

“make me your death slave”: men who have sex with men and use the internet to intentionally spread HIV

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This study analyzes the personal ads of an Internet web site solely devoted to unprotected (bareback) sex among men who have sex with men (MSM), in order to identify the profiles of individuals actively and overtly seeking to spread HIV. Although the purpose of the website is not necessarily for spreading HIV, it does provide a medium to exchange such discourses. Analysis of the website identifies 81 profiles of individuals with an overt interest in spreading HIV. In an attempt to better explain and understand this behavior, two theoretical paradigms of deviance are tested (social learning theory and labeling theory). Findings indicate that both theories offer adequate arguments to better understand this behavior. Future research directions and prevention strategies are discussed.

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The devastating effects of HIV and AIDS are well established and widely understood across the United States today. Nonetheless, the spread of the disease is yet to be contained both nationally and globally. With no immediate promise of a vaccine for this virus, tools to combat its effects include both preventive education and vigorous drug therapy for those already affected. Those infected face uncertain futures plagued by potential sickness and stigma. Additionally, the lifetime cost of treatment for this disease is in excess of \$192,000 (Holtgrave and Pinkerton 1997). It would be difficult to imagine that any one individual would want this disease, much less intentionally seek it out. Nonetheless, there is a little-known subculture of men who have sex with men (MSM) that bear the dark secret of either intentionally spreading the virus or actively seeking it out. This study will analyze Internet personal ads posted by MSM with the full intention of either spreading HIV or being infected with it. In so doing, two theoretical frameworks are integrated that may help better understand these behaviors as well as identify an agenda for both future theoretical and empirical research.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

HIV and the Gay Community

HIV and AIDS, now in the third decade of acknowledged existence, was first identified in the early 1980s as it spread rampantly throughout the gay community (Kippax and Race 2003). Because MSM were, by-and-large, the first affected by this disease, education and prevention techniques were initially heavily ingrained into this community (Kippax and Race 2003) and were largely successful in changing attitudes and behaviors among MSM living in the epicenters of infections (Martin et al. 1989; Turner et al. 1989). However there has been little assessment as to whether the impact of these messages remained over time (Gross 2003). Yet, while the spread of HIV may have slowed in the gay community (Gross 2003; Suarez and Miller 2001), MSM still account for more than half of the active AIDS cases in the United States (Sogolow et al. 2002). Additionally, more than 42%

of new HIV infections in the U.S. occur among MSM. (<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/msm.htm>).

Because of consistent educational targeting of the gay community, there is now the idea that overall, they have experienced some level of fatigue in learning about prevention strategies for HIV and AIDS. Several studies have suggested that because of improved medical management of HIV (i.e., highly active antiretroviral therapies [HAART]) many men have begun to reevaluate sexual practices as HIV is now seen as a manageable disease that is no longer synonymous with certain death (Dilley et al. 1997; Elford et al. 2000; Kippax and Race 2003; Murphy et al. 1999; Remien et al. 1998). In addition, there is also evidence and beliefs that HAART may help reduce the transmission risk of HIV (Kippax and Race 2003; Pinkerton and Holtgrave 1999; Suarez and Miller 2001). Beyond that, there may even be subtle beliefs that in the event of exposure to HIV, an individual can simply undergo post exposure prophylaxis (i.e., a “morning after pill”) (Kippax and Race 2003). The dramatic decline in deaths from HIV infection since 1995 helps support these beliefs (www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats/hasrlink.htm). The reduced emphasis on educating the gay community, in addition to changing perceptions about the disease and its transmission, cumulate to the possibility of increased HIV spread within the gay community.

MSM and the Internet

The Internet has become a supreme epicenter of information, linking the world together. This has allowed ease and anonymity in connecting MSM who, in a homonegative society, might not have been able to otherwise encounter each other (Halkitis and Parsons 2003). The Internet now serves the same purpose as gay bathhouses¹ of the 1980s, potentially increasing the number of anonymous sexual encounters among MSM (Haney 2003).

The evolution of the Internet has allowed for the growth of Internet chat rooms and personal ads. Research has

¹See also Delph 1978; Humphreys 1975; Leap 1999; Tewksbury 2002; Tewksbury and West 2000; Weinberg and Williams 1975 for further information on other ways MSM engage and negotiate anonymous sex.

identified the Internet as having potential for locating marginalized groups, giving particular advantage in the study of sexuality (Halkitis and Parsons 2003; Koch and Emrey 2001; Mustanki 2001). Although both Mustanki (2001) and Koch and Emrey (2001) admit that the anonymity of the Internet may allow potential for biased data, they both conclude that this problem currently plagues traditional survey methodology as well.

Rossa et al. (2000), in a Swedish study, compared survey data completed by MSM on the Internet to those using conventional research techniques. They found that the Internet sample was younger, more geographically isolated in rural areas, and less likely to have had sex with other men. However, they were more likely to visit an "oasis" for anonymous sex (e.g., a bathhouse, video clubs, or erotic movie houses). Other researchers have made similar findings correlating the use of the Internet with inconsistent safe sex among MSM (Hirschfield et al. 2003; Hospers et al. 2002).

"Barebacking" and the Intentional Spread of HIV

"Barebacking," defined here as unprotected anal intercourse (UAI), is primarily responsible for the spread of HIV among MSM (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999). Suarez and Miller (2001) define several neutralization techniques (see Sykes and Matza 1957) used to justify barebacking behavior between anonymous partners. Their first category includes "seroconcordant couples" or men who believe that their partner is the same HIV status as them, whether it is positive or negative. The second category includes "rational risk takers," or those men who evaluate different sexual behaviors as presenting less risk than others (i.e., being the penetrator in anal sex versus being penetrated). Rational risk takers as a category are similar to those discussed in Pinkerton and Abramson's (1992) study, which finds that not all unprotected sex is necessarily irrational as individuals do weigh potential benefits (e.g., pleasure and intimacy) against risks (e.g., disease severity). Another technique used by rational risk takers includes sero-sorting, or discussing HIV status with potential partners and not having sex with those perceived as having a different HIV status. The final category of individuals includes

"irrational risk takers." Individuals in this category typically deny their own risk or use non-scientific/irrational information when engaging in barebacking behavior. Under the genera of irrational risk takers, Suarez and Miller (2001) also discuss gay youth. They argue that these youth may lack experience with HIV and hold pessimistic attitudes about the future. This combination, according to Suarez and Miller, lead to risk taking sexual practices. Scarce (1999) identified young MSM who actually seek out becoming infected with HIV. At times, some of these youth talked about selecting a "father" who would give them the virus. This, Scarce argues, empowered the youths because they now had control over when and how they were infected. Both Scarce and Suarez and Miller suggest that rampant homophobia breeds an ideology of a dismal future among young MSM just coming out of the closet.

In academic sociological literature, there exists two accounts of research on the intentional spread of HIV (Gauthier and Forsyth 1998; Tewksbury 2003). "Bug Chasing" is the term used by these authors to describe individuals in search of becoming infected with HIV. Gauthier and Forsyth use the Internet and analyze chat rooms, mailing lists, and personal ads devoted to barebacking in search of the "bug chasers." In explaining this behavior, Gauthier and Forsyth identify four categories of choices/justifications. The first includes individuals who live in fear and are in search of relief. These individuals seek out the "bug" because after infection they will not have to worry about becoming infected or their serostatus. The next category identified includes those who engage in barebacking behavior as a form of eroticism and risk. These individuals engage in risky behavior because they find it erotic, but there is no implication that they may actively seek out infection. The third category of individuals includes those who suffer from loneliness. This implication is that they seek out infection because other loved ones have become infected and the seronegative individual feels left out or left behind.² The final category of individuals who actively seek out infection do so for political action. Because gays are stigmatized, individuals fulfill the negative label placed upon

²This category does not include those youth identified by Scarce (1999) who seek out seroconversion because they want to feel desired.

them by society. Gauthier and Forsyth identify this behavior following Lemert's (1951) theory on secondary deviance and fulfilling a negative prophecy/stereotype.

Tewksbury (2003) utilizes the same dataset as this study in analyzing personal ads of MSM. Tewksbury's article assesses the potential correlation between a desire for bareback sex and the desire to spread HIV by analyzing all ads posted within a one-week period in January 2003 ($N = 880$). The Tewksbury article also implies that the purpose of this website is to foster the spread of HIV, however only a small number of individuals are actually looking to do so. In assessing bug chasing behavior, Tewksbury looks at self-reported HIV status and the desired HIV status of potential partners (e.g., no preference, HIV+ or HIV-). Although only a small portion of men were directly seeking a partner of discordant status, his study nonetheless finds that a fairly large portion have no preference (72% of HIV+ men and 17.4% of negative men). This suggests that many men may be willing to "risk" infection and/or not overtly vocalize intention to spread HIV.

Looking Towards a New Theoretical Paradigm

In analyzing research on barebacking behavior, there is an implicit argument that the irrational aspects of this behavior are due to low self-esteem and other psychological factors (Scarce 1999; Suarez and Miller 2001). Application of different theoretical paradigms suggests additional causal factors for barebacking behavior. In this article, two established theoretical paradigms are presented to account for these behaviors.

Labeling Theory and Secondary Deviance

Labeling theory (Lemert 1951) argues that primary deviance exists everywhere; that is, all individuals commit some deviant acts. Discovering deviant acts and labeling them as "deviant" may create secondary deviance. That is, the number of deviant acts committed by an individual may accelerate as the individual behaves in a way consistent with the label.

As discussed, the HIV epidemic first emerged almost exclusively within the MSM community. As a result, many individuals exterior to the community saw risky sexual behavior as characterizing the "gay lifestyle" and viewed HIV-related disease as punishment for perceived immoral behavior. Contracting HIV was seen as a fitting end to a horrific lifestyle choice. Although it is well known that HIV is not a gay disease, rampant homophobia in combination with stereotypes of HIV could perpetuate an ideology/label that contracting HIV "should" happen to MSM. Labeling theory argues that the labeling of the primary deviance (being MSM) may produce secondary deviance in which the individual attempts to fulfill the expectations that accompany the label. One complication is that not all MSM self-identify as gay just as not all gay men are "out" about their sexual orientation. In this situation, others may not have ever labeled the primary deviance. Nonetheless, these men may be aware that their behavior is perceived as wrong; hence they may adopt behaviors congruent with negative stereotypes.

Social Learning Theory

A second theoretical paradigm that could account for this behavior is social learning theory (Akers et al. 1979). Crudely stated, this theory argues that deviant behavior is largely learned through peer associations, perceptions of costs and rewards, and personal definitions as to what deviant behavior may be. Peer associations foster and support favorable definitions of deviant acts.

In a later book, Akers (1985) describes and accounts for both sexually deviant behavior and homosexual behavior. Although his book does not broach the topic of the intentional spread of any sexually transmitted diseases, he does discuss the transition into a gay identity. The adaptation of a gay identity may involve some elements of establishing peer networks (among other LGBT individuals) and possibly learning and adopting characteristics of these subgroups. In essence, according to Akers, there are several elements to learning and adopting a gay identity. Granted, adopting a gay identity is not the same as engaging in same-sexed sexual behavior (i.e., labeling oneself as gay versus being a male

who has sex with men); however, Akers does set the stage in suggesting that some of the many dynamic elements of human sexuality are culturally assembled.

Though not considered by Akers, the Internet, with web sites utilized by thousands of individuals in direct search of high-risk sexual behavior (in addition to hundreds of thousands more who may visit these web sites without actually participating), may facilitate a supportive culture for high-risk sexual behavior. Under this theoretical paradigm, there may already have been some implicit desire to engage in high-risk behavior (explaining individuals initial visits to the web sites). However, the cultural structure and discourses present throughout web sites normalize the behavior suggesting some altering of definitions in addition to fostering peer associations. The website used for this research fosters favorable definitions and promotes peer networks through its contact and guest book features.

Current Focus

This study attempts to independently analyze both theoretical paradigms discussed. Notably, this study departs from a medicalized approach to deviant behavior and instead looks at how theories of deviant behavior might better explain or shed new light on a relatively undisclosed and taboo topic. Although no one theory may account for explaining all sero-convertive discourses, this comparative analysis allows for the opportunity to examine which theory(ies) are more adequate. Finally, this analysis allows opportunity to critically evaluate the potential need for a different paradigm in understanding other forms of sexual behavior, and hopefully identifies points for future theoretical and empirical research.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study are taken from a single website (see Tewskbury 2003 for a full description). This web site states that it is now in its third year and is a free web site solely devoted to connecting individuals with related interests in unprotected sex, albeit not necessarily for the spread of HIV. Some of the web site's features include the ability to

create a profile with pictures, establish a message board so other members can relay comments in a "guest book" format, post and respond to announcements about "sex parties," advertise "escort" services, filter through personals, chat live, and instantly connect with other men almost anywhere in the world with the "hookup now" feature. As of May 2003, the web site claims to host over 55,000 active profiles with more than 32,000 of them having pictures.³ Additionally one is able to browse through profiles and contact members without being a member of the web site.

To identify and select the individuals specifically interested in the intentional spread of HIV, the text portions of all profiles on the web site between January and February of 2003 were searched using the web site's keyword search features.⁴ A second search was conducted in June 2003 to assess any additional profiles. Keywords entered included "bug," "spread," "breed," "seed," "gift," and so forth. The text within matching profiles was subsequently analyzed for content that specifically identified a genuine intent to spread HIV. To take matters a step further, the guest books of individuals displaying intent to spread HIV also were analyzed. Guestbooks helped identify a network of individuals who may have been interested in the spread of HIV but did not state so directly in their own profile. Furthermore, the profiles of respondents were analyzed in search of a continuing network and dialog between members.

RESULTS

Exhaustive keyword searches identified 55 original profiles overtly displaying some form of intentional desire to either

³This number is inconsistent with Tewksbury 2003 who states there are over 180,000 profiles. His figure is based on the number of profiles ever created. Some may be inactive or have been deleted since the inception of the web site.

⁴This method differs from Tewksbury (2003) as he looked at self-reported HIV status and desired HIV status of partners in assessing intention to spread HIV. The current study at hand looks specifically for discourses surrounding the intentional spread of HIV. Tewksbury's article assess whether bug chasing was the primary purpose of this web site and although he found it is not the purpose of this web site, he found the behavior does still exist. This study analyzes only those individuals involved in HIV spreading discourses. In its qualitative approach, this study differs from Tewksbury's in that it also looks at the guest books of individuals. Finally, this study looks at all profiles present compared to assessing only "new" profiles within a limited time span.

infect or be infected with HIV (seroconversion). Twenty-six more individuals were identified through analyzing the guest books of the original 55.⁵ These 26 additional individuals all overtly implied a desire to spread HIV, but did not do so in their own profile and were hence not identified in original searches. For example, an HIV positive male wrote in the guest book of a negative male who wanted to be infected "I can arrange for you to be poz [HIV positive] barebacked in [my location] . . . if interested come back [to my location]. [I am into] any scene except brown [feces.] [I have] bi[-sexual] and gay bareback top and other young sluts who want poz in them." A second individual selected through guest book analysis wrote "vgl [very good looking] masc[uline] bug chaser here in [location], want you to cum-soak my hole in a verbal, no limits pig session. lets talk man" A final example can be seen with an individual who wrote, "I wish I was going to be in your area, I would love to catch your bug. My ass is aching for several poz loads to be pumped into it!" In all circumstances the sero-statuses were inconsistent (i.e., HIV negative individuals writing to HIV positive individuals or vice versa). There is clearly no question as to what the intentions of these individuals are.

Individuals responding in guest books were not selected into the sample unless they showed an overt intention to spread HIV. Excluded individuals typically discussed a sexual attraction or a desire to have sex without overt indication for seroconversion (e.g., "man you are hot," or "you are beautiful . . . let's roll around and we will have loads of fun"). While some language implied a desire for seroconversion, profiles were included in the sample only when there was a clear and explicit statement to that effect. For example, one excluded individual responded "let me know when you are in [my location], I would love to breed that hole." The term "breed" can take on multiple meanings. "Breeding" has been used by some in context with spreading HIV— "breeding" the virus in a new host. However, "breeding" could also simply

⁵This sample size is small due to very stringent selection criteria. If it was not 100% clear what the intentions of individuals were, they were not included in the sample. This number is also small relative to the total population on this web site. The purpose of this site is not explicitly for spreading HIV, however it is a conducive environment. Currently there exists a small vocal and possibly growing subculture of men wishing to spread HIV present among these individuals. This study wishes to understand why this is happening.

mean sex, like how animals breed. The implication of these selection criteria is that the individuals identified in this study represent a conservative highly-vocal few among a potentially unvocal many. The final sample includes 81 profiles ($N = 55 + 26$).⁶

The average age of the sample was 31 with more than 50% being between the ages of 21 and 30. The oldest respondent was 57. Race of the respondent was not a feature coded within profiles however among those with pictures, a large majority appeared to be Caucasian. In total, 74% of the sample was looking to be infected with 53% of the sample identifying as HIV negative and an additional 17% identifying as not knowing their status (5.1% did not identify a serostatus). For a more detailed description of the composition of this web site see Tewksbury (2003).

Labeling Theory and Secondary Deviance

As introduced, the concept of labeling theory argues that minor acts of deviant behaviors are ubiquitous. Important to the study of labeling theory is the idea that certain deviant acts may persist or become worse. It is at this point that primary deviance becomes secondary deviance. According to labeling theory, this transition is as a result of somehow being labeled as deviant and subsequently reifying both personal and societal beliefs (a self-fulfilling prophecy). Not all MSM engage in serial monogamy, have a desire for unprotected sex, advertise for sex via the Internet, or actively seek to spread HIV. Nonetheless, there are more than 55,000 individuals who are doing one or more of these things on this web site. Granted the specific intentions of every individual may be uncertain, however the web site owners

⁶Keyword searches sometimes produced profiles of HIV positive men who were well aware of the seroconversion subculture and did not want to take part in it. For example, a 48-year-old white male listed in his "turn off's" that "you already know from my profile I'm POZ [for HIV] so if you don't care that I am or don't know about yourself... fine, we'll play [have intercourse] but if you are looking for the "thrill of conversion... move on!" A second example can be seen with a 42-year-old white male who said in his comments section that, "I like to take loads [of ejaculation] from [HIV negative] people, and am OK giving oral loads to [HIV negative] guys, but will not shoot my load in a neg guy's ass. [I am] not into giving the bug to other." Although the analysis of "Anti-Bug Chasers" is quite interesting, these have been excluded from this study.

make it abundantly clear that this web site is for individuals with related interests in bareback sex and that other outlets exist for those with other interests. One could argue that all these men are now engaging in secondary deviant behavior.

Rampant historical homonegative attitudes continue to exist both within and exterior to the gay community and its effects have been documented (Baumrind 1995; Kaiser Family Foundation 2001). Society in general still believes homosexual behavior is deviant just as many gays believe or once believed their same-sexed affections and behaviors to be wrong (Fishbein 1996, Herek 1984, 1986, 1988, 1994, 2000, 2002, Weinberg 1973). In accepting a "gay identity" or actively engaging in same-sexed sexual behaviors, MSM have subsequently adapted some of the ideologies associated with being gay (Akers 1985). These beliefs may include incorrect ideologies that MSM are promiscuous and the progenitors of HIV and AIDS. As discussed, MSM who engage in high-risk sexual behaviors may have adapted these stereotypes as a result of the labeling process and thereby began to reify these ideas. Men who engage in high-risk sex can represent the development of secondary deviance whereas those seeking to spread HIV might represent this effect to the nth degree.

This study specifically focuses on men with the direct intention to spread HIV. As argued, all the men on this web site display some level of secondary deviance as the web site is clear that it is for bareback sex only. Presently, the theory as applied gives little distinction between men who simply want to engage in high-risk behavior compared to those who wish to spread HIV. In looking labeling theory, it may be necessary to further dichotomize those individuals engaging in secondary deviance, as there is some implicit difference between men who wish to engage in unprotected sex and those wishing to spread HIV. One could argue that men seeking seroconversion have most likely adapted an ideological stance toward the disease. These men appear to believe the disease will benefit them in some way because they discuss it as both valuable and desired. For example, a 32-year-old HIV negative male describes his desire to convert:

Neg[ative] bottom looking for contacts to convert me. Not really into anonymous conversions in the darkrooms. I want

a poz top to know I'm neg and looking for a conversion so that he can enjoy bugging me as much as I can enjoy getting bugged. Prefer non-med guys, but won't say no to any poz top.

Clearly this individual does not want the disease for the sake of having it. Rather he wants an investment on the part of the person who will give him the disease as he states he wants the person having sex with him to be aware and enjoy passing along the disease. In addition, this individual expresses a desire to maintain active control in his seroconversion although he admits in the end that he will not decline an HIV positive partner. Finally, it is odd that this individual indicates he prefers a partner who is not taking medicine for HIV. There are two possible reasons for this. First, he may prefer a person not on medicine to ensure a high viral load. Second, he may not want a drug-resistant strain of HIV to be passed to him. Both reasons are possible; however, only the first supports the stipulation that the disease is glorified.

The glorification of the disease represents a new and odd ideological structure. This ideology could clearly be as a result of the labeling process or rather the idea that infection is ultimately inevitable so why not "speed up the process" or at least have some active control in the ultimate destiny. Although the long-term consequences of the disease are not necessarily discussed, there is clear understanding about how the virus first invades and initially compromises the immune system. For example, in response to a "bug-seekers" profile, a 32-year-old HIV positive male writes in the guest book that he,

Wood luv to seed you a few times while my big cock tears some of your inside so cum can seep in good and plenty. Then see you again in a few weeks when you get that high fever and flu-like symptoms and finish the job. Want to hear you say Finish me off Sir, make me your Death Slave.

This individual clearly discusses how sometimes flu-like symptoms may occur after initial HIV infection and it seems he implies ultimate death with the remarks "finish me off" and "finish the job." To clarify his earlier comments this same individual posted a second entry on the guest book

and said “clarification: Finish the job and finish me off [in my previous entry] refers to SEEDING you with my charged load over and over again to complete the conversion” (original emphasis). In this unique circumstance, the disease is valued while the long-term implications are clearly denied; a new ideological structure has clearly developed.

Secondary deviance and labeling theory can be applied to studying both high-risk sexual behavior among MSM and the specific behavior of seroconversion. In either circumstance, distinction is needed among the different manifestations of secondary deviance, as there are clearly differences between the two groups discussed. Although labeling theory may be applicable in studying these behaviors, the data suggest a need to expand the principles of labeling theory to better categorize and explain the variety and severity of behaviors that may exist among those individuals who commit secondary deviance.

Social Learning Theory

As introduced, Social Learning Theory argues that deviant behaviors are learned through peer associations and changes in definitions favorable to committing deviant acts. As a result, the potential benefits of committing deviant acts now outweigh the potential costs. As illustrated in the previous discussion on labeling theory, the sample contains clearly favorable definitions toward both spreading and being infected with HIV.

The data offer little information on how individuals learned these favorable definitions. Nonetheless, the guest book features and purpose of this web site foster a climate that encourages members to establish networks among themselves. Because members are free to contact other members via private email and instant messenger services, the mapping of these social networks cannot be ascertained.

Nonetheless, the guest books of profiles can be analyzed to tap into one aspect of network building. In some circumstances individuals will contact others about “conversion parties” or sex parties where there may be both HIV negative and positive individuals and the theme of the event is to spread the virus. For example, a 45-year-old HIV positive male responds in a guest book with,

Hey Fuck Toy, [I have] been POZ for over 18 years, my multiple loads would convert yer ass in no time... I've got the good stuff, [I] have converted a few already you won't be the first and you won't be the last but you will be the happiest cum filled POZ BOY FUCK TOY around!

Clearly this individual defies and denies the long-term consequences of the disease as he proudly states he has been infected for more than 18 years. An HIV positive individual who does not treat his disease will usually develop AIDS within 6–8 years (www.cdc.org). He openly describes favorable definitions towards the disease in addition to mentioning the number of individuals he has converted. There is little distinction as to whether these encounters were simply for anonymous (one-night-stand conversion purposes) or if communication is still maintained between the individuals who have been infected. Because this individual puts forth efforts to “recruit” others willing to convert, one can understand how a form of rapport is established among members of this web site.

In a second example, a 31-year-old HIV negative male stated in his profile that he is “still NEG and want to convert soon. Please SIR, give me your hot charged load! Would also like to set up a conversion party.” This individual opens up the dialog for being contacted and organizing or being involved in a celebration themed on spreading HIV. Presumably, all men involved would support and foster a similar ideological structure and if not, the yoking and networking of individuals involved would at least set the stage to enhance these favorable definitions.

In a final example a 23-year-old HIV negative male who has a partner of an unknown age and HIV status states they are,

two fuck buds who are both into getting bred. [We] always do someone as a couple. We love watching each other getting fucked by a poz top [and] love giftgivers. [We] love holding each other down as a poz fucks us and then wanking ourselves off knowing we have the bug up us. Another turn on is 4 us to be laying down facing each other with a neg fucking one of us and a poz fuck the other but not knowing who is who until u both shoot up us.

This individual opens the door for both HIV negative and HIV positive individuals to engage in Russian-Roulette type sexual behaviors. In addition to their favorable definitions and desires to build networks, they treat infection as if it were a game where no one loses.

Although limited for the purposes of this study, Social Learning Theory can inevitably and easily be applied towards understanding and explaining these behaviors. Unfortunately, more detailed conversion discourses would be needed to understand both the building of these networks and the transition into these behaviors. Social Learning Theory would be interested in how members develop favorable definitions toward spreading HIV. One possible explanation could be that individuals may first join this web site with a simple interest in bareback sex and, over time, move towards more risky behaviors as they acclimate to the web site and begin to establish cyber-relationships or sexual encounters with other members.

CONCLUSION

The intentional spread or even desire to transmit the deadly virus HIV has been a topic largely overlooked in the academic literature. Nonetheless, it is a topic that, to some extent, is clearly understood among members of the MSM community. Because MSM comprise a smaller and undiscerned segment of the population, locating and studying them as a group has proven a difficult task. As a result, alternative non-conventional research techniques might better identify members of this community (Halkitis and Parsons 2003). Regardless of its size, MSM still comprise nearly half of all new HIV and AIDS infections. Clearly there is an undiscussed need to both better understand this community and target its population with preventative outreach.

In analyzing behavior related to the intentional spread of HIV, this study departs from a medicalized (pathological) model and rather incorporates a deviant behavior model. No attempt is made to suggest that a medicalized model may not be appropriate; however, incorporation of other theoretical paradigms and approaches might help to better understand this behavior. For that reason, two theories were presented as potential explanations of behavior directed at

intentional HIV spread. Both approaches might help explain and prevent this behavior.

To the extent that Labeling Theory is applicable, the policy implication is that targeting both homophobia in general and MSM's perceptions of themselves could change behavior. Presumably, if a more positive atmosphere and ideology were associated with homosexuality and same-sex sexual behavior there would be no desire to fulfill a negative stereotype or prophecy. Secondly, the implicit meaning of HIV itself would need to be changed to destigmatize the virus and those it afflicts. Finally, the idea that HIV is a manageable disease and something to be glorified would need to be reversed.

The policy implication of the Social Learning approach focuses on modifying the transition into deviant acts. Presumably, this transition results from favorable definitions of the behavior and disease and is fostered by establishing a network of peers who similarly approve of this behavior. The web site studied clearly fosters a unique ideology and the development of networks. While elimination of the networks would probably not eliminate the behavior, removing social support would most likely reduce the level of sexual behavior directed toward the intentional spread of HIV, particularly among those who have not yet made the transition to this type of behavior.

Both theories suggest potential strategies for reducing intentional HIV spread, but the real challenge lies in devising ways to use the Internet as a mechanism for such efforts. As illustrated in this article, the Internet has shown potential for aiding the spread of HIV. However, the Internet remains an almost barren territory in outreach and prevention campaigns among health officials. Regardless of whatever theory or approach may be best in explaining these behaviors, one can still assess the potential in using the Internet to both recruit a marginalized/deviant sample and develop policy/protocol towards effective outreach strategies.

In testing both theories, there is an obvious need for more data on these individuals. Tapping into the Internet represented the first step in identifying a population. Future research may consider taking matters a step further and actually establishing contact and rapport with these individuals.

The web site used for this study presented several difficulties in data collection. Members could connect with other members directly via email and not use the guest book feature; hence the guestbook does not accurately represent all discourses. Second, there is doubt whether a member's intentions are indeed genuine. Nonetheless, the fact that these discourses exist and that in some circumstances some HIV positive men have identified that they are vehemently against it suggests its manifestation is likely to be real.

Previous research has identified that Internet samples are quite similar to conventional research methodologies, however one must never forget that not all individuals have access to this technology. Strong caution is urged when forging into this new technological territory, as there is still potential for a sample bias. Social class and socioeconomic status (SES) are heavily correlated with access to the Internet. Equally so is the correlation between SES and some types of deviant behaviors.

Additionally, individuals may internally have the intention to spread HIV without verbally expressing it within their profiles (i.e., one does not have to say they want to commit an act in order to do it.) Similarly, because it was impossible to identify specific desires in seroconversion, many respondents to the guest books of the original 47 individuals were excluded. It may have been possible that these respondents did want to engage in seroconversion, did not directly identify this, and were excluded. These implications suggest the subculture may be larger than this study conservatively suggests.

Finally, future research will need to compare individuals selected into this study to other men who are interested or engage in unprotected sex for potential assessment of inherent differences. Additionally, high-risk sexual behavior is not a topic unique to Caucasian MSM. Nearly two thirds of all women with AIDS are African-American and 47% of all new AIDS cases in 2000 were among African-Americans. Similarly, Latinos represent 13% of the U.S. population and 18% of all AIDS cases. HIV can be spread many ways, however, the most common is through sexual intercourse (www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/BROCHURE/care3.htm; Davis 2002). Both application and comparison across sexual orientations, racial/ethnic groups, genders, and age cohorts

would be necessary to better understand both high-risk sexual behavior and seroconvertive behaviors.

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