

project

STRIDE

PROJECT STRIDE

FALL 2004

We appreciate your generosity in sharing your life experiences with us. As the summer comes to a close and the fall begins, we would like to send greetings and thanks to all who have shared their stories with us. We hope you enjoy this newsletter, as it provides you with an update on Project STRIDE, a little bit more about the study, and also shares some of the preliminary information we've found.

What is the study about?

Project STRIDE is a public health study looking at stress, identity and mental health in the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) communities of New York City. This project is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, which is part of the National Institutes of Health. We are conducting the study at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. The lead researcher of the study is Dr. Ian Meyer, an Associate Professor with extensive experience in minority and LGB health research.

In Project STRIDE we look at how social

stressors affect health and wellbeing and on how individuals and groups cope with these stressors, focusing on minority populations. The study also explores how identities related to sexual orientation, ethnoracial identity, and gender affect health. For example, whether the strength of one's closeness to a community can increase or decrease the negative effect of stress. Our goal is to interview 528 individuals by February 2005, then conduct follow up interviews with these persons one year after the first. Participants are compensated for both interviews.

What have we done so far?

Between the beginning of Project STRIDE (February 2004) and July 2004 we have interviewed 221 people. Including yourself, this diverse group of people, has been very generous in sharing their stories and life experiences. In selecting participants for the study we aim to represent several groups of people so that we can examine differences among groups. Specifically, we recruit equal numbers of women and men, Blacks, Latinos and Whites, LGB and straight, and individuals in age groups 18 - 30 and 31 - 59.

People sometimes wonder why we don't include all those who want to participate in the study. For instance, why not include those who are younger than 18, people of other ethnoracial backgrounds, or transgender persons? These people can bring very important and interesting issues to study, however, one project cannot study everything that is interesting and important to everyone. The reasoning

behind this is that research has to define very clear study questions and the research methods must relate to these questions. There must also be a large enough number of people within each group to allow for the required statistical analyses to be meaningful.

This limits what can be done in any study, including ours. Therefore, researchers select certain areas to be studied and focus on examining those issues carefully. In a sense, this is similar to taking a snapshot of Times Square: One has to select the focus of the photograph and try to convey its story well. The photo is good as long as it accurately tells a story, even if it doesn't show us everything that was interesting at the time it was taken. Researchers define groups that can represent some of the diversity of issues that the study addresses, and using this information, try to give the clearest answers to the research questions.

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Charts of interest:

- 1: Ethnoracial identity of STRIDE participants, by gender
- 2: Sexual orientation of STRIDE participants
- 3: Age at which participants realized they were LGB, and age they first told a family member about it
- 4: Participants out to all, by ethnoracial identity
- 5: Participants out to none, by ethnoracial identity



Who participates?

As of this past July, we've interviewed 140 (63%) men and 81 (37%) women. 66 of the men and 49 of the women were between the ages of 18–30 years old, and the others were 31–59 years old. By the time we finish all the interviews we will have equal numbers of men and women. We are now interviewing more women to balance out the numbers. Chart 1 gives you a visual as to where we are as far as the ethnoracial background of the participants, divided up by gender.

All of the 221 participants so far identified within the LGB community. Chart 2 represents the ways in which our participants have identified their sexual orientation. In order to understand trends in straight communities, we are also interviewing respondents

who identify as heterosexual, but we have just begun this stage of the study.

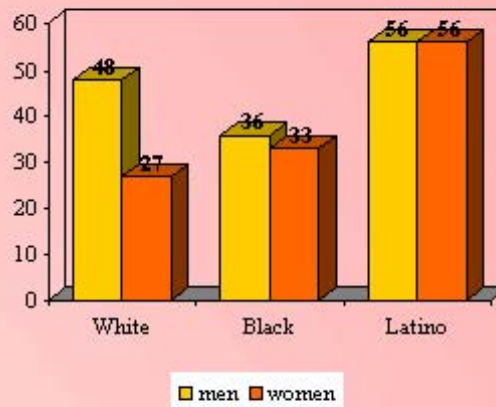


Chart 1: Ethnoracial identity of STRIDE participants, by gender

As one of the recruitment requirements, all Project STRIDE participants have lived in New York City for a minimum of two years. About half (49%) have lived here their entire life (108 persons), with 113 people moving here as adults. 176 (80%) of the participants were born here in the United States; the rest from many other nations, including Cuba, Greece, Japan, the Dominican Republic, England, Lebanon, and Colombia, to name a few. We also asked participants about the countries connected with their ethnic background: the majority of participants said the United States followed by Puerto Rico.

Where we met you (and other participants)

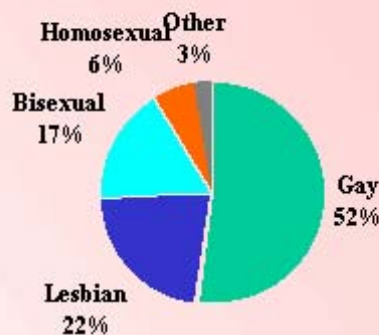


Chart 2: Sexual orientation of STRIDE participants

We take great efforts to represent the diversity of New York City communities in the study. In order to ensure that we interview a diverse group of people, Project STRIDE recruiters go to many places to talk to potential volunteers, such as various organizations, events, public gatherings, and bars and clubs.

Among the many groups we have been to so far are Femme to Femme, BiPerspectives, Fast N' Fab Cycling Club, the Gay Men's Chorus of New York, Queens Pride House, Bay and Lesbians of Bushwick, and the Salsa Social Club. As far as events, we have visited the Women Warriors award ceremony at Casa Atabex Ache, and the Gay and Lesbian Dominicans Empowered health festival. Some bars and clubs include Henrietta Hudsons, Cubby Hole, View, Boiler Room, Urge, Splash Bar, Starlight, Ty's, Metropolitan, Nowhere, and The Monster. Our recruitment staff also went to some special nights at a few local establishments, such as Ladies Night at Doc Holidays, Temperamental at Opaline, and La Noche Latina at Heaven. And, of course, our staff members recruited at the annual Pride festivities in all five boroughs, as well as Black Pride and the Dyke March.

Thanks so much to all of the organizers who have hosted us at their events!

To help diversify recruitment venues, we met other participants at organizations, coffee houses, and other public spaces such as the Chelsea Piers and Rüs Park. We want to cover the whole city in our recruitment efforts, so if you can recommend other places that we have missed, please let us know!

As you may recall, at the end of the interview, we ask participants to invite up to three of their friends or acquaintances to participate in the study. This is called "snowball recruitment." The purpose of this type of recruitment is to increase the diversity of people in the study by reaching out to those who do not attend the places we have recruited from. That is, they may not go out as much, or maybe they don't go to gay or lesbian identified establishments. Snowball recruitment is very important so that the study avoids a bias. We appreciate all the participants who've helped up with this type of recruitment so far.

If you have not referred three people you still can! Please call or email us (contact info is on the back page). As a thank you, after we interview a person you refer, you'll receive a \$10 Starbucks gift card.



Some things you've shared about yourselves

Project STRIDE still has much work to do before we can look at the results of our main areas of interest (stress, identity, and health). Once we begin to look at that data we will share it with you. But, to provide you with a glimpse of what we've noticed in the first few months, we wanted to let you know about some of the findings so far.

History of same sex attraction, relationships and identities: More than 50% of our participants had their first same sex attraction by the age of 11, and an additional 25% did by the age of 14. More than half had their first same sex relationship by the age of 19, and by the age of 22 more than 75% did. Chart 3 shows the age at which participants first realized they were lesbian, gay or bisexual, and the age they first told a family member about it. You can see from the overlap of the chart that coming out followed pretty soon after realizing one is lesbian, gay or bisexual, and that for most people this was between the ages of 16–20. This pattern also held true for both gender groups as well.

Out? To whom?: We asked our participants whether they are out of the closet to various groups of people in their lives (family, friends, co-workers, health care providers). As you may remember, we wanted to know whether you were out to all, out to most, out to some, or out to none of these groups of people. Chart 4 shows people's responses to the out to all category broken down by ethnoracial identity, while Chart 5 depicts the out to none category. It is interesting to note that the White participants are more likely to be out to all groups than their Black and Latino counterparts. Also, among all ethnoracial groups and both genders, individuals tend to be out to none of their co-workers and health care providers more than the other three categories of people.

Family and relationships of participants: We at STRIDE also talked with people about whether they are in relationships or have children. 98 (44%) of the people we've interviewed described themselves as being in an intimate relationship with a partner. Of those 98 persons, 90% say that they and their partner are recognized as a couple by other individuals. Most people (more than 50%) said they have been together for nearly a year, with about 23% having been together for 4 years or more. 36% of the people in relationships say they live together, yet only 9 individuals report that they are married or registered as domestic partners. Most of these interviews took place before the current discussions about gay marriage so it will be interesting to learn if some of this has changed during the year before the follow up interview.



Children: In terms of children, 30 (14%) of those interviewed so far report having a child either biologically or through their partner. 13 of these individuals have children who currently live with them.

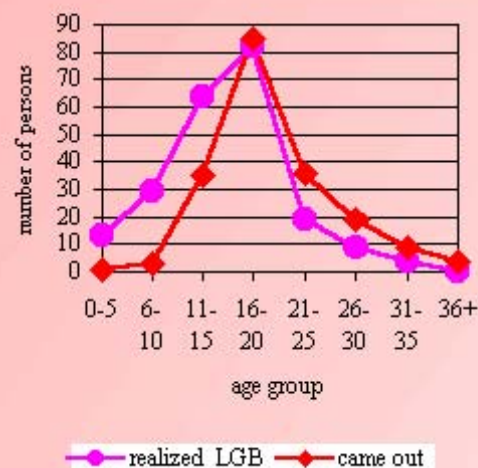


Chart 3: Age at which participants realized they were LGB, and age they first told a family member about it

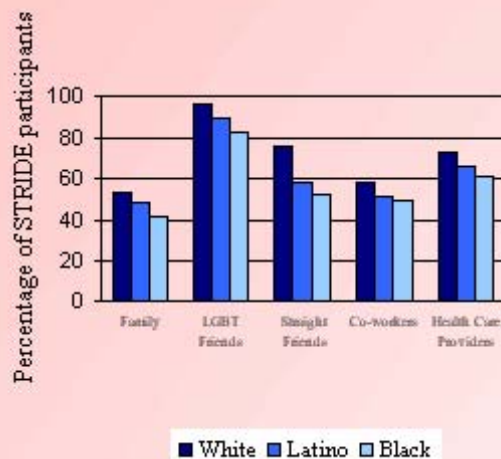


Chart 4: Participants out to all, by ethnoracial identity

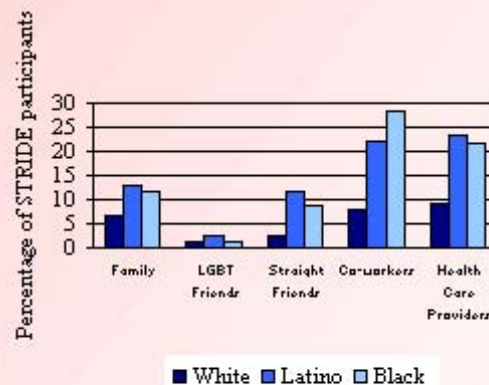


Chart 5: Participants out to none, by ethnoracial identity

Reflections on the interview

"I faced things I try to run away from"

"It gets to the basics— to the rest of the serious issues that can occur in our community"

"I liked thinking about my relationship to communities"

The interviews can be extensive, but are often emotionally rewarding. We ask about a lot of life experiences that sometimes are hard to talk about or that people don't often discuss with others. Jason, a Project STRIDE interviewer, shared his thoughts about listening to participants, "It has been great talking with our participants and hearing their stories. I have found many of their insights and experiences to be inspiring."

At the end of each interview we ask participants for feedback about the interview and of the interview process. Some Project STRIDE participants have also shared some of their reflections on the study with us. Around this page you can see some of the comments we have heard.

"I liked getting things out and expressing myself"

"I enjoyed reflecting on who I am as a person"

"It was constructive for me"

"It made me look into myself— which I don't normally do"

As the project continues we will begin to analyze data about health and we will also have reports and articles regarding the findings of Project STRIDE. By doing this we will generate information that will help in the understanding of the life experiences of LGB persons. This includes how these people cope with daily stressors, what kinds of health issues they have, and what resources they use and that are available to them. This information will help build further resources for communities facing discrimination and struggle, in particular in our LGB communities here in New York City. About one year after your first interview we will begin to contact you to



Project STRIDE crew: (left to right) Jason, Yulya, Diana, Ilan, Jessica

set up the follow up interview.

Like last time we will compensate all participants for their second interview (which will not last as long as the first interview as it mainly deals with events which have happened since the last time

we spoke with you). We are excited about talking with you again, hearing how you've been, and learning what changes took place in your life. If your contact information has changed, please call or email us so we can be sure to stay in touch with you. We here at Project STRIDE thank you for all your efforts and support!

Please feel free to get a hold of us at anytime. If you want to tell us about your experience with Project STRIDE, and maybe be published in upcoming volumes of this Newsletter, please write to us (as always, we will not publish your name and keep all information confidential).

We look forward to talking with you again!

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