New research uncovers how intimate partners believe they directly and indirectly contribute to one another’s unhealthy habits. By Dawn Fuller

For better or for worse, in sickness and in health – there’s a long line of research that associates marriage with reducing unhealthy habits such as smoking, and promoting better health habits such as regular checkups. However, new research is emerging that suggests married straight couples and cohabiting gay and lesbian couples in long-term intimate relationships may pick up each other’s unhealthy habits as well.

Corinne Reczek, a UC assistant professor of sociology, reports three distinct findings into how unhealthy habits were promoted through these long-term, intimate relationships: through the direct bad influence of one partner, through health habit synchronicity and through the notion of personal responsibility.

Reczek reports that gay, lesbian and straight couples all described the “bad influence” theme, while in straight partnerships, men were nearly always viewed as the “bad influence.”

“The finding that one partner is a ‘direct bad influence’ suggests that individuals converge in health habits across the course of their relationship, because one individual’s unhealthy habits directly promotes the other’s unhealthy habits,” reports Reczek. An example would be how both partners eat the unhealthy foods that one partner purchases.

“Gay and lesbian couples nearly exclusively described how the habits of both partners were simultaneously promoted due to unhealthy habit synchronicity. For these individuals, one partner may not engage in what they consider an unhealthy habit on their own, but when their desire for such a habit is matched by their partners, they partake in unhealthy habits,” writes Reczek.

“Third, respondents utilized a discourse of personal responsibility to describe how even when they observe their partner partaking in an unhealthy habit, they do not attempt to change the habit, indicating that they were complicit in sustaining their partner’s unhealthy habits. The final theme was described primarily by straight men and women,” says Reczek.

Reczek adds that the study is among the first of its kind to examine how gay and lesbian couples promote each other’s unhealthy habits.

Study Method
Reczek and two team researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 122 people involved in long-term straight or married relationships (31 couples), gay partnerships (15 couples) and lesbian relationships (15 couples), who had been together between eight and 52 years.

Participants were individually asked a series of open-ended questions about smoking, drinking, food consumption, sleep patterns, exercise habits and other health habits. “Particular attention was paid to how partners shaped each of these habits,” writes Reczek.

Demographic Description
In the survey sample, 83 percent of the straight respondents were white, nine percent were African-American, one person was Asian American, two were Latina and one respondent identified as multiracial. For the gay and lesbian couples 63 percent were white, four percent identified as Hispanic, Latino or Latina, one respondent identified as African American, one Native American/Hispanic and one South American.

The average age for the straight couples was 53 years – 49 years for gay couples and 43 years for lesbian couples.

The average relationship duration for straight couples was 25 years. For gay couples, it was 21 years and for lesbian couples it was 14 years.

Household income of the participants ranged from $40,000 to $120,000.

“While previous research focuses nearly exclusively on how intimate relationships – particularly marriage – are health-promoting, these findings extend this research to argue that intimate partners are cognizant of the ways in which they promote the unhealthy habits of one another,” states Reczek.

The research was supported by the National Institutes of Aging.

Save the Date: 2012 Taft Lecture
This spring’s Taft Speaker will be Kathryn Edin, professor of public policy and management at Harvard. Her research focuses on urban poverty and family life, social welfare, public housing, child support and nonmarital childbearing. Her most recent book (with Paula England), “Unmarried Couples with Children,” is an analysis of a four-year study of 30 unmarried couples who shared a birth in 2000. Previous books include the results of a six-year ethnographic study in eight Philadelphia neighborhoods, “Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage” (with Maria J. Kefalas), and “Making Ends Meet: How Low Income Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low Wage Work” (with Laura Lein). Her next book is tentatively titled “Fragile Fatherhood: What Being a Daddy Means in the Lives of Low Income Unmarried Men” (with Timothy Nelson). She will talk at Taft House (2625 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH) on March 2, 2012 at 3:00 p.m. The lecture is free and open to the public.

Dear Alumni and Friends,

This year and the next will bring significant changes to the department—new additions, retirements, hiring new faculty and a new lecture series.

Corinne Rezek recently joined our department, coming to us from the University of Texas—Austin. Her interests in families, relationships, health, and sexual orientation will strengthen the department's families and health orientation. Her research is featured on the cover.

But this year will bring even more changes. Four faculty members—Dave Evans, Jan Bending, Paula Dubek and Neal Ritchey—have decided to retire. In fact, Evans retired at the end of last August. Bending, Dubek and Ritchey plan to retire this coming summer.

Dave Evans, who received his doctorate from us (PhD, ’92), taught courses for us for a number of years after retiring from his position at the University of North Carolina—Wilmington. During his time here he covered “Intro” and used his extensive knowledge of the sociology of crime, deviance, and delinquency to offer upper-level undergraduate courses in those areas. A number of these courses were taught on-line.

Jan Bending (PhD, ’93), returned from a career in business to teach for us. She has taught “Intro,” courses on drugs in American society, sociology of the family, and has developed a number of internship opportunities for undergraduates. In addition to providing significant service to the university in overseeing the department for decades and have guided innumerable dissertations and theses to completion. Dubek joined the department in 1976 and has taught graduate statistics, research methodology, and demography, among other courses. He has also been active in the department, having served at various times as acting head, director of graduate studies, and as interim head of anthropology. Both Paula Dubek and Neal Ritchey have been with the department for decades and have guided innumerable dissertations and theses to completion. Dubek joined the department in 1976 and has served as department head from 1985 through 2000. During that time she wrote a successful grant that established what has become the Kunz Center for Social Research. In addition to teaching courses on research methodology, media and society, and professional women, she has served on numerous thesis and dissertation committees. During years that she was not serving as head of sociology, she served as our director of graduate studies, and as interim head of anthropology.

Neal Ritchey joined the department as an associate professor in 1976 and has taught graduate statistics, research methodology, and demography, among other courses. He has also been active in the department, having served at various times as acting head, director of graduate studies, and has chaired numerous committees. Neal’s research has been instrumental in creating demographic projections for Ohio and Kentucky counties.

These four retirements represent a huge loss of expertise for the department. Each has a stock of knowledge about sociology, as well as the university, the college and the department that is truly impressive. During this last year we intend to draw on their wisdom as heavily as possible.

This year we will welcome four new faculty members to our department. We have hired a visiting assistant professor to teach Dave Evans’ courses and are currently in the process of interviewing candidates for two assistant professor positions and will interview candidates for an associate professor during winter quarter. Bringing in these new faculty members will strengthen our emphasis on urban sociology.

In addition to our annual Taft lecture (see back cover for more) the department is extremely pleased to announce the upcoming inauguration of the Virginia Hibbard Dinnie Lecture in Sociology. This lecture series has been made possible by a generous gift from Dinnie (aka Virginia) Hibbard (PhD, ’82). The lecture series will focus on issues typically of interest to undergraduate students. We anticipate the first lecture occurring during the fall of 2012.

If you want to keep up with these and other changes in the department, please visit our Facebook site (http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cincinnati-Department-of-Sociology/123370277729411 http://www.ucmail.uc.edu). Dave Lundgren (professor emeritus) makes sure that it features the latest news about the department.

Sincerely,

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Welcome to this issue of Sociology Departmental News. This newsletter will keep you up to date on changes in the department and provide a glimpse into the activities of our students, faculty, and alumni.

### Faculty News

**Danielle Bessett** launched the Cincinnati arm of her multi-method study examining how women’s pregnancy and birth experiences are affected by previous reproductive events in their lives. This study is funded by the Ellerton Postdoctoral Fellowship.

Steve Carlton-Ford extended his cross-national research on militarization to investigate the impact of military control of the social and economic resources on the well-being of children. His recently published “Handbook of War and Society: Iraq and Afghanistan” (edited with Morten Ender) was chosen as the Outstanding Book of the Year by the Peace, War, and Social Conflict Section of the American Sociological Association.

**Anna Linders** has extended her research on execution spectacles to consider how executions of blacks in the south not only served to dominate blacks (which previous research has documented) but that the execution of black convicts became events that evolved into locations for black resistance to oppression.

**Jennifer Malat** was appointed as Research Director of our newly re-organized Kunz Center for Social Research.

**Erynn Masi de Casanova’s** book “Making Up the Difference: Women, Beauty and Direct Selling in Ecuador” was one of only four featured as “important contributions to the field of women’s studies,” in an Author-Meets-Critics session at the National Women’s Studies Association conference.

**The National Science Foundation recently funded Dave Maume’s new study which will investigate the impact of disrupted sleep on the well-being of adolescents. His research will track boys and girls from elementary school to age 15, answering three questions: 1) in addition to the effect of biological development, how strongly does social support predict changes in sleep habits; 2) do sleep problems increase depression, substance use, and obesity in youths, or do these health problems disrupt sleep; and 3) since boys and girls develop at different rates and live different lives at home, at school, at work, and among peers, does gender lead to different pathways that predict healthy sleep, and physical and mental well-being? The results of the study should help pinpoint the causes of health problems, possibly leading to treatments that can reduce long-term medical costs.

Jerry Reid came last year from UC’s College of Applied Science to join our faculty teaching in the undergraduate program. This year he has taken on the position of director of undergraduate studies.

Sociology’s newest assistant professor, Corinne Rezek, received her doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. Her research is among the first of its kind to examine how gay and lesbian couples promote each other’s unhealthy habits (see cover for more). Her research has also been featured on MSNBC (http://tinyurl.com/jgoggw).

Jeff Timberlake is on leave this year, working on several research projects.

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### Emeriti News

Dana Vannoy continues with her “second career” as a photographer (http://www.lewissparkphoton.com/) and has won a number of competitions. She also travels extensively, capturing outstanding images from such places as China and Jordan.

Bill Feinberg continues to exhibit his sculpture (http://www.feinberg-art.com/).

Norris Johnson stays involved in local politics.

Tom Jenkins remains active following tennis and visits the department periodically, which we do enjoy.

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### Graduate Student News

Travis Spence was awarded a Taft Dissertation Fellowship. Amanda Staight will be interviewing community leaders and residents in Westwood (which has a community activist program named “Good Guy Lotterying”) to better understand how people decide between lottering that appears criminal and lottering that is acceptable.

Kelli Chapman and Sarah Rompola (working with Assistant Professor Bessett) have been administering surveys to women in the postpartum ward at UC Medical Center since July; the data collection is expected to be complete by the end of 2011.