

Research on Lesbianism: Selected Effects of Time, Geographic Location, and Data Collection Technique

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It is the intention of this article both to be descriptive of elements of the lesbian life style that appear to be consistent over time and to examine the results of using widely different data collection techniques attempting to differentiate such behaviors. In addition, the study from which the data are derived examined areas of change and social movement among selected areas of personal commitment or interaction. Research in the area of covert behavior is extremely difficult. Certain types of covert behavior preclude traditional survey and sampling procedures, making parameter estimates for the general population, as well as precluding the use of inferential statistics for data analysis. The masking of the deviant self is perhaps most pronounced where the covert activity in question is illegal (Klockars, 1974). Given this, a comparison of the impact of different research techniques on the quality of data generated in the study of deviant behavior would appear to be important. The data were collected from three separate groups involving three data collection times spread over a 10-year period, involving three geographic locations, and involving two different data collection techniques. A total of 394 lesbians were interviewed or responded to a questionnaire distributed with the cooperation of a large, well-known homophile organization. An analysis was made, and both significant and nonsignificant differences in sample types are discussed. It should be noted that these data represent a small segment of the data generated by the study. The parts of them presented were chosen because they address pertinent theoretical and methodological questions in the area of researching covert behavior.

KEY WORDS: lesbian; subculture; sociodemographic variables; coming out; homosexual; data collection.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of covert behavior or deviant behavior has always presented unique challenges not encountered in the traditional sociological research. Not the least of these problems involves the covert nature of deviant activity and the unwillingness of those defined as deviant to be subject to scientific inquiry. Such problems are compounded when the areas explored are heavily imbued with emotional content or defined as of crucial importance by the membership of the culture at large (Polsky, 1967). In approaching these areas, the most frequently used research techniques are those that do not require confrontation with research subjects or with their status as such.

In a general way, these approaches are frequently defined as field or observational techniques. In fairness to them, it should be noted that they allow the approach of social phenomena not available to other methodological approaches. Field research often leads to the development of instruments which are in turn utilized in more traditional survey frameworks. In other instances, field researches are final in and of themselves. It has been argued that they should not be used in combination with other techniques as a means of approaching both reliability and validity problems. Since it is not possible to "replicate" an observational or a participant-observation type of study in the traditional sense of the word, its reliability must relate to continued observations of behavior "as occurring" within a generic category, rather than specific behaviors which, having occurred, can occur no more. It is often assumed that there are gross differences between the nature of data generated by participant observation and those generated by more traditional sampling techniques.

This, however, is not substantiated in the literature of sociology. In the study reported, data were originally generated through observational techniques evolving to the development of more specific areas of focus and a questionnaire (Whyte, 1955). Whyte points out that immersion in the research milieu is often a criterion of the validity of the observation and yet it need not be. While the researcher immerses himself as "researcher" into the milieu of the community without seriously disturbing that milieu, he or she does not necessarily blend into the milieu as a member. Reporting on "self" therefore derives from discussions, interviews, or interactional observation which is related to the self-report material not characteristically defined as hard data. Just as the milieu is sensitized to the researcher as his role evolves, the researcher is sensitized to his environment and therefore affected by the role that he or she plays. It is difficult, therefore, to separate the research out from perceptions on the part of both the researcher and the researched. Each incorporates the social and political context surrounding them in their behavior, assigning importances with

regard to their unique perceptions. Instruments sensitive to such perceptions should, when administered over time, reflect changes (if they occur) given that they are administered to respondents sharing commonalities of identity or experience. Unfortunately, in the literature of most behavioral sciences, it is frequently assumed that differences in responses noted between data collection instruments of different types used over time derive from technique rather than real differences in response. Despite this, the extent to which data collection techniques affect the quality, validity, or reliability of data utilized in research has as of yet to be assessed. We approach such an assessment here.

Some elements in all life styles are affected by changes in the socio-political environment. Frequently these changes affect the extent to which certain life styles are visible in the culture. We need note only the increasing presence of the black in varying institutions or the increasing willingness of marijuana users to be so identified. On the other hand, certain normative proscriptions remain relatively constant. The denigration of the homosexual commitment and life style is one of those cultural proscriptions. Nonetheless, changes can be perceived in the extent to which the lesbian life style remains covert and the extent to which changes in it can be noted. The notation of such social change is an offshoot of our research.

OBJECTIVES

It was our intention to examine certain sociodemographic characteristics of lesbians over time and over place of data collection, and to compare data collection techniques utilized. Essentially, the research was intended to be descriptive and exploratory, covering three major dimensions: the first, time, dealing with changes in response patterns over a 10 year period; the second examining what differences, if any, existed between samples collected in different parts of the county, roughly defined as eastern and midwestern, with considerations given to size of community and residence level; and the last dealing with differences which might be generated by the use of different data collection techniques, i.e., data collected via interviews conducted by lesbians and data collected by a mailed questionnaire authorized under the auspices of a homophile organization. As is the case in many studies, the data reported are derived from a series of events unfolding over a decade of interest and observation.

DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected in 1964 through 1970, 1972, and 1973. From 1964 to 1970 data were collected from 65 self-reported lesbians residing in

the Philadelphia general area. These are referred to as the original data and were collected by a lesbian interviewer. Respondents consisted of members of established friendship groups identifying themselves as lesbians, as well as others (snowball sample technique) similarly self-identified. All responded to a questionnaire. The geographic designations used were a matter of convenience and are not meant to imply that characteristics attributed are unique to those designations. From a more traditional point of view we were not concerned with whether the "samples" derived from each each were characteristic of a universe of lesbians derived from each designated area. Such generalizations could not be made for reasons previously designated.

The midwestern sample consisted of 81 lesbian respondents interviewed by lesbian interviewers in the Wichita, Kansas, area in 1972 (a 200-mile radius). Again, the process of sample selection was essentially the same as that used in 1964. The same questionnaire was used in all three sample areas, over time and in all data collection situations.

The eastern sample was collected in cooperation with a large homophile organization and was mailed under their control and auspices. The questionnaire was sent under cover with a letter indicating some endorsement, requesting cooperation on the basis of its being better to have us do the research than others who would be more likely to abuse the subject of that research. In this the researchers were also defined as non-sensationalists and nonmoralists. The mailing resulted in 248 usable replies from a large eastern metropolitan area overlapping New Jersey and Pennsylvania and including some of the "bedroom" areas surrounding New York City. All three groups combined to make 394 responses. This article, therefore, reports on results of a total ($N = 394$) of groups defined as the "original" ($N = 65$, 1964), the midwestern ($N = 81$, 1972), and the eastern ($N = 248$, 1973). Table I will clarify these designations.

Table I

Time	Place	Collection technique	Sample source	Resulting sample size
1964-1968	Philadelphia	Lesbian/interviewer	Contacts in gay community	65
1971	Midwest	Lesbian/interviewer	Contacts in gay community	81
1972-1973	Eastern	Mailed/questionnaire	Organization list	248
Total				394

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed across the dimensions of time, place, and collection technique. All three dimensions required combining samples for comparative analysis. The midwest and the eastern samples were combined on the time dimension, 1972–1973. The Philadelphia (or original) sample and the midwest sample were combined to examine data based on collection type, or interviewer-collected vs. mailed questionnaire data. Last, the original (Philadelphia) sample and the eastern sample were combined to examine data based on regional expectations. The data were defined as nominal, and the study was considered to be exploratory and descriptive. It was not defined as longitudinal since the same respondents were not used in the decade-later data collection. Additionally, it was not defined as cross-sectional or comparative since different data collection methods were used.

Given this, use of the traditional examination for significant differences utilized in theory- and/or hypothesis-testing studies was inappropriate. It was impossible to define what factors could be held responsible for any noted significant differences relating to time, to region, or to data collection type. Given our sampling restrictions, differences between groups could have resulted from any one of the above or combinations of them. Therefore, it was reasoned that more important than the search for differences would be an examination for consensus or nonsignificant differences between the designated categories. If responses were essentially the same with known differences in time, region, data collection, and sampling difficulties, confidence could be raised in both validity and reliability of responses. This we felt was the case. In an area where theory, concepts, variables, or measures are uncertain or contradictory findings exist, it appeared logical to make clear normative structures and identify area of consensus rather than to establish significant differences between groups, temporal differences, or geographic differences. Nonetheless, certain differences emerged from the data.

RESULTS

Tables II-VI focus on age, education, occupation, religious affiliation, and race of the samples.

In describing the demographic characteristics, generally it can be said that the groups were comparable. The original sample was slightly older, while the midwestern sample was, from a mean perspective, the youngest.

Table II. Age Distribution by Sample Area

Age	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
16-20	49	12.4	29	11.7	19	23.5	1	1.5
21-25	122	31.0	69	27.8	35	43.2	18	27.7
26-30	101	25.6	57	23.0	17	21.0	27	41.5
31-35	44	11.2	31	12.5	6	7.4	7	10.8
36-40	35	8.9	27	10.9	1	1.2	7	10.8
41-45	22	5.9	15	6.0	2	2.5	5	7.7
46+	19	4.8	19	7.7	0	0	0	0
N/R	2	0.2	1	0.4	1	1.2	0	0
Total	394	100.0	248	100.0	81	100.0	65	100.0

Table III. Educational Attainment by Sample Area

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Elementary	4	1.0	4	1.6	0	0	0	0
Some high school	115	29.2	51	20.6	27	33.3	37	57.0
Some college	130	33.0	85	34.3	29	35.8	16	24.6
College	65	16.5	48	19.4	11	13.6	6	9.2
Grad work	78	19.8	59	23.8	13	16.0	6	9.2
N/R	2	0.5	1	0.4	1	1.3	0	0
Total	394	100.0	248	100.0	81	100.0	65	100.0

Table IV. Occupational Attainment by Sample Area

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professional	136	34.5	105	42.3	14	17.3	17	26.2
Clerical	118	29.9	66	26.6	18	22.2	34	52.3
Manual	50	12.7	15	6.0	25	30.9	10	15.4
Self-employed	4	1.0	3	1.2	1	1.2	0	0
Student	50	12.7	40	16.1	9	11.1	1	1.5
Retired	1	0.3	1	0.4	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	15	3.8	9	3.7	5	6.2	1	1.5
N/R	20	5.1	9	3.7	9	11.1	2	3.1
Total	394	100.0	248	100.0	81	100.0	65	100.0

Almost one in four of the midwestern sample was under 21 years of age. The eastern sample, on the other hand, fell between the other two, but in all of the areas of group differentiation—that is, over time and data collection—approximately two-thirds to almost nine-tenths were 30 years of age or younger.

With regard to education, the eastern sample was generally better educated in the formal sense of the word, with 43% holding a bachelor's

Table V. Religious Affiliation by Sample Area

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Protestant	140	35.5	76	30.6	42	51.9	22	33.8
Catholic	111	28.2	71	28.6	10	12.3	30	46.2
Jewish	18	4.6	13	5.3	2	2.5	3	4.6
Other and none	119	30.2	83	33.5	26	32.1	10	15.4
N/R	6	1.5	5	2.0	1	1.2	0	0
Total	394	100.0	248	100.0	81	100.0	65	100.0

degree or having completed graduate work. In the original sample only 18% held a college degree or had completed graduate work. The midwestern sample, on the other hand, fell between the other two groups with approximately 30% having completed a college degree or done some graduate work. In fact, the only major differences in educational attainment of the three sample groupings may relate to time rather than geographic location. These findings also reflect the changing role of women in the culture with regard to both educational and occupational expectations and goals.

It was expected that occupation would be highly correlated with educational attainment, but our data indicate less than a direct relationship. The eastern sample had perhaps the highest percentage of persons employed professionally or who were still students, at 42% and 16%, respectively. The original sample had the highest percentage of clerical employees at 52% and fell between the east and the midwest with 26% of the group employed professionally. The midwestern sample contained approximately 31% classified as clerical, and 11% classified as students. There was, therefore, considerable variation in the occupational status of respondents. Most variants appeared to be regional rather than being related to time or data collection technique.

As can be seen in the tables, some interesting differences appear regarding the professed religious affiliations of the samples. There was a

Table VI. Race by Sample Area

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
White	373	94.7	231	93.1	78	96.3	64	98.5
Black	12	3.0	9	3.6	2	2.5	1	1.5
Asian-American	1	0.3	1	0.4	0	0	0	0
Other	6	1.5	5	2.1	1	1.2	0	0
N/R	2	0.5	2	0.8	0	0	0	0
Total	394	100.0	248	100.0	81	100.0	65	100.0

higher percentage of Catholics and Jews in the two eastern samples compared with the midwestern sample. Time appeared to affect these responses in about one-third of the 1972–1973 respondent groups who specified something other than one of the three major religious affiliations or claimed to have no religious affiliations. The three samples were virtually devoid of racial differentiation. Percentages ranged from 93% to 98% white.

Diversity exists between the three groups. If, however, consensus on reported lesbian behavior is established in light of time, place, and data collection technique, then a triangulation of a sort (validity) can be claimed as a check on normative patterns in lesbian experience (Denzin, 1970). Because of space and time limitations it is not possible to report on all the data analyzed.

THE GAY RELATIONSHIP AND COMING OUT

Twenty-one questions were asked about the gay relationship and coming out, and 12 showed no significant differences in responses over any of the given dimensions (Table VII).

Responses to the other nine questions varied with regard to either the region where the data were collected, the time during which the data were collected, or the mode of data collection, or some combination. In three of these cases, changes over the dimension of time were accompanied by regional differences. Where only regional differences existed (two cases), the differences tended toward a noticeable conservative bias in the midwestern sample. For example, when responding to questions as to age at first homosexual contact (after initial exploratory contact), the midwest sample was significantly older, yet from a modal point of view all samples were approximately the same. Tables VIII-X offer some interesting comparisons. As can be seen, awareness and self-definitions occurred early in life consistently over the period of our study. Our respondents indicated that they had thought of women sexually prior to this contact. Again, these data were consistent over time and region. Almost 80% had had their first contact by age 21; 70% had had a first sexual contact by age of 15; 30% had had their first contact by the age of 10. The significant difference was in the midwestern sample, where first experiences tended to occur later. Given this, however, the midwestern sample also had their first postexploratory experience early in their teens.

Changes over the dimension of time were reflected most frequently in the eastern sample, which categorically appeared to reject role playing³ to a greater extent than the corresponding midwestern or original sample. In cases where change was apparent over time but not accompanied by changes with regard to region, both appeared to reflect changes in the role of all

³Butch or femme, i.e., an imitative male or exaggerative female role.

Table VII. Dimension Differences: Gay Relationships and Coming Out

	Differences			None
	Time	Region	Collection	
1. Age at first homosexual awareness?				X
2. Age at your first homosexual contact?		X		
3. Were you seduced or the seducer?			X	
4. What sex role do you assign yourself in homosexual relations?			X	
5. What percent of your dates result in sexual relations?				X
6. Do you prefer a stable relationship to dating around?				X
7. When you had your first sexual contact with a woman had you already thought about women sexually?				X
8. How many permanent relationships have you terminated?				X
9. Have you ever been emotionally involved with a straight girl?	X	X	X	
10. With how many girls have you been sexually intimate?				X
11. Do you think homosexuals are especially creative?	X	X		
12. At the time of your first contact with a woman had you already focused on women as your principal sex object?		X		
13. Did your first sexual contact with a woman involve more than manual stimulation?				X
14. When did you first achieve orgasm?				X
15. Are most of your friends going with someone more or less steadily?	X	X		
16. Was your first real girlfriend older or younger than you?	X			
17. Do you date men?	X			
18. Did being a homosexual affect your elementary school experience?				X
19. Did being a homosexual affect your high school experience?				X
20. At what age did you first seek out women?				X
21. At the point of your first sexual fantasy about women, how old were you?				X

women that have occurred over the past decade. As women in the culture have become more "liberated," the role of the lesbian likewise has become more "liberated." With the eastern sample dividing itself approximately equally into seduced and seducer, or as playing a mutually reciprocal role at first contact, fewer women reported their first girlfriend as being older. It would appear that lesbians in the same age cohort find their way mutually to the relationship rather than having an older woman introduce a novice to the "life." Further, fewer of the eastern sample reported being seduced compared to both the midwestern sample and the original sample (Table XI).

Table VIII. Age at First Homosexual Contact (Exploratory)

	Total	East	Midwest	Original
Median 12-13		12-13	12-13	13-14
Mode	13	13	13	14

Table IX. Age at First Homosexual Self-Definition

	Total	East	Midwest	Original ^a
Median 12-13		12-13	12-13	13-14
Mode	13	13	13	14

^aNo significant difference between any subsample, *t* test.

Given this, both median and modal age at first homosexual contact were constant over time and region. Disagreement in the dimensions of time and region existed in that both eastern and midwestern samples reported more involvement with straight women than was reported in the original sample. There was a linear relationship between the samples from a reported high in the east to a low in the original sample. This might well reflect an increasing willingness to admit feelings on the part of the lesbian, or it might well have reflected an increased identification of women with women. Yet another dimension of change related to the ideological perception that homosexuals possessed special qualities of creativity and sensitivity. A linear relationship existed between the responses of the samples. The original sample perceived this as true more frequently than either of the other samples. The midwestern sample was the more conservative in its responses. Nonetheless, response agreement existed over time and the dimension of region. Clearly lesbians view other homosexuals as being uniquely sensitive to other people.

Table X. When You Had Your First Sexual Contact with a Woman Had You Already Thought About Women Sexually?

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	323	82.0	208	83.9	64	79.0	51	78.5
No	62	15.7	33	13.3	16	19.8	13	20.0
N/R	9	2.3	7	2.8	1	1.2	1	1.5
Total	394	100	248	100	81	100	65	100

Table XI

	Total		East		Midwest		Original	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Seduced	146	37.1	78	31.5	39	48.1	29	44.6
Seducer	148	37.6	88	35.5	30	37.0	30	46.2
Both	75	19.0	64	25.8	7	8.6	4	6.2
N/R	24	6.2	18	7.2	5	5.2	1	1.5
Don't remember								1.5
Total	394	99.9	248	100.0	81	99.9	65	100.0

In general, few differences were found with regard to region or time that could be attributed to different data collection techniques. There were three significant differences, and yet, in all three, the original and midwestern samples were significantly different from the eastern sample. The eastern sample statistically was less likely to have been seduced in their first sexual contact. They were more likely to have been emotionally involved with straight women and were more egalitarian and defined themselves as being less dominant in their assessment of their role in homosexual context.

In conclusion, of 63 possibilities for significant differences on the dimensions defined, only 13 were found. This low proportion of differences, coupled with the 12 of 21 questions in which no differences were noted, leads one to the conclusion that lesbian behavior has a high degree of normative structure which has remained constant over a long period of time. These differences can be viewed as minimal based on the known differences in the samples, the times separating data collection, and regional differences. In addition, the data indicate considerable consistency across indicated dimensions over both time and region with regard to the coming out process and various types of social encounters.

COMMUNITY

The community dimension was meant to include a measure of specialized activities and feelings perceived by lesbians about themselves and about lesbians in general. Further, we sought to gauge the extent to which these facilities and activities were important to and involved in the life style of the lesbian.

As can be seen in Table XII, there were no significant differences in four of the eight questions shown. There was more change and difference between regions than in the dimension of time or with regard to data

Table XII. Dimension Differences: Community

	Differences			
	Time	Region	Collection	None
1. Do you date girls met in gay bars?	X	X		
2. What percent of gay friends have you met in gay bars? ^a		X		
3. What percent of women with whom you shared a relationship have you met through friends? ^a		X		
4. At what age did you first seek out other lesbians as your principal social group? ^a				X
5. Have you ever gone anywhere in "drag"?				X
6. Have you had a "butch" period in your life?	X	X		
7. Are you happy in general?				X
8. Are homosexuals especially sensitive to others?				X

^aQuestions were tested by use of Student's *T*.

collection technique. Three of the four regional differences indicate that the midwestern sample was again significantly different from the original or the eastern sample. These differences appeared to focus on the gay bar. Lesbians in the midwest tended to be less likely than those in other samples to have relationships with women met through friends. The regionally related difference was a linear relationship between samples designating a butch period in their social career; 74% of the original group indicated that they had had such a period; 63% of the midwestern sample indicated such a period; while 48% of the eastern sample had experienced a similar period. The eastern sample, again, appeared to be less concerned with role playing and role dominance than other samples. Time dimension differences were found between the original sample and the midwestern sample with regard to dating and gay bars, and also between the original and the eastern samples in experiencing a "butch" period in their lives.⁴ Fully one-half of the questions dealing with community showed no differences on any of the defined dimensions. Of these, only six of the possible 24 differences were noted based on time and region. None of these differences, however, could be directly attributed to the data collection method. General agreement again existed over the dimensions of region and time as to when other lesbians became the respondents' principal social group. Our respondents also agreed that they were generally happy with their lesbian commitment and life style.

⁴The term "butch" is usually meant to designate a female playing a decidedly male role, and it should be noted that it has a pejorative connotation.

We concluded that again there were surprisingly few differences between the groups based on the total number of differences possible.

THE HOMOSEXUAL BAR AS A SAMPLE SOURCE

There were a number of reasons why we perceived the gay bar as a source (if sampled over time) that would provide samples approximating the general lesbian population. This is a position generally disregarded in the literature. We perceived the gay bar as serving as a marketplace in every sense of the word. It is the most obvious place to meet potential sex partners and friends outside of one's immediate network of acquaintances. It serves as a clearinghouse for information of all sorts. It is a combination social calendar and daily bulletin board. It is a public place where relatively private behavior can be displayed. It is a milieu of common understanding and identity and a place where the minority becomes the majority.

The gay bar is comparable to the heterosexually oriented bar on the surface only. Each serves a completely different function for its clientele and, as a result, is meaningful to them in different ways and to different degrees. In short, the heterosexual bar does not have the same cathetic focus for the heterosexual that the homosexual bar has for the lesbian. Additionally, since cruising activity³ is virtually unknown among lesbians, the lesbian bar may well be more functionally important to the lesbian than its male counterpart is to the male.

Our data reflect interesting patterns of bar attendance. In the total sample 17% reported that they had never attended gay bars. This, however, was complemented by 23% reporting that they had met none of their friends in gay bars. Note, however, that 16% indicated in excess of 51 visits to gay bars per year, with the remainder of the sample reasonably evenly distributed throughout the remainder of the categories. Additionally, almost 12% indicated that they had met 80-90% of their friends in the bars. In the case of the midwestern and the original sample these figures were 29.6% and 23.1%, respectively. As can be seen in Table IX, the eastern sample, as a group, appeared to be less dependent on the bars as a source of friends. Even so, a broad range of all of the samples attendance in gay bars during the year was disproportionately drawn from the eastern sample which included both direct interviews and mailed questionnaires which were themselves directed to members of a large

³By this is meant the solicitation of relatively impersonal sex in public places. This excludes the meeting of someone in a relatively nonpublic atmosphere and engaging in sexual activity, the dimensions of which include individual recognition and concern.

homophile organization. Membership in this organization, however, did not necessarily mean openness about one's lesbianism, and, in fact, according to the organization, some of the women in the sample (an undisclosed number) were still "in the closet." Even so, a broad range of all of the samples attended gay bars frequently.

The fact that the midwestern sample in general attended the bars more frequently than either the eastern or the original sample affords interesting speculation. Throughout the study we noted more conservative responses in the midwestern sample than in either of the others. The midwestern sample appeared to be less "liberated," and less than open about their lesbianism. According to our data, the midwestern lesbian was more isolated than her counterpart in other parts of the country. Given greater isolation and stigmatization, a greater reliance on the gay bar is predictable. This is complemented by other data that indicate that the midwestern lesbian is more involved with other lesbians than the eastern sample (N/W 67.9 vs. East 34.7).⁶ The fact that the original sample had 81.5% reporting that most friends were homosexual may indicate a lessening of the isolation of the lesbian, perhaps a facet of the gay liberation movement. Curiously, all of the samples indicated that they were not uncomfortable around nonhomosexuals, and on these dimensions no changes over region or time were manifest.

When respondents were asked if they found it necessary to maintain a front of heterosexuality, we again find a linear relationship going from a high (73.8% in the original sample to a low of 57.3% in the eastern sample). The midwest once again occupies a middle position (66.7%), perhaps indicative of less openness about being a lesbian. The change over time, again, may well relate to the changing mores with regard to both womanness and overt sexuality in general. When asked if the bars catered to younger girls, we noted a change over time but no change over region or with regard to data collection technique. The change over time once again reflects a less clandestine acting out of the lesbian role. The data also reflect a more extensive use of the bar on the part of the midwestern sample. The pattern of responses indicates a mix of ages in the bars in general. A more refined questionnaire would have elicited more information about the several types of gay bars which cater to particular segments of the population. In a similar vein, the samples split evenly as to whether they attended the bars more frequently when they were younger or new to the life. A change over time was noted but none with regard to data collection technique. The samples generally indicated that the unattached female

⁶We mean by this that she has a more restricted social experience which is circumscribed by her lesbianism; that she has proportionately more lesbian friends, and relies more upon the lesbian community for all patterns of interaction.

tended to attend bars more frequently than the attached. However, it should be noted that in the original sample 49% were attached (living with someone in a marriage arrangement) and 51% were unattached, while 90% indicated bar attendance.

That the network of friends in the gay community is of particular importance in the social process is indicated in our data. Across time and region, respondents state that a considerable proportion of their lovers have been met through friends. As in the case of other data, the midwestern sample showed more solidarity of community or more isolation of the community. It was interesting that 45% of the eastern sample indicated that 10% or fewer of their lovers were met through friends. Even so, this same sample indicated (71%) that 10% or less of their friends were met in gay bars. One can speculate on what plays the role of fountainhead for friends and lovers. These findings may indicate realistic open interaction in the straight community wherein such meetings occur. Recall that only 20% of this same sample indicated that they were uncomfortable around a nonhomosexual. However, 57.3% of this very sample indicated that they maintained a heterosexual front for straight friends and acquaintances. Whatever the vehicle of social interchange, it is clear that interchange occurs within a set of meanings that can be attributed to a sense of community. This is reinforced by all respondents in all samples indicating that between 19 and 20 years of age they chose other lesbians as their principal social group. These findings were consistent over time and region as well as with regard to data collection technique.

It would appear reasonable at this point to suggest that the population found in gay bars approximates the lesbian populations generally. The bar plays a relatively important role for most lesbians for one reason or another. It is clearly not the sole source of social or sexual contact. While the data indicate a perception of stigmatization of identity manifest in the need to present a false front of heterosexuality, they also indicate an increasing openness about sexual identity and increasing overlapping interaction with the straight community. Respondents generally reported themselves as being in the "gay life."

HETEROSEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Table XIII presents questions exploring this dimension of interaction and what differences were manifest between samples with regard to their heterosexual experience. The data appear to indicate considerable interchange between lesbians and nonhomosexuals, both male and female. Consider that of all samples indicated emotional involvement with one or

Table XIII. Dimension Differences: Heterosexual Experience^a

	Differences			
	Time	Region	Collection	None
1. Have you ever had sexual relations with a man?		X		
2. Did it involve physical penetration?		X		
3. Did it involve oral-genital contact?	X			
3a. If you answered yes to question 3, did it involve				
1. Both of you	X		X	
2. Just you				X
3. Just him				X
4. No response				X
5. No contact				X
4. Did you achieve orgasms in your heterosexual contact?		X		
5. Did being a homosexual affect your elementary school experience?				X
6. Did being a homosexual affect your high school experience?				X
7. Do you find it necessary to keep up a heterosexual front for straight friends or acquaintances?	X			
8. Do you feel uncomfortable around non-homosexuals?				X

^aAll questions were tested by the nonparametric difference of proportions test, with the 0.05 level judged significant.

more heterosexual women. Note, however, that the question did not explicitly specify sexual contact or acting out; neither did it exclude it.

Most (71% of the three samples) of our respondents had had sexual relations with a male. There were regional differences, but the original sample reported the lowest percentage of experiences. Of those who had had sexual relationships with a male the eastern and original samples apparently experienced sexual intercourse (61%) more than the midwest with 41% reporting penetration. This conclusion is supported by the difference in the oral-genital contact time difference (36% in 1972-1973 to 25% in 1964-1970). The last of the time differences reflects all possible combinations of oral-genital contacts.

Of the 13 questions about heterosexual experiences, seven showed no significant differences between samples on any of the dimensions. In one question exploring the area of oral-genital practices, differences were noted. Both the eastern sample and the midwestern sample indicated more of such contacts than the original sample. An additional difference was noted in the samples reporting on the importance of maintaining a heterosexual front for straight (nonhomosexual) friends. The original sample had a higher

proportion (74%) than either the eastern or midwestern sample (59%). This might well indicate a lessening need for maintaining a heterosexual front as homosexuality becomes seen in a more benign way by the culture at large. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents in all samples reported that they maintained a straight front for straight society.

The last difference in heterosexual activities pertained to whether the respondent achieved orgasm without regard for the type of relations. The eastern and original samples did so in much higher percentages (28%) than the midwestern sample (15%). Again the midwestern sample reflected the more restrained position in most heterosexual relationships.

The only difference directly attributable to data collection was oral-genital contact involving both the male and female. The data collection analysis mixed time and region, but by our classification there was a significant difference between data reported on the questionnaire and data collected by an interviewer.

Of the 39 possible time, region, collection differences there were actually seven significant differences (18%). As a result we again concluded that there were surprisingly few differences in heterosexual relationships and a high degree of consensus when viewed across time, region, and data collection techniques.

CONCLUSIONS

In general trends, there were differences in the social experience of the lesbian living in the midwest when compared with those in the eastern sample. The data indicate that she was less willing to risk herself, that she appeared to be less liberated and "up front" about her lesbianism. This may be accounted for in part by differences between the two samples. The eastern regional sample was better educated on the whole and occupationally enjoyed positions of higher status. In occupation the midwest sample more closely approximated the original sample.

It is evident there have been changes over time. The majority of these reflect a growing militant feminism and more openness about sexual commitments, most clearly seen in the eastern regional sample. Where these changes were noted, changes in the same direction also can be noted in the midwestern sample. An interesting trend can be noted in patterns of friendship. When our respondents perceived less stigmatization, they appeared to interact across a broader range of the heterosexual world. Correspondingly, the gay bar typically became less important as a facilitator of social exchange. Even so, our data indicated that the gay bar is a unique institution and as such it draws on virtually all segments of the gay population at one time or another. Given the pattern of bar attendance, we suggest that the

bar population provides a more representative sample of the gay community than is generally reported in the literature.

Combining all questions for the three major areas of gay relationships, community and heterosexual experience together produced 126 possible differences on the questions. Of these only 26 (21%) could be called significant differences. Ten were time differences, 12 were regional differences, and four could be attributed to data collection differences.

Perhaps one of the most provocative findings of this study is the lack of difference between samples based on data collection process. Based on our data we call into question the time-honored notion that data collection techniques generate differing qualities of data and, by implication, differing levels of data. The literature of the behavioral sciences reflects a denigration of data derived from observation (regardless of how systematic) as less than laboratory conditions. Given our findings it can be suggested that data collection techniques, given a relatively structured instrument (questionnaire or the like), has no effect on the quality of data generated.

As can be seen in the tables, there was far more consensus than disagreement on all dimensions. This was particularly true in the early stages of awareness and coming out. It is obvious that there exists a high degree of stability in the gay life over time and region. Where changes have occurred, they are related to movements in the general culture. Given the amount of consensus we also conclude that the type of data collection did not affect the data derived, at least where interviews are conducted using a questionnaire format capable of being completed by a respondent acting alone. These data suggest many further directions of analysis and many hypotheses. These delineations must, however, await another format and time frame.

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