

selection and data collection procedures. Nevertheless, for the 65 subjects finally selected it has to be said that the criteria of 'complex specificity' appears to have been well met. For each of them their activities at 10-second intervals were observed over several hours, using a set of 96 symbols. The researchers make no claim that the 65 individuals are representative in any strict sense, nor that their settings are representative of the four institutional types, but the original selection of 80 people was organised to cover the range of physical dependency and mental status.

The findings reported here will be of particular interest to those involved in the delivery of care to elderly people—there are clearly overlaps and rationalisations to be made, if not economies, across these areas or provision. The suggestion made by the authors that this mode of observation could prove a valuable training exercise is certainly apposite. The application of observation methods to this kind of issue is justified by the findings, though I would add here that it is not always easy to follow the procedures used in the study. All the same, there is sufficient detail provided to permit replication of the approach. Observation strategies of this intensity can yield densely textured facts about the flow of daily life within a social environment, and permit certain generalisations to be made which have important implications for practice. It also seems to me that where an elderly, frail possibly submissive group of informants is concerned, observation methods are likely to produce material which is both more comprehensive and more useful than that yielded by self-reported approaches. In this instance diaries might have been the only alternative way of collecting data of this kind, a demand which would clearly have exceeded the strengths of these elderly people. It is a pity that methodological considerations and an often condensed style of presenting the more 'technical' findings obscure the central results, but all in all a useful and, for me, an interesting contribution to the ethnography of establishments for the elderly.

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Raymond M. Berger, *Gay and Gray*, University of Illinois Press,
Chicago, 1982, pp. 192, no price. ISBN 0 252 00950 9

In this study, Berger attempts to prove his hypothesis that ageing presents the same problems for homosexual people as for heterosexuals. The two main aims were: first, to study the degree of self worth, life satisfaction and integration into the younger and older gay community, and the extent of an active sexual life among the sample; and secondly, to consider the extent of successful adaptation to ageing among homosexual men.

There were 19 in-depth interviews and 112 respondents to a questionnaire. The interviews contained open-ended questions which reflected the importance to each individual of certain aspects of life relative to others. What was concealed or elaborated depended on the interviewee. There was difficulty in finding sufficient women and gay people from minority groups, so the study

is confined to white older males. The reason given is that white gay men lead more 'public' lives. This must skew the sample even more than the author acknowledges, for we do not have access to white older men who conceal their homosexuality through fear or social constraints. There are also difficulties in defining homosexuality – not everyone remains homosexual all their lives, or exclusively so. Kinsey demonstrated that sexual orientation is better described as a continuum and that any attempt to define where homosexuality begins is arbitrary. Nevertheless, the author maintains that his sample is adequate to refute stereotypes and to illustrate the diversity of characteristics in older homosexual men.

He does not seek to compare homosexuals with heterosexuals but to examine a group of men in their own right and to observe what happens to them rather than why it happens. The effect on the lives of homosexual older men of the relative openness of lifestyle of the younger generation must be of importance and cannot be adequately measured. Their sense of isolation from the younger gay generation and the different lifestyle they were forced to adopt when young might have exacerbated the cultural gap between the generations.

Younger American homosexual men do not experience the depth of shame, of fear and of anxiety that these older people have known. Twenty-eight per cent of the sample were or had been married, and this high proportion might be partly explained by the greater social pressure to conform when they were younger and by the hope, not realised at least for those in the sample, that their homosexuality would 'go away'.

The most difficult aspect of their lives had been coming to terms with their own sexual orientation. However, these older men tended to be more self-accepting than younger homosexuals. In their young days there were few, if any facilities for them and the process of seeking out others was far more difficult, surreptitious and dangerous to employment and social status. They had needed to draw on their own strength to survive. Having to do this against such heavy odds might have made them better adjusted. They rated themselves more exclusively homosexual than younger groups did, another difference which the author speculates could be due to the greater freedom among younger people to experiment and to accept sexual ambiguity.

Half of those interviewed went to gay churches and placed great emphasis on spiritual values and community life. They preferred gay friends. One man commented 'We have to realise we are not beautiful forever, not on the outside at any rate. So in order to attract others, we must make ourselves attractive on the inside.' Over 50% of the sample had experienced a stable relationship with a male partner at some time and only 39% lived alone, so the stereotype of the solitary older man was not supported by this study. The fear of loneliness was, however, apparent in many of the interviewees, in their fear of losing their looks and attractiveness. Their need for closeness with another person transcended other priorities and without marriage bonds this need seems to have a more pronounced sexual aspect than with male heterosexuals of the same age. Great value was placed on the home or on the gay bar or club, because here the subculture provides a set of values which reinforce the individual's identity, difficult to maintain in the outside world where his deviance from the norm is always apparent to himself. It may be more difficult

to recognise homosexuals now than it was in the past. One older man said he found this to be so with 'all the football players and truck drivers who are coming out'.

Throughout, the similarity of these men to women and to disabled or other stigmatised or deviant groups was apparent. They had a need to reinforce their identity, their feeling of self-worth and self-acceptance, and they placed great importance on physical attraction. The writer used social reaction theory to demonstrate that an individual's beliefs regarding how others observe and evaluate him determine his self-evaluation. Beliefs regarding other people's evaluations are crucial, not whether such evaluations are true, as in any form of labelling. Quality of life for these ageing homosexuals was less determined by their sexual orientation than by factors crucial to ageing people in general, i.e. health, finance and social support. 'Age can be a stigma just as difficult to bear as homosexuality' said one respondent. Those interviewed resented being unable to find a job after the age of 40, more than discrimination about their homosexuality, because they could hide the latter, but not the former. One ageing man in his 70s said that both heterosexuals and homosexuals devalue old people and feel that they are 'past it'. Another commented that 'The older homosexual is not wanted by either side, the heterosexuals or homosexuals', and the author believes that age, not sexuality, relegates us to the scrapheap when we are no longer considered 'useful' to society.

The book is well written and the reader must recognise the sensitive and difficult task of working with any minority group, especially older people when so many factors over time need to be taken into account. There are some poignant reminders of the particular difficulties faced by this group of people, such as the ex-soldier who had been dishonourably discharged. 'The army gave me a medal for killing a man and threw me out for loving one', he told the interviewer. The research certainly contradicts stereotypes. These men were healthier, less anxious about exposure and had, on the whole, satisfactory social and sexual lives and more stable concepts than their younger counterparts. Their score on life satisfaction was comparable to that of the general population, and the difficulties they faced of coming to terms with the ageing process were common to heterosexual people and very similar to those articulated by many women.

The book leaves many questions unanswered, but points to the need for further research in this area, where disadvantage, prejudice and stereotyping are multiplied.

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Carole R. Smith, *Social Work with the Dying and the Bereaved*. Macmillan, London, 1982, 149 pp., £3.95, ISBN 0 333 3089.

This is a useful book, well organised, clearly written, decently researched and with a good eye for the illuminating anecdote. It is firmly based on relevant practical experience and would be of value to any social worker or counsellor