When the Central becomes Peripheral

Shifting Identity among ‘Young Gay Men’ & What it Means for HIV Risk

Definitions (or ‘discomforts’)

“Young Gay Men”
▪ Same sex attracted
▪ Sexually active or not
▪ Sexual identity may not be well defined
▪ Probably around 14 to 26-ish

➢ Recognising diversity
➢ Focusing on HIV risk - sex

Background

Issue arose frequently at AFAO meetings

➢ Discussion paper
Are young gay men really so different? Considering the HIV health promotion needs of young gay men (April 2014)

➢ Seminar
Young Gay Men and HIV, CSRH Social Research Conference (April 2014)

➢ Risks may not be greater but may be different

Development of Best Practice Principles

1. Scoping of Services - HIV, LGBTI, Youth & Mental Health
2. Expert Practitioners’ Workshop
3. Young Gay Men Cultural Probes Activity

1. Services Scoping Study
Structured interviews with 24 AFAO member orgs & key LGBTI-focussed youth/mental health services

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<th>AFAO Members</th>
<th>Non-AFAO Members</th>
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<td>Family Planning Queensland</td>
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<td>AACACT</td>
<td>Gay and Lesbian Health Alliance</td>
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<td>GMH (RASA)</td>
<td>Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (WA)</td>
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Scoping: Strong health promotion requires

- Peer education
- Targeted campaign materials
- Youth specific events
- Web based resources
- Social media
- Online networks
  - Involvement in campaign design
  - Youth participation and ownership

Scoping: How to do health promotion

- Youth specific workshops (require large urban populations)
- Social events with HP ‘weaved’ in (outreach or ‘inreach’)
- Skills development with HP weaved in
- Partnerships with clinical services
  - “I’d like to get an internet?”
  - Meet young men where their interests lie
  - Recognising the ‘whole person’
  - Youth participation and ownership

Scoping: Challenges

- Core HP settings are shifting
- Targeting is more complicated
- Messaging and format varies by region
- Requires increased organisational capacity
  - HP is increasingly complex – messaging & technical skills
  - Volunteers vital but require solid training and support
- Absence of LGBTI sex education in schools

Questions …

- If AIDS Councils are not ‘young-gay-men-community’ based, how can they act as catalyst for community engagement?
  - Are resources better targeted at queer spaces?
  - Are resources better targeted at mental health services?
  - Do community based clinics have an increasing role?
  - Can AIDS Councils better engage with new versions of health promotion organisations that are actually youth-led?

More questions …

- How can AIDS Councils
  - maximise HIV prevention in light of decreasing gay social (physical) spaces?
  - better understand the currency of different platforms & use them to best advantage?
  - ensure young gay men develop and ‘own’ their HIV health promotion strategy?
- How can AFAO and its members improve school based sex education in Australia?

2. Young Gay Men’s Health Promotion Workshop

25 participants

May 2015
Workshop

- What are YGM’s key HIV prevention needs?
- What’s working well locally and globally?
- How can agencies work together more effectively?

Key contextual changes

- Obsession with body image managed across different platforms
- Othering of gay culture by straight acting gay community
- Navigating between fantasy and reality more complicated with hook up apps
- Online communities shortens period of internalised homophobia
- HIV messaging is more complicated.
- Online Apps and # introduces problematic technology, e.g. #clean, #nofat, #noIndians, #nofems, #noAsians, which impacts how young gay men feel about themselves.

Young gay men are resourceful and capable but HIV is not a prominent issue: “Why should I care about HIV?”

3. YGM’s Cultural Probes Exercise

- 22 participants
- All states and territories
- Mainly urban
- AIDS Councils selected

- AIDS Council connected

One thing I regularly do to take care of myself is:

- Time for myself
- Meditation
- Exercise
- Mindfulness
- Gym
- Eat well
- Massage
- Sleep well
- Social interactions
- Bike riding
- Cook better food
- Walk
- Smile
- Listen to music

- Broad/holistic understanding of health

What do young gay men I know feel about their sexual health?
What would you say to a young gay man starting to have sex?

1. Don’t rush into sex or particular sexual practices
   Go slow! See what you do or don’t enjoy.
   Ease yourself into it, and do things at your own pace and on your terms.

2. Don’t feel pressured
   I would say make sure you have safe sex and not get pressured into doing anything you don’t want to do.
   Don’t feel you have to conform to the stereotype that gay men always want sex and there’s something wrong if you don’t.

3. Don’t let things get out of control
   If it doesn’t feel right let the other person know.
   Don’t do anything you are not comfortable with.
   It is okay to stop if you don’t feel comfortable.
   Try and make smart decisions when drinking and looking for sex because I have ended up in some strange situations before!
   Always tell someone where you are going or ask the person for their details for safety reasons.

4. Practice safe sex
   Don’t be naïve to think you aren’t at risk if you aren’t practicing safe sex.
   Of course I would tell them to use a condom … but that seems a little bit obvious!

5. Make sure you’re well informed about types of sex & safe sex practice
   Enjoy yourself, just don’t be unprepared.
   Be informed, read up about STIs.
   Have an idea about how sex should be.
   Have fun. It’s not supposed to hurt. Read online.

6. Enjoy sex
   Make sure you’re ready, make sure you’re protected and make sure you have fun.

7. Love and Romance
   Be mindful of what you do. By all means enjoy sex. It is a wonderful thing to do with someone you love.
   Only do it when you’re comfortable with yourself, and pick a nice guy to have sex with!
Some big questions
How do we:

- address SSA young men’s emerging sexuality & sexual practice while ensuring messaging remains ‘sex positive’?
  - relationships
  - pleasure
  - desire

- Avoid victim discourse
- Consider ‘how to make sex more enjoyable’
- Pleasure as a ‘measure’

Some more big questions

- enable organisational capacity to reach young gay men across broad platforms?
- leverage changes to school based sex education?

The biggest questions

How to:

- Better involve young gay men men?
- Hand ownership to young gay men?

“Well you’d have to get them interested first!”