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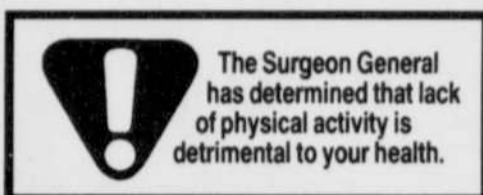
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national news

The whole truth and nothing but

Contradictory prevention messages may have led gay and bisexual men to overestimate the risk of HIV transmission during oral sex, according to a study published in the September issue of the quarterly *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*.

The study, "Oral Sex Anxiety, Oral Sex Behavior, and HIV Risk Perceptions Among Gay and Bisexual Men," found that many men have heightened anxiety about oral sex despite the low number of documented cases of HIV transmission which are attributable to oral sex.

Researchers found that nearly one-third of 348 gay and bisexual men who completed an anonymous survey at a gay pride festival in Atlanta were "oral-sex anxious," and that significantly more "oral-sex anxious" men use condoms during oral sex than do men deemed "non-anxious."

According to the report, the men's attitudes about oral sex did not correlate with their self-identified orientation, relationship status, HIV status or how often they get tested for HIV.

In other areas of sexuality, all of the men reported similar choices. Fifty percent of the "non-anxious" men said they had engaged in unprotected anal sex within the previous six months, while 49 percent of the "anxious" men also reported engaging in anal sex without a condom during the same time period.

To address the apparent confusion surrounding oral sex and to improve the overall sexual health of gay men, the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association in 1996 began advocating the creation of HIV-prevention messages that classify oral sex as a low-risk behavior that is significantly safer than anal sex.

Ben Schatz

"This study lends credence to the hope that if we can help gay men understand the relative risk levels of different sexual activities they will make choices that are more likely to keep them healthy," GLMA Executive Director Ben Schatz said in a news release. "Informing gay men that oral sex is low-risk allows them to enhance their sexual intimacy, and it may encourage them to take fewer risks with other sexual behaviors, such as anal sex."

No sense in being counted on census?

Gay and lesbian rights activists are not going to push for recognition of sexual orientation in the U.S. Census Bureau's count in 2000, the *Washington Blade* reports.

Activists fear the numbers would be inaccurate since privacy concerns and the lack of discrimination protections would likely inhibit sexual minorities from honestly answering census questions about their orientation.

Winnie Stachelberg, political director of the Human Rights Campaign, told the *Blade*, "The numbers would be far lower than they actually are [because] the number of gay people who would answer such a question honestly on a government form would be lower. And our enemies would use [the low count] against us."

Sylvia Peregrino, spokeswoman for the National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization, pointed out that anti-gay groups could use inaccurate census data to suggest that sexual minorities



only exist in certain urban communities.

"People in places like Kansas and Texas would be ignored," she said.

Keith Boykin, executive director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum said, "Most people who are gay or lesbian probably don't live the types of open lives that many activists do. I don't believe most would want to say they're gay to anybody."

Despite that, HRC and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force are encouraging gay and lesbian couples to answer honestly if questioned about the number of unmarried partners living in the same household (both the Census 2000 form and the one used in 1990 contain such a question).

"It's terribly important that gays and lesbians answer the question openly and honestly," Stachelberg said. "Until we can be married partners, we will have to continue answering questions this way."

Ken Sherrill, chair of the political science department at Hunter College, however, contends the people most likely to answer such a question will have high incomes and education levels.

Sherrill, who is gay, warns, "The question will produce biased data that will be used by those people who oppose protecting our rights to demonstrate that we are wealthy and well-educated and don't need any protection."

Democratic brass will support lesbian candidates

At an Oct. 29 meeting between House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt and representatives of several national sexual minority advocacy groups, Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund Executive Director Brian Bond urged the congressman to ensure that qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates are given equal consideration by Democratic Party leaders.

According to a Victory Fund news release, Gephardt arranged the meeting in order to enhance the relationship between the gay and lesbian community, the Democratic Party and seated politicians. He told those gathered he was encouraged by the number of sexual minority candidates running for the House this cycle, and gave his assurance that gay and lesbian candidates would be treated fairly.

The Victory Fund is currently working with three openly lesbian congressional candidates: Wisconsin state Rep. Tammy Baldwin, who is already a front-runner in the Democratic primary for that state's open 2nd District seat; San Diego City Councilmember Chris Kehoe, who will be challenging two-term incumbent Republican Brian Bilbray in California's 49th District; and retired Army Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer, who is researching a run against Republican Jack

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