

# Monopoly

Monogamy?

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A study of gay men's relationships 2014





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## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In contrast to previous research which has usually not included detailed questions about types of partnerships, we found that only a minority of gay and bisexual men's regular partners may actually be appropriately categorised as boyfriends or as someone with whom they might consider themselves as being 'in a relationship'. A majority of men had multiple regular partners, with many referring to their non-'boyfriend' regular partners as 'fuckbuddies'.

'Being in a relationship' was associated with length of time together and with feelings of intimacy and trust. Regardless, though, the nature of men's partnerships is highly varied, and far more complex than the usual regular vs casual binary that is commonly reported. Nonetheless, most men with any regular partners were able to identify a 'primary' partner, even if they did not necessarily consider themselves in a relationship with that partner.

For the most part, gay and bisexual men appear to be quite open and communicative with their regular partners, particularly if they consider themselves to be in a relationship with their partner. Most primary partners knew about the men's other regular partners. Nonetheless, less than half had actually discussed with their regular partner the possibility of sex with other men, although this was true of only about a third of men who considered themselves to be in a relationship. The majority of men had a non-monogamous arrangement with their regular partners, but about half of those men in relationships had a monogamous arrangement. Regardless of the nature of their relationship to each other, the majority of men had agreed with their partner that they should let each other know about the sex they have with other partners. The experience of sex with other men mostly appeared to have little impact on men's relationships with their regular partners, although a minority did revise their agreements with each other as a consequence.

Only a minority of men discussed HIV and risk reduction as part of their negotiations with their regular partners about the nature of their relationship to each other. Monogamy, or the lack of it, appeared to be a far more important consideration in negotiating agreements than the issue of HIV risk reduction. While only a minority reported engaging in

condomless anal intercourse with their regular partners, this was true of a majority of those who were in a relationship. As much as a third of men reported that they had never used condoms with their regular partners, even when they had first met. The majority of men knew the HIV status of their regular partners, and were usually fairly confident in that knowledge.

Most men reported that their regular partners, and particularly those with whom they were in a relationship, were very supportive and that conflict was not a particularly common experience. Less conflict between regular partners was due to issues concerning the nature of their relationship to each other than to domestic issues (such as finances, and housework). Nonetheless, one in twenty men in relationships had experienced some physical altercation in the previous year.

Despite most men being fairly open about their relationship with their primary partner, about one in five had not informed their immediate family or heterosexual friends about him. Only a minority of men had informed their friends and family about other regular partners with whom they were not in a relationship. Few men had experienced any public partnership ceremony, and only a minority expressed a clear interest in marrying their primary regular partner.

An increasing proportion of men over the previous 15-20 years had met their primary regular partner online, including those partners with whom they were in a relationship. This applied to all age groups.

Most men tended to have friends whose partnership patterns were similar to their own, whether they were in a relationship themselves or not. Also, men's attitudes to different kinds of partnerships tended to reflect their own partnerships, although they seemed to commonly expect at least some degree of monogamy while they are 'dating' or at the outset of establishing a 'relationship'.

## BACKGROUND

Personal partnerships, particularly sexual partnerships, are central to the development of personal identity and to cultural and community affiliation. They are also crucial in promoting and supporting personal health and well being. Bonds of relationship and attachment are complex and heavily mediated by social context. We investigated how gay and bisexual men have structured their partnerships.

Interpersonal connections are categorised into distinct groups, and sexual contact is viewed as a clear demarcation point between different categories of partnership. A long-term, monogamous sexual relationship is regarded as qualitatively different to a long-term friendship: The former may include friendship, but if a friendship incorporates sexual contact, then it is no longer considered to be 'merely friendship'. In a national Australian study of sex and relationships, sex was deemed less important than other aspects of a partnership: Three of the four best things in life for this group were relationships, friends and family with only 1% mentioning sex (Pitts et al, 2006). Yet, sexuality, friendship, familiarity and fidelity are all potential variations in interpersonal connections.

Extensive literature in sociology, psychology, and health sciences identifies partnerships of various kinds as integral to the well-being, and personal and social efficacy, of individuals and their communities (Dindia and Duck, 2000; Hewitt, 2005; Selznick, 1994). Less is known about partnership experience for groups such as gay and bisexual men because research which considers these groups is often framed by more broadly, mostly heterosexual, applicable models, making it difficult to recognise and understand partnership experiences outside these models. Consequently, little is known about divergent partnership forms among gay and bisexual men.

To investigate this issue, it is therefore vital that understandings of partnerships not stem from an application of or translation to heterosexual norms as this may restrict the kinds of understandings produced and the effectiveness of interventions and support that stem from these understandings. In many ways, gay and bisexual men's partnerships fall outside commonly recognised norms even if they adhere to some forms, structures and functions similar to those of the heterosexual majority. Indeed, recent research suggests



that some forms of contemporary 'rainbow' families are quite heteronormative and traditional in structure (Irenyi 2006).

In the past, much of what was written about gay and bisexual men's partnerships was largely modelled on existing (mostly heterosexual) norms, and assessed their relative 'success' from within that paradigm. Adam (2006), however, considers gay men's partnership forms not as modeled on or in comparison to heterosexual partnerships, but as somewhat autonomous and innovative.

Research literature on gay and bisexual men's partnerships has, on the whole, focused on issues in the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Much of this published research signals the need for further research that is geared toward in-depth and detailed understandings of relationship formation, management and maintenance in order to more fully understand the roles partnerships play in the management of transmission risk for HIV and other STIs (Kippax et al 1997). Most published research on gay and bisexual men's partnerships has been situated within medical-epidemiological and public health/behavioural frameworks (Hickson et al 1992; Elford 1999; Kippax et al 1997, 1993; Crawford 2001; Davidovich 2000, 2001, 2004). Little focused research that explores partnerships beyond sex, sexual negotiations and styles has been attempted. Outside of HIV-focused research and the work of Nardi (1999) and Weeks et al (2003), almost no research into gay men's partnerships exists, particularly in an Australian context, other than some work conducted within psychology and social work that is mainly concerned with interpersonal support and communication between (regular) partners, rather than the structure and nature of the types of partnerships themselves.

Much of the published research hinges on core assumptions that, arguably, obscure more detailed understandings of gay and bisexual men's partnerships. Most research has concerned itself with the question of safety vs. risk because it is mainly interested in informing HIV prevention and intervention. Yet, this distinction, safety vs. risk, is limited in scope. It relies on assumptions about the relative place of risk as a consideration within partnerships, and on research foci that leave other questions (of intimacy and pleasure and mutual support) unasked and unanswered. Also, these restrictions on the conceptual and methodological aspects of HIV-focused research are limited in their capacity to inform continued sexual health promotion. Nor can such research identify other possibilities for the

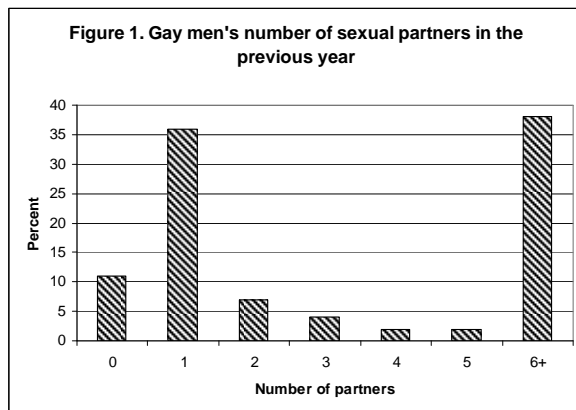
promotion of well-being among gay and bisexual men that have not previously been considered.

Research questions driven by a focus on 'what is safe/risky?', draw unproblematically on other conditioning binaries: either a 'regular vs. casual' (Kippax et al 1997; Crawford et al 2001) or 'steady vs. casual' (Moreau-Gruet et al 2001; Crawford et al 2003) division when asking men questions and in organising data. The effect has been to 'force' data about gay and bisexual men's partnerships into categories implicitly drawn from the wider population and centred exclusively on sex as the criterion for distinction. This obscures the detail and subtlety needed to develop greater and more useful knowledge in this area, as Adam (2006) has done.

In the Australian context, the key role of relative familiarity, and prior contact, with sexual partners as a key consideration in understanding risk behaviour among gay men has been previously identified. The more familiar a man is with his sexual partners, the greater the likelihood that he will engage in sexual risk behaviour (i.e. condomless anal intercourse). Initially, this was observed in the context of what was understood as 'regular partnerships', and was termed as 'negotiated safety' (Kippax et al, 1993; 1997). More recently, this has been observed in relation to what was understood as casual sex encounters (Zablotska et al, 2011; Prestage et al, 2012; Rouwenhorst et al, 2012). In relation to negotiated safety this has been represented as an opportunity for HIV risk reduction within the 'safety' of a committed and established relationship, but in the context of casual sex this has been represented as potential risk for HIV infection. However, analyses from the HIV Seroconversion Study suggest that this may not be as simple as such a simple binary between regular=safe and casual=risky. Gay men recently diagnosed with HIV in that study appeared to be more likely to be infected by casual partners than by regular partners, but also, among those infected by a regular partner, they were more likely to have been infected by men they have been with for relatively short-term periods or by men they did not consider as a 'boyfriend' or 'partner', such as a 'fuckbuddy' (Gianacas et al, 2013). A similar trend applies among men who believe they were infected by a casual partner: they appeared to be more likely to have been infected by someone they had just met, and about whom they knew very little, than by a casual partner with whom they had previously had sex. So, among those infected by regular partners (who are usually presumed to be

familiar), the length of time they had known them seemed to be an important consideration in the risk of HIV infection; while among those infected by casual partners whether they had had any previous sexual contact seemed to be the key consideration. All of which suggests that gay men's partnerships are far more nuanced than is suggested by the simple casual/regular binary, and that understanding the diversity in their partnerships, and the details of the different kinds of partnership structures they develop is important, both in itself, and in term of the potential impact on their sexual behaviour and the risk of HIV transmission.

The first Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR) indicated that the distribution of gay men's partner numbers is strongly bimodal (Figure 1).



As can be seen, while a minority of men (11%) report no male sexual partners in the previous year, the most common numbers of partners reported were one (36%) and six or more (38%).

About one in six gay men in Gay Community Periodic Surveys (GCPS) report having just one sexual partner in the previous six months and over a quarter to a third report being monogamous (Hull et al, 2015). In the GCPS, most analyses have concerned risk of HIV infection, and so the items used to define whether participants are monogamous or not were strictly behavioural. The GCPS definition is simply that the men did not **'currently'** have sexual partners outside their primary partnership. This flags an important issue in thinking about gay men and their partnerships: what do gay men understand and mean by 'relationship', and by 'monogamy'.

Monogamy may mean that the couples are in an exclusive relationship or it may mean that they have an agreement about including others in the partnership. Some gay couples describe monogamy by 'degrees' and maintain that its true definition is up to the couple (Trussler, et al. 2000)

Not only are there differences among gay men about the definition of monogamy, but the likelihood of practicing monogamy, however defined, can vary over the course of a partnership. A German national survey of gay men (conducted seven times between 1987-2003) found that approximately half the respondents reported having 'steady' partners at the time of the surveys (Bochow 2004). This pattern had remained stable throughout the period. Among men with steady partners, just over half reported being monogamous. The other couples reported 'open' partnerships. Monogamy tended to decrease with the length of the partnership, with over three quarters of partnerships of less than six months being monogamous, this decreased to just over a quarter of men whose partnerships were of more than four years duration. Australian data from the GCPS also indicate that length of partnership is related to monogamy (Prestage et al., 2008): Two thirds of partnerships of less than six months duration were monogamous, while this was true of less than half of those of more than two years duration.

Australian data also indicate that age may be a factor in determining partnership style: Younger men were more likely to report being in a monogamous than open partnership while this balance reversed for older men (Prestage et al., 2009). Notably, additional analysis of these data indicate that among younger men the previously described trend for more long-lasting relationships to be less monogamous did not apply, but among men aged 30 or more this trend was present. These patterns have remained fairly similar throughout the entire period of the GCPS – from 1996 to 2015.

In a study of thirty Christian gay male couples in London, Yip (1997) identified three reasons for sexual exclusivity or monogamy: they viewed exclusivity to be a reflection of total commitment between partners; it was also a symbol of complete mutual satisfaction with each other; and, conventional Christian ethics required a commitment to the Christian ideal of faithfulness. In a New Zealand study of twenty men representing eleven gay couples, Worth et al. (2002) found that monogamy was generally laid down as a ground rule at the very beginning of the relationship although the men simultaneously believed that monogamy was not sustainable. This expectation of monogamy can lead to a reluctance to discuss 'lapses', which can lead to elevated risk of HIV and STIs if the sex within the relationship is condomless and that outside the relationship is not always protected (see also Prestage et al., 2006; LaSala 2001, 2004))

Vadasz & Lipp (1990) interviewed fifty gay male couples in Melbourne and Sydney in 1989. The published material is a collection of thematically organised quotes from the study participants and was not formally analysed beyond that thematic organisation. From the quotes, it is clear that a number of patterns or rationales for monogamy existed for those men at that time. One theme related to an ideological position that any relationship should be monogamous. A second appeared based on an assumption that monogamy was supportable at the beginning of a relationship but the relationships naturally tended towards non-monogamy over time. The material was silent on their perceptions of gay community views about monogamy and their experience of barriers to, and facilitators of, the establishment and maintenance of monogamous gay relationships. The place of monogamy as a response to the risk of HIV and STI transmission was not specifically explored.

In the GCPS, there appears to have been a slight increase in the percentage of men reporting being in a monogamous partnership (Prestage et al, 2008). About a quarter of men in the surveys reported being monogamous. More of the men who identified as gay reported being in a monogamous partnership with another man than did men who identified as bisexual. Also, men reporting being in a monogamous partnership were significantly younger than other men. The extent of monogamy observed in the GCPS is similar with that observed in the Health In Men (HIM) cohort – a 2001-7 cohort of HIV-negative men in Sydney (Prestage et al., 2006).

Overall, then, there is limited information about the structure of gay and bisexual men's partnerships, and about their expectations and beliefs about relationships. What information we do have is largely framed by HIV and focuses on risk behaviour and risk reduction. Despite this, much of the behavioural surveillance and sexual health promotion among gay and bisexual men, at least in Australia, is based on this fairly narrow, and limited, information, and uses a very simple binary between 'regular' and 'casual' partners to convey risk reduction messages. Yet, we also have strong evidence that this binary is not actually reflected in how gay and bisexual men who have been recently diagnosed with HIV describe their relationship to the man they believe infected them.

## METHODS

This research project addressed types of partnerships, and understandings and beliefs about relationships, among gay men in Australia. This study aimed to:

- Investigate the prevalence of different types of partnerships among gay men in Australia;
- Explore in detail how gay men negotiate their partnerships;
- Identify gay men' own attitudes toward, expectations of, and feelings about relationships;
- Investigate what gay men believe about gay community attitudes toward relationships;
- Explore the commitments and responsibilities gay men apply to their own partnerships.

The key components of this project were an online survey exploring the key issues and measuring partnership forms, following previous work entailing more detailed face-to-face interviews to explore men's motivations, attitudes and beliefs regarding monogamy. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of New South Wales and La Trobe University and from ACON's research ethics review committee.

Eligibility criteria for the study included being male; having engaged in sex with other men in the preceding twelve months or identifying as gay or bisexual; being aged 16 years or above; and living in Australia.

Recruitment into the study was achieved through mainly online methods. Direct referrals to the website were received through promotion within gay community organisations, media and events and through online promotion.

Enrolments occurred through: direct referrals from local community organisations targeting gay men in Australia; online promotion through gay dating websites and through social networking sites. A website was created as a portal to provide information about the Monopoly study and to direct recruitment to the survey. This website also contained information and links to our research partners, funding information, and ethics and privacy

parameters, and individuals could then directly access the online survey component themselves. A group page was set up on a popular social networking site with details of the study through which men were invited to join, and were invited to spread the link among their social networks for others to join as well. This also allowed us to post regular calls for participation, updates on the research, and to utilise the focused advertising available through this website and the page we had established.

Paid banner advertisements and targeted, paid email approaches through a popular gay dating and hook-up site as well as social sites were also used, and free direct email approaches through community organisations were conducted throughout the course of the recruitment period.

### **ONLINE SURVEY**

Participants completed an online questionnaire to enrol into the study. The questionnaire included demographic characteristics, details of their sexual and emotional partnerships and sexual behaviours, their beliefs about relationships, contact with the community, and measures of mental well-being. We included a broad, general set of questions at the outset about relationship status/es; followed by three sections to describe three specific regular partners. For a small number of men, there were contradictions between their responses in these different sections, but we simply accepted their responses as they were.

Validated measures included: A measure of social engagement with gay men that has typically been used in Australian research to assess the degree of association with gay community life (Zablotska et al., 2012); a measure of sexual sensation-seeking, which has commonly been used as an indicator of men who tend to be relatively more sexually adventurous and thereby at greater risk of HIV infection (Kalichman et al., 1994; Kalichman, 2014); the Rosenberg measure of global self-esteem (Rosenberg et al., 1995); the Kessler six-item (K-6) distress battery (Kessler et al., 2002).

There were a number of open-ended questions in the survey, which allowed respondents to provide detailed responses; some of those responses are presented in this report to help illustrate common themes and patterns or in some cases, of uncommon or atypical cases.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE**

There were a total of 4215 respondents. These included 2289 respondents (54.3%) who were recruited through an online gay dating website, 1528 (36.3%) recruited through Facebook, and 398 (9.4%) recruited through other referrals. Their geographic distribution by state was as would be expected of a sample of gay and bisexual men in Australia: 30.2% in NSW, 23.7% in Victoria, 18.9% in Queensland, 8.6% in Western Australia, 7.8% in South Australia, 2.2% in the Australian Capital Territory, 1.6% in Tasmania, and 0.8% in the Northern Territory. The remaining 6.2% did not specify their state of residence.

The mean age among these men was 36.9 years. Half (47.4%) were university educated. Most identified as homosexual (81.0%) or bisexual (15.8%). One in five (20.1%) reported that 'most' of their friends were gay. Three quarters (73.2%) had been tested for HIV, including 5.1% who had tested HIV-positive. Among non-HIV-positive men, 48.8% had been tested in the previous twelve months. About one in twenty men (6.2%) reported having a regular female partner, regardless of whether they had a regular male partner or not.

### **PROFILE OF PARTNERSHIPS**

The majority of men (2919; 69.3%) reported having a regular partner: 1833 (43.5%) reported having just one regular partner and 1086 (25.8%) reported having two or more regular partners. Of the men with multiple regular partners, 55.8% nonetheless considered one of those partners to be their primary regular partner. Despite the majority having at least one regular partner, only half of the men with a primary regular partner described themselves as being 'in a relationship' with any of those partners, and a quarter indicating that they had a monogamous arrangement (Table 1a).



**Table 1a: Description of partnerships. N=2919 (%)**

Considers it to be a relationship	1536 (52.6)
Type of partnership	
Has open arrangement	2144 (73.4)
Has monogamous arrangement	775 (26.6)
Number of regular partners	
Has one regular partner	1833 (62.8)
Has multiple regular partners	1086 (37.2)
Length of partnership	
Less than 6 months	536 (18.4)
7-12 months	247 (8.5)
1-2 years	433 (14.8)
3-5 years	510 (17.5)
6-10 years	331 (11.3)
Over 10 years	409 (13.7)
Not provided	467 (16.0)

**Note: Only includes men who had a regular partner**

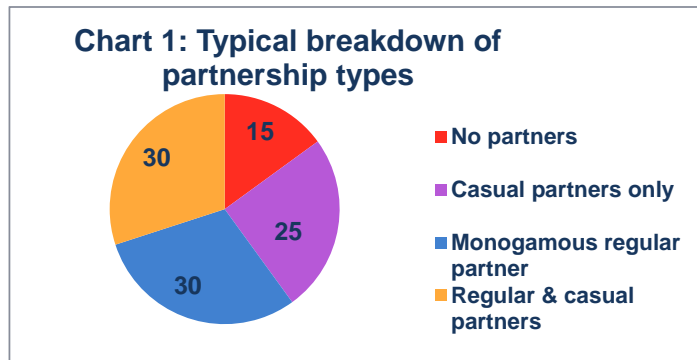
Although the majority of those with any regular partners considered themselves to be in a relationship with a regular partner, this was more common among those who had just one regular partner than those with multiple regular partners (Table 1b).

**Table 1b: Regular partner status and partnership style.**

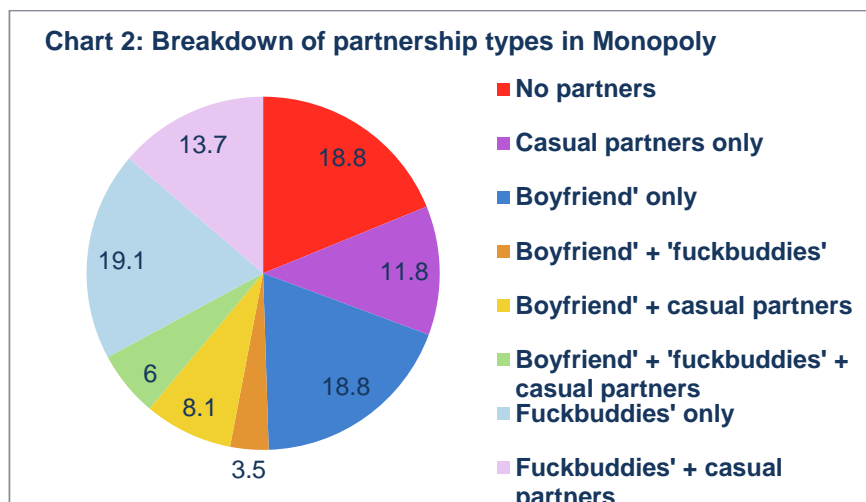
N (%)	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1784	N=1053
Considers it to be a relationship		
Yes	1134 (61.9)	402 (37.0)
No	699 (38.1)	684 (63.0)

In previous research, the partnership structure for gay men has tended to indicate a quarter having sex with casual partners and a third having sex with regular partner, plus

about a third who have sex with both regular and casual partners (Chart 1; based on GCPS data, Hull et al, 2015).



In these data, however, based on the full sample of 4215 men, a considerably more complex partnership structure emerges for gay men (Chart 2). According to this breakdown, only about one in eight report sex only with casual partners, and one in five report having a ‘boyfriend’ exclusively. The discrepancies appear to be largely due to the addition of the category of ‘fuckbuddies’. Nearly half the men report having ‘fuckbuddy’-style arrangements, but this includes about a quarter (i.e. half those with fuckbuddies) who also report sex with either their boyfriend (about one in ten of all men) or with any casual partners (about one in five of all men). One in twelve men report having both a boyfriend and casual partners, but no fuckbuddies. It is likely that in the absence of the ‘fuckbuddy’ category, some men assign some of their partners to the category of regular partner and others classify them as casual partners.



## MULTIPLE REGULAR PARTNERS

441 men provided details about a second regular partner. The majority of men's first partners also knew about their second partners (Table 2). The majority of second partners also knew about the men's first partners, particularly among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner. While only a minority of men's first partners also had sex with their second partners, they were more likely to do so with men who also considered themselves to be in a relationship with the respondent. Most commonly, especially among those who considered themselves in a relationship, sex between a first and second partner usually only occurred when all three partners (participant, their first partner, and their second partner) were together.

**Table 2: Interactions between primary & second regular partners and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship with their primary regular partner	Not in a relationship with their primary regular partner
Described 2 <sup>nd</sup> regular partner	N=144	N=121
1 <sup>st</sup> partner knows about 2 <sup>nd</sup> partner		
No	35.4	44.5
Yes	64.6	55.5
2 <sup>nd</sup> partner knows about 1 <sup>st</sup> partner		
No	12.6	53.2
Yes	87.4	46.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> partner has sex with 1 <sup>st</sup> partner		
Never	68.0	83.3
Yes, without me	2.3	3.9
Yes, but only with me	19.2	5.4
Yes, separately or together	10.5	7.4

**Note: Only includes men who provided information about a second regular partner**

92 men provided details about a third regular partner. The majority of men's first and third partners knew about each other, particularly among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner (Table 3). Second and third partners were somewhat less likely to know about each other, though among men

who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, the second and third partners were more likely to know about each other. While only a minority of men's first partners also had sex with their third partners, they were more likely to do so with men who also considered themselves to be in a relationship with the respondent. Most commonly, especially among those who considered themselves in a relationship, sex between a first and third partner usually only occurred when all three partners (participant, their first partner, and their third partner) were together. Only a few second and third partners also had sex with each other.

**Table 3: Interactions between primary, second, & third regular partners and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship with their primary regular partner	Not in a relationship with their primary regular partner
Described 3 <sup>rd</sup> regular partner	N=47	N=45
1 <sup>st</sup> partner knows about 3 <sup>rd</sup> partner		
No	46.8	51.1
Yes	53.2	48.9
2 <sup>nd</sup> partner knows about 3 <sup>rd</sup> partner		
No	51.1	63.6
Yes	48.9	36.4
3 <sup>rd</sup> partner knows about 1 <sup>st</sup> partner		
No	25.5	62.2
Yes	74.5	37.8
3 <sup>rd</sup> partner knows about 2 <sup>nd</sup> partner		
No	42.6	64.4
Yes	57.4	35.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> partner has sex with 1 <sup>st</sup> partner		
Never	76.6	95.6
Yes, without me	0.0	0.0
Yes, but only with me	12.8	0.0
Yes, either with or without me	10.6	4.4
2 <sup>nd</sup> partner has sex with 3 <sup>rd</sup> partner		
Never	83.0	88.9
Yes, without me	0.0	0.0
Yes, but only with me	6.4	2.9
Yes, either with or without me	10.6	8.9

**Note: Only includes men who provided information about a third regular partner**

## ATTITUDES & BELIEFS ABOUT GAY RELATIONSHIPS

### WHAT ARE OTHER GAY MEN’S RELATIONSHIPS LIKE?

Men who had no regular partners appeared to have fewer gay friends who were in a relationship, particularly long-term relationships (Table 4). Men who did not have a regular partner were also less likely to have friends in open relationships, or friends with a fuckbuddy-type arrangement. Among men with a regular partner, those who considered themselves to be in a relationship tended to know more gay friends who were in long-term relationships, and who were monogamous, than those who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner. Men with just one regular partner tended to know more men in monogamous relationships, while those with multiple regular partners were aware of more friends in open-style relationships.

**Table 4: Perceptions of gay men you know and partnership style.**

%	No regular partners	One regular partner	Multiple partners	In a relationship	Not in a relationship
Gay men you know	N=1371	N=1784	N=1053	N=1498	N=1156
Most not in relationship	35.9	23.5	26.4	23.1	28.2
Any in relationship	49.9	67.0	75.3	73.9	65.7
>10 years					
Some or most are monogamous	31.4	40.4	27.7	39.4	29.7
Some or most are in an open relationship	25.0	33.0	53.6	39.2	43.3
Some or most have many brief relationships	34.4	35.2	51.9	38.5	47.1
Some or most are in & out of relationships all the time	30.1	29.4	39.2	31.3	36.2
Some or most have fuckbuddies	41.6	46.3	74.8	52.1	64.5
Any have more than one boyfriend	28.7	35.6	58.1	41.7	48.4

## ATTITUDES TO SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

Men who had no regular partners appeared to have somewhat more negative attitudes toward gay relationships than did men with regular partners, particularly those who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner (Table 5). Men who did not have a regular partner were less likely to agree that gay relationships are enduring. They were also somewhat less likely to agree that fuckbuddies are a convenient arrangement, or that open relationships can be ‘more honest’. On the other hand, those men with regular partners who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner had very positive attitudes about both fuckbuddies and open relationships.

**Table 5: Beliefs about sex & relationships and partnership style.**

%	No regular partners	One regular partner	Multiple partners	In a relationship	Not in a relationship
Agrees that:	N=1371	N=1784	N=1053	N=1498	N=1156
Easier to have sex with someone I know than casual partners	53.7	66.8	57.2	63.3	64.2
Fuckbuddies are a convenient arrangement	76.1	78.2	92.9	79.4	91.2
Gay relationships do not last	31.0	20.9	28.6	14.4	37.9
Monogamous relationships do not last	28.9	21.2	42.1	23.5	35.9
Open relationships are more honest	33.1	37.3	62.2	44.9	48.4

## EXPECTATIONS OF PARTNERS

When asked about their expectations for both dating and commencing a relationship, men who had no regular partners appeared to have the most stringent expectations, both of themselves and of their partners (Table 6). Men who did not have a regular partner were far more likely to expect both themselves and their partners to stop seeing other men, to stop having sex with other men, and to tell each other if they did have sex with someone else, once they were ‘dating’. If they decided to begin a relationship, then these expectations were even more pronounced. Among men with a regular partner, these sorts of expectations were not as strong, regardless of whether they considered themselves

in a relationship with their primary regular partner or not. Men who had just one regular partner tended to have more stringent requirements of their partner than did those with multiple regular partners.

**Table 6: Expectations during dating & relationships and partnership style.**

%	No regular partners	One regular partner	Multiple partners	In a relationship	Not in a relationship
	N=1371	N=1784	N=1053	N=1498	N=1156
Considered very important that when dating:					
He will stop seeing other men	37.3	32.8	16.3	28.1	23.0
I stop seeing other men	41.1	34.1	16.8	28.4	25.2
Tell each other about if we have sex with other men	51.8	44.0	27.3	39.7	33.4
We should stop having sex with other men	47.5	38.3	16.9	31.4	27.2
We can continue having sex with other men	10.5	11.1	18.9	12.6	15.0
Considered very important that when start relationship:					
He will stop seeing other men	78.3	71.0	43.4	62.3	60.8
I stop seeing other men	78.3	71.3	43.7	62.4	61.3
Tell each other about if we have sex with other men	81.9	73.3	56.8	67.8	68.2
We should stop having sex with other men	76.4	67.0	37.5	56.6	56.2
We can continue having sex with other men	14.1	18.2	20.1	17.1	20.1

**PEER NORMS: WHAT DO THEIR FRIENDS THINK?**

Men who had no regular partners appeared to believe that a greater proportion of their gay friends felt that gay relationships should be monogamous rather than open (Table 7). Men who had a regular partner appeared to have more diverse perspectives on their friends’ attitudes to monogamous versus open relationships, regardless of whether they considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner. Men with just one regular partner were somewhat more inclined to believe that more of their gay



friends supported monogamy, but the differences were not as stark as those between men without a regular partner and those with a regular partner.

**Table 7: Perceptions of gay friends' beliefs about gay relationships and partnership style.**

%	No regular partners	One regular partner	Multiple partners	In a relationship	Not in a relationship
Number of gay friends who believe that:	N=1371	N=1784	N=1053	N=1498	N=1156
Gay relationships should be monogamous					
None	9.4	5.7	9.1	5.7	8.1
One or a few	31.1	36.1	46.0	39.7	38.8
Some	19.6	23.7	26.6	25.2	24.7
Most or all	40.0	34.6	18.3	29.4	28.4
Gay relationships should be open					
None	23.7	15.7	3.6	10.6	8.0
One or a few	50.6	49.7	40.1	45.1	50.0
Some	16.2	24.6	33.4	29.1	27.6
Most or all	9.5	10.0	22.8	15.2	14.5

## **PROFILE OF MEN IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS**

Younger men were somewhat less likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner although they were more likely to have just one regular partner (Table 8). More well-educated men were likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, though there was little difference in education in the number of regular partners they had. Men who were employed in more higher status positions tended to be more likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner. Ethnic or cultural background appeared to make little difference to the style of men's partnerships, either in terms of regular partner number or whether they considered themselves in a relationship. Men who had not been tested for HIV were somewhat less likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, even though they were more likely to have just one regular partner. HIV-positive men were more likely to report multiple regular partners.

**Table 8: Demographic profile and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Age				
Under 26	16.7	24.3	22.0	17.2
26-35	30.1	27.2	30.8	25.3
36-50	30.9	28.0	27.5	32.9
Over 50	19.5	17.8	17.0	21.5
No age provided	2.8	2.8	2.7	3.0
Education				
Less than university level	46.2	54.8	51.4	48.5
Undergraduate degree	29.9	28.6	29.0	29.6
Postgraduate degree	23.9	16.6	19.6	21.9
Employment status				
Not in workforce	30.5	35.4	32.5	33.2
Part-time employed	10.9	12.1	11.7	11.1
Full-time employed	58.7	52.5	55.8	55.6
Occupation				
Managerial or professional position	59.1	47.9	52.6	55.9
Other position	22.1	28.1	25.6	23.8
Not stated	18.8	23.9	21.8	20.4
Cultural or ethnic background				
Anglo-Australian	56.3	53.4	54.8	55.1
Other	43.7	46.6	45.2	44.9
HIV status				
Unknown/not tested	15.7	24.6	21.8	16.8
HIV-positive	6.5	5.3	3.9	9.4
HIV-negative	77.8	70.1	74.4	73.8

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **SEXUAL IDENTITY & HOMOSOCIALITY**

Men who identified as gay were more likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner and to have just one regular partner (Table 9). More well-educated men were likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, though there was little difference in education in the number of regular partners they had. Men who had a greater proportion of gay friends, and who spent more time with their gay friends, tended to be more likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, but they also tended to be more likely to have multiple regular partners. Men who were more open with others about their homosexuality were somewhat more likely to consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, but it made little difference to the number of regular partners they had.

**Table 9: Sexuality and social engagement with gay men and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Sexual identify				
Gay	92.1	76.0	87.0	80.1
Bisexual	6.8	21.1	11.2	17.6
Other	1.1	3.0	1.8	2.3
Proportion of gay friends				
None	2.5	7.9	5.5	4.3
A few	32.1	39.5	37.3	32.7
Some	40.8	32.9	37.7	36.2
Most or all	24.5	19.7	19.5	26.8
Free time with gay friends				
None	7.2	12.6	10.7	8.3
A little	38.0	41.0	41.9	35.5
Some	37.9	34.4	34.8	38.8
A lot	16.9	12.0	12.7	17.6
How open with others about sex with men				
Extremely open	40.5	32.3	36.2	39.8
Somewhat open	40.2	33.1	39.4	33.9
Not very open	14.4	17.8	15.7	15.6
Keep it completely to myself	4.9	16.8	8.6	10.7

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **MEETING REGULAR PARTNER**

There was little difference between those who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner and those who did not in terms of at what age they first met their primary regular partner (Table 10). Number of regular partners also made little difference. Only a small proportion of men first met their primary regular partner when they were aged more than fifty. The majority of men met their partners online (through dating websites or mobile phone apps), even among men who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner. Relatively few men met their regular partner through non-gay situations (either through non-gay friends or at non-gay venues). Men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their regular partner, tended to have been with their partner for a longer time.

**Table 10: Meeting regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
How old were you when first met regular partner				
25 or younger	33.8	21.3	28.8	26.2
26-35 years old	33.6	19.7	27.6	26.1
36-50 years old	20.6	20.1	17.3	25.5
Over 50	6.1	8.2	6.1	8.7
Age not provided	5.9	30.8	20.2	13.4
How first met regular partner				
Online or phone app	50.2	71.9	55.6	64.0
At gay social venues or events	14.4	2.9	10.8	8.2
Sex venues	3.3	2.9	2.6	3.9
Beats	2.9	2.8	2.6	3.2
Through family or friends	16.3	9.1	15.2	10.6
At non-gay venues or events	8.7	7.9	9.2	7.1
Other	4.0	2.2	3.8	2.5
When first met regular partner				
Over 13 years ago	19.3	3.9	10.7	14.2
9-13 years ago	13.3	3.8	9.0	8.5
4-8 years ago	28.4	16.2	22.1	23.4
2-3 years ago	19.0	18.1	17.8	19.8
Within previous year	16.7	28.7	21.8	23.3
Not provided	3.3	29.3	18.4	10.9

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

### LENGTH OF PARTNERSHIPS

While length of partnership with their primary regular partner made little difference to the number of regular partners men reported, those who considered themselves in a relationship with this partner tended to have been with their partner for a longer duration (Table 11).

**Table 11: Length of partnership and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Length of partnership				
Less than 6 months	13.3	34.8	22.0	21.4
7-12 months	7.3	14.0	9.5	10.7
1-2 years	15.2	21.5	17.5	18.0
3-5 years	23.6	16.5	21.0	20.5
6-10 years	17.0	8.2	13.9	12.9
Over 10 years	23.6	5.0	16.1	16.6

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

### DESCRIPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIPS

In general, men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their regular partner were much more likely to use romantic descriptors to describe their partner than were men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship, who were much more likely to use the specifically sexual term of ‘fuckbuddy’ (Table 12). Men who had only one regular partner were also somewhat more likely than those with multiple regular partners to use romantic descriptors to describe their primary regular partner. While nearly two thirds of men who considered themselves in a relationship lived with their regular partner, three quarters of those who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their partner lived separately. While less than half the men who had only one regular partner lived with him, they were much more likely to do so than were men with multiple regular partners,



two thirds of whom lived separately. In describing the kind of partnership they had with their regular partner, men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner were much more likely to describe him in more romantic and emotionally intimate ways, whereas men who did not consider themselves in a relationship were much more likely to use terms that emphasize the sexual and physical connections with their partner. These patterns also applied to men who had just one regular partner in comparison to those who had multiple regular partners, although the differences were not as stark.

**Table 12: Regular partner status and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
How describes regular partner				
Boyfriend	28.4	3.2	23.6	9.8
Partner	45.2	2.0	34.6	16.8
Lover	4.7	5.0	4.2	5.8
Husband	15.8	0.1	11.3	6.3
Fuckbuddy	3.5	69.1	18.4	48.4
Friend (with benefits)	0.6	8.7	3.0	5.3
Other	5.0	11.9	4.9	7.8
Living arrangements				
Do not live together	27.1	73.2	38.5	66.7
Live together part-time	9.1	0.7	5.9	3.7
Live together full-time	63.6	2.3	40.5	24.5
No answer provided	0.1	23.9	15.1	5.2
How describes partnership with regular partner				
'Somewhat' to 'very' as committed	87.6	12.6	71.2	40.3
'Somewhat' to 'very' as 'romantic'	81.8	23.9	70.5	42.5
'Somewhat' to 'very' as 'companions'	82.2	26.8	68.7	47.5
'Somewhat' to 'very' as as 'dating'	40.4	10.7	34.0	20.2
'Somewhat' to 'very' as friends with benefits	8.1	63.3	20.4	47.1
'Somewhat' to 'very' as 'strictly physical'	21.5	61.7	29.6	50.0

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## HIV STATUS

Over three quarters of the men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner knew his HIV status, as did over half of those who did not consider themselves in a relationship with him (Table 13). Similar findings applied to men who had just one regular partner compared with those who had multiple regular partners. For the most part, those that knew their regular partner's HIV status did so because their partner had told them. Few men reported that their regular partner was HIV-positive. Men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their regular partner, as well as those with just one regular partner, tended to be very confident of their knowledge of their partner's HIV status.

**Table 13: Regular partner's HIV status and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Knows partner's HIV status				
No	20.4	43.8	26.6	31.0
Yes	79.6	56.2	73.4	69.0
How knows partner's HIV status				
He told me	88.8	95.0	88.5	93.9
Other	11.2	5.0	11.5	6.1
Partner's HIV status				
HIV-positive	6.9	4.6	4.6	8.7
HIV-negative	72.7	51.5	68.8	60.3
Unknown	20.4	43.8	26.6	31.0
Confidence in knowledge of partner's status				
Not at all/slightly confident	0.4	3.0	0.6	2.1
Fairly confident	6.9	24.0	7.7	18.7
Very confident	40.2	42.8	39.7	43.2
Certain	52.5	30.2	52.0	36.0

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

While the majority of men whose primary regular partner was HIV-positive reported that he had been diagnosed before they had met, about a third had been diagnosed during the time they had been together (Table 14). Most of the HIV-positive regular partners were reported as being on treatment and usually with an undetectable viral load.

**Table 14: HIV-positive regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=82	N=30	N=53	N=61
When was partner diagnosed				
Before began relationship	68.3	66.7	76.5	60.7
During the relationship	30.5	30.0	23.5	36.1
Unsure	1.2	3.3	0.0	3.3
Is partner on treatment				
No	6.1	17.2	7.7	10.2
Yes	91.5	75.9	90.4	84.7
Unsure	2.4	6.9	1.9	5.1
Partner's viral load				
Undetectable	82.1	83.3	86.8	78.7
Detectable	11.9	13.3	7.5	16.4
Unsure	6.0	3.3	5.7	4.9

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## FINANCES

Men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner rarely had shared financial arrangements with him (Table 15). This also applied to men with multiple regular partners, though not as starkly. Nonetheless, even among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, and among those with just one regular partner, only a minority had joint financial arrangements their regular partner. The most common joint financial arrangements were joint bank accounts and planning for the future, although even these applied to only a minority of men, even those who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner.

**Table 15: Joint finances and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
Financial arrangements with regular partner*	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Joint bank accounts	40.6	1.9	30.3	17.8
Joint child custody	1.3	0.3	0.8	1.1
Joint credit cards	24.6	1.2	17.7	12.0
Insurance documents	31.8	1.3	22.6	15.5
Both named on lease	34.0	1.5	25.3	15.0
Both named on mortgage	23.6	1.0	16.4	12.0
Planned for future together	41.5	1.6	31.3	19.5
Partner named on superannuation	34.3	1.2	25.2	15.2
Partner named on will	33.1	1.8	23.1	17.4

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

\*Men could select more than one option.

## FEELINGS ABOUT PARTNERSHIP

### FREQUENCY OF SEX

Men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner reported more frequent sex (self-defined) with their partner, although whether they considered themselves in a relationship with their partner or not appeared to make little difference to their level of sexual satisfaction (Table 16).

**Table 16: Sexual and emotional relationship with regular partner status and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Frequency of sex with regular partner				
At least weekly	44.3	15.4	39.8	23.1
About monthly	39.6	63.8	44.5	55.5
Less than monthly	16.1	20.8	15.7	21.4

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

### FEELINGS ABOUT REGULAR PARTNER

Those who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner were much more satisfied with their partner overall than were those who did not consider it to be a relationship (Table 17). Those with multiple regular partners also tended to be less satisfied overall with their primary regular partner than did those with just one regular partner. The majority of men who considered themselves in a relationship completely loved and trusted their primary regular partner, but this was much less true of men who did not consider themselves in a relationship. In particular, over half of those who did not consider themselves in a relationship indicated they had little or no love for their partner. Similarly, those with just one regular partner were far more likely to express feelings of love for and trust in their primary regular partner than was the case among men with multiple regular partners.

**Table 17: Sexual and emotional relationship with regular partner status and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
<b>Satisfaction with sex with regular partner</b>				
Slightly to very dissatisfied	25.2	18.4	22.0	23.5
Slightly satisfied	12.1	19.0	14.1	15.6
Moderately satisfied	31.6	32.9	32.4	31.6
Very satisfied	31.1	29.8	31.4	29.3
<b>General satisfaction with partnership</b>				
Slightly to very dissatisfied	13.0	23.9	15.8	19.0
Slightly satisfied	6.0	25.2	9.6	18.9
Moderately satisfied	29.3	34.6	28.7	35.4
Very satisfied	51.8	16.5	46.0	26.7
<b>How much he loves partner</b>				
Not at all	0.5	35.3	8.2	22.2
Very little	1.2	19.1	5.2	12.4
Moderately	10.7	33.3	14.0	27.5
Very much	36.1	9.2	29.6	20.1
Completely	51.4	3.1	43.0	17.7
<b>How much he trusts partner</b>				
Not at all	0.5	4.8	1.4	3.2
Very little	1.8	12.3	4.4	8.0
Moderately	14.2	42.8	19.6	33.6
Very much	32.4	27.7	30.7	30.4
Completely	51.2	12.4	43.9	24.8

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **CONFLICT & SUPPORT**

While few men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner reported frequent conflict with him, over a third indicated at least occasional conflict (Table 18). Men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with their partner rarely, if ever, experienced conflict with their regular partner. Men who had only one regular partner also experienced somewhat more conflict with their primary regular partner than did those with multiple regular partners. Among men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, as well as those who had only one regular partner, the main sources of conflict were practical domestic issues such as finances and housework. Jealousy, and disagreements about the type of partnership (i.e. monogamous or open), were sources of conflict for a minority of men, and largely regardless of the number of regular partners, or whether they considered themselves to be in a relationship.



**Table 18: Conflict with regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Frequency of conflict				
Never	12.3	60.5	20.1	42.5
Rarely	45.6	25.4	42.8	32.1
Occasionally	36.9	12.8	33.3	21.3
Often	5.2	1.3	3.7	4.1
Causes of at least some conflict*				
Finances	53.6	8.6	45.9	28.4
Chores/housework	59.5	8.8	50.4	32.0
Living arrangements	35.9	18.3	32.7	26.4
His jealousy	18.8	18.3	27.1	13.6
My jealousy	18.3	20.4	16.8	22.6
He wants monogamy	12.5	11.8	10.5	15.3
He wants open relationship	5.4	8.3	5.3	8.0
He wants me to have sex with others	8.0	11.8	8.5	10.5
I want monogamy	10.7	15.4	11.3	13.8
I want open relationship	11.1	8.1	9.1	11.9
I want him to have sex with others	12.2	8.6	9.5	13.9

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**\*Men could select more than one option.**

Most men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, and those who had just one regular partner, identified positive and supportive actions that their primary regular partner had performed during the previous twelve months (Table 19). Nonetheless, even among those who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, over half reported positive experiences with him. The majority of men with multiple regular partners also reported positive and supportive actions by their primary regular partner. Few men were intimidated or assaulted by their primary regular partner, largely regardless of whether they considered themselves

in a relationship or not, or of how many regular partners they had. Those who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner were, however, more likely to have been insulted by him.

**Table 19: Regular partner actions in previous 12 months and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Made you feel appreciated	90.8	58.2	86.3	70.3
Made you feel safe	87.8	58.0	83.3	70.2
Supported me through difficult time	84.1	35.9	76.2	56.5
Acted selflessly to help me	65.6	19.6	58.3	38.3
Pressured me not to use condoms	3.9	9.9	4.9	7.2
Pressured me to use condoms	5.3	8.3	5.6	7.3
Pressured me into something	9.7	7.3	9.0	8.7
Insulted me	50.3	21.2	44.9	34.4
Made me fearful	12.0	7.3	10.5	10.6
Threatened me physically	7.3	2.8	5.6	6.1
Assaulted me	5.6	1.7	3.8	5.1

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **BREAKING UP WITH PARTNER**

Not surprisingly, being treated badly by their primary regular partner was the most likely reason cited for why men might break up with their partner, regardless of how many regular partners they had or whether they considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner (Table 20). Among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, and among those with just one regular partner, not being satisfied emotionally, breaking an agreement, or having sex with someone else, were often cited as potential reasons for breaking up with their regular partner. Among men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, though, not being satisfied sexually was often cited as a potential reason for breaking up with their regular partner. This was also somewhat the case among men with multiple regular partners.

**Table 20: Possible causes of partner break-ups and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
What would (possibly) cause you to break up with partner?*	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
He had sex with someone else	53.2	19.2	56.1	19.5
He broke an agreement	60.4	31.9	59.6	37.5
He treated me badly	86.1	78.6	85.1	81.5
He did not satisfy me sexually	49.1	69.2	53.8	58.2
He did not satisfy me emotionally	78.3	51.3	75.2	60.8

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**\*Men could select more than one option.**

## DISCLOSURE OF PARTNERSHIP

Most men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner reported having told most people who were close to them about their regular partner (Table 21). This included both family and friends. Nonetheless, about one in five had not informed their immediate family or their heterosexual friends, and well over a third had not informed their doctor. Among men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their regular partner, a little under half had told no one about this partner; only about a third had informed even their close friends. Very few had informed their doctor about their regular partner. These same patterns also applied to men with multiple regular partners compared with those with just one partner except that the differences were not as stark.

**Table 21: Disclosure of regular partnership and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
Who knows about regular partner	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Close friends	90.7	35.1	78.8	55.3
Doctor	60.5	8.5	48.2	29.3
Gay friends	88.9	35.5	76.4	56.7
Immediate family	81.7	12.7	67.8	36.6
Neighbours	56.4	2.6	43.3	24.7
Other family members	71.0	5.8	56.8	30.0
Straight friends	81.7	16.2	68.4	39.0
Work colleagues	72.4	10.4	59.6	32.3
No one	3.4	40.9	11.9	26.5

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## MARRIAGE & OTHER CEREMONIES

While only a minority of men indicated that they would like to marry their primary regular partner, this was more common among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner – although it still only applied to a third of men in relationships (Table 22). Men who had only one regular partner were also somewhat more likely than those with multiple regular partners to indicate an interest in marrying their primary regular partner, although it was only a quarter of these men. Very few men report having had any other form of public, or private, ceremony, and few had already been married elsewhere.

**Table 22: Public acknowledgement and recognition of relationships and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Would you marry partner				
No	18.7	40.6	21.4	42.1
Yes	34.3	2.8	24.3	11.0
Unsure	34.6	10.5	25.1	19.9
No answer provided	12.4	46.1	29.2	27.0
Ceremonies already performed*				
Commitment ceremony	5.3	0.3	4.4	1.9
Formal marriage	3.4	0.3	2.6	1.7
Private ceremony	2.3	0.5	2.1	0.9
Other type of ceremony	4.8	0.8	4.1	2.1

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**\*Men could select more than one option.**

## **AGREEMENTS**

### **NEGOTIATING SEX**

Men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner were more likely to have discussed with their partner the possibility of sex with other men, although nearly two thirds had nonetheless made no actual agreement about this with their partner (Table 23). There was little difference between those with one regular partner and those with multiple regular partners in their likelihood to have discussed with their primary regular partner the possibility of sex with other men. Over two thirds of those with just one regular partner had made no agreement with him about this. Men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner were more likely to have a monogamous arrangement with him. While this was also the case for those who had only one regular partner, nonetheless only a third of these men described their partnership as monogamous. Among those who had made an agreement with their primary regular partner that permitted sex with other men, most had agreed that they could do so either together or separately. This was especially true of men with multiple regular partners. Those who considered themselves in a relationship with their partner were, however, much more likely to require that they inform each other when they had sex with other men than were those who did not consider it to be a relationship. Number of regular partners made little difference to the requirement to inform their primary regular partner when they had sex with other men.

**Table 23: Negotiating agreements about sex with other men and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Have discussed possibility of sex outside				
No	39.3	80.7	57.0	62.0
Yes	60.7	19.3	43.0	37.9
Type of partnership agreement				
Has open arrangement	52.6	96.6	61.4	93.8
Has monogamous arrangement	47.4	3.4	38.6	6.2
Type of agreement about sex outside				
No agreement	63.3	52.8	70.8	37.2
Only when together	5.3	0.6	3.3	2.8
Only separately	8.8	13.5	8.1	15.9
Either together or separately	22.6	33.1	17.8	44.1
Agreements about discussing outside sex				
No agreement	68.2	90.3	79.9	76.7
Never tell each other	1.8	0.2	0.8	1.5
Sometimes tell each other	6.2	4.7	3.2	9.6
Always tell each other	23.7	4.7	16.1	12.3

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **NEGOTIATING RISK**

The majority of men had not discussed the possibility of HIV transmission with their primary regular partner, although those who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner were more likely to have done so (Table 24). Mostly, those who had discussed HIV transmission with their partner had agreed that they should always use a condom with other men. Nonetheless, nearly half of those who considered themselves in a relationship, and over half of those with just one regular partner, had agreed not to permit sex with other men.

**Table 24: Negotiating agreements about HIV transmission and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Have discussed HIV transmission risk				
No	43.0	75.5	58.9	57.6
Yes	57.0	24.5	41.1	42.4
Type of agreement about condom use during sex outside				
No agreement	49.6	76.0	54.8	60.4
No sex outside permitted	27.3	1.7	23.5	1.1
Always use condoms outside	27.9	16.5	19.0	28.3
No condoms outside is permitted	5.3	5.6	2.7	10.3

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

Only a minority of men indicated that they had negotiated their current agreement with their regular partner in order to stop using condoms with each other (Table 25). Nonetheless, among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, one in five cited this as the reason for their agreement; this was far less common among men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with their partner. Men who had only one regular partner were also somewhat more likely than those with multiple regular partners to have negotiated their agreement with their primary regular partner in order to stop using condoms with each other. More often, the reasons for having negotiated their current agreement with their regular partner was in order to clarify whether they could have sex with other men. Men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, or who had only one regular partner, were far more likely to have negotiated their agreement because either or both partners did not want each other to have sex with other men.



**Table 25: Reasons for negotiating current agreement with regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
Reasons for agreements about sex with other men*	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
To stop using condoms with each other	21.5	7.6	20.9	9.6
He had sex with someone else	12.0	16.3	10.6	18.2
He wanted to have sex with other men	19.5	21.9	14.0	30.7
I had sex with someone else	13.6	17.7	9.8	23.6
I wanted to have sex with other men	24.7	24.9	16.5	38.5
I did not want him to have sex with other men	27.2	5.0	28.8	4.2
He did not want me to have sex with other men	30.0	3.7	29.7	6.2
One of us tested HIV-positive	2.7	1.3	1.8	2.8

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**\*Men could select more than one option.**

## CONDOM USE

While the majority of men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner reported ever engaging in condomless anal intercourse with him, this was only true of one in six men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship (Table 26). Men who had only one regular partner were somewhat more likely than those with multiple regular partners to report having ever engaged in condomless anal intercourse with their primary regular partner. About a third of men report having not used condoms with their regular partner from the outset, regardless of whether they considered themselves in a relationship, or the number of regular partners they had. However, about half the men who considered themselves in a relationship with their partner, and almost as many of those who had only one regular partner, had subsequently ceased using condoms with their regular partner at some stage. Nearly half the men who did not consider themselves in a relationship, and a third of those with multiple regular partners, have always used condoms with their primary regular partner. The majority of those who use condoms with their primary regular partner, report doing so on every occasion.

**Table 26: Condom use with regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
Has condomless sex with regular partner				
Never	42.5	81.7	58.6	65.1
Ever	57.5	18.3	41.4	34.9
Condom use with regular partner				
We have never used condoms	30.7	31.6	29.6	33.3
We used to use condoms but no longer	50.0	19.8	45.7	31.4
We did not use condoms before but we do now	3.4	5.1	3.8	4.3
We have always used condoms	15.9	43.5	20.9	31.3
Frequency of current condom use with regular partner				
Never	62.7	29.7	55.6	46.2
Sometimes	8.5	9.5	9.3	8.0
Often	3.6	6.3	4.2	5.0
Always	12.8	39.5	17.4	28.2
Not relevant – no anal sex	12.4	15.0	13.6	12.6

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary due to some men who did not respond to these items.**

When those who had stopped using condoms with their primary regular partner were asked why they had stopped, the majority of men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner reported that they had the same HIV status and trusted each other to keep their agreements (Table 27). Men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner had more diverse reasons for stopping condom use with him, but the most common reason given was that they had simply failed to use a condom on one occasion and had not returned to condom use ever since. The differences between men who had only one regular partner and those with multiple regular partners were similar, though not as stark.

**Table 27: Reasons for stopping condom use with regular partner and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
Why did you stop using condoms with each other?	N=591	N=107	N=500	N=198
Tested and had same HIV status	66.8	33.6	64.6	54.5
We wanted to feel closer	38.2	31.8	38.2	34.8
We trusted each other to keep our agreements	59.6	35.5	58.8	48.5
We dislike condoms	34.3	35.5	32.4	39.9
We had sex without one and never used them again	26.4	44.9	27.0	34.8

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner and who had stopped using condoms with their primary regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

## **SEX WITH OTHER MEN**

### **REGULAR PARTNER'S SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR**

Most men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner reported that their partner had ever had sex with other men (either other regular partners or casual partners), whereas only about half the men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner indicated that he had had sex with other men (Table 28). This also applied to men with multiple regular partners compared with those with just one partner. Among men who indicated that their regular partner had not had sex with other men, those who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, as well as those with just one regular partner, tended to be highly confident about knowledge of their regular partner's sexual behaviour. Among those who indicated that their regular partner did have sex with other men, those who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner, and those with just one regular partner, most often knew about their regular partner's sexual behaviour because he had told them, or because they were present at the time (either in the context of a 'three-way' or during group sex).

**Table 28: Regular partner's sexual contacts and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Has partner ever had sex with someone else outside the relationship				
No	54.0	18.1	57.8	16.1
Yes	46.0	81.9	42.2	83.9
Confidence partner has never had sex with someone else <sup>1</sup>				
Not at all confident	2.0	21.2	3.1	13.7
Slightly confident	6.1	17.2	6.3	15.7
Fairly confident	18.4	26.3	18.1	27.5
Very confident	36.1	20.2	34.8	28.4
Certain	37.5	15.2	37.7	14.7
How knows partner had sex with someone else <sup>2</sup>				
He told me	56.3	82.8	60.0	75.5
I was there	24.0	7.1	19.2	14.0
Other	19.6	10.0	20.7	10.6

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**1. Includes only those men who report partner has never had sex with other men.**

**2. Includes only those men who reported sex with men outside the relationship.**

The most common outcome of their regular partner having sex with someone else, among those who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner and among those with just one regular partner, was that they discussed it, and that nothing changed in their relationship (Table 29). Among men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, and among those with multiple regular partners, however, nothing changed after their partner had sex with someone else. Over a third of men who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner, and one in five of those with just one regular partner, reported that after their primary regular partner had sex with someone else, they then had a three-way involving the both of them

and the other man. After their regular partner had sex with someone else, some men revised their relationship agreement and about one in eight of those who considered themselves in a relationship decided to open up their relationship to permit sex with other men. A few men were still sorting through the consequences of learning that their regular partner had had sex with someone else, but very few indicated that they had sought counseling.

**Table 29: Consequences of regular partner’s sexual contacts and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
What happened after partner had sex with someone else <sup>1,2</sup>				
We had a threesome	29.2	11.9	19.6	22.9
I had sex with someone else	11.0	2.2	6.5	7.4
We sought counselling	2.5	0.0	2.7	0.2
Nothing changed	37.5	74.9	42.9	64.7
We discussed it	49.6	29.2	44.2	37.0
Used it to spice up our sex life	26.7	13.0	18.3	22.4
We revised our agreement	9.2	0.9	7.2	3.9
We opened up our relationship	12.5	2.8	8.4	7.8
We worked it out	26.5	1.7	21.9	9.4
Still working it out	9.2	1.1	7.4	3.9

**Note:** Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.

**1.** Includes only those men who reported sex with men outside the relationship.

**2.** Men could select more than one option.

## OWN SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Most men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner reported having ever had sex with other men (either other regular partners or casual partners), whereas only about half the men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner had had sex with other men (Table 30). This also applied to

men with multiple regular partners compared with those with just one partner. Among men who indicated that they did have sex with other men, most indicated that their regular partner knew about their sexual behaviour with other men, largely regardless of whether they considered themselves to be in a relationship with their partner or of how many regular partners they had. Mainly, their regular partners knew about their sex with other men because they had told their partner, or because their regular partner was there at the time (either in the context of a ‘three-way’ or during group sex).

**Table 30: Sex with other men and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
Has participant ever had sex with someone else outside the relationship				
No	41.5	12.7	49.2	3.2
Yes	58.5	87.3	50.8	96.8
Does partner know participant had sex with someone else outside the relationship <sup>1</sup>				
No	26.1	14.3	27.6	15.4
Yes	73.9	85.7	72.4	84.6
How partner knows he had sex with someone else <sup>1</sup>				
I told him	65.7	84.8	67.6	79.2
He was there	24.2	9.4	24.1	12.7
Other	10.1	5.8	8.3	8.1

**Note:** Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.

**1.** Includes only those men who reported sex with men outside the relationship.

The most common outcome of having had sex with someone else, among those who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner and among those with just one regular partner, was that they discussed it, and that nothing changed in their relationship (Table 31). Among men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, and among those with multiple regular partners, however,



nothing changed after they had sex with someone else. Over a third of men who considered themselves in a relationship with their regular partner, and over a quarter of those with just one regular partner, reported that after they had sex with someone else, they and their regular partner then had a three-way involving the both of them and the other man. After having had sex with someone else, some men revised their relationship agreement and about one in seven of those who considered themselves in a relationship decided to open up their relationship to permit sex with other men. A few men were still sorting through the consequences of having had sex with someone else, but very few indicated that they had sought counseling.

**Table 31: Sex with other men and partnership style.**

%	In a relationship	Not in a relationship	One regular partner	Multiple partners
	N=1498	N=1156	N=1784	N=1053
What happened after participant had sex with someone else <sup>1,2</sup>				
We had a threesome	36.9	16.8	29.8	26.5
Partner had sex with someone else	8.9	1.7	6.5	5.0
We sought counselling	1.9	0.0	2.2	0.2
Nothing changed	36.9	74.7	41.8	63.0
We discussed it	51.5	30.7	48.1	37.8
Used it to spice up our sex life	29.5	15.4	20.7	25.2
We revised our agreement	11.2	0.5	9.6	3.9
We opened up our relationship	15.5	4.0	9.9	10.8
We worked it out	25.4	4.0	22.1	11.0
Still working it out	7.2	1.7	5.3	4.3

**Note: Only includes men who had at least one regular partner. Actual numbers vary slightly due to a small number of men who did not respond to these items.**

**1. Includes only those men who reported sex with men outside the relationship.**

**2. Men could select more than one option.**

## **DISCUSSION**

The men in this sample were broadly similar to those in other samples of Australian gay and bisexual men. However, the proportion of men reporting multiple regular partners, and particularly, the proportion reporting that they had one or more fuckbuddies, was considerably higher than has often been found previously.

### **PARTNERSHIP PATTERNS**

In other studies where questions about regular partners (other than a 'main' partner or 'boyfriend') have been limited, the proportion with multiple regular partners has usually appeared to be below ten percent. The HIV Seroconversion Study, though, has found a larger proportion of men newly diagnosed with HIV reporting that the person they believed to have infected them was more often a fuckbuddy, or a friend, rather than an actual 'boyfriend'. In response to this information, some more recent studies have specifically included questions to better identify these other, non-primary, partners. In Monopoly, we were able to investigate this issue in far more detail than has been possible in the past, and we have thereby found that at least a third of men may have regular partners of this type. We also found that about a quarter of men had more than one regular partner. Only about half of the men's regular partners - usually referred to only as 'regular partners' in previous research - may actually be appropriately categorised as boyfriends: Half of those with a regular partner indicated that they considered themselves as being 'in a relationship' with that partner.

Considering oneself as being in a relationship with a regular partner was associated with having just one regular partner, but one was by no means a consequence of the other. Less than two thirds of those with just one regular partner described themselves as being in a relationship with that partner. Those who did not consider themselves in a relationship had been with their primary regular partner for a shorter duration than those who considered themselves in a relationship. This suggests that some men may have been in the early stages of their partnership and did not feel quite ready to commit to the concept of a relationship, especially as length of time made no difference to how many regular partners they had. Much depends on how these men interpreted the term 'partner'. In nominating a primary regular partner – an artefact of the questionnaire – they indicate that one sexual

partner is of greater importance than others, but these partnerships are undoubtedly highly varied.

### **THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARTNERS**

Among men who had multiple regular partners, the majority of their primary partners knew about the other partners, and the majority of those other regular partners knew about their primary partners. However, these other, secondary, partners were less likely to know about each other (if there was more than one of them). About a quarter to a third of the men's primary regular partners also had sex with the men's other regular partners, but where there was more than one of these other, secondary, regular partners, only about one in eight had sex with each other. The likelihood of men's regular partners (primary or secondary) having sex with each other, was greater among those who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner. They more commonly had sex with each other as part of a three-way.

While about two thirds of those who considered themselves in a relationship lived with their primary regular partner, this was true for only a few of those who did not consider themselves in a relationship. Men's reported frequency of sex with their primary regular partner probably also reflects this. Whereas almost half of those who considered themselves in a relationship had sex with their primary regular partner at least weekly, the majority of those who were not 'in a relationship' with their partner only had sex with him on a monthly basis.

The use of the term 'boyfriend' or 'partner' was far more common, though far from universal, among men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, and to a lesser extent, among men with just one regular partner. However, among men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, by far the most common term used to describe that partner was 'fuckbuddy'. Also, men who considered themselves as being in a relationship were far more likely to describe their partnership with their primary regular partner in terms of romance and commitment, while those who felt they were not in a relationship described it less emotionally, using terms that emphasised its specifically physical and sexual aspects. Indeed, those who did not consider themselves in a relationship were as satisfied sexually with their primary regular partner as were those in a relationship, but feelings of love and trust, and indeed,

satisfaction in general, were far more pronounced among men who considered themselves in a relationship. These patterns were similar for men with just one regular partner compared with men with multiple partners.

### **CONFLICT & SUPPORT**

While only a minority of men overall reported more than incidental conflict with their primary regular partner, this was more common among those who considered themselves in a relationship with him than among those who did not consider themselves in a relationship. On the other hand, most of those in a relationship also reported feeling supported by their primary regular partner. Conflict, per se, is not always unproductive, but without strong emotional investment, conflict may not always be inevitable. So, it is perhaps not surprising that those with a stronger emotional commitment to their partner would also experience more conflict. For the most part, the sources of the conflict reported by men who considered themselves in a relationship with their partner were issues that tend to arise in domestic situations, such as housework and finances. Mostly, it was only men who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner who had joint financial arrangements with that partner. Nonetheless, only a minority of men in relationships reported these kinds of financial arrangements.

Issues related to the nature of their partnership were far less commonly a source of tension, and there was little difference in this regard between those who considered themselves in a relationship and those who did not. Being treated badly was most often cited as a potential reason for a possible break-up. Sexual satisfaction tended not to be as commonly cited, but was a more common reason for a potential break-up with partners when they did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with him.

Only a few men reported violence or feeling unsafe with their regular partners. Nonetheless, one in twenty men in relationships had experienced some physical altercation in the previous twelve months.

### **OPENNESS ABOUT PARTNERSHIPS**

Mostly, the men who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner appeared to be fairly open about their partnership, with most of their close friends and family being aware of this partner. Nonetheless, about one in five of these men

had not informed their immediate family or heterosexual friends about him. Among men who did not consider themselves in a relationship, the majority were far less open with friends and family about this partnership. Despite being fairly open about their primary regular partners, especially among those who considered themselves in a relationship with him, overall, few men had experienced any public partnership ceremony, and only a minority expressed a clear interest in marrying their primary regular partner. Even among those who considered themselves in a relationship, only a third indicated that they would marry their partner if that option was available to them.

### **AGE & PARTNERSHIP PATTERNS**

Although younger men were less likely to describe themselves as being in a relationship with their regular partner, they were more likely to have just one such partner. Those who considered themselves to be in a relationship also tended to be younger overall *at the time when they met* their primary regular partner. It may be that younger gay and bisexual men may be less aware of the possibilities of non-monogamous partnerships, or of alternatives to traditional romantically committed relationships. For many, naming it as a 'relationship' may imply monogamy and other relationship conventions that conflict with the opportunities of gay life (Duncan et al, 2015). As gay and bisexual men age, they may simply find it easier to conceive of the idea of multiple partnerships and of open (non-monogamous) relationships. Generational change is often cited as a possible explanation for these sorts of differences, as homosexuality becomes more socially accepted and gay and bisexual men are less likely to socialise within predominantly gay community contexts. This may, of course, explain some of what is observed here, but is not a sufficient explanation in itself. The same broad age differences in terms of younger men being more disposed toward monogamy have been observed throughout the entire period of data collection for the GCPS (Hull et al, 2015), and has been observed in most other Australian studies of gay and bisexual men where these data have been available since the mid-1980s. Regardless of broader social changes in the acceptance of homosexuality, it is likely that younger gay and bisexual men still require time to conceive of alternative models of relationships between men.

## **GAY COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS & PARTNERSHIP PATTERNS**

Men who identified as gay, and who had stronger social connections to other gay men, were more likely to indicate that they considered themselves in a relationship, although they differed little in terms of the number of regular partners. Acknowledging a relationship with another man is, of course, a fairly significant statement about one's sexuality and it is therefore not surprising that they might resist the label of a 'relationship', even if their behaviour appears otherwise. Gay identification and social connectedness were also associated with likelihood of having non-monogamous agreements, suggesting that among men with less experience of gay community, monogamy acted as a marker of what constitutes a valid relationship.

## **MEETING REGULAR PARTNERS**

The majority of men, including those who considered themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner, had met him online. In separate analysis, we found that this applied to all age groups, and appears to have become more common over time: Men who had first met their partners over a decade ago were more likely to have met their partner at gay venues and event, whereas those who had met him more recently were far more likely to have done so through gay cruising sites and mobile apps (Prestage et al, 2015). These findings were only partially offset by the recruitment method in this study: For the most part, meeting partners of all types (whether boyfriends, fuckbuddies, or casual sex partners) through online methods has become somewhat ubiquitous, at least for a large proportion of gay and bisexual men.

## **MONOGAMOUS & OPEN PARTNERSHIPS**

Whereas most previous research has found that about half of gay men's relationships were described as monogamous, in Monopoly that proportion is far less clear. It appears that far fewer than half the men with a regular partner were in fact monogamous, but in Monopoly we were able to identify different categories of regular partner. It may be that the more appropriate comparison with previous research is of those in Monopoly who described themselves as being 'in a relationship' rather than those with regular partners in general. Among those men, it was indeed the case that about half reported being monogamous.

When it came to actually discussing with their primary regular partner the nature of their partnership, and the possibility of sex with other men, slightly less than half had done this, regardless of how many regular partners they had. However, the majority of men who considered themselves in a relationship had discussed this with their primary regular partner. Nonetheless, well over a third of even these men had not discussed this issue with their partner. As was noted above, the majority of men with regular partners (even among those with just one regular partner) had a non-monogamous arrangement with their primary regular partner. Among men who considered themselves in a relationship, nearly half had a monogamous arrangement with their primary regular partner. For the most part, regardless of whether they considered themselves in a relationship, and regardless of partner number, when they had agreed to permit sex with other men, mostly they had permitted this to occur both together and separately. They also tended to agree that they should tell each other about their sex with other men.

Mostly, the men with multiple regular partners, and the men who did not consider themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner, reported that both themselves and their partner had sex with other men. However, among men who considered themselves to be in a relationship, and men who had just one regular partner, only about half reported sex with other men. Mostly, they tended to know about each other's sexual behaviour with other men because they had discussed it. Among men who reported that their primary regular partner had *not* had sex with other men, those who considered themselves in a relationship tended to be very confident that this was the case, whereas those who were not 'in a relationship' were somewhat less confident. Presumably, this reflects the greater levels of trust, and communication, among men in relationships. The most common consequence of men (or their primary regular partners) having sex with other men was that little changed. While some men did revise their agreements as a result, very few had not been able to resolve it. About a third of the men in relationships reported that they had a three-way with their primary regular partner and another man.

#### **HIV, RISK BEHAVIOUR & PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**

Men's discussions, and agreements, with their primary regular partner about sex with other men did not necessarily always canvass the issue of the risk of HIV transmission. Less than half the men indicated they had discussed HIV risk with their primary regular

partner, regardless of the number of regular partners, but a majority of men who considered themselves in a relationship had discussed this issue with their partner. Nonetheless, two in five of even these men had not discussed HIV risk with their primary regular partner. Where these issues had been discussed, they had overwhelmingly agreed to always use condoms with other men. In general, men's motivation for negotiating their agreements with their primary regular partner was not especially due to HIV risk or even a desire not to use condoms with their partner, but about whether to permit or forbid sex with other men. Monogamy, or the lack of it, appeared to be a far more important consideration in negotiating agreements than was the prospect of HIV risk reduction.

A minority of men reported engaging in condomless anal intercourse with their primary regular partner, although this was actually a majority of those who considered themselves in a relationship with him. About a third of men reported having never used condoms with their primary regular partner (i.e. from the outset), regardless of whether they were in a relationship with him, and regardless of how many other regular partners they had. About half of those who considered themselves in a relationship with their primary regular partner have, at some time (after they first met) not used condoms with him. For the most part, they did so because they trusted their partner and they had informed each other of their HIV status. Often, men who did not consider themselves to be in a relationship with their primary regular partner had stopped using condoms because they had not used a condom on one occasion and so they continued not using condoms thereafter. The men in relationships tended to be more considered in their decision, whereas those who did not consider themselves in a relationship appeared to just respond to events.

The majority of men were aware of the HIV status of their primary regular partner, especially those who considered themselves in a relationship with him. For the most part they knew his HIV status because their partner had told them, and most were very confident of this knowledge, again, particularly among men who considered themselves in a relationship. Few men reported that their partner was HIV-positive. The majority of those whose partner was HIV-positive reported that he had been HIV-positive when they first met, but about a third had been diagnosed since then. Most of the HIV-positive partners were on treatment and had undetectable viral load.



## **PEER NETWORKS & ATTITUDES TO PARTNERSHIPS**

Overall, men in Monopoly, regardless of whether they had a regular partner or not, and regardless of how many regular partners they had, tended to have friends whose partnership patterns were similar to their own. Men in relationships had more friends that were in relationships. Men with multiple regular partners, and men with regular partners with whom they did not consider themselves in a relationship, tended to have more friends with less committed, shorter-term partnerships. Also, about a third of men without any regular partners report having mostly friends who are not in relationships.

Most men seemed to understand and see merit in 'fuckbuddy' arrangements, especially those who had such arrangements with a regular partner already. Indeed, for the most part, men's attitudes to different kinds of partnerships tended to reflect their own partnerships, including whether they were monogamous or not. In general, though, men seemed to commonly expect at least some degree of monogamy while they are 'dating' or at the outset of establishing a 'relationship'. Nonetheless, men who currently did not have any regular partners, and were therefore not in a relationship themselves, appeared to have the most stringent expectations regarding sex with other men, both for themselves and for any prospective partners. This was also reflected in what they believed were the attitudes of the gay men they knew as well, with nearly half of them stating that their friends mostly believe that gay men's relationships should be monogamous.

## **CONCLUSION**

The overall impression of gay and bisexual men's partnerships that emerges from these data suggests that they are far more complex than has been described, or represented, previously. The current use of a simple binary that counterposes 'regular' against 'casual' partners conceals this complexity. Moreover, this is even more problematic when this binary is simplistically represented as 'regular=safe' and 'casual=risky'.

Gay and bisexual men appear to develop multiple ways of experiencing partnerships, and they consequently understand, and develop, their relationships in diverse ways. While many men may start out with quite traditional notions of a 'relationship', apparently based largely on heterosexual models, over time their understandings of what they require for a successful relationship, or for partnerships more broadly, often undergoes significant

change. Most importantly perhaps, the assumption that monogamy is the foundation to a successful relationship is far from universal among gay and bisexual men, and may in fact be a minority opinion. Also, many of the other fundamentals that are often presumed to be necessary prerequisites to a 'successful' relationship (such as financial interdependence, marriage or other public forms of recognition, even shared living arrangements), are not necessarily uniformly adopted by all gay and bisexual men in establishing their relationships.

Sexual partnerships among gay and bisexual men are highly diverse, ranging from completely open and irregular to completely monogamous and routine, with multiple variations in between. What differentiates these various forms of partnership from what is understood by the term 'relationship', or perhaps more correctly, being 'in a relationship' appears to be a level of emotional and personal commitment to sharing significant aspects of one's life with each other. While for many men, monogamy is a taken-for-granted aspect of this, it is not necessarily so for all gay and bisexual men. If anything, monogamy can be viewed as just one of many other conditions that some men negotiate but is perhaps no more significant than many others, and, for most, appears to be less significant than being able to entrust each other with a mutual, emotional commitment into the future.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

### Implications

- The majority of men in the sample that had sex outside of their partnership told their partners about this. This type of communication allows partners to discuss their sexual lives and, ultimately, their health. 'Negotiated safety' agreements have been declining in prevalence among gay and bisexual men. New tools could be developed to help gay and bisexual men to use this existing communication between (some) regular partners, and to encourage it in others, to establish 'negotiated safety'-style arrangements with all regular partners.
- These findings indicate that when clinicians and health promotion professionals engage with gay and bisexual men about their 'relationships' they need to be aware of the different meanings that terms such as 'partner', 'regular partner', 'boyfriend', 'fuckbuddy', 'casual partner', and 'in a relationship' carry.
- The diversity of partnership configurations observed in this sample indicates the complexity of gay and bisexual men's sexual behaviour. Risk reduction strategies that are applicable to a range of partner types/scenarios or that act at the level of the individual (such as PrEP) may be most effective in this population.
- The men in this sample are meeting their intimacy needs and sexual needs often from a range of different types of partners. When seeking support from health and other services, men may not disclose this complexity. Service-providers, including clinicians, should be aware of this possible complexity as should health communication messaging targeting this population.
- Most gay and bisexual men have at least one type of partner. These partnerships can last hours or lifetimes, show tremendous adaptability and, overall, a great deal of openness.

#### Future research issues:

- **Categorisation of partner type:** A simple binary distinction between casual and regular (or steady) partners is insufficient to account for the complexity of gay men's partnerships. While there appears to be a continuum between completely anonymous, previously unknown, partners and committed 'boyfriend'-type partners of longstanding, this may not always be helpful for meaningful analysis. Nonetheless, there are at least three major categories of sex partner, that we have tended to characterise as 'boyfriends', 'fuckbuddies', and 'casual partners', the last two of which appear to account for the bulk of new HIV infections among gay and bisexual men in Australia. The Monopoly data indicate that while a majority of gay and bisexual men report having a 'regular partner', a very substantial proportion of these, probably more than half, may be 'fuckbuddy'-style arrangements rather than the 'boyfriend'-style 'relationships' that is often implied by the use of the term 'regular partner'. And, perhaps even more importantly, there are very clear and significant differences both in behaviour and in expectations between these two different types of partner categories. More nuanced use of partnership categories, and clearer definitions of what is intended by these categories, is warranted.
- **Age and relationships:** Young gay men appear to be more inclined to monogamous, short-term partnerships. Commonly, this is described as 'serial monogamy', although there may be greater complexity and diversity here as well. There is less communication in general, and particularly less communication about HIV and risk, in these sorts of partnerships. Whether this is a product of younger age, or reflects a broader issue about shorter-term relationships where expectations about monogamy may often be more assumed than negotiated, should be considered.

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