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Gary Smith Heather Worth Susan Kippax

NCHSR

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report
summary

KEY FINDINGS

There were three parts to the study. The findings are summarised below.

Part 1
Sexual adventurism and subculture

The concept of 'subculture' was central to our research. While some interviewees did not identify themselves as participants in or members of a sexually adventurous subculture, others did. Our use of the term 'subculture' in this report refers to gay men's sense that they engage in adventurous sexual practices, identify with other men who engage in those practices and/or meet other sexual partners through networks of sexual adventurism. The following were our key findings.

- The interviewees, gay men from Sydney, most commonly described adventurous sex as fisting, water sports, sadomasochism (SM) and bondage and discipline (BD) and fetish sex. In contrast, they described 'vanilla' sex as hugging, kissing, mutual masturbation and anal intercourse. Between these two categories lies a 'transitional' or 'disputed' sexual zone, including unprotected anal intercourse, rimming, promiscuity and group sex.
- The great majority of interviewees, when describing sexually adventurous practices, framed them within their own personal and accumulated sexual experience.
- Many adventurous gay men identified the existence of an adventurous gay subculture centred on specific sex venues, dance clubs, social organisations, the use of internet chat sites and informal social networks. This sexually adventurous gay subculture (or subcultures) is embedded within gay culture more generally.
- While adventurous men distinguished themselves from other gay men less adventurous than themselves, both groups often shared the same sexual spaces.

Part 2
Sexual practice and risk

Previous research has shown that sexual adventurism among gay men predicts HIV seroconversion. However, sexual adventurism should not be seen as a cause of HIV seroconversion, but as part of a complex web of reasons for unsafe sex.

- Most adventurous activities (particularly the use of sex toys, role play, rimming, fisting and water sports) carry a low risk of HIV transmission. However, there was a high level of unprotected casual sex amongst the men. Of the 31 interviewees, 13 had engaged in what we define as high-risk 'unsafe sex' in the past 12 months, i.e. unprotected anal intercourse with an HIV nonconcordant partner. The concurrence of adventurous sexual activities and unsafe sex indicates that sexual networks, or cultures of sexual adventurism, may be important contexts for HIV seroconversion.

- All but one of the HIV-positive men (12 out of 13) and about half of the HIV-negative men (10 out of 18) had *not* used condoms in recent anal sexual intercourse. Among both HIV-positive and HIV-negative men, however, unprotected sex was often with men of the same serostatus.
- For some men, sexual adventurism followed diagnosis of HIV and in this context was understood or framed as a kind of sexual liberation.
- Both HIV-positive and HIV-negative sexually adventurous men disliked condoms. Negative men used condoms to protect their own health (self-interest) and positive men used condoms to protect the health of others (altruism).
- Among HIV-negative men, not using condoms was most commonly attributed to an occasional 'slip-up' or 'one-off' event, such as drug use or a high state of arousal. Some found it difficult to articulate a rationale for not using condoms.
- Most sexually adventurous men preferred unprotected to protected anal intercourse and most HIV-positive men believed or knew they were having unprotected sex with other positive men. Over half of the HIV-positive men in our study *always* used condoms with partners known or suspected to be HIV-negative.
- In anonymous sex, HIV-positive men were more likely to defer responsibility for condom use to their sexual partners. By contrast, when they were more familiar with their sexual partners, HIV-positive men felt a greater sense of responsibility not to transmit HIV.

Part 3
Drug use

An aspect of sexual adventurism, beyond engaging in specific 'esoteric' sexual practices, was drug use. Many interviewees incorporated drug use into their repertoires of adventurous sex. Others deliberately avoided drug use for adventurous sex. Common to those who did and did not use drugs for sex was a belief that drug use (for sex or otherwise) necessitated degrees of caution and responsibility.

- Most sexually adventurous men were polydrug users and there was a strong and complex relationship between drug use and sex. Methamphetamine (crystal meth) was the most commonly used sex drug. Although about half of the men did not use recreational 'party' drugs, those who did so were more likely to use them to enhance sexual pleasure.
- When using drugs for sex, the maximisation of pleasure and 'disinhibition' were primary. However, there was a fundamental tension between disinhibition and remaining in control.
- Sexually adventurous men managed functional and controlled drug use, both for sex and in life more generally, by developing complex harm-reduction strategies.
- In the context of adventurism, drug use was one aspect of a complex web of reasons for unsafe sex but, for most interviewees, drug use was not a significant factor in unsafe sex.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A sizeable minority of gay men practise a range of adventurous sexual activities and self-consciously see themselves as adventurous. That some men are self-consciously adventurous means that they can be addressed as a group, albeit a diverse group in many respects. Importantly for health promotion, some sex-on-premises venues are more likely than others to be visited by sexually adventurous men. Sexually adventurous spaces are therefore spaces that enable targeted sexual health promotion.

HIV educators and policy makers should consider that:

- men understand responsibility for HIV transmission differently according to their serostatus, their familiarity with their partners, and ideas of individual/collective accountability
- HIV-negative men who engage in sex in contexts of sexual adventurism, specifically in sexually adventurous spaces which are sometimes understood to be HIV-positive spaces, are particularly vulnerable
- compared with non-adventurous gay men, sexually adventurous men have a higher likelihood of HIV seroconversion because of the predominance of HIV-positive men in their sexual subculture, the greater number of partners they have, and the greater likelihood that they will have unprotected anal intercourse[1]
- particular sexual spaces (especially venues) and sexually adventurous subcultures are sites of sexual learning, and this context may pose challenges for the incorporation of traditional HIV prevention messages that promote condom use for anal sex with casual partners
- sexually adventurous men need to balance the use of drugs to reduce inhibition, enhance sexual pleasure and create opportunities for new experiences and knowledge with the necessity to maintain control in order to reduce harms, both sexual and otherwise.

[1] The evidence for a greater predominance of HIV-positive men who are sexually adventurous requires further empirical support.

introduction

This study examines a significant gay 'subculture', that of sexual adventurism. We sought to understand how gay men made sense of their adventurous sex, the social context in which it was practised, and the HIV-related health risks associated with it. We use the terms 'sexual adventurism' and 'adventurous sex' interchangeably throughout the report, but we ascribe to them two levels of meaning. 'Sexual adventurism' refers, firstly, to a group of practices defined by the men as different from 'vanilla' sex. It includes esoteric sexual practices such as fisting, water sports, sadomasochism (SM), and bondage and discipline (BD) and fetish sex. (In contrast, 'vanilla' sex includes hugging, kissing, mutual masturbation and anal intercourse.) The term is used by men to mark the boundary between the range of sexual practices to which most gay men limit themselves and those in which adventurous men engage. Secondly, on a more individual level, 'adventurism' refers to a sense of possibility, playing with limits/capacity, learning, and venturing into the unknown.

The objectives of the study were to:

- map the social context in which sexual adventurism occurs
- understand the ways in which gay men engage in a sexually adventurous subculture
- investigate the sexual practices and drug use of gay men in the context of adventurous sexual sessions
- identify the relationship between unsafe sex, drug use and sexual adventurism.

Previous Australian research (Kippax et al., 1998; Van de Ven et al., 1998) indicated a strong association between engagement in esoteric sex, recreational drug use, unprotected anal intercourse with casual sexual partners and HIV seroconversion. While esoteric practices are not in and of themselves high-risk for HIV transmission, the findings suggest that engagement in a range of esoteric practices is a marker of involvement in particular sexual subculture/s, and that such involvement or membership places men at increased risk of HIV transmission (Kippax et al., 1998).

This previous research into adventurous sex among gay men was quantitative in nature, based on survey methodology, and McInnes et al. (2002, p. 5) note the absence of ethnographic research in Sydney that establishes a clear link between practitioners of esoteric sexual practice and a particular subculture or subcultures. This gap in research, together with the strong association between sexual adventurism and seroconversion, provides the rationale for the present research project. Of particular concern is Kippax et al.'s (1998) suggestion that particular 'subcultures' or 'networks' underpin that association.

Sexual Adventurism and Sydney Gay Men is a qualitative study that examines the ways in which sexual adventurism frames the social and sexual relationships of the men who engage in a range of esoteric sexual practices. The study seeks to understand how adventurous sex plays out at a community level and the implications of this for HIV transmission risk.

This report is divided into three parts:

- The first part identifies the phenomenon of a sexually adventurous subculture and argues that, although extremely permeable, such a subculture does exist within the larger gay community and the majority of men in this study felt they were a part of it.

- The second part examines sexual practice in the context of adventurism, particularly focusing on unsafe sex. It argues that while esoteric sexual sessions may not, in and of themselves, put gay men at risk, the milieu in which esoteric sex occurs may do so.
- The third part analyses drug use in sexual sessions. The interview data reveal that men use drugs to enhance sexual pleasure but mostly do so within highly regulated modes of management.

background and method 1

BACKGROUND

The phrase 'sexual adventurism' was first coined in 1995 by a group of researchers analysing data from the Chicago Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS) research project (DiFranceisco, Ostrow, & Chmiel, 1996). They identified a relationship between gay men who seroconverted and those who scored highly on a 'sexual sensation seeking' scale. The scale was drawn from previous studies on sensation seeking among gay men (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995) and measured both the pleasurable and compulsive aspects involved in HIV-related sexual risk-taking. The scale was composed of three sets of statements to which respondents were asked to agree or disagree (DiFranceisco et al., 1996, p. 455):

- I enjoy […] too much to stop.
- Although I tell myself that I'm not going to […], I end up doing it anyway.
- […] increases my enjoyment.

These statements referred to receptive oral/genital intercourse, rimming, receptive anal intercourse and anonymous sex. Those who more frequently agreed with the statements were categorised as 'sexually adventurous'. In DiFranceisco et al.'s study, 79% of seroconverters scored higher than the median on the sexual adventurism scale. Other stronger predictive factors for seroconversion were use of 'poppers' and snorting cocaine during sex, anal intercourse with and without condoms, and multiple sexual partners. The risk scenario generated by MACS was one where men were compulsive in their sexual activity, engaged in anal intercourse (especially unprotected) and used drugs during sex. This research exemplifies that much HIV social research is particularly dominated by individualist psychological explanations of adventurous sexual practice, and tends to pathologise adventurous and other non-normative sexual practices among gay men (see for example, Halkitis et al., 2001; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995; Parsons & Halkitis, 2002).

In contrast to the above research, Kippax et al. (1998) took a 'sexual practice' approach to sexual adventurism, generating a sexual adventurism scale that was grounded in 'esoteric' practices including fisting, water sports, use of sex toys, use of cock rings, SM practices, watching and being watched and dressing up/role play. This sexual adventurism scale was philosophically different from the MACS scale, which was grounded in psychological criteria—namely, compulsion. Instead, esoteric practices were understood as socially produced and attention shifted to the social milieux or sexual subcultures of the sexually adventurous men.

Recently, researchers have questioned Kippax et al.'s framing of sexual adventurism as 'an inventory of infrequent sexual practices pursued in a subcultural pocket' (McInnes et al., 2002, p. 8). They argue that while sexually adventurous men may be situated within an existing subculture and that various organisations and events have formed around different sexual styles, these men may not identify with the subculture (McInnes et al., p. 5):

> [I]t remains unclear whether such men should be characterised by their attendance at particular venues and events, by their interest in particular 'esoteric' sexual practices, by their participation in particular sexual styles and scenarios, by an adventurous or experimental attitude towards sex and drug use, by an awareness that they are members of a particular sexual subculture, or by some combination of these factors.

Ultimately, McInnes et al. reject the idea of a sexually adventurous subculture and network, especially when understood in terms of sex in particular spaces. Instead, they favour a temporal model of sexual learning. This focus on learning over time is a fruitful one and highlights the fluidity, diversity and relativity of the contexts of adventurous sex between men (McInnes & Bollen, 2004).

While the characterisation of a sexually adventurous subculture in terms of event-based sexual practice and drug use is imperfect, the use of the terms 'subculture' and 'sexual network' does not necessarily imply a contained space but, rather, more or less permeable boundaries and loose affiliations between people, places, and sexual practices. There is no necessary opposition between space and time in relation to subculture. Cultures emerge, transform and disappear over time. While learning implies movement over time, all learning has a spatial dimension. Culture is relevant to time *and* space.

Defining 'culture' and 'subculture'

Raymond Williams argues that the intricacies of culture illustrate the historical complexity of human development and ways of life (Williams, 1988 [1983], p. 87). Modern usage of the word 'culture' has come to have three broad meanings (Williams, p. 90):

- a process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development
- a particular way of life of a people, a group, a period or of humanity in general
- the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

'Culture' has both material and signifying or symbolic meaning (Williams, p. 91) and can be defined as the regular, ongoing ways in which people are materially and symbolically connected through 'networks of relationships' (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 139) and 'being together' (Maffesoli, 1996, p. xx).

Following Williams (p. 91) it appears that esoteric sexual practices are both material and symbolic, and both aspects will be explored in this report. For example, the regularity with which particular sexual practices occur within specific spaces and over periods of time allows us to think of those practices, spaces and times in terms of 'subculture' and 'sexual networks'. The term 'subculture', as we use it in this report, refers to the regularised and ongoing connections between people of a smaller group who are encompassed by a larger group (Williams, p. 92). For our purposes, the smaller group is the cohort of sexually adventurous gay men; the larger group is gay men more generally, who very often share the same spaces and networks as sexually adventurous gay men. The material aspects of subculture here include specific sex venues and sexual practices; the symbolic aspects include the meanings that attach to sexual adventurism.

A subculture is never isolated from the broader culture within which it is embedded: 'The concrete activity of representing a culture, subculture or indeed any coherent domain of collective activity is always strategic and selective. The world's societies are too systematically interconnected to permit any easy isolation of separate or individually functioning systems' (Clifford, 1999). What is sexually adventurous among gay men in a statistical sense (i.e. esoteric sexual practice) is also recognised to be marginal by men who engage in adventurous sex. As the findings below indicate, the gay men in this study mostly defined their adventurism against vanilla gay men rather than against broader hetero-normative culture. While adventurous and non-adventurous gay men alike frequented many of the gay-centred commercial and non-commercial cultural events, places and organisations, within this culture there were higher densities of sexually adventurous men within specific venues, organisations and friendship networks.

METHOD

Recruitment and data analysis

Men were invited to participate in this study because they were engaged in 'sexually adventurous' practices (i.e. esoteric sex); this was the sole criterion for their inclusion. 'Sexual adventurism' was defined in terms of having engaged in one or more of the following sexual activities: water sports (WS), bondage and discipline (BD), sadomasochism (SM), fisting and 'other' sexual practices. Men were also recruited on the basis that they used drugs *for* sex, although drug use was not a prerequisite for participation.

Interviewees were recruited primarily through two ongoing Australian studies: Health in Men (HIM), which is a cohort of HIV-negative gay men; and Positive Health (PH), a cohort of HIV-positive gay men. Invitations to participate were mailed to men through a regular newsletter, followed up by individual letters to participants in both studies. Men were also recruited through an article about the study published in a local gay newspaper, the *Sydney Star Observer* (Benzie, 2003). Over 50 men responded to the invitation to participate in the study and 31 men were interviewed. Sixteen men were drawn from HIM, 13 from PH, one from the *Sydney Star Observer* article and one from 'snowballing' (i.e. recruiting interviewees through other interviewees).

The interviews were semi-structured and took, on average, a little under two hours to conduct. They were taped and transcribed. Pseudonyms were used and all other identifying details were changed to protect the participants' anonymity. The interviews were analysed using NVivo, a software package designed to assist in the management of qualitative research data.

A number of themes were explored in the interviews including: conceptualising sexual adventurism; notions of subcultures and networks; the regulation of drug use for sex; sexual risk and safety; knowledge of HIV, STIs and hepatitis C (especially transmission, symptoms and consequences); and sexual pleasure (power, intimacy, transgression). The themes were discussed in relation to recent sexual encounters, including encounters that were 'novel' or 'unusual', 'hot' or 'excessive', and 'boring' or 'unsatisfying'. The focus on recent sexual events served to ground the discussion of the core themes explored in the project.

The sample

Of the 31 men interviewed, the great majority identified as gay. One man identified as a leather boy, another as bisexual. The average age of the men was 37, with a range of 27 to 61 years. While several of the men had moved from outer-Sydney to inner-Sydney, two-thirds had not been born in Sydney, having come from other states and rural areas of Australia and from other countries (New Zealand, Hong Kong, England, Portugal, Pakistan and the United States). Most now lived in the gay and lesbian precincts of the inner city, with more than half having lived in Sydney for ten or more years. Most men were tertiary educated. The great majority were highly sexually active and attended sex venues. More than half of the men took 'party' drugs and many used them specifically for sex.

thematic analysis 2

PART 1
SEXUAL ADVENTURE AND SUBCULTURE

Even though men were recruited on the basis of types of adventurous sexual practice, the degree of adventurism varied greatly within the group. The men were therefore categorised according to the degree of adventurism they practised: 16 men as 'very adventurous', 12 as 'somewhat adventurous' and 3 as 'not adventurous'. A man was categorised as 'very' adventurous if he engaged in a range of adventurous sexual activities (WS, BD, SM, role play, body piercing during sex, fisting or scat), if he actively and regularly sought out those activities, and if his engagement in any given practice was more 'heavy' than 'light'. For instance, one of the more adventurous men regularly engaged in marathon sexual sessions, sometimes lasting days, which included water sports, fisting, body piercing and SM.

Compared with the 'very adventurous' category, the 'somewhat adventurous' category was based upon a lesser degree of sexual adventurism in terms of type, frequency, duration and intensity of sex activities.

The third category of 'not adventurous' men lacked what might be described as a commitment to adventurous sex as demonstrated by the others, but they tended to consider some sexual activities as adventurous that other participants were unsure were adventurous or did not consider adventurous, such as rimming and group sex. One participant, who often engaged in 'bondage', limited it to the use of restraints found around the house (e.g. neckties) and included only blindfolding and the restraint of hands. More adventurous participants would not have regarded this activity as bondage.

The men's narratives about adventurous sex highlighted a number of different but related understandings of sexual adventurism:

- There was relatively uniform agreement among the men about which sex acts counted as adventurous.
- Almost all of the men were emphatic that their personal understanding and experience of adventurism became more intense over time, and some men believed that gay sexual culture had become more adventurous over time.
- Although the men recognised that their sexual practices were considered by others to be adventurous, they saw their activities as 'normal', a part of their usual sexual repertoire.
- To a limited extent, some men saw the *context* in which sex occurred as the major definitive characteristic of 'adventurous', especially sex that was outside the domestic sphere.
- For many men, being sexually adventurous was about extending their sexual boundaries, comfort zones and limits. This suggests that sexual adventurism is partly about a 'quest for excitement' in what they perceive as a mundane (sexual) world, and that it is related to transgression.

Each of these points is discussed in detail below.

Adventurism as non-normative sex

Most of the interviewees described sexual adventurism as a range of non-normative sexual practices. There was a high degree of agreement between them about what those non-normative practices were, and most framed the differences in terms of 'vanilla' and 'non-vanilla' (and sometimes 'kink' or 'fetish'). This broad agreement about what comprised sexual adventurism was based on the men's understanding of the commonness ('vanilla') and uncommonness ('adventure') of different sexual practices.

The interviewees thought that different social groups in society, e.g. adventurous gay men, bisexual men, vanilla heterosexuals, had different views of what constituted adventurous sex. Ted expressed ignorance about what counted as adventurous among heterosexuals in general, but described his heterosexual brother's notion of adventure as 'a root outside of marriage', to which he responded, 'Big deal!' Trent saw gay men as more adventurous than heterosexuals and grounded that belief in gay 'lifestyle and culture', which he believed emphasised multiple sexual partnering. Stephen similarly spoke of cultural differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, suggesting that sex for heterosexuals was more 'heavily socialised' and therefore more limited than it was for gay men.

Andrew, the only bisexually identified man in the sample, believed that the heterosexual 'mainstream' would consider man-on-man sex to be a fetish, but that from the bisexual or gay perspective 'that would be just straight [normal] sex … so adventurous [sex for gays and bisexuals] would be to go beyond that to BDSM or water sports or various things like that which are a bit more out there and maybe not as well publicly known.'

However, the great majority of interviewees viewed other gay men's sex as the standard against which they measured their own adventurism. The most frequent distinction made was between adventurous gay men and vanilla gay men and there was a continuum between the common and the esoteric (see Table 1).

The interviewees positioned 'vanilla' sex as common and 'adventurous' as unusual, and this understanding came through their immersion in gay sexual culture (see Kippax et al.'s [1998] description of esoteric sexual practices). In this sense, sexual adventurism is placed outside of, but in relation to, a gay sexual norm. Robert, for example, defined adventurous sex as: 'Anything I suppose beyond two people doing what two people would normally be doing.' Charles gave a similar definition: 'Well, I suppose doing things that are beyond what I'd consider ordinary sexual practices, such as sucking or fucking, or mutual masturbation.'

Table 1: Participants' views of sexually adventurous practices

Type of sexual practice	Degree of adventurousness
Hugging Kissing Touching Masturbation Oral/Genital Anal intercourse	Vanilla (normal)
Rimming Promiscuity Group sex Unprotected anal intercourse	Transition zone or Zone of dispute
Sex toys Water sports SM BD Bondage Role play Body piercing Fisting	Adventurous (kinky)
Scat Felching	Extreme

Most of the men recognised that their own sexual activity was adventurous in relation to the majority of other gay men. While this distinction was sometimes explicit, in most cases the interviewees talk assumed a gay standard. Charles illustrated this point:

> *... if one was to go home with anyone it would be surprising that anyone would be interested in [fisting and water sports]. And that really one has to seek out people who you know are interested in those things.*

Most men were able to place different kinds of sexual activity on a continuum between vanilla and extreme, and were highly consistent in what specific sexual activities they considered adventurous. Sexual adventurism (or kink) was generally not considered extreme. As Table 1 indicates, the sexual practices the men described as adventurous were all (and more) of those named in recruitment

advertisements: BDSM, water sports, piercing the body during sex, role play, the use of sex toys.

Leroy was typical of the interviewees: 'I would have thought it was anything that's not vanilla … anything beyond straight touching, kissing, sucking, fucking.' Other vanilla practices named by interviewees included hugging and mutual masturbation. Some interviewees described receptive oral and anal intercourse and receptive fisting as more adventurous than the insertive modes. Insertive rimming was also classed as more adventurous. However, most men did not class these practices (insertive or receptive) as adventurous in themselves.

Between the categories of vanilla and adventurous sex were 'indeterminate' practices such as promiscuity, group sex, rimming and unprotected anal intercourse. There was disagreement between the men about the status of these practices, a 'zone of dispute'. Most men considered promiscuity or multiple sex partnering, for example, as vanilla: 'Being promiscuous is not sexually adventurous' (Paul). But a limited number saw it as either borderline ('… that's getting more adventurous' [Michael]) or as adventurous ('Yes. I would, yes' [Drew]). However, the more adventurous the interviewees, the less likely they were to designate disputed practices as adventurous and the more likely to raise the bar of what counted as sexually adventurous.

As well, many men qualified or expressed uncertainty about how to categorise some sexual practices—what we have called the 'transition zone'. For example, although many clearly categorised rimming as vanilla, others described it in more uncertain terms, as 'mildly adventurous' (Charles), 'a little bit adventurous' (Ted) and 'borderline [vanilla] I guess' (Brendan). However, the practices men in this study viewed as transitional or disputed adventurous sex (particularly rimming, group sex and unprotected anal intercourse), have been found by researchers to be relatively common among gay men—not as common as oral intercourse but far more common than fisting (Crawford et al., 1998, p. 43).

Individual and group change over time

Engaging in sex and then becoming sexually adventurous are necessarily learned in the course of one's sexual life (McInnes et al., 2002). In this present study, a number of the men commented on this. Brendan, reflecting upon his own sexual history, said:

> *Looking back, I can remember when I had my first wank … my first sexual experience with a guy … the first time I got fucked, and the first time I ever fisted someone. You know. Now, in all those instances I thought I was being sexually adventurous. Well, that is, for me at that particular point in time, because it hasn't been something I've ever tried before. Same with fisting. Same with anything I've never done. There is, yeah, it's … those things now just come sort of second nature to me and I just … I don't think I'm being sexually adventurous at all with them.*

Robert similarly grounded sexual adventurism in his own sexual development:

> *Well, I've been out for a while so I've gone through different stages where some of these things I would have thought originally were extreme. And now I sort of consider them normal.*

Most men, over time, became increasingly sexually adventurous and, as they became more adventurous, their understanding of what counted as adventurous became increasingly narrow and more extreme. Adrian drew upon his involvement in Sydney gay community over time to broaden his view of 'vanilla' and, therefore, what no longer counted as adventurous:

> *[That term 'vanilla'], it's so nebulous. What was vanilla ten years ago isn't necessarily vanilla today. So when people say, 'I'm into vanilla sex,' well automatically you think of, well, probably just vanilla is just oral, nipple play, and masturbation, or you know, mutual masturbation. That was, I suppose, the old-*

fashioned or the ten-years-ago vanilla. But I think today's vanilla could possibly mean … is in most cases kissing, tit play, sucking, rimming, licking all over the body from head to toe, um, is pleasuring a body completely.

Adrian's idea of change over time in what counted as adventurous sex, however, focused on cultural change in the gay community rather than any given individual's shift toward adventurism.

Most men in this study considered sexual adventurism to be a constant 'becoming', where current sexual practice was without limit or point of arrival, an extension of personal boundaries and an exploration of the unknown or untried. Brendan, for example, defined sexual adventurism as: 'Something you wouldn't normally try. Something you wouldn't normally indulge in.' Stephen offered a similar definition, in the negative: '[Vanilla sex is] about not actually wanting to explore or go beyond.'

The way the men framed their experimental approach to sex was complex. It was variously described as a political act, a compulsion, but mostly as a desire to enhance pleasure. If one understands sexual pleasure in terms of the building and release of sexual tension, as did Freud (Freud, 1975, pp. 12, 75–66, 78), it might be the case that once a sexual practice has been learnt, the degree of sexual tension the practice once offered is no longer present. New sexual activities must be found to achieve the same degree of sexual pleasure. In Foucault's terms (Foucault, 1988, p. 298):

> You find emerging in places like San Francisco and New York what might be called laboratories of sexual experimentation … It is because the sexual act has become so easy and available to homosexuals that it runs the risk of quickly becoming boring, so that every effort has to be made to innovate and create variation that will enhance the pleasure of the act.

The ready availability of sex for gay men makes sex, perhaps, an obvious outlet in the quest for excitement. In the words of Stephen: 'How many ways can you suck a cock or shag an arse before it gets a bit tedious and it's over and done with?' Such a view is supported by the interviewees' sense that older age and greater sexual experience are markers of being sexually adventurous.

'Becoming' and 'being', however, are not mutually exclusive. Adventurism often means learning and then practising variations within a defined area of adventurous sex (e.g. fisting, SM, BD, water sports). For example, Michael was asked if he wanted to try new sexual practices:

> MICHAEL: *Not particularly. No, I don't feel I want to get into water sports or bondage and discipline or anything like that.*
>
> INTERVIEWER: So fisting is basically where you're at and where you want to remain?
>
> MICHAEL: *Yeah. Yeah, I think so.*
>
> INTERVIEWER: So with fisting then, have you pushed the boundaries more in fisting?
>
> MICHAEL: *Yeah, there are things, like, within the fisting, yeah, that I have gradually tried. Yeah.*
>
> INTERVIEWER: What would be the progression?
>
> MICHAEL: *Um, when you start, just getting the hand in is an achievement [both laugh]. So then you realise that you can do things once it's in there [small laugh from interviewee]. So people try and go in deeper or you might try and stretch the width. People might try and go for two hands or double fisting. Yeah. Things like that.*

A minority of interviewees had no desire to extend their (adventurous) sexual repertoire, which was either limited or was a repetition of a particular adventurous activity. Phillip's compulsion to repeat his spankings did not manifest in a desire to do new adventurous things. Similarly, Ted's game was 'narrow' and endlessly repeated: 'I'm really into the daddy/son thing … My dad could take off their belt to a boy and discipline them.' This practice might be described as a fixation; it was the daddy/son practice itself rather than the introduction of novelty that was central to achieving sexual satisfaction and to being outside the sexual norm. It should not be forgotten that, while endlessly repeated, some men's experiences do not diminish in intensity. Many men

highlighted that adventure was tied to maintaining and enhancing pleasure. Colin, for instance, stated:

> *... I view sex as play, you know, it's just there for the physical pleasure of being with someone else and just experimenting and doing things that add spice or interest to your activity. But vanilla—those people I classify as vanilla—sit within that precinct of not wanting to [experiment] ...*

Adventurous spaces for sex

Some interviewees made clear-cut distinctions between sex within the domestic sphere and in 'public' places such as sex venues and beats; adventurous sex did not take place in a bed or at home. Johnny highlighted this: 'Um, more out of the ordinary. Not the straightforward vanilla—"Yes I love you. Let's go to bed and play." That bores the shit out of me' [laughs].

However, most men did not consider 'beats' to be adventurous; while the context was adventurous, the activities within them were not. This was illustrated by Anthony:

> *I think it's adventurous but I still think it's vanilla. Like, if you said to me, 'What do you consider beat sex?' I'd say, 'I think those guys are into very vanilla stuff because how creative can you be?'*

Leroy expressed the same idea:

> *I guess the adventure is not being caught or the location you're at. But I still kind of see it as mainly vanilla kind of acts.*

At the same time, many men recognised that some people considered beats to be adventurous, primarily because of the danger of being caught.

Three other interviewees made an even stronger distinction between the domestic and extra-domestic spheres. Simon tied vanilla sex (so to speak) to beds: 'Between the sheets. Anything, basically, in a bed.' Using sex-on-premises venues meant entering into the realm of adventure. But for Simon, these different spaces also related to different sexual activities. Sex in beds was a space reserved for emotional intimacy and related to 'very close tactility', including 'sucking, fucking, touch, massage, licking, kissing, smooching'. Adventurous sexual activities, such as fisting, sex toys, arse play, chemical sex and watching dirty videos, were reserved for spaces beyond the bed, and definitely not between the sheets.

Leroy engaged in both adventurous and vanilla sex with his regular and casual partners. His particular adventurous interest was to be heavily caned and sexually 'used'. Leroy's pain threshold was lower at home with his regular partner than in public spaces. For this reason, adventurous sex at home, and with his regular partner in particular, tended to be less successful than in a sex venue:

> *We don't have successful adventurous sex [at home], as boyfriends and partners ... we're equals. At home we're equals. So if we want to get involved with a full-on adventurous sex we go to [Underground]. Yeah. And we're not equals anymore.*

By removing sex from the domestic sphere, Leroy and his partner could move into a more satisfying inequality in their sexual play.

Transgression

Some interviewees linked sexual adventurism to transgression: extending personal boundaries and limits, or stepping outside of accepted social norms. Stephen was asked if transgression was an element of sexual adventurism:

> *Oh, absolutely, and it's something that we've absolutely lost sight of. I think gay men need to be outlaws to some extent, in the broader sense of that word. I find it really interesting about how we've actually shadowed it out. You know, and it's almost about this good little, sort of, like, queer citizen set that we're supposedly embarked on now ... basically sort of settle down and ... not startle neighbours. But I think there's something really powerful about being gay that is about upsetting the neighbours.*

In a somewhat different way—at a more personal political level—at least three other interviewees framed their sexual adventurism as

transgressive. Brendan considered he was different from most other people because they 'didn't think' or were 'boring', and his engagement in adventurous sex set him apart from the boring and unthinking. Gordon very clearly framed sexual adventurism as transgressive:

> *And it's definitely a part of what being out, as a gay man, means to me. It's that I will do whatever I want to do, albeit in a very narrow, confined way and only at certain times. But there's that feeling that this is ... it's me. That's just how it is.*

For Gordon, being sexually adventurous was a revolt against the perception that he was a 'good boy'. He desired sexual partners who represented an ideal of what he would like to be but wasn't. His rebellion against his 'good boy' image was as much a struggle with his own sense of self:

> *But picking up on that transgression thing ... quite a strong sense of looking for guys that would be quite bad and wanting to be bad, wanting to be a bad boy in the bad boys' club. And some sexual act, some sexual adventurism, gives me some kind of membership in the bad boys' club ... when I know that no matter how desperately hard I try, I'm not [laughs]. I don't fit in the bad boys' club, even when I am being bad ... because I'm more likely to be beating myself with remorse, thinking, 'I shouldn't have done that'. Oh, that was so terrible.*

Gordon envied the apparent confidence and aloofness of the bad boys and by having sex with them he gained fleeting entry into the club. He made clear that being a bad boy was not genuinely bad. Genuinely bad behaviour was stealing cars or 'setting the neighbour's cat on fire', while his badness was expressed within the narrow confines of consensual sexual adventurism, within which he was able to explore, through sexual fantasy, a darker aspect of himself.

Bruce gave a strikingly similar account of his own sexual adventurism as a primary site of transgression, which he linked to a desire to overcome other people's perception that he was 'conservative' and a 'mummy's boy' and his own recognition that he had been conservative in the past. Bruce illustrated his shifting sense of self, toward a celebration of his difference from others, in a surprising way. He recounted that on the day of the interview he had not shaved before going to work, an act he recognised as relatively insignificant but one he believed would upset his work colleagues' impression that he was conservative. Less surprising, and in the context of sex, he situated drug use and fisting as forbidden pleasures that placed him outside a norm and which illustrated to himself and others that he had a capacity to rebel against stifling social norms. Within the adventurous sexual encounter, unlike in vanilla sex, certain kinds of high passion, such as fear and anger, were permitted. BDSM was an especially powerful expression of darker 'antisocial' desires but, again, mostly expressed within highly controlled and regulated spaces. For some sexually adventurous men, their adventurous sex is framed as a kind of protest, both against stifling, routine and mundane social norms and against their internalisation of those norms.

A subculture of sexual adventurism

This study was particularly interested in the men's socio-sexual networks and interconnections. Charles noted that if one was interested in having adventurous forms of sex then one must 'seek out people who you know are interested in those things'. If there is a critical mass of men interested in and seeking out sexual adventure, then a culture of sexual adventurism is probable. Sydney, as the 'gay capital' of Australia, perhaps has the critical mass of gay men that allows such a culture to emerge.

The men recruited to this study clearly illustrated the existence of a sexually adventurous subculture in Sydney. Entry criteria were solely grounded in engagement in adventurous sex (and drug use): two-thirds of interviewees regularly attended the Underground sex venue[2], and most of the interviewees identified it as a primary site of

[2] This and all other names of venues are pseudonyms.

sexual adventurism (whether or not they used the venue). The more sexually adventurous the men were in relation to other men in the sample, the more likely they were to have attended this venue. The relatively high number of men who attend the Underground suggests that sexual adventurism is not accidental and dispersed, but patterned and concentrated, although relatively fluid.

Most of the interviewees, especially the more adventurous ones, believed there was a sexually adventurous subculture in Sydney, and some were more definite than others that such a subculture existed. While other sex venues (the Piston and the Attic) were also named as part of a cluster of sexually adventurous venues, Ted believed the Underground sat at the centre of sexual adventurism in Sydney: '… because it has rooms specifically set up with slings and with benches that you can lean guys over to beat them and things like that, whereas the other clubs aren't set up [that way].' Other aspects of the Underground interviewees mentioned were: the 'piss room', 'drawbridge', 'flogging room' and, perhaps most importantly, its 'mood' and 'reputation'. Stephen succinctly described the mood at the Underground as 'a darker, dirtier sexuality', while Robert said: 'I mean, if somebody says they've gone to Underground, I'll make some smart-arse comment about being pissed on or fisted.'

Although at some venues (and other spaces) there was a high concentration of sexually adventurous practices (or men), such venues are not used exclusively by adventurous men for adventurous practices: many vanilla practices occurred in the same venues and many men who used those spaces only ever engaged in vanilla practices. Similarly, the venues our interviewees identified as vanilla, especially saunas, were also spaces within which adventurous sex was practised.

However, what categorises a space as adventurous is the proportion of the clientele who are interested in and seek out adventurous practices there. Certain venues encourage 'kinky' forms of sex on premises, and specific fetishes on particular nights of the week. Venues may also foster kinky sex through themed rooms (prison, dungeon, etc.) that encourage BDSM and other adventurous sexual practices. Some venues promote sexually adventurous activities through marketing, design and the provision of adventure-specific facilities and services, such as slings, dungeons and artwork designed to promote certain fantasies.

Several interviewees made assignations through existing sexual networks or over the internet, and arranged to meet at the Underground. Stephen illustrated the point:

> *I mean, if I go to [Underground] these days, we either go because we've organised a play party there in one of the sling rooms. I very rarely go and wander around … largely because I just can't be bothered with that shit now.*

The Underground was one of the only sex-on-premises venues at which men said they made arrangements to meet sex partners, rather than just meeting them at a venue by chance. One reason for this is that the Underground not only caters to a sexually adventurous clientele but it also has private rooms that can be booked for this purpose.

This sexually adventurous 'subculture' does not have a name, or a single name. Many men identified the existence of a leather subculture, and some identified themselves as members of it. However, most did not express a strong overall adventurous group identity, and the most commonly mentioned sexually adventurous spaces were specific social clubs, dance parties, private sex parties and the internet. Thus, a sexually adventurous subculture consists of fluid networks, intersections and densities of sexual practices within particular spaces (and times), including the concrete space of specific sexual venues and dance events, or the virtual space/time intersection of the internet. These spaces of sexual adventurism are not solely populated by gay men exclusively interested in adventurous sex, but are shared by both adventurous and vanilla men.

The internet is a good illustration of a shared zone for adventurous and vanilla men alike. A third of the interviewees at least sometimes used the internet to find sexual partners, but few used it as the primary way of meeting sexual partners and only one man reported using the internet for cybersex. For some men, the internet enabled sexual interests to be explored in the safe environment of the cyber

world, a kind of learning within safe boundaries. Of course, cruising existing internet chat sites is not limited to sexually adventurous men, but the chat sites permit men to describe and advertise their specific sexual interests. The internet can therefore be used to connect with other men who are similarly inclined.

Each interviewee was asked to describe 'markers' of sexual adventurism, and these included dress styles, attendance at particular places, and behaviours and attitudes. The following were commonly identified:

- hanky codes (the most transparent marker of all but also, it was noted, uncommonly used)
- membership and identification with specific organisations (leather especially)
- leather attire and uniforms
- attendance at specific sex venues, specific social venues (pubs and clubs) and/or at specific dance parties
- tattoos, especially when large and prominent
- piercings, especially genital
- confidence and masculinity
- shaved heads
- older age
- HIV-positive serostatus
- drug use.

Many interviewees, however, qualified these 'markers' by noting, firstly, that they were not a guarantee of adventurism. While leather was one of the most commonly noted markers, many interviewees also noted that leather was as much a fashion statement as an indication of interest in sexual adventure. Many men who did not outwardly appear to be adventurous (i.e. did not bear the markers) were adventurous. Interviewees commonly pointed to themselves as evidence that an appearance of non-adventure could be misleading. Secondly, while men very often mentioned hanky codes as quintessential markers of being sexually adventurous, most men recognised that hankies were infrequently used—they were more of a comic gesture of adventurism. Yet, these hanky codes were one among a range of other markers that suggested the existence of a sexually adventurous subculture in Sydney.

The use of the term 'subculture' in this report, as a way of making sense of the patterns of sexually adventurous practice, is not entirely accurate however. The concept of 'subculture' is perhaps too rigid and erects boundaries around gay male sexual adventurism, masking the extent to which it is embedded within gay culture more generally. McInnes et al. (2002) note that there is an absence of ethnographic research in Sydney that permits us to claim the existence of a subculture of sexual adventurism. They also note that '… "sexually adventurous gay men" may have little or no awareness that they are members of such a subculture or group' (McInnes et al., 2002, p. 5). McInnes et al.'s research, however, recognises not only that sex venues are associated with sexually adventurous practice, but also that much adventurous sex occurs outside of those spaces.

Despite this, the concept of 'subculture' did resonate with many of our interviewees who engaged in sexually adventurous practices. For that reason, the concept may be put to good educational use, especially in terms of audience reach and the use of signifiers of sexual adventurism, i.e. in campaigns targetting sexually adventurous men. In this study the majority of our interviewees felt that they belonged within a sexually adventurous subculture in Sydney, and that this subculture was more or less facilitated by a range of different clubs, bars and sex venues, and the internet. Interviewees identified a range of markers of sexual adventurism relating to aesthetics, codes, attitudes, and even to factors such as age, serostatus, and place of residence.

PART 2
SEXUAL ADVENTURISM AND SAFE SEX

Different sexual practices carry different levels of risk for HIV transmission, and most adventurous activities (sex toys, role play, rimming, fisting and water sports) carry a low risk of HIV infection. While some international research argues that there is an association between sexually adventurous sex and unsafe sex with casual partners, much of this research focuses on individuals rather than the social contexts in which individuals are situated. It refers to sexual compulsion (Bancroft et al., 2003; Cooper et al., 2000; Dolezal et al., 1997; Halkitis & Parsons, 2003; Ostrow et al., 1997) rather than to esoteric sexual practice (Kippax et al., 1998).

Data from the Sydney cohort studies of gay men (Sydney Men and Sexual Health [SMASH][3] and Health in Men [HIM][4]), indicate that HIV-negative men who are sexually adventurous are more likely to have unprotected anal intercourse than negative men who are non-adventurous, and are also more likely to have greater numbers of sexual partners. These factors, taken together, may generate a greater cumulative risk of HIV transmission for sexually adventurous HIV-negative men. HIV-positive men are also more likely to engage in unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners: in Sydney and other capital cities, HIV-positive gay men are twice as likely as negative men to have unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners over a six-month period (National Centre in HIV Social Research, 2003, p. 31), although much of this unprotected anal intercourse is between positive men (Fogarty et al., 2003).

In the current study, in the six months prior to being interviewed, each interviewee had had on average just over 50 partners (range 1 to 140), with 25 of the 31 interviewees having had 10 or more sexual partners during the six-month period. In addition, the more sexual partners the interviewees had had, the more likely they were to have also had a sexually transmissible infection in the previous six months, especially syphilis, gonorrhoea or chlamydia.

The interviewees engaged in a range of adventurous sexual activities, including fisting, waters sports, BDSM, felching, scat, piercing for sex, unprotected anal intercourse and the use of sex toys. Many of the men engaged in a range of different adventurous practices, though many men seemed to prefer specific sexual practices. The most common practice, engaged in by about half of the sample, was fisting. Most interviewees who engaged in fisting did not use gloves and considered the HIV transmission risk to be minimal. Somewhat common practices included water sports, BDSM and unprotected anal intercourse. The least common practices were scat, felching and piercing the skin for sex. For those men who engaged in BD and/or SM, there was a range of engagement from light to heavy; for example, some men were caned or whipped to the point of bleeding and bruising.

Two interviewees described occasions of adventurous sex that they deemed unsafe. The first involved an HIV-positive man, Simon, who bled from his anus while being fisted by an HIV-negative man.[5] The second related to a group caning session between an HIV-negative man, Leroy, and a number of other partners of unknown serostatus. While being

[3] Personal communication with June Crawford in relation to an analysis of the Sydney Men and Sexual Health Study (SMASH) data.

[4] Unpublished data from the HIM cohort. Based on personal communication with Limin Mao.

[5] There has been only one confirmed case of HIV transmission from fisting (Donovan et al., 1986).

caned Leroy's blood began to spatter and the caning session was stopped.

The great majority of men regularly engaged in anal intercourse, both insertive and receptive, as part of their sexual repertoire. Only one man had not engaged in anal intercourse in recent years, primarily because his sexual activity rarely involved physical contact and was oriented toward exhibitionism. While some interviewees considered some forms of anal intercourse to be adventurous (e.g. when unprotected, rough, or engaged in over extended periods of time), all interviewees considered 'normal' anal intercourse to be vanilla. Some of this anal intercourse was unsafe casual sex. In the 12 months prior to interview, 13 of the 31 interviewees had engaged in what we define as high-risk 'unsafe sex'—unprotected anal intercourse with an HIV nonconcordant partner—although the majority of HIV-negative men used condoms consistently for anal intercourse. Almost all of the men's accounts of unsafe sex related to unprotected anal intercourse.

The majority of HIV-positive men did not use or inconsistently used condoms with their sexual partners (either regular or casual). All but one of the HIV-positive men (12 out of 13) and around half of the HIV-negative men (10 out of 18) had not used condoms in *recent* anal sexual intercourse. Among the HIV-positive men, however, unprotected sex was generally with other positive men. Similarly, most of the negative men believed the unprotected sex was with other negative men.

While Kippax et al.'s (1998) study found that sexual adventurism predicted HIV seroconversion, several men in our study, especially positive men, inverted that relationship; becoming sexually adventurous followed becoming HIV-positive, as a kind of sexual liberation. In the words of a recent seroconverter, Drew: 'I think HIV-negative men are actually are a bit more cautious than the HIV-positive men. As an [HIV-positive] group, I sort of see, "Oh well, let's go for it now." ' Similarly, Paul said he became 'more daring' and was more prepared to step outside of his 'comfort zone' when he became HIV-positive, not only in terms of sexual practice but in life more generally. Again, Stephen broadly agreed that HIV-positive men were more sexually adventurous, because of the 'Why not?' factor, but also because HIV-positive men tended to be older and therefore more likely to be adventurous as a consequence of accumulated sexual experience.

Casual sex, adventurism and risk

HIV-negative men and unsafe sex

In this study most HIV-negative men consistently used condoms for anal intercourse with casual partners and, in the case of those who sometimes did not use condoms, most incidences were in the order of occasional 'slip-ups', one-off events as distinct from their more usual safe sex practice. Michael exemplified the pattern: 'I know the risks. I know what to do and what not to do. I know how to negotiate safe sex. I've done all those things for years. But you slip up.' The reasons for the slip-ups were diverse but the most commonly stated reasons were a high state of arousal, the sexual partner's claiming to be HIV-negative, condoms reducing pleasurable sensation (and a related dislike of condoms) and drug use. Most men gave multiple reasons for not using condoms. Only three HIV-negative men consistently engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners, at times in adventurous situations.

Although many cases of unsafe anal intercourse occurred in the context of adventurous sex, almost none of the unsafe activities were 'adventurous' activities, because most forms of adventurous sex are not likely to transmit HIV. A number of interviewees' accounts of their sexual practice supported Kippax et al.'s (1998) finding that unsafe sex and sexual adventurism were associated with HIV seroconversion. Brad and Ted recounted (and in fact, usually had) unsafe sexual encounters in the context of adventurous sex. Both knowingly engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with HIV-positive men or with men whose status they did not know. Ted's particular form of sexual adventurism was to play 'daddy' in a tightly scripted daddy/son relationship. Being the insertive partner was an aspect of that script. He almost never used condoms when engaging in anal intercourse and rarely met resistance to unprotected sex from his sexual partners. (Brad's unprotected anal intercourse is considered below).

Another HIV-negative man, Michael, had recently engaged in a fisting session at a private sex party with five other men. Four of the men were HIV-positive and Michael and the remaining man were HIV-negative. In the session, Michael engaged in unprotected anal intercourse with a known HIV-positive partner. He described the incident as a 'slip-up' from his usual safe sex practice, and sought post-exposure prophylaxis treatment the following day. The reasons for the slip-up included many familiar themes in HIV social research: a high state of arousal, his partner not wanting to use condoms, his partner being especially sexy, his feeling especially comfortable and relaxed in the sexual situation, and his experiencing a 'loss of reason'.

Other negative men also suggested a 'loss of reason' as the reason for engaging in unprotected sex in the context of adventurism; on the one hand, they strongly desired to remain HIV-negative (e.g. by using condoms) and, on the other hand, they had an equally strong desire to maximise pleasure (e.g. by not using condoms). Heightened states of arousal, particularly in sexually adventurous sessions, may override the (reasoned) importance of remaining HIV-negative. Added to this, a minority of HIV-negative men also displayed naïve optimism that HIV-positive men would not have unprotected anal intercourse, or that the unprotected sex was negotiated on the basis that both men were HIV-negative.

The interviewees found it difficult to articulate a rationale for not using condoms and, when they could do so, the rationale was often complex. Michael was a very good example of this. He knew what safe sex was and had successfully negotiated and practised it for many years, but he had 'slipped up' during an adventurous session and had considerable trouble explaining the reason for the unsafe encounter: 'He wanted to fuck me without a condom and I said "Yes". That's pretty inexplicable to me—still.' This uncertainty about his reasons for engaging in unsafe sex was also expressed by many other interviewees.

Michael also agreed, upon request, to his partner ejaculating inside him. The context of the unsafe sex did not greatly differ from others he was involved in: group fisting sessions and the use of drugs for sex (methamphetamine and MDA). He did, however, identify aspects of that particular session that may have led to unprotected sex:

> *... all the reasons are really silly and bad that I could think of. He had a very nice dick, and that's not a good reason [laughs].*

Most often Michael engaged in fisting sessions at the Underground sex club. Being in someone's home made the evening particularly, 'calm and friendly and chatty and social'. He felt that being relaxed was a possible reason for his 'bad decision'. Throughout the interview, and not specifically in relation to the episode of unsafe sex, Michael repeatedly raised the importance of 'connectivity' when selecting fisting partners. He not only felt a need to establish trust with such partners because of the potential for physical damage to his anus and rectum, but he was also concerned to establish an emotional connection befitting the intimacy of the act itself:

> *In some ways the physical act of fisting is very, very intimate, and requires a level of trust with the other person.*

He had established such a relation of trust with the man with whom he engaged in unprotected anal intercourse and, paradoxically, Michael's trust and comfort with his partner led him to drop his usual guard against unsafe sex (fisting had preceded anal intercourse). Because he and his sexual partner had 'negotiated' unsafe sex, Michael took full responsibility for the unsafe encounter. Other factors Michael attributed to the unsafe event were the more 'controlled environment' of being at someone's house (and not at the Underground, which was more usual) and the drugs being particularly good on the evening and 'peaking' when the unsafe event occurred.

The uncertainty about motive for unsafe sex, combined with a strong desire to make sense of any given 'slip-up' was also present in the narratives of many other men. The received wisdom about why unsafe sex occurs may help to make sense of their unsafe sex, but those reasons should not be taken at face value and the interviewees themselves did not take them that way. Brad was a case in point. When asked why he 'barebacked' when insertive,

he said: 'I don't actually feel like I'm taking that much of a risk.' Further discussion revealed, however, that Brad also rarely used condoms when receptive in anal intercourse and he had limited insight into what informed his 'decisions' to use or not to use condoms:

> *Sometimes I do. And I'm not sure why. Even afterwards I'm like, well, 'Why the other night did I let that person but tonight I didn't let that person?' You know, I'm not sure what determines it for me ... just sometimes.*

Despite this uncertainty, Brad repeatedly mentioned the 'kind' of sex he engaged in as a reason for not using condoms consistently:

> *When I weigh up the amount of sex that I have and having to think about having sex a certain way or letting go of that and just doing it the way that I want to do it, then I'd rather just do it ... the way that I want to do it.*

The 'certain way' of having sex included fisting, felching (see quote below) and urinating in his partner's rectum. While fisting carries a low risk for HIV transmission, the latter two practices necessarily involved unprotected anal intercourse.

Brad felt a stark choice between practising safe sex and giving up a range of highly desirable sexual practices. Some of those practices, however, were low risk for HIV transmission:

> *Yeah. One of the other things that I do during sex, if I'm like eating cum out of some guy's arse [felching] or if I'm going down on a guy and I've got a cut in my mouth. Or all these other things that are ways that I could contract this STD, whatever one it is, and I've had them all. But I don't have HIV. Then I don't understand why I'm going to go to all the trouble of putting on a condom and not having it be how I want it to be.*

Brad repeatedly stated that safe sex made the kinds of adventurous sex he wanted more complicated and less pleasurable. However, he made no clear distinction between the severity of HIV and other STIs, and he seemed not to have a clear understanding of the degree of HIV transmission risk associated with different sexual practices. That he hadn't yet seroconverted, given his sexual history of unsafe sex, allayed some of his fears of contracting HIV.

Sexually adventurous men are more likely than others to be HIV-positive[6], have more sexual partners and have more STIs. Just over half (7) of the reported recent episodes of unprotected anal intercourse amongst the HIV-positive men were with casual partners whose HIV status was negative or unknown. These factors, taken together, mean that HIV-negative men who engage in unprotected anal intercourse within adventurous settings are more likely to do so with an HIV-positive man. HIV-negative men who understand the adventurous sexual culture in which they participate are perhaps better equipped to negotiate safe sex within that culture than men who are new to it, or on the fringes of it. Given that positive men are less likely to initiate condom usage in certain casual sexual encounters, as will be discussed, the burden of initiating condom use falls more heavily on HIV-negative men.[7] Given this, negative men require a high degree of commitment to, and assertiveness in, using condoms.

HIV-positive men and unsafe sex

Being HIV-positive is one marker within a cluster of other markers of adventurism, including attending Underground and similar sex venues and being older and more sexually experienced. Many HIV-positive men in this study preferred unprotected anal intercourse, and most sought out other positive men for unprotected sex. Paul, Bruce and Drew, all HIV-positive, spoke of their strong dislike of condoms and disappointment when their sexual partners used condoms for sex. Their preference was for 'bareback' whenever possible, as illustrated by Jeremy:

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[6] This assertion is based on a comparison between men from PH and HIM who scored highly on the esoteric sexual practice scale. It is also based on personal communication with Andrea Fogarty.

[7] As will be discussed below, HIV-negative men often refuse to take up the burden (i.e. responsibility) of initiating condom use, thus transferring the burden of safe sex to HIV-positive men.

My preference is always for sex with another positive guy—unprotected sex with another positive guy, always. Um, but if I want sex and the guy's hot and they want to use a condom, I will use a condom. Or if they are negative or they say they're negative and they're not HIV I will put on a condom.

Over half the positive interviewees took full responsibility for their partners in sexual encounters, and made statements such as Dwayne's:

The virus stops here ... this is my disease and I'm not sharing it, you know. I'm not going to kill somebody else.

Stephen was asked if condoms symbolised being positive:

Well, no, I think, you know, if in fact they're emblematic of anything, they're emblematic of negativity. I mean [laughs], I don't think condoms signify positivity at all. I mean condoms are, totally to me, emblematic of negativity. Um, you know, it's completely the reverse.

For other positive men, however, responsibility was often or sometimes devolved to their sexual partners, especially in casual or anonymous sexual encounters in the context of adventurism. Three positive men gave strikingly similar detailed accounts of unprotected sex with men of unknown HIV serostatus grounded in the belief that safe sex was an individual responsibility. For example, Paul argued:

If you want to participate in barebacking you have to be responsible for your own actions. You have to know that the other person that you're barebacking with could be positive. And you're opening yourself up to risk. And to me, guys who want to fuck me, or guys who want me to fuck them bareback, I don't ask. I'm not interested in asking because I just assume they're positive.

A fundamental HIV education discourse in Australia is to assume that everyone is positive. However, the effect of such a message upon positive men, such as Paul, may have the unintended outcome of promoting unprotected sex. Bruce inverted the intended meaning of the 'shared responsibility' education message:

BRUCE: *He fucked me unsafely and I let other men fuck me unsafely at Underground. Um, I feel they have that responsibility if they are negative. It's generally regarded as a lower risk for the top.*

INTERVIEWER: What's your responsibility?

BRUCE: *There's shared responsibility, as in 'I'm responsible for me, I'm not responsible for them', and there's probably more risk of me catching another sort of STD than there is of them possibly getting HIV from my ass.*

Jeremy also placed responsibility for condom use with his partners and grounded that belief in sexual politics:

To some extent I think the active person has to take the responsibility [for condom use]. Maybe it's an old feminist issue or something like that [laughing] ... I'm the one with my ass up in the air; he's the one who wants to take the risk so he has to make the decision.

Here we find a more clearly articulated logic that the receptive and insertive modes of anal intercourse are a relation of power, an idea that was implicit in Paul's and Bruce's talk. The more powerful insertive partner should take responsibility for not transmitting HIV to his less powerful receptive partner.

The individualising and responsibilising discourses of both HIV-positive and HIV-negative men were highly context-sensitive. For some positive men, the more a sexual partner was 'known', the more feelings of responsibility toward that person came to the fore, regardless of whether the unprotected sex was insertive or receptive. An HIV-negative man, Charles, explained the specific contexts in which he believed disclosure of HIV serostatus was more likely:

In back rooms and saunas it's much more anonymous and people don't seem to care, I think. And this may just be my own mind, but if somebody's there in your house or you're in their house and you've sort of built up something of a rapport, just by being there and talking to them, I feel that there's likely to be more respect for my needs in that regard than by anyone whose name I don't even know out at a sex-on-premises place.

Charles described the connection between attending sex venues and a lack of care, comparing it with the connection between being in the domestic environment and caring for others. Some of the positive men's accounts of unsafe sex clearly described this logic in practice. While Paul, Drew and Bruce all disliked condoms, on some occasions their use was welcomed. Paul, for example, greatly enjoyed unprotected anal intercourse and was almost always receptive. If his sexual partners used condoms he tended to 'quickly move on'. He recounted one occasion, however, when he was thankful a condom had been used:

PAUL: *We actually met at Underground and then he fucked me with a condom. At that time I wasn't ... really like 'groan' [boredom], I didn't really like him. Like, I thought he was cute but, you know ...*

INTERVIEWER: The sex wasn't what you wanted?

PAUL: *The sex wasn't what I wanted but I didn't mind doing it because I thought he was quite cute and I could sense a chemistry there, so, it's okay, it's okay. And we only fucked for a while ... But it's only after the fucking we started talking and blah, blah, blah. So I thought, 'Oh shit, that was a good thing that we had rubber sex.'*

Paul explained why he was glad a condom had been used:

If I had known someone that I liked I would really prefer to start off having safe sex, rather than barebacking *[his emphasis].*

Which is weird because ... it's not weird, but my logic is, if I know this guy and if I'm truly emotionally attached to this guy, I don't want this guy to get all the STDs from me. I would like to have safe sex for the next three months until I go and do my blood test and do everything and come back and confirm everything is negative, then I'll have barebacking sex with him, provided that he's positive. But otherwise I really just prefer this guy to actually have safe sex with me.

Bruce expressed the same idea. He explained the conditions under which he would disclose his serostatus before engaging in unprotected sex:

It depends. If I'm about to fuck somebody in the dark room and they don't seem to ... they give me signals that they don't care whether I use a condom, then I don't. If I pair up with somebody, I always go to a room, then I'm more likely to engage in some sort of conversation. I'm getting quite bold. I'm getting to the stage where: 'I'm positive, are you?' And if they say 'No', I say 'Ok', um, 'I wear a condom' and it would be very, very upfront.

When Drew was asked if he typically disclosed his serostatus to sexual partners, he said:

Okay, put it this way. If I'm picking someone up in a bar to go home with them, if I like the person I will tell them straight away before we leave the bar that I'm HIV-positive ... If it's anonymous sex in a back club, no. And if it's someone I'm just taking home that I've just like picked up, like, at a beat or something like that, or club, and said, 'Let's go home with me,' we'd go home together. I probably wouldn't tell them unless they asked me and said, 'Are you HIV-positive?'

Like other men in the study, Drew also discussed his willingness to engage in unprotected anal intercourse in dark rooms without disclosing his serostatus. It is useful here to draw a distinction between 'anonymous' and 'casual' sexual partners; unprotected sex without HIV disclosure is far more

likely in anonymous sexual encounters, and engaging in safe sex was clearly positioned as an individual responsibility. Because dark rooms are open, public, and talking is highly unusual, such spaces work against sexual negotiation and therefore against HIV disclosure. Other forms of casual sex, however, make interpersonal contact more involved. For example, cubicles within sex venues are relatively more private and therefore make more involved interpersonal contact more likely, including verbal and visual communication, both of which are typically absent in dark rooms. Having sex in a home further facilitates, perhaps demands, higher degrees of familiarity between sexual partners and provides the conditions for more complex sexual negotiations. Of course, intimacy at the level of relationships may just as easily lead to a strong desire, for many reasons, to engage in unprotected anal intercourse.

Disclosure of HIV status: a double bind

This research, as well as that of Van de Ven et al. (2001), suggests that there are fundamental differences in safe sex practice, at least as currently practised, between HIV-positive and HIV-negative men. Survey data show that most positive men do not expect their sexual partners to disclose their serostatus and are prepared to have sex with men known to be positive. On the other hand, most HIV-negative men expect HIV-positive men to disclose their serostatus before sex, and claim they would avoid having sex with a known HIV-positive man (Van de Ven et al., 2001, pp. 31–32). These data suggest that positive men are caught in a double bind when it comes to disclosure of serostatus before having sex with HIV-negative casual partners.

In the absence of condom use, establishing seroconcordance between sexual partners is paramount in preventing HIV transmission. However, in sexually adventurous contexts, the following cues were used as surrogates for disclosure of HIV status: a 'sixth sense', recognition of the effects of lipodystrophy as a surrogate marker of HIV-positivity, telling anally receptive partners that ejaculation was imminent, and assuming that one's sexual partner was HIV-positive (or didn't care about becoming positive) because the partner had consented to unprotected sex.

In theory, gay men's commitment to condom-based safe sex undermines the need to disclose and negotiate around HIV status and makes the sexual encounter democratic for both negative and positive men. In practice, adventurous sexual encounters are more complex.

Disclosure of serostatus between HIV-positive people is far more reliable than between HIV-negative men; only in rare situations is a person likely to claim to be HIV-positive when actually negative. Most HIV-positive interviewees did not engage in unprotected anal intercourse with partners whose serostatus they did not know, and some of those men spoke in terms of protecting their own and others' health, and of an obligation not to infect others.

However, for HIV-positive men who did have unsafe sex, sexual anonymity and the spaces that facilitated anonymity seemed to provide conditions in which the responsibility for safe sex became individualised. While many positive men did discuss HIV serostatus with sexual partners before engaging in unprotected anal intercourse, at least three men did not know the serostatus of their sexual partners. Relying on strategies other than explicit disclosure to establish HIV seroconcordance is highly problematic. This is especially true in the context of different expectations of disclosure between positive and negative men.

In the interviews, HIV-negative men who used condoms said they did so to protect their own health, even though this was also at the expense of their own pleasure (i.e. self-interest). In contrast, the fundamental reason given by HIV-positive men for using condoms was to protect the health of others at the expense of their own pleasure (i.e. altruism). However, most men (both negative and positive) disliked using condoms for receptive and, especially, insertive anal intercourse.

PART 3
DRUG USE AND ADVENTUROUS SEX

A significant area of discussion in these interviews was club or party drug use in the context of adventurous sex (we excluded marijuana, amyl nitrite and alcohol from the drug category). Over half of the men had used party drugs in the six months prior to interview, most using a combination of different drugs, especially methamphetamine, MDA (ecstasy), MDMA, ketamine (special K) and amphetamine (speed). GHB and cocaine were also used, but by fewer men. Approximately half (14 out of 31) of the men sometimes or regularly used drugs for sex, and a further third specifically used these drugs to enhance pleasure in sex. The primary mode of administration was oral ingestion or snorting. Of the 31 men, 10 men had ever injected drugs and only two men regularly injected.

For most of the men, a major benefit and reason for using drugs for sex was to become 'disinhibited'. Paul explained that he never drew a line between what was and wasn't adventurous, but went on to say that fisting and water sports 'definitely added one notch to the gear'. He was then asked under what conditions he would practice more adventurous sex: 'Oh, I definitely [would] already have [had] drugs.' Other men described drug use in similar terms: '… it dismisses a lot of your inhibitions' (Hank) and 'It just helps you to relax' (Michael).

For Hamish, drug use was seen to lift the veil on social taboos. Forbidden desires could be indulged with the assistance of drugs. Robert clearly conceptualised disinhibition through drug use:

> *I was told when I did training at [an AIDS organisation] … that drugs are not dangerous in the way that they make you do things you don't want to do, but they may make you do things that you do want to do which normally you wouldn't let yourself do.*

Drug use permitted Robert to overcome an internal resistance to simultaneously forbidden but desired sexual activity. For some interviewees, drug use was one way of overcoming inhibitions to engage in non-normative gay sex.

The disinhibiting effects of drug use also opened one up to sexual learning. Hamish suggested that drugs 'melt away any inhibitions', but he also noted that drugs made him 'more open and suggestive' to new adventurous sexual experiences, receptive to learning new desires. Charles, for example, described learning to enjoy fisting:

> *I've never done fisting before I met [Craig]. After a little while he suggested that we do this and I went along with it but I didn't enjoy it for quite some time. But I knew that it was important to him and so I did it. And then, all of a sudden a few years ago when we were on holidays, it suddenly started to turn me on. I don't know what … why that was or anything, but it just did. And from that point on our sex became extremely … much better than it had been.*

This sexual learning was sometimes linked to drug use and, by implication, to disinhibition. According to Robert:

> *If I went anywhere from where I am, then, yes, that would probably be [water sports] … I've fisted guys but that's always been initiated by them. I've usually been wasted to start with.*

Many interviewees explained that drug use for sex extended the length of sexual play, and physically relaxed the body. These effects often dovetailed with being disinhibited. For Paul, the primary aim of drug taking was to relax him physically so as to enable many hours of receptive anal intercourse. If sex did not involve drugs, receptive anal intercourse was more painful and therefore limited in duration. He was only able to be receptive in fisting when using drugs:

The main purpose of me having drugs is only to relax my hole, it's to relax my arse, it's to relax myself. And like ... you know how crystal comes in one point, like I only take one speck of it, I don't take the whole thing.

A primary way of controlling the intensity of drug use was to limit the amount of drug taken and mode of administration. Some men preferred swallowing and snorting drugs so as to limit the intensity and rate with which the drugs came on. In effect, drug use was mostly described by the interviewees as a controlled decontrolling of inhibitions within sexual contexts that felt safe and with people with whom a relationship of trust had been established.

Managing drug use

Our interviewees described their drug use in terms of maximising pleasure, although they also recognised inherent dangers associated with it. Such harms included the risk of HIV or hepatitis C transmission through injecting, lack of awareness that damage was being done to the body (e.g. in fisting), overdose and engaging in unsafe sex. Drug use did not always induce the desired effect—heightened sexual arousal—and sometimes generated negative emotional and physical states. In pursuing maximum sexual pleasure, our interviewees had developed control strategies to minimise the potential harms of drug use. If these risks were controlled, the experience of using drugs to enhance and prolong sexual activity was highly rewarding.

Many interviewees spoke of the inherent tension between disinhibition and self-regulation, both in the case of drug use for sex and in other social contexts. In general, most interviewees, recognising this tension, approached their drug use within a harm reduction framework. In short, they recognised the possible dangers of drug use and employed a range of self-regulating strategies to ensure drug use remained controlled and pleasurable. For the non-drug-using interviewees, fear of losing control was given as the primary reason for not using drugs in sex. However, for men who did use drugs for sex, the same fear of losing control was also apparent. Said Michael:

I tend to take enough drugs just to get me into it and out of it, because I don't like that feeling of losing control, not being in control of my faculties.

Many of the men described their need to maintain control within sexual situations when using drugs. Stephen, for example, expressed a 'mortal dread' of losing control.

The men who regularly used drugs (approximately once a month or more) described complex strategies of regulating drug use. Bruce had until recently lived outside Sydney and had limited most of his sexual activity, and all of his drug use in sex, to regular visits to Sydney. He regularly used drugs in the course of sexual encounters, both in one-off encounters and, increasingly, in ongoing sexual contacts made at a sex venue. The drugs he primarily used were methamphetamine and MDA. Bruce's basic strategies for limiting his drug consumption were to take drugs only when in Sydney and not to seek drugs outside of sexual encounters.

Bruce noted that his level of drug use had taken its toll in other areas of his life:

... drugs leave me so washed out and I work full time. I've got other things I want to do with my time. There are other things I want to do with my weekend. I want to live a normal sort of life. I don't want to spend all day sleeping because I've been up all night.

While enhancing sexual pleasure was a primary reason for using drugs, most interviewees also recognised the need to regulate their drug intake so as not to negatively affect other areas of their lives.

Charles's preferred drugs were methamphetamine and LSD, both of which facilitated 'dirty' and marathon sex sessions. He recognised a tension between his desire for drugs and work commitments, and managed this tension by closely monitoring his drug use. For example, he would stop using on Sunday afternoon to ensure being effective at work on Monday. If he recognised that he was overly tired during the week, he and his

partner agreed not to use drugs for a number of weeks. Such a strategy required a capacity to recognise when drugs encroached upon other areas of his life:

> *Fortunately I was brought up in such a way that I'm fairly well self-controlled and able to order my life so that I can do these things.*

Michael's preferred sex drug was methamphetamine. As other interviewees also said, the drug facilitated marathon sexual sessions. The number of hours a sex-on-drugs session took required degrees of control over his drug use, and Michael believed he had achieved a balance between that and other commitments to family and friends:

> *I'm happy with the balance. I don't feel a compulsion to have sex. Or I don't feel that ... I guess that if you have a big night on a Friday night, then you're not in much shape to go and visit family during the day on Saturday and even Saturday night maybe. So there are time constraints I guess. If I ... because there's an association with the sex and the drugs then it's not just like an hour to have a fuck or something, it's like a whole night. So there are time constraints on other sorts of socialising.*

An overarching concern for men who used drugs for sex was to retain self-control within sexual scenes. This concern about control was important on number of levels: for example, maximising pleasure, remaining sexy, avoiding social embarrassment, and preventing HIV transmission and other harms to the body. All of these factors suggested an important distinction between excessive and moderate drug taking. Paul typifies this distinction:

> *To me, when you are drug fucked, [it] means that you are totally drug fucked, so you don't know what you are doing. I have never reached that level before. And I don't want to reach that level.*

Brad specifically avoided drug use when being fisted: 'I would want to be in as clear a head space as I could be while that was happening.' Having a clear headspace was about being aware of what one was doing in sex. The kind of drug being used was also an aspect of maintaining control. For Robert, methamphetamine provided endurance but didn't alter his ability to make judgments. Alcohol was considered more problematic with respect to impaired judgment.

Some men, such as Brendan, maintained control of sexual situations by smoking or swallowing drugs rather than injecting. Brendan considered smoking or swallowing to be more gradual in its effects, more social and less intense while using and when coming down. Other men also rejected injecting because they believed it was more likely to lead to drug dependency or 'addiction'. And others, such as Jeremy, preferred injecting because of the intensity it provided.

Some men described occasions in which they lost control or were excessive in their use of drugs for sex. Sometimes it was sexual partners who lost control; for instance, overdosing during sex or being unaware that they had gone too far. Hamish believed that judgments were 'impaired' by drug use and that it was equally important that all sexual participants in any given sexual encounter controlled their drug use. Control around sexual acts, and thus responsiveness (and responsibility) to a sexual partner, was often considered especially important for a 'top', especially in sexual scenes that might cause physical damage to the body, such as BDSM or fisting. This was partly enabled by not being too 'drug fucked', as Stephen described it. Drug-fucked people were considered 'unable to fist … It's just completely useless having them there … they can hardly imagine where they are.' Leroy never used drugs for sex and expected his partners to be similarly drug free. This was especially important for him as a submissive in sex:

> *As I've gotten more involved in very heavy SM, I've always been aware of ... if somebody's going to control me that they've got to be able to control themselves. So I've not even been involved in alcohol during a session— for that reason, for that control thing.*

Brendan also discussed loss of control as an effect of drug use. He often used drugs for sex, but chose not to use drugs when being the dominant

partner in adventurous sexual play: 'Usually when I top with people I like to … try and remain as drug free as possible.' Interrogation, involving caning and beating his sexual partners, limited 'quick thinking' and 'quick reactions' and therefore created a possible condition for unintentionally injuring a sexual partner.

Stephen also reported an encounter long-past when he entered a 'k-hole' while being fisted.[8] He described the experience as 'incredible', in a positive sense, but also as a 'cautionary tale' about the need to 'keep a sense of where you're at'. In effect, Stephen explained, he trusted his partner with his life as he would not have been able to recognise an emergency within the sexual scene nor act quickly if one arose.

Many interviewees did not use drugs during sexually adventurous sessions because they were afraid of losing control. Peter, for example, was afraid of embarrassing himself. Other non-drug-users specifically mentioned the importance of not using drugs in sexually adventurous contexts. Andrew explained his desire to push sexual boundaries in a controlled way, and being drug free was one way of ensuring that control. Trevor also never used drugs because he needed to trust a partner when being fisted:

> *And I know fisters use [drugs]. But, my God, if you're off your face, how are you going to know when you've passed the point of no return, when you've gone too far, when you have done damage? You need your wits about you.*

For this reason, which he also tied to trust, Trevor never used 'heavy drugs' (although he also reported he would not take drugs under any circumstances). The only drug Peter had used in any context was alcohol, and his fear of losing control was based on past experience with alcohol.

For some, drug use for sex was enormously pleasurable, while for others drugs reduced the pleasure of sex. Fear of losing control was an important aspect for some and, for others, drug taking diminished sexual arousal in itself. For example, Ted explained that drugs did not make him 'feel sexy'. The same was the case for Drew: 'I tend to lose my interest in sex a bit. I'm into dancing.' On the drug comedown, however, Ted then became 'slutty'. Previous research has identified that while drugs are taken for dancing, sexual interest is heightened as the drugs wear off (Southgate & Hopwood, 1999).

Fear of losing control was salient for many current or past drug users. Adrian had recently become disabled and, as a consequence, most of his sexual activity was confined to his home. One reason for giving up drugs was: 'I'm scared of losing control.' This fear was due, at least partly, to his disability, which made him vulnerable when inviting unknown men into his home for sex.

Sexual safety and drug use

Very few of the men who engaged in unsafe sex during sexually adventurous sessions, whether HIV-positive or HIV-negative, attributed that lack of safety to drugs. Rather, they framed it within a much more complex context. While HIV-negative men sometimes engaged in unsafe sex when using drugs, most men used condoms consistently. The consistent engagement of the HIV-negative interviewees in unsafe sex with men of unknown or HIV-positive status cannot be explained in terms of drug use. One of the men never used drugs, and another avoided using drugs when engaging in adventurous sex.

There are many ready-to-hand discourses circulating about reasons for unsafe sex, and drug use is frequently framed as inhibiting rational decision making. As a consequence, it is the drug that is often reviled in order to make sense of unsafe sex while using drugs. While some men blamed drug use for unsafe sex, or attributed adventurous sex to drug use, such use was rarely seen as the only, or even part of the, reason. Most men recognised that judgments made within sexual situations were impaired by drug use and, for this reason, some men were more cautious about safety when using drugs,

[8] A 'k-hole' is a drug-induced experience described by many users of ketamine. The experience is often described in terms of hallucinations and losing a sense of one's environment and body.

especially in the context of adventurous sex. Safety concerns included HIV transmission, but also some forms of adventurous sex that had the potential to cause physical damage to the body.

Previous research has noted the importance of 'folk pharmacology' that circulates within socially connected drug users. Knowledge about drug use is shared between people, and some people, 'network nannies', are more central to the circulation of that knowledge, an aspect of which is to initiate new users into practices of controlled drug use (Southgate & Hopwood, 2001). In a climate of zero tolerance toward drug use, policy makers and educators are less able to encourage a functional drug-using culture, including drug use for sex. In contrast, our interviews make clear that sexually adventurous gay men who use drugs for sex recognise the dangers of their use and are highly motivated to minimise the harm that flows from drug use. Responsibility does not preclude drug use.

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