

Prevalence of Non-Monogamy

Initial Research:

- Most research shows that approximately two-thirds of long-term male couples who have been together for five years or more are honestly non-monogamous (Shernoff, LCSW, 2007).
- The prevalence of non-monogamy in gay male relationships became widely known as the result of the ground-breaking book, The Male Couple, David McWhirter, M.D. and Andre Mattison, Ph.D., 1984. Based on interviews of 156 long-term couples, they found that after 5 years, all of the couples had incorporated some provision for outside sexual activity.
- Since the AIDS pandemic, four studies have found that gay men have not become more monogamous out of fear of HIV (Crawford, Rodden, Kippax & Van de Ven, 2001; Davidovich, et.al., 2001; Halkitis, Zade, Shrem & Marmor, 2004; LaSala, 2005).
- Four studies document that only one third of male couples are sexually exclusive (Advocate Sex Poll, 2002; Bryant & Demian, 1994; LaSala, 2004; Wagner, Remien & Carballo-Diequez, 2000).
- One study contradicts these. 70% of men in male couples reported being monogamous and would view any outside sex as betrayal of commitment (Campbell, 2000).
- Multiple studies have found no significant differences in relationship quality or satisfaction between samples of sexually exclusive and non-exclusive male couples (Blasband & Peplau, 1985; LaSala, 2004, 2005; Wagner, et.al., 2000).
- Two studies found that both monogamous and self-described 'open' male couples demonstrated higher levels of relationship quality and lower levels of psychological distress compared with couples who had not negotiated non-monogamy but reported covert outside sexual activity (Wagner, et.al., 2000; LaSala, 2004).
- Tangentially, a study on heterosexual relationships found that 24% of married men and 22% of married women had sex outside their marriages even though their spouse believed the relationship was sexually exclusive (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). (Of course, these numbers may have decreased as a result of the recent emphasis on family values). ☺

– Excerpted from Negotiated Nonmonogamy and Male Couples, Michael Shernoff, LCSW, 2007

More Recently:

- In 2010 researchers at SF State University revealed a study where they followed 556 male couples for 3 years. 45% were monogamous, 47% had open agreements, and 8% were discrepant (partners reported different understandings). Colleen Hoff, SFSU Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality, July, 2010, AIDS Care.
- CHEST (Dr. Jeffrey T. Parsons, director of Hunter College's Center for HIV Educational Studies and Training) reports a study of 161 gay male couples where 53% were monogamous, 13% were open, 15% were 'monogamish', and 19% were discrepant. Journal of Family Psychology, October, 2012.

- A second CHEST study surveyed over 316 gay and bisexual men in relationships and found 57% were monogamous, 22% were open, 20% were 'monogamish'. Alternatives to monogamy among gay male couples in a community survey: implications for mental health and sexual risk. Parsons JT, Starks TJ, DuBois S, Grov C, Golub SA, Archives of Sexual Behavior, Feb, 2013.
- A study of 1006 gay men in U.K. found that 41% had previously experienced, or are currently in, an open relationship, FS magazine and GMFA, Feb, 2016