch hunts. Cats are symbols of black magic and symbolic omens of dangerous “evils.” Even today, black cats remain symbols of “magical” events during Halloween celebrations.

However, there is a deeper meaning. Rumor stories about the killing of cats at secret rituals are metaphors for imminent danger from sources of “evil.” The killing of cats is an omen.

Rumors about Kidnapping
Rumors about kidnapping are a persistent tradition in folklore. They circulate and recirculate, generation after generation, in local “urban legends” in ever new variation. There are persistent stories about the kidnapping of children at shopping malls, at entertainment parks, and in school parking lots. These rumors are symbols for parental fears for the safety of their children. Kidnapping rumors serve a useful socialization function. They communicate a message that all parents want children to learn: “Beware of strangers; don’t talk to them; don’t accept rides from them.”

In addition, kidnapping rumors are metaphors for parental worries about their children’s future in a society which is perceived to be unsafe for children. By extension, they are also symbols for worries about our children’s future and the future in general.

Rumors about the Ritual Murder of a Blond Virgin
The rumor about the imminent kidnapping and ritual sacrifice of a blond, blue-eyed virgin emerged over the whole region. It has also and after interpre dark-eye answer. Since an been a sity in folklo

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has also been present in many Satanic cult rumor-panics before and after the one studied here. As such, its symbolism is a key to interpreting Satanic cult rumors.

Why do these particular kidnapping stories feature a blond, blue-eyed virgin, rather than, for example, a dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty, or perhaps a sexually promiscuous girl? The answer lies in the symbolism of the blond-haired, virgin girl. Since ancient times in European cultures, the blond virgin has been a symbol of innocence, purity, and rare beauty. It is found in folklore stories and in folk ballads.

At a deeper level, the blond virgin is a symbol for people’s cherished ideals. Stories about the kidnapping and murder of a blond virgin are metaphors for attacks upon our most cherished traditional values. Such attacks arise only from the opposite of innocence and purity, from that which is most “evil.” These rumors are parables about evil forces in our society. The rumor metaphor bespeaks this collective complaint: “Our most cherished values are in danger from mysterious forces of evil.”

Rumors about Dangerous Satanic Cults

The Satanic cult metaphor functioned as a leitmotif throughout the evolution of the emerging rumor. It tied together the collaborative story-telling, so that the sub-themes of the story made sense as a whole. This metaphor is meaningful primarily in the cultural context of American society in recent decades and possibly would not be in many other contemporary societies. This is so because of the widespread American concern about new religious “cults” which symbolically “kidnap” children away from their parents’ influence and because belief in a supernatural Satan is more common among Americans than among people in most other modern societies.31

The metaphor of a “Satanic cult” combines two powerful symbols: a cult and Satan. When most Americans use the word “cult,” they don’t do so in its technical sociological or anthropological sense, as simply a new religious group which is distinctively different from previous religious groups in a society. Instead, when people label a group a “cult,” they mean to
denote that it is a dangerous, manipulative, secretive, conspiratorial group. Moreover, a cult is seen as a heresy, a threat to decent, traditional cultural values.

Satan is an ancient symbol in Western tradition for powerful forces which work for evil. Satan is a symbol for forces which conspire against the legitimate authority of God and work for the destruction of God’s moral order. On a deeper level, Satan is a collective symbol for evil forces working toward the destruction of the current moral order of a society. Satan is a symbol for threats to people’s consensually accepted norms, values, and ideals which regulate stable relationships between people in a society. Threat rumors about Satanic cults are, therefore, metaphors for a dangerous heresy which threatens the legitimate moral order of American society, and which is causing the destruction of traditional American values.

There is another level of symbolic meaning which needs to be recognized in these rumors of Satanism. Satan is also a symbol for the loss of faith. It is Satan who conspires to tempt individuals to reject God and God’s moral order. In the current cultural context of American society, rumors about Satanism are metaphors for fears about loss of faith in the traditional institutions and authorities of American society.

This interpretation fits the situation in American society today. There is abundant research evidence for the increasing “loss of faith” by Americans in their institutions and authorities since the 1960s. The decline of faith and confidence in the ability of the institutions of American society to deal with people’s problems is evident in the attitudes that American’s hold toward the political system, toward business, toward education, and even toward organized religion.

When these rumor stories are interpreted together as a whole, they offer an emotionally powerful message in metaphorical form. Now, it can be understood why the Satanic cult rumors were meaningful and relevant to so many thousands of people. Their hidden meaning conveys the complaint: “The moral order of our society is being threatened by mysterious and powerful evil forces, and we are losing faith in the ability of our institutions and authorities to deal with the threat.” When
many people are experiencing economic decline and family breakdown, this message expresses precisely how they feel as their world is falling apart.

I may be quite wrong, but it seems to me that these stories about Satanism, which circulate in rumors, claims, and allegations, are no trivial matter. I believe that they are "omens" of deep-seated problems in American society. Much like nightmares, they have something important to tell us.

**Symptoms of a Moral Crisis**

Satanic cult rumors are symptoms of anxieties deeper than fantasy worries about secret, conspiratorial kidnappers and murderers. These rumors are collaborative messages in metaphorical form, which speak of a moral crisis. That moral crisis, as people perceive it, involves a loss of faith in the moral order of American society, a perception of the rapid decline in traditional moral values. People are saying, in essence, that "our world is falling apart, because all things good and decent are under attack by evil forces beyond our control."

This metaphor arises out of concrete sources of shared social stress in rural and small town areas of the country, areas which manifest particularly high rates of economic decline and family disintegration. The social stress is most intense for poorly educated, blue-collar workers, whose jobs are rapidly disappearing and whose families are disintegrating. Economically stressed blue-collar workers are those people who are most likely to believe the Satanic cult rumors. They are also those people who have held most uncritically to traditional American cultural values, such as the ideal of hard work, the ideal of unuestioning patriotism, the ideal of religion as a force for morality in society, and the ideal of the family as the central source of stability in life.

It has been common in the history of American culture for socio-economic tensions to become translated into moral-religious ideology, rather than to be expressed directly in terms of some purely economic ideology, as is more commonly the
case in European societies. In a culture which blames financial difficulties on individual personality traits rather than impersonal social forces, the translation of problems of the "public sphere" of life (economics, politics) into problems of the "private sphere" of life (religion, morality, family relations) should not be surprising. Nor is it surprising that a major component in the informal communication network active in the dissemination of Satanic cult rumors is that of fundamentalist Protestants. The fundamentalist Protestant component is disproportionately composed of economically stressed, poorly educated blue-collar workers. They hold most tightly to traditional American cultural values which are affirmed in fundamentalist religious ideology.

Rumors, allegations, and claims about Satanism may also be a symptom of an emerging moral crisis in American society as a whole, as increasing numbers of people experience the effects of economic stress and family disintegration. If the economic decline of America accelerates as more and more well-paid blue-collar jobs disappear, it is likely that people will fantasize more conspiratorial threats and seek to find more scapegoats for their anxieties.
31
Managing Emotions in an Animal Shelter
Arnold Arluke

Social structures endure because one generation transmits to the next the symbols, classification systems, meanings, and rules that structure action, interaction, and social life. Each subsequent generation consequently engages in recurrent patterns of action and interaction that reproduce those social structures. They seldom perfectly replicate social structures, but alter them in various ways that sometimes lead to profound restructuring over time. Even such imperfect replication of social structures is not guaranteed but subject to what Herbert Blumer called “the play and fate of meaning.” Yet, social structures are more or less enduring thanks to processes of socialization.

For example, the medical students discussed by Smith and Kleinman in an earlier selection eventually reproduced the affectively neutral culture and social structure of modern medicine. Their teachers and training at medical school subtly but effectively transmitted feeling rules and emotion management strategies that encouraged them to do so. They learned how to control their emotions and, thereby, how to control and distance themselves from their patients. That is, they learned how to reproduce physicians’ authority over patients and the conventional structure of the physician-patient relationship.

This selection examines another instance of how emotional socialization promotes the reproduction of social structure, in this case a specific social institution. It concerns a Humane Society shelter where euthanasia of animals was and is routine. As Arluke observes, people in Western societies have inconsistent and often conflicting attitudes toward animals. On the one hand, we consider at least some sentient creatures who deserve affection and care. On the other hand, we consider others, even of the same species, as utilitarian objects to be used as we see fit. Arluke shows how such conflicting meanings caused new workers at the shelter emotional difficulties. Kinds of animals that they had previously learned to love, care for, and protect were being routinely killed, often with their involvement. Yet, similar to medical students, they learned emotion management and interpretive strategies that relieved their emotional discomfort and convinced them of the nobility of their gruesome tasks. This socialization process produced a new generation of workers who would reproduce the social institution of the animal “kill shelter.”

We may be more similar to these kill shelter workers than we might first recognize. Our work often requires us to do things that we find morally troubling and emotionally disturbing. However, we usually learn ways of excusing what we do that calm our emotions. Like the “kill shelter” workers, we learn how to live with all the little murders that we commit as part of our jobs, convincing ourselves that they are necessary and perhaps even noble. The reproduction of social structures requires sacrifices, and most of us learn to make them with hardly a thought and only a twinge of emotion.

From the sociologist’s perspective, what is most interesting in the study of conflicts in the contemporary treatment of animals is not to point out that such conflicts exist or to debate the assumptions that underlie them—a task more ably served by philosophers—but to better understand what it is about modern society that makes it possible to shower animals with affection as sentient creatures while simultaneously maltreating or killing them as utilitarian objects. How is it that a conflict that should require a very difficult balancing of significant values has become something that many people live with comfortably? Indeed, they may not even be aware that others may perceive their actions as inconsistent. How is it that instead of questioning the propriety of their conflicts, many don’t even consider the ethical blindfolds?
As with any cultural contradiction, these attitudes are built into the normative order, itself perpetuated by institutions that provide ways out of contradictions by supplying myths to bridge them and techniques to assuage troubled feelings.

Humane and scientific institutions, for example, must teach newcomers in shelters and laboratories to suspend their prior, ordinary or commonsense thinking about the use and meaning of animals and adopt a different set of assumptions that may be inconsistent with these prior views. The assumptions are not themselves proved but rather structure and form the field upon which the activity plays out its life. Typically, these assumptions are transmitted to nascent practitioners of a discipline, along with relevant empirical facts and skills, as indisputable truths, not as debatable assumptions. They must come to accept the premise of the institution—often that it is necessary to kill animals—and get on with the business of the institution. But exactly how do they get on with this business?

In addition to learning to think differently about the proper fate of animals in institutions, workers must also learn to feel differently about them in that situation. Uncomfortable feelings may be experienced by newcomers even if the premise of the institution is accepted at an intellectual level. Although institutions will, no doubt, equip newcomers with rules and resources for managing unwanted emotions, researchers have not examined how such emotion management strategies actually work and the extent to which they eliminate uncomfortable feelings. In the absence of such research, it is generally assumed that newcomers learn ways to distance themselves from their acts and lessen their guilt. These devices are thought to prevent any attachment to and empathy for animals (Schleifer 1985) and to make killing "a reflex, virtually devoid of emotional content" (Serpell 1986: 152).

To examine these assumptions, I conducted ethnographic research over a seven-month period in a "kill-shelter" serving a major metropolitan area. Such a case study seemed warranted, given the sensitivity of the topic under study. I became immersed in this site, spending approximately 75 hours in direct observation of all facets of shelter work and life, including euthanasia of animals and the training of workers to do it. Also, interviews were conducted with the entire staff of sixteen people, many formally and at length on tape, about euthanasia and related aspects of shelter work.

The Newcomer's Problem

Euthanasia posed a substantial emotional challenge to most novice shelter workers. People seeking work at the shelter typically regarded themselves as "animal people" or "animal lovers" and recounted lifelong histories of keeping pets, collecting animals, nursing strays, and working in zoos, pet stores, veterinarian practices, and even animal research laboratories. They came wanting to "work with animals" and expecting to spend much of their time having hands-on contact with animals in a setting where others shared the same high priority they placed on human-animal interaction. The prospect of having to kill animals seemed incompatible with this self-conception.

When first applying for their jobs, some shelter workers did not even know that euthanasia was carried out at the shelter. To address this possible misconception, applicants were asked how they would feel when it was their turn to euthanize. Most reported that they did not really think through this question at this time, simply replying that they thought it was "Okay" in order to get the job. One worker, for instance, said she "just put this thought out of [her] mind," while another worker said that she had hope to "sneak out of (or avoid) doing it. Many said that having to do euthanasia did not fully sink in until they "looked the animal in its eyes." Clearly, newcomers were emotionally unprepared to actually kill animals.

Once on the job, newcomers quickly formed strong attachments to particular animals. In fact, it was customary to caution newcomers against adopting animals right away. Several factors encouraged these attachments. At first, workers found themselves relating to shelter animals as though they were their own pets because many of the
animals were healthy and appealing to workers, and since most of the animals had been pets, they sometimes initiated interaction with the workers. Newcomers also saw more senior people interacting with animals in a pet-like fashion. Shelter animals, for example, were all named, and everyone used these names when referring to the animals. While newcomers followed suit, they did not realize that more experienced workers could interact in this way with animals and not become attached to them. Moreover, newcomers found that their work required them to know the individual personalities of shelter animals in order to make the best decisions regarding euthanasia and adoption, but this knowledge easily fostered attachments. Not surprisingly, the prospect of having to kill animals with whom they had become attached was a major concern for newcomers. This anticipated relationship with shelter animals made newcomers agonize when they imagined selecting animals for euthanasia and seeing “trusting looks” in the faces of those killed. They also worried about having to cope with the “losses” they expected to feel from killing these animals.

Further aggravating the novices’ trepidation was the fact that they had to kill animals for no higher purpose. Many felt grieved and frustrated by what they saw as the “senseless” killing of healthy animals. Several newcomers flinched at the shelter’s willingness to kill animals if suitable homes were not found instead of “fostering out” the animals. In their opinion, putting animals in less than “ideal” homes for a few years was better than death.

The clash between the feelings of newcomers for shelter animals and the institution’s practice of euthanasia led newcomers to experience a caring-killing “paradox.” On the one hand, they tried to understand and embrace the institutional rationale for euthanasia, but on the other hand, they wanted to nurture and tend to shelter animals. Doing both seemed impossible to many newcomers. Acceptance of the need to euthanize did not remove the apprehension that workers felt about having to kill animals themselves or to be part of this process. Their everyday selves were still paramount and made them feel for shelter animals as they might toward their own pets—the thought of killing them was troubling. They even feared getting to the point where they would no longer be upset killing animals, commonly asking those more senior, “Do you still care?” or “Doesn’t it still bother you?” Experienced shelter workers acknowledged the “paradox” of newcomers, telling and reassuring them that:

There is a terrible paradox in what you will have to do—you want to care for animals, but will have to kill some of them. It is a painful process of killing animals when you don’t want to. It seems so bad, but we’ll make it good in your head. You will find yourself in a complex emotional state. Euthanizing is not just technical skills. You have to believe it is right to make it matter of fact.

**Emotion Management Strategies**

How did shelter workers manage their uncomfortable feelings? Workers learned different emotion management strategies to distance themselves enough to kill, but not so much as to abandon a sense of themselves as animal people. These strategies enabled workers at least to hold in abeyance their prior, everyday sensibilities regarding animals and to apply a different emotional perspective while in the shelter.

**Transforming Shelter Animals into Virtual Pets**

New workers often had trouble distinguishing between shelter animals and their own pets. Failure to make this distinction could result in emotionally jarring situations, especially when animals were euthanized. However, they soon came to see shelter animals as virtual pets—liminal animals lying somewhere between the two categories of pet and object. In such a liminal status, workers could maintain a safe distance from animals while not entirely detaching themselves from them.

One way they accomplished this transformation was to lessen the intensity of their emotional attachments to individual animals. Almost as a rite of passage, newcomers were emotionally scarred by the euthanasia of a favorite animal, leaving them distraught over the loss. They also heard cautionary
tales about workers who were very upset by the loss of animals with whom they had grown "too close" as well as workers whose "excessive" or "crazy," attachments resulted in harm to animals—such as the person who was fired after she released all the dogs from the shelter because she could no longer stand to see them caged or put to death. Newcomers soon began consciously to restrict the depth of their attachments. As one worker observed: "I don't let myself get that attached to them."

On the other hand, certain mottos or ideals were part of the shelter culture, and these underscored the importance of not becoming detached from their charges or becoming desensitized to euthanasia. One worker, for instance, told me that you "learn to turn your feelings off when you do this work, but you can't completely. They say if you can, you shouldn't be on the job." Another worker noted: "If you get to the point where killing doesn't bother you, then you shouldn't be working here."

While they stopped themselves from "loving" individual shelter animals, because of their likely fate, workers learned that they could become more safely attached by maintaining a generalized caring feeling for shelter animals as a group. As workers became more seasoned, individual bonding became less frequent, interest in adopting subsided and a sense emerged of corporate attachment to shelter animals as a population of refugees rather than as individual pets.

Workers also came to see shelter animals differently from everyday pets by assuming professional roles with their charges. One role was that of "caretaker" rather than pet owner. As a worker noted: "You don't set yourself up by seeing them as pets. You'd kill yourself; I'd cut my wrists. I'm a caretaker, so I make them feel better while they are here. They won't be forgotten so quickly. I feel I get to know them. I'm their last hope." Comparing her own pet to shelter animals, another worker noted: "No bell goes off in your head with your own pet as it would with a shelter animal, where the bell says you can't love this animal because you have to euthanize it." If not caretakers, they could become social workers trying to place these animals in homes of other people.

New workers came to view their charges as having a type of market value within the larger population of shelter animals. Their value was not to be personal and individual from the worker's perspective. Rather, they were to be assessed in the light of their competitive attractiveness to potential adopters. This view was nowhere more apparent than in the selection of healthy and well-behaved animals to be euthanized in order to make room for incoming animals. An experienced shelter worker described these "tough choices" and the difficulty newcomers had in viewing animals this way:

When you go through and pull [i.e. remove an animal for euthanasia]—that's when you have to make some real tough choices. If they've all been here an equal amount of time, then if you've got eighteen cages and six are filled with black cats, and you have a variety in here waiting for cages, you're going to pull the black ones so you can have more of a variety. It's hard for a new employee to understand that I'm going to pull a black cat to make room for a white one. After they've been here through a cat season, they know exactly what I'm doing, and you don't have to say anything when you have old staff around you.

In addition, newcomers learned to think differently when spending money for the medical care of shelter animals than they would when spending on their own pets. Although an occasional animal might receive some medical attention, many animals were killed because it was not considered economically feasible to treat them even though they had reversible problems and the cost might be insubstantial. For example, while two newcomers observed the euthanizing of several kittens, an experienced worker pointed to a viral infection in their mouths as the reason behind their deaths. One newcomer asked why the kittens could not be treated medically so they could be put up for adoption. The reply was that the virus could be treated, but "given the volume, it is not economical to treat them."
Keeping shelter mascots further helped workers separate everyday pets from their charges, with mascots serving as surrogate pets in contrast to the rest of the shelter's animals. Cats and dogs were occasionally singled out to become the group mascots, the former because workers took a special interest in them, the latter because workers hoped to increase their adoptability. Unlike other shelter animals, mascots were permitted to run free in areas reserved for workers, such as their private office and front desk, where they were played with and talked about by workers. Importantly, they were never euthanized, either remaining indefinitely in the shelter or going home as someone's pet. Although most shelter workers interacted with the mascots as though they were pets, one shelter worker, akin to an owner, often took a special interest in the animal and let it be known that she would eventually adopt the animal if a good home could not be found. Some of their actions toward these mascots were in clear contrast to the way they would have acted toward regular shelter animals. In one case, for example, a cat mascot was found to have a stomach ailment requiring expensive surgery. In normal circumstances this animal would have been killed, but one of the workers used her own money to pay for the operation.

**Using the Animal**

By taking the feelings of animals into account, workers distracted themselves from their own discomfort when euthanizing. Workers tried to make this experience as "good" as possible for the animals and, in so doing, felt better themselves. Some workers, in fact, openly admitted that "it makes me feel better making it [euthanasia] better for the animal." Even more seasoned workers were more at ease with euthanasia if they focused on making animals feel secure and calm as they were killed. A worker with twenty years' experience remarked that "it still bothers you after you're here for a long time, but not as much. Compassion and tenderness are there when I euthanize, so it doesn't eat away at me."

One way workers did this was to empathize with animals in order to figure out how to reduce each animal's stress during euthanasia. By seeing things from the animals' perspective, workers sought to make the process of dying "peaceful and easy." As a worker pointed out: "You make the animal comfortable and happy and secure, so when the time to euthanize comes, it will not be under stress and scared—the dog will lick your face, the cats will purr." In the words of another worker: "They get more love in the last few seconds than they ever did." Workers were encouraged to "think of all the little things that might stress the animal—if you sense that some are afraid of men, then keep men away." For example, one worker said that she decided not to have cats and dogs in the euthanasia room at the same time. Observation of euthanasia confirmed that workers considered animals' states of mind. In one instance, where a cat and her kittens had to be euthanized, the mother was killed first because the worker thought she would become very upset if she sensed her kittens were dying. And in another case a worker refused to be interviewed during euthanasia because she felt that our talking made the animals more anxious.

Another way that taking animals into consideration helped workers distract themselves from their own concerns was to concentrate on the methodology of killing and to become technically proficient at it. By focusing on the technique of killing—and not on why it needed to be done or how they felt about doing it—workers could reassure themselves that they were making death quick and painless for animals. Workers, called "shooters," who injected the euthanasia drug were told to "focus not on the euthanasia, but on the needle. Concentrate on technical skills if you are the shooter." Even those people, known as "holders," who merely held animals steady during the injection, were taught to view their participation as a technical act as opposed to a demonstration of affection. In the words of a worker:

The holder is the one who controls the dog. You have your arm around her. You're the one who has got hold of that vein. When they get the blood in the syringe, you let go. But you have to hold that
dog and try and keep him steady and not let him pull away. That’s my job.

Bad killing technique, whether shooting or holding, was bemoaned by senior workers. As one noted: “I get really pissed off if someone blows a vein if it is due to an improper hold.”

Since euthanasia was regarded more as technical than as a moral or emotional issue, it was not surprising that workers could acquire reputations within the shelter for being “good shots,” and animals came to be seen as either easy or hard “putdowns”—a division reflecting technical difficulty and increased physical discomfort for animals. If the animal was a “hard putdown,” workers became all the more absorbed in the mechanics of euthanasia, knowing that the sharpness of their technical skills would affect the extent of an animal’s distress.

Workers could also take animals into consideration, rather than focus on their own feelings, by seeing their death as the alleviation of suffering. This was easy to do with animals who were very sick and old—known as “automatic kills”—but it was much harder to see suffering in “healthy and happy” animals that were killed. They too had to be seen as having lives not worth living. Workers were aware that the breadth of their definition of suffering made euthanasia easier for them. One worker acknowledged that: “Sometimes you want to find any reason, like it has a runny nose.” Newcomers often flinched at what was deemed sufficient medical or psychological reason to euthanize an animal, as did veterinary technicians working in the adjoining animal hospital who sometimes sarcastically said to shelter workers and their animals: “If you cough, they will kill you. If you sneeze, they will kill you.”

Workers learned to see euthanasia as a way to prevent suffering. For example, it was thought that it was better to euthanize healthy strays than to let them “suffer” on the streets. One senior worker told newcomers:

I’d rather kill than see suffering. I’ve seen dogs hung in alleys, cats with firecrackers in their mouths or caught in fan belts. This helps me to cope with euthanizing—to prevent this suffering through euthanasia. Am I sick if I can do this for fifteen years? No. I still cry when I see a sick pigeon on the streets, but I believe in what I am doing.

Once in a shelter, healthy strays, along with abandoned and surrendered animals, were also thought better dead than “fostered out.” A worker noted: “I’d rather kill it now than let it live three years and die a horrible death. No life is better than a temporary life.” Even having a potential adopter was not enough; the animal’s future home, if deemed “inappropriate,” would only cause the animal more “suffering.” One worker elaborated:

Finding an appropriate home for the animal is the only way the animal is going to get out of here alive. The inappropriate home prolongs the suffering, prolongs the agony, prolongs the neglect, prolongs the abuse of an animal. The animal was abused or neglected in the first place or it wouldn’t be here.

This thinking was a problem for newcomers who believed that almost any home, even if temporary, was better than killing animals. Particularly troubling were those people denied an animal for adoption even though their resources and attitudes seemed acceptable to workers. Some potential adopters were rejected because it was thought that they were not home often enough, even though by all other standards they seemed likely to become good owners. In one case, a veterinary hospital technician wanted to adopt a four-month-old puppy, but was rejected because she had a roommate who was at home most of the time, her request was still denied.

But newcomers soon learned to scrutinize potential adopters carefully by screening them for certain warning flags, such as not wanting to spay or neuter, not wanting to fence in or leash animals, not being home enough with animals, and so on, in addition to such basics as not having a landlord’s approval or adopting the pet as a gift for someone else. Most workers came to see certain groups of people as risky adopters requiring even greater scrutiny before approval. For some workers, this meant welfare recipients because they were unwilling to spay or neu-
ter, or policemen because they might be too rough with animals.

Although workers accepted the applications of most potential owners, they did reject some. But even in their acceptances, they reaffirmed their concern for suffering and their desire to find perfect homes; they certainly did so with their rejections, admonishing those turned down for whatever their presumed problems were toward animals. Occasionally, rejected applicants became irate and made angry comments such as "You'd rather kill it than give it to me!" These moments were uncomfortable for newcomers to watch since, to some extent, they shared the rejected applicant's sentiment—any home was better than death. More experienced workers would try to cool down the applicant but also remind newcomers that some homes were worse than death. In one such case, the shelter manager said to the rejected applicant, but for all to hear, "It is my intention to find a good home where the animal's needs can be met."

**Resisting and Avoiding Euthanasia**

New workers, in particular, sometimes managed their discomfort with euthanasia by trying to prevent or delay the death of animals. Although there were generally understood euthanasia guidelines, they were rather vague, and workers could exert mild pressure to make exceptions to the rules. Certainly, not all animals scheduled or "pink-slipped" to be killed were "automatic kills." As a worker noted: "If a 12-year-old stray with hip dysplasia comes in, yes, you know as soon as it walks in the door that at the end of the stay holding period it's going to be euthanized, but not all of them are like this." A worker described such an instance:

Four weeks is really young. Five weeks, you're really pushing it. Six weeks, we can take it, but it depends on its overall health and condition. But sometimes we'll keep one or two younger ones, depending on the animal itself. We just had an animal last week—it was a dachshund. She is a really nice and friendly dog. In this case, we just decided to keep her.

Sometimes a worker took a special liking to a particular animal, but it was to be euthanized because the cage was needed for new animals, or it was too young, too old, somewhat sick, or had a behavior problem. The worker might let it be known among colleagues that they were very attached to the animal, or they might go directly to the person making the euthanasia selection with a plea for the animal's date of death to be delayed in the hopes of adoption. One worker had a favorite cat that was to be euthanized, but succeeded in blocking its euthanasia, at least for a while, by personally taking financial responsibility for its shelter costs.

However, opposing euthanasia had to be done in a way that did not make such decisions too difficult for those making them. Workers could not object repeatedly to euthanasia or oppose it too aggressively without making the selector feel uncomfortable. One worker felt "guilty" when this happened to her:

There was one technician—Marie—who used to make me feel guilty. I have to make room for new animals because we have so few cages. I must decide which old ones to kill to make room for new ones. Marie would get upset when I would choose certain cats to be killed. She would come to me with her runny, snotty nose, complaining that certain cats were picked to be killed. This made me feel guilty.

If opposing euthanasia failed, workers were able to avoid the discomfort of doing it. One worker said that he would not "be around" if his favorite cat was killed, and noted:

There's not an animal I'm not attached to here, but there's a cat here now that I like a lot. There's a good chance that she'll be euthanized. She's got a heart murmur. I guess. It's a mild one, but . . . any type of heart murmur with a cat is bad. She's also got a lump right here. They've already tested her for leukemia and it's negative, so they are testing her for something else. But she's just got an adorable face and everything else with her is fine. I like her personality. But I have two cats at home. I can't have a third. I won't be around when they euthanize her. I'll let somebody else do it. I would rather it be done when I'm not here.
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Although workers could be exempted from killing animals with whom they had closely bonded, there was a strong feeling that such persons should be there for the animal’s sake. Yet if present, they could indicate to others that they did not want to be the “shooter” and instead be the “holder,” allowing them to feel more removed from the actual killing. A worker said:

Especially if it’s one I like a lot, I would rather be the one holding instead of injecting. If you don’t want to inject, you just back up and somebody else does it. Everybody else does that. I just look at it, I don’t want to be the one to do it. Even though people say that holding is the harder of the two, I would look at it as, well, I am the one who is doing this. And sometimes, I don’t want to be the one to do it.

Customizing the division of labor of euthanasia to fit their own emotional limits, other workers preferred not to do the holding. One worker observed:

One of the ways that I detach myself from euthanasia is that I do the shooting rather than the holding so that I don’t feel the animal dying. I’m concentrating on the technical skill behind the actual injection. And with a dog, you literally feel the animal’s life go out of it in your arms, instead of giving the injection and letting it drop.

Using the Owner

Shelter workers could also displace some of their own discomfort with euthanasia into anger and frustration with pet owners. Rather than questioning the morality of their own acts and feeling guilty about euthanasia, workers came to regard owners, and not themselves, as behaving wrongly toward animals. As workers transferred the blame for killing animals to the public, they concentrated their energies on educating and changing public attitudes to pets and making successful adoptions through the shelter.

The public was seen as treating animals as “property to be thrown away like trash” rather than as something having intrinsic value. One worker bemoaned:

A lot of people who want to leave their pets have bullshit reasons for this—like they just bought new furniture for their living room and their cat shed all over it.

This lack of commitment resulted in many of the surrendered animals being euthanized because they were not adoptable and/or space was needed. Speaking about these owners, one worker candidly acknowledged:

I would love to be rude once to some of these people who come in. I’d like to say to these people, “Cut this bullshit out!”

Another worker concluded: “You do want to strangle these people.”

Even if pet owners did not surrender their animals to the shelter, they became tainted as a group in the eyes of workers, who saw many of them as negligent or irresponsible. A common charge against owners was that their pets were allowed to run free and be hurt, lost or stolen. One senior worker admitted: “A bias does get built in. We’re called if a cat gets caught in a fan belt. We’re the ones that have to scrape cats off the streets.” Owners were also seen as selfish and misguided when it came to their pets, thoughtlessly allowing them to breed, instead of spaying or neutering them. Workers often repeated the shelter’s pithy wish: “Parents will let their pets have puppies or kittens so they can show their children the miracle of birth—well, maybe they should come in here to see the miracle of death!” Workers could be heard among themselves admonishing the public’s “irresponsibility” toward breeding and the deaths that such an attitude caused. A worker explained: “The only reason why it has been killed is that no one took the time to be a responsible pet owner. They felt the cat deserved to run free or they didn’t want to pay the money to have it spayed or neutered, or that she should have one litter. Well great, what are you going to do with her six offspring?”

Even owners who declared great love and affection for their pets sometimes came across in the shelter environment as cruel to their animals. These were owners who let their animals suffer because they could not bear to kill them. A worker noted:

I’ll get a 22-year-old cat. And the owner is crying out there. I tell her, “You know,
twenty-two years is great. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing." But you get some others that come in and they [the animals] look absolutely like shit. You feel like taking hold of them and saying "What in the hell are you doing? He should have been put to sleep two years ago."

According to shelter workers, owners should have to suffer pangs of conscience about their treatment of animals, but did not. Some owners seemed not to want their pets, and this shocked workers, as one noted: "You'd be surprised at how many people come right out and say they don't want it any more. They are usually the ones who call us to pick it up, otherwise they'll dump it on the street. And of course, we're going to come and get it. I feel like saying 'It's your conscience, not mine, go ahead, do it.' Of course, I don't do that." Many surrenderers, in the eyes of shelter workers, just did not care whether their animals lived or died. At the same time that surrenderers were seen as lacking a conscience, shelter workers were afforded the opportunity to reaffirm their own dedication to and feelings for animals. A worker commented:

Some surrenderers take them back after we tell them we can't guarantee placement. Most say, "Well that's fine." Like the owner of this cat, he called this morning and said, "I've got to get rid of it, I'm allergic to it." Of course, he didn't seem at all bothered. He goes, "That's fine." Or somebody is going to surrender a pet because they're moving, well, if it was me, and I'm sure quite a few other people here feel the same way, I'd look for a place where pets were allowed. People are just looking out for themselves and not anything else.

In the opinion of the workers, it was important for newcomers to learn not to bear the "guilt" that owners should have felt. To do this, they had to see owners as the real killers of shelter animals. As one worker put it, "People think we are murderers, but they are the ones that have put us in this position. We are morally offended by the fact that we have to carry out an execution that we didn't necessarily order." A senior shelter worker recounted how she came to terms with guilt:

Every night I had a recurring dream that I had died, and I was standing in line to go to heaven. And St. Peter says to me, "I know you, you're the one that killed all those little animals." And I'd sit up in the bed in a cold sweat. Finally, I realized it wasn't my fault, my dreams changed. After St. Peter said, "I know you, you're the one that killed all those little animals," I turned to the 999,000 people behind me and said, "I know you, you made me kill all these animals." You grow into the fact that you are the executioner, but you weren't the judge and jury.

Shelter workers redirected their emotions and resources into changing public attitudes about pets in order to curtail the never-ending flow of animals—often called a "flood"—that always far exceeded what was possible to adopt out. Overwhelmed by this problem, workers wanted to do something about it other than killing animals. By putting effort into adoption or public education, they felt they were making a dent in the overpopulation problem instead of feeling hopeless about it. For many, combating pet overpopulation became addictive and missionary. Rather than chew over the morality of their own participation in euthanasia, they felt part of a serious campaign—often described as a "battle"—against the formidable foe of the pet owner and in defense of helpless animals.

Owners were used in ways other than as objects of blame. Successful adoptions helped to accentuate the positive in a setting where there were few opportunities to feel good about what workers were doing. Finding homes for animals came close to the original motivation that brought many workers to the shelter seeking employment. One worker commented: "For every one euthanized, you have to think about the one placed, or the one case where you placed in a perfect family." Another worker said that "you get a good feeling when you see an empty cage." She explained that she did not think that it was empty because an animal had just been killed, but because an animal had just been adopted. Indeed, out of self-protection, when the cage of someone's "favorite" was empty, workers did not ask what happened to the animals so they could assume that it was
adopted rather than killed. They talked about how all of their animals were “either PWP or PWG—placed with people or placed with God.” Shelter workers felt particularly satisfied when they heard from people who had satisfactorily adopted animals. Sometimes these owners came into the shelter and talked informally with workers; at other times, they wrote letters of thanks for their animals. Besides taping this mail on the walls for all to see, workers mounted snapshots of adopters and their animals in the shelter’s lobby.

Dealing With Others

For workers to manage their emotions successfully, they had to learn to suspend asking hard ethical questions. While this was easy to do within the confines of the shelter, it was more difficult outside. Many reported feeling badly when outsiders learned they killed animals and challenged them about the morality of euthanasia. Workers dealt with these unwanted feelings in two ways.

Outside work, they could try to avoid the kinds of contact that give rise to unwanted emotions and difficult questions. Workers claimed that roommates, spouses, family members, and strangers sometimes made them feel “guilty” because they were seen as “villains” or “murderers.” As one worker said, “You expect your spouse, your parents, your sister, your brother, or your significant other to understand. And they don’t. And your friends don’t. People make stupid remarks like, ‘Gee, I would never do your job because I love animals too much.’” Workers claimed that they had become “paranoid” about being asked if they killed animals, waiting for questions such as, “How can you kill them if you care about animals so much?” Sometimes people would simply tell workers: “I love animals, I couldn’t do that.” One worker claimed that these questions and comments “make me feel like I’ve done something wrong.” Another said, “So what does it mean—I don’t love animals?” If workers were not explicitly criticized or misunderstood, they still encountered people who made them feel reluctant to talk about their work. One worker noted that “I’m proud that I’m a 90 per cent shot, and that I’m not putting the animals through stress, but people don’t want to hear this.”

In anticipation of these negative reactions, many workers hesitated to divulge what they did. One worker said that she had learned to tell people that she “drives an animal ambulance.” If workers revealed that they carried out euthanasia, they often presented arguments to support their caring for animals and the need for euthanasia. As one worker noted, “I throw numbers at them, like the fact that we get 12,000 animals a year but can only place 2,000.” While concealing their work and educating others about it were by far the most common strategies used with outsiders, some workers would occasionally take a blunter approach and use sarcasm or black humor. The following worker talked about all these approaches:

People give me a lot of grief. You know, you tell them where you work, and you tell them it’s an animal shelter. And they say, “Well, you don’t put them to sleep, do you?” And I always love to say, “Well actually I give classes on how to do that,” just for the shock value of it. Or it’s the old, “I could never do what you do, I love animals too much.” “Oh, I don’t love them at all. That’s why I work here. I kill them, I enjoy it.” But sometimes you don’t even mention where you work because you don’t want to deal with that. It depends on the social situation I am in as to whether I want to go into it or not, and it also depends on how I feel at a given time. Some people are interested, and then I talk about spaying and neutering their pets.

Another way workers dealt with outsiders was to neutralize their criticism of euthanasia. The only credible opinions about euthanasia were seen as coming from those people who actually did such killing as part of the shelter community. Humor was one device that helped workers feel part of this community. It gave them a special language to talk about death and their concerns about it. As with gallows humor in other settings, it was not particularly funny out of context, and workers knew this, but learning to use it and find it humorous became a rite of passage. For instance, people telephoning the shelter might be greeted with the salutation, “Heaven.”
Referring to the euthanasia room and the euthanasia drug also took on a light, funny side with the room being called “downtown” or the “lavender lounge” (its walls were this color) and the drug being called “sleepaway” or “go-go juice” (its brand name was “Fatal Plus”).

But no ritual practice gave more of a sense of “we-ness” then actually killing animals. No single act admitted them more into the shelter institution or more clearly demarcated the transition of shelter workers out of the novice role. As they gained increasing experience with euthanasia, workers developed a firmer sense of being in the same boat with peers who also did what they did. They shared an unarticulated belief that others could not understand what it was like to kill unless they had also done so. Even within the shelter, kennel workers often felt misunderstood by the front-desk people. As one worker reflected, “It does feel like you can’t understand what I do if you can’t understand that I don’t like to kill, but that I have to kill. You’d have to see what I see. Maybe then.” Since outsiders did not share this experience, workers tended to give them little credibility and to discount their opinions. By curtailing the possibility of understanding what they did and communicating with others about it, workers furthered their solidarity and created boundaries between themselves and outsiders that served to shield them from external criticism and diminish any uncomfortable feelings easily raised by the “uninformed” or “naive.”

The Imperfection of Emotion Management

Certainly, the killing of animals by shelter workers was facilitated by the kinds of emotion management strategies that have been discussed. Yet it would be wrong to characterize these people, including those with many years’ experience, as completely detached. These strategies were far from perfect. It would be more accurate to say that their institutional socialization was incomplete. All workers, including those with many years of experience, felt uneasy about euthanasia at certain times.

For the few who continued to experience sharp and disturbing feelings, quitting became a way to manage emotions. For example, one worker felt “plagued” by a conflict between her own feelings for the animals which made killing hard to accept and the shelter’s euthanasia policy with which she intellectually agreed. She said it was “like having two people in my head, one good and the other evil, that argue about me destroying these animals.” This conflict left her feeling “guilty” about deaths she found “hard to justify.” After nine months on the job, she quit.

For most workers this conflict was neither intense nor constant, but instead manifested itself as episodic uneasiness. From time to time euthanasia provoked modest but clearly discernible levels of emotional distress. There was no consensus, however, on what kind of euthanasia would rattle people and make them feel uncomfortable, but everyone had at least one type that roused their feelings.

The most obvious discomfort with euthanasia occurred when workers had to kill animals to which they were attached or that they could easily see as pets. While newcomers were more likely to have formed these attachments, seasoned workers could still be troubled by euthanasia when animals reminded them of other attachments. As one veteran worker reflected:

I haven’t been emotionally attached to a dog, except for one, for quite a while. I know my limit. But there are times when I’ll look at a dog when I’m euthanizing it and go, “You’ve got Rex’s eyes.” Or it’s an Irish setter—I have a natural attachment to Irish setters. Or black cats—I hate to euthanize black cats. It’s real hard for me to euthanize a black cat.

Even without attachments, many workers found it “heartbreaking” to euthanize young, healthy and well-behaved animals merely for space because they could have become pets. Without a medical or psychological reason, euthanasia seemed a “waste.”

For many, euthanasia became unsettling if it appeared that animals suffered physically or psychologically. This happened, for example, when injections of the euthanasia drug caused animals to “scream,” “cry,” or become
very disoriented and move about frantically. But it also happened when animals seemed to "know" they were about to be killed or sensed that "death was in the air." "Cats aren't dumb. They know what's going on. Whenever you take them to the room, they always get this stance where their head goes up, and they know," observed one worker. Another said that many animals could "smell" death. These workers became uneasy because they assumed that the animals were "scared." "What is hard for me," said one worker, "is when they are crying and they are very, very scared." Another said that she could "feel their tension and anxiety" in the euthanasia room. "They seem to know what's happening—that something is going to happen," she added to explain her discomfort.

Ironically, for some workers the opposite situation left them feeling unsettled. They found it eerie when animals were not scared and instead behaved "as though they were co-operating." According to one worker, certain breeds were likely to act this way as they were being killed: "Greyhounds and dobermans will either give you their paw or willingly give you their leg, and look right past you. It's as though they are co-operating. The other dogs will look right at you."

Killing large numbers of animals in a single day was disconcerting for nearly everyone. This happened to one worker when the number of animals killed was so great she could not conceptualize the quantity until she picked up a thick pile of "yellow slips" (surrender forms), or when she looked at the drug log and saw how many animals had been given euthanasia injections. The flow of animals into the shelter was seasonal, and workers grew to loathe those months when many animals were brought in and euthanized. The summer was a particularly bad time, because so many cats came in and were killed. As one worker said, "They are constantly coming in. On a bad day, you might have to do it [euthanasia] fifty times. There are straight months of killing." Another observed, "After three hours of killing, you come out a mess. It drains me completely. I'll turn around and see all these dead animals on the floor around me—and it's "What have I done?" And yet another worker noted:

It's very difficult when we are inundated from spring until fall. Every single person who walks through the door has either a pillow case, a box, a laundry basket or whatever—one more litter of kittens. And you only have X number of cages in your facility and they are already full. So the animal may come in the front door and go out the back door in a barrel. It's very difficult if that animal never had a chance at life, or has had a very short life.

Even seasoned workers said that it did "not feel right" to spend so much time killing, particularly when so many of the animals they killed were young and never had a chance to become a pet.

All workers, then, experienced at least some uneasiness when facing certain types of euthanasia, despite their socialization into the shelter's culture. The emotions generated by these situations overruled attempts by the shelter to help them manage their emotions and objectify their charges. When emotion management and objectification failed, workers felt some degree of connection and identification with the animals which in turn elicited feelings of sadness, worry, and even remorse.

**Conclusion**

The initial conflict faced by newcomers to an animal shelter was extreme—because of their prior, everyday perspective toward animals, killing them generated emotions that caused workers to balk at carrying out euthanasia. However, on closer inspection, this tension was replaced by a more moderate and manageable version of the same conflict. The conflict was repackaged and softened, but it was there, nonetheless. Shelter workers could more easily live with this version, and their emotion management strategies got them to this point. These strategies embodied an underlying inconsistency or dilemma between the simultaneous pulls toward objectifying the animals and seeing the animals in pet-related terms—a conflict between rational necessity and sentimentality, between head and heart, between everyday perspective and that of the institution...

A final look at these strategies reveals this underlying tension. By transforming shelter
animals into virtual pets, the workers could objectify the animals to some degree, while also categorizing them as something like, yet different from, everyday pets. When it came to actually killing them, workers could play the role of highly skilled technicians efficiently dispatching animal lives seen as not worth living, simultaneously trying to take the emotional and physical feelings of animals into account. Being able to avoid or postpone killing was itself viewed as a struggle between emotion and rationality; importantly, this was allowed, thereby acknowledging some degree of emotion but within limits that reaffirmed a more rational approach. When it came to their view of owners (perhaps a collective projection of a sort), it was the public, and not themselves, that objectified animals; whatever they did, including the killing, paled by comparison and was done out of sentiment and caring. Indeed, outsiders came to be suspected, one-dimensionally, as a distant and alien group, while workers increasingly cultivated a strong sense of we-ness among themselves—humans, too, seem to have two fundamentally kinds of relations with each other. . . .

It is . . . not surprising that these strategies were sometimes imperfect, failing to prevent penetration of the everyday perspective toward animals into the shelter. Even the most effective programs of organizational socialization are likely to be fallible when workers face situations that trigger their prior feelings and concerns. Many shelter workers may have felt uneasy because at certain times their personal, everyday thinking and feeling about animals in general may have taken precedence over the institutional “rules” for thinking and feeling about animals. . . .

Yet, in the end, by relying on these strategies workers reproduced the institution (e.g., Smith and Kleinman 1989), thereby creating a new generation of workers who would support the humane society model and the kind of human-animal relationship in which people could believe they were killing with a conscience. Far from being a unique situation, the shelter worker’s relationship with animals is but our general culture’s response to animals writ small. It is not likely that we ourselves are altogether exempt from this inconsistency, as our individual ways of managing our thought and feelings may similarly dull the conflict just enough for it to become a familiar uneasiness. For shelter workers, the conflict is merely heightened and their struggle to make peace with their acts is more deliberate and collective.

References


Although sexuality is a biological process, the meaning of sexuality is culturally variable. Carrier shows that attitudes toward homosexuality are far from uniform around the world. Some societies are quite accommodating about sexual practices that other societies punish harshly.

The available cross-cultural data clearly show that the ways in which individuals organize their sexual behavior vary considerably between societies (Westermarck, 1908; Ford & Beach, 1951; Broude & Greene, 1976). Although biological and psychological factors help explain variations of sexual behavior between individuals within a given society, intercultural variations in patterns of human sexual behavior are mainly related to social and cultural differences occurring between societies around the world. The purpose of this chapter is to consider what kinds of variations in homosexual behavior occur between societies, and to determine which sociocultural factors appear to account for the variance of the behavior cross-culturally.¹

THE CROSS-CULTURAL DATA

Data available on homosexual behavior in most of the world’s societies, past or present, are meager. Much is known about the dominant middle-class white populations of the United States, England, and northern European countries where most scientific research on human sexual behavior has been done, but very little is known about homosexual behavior in the rest of the world. The lack of knowledge stems from the irrational fear and prejudice surrounding the study of human sexual behavior and from the difficulties associated with the collection of information on a topic that is so personal and highly regulated in most societies.

Most of the cross-cultural information on sexual behavior has been gathered by Western anthropologists. The quality of the information collected and published, however, varies considerably. Based on a survey of the literature, Marshall and Suggs (1971) report that "sexual behavior is occasionally touched upon in anthropological publications but is seldom the topic of either articles or monographs by anthropologists." Broude

*The author is particularly indebted to Evelyn Hooker for her invaluable comments and criticism; and to the Gender Identity Research Group at UCLA for an early critique of the ideas presented in this paper.

and Greene (1976), after coding the sexual attitudes and practices in 186 societies using the Human Relations Area Files, note:

... information of any sort on sexual habits and beliefs is hard to come by... when data do exist concerning sexual attitudes and practices, they are often sketchy and vague; what is more, such information is usually suspect in terms of its reliability, either because of distortions on the part of the subjects or because of biases introduced by the ethnographer...

Cross-cultural data on homosexual behavior is further complicated by the prejudice of many observers who consider the behavior unnatural, dysfunctional, or associated with mental illness, and by the fact that in many of the societies studied the behavior is stigmatized and thus not usually carried out openly. Under these circumstances, the behavior is not easily talked about. At the turn of the twentieth century such adjectives as disgusting, vile, and detestable were still being used to describe homosexual behavior; and even in the mid-1930s some anthropologists continued to view the behavior as unnatural. In discussing sodomy with some of his New Guinea informants, Williams (1936), for example, asked them if they “had ever been subjected to an unnatural practice.” With the acceptance of the view in the mid-1930s that homosexual behavior should be classified as a mental illness (or at best dysfunctional), many anthropologists replaced “unnatural” with the medical model. This model still finds adherents among researchers at present, especially those in the branch of anthropology referred to as psychological anthropology.

Because of the prejudice with which many researchers and observers approached the subject, statements about the reported absence of homosexual behavior, or the limited extent of the behavior where reported, should be viewed with some skepticism. Mead (1961) suggests that statements of this kind “can only be accepted with the greatest caution and with very careful analysis of the personality and training of the investigator.” She further notes that “denials of a practice cannot be regarded as meaningful if that practice is verbally recognized among a given people, even though a strong taboo exists against it.”

This chapter will mainly utilize the published research findings of empirical studies which have considered homosexual behavior in some detail. It will examine homosexual behavior in preliterate, peasant, and complex modern societies in all the major geographical regions of the world. Where necessary, these findings will be supplemented with information found in accounts given by travelers, missionaries, and novelists.

**SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS**

A number of sociocultural factors help explain variations of homosexual behavior between societies. Two of the most important are cultural attitudes and proscriptions related to cross-gender behavior, and availability of sexual partners. The latter is in turn related to such variables as segregation of sexes prior to marriage, expectations with respect to virginity, age at marriage, and available economic resources and/or distribution of income.

**Cross-Gender and Homosexual Behavior**

Different expectations for male persons as opposed to female persons are culturally elaborated from birth onward in every known society. Although behavioral boundaries between the sexes may vary culturally, male persons are clearly differentiated from female persons; and progeny is assured by normative societal rules which correlate male and female gender roles with sexual behavior, marriage, and the family. There is a general expectation in every society that a majority of adult men and women will cohabit and produce the next generation. Social pressure is thus applied in the direction of marriage. The general rule is that one should not remain single.

The cross-cultural data on human sexual behavior suggest that a significant relationship exists between much of the homosexual behavior reported cross culturally and the continuing need of societies
to deal with cross-gender behavior. Feminine male behavior, and the set of anxieties associated with its occurrence in the male part of the population, appears to have brought about more elaborate cultural responses temporally and spatially than has masculine female behavior. There are no doubt many reasons why this is so, but it appears to be related in general to the higher status accorded men than women in most societies; and, in particular, to the defense role that men have historically played in protecting women and children from outsiders.

Societies in which homosexual behavior can be linked to cultural responses to cross-gender behavior may be categorized according to the type of response made. Three major cultural types have been identified: those societies which make a basic accommodation to cross-gender behavior, those societies which outlaw the behavior as scandalous and/or criminal, and those societies which neither make an accommodation to such behavior nor outlaw it but instead have a cultural formulation which tries to ensure that cross-gender behavior does not occur.

**Accommodating Societies**

Societies making an accommodation to cross-gender behavior in one form or another have been reported in many different parts of the world. Munroe et al. (1969), for example, put together a list of societies having what they call “institutionalized male transvestism . . . the permanent adoption by males of aspects of female dress and/or behavior in accordance with customary expectations within a given society.” Their list includes Indian societies in North and South America, island societies in Polynesia and Southeast Asia, and preliterate and peasant societies in mainland Asia and Africa. Although reported for both sexes, male cross-gender behavior appears in the literature more often than female.

A folk belief exists in some of these societies that in every generation a certain number of individuals will play the gender role of the opposite sex, usually beginning at or prior to puberty and often identified at a very early age. The Mohave Indians of the American Southwest, for example, used to hold the following belief—typical of many Indian societies in North America—about cross-gender behavior of both sexes:

> Ever since the world began at the magic mountain . . . it was said that there would be transvestites. In the beginning, if they were to become transvestites, the process started during their intrauterine life. When they grew up they were given toys according to their sex. They did not like these toys however. (Devereux, 1937)

In southern Mexico one group of Zapotec Indians believes that “effeminate males” are born, not made: “Typical comments include, But what can we do; he was born that way; he is like God made him. A related belief also exists that . . . it is a thing of the blood” (Rojce, 1973). In Tahiti, the belief exists that there is at least one cross-gender behaving male, called a māhū, in all villages: “When one dies then another substitutes . . . God arranges it like this. It isn’t allowed (that there should be) two māhū, in one place” (Levy, 1973).

Cross-gender behavior is accepted in other societies because it is believed that some supernatural event makes people that way prior to birth, or that the behavior is acquired through some mystical force or dream after birth. In India, for example, the following belief exists about the Hijadās, cross-gender behaving males thought to be impotent at birth who later have their genitals removed:

When we ask a Hijadā or an ordinary man in Gujarat “Why does a man become a Hijadā?” the usual reply is “One does not become a Hijadā by one’s own will; it is only by the command of the mātā that one becomes a Hijadā.” The same idea is found in a myth about the origin of the Hijadās. It is said that one receives the mātā’s command either in dreams or when one sits in meditation before her image. (Shah, 1961)

Among the Chukchee of northeastern Asia, a role reversal was accepted because of an unusual dream or vision:

Transformation takes place by the command of the ka’let (spirits) usually at the critical age of early youth when shamanistic inspiration first manifests itself. (Bogores, 1904)
Among the Lango in Africa:

A number of Lango men dress as women, simulate menstruation, and become one of the wives of other males. They are believed to be impotent and to have been afflicted by some supernatural agency. (Ford & Beach, 1951)

Although not necessarily accepted gladly, the various folk beliefs make the behavior acceptable, and a certain number of cross-gender behaving individuals are to be expected in every generation. Expectations about the extent to which the opposite gender role is to be played, however, appear to have changed over time with acculturation. Affected individuals in the past often were required to make a public ritualized change of gender and cross-dress and behave in accordance with their new identity. Among the Mohave, for example, there was an initiation ceremony and it was important for the initiate “to duplicate the behavior pattern of his adopted sex and make ‘normal’ individuals of his anatomic sex feel toward him as though he truly belonged to his adopted sex” (Devereux, 1937). The māhū in Tahiti were described in the latter part of the eighteenth century as follows:

These men are in some respects like the Eunuchs [sic] in India but are not castrated. They never cohabit with women but live as they do. They pick their beard out and dress as women, dance and sing with them and are as effeminate in their voice. (Morrison, 1935)

Affected individuals in most societies at present are allowed a choice as to the extent they want to play the role; e.g., how far they want to identify with the opposite sex, whether they want to cross-dress or not, etc. Levy (1973) notes, for example, that in Tahiti, “Being a māhū does not now usually entail actually dressing as a woman.” The North American Indian societies who used to have initiation ceremonies discontinued them long ago; and, although expectations about cross-gender behaving individuals persist, only remnants of the original belief system are remembered currently. They continue, however, to be tolerant and “there apparently is no body of role behavior aimed at humiliating boys who are feminine or men who prefer men sexually” (Stoller, 1976).

The link between cross-gender behavior and homosexual behavior is the belief that there should be concordance between gender role and sexual object choice. When a male behaves like a female, he should be expected therefore to want a male sexual partner and to play the female sex role—that is, to play the insertee role in anal intercourse or fellatio. The same concordance should be expected when a female behaves like a male. As a result of beliefs about concordance, it is important to note that a society may not conceptualize the sexual behavior or its participants as “homosexual.”

There is some evidence in support of this linking of gender role and homosexual behavior in societies making an accommodation and providing a social role for cross-gender behaving individuals. Kroeber (1940), for example, concluded from his investigations that “In most of primitive northern Asia and North America, men of homosexual trends adopted women’s dress, work, and status, and were accepted as nonphysiological but institutionalized women.” Devereux’s Mohave informants said that the males who changed their gender role to female had male husbands and that both anal intercourse and fellatio were practiced, with the participants playing the appropriate gender sex role. The informants noted the same concordance for females who behaved like males.

Unfortunately, the anthropological data do not always make clear whether cultural expectations in a given society were for concordance between gender role and erotic object; or, in terms of actual behavior, how many cross-gender behaving individuals chose same sex, opposite sex, or both sexes as erotic objects. In the paper I just quoted, Kroeber also concluded, “How far invert erotic practices accompanied the status is not always clear from the data, and it probably varied. At any rate, the North American attitude toward the berdache stresses not his erotic life but his social status; born a male, he became accepted as a woman socially.”
Many anthropologists and other observers confounded their findings by assuming an equivalence between “transvestite” and “homosexual.” Thus, when an informant described cross-gender behavior, they may have concluded without foundation that a same-sex erotic object choice was part of the behavior being described, and that they were eliciting information on “homosexuals.” Angelino and Shedd (1955) provide supporting evidence. They reviewed the literature on an often used anthropological concept, berdache, and concluded that the “term has been used in an exceedingly ambiguous way, being used as a synonym for homosexuality, hermaphroditism, transvestism, and effeminism.” They also note that the meaning of berdache changed over time, going from kept boy/male prostitute, to individuals who played a passive role in sodomy, to males who played a passive sex role and cross-dressed.

In spite of the confusion between “transvestite” and “homosexual,” the available data suggest that in many of the societies providing a social role for cross-gender behavior, the selection of sexual partners was based on the adopted gender role; and, though they might be subjected to ridicule, neither partner in the sexual relationship was penalized for the role played.

The māhū role in Tahiti provides a contemporary look at how one Polynesian society continues to provide a social role for cross-gender behavior. According to Levy (1973), villagers in his area of study do not agree on the sexual behavior of the māhū—some “believe that māhū do not generally engage in homosexual intercourse.” Information from both māhū and non-māhū informants, however, leads to the conclusion that probably a majority of the māhūs prefer adolescent males with whom they perform “ote moa” (literally, “penis sucking”). The following are some aspects of the role and the community response to it:

It is said to be exclusive. Its essential defining characteristic is “doing woman’s work,” that is, a role reversal which is publicly demonstrated—either through clothes or through other public aspects of women’s role playing. Most villagers approve of, and are pleased by, the role reversal. But homosexual behavior is a covert part of the role, and it is disapproved by many villagers. Men who have sexual relations with the māhū . . . do not consider themselves abnormal. Villagers who know of such activities may disapprove, but they do not label the partners as unmanly. The māhū is considered as a substitute woman for the partner. A new word, raerae, which reportedly originated in Papeete, is used by some to designate nontraditional types of homosexual behavior. (Levy, 1973)

It should also be noted that in Levy’s village of study māhūs were the only adult men reported to be engaging in homosexual intercourse.

Another contemporary example of a social role for cross-gender behavior is the Hijadā role provided cross-gender behaving males in northwestern India. Given slightly different names by different observers (Hijarās, Hinjakās, and Hijrās), these males appear to be playing the same role. There is general agreement on the fact that they cross-dress, beg alms, and collect dues at special ceremonies where they dance and sing as women. There is a considerable difference of opinion, however, as to whether they engage in homosexual intercourse or in any sexual activity for that matter. From the available data, it appears that they live mostly in towns in communes, with each commune having a definite jurisdiction of villages and towns “where its members can beg alms and collect dues” (Shah, 1961). They are also reported to live separately by themselves. From the findings of Carstairs (1956) and Shah (1961), one can at least conclude that the Hijadās living alone are sexually active:

Carstairs is wrong in considering all the Hijadās as homosexual, but there seems to be some truth in his information about the homosexuality of the Deoli Hijadā (Note: Deoli is the village of Carstairs’ study.) Faridi and Mehta also note that some Hijadās practice “sodomy.” This, however, is not institutionalized homosexuality. (Shah, 1961)

The finding by Opler (1960) that “they cannot carry on sexual activities and do not marry” may apply to the majority of Hijadās living in communes. The question of what kind of sexual behavior the Hijadās practice, if any, cannot be answered
definitively with the data available. That they are still a viable group in India is confirmed by a recent Associated Press release:

About 2000 eunuchs dressed in brightly colored saris and other female garb were converging on this northern town from all over India this weekend for a private convention of song, dance and prayer.

Local reaction to the gathering was mixed. "They're perverts," commented a local peanut vendor. "We should have nothing to do with them. They should be run out of town."

A New Delhi social worker . . . said they sometimes supplement their income as paid lovers of homosexuals. (Excerpts from AP, February 6, 1979)

Disapproving Societies

Societies in which cross-gender behavior produces strong emotional negative reactions in large segments of the population tend to have the following commonalities: (1) negative reactions produced by the behavior are essentially limited to the male part of the population and relate mainly to effeminate males; (2) cross-gender behavior is controlled by laws which prohibit cross-dressing, and by laws and public opinion which consider other attributes associated with the behavior as scandalous; (3) gender roles are sharply dichotomized; and (4) a general belief exists that anyone demonstrating cross-gender behavior is homosexual.

A number of complex modern and peasant societies in the Middle East, North Africa, southern Europe, and Central and South America have the commonalities listed. The author’s research in Mexico (Carrier, 1976 and 1977) illustrates how homosexual behavior in these societies appears to be linked to social responses to cross-gender behavior. The comments that follow are limited to male homosexual behavior. Female homosexuality is known to exist in these societies, but too little is known about the behavior to be included in the discussion.

Mexican Homosexual Behavior. The Mexican mestizo culture places a high value on manliness. One of the salient features of the society is thus a sharp delimitation between the roles played by males and females. Role expectations in general are for the male to be dominant and independent and for the female to be submissive and dependent. The continued sharp boundary between male and female roles in Mexico appears to be due in part to a culturally defined hypermasculine ideal model of manliness, referred to under the label machismo. The ideal female role is generally believed to be the reciprocal of the macho (male) role.

As a consequence of the high status given manliness, Mexican males from birth onward are expected to behave in as manly a way as possible. Peñalosa (1968) sums it up as follows: “Any signs of feminization are severely repressed in the boy.” McGinn (1966) concludes: “The young Mexican boy may be severely scolded for engaging in feminine activities, such as playing with dolls or jacks. Parents verbally and physically punish feminine traits in their male children.” The importance of manly behavior continues throughout the life span of Mexican males.

One result of the sharp dichotomization of male and female gender roles is the widely held belief that effeminate males basically prefer to play the female role rather than the male. The link between male effeminacy and homosexuality is the additional belief that as a result of this role preference effeminate males are sexually interested only in masculine males with whom they play the passive sex role. Although the motivations of males participating in homosexual encounters are without question diverse and complex, the fact remains that in Mexico cultural pressure is brought to bear on effeminate males to play the passive insertee role in sexual intercourse, and a kind of de facto cultural approval is given (that is, no particular stigma is attached to) masculine males who want to play the active insertor role in homosexual intercourse.

The beliefs linking effeminate males with homosexuality are culturally transmitted by a vocabulary which provides the appropriate labels, by homosexually oriented jokes and word games (albures), and by the mass media. The links are
established at a very early age. From early childhood on, Mexican males are made aware of the labels used to denote male homosexuals and the connection is always clearly made that these homosexual males are guilty of unmanly effeminate behavior.

The author’s data also support the notion that prior to puberty effeminate males in Mexico are targeted as sexual objects for adolescent and adult males, and are expected to play the passive insertee sex role in anal intercourse. Following the onset of puberty, they continue to be sexual targets for other males because of their effeminacy. The consensus of my effeminate respondents in Mexico is that regardless of whether they are at school, in a movie theater, on the downtown streets, in a park, or in their own neighborhood, they are sought out and expected to play the anal passive sex role by more masculine males. As one fourteen-year-old respondent put it, in response to the question of where he had looked for sexual contacts during the year prior to the interview: “I didn’t have to search for them . . . they looked for me.”

The other side of the coin is represented by masculine male participants in homosexual encounters. Given the fact that effeminate males in Mexico are assumed homosexual and thus considered available as sexual outlets, how do the cultural factors contribute to the willingness of masculine males to play the active insertor sex role? The available data suggest that, insofar as the social variables are concerned, their willingness to participate in homosexual encounters is due to the relatively high level of sexual awareness that exists among males in the society, to the lack of stigmatization of the insertor sex role, and to the restraints that may be placed on alternative sexual outlets by available income and/or by marital status. The only cultural proscriptions are that “masculine” males should not play the passive sex role and should not be exclusively involved with homosexual intercourse.

The passive sex role is by inference—through the cultural equivalence of effeminacy with homosexuality—prescribed for “effeminate” males. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of the society that effeminate males (a majority?) are eventually, if not from the beginning, pushed toward exclusively homosexual behavior. Some do engage in heterosexual intercourse, and some marry and set up households; but these probably are a minority of the identifiably effeminate males among the mestizos of the Mexican population.

**Brazilian Homosexual Behavior.** Both Young (1973) and Fry (1974) note the relationship between cross-gender behavior and homosexuality in Brazil:

Brazilians are still pretty hung-up about sexual roles. Many Brazilians believe in the bi cha/böje (femme/butch) dichotomy and try to live by it. In Brazil, the average person doesn’t even recognize the existence of the masculine homosexual. For example, among working-class men, it is considered all right to fuck a bi cha, an accomplishment of sorts, just like fucking a woman. (Young, 1973)

In the simplest of terms, a male is a man until he is assumed or proved to have “given” in which case he becomes a bi cha. With very few exceptions, males who “eat” bi chas are not classified as anything other than “real men.” Under this classificatory scheme they differ in no way from males who restrict themselves to “eating” females. (Note: the male who gives is an insertee, the one who eats is an inser tor.) (Fry, 1974)

**Southern European Homosexual Behavior.** Contemporary patterns of male homosexual behavior in Greece appear similar to those observed by the author in Mexico. An American anthropologist who collected data on homosexual behavior in Greece while working there on an archaeological project (Bialor, 1975) found, for example, that preferences for playing one sex role or the other (anal insertor or anal insertee) appear to be highly developed among Greek males. Little or no stigma is attached to the masculine male who plays the active insertor role. The social setting in modern Greece also appears to be strikingly similar to that in modern Mexico. Karlen (1971) describes it as follows:
The father spends his spare time with other men in cafes; society is a male club, and there all true companionship lies. Women live separate, sequestered lives. Girls' virginity is carefully protected, and the majority of homicides are committed over the "honor" of daughters and sisters. In some Greek villages a woman does not leave her home unaccompanied by a relative between puberty and old age. Women walk the street, even in Athens, with their eyes down; a woman who looks up when a man speaks to her is, quite simply, a whore. The young male goes to prostitutes and may carry on homosexual connections; it is not unusual for him to marry at thirty having had no sexual experience save with prostitutes and male friends. (p. 16)

In an evaluation of the strategy of Turkish boys' verbal dueling rhymes, Dundes, Leach, and Ozkok (1972) make the following observations about homosexual behavior in Turkey:

It is extremely important to note that the insult refers to passive homosexuality, not to homosexuality in general. In this context there is nothing insulting about being the active homosexual. In a homosexual relationship, the active phallic aggressor gains status; the passive victim of such aggression loses status. It is important to play the active role in a homosexual relationship; it is shameful and demeaning to be forced to take the passive role.

**Moroccan Homosexual Behavior.** The author does not know of any formal studies of homosexual behavior in Morocco. The available information suggests, however, that contemporary patterns of homosexual behavior in Morocco are similar to those in Mexico; that is, as long as Moroccan males play the active, inserter sex role in the relationship, there is never any question of their being considered homosexual. Based on his field work in Morocco shortly after the turn of the century, Wetermarck (1908) believed that "a very large proportion of the men" in some parts of the country were involved in homosexual activity. He also noted that "in Morocco active pederasty is regarded with almost complete indifference, whilst the passive sodomite, if a grown-up individual, is spoken of with scorn. Dr. Polak says the same of the Persians." Contemporary patterns of homosexual behavior in the Islamic Arab countries of North Africa are probably similar to those in Morocco.

**DISCUSSION**

Heterosexual intercourse, marriage, and the creation of a family are culturally established as primary objectives for adults living in all of the societies discussed above. Ford and Beach (1951) concluded from their cross-cultural survey that "all known cultures are strongly biased in favor of copulation between males and females as contrasted with alternative avenues of sexual expression." They further note that this viewpoint is biologically adaptive in that it favors perpetuation of the species and social group, and that societies favoring other nonreproductive forms of sexual expression for adults would not be likely to survive for many generations.

Homosexual intercourse appears to be the most important alternative form of sexual expression utilized by people living around the world. All cultures have established rules and regulations that govern the selection of a sexual partner or partners. With respect to homosexual behavior, however, there appear to be greater variations of the rules and regulations. And male homosexual behavior generally appears to be more regulated by cultures than female homosexual behavior. This difference may be the result of females being less likely than males to engage in homosexual activity; but it may also just be the result of a lack of data on female as compared with male homosexual behavior cross-culturally.

Exclusive homosexuality, however, because of the cultural dictums concerning marriage and the family, appears to be generally excluded as a sexual option even in those societies where homosexual behavior is generally approved. For example, the two societies where all male individuals are free to participate in homosexual activity if they choose, Siwan and East Bay, do not sanction exclusive homosexuality. Although nearly all male members of these two societies are reported to engage in extensive homosexual activities, they are not permitted to do so exclusively over their adult life span. Davenport (1965) reports that "East Bay is a society which permits men to be either heterosexual or bisexual in their behavior,
but denies the possibility of the exclusively homosexual man.” He notes that “they have no concept and therefore no word for the exclusive homosexual.” There are not much data available on the Siwans, but it has been reported that whether single or married, Siwan males “are expected to have both homosexual and heterosexual affairs” (Ford & Beach, 1951).

In East Bay there are two categories of homosexual relationships. One category appears similar to that found in a number of Melanesian societies; an older man plays the active (insertor) sex role in anal intercourse with younger boys “from seven to perhaps eleven years of age.” Davenport notes:

The man always plays the active role, and it is considered obligatory for him to give the boy presents in return for accommodating him. A man would not engage his own son in such a relationship, but fathers do not object when friends use their young sons in this way, provided the adult is kind and generous. (p. 200)

The other category is between young single men of the same age group who play both sex roles in anal intercourse. The young men, however, “are not regarded as homosexual lovers. They are simply friends or relatives, who, understanding each other’s needs and desires, accommodate one another thus fulfilling some of the obligations of kinship and friendship.” This category may be related to several social factors which limit heterosexual contacts of young single men. First, the population is highly masculine with a male/female ratio of 120:100 in the fifteen- to twenty-five-year-old age group. Second, females have historically been brought in as wives for those who could afford the bride price. Third, sexual relations between unmarried individuals and adultery are forbidden. Both relationships are classed as larcenies and “only murder carries a more severe punishment.” At first marriage a bride is expected to be a virgin. Chastity is highly valued in that it indicates adultery is less likely to occur after marriage. And fourth, there is “an extensive system for separating the sexes by what amounts to a general social avoidance between men and women in all but a few situations.” From early adolescence on, unmarried men and boys sleep and eat in the men’s house; and married men spend much of their time there during the day. Davenport notes that both masturbation and anal copulation are socially approved and regarded as substitutes for heterosexual intercourse by members of the society. Female homosexual activity is not reported in East Bay.

Among Siwan males the accepted homosexual relationship is “between a man and a boy but not between adult men or between two young boys” (Bullough, 1976). They are reported to practice anal intercourse with the adult man always playing the active (insertor) sex role. In this society, boys are more valued than girls. Allah (1917) reports that

. . . bringing up of a boy costs very little whereas the girl needs ornaments, clothing, and stains. Moreover the boy is a very fruitful source of profit for the father, not for the work he does, but because he is hired by his father to another man to be used as a catamite. Sometimes two men exchange their sons. If they are asked about this, they are not ashamed to mention it.

Homosexual activity is not reported for Siwan females.

The way in which cross-gender behavior is linked to homosexual behavior, and the meaning ascribed to the “homosexual” behavior by participants and significant others, differ between the three categories of societies identified in this study. What is considered homosexuality in one culture may be considered appropriate behavior within prescribed gender roles in another, a homosexual act only on the part of one participant in another, or a ritual act involving growth and masculinity in still another. Care must therefore be taken when judging sexual behavior cross-culturally with such culture-bound labels as “homosexual” and “homosexuality.”

From a cultural point of view, deviations from sexual mores in a given society appear most likely to occur as a result of the lack of appropriate sexual partners and/or a result of conditioning in approved sexual behavior which is limited by age or ritual (for example, where homosexual intercourse is only appropriate for a certain age group and/or
ritual time period and inappropriate thereafter). Homosexual activity initiated by sociocultural variables may over time through interaction with personality variables, produce an outcome not in accordance with the sexual mores of the society.

The findings presented in this chapter illustrate the profound influence of culture on the structuring of individual patterns of sexual behavior. Whether from biological or psychological causation, cross-gender behaving individuals in many societies must cope with a cultural formulation which equates their behavior with homosexual activity and thus makes it a self-fulfilling prophecy that they become homosexually involved. There are also individuals in many societies who might prefer to be exclusively homosexual but are prevented from doing so by cultural edicts. From whatever causes that homosexual impulses originate, whether they be biological or psychological, culture provides an additional dimension that cannot be ignored.

CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What type of society tends to be accepting of homosexuality? What kind of society is disapproving of this sexual orientation? Why?

2. What insights can be drawn from this article that help to explain violence and discrimination directed toward gay people in U.S. society?

3. Are data about sexuality easily available to researchers? Why not?

NOTES

1. Homosexual behavior or activity will be used here to describe sexual behavior between individuals of the same sex; it may have nothing to do with sexual object choice or sexual orientation of the individual involved. Additionally, the terms “sex role” and “gender role” will be used to describe different behavioral phenomena. As Hooker (1965) points out, they “are often used interchangeably, and with resulting confusion.” Following her suggestion the term “sex role,” when homosexual practices are described, will refer to typical sexual performance only. “The gender connotations (M-F) of these performances need not then be implicitly assumed.” The term “gender role” will refer to the expected attitudes and behavior that distinguish males from females.

2. The Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) contain information on the habits, practices, customs, and behavior of populations in hundreds of societies around the world. These files utilize accounts given not only by anthropologists but also by travelers, writers, missionaries, and explorers. Most cross-cultural surveys of sexual behavior, like those of Ford and Beach and Broude and Greene, have been based on HRAF information. A major criticism of the HRAF information on sexual behavior relates to the difficulty of assessing the reliability of the data collected in different time periods by different people with varying amounts of scientific training as observers.

3. “Preliterate” refers to essentially tribal societies that do not have a written language; “peasant” refers to essentially agrarian literate societies; and “complex modern” refers to highly industrialized societies.

4. In one of the first scholarly surveys of homosexual behavior done by an anthropologist, Westermarck (1908) concluded that: “A very important cause of homosexual practices is absence of the other sex.”

5. The confounding of transvestism with homosexuality still occurs. For example, Minturn, Grosse, and Haider (1969) coded male homosexuality with transvestism in a recent study of the patterning of sexual beliefs and behavior, “because it is often difficult to distinguish between the two practices, and because they are assumed to be manifestations of the same psychological processes and to have similar causes.”

6. The roles described represent the normative cultural ideals of the mestizizado national culture. Mestizos are Mexican nationals of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry. They make up a large majority of the population, and their culture is the dominant one.

7. Both societies are small, each totaling less than 1,000 inhabitants. The Siwis live in an oasis in the Libyan desert. The people of East Bay (a pseudonym) live in a number of small coastal villages in an island in Melanesia.

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Sex is a topic at once very familiar and little understood. This selection is part of a broad study of sexuality in the United States that produced some surprising findings. Despite the common belief that our society has become “free and easy” when it comes to sex, the typical individual has fewer sexual partners than most people think.

Sometimes, the myths about sex contain a grain of truth. The common perception is that Americans today have more sexual partners than they did just a decade or two ago. That, it turns out, is correct. A third of Americans who are over age fifty have had five or more sexual partners in their lifetime. But half of all Americans aged thirty to fifty have had five or more partners even though being younger, they had fewer years to accumulate them.

Still, when we ask older or younger people how many partners they had in the past year, the usual reply is zero or one. Something must have changed to make younger people accumulate more partners over a lifetime, yet sustain a pattern of having no partners or only one in any one year. The explanation is linked to one of our most potent social institutions and how it has changed.

That institution is marriage, a social arrangement so powerful that nearly everyone participates.

About 90 percent of Americans have married by the time they are thirty, and a large majority spends much of their adulthood as part of a wedded couple. And marriage, we find, regulates sexual behavior with remarkable precision. No matter what they did before they wed, no matter how many partners they had, the sexual lives of married people are similar. Despite the popular myth that there is a great deal of adultery in marriage, our data and other reliable studies do not find it. Instead, a vast majority are faithful while the marriage is intact.

So, yes, many young people probably are having sexual intercourse with a fair number of partners. But that stops with marriage. The reason that people now have more sexual partners over their lifetimes is that they are spending a longer period sexually active, but unmarried. The period has lengthened from both ends and in the middle. The average age at which people have their first sexual intercourse has crept down and the average age at which people marry for the first time has edged up. And people are more likely to divorce now, which means they have time between marriages when they search for new partners once again.

To draw these conclusions, we looked at our respondents' replies to a variety of questions. First, we asked people when they first had heterosexual intercourse. Then, we asked what happens between the time when people first have intercourse and when they finally marry. How many partners do they have? Do they have more than one partner at any one time or do they have their partners in succession, practicing serial monogamy? We asked how many people divorced and how long they remained unmarried. Finally, we asked how many partners people had in their lifetimes.

In our analyses of the numbers of sex partners, we could not separately analyze patterns for gay men and lesbians. That is because homosexuals are such a small percentage of our sample that we do not have enough people in our survey to draw valid conclusions about this aspect of sexual behavior.

If we are going to look at heterosexual partners from the beginning, from the time that people first lose their virginity, we plunge headfirst into the maelstrom of teenage sex, always a turbulent subject, but especially so now, in the age of AIDS.

While society disputes whether to counsel abstinence from sexual intercourse or to pass out condoms in high schools, it also must grapple with a basic question: Has sexual behavior among teenagers changed? Are more having sexual intercourse and at younger ages, or is the overheated rhetoric a reaction to fears, without facts? The answer is both troubling and reassuring to the majority of adults who prefer teenagers to delay their sexual activity—troubling because most teenagers are having intercourse, but reassuring because sexual intercourse tends to be sporadic during the teen years.

We saw a steadily declining age at which teenagers first had sexual intercourse. Men and women born in the decade 1933–1942 had sex at an average age of about eighteen. Those born twenty to thirty years later have an average age at first intercourse that is about six months younger, as seen in Figure 1. The figure also indicates that the men report having sex at younger ages than the women. It also shows that blacks report a younger age at first intercourse than whites.

Another way to look at the age at first intercourse is illustrated in Figure 2. The figure shows the proportions of teenagers and young adults who experienced sexual intercourse at each age from twelve to twenty-five. To see at what age half the people had intercourse, for example, follow the horizontal line that corresponds to a cumulative frequency of 50 percent. It shows that half of all black men had intercourse by the time they were fifteen, half of all Hispanic men had intercourse by the time they were about sixteen and a half, half of all white women had intercourse by the time they were nearly seventeen,
FIGURE 2  Cumulative Percentage Who Have Had Intercourse

Note: Cumulative percentage indicates the proportion of respondents of a given group at a given age. This figure only includes respondents who have reached their twenty-fifth birthday by the date of the interview.

and half the white women and half the Hispanic women had intercourse by the time they were nearly eighteen. By age twenty-two, about 90 percent of each group had intercourse.

The patterns are crystal clear. About half the teenagers of various racial and ethnic groups in the nation have begun having intercourse with a partner in the age range of fifteen to eighteen, and at least four out of five have had intercourse by the time their teenage years are over. Since the average age of marriage is now in the mid-twenties, few Americans wait until they marry to have sex.

Our data, in fact, show that the proportion of women who were virgins when they turned twenty or had had sexual intercourse with only one person declined from 84 percent, among women born in 1933 to 1942, to about 50 percent for those born after 1953. . . .

The proportion of women who were virgins has traditionally been somewhat higher than the proportion of men who had had no sexual intercourse by age twenty, but that gender difference has disappeared. . . .

It's a change that built up for years, making it sometimes hard to appreciate just how profound it is. Stories of what sex among the unmarried was like decades ago can be startling. Even people who were no longer teenagers, and who were engaged, felt overwhelming social pressure to refrain from intercourse before marriage. . . .

In addition to having intercourse at younger ages, many people also are marrying later—a change that is the real legacy of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This period was not, we find, a sexual revolution, a time of frequent sex with many partners for all. Instead, it was the beginning of a
profound change in the sexual life course, providing the second reason why Americans have accumulated more partners now than in decades past.

Since the 1960s, the route to the altar is no longer so predictable as it used to be. In the first half of the twentieth century, almost everyone who married followed the same course: dating, love, a little sexual experimentation with one partner, sometimes including intercourse, then marriage and children. It also was a time when there was a clear and accepted double standard—men were much more likely to have had intercourse with several women before marrying than women were to have had intercourse with several men.

At the dawn of the millennium, we are left with a nation that still has this idealized heterosexual life course but whose actual course has fragmented in the crucial years before marriage. Some people still marry at eighteen, others at thirty, leading to very different numbers of sexual partners before marriage. Social class plays a role, with less-educated people marrying earlier than better-educated people. Blacks tend to marry much later than whites, and a large number of blacks do not marry at all.

But a new and increasingly common pattern has emerged: affection or love and sex with a number of partners, followed by affection, love, and cohabitation. This cycles back to the sexual marketplace, if the cohabitation breaks up, or to marriage. Pregnancy can occur at any of these points, but often occurs before either cohabitation or marriage. The result is that the path toward marriage, once so straight and narrow, has begun to meander and to have many side paths, one of which is being trodden into a well-traveled lane.

That path is the pattern of living together before marriage. Like other recent studies, ours shows a marked shift toward living together rather than marriage as the first union of couples. With an increase in cohabitation, the distinctions among having a steady sexual partner, a live-in sexual partner, and a marriage have gotten more fuzzy. This shift began at the same time as talk of a sexual revolution. Our study shows that people who came of age before 1970 almost invariably got married without first living together, while the younger people seldom did. But, we find, the average age at which people first move in with a partner—either by marrying, or living together—has remained nearly constant, around age twenty-two for men and twenty for women. The difference is that now that first union is increasingly likely to be a cohabitation.

With the increase in cohabitation, people are marrying later, on average. The longer they wait, however, the more likely they are to live with a sexual partner in the meantime. Since many couples who live together break up within a short time and seek a new partner, the result has been an increase in the average number of partners that people have before they marry.

Finally, we can look at divorce rates, another key social change that began in the 1960s and that has led to increasing numbers of partners over a lifetime. Our data show this divorce pattern, as do many other data sets in the United States. For example, we can look at how likely it is that a couple will be divorced by the tenth anniversary of their marriage. For people born between 1933 and 1942, the chance was about one in five. For those born between 1943 and 1952, the chance was one in three. For those born between 1953 and 1962, the chance was closer to 38 percent. Divorced people as a group have more sexual partners than people who remain married and they are more likely, as a group, to have intercourse with a partner and live with a partner before they marry again.

These three social trends—earlier first intercourse, later marriage, and more frequent divorce—help explain why people now have more sexual partners over their lifetimes.

To discern the patterns of sexual partnering, we asked respondents how many sexual partners they had. We could imagine several scenarios. People could find one partner and marry. Or they could have sex with several before marrying. Or they could live with their partners first and then marry. Or they could simply have lots of casual sex, never marrying at all or marrying but also having extramarital sex.
Since our respondents varied in age from eighteen to fifty-nine, the older people in the study, who married by their early twenties, would have been married by the time the turbulent 1960s and 1970s came around. Their premarital behavior would be a relic from the past, telling us how much intercourse people had in the days before sex became so public an issue. The younger people in our study can show us whether there is a contrast between the earlier days and the decades after a sexual revolution was proclaimed. We can ask if they have more partners, if they have more than one sexual partner at a time, and if their sexual behavior is markedly different from that of the older generations that preceded them.

Most young people today show no signs of having very large numbers of partners. More than half the men and women in America who were eighteen to twenty-four in 1992 had just one sex partner in the past year and another 11 percent had none in the last year. In addition, studies in Europe show that people in the United Kingdom, France, and Finland have sexual life courses that are virtually the same as the American life course. The picture that emerges is strikingly different from the popular image of sexuality running out of control in our time.

In fact, we find, nearly all Americans have a very modest number of partners, whether we ask them to enumerate their partners over their adult lifetime or in the past year. The number of partners varies little with education, race, or religion. Instead, it is determined by marital status or by whether a couple is living together. Once married, people tend to have one and only one partner, and those who are unmarried and living together are almost as likely to be faithful.

Our data for the United States are displayed in Table 1.

The right-hand portion of Table 1 tells how many sexual partners people had since they turned eighteen. Very few, just 3 percent, had no partners, and few, just 9 percent, had a total of more than twenty partners.

The oldest people in our study, those aged fifty-five to fifty-nine, were most likely to have had just one sexual partner in their lifetimes—40 percent said they had had only one. This reflects the earlier age of marriage in previous generations and the low rate of divorce among these older couples. Many of the men were married by age twenty-two and the women by age twenty.

The left-hand portion of Table 1 shows the number of sexual partners that people had in the past twelve months. These are the data that show how likely people are to remain faithful to their sexual partner, whether or not they are married. Among married people, 94 percent had one partner in the past year. Couples who were living together were almost as faithful. Seventy-five percent of people who had never married but were living together had one partner in the past year. Eighty percent of people who were previously married and were cohabiting when we questioned them had one partner in the past year. Two-thirds of the single people who were not living with a partner had no partners or only one in the past year. Only a few percent of the population had as many as five partners for sexual intercourse in the past year, and many of these were people who were never married and were not living with anyone. They were mostly young and mostly male.

One way to imagine the patterns of sexual partners is to think of a graph, with the vertical axis showing numbers of partners and the horizontal axis showing a person's age. The graph will be a series of blips, as the person finds partners, interspersed with flat regions where the person has no partners or when the person has just one steady partner. When the person marries, the line flattens out at a height of one, indicating that the individual has only one partner. If the marriage breaks up, the graph shows a few more blips until the person remarries, and then it flattens out again.

For an individual, the graph is mostly flat, punctuated by a few areas of blips. But if we superimposed everyone's graph on top of each other, we would have a sort of supergraph that looked like it
### TABLE 1
Number of Sex Partners in Past Twelve Months and since Age Eighteen

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*Note: Row percentages total 100 percent.*
was all blips. That, in essence, is what has led to the widespread impression that everyone is having lots of partners. We see the total picture—lots of sex in the population—without realizing that each individual spends most of his or her life with only one partner.

These findings give no support to the idea of a promiscuous society or of a dramatic sexual revolution reflected in huge numbers of people with multiple casual sex partners. The finding on which our data give strong and quite amazing evidence is not that most people do, in fact, form a partnership, or that most people do, in fact, ultimately get married. That fact also was well documented in many previous studies. Nor is it news that more recent marriages are much less stable than marriages that began thirty years ago. That fact, too, was reported by others before us. But we add a new fact, one that is not only important but that is striking.

Our study clearly shows that no matter how sexually active people are before and between marriages, no matter whether they lived with their sexual partners before marriage or whether they were virgins on their wedding day, marriage is such a powerful social institution that, essentially, married people are nearly all alike—they are faithful to their partners as long as the marriage is intact. It does not matter if the couple were high-school sweethearts who married after graduation day or whether they are in their thirties, marrying after each had lived with several others. Once married, the vast majority have no other sexual partner; their past is essentially erased. Marriage remains the great leveler.

We see this, for example, when we ask about fidelity in marriage. More than 80 percent of women and 65 to 85 percent of men of every age report that they had no partners other than their spouse while they were married. . . .

The marriage effect is so dramatic that it swamps all other aspects of our data. When we report that more than 80 percent of adult Americans age eighteen to fifty-nine had zero or one sexual partner in the past year, the figure might sound ludicrous to some young people who know that they and their friends have more than one partner in a year. But the figure really reflects the fact that most Americans in that broad age range are married and are faithful. And many of the others are cohabiting, and they too are faithful. Or they are without partners altogether, a situation that is especially likely for older women. . . . We find only 3 percent of adults had five or more partners in the past year. Half of all adult Americans had three or fewer partners over their lifetimes.

**CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS**

1. What single factor seems to do more than any other to limit the typical person’s number of sexual partners?

2. Were you surprised that half of U.S. adults have had three or fewer sexual partners over their lifetimes? Why do we tend to think of our society as much more sexually active?

3. What has changed with regard to sexuality in the United States over the course of the last fifty years? What has stayed pretty much the same?