

# **Women in contact with the gay and lesbian community: Sydney Women and Sexual Health survey 1996 and 1998**

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## 1 Introduction

At the start of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, considerable attention was paid to the risk of women becoming infected and the spread of HIV from gay men to the 'general community'. Early fears about the infectivity of HIV and spread via bisexual men have now largely been calmed in Australia, as the infection rates among women have remained low compared to those among men. Nonetheless, sex with a man remains the main risk for HIV transmission to women. During

1997, 66 women were newly diagnosed with HIV infection in Australia, 58 of them through heterosexual contact and 7 through injecting drug use (*Australian HIV Surveillance Report* April 1998)<sup>1</sup>. However, it is important to remember that for a case of 'heterosexual' transmission of HIV to occur, neither party need be heterosexual.

There is a tendency among some clinicians, the popular media and members of the general public to assume that lesbians are by definition 'women who do not have sex with men', and thus to disregard any possibility of their exposure to HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Such an assumption equates epidemiological or behavioural categories with social identities and disregards the fact that women who identify as lesbians have often had sex with men in the past and may continue to do so intermittently or even frequently, just as some gay-identified men may have sex with women. Further, because of the social circles in which they move, lesbian-identified women and other women associated with gay/lesbian/queer community who do have sex with men are more likely to have sex with homosexually active men than are women randomly selected from the community at large. If they inject drugs in the company of gay or homosexually active male friends, they are more likely to come into contact with HIV, especially if they share injecting equipment.

Both the Gay and Lesbian Injecting Drug Use Project (GLIDUP) and the Women Partners of Gay/Bisexual Men Project at the AIDS Council of NSW are accessed by women who are connected to Sydney's gay and lesbian communities. Some of these women have reported having sexual contact with and/or injecting drugs with gay or bisexual men. Women also access GLIDUP's needle exchange services at major gay and lesbian parties.

Late in 1995 the Sydney Men and Sexual Health (SMASH) project released a report on men in the gay community and their sex with women (Prestage et al. 1995). This preliminary report raised issues about women in contact with the gay community which needed to be addressed more directly.

These circumstances prompted project officers with GLIDUP and the Women Partners of Gay/Bisexual Men project to initiate research into the contact these women have with community-attached gay and bisexual men. The result was this survey, carried out for the first time in 1996 and again in 1998. It is based on convenience sampling and was initiated in order to estimate risks to women in contact with Sydney's gay and lesbian community, with the primary aim of finding whether further work was necessary, either in research or targeted prevention campaigns.

This monograph reports primarily on the 1998 survey, but 1996 figures are given in the tables for comparison. Because of slight differences in the sampling and the questionnaire, the differences between the two years cannot be attributed solely to change over time. Rather the figures from the two surveys should be read together to give an approximate indication of HIV-related behaviour and risk factors among women in this milieu.

## 2 Methods and sample

A two-page self-completion questionnaire was developed on the model of the one used for the Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey of men in sexual and/or social contact with Sydney's gay community (Prestage et al. 1996). The questionnaire asked women about HIV-related risk behaviours including drug use and sex with gay or bisexual men. (See Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire.) Because of our experience in 1996, we altered some questions slightly to improve comprehension and to provide check data on important points. We also added some new questions related to hepatitis C. Where the 1996 and 1998 questionnaires differed materially, only the 1998 results are given here.<sup>2</sup>

In February&mdash;March 1998 the questionnaire was distributed to women attending the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day at Victoria Park in inner western Sydney next to the University of Sydney and at several other gay/lesbian community venues and health services, including needle and syringe exchange points. Some venues were used for distribution which had not been used in 1996, so the sample was not exactly the same as the 1996 one. Volunteer respondents were offered raffle tickets with a prize of theatre or opera tickets for two in return for the completed questionnaires.

Results were entered from the questionnaires into an ASCII file which was then loaded into SPSS for analysis. The data were cleaned and checked for internal consistency and checked against the questionnaires where inconsistencies were found. All additional comments and answers to open-ended questions were also transferred from the questionnaires at this stage. The analysis presented here is primarily descriptive, with cross-tabs and *t*-tests to confirm significant differences between subgroups where appropriate.

The majority of respondents took part in the survey at Fair Day. They were completing the questionnaires under less than ideal conditions: usually standing at a booth, on a very hot day. It is not surprising therefore that non-answer rate for some questions was high, especially those requiring writing a word or phrase rather than simply ticking a box. It was also clear that many respondents simply left a question blank when it did not apply to them, rather than ticking the 'no' response. For this reason, percentages have generally been calculated in this report on the total sample, not on the question-specific response rate, which would have inflated the 'yes' percentages. Readers can take the 'yes' percentages given as lower-bound estimates and judge for themselves whether to interpret the missing people as likely to be similar to the respondents or likely to mean 'no' or 'not applicable'. Where the non-answer rate was low and the difference between the valid and total percentages was less than 1 per cent, results are generally given without comment on missing responses.

## 3 Results: recruitment and sample characteristics

## Recruitment

At Mardi Gras Fair Day, 554 women completed the survey; a further 220 were recruited at the other venues and clinics, giving a total of 774 responses. Social events/venues included a women's sauna party, pubs and clubs and a social-cum-sporting venue. Community groups included organisations for sex workers, transgender people, bisexual men and women, and women partners of gay/bisexual men. Clinics included a private primary care and STD/HIV practice, a public primary care facility for sex workers and homeless youth, and a stand-alone needle-and-syringe exchange point (Table 1). Questionnaires were offered to everyone identifying as a woman who was willing to respond. Because of practical difficulties, refusal rates were not calculated. Fair Day is an open-air function, so people who wish to avoid researchers handing out questionnaires can take a route to avoid people carrying clipboards or directing respondents to the booths; they can also easily accept a survey form and disappear with it. Women who explicitly refused a verbal offer to contribute were rare (less than 5 per cent); they appeared mostly to do so because they felt they had nothing to contribute because they were not sexually active or did not perceive HIV/AIDS risks as relevant to them.

The same questionnaires were also distributed to 163 women through two events/venues not connected to the gay and lesbian community, but the results are not reported here.

**Table 1 Recruitment venue category, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mardi Gras Fair Day	496	84.8	554	71.6
Community social event/venue	5	0.9	136	17.6
Community group/meeting	42	7.2	37	4.8
Clinic/NSEP	42	7.2	47	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Social attachment to the gay community

Of the total 774 respondents, 96 per cent said that at least a few of their friends were gay men (Table 2). In the past six months, 68 per cent had attended a gay bar, 65 per cent had attended a lesbian bar and 49 per cent had attended a gay/lesbian dance party. The great majority had at least some social contact with gay men: 88 per cent had more than a few gay male friends or had attended a gay bar or dance party.

**Table 2 Number of friends who are gay or homosexual men, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
None	28	4.8	24	3.1
A few	169	28.9	212	27.4
Some	214	36.6	260	33.6
Most	162	27.7	260	33.6
All	8	1.4	13	1.7
Not answered	4	0.7	5	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.1 Attendance at gay/lesbian social venues in the past six months, 1996 and 1998**

	<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Gay bar	62	68
Lesbian bar	64	65
Gay/lesbian dance party	44	49
Any one of the above	79	85

Fifty-nine per cent of the women (455/774; 41 did not answer the question) lived in inner or eastern Sydney, the areas generally associated with 'gay Sydney' (Table 3). This area includes only 18.7 per cent of Sydney's total population of women aged 15 or over (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 Census).

**Table 3 Where respondents lived, 1996 and 1998**

Location	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Gay Sydney <sup>a</sup>	58	9.9	72	9.3
Eastern suburbs	73	12.5	105	13.6
Inner Sydney	243	41.5	278	35.9
Southern suburbs	25	4.3	42	5.4
Northern suburbs	50	8.5	70	9.0
Western suburbs	45	7.7	63	8.1
Outside Sydney	69	11.8	103	13.3
Not answered	22	3.8	41	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Transgender respondents

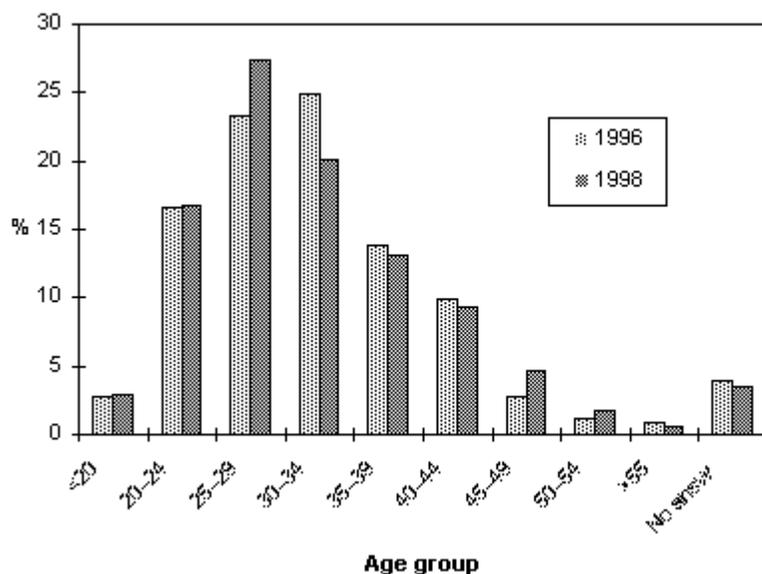
Twenty respondents indicated that they were transgender.<sup>3</sup> The trannies<sup>4</sup> represented less than 3 per cent of the group as a whole. More than half (12) of them were recruited from groups or clinics. In 1996 there were 27 trannie respondents (5 per cent). The trannies differed significantly from the other women on only a few variables, which are noted below where appropriate.

## Social and demographic characteristics

### Age

The age range was 15 to 60 years and the median age 30 (27 people did not answer the question). Only one respondent was under 16; she was attending Fair Day with her mother, who encouraged her to complete the questionnaire. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Age distribution of sample, 1996 and 1998**



### Education, occupation and employment

This was a well-educated sample: 64 per cent had post-school qualifications. In SWASH 1996, 72 per cent had post-school qualifications. For comparison, only 31.5 per cent of Australians in general aged 15 or over had qualifications in 1996 (ABS, 1996 Census). See Table 4. Of those who answered the question on employment ( $n = 746$ ), 63 per cent were employed full-time, 13 per cent were employed only part-time, 13 per cent were students (some of whom were also employed) and 5 per cent stated that they were unemployed (Table 4.1). Nine per cent had dependent children: 15 per cent of the straight/heterosexual women (see below) and 7 per cent of the lesbian women. Respondents were asked to state their occupation and the responses were coded into the categories used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Categories of occupation are shown in Table 4.2. Note that this question had a high rate (17 per cent) of missing answers.

**Table 4 Education, 1996 and 1998**

Education	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Primary school only	4	0.7	2	0.3
Up to 3 years of high school	26	4.4	40	5.2
Year 10/School Certificate	50	8.5	117	15.1
Year 12/Higher School Cert.	79	13.5	108	14.0
Tertiary diploma or trade cert.	108	18.5	144	18.6
University or CAE degree	292	49.9	330	42.6
Not answered	26	4.4	33	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4.1 Employment status, 1998** <sup>5</sup>

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%<sup>a</sup></b>
Self-employed full-time	66	8.5
Self-employed part-time	41	5.3
Employed full-time	419	54.1
Employed part-time	103	13.3
Unemployed	39	5.0
A student	103	13.3
A pensioner or on social security benefits	44	5.7
Doing domestic duties	17	2.2
A voluntary worker	27	3.5
Not in the work force	9	1.1
Not answered	28	3.6

(*a*) Respondents could tick more than one category, so percentages sum to more than 100%.

#### **Table 4.2 Occupation categories, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Professional	175	29.9	147	19.0
Managerial	31	5.3	58	7.5
Paraprofessional	89	15.2	191	24.7
Trade	24	4.1	59	7.6
Clerical	49	8.4	61	7.9
Sales	44	7.5	92	11.9
Driver	10	1.7	22	2.8
Labourer	15	2.6	2	0.3
Sex worker	13	2.2	10	1.3
Not answered	135	23.1	132	17.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### *Ethnicity*

The question on ethnicity (see Appendix), like the question on occupation, had a high rate of missing answers, 13 per cent. Table 5 shows the responses grouped into broad categories. This cannot be compared directly with the Census data,

which report place of birth and language spoken rather than ethnic affiliation. However, 5.5 per cent of Sydney's population was born in southern Europe and 9.5 per cent in eastern Asia. This suggests that the SWASH sample contains more Europeans and fewer Asians than would be expected if it were similar to the total Sydney population.

**Table 5 Ethnic group categories, 1996 and 1998**

Ethnic group	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Anglo-Australian <sup>a</sup>	373	63.9	557	72.0
Aboriginal	15	2.6	8	1.0
European <sup>b</sup>	36	6.2	60	7.8
Asian	10	1.7	11	1.4
Other	29	4.8	36	4.7
Not answered	122	20.7	102	13.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Including UK and Irish/Scottish/Celtic.

(b) Including Middle Eastern.

## Sexual identity

The questionnaire asked, 'Do you think of yourself as: Lesbian/dyke/homosexual/gay, Bisexual, Heterosexual/straight, Other (please specify)'. This response is termed 'sexual identity' here. Throughout this report, when women are referred to as lesbian, bisexual etc., it is this self-description that is being used. Two thirds of the women described themselves as lesbian/

dyke/etc. (Table 6). About one in six identified as heterosexual/straight and one in eight as bisexual. Twenty-eight women used some other term to describe themselves, such as 'queer' (8); many of them resisted categorisation, writing 'myself', 'sexual', 'try anything' or 'in transition'. Those who ticked either lesbian, bisexual or straight and also added a comment (13 respondents) most commonly added 'queer' (5). Eleven women did not answer the question. Transgender respondents were much more likely to choose the 'other' response and less likely to identify as lesbian.

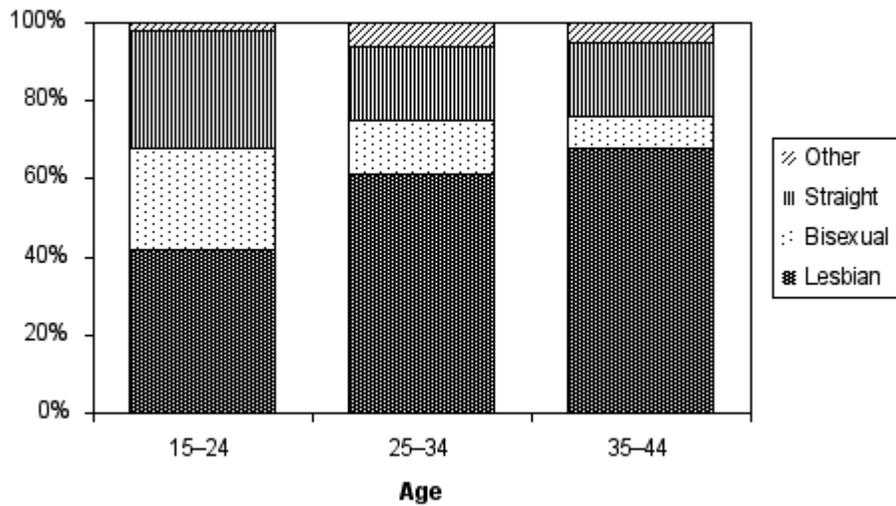
**Table 6 Stated sexual identity, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Lesbian/homosexual	340	58.1	503	65.0
Bisexual	86	14.7	100	12.9
Heterosexual/straight	124	21.2	133	17.2
Other	20	3.4	27	3.5
Not answered	15	2.6	11	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 6.1 Sexual identity by age group, 1996**

	Age 15&emdash;24	Age 25&emdash;34	Age 35&emdash;44	Age 45&emdash;54	Age 55&emdash;64	Total
Lesbian	48	172	87	19	2	328
Bisexual	29	40	10	4	1	84
Straight	34	53	24	7	1	119
Other/n.a.	2	17	7	4	1	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>562</b>

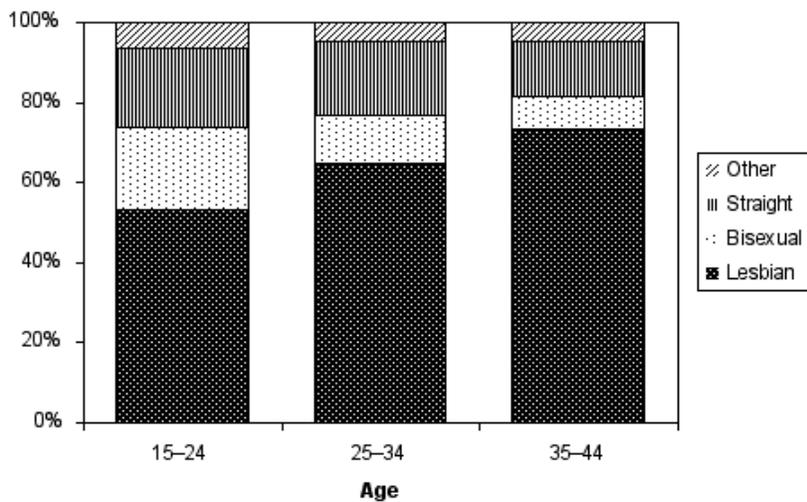
**Figure 6.1 Sexual identity by age group, 1996**



**Table 6.2 Sexual identity by age group, 1998**

	Age 15&dash;24	Age 25&dash;34	Age 35&dash;44	Age 45&dash;54	Age 55&dash;64	Total
Lesbian	81	237	128	39	3	488
Bisexual	31	45	14	3	1	94
Straight	30	68	24	6	0	128
Other/n.a.	10	17	8	2	0	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>747</b>

Figure 6.2 Sexual identity by age group, 1998



Younger women were more likely than older women to identify as bisexual and less likely to identify as lesbian (Tables 6.1 and 6.2 and Figures 6.1 and 6.2).

Thirteen women used the term 'queer' about themselves, six of them adding it after indicating lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. These women were younger than average&endash;all were under 40 and six were under 25. Eleven had had sex with a woman in the past six months, two with a gay man and two with a straight man.

## Sexual preference

The questionnaire asked 'Do you enjoy having sex with men, women or both?'; the responses are shown in Table 7. There was considerable but not exact correspondence between sexual identity and enjoyment of sex with men or women. Although 79 per cent of lesbians said they enjoyed sex only with women, 18 per cent had a non-exclusive preference, saying they liked mostly women or, in a few cases, men and women equally. Of two lesbians who said they enjoyed sex only or mostly with men, one was a trans woman. Bisexual women enjoyed sex with men and women equally (27 per cent), or had a preference for mostly men (13 per cent) or mostly women (21 per cent). They were more likely than the women in the other groups to say 'can't compare' (29 per cent). Of straight women, 62 per cent said they enjoyed sex only with men, but 23 per cent had a non-exclusive preference, and one woman (not a trans woman) said she enjoyed sex only with women.

**Table 7 Enjoyment of sex with men or women, by sexual identity, 1996 and 1998**

	1996 (n = 585)				1998 (n = 774)			
	Lesbian %	Bisexual %	Straight %	Other <sup>a</sup> %	Lesbian %	Bisexual %	Straight %	Other <sup>a</sup> %
	n = 340	n = 86	n = 124	n = 35	n = 503	n = 100	n = 133	n = 38
Men only	0.9	0.0	70.2	25.7	0.4	2.0	62.4	10.5
Mostly men	0.3	27.9	22.6	17.1	0.0	13.0	21.1	10.5
Men and women equally	0.3	44.2	1.6	14.3	0.8	27.0	0.8	5.3

Mostly women	20.3	19.8	0.0	25.7	16.9	21.0	0.8	23.7
Women only	77.1	3.5	0.8	5.7	79.1	3.0	0.8	23.7
No one	0.9	1.2	3.2	5.7	0.4	0.0	2.3	2.6
No answer <sup>b</sup>	0.3	3.5	1.6	5.7	2.4	34.0	12.0	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>							

(a) Including women who did not answer the question on sexual identity.

(b) Including women who answered 'It depends' or 'Can't compare'. This was not offered as a response on the 1996 questionnaire, although a few women wrote it.

## 4 Results: sexual partners

Respondents were asked whether they had had sex with gay or bisexual men, with heterosexual men and with women. Results are shown in Tables 8 to 11.3.

### Sex with gay or bisexual men

Two hundred and twelve women (27 per cent) had had sex with a gay or bisexual man, and 51 (7 per cent of the total group) had done so in the past six months (Table 8); eight of the 51 were trannies. Twenty of these women had had sex with more than one gay or bisexual man (Table 8.3). All four of the respondents who had had six or more gay/bi male partners in the past six months were trannies.

### Table 8 When respondents last had sex with a gay or bisexual man, 1996 and 1998

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
Never	430	73.5	540	69.8
Over 6 months ago	109	18.6	161	20.8
In the past 6 months	42	7.2	51	6.6
Not answered	4	0.7	22	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 8.1 When respondents last had sex with a gay or bisexual man, by sexual identity, 1996**

	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other
Never	285	38	82	25
Over 6 months ago	50	20	34	5
In the past 6 months	5	25	7	5
Not answered	0	3	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>35</b>

**Table 8.2 When respondents last had sex with a gay or bisexual man, by sexual identity, 1998**

	<b>Lesbian</b>	<b>Bisexual</b>	<b>Straight</b>	<b>Other/n.a.</b>
Never	388	44	89	19
Over 6 months ago	92	30	31	8
In the past 6 months	9	25	10	7
Not answered	14	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>38</b>

**Table 8.3 Number of gay or bisexual male sexual partners in the past six months, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number	%	Number	%
No. of partners				
One	17	2.9	31	60.8
2&dash;5	19	3.2	16	31.4
6&dash;10	3	0.5	2	3.9
>10	3	0.5	2	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 8.4 Number of gay or bisexual male sexual partners in the past six months, by sexual identity of respondents, 1996 ( $n = 42$ )**

No. of partners	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other
One	1	8	5	3
2&dash;5	3	13	2	1
6&dash;10	0	3	0	0
>10	1	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 8.5 Number of gay or bisexual male sexual partners in the past six months, by sexual identity of respondents, 1998 ( $n = 51$ )**

No. of partners	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other/n.a.
One	6	15	7	3
2&dash;5	2	9	3	2
6&dash;10	0	1	0	1
>10	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

A few lesbians (about 2 per cent) reported that they had recently had sex with a gay or bisexual man, as did 8 per cent of the heterosexual women. This was much more common among the bisexual women, of whom 25 per cent had had sex with one or more gay or bisexual men in the past six months ( $P < 0.001$ ).

### Sex with heterosexual men

Three hundred and ninety-five women (51 per cent) had had sex with one or more heterosexual men, of whom 181 (23 per cent of the total) had done so in the past six months (Table 9). Five of the 67 women who had had more than one straight male partner in the past six months were trannies. Fifteen women (one of whom was a tranny) had had more than 10 such partners (Table 9.2).<sup>6</sup> Twelve of these women had done sex work in the past six months.

### Table 9 When respondents last had sex with a straight or heterosexual man, 1998

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Never	191	24.7
Over 6 months ago	377	48.7
In the past 6 months	18	2.3
Not answered	2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 9.1 When respondents last had sex with a straight or heterosexual man, by sexual identity, 1998**

	<b>Lesbian</b>	<b>Bisexual</b>	<b>Straight</b>	<b>Other/n.a.</b>
Never	163	8	10	10
Over 6 months ago	304	37	22	14
In the past 6 months	18	54	99	10
Not answered	18	1	2	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>38</b>

**Table 9.2 Number of straight/heterosexual male sexual partners in the past six months, 1998**

Number of partners	Number	%
One	104	13.4
2&emdash;5	53	6.8
6&emdash;10	7	0.9
>10	15	1.9
Not answered	2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 9.3 Number of straight/heterosexual male sexual partners in the past six months, by sexual identity of respondents, 1998**

Number of partners	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other/n.a.
One	9	21	71	3
2&emdash;5	3	23	23	3
6&emdash;10	0	4	2	1
>10	5	6	2	2
Not answered	1	6	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>9</b>

Of the lesbian women, 4 per cent had had sex with at least one straight man in the past six months, as had 54 per cent of the bisexual women and 74 per cent of

the straight women. Note that the proportion of lesbians who had sex with a straight man was not accounted for by sex work, as only 6 of the 18 lesbian women who had had sex with a straight man reported having done sex work in the past six months (see below).

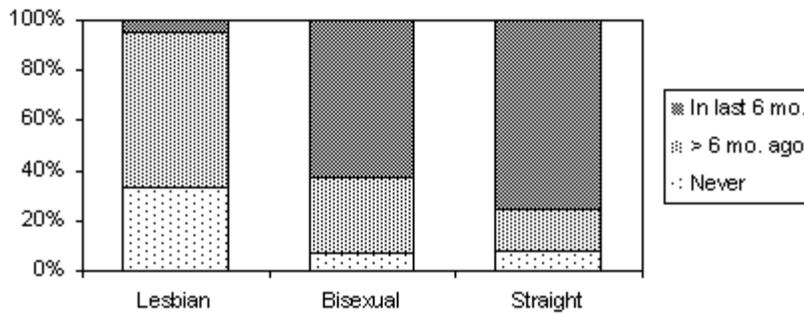
### Sex with men in general

Women's experience of sex with men in general, whatever the men's sexual identity/orientation, is shown in Table 10. It is notable that 331 of the 503 lesbians, 66 per cent, have ever had sex with a man.

**Table 10 When respondents last had sex with a man, by sexual identity, 1998**

	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other/n.a.
Never	167	7	11	8
Over 6 months ago	308	30	22	8
In the past 6 months	23	63	100	11
No answer	5	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>38</b>

**Figure 10 When respondents last had sex with a man, by sexual identity, 1998**



**Sex with women**

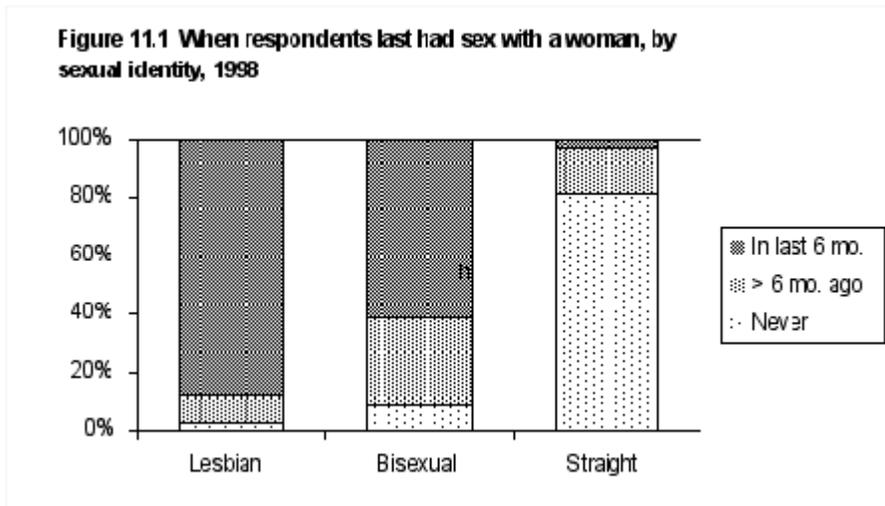
Six hundred and twenty-one women (80 per cent) reported that they had ever had sex with a woman, and 519 (67 per cent) had done so in the past six months. (Seventeen women did not answer the question.)<sup>6</sup>

**Table 11 When respondents last had sex with a woman, 1998**

	Number	%
Never	136	17.6
Over 6 months ago	102	13.2
In the past 6 months	519	67.1
Not answered	17	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 11.1 When respondents last had sex with a woman, by sexual identity, 1998**

	Lesbian	Bisexual	Straight	Other/n.a.
Never	12	8	108	8
Over 6 months ago	49	29	21	3
In the past 6 months	434	59	3	23
Not answered	8	4	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>38</b>



**Table 11.2 Number of female sexual partners in the past six months, 1998**

<b>Number of partners</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
One	388	74.8
2&emdash;5	114	22.0
6&emdash;10	7	1.3
>10	3	0.6
Not answered	12	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 11.3 Number of female sexual partners in the past six months, by sexual identity of respondents, 1998**

<b>Number of partners</b>	<b>Lesbian</b>	<b>Bisexual</b>	<b>Straight</b>	<b>Other/n.a.</b>
One	332	35	3	13
2&emdash;5	89	20	0	5
6&emdash;10	4	3	0	0
>10	3	0	0	0
Not answered	6	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>

The great majority of the lesbians (86 per cent) reported having recently had sex with at least one woman, as did 59 per cent of the bisexual women, 47 per cent of the 'other' women and 2 per cent of the straight women.

### **Regular relationships**

Respondents were asked whether they were currently in a sexual relationship with a regular partner (Table 12); 54 per cent were in a relationship with a woman.

### **Table 12 Regular relationships**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes&endash;with a woman	410	53.0
Yes&endash;with a man	114	14.7
Yes&endash;with both	8	1.0
No regular relationship	233	30.1
Not answered	9	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **Casual sex**

Respondents were asked whether they currently have casual sex (Table 13). Of those not in a regular relationship, 42 per cent were having casual sex. Only 16 per cent (82 out of 527) of those in regular relationships said they also had casual sex (Table 14). This is in marked contrast to the men responding to the Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey at the same time, among whom having a regular relationship where either partner may have casual sex with other men is the most common relationship pattern (40 per cent of respondents; two thirds of those in a relationship).

### **Table 13 Casual sex**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes&endash;with a woman	104	13.4
Yes&endash;with a man	44	5.7
Yes&endash;with both	32	4.1
No casual partners	581	75.1
No answer	13	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 14 Casual sex among respondents in regular relationships ( $n = 527$ )<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>In a regular relationship</b>		
	<b>With a woman</b>	<b>With a man</b>	<b>With both</b>
Casual sex with women	43	4	2
Casual sex with men	0	18	0
Casual sex with both	3	8	4
No casual sex	359	84	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>8</b>

(a) Excluding 15 women who did not answer about either casual sex or relationships.

### **Women in a regular relationship with a gay or bisexual man**

Sixteen women said that their regular male partner was bisexual. (In 1998, none described their regular partner as gay.) These 16 women were asked about the HIV status of their male partner and whether they had an agreement about sex outside the relationship; 12 of the men were reported to be negative and two were of unknown status or untested. Two women did not answer the question. Of these four women whose bisexual male partner's HIV status was not stated to be negative, three had had unprotected vaginal and/or anal intercourse with that partner.

Eleven women indicated that they had a clear agreement with their regular partner about him having sex with men (Table 15). All of the three women who said they had no agreement had had unprotected vaginal intercourse with their regular partner.

In 1998, there were no trannies in this group.

### **Table 15 Agreement about partner's sex with other men, 1996 and 1998**

	1996	1998
Type of agreement	Number	Number
He must have no sex with men	1	2
He must have no anal sex with men	0	1
He must always use condoms for anal sex with men	7	8
He can have anal sex with men without a condom	1	0
Other ('He is not into anal sex with men')	1	0

**Table 16 Sexual acts practised occasionally or often with a gay or bisexual regular partner, 1996 and 1998**

	Number	Number
Practice	1996	1998
Oral sex with ejaculation	18	12
Vaginal sex with condom	19	10
Vaginal without condom, no ejaculation	10	10
Vaginal without condom, with ejaculation	15	12
Anal sex with condom	11	4
Anal without condom, no ejaculation	3	5

Anal without condom, with ejaculation	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16</b>

### Sexual practices with casual gay or bisexual male partners

**Table 17 Women who had had sex with a gay/bi man: sexual acts practised occasionally or often with casual partner(s), 1996 and 1998**

Sexual practice	Number	Number
	1996	1998
Oral sex with ejaculation	8	13
Vaginal sex with condom	18	19
Vaginal without a condom, no ejaculation	2	10
Vaginal without a condom with ejaculation	4	6
Anal sex with condom	10	12
Anal without condom, no ejaculation	2	7
Anal without condom with ejaculation	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>27</b>

There were five transies in this group; three reported vaginal intercourse and all

reported anal sex.

**Table 18 Number of respondents having unprotected<sup>a</sup> vaginal or anal intercourse in the past six months with a gay or bisexual male partner**

Unprotected intercourse	1996	1998
	Number	Number
Regular partners		
Vaginal	16	14
Anal	4	6
Any intercourse	17	14
Casual partners		
Vaginal	5	13
Anal	2	8
Any intercourse	6	13
Regular or casual Any intercourse	20 <sup>b</sup>	25 <sup>c</sup>

(a) Without condoms, with or without ejaculation.

(b) Two women had vaginal withdrawal 7 as their only unprotected intercourse.

(c) Three women had vaginal withdrawal as their only unprotected intercourse.

Are these practices potentially placing women at risk? To summarise, 25 of the 51 women have had unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a regular or casual partner (Table 18). Of these 25 respondents, 13 had unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse (UVAI) with a casual partner. Of the 12 who had UVAI only with a

regular partner, eight had clear agreements that the partner should have no sex with men or always use condoms for anal sex. For the other four, it is unclear whether they are at risk of STDs from their partners' other activities. These women—17 in all—seem to be relying, without explicit negotiation, on the men's safe practice with other men for their own protection.

Twenty-five women (3 per cent of the whole sample) said that they had had group sex involving a gay/bi man in the past six months. Thirteen of these women were among the 51 who reported having had sex with a gay/bi man. Those who had had group sex were more likely than other women to be bisexual ( $P < 0.001$ ), to have done sex work ( $P < 0.001$ ) and to have injected drugs ( $P = 0.001$ ), indicating the probable presence of a subcultural pattern of behaviour. A similar subcultural pattern in gay men is related to higher risks of HIV seroconversion. However, among these women there was no correlation between having had group sex and having had unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a casual male partner. It is hard to tell to what degree group sex exposes women to risk, as group sex is often part of a scene such as SM where body fluids are unlikely to be exchanged. For example, one woman responded to the questions about casual sex with gay or bi men but ticked 'never' for all the sexual practices listed and added 'It was SM sex—it contained no genital play'.

### **Sex and drug use**

Women were also asked whether they had had sex with a gay/bi man while under the influence of drugs other than alcohol; half (25) indicated that they had done so (see Table 19).

### **Table 19 Drug use while having sex with gay or bisexual men, 1996 and 1998**

	<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>
<b>Drug</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Number</b>
Amyl	1	3
Marijuana	9	10
Speed	7	7
Cocaine	8	6
Ecstasy	4	4
Heroin	4	4
Methadone	1	1
LSD	1	3
Tranquillisers	3	1
Drug(s) not stated	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>

## 5 Results: injecting drug use

Asked whether they had injected drugs in the past six months, 61 (8 per cent) said yes (Table 20). Of the 220 respondents from the clinics and community venues, 32 (14.5 per cent) had injected (8 women did not answer the question). Of the 554 Mardi Gras Fair Day respondents, 29 (5.2 per cent) had injected (16 women did not answer).

**Table 20 Injecting drug use in past six months by recruitment venue category, 1996 and 1998**

	1996		1998	
	Number of injectors	% of category	Number of injectors	% of category
Mardi Gras Fair Day	40	8.1	29	5.2
Community social event/venue	2	40.0	7	5.1
Community group/meeting	9	21.4	6	16.2
Clinic/NSEP	20	47.6	19	40.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>7.8</b>

Injectors are largely confined to the under-35 age groups (92 per cent in 1996 and 80 per cent in 1998). The median age of the group who had injected was 26 years, compared to 30 for the sample as a whole.

**Table 21 Drug injectors by sexual identity, compared with total group, 1996 and 1998**

	1996			1998		
	Injectors		Total group	Injectors		Total group
	<i>n</i>	%	%	<i>n</i>	%	%
Lesbian	34	48	58	35	57	65
Bisexual	19	27	15	10	16	13
Heterosexual	14	20	21	11	18	17
Other/n.a.	4	6	6	5	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

In 1996 bisexuals were over-represented, and lesbians somewhat under-represented, among those who had injected drugs. (To put it the other way round, 10 per cent of lesbians, 22 per cent of bisexuals, 11 per cent of heterosexuals and 14 per cent of the other women had injected drugs. In 1996 there were also fewer lesbians among those who were recruited through clinics and venues rather than Fair Day.) This difference was not apparent in 1998. In 1996 there seemed to be a correlation between bisexual identity, sex work and injecting drug use that is not apparent in the 1998 data.

Fifteen of the 61 injectors (25 per cent) had done sex work in the past six months, compared to 48 in the group as a whole (6 per cent; nine women did not answer the question about sex work and 24 did not answer about injecting). Whatever assumptions are made about women who did not answer the questions, sex work and injecting are significantly related ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table 22 Sexual identity of people with whom respondents injected drugs during the past six months, 1996 and 1998**

	1996 Number <sup>a</sup>	1998 Number <sup>a</sup>
Gay/bi man	40	22
Heterosexual man	26	20
Heterosexual woman	28	5
Bi woman <sup>b</sup>	0	11
Lesbian	41	31
None of the above	1	0
Not answered	1	7
<b>Total</b>	71	61

(a) Categories are not mutually exclusive.

(b) Category not offered in 1996.

Of the 22 women who had injected drugs with a gay/bi man, six had also had sex with a gay/bi man, so there is some overlap between sexual and drug-using behaviour with gay or bisexual men in the past six months ( $P < 0.001$ ).

Of the 61 injectors, 23 reported that they had shared any injecting equipment in the past six months. All sharers indicated at least one category of person with whom they had shared; five had shared with a gay or bisexual man.

## 6 Results: HIV, STDs and hepatitis C

### HIV

A majority (513; 66 per cent) of the women had been tested for HIV. This is a high rate of testing among women, though testing was less common, and the last test less recent, than among gay men in the Periodic Survey (Prestage et al. 1996, p. 14); half of the women who had been tested were last tested over a year ago.

Eight women (one of whom was a trannie) reported that they were HIV-positive. Three were lesbians, one bisexual, two straight and two 'other'; four had had sex with a gay/bi man more than six months ago, none recently and four never.

### **Sexually transmissible diseases**

Fifty-five women (7.1 per cent) said they had had an STD in the past six months; 31 did not answer the question. The STDs they named are listed in Table 23. An additional 11 women named an STD after responding 'no' to the question about the last six months; perhaps they had had an STD more than six months ago, or did not regard the disorder they named (4 thrush, 3 warts) as an STD. Of the 34 women who answered 'yes' to the separate question 'Have you ever had genital herpes?', 13 said they had not had an STD in the past six months (37 did not respond).

#### **Table 23 Sexually transmissible diseases reported in the past six months, 1998**

<b>STD</b>	<b>Number</b>
Herpes	11
Warts	3
Gardnerella	2
Thrush	1
Chlamydia	1
Other <sup>a</sup>	2
Not stated	37
<b>Total<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>55</b>

(a) One woman claimed she had had them all.

(b) Does not add up to 55 because one woman had both gardnerella and thrush and another had gardnerella and warts.

## Hepatitis C

Over 44 per cent of the women (346) reported that they had been tested for hepatitis C, of whom 39 (5 per cent of the total sample) said they were positive. This is an implausibly high rate of testing for hepatitis C, so it is possible that many respondents were unaware of the difference between hepatitis C and other hepatitides.

## 7 Discussion

The 1996 survey was the first attempt at surveying women in contact with a gay and lesbian community in Australia in relation to HIV risks. As a way of surveying women in social contact with gay men it was extremely successful, as

96 per cent of respondents had at least a little social contact with gay men. The same is true of this repeat survey in 1998. The questionnaire was completed by 774 women, of whom 20 were transgender. The majority (77 per cent) were aged between 20 and 40 years, 59 per cent lived in inner or eastern Sydney, and they were better educated than the NSW population in general. In these ways they were roughly similar to the men responding to the Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey at the same time, 71 per cent of whom lived in inner or eastern Sydney.

## Generalisability

It is impossible to be certain that the respondents to this survey are a representative sample of the somewhat fuzzy category 'women in contact with Sydney's gay and lesbian community'. Such a group cannot be identified and then randomly selected for study. The women recruited at the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day or the social events differed from those recruited at clinics and community groups, who are more likely to include people with health problems or special needs. Thus this study gives a more balanced picture of women in contact with the gay and lesbian community in general than would a study based only on recruitment through clinics and community groups.

## Sexual identity and preference

In terms of sexual orientation, 65 per cent identified as lesbian/homosexual, 13 per cent as bisexual and 17 per cent as heterosexual/straight; 5 per cent identified as 'other' or gave no answer. There was considerable but not total correspondence between sexual identity and reported enjoyment of sex with men and/or women. Behaviour, i.e. gender of partners in the past six months, correlated somewhat less well with identity. For example, 18 per cent of the straight women reported ever having had sex with a woman, and 66 per cent of the lesbians reported ever having had sex with a man. Identifying oneself as straight, bisexual or lesbian is a complex and multifaceted process which does not correlate in a direct or simple manner with sexual practice. The findings also confirm that women's sexual behaviour and how they identify themselves may change over the years. This is illustrated by the many lesbians who have had sex with men in the past but do not do so now, and by a respondent who wrote 'At first I used to label myself as lesbian, but now I just feel like I am just a being that loves both men and women, equanomously [*sic*]. I am not bisexual either. My relationship with my girlfriend is monogamous.' For people who assume that sexual behaviour and identity are usually congruent and fixed for life, this kind of response would be puzzling, as would the comment of one lesbian who ticked the 'mostly women' option in the question on enjoyment of sex but added 'though I did enjoy sex with men. Mostly very sexual and steamy'.

These findings mirror those found in an earlier study of homosexually active men not associated with the gay community (Hood et al. 1994) and confirm that

this distinction between behaviour and identity is not gender-specific.

There were more bisexuals and fewer lesbians in the youngest age group. This may be because bisexuality as a stated orientation is a developmental one that women move away from, or it may be that social pressure to adopt a lesbian rather than a bisexual, queer or fluid identity has been heavier, or has had longer to operate, for the older age cohorts. There were also more straight younger women in the sample.

## **Sexual relationships**

One stereotype—that lesbians have fewer partners than gay men—is borne out by the results. Of 405 women (52 per cent of the total) who were in a relationship with another woman, only 46 (11 per cent; 6 per cent of the total) said they currently also have casual sex. This percentage is much lower than among the men in the Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey, among whom only 20 per cent were in a relationship with one regular male partner only; 40 per cent of men had one or more regular partners and/or also had sex with casual partners, an arrangement which was rare among the women.

## **Sex with gay or bisexual men**

A major concern motivating this research was the possible HIV risk to women whose male sexual partners are also having sex with men. Obviously it is impossible to survey women who are completely unaware that they fall in this category. 8 Apart from the 51 women who had recently had sex with a man they knew to be gay or bisexual, only three women indicated any awareness of the possibility their partner might have sex with men.

Although more heterosexual than bisexual women had recently had sex with heterosexual men (74 per cent of straight women, 54 per cent of bisexual women), bisexual women were three times more likely than straight women to have recently had sex with gay or bisexual men (25 per cent bisexual women, 8 per cent straight women). This indicates that bisexual groups, websites etc. may be a useful locus in which to provide safe-sex information and support.

Twenty-five women (3 per cent of the total group) had had unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse with a gay or bisexual man. This is a reassuringly small proportion of the whole group, but it is still worrying that these women appear to be depending on their male partners' safe practice with other men for their own protection, even though some of the partners were casual, and not all regular partners had clear agreements about safe sex outside the relationship. Half of the women who had had sex with a gay or bi man (25 of 51) had used a drug other than alcohol while doing so, most commonly marijuana, speed or cocaine.

How many gay or bi men have sex with women? Among 2200 men in the Sydney Gay Community Periodic Survey conducted at the same time as this survey, 124 (5.6 per cent) had had vaginal or anal intercourse with one or more women in the past six months. In terms of sexual identity, 92 per cent of the 2200 respondents considered themselves gay, 6 per cent bisexual, 1 per cent heterosexual and 1 per cent 'other'. Two per cent of the gay men and 48 per cent of the bisexual, heterosexual or 'other' men had had sex with a woman.<sup>9</sup> As these men had to have had sex with a man in the past five years to be eligible for inclusion in the Periodic Survey, but any woman could respond to SWASH, the men's and women's figures are not directly comparable. However, as about three quarters of the men and women were recruited at the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day and other mixed social venues, they are clearly moving in related social circles, at least as far as community events are concerned.

### Injecting drug use

Injecting drug use in the past six months (8 per cent overall, and 5 per cent among the Fair Day respondents) was several times higher in this group than in the Australian population in general (CDHFS 1995), but slightly lower ( $P < 0.05$ ) than the level of 12 per cent found among gay men interviewed in the SMASH study in the first half of 1998 (Knox et al. 1998). Women who had done sex work were more likely than others to have injected drugs. Recreational drug use and injecting drug use are issues of concern for the gay and lesbian community.

A project monitoring HIV prevalence and incidence among people using needle and syringe exchange programs (NSEPs) around Australia reported three years' data collection early last year (MacDonald 1998). Participants were asked to provide blood samples and complete a questionnaire, which included an item on sexual identity. Response rates were 41 per cent in 1995, 54 per cent in 1996 and 55 per cent in 1997. Each year, about 65 per cent of respondents were men. Results for women are shown in Table 24. As in SWASH 1996, these groups of injecting drug users have high proportions of bisexual women.<sup>10</sup> The data overall show very low rates of HIV infection except among gay men.

**Table 24 Sexual identity and HIV status among women attending NSEPs, 1995 to 1997**

	Number tested	Number with HIV	% with HIV
<i>1995</i>			
Heterosexual	233	2	0.9

Bisexual	64	1	1.6
Homosexual	23	1	4.4
Not reported	7	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<i>1996</i>			
Heterosexual	321	1	0.3
Bisexual	97	0	0.0
Homosexual	32	0	0.0
Not reported	16	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<i>1997</i>			
Heterosexual	386	3	0.8
Bisexual	120	1	0.8
Homosexual	54	0	0.0
Not reported	13	0	0.0

Total	573	4	0.7
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Source: MacDonald 1998, with additional data kindly supplied to us by Margaret MacDonald.

## Lesbians and HIV risk

Two thirds of the respondents to this survey were lesbians. Lesbians have been entirely ignored as a 'risk group' in HIV policy discourse in Australia, although there has been a small amount of HIV/AIDS prevention work with lesbians, aimed both at injecting drug users (such as ACON's Gay and Lesbian Injecting Drug Use Project) and at possible sexual transmission (such as the attendance of 'Safe Sex Sluts' handing out lube and dental dams at lesbian community functions). Many epidemiologists would argue that even this is more than is warranted (or perhaps that the prevention work has been extremely effective), as there have been no documented cases of woman-to-woman sexual transmission of HIV in Australia and only a handful reported in the world (Kennedy et al. 1995). But 'minimal risk from sex between women' is not the same as 'minimal risk for women identifying as lesbians'. Most people select sexual partners from their social networks (Laumann et al. 1994), and the same is true of drug use (Neaigus et al. 1994). Behaviour such as sex with women should not be seen as a discrete individual activity but rather as embedded in a social setting. This point is made by Friedman et al., who argue that methodological individualism in American research into drug users has led to a failure to realise that lesbians—conceptualised simplistically as 'women who have sex with women' (in itself a low-risk activity for HIV transmission)—could be at greater HIV risk than other women (Friedman et al. 1998). Other US researchers have made the same point (Chu et al. 1992, Marmor et al. 1998).

Naturally it would not be a good thing if people who had previously thought of lesbians as at low or no risk from HIV changed their view to regard *all* lesbians as at higher risk than other women. Since early in the epidemic AIDS Councils and other HIV prevention workers have argued that it was not being a member of a perceived risk group (such as gay men) that put a person at risk, but rather the person's behaviour. For example, a gay man is not at risk simply by being a gay man, if neither he nor his partner has sex with anyone else, or if he is celibate. And a man who identifies as straight is not protected by that identity if he has sex with gay men who are part of a community in which infection rates are high.

The conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that educators, health care practitioners and policy makers need to distinguish between sexual identity and sexual behaviour and not assume one from the other. Correlation is not the same as equivalence. Too often people make the unnoticed slip from 'gay or lesbian' to 'exclusively homosexually active'. We cannot tell whether lesbians and bisexual women in Australia in fact have a higher rate of HIV infection than other women, because official HIV diagnosis reports do not record sexual identity/orientation.

## Differences between the 1996 and 1998 surveys

The main difference in recruitment between the two years was the addition in 1998 of the social venues, including pubs and clubs. This meant that the proportion of respondents from groups and clinics was lower than in 1996. Respondents from the groups and clinics included more bisexual and heterosexual women. Fair Day respondents included more lesbians. The respondents from the social venues were roughly similar to the sample as a whole. The categories of venue did not appear to contain women with different levels of attachment to gay and lesbian community; women in all categories had roughly the same number of gay men as friends. Naturally, the social venues category (which included gay pubs) contained more women who had visited a gay bar. Those recruited in groups were less likely to have attended a gay bar.

The distribution of respondents by age and by region of residence was roughly the same in 1996 and 1998. However, the 1998 sample had somewhat lower levels of education than the 1996 sample, though still high compared to the population at large. The 1998 sample also had a correspondingly lower proportion in professional jobs and a higher proportion in paraprofessional jobs.

There were slightly more lesbians in 1998 (65 per cent) than in 1996 (58 per cent) and fewer heterosexuals: 17 per cent in 1998 and 21 per cent in 1996. There were no marked differences between the two years in the percentages who had had sex with a gay or bisexual man recently or ever. Unfortunately, the questions about sex with straight men and with women cannot be compared because of the ambiguity of some replies in 1996. Results for drug use while having sex were very similar for the two years. The numbers of women in regular relationships with gay or bisexual men were too small for any year comparisons to be meaningful. We would need much larger numbers and a longer period between surveys to detect any change in the safety of women's sexual practice.

In 1996, 12 per cent of respondents reported having injected a drug in the past six months. In 1998, the rate was 8 per cent. There are far more injectors among those recruited from groups and clinics than among those recruited at social venues and Fair Day; this is hardly surprising, as the clinics included needle and syringe exchange services. However, the difference between 1996 and 1998 is not due to recruitment, as the percentage of injectors in each category of recruitment sources was lower in 1998 (Table 20). We do not know why this is, as the form of the question was the same.

## 8 Summary of 1998 findings and conclusion

- In February 1998 at Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day, 554 women completed a 2-page self-complete survey questionnaire; a further

220 were recruited through other groups, venues and clinics in contact with gay, bisexual and lesbian communities (total 774 women).

- 96% of respondents said that at least a few of their friends were gay or homosexual men.
- 68% said they had attended a gay bar in the past 6 months.
- Ages ranged from 15 to 60 (median age 30) and 64% had post-school education.
- 65% thought of themselves as lesbian/dyke/homosexual/gay, 13% as bisexual and 17% as heterosexual/straight. 5% chose the 'other' category or did not answer.
- 20 respondents (2.6%) were transgender/trannies. They were more likely than other respondents to identify as 'other' or bisexual.
- 212 women (27%) said they had ever had sex with a man they knew to be gay or bisexual; 51 women (7%) had done so in the past 6 months.
- About 2% of the lesbians said they had had sex with a gay or bi man in the past 6 months, as had 8% of the heterosexual women and 25% of the bisexual women.
- 25 women had had unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a male gay or bi partner (regular or casual) in the past 6 months.
- 48 women (6%) had done sex work at some time in the past 6 months.
- 61 women (8%) had injected drugs in the past 6 months. Most injectors were under 35. Among the Fair Day respondents, 5% had injected, and among respondents from clinics, groups and venues, 15% had done so.
- 23 women had shared equipment with someone, and five had shared with a gay or bi man.

These results show that sexual identity and behaviour do not always coincide. When women in this social milieu have sex with men, those men are more likely than men Australia-wide to be sexually active with other men. Policy makers and practitioners need to be aware that neither lesbians nor women in general are automatically at low HIV risk. A minority of women are at risk of HIV through unsafe sex with men, or injecting drug use, or both. Prevention strategies can usefully be addressed to gay and lesbian drug user groups, to bisexual groups, and to all women who are socially involved with men in the gay community.

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## Notes

1. There were also two female children and a further eight women or transgenders for whom exposure category was not available.
2. The 1996 survey was reported on in Richters et al. 1997.
3. One respondent who ticked both yes and no to this question was coded as 'no answer'; she wrote 'born both sexes now female'.
4. This term is often used by Sydney transgender people of themselves, sometimes spelt 'transys'. It has the advantage of avoiding any political difficulties with the distinction between transsexual and transgender.
5. In 1996 respondents were asked to tick one option only, which provoked objections and produced unreliable data.
6. Because of a fault in the layout of the 1996 questionnaire, the responses to this question were inconsistent, so no 1996 figures are given here.
7. Evidence to define vaginal intercourse without ejaculation as more risky for HIV transmission than oral sex with ejaculation is lacking (Vincenzi et al. 1994).
8. An attempt was made in 1993 to research such women, or at least those who had discovered that their heterosexual partners had had sex with men, in the Women Partners of Bisexual Men Phone-In, which was widely promoted in the mainstream media. Of the 61 women who responded, most lived in northern Sydney or the central New South Wales coast, and a quarter were aged over 50. They were socially and demographically very different from the women responding to this survey.
9. Figures given here are slightly different from those reported in the Sydney Gay Community Surveillance Report, because here the SMASH men responding to the Periodic Survey have not been removed from the 2200.
10. There are no national figures for Australia as yet, but the US survey reported in Laumann et al. 1994 found that under 1 per cent of women aged 18-59 identified as bisexual. The British survey (Johnson et al. 1994) did not ask about identity, only about attraction and gender of partners.
11. To complicate matters further, what women report as their identity - what 'you think of yourself as', in the words of our question - may not be what others may infer from the circumstances. Thirty per cent of the women identifying as 'bisexual' in our survey were in regular relationships with women. Might they not be seen by their friends, or their doctors, as self-evidently lesbian?

## Glossary

ACON AIDS Council of New South Wales

AIDS acquired immune deficiency syndrome

GLIDUP Gay and Lesbian Injecting Drug Use Project

HIV human immunodeficiency virus

NSEP needle and syringe exchange program

SM mutual consensual activity for the purposes of sexual arousal which involves some sort of pain, physical restraint or domination (from sado-masochism)

SMASH Sydney Men and Sexual Health cohort study

STD sexually transmissible disease

SWASH Sydney Women and Sexual Health survey

UVAI unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse

WPBM women partners of bisexual men