

## TRUST, RISK, INTIMACY AND HIV IN A COHORT OF HIV-NEGATIVE GAY MEN

M Botnick<sup>1,3</sup>, B Coleman<sup>4</sup>, S Martindale<sup>3</sup>, ML Miller<sup>3</sup>, R Hogg<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Anthropology and Sociology; <sup>2</sup>Department of Health Care and Epidemiology, University of British Columbia; <sup>3</sup>Vanguard Project, British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS; <sup>4</sup>Vancouver/Richmond Health Board

**Objective:** To test the hypothesis that in the gay world, the social meanings ascribed to notions of 'trust', risk' and 'intimacy' are more contingent and unstable than in the heterosexual world; therefore attempts to communicate MSM risk-avoidance health messages must acknowledge and account for ambiguity and multiple meanings in their communication objectives, strategies and messages.

**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:** Social marketing messages that do not specify what they mean when they propose 'safe sex' fall on deaf ears if the recipient's definition of sex or love are at odds with the conventional message. It would appear that, as crude as it may sound, "don't fuck without a condom" would have more impact than most euphemistic slogans, 'cute' plays on words or arresting graphics. In other words, trust in advertising, a rare commodity in most cases, regardless of the product or social message being touted, must be generated through scrupulously honest communication in both the graphics and text if the advertising is going to resonate with the audience.

**Conclusions:** The relevance of safe sex messages received early in life differs greatly from one member of the subject group to another, depending on their own social and sexual development. The uptake of these messages is highly dependent on the individual's trust in so-called 'knowledge makers', their own degree of trust in their personal ability to interpret and implement safer sex messages and then apply them to their own sexual risk situations, and the degree to which their intimacy needs override their safety concerns.