

Measuring urban sexual cultures

Amin Ghaziani

Published online: 19 May 2014

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

Abstract Gay neighborhoods across the United States are de-concentrating in today’s so-called “post-gay” era as sexual minorities assimilate into the mainstream and disperse across the city. This context creates a problem of measurement. If by “culture” we mean to say a particular way of life of a group or subgroup of people like sexual minorities, and if that way of life is blending with other aspects of the metropolis, then how can we detect distinct urban sexual cultures? In this article, I use 125 interviews with Chicago residents to propose a two-pronged strategy. First, gay neighborhoods continue to house anchor institutions, despite ongoing residential out-migrations. These are the primary engines of community building, and they locate the material culture of a group in a specific place. Commemorations serve as a second indicator for a culture, and they too put meanings into form. Although it is a fact of city life that all neighborhoods change, anchors and commemorations are analytic devices that scholars can use to observe urban sexual cultures. More generally, they provide a framework for how to measure the shifting geographic profile of a historically stigmatized group as it experiences positive change in public opinion.

Keywords Culture · Measurement · Post-gay · Gay neighborhoods · Sexuality · Urban sociology

“Gay enclaves face prospect of being passé.” This October 2007, front-page headline from the *New York Times* predicted the demise of San Francisco’s Castro district. “These are wrenching times for San Francisco’s historic gay village,” the journalist lamented in the article, “with population shifts, booming development, and a waning sense of belonging that is also being felt in gay enclaves across the nation.” Chicago is another city where we see a similar trend. Residents of the local gay neighborhood, which they affectionately call Boystown, are mourning the loss of the area’s character. In a feature story entitled, “Culture Clash,” a writer for the *Chicago Tribune* presaged,

A. Ghaziani (✉)

Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia, 6303 N.W. Marine Drive, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1, Canada
e-mail: amin.ghaziani@ubc.ca

“With more [straight] families moving in and longtime [lesbian and gay] residents moving out, some say Boystown is losing its gay flavor.”¹

We can identify a gay neighborhood—or gayborhood, in playful shorthand—by several of its qualities. It is a place that has a distinct geographic focal point locals can point it out on a map, usually by singling out one or two specific streets. It has a unique culture: gays and lesbians set the tone of the neighborhood. Hence, symbols like the rainbow flag are visible as you walk along the streets, and ritual events like the pride parade take place in the area. It has a concentration of residences: everyone who lives in a gayborhood does not self-identify as gay or lesbian, of course, but many people certainly do. Finally, it has a cluster of commercial spaces, such as gay-owned and gay-friendly businesses (from bars to bookstores and sex shops), non-profit organizations, and community centers (Levine 1979; Castells 1983; Castells and Murphy 1982; Murray 1992, 1979; Chauncey 1994).

Midtown in Atlanta, Boston’s South End, Oak Lawn in Dallas, Houston’s Montrose, Miami’s South Beach, Montreal’s Gay Village, New York’s Chelsea, Philadelphia’s Gayborhood in Washington Square West, San Diego’s Hillcrest, Seattle’s Capitol Hill, Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village, Vancouver’s Davie Village, Washington DC’s Dupont Circle, and the entire city of West Hollywood: each is an example of a gayborhood—and each might be on a list of endangered urban species as more commercial spaces like gay bars and bookstores close, as straights move in, and as gays disperse across the city (Doan and Higgins 2011; Usher and Morrison 2010; Ghaziani 2010; Rushbrook 2002). Demographers who analyze the US Census confirm that zip codes associated with such traditional gay neighborhoods are “de-concentrating” (Spring 2013): fewer same-sex households lived in them in 2010 than they did in 1990 or 2000. In fact, same-sex partner households now reside in 93 % of all US counties (Gates and Cooke 2011) and their numbers are unexpectedly “increasing in some of the most conservative parts of the country” (Graham 2008).

Gay life in the Western world is moving “beyond the closet” (Seidman 2002) and becoming more “post-gay” (Ghaziani 2011) as public acceptance of lesbians and gay men increases year after year (Taylor 2013). These evolving social attitudes affect the character and composition of gay neighborhoods. Post-gays, for example, profess that they are your regular, normal neighbors next door—no longer the stigmatized and status-marked (Goffman 1963) gays who were once forced to live and socialize in the “gay ghetto” (Levine 1979) for safety and self-protection (Wittman 1970). The resulting assimilation of lesbians and gay men has prompted some public intellectuals to ask, “When did gays get so straight?” (Mendelsohn 1996), while others have declared the “fall of gay culture” (Harris 1997) and “the end of gay” (Sullivan 2005) altogether.

The over-time acceptance and urban expressions of a historically marginalized group presents a methodological puzzle. If by culture we mean to say a “*particular way of life*” (Williams 1976, p. 90, emphasis added) or a “*specific*” (ibid., p. 89, emphasis added) characterization of a group of people such as sexual minorities, and if that way of life in a post-gay era is merging into the mainstream—if it “*blends* with other aspects of the city” (Aldrich 2004, p. 1732)—then how can we detect distinct urban sexual cultures? How can we measure post-gay city life if its signature is a “distinction-muting

¹ “Culture Clash: Boystown Shifting as More Families Move In,” *RedEye*, December 10, 2007, p. 6.

logic” (Ghaziani 2011, p. 99) of normalization (Warner 1993, 1999a) that positions lesbians and gay men as culturally similar to heterosexuals?

In this article, I use 125 interviews with Chicago residents to identify two ways to measure post-gay urban culture. First, gayborhoods continue to house anchor institutions (Birch 2010; Dubb and Howard 2012) like particular bars, bookstores, and bathhouses, which are the primary engines of community building. Anchor institutions ground the material culture (Miller 1987; Mukerji 1994) of a group to a specific urban place, despite the realities of residential drift, and they seal the area’s character and collective identity in the local imagination. Anchor institutions put “meaning into form” (McDonnell 2010). Commemorations, such as the tax-funded rainbow color pylons that city officials installed in Chicago’s gayborhood, are a second analytic device that scholars also can use to measure culture. Although it is an inexorable fact that all neighborhoods change, anchor institutions and commemorations fossilize a way of life in space and place. They enhance the “entitativity” (Campbell 1958) or “resinousness” (Ghaziani 2009) of urban sexual cultures.

Gay neighborhoods and societal attitudes toward homosexuality

Gay neighborhoods formed after World War II (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997, p. 289; Berube 1990, pp. 106, 244) during the “coming out era,” a period of time that lasted through the late 1990s (Ghaziani 2011). Many lesbians and gay men were discharged from the military for their homosexuality, and rather than return home disgraced, they remained behind in port cities. As an indirect indicator, Census data from 1950 to 1960 show that the number of single-person households in San Francisco doubled following the War and accounted for 38 % of the city’s total residential units (D’Emilio 1989). Bars organized dense social networks that made sexual minorities more visible to each other and inspired them to assert a right to gather in public places (Meeker 2006).

These efforts gained momentum during the “great gay migration” (Newton 1993, p. 44; Weston 1995, p. 255) of the 1970 and 1980s, which itself was triggered by the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City (Duberman 1993; Carter 2004). Large port cities were the strongest magnets in this nationwide demographic movement of lesbians and gay men into urban areas, but their visibility also surfaced in places like “Worcester, Massachusetts and Buffalo, New York; in Columbia, South Carolina, and Des Moines, Iowa” (D’Emilio 1993, p. 472). Lesbian and gay “moral refugees” (Castells 1983, p. 161; Wittman 1970, pp. 67–68) of the time perceived their developing urban concentrations as a “beacon of tolerance” (Weston 1995, p. 262), a “liberated zone,” (Castells 1983, pp. 139, 168), and a “safe space” (Evans and Boyte 1986; Polletta 1999) that promised reprieve from heterosexual hostilities. In other words, gay neighborhoods first formed as “a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” (Lauria and Knopp 1985, p. 152).

But gay life in the Western world today is so open that it is moving “beyond the closet” (Seidman 2002, p. 6), despite a persistent privileging of heterosexuality by the state, societal institutions, and popular culture. While the coming out era was typified by being open and out about one’s sexuality and having almost exclusively gay social networks (Valocchi 1999b; Armstrong 2002), today’s putatively “post-gay” period (Ghaziani 2011) is characterized by a rapid assimilation of lesbians and gay men into

the mainstream (Sullivan 1996; Seidman 2002). British journalist Paul Burston coined the phrase in 1994, and it found an American audience 4 years later in 1998 when *Out* magazine editor James Collard used it in the *New York Times* to argue, “We should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality—even if our opponents do. Post-gay isn’t ‘un-gay.’ It’s about taking a critical look at gay life and no longer thinking solely in terms of struggle. It’s going to a gay bar and wishing there were girls there to talk to.” He clarified the urban implications of this idea 2 months later in a *Newsweek* feature: “First for protection and later with understandable pride, gays have come to colonize whole neighborhoods, like West Hollywood in L.A. and Chelsea in New York City. It seems to me that the new Jerusalem gay people have been striving for all these years won’t be found in a gay-only ghetto, but in a world where we are free, equal and safe to live our lives.”²

The term post-gay has broad applications. It can be a mode of self-identification, a way to describe the features of a specific space, a characteristic of an entire neighborhood, and a way to think about the zeitgeist of a historical moment (Warner 1999b; Harris 1997; Sullivan 1996; Seidman 2002; Seidman et al. 1999; Nash 2012; Ghaziani 2011; Richardson 2005). Individuals who identify as post-gay, for example, define themselves by more than their sexuality, disentangle it from a sense of militancy and struggle, feel free from persecution despite persisting inequalities, and prefer sexually mixed company—hence Collard’s lament for more girls in gay bars. Post-gays generally “do not feel a strong sense of shared fate with other LGBs or think that their membership in the LGB community is particularly important” (Egan et al. 2008, p. 2). Similarly, a post-gay space like a bar is one where “the need to clearly define and delineate our sexualities is largely deemed unnecessary” (Brown 2006, p. 136), while gayborhoods in a post-gay era no longer demand “the assertion of one identity or another. Most times they contain a majority of heterosexuals” (ibid., p. 140) as lesbians and gay men disperse across the city (Ghaziani 2010).

During the early coming out era when gayborhoods first formed, they were culturally distinct and “quasi-utopian” (Doan and Higgins 2011, p. 8) urban areas. Today, however, they are becoming culturally diluted spaces (Rushbrook 2002) as the gay community transitions from the “exoticized gay margin to the normalized straight center” (Mendelsohn 1996, p. 31; see also Sullivan 2005). This results in the “heterosexualization of gay culture” (ibid.) and an associated problem of measurement: how do we detect urban ways of life that are defined by the suppression of cultural distinctions?

Measuring culture

Culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams 1976, p. 87), one that has “acquired a certain aura of ill-repute ... because of the multiplicity of its references and the studied vagueness with which it has all too often been invoked” (Geertz 1973, p. 89). While scholars have made great strides

² Collard references: “New Way of Being,” by James Collard. *New York Times*, June 21, 1998; and “Leaving the Gay Ghetto,” by James Collard. *Newsweek*, August 17, 1998, p. 53. In his *Newsweek* piece, Collard credits Burston with coining the term post-gay.

defining the concept, our repertoire for how to study it systematically has lagged behind (Ghaziani 2009). Three intellectual moves have undermined the development of such a measurement-focused program. First, Clifford Geertz, who has had incomparable influence on the study of culture, argued that “operationalism as a methodological dogma never made much sense as far as the social sciences are concerned.” He declared that it was “largely dead”—and by 1973, at that (Geertz 1973, p. 5). Geertz unhinged measurement from his preferred qualitative and interpretive method of “thick description.” However, the publication of several prominent articles in recent years shows that operationalism is neither dogmatic nor dead, and the principle is compatible with a qualitative approach (e.g., Small et al. 2010).

Second, some researchers have redirected the study of culture toward continued conceptual clarification. Jepperson and Swidler (1994), for example, assert that “the greatest impediments to measuring culture are conceptual rather than strictly methodological” (Jepperson and Swidler 1994, p. 360). Measurement precision requires clear, even if actively debated definitions (Cook 1985), of course, but this counsel risks conflating two distinct enterprises of defining the culture concept and measuring it. These are related but not interchangeable.

Finally, some scholars imagine that culture is “chameleon-like” and that it can take “many shapes and forms” (Binder et al. 2008, p. 8). This sounds virtuous in principle. But if culture is a chameleon that is always blending into its surroundings, then our ability to detect it, to observe it, and to identify indicators of it—in short, to measure it—will suffer from strain. The concept is then “doomed” (Wuthnow 1997) to be nothing “in particular” (Goldfarb 1987, p. 2). Dismissing operationalism as dogma, favoring endless conceptual clarification, and promoting definitional catholicity are “impossibly vague” (Sewell 1999, p. 41) strategies that provide “no particular angle or analytical purchase” (ibid.) for the problem of measurement.

In sociology, quantitative researchers have taken the helms on measurement. This is not surprising, given the following types of assertions: “Perhaps the clearest definition of measurement is provided us by S.S. Stevens’s (1951) classic treatment: ‘Measurement is the assignment of numerals to objects or events according to rules’” (quoted in Neuendorf 2002, p. 111; Stevens 1951, p. 1). Quantitative culture scholars have developed formal methods to “measure meaning structures” (Mohr 1998; Mohr and Duquenne 1997) and cultural practices (Bourdieu 1984) using innovative tools like network analysis (Lizardo 2006; Vaisey and Lizardo 2010), topic modeling (Hopkins and King 2010), and plagiarism detection software (Bail 2012), all of which “map the contours” of meaning (ibid., p. 861).

Geertz’s dismissal of “operationalism as a methodological dogma” likely dissuaded qualitative researchers from being similarly explicit about measurement. To recognize their unique efforts, however, we need to *redefine measurement* as an effort to consolidate and capture meanings into observable analytic units. Qualitative scholars weave together these analytic units of meaning to discern the outlines of culture. Humanist-inspired approaches conduct close readings of text and code for indicators of a culture (Griswold 1987; 1986). Micro-sociologists examine the “idioculture” (Fine 1979) and “group styles” (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) of smaller contexts, such as everyday interactions among individuals who participate in a particular group, around objects that are known to them, usable in the course of their conduct, functional in supporting their group’s goals, appropriate in maintaining internal status hierarchies,

and triggered by external events (Fine 1979, 1987). Macro approaches measure culture by focusing on large-scale units of analysis like national cultures (Bellah et al. 1985; Edgell and Tranby 2010; Gitlin 1980, 1995), social movements (Ghaziani 2009; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Lichterman 1995; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor et al. 2009), and art organizations (Becker 1982; Peterson 1976; DiMaggio 1987), or they examine the institutionalization of cultural objects like ideologies (Wuthnow 1987, 1989) and discourse (Spillman 1995). Finally, meso-studies focus on resources, strategic actions, practical styles, and skills that social actors can use to navigate their everyday problems (Swidler 1986, 2001; Gross 2009; Lamont 2001; 1992).

Measurement matters, it is distinct from conceptualization, and it requires some definitional specificity of the culture concept in order to prevent it from devolving into “an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members” (Fine 1979, p. 733) or some kind of “a diffused mist within which social action occurs” (Swidler 1995, p. 38, 39). No one method or methodology can claim exclusive expertise on finding solutions to the problem of measurement. Integrative frameworks (Vaisey 2009) and mixed methods approaches (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011; Mische 2008; Small 2011) debunk the “assumed gap” (Griswold 1987, p. 2) between qualitative and quantitative camps or between empirical social sciences and the interpretive humanities. Although they can “be made into fine bedfellows” (Alexander 2003, p. 26), they do not equally engage in this conversation. Qualitative researchers are less explicit about cultural entitativity (Campbell 1958), or operational cohesiveness, in their work. Like our quantitative colleagues, however, those among us who are more qualitatively inclined also make careful, deliberate observations of a group’s culture, study the perceptual realities that organize it, and identify indicators of what makes “a group ‘groupy’” (Hogg et al. 2007, p. 136), that is, what observable analytic properties make a group a reasonably coherent. In this article, I offer such an illustration, one that links urban sociology, the sociology of sexualities, and the sociology of culture.

Data and analysis

I build my study of urban sexual cultures on interviews that I conducted during the summer of 2010 in Chicago. That particular city has always been “as much a sexual laboratory as a social one” (Heap 2003, p. 458), but scholars disagree about what exactly it represents. Some remark that it is a global city (Abu-Lughod 1999; Sassen 2001, pp. 3–4): a command point in the world economy, a key location for international finance and specialized services, a crucible for innovation, and an exciting hub for the circulation of people and products. Others disagree and view Chicago instead as a secondary city (Rushbrook 2002, p. 188): one that is decidedly not global and thus incapable of competing at that level. Globalization prompted the development of world cities like Frankfurt, London, New York, and Tokyo. As they grew in importance and as manufacturing declined, secondary cities like Chicago, Miami, Manchester, Vancouver, Seattle, and Sydney engaged in competitive strategies to attract capital. One way they did this was by rebranding themselves as places of culture, cosmopolitanism, and consumption, and they showcased their stock of ethnic spaces like Chinatown, Greektown, and Little Italy. In recent years, city officials have added gayborhoods to their urban buffet. Competing under the “cosmopolitan canopy”

(Anderson 2011) of a globalizing world has motivated some cities like Chicago to go a step further and formally mark its gayborhood.

The disagreement among scholars and urban planners about whether Chicago is a global or secondary city tells us that it is at once a typical case (modal, exemplary, or representative—a quintessential American city) and a critical case (unusual or atypical). Of course, “no city represents the nation or the world” (Clark 2011, p. 236) since there are regional differences, especially in sexual cultures (e.g., Sears 2001). But there are patterns such that a case study of one city can teach us about another. Chicago is “perhaps the most studied city in the world” (Lloyd 2006, p. 14), but its history of sexuality is “vastly underwritten in comparison to New York, San Francisco, or L.A.”³ All of these are compelling reasons to study it.

Chicago has two active gayborhoods: Boystown, the informal moniker of the commercial and nightlife district nestled in the East Lakeview neighborhood, and Andersonville, a historically Swedish subsection of the Edgewater neighborhood to the north of Boystown. In 1997, Chicago became the first city in the United States to municipally mark its gayborhood. Officials installed tax-funded rainbow pylons along North Halsted Street in Boystown. Residents recognize Andersonville as another “queer space” (Betsky 1997). In fact, both areas are “so strongly gay and lesbian identified that even the straight denizens of these’hoods admit that they live in a gay neighborhood” (Bergquist and McDonald 2006, p. vii). According to the 2010 American Community Survey, half of Illinois’s estimated 25,710 unmarried partner households are in Chicago’s Cook County. Of this group, 40 % reside the four northernmost lakefront neighborhoods. “Lakeview leads the way among the city’s 77 designated community areas ... in terms of its total number of estimated same-sex couple-led households.” It is “home to 1,106 such households, or 12 % of the city total, followed by Edgewater (951, 10.3 %), Rogers Park (736, 8 %) and Uptown (635, 6.9 %).”⁴

I used a 2×2, neighborhood-by-sexual-orientation design to structure my interviews. I spoke with a snowball sample of 25 self-identified lesbian/gay residents of Lakeview, 25 self-identified straight residents of Lakeview, 25 lesbian/gay residents of Andersonville, and 25 straight residents of Andersonville. I also interviewed 25 business owners, government officials, representatives of non-profit community organizations, realtors, developers, and various public figures from both neighborhoods (see Table 1). It is impossible to randomly sample lesbians and gay men because there is no way to identify the population. To mitigate this concern, I sought to maximize variation from respondents of diverse backgrounds. Their occupations ranged from students and waiters to attorneys, physicians, professors, and everything in between, including the unemployed.

The Boystown lesbian/gay sample is slightly skewed toward older individuals who are more established in the neighborhood, those who own homes, gay men, whites, and those who are partnered. The Boystown straight sample is comparatively younger, less established in the neighborhood yet with more owners and more women. This group is also white and more partnered. Roughly equal numbers of lesbians/gays and straights

³ “A Gay Old Time,” by Jason Heidemann. *Time Out Chicago*, April 14, 2010: <http://timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/gay-lesbian/78369/a-gay-old-time>, accessed May 26, 2012.

⁴ www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/article.php?AID=31459, accessed March 7, 2012.

Table 1 Interview profiles

	Gays and lesbians	Straights
Boystown	Average age: 41	Average age: 34
	Age range: 21–61	Age range: 24–59
	Average residence: 10.4 years	Average residence: 5.8 years
	Residence range: 0.25–31 years	Residence range: 1–13 years
	17 gay men (68 %)	9 men (36 %)
	5 lesbians (20 %)	16 women (64 %)
	3 bisexual women (12 %)	
	20 whites (80 %)	21 whites (84 %)
	1 Asian (4 %)	1 Hispanic/Latino (4 %)
	1 Hispanic/Latino (4 %)	3 multiracial (12 %)
	3 multiracial (12 %)	
	9 renters (36 %)	10 renters (40 %)
	16 owners (64 %)	15 owners (60 %)
	7 singles (28 %)	6 singles (24 %)
18 partnered (72 %)	19 partnered (76 %)	
4 with kids (16 %)	6 with kids (24 %)	
Andersonville	Average age: 35	Average age: 38
	Age range: 28–51	Age range: 30–54
	Average residence: 4.8 years	Average residence: 5.9 years
	Residence range: 0.25–17 years	Residence range: 0.25–20 years
	16 gay men (64 %)	11 men (44 %)
	9 lesbians (36 %)	14 women (56 %)
	19 whites (76 %)	22 whites (88 %)
	2 African-Americans (8 %)	3 multiracial (12 %)
	1 Asian (4 %)	
	1 Hispanic/Latino (4 %)	
	2 multiracial (8 %)	
	11 renters (44 %)	12 renters (48 %)
	14 renters (56 %)	13 owners (52 %)
	5 singles (20 %)	7 singles (28 %)
20 partnered (80 %)	18 partnered (72 %)	
3 with kids (12 %)	10 with kids (40 %)	
Public figures and business owners	Average age: 46	Average age: 41
	Age range: 26–75	Age range: 39–45
	Average residence: 12.5 years	Residence range: 2–30 years
	Average residence: 11.7 years	Residence range: 10–15 years
	16 gay men (64 %)	3 straight women (12 %)
	1 bisexual woman (4 %)	
	5 lesbians (20 %)	
	19 whites (76 %)	3 whites (12 %)
	3 Hispanic/Latinos (12 %)	
	2 renters (8 %)	0 renters (0 %)
	20 owners (80 %)	3 owners (12 %)
	9 singles (36 %)	1 single (4 %)
	13 partnered (52 %)	2 partnered (8 %)
	5 with kids (20 %)	2 with kids (8 %)

are part of a household with children. The Andersonville lesbian/gay sample is younger than Boystown, less established, roughly balanced in terms of home ownership or renting, and it has a slightly smaller range on both accounts. But it too is skewed toward gay men, whites, and those who are partnered. The Andersonville straight sample is slightly older than Boystown, equally established in the neighborhood, slightly more female, heavily white, balanced in terms of owners and renters, and mostly partnered.⁵

My interviews averaged 51 min, and they ranged from 25 to 80 min. Most were one-on-one, but I sometimes interviewed couples jointly. I transcribed each interview, which produced 1,573 pages of single-spaced textual data. I used NVivo to analyze this material line by line. My retroductive codes (Ragin 1994) focused on indicators of the post-gay era (e.g., deductive codes that referenced assimilation and the recession of sexual identity) along with counterfactual challenges to it (e.g., inductive codes for the continuing significance of gay neighborhoods and sexual identity). I assembled my codes into “meaning structures” (Cicourel 1964, p. 50) by thinking about that analytic space where post-gay themes overlapped with references to urban sexual cultures: What can indicate the *presence* of an urban sexual way of life in a social context characterized by the *absence* of cultural distinctions between groups of residents? How can we measure minority cultures that are merging into the mainstream? Satisfying answers had to achieve dual-goals of social world sensitivity (an idea must be meaningful for those who live and socialize in Chicago gayborhoods) and analysis (an idea must offer a solution to the problem that motivates my article). Qualitative interviews are well-suited to assess such “cultural accounts” (Pugh 2013).

I now turn to a discussion of my results, which I organize in four sections. I first draw on national public opinion surveys to establish that societal attitudes toward homosexuality have increased in recent years. Recall that this is the primary feature of today’s post-gay era. I then offer qualitative evidence from Chicago for the claim that post-gay culture is characterized by a distinction-muting logic. After I have established that assimilation is occurring and that its main effect is the articulation of cultural similarities between gays and straights, I next identify two solutions—anchor institutions and commemorations, respectively—for the problem of measuring urban sexual cultures in an era that rejects the notion of particularity. I conclude with remarks about the importance of a measurement-focused program in the study of culture.

Results

Indicators of assimilation

The rate of lesbian and gay assimilation into the mainstream has exceeded a critical threshold in a post-gay era. There are two indicators for this. First, a straight allies movement of “politically gay” heterosexuals has emerged (Meyers 2008; Ghaziani 2011). This testifies to increased intergroup interactions, gay-straight in this case, which some sociologists use to operationalize assimilation (Waters and Ueda 2007; Waters 1990, 2000).

⁵ For more on the histories of these two neighborhoods, and thus to appreciate better the context of these sample differences, see (Baim 2008; Bergquist and McDonald 2006).

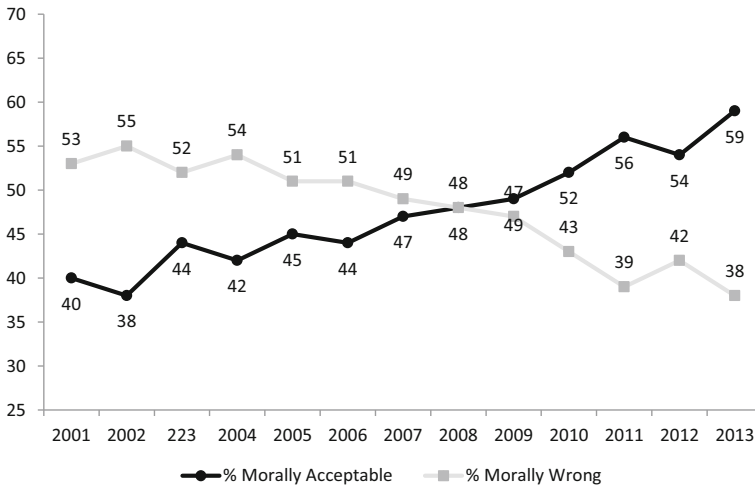


Fig. 1 Perceived moral acceptability of same-sex relations

Changes in public opinion provide a second indicator. Several independent surveys provide evidence for a significant shift in attitudes toward homosexuality, especially in recent years. According to a 2010 Gallup Poll, “Americans’ support for the moral acceptability of gay and lesbian relations crossed the symbolic 50 % threshold in 2010. At the same time, the percentage calling these relations ‘morally wrong’ dropped to 43 %, the lowest in Gallup’s decade-long trend.” This trend has continued into the present (see Fig. 1).

Consider next a 2011 CNN poll that found most Americans are now in favor of same-sex marriage. The *New York Times* reported, “A poll from CNN this week is the

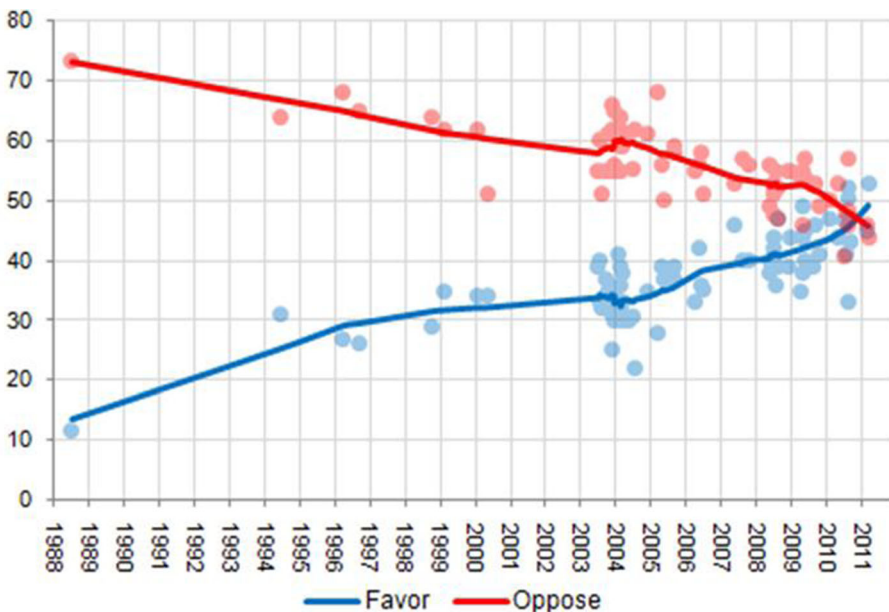


Fig. 2 Same-sex marriage: public opinion polls since 1988

Table 2 Cross-regional acceptance of sexual minorities

% who favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally

	2003 %	2012 %	Change
Total	33	48	+15
New England	48	62	+14
Mid Atlantic	38	57	+19
Pacific Coast	41	54	+13
Mountain West	40	51	+11
Great Lakes	30	49	+19
Midwest	32	46	+14
South Atlantic	28	42	+14
South Central	21	35	+14

Pew Research Center. Based on aggregated numbers from surveys conducted in 2003 and 2012

latest to show a majority of Americans in favor of same-sex marriage, with 51 % saying that marriages between gay and lesbian couples ‘should be recognized by the law as valid’ and 47 % opposed” (see Fig. 2). What makes this story remarkable is how quickly the tides have turned.

Finally, a 2012 poll from the Pew Research Center found evidence for the acceptance of gays and lesbians in *all* regions of the country and in urban *and* rural areas (see Table 2).⁶

The world today is a safer place for sexual minorities, and this has consequences for where they choose to live and socialize. “Segregation into ‘gay ghettos’ may have marked a passing phase in homosexual urban history... Increasingly, homosexual life blends with other aspects of the city” (Aldrich 2004, p. 1732). How can we measure the culture of such a group?

Post-gay culture

An assimilation of lesbians and gay men into the mainstream motivates many of them to mute their differences from heterosexuals. Openly-gay Alderman Tom Tunney of the 44th Ward, which includes Boystown, remarked, “We have more in common than we have apart.” Bernard Cherkasov, C.E.O. of Equality Illinois, a local LGBT rights organization, agreed. When I asked for his thoughts on straight in-migration into Boystown he replied, “I love it, because it indicates that the idea of gayness used to be controversial or unusual in a negative way, that [straight] people thought, ‘Oh my

⁶ “Americans’ Acceptance of Gay Relations Crosses 50 % Threshold,” by Lydia Saad. www.gallup.com/poll/135764/Americans-Acceptance-Gay-Relations-Crosses-Threshold.aspx, accessed May 25, 2010. CNN poll: “Gay Marriage Opponents Now in Minority,” by Nate Silver. <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/20/gay-marriage-opponents-now-in-minority/>, accessed April 25, 2012. Gallup results: www.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx, accessed November 21, 2012. Pew poll: www.people-press.org/2012/11/09/behind-gay-marriage-momentum-regional-gaps-persist/ and www.socwomen.org/web/media/press-releases/3683-kazyakgenderasoc.html, accessed December 11, 2012.

goodness, I am never going to move within close proximity of gay people because that just means immoral behavior or lifestyle.’ What it means now is that they recognize that there is nothing particularly unusual about gay people.” Consider lastly the remarks of dyke march organizer Clarissa Gonzalez: “You don’t need to be queer for me to feel like you’re family. People are people.” The political philosophies of the Alderman, the CEO of a lobbying group, and a dyke march organizer range from centrist to far left, yet they all perceive themselves to be similar to their straight neighbors.

Residents agreed that “it’s no big deal” anymore to be gay. “There is more of a mix now, like people just don’t care,” a lesbian in Andersonville commented. Echoed another, “If you’re gay, nobody really cares. If you’re not, nobody really cares.” Some define the present as a moment when being gay is mainstream: “Our society has become more gay. Gay has been mainstreamed,” noted a Boystown gay man. An Andersonville gay male couple added, “It’s mainstream to be gay.” Acceptance, in turn, affects the decisions people make about where to live, as the following realtor explained: “There doesn’t seem to be the need to be in a gay community because the overall urban mentality is more accepting of the gay community.”

Consistent with Collard’s assertions about what it means to be post-gay, many lesbians and gay men on the ground define themselves less centrally by their sexuality. A 31 year old Andersonville lesbian has noticed “a trend away from needing to identify [as lesbian or gay]” and away from “gathering in a gay space or a gay bar or in a gay neighborhood.” Linda Bubon, co-owner of a feminist bookstore Women and Children First in Andersonville added, “I think it’s so much healthier that people don’t feel the need to segregate themselves, that they feel that they can go anywhere with their friends, that they don’t necessarily have to be in an all-women or all-lesbian space.” A Boystown lesbian independently agreed on all accounts, although she preferred the language of “fluidity,” “blending,” and “blurring” that is more common among women (Diamond 2008): “Everything is very fluid and very blended and much more blurred than it was previously.” A gay man in Andersonville contextualized gayborhood change within broader social and political currents: “These places are indicators about where the population is, both socially and politically. If the idea is America’s become more okay about gayness or about being a lesbian or transgender, then it seems like by virtue of that, these spaces will lose their salience.”

The mainstreaming of gay life is unraveling the uniqueness of urban sexual cultures. A gay man in Boystown reflected, “I think the challenge for the gay community is, ‘How do we continue to be a community? How do we maintain a sense of community regardless of whether we have a physical community, centralized, or a more virtual community?’” Later in our conversation, he shifted from cultural loss to personal identity: “Do I identify being gay by where I live? And is how I live who I am?” As he talked this out, he eventually concluded that “where I live is who I am” and realized that “a lot of people identify themselves that way.” But this prompted more questions: “What does it mean if there is no gay neighborhood? Does that mean I’m not gay? Or not necessarily not gay, but am I not a part of the gay community?”

In the next two sections, I will explain how anchor institutions and commemorations can indicate the presence of urban sexual cultures in a post-gay era. They each make “a group ‘groupy’” (Hogg et al. 2007:136) and put “meaning into form” (McDonnell 2010).

Measuring post-gay culture with anchor institutions

The “existence of distinctive facilities” such as gay bars, bookstores, bathhouses, an LGBT community center, or a museum “is more salient to the identification of a community—for both insiders and for others—than is residential segregation” (Murray 1979, p. 168). Such facilities are “anchor institutions” that materialize urban cultures (Birch 2010; Dubb and Howard 2012). A gay man in Boystown noted, “There does need to be some sort of institutions identified with a community to really make it a gay neighborhood.” Residential concentration is necessary, he said, but insufficient: “I think if there’s a group of gay people that live someplace, I think you can have a gay community, but to really move to a [gay] neighborhood, I think there needs to be something more.... In Boystown, you have this very strong institutional presence” which does the trick. He predicted that it would anchor the community despite “residential drift”: “Even though you have this very strong institutional presence, the residential presence is that a lot of gays have left Boystown. So you sort of have a residential drift while there continues to be an institutional presence. So in the institutional sense, Boystown will continue to be a gay neighborhood for a long time.”

Several public figures affirmed this view as well when I asked them to define what made Boystown a gay district. Sidetrack bar owner Art Johnson said, “I remember the first time I saw Halsted referred to in the same sentence as Greenwich Village and Castro.” It happened in the 1980s when “a few of us went out of our way to encourage other gay businesses to relocate there....Our sense was that we needed more gay businesses there.” Sidetrack today anchors the gayborhood. “We’ve been there a long time, and we’re a large presence on the street,” he added. Unabridged bookstore owner Ed Devereux agreed about the effects of anchors: “Businesses ... are an important part of anchoring the gay neighborhood and defining it in the same way that ethnic businesses would help define an ethnic neighborhood.” Such businesses position sexuality as a “quasi-ethnicity” (Murray 1996, p. 4, 1979; Epstein 1987), and they provide a “thin coherence” (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011) to urban sexual cultures by anchoring shared aspects of a way of life.

Control over real estate enables the owners of institutional anchors to put down deeper roots into a neighborhood. Ed explained how this is an unprecedented trait of Boystown: “Historically, gays have pioneered. And they pioneered in this neighborhood in ’78 and ’79, ’80. And I was part of that...We did a lot of renovations. And, contrary to other parts of our movement, gay business owners bought their property, so they weren’t leased out, you know? I bought as early as ’84. And now the real estate’s worth more than the business. And Sidetrack’s the same thing. If you look at the history of the migration of the gay community, they never owned that kind of real estate. I think that’s why the roots here in Lakeview are still pretty deep. In Lakeview, people like myself own their properties and are committed to the community.”

Property ownership anchors the community in Boystown, despite the urban realities of residential flux. Consider the remarks of Tico Valle, the CEO of the Center on Halsted, Chicago’s LGBT Community Center: “One of the [historical] realities is that the community has moved from the Gold Coast [downtown] to Diversey [in the Lincoln Park neighborhood] and now Lakeview and Andersonville. What happened in Lakeview [that didn’t happen before] was probably the laying of the foundation where a lot of LGBT individuals finally started buying homes and buying their

businesses as opposed to renting. So, in Lakeview, there is a foundation and an anchor of LGBT owners.” Tico and Ed distinguish the current phase of residential migration from its long history in Chicago, and by doing so, they promote counterfactual thinking. How would the current migration be different if LGBT individuals had *not* purchased property? In the absence of ownership, LGBT communities may have completely dispersed, similar to what happened in prior transitions.⁷ While another wave of residential reshuffling is actively transpiring, Boystown is institutionally and economically anchored in an unprecedented way.

Some organizations, like the Center on Halsted, are particularly powerful anchors. “The gay and lesbian community center is an anchor space for that neighborhood,” said a lesbian in Boystown. “It was key to keeping the neighborhood to its roots,” despite straight in-migration. “With the presence of the Center, it really became an anchor,” Tico added. Other anchors in Boystown include Unabridged bookstore and the dense commercial strip of gay bars on Halsted Street, especially Sidetrack.

Women and Children First bookstore is a major institutional anchor in Andersonville. When I asked owner Linda Bubon when a lesbian identity first formed in Andersonville, she pointedly replied, “When we moved here.” Jason Cox of the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce agreed, “When businesses like Women and Children First moved into the neighborhood, a migration followed.” There is a special relationship between the bookstore and its women-loving-women patrons. “While I know many, many straight women who love the store and have been loyal customers over the years, there’s something about the love and loyalty of women who love women who love our business and know that there’s this love for them there, too, that just kind of goes beyond.” DePaul University professor Alex Papadopoulos confirmed the symbolic importance of Women and Children First: “The most important visual marking in Andersonville is Women and Children First, the bookstore, with its lavender awning.” When I inquired about its meaning, he replied, “It’s definitely a gay marking. It’s a Girlstown marking.”

Residential and commercial concentrations can each signal the presence of a distinct way of life. But even as the former wanes in today’s post-gay era, institutional anchors can still provide meaningful indicators of urban sexual cultures. A gay man in Boystown said, “As long as those businesses are still here, that’s a big thing that keeps the perception in people’s head that Lakeview is still gay.” That the institutions are located in a physical place imbues the neighborhood with a home-like quality. I asked a gay man in Andersonville if it matters whether he goes to go to a gay bar in Boystown or somewhere else in the city. He replied, “You want it to be an area, a land. You want to be attached to something. Take Italians, for example. It’s not enough that there’s an Italian restaurant that’s over there.... That doesn’t feel like home. That feels different for me than saying, ‘I’m in this area, an Italian area. I’m in the French area. I’m in the Greek area. I’m in the gay area.’” The way of life of a group of people acquires materiality through institutional anchors that are grounded in a symbolically charged space.

Measuring post-gay culture with commemorations

In a nationally unprecedented move in 1997, Chicago, a quintessential city of neighborhoods (Keating 2008; Sampson 2012), installed tax-funded, rainbow colored pylons

⁷ For more on the history of gay migration patterns in the city of Chicago, see (Papadopoulos 2005).

along North Halsted Street to celebrate the area's lesbian and gay presence. A travel guide described the scene on the street: "You'll pass some rainbow pylons.... [T]hey are visible indicators that the city of Chicago felt fondly enough about its gay community to put several million dollars [\$3.2 million, to be exact] into marking the area as Gay Central" (Bergquist and McDonald 2006, p. 16). Over the years, the pylons have established the strip as the center of gravity for gay entertainment, business, commerce, and community. They represent a mode of commemoration, which is the second analytic device for measuring urban sexual cultures.

The pylons and other commemorative markers fossilize the culture of a group in space. Bernard Cherksov, CEO of Equality Illinois, offered a territorial image: "We planted an anchor in Boystown, and with these pylons we're saying, 'This is our community space.' People move in and out of this neighborhood for different reasons, but the community isn't moving. Boystown is still here." An African-American gay man in Andersonville compared the gay and black communities in this regard: "It's like Harlem or Bronzeville: even if these spaces aren't Black anymore or aren't what they once were, they still matter because they are pieces of something. They are the urban product of a lot of work that people put in, lived for, died for."

Commemorative markers for racial, ethnic, and sexual groups enable a sense of permanence amid the inevitable urban realities of migrations and neighborhood change. Alex Papadopoulos explained: "It is a political victory, an urban political victory to have any metropolitan or municipal authority allow you to fix identity to space. So many struggles are really about contestations of space. So, when you are allowed to plant your flag anywhere, I think it's a victory for lesbigay identity politics ... because it says we are here or we were here: this is an important dimension of the city." A lesbian in Boystown similarly advocated this position as part of a logic of urban planning and design: "I like that, from a city planning perspective, the idea of some protection is given to the historical nature of the neighborhood.... It's a social marker or a historical marker." Markers, in turn, bestow a sense of permanence in a world filled with flux. Her partner quipped, "You don't move the Plymouth Rock, right?"

The culture of a group in the present is linked with its history. "What can we do to preserve what we've had from a historical perspective," a gay man in Andersonville mused. "If we don't preserve these types of things, we don't remember what we came from or where we came from or what we did or what the struggle was like along the way." Without commemorations like the pylons, "we're just losing a sense of history and ourselves." In this way, sexual minorities are like "any other cultural group" in that that "we have our own history, and we have our own sufferings that we went through. It's important to remember that." The pylons accomplish this objective by materializing aspects of a culture. A different gay man in Andersonville added, "Lakeview is my gay history.... It's really important that we're not just learning about our gay history in a museum, but you can go and actually see it and that the neighborhood is preserved."

Lesbians and gay men lack a sense of ancestral linearity, at least in comparison with what racial and ethnic groups know about themselves, and this can induce collective amnesia (Sedgwick 1990). Commemorative devices protect against the temptation or coercion to forget. Museums offer an obvious way to redress this problem. Until recently, however, no such institution existed for sexual minorities in the United States. San Francisco blazed the trail in January 2011 when the first GLBT History museum opened there. The *Chronicle* reported,

Long recognized as ‘one of the great ground zeroes of queer liberation,’ the Castro becomes the site of the nation’s first lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history museum today. ‘Our letters were burned, our names blotted out, our books censored, our love declared unspeakable, our very existence denied,’ spell out words from a 1979 San Francisco Gay History Project flyer inscribed along one of the museum’s walls. Now, objects from the kitchen table and pink-framed sunglasses that belonged to Harvey Milk—who became the first elected openly gay politician in California by becoming a member of San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors—to manuscripts and sex toys, are on display at the 1,600-square-foot space at 4127 18th St. With two exhibits and hundreds of articles, the GLBT History Museum is the world’s second museum dedicated solely to gay and lesbian archives and materials, museum officials said. The only other one is in Germany. ‘Telling our stories transforms our lives and our society and takes us out of the margins,’ said Don Romesburg, a curator.... ‘The museum is at the heart of that project.’⁸

Chicago followed suit in 2012 when local officials unveiled the “Legacy Project,” a local non-profit organization “conceived to install memorials to GLBT Historic figures.” The group created “the world’s only outdoor museum walk celebrating the rich and diverse accomplishments of the GLBT community.” In the inaugural first phase, organizers installed 18 bronze plaques onto some of the existing rainbow pylons. This decision converted the pylons from markers to museum exhibits. Each plaque features an image cast relief portrait and a paragraph that has a brief biography of a historically important gay person or event that “marked a turning point in history.” Notable individuals include Jane Addams, Alvin Ailey, James Baldwin, Barbara Gittings, Keith Haring, Alfred Kinsey, Harvey Milk, Bayard Rustin, and Oscar Wilde, among others. Historical symbols and events include the pink triangle that the Nazis used during the Holocaust to mark lesbians and gay men; the Harlem Renaissance; the American Psychiatric Association’s decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973; and the Stonewall Riots.⁹

It is no accident that the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco, the pylons and the Legacy Walk in Chicago, and other commemorative markers are situated in specific urban spaces. They redress the problem of ancestral lineage by connecting sexual minorities with their own history. There are many other national examples, including honoring Dr. Franklin Kameny, one of the most significant figures in the gay rights movement, by naming a street in Washington, D.C. “Frank Kameny Way” in December 2010; doing the same for Harvey Milk in 2013 in San Diego; President Obama’s 2009 designation of the month of June as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month; installing George Segal’s “Gay Liberation” sculpture in Christopher Park in New York; including the Stonewall Inn on the National Register of Historic Places as a National Historic Landmark; and remembering the riots with annual gay pride parades. Sociologists who study collective memory call such items the “facts of representation”

⁸ “SF Gay History Museum Finds Home, Identity,” by Jessica Kwong. *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 2011, p. C-1. See: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/01/12/BAK81H7L8I.DTL>, accessed May 6, 2011.

⁹ <http://legacyprojectchicago.org/>

(Griffin and Bollen 2009:595). But the perceptions of ordinary people, or the “facts of reception” (ibid.) such as the ones that I have detailed in this section, imbue those memories with meaning and materiality (Olick and Robbins 1998, p. 106; Armstrong and Crage 2006; Wagner-Pacifici 1996; Irwin-Zarecka 1994). As a result, the past, present, and future all blend together: “The past is never really ‘past.’ It persists into the present and presages the future” (Griffin and Bollen 2009, p. 594). Commemorations ensure the cultural survival of gayborhoods despite accelerating sexual integration, and they allow social scientists to measure urban sexual cultures in a post-gay era.¹⁰

Conclusions

In this article, I used contemporary changes in gayborhoods as an opportunity to think about how to study the culture of a minority group as its members move into the mainstream. If by “culture” we mean to say a “*particular way of life*” (Williams 1976, p. 90, emphasis added) or a “*specific*” (ibid., p. 89, emphasis added) characterization of group of people like sexual minorities, and if members of that respective group are assimilating into the mainstream of American society, then how is it possible to detect their distinct cultures? The very idea of measuring sexual cultures is potentially thwarted in a post-gay era of public acceptance and assimilation. And while sociologists have made great progress on conceptual clarification of the culture concept, they have remained comparatively quiet on the related question of measurement (Ghaziani 2009). What can indicate the *presence* of an urban sexual way of life in a social context characterized by the *absence* of cultural distinctions, a time when lesbians and gay men are integrating into neighborhoods across the entire city?

I have argued that sexual cultures are analytically observable, despite the alleged “decline of the gay enclave” (Usher and Morrison 2010, p. 271), through particular placeholders like institutional anchors and commemorations. These urban artifacts create a type of nostalgia space in the midst of a diaspora, perhaps more than they represent the advent of a uniquely post-gay culture. Nevertheless, they create important cultural continuities across periods of historical change. As devices of measurement, anchors and commemorations can prevent the culture concept from devolving into “an amorphous, indescribable mist” (Fine 1979, p. 733). That said, they also carry a risk of reductionism and selection bias that is worth mentioning. Not all same-sex cultures are urban (Herring 2010; Gray 2009; Brekhus 2003; Kazyak 2012), not all urban sexual cultures are based in gay neighborhoods (Barrett and Pollack 2005), those that are can

¹⁰ Frank Kameny Way: “‘Kameny Way’ Ceremony Highlights Capital Pride Events,” by Lou Chibbaro Jr. *Washington Blade*, June 8, 2010: <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2010/06/08/%E2%80%98kameny-way%E2%80%99-ceremony-highlights-capital-pride-events/>, accessed May 9, 2011. See also (Greene 2011). Harvey Milk Street in San Diego: <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2013/apr/11/sd-harvey-milk/>, accessed June 25, 2013. June as Pride Month: see the White House press release, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month, 2009,” June 1, 2009, Office of the Press Secretary: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Presidential-Proclamation-LGBT-Pride-Month/, accessed May 9, 2011. Stonewall Inn as a historic landmark: “Stonewall, Gay Bar That Made History: Is Made a Landmark,” by David W. Dunlap. *New York Times*, June 26, 1999, p. 1: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/26/nyregion/stonewall-gay-bar-that-made-history-is-made-a-landmark.html>, accessed May 9, 2011. Christopher Park: see the website of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation: <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M012/highlights/7714> and <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/M012/highlights/10767>, accessed May 9, 2011.

sometimes exclude women, people of color, people from working class backgrounds, bisexuals, and transgender individuals (Nero 2005; Pritchard et al. 2002; Valentine 2000; Adler and Brenner 1992; Doan 2007; Hemmings 2002; Valocchi 1999a), and sexual cultures, whether urban or otherwise, can vary by region (Sears 2001; Fellows 1996; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996).

Furthermore, even those urban sexual cultures that are based in a gayborhood involve more than a collection of organizations, businesses, municipally-sanctioned installations like the rainbow pylons, and an outdoor museum. Ways of life of sexual minorities encompass symbolic meanings associated with the closet (Chauncey 1994; Yoshino 2006), genres of television, music, and literature (e.g., Frank Ocean as an out hip-hop artist, the Ellen show, and Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*), ritual events (e.g., Pride Parades, Dyke Marches, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Marches on Washington), the iconography of drag (Rupp et al. 2010) along with their respective histories of male effeminacy and female masculinity (Hennen 2008; Halberstam 1998), political infighting (Ghaziani 2008), relationships, kinships, and family forms (Powell et al. 2010; Nardi 1999; Lorde 1982; Moore 2011), camp (Cleto 1999; Babuscio 1977), medical concerns such as HIV/AIDS (Gould 2009; Gamson 1989), relationships with heterosexuals (Meyers 2008), and countless other aspects of "gay culture" or "lavender culture" that point to the expression of a unique subjectivity, aesthetic, and style of socialization (Halperin 2012; Jay and Young 1978).

None of this trivializes the cultural power (Griswold 1987; Schudson 1989; Swidler 1995) that inheres in institutional anchors and commemorations, or their capacity to operationalize group boundaries. No single concept or mechanism can explain the full range of variation in urban sexual cultures. To attempt to do so is not our principal objective. What matters instead is for us to innovate on methods that we can use to increase our degree of measurement precision, especially but not exclusively using qualitative approaches.

Acknowledgments This article was inspired by a Measuring Culture conference that John Mohr and I organized at the University of British Columbia in October 2012. The Vancouver gathering was generously funded by the UBC Department of Sociology (special thanks to Neil Guppy); a Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Seed Fund Grant from the UBC Dean of the College of Arts (special thanks to Gage Averill); an HSS Symposium Grant; and a grant from the UBC Vice President Research and International (special thanks to Ralph Matthews). I am grateful for the collective insights of conference attendees: Chris Bail, Neil Gross, Jenn Lena, Omar Lizardo, Terry McDonnell (a special thanks to him for his comments on an earlier draft), Ashley Mears, Ann Mische, John Mohr, Steve Vaisey, and Fred Wherry (a special thanks to Fred, as well, for providing comments on an earlier draft). Finally, I would like express my gratitude to the Princeton Society of Fellows (and the Fund for Reunion/Princeton Bisexual, Transgendered, Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association). This article is part of a book project that I developed during my time as a fellow. I would not have been able to conduct the interviews that I reported here without the financial support of Princeton University's Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

References

- Abu-Lughod, J. L. (1999). *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's global cities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Adler, S., & Brenner, J. (1992). Gender and space: lesbians and gay men in the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 16(1), 24–34.
- Aldrich, R. (2004). Homosexuality and the city: an historical overview. *Urban Studies*, 41(9), 1719–1737.

- Alexander, J. C. (2003). *The meanings of social life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, E. (2011). *The cosmopolitan canopy: race and civility in everyday life*. New York: Norton.
- Armstrong, E. A. (2002). *Forging gay identities: organizing sexuality in San Francisco, 1950–1994*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Armstrong, E. A., & Crage, S. M. (2006). Movements and memory: the making of the stonewall myth. *American Sociological Review*, 71(5), 724–751.
- Babuscio, J. (1977). Camp and the gay sensibility. In R. Dyer (Ed.), *Gays and film* (pp. 40–57). London: British Film Institute.
- Bail, C. A. (2012). The fringe effect: civil society organizations and the evolution of media discourse about Islam since the September 11th attacks. *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 855–879.
- Baim, T. (Ed.). (2008). *Out and proud in Chicago: an overview of the city's gay community*. Chicago: Surrey Books.
- Barrett, D. C., & Pollack, L. M. (2005). Whose gay community? Social class, sexual self-expression, and gay community involvement. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(3), 437–456.
- Becker, H. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. T. (1985). *Habits of the heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bergquist, K., & McDonald, R. (2006). *A field guide to gay and lesbian Chicago*. Chicago: Lake Claremont Press.
- Berube, A. (1990). *Coming out under fire: the history of gay men and women in World War Two*. New York: Plume.
- Betsky, A. (1997). *Queer space: architecture and same-sex desire*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.
- Binder, A., Blair-Loy, M., Evans, J., Ng, K., & Schudson, M. (2008). The diversity of culture. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 619, 6–14.
- Birch, E. (2010). *Anchor institutions and their role in metropolitan change*. Philadelphia: Penn Institute for Urban Research.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brekhus, W. (2003). *Peacocks, chameleons, centaurs: gay suburbia and the grammar of social identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, G. (2006). cosmopolitan camouflage: (post-)gay space in Spitalfields, East London. In J. Binnie, J. Holloway, S. Millington, & C. Young (Eds.), *Cosmopolitan urbanism* (pp. 130–145). New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, D. T. (1958). Common fate, similarity, and other indices of the status of aggregates of persons as social entities. *Behavioral Science*, 3(1), 14–25.
- Carter, D. (2004). *Stonewall: the riots that sparked the gay revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Castells, M. (1983). *The city and the grassroots: a cross-cultural theory of urban social movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Castells, M., & Murphy, K. (1982). Cultural identity and urban structure: the spatial organization of San Francisco's gay community. In N. I. Fainstein & S. F. Fainstein (Eds.), *Urban policy under capitalism* (pp. 237–259). London: Sage.
- Chauncey, G. (1994). *Gay New York: gender, urban culture, and the making of the gay male world, 1890–1940*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cicourel, A. V. (1964). *Method and measurement in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- Clark, T. N. (2011). The New Chicago School: notes toward a theory. In D. R. Judd & D. Simpson (Eds.), *The city revisited: urban theory from Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York* (pp. 220–241). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cleto, F. (Ed.). (1999). *Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Cook, T. D. (1985). Postpositivist critical multiplism. In R. L. Shotland & M. M. Mark (Eds.), *Social science and social policy* (pp. 21–62). London: Sage.
- D'Emilio, J. (1989). Gay politics and community in San Francisco since World War II. In M. Duberman, M. Vicinus, & G. Chauncey (Eds.), *Hidden from history: reclaiming the gay and lesbian past* (pp. 456–473). New York: New American Library Books.
- D'Emilio, J. (1993). Capitalism and gay identity. In H. Ablove, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *The lesbian and gay studies reader* (pp. 467–476). New York: Routledge.
- D'Emilio, J., & Freedman, E. B. (1997). *Intimate matters: a history of sexuality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Diamond, L. (2008). *Sexual fluidity: understanding women's love and desire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- DiMaggio, P. (1987). Classification in art. *American Sociological Review*, 52, 440–455.
- Doan, P. L. (2007). Queers in the American City: transgendered perceptions of urban spaces. *Gender, Place, and Culture*, 14(1), 57–74.
- Doan, P. L., & Higgins, H. (2011). The demise of queer space? Resurgent gentrification and the assimilation of LGBT neighborhoods. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 31(1), 6–25.
- Dubb, S., & Howard, T. (2012). *Leveraging anchor institutions for local job creation and wealth building*. College Park: The Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland.
- Duberman, M. (1993). *Stonewall*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Edgell, P., & Tranby, E. (2010). Shared visions? Diversity and cultural membership in American life. *Social Problems*, 57(2), 175–204.
- Egan, P. J., Edelman, M. S., & Sherrill, K. (2008). *Findings from the Hunter College poll of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals: new discoveries about identity, political attitudes, and civic engagement*. New York: Hunter College.
- Eliasoph, N., & Lichterman, P. (2003). Culture in interaction. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(4), 735–794.
- Epstein, S. (1987). Gay politics, ethnic identity: the limits of social constructionism. *Socialist Review*, 17(3–4), 9–54.
- Evans, S. M., & Boyte, H. C. (1986). *Free spaces: the sources of democratic change in America*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fellows, W. (1996). *Farm boys: lives of gay men from the rural Midwest*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fine, G. A. (1979). Small groups and cultural creation: the idioculture of little league baseball teams. *American Sociological Review*, 44, 733–745.
- Fine, G. A. (1987). *With the boys: little league baseball and preadolescent culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gamson, J. (1989). Silence, death, and the invisible enemy: AIDS activism and social movement 'newness'. *Social Problems*, 36, 351–367.
- Gates, G. J., & Cooke, A. M. (2011). *United States census snapshot: 2010*. Los Angeles: The Williams Institute.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ghaziani, A. (2008). *The dividends of dissent: how conflict and culture work in lesbian and gay marches on Washington*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ghaziani, A. (2009). An 'amorphous mist'? The problem of measurement in the study of culture. *Theory and Society*, 38(6), 581–612.
- Ghaziani, A. (2010). There goes the gayborhood? *Contexts*, 9(4), 64–66.
- Ghaziani, A. (2011). Post-gay collective identity construction. *Social Problems*, 58(1), 99–125.
- Ghaziani, A., & Baldassarri, D. (2011). Cultural anchors and the organization of differences: a multi-method analysis of LGBT marches on Washington. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2), 179–206.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gitlin, T. (1995). *The twilight of common dreams: why America is wracked by culture wars*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Goldfarb, J. (1987). The sociology of culture as a subfield. *Culture*, 2(3), 2.
- Gould, D. B. (2009). *Moving politics: emotion and ACT UP's fight against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Graham, A. H. (2008). Where the gays are. *Advocate*, p. 34.
- Gray, M. L. (2009). *Out in the country: youth, media, and queer visibility in Rural America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Greene, T. (2011). Sexual orientation, sexual identity, and the politics of place. *Northwestern University Sexuality Project Working Paper*. Evanston, IL.
- Griffin, L. J., & Bollen, K. A. (2009). What do these memories do? Civil rights remembrance and racial attitudes. *American Sociological Review*, 74(4), 594–614.
- Griswold, W. (1986). *Renaissance revivals: city comedy and revenge tragedy in the London theatre 1576–1980*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Griswold, W. (1987). The fabrication of meaning: literary interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(5), 1077–1117.
- Gross, N. (2009). A pragmatist theory of social mechanisms. *American Sociological Review*, 74(3), 358–379.

- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halperin, D. M. (2012). *How to be gay*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Harris, D. (1997). *The rise and fall of gay culture*. New York: Hyperion.
- Heap, C. (2003). The city as a sexual laboratory: the Queer Heritage of the Chicago School. *Qualitative Sociology*, 26(4), 457–487.
- Hemmings, C. (2002). *Bisexual spaces: a geography of sexuality and gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Hennen, P. (2008). *Faeries, bears, and leathermen: men in the community queering the masculine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Herring, S. (2010). *Another country: queer anti-urbanism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hogg, M. A., Sherman, D. K., Dierselhuus, J., Maitner, A. T., & Moffitt, G. (2007). Uncertainty, entitativity, and group identification. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(1), 135–142.
- Hopkins, D. J., & King, G. (2010). A method of automated nonparametric content analysis for social science. *American Journal of Political Science*, 54(1), 229–247.
- Irwin-Zarecka, I. (1994). *Frames of remembrance: the dynamics of collective memory*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Jay, K., & Young, A. (Eds.). (1978). *Lavender culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jepperson, R. L., & Swidler, A. (1994). What properties of culture should we measure? *Poetics*, 22(4), 359–371.
- Johnston, H., & Klandermans, B. (Eds.). (1995). *Social movements and culture (Vol. 4, Social movements, protest, and contention)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kazyak, E. (2012). Midwest or lesbian? Gender, rurality, and sexuality. *Gender & Society*, 26(6), 825–848.
- Keating, A. D. (Ed.). (2008). *Chicago neighborhoods and suburbs: a historical guide*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, morals, and manners*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, M. (2001). *The dignity of working men: morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Lauria, M., & Knopp, L. (1985). Toward an analysis of the role of gay communities in the urban renaissance. *Urban Geography*, 6(2), 152–169.
- Levine, M. P. (1979). Gay ghetto. In M. P. Levine (Ed.), *Gay men: the sociology of male homosexuality* (pp. 182–204). New York: Harper and Row.
- Lichterman, P. (1995). Piecing together a multicultural community: cultural differences in community building among grassroots environments. *Social Problems*, 42, 513–534.
- Lizardo, O. (2006). How cultural tastes shape personal networks. *American Sociological Review*, 71, 778–807.
- Lloyd, R. (2006). *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. New York: Routledge.
- Lorde, A. (1982). *Zami: a new spelling of my name*. Freedom: The Crossing Press.
- McDonnell, T. (2010). Cultural objects as objects: materiality, urban space, and the interpretation of AIDS campaigns in Accra, Ghana. *American Journal of Sociology*, 115(6), 1800–1852.
- Meeker, M. (2006). *Contacts desired: gay and lesbian communications and community, 1940s–1970s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mendelsohn, D. (1996). When did gays get so straight? *New York Magazine*, 24–31.
- Meyers, D. J. (2008). Ally identity: the politically gay. In J. Reger, D. J. Myers, & R. L. Einwohner (Eds.), *Identity work in social movements* (pp. 167–187). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Miller, D. (1987). *Material culture and mass consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mische, A. (2008). *Partisan publics: communication and contention across Brazilian youth activist networks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mohr, J. W. (1998). Measuring meaning structures. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 345–370.
- Mohr, J. W., & Duquenne, V. (1997). The duality of culture and practice: poverty relief in New York City, 1888–1917. *Theory and Society*, 26(2–3), 305–356.
- Moore, M. (2011). *Invisible families: gay identities, relationships, and motherhood among Black women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mukerji, C. (1994). Towards a sociology of material culture: science studies, cultural studies, and the meanings of things. In D. Crane (Ed.), *The sociology of culture: emerging perspectives* (pp. 143–162). New York: Blackwell.
- Murray, S. O. (1979). Institutional elaboration of a quasi-ethnic community. *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 9(2), 165–178.
- Murray, S. O. (1992). Components of gay community in San Francisco. In G. Herdt (Ed.), *Gay culture in America* (pp. 107–146). Boston: Beacon.
- Murray, S. O. (1996). *American gay*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nardi, P. (1999). *Gay men's friendships: invincible communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Nash, C. J. (2012). The age of the ‘post-mo’? Toronto’s gay village and a new generation. *Geoforum*. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.11.023.
- Nero, C. (2005). Why are the gay ghettos white? In E. P. Johnson & M. G. Henderson (Eds.), *Black queer studies* (pp. 228–245). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Newton, E. (1993). *Cherry grove, Fire Island: sixty years in America’s first gay and lesbian town*. Boston: Beacon.
- Olick, J. K., & Robbins, J. (1998). Social memory studies: from ‘collective memory’ to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 105–140.
- Papadopoulos, A. (2005). From “towertown” to “boystown” and “girtown”: Chicago’s gay and lesbian geographies. In R. P. Green, M. J. Bouman, & D. Grammenos (Eds.), *Chicago’s geographies: a 21st century metropolis*. Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers.
- Peterson, R. A. (Ed.). (1976). *The production of culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Polletta, F. (1999). ‘Free spaces’ in collective action. *Theory and Society*, 28(1), 1–38.
- Powell, B., Bolzendahl, C., Geist, C., & Steelman, L. C. (2010). *Counted out: same-sex relations and americans’ definitions of family*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Pritchard, A., Morgan, N., & Sedgley, D. (2002). In search of lesbian space? The experience of Manchester’s gay village. *Leisure Studies*, 21(2), 105–123.
- Pugh, A. J. (2013). What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 1(1), 42–68.
- Ragin, C. C. (1994). *Constructing social research*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.
- Richardson, D. (2005). Desiring sameness? The rise of a neoliberal politics of normalisation. *Antipode*, 37(3), 515–535.
- Rupp, L. J., & Taylor, V. (2003). *Drag queens at the 801 cabaret*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rupp, L. J., Taylor, V., & Shapiro, E. L. (2010). Drag queens and drag kings: the difference gender makes. *Sexualities*, 13(3), 275–294.
- Rushbrook, D. (2002). Cities, queer space, and the cosmopolitan tourist. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8(1–2), 183–206.
- Sampson, R. J. (2012). *Great American city: Chicago and the enduring neighborhood effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schudson, M. (1989). How culture works: perspectives from media studies on the efficacy of symbols. *Theory and Society*, 18(2), 153–180.
- Sears, J. T. (2001). *Rebels, rubyfruit, and rhinestones: queering space in the stonewall south*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Seidman, S. (2002). *Beyond the closet: the transformation of gay and lesbian life*. New York: Routledge.
- Seidman, S., Meeks, C., & Traschen, F. (1999). Beyond the closet? The changing social meaning of homosexuality in the United States. *Sexualities*, 2(1), 9–34.
- Sewell, W. H., Jr. (1999). The concept(s) of culture. In V. E. Bonnell & L. Hunt (Eds.), *Beyond the cultural turn: new directions in the study of society and culture* (pp. 35–61). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Small, M. L. (2011). How to conduct a mixed methods study: recent trends in a rapidly growing literature. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 57–86.
- Small, M. L., Harding, D. J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering culture and poverty. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 629, 6–27.
- Spillman, L. (1995). Culture, social structures, and discursive fields. *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 15, 129–154.
- Spring, A. L. (2013). Declining segregation of same-sex partners: evidence from census 2000 and 2010. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 32(5), 687–716.
- Stevens, S. S. (1951). Mathematics, measurement, and psychophysics. In S. S. Stevens (Ed.), *Handbook of experimental psychology* (pp. 1–49). New York: John Wiley.
- Stryker, S., & Van Buskirk, J. (1996). *Gay by the bay: a history of queer culture in the San Francisco bay area*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Sullivan, A. (1996). *Virtually normal: an argument about homosexuality*. New York: Vintage.
- Sullivan, A. (2005). The end of gay culture: assimilation and its meanings. *The New Republic*.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51, 273–286.
- Swidler, A. (1995). Cultural power and social movements. In H. Johnston & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (pp. 25–40). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Swidler, A. (2001). *Talk of love: how culture matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tavernise, S. (2011). New numbers, and new geography, for gay couples. New York Times.
- Taylor, P. (2013). *A survey of LGBT Americans: attitudes, experiences and values in changing times*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Taylor, V., Kimport, K., Van Dyke, N., & Andersen, E. A. (2009). Culture and mobilization: tactical repertoires, same-sex weddings, and the impact on gay activism. *American Sociological Review*, 74, 865–890.
- Usher, N., & Morrison, E. (2010). The demise of the gay enclave, communication infrastructure theory, and the transformation of gay public space. In C. Pullen & M. Cooper (Eds.), *LGBT identity and online new media* (pp. 271–287). New York: Routledge.
- Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: a dual-process model of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(6), 1675–1715.
- Vaisey, S., & Lizardo, O. (2010). Can cultural worldviews influence network composition? *Social Forces*, 88(4), 1595–1618.
- Valentine, G. (Ed.). (2000). *From nowhere to everywhere: lesbian geographies*. Binghamton: Harrington Press.
- Valocchi, S. (1999a). The class-inflected nature of gay identity. *Social Problems*, 46(2), 207–224.
- Valocchi, S. (1999b). Riding the crest of a protest wave? Collective action frames in the gay liberation movement, 1969–1973. *Mobilization*, 4(1), 59–73.
- Wagner-Pacifi, R. (1996). Memories in the making: the shapes of things that went. *Qualitative Sociology*, 19, 301–322.
- Warner, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Warner, M. (1999a). *The trouble with normal*. New York: The Free Press.
- Warner, M. (1999b). *The trouble with normal: sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life*. New York: Free Press.
- Waters, M. C. (1990). *Ethnic options: choosing identities in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Waters, M. C. (2000). Immigration, intermarriage, and the challenges of measuring racial/ethnic identity. *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(11), 1735–1737.
- Waters, M. C., & Ueda, R. (2007). *The new Americans: a guide to immigration since 1965*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weston, K. (1995). Get thee to a big city: sexual imaginary and the great gay migration. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 2(3), 253–277.
- Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wittman, C. (1970). *A gay manifesto*. New York: Red Butterfly Publication.
- Wuthnow, R. (1987). *Meaning and moral order: explorations in cultural analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wuthnow, R. (1989). *Communities of discourse: ideology and social structure in the reformation, the enlightenment, and European socialism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wuthnow, R. (1997). Is cultural sociology doomed? *Culture*, 11(3–4), 1–2.
- Yoshino, K. (2006). *Covering: the hidden assault on our civil rights*. New York: Random House.

Amin Ghaziani is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia. He has published articles in the *American Sociological Review*, *Social Problems*, *Sociological Forum*, *Contexts*, and *Theory and Society*. Ghaziani is author of *The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (Chicago, 2008). His newest book, entitled *There Goes the Gayborhood?*, is forthcoming in August 2014 with Princeton University Press (Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology Series).