

SEX, INTIMACY & POWER

Lived Experiences of Young Gay Men In Vancouver in a Context of Rising HIV Incidence

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BACKGROUND

- **This prospective study of over 1000 Gay youth mirrors the rising HIV infections in other cities throughout North America, Europe and Australia.**
- **HIV seroincidence increased three-fold within the Vanguard cohort in the year 2000 compared to the previous four years, and so far appears to have plateaued in the year 2001.**



WHY BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV NOW?

_ IS HAART OPTIMISM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SLIPPAGE?

Heard in the hallways of public health.

_ ARE THERE NEW TRENDS IN SUBSTANCE USE?

“You know how big party drugs are now-a-days?”

_ ARE BELIEFS ABOUT INTIMACY LINKED TO BAREBACKING?

“Fucking is more intimate without condoms. Sex without condoms is the real thing”

_ ARE GAY MEN JUST TIRED OF BEING AFRAID?

“Before I was just so worried about becoming HIV-positive . . . and now I am!”



METHODS

- **A qualitative study nested within the Vanguard project**
- **26 participants have been recruited, 13 of whom are HIV-positive and 13 HIV-negative.**
- **Participants are interviewed up to four times over 12 months**
- **Textual data are coded, managed and explored using NUDIST qualitative research software.**
- **We explore the experience with abuse, sex, family, community, substance use, beliefs about condom use and cum, and HAART optimism.**



VIOLENCE AND EARLY LIFE

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ASSAULT

"He about seventeen and I was eight years old. I guess I was just giving off this energy [atypical social sex roles]. He started molesting me and forced me to *blow him*. That was my introduction to sex and that went on for 6 years."

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



VIOLENCE AND EARLY LIFE

PHYSICAL ASSAULT

“It was awful. I remember the worst was going to school with hideous bruises on my body and the gym teacher saying, ‘What's up?’ I would say, ‘Oh . . . I fell down the stairs.’ I remember being hardly able to walk because my father had beat me so hard with a cane. It was really stupid, like it was really dumb.”

HIV Negative Young Gay Man



GAY IDENTITY AND STIGMA

TAKING ON A DEVALUED SOCIAL IDENTITY

"I was probably going through a really rough time. I was '*coming out*'... and dealing with a break-up and being '*Gay*' and finally admitting it to myself? I was not really feeling very positive about my future. I was wondering are people going to accept me? Like... really accept me?"

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



GAY IDENTITY AND MIGRATION

NEW LIVES IN A URBAN GAY URBAN VILLAGE

“For me and a lot of people especially if you’re from a small town, when you first *come out*, you are a new face in town. You are a kid in a candy store because all these men want you.”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



SOCIAL LIVES

PARTYING AND RISK

“Pride week is about being together with friends. Since last year's Pride, there was one group of friends that I've gotten to know better. Uh, but usually the drugs make you horny, and then you end up going home with someone.”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



NEW SOCIAL LIVES

COMING OUT AND SUBSTANCE USE

“When I *came out*, I would party for a good year. We would go out like every weekend. Sometimes I was going out 5 of 7 nights a week. I was not necessarily doing party drugs every one of those times.”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



RELATIONSHIP STYLES

CULTURAL DEFINITIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY

- Monogamy is defined as the marriage of one man to one woman, at one time.
- Polygyny is the marriage of a man to more than one women at any one time.
- Polyandry is the marriage of a woman to more than one man at any one time.



RELATIONSHIPS

LIFESTYLE NAMES USED IN THE GAY CONTEXT

- Date
- Trick
- Black book
- Trap-line
- Anonymous sex
- Casual sex
- Fuck buddy
- Boy friend
- Partner
- Booty run
- A Number
- Husband
- Hubby
- Stable
- Main squeeze
- Primary partner
- Long-time companion
- Roommate
- Harem
- Buddy
- Man
- Significant other



GAY SERIAL MONOGAMY

AN ELUSIVE LIFESTYLE

“When I first came out, I was dead set against open relationships (non monogamous) and very much into monogamy. I know definitely that is an issue that comes up and guys struggle with it. My last relationship started out as *monogamous* and went away from there. I think it is an ideal situation and have some friends that are monogamous. Not a lot.”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



GAY SERIAL AND NON-SERIAL POLYANDRY

SUGGESTED DEFINITIONS

Gay Serial Polyandry:

Is defined as plural sexual and affective concurrent relationships of a serial [reoccurring and overlapping] nature men have with other men.

Gay Non-serial Polyandry :

Is defined as the plural sexual relationships of a serial nature [non-recurrent or one time events] that men have with other men.



GAY SERIAL POLYANDRY

“Now I'm still in a three-way relationship with two lovers who are a couple. I had someone challenge me on the fact that I kept saying it was just an arrangement and they were just friends. He said, ‘Nope! You are dating them, going out for dinner and movies, socializing and having sex with them. That's dating. ‘ I guess I am dating them.’”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



GAY NON-SERIAL POLYANDRY

“I had group sex a number of times and used to party with a bunch of guys that all hung out at this apartment. Like, you would go there, get high . . . and fuck for eight or nine hours. There would be guys coming and going and most were doing tons of crystal and so they would have the stamina to fuck for nine hours. I was doing a lot of coke, because it was after I stopped doing crystal.”

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



POWER AND BOTTOMS

TOPS AND VIOLENCE

“I was going out this with a big beef cake guy who was mad at me because I was at a bathhouse having fun and sex with this another guy. He came up behind me and stuck his dick in me for 30 seconds and blew his load and infected me. I remember looking at him saying, ‘Why did you do that?’ And he just said, ‘Fuck you’ and walked away. “

HIV Positive Young Gay Man



LEARNING TO BOTTOM

VULNERABILITY AND ROLES

“The first time I got fucked was rather rough. I started to bleed. That is when I made him wear a condom. Even though he was HIV positive already. I just did not like the idea of him being that exposed.”

At the time he was an HIV negative Gay Man



RECOMMENDATIONS

- _ Acknowledge that violence exists in the lives of Gay boys and make intervention a priority.
- _ Identify trauma in adult Gay men and intervene appropriately.
- _ Be aware of 'liminal' time and create culturally safe environments -- including rituals and customs for youth to safely transition into adult life.
- _ Incorporate the cultural values and beliefs of Gay men into prevention.
- _ Educate Gay youth about how gender constructs devalue and contribute to risk.

