

PARTNERS

Newsletter for Gay & Lesbian Couples

A resource
& forum
supporting
committed
same-sex
relationships

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Special issue:
National
survey results

Couples report solid, long-lasting relationships

Partners' National Survey of Lesbian and Gay Couples — the largest such project in a decade — found couples building and sustaining committed relationships of great significance. Most notably, relationships averaged nearly six years in length, 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.

The longevity and commitment found in these relationships may surprise even the gay community, and it could help policy makers understand the significance of our often ignored and trivialized families.

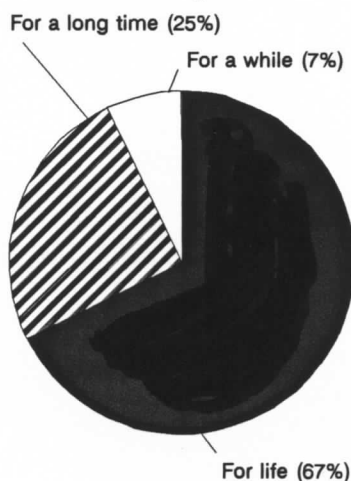
Relationship length

	Women	Men
1 year or less	19%	13%
2 years	15	10
3 years	15	11
4 years	10	9
5 years	8	11
6 years	7	6
7 years	6	6
8 years	4	6
9 years	5	4
10 years	3	4
11-15 years	7	11
16-20 years	2	6
20-25 years	1	2
25 or more years	<1	2

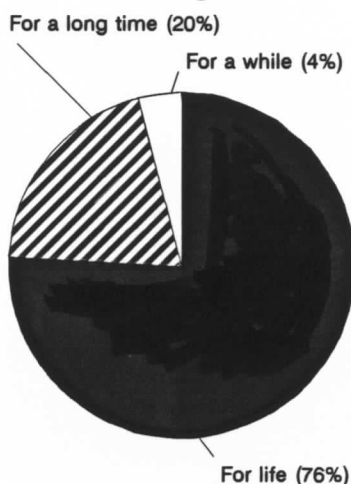
Fully 92% of the women and 96% of the men were committed to be together for life or "a long time." The longer couples were together, the stronger they rated their commitment level and the quality of their relationship.

Degree of commitment

Female couples



Male couples



Relationship rituals

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

Half of the couples had symbolized their commitment with a relationship ritual of some kind. Sixteen percent of all couples had ritualized the relationship with a ceremony.

Women were more inclined than men to observe rituals. For example, wearing a ring or other symbol was reported by more than half the women and one-third of the men.

In contrast, the survey revealed longer relationships among men than women. Lesbian couples had been together an average of 4.9 years, while male couples averaged 6.9 years. (Although male respondents averaged nearly two years older than lesbians, the difference does not fully account for the variation in relationship longevity.)

However, the women and men had spent a comparable amount of *total* time in current and previous same-sex relationships. (See graph, page 5.)

Survey marks decade of progress, challenges

In the fall of 1988, **Partners** undertook a major survey to develop an accurate portrait of lesbian and gay couples in America. The information seemed vitally important, given the major forces shaping the gay and lesbian community.

The emergence of domestic partnership initiatives, a heightened awareness of relationships, the aging of gay activists, and facing AIDS all had influenced the lives of lesbians and gay men in America. Yet an extensive survey had not been undertaken in more than a decade.

PARTNERS

Newsletter for Gay & Lesbian Couples

Purpose: To support the diverse community of gay and lesbian couples with timely information and ideas.

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Partners editors/publishers (and partners) Stevie Bryant and Demian set out to fill this knowledge gap. We personally funded and conducted the survey, relying on our knowledge of the gay community and our academic training. Demian holds a doctorate in education and Stevie holds a bachelors degree in sociology and psychology. This special issue of **Partners** reports the results of our efforts.

The survey was designed to capture a broad range of information about gay and lesbian couples. It also set out to test commonly held beliefs about same-sex relationships; for example, that they don't last. It also was clear that policy makers and professional service providers could better plan for and support couples with current information on issues such as discrimination, abusive behaviors, safe sex, and legal planning.

A profile of respondents

One-page survey forms, packed with nearly 100 questions, were circulated through gay churches and community organizations, but most couples requested the forms after reading notices in the gay press. The survey itself was published in a few gay publications, including **Out/Look**, the national lesbian and gay quarterly magazine. Data was collected from fall 1988 through fall 1989.

The survey drew a total of 1,749 responses, representing 1,266 cou-

ples — 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.

In general, separate results are reported for men and women, especially where they are significantly different. In some cases, however, total figures for all couples are provided because the information is both representative and useful.

Respondents provided demographic information, such as age and education, for both themselves and their partners. The profile below reports only information for the respondents since it differed little from the information they provided for their partners.

Any application of these survey results must take into account the descriptive statistics presented below. For example, because white couples are heavily over-represented, the survey's results and conclusions cannot safely be said to represent other populations.

In general, it must be remembered that the respondents were not selected at random, but volunteered their participation. As a result, the survey cannot as reliably represent *all* gay and lesbian couples as could a comparable survey of randomly-selected couples.

For the sake of clarity, this report refers to *both* partners as a

"couple" and to *individuals* as "respondents" or "partners."

In addition to multiple choice questions, three open-ended questions asked respondents to recommend relationship resources and advice, and to describe victories they had experienced as a couple. Their answers appear periodically in *Partners*.

Source of survey responses

	Women	Men
Out/Look	34%	27%
Partners	3	13
Other	64	60

Partners who responded through *Out/Look* were slightly more affluent, liberal, educated and atheistic/agnostic than the respondents as a whole. In addition, they were somewhat less likely to live together, share income or choose monogamy. As a whole, their responses were not highly dissimilar to those of other couples.

Sexual orientation

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

Age

	Women	Men
Average years	34.7	36.5

Age differences between partners were not found to be significantly correlated with relationship quality or longevity.

Race

	Women	Men
White	95%	95%
Latino/Latina	2	2
Black	2	1
Asian/Pacific Isl.	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 (not on survey)

Annual income

	Women	Men
\$8,000 or less	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
More than \$65,000	3	9

These figures refer to the respondent's income. Incomes they reported for their partners were comparable. Therefore, average family incomes would have been roughly twice these levels.

Income differences between partners were positively correlated with the number of years they had been together. In other words, long-term partners were more likely to earn different levels of income.

Formal education

	Women	Men
Average years	16.7	16.8

Fully 73% of women and 72% of men reported four or more 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

Residence

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

Represented in the survey were residents of 48 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Geo-

graphic distribution was remarkably even, with the best represented state, California, accounting for only 3% of the responses.

Survey results © Partners, 1990.

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Notes

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of numerous individuals and organizations: Clinical psychologist Glenn Pressell, gay ac-

tivist John Wilkinson, and the Lesbian Mothers National Defense Fund for reviewing drafts of the survey form; Researcher Michael Sieber for valuable advice on statistical analysis software; the hundreds of gay media and organizations that helped us reach out to couples, and the 1,749 partners who took the time to participate.

Social scientists and community activists may contact us for information not contained in this report. A copy of the survey form may be requested for reference purposes by sending a stamped, self-addressed business envelope to **Partners**.

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

Terminology

Name game still unsettled

"Longtime companion" is the euphemism newspapers often use to identify a same-sex mate. *None* of the couples surveyed use that term to describe one another. Instead, "lover" and "partner or life partner" are the names they "most often" use.

Overall, the two terms were about equally favored, but men clearly preferred "lover" while women leaned toward "partner/life partner."

Leading the long list of less favored options was "spouse," a term borrowed from marriage law.

In practice, couples probably rely on several different terms, depending on circumstances. Some couples said as much with written-in remarks. In addition, 9% of the respondents checked off more than one term despite survey instructions to the contrary.

Name most often used to identify 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

Women in their relationship more than five years showed an even stronger preference for "partner" (41%). Predictably, those couples who relied on the terms "roommate/friend" and "boyfriend/girlfriend" were less open about their relationship.

Combined incomes

Financial interdependence was widely observed among the couples surveyed. Fully 82% of the male couples and 75% of the female couples shared all or part of their incomes. Some partners also were able to share job benefits with their partners.

Income sharing

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

The longer couples had been together, the more likely they were to share income.

Employer-provided benefits for partner

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

Employers provided 8% of respondents' partners with benefits of some kind. The benefits provided showed no significant correlation with either the respondent's length of relationship or income level. In fact, individuals at the lowest income level — \$8,000 or less — reported slightly more partner benefits.

(These percentages exclude respondents who said they were retired or self-employed.)

Relationship experience

Experienced partners outnumber first-timers

For most of the partners surveyed, their current relationship was not their first. Three of four respondents had at least one former, "major lesbian/gay relationship" or had been heterosexually married.

It's unclear, however, whether the experience benefitted these partners. No form of previous relationship experience appeared to be significantly correlated with higher relationship quality ratings.

On average, women had 50% more same-sex relationship experience than men in terms of both years and the number of former partners. So, while lesbians reported *current* relationships of shorter duration, the women and men surveyed had spent about the

same *total* amount of time in major same-sex relationships — 11.5 years for women and 11.1 for men. (See chart below.)

Considering the average respondent's age of 35, these partners had spent two-thirds of their adult lives in major same-sex relationships.

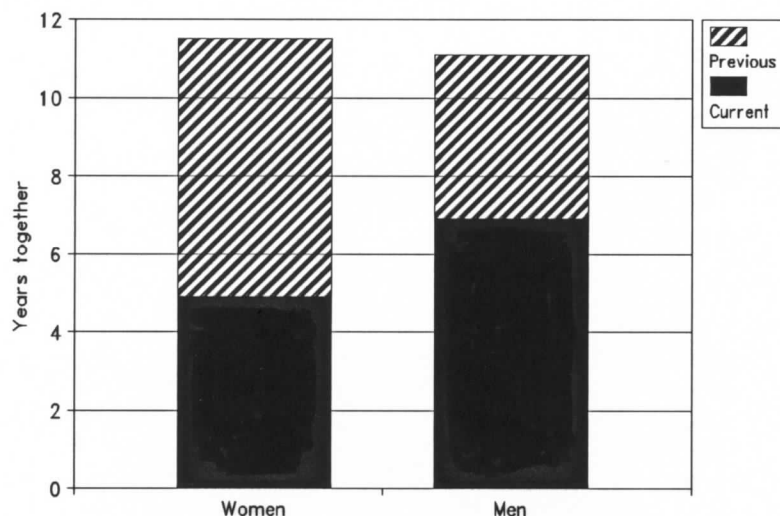
Number of previous major lesbian/gay relationships

	Women	Men
None	32%	38%
One	26	33
Two	23	18
Three	10	7
Four	4	3
Five or more	5	1
Average number	1.5	1.1

Years in previous major lesbian/gay relationship(s)

	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
Average years	6.6	4.2

Total years in major lesbian/gay relationships



Previous heterosexual relationship experience

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

Heterosexual marriage was reported by far more women (27%) than men (19%). Reflecting changing mores, older partners were much more likely to have been married than younger partners. Not surprisingly, bisexual partners were twice as likely to have experienced marriage.

Rampant discrimination confirmed

Many right-wing legislators, church leaders, and media personalities openly boast about the limitations they place (or hope to place) on the freedom of gay men and lesbians. So it's no surprise that survey respondents reported an extraordinary degree and range of discrimination. Overall, 71% of couples had encountered relationship discrimination of some type, and 39% had experienced three or more types.

Reports of discrimination were significantly higher among couples who were more open about their relationship, more strongly committed, more politically liberal, and together more than one year. These couples presumably are more inclined to have asked for or expected equal treatment.

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

Women reported significantly more discrimination than men. Fully 75% of women reported relationship discrimination of some type, as compared to 65% of men. This may be partly attributable to the added discrimination lesbians experience as women. The difference also reflects the more liberal political orientation reported by women.

Housing discrimination was experienced among 15% of renters and by 9% of couples who own their home. Nearly half of those couples caring for children through adoption or foster parenting programs faced discrimination in the process.

Living situation

Couples share responsibility for home

Moving in together is a common sign of a couple's commitment to a relationship. Nine in ten couples reported at least some degree of cohabitation during the previous year, and one-third jointly owned their home.

Respondents who lived with their partners full-time tended to be older and less closeted. Full-time cohabitants reported higher levels of family income, commitment, income sharing and legal preparation. They also had sex less frequently and rated it less highly. Predictably, they experienced more discrimination as a couple.

Living together during previous year

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

As expected, many couples together one year or less had not moved in together — only 69% had lived together always or sometimes. Even among couples together more than five years, 4% did not cohabit during the last year. Also, women were less likely to live together full-time.

Residence status of couples living together

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

Fully 65% of female couples and 63% of male couples jointly owned or rented their residence.

Gender differences profound regarding sex

Nothing appeared to distinguish the lesbian couples from the gay male couples more than their sexual agreements. Female respondents heavily favored exclusive sexual relationships. While monogamy also was the preferred mode for male couples, the men made far more exceptions, and one in ten practiced non-monogamy.

The male couples also had more sex together, but the female couples enjoyed their sex much more.

Sexual agreements

	Women	Men
Monogamy	91%	63%
Monogamy with agreed exceptions	7	26
Non-monogamy	3	11

The term monogamy properly refers to individuals who marry only one person (as opposed to polygamy.) However, the term is widely used to connote exclusive sexual relationships, and this survey adopted the term in that context.

While the category "monogamy with agreed exceptions" is technically contradictory, it handily accounts for those relationships that are not entirely open, but which allow for outside sexual contact under special circumstances. For instance, couples may permit or encourage outside sex with selected individuals or during extended absences.

How often monogamous respondents broke sexual agreements

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

Of the partners who broke their agreements, 24% were monogamous with agreed exceptions.

Agreement-breaking respondents were more likely to argue, to suffer abusive behavior, and to give their relationship lower quality ratings. They also gave lower ratings to sexual interaction with their partner.

Long-term partners were more likely to have broken their agreements. On the other hand, partners with children broke them less often.

How often partners of monogamous respondents admitted to breaking sexual agreements

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

Of the respondents who listed sex as a relationship challenge, 46% said they or their partners had broken their agreements regarding sexual exclusivity.

Frequency of sex with partner per month

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

Male couples had sex 10 times per month on average, while lesbians averaged seven times. However, these figures were boosted by the 21 percent of men and 14 percent of women who averaged sex at least every other day. Most active were couples together one year or less, who had sex about twice as often as the average couple.

But half of all the gay male couples had sex no more than twice a week, and about half the lesbian couples had sex no more than weekly.

Quality of sex with partner

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

Higher ratings were observed among couples who were more committed and who rated relationship quality more highly.

In contrast, respondents who were older and those caring for children rated sexual interaction lower.

On average, these ratings also declined somewhat over time. For example, 42% of couples together 10 or more years said their sexual interaction was less than good.

Frequency of outside sex per month

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

Sex outside the relationship was much more common for men than women. Only two percent of women reported *any* outside sex. On the other hand, 22% of the men said they had some outside sex, though only 12% had outside sex more often than monthly.

Interestingly, male respondents reporting outside sex also had more frequent sex with their partners. Also, the longer male couples had been together the more likely they were to report outside sex. These phenomena were not observed with lesbian respondents.

Men, women met at different spots

Lesbian couples were likely to have met under different circumstances than those common for gay male couples. Lesbian couples most often met through friends or at work, while male couples met at bars more often than any other way.

More than one in five of the lesbian couples met at work, while only 7% of the men did. Male couples were far more likely to have met through anonymous or sexually charged arenas, such as bars, baths, cruising, classified ads, or parks/public spaces.

Friends, an enduring source of introductions, were responsible for the meetings of 28% of the lesbian couples and 19% of the men.

Where female couples met

Friends	28%
Work	21
Social event	16
School*	9
Bar	4
Religious event	4
Political event	4
Support group*	3
Park/public space*	2
Classified ad	2
Baths/cruising*	<1
Other	5

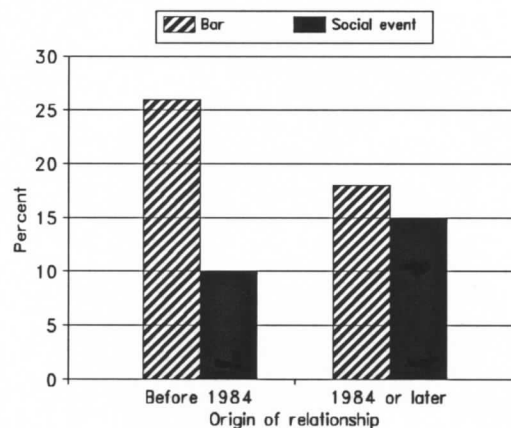
* write-in response

Where male couples met

Bar	22%
Friends	19
Social event	13
Religious event	7
Work	7
Park/public space*	6
Classified ad	6
Baths/cruising*	5
Political event	4
School*	3
Support group*	2
Other	6

* write-in response

Male meeting ground shifts



While 22% of the men met in a bar, the venue is becoming less prominent as a meeting spot. The newer the relationship, the more likely male couples had met at a social event instead.

Couples confront problems with little assistance

Most married heterosexual couples can count on congratulations, wedding presents, blessings and a host of other tangible and intangible support from the very start of their relationship. Gay men and lesbians have yet to achieve broad support.

On average, the couples in this survey reported shockingly low levels of support from their relatives — less than they got from co-workers. In fact, they ranked their relatives as the third greatest challenge in their relationship, and less than 10% had sought relationship help from their relatives.

Similarly, the "church" was considered more hostile than supportive on average, and only 4% of couples had sought relationship help from the clergy.

The couples instead had sought and found support from gay friends and institutions, such as churches, organizations, and couples groups. Many couples also had secured effective assistance from counselors, though women were far more likely to have sought this form of help.

Sources of support

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

	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	2.64	2.65

On average, women reported more support from the gay community than men. On the other hand, men found more support than women from all other sources except the church. The "church" was the only source rated more hostile than supportive.

Not all couples were in a position to receive support. One-quarter said that at least five of these potential sources of support didn't know about the relationship. These couples reported more arguments and abuse, yet they were less likely to seek help from friends, counselors, relatives, or the clergy.

Strangely, relationship quality and longevity were not related to the amount of support couples received from any source.

Greatest challenges

Female couples

Communication	42%
Career	26
Relatives	26
Sex	25
Money	25
Health	9
Co-workers	3
Neighbors	1
Other	23

Male couples

Communication	49%
Career	30
Money	28
Sex	22
Relatives	18
Health	12
Co-workers	2
Neighbors	1
Other	13

The survey asked respondents to categorize the two greatest challenges to their relationship. Communication was far and away the most commonly reported challenge. Notably, gay men faced fewer challenges from relatives than did lesbians.

Partners in relationship five or more years more often considered sex a challenge (28%) than did newer couples (19%).

Among the diverse "other" challenges written in were children, religion, non-monogamy issues, friends, "recovery," and long-distance relationships.

Sought relationship help from:

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

Of all the couples, 64% had sought relationship help from at least one source, and 93% of those found help from at least one source. On average, couples who sought help assigned their relationship a higher quality rating than couples who had not.

Both short- and long-term couples were less likely than mid-term couples to have sought help. Only 30% of all couples together more than 10 years had seen a counselor, and only 36% of couples together one year or less had sought *any* kind of help.

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

Fully 31% percent of all couples said their relationship suffered from at least one kind of abuse. Abuse was significantly more frequent among couples who had experienced relationship discrimination, and among those with less income and education.

Predictably, partners reporting abuse argued more often and gave their relationships lower quality ratings. They also were more likely to seek help.

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

Eleven percent of all couples reported no arguments whatever.

Kids still rare

Even among lesbian couples, talk of a nationwide baby boom is probably premature. Most of the couples surveyed are in families of two. And although 21% of female couples and 9% of male couples reported "caring" for children, most were from a previous marriage.

However, many more couples are planning or considering children (or more children). In fact, kids are planned or under consideration by 30% of lesbians and one-third of *all* couples under age 35.

Number of children

	Women	Men
None	79%	91%
One	10	5
Two	8	3
Three	2	1
Four or more	2	1
Average number	0.4	0.2

(By definition, these figures exclude most or all adult children of older partners.)

Couples with children expressed a stronger commitment and had somewhat more sex than average. On the other hand, they also reported many more arguments than other couples.

Couples cover their legal assets

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

Most lesbians whose children were conceived through alternative insemination were politically very liberal (60%) or liberal (23%). In addition, 56% of them planned or were considering additional children.

Plans for children (or more children)

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

(Because of the survey's design, "no response" to this question probably meant the couple was not considering children.)

Of those couples planning or considering children, 82% do not currently care for children.

In the United States, same-sex couples have none of the automatic legal protections that are routinely conferred on married couples. Consequently, lawyers generally recommend that we execute certain legal documents to protect ourselves and our partners. Most commonly mentioned are wills, powers of attorney, and partnership or living together agreements.

Generally speaking, a will can ensure that your wishes are carried out in the event of death. With powers of attorney, you can assign your partner the right to act on your behalf under specified circumstances, such as incapacitating illness. Partnership or living together agreements allow you and your partner to record the ground rules of the relationship, including how it will be dissolved, if necessary.

In all, 43% of the couples had executed at least one of these legal documents, and 54% had planned to complete at least one. However, only 5% had completed all three.

Predictably, couples together one year or less were not as likely to have taken legal steps.

Legal precautions were far more likely among partners who had experienced relationship discrimination. Legal preparedness also correlated with higher levels of commitment, relationship longevity, income and education.

In addition, legally prepared couples were more likely to live together, share income and have carried out some kind of relationship ritual. They also gave their relationship higher quality ratings.

"Other" legal arrangements mentioned by respondents included trusts and living trusts, nominations of guardianship (for one or both partners' children), and the adoption of one partner by another.

Women appeared better informed about powers of attorney, since 69% had or planned to secure this power, as compared with 56% of the men.

Legal arrangements

	Women		Men	
	Done	Planned	Done	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

AIDS impacts sex, relationship decisions

AIDS has played a role in the decision of many partners to form their current relationship, or their intent to continue it. Fully 52% percent of men and 23% of women said AIDS played at least some role in their relationship decisions.

Role of AIDS in relationship

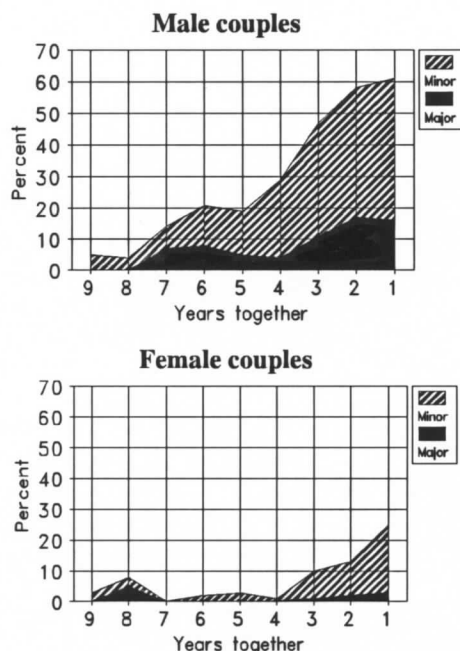
	Women	Men
Decision to form		
None	91%	72%
Minor	8	21
Major	1	8
Intent to continue		
None	79%	52%
Minor	18	34
Major	3	14

Couples who gave their relationship the highest quality ratings were those least likely to consider AIDS a factor in forming or continuing their relationship.

Also, AIDS played a more prominent role among partners with a higher than average number of previous relationships.

Naturally, AIDS had far less influence on relationships of at least 10 years duration — those established before 1980, when the risk of AIDS was not known. Of those couples, 96% said AIDS played no role in the formation of the relationship. In terms of continuing the relationship, AIDS played no role for 91% of women and 66% of men together a decade or more.

Changing role of AIDS in forming relationships



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

Fourteen percent of the male couples reported one or both partners with AIDS/ARC or HIV-positive status.

AIDS appears also to have influenced couples' sexual behavior. Most couples said they practiced sex that was "primarily" safe, or were HIV-negative and monogamous. (The survey form did not define safe sex or other AIDS-related terms.)

Safety of sex in relationship during past year

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

Overall, far more men than women had adopted safer sex — and men heavily favored safe or possibly safe sex. Of the couples sharing unsafe sex during the last year, 63% were in monogamous relationships and 24% had relationships that were monogamous with agreed exceptions.

(At the time this survey was conducted, medical authorities assigned no risk of AIDS in monogamous partners who both tested HIV-negative six months after their last sexual encounter with an outside partner — thus, the category "monogamous and HIV-negative." Risk assessments are now less certain since recent research has shown that some individuals can have an HIV infection yet test negative for many years following the initial infection.)

Couples who practiced safe and possibly safe sex during the last year reported the lowest quality of "sexual interaction." Those reporting unsafe sex enjoyed sex most, with monogamous, HIV-negative couples a close second.

Crossword solution

Puzzle for partners unpuzzled

Safety of sex outside relationship during last year

	Women	Men
Safe	50%	72%
Possibly safe	33	24
Unsafe	17	2

Most respondents — 90% of women and 58% of men — reported no outside sex. Of those who had outside sex, the vast majority appear to be taking precautions against AIDS.

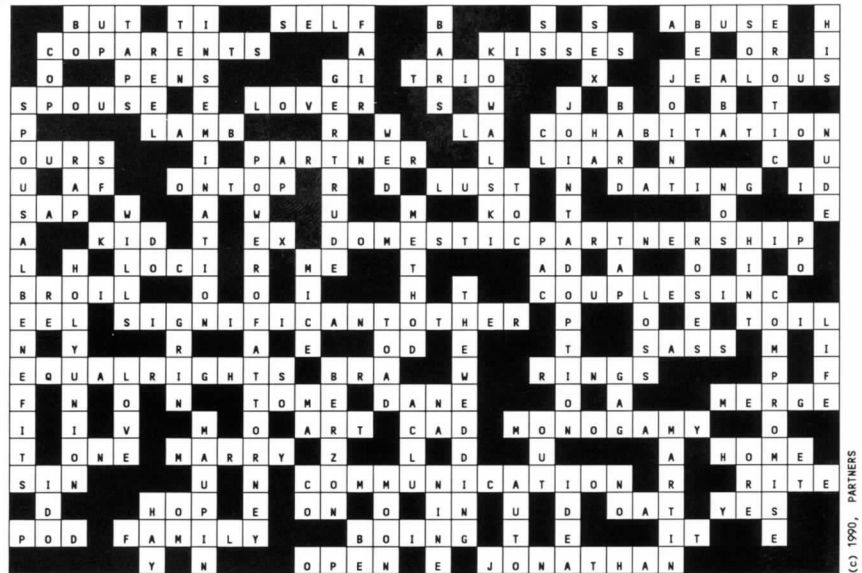
Safety of partner's outside sex during last year

	Women	Men
Safe	30%	43%
Possibly safe	19	15
Unsafe	8	2
Don't know	42	40

Most respondents — 86% of women and 54% of men — said their partners had no outside sex. Of the respondents who answered "don't know," 55% said that "communication" was one of the two greatest challenges facing their relationship.

In our next issue

The July/August issue of **Partners** will include news, interviews of two committed couples (one gay, one lesbian), and results of our recent subscriber survey, in which 83% said they would legally marry their same-sex partner if the option were available.



To receive a copy of the puzzle, which appeared in our April 1990 issue, send **Partners** your request with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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December 86

ACLU endorses lesbian & gay male marriage • **Sexual Compatibility Evaluation** • Interview: Lesbian couple; alternative insemination • **Don't Let Them Shut You Out: When your partner goes to the hospital** — legal pointers

January 87

Joint adoptions by lesbian couples; same-sex marriage rites — reports • **Shall I Compare Thee To A Triangle?** — eight varieties of love, a psychologist's view • Interview: Two men in a 14-year relationship share purchases & decisions • **Jenny Lives With Eric & Martin** — review of children's book about a gay couple's family

February 87

Drugs/Alcohol: The significant other by Christopher Eskeli, Ph.D. • Immigration law communique: U.S. Rep. Barney Frank • **Images: A Lesbian Love Story** — 13 lesbians evaluate an erotic lesbian video • **The Taxman Cometh** — tax planning

March 87

Lavender Couch — review of guide to gay-affirmative counseling • Interview: A founder of Couples National Network on support for gay couples • **LoveSex: The Horny Relationship Chronicles of Max Exander** — review of book on sexual exploration in & out of a relationship

April 87

Bring Sharon Home — the separation of Sharon Kowalski from her partner Karen Thompson • **"Safe" Sex for Couples at Risk** — pointers • Interview: Lesbian couple buys a house • **My Lover Tricks** by Glenn Pressel, M.A.

May 87

Loving for More Than a Decade by Corinne Lightweaver; first in a series of eight • **Surviving Two-Career Partnerships** — pointers • Interview: 10-year male couple, career changes • **Male Couples: Highly satisfied partners** by Michael Bettinger, Ph.D.

June 87

Conflict Resolution Guidelines by Glenn Pressel, M.A. • **The Male Couple** — video review • Lesbian couple's child custody battle • **Intimacy Inventory** — self-examination chart

July 87

Nursing Your Relationship: When your partner is seriously ill • Interview: Lesbian couple works on their relationship & their business • **Your "Guardian" Angel: The power of attorney** by Claire Youmans, J.D.

August 87

Interview: The male couple who created **The Wedding** on the politics of gay couplehood • **Don't Just Shake on It: Relationship agreements** by Claire Youmans, J.D. • Swedish lesbian & gay male couples gain rights equal to heterosexual couples

September 87

Wendel, a comic-strip story of a gay male relationship — book review • **19 Famous Gay & Lesbian Relationships** — a list • **Common Sense About Money Matters** • **Where There's a Will...** by Claire Youmans, J.D. — legal pointers • Interview: Lesbian couple redefines sex lives through therapy

October 87

Devastated: Break-up survival — Interview & pointers on domestic violence • **Living Wills: The right to die** by Claire Youmans, J.D. — legal pointers • Partnership rights in Berkeley & West Hollywood

November 87

2,000 Lesbian & Gay Couples "Wed" in D.C. — report • Interview: Interracial male couple on monogamy, independence & being seriously ill • **Domestic Bliss** — British sit-com about a lesbian family — video review

December 87

Home Again, Home Again: When you visit your parents by Maggie Seibel, M.A. — holiday pointers • Interview: Lesbian couple met when one of them was a Catholic nun • **I Saw How You Looked at Him!** by John Armstrong — Supporting your partner's wandering eye • One male couple whose life changed because of **The Wedding**

January 88

Alternatives for Dispute Resolution by Claire Youmans, J.D. — legal pointers • **Fear of Intimacy: Mad at your partner? Tell them!** by Glenn Pressel, M.A. • Interview: Male couple survives differences in lifestyles • **Creative Conflict -or- How to Fight Fair & Grow Closer**

February 88

Starting Your Own Couples Group • Interview: One woman is a traveling musician, her partner is a counselor with three children • **Keep the Kids: Legal planning for gay couples who are parents** by Dell Richards

March 88

Interview: Male couple has Holy Union in grand style • **Adult Adoption: Not the best option** by Claire Youmans, J.D. — legal pointers • Philadelphia committee argues for equal benefits • **I Got Rhythm** by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — emotional & sexual intimacy cycles

April 88

The Money Commitment by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — whether to combine finances • **Yours & Mine: Ours** by Claire Youmans, J.D. — joint ownership of real property • Interview: Karen Thompson on her struggle to gain access to disabled partner Sharon Kowalski • **The Male Couple's Guide to Living Together** — review of a great guide • **The Family that Files Separately Saves Together** by Nola Wilkin, CPA — tax pointers

May 88

Discover Discomfort — values clarification exercise on relationship conflicts • **Gay & Lesbian Coupling** — review of PFLAG audio cassette • Interview: Male couple lived apart first five years • **Sand Dunes & Transubstantiation** by Rex Wockner — sex, love & partnership

June 88

Happily Ever After: Many princes may be better than one by Donald Vining — man partnered 40+ years says there's nothing special about long-term relationships • **Media Notes: Newspaper series AIDS in the Heartland; video We Are Family** • Interview: Female couple, one a pastor, overcome abusive family history • **Rat & the Devil: Journal letters of F.O. Mattiessen and Russell Cheney** — review by Eric Rofes

July 88

An Alliance of Differences by Terri Jewell — an interracial relationship • Interview: Male couple from rural Vermont on their lives & Holy Union • **Lesbian Couples** — review of excellent guidebook • **How To Get Domestic Partner Benefits From Your Employer!**

August 88

Considering a Ceremony by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — benefits & limitations of a union ceremony • Interview: 18-year lesbian partnership began in a bar with an interview for the position of spouse • **Lighting Our Way** by Chris Glasser — union ceremonies, sample service • **Journey Together** by Richard Kitterman — mourning loss of partner, double portrait on gravestone

September 88

Karen Thompson: "I Wasn't 'Family'" — a personal view by Bill Sweigart • **Interview:** Male couple of 12 years, spent last four years as a trio • **The Two Room Solution** by Rachel Pepper — she's out to parents, partner isn't

October 88

The Secret of Long-Term Relationships by Donald Vining • **Interview:** 12-year lesbian relationship; therapist & physician each birthed a child • **Reality Check** — crises legal advice

November 88

L.A. O.K.s "No Cost" Benefits for Domestic Partners • **Living in Sin?** — Bishop's book supports same-sex relationships & marriage • **Interview:** Male couple lives on the road, publish Monk magazine • **Dealing with Death:** planning for death & funeral arrangements

December 88

The Psychophysicality of Coupledness by Gail Sausser — humorous theories on life as a couple • **Interview:** Lesbian couple with a 31-year age difference • **Agreements that Secure Your Rights** by attorneys Gale Toko & Tammi Milligan — relationship contracts • **Don We Now Our Gay Apparel** — visiting parents during the holidays

January 89

Five-Letter Dirty Word by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — expressing anger, dealing with your partner's anger • **I Love You — Leave Me Alone** — an intimacy evaluation for partners • **Interview:** Gay male couple raises an adopted infant; their "Family Pact" does not include being lovers • **Forget the Candlelight, Sweetheart** — advice on finding a life-partner

February 89

Big Win In Sharon Kowalski Case — a report • **Interview:** A nun for 30 years who left religious life to be with her female partner • **Why Can't Sharon Kowalski Come Home?** — book review

March 89

Test the Waters by Donald Vining • **Reunited: Karen & Sharon** — legal victory for Thompson & Kowalski • **Interview:** Male couple of four years, partners in life & landscape business • **Permanent Partners: Building Gay & Lesbian Relationships That Last** — review of an excellent guidebook • **The Living Trust: Estate planning** by Roger V. McCaffrey, attorney — legal pointers

April 89

Anti-Discrimination Laws: Use 'em! — how to get benefits & freedom • **A Real Bride** by Leslie Lapides — a change of heart toward marriage • **Interview:** Lesbian fundamentalists, one adopts the other's children • **The Couple from Y-12: Freedom to love in Delhi** by Kartikeya — standing up to street hostility

May 89

More Involved, More Satisfied by Dell Richards — on lesbian research by Ellie Zacks • **Quality Sex Time** by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — stoking the fire • **Interview:** A male couple of 16 years on mutual interests & enjoying each other • **Living Together with AIDS** — video review

June 89

Government-Sponsored Report Boosts Domestic Partnerships — California • **Feelings Patrol** by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — monitoring a partner's emotions • **Interview:** Lesbian couple changes their last names, seeks spousal benefits, raises their own child • **Picture These Couples: A profile of 369 gay & lesbian couples** — preliminary results of Partners national survey

July 89

News of legal same-sex marriage in Denmark • **Interview:** Male couple together for 25 years; one partner is disabled • **Gay Marriage Nothing New** — John Boswell's findings on ancient Christian same-sex marriage ceremonies • **Emergency!** by Gale Harris — light-hearted look at health care planning

August 89

Gay Relationships: How to Form Them, How to Improve Them, How to make Them Last — review of a new guidebook for men & women • **Interview:** Lesbian interracial couple of 10 years; raising two children with support & encouragement from other lesbian moms • **Lesbian & Gay Couples Do It Differently** — preliminary report from Partners national couples survey • **Keeping a Sexually Open Relationship Intact** — tips for nonmonogamous couples

September 89

Working Side by Side — guidelines for constructive criticism for partners who work together • **Couples Guides** — comparing four books • **Your Turn to Take Out the Garbage** — worksheet for sharing household chores • **Interview:** Male couple jointly runs a gay newspaper • **For Better or Worse ... Taste** by Gale Harris — humorous look at an oddball gay wedding

October 89

Partnership Law Defended — San Francisco gay community fights to retain city's domestic partnership ordinance • **Interview:** Lesbian couple, partners for 18 years; running Naiad Press for 17 years • **Gay in the USA** — national poll finds roughly 60% of gay men & lesbians in relationships

November 89

World's First Legal Gay Marriages — Danish ceremony marks new era • **Partnership Laws Catching On** — five U.S. cities • **Interview:** Male couple, together for 17 years, goes for counseling when one wants to bail out • **Out to the In-Laws** by Lee Lynch — warm-hearted look at relating to a lover's family • **Non-Stop Cruising** by Glenn Pressel, M.A. — when a partner is sexually addicted • **Why Lesbians Break Up** — psychotherapist finds commonalities

December 89

Adoption Option — Joint Custody Still Rare • **Interview:** Lesbian couple of 15 years; considered breaking up last year, now wants children • **Be Prepared** by Roland T. Sedillos — dealing with relatives when his partner died

January 90

Common-Law Party by "The Empty Chair" — sour grapes about weddings • **How to Prevent Contested Wills** • **Heather has Two Mommies** — a children's book reviewed • **Interview:** Male couple of 14 years overcomes early jealousies, conflicts about cigarette smoking

February 90

The Need for Privacy by Jo Ann Gilberg, Ph.D. — how close is too close? • **Interview:** Lesbian couple of 20 years, met in 1st grade, together since • **Register Your Gay Family: Human Rights Campaign Fund** launches nationwide registry program

March 90

U.S. Census to Count Gay Couples: Will you answer honestly? — recognition of our relationships vs. misuse of data • **Interview:** Male couple of 11 years, one an editor, the other a nationally-known cartoonist — free to explore outside relationships • **The Lesbian Relationship Handbook** — review of a helpful booklet

April 90

Dancing the Slow Dance by Rosemary Reeves — coming out at work • **Family Values** by Robert A. Bernstein — a straight father supports same-sex families & weddings • **Partner & I** — review of a biography of Molly Dewson & her life partner Polly Porter • **Interview:** Lesbian couple of 17 years met when one was a convent nun • **A Puzzle for Partners** — crossword

The secret of high-quality relationships

Good relationships, most concede, result from a combination of commitment and hard work. Indeed, the survey results bear out this formula.

In a search for clues to relationship success, respondents' ratings of relationship quality were compared to more than 40 other factors. High quality ratings were significantly associated with the following (listed in no particular order):

- Relationship rituals
- Legal preparedness
- Higher sexual interaction ratings
- Stronger commitment
- Higher family incomes
- Less abusive behavior
- Fewer big arguments
- Fewer broken sexual agreements.

Also, among respondents who engaged in outside sex, safe sex practices were more common among those who rated their relationships highly.

Of course, these correlations do not indicate cause and effect. Does a higher income help make a relationship better, possibly by easing the strains on the relationship? Or do successful relationships promote prosperity? Alternatively, are high-income respondents simply inclined to overstate the quality of their relationship? We can only say with certainty that higher family incomes and higher quality rat-

ings "go together" in the couples surveyed.

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

More than three in four of the respondents rated their relationships at the highest or next-to-highest level.

Women rated their relationships somewhat more highly — their average rating was closer to the highest rating of 1.

Respondent's share of decision making

	Women	Men
Most decisions	8%	16%
About half	88	79
Few decisions	4	5

While most respondents shared decision making power equally, women were more likely than men to do so.

Both income and age were a source of power in the relationships. The greater the income and age difference, the more likely that decision-making power was vested in the older partner and the one with the higher income.

With whom respondent spends most leisure time

	Women	Men
Self	8%	10%
Partner	76	69
Partner & others together	15	18
People other than partner	1	4

The vast majority of respondents concentrated their leisure time on their partners. Fully 91% of women and 87% of men spent "the most leisure time" with their partner, or their partner and others together. Naturally, respondents who rated their relationship highly were more likely to spend leisure time with their partner.

Respondent's wishes for time together

	Women	Men
Wants more time	41%	37%
Wants neither more nor less	53	60
Wants less time	6	4

Partner's requests for time together

	Women	Men
Wants more time	47%	42%
Wants neither more nor less	48	55
Wants less time	5	3

Couples reporting higher quality ratings and commitment levels were more likely to want additional time together.