

# THE GAY COUPLES STUDY

Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, 50 Beale St., Suite 1300, San Francisco, CA 94105

[www.GayCouplesStudy.org](http://www.GayCouplesStudy.org) [gay.couples@ucsf.edu](mailto:gay.couples@ucsf.edu) 1-888-688-1777

## Greetings

By Colleen Hoff

Greetings Gay Couples Study participants! I would like to open this newsletter by acknowledging how much we appreciate your participation in this study. Thank you for all of the time and effort you have given us so far. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge some of the concerns we are hearing from you.

First, we understand that the survey may at times seem long and repetitive because we ask many of the same questions again and again. To address this concern we have attempted to edit the survey so that we ask questions that are essential to our overall research objectives. Some items, however, cannot be edited because they make up the core of the survey and if we change or remove them we alter and perhaps invalidate the meaning of the results. We do, however, take all of your feedback seriously and we integrate into follow-up surveys whenever possible, so please keep it coming! Additionally, we must ask some questions each time you come in so we can see how your responses change over time. Change is an important aspect of this study and the best way to address it is to ask you many of the same questions each time you visit. Thank you for sticking with it!

Next, some of you may feel that because there have not been significant changes in your life or relationship recently, the questions do not apply to you. Know that all your responses are still very

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Greetings	1
Volunteer Opportunity	2
Gay Families and the Census	2
Agency Spotlight	3
May I ask you some questions about your relationship?	3
Staff Spotlight	5

important to us. The more of you who return for follow-up surveys the stronger our results will be. Your responses are important to us and we need to hear from all of you to the end!

Finally, we understand that parking may be difficult near our offices and that sometimes it may be hard to reach our staff. To help we have created a map of nearby parking lots and garages. You may find it on the last page of this newsletter and online at our website ([www.gaycouplesstudy.org](http://www.gaycouplesstudy.org)). If you have questions regarding your appointment our toll-free number (1-888-688-1777) is the easiest and fastest way to reach us. From now on, please call that number. We apologize if we have confused you with multiple phone numbers for different staff members in the past.

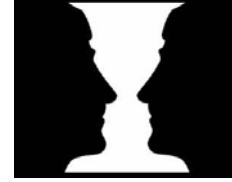
As in earlier newsletters, I would like to invite your feedback. We strive to make the experience of participating as beneficial for everyone as possible. If you have additional questions or concerns feel free to write or call us. Thank you again for making this study such a success and happy reading!

## Volunteer Opportunity

The Duo Project is a research study based at the University of California, San Francisco. The project is looking at same-sex male couples in which one or both partners is on antiretroviral therapy for HIV. The aim of the project is to study how male couples interact around HIV treatment, including decision-making about treatment and activities around medication-taking.

The study is currently recruiting 80 couples to participate in Phase 2. Participants may be seen in San Francisco, at the offices of the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, or in the East Bay, at Summit Hospital. Each eligible couple comes to the office of their choice for an individual (private) computer-based interview. This computer-assisted interview will focus

### The Duo Project



on HIV treatment and other issues around HIV medications within the relationship.

The interview takes approximately 60 minutes to complete, and compensation is \$30 per individual (\$60 per couple). To be eligible, both partners must be over 18 and one or both partners must be on antiretroviral therapy.

If you and your partner are interested, please call the project information/recruitment line at: (415) 597-9322.

## Gay Families and the Census

By Rand Dadasovich

In the last Gay Couples Study newsletter, we explored how changes to the 2000 U.S. Census made it possible to count the number of same-sex couples across the country (gay couples can be found in 99.2% of all U.S. counties). In this newsletter, we will examine how the number of gay families is measured both nationally and here in the Bay Area.

Nationwide, at least one in three lesbian couples and one in five gay male couples are raising children, according to a 2007 study released by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law. According to the report, which examined 2000 Census data, LGBT couples with children can be found in 96% of all U.S. counties.

A survey of local Census data recently released by Our Family Coalition, done in conjunction with COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) and The San Francisco LGBT Community Center, reports that only 6.6% of all same-gender couples in San Francisco

County are currently raising children, while 22% of same-gender couples in Alameda County are. Mississippi is the state where same-sex couples are most likely to have kids in the home (more than 40% of same-sex couples there are raising children). States with the highest percentage of gay male couples raising children are: South Dakota (33%), Mississippi (31%), and Idaho and Utah (30% each).

According to the report, there are only 589 same-sex couples raising children in San Francisco County, roughly a third of whom are gay male couples, placing it behind places like Salt Lake County, with 640, and Los Angeles County, with 8015. San Francisco ranks first, however, in the number of same-sex couples with children as a percentage of all households with children, which speaks to the relatively small percentage of children in San Francisco households in general.

As before, these data come with a few disclaimers since the Census does not ask directly about sexual orientation and thus may grossly underestimate the number of gay couples raising children. Some

*“6.6% of all same-gender couples in San Francisco County are currently raising children.”*

Please see *Gay Families* on page 4

## Agency Spotlight

By Brad Vanderbilt

Gay men may be more frequently associated with partying than parenting, however, behind the stereotype lies the reality that increasing numbers of gay male couples are starting families and becoming devoted, caring parents. Several couples participating in the Gay Couples Study reported having children. Some couples have children from previous relationships while others adopted their children with their current partners. The *Our Family Coalition* exists to support and protect the civil rights of same-sex couples like these and their families.

*Our Family Coalition* was formed in 1994 as a group for lesbian and gay parents with infants. Started by ten lesbian and gay families, the group continued to grow in popularity and membership so that within a couple of years the group expanded to nearly 30 families and became the Gay & Lesbian Toddler Group. As the original members' kids grew, and new families joined every day, the name *Our Family Coalition* was born. Their membership now includes more than 600 families.

The work of *Our Family Coalition* encompasses many



activities, such as media advocacy aimed at helping shape the public's perception of LGBT families and influencing public policy around matters of importance to LGBT families. The group also trains LGBT parents to advocate directly for their children's needs and rights at school and at other agencies and service providers, such as their doctors. By enhancing these skills among LGBT parents, *Our Family Coalition* hopes to create a more welcoming environment for children of LGBT families in local schools and other public institutions.

*Our Family Coalition* also works to support and educate LGBT parents around parenting issues. From organizing speakers and discussion forums on issues of specific concern to LGBT families, such as family law issues, to helping gay and lesbian parents with questions and concerns common to all parents, the group aims to assist parents across a wide range of issues.

Please see *Agency Spotlight* on page 5

## May I ask you some questions about your relationship?

By Sean Christian Beougher

This spring we invited 40 couples from the Gay Couples Study to talk to us about their relationship, their agreements, and what it is like being a participant in this research.

Unlike the computerized survey, the interviews were face-to-face and gave participants the opportunity to talk about these subjects in-depth and to use their own words. Questions were open-ended to elicit participants' thoughts, experiences, and behaviors. Partners were interviewed separately for privacy.

The subjects we asked about included relationship status and history, friends and social relations, racial and sexual identities, sex and sexual agreements, recent sexual encounters, and the impact, if any, of participating in this research.

Some examples of questions included: How did you first know you were a couple? What do you think the future holds for you and your partner as a couple? Describe your relationship to your ethnic community? Overall, how does being a different ethnicity from (or the same ethnicity as) your partner affect your relationship? How do you address HIV in your sexual relationship with your partner? What is the agreement you have with your partner about whether or not you have sex with outside partners? Overall, how do you think participating in this study impacts your relationship and agreements?

The objectives of these interviews were two fold: to get a deeper, richer understanding of relationships and agreements, and how they may change over time, and to monitor any affects of participating in the Gay Couples Study.

*Con't...*

**May I ask... from page 3**

Couples were pulled at random from the larger pool of participants currently taking the computerized survey. When possible, we interviewed equal numbers of white men and men of color and one third each of HIV positive, negative, and discordant (one positive and one negative partner) couples.

The interviews began in April and ended in early June. Each interview lasted about 75 minutes, with a few stopping short of an hour and some stretching beyond 90 minutes. Coordinating and conducting the interviews involved nearly everyone on the study team: The main interviewers were Brad, Rand, and Sean, with Colleen and Lynae stepping in for occasional interviewing. Binh did much of the calling and scheduling.

*“Many said that the sensitive nature of the survey caused them to reflect on their lives...”*

One of the main themes to emerge from the interviews was that participating in the computerized survey was not, by and large, having a negative impact on couples and their relationships. On the contrary, many said that the sensitive nature of the subjects in the survey caused them to reflect on their lives, their relationships, and their agreements. Many reported that they talked to their partners and compared their responses in an informal, light-hearted manner. Some said that after taking the survey they revisited the boundaries of their relationship to reset or refresh them. A few, however, preferred not to talk about the survey with partners. They felt their responses should remain private and confidential.

In sum, the experience of participating in the Gay Couples Study ranged from benign (for a few) to positive and beneficial (for the majority). These, of course, are only our first impressions from the interviews. Data analysis is soon to begin in earnest.

Similar to the computerized survey, these face-to-face interviews are longitudinal, meaning that we plan to see couples for follow-up interviews, once a year for the next two years for a total of three interviews. We look forward to future face-to-face interviews and to reporting more findings as we uncover them.

**Gay Families from page 2**

same-sex couples may not feel comfortable reporting their relationship to the Census, and the data does not reflect single gay and lesbian parents, bisexuals in different-gender relationships, or transgender parents. According to Our Family Coalition, a 2003 survey of local LGBT parents revealed that 14% were single.



Among same-gender couples with children in California, ethnic minority couples are much more likely to be raising children than white couples. More than half of all African American, API, and Latino same-gender couples between the ages of 25–55 years are raising children (43%, 45%, and 62%, respectively), while only 18% of white same-gender couples are raising children.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, same-sex couples are more likely to adopt children than married or unmarried heterosexual couples. The study also reveals that same-sex couples raising children share much in common with their heterosexual counterparts. There is a stay-at-home parent in 25% of heterosexual couples with children, versus 26% in male couples and 22% in female couples.

However, there are stark differences in how families headed by same-sex and opposite-sex couples are treated, both financially and legally. In fact, legal protections for LGBT families are least available in those parts of the country that have the highest percentage of same-sex couples with children, namely the South and Midwest. Florida is the only state that explicitly forbids “homosexuals” from adopting. Mississippi bans “same-gender” couples from adopting, and Utah bans adoption by any unmarried couple, although a single LGBT person in either of these states might theoretically be able to adopt. As a consequence of these laws, more than two-thirds of children in same-sex households nationwide live in states that do not guarantee both their parents the right to establish a legal relationship to their children through second-parent or joint adoption. As a result, these children cannot rely on both their parents to be permitted to authorize medical treatment in an emergency, support from both parents in the event of their separation, or Social Security survivor benefits in the event of the death of the parent who was unable to establish a legal relationship with the child.

**Agency Spotlight from page 3**

Social support is another critical component of the *Our Family Coalition's* mission. Every month, the coalition plans social and educational events where families can enjoy potlucks at the beach, visits to museums, and, of course, trips to the zoo. These events provide an important opportunity for LGBT parents to build stronger social networks for themselves and their children.

Recently, the group incorporated the allied group *Mamas & Papas*, a parent-led, drop-in discussion group for LGBT parents with children ages 0 to 8 years. The group meets regularly at the San Francisco LGBT Community Center, providing a space for parents to swap parenting tips and explore common concerns.

For more information about *Our Family Coalition* and its many programs call (415) 981-1960 or visit their website at [www.ourfamily.org](http://www.ourfamily.org)

**Staff Spotlight: 3 Questions for Lynae Darbes, Co-Investigator**

Q – When did you start working at UCSF and with the Gay Couples Study?

LD – I started working at UCSF most recently in the fall of 2000. I have been working on the Gay Couples Study since its inception, and was involved in applying for the original grant and have continued my involvement ever since. It has been a great experience.

Q – What other projects are you currently working on?

LD – I am also conducting a study in South Africa focusing on how relationship dynamics influence HIV risk behavior in heterosexual couples. In addition, we are looking at how to improve programs for couples, such as couples-based voluntary counseling and testing for HIV. There has not been a lot of work that has examined relationship dynamics among couples, such as the level of communication about HIV, or how differences in power impact risk in this setting. I have been intrigued to find many similarities in issues facing both heterosexual couples in South Africa and gay couples in San Francisco!

Q – How did you become interested in working with gay couples and HIV prevention?

LD – When I was a research assistant at CAPS in the early 90's, I worked on a study which



Lynae Darbes (center) and interviewers from her study in South Africa, Sibongile (L) and Thomas (R)

interviewed gay men who were caregivers for their partners with AIDS and was inspired by the response to the epidemic on both an individual and community level. I knew that when I went to graduate school in clinical psychology, I wanted to focus on HIV. While in graduate school, I became more interested in relationship research. My dissertation research was similar to the Gay Couples Study, in that I conducted a survey with gay male couples on relationship issues and HIV. When I got the job at UCSF, I was thrilled to connect with Colleen Hoff around our mutual interest in putting a focus on gay couples in the field of HIV. My work on this study has been incredibly fulfilling.

*“I have been intrigued to find many similarities in issues facing both heterosexual couples in South Africa and gay couples in San Francisco!”*

**Company Name:**  
The Gay Couples Study  
Center for AIDS Prevention Studies  
50 Beale St., Suite 1300  
San Francisco, CA 94105

**Phone:**  
1-888-688-1777

**E-Mail:**  
gay.couples@ucsf.edu

## The Gay Couples Study Staff

Colleen Hoff, Principal Investigator

Lynae Darbes, Co-Investigator

Tor Neilands, Co-Investigator

Deepalika Chakravarty, Statistician

Sean Christian Bougher, Project Director

Rand Dadasovich, Research Associate

Binh Nguyen, Research Associate

Brad Vanderbilt, Research Associate

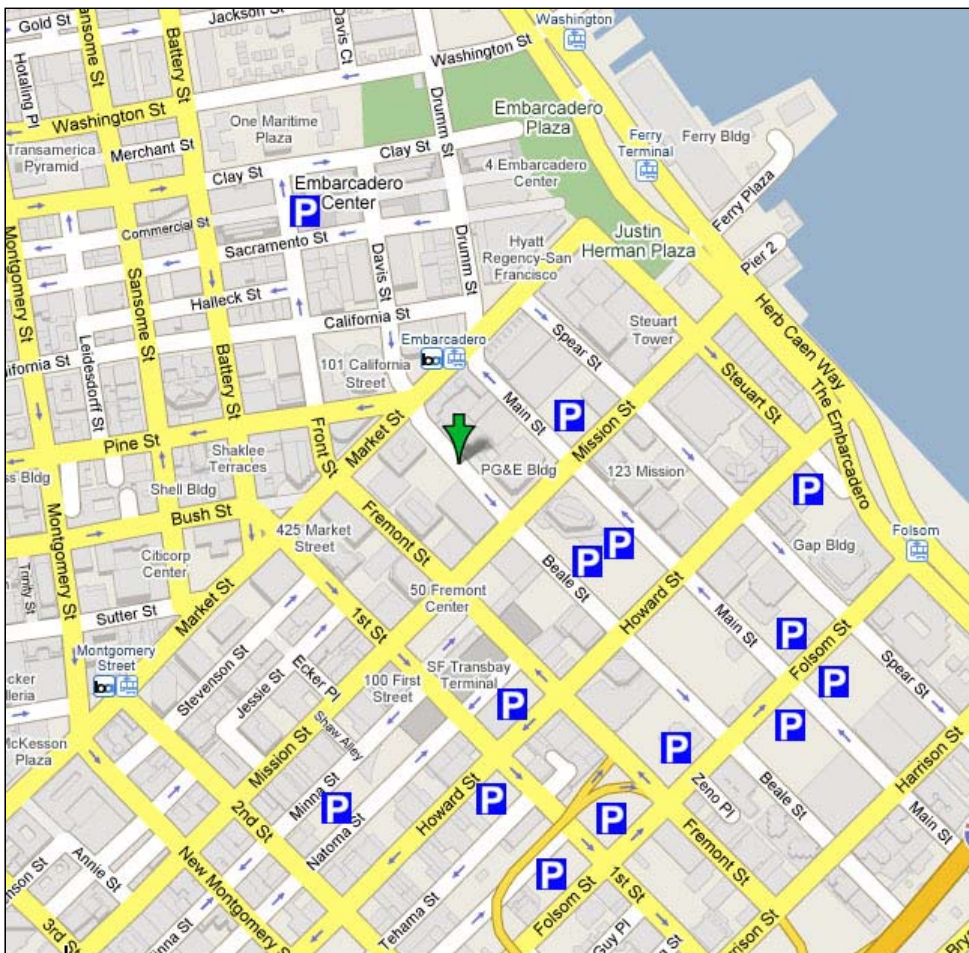
---

*We're on the Web!*

*Visit us at:*

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

---



### Downtown Parking for San Francisco

Parking Map Legend:



Parking Lot



CAPS Offices, 50 Beale Street

Street parking is available after  
6:00 PM.