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Title: The LGBT Presence in Local Media: 1970–79

About the Author: I am a junior at the University of Illinois, majoring in Gender and Women's Studies. I hope to pursue a career as a librarian, and have enjoyed the library and archival research done for this project.

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Abstract: Newspaper articles from the 1970s can give us information that cannot be found anywhere else. The words of public officials, students, and residents are put into dialogue in letters to the editor, editorials, interviews and news stories. I looked at newspapers from the University of Illinois campus, and the Champaign–Urbana community to see what was being said about LGBT issues at this time, and how it was being said. I found a wealth of data to work with, and I evaluated the intersections of race, class and gender in the context of the local gay and lesbian community.

Initial Exercises: 1. I have considered a project on the Champaign or Urbana Human Rights Commission. These groups were mentioned frequently in the articles I found in the Urbana Free Library's archives. The work that these groups have done for LGBT people and other minority groups in Champaign in Urbana impacts the University as well. I am also interested in the interactions between the campus's LGBT social groups and the Champaign–Urbana community. While looking for articles about LGBT student groups in the 1970's I noticed that activities were reported in the Daily Illini as well as the Urbana Courier. Also, activities of the Gay Illini, and possibly other groups were open to residents of Champaign and Urbana who were not affiliated with the University. I am interested in how group members negotiated the boundaries between the University and greater Champaign–Urbana. What did these boundaries look like, and are they reflected in the newspapers and other items that have been preserved for us?

2. A broad topic that I would want to look at would be the representation of University LGBT groups in the Courier or

News-Gazette.

3. I could narrow this topic by only considering news items from the 1970s in the Courier. If necessary, I might narrow my focus down to one or two specific groups. From initial investigations it seems like the most known groups were the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Illini.

4. Why did University LGBT groups choose to open membership to community residents?

How were events publicized in community media sources?*

How many/what kind of non-university members were involved in LGBT organizations?

Did groups exist in the Champaign Urbana area that were not affiliated with the University?

Were there any alliances between student groups and city-wide groups?

Question: How did representations of LGBT people differ between the *Daily Illini* and local newspapers like *The Courier*?

4/15/09

I want to look at newspapers from Champaign-Urbana, and compare these with campus news sources. By looking at the number of stories published on queer issues, the language used, and the types of stories I hope to better understand any differences in attitudes towards LGBT people in the UIUC community and the local community in the 1970s.

Plan: By 4/9: Check University Library sources including Lavender Prairie News, Campus Digest, Campus Daily News. Search Student Life Archives for relevant clippings files, and other sources.

By 4/16: Complete survey of Champaign-Urbana News Gazette, Daily Illini, and Urbana Courier.

By 4/23: Read and analyze sources, compare and contrast the representation of queer issues and LGBT people in

publications.

4/15/09

My plan has stayed mostly the same. I have not yet gone to the Student Life Archives. I have looked through most of the newspaper sources I wanted to, but this has been taking much longer than expected. I may have to be more selective with the larger daily newspapers than I would like.

Data: 4/8/2009

So far I have looked at two media sources for my project. I found articles in the *Champaign-Urbana Courier* and the *Lavender Prairie News*.

Articles from the *Courier* were from 1970–1979. This is the first source I looked at to find articles about queer issues. Articles were concentrated most heavily in the years 1972 and 1977. The articles in 1972 seem to have been driven by the proposal and defeat of a gay rights bill to the Champaign City Council. Although an article was listed in the library database I for an article on this topic, I was unable to find the article on microfilm. In September of 1972 a group of three articles was published in the *Courier*, addressing lesbians, the Gay Liberation Movement, and professional attitudes towards homosexuality. The 1977 series of articles seem organized around another proposal of the gay rights ordinance, and its passage in July of that year. A persistent topic in the articles is homophobia in the community. The more lengthy articles tend to address the fears of citizens if gay rights bills pass. All articles I have found so far are in an attached file.

The *Lavender Prarie News* is a Champaign Urbana lesbian newsletter that was published beginning in 1976. I have read the newsletter from 1976 until the end of 1979. The focus of this newsletter is quite different than articles in the *Courier*. The assumed audience of this publication is almost exclusively lesbian. The main topics are social gatherings such as coffeehouses and movie nights. Only a few articles mention the Human Rights Ordinance. Unfortunately, the library seems to be missing any issues

of the newsletter published in August of 1977, directly following the passage of the HRO. These issues, were they available, may have been more focused on the lesbian community's reaction to the ordinance. The group responsible for publishing the newsletter, The Lavender Prairie Collective, seems to have worked closely with University groups like the Gay Illini. Almost every issue references the group as co-sponsors of events, or otherwise active members of the network of queer people in Champaign-Urbana. I have attached a few pages from throughout the run of the Lavender Prairie News to provide examples of articles and production quality.

4/23/2009

At this point in my research I have found dozens of LGBT-related articles in publications such as *The Daily Illini*, *The Student Advocate*, *Campus Daily News*, and *Campus Digest*. My survey of *The Champaign-Urbana Courier* is incomplete, as is my research into *The Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette*. I am disappointed that I was unable to do a more intensive search into these publications. My initial impression is that *The Daily Illini* covered LGBT life in more depth and with greater sensitivity than *The Courier*. It also seems that with the formation of the Gay Illini and a few well publicized events the coverage of LGBT material in *The Daily Illini* increased dramatically. The articles from *The Daily Illini*, *Student Advocate*, and *Campus Digest* are attached below.

Discuss: Any individual's opinions are subject to change over time. One way of retrieving the opinions of the past is by looking at newspapers and other print sources. In the 1970s Champaign and Urbana passed laws protecting gay rights and groups like the Gay Illini formed on the University of Illinois campus. In light of these developments, I looked at newspaper coverage involving LGBT themes to see how members of the press conceptualized gay rights, and how different genders, races, and classes were represented in the context of the LGBT community in Champaign-Urbana. I found a surprising amount of material. Debates about gay rights seemed to revolve around two main themes, criminality, and mental illness. Throughout the 1970s articles were published on both sides of these debates.

Another aspect of my research was to look for the ways that race, gender and class were made visible through these articles.

News articles in the Champaign Urbana Courier generally did not make outright discriminatory remarks about homosexuality. Unless the article quoted an interviewee, or a citizen's remark, presentations of homosexuality as a mental illness or perversion were absent from the articles I looked at. Negative comments about the mental health of homosexuals in interviews or other public opinions occurred in four out of twenty three articles I looked at. In "Four Lesbians Speak Frankly about Homosexuality" by Sharon Robinson the women interviewed are said to have undergone "Marathon group therapy". Words like paranoia and fear are used to describe the women's feelings about their homosexuality. One woman mentions an aunt's attempts to have her committed to a psychiatric facility, and another asserts that "[Lesbians are] not walking around with antennae molesting children." These remarks are mixed with more upbeat positive statements like "I'm really happy." An accompanying piece on professional attitudes towards homosexuality gives the opinions of a psychiatrist as well as a gynecologist/obstetrician and a minister (Robinson). Both doctors mention the possibility that homosexuals have a mental illness, while the minister suggests that they are just people in need of guidance (Robinson).

One article that explicitly links criminality with homosexual activities was "YAF Gains, Gay Lib Doesn't at Council Meeting" (Kroemer). This article quotes a gay man, Jeff Graubart, who attended the University of Illinois. At the Champaign City Council meeting he tried to bring attention to the criminal charges faced by people dressed in clothing that was judged not appropriate to their sex. Graubart brings up a party he had attended in which two female impersonators were arrested and fined. It appears that these issues were not pursued by the council at this time. A series of stories addressed the arrest and charging of Graubart with trespassing following a non-violent protest. These articles do not explicitly link homosexuality and criminality, but they do define Graubart as a homosexual

and his cause in the protest was to speak out against the unfair treatment he had received as a gay man.

Out of approximately 103 items from the Daily Illini, I found that about 25 made reference to the idea that homosexuality is a psychological or criminal problem. One article explained that University of Minnesota had refused to hire a gay man because in that state sodomy was a crime. According to the article, courts found this to be insufficient reasoning to refuse to hire a qualified person. Another article on a debate between Baptist ministers and the Gay Illini quotes one of the Baptist debaters as saying, "My personal conviction is that there should be laws punishing homosexuality."

The other articles which link criminal behavior to homosexuality are the Daily Illini's coverage of Jeff Graubart's demonstration at city hall. A series of five stories cover Graubart's protest, his sentencing, and the aftermath. Graubart was arrested for trespassing at the Urbana city building. This purpose of his non-violent protest was to bring attention to abuse he had received from the Urbana police. The issue is compounded when Graubart is repeatedly quoted describing himself as a "psychopathic vegetable" (Johnson; Wingert). Psychological assumptions seem to have been made about Graubart, as Mayor Paley called counselors to consult with him and attempted to have him committed in order to remove him from the city building ("Paley Bungles Case"). Graubart may be suffering from a mental illness, as he himself seems to think, but these multiple stories reinforce the idea that homosexuals are unstable, criminal, mentally disturbed individuals in the community.

A feature called "Lesbians Strive for an End to Bias" addresses campus psychological counseling services (Cohen). In the article McKinley Health Center, the Psychological and Counseling Center, and Champaign County Mental Health Center are listed as potential sources of counseling, and the attitudes of some administrators and employees towards lesbians and gay men are listed. The article notes that no lesbians have been to McKinley or the Counseling Center in that year. According to the author

Sharon Cohen, “Although there is a scarcity of clients visiting counselors, the attendance is not an indication of lesbians’ assimilation into society.” As evidence for this assertion she cites anecdotes of harassment that one lesbian couple she interviewed had faced. There seems to be a stubborn refusal to accept a potential explanation that although lesbians or gay men may face harassment, they may also be competent enough to deal with these problems without the need for psychiatric treatment.

The need for psychiatric intervention in the lives of homosexuals is the explicit topic of one article entitled “2 analyze ‘gay life’ psychology.” It addresses a discussion that had been held at the Red Herring called “Homosexuality—Disposition or Disease” where psychological reasons were suggested to explain homosexuality (House). An article In “Questioning the Heterosexual Values of American Society” Reid Smith gives a competing explanation for the criminalizing and pathologizing attitudes taken by many towards homosexuality. He writes of America’s “Neurotic version of sex” as the real source of oppression for gay men and women.

The remainder of the articles tend to reject the idea that homosexuality is a disease, but the fact that these assertions continually appear throughout the decade suggests that it continues to be a commonly held idea that people feel the need to speak out against. Letters to the editor confirm this idea. An article titled “I’m a Person Too” by Roger Wilson gave quotes from one student who had struggled with his gay identity throughout high school and college. Interviewee Wayne Knights does not claim to be a picture of mental health, acknowledging sleeplessness, anxiety, and an eventual realization that he is “not a raving maniac” (Wilson). This look into gay life provoked a number of letters to the editor. One letter compares homosexuals to “alcoholics, hypochondriacs, and schizophrenics” (Hichz). In another letter written about a week later, they are lumped in with “Nazis, Communists, gamblers and prostitutes” who he believes it is acceptable to exclude from certain areas of society if necessary (Hichz). This replicates views that make the status of

homosexuality as a mental illness. Another letter later that year compares homosexuality to necrophilia and pedophilia. The Daily Illini staff does publish articles that are positive towards homosexuality, as well as a few letters, like “Being Gay No Problem” (Griffin) and “Western Tradition”.

For the articles I found, I attempted to determine the role of racial minorities in the gay rights movement. The ways available to do so were extremely limited, as race was almost never mentioned explicitly in a news item. A few articles by regular columnists included a small photograph of the author. These photographs were all of people who appeared to be white. Of the photographs I encountered, most were of public figures, such as city council members, public officials, or candidates for office. Willis Baker and Joan Severns appear in an article about a debate for city manager in which gay rights issues came up (Doyle). In an article in the Daily Illini “Dr. Morton S. Tabin, a Champaign psychiatrist” is shown speaking at a Champaign City Council Meeting in favor of the Human Rights Ordinance (Miller). Urbana Mayor Hiram Paley is pictured in an article in the Daily Illini where he is criticized for the way he handled Graubart's nonviolent demonstration for gay rights (“Paley Bungles Case”). The paper also ran articles about the protest, which showed white male protester Jeff Graubart, and Toby Schneiter engaged in a sit-in (Wingert). There were photographs accompanying a few stories, but it was hard to tell who was actually involved in a group, rally, or event, and who may have just been passing by. Photographs usually do not have captions telling the names of those pictured. One article from The Daily Illini explains that most participants at a Gay Illini Dance preferred to be photographed from behind if at all (Walker). One image shows a dance floor with several backs turned towards the camera, while another is a close up shot of Kevin Cleeland, a white male active in the group. Photos accompany a story on Homecoming Queen candidate Tim Glisson, also a white male (Knauer). Regardless of these problems obscuring the motives or identifications of some individuals the overarching fact is that most people pictured in any way are white. These few representations may reflect the relatively privileged space

that white men occupy within the homosexual community.

Drawings used to accompany opinion pieces or editorials were of apparently white couples, both male and female, with the exception of one Daily Illini article from 1979 which shows a male couple that appears to be interracial (Austin). When actual photographs are chosen to appear with this sort of article, the photograph is either purposely shadowy, or of an unidentifiable couple holding hands, making it impossible to determine either race or gender (Robinson; "Homosexual's Rights Should be Protected"). Three cartoons appear in the Daily Illini addressing Anita Bryant's campaign to get rid of gay rights in Florida. All people in the cartoons appear white, or are in shadow.

In some articles, detailed physical descriptions take the place of a photograph. It seems that authors try to balance the voyeuristic desires of readers while keeping the confidentiality of their informants. In an article talking about lesbians from the Champaign Urbana Courier, the photograph is shadowy, but three of the four women interviewed are given physical descriptions. In the article we are introduced to "Kathy, a frank spoken blonde...Suzy, a 22-year-old University of Illinois student with long dark hair and a spirited personality... [and] Sandie, who was dressed similarly to the others in the casual jeans and T-shirt or blouse attire of the young" (Robinson). These descriptions assure the general public that lesbians are "normal," that they are students, feminine, and otherwise typical youths. Nothing is said about the women's race in this article. This article was published in 1972, but another article from 1979 follows a similar pattern in their discussion of gay men. "Don," a pseudonym, is described as "a brown-haired, blue-eyed athlete," while his friend Dave is "A lanky musician" (Austin). In the article "Where Gays Can Feel Unfettered" in the Daily Illini the patrons of bars are described in a similar level of detail. The photograph shows only apparently white patrons, and race is only mentioned briefly in regards to "a black transvestite [who] waltzed by dressed in white with a long curly wig" (Hanson). Here only the exoticized racialized exception to the norm receives any detailed description. Other bar patrons are described in terms of their conformity to typical

styles of dress.

Gay Rights issues are often equated with race and gender politics in these newspaper articles, and in editorials and letters to the editor. It is common for interviewees in news stories who are in favor of gay rights to compare the movement to other civil rights struggles. One Champaign Council Member, Mary Pollock, implied that two members of the council who voted in favor of gay rights did so because as a woman and a black man they knew what it was like to feel oppressed (Graessle).

In other instances people who were against gay rights invoked the idea that people choose to be homosexual whereas race cannot be chosen, and therefore, gay rights are unnecessary. This is the opinion of Bill Groninger of the Champaign-Urbana Courier in his article, "Gay or Straight—It's My Opinion." He writes, "When were homosexuals or lesbians ever held in slavery? When were they denied the right to vote? When were they denied equal opportunity because of their color?" (Groninger). A Daily Illini letter to the editor takes a similar stance (Yudewitz).

I found many references to the women's movement in articles about sexuality as one might expect. Some articles treated the relationship between the struggle for gay rights as the same as race-based and gender-based political movements. There is also a tension visible between issues of sexuality and gender, which crops up frequently in discussion of the Equal Rights Amendment, or lesbian involvement in either gay liberation or women's liberation organizations. A series of articles and letters in the Daily Illini discuss space for student groups in the Union. The Gay Illini were allotted a space in the same room as the Women's Student Union. According to Kevin Cleeland, he was told that this was a problem by the WSU because it "Might hurt the image of the Equal Rights Amendment" (Cleeland). Members of the WSU responded, saying that this statement did not represent the group's opinion and that "The WSU supports the rights of all women, including gay women, to choose their own lifestyles" (Keehn). Although this may have been the official party line, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that lesbians did not always

feel welcome in Women's Rights groups like the WSU. In the article "Four Lesbians Talk Frankly about Homosexuality" interviewees discuss problems they faced within the male dominated gay liberation group and the heterosexual dominated women's liberation group.

A number of problems arise in this attempt to learn about attitudes towards homosexuality through analysis of print sources on the topic. The articles and especially letters to the editor tend to weed out those with moderate opinions and preserve militant arguments on both sides of issues. The potential for discrimination is still something feared in the gay and lesbian community today. Although letters could be written anonymously and authors were not always listed for editorials, the choice to publicize one's view was potentially dangerous. When looking at the Lavender Prairie Collective Newsletters and the Student Advocate newspaper I find it important to remember that these individuals began their projects with a like minded group of contributors on their side, and a like minded audience. The people producing and receiving the LPC newsletter were mostly friends, close enough to comfortably hold events at each other's homes. Women would sometimes send in updates on their travels with the knowledge that if it were published in the newsletter their friends would see it. I noticed that the contributors for the newsletters, when listed usually only listed their first names. I originally thought that this was for anonymity, but I now believe they just expected all their readers to recognize them by first names or pseudonym only.

Similarity was not always seen as an advantage by readers of the Lavender Prairie Collective Newsletter. A reader's criticism of the group's bias in regards to class is preserved in a letter written by a woman identified as Mary Jo. She wrote to the newsletter stating, "Most of the women who publish this newsletter have jobs and pretty [g]ood ones, as do most of the women associated with the feminist cause. They eat well and live well. Tell me, please, where the poor woman fits into the picture...I support women but when I find myself supporting only middle class, healthy, mostly white women, I start to wonder; who is this for? Is it for some women or all

women?" (Mary Jo). Clearly, conflicts between a wish to be inclusive and a certain lifestyle similarity among members of the Lavender Prairie Collective coexist with tension in the newsletters. Events are often listed as including free child care and community events are generally inexpensive and communal. However, there are also numerous stories about professional academic organizations, announcements for events requiring a large financial commitment, and requests for financial support of the newsletter and other feminist and/or lesbian organizations in the area. The women of the Collective encouraged letters and feedback, but the limited audience may have worked against the likelihood that they would receive any.

In the case of The Student Advocate, I learned through my research that the Gay Illini shared office space with the paper which existed as a Registered Student Organization. It seems to me that articles like Robert Michael Doyle's "Gay Notes" series in the paper may have been due to the physical space shared by these groups and a want of content for the paper as much as by a similar outlook on gay rights.

Another issue I faced was the sheer volume of material to look through. The only way I was able to narrow my search was by using a limited index of articles through the Urbana Free Library Catalog, and by looking in the Student Life Archives for newspaper articles that had been clipped and preserved. These sources were extremely helpful, but far from complete. Clippings had been kept by a student at the university for the years he was in school only. Even over this brief span of time, the clippings included a number of articles that were not present in the Urbana Free Library's index of articles on homosexuality or gay liberation. For these reasons I feel that any evaluation of sources by statistical methods would be unhelpful. Even if I did have an accurate number for the articles in a given newspaper, I am not sure what this data would really tell me. Many Daily Illini articles addressed campus events, registered student organizations, or University politics. It seems natural that these issues would not be represented in papers like the Courier, and this might not be evidence of a more negative attitude towards homosexuality on the

part of the editors or writers for the paper. It also seemed that articles on topics like gay rights legislation were covered with a basic level of neutrality, and that neither large paper made judgments in this context. What was interesting to me, therefore were the editorials, letters, and less event based stories which relied more on individual opinions.

Finding the voices that people were willing to speak in at this particular moment in time has been an interesting window into the past. Given the time that has past, and the political and social changes that have occurred, it seems doubtful that any one article or letter would use the same language or take the exact form today that they did at the time they were published. In understanding how things like representation, race, gender, and class have operated in the past we can look to make changes for the future.

EUI Links: [The Student Soldier Athlete: Representations of athletes at the University of Illinois in the 1940s](#)

[Women's Tennis at UIUC](#)

[Student Voice?: An ethnography of activist women of color and the Daily Illini's negative representation of student activism.](#)

Reflect: I have enjoyed the opportunity to take an EUI affiliated class. The idea of archiving our projects for future use and reference is exciting to me. The use of Moodle and IDEALS has been sometimes difficult, but also useful. Projects related to my topic were not very available in the archives. I am glad to see that our class will be filling the archives with queer and LGBT related projects, for people to use in the future.

Recommendations: I think it would be helpful for future students if there was an online database for the articles I looked at. I spent many hours looking at microfilm to find articles. Although I felt that this was a bit like a treasure hunt, it might be an obstacle for students doing research, or people who are just curious.