

Study Shows Gay Men Are Healthier than Straight Men

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Greg Pizzi

But Lesbians Aren't Healthier than Straight Women

A recent *MSNBC* report shows that gay men are healthier than straight men. The report also found that gay women tend to be heavier than heterosexual women.

Boston researchers determined that gay women were more than twice as likely as straight women to be obese, while gay men are 50 percent less likely to be obese compared to their heterosexual counterparts, according to a report published in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

After scrutinizing a health survey of more than 67,000 Massachusetts residents between the ages of 18 and 64, the researchers found that 14 percent of gay men were obese versus 21 percent of straight men. On the flip side, 26 percent were found to be obese, compared with 17 percent of the straight women.

The researchers also found that both gay men and gay women are more likely to smoke compared to their heterosexual counterparts and that gay women were more likely to have multiple heart-disease risk factors.

“Earlier studies that looked at health in the gay community focused mostly on sexually transmitted diseases and mental health, rather than on chronic illnesses like obesity and heart disease,” says the study’s lead author Kerith Conron, an associate research scientist at Northeastern University and a research fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health. “This may mean that we in the public health community need to come up with more tailored messages to reach these groups, just as car dealers do when they want to reach a specific target audience,” she says.

Conron suspects that cultural differences might at least partly explain the weight divide. “It may be more acceptable in the lesbian community for women to be full-sized,” she says.

Dr. Gregg Pizzi, Psy.D, a licensed psychologist in Aventura, finds the overall nature of the report positive. “The fact that research is beginning to focus on overall health trends in the gay community, rather than only on sexual and emotional problems,” he says, “is positive and indicative of LGBT people’s growing status as an important sector of society.”

Dr. Pizzi agrees with the study’s findings. “It makes sense that people, men or women, who are in relationships with men would generally take better care of their bodies, since men tend to be more visual in their attractions and make it pretty clear that they are looking for a partner who looks good. Women, on the other hand, do value looks—however, they frequently place security, intelligence, humor, and other non-physical characteristics at the top of their list.”

Esther Rothblum, a professor of women’s studies at San Diego State University, adds: “Another example comes from an older study of bisexual women. When the bisexual women were asked to describe their experiences with women and men, the differences were dramatic: they often reported that they got more pressure to be thin when they were with men.”

Other researchers have found further evidence of this male effect while studying personal ads and dating sites like Match.com, Rothblum explains. “Men will say they are looking for a partner who is not above 35 years-old and not above 135 pounds,” she said. “Women don’t typically do that. They say they are looking for someone with good sense of humor, intelligence, and creativity, or someone who is not an alcoholic.”

Furthermore, Dr. Pizzi states, “LGBT people are more likely to abuse alcohol, drugs, and to smoke, probably due to the disproportionate amount of stress and depression that gay people suffer as a result of being told their entire lives by society that they are unhealthy, flawed, or sometimes downright evil because of their sexual orientation.”