

## **ESSAY 2:**

# **THE LIBERATION THESIS: SECRET DEVIANCE, DISCIPLINARY POWER, AND ESCAPISM**

### **Secret Deviance**

During Mardi Gras in 1997, I was standing on a balcony with Shelly, a fifty-year-old woman from Oklahoma City who described herself as a housewife and a grandmother. About every three minutes Shelly performed a typical routine that many women perform during Mardi Gras on Bourbon Street. “Hey you, up there! Show your tits!” one man yelled to Shelly. “Give me some beads! Big beads!” Shelly responded, emphasizing the word ‘big’. Next, Shelly negotiated with anonymous members of the crowd for beads, while they, in turn, bargained with Shelly on which part of her body they wanted to see. “I want those beads,” Shelly declared, while pointing to a man wearing heart-shaped beads around his neck. “You want these? Then you gotta show me those,” the anonymous man playfully yelled, pointing to her breasts. “You like these?” Shelly exclaimed, pointing to her breasts as she slowly and playfully raised her shirt to reveal them and, on this rare occasion, lifted her skirt for the crowd to see her vagina. Immediately a thunderous roar reverberated throughout the crowd as camera flashes and lights from video recorders illuminated her body, “Whhoooooaaaaaaa! Yeeeeesssssss,” the crowd collectively roared as they showered Shelly with Mardi Gras beads.

“Flashing your tits is harmless! It’s just fun. That’s why I do it.” Shelly yelled to me. “I love it when people admire me!”

“What about your vagina? Is showin’ it harmless, too?”

Shelly looked at me, looked at her vagina, thought about the question for five seconds, and said, “Yea! It ain’t hurtin’ no one,” and chuckled.

“Just look at these!” she exclaimed, as she flashed her breasts, although I didn’t ask her to raise her shirt.

“Yes, I see. What am I supposed to be looking for?” I facetiously asked.

“I’m fifty-years old and hundreds of people still want to see ‘em. It makes me feel sexy! I’m just glad my husband can’t see me.”

“Is your husband here,” I inquired, hoping to talk with him, too.

“Ohhhhh nooooo!” she exclaimed, while waving her hands back and forth. “He wouldn’t approve

of this. But what he doesn't know won't hurt him!"

"I'm wondering, would you show your breasts back home?"

"You mean my tits? Nope. Never. Just at Mardi Gras," she explained while she began to dance and slowly raise her shirt to reveal her breasts to the crowd of men who were chanting, "Show your tits!"

"What would your husband say if he found out you were flashing?" I queried.

Shelly paused, thought about the question, and said, "Well, I don't think he would like it. It's just not information he'd want to know."

"Are you going to tell him?" I asked.

"Probably not. It's my secret. I'm here with my friends and they won't tell him either."

The scene I have described above is an example of what sociologists call 'secret deviance'. The sociologist Howard Becker argues that secret deviance occurs when someone performs a deviant act, yet no one responds to it as a violation of the rules. Although flashing one's breasts, vagina, or penis in public during Mardi Gras violates the New Orleans Criminal Code, most police officers do not arrest revelers for performing it, unless the revelers are men. Nor do the crowds define these performances as deviant. Nevertheless, the majority of revelers who performed nudity and public sex during Mardi Gras felt they needed to justify their performances by stating that it is necessary to hide them from those whose respect, power, and acceptance are required to maintain their reputation, status, and dignity. As Shelly later told me, "If I told my husband, it would destroy our relationship. He might divorce me. It's best that I and my friends keep it a secret from him."

"What do you like about showing your body?" I asked.

Shelly thought about the question, looked at me, and sincerely explained that it is "The freedom. The freedom to just do it, and no one cares. No one cares! I can be whoever I want to be and no one cares. That's what I like about it. It's really quite freeing. It's a way to escape."

Shelly's response indicates that the people closest and most intimate to her might disapprove of her flashing. On the other hand, she's not concerned with whether strangers approve of her behavior. In other words, Shelly enjoys the freedom that anonymous situations like

Mardi Gras create. Few people in the crowd negatively judge her actions; almost no one will tell her she is acting “immoral;” and very few people will tell her to “act like a proper woman.” Indeed, from the revelers’ perspective, Mardi Gras creates spaces of freedom precisely because they do not have a stake in conformity with strangers and because they lack social capital with strangers. Instead of leading to instrumental, cold, calculating interactions, lack of social capital and having low self-control during Mardi Gras sometimes creates fun-filled, playful, and innovative social relations.

Other revelers corroborated Shelly’s explanation. As Julie, a twenty-three year old married teacher from Austin, TX, told me, “Here, I’m really free, I’m open! Although I’m married at home, here I’m single. I’m a different self and no one knows!” Likewise, Christy and Mike, a married couple from California, told me that they perform secret deviance because no one important can see them, yet they do not define flashing during Mardi Gras as deviant. Their public reputation in the community in which they live – California – is unimportant during Mardi Gras because the anonymity in New Orleans masks their ‘deviant’ performances.

David: “So what’s it like to be on the balcony exposing yourself to everyone below you?”

Mike: “It’s pretty cool. It’s a blast. It’s pretty cool because no one knows you. You can always go back home and no one will know. We’re from California, so it doesn’t really matter; it’s pretty easy. It’s safer this way.”

David: “So why can’t you do it back home?”

Mike: “There’s nothing like this back home. You’d never find anything like this anywhere else. Only in New Orleans!”

David: “Do you think there should be other places like this?”

Mike: “Well, yea! Maybe Vegas! I bet Vegas does something like this. Every town should have a strip like this. If I did this at home I’d be jailed for indecent exposure. It’s not indecent at all. It’s just fun! It’s fun to do things you’ve never done, see women you’ve never seen, ain’t that right [He looks at his male and female friend for confirmation]. People know us back home, and we’d be known as indecent.”

Christy: “I’d be a slut. That’s what everyone thinks when they look up, ‘Hey, there’s some whores showing some titties’. We’re really not whores. We’re just family women having a good time, getting the guys to yell and holler. No one knows me. You can come out here tomorrow, and you may think that people are looking at you funny, but they don’t remember you. They’ll never know back home! If everyone down there knew me, it’d be totally different. It wouldn’t be as exciting,

and it'd ruin everything. Back home, though, it'd be bad. I wouldn't be able to establish my reputation and build roots."

Mike: "It's like me, I'm a safety director of a trucking company, and if I got caught, that'd do a lot of damage to my image, my family. We have a daughter and if we got caught, and she went to school the students would say, 'Yea, we remember you're mother! My dad told me about her!'"

The relative ease in performing secret deviance with strangers is partially explained by the anonymous situation that prevents authority figures from identifying the performers. The crowd's anonymity and acceptance of their displays function as a mask to protect their discrediting performances from vital people who have the power to stigmatize them. Thus, revelers feel free to openly engage in a range of tabooed activities with some degree of security. Both Ken and Dan provide excellent examples of why Mardi Gras is a space where they can perform secret deviance without disapproval from others.

Ken: "I am married, and have been married now for 15 years. My wife was not at Mardi Gras with me when I had my first homosexual experience."

David: "How did it occur?"

Ken: "After being approached by two other men, we talked, and I allowed one to suck my dick. It was my first time. He wanted me to suck his, but I was too afraid to do it. There were at least six people watching, which I found very exciting. This was my first homosexual experience and I was no expert. He also wanted to fuck."

David: "What was your first reaction?"

Ken: "Fear was my first reaction. I did not cherish the thought of someone fucking me, but I did feel liberated. I love the wild freedom."

David: "Have you experienced this outside of Mardi Gras?"

Ken: "No, only during Mardi Gras. I only do it when I'm at Mardi Gras."

Dan, who is married to his wife and lives in California, also provides an example of why Mardi Gras is a space where he performs secret deviance. Dan specifically states that he must keep part of his identity a secret and hide it from his wife at home, but he can be open during Mardi Gras.

Dan: "You see, I'm married to my wife in California and we never do anything like this. But I've always wanted to. It's just a part of me that I can never express or show."

David: "Does she know what you're doing here?"

Dan: "She doesn't know what's going on, and I don't think she'd like how I'm acting. She wants nothing to do with Mardi Gras. She doesn't even know I'm gay! I've never told her that I'm attracted to men. It's the secret me. If she found out, I'd be embarrassed, I'd disappoint her. But here, I can be me. I don't have to keep it a secret."

David: "Why can you be open during Mardi Gras?"

Dan: "Because here I'm free. I just feel free."

The revelers who I interviewed indicated that they perform public nudity and sex because it helps them 'feel free' and 'escape' from something. These comments indicate that revelers have an urge to 'liberate' themselves from something. But what is this something? During moments of stress and routine work, surely some people would like to 'escape' from these conditions and to another place. And Mardi Gras seems like the perfect event to which to escape, par excellence, and to 'liberate' oneself! After all, it is a riveting theme park filled with nudity, 'free' beads, magical floats, and effervescence. Two interesting questions arise: Why do revelers who perform secret deviance during Mardi Gras feel they need to hide it from those closest to them? and, What do revelers want to escape from and escape to? By analyzing interviews with revelers during Mardi Gras through the frames of what sociologists call 'culture', 'disciplinary power', and 'political economy', we will begin to gain clarifications to these questions.

"I can't stand my job! It controls me all the time!"

Deborah is a thirty-eight year old single mother with three children, one boy and two girls, who works for the United States Post Office. Deborah and I met in Tropical Isle, a bar located on Bourbon Street, three days before Fat Tuesday in 1998. I was resting and reviewing my notes while she was drinking a Hand Grenade and pointing her finger in my direction, laughing at me.

"Why are you studying during Mardi Gras," she humorously asked me.

"I'm working on my dissertation; just takin' a break," I responded with a smile. "Would you like to talk?"

"About what," Deborah inquired.

"Mardi Gras, why you're here, what you do for a living. Ya' know, life," I said.

“Why do you want to talk to me?” she asked in confusion.

“Because you seem like an interesting person.”

Deborah paused for a moment and said, “Okay. I have nothing else to do. Would you like a drink?”

Deborah ordered a drink before I could answer her question and then sat down next to me. I turned on my tape recorder, began sipping the Hurricane that she placed below my mouth, and Deborah started talking about her job, daily routines, and school. After thirty minutes Deborah described, in detail, powerful social and cultural elements in her life that she believed disciplined her conduct, tamed her body, made her feel docile, and modified her speech.

“Neatness,” Deborah sternly blurted out, while pounding her fist on the table. “They require us to be neat!”

“Who is ‘they’?” I asked.

“My employer, my bosses. They require us to be neat, clean, well groomed. If not, they send us home. We have to wear uniforms so we all look the same. In fact, everything lately seems to be the same. Each day I get up and go to work or volunteer or school or whatever as a part of my daily routine. I am never truly myself in those situations because in order to keep that job, class or position, certain things are expected of me. How you act, treat others and sometimes just your opinions could affect your longevity. Not to mention appearance, and choice of friends. That can and does become mundane and boring because it’s the same ‘hooley’ day in and day out. Just to keep this ‘position’ in your life if you are happy or not. Unless you call the shots and are comfortable with yourself and others, as many are not, you tend to become numb. Once you are numb, your borders between work and outside of work begin to gray. All too often what you carry on your shoulders during work, walks out the door with you at the end of the day.”

“What do you mean by numb?” I ask.

“I say ‘numb’ as in you go through the same drill, its like ‘de ja vu’ where you know what’s going to happen hours ahead. Day in and day out. I have a planner. And if you look into it, each week looks exactly the same. It’s the same macaroni and cheese on Thursday, Meatloaf on Tuesday and Pizza each Friday. It doesn’t change. Mardi Gras puts a wrench in that dull stuff! Mardi Gras allows me to not only be myself and it also allows me to check a few, possibly naughty, things off of my ‘things I would like to do before I die’ list!”

Deborah's comments are extremely insightful from a sociological perspective in that her life is thoroughly invested in the normalizing project that the philosopher Michel Foucault identified in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When Deborah speaks of "neatness" and "feeling numb," she is describing the effects of what sociologists call 'disciplinary power'. C.G. Prado explains that disciplinary power "means physically structuring institutions to maximize visual and/or auditory access by those with greater authority and responsibility over those with less authority and responsibility." The United States Post Office, where Deborah works, is the exemplar of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power separates and divides people by placing them in rooms, cubicles, or isolating them in the workplace. It uses surveillance systems such as security cameras, beepers, photographs, lie detector tests, drug testing, ID cards, computer tracking, uniforms, and audio equipment to make workers permanently visible so those in power know where they are, what they are doing, and how much they are producing. Disciplinary power examines people's conduct to reform their bodies, ensures neatness and proper décor to please the customer, and monitors people's actions so they can be 'productive members' of a capitalist society by making sure they work faster, produce more items, and perform the same routines. In short, disciplinary power evaluates people by a standard norm to ensure that deviations do not occur. If people, such as Deborah, deviate from the standard norms, managers, religious groups, parents, experts, supervisors, and bosses quickly locate the deviation and punish them, correct their 'infraction', and normalize their conduct in various ways to 'keep them in line'. In other words, disciplinary power ensures homogeneity and sameness, as Deborah illustrates, by civilizing their conduct so they perform the same routines everyday.

Deborah is clearly a partial effect of disciplinary power. Still, there is always room for escaping disciplinary power. How does Deborah believe that she 'escapes' disciplinary power? How does she believe that she 'liberates' herself? Does disciplinary power influence Deborah, and other revelers, to escape to Mardi Gras and liberate themselves by performing secret deviance? Again, Deborah provides some insights to these questions.

"Mardi Gras is completely different than working inside of a postal facility third shift! I mean we get to wear headsets and to jam to music while we work, but we are constantly being watched from up above us, so we have to be very careful. We have to be very efficient, we are based on a time schedule, and we do the same thing over and over again! It really does get stressing to do the same thing over and over again everyday, but I have three kids to feed. You also have to watch yourself and what you do. I mean, you must be careful that you don't accidentally look like you are up to something shady. They will snatch you off of the floor, right then and there. Then you go

to court! As you can tell, my job is based on accuracy and speed. Plus to them conduct is very important. So hey, at least at Mardi Gras, you're able to be a lot more free!”

The disciplinary power that Deborah describes produces people who shape and correct their own behaviors. She confirms what the sociologist Jock Young (1972, p. 73) describes as disciplinary values: deferred gratification, foresight, conformity to rules, high control over detail, little control over direction, and routine, predictable, and instrumental activities. These values maintain “diligent, consistent work and the realization of long-term productive goals ... It is during leisure and through self-expression that modern man seeks his identity ... This states that people are justified in expressing themselves if, and only if, they have earned the right to do so by working hard and being productive” (Young 1972, p. 73). James, a twenty-five year old working class man from Texas, expresses his discontent with disciplinary values when he describes how his daily and weekly activities are broken down into structured rhythms. The outcome, James explains, is the performance of secret deviance.

“I'm tired of my job. I told my boss to fuck off, that I'm taking a day off of work and going to Mardi Gras because I haven't missed a day of work in the last four years ... I can't stand my job anymore! My boss is really an idiot, and the people I work with don't know how to do their job. So guess who gets to correct their mistakes? I do. On top of that, I have to do the same work over and over again daily. I just get up at five in the morning, go to work, punch in, assemble parts, punch out, go home, eat, and then fall asleep around eight thirty. My whole day is blown, and on top of that, I have to work every other Saturday just to make ends meet. And then I have to go to church on Sundays! It gets very tiring, very boring. And they don't care. To them, I'm just another person. Half the people I work with smoke pot and get drunk on their lunch break, just to endure their job. It makes me so mad!”

Interviewer: Why are you telling me this at Mardi Gras?”

Male: “I don't know. I guess I'm just venting. I'm out here to have fun and not to think about my job. I'm going to eat, drink, and show my dick!”

To escape from what the revelers consider distressing, sometimes vexing conditions, they temporarily escape to Mardi Gras as a strategy to counter their negative feelings and animosity towards their job, bosses, and disciplinary institutions. During Mardi Gras, revelers believe they gain temporary satisfaction and pleasurable relations that momentarily freshens their lives. Many revelers believe that Mardi Gras allows them to live their lives the way they believe

they should live them, all of which might not be unavailable in their everyday life due to their uniform living conditions. In other words, they believe that Mardi Gras functions as place to escape from disciplinary power and 'liberate' themselves. Leigh explains why she feels liberated during Mardi Gras when she flashes various parts of her body.

"What have you done that you wouldn't normally do?" I ask her.

"I stripped in front of people, and I have never felt so free in my whole life! It felt so good!" Leigh says.

"What do you mean by good, what was so good about it?"

"Because everyone was looking at me, and so my body looked good. If you were up there doing it, you would feel very good, like you were the most handsome man in the whole world and all the men or women or whatever would love your body! I really enjoyed being the center of attention. If my parents really knew what I was doing, I would feel very embarrassed. I mean, to them, I have morals. But here, I can get away with doing whatever I want!"

Colleen, a thirty-one year old woman from Mississippi, illustrates why she believes that Mardi Gras allows her to escape disciplinary power. I first saw Colleen while she was performing oral sex on a man in the middle of Bourbon Street, with about seventy people watching, screaming, and photographing them. When they finished their performance I asked Colleen for an interview.

"An interview? Come on! Do you really want to interview me or do you want me to blow you, too?" she responded sarcastically.

"Ummmm, no. I really would like to interview you," I explained with a smile.

"What would you like to ask me," Colleen inquired.

"I'm just wondering how you decided to perform oral sex on that man in public?"

Colleen began to explain that performing oral sex in public was a tactic for her to be the center of attention, be someone else, and live life according to her own rules.

"I enjoy being the center of attention. I want everyone to see me!" she said matter-of-factly.

"How do you think of the act itself?" I asked.

“For me, it was a confession. I was confessing when I gave head in public. I was confessing that I wanted to leave my husband. I was married at that time, so by doing that [performing oral sex] in public I was confessing to wanting someone else and to wanting to be someone else. I was saying that I was moving on and nothing was going to hold me back from having oral sex in public and nothing was going to hold me back from living my life the way I wanted to. At that time, you just live once, and that was my frame of mind.”

Central to Colleen’s performance of secret deviance is the attraction discovered in making her secret behavior a public spectacle. She also perceives her performances as escapes from disciplinary power enforced by the institutions, knowledge, and people who judge and police her conduct. Hence, one reason why revelers define secret deviance as a moral issue is because they are implicitly seeking excitement in an effort to respond to and overcome disciplinary power. It makes sense, then, that almost all the revelers described their performance of secret deviance during Mardi Gras as liberating and free. It is not a mere coincidence that the emotions, spontaneity, and activities revelers experience during Mardi Gras are all in direct opposition to the routine living conditions of the 'responsible', self-controlled citizen. Revelers perceive that performing secret deviance is a way to oppose disciplinary power. As Beth told me,

“Mardi Gras is a definite stress reliever because you can leave your life behind and live another one while you are there. Rules are tossed out the door, laws have changed, and life is good. It is also a stress reliever to let your hair down, and to do whatever you please. It is very liberating.”

The production of the self-controlled, disciplined person does not lead to less deviance, but rather a more efficient and effective way to socially control people by developing the myth of the “normal” citizen by which all others are judged. One consequence of disciplinary power is that people seek to overcome and transgress the straight-jacket of interdependent obligations in which disciplinary power embeds them. Lisa, who describes herself as a twenty-two year old single mother, provides an example of this form of transgression.

“Can you describe yourself outside of Mardi Gras?”

“I’m just normal. I’m law abiding, I go to church, I follow rules, I have a 9-5 routine, I go to school, I have a child I take care of. I just don’t do wild and crazy and drinking and yelling and screaming and flashing your body and other stuff in normal life. I have foresight. I act like a responsible, moral abiding citizen. So these medians, like Mardi Gras and S/M bars, are places where I can express myself. But like I said, if you had a perfect world, it wouldn’t be perfect because you’d be

bored with it. My normal world is perfect, but it's boring. When I leave here, I'm going back to the normal world. I love this. I love coming out here and just being free. It's a feeling of freeing yourself and letting yourself go. Well, if you did that everyday, it wouldn't feel like that. It wouldn't be special, fun, or exciting. Because there would be nothing bad about it. And we don't like to do things unless there's something sick and demented and bad about it. It's about transgressing and crossing boundaries. It's like wonderful. It's like losing your virginity. Once you do it, you never go back. You're never the same, you're never the same, and you're a little more free each time. That's why I'm lured to these places, S/M, and my body. The body is art.”

The sociologist Norbert Elias argues that discipline and self-control are imposed on people through networks, interdependence, and the “tempo” of time. “This tempo is in fact nothing other than a manifestation of the multitude of intertwining chains of interdependence which run through every single social function people have to perform, and of the competitive pressure permeating this densely populated network and affecting, directly or indirectly, every single act of individuals.” The tempo of the “chains of interdependence” and self-constraint is exemplified, according to Elias, by the modern-day “businessperson,” with her profusion of appointments, meetings, punctuality, and the struggle to keep it all in sequence and order. These chains of interdependence “train them to eliminate all irregularities from behavior and to achieve permanent self-control” (Elias 1994, p. 457). The production of the self-controlled and disciplined citizen is achieved at the expense of eliminating spontaneity and pleasurable behaviors, those behaviors exemplified during Mardi Gras and eliminated by disciplinary power.

Another sociologist, Arlie Hochschild (1983, p. 7), calls this type of disciplinary modification “emotion work.” Emotion work is managing, regulating, and modifying one's feelings and emotions to create facial and bodily displays expected from others. Emotion work requires people, especially workers, to internally produce and manipulate their emotions or bodies by acting. One type of emotion work is surface acting. Surface acting occurs when people mask what they really feel by pretending to feel something different. A second type of emotion work is deep acting. Deep acting occurs when people alter their actual feelings to feel something else (Hochschild 1983, p. 33). The result is that workers temporarily feign how they feel and consequently feel estranged from themselves. John, a forty-year old dentist from St. Louis, discusses how he performs emotion work daily.

“Everyday I have to act for the people who come into my office. I have to put on the fake smile, act like I enjoy their company, adjust my behavior so they'll be comfortable. Everyday is the same routine--my customers come in, I greet all of them with the same ‘Hello, nice to see you again.

How are you?' routine. It's like I'm acting just so they'll feel comfortable. And when I leave to go eat, I have to perform for them, too. When I go to the bank, I have to pretend I'm a successful business owner just to get a damn loan. I make appointments, run around town, set meetings, go to my kids' games. It's really demanding! It takes a lot of time. No matter where I go, I'm acting and trying to convince others that I am someone who I'm not! Ideas about finding your 'true' self is bullshit. There is no 'true' self. I have to escape from that false life to just feel connected to myself. For me, Mardi Gras helps me do this."

If emotion work fails to discipline people, then religious institutions are used to discipline their conduct. As Tracy explains:

"It feels great! You get to do whatever the fuck you want! You can't do shit where I'm from! I live in an area where the Southern Baptist convention is located, and it's so conservative! You can't do shit there! I had to suck someone's dick a while ago to get beads! I will probably never do it again."

David: "What did you think about when you were doing it?"

Tracy: "I was thinking, 'I'm crazy, yea! If they [my family and church] could only see me now!' But of course I really wouldn't want them to see me. Afterwards, I felt really different. It was strictly platonic, though."

During Mardi Gras, revelers perceive to be free from planned or calculated behavior and free from impersonal norms of "respectable" conduct. This point is illustrated by Kelly, a twenty-five year old woman from New York who said she did not want to reflect on her life and experience regret for not participating in unusual experiences once she did the "normal thing of marriage" and took on other adult obligations.

David: "So what was it like to kiss your [female] friend's breasts in public?"

Kelly: "Honestly, it was awkward. Like, I didn't like it, but it's Mardi Gras. I did it because it's New Orleans, and who knows if I'll ever come back! Just for the fuck of it! You've got to do it when you're young! Because, when you're thirty-five or whatever, and you've got kids, or whatever, you're going to say, 'Ohh God! I wish I would've gone to Mardi Gras! So, we're just doing it and we're going to have fun! I mean, I'm going to settle down and have kids, and do the whole respected thing, but right now I'm just like, 'what the fuck!'"

Take a part of the interview with Tim as another example.

Tim: "You can do anything you want to do, be who you want to be. There's nothing wrong with it here. Where else on earth, on a Saturday night, can you fill yourself with everything you want, go out and have a great time without being judged? On this one occasion everyone comes in from all over the United States, all over the world, and they can do what they want to, they can have a good time and be anyone they want to be and be someone they're not for a night, and that's the attraction. You can be anyone you want to be."

Jenny provides another example.

David: "Have you flashed yet?"

Jenny: "No, but I want to. I just want to show my tits! I mean, I come from a small city, and my parents are always watching me. They make me go to church, tell me how to behave, what's proper and improper for a girl, and everyone knows everyone in the town, so you can't shit without someone knowing. I can't go anywhere without them knowing! But, they don't even know I'm here! I told them I was spending the night with a friend, and her and I came here for Mardi Gras. I mean, I am spending the night with her!"

David: "Why do you want to flash?"

Jenny: "I don't know. I just want someone to look at my breasts. I mean, my parents never let me do anything! Here, I'm free! They can't do anything about it! [At this moment a man overhears our interview. He intervenes to tell her that he wants to see her breasts].

Strange Male: "You want to show your tits? I'll give you these beads if you show me!" [he hands her the beads]

Jenny: "Okay!"

[Another man lifts the woman on his shoulders, a crowd quickly gathers, and she flashes for the first time in front of a screaming crowd of people].

David: "How did that feel, I mean, what was that like?"

Jenny: "Oh my God! That was awesome! I want to do it again! I want to do it again! It was like a cold glass of water being thrown into my face! It was overwhelming! I need some alcohol."

These pleasurable performances during Mardi Gras are also transgressive experiences. For instance, when I asked one Amy to comment on kissing and suckling her female friend's breasts in front of crowds, she said that she was "pretending to be a lesbian" by "taking delight with another woman." Although Amy and her friend were deliberately performing as a "joke to trick the crowd," Amy's comment indicates that the presence of heterosexual norms from her family constrains her from participating in these interactions with other women. Instead of participating in same-sex relations with other women, Amy is supposed to "get a job and get married" to a man.

David: "How do you experience kissing your friend's breasts in public?"

Amy: "It's just for fun. Honestly, it's more of a joke, like, to make us laugh. It's like we're performing for the audience. Like, when the guys go 'Ohh, my God, look they're kissing!' we just start laughing because they think we're getting into it. It's totally a joke! Guys are so into lesbianism, but we're just acting like we are. They think that what we're doing is real, but it's not."

David: "Do you mean to say that what you're doing is not real for you?"

Amy: "Yea, exactly. I'm not a lesbian, but these guys make a big deal out of it. They think we are lesbians because we make-out, but we're not. We're just doing this for beads, for laughs, for fun, and because we can't be this way back home."

David: "What do you mean by that?"

Amy: "Well, it's simple. I'm expected to grow up, graduate, get a job, get married, and have children. Being with someone like her is out of the question. So it's my chance to be different, to not be me. But it's so funny to see all these guys watching us do something that's not real! I'm not a lesbian, but if they want to think I am, then that's fine. I can't believe all these guys get a kick out of two girls sucking each other's breasts!"

Amy's comment also reveals that her cultural expectations forbid and marginalize same-sex arrangements. Yet, forbidding and marginalizing same-sex interaction also created an attraction to transgress these cultural expectations by participating in same-sex interactions during Mardi Gras. One implication of Amy's story is that what culture marginalizes often takes place in places like Mardi Gras.

A second implication is that culture creates categories of secret activities by outlawing them in everyday life. Yet, these secret behaviors are embraced when performed during Mardi Gras. The more that secret deviance is diminished in everyday life, the more that people have the

possibility of performing and embracing it during Mardi Gras. Therefore, the assumptions about the 'nature' and 'essence' of deviant behaviors are immediately contested if we accept that the meaning of a deviant behavior does not reside within the person who performs it. Instead, deviant behavior is a product of how the audience socially constructs that behavior as a prohibition and links it with shame or repulsion. Yet, the categories of shame and repulsion are inverted during Mardi Gras. The person's "secret," yet "public" display of deviance adds to the sensations and thrills. After performing the symbolic act, they enjoy the euphoric thrills. In this sense, it is not the desire to flash that leads to the deviant behavior; rather, it is the attraction found in transgressing disciplinary power and getting away with it that makes the desire attractively exciting. Seen in this context, revelers perform secret deviance during Mardi Gras to escape from the disciplinary power that monitors their conduct, emotions, body, and language.

### Secret Deviance as Fun

So far I have been arguing that the revelers' performance of secret deviance is embedded in culture and that social context, disciplinary power, and how they think about their relationships with other people all influence how they decide to participate in it. I have also illustrated that revelers who participate in secret deviance describe themselves as 'liberationists' who believe they are 'escaping' from disciplinary power. The revelers believe that Mardi Gras temporarily suspends disciplinary norms and is the ultimate symbol of freedom of expression and liberation from disciplinary power. There are at least two implications to this argument. First, secret deviance during Mardi Gras can evoke mixed responses from those who participate in it, read about it, and watch it: it can be attractive, repulsive, effervescent, fun, threatening, and euphoric simultaneously. Revelers can participate in secret deviance during Mardi Gras and find it both delightful and repellent because they have no direct or long-term social, cultural, physical, and/or emotional investment with the people observing or performing the activity.

A second implication is that revelers can wear multiple masks without remaining true to a core or essential definition of their self. This implication regards people as having multiple selves, identities, and beliefs, none of which are real or true. As the social psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1991) explains, in postmodern societies people are revelers with pastiche selves who experience liberation by deriving enjoyment from the many forms of self-expression permitted in different contexts. People who participate in acts defined as shameful by religious mores or biblical discourse, for example, can invert these definitions during Mardi Gras and redefine them as

entertaining, fun, exciting, and thrilling. In fact, Kelly, a nineteen-year old woman from a small city in Pennsylvania that she describes as “very Christian,” provides an excellent illustration to this implication. I met Kelly when approximately sixty people, mostly men, were photographing her suckling another woman’s breast on Bourbon Street.

“The city that I live in, it’s very Christian! But my friends and I have agreed not to tell anyone what we’ve done in New Orleans.” Kelly explained.

“Agreed not tell? Does that mean you’ve done things that you wouldn’t normally do? I mean, what’s the wildest thing you’ve done so far?” I asked.

Kelly thought about the question for a mere second, smiled excitedly, and enthusiastically exclaimed while laughing, “Umm, licked my friend’s breasts! That’s the first time ever! First time in history! First time to touch a girl, first time to kiss a girl! Okay, like I am very, I know it doesn’t seem like it, I am a very strong Christian, like totally believe in morals and all that. Strong morals. So like for me to do that, totally New Orleans! No one else will know! No one else from our town is here, so they can’t see us! No one else will ever know! It stays here! Like, as far as our boyfriends go, all we did was show tits and that’s it! It’s our secret!”

“So you’re from a ‘very Christian’ town?” I ask for clarification.

“Yes, but the school is worse. Where we’re from, the Christian school, you can’t do this because they have a tight grip on us! They tell us how to act all the time. Here, it’s so wonderful! When I thought about coming down, I said I would never show my breasts for anything! But after you get here, it’s all about losing your inhibitions and drinking alcohol, and you show your tits! For these plastic beads! These are just plastic beads!” Sheila explained.

“How does it feel to flash? I mean, why is sucking on another woman’s breasts in public attractive?”

“It’s liberating, just wonderful! It feels so good to flash! It’s great! But tomorrow, it will be, ‘I CAN’T BELIEVE I DID THAT!’ It’s so exciting! I get to control my own behavior. What I find most exciting is that I’m from a small town in Pennsylvania where everyone is conservative and works all the time. No one knows how to have fun. Anyway, there was a guy a couple of blocks down from where I live who had a sign that said, ‘Show your dick’, and he started getting the crap beat out of him for having that sign! He was just having fun! That sucks, and it’s wrong for them to have beat him up! Basically, Mardi Gras is the idea that everyone can be so free, and no one cares! NO ONE CARES! It makes you feel good.”

Kelly's account is extremely interesting because she insists that she is a "strong Christian" who "believes in morals, strong morals," and that her presentation of an "amoral" self in New Orleans is a "secret." As the sociologist Erving Goffman illuminates, people are not concerned whether their behavior is moral or amoral as much as they are concerned with presenting a moral self and keeping the presentation of the amoral self a secret from those who might condemn them. He writes,

"Individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards [by which they are judged], but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. Our activity, then, is largely concerned with moral matters, but as performers we do not have a moral concern with them. As performers we are merchants of morality" (1959, p. 251).

Manufacturing a consistent presentation of the moral self is essential for individuals to prevent discrediting themselves, as Kelly illustrated when she stated, "What we did stays here." When discrediting occurs, individuals must perform 'remedial activities' to correct their image. Other revelers supported Kelly's comment. Jack, for instance, told me, "You can't describe it; it's just indescribable. Mardi Gras is cool because it is a different world. Do you think I would be considered normal for doing this where I'm from? No way!" and Paula said, "I came to Mardi Gras to be whole new person, to experience a whole new world, and be around new people who do not know me! If my family or some of my friends knew I was doing this, I'd definitely be considered a slut! It goes against their morality." On the other hand, the same revelers told me that if they fail to remedy or hide their embarrassing performance, those closest to them might try to shame them, produce guilt, or humiliate them as a way to stigmatize or control them. On the other side of this potential threatening stigma, then, is the thrill, awe, and fun in getting away with performing secret deviance in a playful way. While the performer is in awe in front of the audience, the same performer would feel shame if this performance was disclosed to those who would condemn it. It is in this tiny secret that lies the "delight in being deviant" (Katz, 1988; Presdee, 1994). Sheila provides an example of the fun discovered in participating in secret deviance and the shame she would feel if her family found out.

"How would your family respond, how would they feel if they knew you were flashing?"

Sheila: "They would flip-out!"

David: "How would you feel if they discovered that you flashed?"

Sheila: "I'd be embarrassed, a bit shameful and uncomfortable. I don't think I could face them for a while." [She says this with a mischievous smile and a look of shame at the same time].

David: "Does it bother you that strangers see your breasts?"

Sheila: "No. Why should it? I'll never see them again. Besides, it's Mardi Gras, and no one cares. I'm here to have fun."

David: "Is that why you flash, because it's fun?"

Sheila: "I flash because it's liberating. It's fun and exciting to know that people actually want to see me, I mean, my breasts. It's also a lot of fun, and a bit flattering, when guys surround me to see my body. I'm an elementary school teacher so I don't get to go out and do this very often [she says this with a laugh]. It's a different part of myself that I don't show to everyone! [she laughs]."

Sheila reveals that excitement and euphoria develop when revelers conceal their deviant secrets from important people who trust them. Revelers who are seduced by deviance know that people deemed important in their lives might disapprove of their secret presentation and that it might damage their public reputation. Yet, the important point is that revelers also realize how tenuous and shaky these socially constructed morals are in the context of Mardi Gras, how constraining and limiting they can be, and how Mardi Gras provides a context to redefine their identity and these activities as fun instead of immoral. And it is precisely in this appeal of performing secret deviance and subsequently facing potential guilt that provides the ephemeral liberation, fascination, euphoric thrills, and excitement. As Lynn told me, "I love it here. I can present a side of myself that I can't back home. No one knows, and that makes it so much better."

## Conclusion

Secret deviance is an entertaining leisure activity that individuals perform in front of large crowds during Mardi Gras characterized by playfulness, performance, and fun. By placing the interviews within the context of secret deviance and disciplinary power, and alongside a culture that demands that people consciously submerge aspects of their self and present a face to society that will enable them to be accepted, it is not surprising that individuals performed secret deviance during Mardi Gras for fun. For this reason, secret deviance creates pleasure for revelers who participate in it. Trisha sums up this point with the following comment.

"This is like the greatest, I mean this is pretty damn cool! Everybody is like, out there, fucking not giving a shit You don't worry about work, you don't worry about school, don't worry about anyone

or anything, you know? You just come out here and have a fucking great time, and that's all you worry about. No one to tell you what to do or how to behave.”

“What makes you do what you do, then?” I ask in a curious tone.

“I have a restricted life, you know, and I'm kinda like a wild spirit who wants to go out and see and do everything, you know! But I can't, but I can here!” Tricia states enthusiastically.

“How is Mardi Gras different?” I ask.

“I work back home. This is just one big party, everybody's having fun, no one knows each other. At home it's just normal, you know, I work, walk the dog, mow the grass, clean the house” Tricia explains.

Hoping to probe further, I ask her, “What is that like?”

“It's restraining. People know you. Here, I'm liberated, I'm having a good time. Anything goes! No boundaries!”

“How are you outside of Mardi Gras?”

“Outside of Mardi Gras I'm just shy, quite, laid back, and chilled. I'm a social drinker, I work. But ever since the Mardi Gras season, you know, you let yourself go just one day after another. You just let yourself go and be free.”

“Well, if you are free during Mardi Gras, then what holds you back at home?” I ask.

“Well, the everyday life of work, the everyday stress. I think that's the reason why people get so crazy, you know. This is a time for them to get crazy and not have to think about anything, you know. You can just let your mind go and have fun. You don't think about work or what's going to happen the next day. You think about this moment and what you get to see. So you see, this is a very stressless, fun party. Usually I'm quite, conservative, and hardworking.”

Thanks for assisting with this essay: **Danielle Laddon, Stephanie Hall, Karen Sause, Kelly Pinkham, Nora Grahm, Samantha Greenspun, Jennifer Wheaton, Jason Sandusky**