

"MARGINAL MAN: THE ALCOHOLIC AND THE HOMOSEXUAL"

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Alcoholics, homosexuals! Different? Yes! But, similar. Think for a moment what these two major social sub-groups or sub-cultures, numbering, in total, over twenty-five million men and women in America, hold in common. On one level these two groups are similar in that they are both sub-cultures within society at large. More specifically, these social sub-groups can be classified under the heading of 'marginal men'.

Who are marginal men, how they achieve this status, how they function within society and specifically the cases of the homosexual and the alcoholic marginal groups will be the major concerns of this paper. What this report hopes to achieve is a broad understanding of the concept of the marginal social group in relation to the alcoholic and the homosexual. It can not, however, hope to accomplish full and complete understanding of either social group as no single book or essay could hope to do.

Marginal men, as described by Peter L. Berger, can be defined as "Those people who have, for one reason or another, withdrawn voluntarily or involuntarily from Main Street and Madison Ave — the worlds of hipsters, alcoholics, homosexuals, hoboes and other 'marginal men'. These worlds are kept safely out of sight on the streets where 'nice people' live, work, and amuse themselves."¹ It is ironic to note that often marginal groups boast many members of the species of so-called 'nice people'. — The apparently happy housewife who is in actuality a 'closet' alcoholic and the husband who sneaks off to his gay lover while on business trips are but two examples of "marginal man whom fate has condemned to live in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures"² There is a problem with the definition of marginal man as defined by Peter L. Berger. The

original and broader concept of marginal man as described by Everett V. Stonequist applied the term 'marginal man' to all groups that at one time or another have been filtered out of mainstream society. This definition would include racial, ethnic and religious, as well as social minorities. Although, for my purposes, I will be referring to Berger's definition whenever the term 'marginal men' is used.

Often the effect on these marginal individuals, who are caught between two cultures, is that they are forced to develop dual personalities in order to cope with their two highly different cultures. This type of dualism may not necessarily pose a problem to the individual marginal man. Human beings have the ability and plasticity to adapt their personalities as the situation demands. This dualism could then be thought of simply as role playing. But, upon closer evaluation it becomes apparent that this type of role playing can be highly distressing and damaging to the individual in marginal society.

In dealing with the marginal man the discussion must be limited to each individual culture. Such as the American alcoholic and the American homosexual. As cultures vary so do attitudes towards the various sub-cultures. What is marginal for one society may be fully accepted by another. Alcoholics in America apparently fall into the category of marginal man. But, why do we recognize alcoholics to be marginal while the French fully accept it as a part of every day living? Our attitudes towards drinking, much like our attitudes towards work, stem from the early colonial period. "Moderate use of alcohol was expected and fully approved, but drunkenness, seen as a moral defect indicating weak self control, was frowned upon and even punished."³ Although many centuries have passed since the Puritans have inhabited the wilds of New England, their attitudes towards drunkenness have carried over into the twentieth

century much as the Puritan work ethic has. We view drunkenness as an anti-social act forcing the drunk or alcoholic away from society and into a smaller sub-group.

France, in contrast, does not uphold the same attitudes towards heavy drinking as we do in America. "The French people accept heavy wine drinking as not only desirable but socially healthy. Although the French alcoholic suffers from the physiological symptoms of alcoholism such as increased tissue tolerance and withdrawal symptoms do occur, the alcoholic does not feel the intense psychological misery and social rejections that the American alcoholic does."⁴ Drinking is an integral part of French culture. The assumption that can be drawn from this is that the numbers of French alcoholics forced by social rejection into the marginal social group would be relatively less than the numbers of Americans forced into the same group purely because of moral and social attitudes. So, despite the statistical evidence that there are more alcoholics in France than in the U.S.,^{the} marginal group of alcoholics, in France those who have been forced to the fringes of society, could be expected to be significantly smaller because of the limited amount of social rejection experienced by the French alcoholic.

American attitudes are not necessarily negative towards alcoholism in general. In exploring the three stage concept of alcoholism it becomes obvious that in general Americans show ambivalence towards the early stages of alcoholism while in the last stage of the three stage concept we often ~~totally~~ reject the alcoholic completely. The difficulty with this sharp contrast of attitudes is that when the alcoholic first needs help, little if any attention is paid to the problem. Once the individual's drinking habits become so bad that the alcoholic is obsessed with drinking we completely reject him when

*Might
Explain at
the
beginning*

he needs help and support most.

During the early stages of alcoholism, the drinker begins to suffer from a number of physiological and psychological symptoms characteristic of the alcoholic. "The best example of a physiological symptom which is not obvious to others but is felt internally and subjectively by the developing alcoholic is the 'black-out'. The term means that the drinker cannot remember what happened during a certain period of time."⁵ Along with these recurring black-outs the drinker experiences an increased tolerance of alcohol. Whereas at one time the individual was able to achieve a high with one or two drinks it may now take four or five. At this point the drinker should be discouraged from continued increase in drinking practices. "Unfortunately, prestige comes to many, especially young males if their tolerance for alcohol is high. So, the process continues. During this first stage of alcoholism the alcoholic senses his difference from others and feels guilty about it."⁶ These early feelings of separation lead to the alcoholics eventual move into marginal society in order to be with those with the same 'illness'. Also during this stage, the developing alcoholic manages to maintain family and business responsibilities and in some cases even improves in some parts of these key roles to compensate for his guilt.

During the middle stages of alcoholism the drinker begins to lose control of his drinking habits. Alcohol becomes the driving force in daily living and the alcoholic finds himself most concerned about his supply of alcohol. The middle stage alcoholic can no longer conceal his problem. His excessive drinking begins to disrupt his performance on the job through growing absenteeism. At home, normal family life begins to deteriorate. Increased drinking brings with it increased feelings of guilt and an eruption of self hatred occurs due to the

unbearable feelings of guilt. Guilt arises from the individual's recognition of his increased lack of responsibility to both his family and his job. Often the alcoholic in the middle stages of alcoholism will seek out those that can offer support and approval for his drinking habits. Here is where the destructive dualism develops. The alcoholic is attempting to function in two distinctly different and conflicting roles and the result is both anxiety and guilt.

Though the middle stage alcoholic is met with disapproval by family members and business associates, objections are often not strong enough to force the alcoholic to change his drinking habits. The second stage alcoholic would almost be better off if his wife, or her husband, left them. It could be the impetice that would force them into treatment. But usually the spouse doesn't give up and leave until the later stages of alcoholism when desertion ~~does little but to encourage~~ the alcoholic to drink even more.

The third and sometimes fatal stage of alcoholism finds the alcoholic fully obsessed with keeping a constant supply of liquor on hand. The hangover is, more often than not, drowned with another drink. This pattern of drinking followed by a hangover which is followed by more drinking in order to dull the ill effects of a hangover leads to long periods of drunkenness or near drunkenness. The drinking becomes so all-consuming that there is a total disregard of time of day, week, or social responsibilities. The life of the third stage alcoholic is fully dependent on alcohol. This stage of alcoholism which takes many years of drinking to reach finds the individual "experiencing so strong a social segregation from society that his only alternative is to accept his deviant status and to seek the comfort that can be found among others in a similar condition. The society has labeled him an alcoholic thus

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stigmatizing and segregating him, and he reacts by a form of self segregation. He joins the company of other drinkers who as a group isolate themselves from 'normal' society."⁷

Alcoholics in this stage of the disease are likely to receive little help from family members, employers or friends. The alcoholic is by this point in time an outcast from society. "Rejection of the alcoholic because of his loss of control of his emotions and actions, due to his drinking, is legitimized by the violation of the dominant social value—self control."⁸ Our view of alcoholism as a violation of this social value, which is again a carry-over from the early colonial period, makes us feel justified in segregating the alcoholic from mainstream society. The alcoholic, by the time he reaches the final stages of alcoholism, has become a full fledged member of a marginal social group that numbers in America today close to five million men and women.

The marginal group serves, for the homosexual and the alcoholic, several purposes which society can not provide. The major function of the marginal group is that it often acts as a primary group. For the alcoholic who has been rejected by family and friends, bar mates serve as a primary group lending comfort and support to the individual. For the homosexual a primary group is also necessary in order to maintain their identity as a homosexual. "Identities are socially bestowed. They must also be socially sustained, and fairly steadily so. One can not be human all by oneself and, apparently, one can not hold on to any particular identity all by oneself. If the individuals identity is not sustained in some way, it usually does not take long before self-image collapses."⁹ For the homosexual to maintain a fairly stable

self image, their identity must be reinforced by those around them who are part of the same marginal group.

It is difficult to imagine that in the United States today, there are as many alcoholics as there are people living in the two New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens combined. Admittedly this is a hard number to conceive of. Now try to imagine a marginal group the size of the population of the entire state of New York— about 20 to 25 million people. By the conservative estimates made by the Kinsey reports this is the number of homosexuals living in the U.S. today. Where are they all? Everywhere! Homosexuals can be found in every facet of American Society from your college biology professor to the minister down the block and even married men and women with children. But, you didn't know they were homosexuals? Their homosexuality quite often remains hidden and for good reasons.

The American view of homosexuality sees homosexuals as people who frequent gay bars, public baths and public toilets; as people on the marginal fringes of society. This image of the homosexual is reason enough for any gay to keep their homosexuality a secret not to mention the prejudice directed towards homosexuals in all areas of society. The question arises; is it the homosexual who desires to be on the fringes of society or is it society who has forced the homosexual to restrict his or her behavior to bars, toilets and baths.* "When homosexuality is regarded as a perversion, the homosexual is immediately exposed to all the conflicts to which deviants from the 'norm' are always exposed. His guilt, his sense of inadequacy, his failures, are all

*It must be noted that there is a misconception that all homosexuals frequent gay bars. Surveys show that just under fifty percent of all homosexuals frequent gay bars.

consequences of the disrepute which social traditions visit upon him, and few people can achieve a satisfactory life unsupported by the standards of their society. The adjustments that society demands of them would strain any man's vitality, and the consequences of this conflict we identify with their homosexuality."¹⁰ The often thought deviant behavior of homosexuals such as the baths and pick-ups in public toilets are simply products of the pressures placed on the homosexual. Deviant behavior is not innate for the American gay. It is the result of societies stigmatization of the homosexual. ~~Homosexuals have made many of the adjustments necessary to exist within the framework of American society as it exists today. Here, again, we find the concept of dualism. The homosexual is often forced to separate his or her homosexuality from public life in order to be able to function in society as a contributing individual. In playing two very different roles, the homosexual has to face the conflicts involved in living in two different worlds. Anxiety and guilt are the most common by-products. In the area of duality, the homosexual has a distinct advantage over the alcoholic. Although homosexuals are considered to be part of marginal society, their homosexuality does not necessarily have to interfere with business and family responsibilities. An individual can hide their homosexuality without too much difficulty. The alcoholic can not, as we have seen, function within society as a contributing individual and has a hard time hiding their alcoholism.~~

It becomes apparent that the major reason homosexuals are marginal men in Western civilization is because society views them as such. "The homosexual illustrates the individual whose congenial drives are not provided for in the institutions of his culture. This dilemma becomes

of psychiatric importance when the behavior in question is regarded as categorically abnormal as it is in Western culture. Western civilization tends to regard even a mild homosexual as an abnormal. The clinical picture of homosexuality stresses the neuroses and psychoses to which it gives rise, and emphasizes almost equally the inadequate functioning of the invert and his behavior. We have only to turn to other cultures, however, to realize that homosexuals have by no means been uniformly inadequate to the social situation. In some societies they have even been especially acclaimed."¹¹ American social-sexual values make little room for anything that strays from the path of heterosexual sex relations. When looking at the values of other cultures such as the American Indians and the ancient Greek's it becomes clear that there have been cultures where homosexuals have been an accepted part of everyday living. "Plato's Republic is, of course, the most convincing statement of the honourable estate of homosexuality. It is presented as a major means to the good life, and Plato's high ethical evaluation of this response was upheld in the customary behavior of Greece at that period. The American Indians as well had a place for homosexuals in their society but did not hold them with such acclaim as did the Greeks."¹² It seems apparent that homosexuality does not necessarily have to be marginal. Those who are openly homosexual in a society that accepts them can be just as productive and responsible as all other members of a given society.

What are the future prospects for alcoholics and homosexuals in American society? For alcoholics the future does not see much change in present attitudes. Society does not yet seem ready to accept

alcoholism as an illness taking the alcoholic one step away form marginal society. That is not to deny that progress has been made in educating the public. But, the progrss is extremely slow. All one needs to do is to look back to books written at the turn of the century to see that what was written about alcoholism then does not differ much from what is written today. Alcoholics can not hope to perform within society as fully functioning individuals and will therefore probably remain apart from larger society. But, if society can accept alcoholism as an illness rather than a weakness in moral values, the stigmatization of alcohol will be eliminated. As the alcoholic will no longer feel compelled to remove himself from society he will be one step closer to treatment. For the alcoholic, treatment is the only road back from marginal society. Society can change its views about alcoholism but that is only half the battle. The rest of the battle is up to the alcoholic. *My has recently decided not to bring alcoholics before the courts, but rather to rehabilitation centers. This is an*

The future for homosexuals looks a good deal brighter than it does for alcoholics. Since the early nineteen-sixties homosexuals have ^{improvement} made tremendous strives towards the legitimization of homosexuality. For homosexuality to be an accepted practice in America, the barriers that seperate homosexuals from the rest of society must be torn down. Two critical factors are involved in achieving this; first, the striking down of descriminitory laws that seperate and single out the homosexual from society, secondly, re-education of the American public as to who and what a homosexual is. The accepted stereotype of the homosexual as 'a limp wristed sissy' who dresses in women's clothes and is psycho-~~logical~~ logically ill is about as correct as believing that Jews have horns, are all rich and monopolize the American economy through the control of banks.

Once the public can be made aware of the fact that the homosexual is just as average as the average American, the barriers that stand between homosexuals and the rest of society will begin to weaken. "Once homosexuality is no longer labeled as a perversion, the emotional reaction to the phenomenon will not be that of a belief of willful sinning on the part of the homosexual. —As heterosexual and homosexual emotions are natural phenomenon it is irrelevant to label them as either right or wrong."¹³

To see the progress of homosexuals away from the marginal status homosexuality has been labeled with, one needs only to look back a decade or two to the 'average' book on homosexuality; the type that labeled homosexuality as a psychological disorder and tried to put the blame for a child's sexual orientation on the passive father, ~~passive~~ dominant mother syndrome. Just a few years ago the Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its lists as a psychological disorder. Homosexuality remains a deviant sexual behavior but it is no longer thought of as something to 'cure' a person of. So, it seems clear that definite and important progress has been made. Books too reflect the changing attitudes towards homosexuality; changes that make an 'average' book on homosexuality written during the nineteen-fifties or sixties obsolete. *A great deal of change is still needed - homos. is still against the law.*

The desire of homosexuals to be accepted as part of society rather than a 'marginal group' can, perhaps, be best illustrated by a controversial gay couple. They are controversial because they were the first legal same sex marriage in America. Before their marriage, Look Magazine did an article on the American family.* Included among the examples of American couples was a homosexual couple, Jack Baker

*The Look Magazine article is reproduced in full at the end of this paper.

and Michael McConnell. The couple comes across in the article as an average American couple (with obvious differences). "In many respects, the Baker-Connell household is like that of other young marrieds except that there is no male-female role playing. No one is a limp wristed sissy."¹⁴

If present trends in the legitimization of homosexuality continue, then surely there is hope for the, perhaps reluctant, acceptance of homosexuality into American culture. Maybe then, homosexuality can be removed from the list of marginal men so that the list reads one less member than it does today.

Alcoholics! Homosexuals! Marginal? That's up to you!!!!!!!

A Your paper is well done. You might have elaborated on the concept of marginal men in more detail at the beginning of the paper, but what's here is well written & well organized. You point out how difficult it is to be marginal in society - this is clearly the case for all kinds of "deviants." I'm not sure I share your optimism about the future status of homosexuals. There is still a long way to go - and always the possibility of regression.

Footnotes

1. Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology (N.Y., Doubleday and Company, 1963), p. 44.
2. Everett V. Stonequist, The Marginal Man (N.Y., Charles Scribner's Sons 1937), p. XV.
3. Harrison M. Trice, Alcoholism in America (N.Y., McGraw-Hill Book Company 1966), p. 12.
4. Ibid., p. 25.
5. Ibid., p. 30.
6. Ibid., p. 31.
7. Ibid., p. 50.
8. Ibid., p. 60.
9. Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology, p. 100.
10. Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company 1934), p. 268.
11. Ibid., p. 262.
12. Ibid., p. 263.
13. Helen Wright, Sex and Society (Seattle, University of Washington Press 1969), p. 63.
14. Gardner Cowles, Look Magazine, "The Homosexual Couple" by Jack Star, January 26, 1971.

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4. Cowles, Gardner. Look Magazine, January 26, 1971, Volume 35 No.2, "The Family: The Homosexual Couple" by Jack Star.
5. Chafetz, Morris E., Demone, Harold W. Alcoholism and Society. New York: Oxford University Press 1962.
6. Palmer, Charles. Inebriety. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company 1898.
7. Stonequist, Everett V. The Marginal Man. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1937.
8. Tobin, Kay. The Gay Crusaders. New York: Arno Press 1975
9. Trice, Harrison M. Alcoholism in America. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company 1966.
10. Wright, Helen. Sex and Society. Seattle: University of Washington Press 1969.