

# Steady Partnerships Among Gay Men in Germany: Findings from the National Gay Press Survey

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Since 1987 a national survey of gay men has been conducted in Germany, with a focus on HIV/AIDS and other lifestyle issues. The survey was conducted seven times between 1987 and 2003. The questionnaire is distributed through gay magazines. In 2003 the questionnaire could also be completed online; banner links to the project server were placed on leading German language web sites for gay men.

The survey provides the only source of national data concerning steady partnerships among gay men in Germany. Over the years, the patterns related to partnership have remained stable. Here data from the last survey in 2003 (n = 4,750) will be presented. At the time of the survey, approximately half of the men (49.5%) were in steady partnerships. About half of the men in steady partnerships (53.5%) reported living monogamously, the other half in "open" relationships (46.5%).

The mean age of the respondents was 30.5 (median: 33) (Tables 1 and 2). Two-thirds (67%) were self-identified as gay, one-fifth (19%) as homosexual and 8% as bisexual (Table 3).

Two-thirds of the respondents expressed a positive attitude toward domestic partnerships; a total of 16% would enter a domestic partnership with their current partner and 44% would not rule out a domestic partnership at some point in the future. In contrast, one-fourth of the men sampled (27%) responded that they would not likely enter a partnership of this kind; 9% strictly reject a domestic partnership for themselves. A total of 6.2% of men in steady relationships had legally registered their partnership (3.1% of the entire sample). The registering of same sex partnerships has been possible under German law since 2001 (Table 4). Older men are somewhat more likely to be in a domestic partnership. One percent of the men under 30 years of age and 5% of the men 30 years or older have registered their partnerships (Table 5).

Fifty-eight percent of the men under 30, 50% of the men 30-44, and 42% of those over 44 would prefer to be in a steady relationship in which they live with their partner. The desire to have a live-in partner decreases, however, with age. Whereas 21% of the men under 30 would prefer having their own residence ("living apart together"), this is the case for 29% of the men over 44. Not only the desire to live together, but also to be in a steady relationship decreases with age, three percent of those under 30 report not wanting a steady partner as compared to 8% of the men over 44 (Table 6). Although the ideal of romantic love is most pronounced in the group of men under 30, there are many men over 44 for whom this is also important - a finding which has been confirmed in all surveys since 1993.

The lifestyles of gay men attest, however, to a variety of creative ways of putting the romantic ideal into practice. There is a notable decrease in monogamy, the longer the relationship continues. A total of 80% of the relationships with a duration of six months or less are monogamous, as compared to 47% of the relationships lasting 2-4 years and 28% of relationships four years or longer (Table 7). Nearly half (48%) of all reported relationships lasted longer than two years. The large percentage of "open" relationships indicates that although dependability and emotional faithfulness are important, sexual contacts to other

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men are not necessarily seen as a violation of the partnership. Contrary to traditional sexual norms, "extramarital" sex seems to be a positive rather than a negative factor in long-term gay relationships.

The longer the relationship, the more likely are the partners to be living together. Two-thirds of the men in relationships with a duration of four years or longer were living with their partners. This was the case for half of the men (46%) who had been with their partners 2-4 years. For the men whose partnerships had lasted for less than six months, only 9% were living with their partners (Table 8). All totalled 41% of the men in steady partnerships were living with their partners. This implies that estimates of same-sex relationships based on census data in Germany would lead to an underestimate of the total number. Using data from the 1999 census Eggen (2002, pp. 225-227) estimated the total number of same-sex households as ranging from 41,400-250,000 (including both gays and lesbians). Based on a conservative estimate of one million homosexual men in Germany (3.2% of men over 19 years old) and assuming that 40% of these men are in a steady partnership, we would arrive at a total of 400,000 men or 200,000 steady partnerships.

Non-Germans were more likely to be in a domestic partnership. This is presumably due to the fact that entering a domestic partnership with a German national results in obtaining a permanent residency status. Less than 5% of the men surveyed in 2003 were not German nationals. These men can be divided into two groups. In the first group are men from countries in which the situation of gay men is comparable to that in Germany (Western European countries, US, Canada). In the second group are men from countries in which homosexuality is not lived as openly as in Germany (Middle Eastern countries and Latin America) (Table 9). A higher percentage of the men in the latter group (13%) were in a domestic partnership as compared with the Europeans and the North Americans (6%). As mentioned above, 3% of the German nationals were in a relationship of this sort. Entering a domestic partnership may also express a desire for a greater level of social integration in Germany on the part of non-nationals. This is evident in the group composed of Europeans and North Americans; the Europeans come predominantly from EU countries and therefore do not require a residency permit in Germany and North Americans are more likely to be granted such a permit than are men from the Middle East or Latin America.

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**Table 1: Age By Survey Year (in percent)**

Age Group	Survey Year					online	magazine
	1991	1993	1996	1999	2003		
< 30	46	45	33	26	42	62	20
30 - 44	40	43	51	57	43	29	57
> 44	13	11	16	17	15	9	23
no response	1	1	-	-	-	-	-

**Table 2: Mean and Median Age By Survey Year**

	Survey Year					online	magazine
	1991	1993	1996	1999	2003		
Mean	32.7	32.6	34.9	36.1	33.5	29.2	38.2
Median	30	30	33	34	33	26	37
n	3,285	2,868	3,048	2,995	4,700	2,442	2,258

**Table 3: Self-Identified Sexual Orientation (in percent)**

Orientation	2003 online	2003 magazine	2003 total	1999
homosexual	20.3	18.5	19.4	17.4
gay	62.7	72.6	67.4	73.9
bisexual	11.2	4.2	7.9	3.9
heterosexual	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2
homophile	0.1	0.6	0.3	0.6
pedophile	5.5	0.5	3.1	0.4
reject such categories	0	3.4	1.6	3.5
n	2,483	2,215	4,698	2,995

**Table 4: Domestic Partnership**  
**Would you consider entering a domestic partnership?**

	2003		1999
already in a domestic partnership	147	3 %	--
perhaps with current partner	780	16 %	22 %
maybe, if the situation is right	2.052	44 %	49 %
probably not	1,301	27 %	23 %
by no means	444	9 %	6 %
no response	26	1 %	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,750</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>

More than two thirds of the German respondents have a positive attitude towards domestic partnerships.

**Table 5: Domestic Partnership by Age (in percent)**

Age groups	already in domestic partnership	perhaps with a current partner	maybe	probably not	by no means	no response	Total
14 - 29	1	16	50	26	7	0.5	n=1976 (42%)
30 - 44	5	18	41	28	8	0.4	n=2000 (42%)
45 - 83	5	12	32	33	17	1	n=724 (15%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>n</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>2052</b>	<b>1301</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4750</b>

Older men are somewhat more likely to be in a domestic partnership.

**Table 6: Partnership Orientation by Age (in percent)**  
**What would be your preferred lifestyle?**

Age groups	living together	living apart	no partner different sex partners	undecided	no partner	no response	Total
14 - 29	58	21	3	14	3	1	n=1976 (42%)
30 - 44	50	20	5	18	4	2	n=2000 (42%)
45 - 83	42	29	6	12	8	3	n=724 (15%)
Total	52	22	5	16	4	2	100
n	2484	1034	212	735	190	95	4750

The desire to be in a relationship decreases with age.

**Table 7: Partnership Status and Duration of Partnership (in percent)**

Partnership	< 6 months	6 - 12 months	13 - 24 months	25 - 48 months	> 48 months
mono-gamous	80	69	63	47	28
not mono-gamous	20	31	37	53	72
Total	22	12	16	16	32
n	520	291	382	382	760

There is a notable decrease in monogamy the longer the relationship continues.

**Table 8: Living Arrangements and Duration of Partnerships (in percent)**

Living Arrangements	no partner	< 6 months	6 - 12 months	13 - 24 months	25 - 48 months	> 48 months	Total
alone	63	48	47	43	41	27	51 (n=2424)
with male partner	--	9	18	33	46	67	19 (n=923)
with female p./wife	5	3	1	2	1	1	3 (n=152)
with friends (homo and hetero)	10	12	8	8	4	3	6 (n=260)
with parents/relatives	22	29	25	13	7	1	18 (n=837)
Total n	50 2379	11 520	6 292	8 382	8 384	16 762	100 4719

There is a greater probability of living together when the relationship lasts longer.

**Table 9: Domestic Partnership by Countries of Origin (in percent)**

Countries of origin	already in domestic partnership	perhaps with a current partner	maybe	probably not	by no means	no response	Total
Germany	3	17	44	28	9	0.5	n=4518 (95%)
Western Europe* USA / Can.	6	15	40	26	11	2	n=104 (2.2%)
Other countries**	13	13	37	21	13	2	n=99 (2.1%)
Total	3	16	43	27	9	0.5	100
n	147	782	2052	1301	444	26	4750

\* Western Europe = Austria, France, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK

\*\* Other countries = Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Eastern Europe, Near East, Latin America Countries were grouped according to social attitudes towards gay men.

Non-Germans are more likely to be in a domestic partnership. This is likely due to the fact that entering a domestic partnership with a German national results in obtaining a permanent residency status. It may also express a desire for a greater level of social integration in Germany.

