



# DISPENSER

Fall Newsletter

October 2006

**Special points of interest:**

- Renew or discover interest in PEZ Projects with seasonal newsletters.
- Reflect with Dr. Sondra Solomon.
- Review community characteristics and stigma results
- Receive updates on PEZ team members and activities.
- Read about and support the PHASE II project.

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## PEZ Greeting and Reflections from Sondra

Greetings From Dr. Sondra,

Hello friends, supporters, colleagues and family, The PEZ Team has seen a number of transitions since our last newsletter. There have been additions to the research team and we have been very busy going to scientific meetings and community gatherings as well as having personal discussions with many of you regarding our current study and plans for the future. Since the beginning of our work 203 participants with HIV/AIDS were recruited and completed the protocol as did approximately 2,400 people selected with random digit dialing from the communities in which the participants with HIV/AIDS lived. In addition about 100 of you participated in a follow-up study that captured information about coping with HIV/AIDS, your relationship status, medical and mental health, your thoughts about how HIV/AIDS stigma has been a problem for you, the ways in which HIV/AIDS stigma has affected those who are close to you, and other aspects of your day-to-day encounters living with HIV/AIDS. For those of you who attended the *July People with AIDS Coalition 2007 Gathering of Friends*, about 60 of you participated in a Diary Study that asked you to tell us about the events and encounters in your life, both major and minor that cause you distress because of your HIV serostatus.

As we continue our data analysis we are encouraged by the resilience of the community. While some of you report daily encounters with HIV/AIDS stigma many of you do not, suggesting that there is a lot of variability in the population of people living with HIV/AIDS. There is a lot of variability in the ways in which people who live in your communities think about individuals with HIV/AIDS. In this edition of our newsletter we will share some of the data we are beginning to publish. There is a profile on Susan Varni – a senior graduate student - and an integral member of our team. You will also meet Tara McCuin, our new Project Coordinator .



### Fall at UVM. The view from Dewey Hall.

Finally, as some of you know on September 7, 2007 Drs. Carol Miller, Rex Forehand and I submitted a grant to continue our work. This grant *Coping with Rural Community HIV Stigma: Sexual Risk and Psychological Well-Being* is under the first round of reviews at the National Institute of Mental Health.

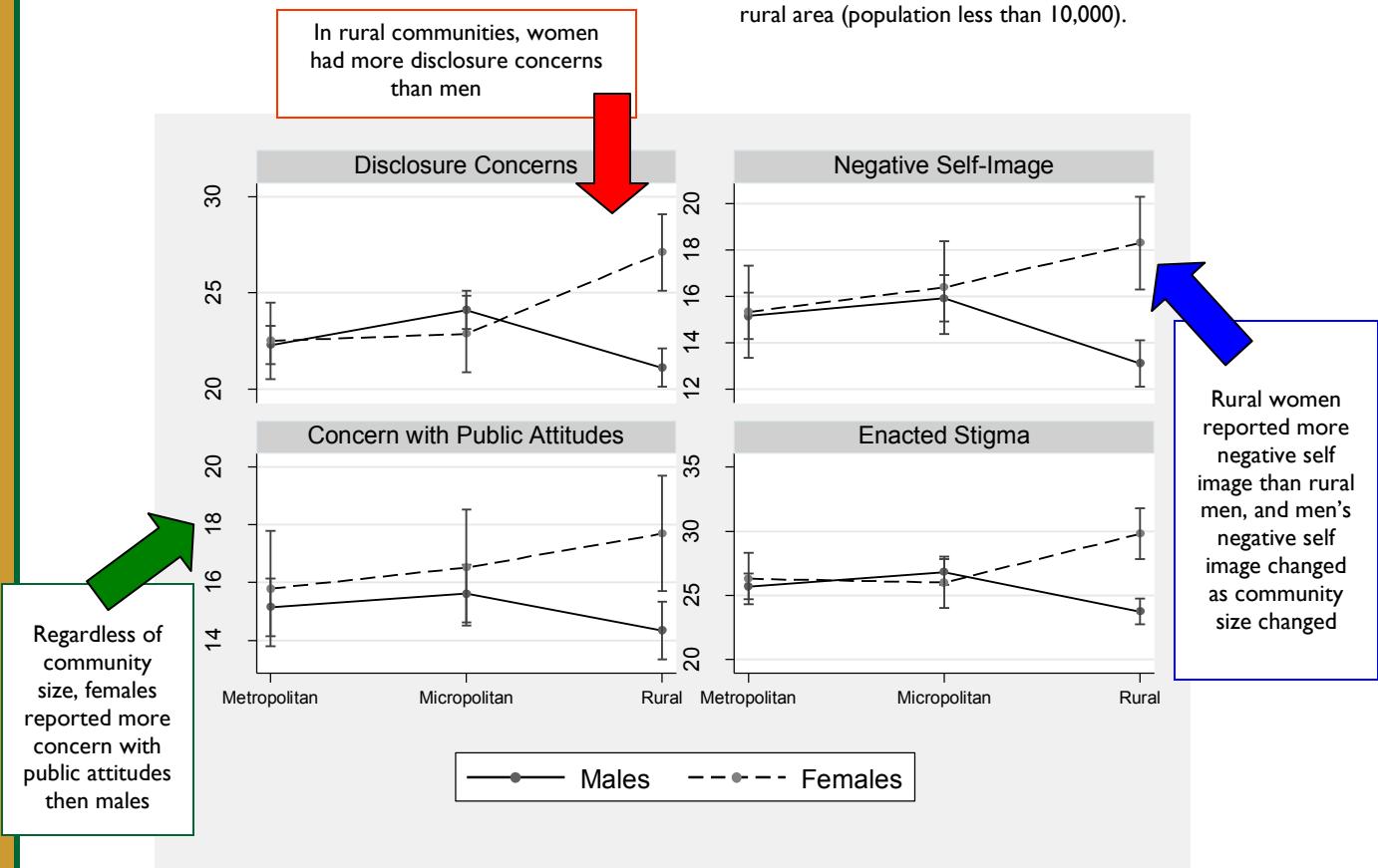
Carol, Rex, the entire PEZ team and I are very thankful and grateful that you are willing to continue to work with us. We will always call upon your expertise to inform our research. Thank you for your support and I look forward to working with you as we continue to examine the intricacies of HIV/AIDS stigma.

Cheers,  
Dr. Sondra

## Research Snapshot: Does Size Matter? Community Size, HIV Stigma, & Gender Differences.

One of the unique aspects of our research is that many of our study participants lived in Vermont. With a population estimated to be only 623,050 (2005) for the entire state, and with only just under 66 people per square mile (Vermont's land area, not including bodies of water, is 9,276 square miles), Vermont is one of the most rural states in the union. But how does rurality relate to HIV/AIDS stigma?

In a recent poster by Adam Gonzalez and other members of our research team, we looked at the relationship between the size of the community a person with HIV/AIDS lives in and their perceptions of HIV/AIDS stigma. We measured community size by whether someone lived in a metropolitan area (population greater than or equal to 50,000), micropolitan area (population at least 10,000, but less than 50,000), or rural area (population less than 10,000).



### Summary of Results

- ◆ **Disclosure Concerns:** Levels of disclosure concerns differed by gender, but only in rural areas (in red). Rural females reported more disclosure concerns than rural males did. Comparing all females, rural females reported more disclosure concerns than females living in metropolitan or micropolitan areas. However, among males it was males living in micropolitan areas that reported more disclosure concerns than men living in metropolitan or rural areas.
- ◆ **Negative Self-Image:** Females in rural areas reported more negative self-image than rural males. Negative self-image appeared to change as community size changed, but only for men (in blue). Rural males reported less negative self-image than micropolitan males or metropolitan males.
- ◆ **Concern with Public Attitudes:** Regardless of community size, females reported more concern with public attitudes than males (in green).
- ◆ **Enacted Stigma:** There were no effects for community size or gender on perceptions of enacted stigma.

## PEZ Projects Profile: Who is Susan Varni?

Susan Varni has been a member of the PEZ research team since 2004. She is an Experimental Psychology graduate student at the University of Vermont, with a focus in Social Psychology. Susan has been a busy member of PEZ projects from its early days by creating some of the computerized surveys and tasks that our participants took. In her "behind the scenes" role in the lab, Susan helped to manage our study results and worked as an unofficial tech support fixing our computer and software problems. More recently, Susan has worked with other members of our lab to create posters to share the results of our study with the professional community, as well as

collaborated on a presentation given at the United States Conference on AIDS on conducting research in a rural area like Vermont. Susan and Tracy Nyerges also worked together to create the follow-up survey that many of our participants received in the mail.

During her time with PEZ projects, Susan successfully completed her Master's degree (working with Carol Miller, one of our Primary Investigators) examining people's expectations of victims of injustice and prejudice. Inspired by the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS who participated in our research, Susan is continu-

ing her research on injustice by considering how people without HIV/AIDS understand claims of discrimination by people with HIV/AIDS in both an interpersonal and legal context.

When she is not busily working away at her dissertation, Susan is an avid baker and cooking enthusiast. Our group greatly enjoys all of the treats that she brings to our weekly meetings. Susan is also member of a cooking club with another PEZ project team member, Kristie Weibust. Susan also recently got married in early September of this year. In addition to being excited about her new marriage, Susan is also excited to have more time to bake again now that she is not planning her wedding. We are proud of the work Susan has done in our lab and with her growth as a researcher, and are proud to introduce her to our study supporters and participants. Thanks to Susan for all of her hard work!



**Thanks to all study participants who received and/or completed our Diary Study over the summer! This was an important step in helping us to better understand the complexities of the day-to-day experiences that people living with HIV/AIDS may have.**

**Please contact us with comments on our Fall Newsletter, suggestions for upcoming seasonal newsletters, and if you would like to be removed from, or know someone who would like to be added to, our mailing list. We could send newsletters via email also.**

**Thank you again for your interest in our projects! We are always available for any questions/comments/concerns you might have at:**

**PEZ Projects  
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2 Colchester Ave.**

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## Person Environment Zone Projects

### PEZ Personal: Hello from Tara

I have been studying at Saint Michael's college working toward a Masters degree for the past two years. When I heard that a position was opening up to work with Sondra in the PEZ lab I jumped at the opportunity. I joined the PEZ research team as the new Project Coordinator in January of this year. I soon realized that I had some big shoes to fill! The previous project coordinator, Tracy, had done a wonderful job not only organizing this complex and exciting project, but also making connections with all of you, the participants of our study. I'm beginning to settle in now aided by the wonderful people I work with here, learning the ins and outs of this large research project and I am excited about the direction that the proposal for our new project has taken. I have spoken with some of you on the phone, but am looking forward to the time, during the next phase of our project, when I will get to meet many of you in person and hear about your unique experiences!

Best wishes for the holidays,  
Tara McCuin

## COPING WITH HIV/AIDS PROJECT PHASE II

- To continue to study HIV/AIDS stigmatization in rural New England, Dr. Sondra Solomon and the Person Environment Zone Projects (PEZ) team are submitting a continuation grant. We hope to receive funding to expand our project to more people living with HIV/AIDS throughout rural New England.
- Please support our attempt to better understand how people cope with the stigma of HIV/AIDS by contacting us via mail, phone, or email and giving us your current contact information. **The information below that you provide will be stored and used confidentially for PHASE II recruitment efforts.** Your participation in previous and future PEZ Projects will assist us in developing and implementing interventions for coping with HIV/AIDS.

Contact me for the **PHASE II PEZ Project!**  
(Please mail/phone/email this optional information to us)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (C) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

Is it OK to leave a message on your voicemail (circle)? YES NO

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The best way to contact me is by (circle): MAIL PHONE EMAIL

I have a friend or family member who would be interested in participating in an upcoming PEZ Friends and Family Project (circle): YES NO MAYBE DON'T KNOW

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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