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UNHAPPY COUPLES

By Andrew Gilliver and Jeni Quirke
MANCHESTER

Lesbians and gay men say having a civil partnership is like coming out to your parents all over again, a recent study has found.

The University of Manchester research was carried out by interviewing 60 lesbians and 31 gay men from Manchester and the surrounding areas who are either planning or have had a civil partnership.

It found some interviewees felt that telling their parents they were going to be married was as nerve-racking and scary as the moment they first came out.

This is the first major study of its kind and researchers found that the majority of same-sex couples received positive approval from family members but some did find themselves confronted by problems, such as coming out.

Professor Carol Smart, who led the research said: "It is not that their parents don't know about their sexuality but they have shelved it as an issue and more or less ignore it. So when their grown-up children said they were going to have a civil partnership, it brought it up again."

"We had quite a few people saying 'the way my family has always dealt with difficult things is not to go there.'"

Some parents still believed that their child's sexuality was a phase or the "problem" would go away, Smart explained. For others, it was merely embarrassing.

Smart added: "Parents worry that more people will be told and it's harder to keep it from Auntie Mable."

As a result, less than half of the interviewees intended to invite both their parents. Some don't even tell them they are getting hitched.

Smart said: "Inviting parents was often a thorny issue. Some people did say they delayed having ceremony until their parents died."

"But we got a lot of heartwarming stories too."

The research also indicated that reactions from the couple's friends posed a big problem with many seeing the partnership as a submission to norms or to heterosexual society.

Half of the interviewees said they hoped legally recognised religious marriage would one day be available to same-sex couples.



Will Young's G-A-Y appearance last weekend was full of quick-change outfits and energetic dancers as the Pop Idol winner zipped through a list of his hits to data. The handsome chap wowed his legion of male admirers with songs such as Keep On and Your Game. The night also featured Sir Ian McKellen who came on stage to introduce Scots actor Alan Cumming star of the West End revival of Bent now showing at London's Trafalgar Studios. Photo by cableimage.com

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Carol Smart interviewed about ESRC Gay and Lesbian 'Marriage' project