

Partners Task Force for Gay & Lesbian Couples

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SUMMARY OF PARTNERS' NATIONAL SURVEY OF LESBIAN & GAY COUPLES

In the fall of 1988, this major survey was undertaken to develop an accurate portrait of lesbian and gay couples in America. Survey forms were circulated through gay churches and community centers, but most couples requested the forms after reading notices in the gay press. **Partners Magazine for Gay & Lesbian Couples** and **Out/Look** (both now discontinued) and a few gay newspapers published the survey itself. Data was collected through fall 1989. The entire project was developed and conducted by Steve Bryant and Demian.

The survey drew a total of 1,749 responses, representing 1,266 couples — 706 lesbian couples (56%) and 560 male couples (44%). In some cases, both partners of a couple submitted a survey; in others, only one partner did. For purposes of statistical analysis, responses were weighted so that each couple was counted only once.

Respondents provided demographic information, such as age and education, for both themselves and their partners. This summary reports only information for the respondents since it differs little from the information they provided for their partners.

LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP

	Women	Men
Average years	4.9	6.9

Relationships averaged nearly six years in length for all couples, even though the average respondent was only 35 years old. More than 100 couples had passed their 15th anniversary. One lesbian relationship had spanned 43 years, and three male couples had lasted more than 40 years. 19% of lesbian couples and 13% of male couples had been together one year or less.

NUMBER OF PREVIOUS MAJOR GAY/LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	32	38
One	26	33
Two	23	18
Three	10	7
Four	4	3
Five or more	5	1
<i>Average number</i>	1.52	1.07

YEARS IN PREVIOUS MAJOR GAY/LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	1	2
1 year	8	20
2 years	12	22
3 years	10	13
4 years	11	10
5 years	10	9
6 years	8	4
7 years	6	4
8 years	5	4
9 years	5	2
10 years	7	3
11 - 15 years	12	4
16 or more years	6	2
<i>Average years</i>	6.6	4.2

PREVIOUS HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Never married	73	81
Married once	23	18
Married twice	4	1
Thrice or more	<1	<1

WHERE COUPLES MET

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Friends	28	19
Work	21	7
Social event	16	13
School*	9	3
Bar	4	22
Religious event	4	7
Political event	4	4
Support group*	3	2
Park/public space*	2	6
Classified ad	2	6
Baths/cruising*	<1	5
Other	5	6

* write-in response

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Gay/lesbian	93	97
Bisexual	7	3

AGE

	Women	Men
Average years	34.7	36.5

RACE

	Women (%)	Men (%)
White	95	95
Latino/Latina	2	2
Black	2	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1
Native American	<1	<1
Other	<1	<1

CLASS BACKGROUND

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Working class	31	33
Middle class	60	62
Moneyed class	6	4
Other	1	1
Poor/welfare*	1	<1

* Write-in response

EDUCATION

	Women	Men
Average years	16.7	16.8

73% of women and 72% of men had at least four years of college.

POLITICAL ORIENTATION

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Very liberal	39	29
Liberal	40	44
Moderate	19	21
Conservative	2	5
Very conservative	<1	1

RELIGION

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Protestant	25	32
Atheist/Agnostic	23	25
Catholic	14	21
Jewish	10	7
Pagan/Goddess/Wicca	6	2
Unitarian	3	2
Eastern religion	1	1
Quaker	1	<1
Other	9	7
No response or uninterpretable	9	4

INCOME

	Women (%)	Men (%)
\$8,000 or below	10	8
\$8,001 - 15,000	17	12
\$15,001 - 25,000	27	26
\$25,001 - 40,000	33	29
\$40,001 - 65,000	11	16
above \$65,000	3	9

INCOME SHARING

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Entirely shared	39	41
Partly shared	36	41
Not shared	25	19

EMPLOYER-PROVIDED BENEFITS FOR PARTNER

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Health coverage	4	6
Other benefits	5	7

TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION ENCOUNTERED AS A COUPLE

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Employment benefits	58	40
Taxes	47	37
Insurance	46	34
Membership	20	11
Credit/banking	15	10
Employment	14	13
Housing	11	11
Hotels	6	6
Hospital visitation	6	2
Adoption	5	2
Foster care	3	2
Other	7	4
None/none indicated	23	34

WHERE COUPLE LIVES

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Urban gay neighborhood	50	66
Urban area	11	9
Suburban area	29	15
Rural area	11	9

LIVING TOGETHER

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Always	75	82
Sometimes	12	11
Never	12	6

RESIDENCE STATUS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Jointly owned	32	36
Owned by one partner	24	24
Rented/leased by both	33	27
Rented/leased by one	11	13

NUMBER OF CHILDREN CARED FOR

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	79	91
One	10	5
Two	8	3
Three	2	1
Four or more	2	1

SOURCE OF CHILDREN

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Previous marriage	74	79
Alternative insemination	13	0
Adoption	7	8
Foster parent program	3	6
Other source	11	11

PLANS FOR CHILDREN (OR MORE CHILDREN)

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Not planning	60	68
Considering	20	9
Planning	10	4
No response	10	20

SEXUAL AGREEMENTS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Monogamy	91	63
Monogamy w/agreed exceptions	7	26
Non-monogamy	3	11

FREQUENCY OF BREAKING SEXUAL AGREEMENTS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Never	90	63
Rarely	8	28
Sometimes	1	8
Often	<1	2

PARTNER'S ADMITTED FREQUENCY OF BREAKING SEXUAL AGREEMENTS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Never	93	73
Rarely	7	21
Sometimes	<1	6
Often	<1	<1

FREQUENCY OF SEX WITH PARTNER PER MONTH

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	3	6
1	15	5
2	12	8
3	10	5
4	15	10
5-9	19	27
10-15	14	25
16 or more	11	15
Average	7.1	10.1
Median	4	8

QUALITY OF SEX WITH PARTNER

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Excellent	54	34
Good	24	33
Satisfactory	16	25
Unsatisfactory	7	9

FREQUENCY OF OUTSIDE SEX PER MONTH

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	98	78
1	1	10
2	<1	5
3	<1	3
4	<1	2
5-10	<1	2
11 or more	<1	1
Average	0.06	0.63

ROLE OF AIDS

In forming relationship:

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	91	72
Minor	8	21
Major	1	8

In continuing relationship:

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	79	52
Minor	18	34
Major	3	14

RISK FOR AIDS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Not at risk	93	62
At risk	7	28
HIV-Positive	<1	8
Person with AIDS/ARC	0	2
Other	<1	1

SAFETY OF SEX IN RELATIONSHIP DURING LAST YEAR

	Women (%)	Men (%)
HIV-Negative & monogamous	54	34
Safe	30	32
Possibly safe	9	17
Unsafe	5	12
Didn't have sex	2	5

SAFETY OF SEX OUTSIDE RELATIONSHIP DURING LAST YEAR

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Didn't have outside sex	90	
Safe	5	30
Possibly safe	4	10
Unsafe	2	2

PARTNER'S SAFETY OF SEX OUTSIDE RELATIONSHIP DURING LAST YEAR

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Didn't have outside sex	86	
Safe	4	20
Possibly safe	3	7
Unsafe	1	1
Don't know	6	19

TWO GREATEST CHALLENGES TO RELATIONSHIP

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Communication	42	49
Career	26	30
Relatives	26	18
Sex	25	22
Money	25	28
Health	9	12
Co-workers	3	2
Neighbors	1	1
Other	23	13

RELATIONSHIP HAS SUFFERED FROM

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Partner's		
Verbal abuse	17	15
Substance abuse	7	11
Physical abuse	3	3
Respondent's		
Verbal abuse	19	16
Substance abuse	8	8
Physical abuse	3	2

BIG ARGUMENTS PER MONTH

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	57	65
One	31	26
Two	9	6
Three or more	3	4
Average number	1.0	0.6

SMALL ARGUMENTS PER MONTH

	Women (%)	Men (%)
None	10	13
One	21	20
Two	28	26
Three	14	14
Four	11	10
Five	5	6
Six or more	11	12
Average number	3.5	3.7

SOUGHT RELATIONSHIP HELP

	Women (%)	Men (%)
from:	[found helpful]	[found helpful]
Friend	47 [92]	43 [93]
Counselor	45 [92]	27 [92]
Relative	9 [86]	7 [82]
Clergy	4 [80]	5 [80]

PREFERRED NAME FOR PARTNER

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Partner/life partner	35	27
Lover	30	40
Spouse	10	9
Roommate/friend	7	5
Mate/life mate	4	6
Boyfriend/girlfriend	2	2
Husband/wife	1	1
Multiple responses	9	8
Other	2	4

LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Done		Done
	[Planned]	[Planned]
Will	32 [46]	39 [40]
Power of Attorney	28 [41]	27 [29]
Partnership/Living		
Together Agreement	9 [18]	10 [13]
Other	6 [4]	3 [1]

DEGREE OF COMMITMENT

	Women (%)	Men (%)
For life	67	76
For a long time	25	20
For a while	7	4
Briefly	<1	0

RELATIONSHIP RITUALS

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Held ceremony	19	11
Wear ring/symbol	57	36
Other ritual	12	9

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP

	Women (%)	Men (%)
1 (Highest)	47	36
2	32	39
3	13	15
4	2	4
5	2	3
6	2	3
7 (Lowest)	1	1
Average rating	1.9	2.1

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

(rated from 1 = strong support to 7 = hostile)

	Women	Men
Gay friends	1.50	1.65
Gay church	1.59	1.99
Lesbian/gay couples group	1.63	1.77
Other gay organizations	1.69	1.91
Other friends	2.15	2.09
Co-workers	2.72	2.55
Siblings	2.82	2.80
Boss	2.84	2.78
Mother	3.34	2.98
Other relatives	3.44	3.34
Father	3.71	3.37
Church	4.22	4.54
Average rating	2.64	2.65

SOURCE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Unknown (gay/lesbian newspapers, political, social & religious gay groups)	56	52

Because figures are rounded, columns may not total 100 percent.