Article

Language use before and after Stonewall: A corpus-based study of gay men's pre-Stonewall narratives

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Abstract

This study presents a contrastive corpus linguistic analysis of language use before and after Stonewall. It uses theoretical insights on normativity from the field of language and sexuality to investigate how the shifting normativities associated with the Stonewall Riots (1969) – widely considered the central event of gay liberation in the Western world – have shaped our conceptualization of sexuality as it surfaces in language use. Drawing on two corpora of gay men's pre-Stonewall narratives dating from two time periods (before and after Stonewall, called PRE and POST), the analysis combines quantitative (keyword analysis, collocation analysis) and qualitative (concordance analysis) corpus linguistic methods to examine discursive shifts as evident from narrators' language use. The study identifies the terms *homosexual* and *normal* as central contrastive labels in PRE, and *gay* and *straight* as corresponding terms in POST. Other discursive shifts detected are from sexual desire/practices to identity (and vice versa), from an individualistic to a community-based conceptualization of sexuality, and from unquestioned heteronormativity and gender binarism to a weakening of such dominant discourses. The findings are discussed in relation to the desire-identity shift, which is traditionally assumed to have taken place at the end of the 19th century, and shed new light on Stonewall as a central event for the development of an identity-based conceptualization of sexuality as we know it today.

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Introduction

This study forms a component of the Linguistic Dimensions of Sexual Normativity (LIDISNO) Project, which is currently being carried out at Florida Atlantic University and Goethe University Frankfurt. The project uses corpus linguistic methods to study the effects of three normative shifts on the discursive construction of sexuality. While other parts of the project concentrate on the discursive consequences of coming out (Motschenbacher, 2019a, in press) and of the desire-identity shift in the conceptualization of sexuality, the present study focuses on how the development of a publicly visible gay liberation movement, for which Stonewall constitutes a central event, has impacted language use. Such historical investigations of the relationship between language and sexuality possess queer potential because they highlight the relativity of the conceptualization of sexuality across time periods and thus help question the notion of sexuality (and, connected to it, sex) as a natural, biological and stable phenomenon (see Leap, 2015 and Motschenbacher, 2010 on queer linguistics, and Leap, 2020 on the historical investigation of language and sexuality).

The 50th anniversary of the New York Stonewall Riots in 2019 is an occasion for commemorating the achievements of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement since the late 1960s. LGBT identities, rights and politics have become increasingly publicly accepted and visible in all Western and many non-Western societies, but it is obvious that the gender- and sexuality-related phenomena that are today covered by the umbrella term *LGBT* pre-date Stonewall, even though they may not have been associated with powerful identity discourses at that time. It can be assumed that our conceptualization of sexuality today has been substantially shaped by these liberationist developments. Still, we know very little about how they have changed our conceptualization and which linguistic consequences they have had for the discursive construction of sexuality. This study sets out to shed light on these issues by means of a corpus linguistic investigation of gay men's pre-Stonewall life narratives.

In the ensuing section, I outline the historical relevance of Stonewall and of normativity as a theoretical concept (section 'Stonewall and shifting sexual normativities'). This is followed by a description of the methodological underpinnings of the corpus linguistic study (section 'Methodological considerations'). The actual quantitative and qualitative analyses are carried out in the 'Data analysis' section. The concluding section ('Discussion and conclusion') recapitulates central findings and discusses them in terms of discursive shifts and in the light of additional evidence from a major American English reference corpus.

Stonewall and shifting sexual normativities

The Stonewall Riots are widely considered a breaking point for gay liberation (Armstrong and Crage, 2006; Duberman, 1993; Leap, 2020; for a documentary history, see Stein, 2019) and, therefore, have been a central driving force in the shifting of sexuality-related normativities. The riots started on 28 June 1969, when the New York City police raided a gay bar named Stonewall Inn and met with an unprecedented degree of resistance. For six days, LGBT people protested against the raid and

violently engaged with the police in the area around Christopher Street. These events continue to be commemorated with LGBT pride parades and festivities under the name *Christopher Street Day*.

One obvious development after Stonewall is that of same-sex sexualities becoming more publicly visible and thus more 'normal', and a concomitant ethically based normativization of the acceptance of same-sex sexualities (i.e. the notion that people should accept same-sex sexualities and not discriminate against people who are same-sex identified). Other normativity-related developments that can be assumed to go together with an increasing visibility and perceived legitimacy of same-sex sexualities are a gradual weakening of the predominance of heteronormative discourses (because they face more competition from alternative sexualities), and the formation of homonormative discourses, that is, discourses that stipulate how a gay man or a lesbian woman should behave or appear in a given context (for a more detailed theoretical discussion of language and sexual normativity, see Hall et al., 2019; Motschenbacher, 2014, 2018b, 2019b).

The shifts described above are of course not the first sexuality-related conceptual changes in history. Another central shift in the conceptualization of sexuality more generally, namely from sexual desire to identity, has been discussed in great detail in queer theoretically informed academic work both within (see Barrett, 2015; Cameron and Kulick, 2003) and outside linguistics (Foucault, 1978 [1976]). This shift is generally believed to have occurred at the end of the 19th century, with the creation of the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* in medical discourse. While, before that time, sexuality is assumed to have been mainly conceptualized in terms of sexual desire, the creation of these terms initiated a conceptualization in terms of sexual personality types ('sexual identities') that remains dominant until the present day. Together with this person-centered conceptualization evolved a stronger normativization of sexuality in the sense that heterosexual identities came to be seen as ideal, natural and preferable to other sexual identifications.

The academic discussion of normativity has given rise to a distinction between two types of norms: descriptive and prescriptive norms (Hogg and Reid, 2006; Motschenbacher, 2014, 2019b). Descriptive norms are quantitatively based and capture majority patterns ('what many people do' / 'what people often do'). Since they do not necessarily imply alternative behaviors to be less valuable, they have a weaker normative force than qualitatively based, prescriptive norms, which stipulate how people are supposed to behave, often from an ethical vantage point ('what people should do'). The two types of norms frequently (though not always) coincide, as frequent practices may develop into prescriptive yardsticks and vice versa. Still, this distinction is relevant, not the least at the methodological level, because, as discussed in the following section, the uncovering of descriptively and prescriptively normative discourses requires different types of analysis.

Methodological considerations

For the purposes of this study, two corpora of gay men's pre-Stonewall narratives were compiled. The term 'gay men' is problematic in this context, because, as we will see in

the analysis, 'being gay' was generally not an available discourse in pre-Stonewall times. The phrase 'gay men' is here therefore used as a (simplifying) shorthand for men before and after Stonewall, who experience same-sex attraction or engage in sexual practices with other men. To render corpus comparison meaningful, I selected material for the two corpora that differs primarily in the time period in which it was created, thus resulting in a pre-Stonewall and a post-Stonewall corpus (abbreviated in the following as PRE and POST). The rationale was to keep all other factors constant, so that the comparison yields evidence for differences that can with a high degree of certainty be attributed to a difference in time period. Central aspects have been kept constant across the two corpora: genre (personal narratives), social group (men experiencing same-sex attraction), region (United States) and topic (life before 1969). Through this material, we can gain two types of insights: (1) historical discursive evidence of the life experiences of men experiencing same-sex attraction before Stonewall, and, more relevant from a linguistic point of view, (2) linguistic evidence on how the discursive construction and conceptualization of sexuality-related aspects has changed after Stonewall.

The corpora were compiled through collecting previously published gay men's narratives. For post-Stonewall material, I was able to use various anthologies devoted to documenting such narratives. Material from pre-Stonewall times is generally not available in the shape of such anthologies. For this reason, I had to draw on other publications up to 1969 that contained such narratives. These works are frequently medical publications, but it has to be noted that for the corpus only the gay men's own stories were selected, while the surrounding medical discourse is ignored. Even though little is known about the exact procedures that were used to produce the data analyzed here, we can gather from the publications in which the narratives appeared that almost all of them were originally collected in the shape of interviews and then transcribed either by a researcher or an anthology editor. The narratives in PRE originate from the 1940s to 1960s, while the texts in POST mainly date from the 1970s to 1990s. The 'References' section contains a list of the primary data sources used for corpus compilation. All texts had to be digitalized, involving processes of scanning, file conversion, text recognition and cleaning up the data, to make the material compatible with the corpus software. PRE contains 70 narratives and 159,966 word tokens; POST contains 95 narratives and 405,900 word tokens.

This study makes a contribution to the field of corpus-assisted (critical) discourse studies (see Baker, 2015; Taylor and Marchi, 2018). Corpus linguistics is a mainly quantitatively proceeding methodology and, therefore, has a stronger affinity with descriptive normativities as discursive formations (see also Motschenbacher, 2018a). Frequently occurring features in a corpus tell us something about the communicative norms and dominant discourses prevalent in the data, that is, aspects that many language users draw on and can thus be deemed 'normal'. Highly frequent features can therefore be considered 'indirect indexes' (Ochs, 1992) of descriptive normativities. In the present study, these normative indexes are studied using the corpus tool AntConc (Anthony, 2018) to perform a keyword analysis (Baker, 2004; Gabrielatos, 2018) and a collocation analysis (Pearce, 2008) of four keywords that constitute important sexual descriptors in the data (*homosexual, normal, gay* and *straight*). These two procedures

draw on inferential statistics to uncover (unusually) frequently occurring linguistic phenomena. To shed additional light on the local negotiation of normativities and on prescriptive normative mechanisms in the material, a qualitative analysis of concordance lines (Carroll and Kowitz, 1994) of the term *normal* in the two corpora is carried out. This term has been selected because it represents a 'direct index' (Ochs, 1992) of normativity. The combination of quantitative and qualitative corpus linguistic methods used here provides a multi-layered picture of the normative discourses drawn on in the data. More specifically, the analysis seeks to find linguistic evidence for discursive shifts between pre- and post-Stonewall time periods.

Data analysis

Keyword analysis

I used AntConc to generate two keyword lists for PRE and POST when compared to each other. The top 100 keywords of the two corpora, sorted by statistical significance (log-likelihood values), were selected for closer analysis. Semantically related keywords were grouped together within semantic domains, to facilitate comparison. In rare cases, keywords were attributed to two semantic categories if they united both meanings (e.g. the noun *lover* was classified as 'personal noun' and as 'sexual practices', because it denotes a person who performs the act of loving).

Table 1 presents the pronominal forms among the top keywords in the two corpora. These provide evidence of the general personal atmosphere in the text material. First, it is remarkable that first-person singular pronouns (*I, me, my*) are key in PRE, even though both corpora consist of first-person narrative texts. What this tells us is that same-sex experiences were (even) more strongly conceptualized as a matter of individual experience before Stonewall. This contrasts with the predominance of first-person plural pronouns (*our, we*) in POST, which points to a stronger conceptualization in terms of gay male in-groups, be it same-sex couples or, more broadly construed, a gay community. The keyness of third-person plural pronouns (*their, they*) is further evidence of this phenomenon.

A closer look at the second-person pronouns (*you, your*), which are also key in POST, yields additional evidence for this claim, because an inspection of concordance lines shows that these pronouns are in general not used to refer to one or several specific addressees (the prototypical function of second-person pronouns), but rather to make generic statements about the experiences of gay men as a group:

Table 1. Keywords in PRE and POST – semantic domain 'pronouns'.

Semantic domain	Keywords in PRE	Keywords in POST
Pronouns	*I, me, my* *she, her* *him, he*	*you, your* *our, we* *their, they* *its*

1)

*It's just that when **you**'re gay and in that kind of structure, **you** can't [. . .]*
[post-US-WIO-115-121-Mark]

2)

*[. . .] Hollywood Boulevard and often **you** could spot a gay and they could spot **you**.* [post-US-QUF-130-141-David Bowling]

Second, it is noteworthy that the female and male third-person singular pronouns (*she, her, him, he*) are key in PRE. This points to the fact that the narrators in pre-Stonewall times felt a greater need to relate their experiences to female people (often female sexual partners, girlfriends, wives). Together with the male references, this yields a more heteronormative and gender-binary picture than in the post-Stonewall data.

A similar trend is verifiable in the semantic domain 'personal nouns' (Table 2). All 10 keywords in PRE in this domain are lexically gendered (*mother, wife*) and largely form binary female-male pairs (*girl – boy, woman – man, women – men, boys – girls*). Among the nine personal noun keywords in POST, we find four lexically gendered forms (*guy, guys, dad, mom*). There is only one binary pair, namely *dad* and *mom*, which points to the fact that a strictly gender-binary picture is in this corpus more relevant to the generation of the parents of the narrators. Besides lexically gendered nouns, one finds socially male (*gays*), contextually male (*lover*), and lexically gender-neutral nouns (*people, kids, parents*). The less binary picture in POST is thus largely achieved through a relative absence of female forms. This creates the impression of a (gay) 'man's world', where male same-sex attraction is treated as legitimate in its own right and no longer explicitly juxtaposed with a traditional heterosexual ideal as in PRE.

Beyond personal references, the keyword lists comprise a wealth of sexuality-related items. These have been categorized into six semantic domains. Table 3 presents the semantic domains that are clearly overrepresented in PRE: 'sexual practices', 'sexual desire', 'sexual relationship', and 'body'. These domains occur virtually exclusively in the keyword list of PRE. Note that in the realm of sexual practices, almost all keywords are verb forms (*practised, performed, slept, masturbated, kiss, masturbate*) or action-denoting nouns (*sodomy, fellation, masturbation, initiative, sex, intercourse*) and thus testify to a more activity-based conceptualization of sexuality. (The only keyword in POST in this domain, *lover*, is also activity-related, but denotes the performer of an action rather than the action itself.) In the realm of desire, the focus is more on feelings and emotions (e.g. *desire, fond, interested, liked, pleasure, satisfaction, jealous, love, aroused, disgusted*). Body-related key vocabulary includes references to body parts that play a role in sexual activity (*penis, rectum, mouth*), physical responses to sexual

Table 2. Keywords in PRE and POST – semantic domain 'personal nouns'.

Semantic domain	Keywords in PRE	Keywords in POST
Personal nouns	*girl, boy, woman, women, man, boys, men, girls, mother, wife*	*people, guy, guys, gays, lover, kids, dad, mom, parents*

Table 3. Keywords in PRE and POST – sexuality-related semantic domains, part 1.

Semantic domain	Keywords in PRE	Keywords in POST
Sexual practices	*sodomy, fellation, masturbation, practised, initiative, sex, performed, slept [together/with], masturbated, kiss, intercourse, masturbate, passive*	*lover*
Sexual desire	*desire, fond, interest, interested, liked, pleasure, wanted, tried, prefer, satisfaction, jealous, love, aroused, kick, disgusted*	
Sexual relationship	*relations, affair, mutual, affairs, attached*	
Body	*penis, orgasm, rectum, erection, mouth, physical, emission, syphilis, gonorrhea*	

Table 4. Keywords in PRE and POST – sexuality-related semantic domains, part 2.

Semantic domain	Keywords in PRE	Keywords in POST
Sexual identity	*homosexual, normal, masculine, sexual, feminine*	*gay, straight, gays, sexuality, coming, out*
Community		*bar, community, bars, movement, political, liberation*

stimulation (*orgasm, erection, emission*) as well as sexually transmitted diseases (*syphilis, gonorrhea*).

Table 4 presents the keywords in the two remaining sexuality-related domains, 'sexual identity' and 'community'. We can see that identity-related terms occur in both keyword lists, but they seem to differ in quality between the corpora. While the terms that are prevalent in PRE suggest that narrators draw on notions of pathology (*homosexual*), normativity (*normal*) and gender (*masculine, feminine*) to make sense of sexual identifications, POST documents the use of more positive sexual identity terminology (*gay, straight, gays*) and an affirmative handling of minoritized sexual identities (*coming, out*). The notion of a sexuality-based community, by contrast, surfaces exclusively in the keyword list of POST, which bears witness to the fact that the concept of a gay community did not yet exist before Stonewall (see Weiss and Schiller, 1988). In POST, this community is based on safe spaces for gay people (*bar, community, bars*) as well as political activism (*movement, political, liberation*).

The last two semantic domains that occur in substantial numbers in the keyword lists, 'time' and 'place', are presented in Table 5. It is not surprising that time-related vocabulary surfaces in both keyword lists, since personal narratives generally contain references to past events in the narrators' lives. However, it is noteworthy that place-denoting keywords occur exclusively in the keyword list of POST. This attests to a higher need to locate gay men's stories in a particular geographical space, thus demonstrating a greater awareness of the diversity of gay men's experiences. Accordingly, among the place-denoting keywords, we find items that point to urban settings (*city, San, Francisco, town, Charleston*) and others that suggest more rural areas (*farm, lake, village*). A greater awareness of diversity also

Table 5. Keywords in PRE and POST – semantic domains 'time' and 'place'.

Semantic domain	Keywords in PRE	Keywords in POST
Time	*always, until, months, older, occasionally, years, ago, twice, times*	*today, already, sixties*
Place		*here, city, San, Francisco, town, farm, north, lake, world, area, Charleston, village, county, place, there*

manifests itself in the fact that the ethnically relevant terms *black* and *Cuban* are key in POST, whereas no such items are found among the keywords in PRE. (As there are only two such keywords, ethnicity was not treated here as a semantic domain.)

Collocation analysis

To gain a better understanding of sexual identification processes in the data, I decided to focus more specifically on the usage of two pairs of sexual identity terms that were shown to be key in the two corpora: *homosexual* vs *normal*, and *gay* vs *straight*. Table 6 gives the absolute and relative frequencies of these four terms in the two corpora. From this we can tell that *homosexual* and *normal* are commonly used in PRE, while *gay* and *straight* were not available in pre-Stonewall times (they hardly occur and where they occur, they are generally not used to describe sexual matters). In POST, by contrast, *gay* and *straight* form the more common pair. The term *homosexual* (62.3 times per 100,000 words) is here used much less frequently than its rough synonym *gay* (319.5 times per 100,000 words), and *normal* is used only infrequently (and often to describe non-sexual aspects).

To obtain insights on the collocational behavior of these four terms, I used AntConc to generate collocate lists for the window span four left to four right, restricting myself to collocations that occur at least seven times, and sorting the resulting list by effect size (mutual information values). Tables 7 to 12 display the top 20 collocates of each term for closer inspection (except for *normal* in POST, which has fewer collocates).

Looking at the collocates of *homosexual* in PRE (Table 7), we find three groups of items. The first group is forms of the lemma BE (*are, am, being, is, were*), which can in connection with *homosexual* plausibly be linked to identity-related statements (3). The second group of collocates is used to denote gender identities more specifically (*women, men, man, he*; 4). Finally, the collocates *relations*, *friends* and *met* point to personal

Table 6. Absolute and relative (per 100,000 words) frequencies of four sexual labels in PRE and POST.

	PRE (159,966 tokens)	POST (405,900 tokens)
homosexual	256 (160.0 phtw)	253 (62.3 phtw)
normal	87 (54.4 phtw)	[38]
gay	[10]	1297 (319.5 phtw)
straight	[4]	197 (48.5 phtw)

Table 7. Collocates of *homosexual* in PRE.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	28	0	28	5.97582	*relations*
2	7	5	2	5.66850	*many*
3	11	2	9	5.59709	*friends*
4	20	11	9	5.57591	*are*
5	8	4	4	5.24301	*met*
6	9	8	1	5.22851	*am*
7	9	9	0	4.85000	*being*
8	11	4	7	4.70244	*women*
9	15	2	13	4.67860	*men*
10	7	5	2	4.67691	*another*
11	12	7	5	4.47149	*who*
12	19	10	9	4.40863	*is*
13	18	11	7	4.31522	*not*
14	16	10	6	4.18674	*were*
15	10	6	4	4.05859	*more*
16	8	6	2	3.94311	*think*
17	107	86	21	3.87817	*a*
18	10	2	8	3.79555	*man*
19	35	27	8	3.73633	*that*
20	40	19	21	3.72516	*he*

relationships (5). There is a notable absence of collocates from the realms of desire and sexual practices.

3)

*She still doesn't suspect that I **am** a **homosexual**. At the age of eighteen I came to [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-150-156-Eric D]

4)

*I resent their slightly superior attitude toward **homosexual men** and toward me in particular.* [pre-US-SVA-132-144 Michael D.]

5)

*Most of the sailors had **homosexual relations** at sea and then when they got into [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-191-203-Louis E.]

If we compare this situation to the collocates of *homosexual* in POST (Table 8), we notice a qualitative shift in the usage patterns. While forms of the lemma BE are still among the collocates (*am 're, 'm, was, is*; 6), there is a complete absence of gendered lexical items or personal reference forms more generally. The remaining content words

Table 8. Collocates of *homosexual* in POST.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	18	0	18	7.46014	*experience*
2	9	0	9	6.89883	*feelings*
3	8	8	0	6.77741	*word*
4	11	10	1	5.96254	*am*
5	8	4	4	5.66478	*homosexual*
6	16	12	4	5.37165	*first*
7	15	14	1	5.33307	*being*
8	11	9	2	5.25858	*re*
9	43	21	22	4.35850	*had*
10	12	7	5	4.33489	*because*
11	7	3	4	4.22871	*life*
12	116	89	27	4.18397	*a*
13	8	7	1	4.07412	*no*
14	64	36	28	4.03398	*that*
15	8	6	2	4.02572	*m*
16	79	47	32	3.91951	*was*
17	15	8	7	3.86816	*or*
18	13	7	6	3.83153	*is*
19	19	13	6	3.76899	*as*
20	143	62	81	3.63858	*i*

in the collocates list (*experience, feelings, first, had, life*) rather suggest a connection to desire or sexual practices (7). This indicates that *homosexual* has to some extent lost its function to describe people and human relationships after Stonewall and is now more likely to be used to describe sexual desires and practices. This development coincides with a greater public awareness of the negative, pathological connotations of the term *homosexual*, which, in the face of greater tolerance and acceptance of same-sex sexualities in the United States, is increasingly viewed as offensive when applied to people.

6)

'Look, Henry, accept the fact that you're homosexual'. And if he had said that, I might [. . .] [post-US-FAB-59-67-Henry Bauer]

7)

*[. . .] ironic that I had my first really successful **homosexual experience** that very first day in Buffalo.* [post-US-QUF-195-211-Tony Isaac]

Moving on to the usage of *normal* in PRE (Table 9), we see that the collocates of this term are mainly function words. However, the top 4 collocates (*relations, sex, sexual, women*) are content words. As with *homosexual* in PRE, the top collocate of *normal* is *relations*, which indicates parallel usage of the two terms before Stonewall (8). The

Table 9. Collocates of *normal* in PRE.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	19	0	19	6.97345	*relations*
2	21	1	20	6.67073	*sex*
3	9	0	9	6.15020	*sexual*
4	8	3	5	5.80007	*women*
5	27	11	16	4.51122	*with*
6	7	5	2	4.43993	*be*
7	7	3	4	4.35032	*they*
8	20	18	2	4.33271	*had*
9	8	7	1	4.24641	*we*
10	10	5	5	3.52434	*t*
11	10	6	4	3.48603	*that*
12	7	6	1	3.46076	*have*
13	7	1	6	3.43265	*but*
14	59	23	36	3.28961	*i*
15	21	14	7	3.16867	*was*
16	20	11	9	3.01569	*a*
17	23	9	14	2.99353	*and*
18	11	5	6	2.94250	*in*
19	9	8	1	2.64588	*my*
20	16	11	5	2.57914	*to*

connection of *normal* with *sex* and *sexual* suggests that the term is commonly used to describe sexual aspects (9), and the collocation with *women* further suggests a heteronormative stance on what 'normal sex' entails (10). Still, in contrast to the use of *homosexual* in PRE, there is a notable absence of identity-related collocates for *normal*. This points to the fact that 'normality' is largely viewed as something that people do (with somebody) rather than as something that they are.

8)

*[. . .] under the influence of these drugs I once had **normal relations** with a girl [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-468-474-Peter R]

9)

*I didn't find out about **normal sex** until I was fourteen.* [pre-US-SVA-66-72-Tracy O.]

10)

*I had an unlimited horror of **normal** relations, with **women**.* [pre-US-TIN-167-167-Another instance]

Table 10 lists the collocates of *normal* in POST. There are only eight collocates in total and all of them are function words. So *normal* seems to have lost its association

Table 10. Collocates of *normal* in POST.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	7	4	3	4.67203	*you*
2	10	6	4	4.09098	*that*
3	10	6	4	3.67272	*was*
4	8	3	5	3.30719	*of*
5	10	8	2	3.27040	*to*
6	9	6	3	3.23098	*a*
7	15	7	8	3.12066	*i*
8	10	4	6	2.75221	*the*

Table 11. Collocates of *gay* in POST.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	10	0	10	8.28980	*activists*
2	35	1	34	8.06153	*liberation*
3	16	15	1	7.70484	*openly*
4	10	0	10	7.70484	*alliance*
5	23	6	17	7.68408	*lesbian*
6	9	2	7	7.21180	*lesbians*
7	7	1	6	7.19027	*cubans*
8	7	0	7	6.77523	*consciousness*
9	8	1	7	6.70484	*parade*
10	46	2	44	6.66362	*bars*
11	43	5	38	6.56632	*community*
12	8	1	7	6.53491	*couples*
13	7	2	5	6.14296	*trade*
14	9	1	8	6.03346	*rights*
15	8	0	8	6.00440	*youth*
16	38	5	33	5.94527	*bar*
17	14	0	14	5.88770	*movement*
18	7	1	6	5.84923	*groups*
19	36	21	15	5.83768	*straight*
20	108	99	9	5.82310	*being*

with the realm of sexuality and heteronormativity after Stonewall. At the same time, it has not developed associations with other semantic areas either. The decrease in the frequency of *normal* from PRE to POST represents evidence that explicit normative judgments figure less prominently in the narratives that were created after Stonewall. The concordance analysis below will shed further light on this.

Due to the low frequencies of *gay* and *straight* in PRE, collocates for these two forms are only retrievable for POST. The collocates of *gay* in Table 11 demonstrate a

predominance of an identity-based conceptualization (*lesbian, lesbians, Cubans, straight, openly*; 11) and, connected to it, notions of community (*parade, bars, bar, community, couples*; 12) and LGBT politics (*activists, liberation, alliance, rights, groups, movement, consciousness*; 13). In other words, *gay* appears as an identity label par excellence, without collocational evidence for connections to desire or sexual practices. This may also have to do with the historical strengthening of the notion of 'sexual identities' throughout the 20th century and, of course, with the greater public visibility and acceptance of same-sex sexualities.

11)

*[. . .] adults who were unashamedly and **openly gay** and **lesbian** and actually wanted the world to [. . .]* [post-US-CRI-155-160-Bob Witeck]

12)

*I didn't know about the **gay community**. I knew there were gay people in [. . .]* [post-US-FAB-84-92-Dennis Lindholm]

13)

*[. . .] was the beginning of what we know as **gay liberation** today.* [post-US-WIO-67-79-George]

The collocates of *straight* in POST also document a strong association with an identity conceptualization (Table 12). This surfaces in forms of the lemma BE (*are, is, been, be, were*; 14), another identity label (*gay*; 15), and personal nouns (*friends, men, man, people*; 16) as collocates of *straight*. However, in contrast to *gay, straight* lacks associations with the realms of community and politics, which points to straightness being heteronormatively viewed as the default sexual identity that does not require community-based safe spaces or political activism in its name. Again, desire and sexual practices do not play a role in the collocates list.

14)

*To know you **are straight** is to know you are normal.* [post-US-BLU-1-26-Samuel R. Delany]

15)

*Suddenly, it was clear that being **straight** or **gay** tells us next to nothing about [. . .]* [post-US-CRI-105-108-Richard Chamberlain]

16)

*Gay people go through the same thing as **straight people** when they lose their other half.* [post-US-QUF-195-211-Tony Isaac]

Finally, Table 13 presents an overview of pronominal forms that collocate with the four selected terms in the two corpora with an effect size of at least 1.5 (mutual information value). The first thing to note is that all forms tested in the two corpora collocate with the

Table 12. Collocates of *straight* in POST.

Colloc. rank	Total collocation frequency	Colloc. freq. left	Colloc. freq. right	Mutual information value	Collocate
1	10	5	5	6.70859	*straight*
2	13	3	10	6.13172	*friends*
3	36	15	21	5.83768	*gay*
4	13	4	9	5.79626	*men*
5	12	1	11	5.60783	*man*
6	20	2	18	5.28625	*people*
7	11	9	2	5.24656	*being*
8	27	12	15	5.07710	*or*
9	18	6	12	4.89093	*who*
10	11	6	5	4.77640	*are*
11	29	13	16	4.73999	*as*
12	15	4	11	4.39892	*is*
13	8	5	3	4.30481	*know*
14	8	4	4	4.09582	*been*
15	13	12	1	3.96012	*be*
16	12	5	7	3.88632	*so*
17	8	5	3	3.73959	*very*
18	19	11	8	3.73848	*you*
19	8	7	1	3.60997	*from*
20	12	11	1	3.52691	*were*

Table 13. Pronominal collocates of the four sexual labels in PRE and POST.

Pronoun	homosexual PRE	homosexual POST	normal PRE	normal POST	gay POST	straight POST
I	2.91600	3.63858	3.28961	3.12066	3.10658	2.81693
me	2.82388	2.22823			1.97460	2.07460
you		3.12961		4.67203	2.94157	3.73848
he	3.72516	3.41710			2.98805	2.24753
him	2.54444				1.52383	
she	2.68873				2.62789	
her					1.99059	
we	2.85928	2.15993	4.24641		2.38692	
us					2.77107	
they		2.87364				3.49762

subject first-person pronoun *I* and can therefore be assumed to play a substantial role in practices of linguistic self-identification in the narratives. It is also noteworthy that the objective first-person pronoun form *me* does not collocate with *normal* in either of the two corpora. This indicates that, while a self-identification as *normal* is common practice for

the narrators, other (out-group) social actors are less likely to describe the narrators as *normal*, and this apparently has not significantly changed across the two time periods.

The fact that *you*, which has been shown to be predominantly used generically above, is only a collocate of the four terms in POST, but not in PRE, points once more to a group- or community-based conceptualization connected to sexual identities after Stonewall. In other words, narrators draw more on notions of what gay men as a group do or experience, while sexual identity was more perceived as a matter of individual experience before Stonewall.

Concerning the use of the first-person plural and third-person plural pronouns in POST, it is interesting to note that there is an oppositional discursive construction of *gay* as an in-group (collocates: *we, us*; 17) versus *straight* as an out-group (collocate: *they*; 18), which cannot be verified for *homosexual* and *normal* in PRE.

17)

*[. . .] or whenever **we** celebrated our **gay** pride, it began, as had the movement itself, [. . .]* [post-US-HOT-257-272-Arnie Kantrowitz]

18)

*[. . .] really can't get what **they** want. Because **straight** males don't want to be bothered with [. . .]* [post-US-WIO-107-113-Donald]

A final aspect to note is that a greater variety of gendered third-person singular pronouns (*he, him, she, her*) collocates only with *homosexual* in PRE and *gay* in POST, that is, with the terms that are in the two periods most commonly used to describe same-sex sexualities. This shows that a narrative focus on these sexualities may not necessarily be associated with a less gender-binary linguistic representation. In fact, it could be argued that same-sex sexualities are equally binary as heterosexualities, since they draw on a similar distinctive logic of 'male' equals 'not female'.

Concordance analysis

An analysis of the concordance lines of the term *normal* in the two corpora sheds more light on the negotiation of sexual normativity in the data. Such an inspection of concordance lines in PRE shows that the term is indeed overwhelmingly used to describe and normatively evaluate sexuality-related aspects before Stonewall. The term is frequently explicitly contrasted with the term *homosexual*, which discursively produces binary opposites and causes a stigmatization of same-sex sexualities as not or less normal (19–20):

19)

*A **homosexual** will try to seduce a **normal** youth.* [pre-US-SVA-191-203-Louis E.]

20)

*[. . .] I don't begrudge **normal** people their feeling against **homosexuals**.* [pre-US-SVA-246-255-Gene S.]

The two terms form a fairly asymmetrical pair of opposites. While *homosexual* is originally a medical technical term with negative, pathologizing connotations, *normal* is an everyday language item that is typically perceived as value-neutral or positive. Also note how negatively 'homosexual' social actors are depicted in 19 and 20 (as seducers of young people and as the target of negative feelings), even by men who experience same-sex attraction themselves.

The concordance lines also produce ample evidence that *normal* is in fact used synonymously with *heterosexual* (21–23; interestingly, the medical term *heterosexual* is only infrequently used in PRE, maybe because other-sex sexualities were not seen to be compatible with a pathologizing discourse):

21)

*I was then sharing an apartment with a **normal** boy who frequented a better class whore house.* [pre-US-SVA-295-300-Archibald T.]

22)

*[. . .] mutual fellatio. I like **normal** coitus and to use my mouth with women, [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-47-59-Sydney H.]

23)

*[. . .] no guilty feeling. He's married now and perfectly **normal**. I see him twice a year.* [pre-US-SVA-234-240-Theodore S.]

Beyond such equalizations of being normal with being heterosexual, the narratives in PRE also draw on the form *normal* to sketch out more specific heteronormative discourses. Often it is not sufficient for a man to engage in sexual activities with a woman (or vice versa) to fulfill the heteronormative ideal. Rather, heterosexuality must be done in certain ways to qualify as ideal or 'normal'. The examples below illustrate this. According to them, 'normal' heterosexuality involves vaginal intercourse (rather than other forms of sexual practice; 24–25), the male partner not having erection problems (26), and women being interested in sexual activity longer in life than men (27). Of course, such normative discourses change over time and the aspects described as 'normal' or less than normal in pre-Stonewall times do not necessarily have the same normativity status today.

24)

*She was always unable to have orgasm from **normal** sex and it was necessary for me to practise [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-504-519 Howard N.]

25)

*We tried **normal** sex, sodomy and fellatio, twice a week for about [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-110-115-Nathan T.]

26)

*[. . .] no trouble getting an erection. The sex act was **normal** and I liked the feeling of the vagina but [. . .]* [pre-US-SVA-102-105-Thomas B.]

27)

*I think that **normal** women continue interested in sex longer than men.* [pre-US-SVA-47-59-Sydney H.]

When analyzing the concordance lines of *normal* in POST, we find that, in many instances, the term is not used to describe sexual normativities but other kinds of normativity. One common pattern involves, for example, the narrator constructing his own childhood as *normal*, which in turn implies that he views his adult life as a gay man as less normal (28–29):

28)

*I lived sort of a **normal** childhood. I now know that I realized I [. . .]* [post-US-QUF-195-211-Tony Isaac]

29)

*Otherwise, I was probably a healthy, fairly **normal**, well-behaved baby as far as anybody could [. . .]* [post-US-GBS-111-122-Ed]

The few sexuality-related examples one finds in POST, however, dovetail with the negative discourses of same-sex sexualities as 'not normal' that we saw above in PRE (30–31):

30)

*[. . .] straight behavior is what I term '**normal** behavior'. A lot of gay behavior is not **normal** [. . .]* [post-US-WIO-185-193-Dennis]

31)

*[. . .] psychiatrists often tried to make you heterosexual – '**normal**'. I had no intention of allowing that.* [post-US-BLU-73-81-Philip Bockman]

There is only limited evidence for a normalization of same-sex sexualities, even in the narratives of gay men in POST. The material contains only one example, in which the term *normal* is applied to a same-sex identified person (32):

32)

*[. . .] didn't know that it was okay, that a **normal** person could be gay.* [post-US-FAB-84-92-Dennis Lindholm]

Discussion and conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis of two corpora of US gay men's pre-Stonewall narratives has yielded interesting evidence of discursive shifts between the time periods before and after Stonewall. While the texts in both corpora divide up sexual space in a largely binary fashion, the terms commonly used to produce this effect have changed. While in pre-Stonewall times, the narrators almost exclusively draw on the contrastive pair *homosexual* and *normal*, the contrastive pair *gay* and *straight* predominates in the

post-Stonewall period. This is interesting, because all narratives describe the same time period (before Stonewall), but narrators after Stonewall draw on different linguistic means to talk about the same historical circumstances. This means that they use their familiarity with the dominant sexuality-related discourses of the present to make sense of their experiences in the past, even though such discourses were actually not available in earlier times.

The usage of the paired terms was demonstrated to be parallel only in some aspects but not in others. For example, although the terms *homosexual* and *normal* are often explicitly contrasted by narrators in PRE, it turned out that only *homosexual* is used as an identity-related term, while *normal* is not. Similarly, *gay* and *straight* form a pair of predominantly identity-related sexual labels in POST, but *gay* has additional associations with the realms of community and politics that *straight* lacks.

The development of *homosexual* and *normal* across the two time periods also exhibits interesting discursive shifts. While *homosexual* is, despite its medical origin – and probably for want of a better term – , used as a self-identifying label by the narrators in PRE, the negative connotations of the term have caused it to be largely dropped as an in-group identity label in POST, leaving its use as a person descriptor after Stonewall mainly to (gay-skeptical) out-group (i.e. heterosexual) language users, and otherwise limiting it mainly to the description of sexual practices and desires, which seems less offensive. The term *normal*, by contrast, is before Stonewall primarily used to make explicit statements about sexual normativity, while it has largely lost this sexual policing function in gay men's narratives after Stonewall.

We also observed other sexuality-related discursive shifts, such as from unquestioned heteronormativity and gender binarism in PRE to a weakening of these dominant discourses in POST, or from the expression of same-sex sexualities as a matter of individual experience in PRE to a more group- or community-based conceptualization in POST. Again these shifts seem remarkable in the light of the fact that both corpora contain descriptions of pre-Stonewall realities.

The data analysis also leaves us with two puzzles that call for further clarification in future research. As the keyword and collocation analyses show, sexual identity (and its politicization) has turned into the dominant conceptualization of sexuality in gay men's narratives after Stonewall. We also saw that, in the pre-Stonewall data, the identity conceptualization had various substantial competitors within the larger field of sexuality-related domains (desire, sexual practices, relationships, body). This challenges the traditional view that the desire-identity shift in the conceptualization of sexuality took place at the end of the 19th century. Maybe it is more adequate to say that the shift was initiated at that time, through the creation of the terms *heterosexual* and *homosexual* in medical discourse and a concomitant normativization of sexual identities. However, the narrative data analyzed in this study suggest that the predominance of the identity conceptualization was not in effect until much later outside medical discourse, and that the Stonewall Riots may in fact be a key point of the social changes that led the shift toward identity in everyday language use to completion. This reasoning is interesting because it throws an additional or even alternative light on Stonewall. It makes it possible to see Stonewall no longer solely as the central moment of gay empowerment in the Western world but also as a central milestone for the conceptualization of sexuality in terms of identity as we know it today.
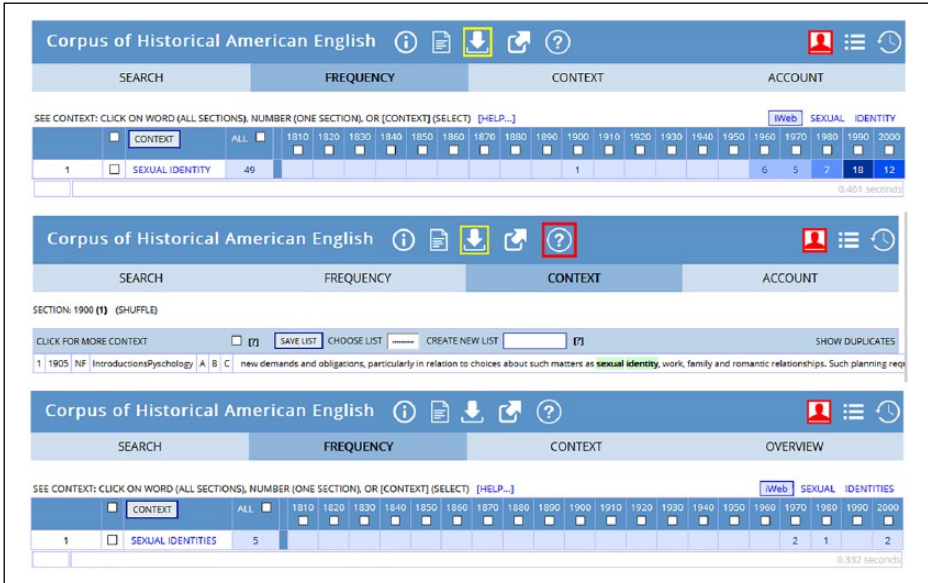
Figure 1. Occurrence of 'sexual identity/identities' across decades in COHA.

Simple searches in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) provide additional evidence. Figure 1 presents an overview of the occurrences of the phrases *sexual identity* and *sexual identities* across the decades in COHA. We see that these phrases indeed start being used in the 1960s and 1970s, that is, around Stonewall. The one instance of *sexual identity* that pre-dates this time in the corpus dates from 1905 and is from a medical publication.

If we perform the same search for the phrases *sexual desire* and *sexual desires* in COHA (Figure 2), another interesting issue arises. We see that these phrases evolve around the end of the 19th century, that is, at the time where we would traditionally locate the desire-identity shift. The COHA data suggest that a shift toward desire (rather than identity) took place around 1890, and it must remain unclear at the moment what kind of conceptualization pre-dates this time (sexual practices may be a good candidate, but future research would have to verify this).

The second puzzle has to do with the fact that we see an increase in identity conceptualizations overall, which is after all in accordance with the notion of a desire-identity shift. However, as the data in this study show, there is at least one form (*homosexual*) that shows exactly the opposite development, namely from a more identity- to a more desire- and practice-based conceptualization. This points to the fact that a description in terms of a unidirectional shift from desire to identity is probably too simplistic to capture all processes at work. One could, for example, be more specific and say that pathologized sexual identities (*homosexual*) lose ground throughout time, while more positive sexual identities (*gay, straight*) gain ground at the same time. And again Stonewall may have been a decisive event to promote these developments.
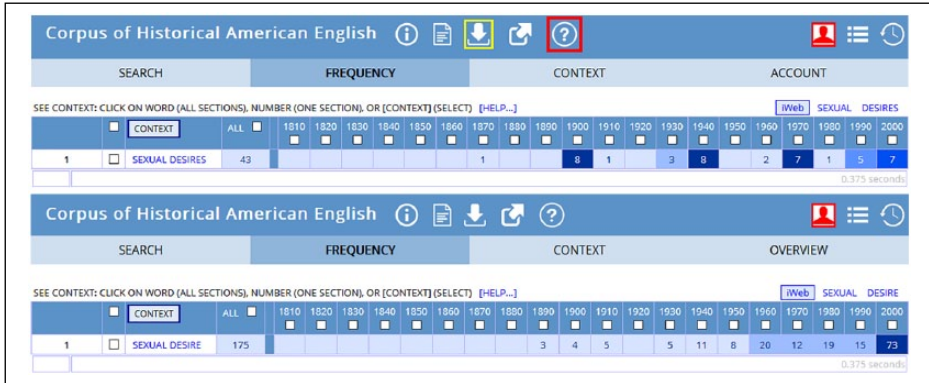
Figure 2. Occurrence of 'sexual desire(s)' across decades in COHA.

Norms are an inescapable social phenomenon. As soon as we communicate, we take certain aspects for granted, and this, in turn, shapes the way we use language. This is also true in the realm of sexuality-related communication, with heteronormativity, homonormativity and cis-normativity being among the sexual normativities people most often orient to. This begs the question of what the agenda of queer linguists could, or even should, be. If we cannot abolish norms altogether, what could be a realistic target for queer linguistic inquiry? Being critical of (harmful) sexual norms and empirically scrutinizing them need not necessarily be done with an (illusionary) anti-normative stance. By contrast, an alternative goal may be to induce changes in the normative force of sexual norms. In other words, intervention could take place at the discursive level, through efforts to make norms more descriptive, less prescriptive and, as a consequence, less harmful. Corpus linguistic inquiry certainly represents an efficient way to achieve these goals, since it enhances our understanding of quantitatively (descriptive) and qualitatively based (prescriptive) normativities and of the tensions between these as they surface at the linguistic level.

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