

NORMS OF THRIVING LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

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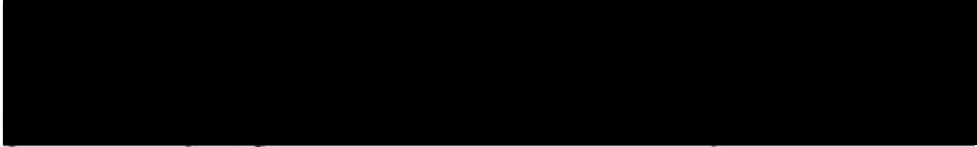
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Female homosexuals can and do form successful, thriving relationships with other female homosexuals. Such relationships are commonly termed homosexual marriages, lesbian relationships, lesbian dyads or "coupled" lesbians. The individual in the relationship refers to her partner as her "lover". While many lesbians are able to form satisfactory relationships with her chosen lover, some have difficulties in this area, and may seek the assistance of the mental health professional. The lesbian experiencing relationship difficulties has the right to expect that the mental health professional will have the knowledge and skill necessary to provide for her unique needs.

Clinical skills of the mental health professional should include the ability to assess the needs of the client. One of the problems faced by the professional in this unique counseling setting is the lack of data upon which to base and compare clinical judgments. Should the professional seek information from libraries, there is little literature about the lesbian relationship to be found. When the professional assesses the problems within the lesbian relationship, the assumption is made that the needs of the lesbian are the same as or similar to the needs of heterosexual females. The needs and norms of a successful lesbian relationship are unknown.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe some of the norms of a successful lesbian relationship. The major areas to be considered are some of the aspects of the courting process, roles, living arrangements and factors that contribute to individual satisfaction.

Definitions

Lesbian - an adult female who will give herself a subjective score of two or greater on the Kinsey scale (Kinsey, 1953, p. 470) in both areas of behavior and feelings (Bell and Weinburg, 1978). Synonyms: female homosexual, gay or gay woman, and homophil.

Relationship - an arrangement in which two homoerotic females define themselves as a couple and have been together as a couple for a period of time not less than six months.

Courtship - the process of meeting one another, dating, finding one another attractive and pleasurable to be with and the implicit/explicit agreement of an exclusive primary relationship with one other person.

Coming out - the degree of knowledge that others outside of the relationship have regarding the sexual identities of the couple.

Affair - an encounter between two homoerotic females in which the major goal is gratification of sexual desires; neither expects the encounter to be a lasting relationship.

Thriving - operationally defined to be a time period greater than six months.

Sex Identity - the biological status of being either male or female.

Sexual Identity - the subjective identity of being either homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual.

Gender Identity - the subjective identity of one's sense of masculinity or femininity.

Background to the Study

In January 1977, this writer helped form a counseling service specifically for persons of transsexual and homosexual identities. One of the more prevalent problems encountered in the counseling setting was that of the dysfunctional lesbian relationship. Despite the varied backgrounds of the members of the counseling service, and those we consulted, none of us could describe a "typical" or thriving lesbian relationship. A natural course to the remedy of this problem seemed to be in finding out what indeed constitutes a thriving relationship, and what enhances this relationship. Assuming that if one knows what works, one could identify and help remedy that which doesn't work.

The initial task was to familiarize oneself with some of the aspects of the lesbian's lifestyle. This has been done informally by talking with a number of lesbians and attending some of their social functions. This was coupled with reviewing the popular literature available in bookstores and then studies from college libraries. This process of learning about lesbian relationships has been formalized now, into the following study.

Review of the Literature

Method of Review

The first study published about homosexuality that used a non-patient population was done by Hooker in 1957. The sample was comprised of twenty males. Since that time empirical literature published about the female homosexual is limited in quantity and quality (Laner, 1977).

The vast majority of all literature on homosexuality focuses on the male homosexual, with little attention paid to the lesbian. During the time period between 1957 and 1974 one can find progressively increasing numbers of studies that describe and compare the female homosexual with the female heterosexual. Bracy (1976) in a review of the literature found that most of the work done has been in the areas of diagnosis, etiology and treatment.

The resource lists used for this study were found in Women's Studies Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts and the Index Medicus. It is probable that the redefinition of homosexuality as no longer a pathological state by the American Psychiatric and the American Psychological Associations which occurred in 1972 and 1974 has changed the manner in which the homosexual responds to themselves and to researchers. Thus only literature published since 1972 has been used in this study. From the three listings only one study was found that specifically describes the lesbian relationship. This study had a population of five couples (Tuller, 1978). Tuller's study and a few other journal articles and books that describe either female homosexuality in general or a specific behavior within the relationship were the primary sources of data about relationships. There was little to be found therefore that describes this portion of the lesbian lifestyle.

Definitions

The definition of who is a lesbian or what is female homosexuality has promoted a fair amount of controversy. Saghir and Robins (1973) considered a person homosexual by self report and a sexual history of homosexual behavior. Bell and Weinburg (1978) used the Kinsey scale to

define homosexuality. This scale is a seven point continuum in which the individual is asked to rate their sexual behaviors and feelings, "as you see yourself now", within a homosexual-heterosexual range. Martin and Lyon (1972) define lesbianism as a way of life in which sexuality is but a facet of the lifestyle. Other studies used self report or self identification (Cotton, 1975; Hedbloom, 1972; Jay and Young, 1979; Laner, 1977).

The definition of a lesbian relationship seemed to be a more difficult task for researchers. The relationship is sometimes equated as being either a "marriage" or "homosexual marriage" comparable to the heterosexual counterpart (Cotton, 1975; Hedbloom, 1972; Saghir & Robins, 1973; Tuller, 1978). Bell and Weinburg define a lesbian relationship as being either "closed coupled or open coupled" depending upon the degree of sexual fidelity. On occasion one finds the word affair used to denote a relationship, and more commonly to mean date or "one-night (sexual) stand".

All sources that address the issue note that the lesbian relationship is more than a sexual union. The many components that make up a relationship include household management, financial arrangements, children and the like (Martin & Lyon, 1972; Tuller, 1978). None of these studies specifically define these aspects of the relationship. Jay and Young (1979) note that the couple may be asexual within the relationship.

Prevalence

Sources vary in the reports of the prevalence of homosexuality among American women. One has difficulty finding a sample that is truly

representative of all sexual identity groups. Another problem is getting agreement among the sources of defining female homosexuality. Hite (1976) found that 8% of her sample of more than 1,000 women were homosexual. The Kinsey studies done in 1953 found that 5% of their sample of women were homosexual for three years or more after puberty (Kinsey et al., 1953). Not included in the statistics is the number of women that are sexually active with both males and females. Generally it is felt that the ratio of male homosexuality to female homosexuality is 2:1 (Money, 1977).

Social Considerations

The lesbian usually has her first homosexual sexual encounter by the time she reaches the age of twenty. Saghir and Robins found that 94% of their sample were sexually active by age 29 and that 49% had had their first homosexual experience by age 19. When this subject is discussed in the literature there is little variability in the findings (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Martin & Lyon, 1973).

Female homosexuals do have some of the same aspirations as bisexual and heterosexual females. About 50 to 75% of all lesbians seek and desire a monogamous relationship, with approximately the same number having had or being currently involved in such a lesbian relationship (Cotton, 1975; Hedblom, 1973; Saghir & Robins, 1973). Jay and Young (1979) report that 80% of their sample are currently involved in a relationship and Bell and Weinberg report 72%. Like her heterosexual counterpart, not all lesbians either desire or have engaged in a lengthy intimate relationship (Bell & Weinberg, Cotton, Jay & Young, Laner, Saghir & Robins). Saghir and Robins found that 93% of their sample had

had a relationship with another woman that lasted at least one year with strong emotional attachment. Cotton found that when a lesbian couple engages in a relationship the relationship tends to endure over a period of years and is usually quite stable. Jay and Young found that the mean length of time for a current relationship is 27 months and that the mean duration of the longest such relationship in one's lifetime to be 38 months. Bell and Weinberg found that current relationships had been on-going for one, two, three years for the majority of their sample.

The number of short term relationships and the number of long term relationships that the individual lesbian has had varies among individuals. Two thirds of Bell and Weinberg's sample had had less than ten female sexual partners with one third having less than five in their entire homosexual careers. Saghir and Robins found that more than half of their sample had had less than four affairs. Neither study define the difference between number of sex partners and number of relationships.

Thus one may conclude from the literature that the majority of lesbians included in the various samples tend to, for an unspecified period of time, attach themselves to a single other lesbian. This suggests that relationships tend to be monogamous and stable. The lesbian tends to have less than ten and often less than five partners in her homosexual career. One needs to note that the mean age of the populations in their studies was less than thirty five.

Courtship

No mention has been made in the literature that quantifies the average length of time among lesbians between the first meeting and the

establishing of a relationship. The most common place that lesbians meet their partners is at a gay social gathering, often in the home (Tuller; Saghir & Robins; Martin & Lyon; Jay & Young). Some couples meet through the gay community which frequently consists of socio-political organizations, non-professional athletic groups, churches and gay bars. Nyburg (1976) found that membership in such a gay community facilitated the achievement of sexual aspirations for the individual lesbian. Nyburg did not specify if the achievements of sexual aspirations included the seeking and/or finding of a permanent partner. Martin and Lyon take the position that "one night stands" are more of the exception than the rule. Some lesbians are members of a six to eight member social network. Partners are often found and sometimes exchanged within this relationship (Weber, 1979).

There is little written in the literature that describes or quantifies the implicit or explicit contracts that are made between the members of a couple. Cotton found that while there is some "flirting" outside the relationship, this is seldom acted upon. Although they did not explicitly ask, Jay and Young suggest that about one half of their sample had monogamous and one half had open relationships. Since about one half of the couples live together (Jay & Young) some kinds of household agreements would have to be made. The literature does not enumerate what these contracts might be. It does appear that the most frequently occurring contract is that of sexual fidelity, as this is referred to more frequently than any other.

One study was found that compared permanent partner priorities between groups of heterosexual and homosexual men and women. It was

found that members of all four groups seek their attributes in this order: honest, affectionate, intelligent, good looking, has sense of humor and has money (Laner, 1977). Yet it was found that homosexual/bisexual women are the least likely of the four groups to perceive what her partner is seeking in her. Thus there may be a tendency during the courtship process to misperceive her partner's needs.

From this review of the literature one may state that the courtship process of the lesbian relationship has not been fully studied. It is unknown if the agreements and contracts that are or are not made influence the stability of the relationship. It is unknown if the gay community is well known enough to a lesbian new to an area to contribute to the meeting of the type of person she desires to know. Nor is it currently possible to determine at what point the courtship process usually ends and the relationship becomes fully established.

Overtness of Homosexual Sexual Identity

One common theme in the "popular" literature about homosexuality is that the large majority of all homosexuals are "hidden in the closet". This is probably a correct assumption. Some gay leaders report that only one percent of the gay population have made public their sexual identity (Time, April 23, 1979). In nearly every study reviewed there was a caveat that the sample of the population studied was not a representative sample of lesbians "due to the covertness" of the population. Ferguson and Finkler (1978) found that the degree of overtness is in part a function of socio-economic status. High status lesbians tend to be more overt and less anxious about their sexual identity.

The degrees of overtness between the two members of the lesbian couple is not quantified in the literature. Martin and Lyon state that conflicts are sometimes found within the relationship when families of origin do not know or accept the lesbian family member as a member of a two female couple. Generalized discrimination towards homosexuality has caused many if not most to hide their sexual identity. There is a need to further study the influence of the degree of overtness as a factor in influencing the stability of the lesbian relationship.

Roles Within the Relationship

One common misconception of the lay population is that lesbian couples split their roles within the relationship to that of "husband and wife". It is thought that one member of the couple assumes the traditional masculine role behaviors of primary breadwinner and the other assumes the feminine role behaviors of homemaker. This is sometimes termed the "butch-fem" dichotomy. Saghir and Robins found that only 12% of their sample had at one time maintained the butch-fem roles for a period of time of three months or longer. Jay and Young, Martin and Lyon, and Tuller also support that this is an uncommon happening.

One study was found that supported the concept of role identification into split roles of masculine and feminine. Pendergrass found that members of the couple attempted to fulfill traditional sex roles (1975). Pendergrass's findings however were based on a sample of two lesbian couples. It is not uncommon to find lesbians who have some crossgender (masculine) role desires. Saghir and Robins found that 63% of their sample expressed such desires. Yet none of their sample sought or desired sex identity reassignment to biological male. Nor is it uncommon for

heterosexual women to express desires to assume the masculine role.

The review of the literature did not reveal if the roles assumed by the couples tended towards one partner being more dominant than the other partner. Tripp (1975) suggests that the roles may be highly interactional and sharing, with discontent between the members of the couple occurring due to too much (undefined) free communication. Cotton found that the tendency was for couples to be of equivalent socio-economic backgrounds, sharing friends and activities.

Commitment Ceremonies

There is little to be found in the literature that describes or quantifies commitment ceremonies between two lesbians. The popular literature notes that there is an on-going philosophical debate regarding ceremonies. Some feel that a ceremony is an unwanted imitation of a heterosexual practice. Some feel that a commitment ceremony adds stability to the lesbian relationship (Rev. Norris, 1979, personal communication).

The ceremony is described as taking one of two forms. A gay wedding can be either a formal or informal ceremony in which each partner exchanges a set of vows. A Holy Union is performed by a clergy person of the Metropolitan Community Church. Although there is no official church doctrine defining Holy Union functions and designs, it is a "sacred ceremony asking God to bless and direct the lives of the parties involved" (Norris, 1979). Jay and Young found that 6% of their lesbian sample had had one of the forms of a commitment ceremony.

Sexual Satisfaction

Most studies concur that the individual lesbian finds the quality of her sexual activities satisfactory to meet her needs and desires (Bell & Weinberg; Cotton; Hedbloom, 1973; Martin & Lyon; Rosen, 1974; Saghir & Robins). Masters and Johnson (1979) related that committed lesbian couples have higher degrees of sexual satisfaction than do uncommitted heterosexual and homosexual couples as well as married heterosexual couples. Yet all agreed that there are some individual lesbians that have sexual dysfunctions. Little specific reference was made to determine if sexual satisfaction is a necessary component of a lesbian relationship. Tripp (1975) stated that in a typical lesbian relationship sexual behavior often ceases within the relationship after three years. This, he attributes to "the relatively low libido of many women" (Tripp, 1975, p. 154).

Relationship Adjustment

There are a number of different scales that have been developed to measure some of the aspects of marital adjustment. These scales can be adapted and applied to non-married couples. Davis (1979) conducted an exploratory study that compared married and non-married heterosexual couples with two male and two female homosexual couples. The sample had five female homosexual couples. The data from these couples was not separated from that of the male homosexuals. Davis found that while homosexual dyads are successful in their relationships, they score significantly lower on some of the adjustment scales when compared to married heterosexual couples. This he attributes to lack of social sanction and acceptance for homosexual relationships. No other studies

that described relationship adjustment were found.

Summary and Conclusions

There is little agreement among the different authors of the above cited studies on many variables. Opinions and findings differ regarding definitions and prevalence of female homosexuality. One can find agreement that the lesbian has assumed her sexual identity behaviorally by the age of 29. A relationship with another woman is a common achievement and desire. Within that relationship one makes some contracts and assumes a form of role definition, even though the role definition is yet to be clearly defined.

As described throughout the above review, many questions are still unanswered. Perhaps some of the questions are too diffuse for one to find the conclusion. Yet many of these questions confront the clinician working with the dysfunctional lesbian relationship. It is the task undertaken in this study to attempt to find additional and updated data on some of the common aspects of the lesbian relationship. These findings may also support the findings of others.

CHAPTER II

Method

Subjects

During the summer months of 1979, 48 self defined homosexual or bisexual women volunteered as subjects for the study. Of these, 46 were interviewed with 45 meeting the specified criteria for inclusion in the study. To be eligible as a subject the volunteer must at the time of the interview:

1. Have been twenty years of age or older, no upper limit.
2. Scored at least two or greater for both sexual feelings and sexual behavior on the Kinsey scale.
3. Have been satisfied with the sex identity of female, i.e. denied any desire to have or undergo a sex reassignment surgical operation.
4. Must have had a lesbian relationship lasting at least six months which:
 - a. was currently an on-going relationship, or
 - b. was terminated within the 12 months previous to the study.
5. Have defined for themselves this relationship as a lesbian relationship.

Setting

Solicitation of subjects was initiated from the general population of the Portland (Oregon) Metropolitan area. About one third of the state's 2.4 million residents reside in this area that incorporates the 3 most populated counties (Oregon Blue Book, 1979-80). Almost one fifth of the subjects came from the Salem-Eugene area and four fifths from the Portland area. Each subject chose the location in which the interview

was conducted. Many selected their homes as sites for the interview. Some interviews were conducted in gay bars, restaurants, a church, and homes of friends. No specific location for the interview was found that was convenient for all respondents.

Procedure

All female homosexual and bisexual women included in the study were volunteers. No subject was offered, or paid for their participation. Each subject was interviewed individually, using the same set of questions. Although there was some variability, each interview took about one hour. It had been anticipated at the onset of the data gathering phase of this study that it would not always be possible to interview both partners in the relationship. About 85% of the sample consists of both partners in the same relationship and 15% only one member of the relationship. In every case, when only one of the two in a relationship would volunteer, the relationship used was one that had been terminated.

Anonymity of each subject was assured by two primary means. Each subject was discouraged from disclosing to the interviewer her last name. She was also asked not to name where she worked. Some subjects stated that they did not mind if the interviewer knew these facts. However, no lists of names, telephone numbers, addresses, or physical descriptions were kept. Subjects were asked to sign the informed consent form with an "X". (See appendix.)

The interview was conducted by posing questions from a prepared interview guide (see appendix A). Each subject was asked the same questions in the same order. Some subjects asked for an explanation of

some of the terms used in the questions, although not all subjects asked about the same terms that others had. In response the subject was encouraged to define the term for herself, usually resulting in no explanations needed. Many of the questions were open-ended. The length and depth of reply varied from subject to subject. Responses were recorded verbatim as much as was possible.

Subject Recruitment

Subject recruitment was initiated by seeking the advice and assistance of three women familiar with the homophil community of Portland. These three women individually or collectively recommended that the Portland Town Council and the Metropolitan Community Church be contacted. In addition numerous gay bars and social functions were suggested as places to solicit volunteers. All of these localities provided help in procuring volunteers.

The Portland Town Council is a socio-political meeting place for gay men and women and others interested in gay civil rights. P.T.C. ran a notice in their monthly newsletter advertising for subjects. The Portland Metropolitan Community Church is a church which does not restrict its attendance or membership to homosexual individuals. However, the majority of the congregation is gay. A meeting with the women's group of the church was arranged for the investigator. These women were asked to volunteer.

Most of the sample was obtained by two other means. Lesbian and bisexual friends and acquaintances of the investigator were asked to ask their gay friends unknown to the investigator to volunteer. This was done primarily in gay bars and other meeting places. Subjects were

asked to ask their friends to volunteer also. Some arranged for their friends to be interviewed on the same day or at the same locality which greatly facilitated the scheduling of interview times.

Interview Guide

The interview guide is comprised of about seventy-five questions and is divided into nine separate sections. Each section contains questions relating to one aspect of the subject's lifestyle or her relationship with her partner. The order of placement of each section was based in part upon the manner in which one might obtain a psychosocial history in a clinical setting. The selection and development of the individual questions came from a variety of sources. During the planning stage of the study design a number of women were informally asked for suggestions (of questions) they thought might be relevant for the study. Some of the questions evolved from the review of the literature as described in chapter one. Some questions came from the clinical work and social awareness of the investigator. No record was kept of the source of the individual questions. A selected group of lesbian women were then shown drafts of the interview guide, with their comments and suggestions taken into consideration.

The first section contains demographic questions so that the sample may be described in general terms. One frequently stated criticism of studies of homosexual populations is that the study sample is drawn from psychiatric caseloads of the clinicians doing the study. The sample for this study was drawn from the general homosexual population. Subjects were asked if they have a history of mental illness merely as another means of describing the population.

The second section is the Kinsey scale that was developed by the Kinsey Institute in 1948. This is a seven point scale in which the subject subjectively defines her sexual behavior and sexual feelings. The scale ranges from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual (Kinsey, 1953). Bell and Weinberg (1978) used this scale to describe the subject "as you (she) see yourself now", in reference to both sexual behaviors and sexual feelings. No attempt was made to test the validity or reliability of these scales for the subjects participating in this study.

Section three contains questions about the subject's gender identity. These questions were posed to the subject in the form of a five point masculine-feminine continuum scale. This scale was devised by the investigator, and has been pre-tested. Fifteen homosexual women were asked to subjectively define their feelings about their own sense of masculinity or femininity "as they see themselves most of the time". Each of the women reported that they were able to understand what was being asked of them, and could choose a quantifier that described their appearance and behavior. Each chose her own definitions for masculine and feminine. This scale has been included in the study since one of the major criticisms of studies on female homosexuality is that they did not control for gender identity. Some studies have had mostly masculine or "butch-type" samples (Bracy, 1976).

The fourth section pertains to the courtship process. The subject was asked how she defined a lesbian relationship. This was to verify that the subject and investigator understood what each other was saying. Then the subject was asked about the process of meeting her partner and

the length of time that elapsed between meeting and the establishment of the relationship. Starting with this section, many of the questions are more of an open-ended type, with the subject encouraged to more fully describe her relationship.

The fifth section asks the subject to define her role(s) within the relationship. This included living arrangements, household matters, recreation time and finances. The decision making process for major decisions was explored, primarily with open-ended questions. The roles and lifestyles were explored in this manner to discover if the two partners had a balance of power within the relationship. Then the lifestyle was examined to determine if the two partners lived either interactional (sharing) or parallel (separate or occasionally sharing) roles.

Section six deals with some of the overtness issues of the individual and the couple's sexual identity. The degrees of overtness vary among individual lesbians (Ferguson & Finkler, 1978). In this section the subject was asked if there was a difference in the degree of overtness between she and her partner. Each was asked if such a difference contributed to conflicts within the relationship. The subject was then asked about her defined couple identity as known by friends, family and significant others.

The seventh section has four questions pertaining to sexual satisfaction. Each subject was told to use her own definition of sexual behavior and sexual satisfaction. The questions were included in the study to determine if sexual satisfaction is important and or necessary to maintain the relationship. Sources vary on this aspect of a lesbian relationship. Tripp (1975) found that most lesbians terminate sexual

behavior within the relationship after two to three years, without determining if ceasing sexual activity lead to a termination of the relationship.

The eighth section has two questions. The first question asked if the subjects experienced problems caused by sex identity (female) rather than sexual identity (lesbian). The second question asked about problems within the relationship other than those noted earlier in the interview.

Section nine is the only section in which the subject was asked to compare her relationship in part with that of a heterosexual couple. These questions were asked to determine any specific strengths and advantages of being in a lesbian relationship.

CHAPTER III

Results

Part 1 - Description of Sample

The sample consisted of 38 lesbian and bisexual women who were currently in a relationship and 7 whose relationship had terminated within the past year. When a subject volunteered who was in an on-going relationship her lover also volunteered and was interviewed. This allowed for both similar and different opinions about the same relationship. Only one partner volunteered and was interviewed if the relationship had terminated. The total number of relationships was 26, i.e. 19 on-going and 7 terminated. Throughout this chapter the frequencies of responses will be discussed as 45 individual responses unless otherwise noted.

Sample

The average age given by the subject was 31.2 years with the range from 21 to 46 years. All subjects were Caucasian. Most members of the sample had never married. Twenty seven stated that they were single, 15 divorced, 2 were married (and seeking a divorce) and one was widowed. Many stated that they considered themselves to be married to a woman. The educational level was quite high. Only one subject reported that she had not finished high school, 38 had attended college or technical training beyond high school and 12 reported post graduate work or degrees. (See tables 1, 2 and 3).

Table 1
Distribution of Ages

Years	<u>n</u>	%
20-24	5	11.1
25-29	17	37.8
30-34	11	24.4
35-39	7	15.6
40-44	2	4.4
45-49	3	6.7
Total	<u>n</u> = 45	100.0%

\bar{x} = 31.2

R = 21-46

Table 2
Legal Marital Status

Status	<u>n</u> (45)	%
Single	27	60.0
Married	2	4.4
Widow	1	2.2
Divorced	15	33.4

Table 3
Educational Levels by Years

Year	<u>n</u>	%
11	1	2.2
12	6	13.3
13	8	17.8
14	10	22.2
15	2	4.4
16	6	13.3
17	6	13.3
18	2	4.4
19	4	8.9
	45	100.0%

$$\bar{x} = 14.8$$

All members of the sample lived with their partners during the relationship. The mean length of time for the relationship was 4.2 years with the range of 6 months to 13 years, and 3 years the median length of time. Four subjects report that another adult lived within the same household. One fourth of the sample had children, although the children did not always live with their mother. No subjects reported having two sets of children if both partners were mothers living in the same household.

The majority (87%) of the sample had not been hospitalized for mental illness. A few stated that they had received some out-patient

counseling although a frequency count was not kept. Six subjects stated that they had been hospitalized at least once. No effort was made to determine the events or problems that lead to hospitalization as this was not considered relevant to the study.

Sexual Identity

The sexual identity of each subject was determined by the use of the Kinsey scale. The subjects were asked to subjectively rate their sexual behaviors and sexual feelings on a seven point scale "as you see yourself now". (See appendix A and table 4 below). The majority (79%) rated themselves as a "6" or exclusively homosexual for sexual behavior. An additional 15% rated their sexual behavior as a "5" or largely homosexual.

The degree of the reported ratings for sexual feelings is "less homosexual" than the ratings of sexual behavior. About one half of the sample rated themselves as a "6". The most frequently occurring (49%) response is a rating of "5". Four subjects rated their sexual feelings as bisexual. Almost one third of the sample rated both their sexual behavior and sexual feelings as exclusively homosexual. One subject noted that she was bisexual only for the sake of social appearance.

Table 4
Rank Order of Kinsey Scale

Exclusively Homosexual	6
Largely Homosexual	5
Mainly Homosexual with Substantial Heterosexual	4
50-50 Homosexual/Heterosexual	3
Mainly Heterosexual with Substantial Homosexual	2
Largely Heterosexual	1
Exclusively Heterosexual	0

Table 5
Kinsey Scale Self Report Ratings

Sexual Behavior			Sexual Feelings		
Rating	<u>n</u>	%	Rating	<u>n</u>	%
6	36	80.0	6	19	42.2
5	7	15.6	5	22	48.9
4	1	2.2	4	3	6.7
3	0	0	3	1	2.2
2	1	2.2	2	0	0
<u>n</u> = 45		100.0%	<u>n</u> = 45		100.0%

Very few subjects displayed discomfort such as long pauses, flushing of face, increased motor activity, or change in speech patterns while discussing their sexual identity. Several, although records were

not kept, made comments similar to "I don't hate men". Some stated that over the course of their lifetime, rather than as they see themselves now, they would consider themselves to be bisexual. They further stated that they did not entirely rule out the possibility of being in a relationship with a male sometime in the future.

Each subject was also asked at what age did she first consider herself gay. This was explained to the subject as when "she was definitely sure of her sexual identity." Some stated that this age would be when they had their first homosexual sexual encounter, others when aware of their attraction towards women. The range of ages is 8 to 37 years. Two thirds of the sample knew of her sexual identity by the age 24 years. (See table A, appendix C.)

Gender Identity

The subjects were asked to subjectively define their own gender identities. Each subject was given a five point scale ranging from "quite masculine" to "quite feminine" with a neutral point in the center. The subject was asked to then rate her appearance and behaviors as she saw herself "most of the time". (See table 6 below.) About one half of the sample chose 50-50 masculine/feminine to describe both their appearance and behaviors. Almost another third rated themselves as feminine appearing and behaving. Only one subject rated herself as quite masculine in appearance. No subject chose quite masculine for her behaviors. Each subject defined for herself what variables she used (such as style of dress, occupation, posture, gestures, or activities) to define her gender. If the subject asked, she was told that behaviors are "things that you do" and appearance is "how you look". Each was

cautioned to define herself as she saw herself and not as she thought others saw her.

Table 6
Rank Order and Responses to Gender Identity Ratings

Description	<u>Appearance</u>		<u>Behaviors</u>	
	<u>n</u>	%	<u>n</u>	%
Quite Masculine	1	2.3	0	0
Somewhat Masculine	6	13.6	11	25.6
50-50 Masculine/Feminine	19	43.2	21	48.8
Somewhat Feminine	10	22.7	7	16.3
Quite Feminine	8	18.2	4	9.3
	<u>n</u> = 44	100.0%	<u>n</u> = 43	100.0%

No subject expressed a desire to be surgically reassigned to the sex identity of male. Many stated that they were totally satisfied with their sex identity or even preferred being a female. A few did state that for social or professional reasons it would have been more convenient for them if they had been born a male, yet they would not change now.

Summary of Part 1

The typical member of the sample in this study, using either the mean or the mode, is a 31.2 year old single white female who has been living with her lover for 4.2 years. She defines her sexual behaviors as exclusively homosexual and her sexual feelings as largely homosexual. This woman has completed almost 15 years of schooling and is employed.

She sees herself as both appearing and behaving 50-50 masculine/feminine. Neither she or her partner have children. She states that she is completely satisfied with her sex identity of female.

Part 2 - Courtship

The courtship process for this study is the time period in which one lesbian meets another, establishes initial bonds, makes initial contracts and makes some commitment to a future relationship. Courtship is not a common term used by the gay community, rather it is a term borrowed from heterosexual usage for use here. Most subjects referred to courtship as the time when they were first "going together" or the time before they began living together.

The most frequently occurring way that one lesbian meets her future partner is by introduction of one to the other by a friend. The friend need not be a lesbian herself although she usually is. Gay women in this area also meet others at work, playing in amateur team sports, or at school. Very few meet prospective partners through family members or in gay bars and taverns. Some met by chance such as while walking in a park or waiting for a bus. None of the members of the sample for this study met her partner through the Metropolitan Community Church or at a function of the Portland Town Council. (This is not to say that they were not later active in these two organizations.) A few had been a member of an open or closed lesbian social network. (See table 7.)

Table 7
Sources Where Subject Met Her Partner
n = 45

Source	<u>n</u>	%
Friend	11	24.4
Work	10	22.2
Team Sports	7	15.6
School	5	11.1
Mental Health Group	4	8.9
Family	2	4.4
Gay Bar	1	2.2
Chance Meeting	5	11.1

Initial Attraction

The traits that a partner possessed that the subject reported as finding attractive when meeting the other were categorized as being either a physical or non-physical trait of that person. The non-physical properties included such things as shyness, friendliness, being open, displaying interest in other people and the like. The physical traits were described by the subjects as physical appearance or behaviors such as a smile, use of hands when talking or posture. A few subjects mentioned articles of clothing or other possessions as being attractive. Listed as first mentioned and second mentioned (if two or more were given) traits, non-physical properties were found to be more frequently stated for both first and second responses. (See table 8 below). Less than one fourth of the sample stated that they were attracted to their

partners by a physical characteristic. A few subjects noted that they were not attracted to their partner at all initially, but rather later when they got to know her as a person. (See table 8.)

Table 8
Attributes of Partner Initially Found Attractive By Subject

Type	<u>First Response</u>		<u>Second Response</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Physical Trait	8	17.8	7	15.6
Non-physical Trait	29	64.4	33	73.3
Other	8	17.8	5	11.1
	<u>n</u> = 45	100.0%	<u>n</u> = 45	100.0%

Process and Time

Most of the interviewees (87%) stated that they had had a period of courtship before they established or self-defined themselves as a couple in a relationship. During this time period about half of these subjects described a time of dating, going to movies, concerts, out to dinner and other social activities. The other half of these subjects described this as a highly emotional period of time. They reported that they were concerned with getting to know each other, testing values, discussing risks of gay identity - not noting any particular social activity. The minority of subjects that had no courtship related that they either immediately, or within a few days, moved in together or commenced a sexual relationship.

For those having a courtship, the length of time that lapsed from the initial meeting until the establishment of a relationship varied widely. Often when both members of a couple were interviewed they gave different figures for the length of time. The range was a few weeks to 4 years, the median time is about 4 months.

Legally married heterosexual couples date their relationship from the time of a marriage ceremony. Since lesbian relationships are not licensed there is not a universal means of defining the onset of the relationship. The onset or length of time for a relationship, distinct from the courtship time period, was defined by the investigator for the subjects as "when you knew that you were in a relationship". Although the members of the sample were not asked how they defined the onset of the relationship, some stated that this was when they began living together or when they became sexually active with their partner on a regular or frequent basis. Usually though, the distinction of onset was made by the formation of a single household.

Table 9
Length of Time of Courtship

Time	<u>n</u>	%
1 month or less	6	15.8
2 months	7	18.4
3 months	2	5.3
4 months	7	18.4
5-11 months	10	26.3
12 months or more	6	15.8
	<u>n</u> = 38	100.0%

Commitment Ceremonies

Two different forms of a ceremony were described by the sample as a gay wedding. The clergy of the Metropolitan Community Church performs a ceremony termed a Holy Union. The other type of ceremony is the exchanging of commitment vows by just the two members of a couple or in the presence of some friends. Eight subjects (representing 5 couples) had had private commitment ceremonies and 5 subjects (representing 3 couples) had had Holy Unions. Within one couple, one partner stated that they had had a gay wedding and the other partner stated that they had not. Three fourths of the subjects stated that they had not had either form of the ceremonies. (See table 10.)

Gay weddings were not desired by all of the sample. Two thirds of those stating they had not had a gay wedding related that they do not wish to have one. The reasons given for not wanting a gay wedding

included "not legal", it would not be recognized by the family, or it would not make a difference as to how each already felt about the other. The other third of those not having a gay wedding stated that they had considered this option but had not yet taken the time to act on this.

Table 10
Commitment Ceremonies Received and Desired

Type	<u>n</u>	%
Holy Union	5	11.1
Gay Wedding	8 ^a	17.8
Have Considered	12 ^a	26.7
No Desire	21	46.7
	<u>n</u> = 45	100.0%

^a 1 subject desires both forms

Fidelity Agreements

Fidelity is defined as the exclusion of sexual behavior outside of the current relationship. Two thirds of the sample reported that they have fidelity agreements and one third reported having no such agreement. Those with fidelity agreements have closed relationships, those not restricting each other to exclusivity have open relationships. Some of the subjects now in a closed relationship stated that the relationship had not always been closed. Some of the subjects reporting open relationships stated that either she, her partner, or both had not acted upon their open agreement.

The fidelity agreement or open agreement may be either explicit or implicit. This was explained to the sample as being either stated or merely understood respectively. The closed relationships were nearly equally split between being explicit and implicit agreements. Two thirds of the open relationships had explicit open agreements. This was one area in which the two partners of a couple did not always agree. Four couples gave conflicting responses about their fidelity agreements. One partner would state that the relationship was open, the other stating it was closed. One couple had a fidelity agreement in that their relationship was closed in the city they lived in, and open "out of town." (See table 11 below.)

Table 11
Explicit/Implicit Fidelity Agreements

	Fidelity Agreement <u>n</u>	Implicit <u>n</u>	Explicit <u>n</u>
Yes (closed)	31	14	17
No (open)	13	4	9
Do not know	1		

n = 45

Summary of Part 2

Members of lesbian couples met their partners in a variety of settings. They tended to meet their partners through informal rather than formal channels of the gay community. Usually the initial attraction

towards another woman was based upon a non-physical trait of that woman. Most then had a courtship time in which each gets to know her partner and some of her partner's values. This process lasted an average time of about 4 months.

The couples usually did not have a form of commitment ceremony although about half considered this to be desirable. Most did have a fidelity agreement making their relationship sexually exclusive to others. The most frequently occurring contract however was the arrangement of forming a single household.

Part 3 - Relationship Background Data

Not all lesbians define a relationship in the same way. Each subject was asked how she would define this to someone who did not know what a lesbian relationship is. Thirteen different words or phrases were used by at least four or more subjects. The five most frequently mentioned phrases or words used to define a lesbian relationship were: "A lesbian relationship is a relationship between two women who love each other on a physical (sexual) and emotional levels and are committed to maintaining that relationship". The underscoring denotes the five words and phrases. The most frequently given short definition was that a lesbian relationship is "two women who love each other". One fourth of the subjects either stated exclusively "just like any other" or included this in their definition. Seven responded that the relationship need not include sexual behavior between the two partners to constitute a lesbian relationship. Only one subject used all five words and phrases of the composite definition in her response. (See table B in appendix C.)

Most of the subjects (96%) felt that there was a difference between a relationship and an affair. A lesbian affair was described as a short term period in which there is little depth of feelings and commitment, and is usually for the gratification of sexual needs. The underscored terms were expressed by nearly one half of the sample. (See table C in appendix C.)

Relationships - Number

For nearly one third of the sample the relationship discussed in the interview was her first. Almost half of the subjects reported this to be either their first or second relationship. Less than one fourth

had had five or more relationships. The number of relationships that the individual reported as having varied in that not all subjects define a lesbian relationship in the same way. Some of those stating that they had had five or more relationships included non-sexual relationships, friendships as relationships, and having two relationships at the same time. Each subject used her own definition of relationships when reporting the number in her lifetime. Thus some previous relationships could have lasted less than 6 months. (See table 12.)

Table 12
Number of Lesbian Relationships^a in a Lifetime

Number ^b	<u>n</u>	%
1	13	28.9
2	10	22.2
3	5	11.1
4	5	11.1
5	4	8.9
6 or more	7	15.6

^a Relationship as defined by the subject could be less than 6 months time together.

^b includes this one

Age of Partner

The mean age of the interviewee's partner is slightly less than the mean age of the subject - 30.6 years and 31.2 years respectively. When

asked of her partner's age some subjects were not sure of the exact age. The difference between the two partner's ages range from 0 to 15 years. One third of the subjects were within two years of her partner's age. Another third were 3 or 4 years younger or older and the last third had more than five years age difference. One subject whose relationship had terminated stated that she felt that the age difference had been a significant factor in their parting. (See table 13.)

Table 13

Difference Between Subject and Her Partner's Age $\underline{n} = 45$

Years	\underline{n}	%
0	4	8.9
1	8	17.7
2	6	13.3
3	7	15.5
4	10	22.2
5	0	0
6	3	6.7
7	2	4.4
8	2	4.4
9	2	4.4
10 or more	1	2.2

Summary of Part 3

A lesbian relationship was defined by the sample as a relationship between two women who love each other on physical and emotional levels

and are committed to maintaining that relationship. This differs from the sample's definition of an affair which has less depth and is largely a sexual attraction between two women. This varies from the author's definition of a relationship. Some subjects define a relationship without considering a minimum length of time. One half of the subjects had had only one or two lesbian relationships in her lifetime. Usually the two members of the couple were within three years of age of each other.

Part 4 - Selected Relationship Elements

Living Arrangements

All subjects lived in the same living quarters with her partner. In the majority (85%) of the households both partners were employed. When one or both member(s) of the couple were not employed, they were either in school or disabled. In all of the relationships both partners had some form of income, although the incomes may not have been equal.

The type of residence determined the nature of household tasks and the financial burden upon the individual. Usually apartment dwellers did not perform household repairs or maintain landscapes. House ownership is more costly. The majority (85%) of the subjects lived in a house, usually in one which they were buying.

Management of Finances

The ownership of income received by the individual member of a couple may be termed either "my money" or "our money". Two thirds of the sample reported that all funds were pooled, even if there was a disparity in incomes. The other third related that they either equally shared expenses or paid a set sum into a household fund. Of those who did not pool their incomes, many stated that they divided expenses by ability to pay. A few subjects who had relatively equal incomes or ability to pay kept accurate records to assure equal burden of financial management. (See table 14).

Table 14
Ownership of Income

Contribution ^a	<u>n</u>
Pooled	29
Set Sum	6
Equally Shared	9
By Ability	9
<u>n</u> = 45	

^a Some subjects gave more than one response.

Table 15
Checking and Savings Accounts, Budgets, Bill Paying

	Checking	Savings	Budgets	Bill Paying
Joint	17	26	19	24
Individual	27	12	4	21
None	1	7	21	0
	<u>n</u> = 45	45	45	45

Most (60%) of the subjects maintained separate checking accounts and joint savings accounts. Those who had separate checking accounts stated that it was too complicated to track her partner's expenditures. They found it easier then to use the account that had the appropriate balance at the time of need. Many stated that the joint savings account

was used as a fund for specific expenditures. (See table 15 above.)

When a household budget was used both partners usually worked on its design. One half of the sample did not use a budget system. Ten percent of the sample maintained a budget with just one of the partners preparing and maintaining it.

While both partners usually assumed the responsibility for paying bills, they did not always do this together. One half of the subjects reported that either she or her partner would alone figure out payments, write the checks and then inform the partner how much money was left in the account(s). The other half of the sample stated that they both worked together at the task of paying bills. (See table 15 above.)

Jointly owned property reportedly included houses, businesses, vehicles, stocks and bonds and household contents. Seventy percent of the subjects reported that they jointly owned at least one such piece of property. Sometimes the quantity of jointly owned property was quite large, with houses and vehicles being noted most often. One couple stated that they had even arranged for each other to assume power-of-attorney over one another to handle business transactions and possible medical emergencies. (See table 16.)

Table 16
Shared Property Ownership

Type	<u>n</u> = 45	%
None	13	28.9
At Least One Item	32	71.1

House	22	48.9
Vehicle(s)	17	37.8
Everything together	11	28.8
Other Items	3	6.7

Decision Making Process

The decision making process within a relationship can take many forms. Both partners may discuss the issue of concern. One may simply state the issue and her decision, expecting her partner to follow. One partner may be more inclined to come up with ideas and plans while the other may be more inclined to make the final decision. The process may be democratic, autocratic or even avoided. On occasion, one partner may have a specific need to fulfill. (See table 17.)

The subjects were asked how they made major decisions, such as large money expenditures or vacations. More than half of the subjects reported that they "talk it over together". Almost one half described the decision making process as an equally shared process. About one fifth stated that they tried to fulfill individual needs first. A few stated that their needs and interests were quite similar thus simplifying the process.

About one half of the subjects reported that one partner was more inclined to think of ideas or plans which the couple must then decide upon. Some stated that she or her partner was "the dreamer" and the other was more practical. Slightly less frequently the subjects stated that they both came up with ideas, though at different times.

The final decision was usually (60%) made by both partners most of the time. Many subjects commented that they must both agree before a decision was acted upon. A few reported taking turns at making final decisions. When both partners were interviewed they did not always agree as to who made the final decision. Twenty percent of the sample stated that they took turns making a decision and twenty percent related that one person made the decisions.

Seven subjects discussed power as a part of the decision making process. Four stated that she "held the power" of decision making, with one stating that her partner had assumed the power. This power was given to one partner thereby relieving the other partner from having to make a decision. Yet only one subject stated that an unequal balance of power had created a conflict within the relationship.

Table 17

Major Decisions - Process, Ideas, Final Decisions and Power

Process ^a	<u>n</u> = 45
Talk about it	38
Fill specific need	10
Have similar interests	1
Shared process	18

^a More than one response possible

Ideas	<u>n</u> = 29
Simultaneous	2
Both	13
Partner	7
Subject	9

Final Decision	<u>n</u> = 40
Both	24
Take turns equally	4
Partner	4
Subject	8

Table 17 (continued)

Power	<u>n</u> = 7
Subject	4
Partner	1
Subject avoids decisions	1
Partner avoids decisions	1

Roles

All subjects related that they did not divide household management tasks into traditional masculine-feminine roles. The two factors listed as most likely to determine who performed which tasks were time and interest. Other factors mentioned were ability (skill or strength) and mood at the time. Some stated that they equally divided up tasks that both disliked doing. (See tables 18 and 19.)

The subjects were asked if they usually worked together on such tasks or did they usually work independently. Again this was determined for some by time available. Of those answering this question, about half stated that they worked together and the other half preferred to work alone.

Table 18
Factors Affecting Who Performs Household Tasks

Factor ^a	<u>n</u> = 45
Time	18
Interest	22
Ability	8
Mood	5

^aMore than one response possible.

Table 19
Responses Given for Quantity of Tasks Performed Together

Response	<u>n</u> = 43
Split dislikes	9
Most together	4
Some together	10
Most separate	9
Some separate	9

Subjects were asked to describe the management of six selected household tasks: cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, car maintenance, household repairs and yard work. It was found that while cooking was more likely to be done by one specific partner, both partners, either alone or together, worked at cleaning, grocery shopping and yard work. Car maintenance and household repairs were found to be more specialized tasks sometimes requiring outside

assistance, sometimes done by the partners together and sometimes done alone. A few subjects noted that one partner would rather do the outside work while the other preferred indoor tasks. (See table 20.)

Recreation

The majority of the subjects reportedly spent their spare time together, shared hobbies and other interests and spent time with their friends together. Most stated that they preferred doing things with their partners rather than alone. Many commented that outside activities (socio-political) took up so much of their free time that they could not be with their partners as much as they would like. Some subjects also noted that they took or allowed for time for either she or her partner to have some personal space. (See table 21.)

Yet this close interaction of time did not exclude either partner from having friends that were exclusively her own. About two thirds of the subjects reported having at least one friend that was just her friend. Only one subject stated that most of her friends were exclusively hers.

Table 21
Recreation Time

	<u>Spare Time</u>		<u>See Friends</u>	
	<u>n = 45</u>	%	<u>n = 45</u>	%
Alone	1	2.2	2	4.4
Together	37	82.2	40	88.9
Both	7	15.6	3	6.7

Table 20
Selected Household Tasks

Task	Subject		Partner		Both		Together		Hired Out		Neither	
	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>n</u>
Cooking	11		11		7		3		1		0	
Cleaning	7		5		9		8		2		0	
Grocery Shopping	6		4		3		12		0		0	
Car Maintenance	3		4		4		6		8		1	
Yard Work	2		5		3		12		0		6	
Household Repairs	2		6		3		8		0		5	

Two members of the same couple do not always agree as to who does what tasks.

Table 22
Friendships Closed to Partner

Exclusive Friends	<u>n</u>	%
Yes	28	62.2
No	17	37.8

If no:	few	19
	some	8
	most	1
	all	0

Sexual Satisfaction

For this study the definition of what constitutes sexual behavior and sexual expression within the relationship was individually defined by the subject. No subject was asked, and no subject described any specific sexual practices. In the opinion of 93% of the subjects, sexual behavior is an important component of a lesbian relationship. Twenty percent of the subjects however, stated that a two female relationship can be a lesbian relation even if the couple is asexual. Individually, 86% of the subjects stated that sexual behavior had some importance.

Only one subject reported that sexual behaviors were the most important aspect of her relationship. Should either partner decide to cease all sexual behaviors, 70% of the subjects stated that this would not lead to the termination of her relationship. Although frequency of sexual activity was not discussed, 89% felt that the quality of sexual

activity within the relationship was satisfactory.

While most did state that the sexual activity within the relationship was satisfactory, 18% of the subjects reported some sexual dissatisfaction. The subjects were not asked and seldom described the nature of sexual dissatisfaction. The relative importance of sexual behaviors and dissatisfactions was viewed as not the most important component or problem of the relationship. (See table 23.)

Summary of Part 4

The members of the sample all lived with their partner, usually in a single family dwelling. Although a few did not work, all had a form of income and were thus financially independent of their partner. Incomes were usually pooled into a common household fund. Most subjects also usually held joint ownership of at least one piece of "property". There was no evidence of a trend towards financial dominance by one of the partners.

The process of decision making was largely a shared process. Most subjects talked over major decisions. If one was more inclined to come up with ideas and projects to decide upon, the other tended to be a balancing realist. The balance of power in the decision making process was most often equal between both partners.

The assignment of household tasks was most often decided by interest and time available. There did not appear to be a clear pattern towards working at tasks together versus working at tasks separately. Again this was determined by interest and time schedules of the individuals.

Free time was most often spent with one's partner. The sample was inclined to have hobbies and friends in common and to spend time together

Table 23
Opinions on the Importance and Quality of Sexual Activity
Within the Relationship

Do you feel that sex is important in any lesbian relationship?

Yes:	41	93.1%	<u>n</u> = 44
No:	3	6.9%	

Is sex important for you?

Yes:	39	86.7%	<u>n</u> = 45
No:	6	13.3%	

If all sex in this relationship were to cease, would this lead to the termination of your relationship?

Yes:	13	29.5%	<u>n</u> = 44
No:	31	70.5%	

Do you find the quality of sexual activity within this relationship to be satisfactory?

Yes:	39	88.6%	<u>n</u> = 44
No:	5	11.4%	

with these.

Most of the sample reported that sexual activity was important for the individual and the quality of sexual activity within the relationship was satisfactory. Most felt that if sexual activity in the relationship were to cease, this alone would not lead to the termination of their relationship.

Part 5 - Couple Identity

Couple identity for lesbians is usually established by informal channels of communication within the gay community or social networks. Coupled lesbians are described by the community as going together or as living together. This community may be expanded to include parents, siblings and children. Into the "knowing" community one may add heterosexual friends, employers, physicians and significant others. This is the third stage of the coming out (of the closet) process that is preceded by self identity and taking a lover (Silverstein, 1977).

The couple identity does not assume the same legal and social status as does the heterosexual marriage. One often hears the couple introduced by their first names with the statement that they have been together for a specific period of time. Subjects often stated that they liked having others think of them, and to be treated on specific social occasions as a couple. This was not universal for all the subjects, however. Some stated that they liked their single legal and social (heterosexual society) status.

The degree of couple identity assumed by each subject varied. More than 90% stated that their friends thought of and treated the subject as a member of a lesbian couple. Usually "most" or "all" was the quantifier that the subject chose to describe the number of friends who observed couple identity for the subject. One half of the subjects stated that most of their friends were also homosexual.

Families of the subject were less likely to know that their offspring was a member of a lesbian couple. Slightly more than half of the sample had told their siblings, slightly less than half had told their

parents. Some had shared their sexual identity just with parents or just with siblings. A few subjects stated that one of their siblings was also gay. (See table 24.)

Couple identity can also assume the form of two people who share expenses, perhaps companionship, and little else. This is not an unusual practice for two single women in this society. Some subjects stated that they have both of these types of couple identity, depending on who they chose to inform of their sexual identity. The distinction was made by calling themselves lovers (or having a lesbian relationship), or when the non-sexual identity was applied, roommates.

One difficulty that lesbian couples face is being allowed, by their families, to be together on holidays. Most of the sample stated that they only had difficulty being together at Christmas time. Thanksgiving, birthdays, and other holidays were usually spent alone together or with friends together. Six subjects stated that either she, her partner or both were not welcome together at their parent(s) home. Ten stated that she went home to her own family without her partner at Christmas time. Twenty spent Christmas together and visited each other's families as roommates. Fourteen reported that they had equal couple identity status as their married siblings and were treated the same. (See table 25.)

Table 24

Known Lesbian Identity Status $n = 45$

	Friends	Parents	Siblings	Subject's		Family Physician
				Children	Employer	
None	3	21	16	3	26	26
Few	0					
Some	5					
Most	20					
All	17					
One or More		22	27	8	16	10
Not Applicable		2	2	34	3	9

Table 25
Christmas Time Together

Identity ^a	<u>n</u> = 45
Coupled lesbian	14
Separate	10
Not accepted together	6
Roommates	20

^a More than one identity possible.

Another problem faced by the couples is deciding who to tell of their sexual identity and couple identity. It is unknown how many couples tell no one. Naturally they do not volunteer for any studies. A few couples chose to be totally open to everyone about their identities. Most members of the sample related that they were selective in disclosing their identities.

One fourth of the subjects stated that different degrees of overt-ness created some interrelationship conflicts, usually early in the relationship. The other three fourths of the sample stated that they had had no major conflicts over overt-ness. They stated that they had merely discussed the issue and easily reached a working compromise.

Most employers had not been told that their employee was a member of a lesbian couple. This can contribute to a number of problems. Some subjects stated that they might lose their job if their employer knew. Some stated that they could not talk of their social lives at work like

others did. Some stated that their lover is excluded from work related social activities. Lovers do not receive the same employment benefits that heterosexual spouses get. One third of the subjects related her employer did know of her status as a member of a lesbian couple. (See table 24.)

Personal physicians were also not usually told of the gay identity of a couple. One third of the subjects stated that they had told their doctor. The other two thirds either did not have a private doctor or did not think that if their doctor knew it would make a difference in their health care. Some subjects noted that medical decisions including medical emergencies would be made easier if one's partner could be included in the consultation. (See table 24.)

Summary of Part 5

Couple identity was described as being either a combination of or one form of known identity. The couple may be known as either roommates or as lovers. Most couples report using both couple identities. Most of the sample reported not having lover couple identity with their family, friends, employer, and physician. One difficulty that arose from this lack of disclosure and/or acceptance was not being able to spend some holidays together as a couple.

Part 6 - Selected Elements of Relationship Stability

Discrimination Against Women

A problem unique to any two women household is that women are thought to be discriminated against by a male dominant society. Subjects were given discrimination examples such as problems getting a loan or having a car repaired and asked if, as members of households of two women, they had had any such difficulties. One half of the subjects stated that they were not aware of any such discrimination practices directed at them. A few of these subjects stated instead that they felt that they had been discriminated against not as women but rather as homosexuals. The other half of the subjects related that they had noticed a variety of such problems. These problems were described as poor car repairs, higher insurance rates, difficulty obtaining credit, less desirable seating in restaurants and poor service from repair/construction companies. Many stated that they had devised means of circumventing these problems by being more assertive or by borrowing the service of male friends or family members. No one stated that these types of problems placed any stress on the relationship bonds. (See table 26.)

Table 26

Forms of Discrimination (as Women)

Form	<u>n</u> = 22
Credit	8
Car Insurance	1
Restaurant Seating	2
Car Repairs	4
Others	7

Problems Within the Relationship

The majority of the subjects stated that some problems do exist within the relationship. No subject reported a complete absence of problems, although some of the problems she described as being minor problems. Less than 10% found only minor problems in the relationship. Another 10% stated that they had solved all of their major problems. Eighty percent of the subjects reported at least one major conflict.

The problems and conflicts the subjects described have been categorized into fourteen types. Some of the subjects named more than one problem. The most frequently named problem was difficulty in communication-feeling expression. The second most common problem was lack of time to spend with her partner. Sexual problems and lack of freedom tied for third place problems. Lack of freedom was described as decreased independence in decision making or time expenditure. A few subjects noted that they had problems with one or more of the following: money, trust, jealousy, gay identity, family, partner's children or immaturity of partner creating conflicts within the relationship. (See table 27.)

Sometimes interpersonal conflicts arose when members of a couple had different religious or political beliefs. No subject listed either as causing problems. Very few noted differences in socio-economic backgrounds as source of problems. A few did note that differences in educational levels and lifetime goals were a source of communication problems.

Most of the subjects stated that they felt they could resolve any of the problems that they faced. Nearly all of the subjects stated that their problems were not a constant source of difficulty, but rather more

a source of occasional irritation.

Table 27
Problems Within the Relationship

Problem	<u>n</u> = 45
Communication	15
Lack of Time	10
Lack of Freedom	8
Sexual Dissatisfactions	8
Outside Affairs (Sexual)	1
Jealousy	4
Trust	3
Gay Identity	4
Family Interference	6
Children	3
Money	5
Immaturity	3
Religion	0
Other	8

No Major Problems	3
Problems Worked Out	3
No Problems Within	0

Advantages of Lesbian Coupling

There are some basic differences between a two female and a male-female couple. Men and women each have traditional roles in Western society, even though they may choose to deviate from these roles. For example, the male is the primary breadwinner, performs tasks that require greater strength and initiates sexual behavior. The female is identified by her husband's name, maintains the home and assumes responsibility for child raising. This is termed role expectations.

Some other kinds of behaviors have been identified as gender differences. This would include such things as the male is expected to be interested in "worldly" matters, curtail feeling expression and be more aggressive in his business dealings. The female is expected to display more of an interest in the home, be less aggressive and more free to express her feelings. These differences and conflicts on interest may be attributed to a somewhat different language spoken by males and females termed gender barrier.

The subjects were asked if they saw any advantages in being two women together versus a male-female couple. Many of the subjects attributed not having different role expectations and not have a gender barrier as advantages to being a member of a lesbian couple. They also cited sexual behavior and a near equal power balance as highly desirable. The subjects who had been in a heterosexual marriage tended to name more advantages than those who had never had that experience. Not having to cross the gender barrier was noted the most frequently noted advantages, followed by not having to live in traditional roles. (See table 28.)

A few subjects (11%) stated that they did not find any advantages or differences between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Of

these five subjects, two had been married before their current relationship.

Table 28
Advantages of Having Female Partners

Advantage ^a	<u>n</u> = 45
No Roles	22
No Gender Barrier	29
Sexual Expression	6
Power Balance	7
Other	3

No Advantage	1
No Difference Between Relationships	4
Don't Know of Any	1

^a More than one response possible (above broken line)

Strengths Within the Relationship

Each subject was asked to name what she found to be the greatest strength within the relationship. The most frequently given response was "our love" or simply "love". Trust or a form of trust was noted second most often. Other responses given in order of high to low frequency stated included: communication, support, understanding, caring, sharing and fulfilling one another's needs. Mentioned only once each were sex, mutual friendship and intelligence. (See table 29.)

Table 29
Strength Received From Relationship

Term Used	<u>n</u> = 45
Love	16
Support	6
Communication	6
Trust	8
Understanding	6
Caring	4
Fulfills needs	3
Sharing	3
Sex	1
Intellect	1
Friendship	1
Others	3

It is most difficult if not impossible to measure love and trust. Without assuming that the question reflected degrees of trust or love, each subject was asked if she intended for this relationship to last a lifetime. Ninety percent of the subjects replied yes, some were most emphatic in their reply. Some stated that they worked daily to maintain their relationship with their partner to that end. A few noted that they did not wish to feel that they had to stay in a relationship at all costs. Of those stating that they did not intend for the relationship to last a lifetime, one half (50% of the sample) stated a definite no,

and the other half stated that they did not know.

One way to test the strength of commitment to the relationship was to ask each subject if she would relocate if her partner had a need to move elsewhere. Eighty percent replied that both she and her partner would relocate for each other if the move was within the state. Only a portion of the sample related that they felt they could offer an opinion to the question of relocating outside of this state. Of those replying, about three fourths thought that both she and her partner would move to another state should the need arise. (See table 30.)

Table 30
Relocation to Fulfill Partner's Needs

Decision	Within Oregon	Outside of Oregon
Subject willing	37	28
Subject unwilling	3	8
Subject unsure	5	2
Partner willing	37	30
Partner unwilling	3	5
Partner unsure	5	3

Summary of Part 6

Two women couples are as likely as not to experience discrimination against women. Those that do are more likely to find problems in obtaining credit and adequate car repairs. Many of the members of the sample had found a variety of ways to circumvent or handle this problem.

No lesbian relationship is completely free of interrelationship problems. Most of the sample reported at least one major problem, often citing communication as the source of this. Despite problems, most of the subjects felt that their relationships have definite advantages over male-female couples. The most frequently noted advantage was not having to deal with a cross-gender barrier. The strengths obtained most from the relationships were described as love and trust for each other. This was apparently a strong enough base for the relationship that most subjects stated that they expected this relationship to last a lifetime.

A test of stability of the relationship was presented in the form of asking subjects if they would relocate for each other. More than 75% thought that they would move either in or out of state, to fulfill one another's needs.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

A lesbian relationship is more than a sexual liaison between two women. The results indicate that the formation and maintenance of the relationship is a highly complex process, with no two being exactly alike. The degree of diversity among the twenty six relationships studied reflect the individual differences of the forty five women interviewed.

The purpose for doing this study was to explore and describe some of the elements of a thriving relationship. Using the norms found, the mental health professional could then compare these with assessments made of dysfunctional lesbian relationships. The data gathered does not answer all questions about a thriving lesbian relationship, yet some trends were found.

The data indicate that there is a social path of meeting, getting acquainted, setting up contracts, establishing a household and arranging day to day living. Within each relationship there are some problems yet also some definite advantages and strengths which are thought to outweigh them. Since the number of variabilities of each of these facets is quite high, the scope of this chapter will give only some selected points of the social path.

Courtship

It was found that the most frequently noted source for subjects to meet their partners was through the informal rather than formal channels of the gay community. This finding concurs with those of other researchers (Jay & Young, 1979; Martin & Lyon, 1972; Saghir & Robins, 1973;

Tuller, 1978) although they did not always specifically use the terms of formal or informal channels. This informal gay community does provide social approval and some support for women seeking other women as partners.

The qualities that the subject would most likely first find attractive in her partner are non-physical traits. This supports Laner's (1977) findings that most people first seek non-physical attributes in a partner.

The courtship time is filled with both social activities and getting acquainted with the other's needs and views. Seldom does one partner solely pursue the other since this is a mutual process. They take turns arranging time together. The average length of time for the courtship is about four months.

It is difficult to define the end of the courtship and the beginning of the relationship. There is no universal definition in the lesbian community. Since two woman "marriages" are not licensed there is no record keeping or dating system. Most relationships begin when the couple forms a single household. It was found that both partners in a relationship do not always agree on the date their relationship began.

Commitment ceremonies are not an important element for most couples in establishing a thriving relationship. Three fourths of the sample had not had either form of a "gay wedding". A higher proportion of the sample in this study (28%) had had a commitment ceremony than the sample used by Jay and Young (6%). Jay and Young did use a more general population not specifying that the subject be a member of a lesbian relationship, and their sample was five times larger.

Relationships

The average length of time the subjects were reported to have been in their relationships was 4.2 years. Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that of their subjects reporting being involved "in a current affair" the median time was between one to three years. Jay and Young reported a mean of 27 months. Both of these studies had comparable populations with the average age of 32 and 29.7 years respectively. It is likely that the mean length of the relationship in this study was higher for the subjects since they come from a more select population.

The lesbian relationship was defined by the group as "two women who love each other on both physical and emotional levels and are committed to maintaining that relationship". One finds in the literature that a lesbian relationship is equated to being a "homosexual marriage" comparable to a heterosexual marriage (Cotton; Hedbloom, 1973; Saghir & Robins; Tuller). There is little difference between the study group's definition and the one found in the literature. A lesbian relationship should not be termed an affair, however. The consensus of the subjects define the two quite differently.

While not all lesbian couples live together (Bell & Weinberg, Jay & Young; Saghir & Robins) during their relationships, all couples described in this study did live together. Living together necessitates making financial arrangements, management of household tasks, establishing personal space, and the arranging of social activities with others. The decisions about these arrangements were usually made together by the subjects in this study. There was little evidence of one partner of the couple being more dominate or powerful within the relationship. The data support that

there is an interactional or sharing of roles as was found by Tripp (1976).

Within the relationship lesbians experience many of the same problems found in all relationships. These included the problems of lack of spare time, communication difficulties, sexual dissatisfactions, child raising problems and family interference. This substantiates the findings of Martin and Lyon and of Jay and Young.

The most frequently mentioned problem noted by almost all subjects was the lack of social sanction or acceptance of the lesbian relationship. This was felt in varying degrees by each subject. The problem of lack of social acceptance is noted by all other studies and is probably the most universal problem. The data gathered do not establish or measure how much pressure this places on individuals. It is still unknown if lack of social acceptance "causes" many of the relationships to be terminated.

There are some economic advantages for persons who are married. These include joint tax returns, employment benefits, and insurance rates among others. It was observed that the sample did not give as many responses regarding this lack of advantage as one might expect. Perhaps the individuals may well have identified more with their single (heterosexual) status, thus giving less thought to these matters.

Despite lack of social sanction and despite loss of some economic benefits most of the subjects reported personal advantages of being in a lesbian relationship versus being in a heterosexual relationship. The most often mentioned advantages came under the categories of (1) not having to deal with the gender differences of their lovers and (2) not

having to play the traditional female social role. Some subjects reported that they found higher degrees of sexual satisfaction with their (female) partner. This is supported by the findings of Masters and Johnson (1979) who found sexual behavior between committed same sex partners superior to that of committed heterosexual partners. This was measured by Masters and Johnson using both physiological and self-report parameters. In addition the couples noted satisfaction in the equality of power within the relationship.

From the data collected, the goals of the relationship could be assumed to include friendship, companionship, personal safety, and someone to share common interests. No subject reported forming a relationship to raise a family. In a minority of the relationships there were a few children who were included as part of the family. The dynamics of the relationship in which a child(ren) was present were not explored in this study.

The social path taken by each subject has enough in common with the path followed by the others to suggest some patterns of behavior. The diversity in the individual ways of meeting needs appears to be a reflection of individual personalities. The stability of the thriving relationship appears to lie, at least in part, in the willingness and desire for the members of the couple to make personal adjustments. While there are some elements of the lesbian relationship that are common to all relationships, some unique elements have also been found.

Relationship Assessment

The assessment of the dysfunctional lesbian relationship by the mental health professional should include discussing contracts, roles,

the degree of commitment to the relationship and the effects of external pressures. Each should be considered in the light of both that which is common to all relationships and that which is unique to the lesbian relationship. It was observed throughout the interviewing process that within the thriving relationship there are some diversity of opinions between members of the same relationship. Thus some differing responses are within normal or thriving limits.

As noted earlier, the most frequently noted contract was the fidelity agreement. The data indicates that the relationship can be either an open or closed relationship and still be thriving, although most relationships in the study were closed. One should note that 4 couples differed in their opinions as to whether their relationship was open or closed. This discrepancy was not pointed out to those subjects. Apparently either the individuals did not act on this discrepancy (infidelity) or did not inform her partner of her differing understanding. Since this misunderstanding occurred in only a minority of thriving relationships, it is important to explore this contract.

Other contracts or agreements included living arrangements, financial management, household tasks and overtness of couple identity. It was found that these agreements as well as other decisions were resolved by a form of democratic decision making process. Both partners demonstrated a willingness to compromise, assuring an equality of power within the relationship.

These contracts form the basis of the roles found within the thriving lesbian relationship. No relationship was constructed around the two partners assuming traditional sex-typed roles. Tasks are not

assigned by gender identity, should either have a more masculine or feminine self image. The roles found in the thriving relationship should reflect a high degree of interaction and sharing. This may be either in the form of the couple tracking who contributes what so that the distribution of time and effort is equal or in the form of contribution by ability.

The degree of commitment to the relationship was observed to be based upon strengths gained and having individual needs met. The strengths were described as love and trust between the two partners. One unique need met was personal support found for having a homosexual sexual identity. Most would have this need whether the lesbian has a relationship or not. A means of measuring love, trust and other strengths was not found. It is important to note that some subjects stated that a couple should not remain together only to fulfill a need to have a relationship, as then one would not benefit from the strengths of the relationship.

The forms of external pressure placed upon the lesbian relationship are numerous. These include fear of discovery by family, employers, and others. The pressure may be of the form of disapproval by a family already aware of the nature of the couple's relationship. The pressure may be in the form of inaccessibility of economic benefits afforded married couples. The couple often has little recourse to alleviate these external pressures. Mutual support and the advantages of a lesbian relationship must therefore outweigh the disadvantages.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore some of the norms of a thriving lesbian relationship. The findings indicate that a lesbian relationship is highly complex and is made up of numerous elements. While no relationship is precisely like any other, some patterns of behaviors or opinions are evident to form a composite model of a relationship. Each of these patterns have been summarized at the end of each of the six parts in chapter three.

The findings in this study represent the opinions and responses made by 45 lesbian and bisexual women who live in the northwestern Oregon area. The sample represents the norms of a thriving lesbian relationship in which the couple has been together for at least six months and is willing to be interviewed. The sample may not be representative of lesbian relationships outside of the area or of those who avoid discussing their identities with others. Indeed no study of lesbians and lesbianism is entirely representative of the entire population.

This study does provide for the mental health professional a model and a set of norms in which the professional may compare findings in the assessment of the dysfunctional lesbian relationship. While not all needs and norms are described some background data is provided.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Replicate the study using a different geographic area and a larger sample size.

2. Compare the findings of this study with a sample group of lesbian and bisexual women who have dysfunctional lesbian relationships.
3. Test the assessment suggestions offered in the clinical setting working with those who have dysfunctional lesbian relationships.
4. Explore the influence of children in the relationship unit.
5. Design some studies to further explore in more depth each of the major sections of the study, i.e., effects of sexual identity, gender identity, courtship process, living arrangements, social pressure, couple identity, problems (specific) and strengths.
6. Design a longitudinal study.
7. Replicate above study using a greater than 30 year old sample.

Limitations of Study

The study contains frequency counts of a reasonably large number of variables within a lesbian relationship. It remains unknown if the "right" questions were asked that would describe the thriving relationship. Perhaps the questions asked of the subjects were not sensitive enough to quantitatively define specific aspects of the relationship, such as what are courtship, couple identity, roles, or balance of power. Indeed more specific measures or scales may be useful. Yet these tools with measures of reliability and validity for a lesbian population are not available. Thus this study is of an exploratory design.

The proof that the subjects were or had been members of a thriving relationship is elusive. Nowhere in the literature is there a universal definition of thriving. The operational definition used in this study for thriving is having been together as a couple for at least six months. Most of the subjects (93%) have had at least one year together. Yet it

remains unknown what length of time would be considered sufficient to describe the relationship as a thriving one. There are other ways to define thriving besides length of time in a relationship.

Probably the greatest problem found by this investigator and others as mentioned in the review of the literature is finding subjects older than the mean 31.2 years of age. Certainly there is evidence that maturity affects behavior and beliefs. Yet one has to consider also that a young population's behaviors and beliefs may be indicative of future trends.

The results of this study may not be generalized to describe a model of a thriving heterosexual relationship. There was no comparison group of heterosexual subjects used. This was a deliberate part of the design. The purpose of the study was to describe only the thriving lesbian relationship.

Thus the results of this study most likely may only be generalized to young homosexual females, recognizing that a limited number of parameters of their relationships were explored. The complexity of a two person relationship warrants further and more explicit study for broader generalizations.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Kinsey Scale

Gender Identity Scale

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Demographic

First name or pseudonym

Age Race Marital Status Children

Occupation Live in Apt/House/More than 2 Adults

Education

Hospitalized for mental illness yes no

At what age did you first consider yourself gay?

Are you involved in a relationship now? How long?

Or within the past twelve months have you had a relationship that
lasted at least six months? How long?

How old is your partner?

2. Kinsey Scales

As you see yourself now:

Sexual behavior Het 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Homo

Sexual feelings Het 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Homo

3. Gender Identity

Most of the time

A Appearance 1 quite masculine

B Behavior 2 somewhat masculine

3 50-50 masculine/feminine

4 somewhat feminine

5 quite feminine

Would like to be surgically changed to a male?

4. Courtship

How would you define a relationship?

How many relationships have you had? How long (each)?

Are relationships different than affairs? How?

How did you meet your current partner?

What about her made you attracted to her?

Was there a definite courtship process (like dating)? For how long?

Did you have a (marriage ceremony, gay wedding, Holy Union)?

Do you have an implicit or explicit fidelity agreement?

5. Living Arrangement with Partner (Roles)

Do you two live together?

Do you both work?

How do you handle money? jointly/separately check, savings, budget

How do you make major decisions like moving, vacation, large expenditures, etc.?

Do you own property together? What?

How do you manage such things as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, car maintenance, yard work, household repairs, etc.?

Should your partner or you need to relocate for school or job, would you/she be willing to move? Out of state?

Spare time: alone/together share hobbies see friends alone/together

Do you have friends that are exclusively yours? some/most/all

6. Coming Out (Overtness)

Who of your family definitely know that you are a member of a gay couple?

Do your friends know? Are most of them gay?

Does your employer know? Doctor?

How do you spend major holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays?

Has openness or lack of openness about being gay caused you to have conflicts with your partner?

7. Sexual Satisfaction

Do you feel that sex is important in any lesbian relationship?

How? For you?

Would the cessation of sexual behavior lead to the termination of your relationship?

Do you find the quality of sexual activity within your relationship satisfactory?

8. Problems

Women are sometimes discriminated against (like in loans, car repairs).

Do you as a couple find this to be a problem? How?

What are some of the problems you have found in your current relationship?

9. Strengths

Are there advantages of being two women together versus male and female?

What would you say is your greatest strength within your relationship?

Do you intend for this relationship to last a lifetime?

KINSEY SCALE (1953)

Rate yourself as you see yourself now

- 1) your sexual behavior
- 2) your sexual feelings

Exclusively Homosexual.....	6
Largely Homosexual.....	5
Mainly Homosexual with Substantial Heterosexual.....	4
50-50 Homosexual/Heterosexual.....	3
Mainly Heterosexual with Substantial Homosexual.....	2
Largely Heterosexual.....	1
Exclusively Heterosexual.....	0

GENDER IDENTITY SCALE

Rate yourself as you see yourself most of the time:

- 1) Your Appearance
- 2) Your Behaviors

Quite masculine.....1
Somewhat masculine.....2
50-50 masculine/feminine.....3
Somewhat feminine.....4
Quite feminine.....5

APPENDIX B
Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

SCHOOL OF NURSING

I herewith agree to serve as a subject in the investigation named, Norms of Thriving Lesbian Relationships, by Karen Gordon (investigator). Under the supervision of Florence A. Hardesty, Ph.D., R.N., N.P. (faculty advisor).

The investigation aims at interviewing individual members of a two female couple. Each subject will be asked to select a value on the Kinsey scale and on a gender scale; will be asked general questions about the courtship process and living arrangement with her partner; questions about "coming out", sexual satisfaction, problems and strengths within her relationship. The time for the interview will be about one hour at a location selected by the subject.

The subject is free to refuse to answer any questions asked by the investigator.

The information obtained will be kept confidential. No names will be used in the study. Anonymity will be insured by: (1) no use of names on the recorded interview data, (2) no use of names on this form, and (3) no record of physical description or other identifying data will be made. The investigator will not identify the subject to others as a participant during or after the study is completed. Ms. Gordon has offered to answer any questions the subject may have about participation in the study.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from participation in the study at any time.

I signify that I have read the above by marking an X on this form on the line that reads "subject's signature".

_____ date

_____ subject's signature

The witness agrees to certify that the subject had the above informed consent explained to her, and the witness observed the subject make a mark (X) upon the signature line.

_____ date

_____ witness's signature

APPENDIX C
Additional Tables

Table A

Age Gay

Age (years)	<u>n</u>	%
up to 15	6	13.3
16 - 19	12	26.7
20 - 24	13	28.9
25 - 29	9	20.0
30 +	5	11.1
	45	100.0

Table B
Terms Used to Define Lesbian Relationship

Term	<u>n</u>
Two women	29
Love	21
Physical/Sex	13
Emotion(al)	9
Commitment	9
Time	7
No sex (necessary for definition)	7
Share(ing)	6
Live together	5
Like any other	11
Friendship	4
Others (used less than 4 times)	17

Many subjects used more than one term.

Table C
Terms Used to Define Lesbian Affair

Term	<u>n</u>
Sex	18
Time (minimum)	19
Depth	17
Commitment	14
Live together	3
Self concern (over others)	2
Others	3

Subjects usually used more than one term.

Table D
Duration of Relationship*

Time in Years	<u>n</u> = 45
0.5	3
1	3
2	11
3	6
4	6
5	4
6	5
7	0
8	0
9	2
10	1
11	0
12	1
13	2
14	1

\bar{x} = 4.2 years

Md - 3.5 years

R = 6 months to 14 years

*The relationship described by subjects for this study.

APPENDIX D
Summary of Data

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date: Summer 1979Age: r = 21-47 years, \bar{x} = 31.2 years Race: CaucasianMarital Status: M (4.4%) S (60%) W (2.2%) D (33.4%)Children: yes 25% no 75% Occupation: variedLive: House Education: \bar{x} = 14.8 yearsHospitalized for mental illness: yes (13%) no (87%)At what age did you first consider yourself gay? Between 20-24 yearsAre you involved in a relationship now? yes (38) no (7)How long? \bar{x} = 4.2 years

Or within the past 12 months have you had a relationship that lasted at

least 6 months? yes = 7 How long? \bar{x} = 4.2 yearsHow old is your partner? \bar{x} = 30.6 years, r = 21 to 47 years

As you see yourself now: (mode)

Sexual behavior Het 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 HomoSexual feelings Het 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Homo

Gender Identity:

Most of the time how would you rate your: (mode)

Appearance 3 1 quite masculineBehavior 3 2 somewhat masculine

3 50-50 masculine/feminine

4 somewhat feminine

5 quite feminine

Would you like to surgically be changed to a male? no = 100%

-2-

How would you define a lesbian relationship? Two women who love each other on physical and emotional levels and are committed to maintaining this relationship.

How many relationships have you had? 1 or 2 How long each? not scored

Are relationships different from affairs? yes

How? An affair is short term; has less depth of feelings or commitment; it is usually for the gratification of sexual needs.

How did you meet your current partner? through a friend; at work; a "chance" meeting.

What about her made you attracted to her? A non-physical trait.

Was there a definite courtship process (like dating)? yes. This is described as getting to know the other, a highly emotional period.

For how long? $\bar{x} = 4$ months

Did you have a (marriage ceremony, gay wedding, Holy Union)? no, nor have I considered this.

Do you have an implicit or explicit fidelity agreement? yes = 60%
open relationships = 32%, closed relationships = 68%

Do you two live together? yes = 100%

Do you both work? Yes = 90%

How do you handle money? Jointly check (separately) savings (joint)
budget (joint)

How do you make major decisions like moving, vacation, large expenditures?
We talk about it; it is a "democratic" process. One is more likely to come up with ideas or plans. Final decisions are made by both partners together.

-3-

Do you own property together? yes What? at least one - car, house, business, household fixtures.

How do you manage such things as cooking (separate), cleaning (both), grocery shopping (together), car maintenance (no pattern), yard work (both), household repairs (no pattern)? Individuals usually work at tasks independently of their partner. Task choice is by time available and interest.

Should your partner or you need to relocate for job or school, would you/she be willing to move? yes Out of state? yes for both

Spare time: spend together share hobbies yes see friends together

Do you have friends that are exclusively yours? yes 62%

Who of your family definitely know that you are a member of a gay couple? Parents = no (50%); siblings = yes (65%); no one (20%).

Do your friends know? yes = 80% Are most of them gay? yes = 50%

Does your employer know? yours (no) hers (no) Doctor? no = 66%

How do you spend major holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays? Christmas - together with family, with identity of just roommates.

Has openness or lack of openness about being gay caused you to have conflicts with your partner? no, just some discussion.

Do you feel that sex is important in any lesbian relationship? yes 93%

For you? yes 86%

Would cessation of sexual behavior lead to the termination of your relationship? no 70%

Do you find the quality of sexual activity within your relationship satisfactory? yes 89%

-4-

Women are sometimes discriminated against (like in loans, car repairs).

Do you as a couple find this to be a problem? no How? just an inconvenience.

What are some of the problems you have found in your current relationship?

Communication problems; lack of time available to spend with partner.

Are there advantages of being two women together versus male and female?

1) do not have to cross the gender barrier (deal with gender differences)

2) do not have to assume traditional feminine roles

3) equal balance of power

4) better sexual expression

What would you say is your greatest strength within your relationship?

love and trust

Do you intend for this relationship to last a lifetime? yes = 90%

no = 5% don't know = 5%

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF
KAREN GORDON

For the MASTER OF NURSING

Date Receiving this Degree: June, 1980

Title: Norms of Thriving Lesbian Relationships

Approved:

Florence Hardesty, Ph.D.

Thesis Advisor

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe selected elements of a thriving lesbian relationship. These norms may then be used by the mental health professional to compare with the assessment made of the dysfunctional lesbian relationship.

Forty five lesbian and bisexual women were interviewed during the summer of 1979. Each was asked the same 70 questions about her sexual and gender identities; courtship process and living arrangements; couple identity, sexual satisfaction; problems and strengths within the relationship. The interviewees were all Caucasian, living with or had lived with her partner at least 6 months and were of an average age of 31.2 years. Each defined her relationship with her partner as a lesbian relationship which had lasted (at that time) an average of 4.2 years.

It was found that the subject was initially attracted to her partner by a non-physical trait of her partner. The relationship was described as (usually) closed to outside sexual behavior. The living arrangements included joint management of finances, decisions, social

activities and free time. Usually the partners worked independently at outside employment and performing household tasks. Thus though quite interactional in decision making and social lives, they did not incorporate all aspects of their lives as a single unit.

Couple identity varied from couple to couple. Some were quite free in divulging couple identity to family and others; some were quite hidden from social view. Lack of social sanction for the lesbian relationship caused a variety of problems for most couples, yet this lack of sanction caused little internal conflicts.

Sexual activity within the relationship was found both satisfactory in quality and of some importance to individuals. The importance of sexual activity was described as less important than other aspects of the relationship. Cessation of sexual activity would not in most cases lead to or cause the relation to be terminated.

No subject reported a total absence of problems within the relationship. The problems most frequently named were communication difficulties, lack of free time (to spend with partner), loss of independence and sexual dissatisfactions. Most subjects related that problems occurring were minor, resulting in only an occasional conflict.

Most interviewees stated that in addition to strengths of the relationship gained there are some personal advantages of having another woman for a partner. These advantages were described as not having gender differences with one's partner and not having a sex typed role expectation from one's partner. The strengths and advantages are sufficient to sustain the relationship in that most subjects related that they anticipate the relationship lasting a lifetime.

The data indicates that a thriving lesbian relationship is founded in part upon an interactional model. This model relationship has the elements of mutually fulfilling needs, a power balance and equality of roles with some allowances for personal space. The greatest problem area evolves from lack of social sanction and allowance for couple identity that is given to heterosexual couples.