

# THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SEXUALITY

*Sexual Practices  
in the United States*

"The most important survey  
since the Kinsey Report."  
—*Time*

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF  
CALIFORNIA

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**Edward O. Laumann, John H. Gagnon,  
Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels**

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## CONTENTS

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	Ackno
	Prolog
	<b>Part I</b>
	Theore
1	1.1
	1.2
	1.3
	1.4
	1.5
	1.6
	as
2	The So
	2.1
	in
	2.2
	<b>Part II</b>
3	Sexual
	3.1
	3.2
	Pa
	3.3
	3.4
	3.5
	App
	Va
4	The So
	Sexu

to apply in the case of sexual partnerships, it would provide a parsimonious description of tables such as table 7.1. It is likely, however, that even if such models are partially applicable to sexual relationships, they will have to be modified to take into account the many unique features of sexual relationships.

Finally, as we have already pointed out, aggregate tables such as those in chapter 6, section 6.5, and even table 7.1 fail to capture certain types of higher-order structure. Thus, bridging groups and other network features involving indirect ties are not explicitly represented. This is an important limitation that can be corrected only through modification of the existing models.

Clearly, much careful work will need to be done before the information contained in the data we have collected can be translated into formal models that will allow us both to explain the path that AIDS has taken in the population thus far and, more important, to predict the path that it will take in the future. On a less formal level, however, we believe that these data offer a convincing explanation of why AIDS has not achieved as high a prevalence in the general population as was originally thought. This, of course, is not meant to belittle the tragic effects of the infection. Nor are we denying the fact that many people will continue to become infected with the disease, many of these through heterosexual contact. We are suggesting, however, that the general lack of connectivity present in sexual networks among adults in the United States, together with the relatively low transmission probability of AIDS through vaginal intercourse, will significantly restrict the extent to which this disease will spread into the general population.

## CHAPTER 8

### Homosexuality

Perhaps no other single number in this study will attract greater public interest than our estimate of the prevalence of homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Dramatic evidence of this popular interest is found in the recent protracted debates over President Clinton's proposal to eliminate the ban on gays in the military and the responses of the Congress and the military itself to such a proposition. Given the highly charged political atmosphere in which all sides adduced wildly contradictory statistics in support of their claims, we want to be especially careful that our data and interpretations are put forward in as responsible and straightforward a manner as possible. Of course, we have no way of controlling or even anticipating the ways in which our findings will be used, but we do want to avoid obvious misinterpretations wherever possible. In short, neither pedantry nor extreme scientific cautiousness leads us to assert that estimating a single number for the prevalence of homosexuality is a futile exercise because it presupposes assumptions that are patently false: that homosexuality is a uniform attribute across individuals, that it is stable over time, and that it can be easily measured.

Estimating the prevalence of various forms of sexual behavior is at the very heart of our research. In fact, the lack of data on the prevalence of men who have sex with other men was a major motivation for the original federally funded project that led to this study. By the mid-1980s, it was clear that the majority of AIDS cases involved men who had sex with men (Institute of Med-

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance with data analysis provided by Fang Li and Dawne Moon. The chapter was drafted and the bulk of the data analysis performed by Stuart Michaels.

1. We have used the terms *homosexuality* and *same-gender sex* or *sexuality* interchangeably in this chapter. We mean these terms to be taken as descriptive of specific partnerships, practices, or feelings. There are some problems with this usage. *Homosexual* and *homosexuality* (and, slightly later, *heterosexual* and *heterosexuality*) are late nineteenth-century creations and bear the mark of their development in a period of the medicalization of sexuality (Katz 1983, Foucault 1978; Chauncey 1983; and Halpern 1990). In particular, they are associated with the emergence of the notion of sexual types or beings defined in terms of the gender of their sex partners or related attributes. We have tried to avoid evoking these notions and to distance our discussion from inferences about etiology, associations, and consequences of the behaviors and feelings reported. *Gay* and *lesbian* as alternative terms referring to sexual patterns have the disadvantage of being associated with a particular historical moment and social (and often political) self-identification. The latter involves issues such as participation in a community and culture that are beyond the current research and its primary focus on the sexual. (For a related discussion in the context of the consideration of the work of Kinsey, see Gagnon 1990).

icine 1986; Shilts 1988). These early cases were men who had had many male sex partners recruited from the gay communities of a handful of major cities on the East and West Coasts (Klovdahl 1986). We also knew that the infectious agent (HIV) could be transmitted sexually and that certain practices, such as anal intercourse, were much more efficient routes of transmission than others. What we did not know was how many men engaged in these practices, the extent to which these men were concentrated in large cities, how they thought of themselves, how many partners they had, and so on. These data are needed to make projections about the spread of the disease, to identify the locations of the next phase of the epidemic, and to illuminate the social and attitudinal correlates of these behaviors.

The social stigma attached to homosexuality creates an added challenge for us. Homosexuality in Western societies has historically been viewed as a sin, a disease, or an aberration. These notions are still extremely widespread. During the twenty years prior to this survey, from 1972 to 1991, an overwhelming majority (over 70 percent) of the U.S. adult population has answered that homosexuality is always wrong in response to a question asked annually as part of the General Social Survey.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this apparent stability in public opinion over a long period of time, the past twenty-five years have seen a notable increase in the legitimation and visibility of homosexuality, in part the result of a growing political movement of lesbians and gay men.

The findings from our research need to be understood in this context. The widespread, strongly negative view of homosexuality shapes both behaviors and our attempts to measure them. While we have attempted to be nonjudgmental in our inquiries, many respondents are likely to have been reluctant to report behaviors and feelings that they think might reflect badly on them in the eyes of the interviewers or the researchers. The estimates derived from survey data on socially stigmatized sexual behaviors and feelings, whether they be masturbation, homosexual relations, anal sex, or extramarital affairs, are no doubt lower-bound estimates.

Independent of questions of valuation and judgment, recent writing and thinking about homosexuality can be divided into two major camps. These two basic views of homosexuality (and many minor variants of them) can be found both in popular thought and in more theoretical and scientific debates. These two perspectives have come to be called *essentialism* and *social constructionism* (Foucault 1978; Greenberg 1988; Halperin 1990; Stein 1992).<sup>3</sup>

2 The question asks specifically about whether "sexual relations between two adults of the same sex" are "always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all." From 1972 to 1991, the most negative category of the four possible has averaged 73 percent. The exact wording of the question, repeated in the NHLSL, can be found in appendix C, section 10, question 4. During the same time, a substantial minority, and often even a majority, of Americans have opposed discrimination against homosexuals.

3 The basic division that will be described is quite independent of the valuation of homosexuality. People who accept one basic viewpoint or the other can hold either pro- or anti-gay beliefs. Social constructionism was mainly developed by pro-gay intellectuals. However, in denying the

Essentialism in various forms is probably the most widespread view, especially in popular thinking, although it also has many proponents among scholars and researchers. An essentialist view of homosexuality is closely related to perspectives that view sexuality through an individualistic, biological, or psychological lens. Those who explain sexuality as the expression of certain fundamental biological drives are likely to view homosexuality in such terms as well. In this view, homosexuality is thought of as defining a separate species of sexual being, the homosexual. The paradigmatic form of this thinking is a kind of biological or genetic causal model. The category *homosexual* describes an aspect of a person that corresponds to some objective core or inner essence of the person. Homosexuality is treated as analogous to similar views of gender or race, where, while the biological and social are seen as quite separate, the former is seen as producing a set of outcomes that, in turn, have social consequences and responses. All members of the categories in these various domains (be they men or women, heterosexuals or homosexuals, whites, blacks, or Asians) share an essential feature that is identical. Usually this essence is thought to be a single quality—for example, an X and a Y chromosome—that leads to external physical attributes (genitalia, etc.). Or this essence may be thought to be a range along a dimension—perhaps like skin color or levels of male hormone. People within this range are clearly to be distinguished from others.

Social constructionism, on the other hand, almost always involves a description and critique of essentialism. This is because elements of essentialism are so much a part of the "taken-for-granted," commonsense view that they need to be brought explicitly into focus. Constructionism examines the implicit assumptions of our thinking about sexual preferences and orientations and questions their universality. It emphasizes the historical and cultural variability of such sexual categories as *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality*, stressing how conceptions of sexual orientation and practices have changed over time and vary across societies. It raises questions about how the categories emerge, are maintained, and change.

We cannot adjudicate the conceptual and theoretical differences between these two opposing positions and their many variants. The data from a cross-sectional survey conducted in a single country at a given moment are simply inappropriate to resolve these issues. While our general theoretical framework is highly compatible with the social constructionist approach, the data themselves can certainly be treated from various points of view. A population-based survey lends itself to a continuous, multifaceted approach to defining and measuring homosexuality. It makes more sense to ask about specific aspects of

innateness of homosexuality, some of their arguments have recently been taken up by the right-wing anti-gay forces, who believe that homosexuality is a sin and want to argue that homosexuality is a choice. Views of homosexuality as a pathological condition or disease have traditionally sought its "cause," an essentialist notion, usually to cure or eradicate it. Ironically, today, many gay people are strong believers in some version of essentialism.

same-gender behavior, practice, and feelings during specific periods of an individual's life rather than a single yes-or-no question about whether a person is homosexual. This approach opens up the possibility of asking about the interrelation of these various elements. Rather than assuming that homosexuality is a single, uniform trait with the same underlying cause and the same outcome in all people, one can begin to look at variation in the aspects and extent of homosexual activity in different individuals.

As an underlying orientation, essentialist notions of homosexuality, on the other hand, correspond to widespread assumptions that many, if not most, of the respondents to our survey believe. Their answers are likely to reflect these conceptions, even if reality is more complex. For example, if respondents think that there are basically two types of people in the world, homosexuals and heterosexuals, they are likely to think about their own behavior in those terms. If those respondents see themselves as fundamentally heterosexual but have had on occasion homosexual feelings or experiences, they may simply not report such feelings or behaviors because they are not "real" or "truly indicative" of their underlying nature.

An essentialist view also pervades much of the discussion of the prevalence of homosexuality. Many of the questions and debates about the number and distribution of homosexuals in the population implicitly assume a clearly identifiable and easily quantifiable phenomenon. These questions also implicitly assume that the instances to be counted are all the same. We argue that these notions are incorrect.

### 8.1 Prior Research on the Prevalence of Homosexuality

Much public attention has been focused recently on the question of the prevalence of homosexuality. Much of this popular interest has been aroused by hotly contested debates about social control and civil rights. Passion runs high on all sides. Debates about how widespread homosexuality is, its causes, and its nature play key roles in arguments about public policies involving the extension, protection, or prohibition of certain rights. In the process, scientific exploration and hypotheses have been held hostage or used in inappropriate ways.

One of the many ironies of our research effort is that politicians such as Senator Jesse Helms and former Representative William Dannemeyer, who represented the extreme Right on these issues, led the attacks against the federal efforts to carry out national surveys of sexual behavior in large part because they were convinced that these studies would help legitimate homosexuality by demonstrating how widespread it was. At the time, 1988–92, while unwilling to accept the widely held notion that 10 percent of the population was homosexual, they feared that surveys might help promote this idea or even increase the estimated proportion to 20 percent. Yet all the recent population-based surveys of sexual behavior, including this one, have found rates that are much lower than 10 percent. Before considering the matter settled, however,

there are a number of questions that need to be addressed. First, what was the empirical basis of the widely accepted figure of 10 percent? How much credence should it have been given? How should the results from a number of different surveys be interpreted? Are there other notions about homosexuality that should be revised in addition to the fairly widely accepted idea about its prevalence?

### 8.2 The Myth of 10 Percent and the Kinsey Research

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explain why so many people, both the lay public and professional researchers, came to believe in a 10 percent figure so firmly, but it is worth discussing its probable origin. Strangely enough, both a strong argument against the notion that there is a single prevalence rate of homosexuality and a single estimate of 10 percent come from the same source, Alfred Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey et al. 1953).

In chapter 2, we criticized the lack of probability samples in Kinsey's research, and we also acknowledged his important pioneering role in the study of human sexuality. He found, as we have, that, in order to ask people questions and expect reasonable and interpretable answers about their sexual experiences, one must be both direct and precise. In particular, one must specify clearly and simply the behaviors and the time period in which one is interested. The results of such queries, moreover, cannot be reduced to simple categorizations.

In particular, Kinsey argued strongly against the notion that the world can be split neatly into two classes, homosexuals and heterosexuals. To avoid this error, Kinsey reported many numbers rather than one. We do the same. It is in the nature of an empirical study of a complex pattern of behavior across a large and variable population to do so.

Let us briefly review Kinsey's numbers and see how they compare to the numbers reported in this research and other recent surveys. It is important to point out that much of the debate on prevalence has been about men, although sometimes this is only implicit.<sup>4</sup> In summarizing the rates of homosexuality among the white men he interviewed, Kinsey lists thirteen different statistics. A few of these numbers stand out either conceptually or because they have often been repeated. To provide a sense of the range as well as the specificity and style of Kinsey's statements, some are quoted here:

4 There are many reasons for this. Kinsey's figures for men appeared first (in 1948) and were presented more explicitly than the later discussion of women (1953). Kinsey's primary measure of sexual behavior was the orgasm, and this turned out to be a much easier measure to use with men than with women (see chapter 3). Historically, there has been a certain invisibility of lesbianism, and the debates about homosexuality have tended to reflect this. This can be seen in the terminology itself. *Homosexual* and *homosexuality* have no inherent gender reference—they denote sex between people of the same gender. Yet they have often been used to refer solely to men.

37 percent of the total male population has at least some overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm between adolescence and old age. This accounts for nearly 2 males out of every 5 that one may meet. . . .

50 percent of all males (approximately) have neither overt nor psychic experience in the homosexual after the onset of adolescence. . . .

25 percent of the male population has more than incidental homosexual experience or reactions (i.e., rates 2-6) for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. In terms of averages, one male out of approximately every four has had or will have such distinct and continued homosexual experience . . .

10 percent of the males are more or less exclusively homosexual (i.e., rate 5 or 6) for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. This is one male in ten in the white male population. . . .

4 percent of the white males are exclusively homosexual throughout their lives, after the onset of adolescence. (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948, 650-51)

This section in the Kinsey volume on men, with its boldface type, has always been easy to find and has been much quoted and cited.<sup>5</sup> Kinsey begins the list with 37 percent, which represents a measure of "any homosexual experience," and ends with 4 percent, which represents a measure of "exclusive homosexuality." These seem to correspond to "folk" notions of what constitutes homosexuality. To many, homosexuality of any sort seems so foreign and deviant that any homosexual experience is enough to define someone as homosexual. On the other hand, exclusive homosexuality has often been treated as the expected state for the "true homosexual."<sup>6</sup> Of course, one reason for reporting the data this way is to emphasize the variation in the mixture of heterosexual and homosexual experience, something that Kinsey was trying to do. (This seems a major function of the 50 percent figure that refers to the proportion of men who had not had any homosexual experience after puberty, whether or not it resulted in orgasm. Of course, that means that 50 percent of the men in Kinsey's sample had some sort of homosexual experience.)

Many people have pointed to the 10 percent figure in this passage and cited it as the source for the conventional population estimate of homosexual prevalence. In fact, of course, this number refers only to men (white men at that), whereas 10 percent has been most commonly used to refer to the whole popu-

5. Kinsey and his colleagues did not report comparable numbers for women in their 1953 volume. Instead, they found that women reported lower levels of homosexual activity, generally a half to a third the comparable levels for men (Kinsey et al. 1953, 474-75).

6. These notions are not confined to everyday life and folklore. In a recent short discussion of homosexuality, Billy et al. (1993) highlighted just such measures. Among their respondents, men between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine, 2.3 percent had at least one homosexual experience, and 1.1 percent had had exclusively homosexual experiences for the past ten years. (Note that this includes experiences of boys as young as ten years old.) The press devoted a lot of attention to this report, particularly to the second number of about 1 percent representing exclusively homosexual experience, often treating it as an estimate of the size of the gay population (Barringer 1993).

lation, male and female.<sup>7</sup> The choice of 10 percent as the single estimate to take from this list represents an interesting compromise. Its attraction seems to reside in the fact that it is a simple round number and one that is neither "too small" nor "too large." It avoids the extremes of counting someone as homosexual who engages in such activity only sporadically and not counting people with extensive homosexual experience who have also had heterosexual experiences.

Kinsey's figures are much higher than those found in all the recent population surveys, including ours. There are a number of reasons for this. As emphasized in chapter 2, the major difference between Kinsey and recent research is that Kinsey did not use probability sampling. Kinsey's respondents were all purposefully recruited rather than sampled with known probabilities of inclusion. This means both that they were volunteers who may have differed in systematic ways from those who did not participate (e.g., by being more open and comfortable about their sex lives and perhaps more sexually active) and that there is no statistically sound way to generalize from his sample to a population. In fact, Kinsey roamed far and wide in selecting his subjects. He was not averse to using institutional settings, including prisons and reform schools, from which to recruit his subjects. Kinsey also purposely recruited subjects for his research from homosexual friendship and acquaintance networks in big cities. Kinsey combined fantasy, masturbation, and sexual activity with partners in some of his calculations (e.g., the 50 percent figure). Experiences were collected retrospectively over the whole lifetime and almost as a matter of course were reported to include activity since puberty or since age sixteen. These devices would all tend to bias Kinsey's results toward higher estimates of homosexuality (and other rarer sexual practices) than those that he would have obtained using probability sampling.<sup>8</sup> Almost all the recent sexual behavior research, largely prompted by AIDS and the sexual transmission of disease, has focused on behavior, primarily penetrative sexual practices.

7. In fact, Bruce Voeller (1990) claims to have originated the 10 percent estimate as part of the modern gay rights movement's campaign in the late 1970s to convince politicians and the public that "We [gays and lesbians] Are Everywhere." At the time, Voeller was the chair of the National Gay Task Force. He says that, using Kinsey, he averaged a 13 percent number for men and a 7 percent number for women to come up with an approximate number of 10 percent for the whole population.

8. A reanalysis of a subset of the Kinsey data on men (Gagnon and Simon 1973, 131-32) demonstrated how much early experience contributed to the higher numbers. Analyzing the data from young men in college between 1938 and 1950, a group that was thought to be less subject to volunteer bias and other forms of selection that might have artificially increased the rate of same-gender experience (e.g., incarceration or being referred through homosexual networks), Gagnon and Simon found that about 30 percent had at least one homosexual experience (roughly comparable to the 37 percent quoted earlier). But, for over half these men (16 percent of the total), this experience was before the age of fifteen and not after, and, for another 9 percent, this experience was primarily in adolescence and had completely ended by age twenty. The remainder, about 5 or 6 percent, was equally divided between those who had exclusively homosexual experience and

There is one other fundamental difference between the Kinsey approach and contemporary surveys. Kinsey and a handful of highly trained colleagues conducted all the interviews. The structure of the Kinsey interview was a "sex history," and people were taken through their lifetime in segments. They were intensively questioned about a wide variety of forms of sexual activity, including fantasies. The focus seems to have been largely on numbers of orgasms achieved in various ways. Having no written and fixed questionnaire, the interviewers memorized the question order, and wording could be varied by the interviewer as he (or occasionally she) saw fit. These interviewers were not averse to challenging respondents who they believed were not admitting to stigmatized behaviors such as masturbation or homosexuality. The interview took respondents chronologically from their early childhood experiences to the time of the interview. It asked a lot about fantasy. The emphasis on ideation and the encouragement of subjects to describe homosexual thoughts and fantasies may have increased reports of other homosexual behaviors as well. It is possible that some of these techniques may have increased the disclosure and reporting of stigmatized activities.

### 8.3 Dimensions of Homosexuality

To quantify or count something requires unambiguous definition of the phenomenon in question. And we lack this in speaking of homosexuality. When people ask how many gays there are, they assume that everyone knows exactly what is meant. Historians and anthropologists have shown that homosexuality as a category describing same-gender sexual desire and behavior is a relatively recent phenomenon (only about 100 years old) peculiar to the West (Foucault 1978; Chauncey 1983; Katz 1983; Halperin 1990; Stein 1992). But, even within contemporary Western societies, one must ask whether this question refers to same-gender behavior, desire, self-definition, or identification or some combination of these elements. In asking the question, most people treat homosexuality as such a distinctive category that it is as if all these elements must go together. On reflection, it is obvious that this is not true. One can easily think of cases where any one of these elements would be present without the

those who had "substantial homosexual as well as heterosexual histories." One still wonders at the almost one-third who reported any homosexual experience compared to a maximal figure in our survey for a similar group of 10–12 percent (see table 8.2 below under *any sex*). One possibility suggested to us by our colleague George Chauncey is that this may in part reflect historical changes in the sex lives of American men. Remember that Kinsey was interviewing in the years surrounding World War II (1938–47) and that the sex lives being described would have extended back from then, whereas our oldest respondents were born in 1933. Changes in the structure of adolescence as well as the increasing visibility and labeling of homosexuality may inhibit the amount of adolescent sexual experimentation that goes on among young men more recently.

others and that combinations of these attributes, taken two or three at a time, are also possible.

Examples abound. Some people have fantasies or thoughts about sex with someone of their own gender without ever acting on these thoughts or wishes. And the holder of such thoughts may be pleased, excited, or upset and made to feel guilty by them. They may occur as a passing phase, only sporadically, or even as a persisting feature of a person's fantasy life. They may or may not have any effect at all on whether a person thinks of himself or herself as a homosexual in any sense. Clearly, there are people who experience erotic interest in people of both genders and sustain sexual relationships over time with both men and women. Some engage in sex with same-gender partners without any erotic or psychological desire because they have been forced or enticed into doing so. A classic example is sex in prison. Deprived of the opportunity to have sex with opposite-gender partners gives rise to same-gender sex, by volition or as the result of force. Surely this is to be distinguished phenomenally from situations in which people who, given access to both genders, actively seek out and choose to have sex with same-gender partners. Development of self-identification as homosexual or gay is a psychologically and socially complex state, something which, in this society, is achieved only over time, often with considerable personal struggle and self-doubt, not to mention social discomfort. All these motives, attractions, identifications, and behaviors vary over time and circumstances with respect to one another—that is, are dynamically changing features of an individual's sexual expression.

This discussion postulates no specific theory or viewpoint on the etiology and nature of homosexuality—another much contested terrain. Instead, we took as our starting point the need to collect good descriptive data on various features of same-gender practices and affect. For these descriptive purposes, we have identified three dimensions of homosexuality: same-gender sexual behavior (and its associated practices), same-gender desire and sexual attraction, and self-identity as a homosexual. We have paid most attention to behavior. Public health concerns about AIDS lent priority to questions about behaviors that place people at risk. Also, behavior seemed to be one of the least ambiguous elements of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. However, as soon as one thinks of the widely divergent meanings of a given sexual act to the participants, one begins to appreciate the oversimplification inherent in an exclusively behavioral approach. The prisoner in the state penitentiary who takes sex where he finds it and the young man cruising a city park, a known haunt of gay men, are engaging in meaningfully different, if superficially similar, behaviors.

We have broken the *behavioral* dimension itself into three separate aspects: the gender of sex partners, specific sexual acts or techniques, and the time frame within which sexual relationships or activities take place. We treat same-gender dyads and their sexual practices just as opposite-gender dyads and prac-

tics.<sup>9</sup> Rather than assuming that the world is made up of two very different types of sexual beings, homosexuals and heterosexuals, we make no assumption about inherent differences between various sexual practices and have let the distinctions, if any, emerge from the data.

Behavior is only one component of sexuality. It has been the focus of most of the recent discussions about the prevalence of homosexuality since these are the data emerging from AIDS-related surveys. While we, too, have emphasized sexual behavior, we have also investigated the *affective* or *cognitive* dimension. While these data are more limited, they allow us to ask some interesting questions about their relation to the behavioral aspect of same-gender sexuality. We cannot understand behavior without some sense of how the actor thinks about his or her actions and their relation to internal, psychological states and the actor's relation to others. The more psychological literature on homosexuality has emphasized internal states related to sexual desire. Especially before AIDS, homosexuality was viewed as an underlying sexual orientation, with desire for or sexual interest in people of the same gender treated as more fundamental than behavior (Marmor 1980). On the other hand, much of the sociological, historical, and social psychological work of the 1970s, following the dramatic emergence of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement, has emphasized the process of "coming out," the development of self-consciousness, and a relatively public sexual identity in the context of an emerging lesbian and gay community (Weinberg and Williams 1974; Levine 1979; Herdt 1992).<sup>10</sup>

#### 8.4 Measurement and Prevalence of Same-Gender Behavior, Desire, and Identity

For the purpose of this analysis, we have divided the questions that relate to homosexual experiences and feelings into three basic dimensions: behavior,

9. It may surprise readers to realize that almost all the data reported in this book were generated without mention of the word *homosexual* or *heterosexual*. These words are used only once, late in the questionnaire, when we asked, "Do you think of yourself as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or something else?" (see appendix C, section 8, question 49). All the behavioral data were generated from questions that asked only about specific partners or practices. In the case of partners, either the respondent had identified a partner and was then asked about the partner's gender (these questions always stated that all partners, whether men or women, should be included; e.g., see appendix C, section 2, question 1, and section 4, question 1), or the respondent was asked about how many male and female partners he or she had had of a given type in a given time period. At the very end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they had ever engaged in specific sexual acts. These acts and questions were specified separately for male and female partners (appendix C, SAQ 4F and SAQ 4M).

10. Of course, there are any number of other aspects of personality and social interaction that one might consider. Historically, homosexuality was thought of as being associated with femininity in men and masculinity in women. Over time, the primary definitions of homosexuality have been separated from these notions, although incompletely (Green 1987). AIDS-related research, in particular, has ignored these dimensions almost completely. Issues related to social identity and its relation to an organized set of institutions or a community have also been neglected in surveys. Some have pointed to the need to investigate social and emotional preferences for people of one's own gender, sometimes called *homosociality* (Klein 1990).

desire, and identity. The questions that we asked about behavior always refer to partners or practices in specific time frames. Desire and identity are measured by questions about the respondents' current states of mind. Because of the many ways in which these three aspects of sexuality might be defined, we first explain how we operationalized them in our questionnaire and then compare their reported frequencies, before turning to an investigation of their interrelations.

Two quite different questions were asked to ascertain the presence of same-gender sexual "desire." The first asked about the appeal of sex with someone of the same gender, the second about the gender of the people to whom the respondent is sexually attracted. These questions appear toward the end of the interview after the main questions about partners and behavior. The first question was worded, "On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is very appealing and 4 is not at all appealing, how would you rate each of these activities: . . . having sex with someone of the same sex?" (see appendix C, section 7, question 4). For this analysis, the two answers "very appealing" and "somewhat appealing" are combined and treated as indicating the presence of homosexual desire. We call this measure *appeal*.

Later in the interview, at the end of a set of questions about early childhood and first sexual experiences, women were asked, "In general, are you sexually attracted to only men, mostly men, both men and women, mostly women, only women?" (see appendix C, section 8, question 47). Men were asked the same question (appendix C, section 8, question 48), except that the order of the answer categories was reversed. Respondents answering with any of the four categories referring to people of the same gender are treated here as expressing some level of homosexual desire. We refer to this variable as *attraction*.

Immediately following the question about attraction, a single question was asked about how respondents think of themselves: "Do you think of yourself as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or something else?" (appendix C, section 8, question 49). This question yielded our measure of self-identification.<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, we have treated respondents who said either "homosexual" or "bisexual" as having some degree of same-gender identity. Altogether, 2.8 percent of the men and 1.4 percent of the women reported some level of homosexual (or bisexual) identity.<sup>12</sup>

11. This question posed several problems. First, about 5 percent of the men and 6 percent of the women seemed to be uncertain about the meaning of these terms and gave answers that were coded by interviewers as equivalent to "normal or straight." In addition, under 1 percent of the respondents (thirteen men and ten women in the cross section) answered "something else" and were prompted to explain. A few of these (two men and four women) said "gay" or "lesbian" and have been included with those who chose "homosexual." Two respondents said that they did not distinguish partners on the basis of their sex (gender). They appeared to be defining themselves as bisexual, but we were hesitant to recode them as such until we checked their sexual experience. Since they had had both male and female partners, we included them with the bisexuals.

12. It would be interesting to compare and contrast homosexual (and gay/lesbian) identity with bisexual identity, but the numbers in a sample like ours are just too small. Fewer than 1 percent of

We have constructed five different measures of same-gender behavior. Figure 8.1 displays these measures for men and women as well as the affective measures described above. On the left in the figure are three measures based on the proportion of men and women who report same-gender sex partners in three different time periods: the past twelve months, the past five years, and since turning eighteen.<sup>13</sup> The rates for women are lower than the rates for men, varying from 1.3 percent of the sexually active women in the past year reporting at least one female partner to 4.1 percent reporting any female partners since turning eighteen. The rates for men vary from 2.7 percent in the past year to 4.9 percent with any male partners since age eighteen. The next two sets of bars labeled *any age* and *any sex* extend the period for same-gender sex back to puberty. Conceptually, they measure the same thing; however, they approach the measurement in different ways and produce different estimates, especially for the men.

*Any age* is a measure of the proportion of respondents who have had a same-gender partner at any time since puberty. It is constructed by combining responses from the previous three partner/time frame questions (past year, past five years, and since age eighteen) and the response to a question about the first sexual experience after puberty with a person of the same gender.<sup>14</sup> About 3.8 percent of the women and 7.1 percent of the men had had at least one same-gender partner since puberty according to this variable.

*Any sex* is based on questions asked on a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) at the very end of the interview. The interviewer does not see the answers to these questions because the SAQ is placed in an envelope and sealed by the respondent before being handed back. These questions ask about ever having engaged in specific sexual activities with a man or woman since puberty. Both male and female respondents were asked about active and receptive oral sex and the question, "Have you ever done anything else sexual with another (woman/man)?" (see appendix C, SAQ 4F, questions 8–11, and SAQ 4M, questions 8–12). Male respondents were also asked about active and receptive anal sex with another man. *Any sex* is the proportion of respondents who completed the self-administered questionnaire who answered yes to any of the activities. Over 4 percent of the women and 9 percent of the men reported having

the men and women said that they were bisexual. Later in this chapter, we look at the mixture of male and female partners among the larger group reporting any same-gender partners, but without necessarily self-identifying as bisexual.

13. The base *N*'s for these rates include all people on whom we have information. In particular, they include the sexually inactive, who have no partners in a given time frame. In that sense, these are incidence and prevalence rates for partnering behavior.

14. The exact wording of the question is, "Now I would like to ask you some questions about sexual experience with (SAME SEX AS R, males/females) after you were 12 or 13, that is, after puberty. How old were you the first time you had sex with a (SAME SEX AS R, male/female)?" (see appendix C, section 8, question 40).

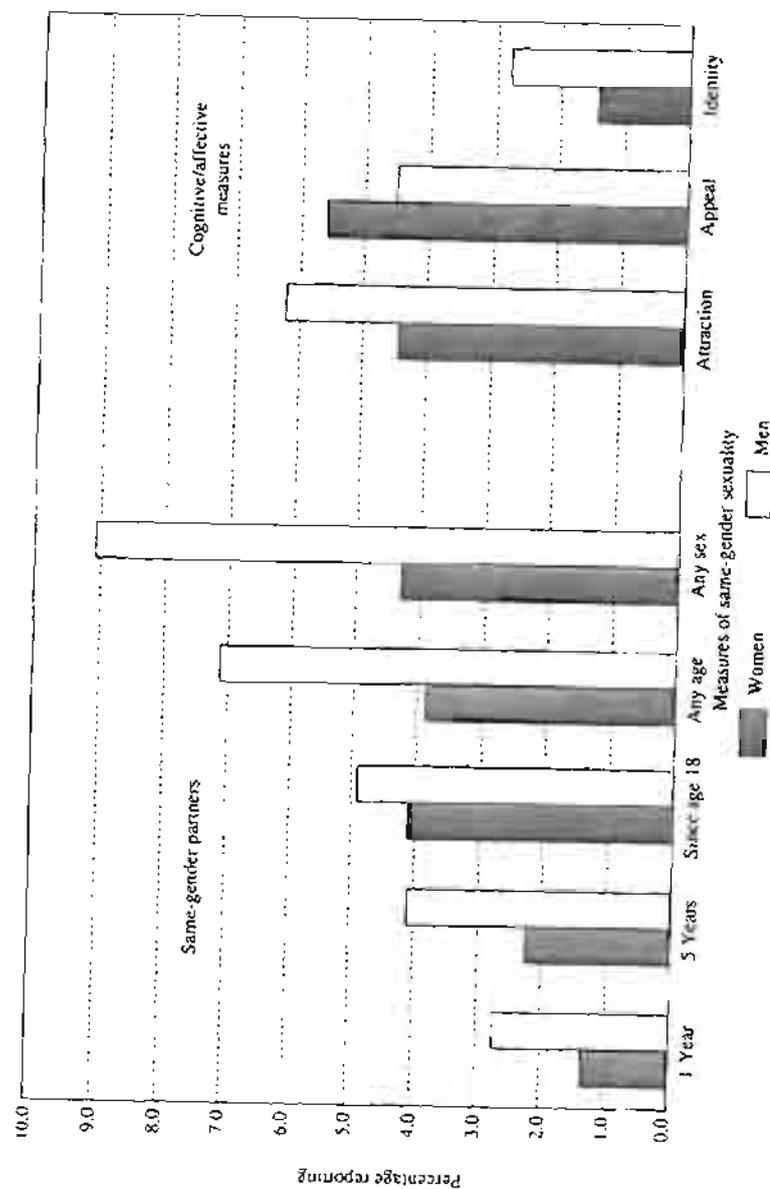


Fig. 8.1 Prevalence of various measures of same-gender sexuality, U.S. adults.

engaged in at least one of these sexual practices with a person of their own gender since puberty.

This last measure produced the highest reporting of same-gender sexual behavior. But the differences are slight for the women and dramatic for the men. There are a number of factors that help explain this pattern. Very few women (about 0.3 percent) who report having sex between puberty and age eighteen with a female partner do not also have sex with a woman after eighteen.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, almost 2 percent of the men (comparing *any age* and *since 18*) report sex before eighteen but not after. However, when we look at *any sex*, the rate of women having a female partner since puberty increases another 0.5 percentage point, from 3.8 to 4.3 percent. But the rate for men increases another 2 percentage points, from 7.1 to 9.1 percent. If this higher number is correct, this implies that almost 4 percent of the men have sex with another male before turning eighteen but not after. These men, who report same-gender sex only before they turned eighteen, not afterward, constitute 42 percent of the total number of men who report ever having a same-gender experience.

But why should one measure be so much higher for the men than another conceptually similar measure? There are several possibilities. The increased privacy of the self-administered form may increase reporting of socially stigmatized behavior. Or the question may be understood somewhat differently by the respondent and may prompt a different answer. *Any sex* is based on questions about specific sexual practices rather than a question about sex partners. Some respondents may not have given an age for a first same-gender sex partner (the major component of *any age*) but might be prompted to remember a specific incident when a sexual act occurred. Some of these acts may not have been considered when reporting about a first same-gender partner. Finally, the questions about *any sex* are asked at the very end of the questionnaire, providing the fullest chance for recall. This measure produces a dramatically higher rate of same-gender partners than the other measures for men. However, it should be pointed out that, while this 9 percent is higher than any figure reported from the other recent surveys, and while it may be an under-report, it is still a far cry from the 37 percent that Kinsey reported.

How do these rates of same-gender partners compare with questions about attraction, appeal, and self-identification? The latter are displayed on the right-hand side of figure 8.1. The rates of reporting some degree of same-gender desire as a current state of mind are higher for both men and women than the rates of reporting same-gender partners for the more recent time frames (one and five years). The levels of reported sexual attraction to one's own gender and the appeal of same-gender sex are also much more comparable for women and men (varying around 5 percent). These different aspects of same-gender

15. The exact figures on which fig. 8.1 is based are reported in table 8.2 below.

sexual interest or desire are only moderately correlated. The relative levels of the two measures also differ for men and women, although this difference is not statistically significant. More men report being at least somewhat attracted to men (6.2 percent) than report finding sex with another man appealing (4.5 percent). In contrast, more women report finding the idea of sex with a woman appealing (5.6 percent) than report any sexual attraction to women (4.4 percent). In an analysis not shown, we found that 7.7 percent of the men and 7.5 percent of the women report one or the other form of same-gender sexual attraction or interest. About one-third of those (39 percent of the men and 34 percent of the women) reporting any same-gender desire expressed both forms, while the other two-thirds expressed only one form.

Our final measure, the self-reported same-gender sexual identity, has the lowest prevalence of any of these measures. About 1.4 percent of the women and 2.8 percent of the men report identifying with a label denoting same-gender sexuality. The ratio of homosexual to bisexual identification is about 2:1, slightly lower for women (1.8:1) and slightly higher for men (2.5:1). This result is discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

How do these simple rates compare with those found in other recent surveys? It is not our purpose to make an in-depth comparison, but overall we find that our results are remarkably similar to those from other surveys of sexual behavior that have been conducted on national populations using probability sampling methods. In particular, two very large-scale surveys were being carried out at the same time as we were designing and beginning to field such a survey in the United States, one in France (Spira et al. 1993) and one in Britain (Wellings et al. 1994). (These were discussed briefly in chapter 2.) There are many basic similarities and overlaps between the three surveys, but there are also many variations in methods and design. For example, the French survey interviewed 20,055 adults aged eighteen to sixty-nine over the telephone, and the British survey conducted 18,876 face-to-face interviews with people aged sixteen to fifty-nine living in England, Wales, and Scotland, but most of the sexual behavior questions were asked in a self-administered supplement. The British survey reports rates of same-gender sexual experience for men that range from 1.1 percent (in the past year) to 6.1 percent (ever having had any homosexual experience). The comparable figures for women are 0.4 and 3.4 percent (Wellings et al. 1994, 187). The French study results range from 1.1 percent of the men reporting at least one male partner in the past year and 4.1 percent reporting any male sex partners in their entire life (Spira et al. 1993, 138). These rates are somewhat lower than the rates that we found, but they are still quite close, especially compared to the rates found by Kinsey. The patterns of the findings in these recent surveys are also quite similar in terms of gender and age and elevated rates in large urban areas.<sup>16</sup>

16. Similar results have been reported regarding the homosexual experience of men in the United States (cf. Fay et al. 1989; Rogers and Turner 1991; and Billy et al. 1993).

### 8.5 The Interrelation of Same-Gender Sexual Behavior, Desire, and Identity

How are these three aspects of homosexuality interrelated? To answer this question, we first need to define a simple dichotomous variable denoting the presence or absence of each dimension. We sought relatively broad and inclusive summary measures for this analysis. However, we have excluded people who report their only same-gender sex partners before they turned eighteen. Thus, we have defined *behavior* in terms of a composite measure intended to tap the presence of any same-gender partner after age eighteen.<sup>17</sup> *Desire* combines the *appeal* and *attraction* measures defined above. For this purpose, any respondent who reported either being attracted to people of his or her own gender or finding same-gender sex appealing is considered to have some same-gender desire. Same-gender identity includes people who said that they considered themselves to be either homosexual or bisexual (or an equivalent).

Figure 8.2 displays the overlap among these three conceptually separable dimensions of homosexuality using Venn diagrams. These diagrams make use of overlapping circles to display all the logically possible intersections among different categories. While a Venn diagram distinguishes all possible combinations, it does not attempt to scale the areas in the circles to reflect the relative numbers of respondents in each category because of technical constraints in the geometry of representation. The latter is indicated by the numbers and percentages attached to each area.

The three circles each represent a dimension or component of same-gender sexuality. The totals of 150 women and 143 men, respectively, who report any same-gender behavior, desire, or identity are distributed across all the possible mutually exclusive combinations of the three categories. For example, the area of the circle labeled *desire* that does not overlap with either of the other circles includes only those respondents who reported some same-gender desire but reported neither same-gender partners since eighteen nor self-identification as a homosexual or bisexual. Desire with no corresponding adult behavior or identity is the largest category for both men and women, with about 59 percent of the women and 44 percent of the men in this cell. About 13 percent of the

17. There are four different sets of questions that were used to construct this composite: (1) questions about the number of male and female sex partners since turning eighteen asked on a self-administered form early in the interview (appendix C, SAQ 2, questions 8 and 9); (2) enumerated sex partners from cohabitational relationships and in the last year (appendix C, sections 2 and 4); (3) counts of sex partners of each gender during the life course since age eighteen (appendix C, section 6); and (4) respondents who report an age of first sexual experience with someone of the same gender as eighteen or older (appendix C, section 8, question 40). Not surprisingly, since these questions are asked in different places and in different ways (face-to-face vs. self-completion, directly vs. indirectly, etc.), there were some inconsistencies between responses. A respondent who answered that he or she had same-gender sex partners on any of these questions is treated here as having had an adult homosexual experience. According to this coding scheme, 5.3 percent of the men and 3.5 percent of the women had had at least one same-gender sex partner since their eighteenth birthday.

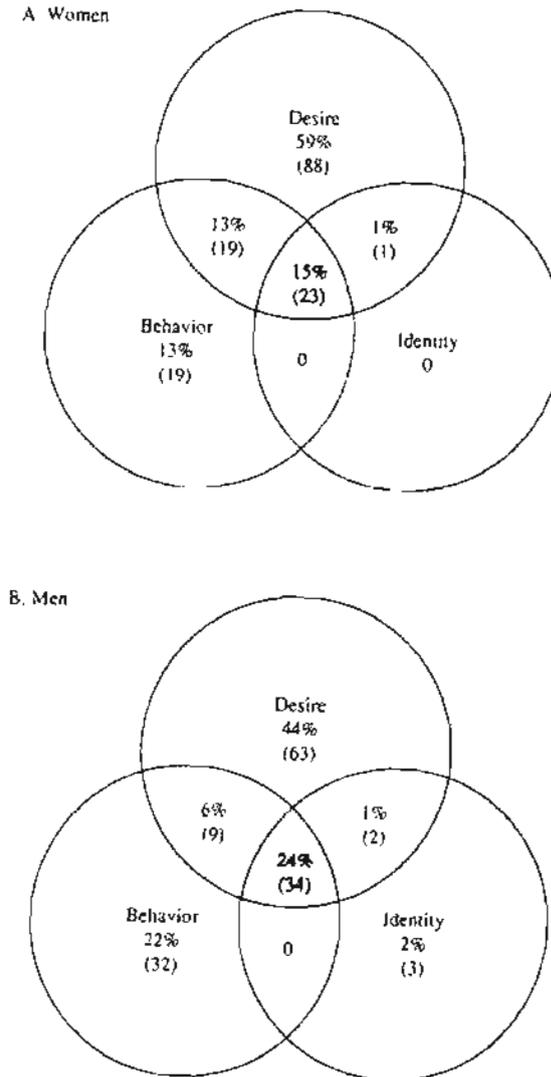


Fig. 8.2 Interrelation of components of homosexuality. A, For 150 women (8.6 percent of the total 1,749) who report any adult same-gender sexuality. B, For 143 men (10.1 percent of the total 1,410) who report any adult same-gender sexuality.

women and 22 percent of the men report a same-gender partner since turning eighteen, but no current desire or identity.<sup>18</sup>

No women reported homosexual identity alone. But there were three men who said that they considered themselves homosexual or bisexual even though they did not report desire or partners. This being an unlikely status, it is possible that these men simply misunderstood the categories of self-identification since none of them reported any same-gender experience or interest.

About 15 percent of the women and 24 percent of the men are found in the intersection of all three circles. This is practically all the women (twenty-three out of twenty-four) and the vast majority of the men (thirty-four out of thirty-nine) who identify as homosexual or bisexual. In order to see the relative proportions in each set of categories more clearly, pie charts based on the same data and categories are displayed in figure 8.3.

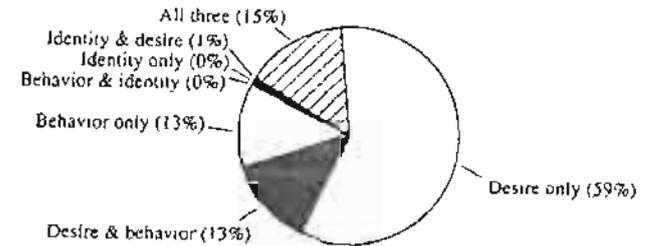
As it is measured here, sexual identity does not appear to represent an analytically separate dimension because it logically entails the existence of both desire and action. Desire, behavior, and the combination of desire and behavior seem to exist in at least a substantial minority of the cases, but identity independent of the other two is quite rare.<sup>19</sup> It is thus not surprising that no men or women reported behavior and identity without desire. Some sort of homosexual desire seems at the heart of most notions of homosexual identity. To report same-gender partners, and to say that one considers oneself to be homosexual or bisexual, but to deny any attraction or appeal of homosexuality, seems illogical. On the other hand, the idea of someone reporting desire and identity but no (adult) behavior does not seem so implausible since homosexuality is often thought of as an underlying sexual orientation understood in a psychological sense of fantasy or desire. One can at least imagine people who consider themselves to be homosexual (or bisexual) without necessarily having had any sex partners. In fact, this state appears to be quite rare, with only one woman and two men found in this category.

This analysis demonstrates the high degree of variability in the way that differing elements of homosexuality are distributed in the population. This variability relates to the way that homosexuality is both organized as a set of behaviors and practices and experienced subjectively. It raises quite provocative questions about the definition of *homosexuality*. While there is a core group (about 2.4 percent of the total men and about 1.3 percent of the total women) in our survey who define themselves as homosexual or bisexual, have

18. Even for the most current time period available, the past twelve months, 10 percent of the women and 11 percent of the men who had had a same-gender sex partner in the past year did not report either desire or identity. Please note the small number bases for these estimates.

19. The group of people who report behavior and desire but not identity is quite small among the men but fairly sizable among the women, comparable to the women who had sex partners but nothing else and to those who exhibit all three characteristics. This may indicate a slightly lower threshold of homosexual and bisexual identity among men than among women. This would fit with the historically greater visibility of gay men as opposed to lesbians.

## A. Women



## B. Men

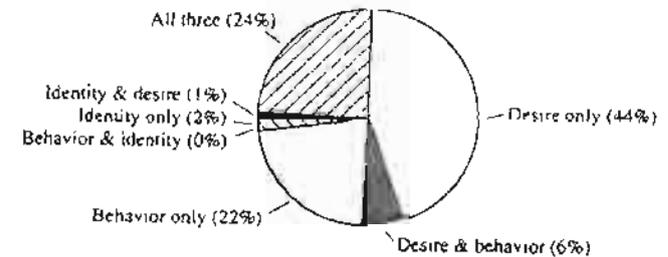


Fig. 8.3 Interrelation of different aspects of same-gender sexuality. A, For 150 women (8.6 percent of the total 1,749) who report any adult same-gender sexuality. B, For 143 men (10.1 percent of the total 1,410) who report any adult same-gender sexuality.

same-gender partners, and express homosexual desires, there are also sizable groups who do not consider themselves to be either homosexual or bisexual but have had adult homosexual experiences or express some degree of desire. Despite pervasive social disapproval, about 5 percent of the men and women in our sample express some same-gender desire, but no other indicators of adult activity or self-identification. A sizable number have had same-gender partners, but consider themselves neither as bisexual or homosexual nor as experiencing any current homosexual desire. While the measurement of same-gender practices and attitudes is crude at best, with unknown levels of underreporting for each, this preliminary analysis provides unambiguous evidence that no single number can be used to provide an accurate and valid characterization of the incidence and prevalence of homosexuality in the population at large. In sum, homosexuality is fundamentally a multidimensional phenomenon that has manifold meanings and interpretations, depending on context and purpose.

## 8.6 The Relation of Master Statuses and Same-Gender Sexuality

*Modification of Master Status Variables*

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 present the distributions of a number of measures of same-gender sexuality by various social and demographic variables. These tables use social and demographic variables similar to the master status variables introduced in the preceding chapters, but we have collapsed some categories because the relative rarity of same-gender sexuality made more fine-grained analysis statistically unreliable.<sup>20</sup> In addition, we took advantage of the replication of these measures in the General Social Survey (GSS) since 1988.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the three measures of gender of sex partners in different time periods (past year, past five years, and since age eighteen) appeared in the GSS.<sup>22</sup> In table 8.1, we pool the data from the GSS and the NHSLs to increase the sample size of U.S. adults aged eighteen to fifty-nine from a maximum of 3,159 for the NHSLs to a combined maximum of 8,744 for those variables that are in both the GSS and the NHSLs. Table 8.2 is based on the data from the NHSLs alone.

Three new variables are added to the list of master variables: urban/rural place of residence, both at the time of the interview and while growing up.<sup>23</sup>

20. Age was collapsed into four categories instead of the original eight five-year age intervals. In the new version, ten-year groupings are used. This has been done because the rates of reporting of same-gender sex are so low for many of these measures that the number of respondents within smaller subgroups of the sample as a whole can become vanishingly small.

21. Marital status has been collapsed into three categories: never married, currently married, and previously married (i.e., separated, divorced, and widowed). This was done both to have fewer categories and because cohabitational status is not available in the GSS. Since same-gender marriage is not legally recognized in the United States, we assume that all the marriages are between men and women; similarly, the separations, divorces, and deaths of spouses reported in the GSS refer to such unions.

22. In collaboration with our earlier work leading up to the NHSLs, the GSS began including a self-administered form with sexual behavior questions in 1988. It was modified slightly, mainly through the addition of items, in 1989 and 1990. The same basic form was used in 1991 and 1993, and that form was used in the NHSLs in 1992. (For the exact wording of the questions as used in the NHSLs, see appendix C, SAQ 2. In the NHSLs, these questions were actually presented to the respondent at the end of the first section of the questionnaire [demography] before any other sex questions. For a complete description of the GSS and the variations in question wordings, see Davis and Smith [1991]. In the GSS, the self-administered form with these questions was given to the respondent at the very end of the interview. For further comparisons of the GSS and NHSLs samples and other questions, see appendix B.)

For the purposes of this analysis, we have merged the NHSLs cross-sectional cases and the GSS cases aged eighteen to fifty-nine from 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1993 into a single data set. The sample sizes for these variables differ because not all questions were asked each year in the GSS. Only the gender of partners in the past year appears in every year of the GSS. The number of partners since age eighteen was added in 1989, and the number of partners in the past five years was added in 1990. We looked carefully for any effects of the year of the GSS survey on answers to the questions. Since no systematic patterns of temporal effects were detected, we feel justified in pooling the multiyear surveys into a single grand sample.

23. The GSS uses age sixteen as the reference age for the question. The NHSLs changed the age to fourteen to correspond to other surveys such as the National Longitudinal Survey. In both cases, the intent is to get an idea of where respondents were living while growing up and before

Table 8.1 Percentage Reporting Any Same-Gender Sex Partners in Different Time Periods, by Selected Social/Demographic Variables (GSS and NHSLs combined)

	Partners							
	Last Year		Past 5 Years		Since Age 18		Total <i>N</i>	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
<b>Age</b>								
18-29	3.0	1.6	4.3	2.5	4.4	4.2	1,169	1,369
30-39	3.5	1.8	5.4	3.2	6.6	5.3	1,220	1,544
40-49	2.1	.8	3.0	1.3	3.9	3.6	968	1,141
50-59	1.4	.4	2.5	.9	4.2	2.2	558	773
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	4.9	4.1		
<i>N</i>	3,493	4,376	2,223	2,838	3,072	3,853	3,915	4,827
<b>Marital status</b>								
Never married	6.6	3.6	9.2	4.8	9.5	8.2	1,188	1,079
Married	1.0	.2	1.7	.8	2.4	2.1	2,153	2,588
Div./wid./sep.	1.0	1.3	2.2	2.7	4.9	4.5	560	1,138
Total	2.7	1.2	4.1	2.1	5.0	4.0		
<i>N</i>	3,479	4,354	2,209	2,816	3,058	3,831	3,901	4,805
<b>Education</b>								
Less than HS	3.1	.9	3.0	2.2	4.5	4.9	592	770
HS grad	1.4	.8	2.7	1.4	2.7	2.7	1,129	1,531
Some college	3.0	1.1	4.6	2.0	5.3	3.8	1,142	1,442
College grad	3.5	2.5	5.4	3.5	6.9	5.8	1,039	1,066
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	4.9	4.1		
<i>N</i>	3,481	4,363	2,214	2,826	3,061	3,839	3,902	4,809
<b>Religion</b>								
Type I Prot.	3.0	1.7	5.0	2.2	5.3	4.0	1,019	1,308
Type II Prot.	1.8	.6	2.5	1.7	3.3	3.5	1,107	1,692
Catholic	1.7	.7	2.3	1.2	2.8	2.5	979	1,268
Jewish	4.5	2.7	8.7	2.0	5.0	6.7	74	83
None	5.9	4.0	8.1	5.7	10.7	9.7	504	356
Other	3.4	4.2	7.5	9.8	10.9	11.6	134	111
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	5.0	4.1		
<i>N</i>	3,487	4,370	2,217	2,834	3,067	3,848	3,907	4,818
<b>Religious attendance</b>								
Never	4.4	2.7	6.7	3.1	8.8	6.6	681	548
< 3 times per year	2.5	1.7	4.0	3.8	4.5	5.6	1,078	954
3-39 times per year	2.5	1.1	4.2	1.8	4.4	3.8	1,169	1,558
> 39 times per year	1.9	.7	2.2	1.3	3.4	2.6	951	1,621
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	4.9	4.1		
<i>N</i>	3,462	4,337	2,206	2,811	3,043	3,816	3,879	4,781
<b>Race</b>								
White	2.7	1.2	4.0	1.9	5.0	3.7	3,329	3,916
Black	3.6	1.3	5.4	2.9	5.0	5.4	423	692
Other	1.4	2.1	1.3	5.9	3.3	7.4	165	219
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	4.9	4.1		
<i>N</i>	3,494	4,376	2,224	2,838	3,073	3,853	3,917	4,827

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

	Partners							
	Last Year		Past 5 Years		Since Age 18		Total N	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Place of residence <sup>a</sup>								
Top 12 central cities (CCs)	10.2	2.1	14.3	3.3	16.4	6.2	283	378
Next 88 central cities	3.6	1.2	5.2	2.5	5.7	5.5	430	607
Suburbs top 12 CCs	2.7	1.2	5.4	1.9	5.9	4.3	430	530
Suburbs next 88 CCs	1.6	1.3	3.5	1.7	3.4	3.6	635	773
Other urban areas	1.8	.8	2.5	1.7	4.1	2.9	1,446	1,659
Rural areas	1.0	.6	.9	1.0	1.5	2.8	422	529
Total	2.6	1.1	4.1	1.9	5.0	3.8		
N	3,255	4,054	1,983	2,512	2,829	3,530	3,649	4,476
Place of residence age 14/16								
Rural	1.2	.7	1.1	2.0	2.2	4.1	972	1,041
Town/med city/suburb	2.5	1.3	3.5	2.0	4.8	3.7	1,783	2,376
Large city/metro. area	4.4	1.6	7.1	2.6	7.3	4.6	1,158	1,393
Total	2.7	1.3	4.1	2.2	4.9	4.1		
N	3,491	4,366	2,222	2,830	3,070	3,844	3,913	4,810

and frequency of religious attendance. The levels of urbanization of current and adolescent place of residence are included because we thought it relevant to reports and experience of homosexuality. The existence of highly visible gay and lesbian communities and neighborhoods in certain major cities like New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago led us to wonder whether place of residence would affect the incidence and prevalence of homosexuality (cf. Levine 1979; D'Emilio 1983; and Murray 1992). Urban-rural differences regarding sexual behavior were also reported in the Kinsey volumes. The type of place where respondents grew up (as measured at either fourteen or sixteen years of age) was added to help investigate whether the effect of current residence was due primarily to migration or to something else. Religious attendance is often used in place of or in addition to religious affiliation itself in explaining sexual behavior and attitudes because it is believed to index more adequately individuals' involvement in the social life of religious communities (cf. Lenski 1960; Laumann 1973; Schuman 1971; Glock and Stark 1965; Roof 1993).

<sup>a</sup>leaving home to live independently. For the sake of brevity, and to have a comparable measure for all respondents, a single age for all respondents before the age of majority is used

Table 8.2 Percentage Reporting Various Types of Same-Gender (SG) Sexuality with a Partner (P), by Selected Social and Demographic Variables

	Any Age, SG Ps since Puberty		Any Sex, SG Sex since Puberty		Attraction, SG Attraction		Appeal, SG Sex Appealing		Desire, Attract or Appeal		Identity, Homo/Bisexual	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
	Total	7.1	3.8	9.1	4.3	6.2	4.4	4.5	5.6	7.7	7.5	2.8
Age:												
18-29	5.1	2.9	6.4	4.2	7.4	4.4	5.6	4.7	9.1	6.7	2.9	1.6
30-39	8.8	5.0	10.6	5.4	6.3	6.0	5.4	6.8	7.2	9.2	4.2	1.8
40-49	8.0	4.5	10.9	4.6	6.7	3.3	3.7	7.3	8.6	8.3	2.2	1.3
50-59	6.5	2.1	8.8	1.9	2.5	2.8	1.5	2.5	4.0	4.6	.5	.4
Marital status:												
Never married	11.8	5.6	14.4	5.9	12.1	7.7	10.1	7.1	13.9	10.4	7.1	3.7
Married	4.1	2.6	6.1	2.8	3.5	2.1	1.7	4.3	4.7	5.2	.6	1
Div/wid./sep	6.9	4.1	7.7	5.5	3.0	6.4	3.5	6.6	3.9	9.6	1.0	1.9
Education:												
Less than HS	4.7	3.3	4.7	1.8	4.3	1.7	2.6	2.0	5.8	3.3	1.6	.4
HS grad.	5.2	1.8	7.3	2.3	4.8	1.6	2.2	4.1	5.5	5.3	1.8	.4
Some college/voc.	9.1	3.9	9.8	5.1	6.4	4.8	6.7	5.6	8.9	7.3	3.8	1.2
College grad.	7.8	6.7	12.0	7.3	8.3	9.3	5.0	9.2	9.4	12.8	3.3	3.6
Religion:												
None	12.4	9.9	15.4	11.3	10.9	12.8	8.2	12.6	12.9	15.8	6.2	4.6
Type I Prot.	7.7	2.1	9.5	2.0	7.7	3.3	4.6	2.8	8.3	5.2	3.1	.5
Type II Prot.	4.7	2.9	5.9	3.3	3.2	1.7	3.4	4.9	5.6	5.5	.7	.3
Catholic	6.4	3.4	7.9	4.2	4.3	5.3	2.4	5.9	5.3	8.4	2.1	1.7
Jewish	7.7	6.9	17.4	12.5	11.5	10.3	7.7	6.9	11.5	10.3	7.7	3.4
Other	9.8	18.9	17.1	14.7	14.6	8.1	12.2	13.5	19.5	16.2	7.5	5.4
Religious attendance:												
Never	10.9	4.4	13.2	5.7	6.4	4.4	6.3	7.0	7.6	7.4	4.7	2.2
< 3 times per year	5.3	6.4	7.2	7.2	8.2	7.9	3.8	7.3	9.6	10.1	2.6	3.1
3-39 times per year	6.5	3.7	8.1	3.2	5.5	4.5	6.3	5.7	7.9	8.0	2.9	1.1
> 39 times per year	7.5	2.2	9.7	3.0	4.5	2.2	1.8	4.1	5.1	5.5	1.5	.1
Race/ethnicity:												
White	7.6	4.0	9.6	4.7	5.9	5.1	4.8	5.7	7.4	7.8	3.0	1.7
Black	5.8	3.5	8.0	2.8	5.3	2.6	3.4	5.9	6.7	7.0	1.5	.6
Hispanic	8.8	3.8	7.5	3.5	13.3	3.9	4.4	6.0	13.9	7.6	3.7	1.1
Asian	6.0	3.3	3.2	0.0	14.3	0.0	2.9	0.0	17.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Place of residence:												
Top 12 central cities (CCs)	14.2	6.5	15.8	4.6	15.8	5.9	10.8	8.4	16.7	9.7	9.2	2.6
Next 88 central cities	8.6	5.7	10.1	7.7	9.1	5.3	6.3	6.1	11.4	7.8	3.5	1.6
Suburbs top 12 CCs	10.3	5.7	11.9	4.1	7.6	4.8	5.6	6.7	10.3	9.0	4.2	1.9
Suburbs next 88 CCs	4.9	3.3	6.0	4.8	7.3	5.5	2.5	7.5	4.5	9.8	1.3	1.6
Other urban areas	6.5	2.7	9.7	3.4	4.6	4.1	3.4	4.7	5.3	6.9	1.9	1.1
Rural areas	2.5	2.1	2.7	2.2	4.4	.5	3.8	1.6	7.5	2.1	1.3	0.0

### Urbanization of Place of Residence

One of the most striking relations in tables 8.1 and 8.2 is between the level of urbanization of the current residence of respondents and the various measures of same-gender sexuality. Men living in the central cities of the twelve largest metropolitan areas report rates of same-gender sexuality of between 9.2 and 16.7 percent (see the columns referring to *identity* and *desire*, respectively), as compared to rates for all men on these measures of 2.8 and 7.7 percent, respectively. And the rates generally decline monotonically with decline in urbanization.<sup>24</sup>

While the rates of reported same-gender sexuality for women generally follow a similar pattern to those for men, that is, they are positively correlated with degree of urbanization, this pattern is not nearly so marked as with the men. In general, the relation is not statistically significant for women, although it is quite consistent across the different measures of homosexuality.<sup>25</sup>

Before turning to a discussion of possible explanations for the relation between residence and same-gender sexuality, a few general comments on the interpretation and social effect of this relation seem appropriate. This relation is an illustration of the limitations of relying on a single number as a summary for a complete distribution. While we were writing this book in 1993, extensive media discussion and debate exploded over the low rates of homosexuality (however measured) found in various recent sample surveys, including the GSS. These debates focused on single estimates produced for the male population as a whole, numbers such as 1.1 percent of men between the ages of twenty and forty exclusively homosexual during the previous ten-year period and a 2.3 percent estimate of any homosexuality during the same time period (Billy et al. 1993; Barringer 1993) or a 2.5 percent figure of adult men reporting male sex partners in the last year (Rogers and Turner 1991; Rogers 1993). The NHLS estimates are not so different from these. While the Billy

24. This measure of urbanization is taken from the GSS and is based on a coding of sampling point for the interview rather than a question asked of the respondent. See the discussion of the variable SRCBELT in Davis and Smith (1991).

25. In the combined NHLS and GSS data, the only relation for women that is statistically significant is that between residence and same-gender partners since age eighteen. (The  $p$ -value of the chi-square with five degrees of freedom is .024.) As with any test of significance of a relation between two variables, statistical significance is a function of both the size of the sample and the degree ("strength") of the association or relation (i.e., the larger the sample, the more likely that a given degree of association will be found significant). This is based on a large sample size (3,530 women) and what appears to be a relatively marked association, with percentages varying from 6.2 percent for women living in the central cities of the twelve largest metropolitan areas to 2.8 percent among the women living in rural areas. In contrast, the relation for men is strongly significant for all three same-gender partner variables in the combined data set, with probabilities less than .001. However, a number of the patterns of association are as strong for the women as they are for partners since eighteen (cf. *any age*, *appeal*, and *any desire* in table 8.2), although the sample size is much smaller (about 1,750 women in NHLS alone vs. about 3,500 in the combined GSS and NHLS data set).

et al. estimates, especially the 2.3 percent, are quite low in comparison to our findings for this age group, the two are closer to each other than the 10 percent estimate widely accepted in the past.

While a single estimate is one of a number of possible summary measures for a whole population, it may not accurately reflect the situation of a specific subgroup within that population. A single number often masks very important differences. For example, in this book, we have generally avoided averaging the rates of various measures of sexual activity for men and women into a single estimate for the population as a whole because the consistent and obvious differences between men and women across almost all our measures seemed worth preserving. One could easily argue that other group differences are important. The only case where a single statistic completely represents a population characteristic is where a distribution is uniform across the whole population without regard to any social or other characteristic. The use of and debates about a single number as a measure of incidence of homosexuality in the population, be it 10 or 2 percent (or some other number), are based on the implicit assumption that homosexuality is randomly (and uniformly) distributed in the population. This would fit with certain analogies to genetically or biologically based traits such as left-handedness or intelligence. However, that is exactly what we do not find. Homosexuality (or at least reports about homosexuality) is clearly distributed differentially within categories of the social and demographic variables that are used in tables 8.1 and 8.2.<sup>26</sup>

One of the more interesting features of the distribution of same-gender sexuality by type of place is that it helps explain some of the disbelief expressed by members of the gay community in response to recent estimates of the prevalence of homosexuality. Even if one assumes that the distribution found by our research is accurate (rather than a lower bound or underestimate), our data indicate that about 9 percent of eighteen- to fifty-nine-year-old men living in the largest central cities in the United States currently identify as either homosexual or bisexual; a higher proportion (14 percent) have had male sex partners in the last five years; and an even higher proportion report some level of sexual attraction to other men (about 16 percent). For men living in gay communities in such cities as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Chicago, this implies that an even higher proportion of the men with whom they come in contact would be gay identified. Research implying that the "true" percentage was on the order of 1 or 2 percent would seem quite inaccurate to such people. Of course, the other side of the coin is that generalizing the experience of people living in the twelve largest cities (where about one-third of the U.S. population

26. There is a statistically significant relation between all the master status variables in table 8.1 and at least one of the same-gender partner measures for both men and women. There are two exceptions: urbanization while growing up for women and race for men. However, the relation between race and same-gender partners for women is due to the different (somewhat elevated) rate for "other" rather than any differences between whites and blacks.

lives) or in gay/lesbian networks to the rest of the country is equally inappropriate.<sup>27</sup>

What are the possible mechanisms that could explain the distribution of the various measures of same-gender sexuality by urbanization of place of residence that we observe? One obvious mechanism is migration. People interested in sex with people of their own gender move to more congenial social environments. Large cities are congenial in a number of ways. Large urban centers generally have more diversity and a greater tolerance of diversity, less familiarity among and scrutiny by neighbors, and an increased variety of work and leisure opportunities than smaller cities and towns. In the United States, many larger cities have substantial and visible gay and lesbian communities, which occupy residential areas with high concentrations of openly gay/lesbian people and institutions that cater to or are tolerant of them. Younger people living in smaller towns or rural areas who are interested in same-gender sex are likely to learn of these communities and may migrate to them, especially if they feel constrained by negative sanctions toward open homosexuality generally or in their local social networks of friends and family.

The migration model for explaining the increased proportions of same-gender sexual practice, interest, and identification among people in larger cities assumes that people discover their own inclinations more or less independently of their environment and then adjust their environment to their "inner nature." But there is another possibility. Large cities may provide a congenial environment for the development and expression of same-gender interest. This is not the same as saying that homosexuality is a personal, deliberate or conscious choice. But an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior.

To test these two models empirically is quite difficult. To do so, one would need longitudinal data. In any case, these two models or explanations are not mutually exclusive. Both might operate to varying degrees. We did not ask respondents about why they moved to their current residence, but migration seems plausible as at least one of the mechanisms by which the higher rates of same-gender sexuality among people living in big cities come about. It fits with many of the generally accepted notions about the "coming-out" process for gays and lesbians and historical work on gay communities (Levine 1979; D'Emilio 1983; Murray 1992).

The elicitation/opportunity hypothesis is the less obvious explanation. It runs counter to the more essentialist, biological views of homosexuality that

27. This may be similar to the mechanism that leads many to think that there is much more sexual activity and more variegated sexual practices throughout the society than the kinds of figures that research such as ours would imply. The images and contexts of sexuality with which we are usually presented in the mass media are often those of the young, the educated, the urban, the uncoupled, or those just beginning sexual relationships, just the places where we have found elevated levels of sexual activity and variety.

are so widespread. It implies that the environment in which people grow up affects their sexuality in very basic ways. But this is exactly one way to read many of the patterns that we have found throughout this research. In fact, there is evidence for the effect of the degree of urbanization of residence while growing up on reported homosexuality. This effect is quite marked and strong for men and practically nonexistent for women. Table 8.1 displays the relation between the urbanization of the place where respondents were living at age fourteen (sixteen for the GSS). We find a similar but much more moderated relation to current residence: among the male respondents, there is a clear monotonic relation between the level of urbanization and the proportion reporting same-gender partners in a given time period. Unlike current residence, residence at age fourteen or sixteen is very unlikely to be the result of a choice by the respondent based on sexual preference.

The relation of urbanization to same-gender sexuality is quite marked for men but much weaker for women. This is true for both current residence and residence while growing up. This suggests that homosexuality among men and women in the United States may be socially organized quite differently. It is even possible that the phenomena themselves (the various forms of same-gender sexuality) are different for men and women. (Of course, we have already demonstrated that the various forms of same-gender sexuality differ in substantial ways among men and among women as well.) Discussions of homosexuality often treat any same-gender sexual behavior or interest as fundamentally the same. These results challenge such easy conclusions.

#### *Education and the Prevalence of Same-Gender Sexuality among Women*

Most of the patterns in the relations between same-gender sexuality and the social and demographic master status variables observed in tables 8.1 and 8.2 are similar for men and women. Except for one variable, the appeal of having sex with someone of one's own sex, the rates for women are always lower than the rates for men in any particular category. Education, however, does seem to stand out for women in a way that it does not for men. Higher levels of education are generally associated with higher rates on any given measure of same-gender sexuality. But this pattern is more pronounced and more monotonic for women than it is for men. In general, women with high school degrees or less report very low rates of same-gender sexuality. The strength and consistency of the pattern for women is mainly due to the fact that women who have graduated from college always report the highest level of same-gender sexuality. In the case of the measures of desire or interest, the female college graduates' rates are higher than those of comparable men, even for sexual attraction, where the overall rate for women is lower than that for men. For the measures of appeal and desire, the women's overall rates are higher than or comparable to the men's rates, but this turns out to be largely due to the especially high rate among the college educated.

There does not seem to be an obvious explanation for this pattern. Higher

levels of education are associated with greater social and sexual liberalism (see chapter 14) and with greater sexual experimentation (see Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey et al. 1953; and chapter 3 above). Acceptance of nontraditional sexual behavior is likely to be higher among the more educated. This may facilitate higher rates of reporting among the better educated, even if behavioral differences across education levels are negligible. But it seems likely that both effects occur.

We have already observed some drop-off in heterosexual partners (and rates of sexual activity) among the more highly educated women (see chapters 3 and 5). On the one hand, more education for women may represent greater gender nonconformity. But it may also represent a higher level of personal resources (human capital) that can translate into more economic and social opportunities, which would, in turn, increase one's ability to please oneself rather than others. The fact that younger women (those under forty) report higher levels of same-gender partners in all three time periods but do not so clearly report higher levels of same-gender desire may be due to historical changes that affect the opportunities and norms for cohorts differentially. In particular, the expectation and need for women to work and the lowering of barriers to economic success have had a greater effect on younger women. A more general pattern of younger women's sexual experiences becoming somewhat more like men's seems to be emerging in terms of both same- and opposite-gender activity. Both the ideology of women's equality and the structural bases for its realization have been increasing in the postwar period, but with especially marked increases since the late 1960s.

#### *The Mixture of Same- and Opposite-Gender Sex Partners*

So far we have focused on the existence of any same-gender partners in given time periods or the expression of sexual interest in people of the same gender. Many of those who report same-gender sexual experience or interest also have sexual experiences with and interest in people of the opposite gender as well. Tables 8.3A and 8.3B show the gender breakdown of sex partners in various time periods and the distribution of sexual identification and sexual attraction for men and women.

First, let us look at the mixture of genders of sex partners in four different time periods: the past year, the past five years, since age eighteen, and since puberty. As would be expected, the longer the time period, the higher the proportion of people who report having had any same-gender partners. However, the relative proportion of people who have had only same-gender partners compared to the proportion who have had partners of both genders changes dramatically. While the overall proportions of men and women reporting any same-gender partners differ, the general pattern of how these are distributed between people having only same-gender partners and those having partners of both genders is quite similar. Beginning with the distribution of partners by gender in the last year, we find that 2.7 percent of the men had a male partner

**Table 8.3A** Prevalence of Same-Gender and Opposite-Gender Partners (Ps) (percentages)

	Ps in Last Year		Ps in Past 5 Years		Ps since Age 18		Ps since Puberty	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
No partners	10.5	13.3	5.9	7.1	3.8	3.4	3.3	2.2
Opposite gender only	86.8	85.4	90.0	90.7	91.3	92.5	90.3	94.3
Both men and women	7	.3	2.1	1.4	4.0	3.7	5.8	3.3
Same gender only	2.0	1.0	2.0	.8	.9	.4	.6	.2
Any same-gender sex (%):								
Both men and women	25.3	25.0	51.6	62.9	81.6	89.9	90.7	94.9
Same gender only	74.7	75.0	48.4	37.1	18.4	10.1	9.3	5.1
Total N	3,494	4,376	2,224	2,838	3,073	3,853	1,334	1,678

*Note.* Partner variables (last year, past five years, and since eighteen) are from combined GSS and NHLS data (appendix C, SAQ 2, questions 4, 7, 8, and 9 cumulatively). Partners since puberty is based on age of first vaginal intercourse and age of first same-gender partner from NHLS (appendix C, section 8, questions 20 and 40).

**Table 8.3B** Prevalence of Sexual Identity and Sexual Attraction, by Gender (percentages)

Sexual Identity <sup>a</sup>	M	W	Sexual Attraction <sup>b</sup>	M	W
Other	.3	.1	Only opposite gender	93.8	95.6
Heterosexual	96.9	98.6	Mostly opposite gender	2.6	2.7
Bisexual	.8	.5	Both genders	.6	.8
Homosexual	2.0	.9	Mostly same gender	.7	.6
Any same-gender sex (%):			Only same gender	2.4	3
Both men and women	28.2	37.5	Total N	1,404	1,731
Same gender only	71.8	62.5			
Total N	1,401	1,732			

<sup>a</sup>From appendix C, section 8, question 49.

<sup>b</sup>From appendix C, section 8, questions 47 and 48.

and 1.3 percent of the women a female partner. Of these, about three out of four report having only same-gender partners in the past twelve months, while the other quarter had at least one partner of each gender. In the past five years, 4.1 percent of the men and 2.2 percent of the women had at least one same-gender partner. About half these men had both male and female partners in this time period. The women are more likely than the men to have had sex with both men and women than only same-gender partners. Almost two-thirds of the women reporting a female partner in the past five years also report a male partner. The proportion of the men with male partners since age eighteen who report having had only male partners declines to about 20 percent of the total. For women, the comparable figure is about 10 percent. When the time period

under consideration is extended to all partners since puberty, the proportion of men with *only* male partners declines again to 10 percent of the men with *any* male partners.<sup>28</sup> Translated to a prevalence rate for the men as a whole, this means that, since puberty, under 1 percent of all men (0.6 percent) have had sex only with other boys or men and never with a female partner. For women, the proportion is even smaller. About 5 percent of the women who have had female partners since puberty have never had sex with a male partner. This means that, overall, only 0.2 percent of all women have had sex only with women.

These findings based on measures of sex partners indicate once again just how normative heterosexuality is in our society. Over a lifetime, the vast majority of people who report sex with others include at least one opposite-gender partner. On the other hand, we have seen that there is a minority, about 9 percent of men and 4 percent of women, who have sex with someone of their own gender (see the *any sex* column in table 8.2). These data also indicate the importance of the life course in viewing issues such as the gender of sex partners as a dynamic process. Given the relatively low rates of same-gender partners and the small size of our sample, it is not possible to look at questions of the movement back and forth between partners of each gender over time. For many, no doubt, the pattern of the mixture of partners represents some experimentation early on and the settling into a fixed choice later, if for no other reason than the fact that most people have relatively few partners overall (see chapter 5). On the other hand, there are some people who have had both male and female partners in the past one to five years. Here again, men and women also appear to differ. Women are much more likely than men in any time frame longer than a year to have had male as well as female partners, given that they have any same-gender partners.

Let us now turn briefly to the questions of self-identification and sexual attraction (table 8.3B). The questions that we asked are in the present tense and refer to the respondents' self-assessment at the time of the interview. The distribution of the responses on sexual identification resembles the distribution of partners in the past year.<sup>29</sup> Does this mean that answers to a question about sexual orientation reflect a statement about current behavior, or do current behavior and orientation express relatively stable outcomes of a developmental process? In either case, the ratio of reports of a self-identification of homosex-

ual to one of bisexual is similar to the ratio of having only same-gender partners to having partners of both genders in the past year (between 2:1 and 3:1).

Responses to the question about sexual attraction display another interesting difference between men and women. If one looks only at the respondents who report any sexual attraction to people of their own gender, one finds that, whereas the men follow a bimodal distribution, the women's distribution is monotonic. An equal proportion of men (2.4 percent) report being attracted only to other men as report being attracted mostly to women (2.6 percent). The other categories of same-gender attraction for men, that is, the men who report equal attraction to men and women and the men who report mainly but not exclusively being attracted to other men, are much lower, at 0.6 and 0.7 percent, respectively. For the women, the pattern is quite different. The largest group of women who report same-gender attraction are those who report mostly, but not exclusively, being attracted to men, 2.7 percent. As the degree of sexual attraction to other women increases, the proportion of women reporting it declines. Only 0.3 percent of women report being exclusively attracted to other women. Now compare these rates with the rates of self-identification (categories of sexual orientation). Slightly more men report being exclusively attracted to other men than report considering themselves to be homosexual (2.4 vs. 2.0 percent), whereas more women consider themselves to be homosexual than report exclusive same-gender attraction (0.9 vs. 0.3 percent). While the numbers here are very small, it appears that, whereas two-thirds of the women who consider themselves to be homosexual report at least some minimal level of sexual attraction to men, a much smaller minority of the men who report attraction to men but none to women do not consider themselves to be homosexual. Again, there seem to be somewhat elusive (owing to small sample sizes) but intriguing differences between the way that same-gender sexuality is experienced by men and women in the United States.

### *Sex Partners, Frequency, and Practices*

In this section, we return to some key measures of sexual behavior from chapters 3 and 5 and compare their prevalence for people who do and do not report same-gender partners. This is a preliminary analysis based on crude summaries of means and proportions. We are limited by the fact that the rates of reporting same-gender sexual behavior are so low and our sample size is small. In chapters 3 and 4, we have already seen that the distribution of sexual behaviors is related to a variety of social characteristics. We have also seen that the distribution of same-gender sexuality is similarly differentiated. Ideally, one would want to look at the differences between sexual behavior between same- and opposite-gender couples, taking into account these other social statuses and contexts. However, we have barely thirty men and women in many of these categories, the minimum that we have set for computing group estimates. In several cases, there are fewer than thirty women who had same-

28. The measure used here for partners since puberty is based solely on the questions about the age of sex (after puberty) with first same- and first opposite-gender partner in the childhood and adolescence section of the questionnaire. This produces a slightly lower rate of same-gender partners than the *any same-gender partner* measure used in fig. 8.1 and table 8.2.

29. The major difference is that, while about 10 percent of the sample had no partners in the past year, practically everyone gave an answer that closely fit into one of the three major categories, heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. The distribution is consistent with the idea that the non-sexually active people had the same distribution on sexual identity as the sexually active people.

gender partners in the past year or who consider themselves homosexual or bisexual. Still, it seems worthwhile to report these summary statistics where we have sufficient data as a preliminary indication of patterns that deserve further investigation when larger samples are available.

Table 8.4 displays data on the number of partners in various time frames: the past year, the past five years, and since age eighteen. Four different measures are used to divide respondents into two groups based on the presence or absence of same-gender sexuality: self-identification as homosexual/bisexual and having any same-gender partners in a given time frame. The mean number of partners includes all partners, both men and women, during the given time period. Only sexually active people are included in the calculation of the means.

We have included 95 percent confidence intervals for the means in this table to give a better sense of the variability in these distributions.<sup>30</sup> These lower and upper limits provide a sense of how large the range is within which the true means are likely to lie. When the intervals are overlapping, this implies that the differences between the means are not statistically significant.<sup>31</sup>

There is a clear overall pattern in this table. In all cases, when we dichotomize our sample, the group of people with same-gender partners (or who define themselves as homosexual or bisexual) have higher average numbers of partners than the rest of the sexually active people in the sample. In many, if not most, of the cases for the men, these differences are not statistically significant. Thus, the mean number of partners in the last year is just under two for men without any male partners and around three for men with at least one male partner. But the differences for the split based on identity and any partners since eighteen are clearly not statistically significant since the confidence intervals are overlapping. For partners in the past five years, the differences are larger and produce intervals that do not overlap and are more separated. Men with no male partners had a mean of about five partners in the past five years, as compared to means between twelve and twenty-one for the men with same-gender partners. Even though the discrepancies between the means for partners since age eighteen are quite large, in fact in only one case is the interval non-overlapping. The pattern for the women is quite similar to that for the men, although the mean number of partners in the two longer time periods is gener-

30. The limits for these intervals are computed by adding and subtracting approximately two standard errors to and from the mean. Under the assumption that these variables are normally distributed, these calculated limits would include the true mean ninety-five times out of a hundred in repeated samples. Of course, number of partners is hardly normally distributed, but generally violation of the normality assumption still provides a reasonable approximation to more exact calculations. A major purpose of interval estimation is that it gives one a sense of the variability involved in the estimate. Variability of estimates is especially large for small sample sizes.

31. Even when the intervals do not overlap, the true means may still not differ. That is because the calculations used here assume that our methods produce more precision than we know they actually do. The point here is mainly to provide some guard against apparent differences, but additional caution against generalization is warranted.

Table 8.4 Mean Numbers of Sex Partners, by Measures of Same-Gender Sexuality, Sexually Active Respondents Only

	Time Frame								
	Partners in Last Year			Partners in Last 5 Years			Partners since Age 18		
	Mean	Confidence Interval		Mean	Confidence Interval		Mean	Confidence Interval	
Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	
<i>Men</i>									
Any same-gender identity:									
None	1.8	1.5	2.0	4.9	4.3	5.6	16.5	13.7	19.4
Homo/bisexual	3.1	1.9	4.2	18.0	9.3	26.7	42.8	12.4	73.1
Any same-gender partners since age 18									
None	1.8	1.5	2.0	4.9	4.2	5.5	15.7	12.9	18.4
Some	2.3	1.7	2.9	12.2	7.2	17.2	44.3	22.2	66.5
Any same-gender partners in past 5 years:									
None	1.7	1.5	2.0	4.8	4.2	5.4	16.9	14.0	19.9
Some	2.9	2.1	3.8	16.7	9.9	23.5	26.6	15.1	38.0
Any same-gender partners in past year:									
None	1.8	1.5	2.0	4.9	4.2	5.5	17.1	14.1	20.1
Some	3.4	2.3	4.5	20.7	11.6	29.8	30.0	17.9	42.2
<i>Women</i>									
Any same-gender identity:									
None	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Homo/bisexual	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Any same-gender partners since age 18:									
None	1.3	1.2	1.3	2.2	2.0	2.4	4.9	4.4	5.5
Some	3.8	- .2	7.7	7.6	2.4	12.9	19.7	13.0	26.3
Any same-gender partners in past 5 years:									
None	1.3	1.2	1.3	2.2	2.0	2.4	5.2	4.6	5.8
Some	5.7	-1.5	12.8	10.1	1.0	19.2	19.9	9.4	30.4
Any same-gender partners in past year:									
None	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Some	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

\* Fewer than thirty cases

ally less than half the rates for men. For the women, it is only the confidence intervals based on the number of partners since eighteen that clearly separate the two groups. Remember that the mean number of partners here is based on both male and female partners. Part of the difference in mean numbers of partners is due to the fact that the "same-gender" groups include many people who have both same- and opposite-gender partners.

The higher mean numbers of partners for respondents reporting same-gender sex corresponds to a stereotype of male homosexuals that is widespread in our society. It is thought to be both easier for men to find short-term male partners and harder for them to form long-term relationships. While some evidence in our data supports this general tendency, the differences do not appear very large in view of the higher variability in our measures that results from the small sample sizes of homosexually active men. From analyses not shown here, we estimate that over one-third of the men who had only male partners in the past year were living with a partner at the time of the interview. This compares with two-thirds of the men who only had female partners in the past year. Of course, for the latter this includes married as well as live-in partners. Lack of formal recognition of same-gender relationships and lack of social pressure and support to maintain them no doubt contribute to the lower rate of longer-term relationships and the higher rate at which new partners are acquired.

One stereotype about lesbians, on the other hand, holds that they form extremely strong bonds with each other, leading one to expect lower rates at which new partners are acquired. But our data do not fit that pattern. We already noted the large proportion of the women reporting female partners in our sample who also have sex with men. Analysis based on larger samples is necessary to sort out whether the lesbians' larger average number of partners is due to having relatively more female or male partners.

Is the comparison of people who report any same-gender sex partners with all those who do not the most appropriate? We have shown that the former are younger, more educated, more likely to live in large cities, and generally less religious. All these factors are also associated with having more sex partners. Again, we need a larger sample to pursue more refined and appropriate comparisons.

#### *Frequency of Sex in the Last Year*

In chapter 5, we pointed out that the relation between numbers of partners and the frequency of sex is nonlinear. Except for a very small proportion of people with many partners, the frequency of partnered sex generally declines with an increase in partners. This seems to be largely a matter of the inefficiencies of having to find new partners with whom to have sex rather than having sex with the same person, especially if that person shares living quarters with the respondent. This is a classic argument dating back at least to

Table 8.5 Mean Frequency of Sex per Month for Past Year, by Measures of Same-Gender Sexuality

	Men			Women			
	Mean	Confidence Interval		Mean	Confidence Interval		
		Low	High		Low	High	
All men	6.5	6.2	6.8	All women	6.2	5.9	6.5
Any same-gender identification:				Any same-gender identification:			
None	6.6	6.3	6.9	None	*	*	*
Homo/bisexual	4.5	2.8	6.2	Homo/bisexual	*	*	*
Any same-gender partners since 18:				Any same-gender partners since 18:			
None	6.1	5.8	6.5	None	5.5	5.2	5.8
Some	5.7	4.4	7.0	Some	6.1	4.6	7.6
Any same-gender partners in past 5 years:				Any same-gender partners in past 5 years:			
None	6.3	6.0	6.6	None	5.8	5.5	6.1
Some	4.4	3.0	5.7	Some	5.5	3.4	7.7
Any same-gender partners in past year:				Any same-gender partners in past year:			
None	6.6	6.3	6.9	None	*	*	*
Some	4.3	2.6	5.9	Some	*	*	*

\*Fewer than thirty cases.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948), where it was applied to homosexually active men. Table 8.5 reports the mean frequency of sex per month (for the exact wording of the question, see appendix C, SAQ 2, question 5). We find practically no difference between the rates of sex per month for the different comparisons. The mean rates for men with male partners are consistently, but not significantly, lower than the rates for the rest of the men. The rates for women hardly differ at all between the two groups.

#### *Selected Sexual Practices*

In table 8.6, we turn to a preliminary investigation of the sexual practices of the people defined by several of our measures of same-gender sexuality. We add one group defined in terms of same-gender experience to the set that we have been using. We have included a category in table 8.6 labeled *any SG [same gender] sexuality, behavior, and desire*. This group includes all the people in the Venn diagrams and pie charts (figs. 8.2 and 8.3). This broad fuzzy set consists of all those one might consider labeling *homosexual* in almost any sense of that term during adulthood (i.e., since age eighteen), given the measures that we have in our survey. The measures of same-gender sexuality used

Table 8.6 Percentage Reporting Selected Sexual Practices, by Various Measures of Same-Gender Sexuality

	Masturbation in Last Year		Proportions Reporting Having Engaged in Practice since Puberty (on final SAQ)									
	Once per Week or More		Active Oral Sex		Receptive Oral Sex		Active Anal Sex		Receptive Anal Sex			
	Not at All		M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Total population	36.7	58.3	26.7	7.6	76.6*	67.7*	78.2*	73.1*	25.6*	N.A.	N.A.	20.4*
Any same-gender (SG) sexuality, behavior, and desire	24.4	29.5	49.6	18.7	32.3	26.7	39.9	34.6	27.3	N.A.	29.3	N.A.
Any SG partners (Ps) since age 18	15.3	29.8	55.6	19.3	58.9	61.8	69.9	72.2	50.0	N.A.	53.4	N.A.
Any SGPs in past 5 years	11.8	30.0	64.7	20.0	74.5	71.4	80.4	82.1	64.0	N.A.	62.8	N.A.
Any SGPs in past year	11.4	68.6	88.6	94.3	79.4	N.A.	77.1	N.A.				
Any SG identity	7.7	74.4	89.5	89.5	75.7	N.A.	81.6	N.A.				

Note: N.A. = not applicable

\*Proportion of respondents reporting practice with an opposite-gender partner (e.g., active oral sex reported by male respondents refers to ever having performed oral sex on a woman).

\*Fewer than thirty cases

in this table become more narrowly and exclusively defined as one moves down the columns.<sup>32</sup>

Table 8.6 includes masturbation in the past year, active and receptive oral sex, and active and receptive anal sex. The two tails of the distribution of masturbation are included: no masturbation in the past year and masturbating once a week or more. The proportion reporting each level of masturbation in the various groups defined by our measures of same-gender sexuality is displayed, as is the proportion for the total population. The rates of masturbation increase as one goes down the columns for both men and women. This appears as a decline in the proportion of people who say that they did not masturbate and an increase in the proportion who said that they masturbated frequently in the past year. The rates of masturbation for all these groups are much higher than the rates observed for the sample as a whole. We can only speculate why this might be the case. There is a compositional problem here similar to that for

32 This is not always true, although the exceptions are quite minor. The exceptions are that there are a few respondents who report same-gender partners in the past five years who did not have such partners since turning eighteen (i.e., among those under twenty-three at the time of the interview). Also, there were five men and one woman who did not have same-gender partners but who considered themselves to be homosexual or bisexual. These exceptions have only a very minor effect on the proportions in this table.

the comparisons made for numbers of partners. The same-gender sexuality groupings tend to be younger, more highly educated, more urbanized, and less religious. They are also less likely to be currently cohabiting or married. Perhaps they are also less subject to social taboos related to sexuality so that, in crossing a major line of sexual demarcation, they have lowered fears of breaching other barriers as well.

The sexual practices in this table refer to lifetime rates (i.e., since puberty) of ever having engaged in the specific practice with a person of the same gender (see appendix C, SAQ 4F [for females] and SAQ 4M [for males]). The comparison rates for the sample as a whole are based on reports of ever engaging in the equivalent practice with someone of the opposite gender. For example, the total population rate for active oral sex for men refers to men who performed oral sex on a woman (cunnilingus). The proportions below it for the various same-gender groupings refer to performing oral sex on another man (fellatio). For the women, the total population rate for active oral sex refers to fellatio performed on a male partner, and, for the same-gender groupings, the proportions are of women who performed oral sex (cunnilingus) on a female partner. The anal sex columns refer to anal intercourse and therefore were not asked of women in terms of other women. The total population rates are based on active anal intercourse by men with female partners and receptive anal sex reported by female respondents with male partners.

Similar to the pattern for masturbation, there are increasing proportions of the groups who report ever having engaged in a given practice as one moves down the columns in the table. In the first and, by far, the broadest grouping, about a third of the men report ever performing oral sex on another man, and about 40 percent report having had oral sex performed on them.<sup>33</sup> These proportions increase markedly in each of the next three rows as one moves down the column to the group of men who had sex with men in the past year. The highest level of active oral sex is close to 90 percent, receptive oral sex 94 percent, and 90 percent of those who identify as either homosexual or bisexual report receptive oral sex. For women, the rates and pattern of oral sex are quite similar. Unfortunately, there are fewer than thirty women in the two last categories, but, even for these groups (not shown here), the rates continue to increase. The highest rate for the women is 92 percent reported by the women identified as homosexual or bisexual. The rates of oral sex with same-gender partners for those who report a same-gender partner in the past year or who identify as homosexual or bisexual rise above those reported between opposite-gender partners for the sample as a whole. While, for these groups, oral sex becomes almost universal, approaching 90–95 percent, it is not so high among people

33 Many of the people in this set may never have had any sex with a person of their own gender. But this is not by definition or design. While 39 percent of the women and 44 percent of the men in this group reported only desire but no behavior and identity in adulthood, the sexual practice questions refer to activity any time since puberty.

reporting at least one same-gender partner since turning eighteen. Only 60–70 percent of these men and women report ever having oral sex with a same-gender partner.

Anal intercourse among men follows the pattern for oral sex, although at slightly lower rates. Anal sex increases from almost 30 percent to about 80 percent as one moves down the columns in the table. There is even more consistency between rates of reporting active and receptive anal intercourse. These rates are higher, even for the broadest definition of a same-gender category, than the lifetime rates for opposite-gender anal sex. On the other hand, while high, these rates are not as high as those for oral sex; 20–25 percent of the narrowest categorization of the men report never having had anal intercourse. They are also lower than the high rates of over 95 percent for vaginal intercourse reported in chapter 3.

### 8.7 Conclusion

In contrast to much of the literature on homosexuality, which draws sharp distinctions between people who identify socially and psychologically with the gay and lesbian experience and everyone else, we have not treated people who had same-gender experiences as being somehow fundamentally different. Following such reasoning, we have included the whole population in all the analyses (with a few exceptions) throughout the book. It was only in deference to the widespread interest in homosexuality *per se* that we decided to report our primary results on same-gender sexual practices and preferences in a separate chapter.

Our data, limited in some respects though they may be, represent the most varied and comprehensive measures of different aspects of homosexuality to be collected on a representative sample of U.S. adults. We have broadened the perspective of population-based sex research beyond a narrow focus on a small set of sexual behaviors between people of the same gender. Put simply, we contend that there is no single answer to questions about the prevalence of homosexuality. Rather, homosexuality is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon whose salient features are related to one another in highly contingent and diverse ways. For example, the highest rates of same-gender experience are found in the largest cities, with sharp declines across levels of urbanization. And there are marked gender differences in the report of same-gender experiences that also interact in complex ways with age and education. It is findings such as these that underscore the importance of understanding the social organization of sexuality throughout the life course.

## CHAPTER 9

### Formative Sexual Experiences

In this chapter, we discuss sexual experiences that are highly salient and emotionally charged: first vaginal intercourse and coercive or abusive sex. Although first intercourse and forced sex are at first glance disparate topics, in this chapter we have grouped them together under the rubric of formative sexual experiences. As we will see, all these experiences involve issues of consent and each has a special power to shape future sexual and nonsexual adjustment.

In our culture, first heterosexual intercourse usually represents the initiation into partnered sexual activity. This transition, or at least the age at which it occurs, has been the subject of extensive previous research that has been motivated in large part by changing policy concerns ranging from "sexual permissiveness" in the 1950s to more recent concerns with teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections among young people. Our research also treats the topic of age at first intercourse, but we have expanded the discussion to a broader consideration of the changing quality of adolescents' sexual lives and how respondents characterize the social context of their early sexual experiences. In this way, we hope to get a sense of the qualitative aspects of how individuals experience a transition that has so much symbolic importance in our culture.

Coercive and abusive sexual experiences are also "formative" in the sense that they have, as we will see, important consequences for the happiness and well-being of those who experience them. Unlike research on age at first intercourse, research on forced sex has been limited by a lack of data from high-quality national samples. Our data include some of the first estimates of the prevalence of forced sex experiences based on a national probability sample of adult men and women as well as a broader treatment of the victims' relationships to their attackers and the physical and emotional consequences of forced sex.

Although our data include useful information about the social context of first intercourse and the prevalence of coerced sex, we must be sensitive to certain features of survey research methodology. We have gathered retrospec-

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