

FIRST PERSON NARRATIVES: UNPROTECTED ANAL INTERCOURSE AND RISK ASSESSMENT AMONGST A COHORT OF GAY IDENTIFIED HIV-NEGATIVE MEN

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Objective: Using interviewees narratives, document several of the key reasons why some HIV-negative gay men choose not to have safer sex, notwithstanding having previously received adequate information on risk of infection.

Methods: We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 participants of the Vanguard Project, to assess their reasons for not using condoms all of the time when having anal intercourse with casual partners. Interviews were taped and transcribed.

Results: Key factors contributing to unsafe sex were based on a trust/risk/ intimacy continuum. Many interviewees expressed a nominal fear of infection, which they believed was within the parameters of reasonableness vis-à-vis other risks. Additionally, many expressed the view that prior sexual and intimacy experiences provided them with the ability to assess potential risky partners, which would provide sufficient evidence to inform their sexual scripts. Also, many expressed a need to simplify their sexual encounters by eliminating mistrust and negotiated safety in favour of intimacy and sexual pleasure.

Conclusions: The respondents' attitudes to potential infection are informed by heteronormativity, condom fatigue, trust in themselves and their partners, contingent risk assessments, and the belief that HIV/AIDS is a chronic but manageable disease.