

# THE GAY COUPLES STUDY

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## Greetings

By Colleen Hoff, Principal Investigator

Greetings and welcome to our inaugural newsletter!

I would like to be the first to say how much we, the staff of the Gay Couples Study, appreciate your willingness to participate. As many of you know, we received funds to conduct follow-up surveys for three additional years. We contacted those of you who participated before we secured those funds and the majority of you agreed to continue participating and are returning to take follow-up computerized surveys.

We are very excited to be awarded this funding because it shows that our funders are as committed as we are to understanding the nuances of relationship dynamics in gay couples and how those dynamics may or may not be associated with HIV. We finished recruiting in February and are happy to report that 569 couples are participating. This is the largest study of gay couples addressing relationship dynamics, HIV, and sexuality. Your responses will not only shed light on this subject, they will also help shape future programs for gay couples.

Many of you have expressed interest in the results of the study, which we plan to share with you via regular newsletters. In this newsletter Brad Vanderbilt, our recruitment coordinator,

## Baseline Demographics

By Deepalika Chakravarty, Statistician

With baseline interviews now complete, meaning that all couples participating in the study have finished their first interview, it is time to begin a preliminary analysis of the data. We surveyed 569 couples over a twenty-month period from May 31, 2005 to February 15, 2007.

Beginning with basic demographic characteristics of the sample as a whole, 65% of participants identified as white. Individuals identifying as either Latino or Black comprised 10% each, while 7% identified themselves as Asian/Pacific Islander (API). Nearly 4% of participants identified as mixed race and 1% identified as American Indian/Native American (AI/NA).

The average age of participants was 41 years, with half the

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describes the recruitment effort his team led for over a year. Deepalika Chakravarty, our Statistician, shows some initial demographic findings. Binh Nguyen and Rand Dadasovich, two of our research associates, look into the changes we are making to follow-up surveys and how national census data describing gay couples allows us to contextualize our study demographics. Finally, in the first of many staff profiles, we feature Sean Christian Beougher, our new Project Director.

We hope to send newsletters regularly, so we urge you to keep your contact information up-to-date. If your address or phone number changes let us know. Finally, I would like to take a moment to invite your feedback. If there are findings you are particularly interested in, let us know and we will try to include them in our next newsletter. Thank you again for making this study a success. Happy reading!

sample being younger and half older. The youngest participant was 18 years old and the oldest 83.

93% of participants identified as gay, homosexual, or queer and 6% identified as bisexual. The remaining 1% of participants identified as straight, heterosexual, or other. Similar to the racial breakdown, at 66% a majority of participants were HIV-negative and 33% were HIV-positive.

The demographic characteristics of the sample shifted slightly when we analyzed it by couple. To our surprise, interracial couples were the most predominant coupling at 47%. White couples followed closely at 45% and Black couples at 5%. Latino, API, and AI/NA couples were all less than 1% each. As for

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## Changes to the Survey

By Binh Nguyen, Research Associate

If you have taken the survey for the second or third time you will have noticed that we continue to make changes to it. We make these changes because we want to address your concerns and suggestions, improve the overall flow of the survey, and incorporate new, interesting, and relevant questions each time you come in.

There are now new questions about communication, sexual satisfaction, and family relations. For the fourth survey, we are including a question looking at general health issues, such as Hepatitis C, heart disease, and cancer as well as a section of questions concerning the impact of race and ethnicity. These additional questions help us get a more nuanced view of the issues that may impact relationship dynamics.

In future surveys, we will include questions dealing with

## Recruitment

By Brad Vanderbilt, Recruitment Coordinator

How did you first hear about the Gay Couples Study? Did you see one of our tear-off posters on the community bulletin boards in the Castro or in the bathroom at the Eagle? Maybe you saw a posting about the study online at Craigslist or at a social networking website like MySpace or Gay.com. Maybe you spoke with a recruiter face-to-face in a club or at an event like Pride or Folsom Street Fair.

These are just a few of the many avenues of recruitment that the Gay Couples Study pursued in its outreach efforts to enroll participants. As the Recruitment Coordinator, I devoted nearly two years to getting the word out about this important research and bringing in new couples to share their stories through the Study's computer-assisted survey questionnaire. Thanks to the

*"The largest and most successful source through which we recruited participants was our ad in the Bay Area Reporter, which led to the recruitment of 107 participants and their partners."*



homophobia and discrimination. We are also planning to include a series of questions surveying your attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

While the overall length of the survey is not increasing (we also remove questions from follow-up surveys), we realize that it is time-consuming and so we greatly appreciate your continuing participation and effort. We strive to make the survey a pleasant experience and always invite your feedback.

commitment of our participants, we have brought together the largest ever research sample for a study exploring relationship issues in gay and bisexual male couples.

Some of you have been curious about where we found our participants. The answer is we found them in many places! The largest and most successful source through which we recruited participants was our ad in the Bay Area Reporter, which led to the recruitment of 107 participants and their partners. We recruited over 60 couples through the recruitment material we placed around the Castro. Other top venues included Craigslist, the San Francisco LGBT Center, Magnet, the pharmacy at Walgreen's, and the University of California, San Francisco's LGBT ListServ. Another important source was San Francisco General

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## Research Opportunities:

### Project T & The Focus Project

**PROJECT T:** Team up with men fighting HIV

As the HIV epidemic continues to grow around the world and in our communities, we need new prevention tools. Worldwide, there are 11,000 new infections per day. Joining a study is one way people can give back to the community and help in the fight against HIV.

In San Francisco, there are 15–20 new HIV infections every week. Most of these new infections are happening among men who have sex with men. While using condoms and reducing the number of partners are the best prevention tools we have at the moment, we clearly need new prevention strategies for our community.

Project T is a new study for HIV-negative gay & bisexual men and transgender women (MTF). It is looking to see if they can safely take tenofovir, a commonly prescribed pill used for HIV treatment. If it proves to be safe, it may be tested to see if taking tenofovir can prevent negative men from becoming infected with HIV. Right now, we do not know if it will.

Project T will also look at how taking a daily pill affects health and



HIV risk-taking behavior. Everyone who participates will receive up to \$75 per visit and free STD and HIV testing/counseling.

To be eligible, you must be HIV negative and between the ages of 18 & 60.

Note: We currently do not know whether tenofovir can prevent HIV infection. This study will NOT show if tenofovir can prevent HIV infection.

For more information, please call (415) 554-8888 or visit [www.projectT-sf.org](http://www.projectT-sf.org)

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## Gay Couples and the Census

By Rand Dadasovich, Research Associate

In San Francisco, male couples account for nearly 2% of all households, according to the latest American Community Survey, released last fall by the U.S. Census Bureau. This represents the highest proportion of male couples of any area in the country (In Manhattan, male couples made up 1% of households, while Hampshire County, Mass. had the highest share of female couples, at 1.7%).

In California, three of the five zip codes with the highest number of male couples are here in San Francisco. In order, they are Castro/Noe Valley (94114) with roughly 1,500 male couples, Twin Peaks/Diamond Heights (94131) with just over 700, and the Haight-Ashbury (94117) with roughly 680.

Other San Francisco zip codes with high numbers of male couples include Mission/Bernal Heights (94110) with just over 600 male couples, Nob Hill (94109) with over 450, and Balboa Park/Excelsior (94112) with 255. In total, the census estimated there were approximately 6,500 male couples in San Francisco.

While the number of married couples nationwide is in steady decline, the number of unmarried male couples has risen 24% since 2000. Though the high percentage of same-sex couples in San Francisco may not be surprising, the number of those identifying as male couples is on the rise in even the most unexpected places. In the rural Midwest, the number of households made up of male partners rose 77% between 2000 and 2005.

These increases may be due to a number of factors, including a growing willingness of male couples to report their relationships, a sense that homosexual relationships are gaining more acceptance, and policy shifts that affect what and whom the census measures.

Of course, there are still strides to be made; the American Community Survey did not account for couples living apart, and only asked indirectly about sexuality, defining a partner as “an adult who is unrelated to the householder, but shares living quarters and has a close personal relationship with the

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relationship length, the youngest couple had been together 3 months and the oldest, 48 years. Congratulations to you!

Roughly 22% of participants were in relationships where both partners were HIV-positive and 23% were in relationships where one partner was HIV-positive and the other partner was HIV-negative. 55% of participants were in relationships where both partners were HIV-negative.

With regard to agreement style, 43% of couples reported monogamous relationships and 45% had agreements that permitted some degree of sex with outside partners, usually

with conditions or rules governing agreed-upon behaviors and conduct. 12% of couples reported no agreement in their relationship.

As we go further into analyzing baseline data, I look forward to sharing more interesting pieces of information with you in future newsletters. On that note, I would like to take a moment to invite you to let me know of any particular areas that are of interest to you. I will try my best to crystallize that information from the data and discuss it in upcoming newsletters. Feel free to send your emails to the study's email address: [gaycouples@ucsf.edu](mailto:gaycouples@ucsf.edu)

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householder." But the fact that the government now makes an effort to collect such data represents a huge shift in attitude. In 1990, the bureau assumed that people who reported being "married" to someone of the same sex had made a mistake. At that time, gay and lesbian couples were counted in only half of all counties in the nation; in 2000, same-sex couples were counted in 99.2% of all U.S. counties.

Reports like the American Community Survey underscore the importance of the Gay Couples Study, not only as a validation of San Francisco as a research epicenter, but by telling us that these results matter to the increasingly visible number of

male couples across the country. And by parsing the statistics we realize that the expression 'strength in numbers' need not only apply to parades and rallies.

For more information on the American Community Survey visit the U.S. Census Bureau's website at: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Additional demographic information and resources may be found at the Gay Demographics organization's website at: <http://www.gaydemographics.org/USA/USA.htm>

Contribute to our next newsletter!

If you have something interesting to share for our next newsletter, please send it to us. Send your submissions to the address listed on the back page, clearly marking them "Newsletter."

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**The Focus Project:** Stress-reduction and HIV

The Focus Project is an intervention using Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to help HIV-positive people with the challenges of taking HIV medications. The study is a UCSF research project located at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. Compensation is provided to participants.

To be eligible, you must be at least 18 years old, HIV positive, and currently taking HIV medications.

For more information, please call (415) 597-9350.

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Hospital (SFGH).

In terms of direct outreach in local gay bars, the top bar venues were the Eagle, Badlands, the Café, Club Eight and the Hole in the Wall. We also recruited at non-profits and health clinics around the Bay Area, including AIDS Project East Bay, the Marin AIDS Project, the Stop AIDS Project in San Francisco, the AIDS Health Project, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, the Positive Resource Center, the San Francisco Department of Public Health, the Immune Enhancement Project, and Project Open Hand. Collectively, these organizations helped us recruit over 50 couples. Many of these same organizations helped us recruit HIV-positive men in relationships, who are a crucial segment of the study.

On a personal level, recruiting was an extremely gratifying experience. Being out in the field and talking to so many of the men who eventually enrolled themselves in the study was a remarkable experience. I also enjoyed running into couples I had recruited at the office as they took the survey. As Recruitment Coordinator, it was fulfilling to see potential

participants come in and take part in the survey questionnaire.

Couples frequently told me they found the survey to be a positive experience that prompted both personal reflection and important conversations with their partners about their relationship. Regardless of how participants heard about the study, we are delighted to have each and every one of our participants. Working together, we are making history in research aimed at better understanding the nature of relationship dynamics in gay and bisexual male couples!

*“Couples frequently told me they found the survey to be a positive experience that prompted both personal reflection and important conversations with their partners about their relationship.”*

## Staff Spotlight: Sean Christian Beougher, Project Director

Sean assumed the position of Project Director in January 2007 after working for nearly two years as a Research Associate for the Couples Study during its Cross-Sectional Phase.

Before joining the study, Sean attended graduate school at San Francisco State University, where he earned a Master’s Degree in Human Sexuality Studies in 2005.

Sean’s graduate thesis examined perceptions of race and desire from the point of view of gay white men in interracial relationships with gay Asian men. He found that, often unwittingly, the gay white men perpetuated racial and sexual stereotypes of their Asian partners while furthering their own white racial privileges. Ironically, this was frequently the result of the men’s efforts to avoid frank discussions about race with their Asian partners for fear of saying something racist or

looking like one. Unsurprisingly then, the label ‘rice queen,’ a term used to describe a predominant or exclusive interest in Asian men, often served to further these fears. In the end, the gay white men demonstrated a unique and complicated relationship to race.

Sean’s initial work with gay couples in graduate school helped lay the foundation for his continuing interest in and research with gay male couples for the Couples Study.

Outside of work, Sean’s research interests include the intersection of race and sexuality, historical perspectives on human sexuality, and couples-based sexuality research and HIV prevention.

Sean plans to return to school and pursue a PhD in Medical Anthropology at UCSF once the Couples Study closes in 2010.



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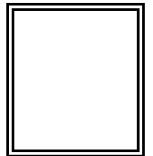
*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

[www.GayCouplesStudy.org](http://www.GayCouplesStudy.org)

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**Participant Name**

**Street Address**

**City, ST ZIP**