Sociology of Homosexuality
The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution

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The bar is the primary and necessary locus for the male homosexual community. Its importance derives from the requirement that people who live in a subculture have the opportunity to get together. Since homosexuality for the most part occurs during leisure hours, the bar meets all the requirements of an institution that can service the community. There are many kinds of bars, and they service both general and specialized homosexual populations, depending on the interests of the owner as well as the neighborhood location of the bar. What is significant is the special case of the San Francisco homosexual community where the bars, while not approved by the conventional community, are not regulated through either systematic harassment or illegal taxation (bribes) by local law enforcement officials. In most metropolitan centers bars are not operated by their true owners and the opportunity for corruption is much higher. As Achilles points out, less sexual activity occurs in locally owned bars—where the owner is personally running a risk—than occurs in bars in cities where the operation of the establish-

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dependent upon the corruption of local law enforcement representatives. In this case, a more permissive environment results in less public sexual activity even though the homosexual community is itself more manifest.

In addition, the variety of bars available is a function of the size of the city. Once the size of the local homosexual community is large enough, bars appear to deal with particular homosexual populations. In smaller communities there is not nearly the differentiation of bar types, and they tend to serve more general populations. This may have some impact on the development of individual homosexual career styles since in a large metropolis a desire may be acted out because there are available both institutions and others who have already so behaved. Thus, a particular kind of homosexual commitment (such as sado-masochism) may be inhibited from expression in a small community, while in a larger community institutions are available to provide the necessary opportunity structure for the behavior.

An institution must arise from a particular social situation, when the individuals concerned feel that there is a need for a change in the existing order or a need for the creation of a new order. Thus it may be that all institutions have their origins in deviance.

When an individual experiences strain in the social system, he may become motivated toward deviance. When this occurs, three basic alternatives are available to the potential deviate. He may continue to participate in his environment, finding conformance to its norms frustrating, but less painful than deviance and separation. He may alter his environment through an alliance with others who share his dissatisfaction, in the formation of a subculture, or in joining an already existing subculture. The final choice open to him is to alienate himself from his environment altogether and attempt to chart his own life course.

If the second alternative is adopted, and the individual becomes a participant in a subculture, he may find moral
legitimatization for his deviance and satisfaction of his socio-emotional needs. Socio-emotional gratification, however, is not sufficient. When the individual pulls away from his former reference group, he is also apt to pull away from the established system of goods and services with which his former institutionalized group was connected. According to Cohen:

The important point is that the consequences of an act in terms of want satisfaction depend upon the way in which it articulates with the established systems of interaction through which goods and services are produced and distributed. Families, businesses, fraternal organizations, churches... are such systems. To obtain the goods and services they offer, the individual must participate in them on their own terms.¹

The act of joining a deviant group may force the individual to break away from these systems, wholly or in part. A new reference group may satisfy his social wants and needs, but not his nonsocial ones. For this an institution must be created, a system which can supply goods and services as well as social interaction. When such an institution is established, the individual may remain completely and comfortably within his subculture, maintaining only minimal ties with the larger society.

The goods and services provided by the bar are well adapted to the needs of the homosexual Community. Its most important service is the provision of a setting in which social interaction may occur; without such a place to congregate, the group would cease to be a group. The milieu of this institution is both permissive and protective, necessary conditions for the continued functioning of the group. It provides the social stimulus and diversion of alcohol and entertainment especially created for the homosexual. Articulating with various commercial and political institutions in the larger society, the bar may obtain legitimate and illegitimate goods and services for its clientele. As each bar develops a “personality” of its own and becomes an institution in its own right, it fulfills more specialized social and nonsocial functions. A particular bar, for example, may serve as a loan office, restaurant, message reception center, telephone exchange, and so forth.
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The bar was naturally adopted as the institution serving the homosexual Community for several reasons. For the most part, participation in the Community is a leisure time activity, albeit the participants' most important activity. Therefore, the institution serving the Community must be one adapted to sociability and leisure. Homosexuals, subject to pressure from law enforcement agencies, require a gathering place which is as mobile and flexible as possible, that is, a place which can open, close, and open again without great alteration or loss. The bar is sufficiently flexible, as it can be situated almost anywhere, and requires little space and few material embellishments. The Community's main institution must be one which provides some degree of anonymity and segregation from the larger society. The bar renders this service well, because it is such a common type of establishment that there is no great pressure from members of the larger society to gain access to any particular bar. Bars located in the outlying districts of the city, with inconspicuous façades, may appear quite innocent and unenticing to all but the cognoscenti.

An essential service which this institution must render is to permit, yet control, the formation of sexual relationships. Sexual contacts may be made on the street, in the park, or on the bench, but as Cory states:

From the gay street to the gay bar may be but a few steps, or several miles, but an aura of respectability is to be found at the latter that is lacking at the former. . . . in the final analysis, it may be that the bar provides a superstructure behind which the libidinous impulses can hide, whereas on the street the passions are denuded, deprived of an aura of romance and culture. In one place it is fun, in the other it is lust. . . . the drinks, the music and the atmosphere of friendliness give a far less outlawed aspect to sex. . . .

The bar is the only place where these contacts, necessary to those concerned and illegal according to the law, can be made with a reasonable degree of safety and respectability. The individual may feel much less anxiety and guilt if he is able to carry on this aspect of his life in an organized framework of social norms and values. The bar is the homosexual equiva-
lent of the USO or the youth club, where the rating and
dating process may unfold in a controlled and acceptable
manner.

Despite the efforts of management and clientele alike, the
bar cannot, by its very nature, remain a totally private and
segregated institution. It must be open to the public, and if
outsiders choose to enter, they may do so. The bar, therefore,
becomes both the center of the private activities of the
Community and its liaison with the larger society.

Perhaps the most frequent, and certainly the most fre-
quently discussed, contact between the bar and its surround-
ings occurs via the police force. While the bar generally
protects its patrons from the hazards of “going it alone,” it
exposes them to the risk of becoming involved in a police
action directed against the bar itself. “Disorderly conduct,”
“lewd and obscene behavior,” and “running a disorderly
house” are the most common charges brought against the gay
bars, and encompass behavior ranging from homosexual
dancing to brief and incidental physical contact. Should the
owner of the bar be found guilty of these charges, which is
usually the case, the bar may be closed or the liquor license
revoked.

The fear of a “raid” is always present in a gay bar, and
stories of past raids on now defunct bars are part of the
group tradition. It becomes rather a badge of honor to have
been involved in such an escapade and have survived. Stories
of what one did and how one escaped identification and/or
arrest are passed on in full detail to newcomers to the group,
accompanied by advice as to what one should do in such
situations. The owners and employees, however, are fully
aware of the consequences of such police action, and take
great care to see that their customers toe the mark. A few
bars have the extra precaution of warning lights or bells
which signal an approaching officer, at which sign all custo-
ers are to make certain that no one is standing too close
to his neighbor.

The question of “payoff” always arises in such situations,
with many rumors and few substantiations. It is unlikely,
however, that such arrangements occur frequently in San
Francisco for several reasons. The “gay life” in San Francisco
is more visible and more a matter of public knowledge than
it is in many other cities. As the president of the LCE [a
homophile reform group—eds.] described it:

Another thing that makes San Francisco unique is that the gay
life is very open—everyone knows it goes on, where a lot of the
bars are, and so on. But the practices are closed—nobody can get
away with anything, anyone trying to make propositions or making
out or even dancing in most places gets thrown out. The owners
stick together on this, they’re a pretty close group. This makes
people from out of town make mistakes sometimes, they think
that because the gay life is so evident they can just cut loose and
have a ball—and they find out they can’t. Bars in Chicago and
LA, for example, are hard to find, but once you get in you can
do almost anything.

This openness makes the gay bars less subject to underworld
control and, therefore, less likely to be involved in police
bribery. Secrecy is almost impossible, as the homosexual
communication network reaches almost every corner of the
city, and the homosexual “problem” receives considerable
attention from the press. Furthermore, most of the bars are
owned by residents of the city and represent their entire
business investment. There is seldom enough capital to make
bribery practical. The bar owners, as the preceding quote
indicates, are a cohesive group, and are generally opposed to
illegitimate dealings with the law. It is interesting to note,
however, that only three of the thirty-seven San Francisco
bars considered in this study were owned by persons who were
not residents of the city. These three were all large, successful,
and inclined to be rather lax in enforcing behavioral stand-
ards. Although all three have been in existence for an unusual
length of time, according to gay bar standards, none has
ever been troubled by the police.

Several respondents in this study reported having had
direct experience with the method of “entrapment” used
by law officers in gathering evidence against the homosexual
collectivity, the gay bars, and their patrons. Entrapment is a
system whereby an officer learns the language, behavior, and
dress of the homosexual group, enters a bar or walks down
a street frequented by homosexuals, and pretends he is one of them in order to elicit a sexual "pass." He may then use the behavior he calls forth as evidence against the individual or against the owner of the bar in which it occurred. Needless to say, the reaction against this method as expressed by the homosexual organizations and by individuals is rather strong. One respondent recalled his experience as follows:

I remember I was sitting in the — one night, a week night, and it was quiet. Only about five other people there. I was by myself, having a beer and about to go home. A young guy with a crew cut comes up and sits next to me. He had on a bright shirt and slacks and tennis shoes, the whole bit. He started a conversation and was real friendly and all, and kind of cute, so I talked to him. Then he started pressing his knee against mine, which you don't do in a bar with only five people in it unless you're asking to get 86'd. I should have known, but hell, you can't suspect everybody! He went out after me when I left, and walked with me to my apartment. So what the hell, naturally I invited him up, and then I find out he's a cop. He took me downtown and said I should be booked for a sex crime.

Another respondent:

I was walking down the street and a man started to follow me. I went faster, and he kept pace, right behind me. Then he came up to me and mumbled something that sounded like he was asking me what I liked to do. I wasn't going to have any part of that, so I kept on walking. He went with me about two more blocks, until he saw he wasn't going to get to add me to his arrest quota. Then he said, "I'm a police officer, and you'd better stop wandering around the streets or I'll arrest you for vagrancy."

If there is one particular issue which calls forth a unified protest from the homosexual Community, it is that of police activity. Many homosexuals remain passive until a favorite bar or a close friend is threatened by the police; then all the latent hostility is fully expressed. A manifestation of hostility from the representative of the larger society calls forth a similar response from the homosexual Community.

It's a police state, I'm telling you. They make me so goddamn mad sometimes. Like the —-, no one had made any trouble there
and it was a nice place. But they wanted to get something on it, just for the record, so they parked a police car in front of the door every night for two weeks. That usually scares people off, but it didn't this time. So they put a cop in uniform right inside the door every night, with a dog yet! It got to be kind of a kick after a while, people would come in and bring things to feed the dog, and pet him and everything. It got so the dog was friends with everyone in the place. Not the cop, just the dog.

The cops are fantastic, really. Before they finally closed ---'s, there was one that used to come in every night for a drink. But he wouldn't drink out of the same glasses that all those dirty fairies used, he had to keep his own glass under the bar!

The greatest sense of group cohesion in the homosexual Community is expressed in reaction to the police. The homosexual organizations, apparently aware of this fact and seeking to further develop a sense of unity, give police activity maximum coverage in their publications. The homosexual's relationship to the law and the police, however, may be viewed as latently functional for the group, and this may explain why the group is often reluctant to express its resentment in action as well as words. The homosexual's legal status enables him to see himself as wronged and persecuted, which relieves his own feeling of guilt. The police are a target upon which he may center his hostility; they are the enemy and he is the underdog. It is in large part due to the police that the homosexual can, and often does, regard himself as a member of an unfairly treated minority group.

In addition to the latent functions they provide for the homosexual group, police "brutality" and "persecution" rally some support from the larger society on behalf of the group. Reports of brutality against any group, even if they are exaggerated, tend to stimulate the traditional American spirit of "rooting for the underdog."

It is often the bars themselves which make the most salient plea for the homosexual's civil rights, for it is most often the bars which undertake a defense in cases involving the law. The attorneys hired to defend the bars serve as intermediaries between the institutions of the homosexual group and those of the larger society.
The case of the Black Cat in San Francisco illustrates both the arousal of some degree of public support for the homosexual collectivity and the attempt to legalize it through institutionalized channels. The Black Cat has long been a part of San Francisco tradition, and is well known to the city's inhabitants. It began as a meeting place for literary Bohemia, and developed into one of the few places in the city where homosexuals, tourists, bohemians, and socialites congregated together. Its reputation, however, was as a "gay" bar.

Over a period of fifteen years, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board brought various complaints against the owner of the Black Cat, who hired one of the city's most renowned civil rights lawyers in his defense. The case went to the California Supreme Court in 1954, with the ruling that homosexuals, if properly behaved, had the legal right to congregate. However, a change in the administration of the liquor control board and a charge of "lewd and indecent acts" ended the bar's career in October of 1963.

The state liquor agents elected to close the Black Cat on Halloween, the night of the traditional costume party at the bar. This brought a response of protest from many quarters, so the agents altered their plans and revoked the license on the preceding evening. The Black Cat, however, remained open on Halloween, serving only coffee and soft drinks. The party that evening was attended by a crowd of some 2000 persons, including a large representation from the homosexual Community, and "college students, business men, matrons with mink coats and jewelry, tee-shirted men in boots, and couples who looked as if they had just come to town for a big night out." The crowd lined the sidewalks, and television cameras were present to record the entrance of the costumed "drag queens." Toward the end of the evening, the bartender led the entire congregation in a rendition of "God Save the Nellie Queen."

The coverage accorded the occasion by the press included three feature columns and several articles. One article quoted the partner of the Black Cat's attorney as saying, "That place is like an institution. This is like closing the cable cars or the Golden Gate Bridge." The same story presented the views of
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the bar's owner: "I know it's an unpopular cause. The Black Cat has been the symbol of a fight that has benefited the gay people to a degree. That's why they want to knock us out. . . ."

The public response, while it manifested more amusement and curiosity than actual sympathy, seemed an illustration of the sophisticated and liberal attitude upon which San Franciscans base their city's image. As a bystander proudly remarked, "It could only happen here." This self-conscious liberalism may be one reason why San Francisco has attracted such a large homosexual population and why the gay life in the city is unusually visible. San Franciscans seem rather ambivalent toward the homosexual collectivity, at times defending it as something of a tourist attraction, and at other times demanding that "something be done about the problem." What effect this type of attitude has had in making the San Francisco homosexual collectivity different from that of other cities cannot be determined without comparative data, which are not yet available.

It is through the bars that members of the larger society may become acquainted with the homosexual Community. The tourist, the reporter, the researcher, the heterosexual who enters a bar by mistake or out of curiosity, and the straight person with friends in the gay Community, all are potential means of interchange between the world of the homosexual and that of the heterosexual.

The official attitude of the larger society toward any deviant group is determined to a great extent by what is contained in the statutes, and the law is often the last institution to adapt to changes in public opinion. Although homosexuality may be considered a form of mental disorder in some quarters and a fashionable peccadillo in others, legally it remains a crime. The police, as the society's official agents, are required to apprehend anyone committing a homosexual act, in private or in public. In practice, however, such legalities are difficult to enforce. A police officer described the situation as follows:

We can't get rid of them, there's too many of them. You close one bar and another one opens somewhere else. As long as they behave themselves you might as well have the bars, at least it keeps them
off the streets. People complain about so many bars for that kind of people in the city, but they'd probably complain a lot more if they were all running around in public. All we can do is keep an eye on them, try to keep them in line.

Police relations with the gay bars are closely linked to the politics of city government. When a change of administration is due or there are reports in the press about sex crimes or the increasing crime rate, the pressure on the homosexual bars is intensified. The closing of a bar tends to pacify the public demand for action, and makes it appear that the administration is doing a fine job of cleaning up the city. Much of the evidence gathered in the constant police surveillance of the bars is held in abeyance until political expediency requires it. The bar owners, aware of the shifting patterns of police pressure, often have a fairly good idea of when the "heat" will be most intense.

In the final analysis, little is resolved in the contest between the gay bars and the police, but important latent functions emerge from the situation. The homosexual collectivity develops a greater unity, its societal position is brought to public attention, and it gains support and sympathy from some sectors of the larger society. On the other hand, those so inclined may vicariously vent their feelings of hostility toward the homosexual group.

OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE BARS

A gay bar does not develop by accident; it is the result of careful and systematic planning. Homosexuals rarely infiltrate an already established bar and make it their own; a gay bar is gay from the beginning. Opening such a bar is a calculated risk; the owner is virtually assured of many customers and a good income, but his successful enterprise is apt to be short-lived.

The most important factor to be considered in opening a gay bar is attracting the type of clientele desired. This again is not a matter of chance. The location of the bar determines
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its clientele to some extent, but the personal characteristics of the owner and his employees are most significant.

The gay bars of San Francisco comprise a closely knit social system. The individual bars may open and close rapidly and regularly, but the system and its participants remain the same. As familiar bars close and new ones replace them, the employees and customers move in a steady flow from one to another. In this shifting system, a particular owner may have operated several bars, and a particular bartender may have been employed in a dozen. These individuals become well known in the Community and acquire personal "followings." The character of a bar often reflects the personality of its owner, and will attract a certain type of customer as a result. According to the president of the LCE:

I think the owner's personality makes a lot of difference. That's another thing about San Francisco gay bars that's different from anywhere else in the country. The owner is always around, and everyone who goes to the bar knows him by name. That really puts a stamp on a place, and you either like it or you don't. There are only three major bars whose owners live out of town, and any gay person could tell you which ones they are. Take Bill out at the ---, for example, he puts everything he has into that bar, and he's a wonderful guy. They only serve beer there, but it's packed every night. It's a matter of the owner's personality, Bill never lets anyone feel he doesn't belong.

The personality of the bartender is even more important than that of the owner in drawing a particular group or type of customer. A successful bartender attracts a personal following, a large number of people who come to a bar because he is employed there. It may be his personality, his looks, his wit, or his style that brings the customers, but whatever it is, he becomes the bar's most valuable asset. If a bartender with a large following leaves one bar and goes to work in another, his retinue usually accompanies him. The services of the most popular bartenders, known to everyone in the homosexual Community, are sought by many owners. A classified advertisement to this effect appeared in the LCE News: "Bartender—Liquor bar, must be experienced and
either have a following or the personality to build a following.”

The gay world is one marked by a galaxy of social types, each one comprising a sub-group within the Community. Often a bar will cater to one particular sub-group, and the bartender will be representative of its social type. For example, one bar will be known as a “leather bar,” where the customers are the exaggeratedly masculine type, sporting motorcycle jackets and boots. Another bar may be popular with the effeminate “queens.” The bartender has an important symbolic function, serving as a mark of identification. One swift glance at the bartender, and the initiate knows what kind of a bar he is in and what kind of people he is likely to find there. The bartender in the leather bar will be a rough looking individual, dressed accordingly; in the “faggot” bar, the person mixing the drinks does so with a limp wrist. A female behind the bar indicates a primarily Lesbian clientele. The same applies to more subtle distinctions; in the discreet gilt and mahogany bars of the financial district, the bartenders wear black ties and speak with Oxford accents; in the neighborhood bars, slacks and sport shirts are the rule.

Someone who intends to open a gay bar may intentionally try to attract a particular sub-group, hoping to reduce competition by catering to those other bars exclude. This goal is accomplished by hiring a bartender who personifies the sub-group’s social type.

There aren’t many faggot bars in town, really, mainly because no one can stand to have them around. Also because most of them aren’t old enough to drink. So Carl opened the ——, as a coffee place. It’s full of them, running around like a bunch of crazy parrots. That bartender has got fingernails long enough to reach across the bar. I don’t know if it’ll stay that way long though, it’s so near ——’s that that crowd, the general gay crowd, may start going there for coffee after closing time.

Once a bar’s character has been established and a suitable bartender installed, a regular clientele builds up and becomes its own attraction. One goes to a particular bar because his
friends meet there, or because he is "cruising" that night and wants a "butch" bar.

Occasionally the process of invasion and succession occurs, and one group begins to frequent a bar which was the stronghold of another or which was merely "gay" and catered to no particular sub-group. In this case, the owner may make it clear that he does not care for the new patronage or he may change the "identity" of the bar. The latter is done quite simply; he hires a new bartender. A respondent outlined the history of a bar with a distinctly protean character.

It's in transition now, I guess it always has been. They've had more trouble down there, and none of it their fault. It was a leather bar, and then somebody started pushing pills, which always seems to bring Hell's Angels. They're not very popular anywhere, so the owner hired a real faggot. That got the motorcycle boys out, and for a while it was all swish. Then the hustlers moved in, and there was a lot of that going on, so they closed for a while. A new owner has it now, and it's a nice place. Some of the girls are going there now, it's mostly a mixed crowd.

A grand opening almost always launches a new bar into the gay world. This usually means a party, with gifts and prizes, entertainment, and food and drinks either gratis or greatly reduced in price. Members of the Community are advised of the event through various channels. If the owner is well known, it is likely that his future plans are also, and the opening of his new bar will be eagerly anticipated. If a popular bartender is to be employed at a new bar, his following will certainly be present at the opening, and his friends will bring their friends. In some instances, the owner will send announcements of the opening to members of the Community, a procedure described by the president of the Mattachine Society as follows:

Someone may decide to open a bar, and he sends out announcements to everyone on a gay mailing list. There are several of these around, I have one—not the Mattachine membership list, that's confidential, but one of people I know who go to the bars. The owners get them by having guest books where people sign, or by selling tickets to things, on which people put their names and addresses, or just by knowing a lot of people. Often people ask to be put on
mailing lists. I have about 900 names on mine. Then the bar sends printed announcements, and offers a party or a special price on drinks, or something similar to attract customers.

Ecological Factors

The location of a bar is another important factor in determining the nature of its clientele. The bar situated in one of the residential areas will almost always be a neighborhood bar, which those who live nearby use as a social meeting place. Unless the owner or bartender is particularly well known or the bar has a unique attraction, its business will be limited primarily to those who live within a short distance. It is this type of neighborhood bar which most often performs extra services for its patrons, such as taking messages, lending money, or providing a bottle of milk for the cat.

Bars in the outlying areas of the city, away from the main business and entertainment districts, are not as unified in character. For the most part, however, they too have a club-like atmosphere, and often cater to those who come to the city from other parts of the Bay Area or to a particular group of city residents who have adopted it as their own.

Several bars are located in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco, and several others in the industrial section and its adjacent waterfront. The nature of these bars varies widely, and they include some which serve the sub-groups within the Community. In general, they tend to be large and rather impersonal places, where people come for entertainment, to "cruise," or for a change of scenery.

Bars are often intentionally situated in a particular area or type of area, in order to draw a desired clientele.

It's not going to have any alcohol at all, just dinners and short-orders, from eight until four in the morning. It's near the — and —, so it'll get those people after the bars close. What she [the owner] wants most are the bartenders, after they get off work. I think they'll come, they want a clean place where they can unwind after work. They're a particular group, and if they like it, it'll go.

I'm going to have it out along the avenues, not near the downtown area. A nice quiet bar, just beer and wine and maybe some
games and singing. I don’t want anyone there who might make trouble. If it’s out there, I think the Sausalito crowd will come.

Patrons go to a specific bar for a specific purpose, and a bar’s locale may be an important factor in determining the purpose for which it is used.

Bars where everyone knows everyone else are hard to cruise in, so if that’s what you have in mind, you don’t go to the neighborhood bar. You want to see some new faces, and you don’t want your sisters coming up and slapping you on the back and saying “Hi Mary” when you’re trying to make an impression.

A big shift happens right before the bars close. If all you want is a bed partner, there’s no use hanging around a bar all night waiting, so you sit around in the early hours with your friends, and maybe go find someone later on at —’s or the —. The big bars are always jammed right before closing time, especially on weekends. If someone doesn’t make it then, maybe you’ll find him in one of the coffee places that stay open all night.

The purely physical characteristics of an area also influence the nature of a bar’s patronage.

A lot of how a bar gets to be a certain way or draws a certain crowd depends on the area. People with cars like to go away from around where they live, and it can depend on whether the roads between their homes and the bars are hilly, or whether there’s a lot of stoplights, or if there’s parking. The bars in the industrial area off Market have acres of parking after five o’clock, and the streets are empty then too, so people don’t have to worry about being seen.

The internal layout of the bar is an additional factor.

The actual layout of the bar may have something to do with who goes to it, depending on what they’re looking for. A well-lit place will get a different crowd than a dark place. Some of the bars in the Tenderloin have johns arranged so that there’s a lot of traffic by them. A dark bar like —’s, with long narrow passages is a paradise for the hustlers and such.

Economic Factors

In a city with a homosexual population the size of San Francisco’s, a gay bar is a lucrative enterprise. To operate
such an establishment is a gamble, as no gay bar lives for long, but the income one produces far exceeds that usually obtained from a "straight" bar. According to one bartender:

—'s brings in more money than any bar in the city. The only place that sells more beer is the Red Garter, and beer's all they sell there. On a week night there will always be at least 75 guys in there, and on a weekend it always reaches 250 capacity.

The probability of financial success often means that an owner will receive some assistance in opening a gay bar and need invest less of his own capital at the outset.

The gay bars are so sure to be a success that the juke box company or the beer supplier will give an owner all he needs to begin, if they know he's opening a gay bar. Or they'll pay his expenses if he gets in trouble, just so he keeps buying from them.

Thus the gay bar articulates with commercial institutions in the larger society, to the profit of both. These economic factors often outweigh the dangers inherent in an operation which borders on illegality.

Closing of the Bars

Due to its inimical relations with the police force, the gay bar has a brief life expectancy. A bar may be closed or its license revoked for any one of the many reasons previously discussed, and these legal complaints account for the highest percentage of the mortality rate. Other pressures may be brought to bear, however; the gay bar is in the path of an urban renewal project, or the Health Department finds a leaky pipe, or the neighbors complain of the noise.

The bars come and go, like a chain of lights blinking on and off over a map of the city, but the system remains constant. When a bar closes, its patrons shift their activities elsewhere. In the new bar, the same music comes out of the jukebox, the same bartenders mix drinks, the same faces appear, and the conversation repeats the same themes. And often, the same policeman is standing by the door.