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As criminologists are beginning to discover in so many other cases, the more objective analytical approach also produces a more objective and less sensational assessment of the nature of the problem. The evidence of homicides and physical violence is horrifying enough, but Blok's careful close-range study shows that the *mafia* that carried them out was never the centralised secret society of popular mythology but a series of networks of violent middlemen each struggling for some base in their own area of a segmented society.

Mary McIntosh

SEXUAL CONDUCT: THE SOCIAL SOURCES OF HUMAN SEXUALITY. By JOHN H. GAGNON AND WILLIAM SIMON. (Chicago: Aldine 1973. 316 pp.)

IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE GAY WORLD. By CAROL A. B. WARREN. (London: John Wiley and Sons. 1974. 191 pp. £5.75)

MALE HOMOSEXUALS: THEIR PROBLEMS AND ADAPTATIONS. By MARTIN S. WEINBERG AND COLIN J. WILLIAMS. (London: Oxford University Press. 1974. 316 pp.)

THESE three books have much in common. They are all concerned with homosexuality; they are all loosely "interactionist"; they all work within versions of "labelling theory"; and they are all substantial contributions of considerable merit. Taken together, they all serve to advance the argument of societal reaction theory, although a useful redirection is made away from the more formal aspects of labelling to a consideration of the heightened importance of indirect, informal and symbolic labelling.

Yet while there is much in common, the books remain significantly different in style, scope and substance. Gagnon and Simon focus upon the entire range of sexual experience, from childhood sexuality to marital sex, from lesbianism to pornography; and while they are not averse to empirical findings (they spent many years at the Indiana Kinseyland of Quantophrenia) their work is essentially a theoretical treatise of great significance. Weinberg and Williams—the new Kinsey sociologists—focus on the adjustment of male homosexuals in three cultures, and present a predominantly statistical analysis of 2,500 completed postal questionnaires. Warren narrows the analysis down even further, providing an observational account of identity, community, interaction rituals and stigma as it appeared to two hundred middle class, apolitical male homosexuals in an American city between 1968 and 1973. Here, the civilised and cultured style of Gagnon and Simon, and the scientific research style of Weinberg and Williams are transformed into a hip sociologists' notepad: bursts of dazzling insight, an armoury of Goffmanesque concepts, and many long quotes where "the actors speak for themselves."

*Sexual Conduct* is a study of towering importance: it is quite probably the single most important general sociological study of sexuality that has ever been published. What Freud did for psychiatry, Kinsey did for zoology, and Masters and Johnson did for medicine, Gagnon and Simon have surely done for sociology. They have brought a vision that is distinctly sociological, and which shows how most previous sociological works on sex have been over-dependent on metaphors and images borrowed from other disciplines. At last a landmark has been made from which a full sociology of sexuality may develop. Here is a study which grounds sexuality

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firmly in principles of social organisation rather than biology; which focuses upon sexual meanings, rather than simply locating sexuality within some powerful organic drive; which focuses upon social change throughout—aware of our pre-occupation with viewing the past through the lenses of the present, and our current over-fascination with the pace and power of change; and which radically (I use a much debased word with care) challenges most of our common-sense attitudes about sexuality.

I cannot do justice to the content of so important a book. As instances of its insights, let me just cite one observation from each of the first three chapters. Chapter 1 tells us that the “powerful biological sex drive”—far from being a universal absolute—is a myth; and that the physical acts of sex themselves only become possible because they are “embedded in social scripts” (p. 9). Chapter 2 further annihilates our Freudian world view by telling us that children are not intrinsically sexual, and that children playing with their genitals may do so with meanings that are quite different from those subsequently imposed by adults. And in chapter 3—which discusses the meaning of sex in marriage—we are told that “it is the socio-cultural that gives sex its meaning, and it is the myths of society that give it its power. . . . Sex is really just like everything else, and there is no natural man struggling against the pressures of civilisation” (p. 108).

Clearly, just these few examples are sufficient to reveal that the book is bound to land in the midst of sociological polemic; and both conservatives and radicals are going to dislike it. Given this, it is a pity that the authors have written a slightly uneven book (most of it is the compilation of past papers, only marginally rounded out). More regrettably, the authors have generally evaded the fundamental issue on which they must be challenged. That is, they *assert* the primacy of the social over the biological, and they *assert* that the “power” of the sex drive is a social myth: there is little detailed attempt to show *how* societies have functioned without sex, or what the *precise* links between body and meaning are. Paradoxically, their distinctive sociological account of sexuality demonstrates the great need for sociologists to focus more on the complex interdependence between body and culture.

By contrast, *Male Homosexuals* is a much narrower book. The core of this latest Kinsey product is to provide empirical material on the male homosexuals' adjustment, focusing especially on his relationship to the heterosexual world, the “gay world”, and his personal psychological problems. More specifically, Weinberg and Williams attempt to test a number of propositions derived from labelling theory which would suggest that the homosexual's situation becomes worse as hostility increases. To this end, they first compare homosexuals in America, where hostility is greatest, with those in Denmark and the Netherlands where hostility is less, and they secondly compare these samples with (highly dubious) samples from the general population. While many of their findings do support the societal reaction thesis, there are some notable anomalies which cast doubt on the blanket acceptance of this approach. For instance, little difference is found in the psychological problems faced by homosexuals in all three cultures; nor are there notable differences found between the homosexuals and heterosexual samples. (p. 136; p. 150). The authors offer a number of reasons why this may be so, and in doing extend and refine the theoretical basis of labelling studies.

It is to Weinberg and Williams' considerable credit that they should have

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brought both theory and policy to Kinseyland, empirical rigour to labelling theory, and cross-cultural comparisons to deviancy study. Yet the book remains somewhat less than it could have been. In sheer magnitude, this volume is dwarfed by the earlier Kinsey studies where vast quantities of empirical data were the norm. With this study, one can turn for information on a wide range of issues—"gay couples," class differentials, secret homosexuals, women, "gay friendships" etc.—and find very little data. There are also curious omissions in the referencing: Schofield's two classics, for instance, are not mentioned even though they provide empirical data on similar problems from yet another culture. And most seriously, the methodology invites scepticism. Unlike other Kinsey studies, these authors gain their data from lengthy self-administered questionnaires distributed through homophile organisations and homosexual bars: their chosen method inevitably leads to a scantiness of detail, low response rates (falling as low as 24·2 per cent.), and sampling skews (most homosexuals that I know don't go near homosexual clubs, and don't belong to organisations).

A notable feature of this study is its sixty pages of photos and ethnography. Brief accounts are given of the legal situation (especially the enforcement policies), the homophile organisations and the homosexual bars in each of the four cities studied (New York, Los Angeles, Amsterdam and Copenhagen). The authors even provide ecological maps locating homosexual bars—making the book a useful guide for the neophyte homosexual searching for the gay areas in these towns!

But the ethnography of this study is very different from that provided by Warren in *Identity and Community in the Gay World*. For whilst the Indiana sociologists look only at the surface, visible institutions of "gay life", Warren shows her immersion in the homosexual community by providing rich detail on friendships, relationships and "homes"—the less visible, less researched but more important segments of homosexual life. Further, her concern lies with the more subjective meanings of homosexual life than with the behaviour patterns and institutional forms. For instance, she charts the norms of much homosexual interaction—dominated by drinking and "serious sociability"; the perception of both class structures and deviant categories within the homosexual world; the feelings of "gayness", "community" and "stigma" as experiences in the gay world; and the contours of homosexual knowledge, language and legitimation machineries. All of this provides a richer ethnography of a limited portion of the homosexual experience than has hitherto been provided.

The book, however, is not mere description. Warren herself claims to be both phenomenologist and existentialist (seeking meanings as members experience them, and taking a non-deterministic viewpoint), yet she spares us from both the theoretical verbosity and the aspirations to "pure description" that so often accompany such claims. Instead, she darts sensitively between the members' meanings, and her own view of the world which is heavily derived from Simmel's writings on secrecy and sociability, and Goffman's discussions on self-presentation, stigma and identity. This is the most expensive of the three books under review; it is also the shortest and the slightest. Yet it still makes an important and welcome addition to any library on homosexuality.

*Ken Plummer*