

Abstract

This thesis "Gay : The Development and Maintenance Process of the Homosexual Identity" is aimed at studying the process through which an individual accepts the meaning of homosexuality to his identity and how he manages to maintain the identity. Two main purposes of this study are :

1. To study what continuous stages of the process a homosexual passes before he comes to identify homosexual identity and gives definitions to it.
2. To study what social conditions and important experiences in each stage of the process have influence upon the acceptance and maintenance of homosexual identity.

Qualitative methodologies - detailed interviews and participation observation - are used with 10 homosexual samples in order to obtain useful data which are collected by means of tape recording and note-taking.

For the analysis of the obtained data, the theory of symbolic interaction is mainly used because this study emphasizes the process of interpreting, giving definitions and associating them to sexual orientation that leads to the development of homosexual identity.

The research points out that the process of homosexual identity development and maintenance consists of 4 continuous stages through which a homosexual experiences the important conditions of meaning and social category of homosexual acceptance for self. The 4 stages are as follows :

1. At this first stage a homosexual feels he is different from other men and begins to accept the definition of

homosexuality. He realizes that some of his behaviors are different from normal men and, as a result, he is differently treated or is classified as a gay according to any definition.

2. The process of separating feelings and actions from identity which is a process where a person begins to wonder he may be a homosexual but can not accept the definition of homosexuality to his identity because being a homosuxual has been considered abnormal or deviant behavior by the public. Thus a gay has to try to find excuses for being a homosexual so that he can refuse the identity and avoid stigma from the society.
3. The stage of coming out. At this point, a gay has got the homosexual identity. In other words, he has accepted that he is a gay and is willing to go into the world of gays where he can find references others of the some sort - and prove his being a gay. At this tage he understands the meaning of homosexuality and the ways gays live which are the very important factors to the construction of gay identity.
4. The stage of identity maintenance. At this stage he decides to live as a gay. He can not live without homosexual identity; he has to maintain it. The most importand thing causing this is that he can not have sexual orientation with females. Being a heterosexual or a bisexual is extreamely difficult for him. Another factor is that later he tries to adjust himself to the society by changing behaviors so that he can be one in the

world of straight. This help to decrease stigma from society. The other factor is that when he goes to the homosexual society, the sub-culture there accepts his feelings and behaviors and that helps make his identity secure.