



Biomedical HIV Prevention, Sexual Pleasure and Intimacy

Nathanael Wells

Department of General Practice, Monash University

To participants who generously gave their time, thank you for making this project possible. I'm indebted to my supervisors Dr Riki Lane and Dr Debbi long for their ongoing support and advice.

Nathanael Wells is supported by an Australian Government Research and Training Stipend (formerly APA)

2019 Joint Australasian Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Conference

Background

- PrEP - the use of antiretroviral therapies by HIV-negative individuals to prevent HIV infection.
- With high levels of efficacy, PrEP allows individuals to experience condomless sex while significantly reducing their risk of HIV.
- PrEP among MSM associated with a sense of agency (Martinez-Lacabe 2019) and increased intimacy and sexual pleasure (Collins et al. 2017).
- This paper outlines how intimacy and pleasure were described by MSM.

Methods

- Multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Marcus 1998) in Melbourne, Australia.
- Observations on the social media pages of two Australian-based PrEP advocacy groups.
- 20 semi-structured interviews:
 - PrEP users ($n=14$)
 - PLHIV ($n=5$)
 - PrEP/HIV researching not using PrEP ($n=1$).

Results

- PrEP use forgoing condoms associated with increased physical sensation.
- Forgoing of condoms described as removing a psychological barrier between sexual partners.

"I describe it to people as like, wearing a condom is like sex without kissing. It's a little bit impersonal. It just has an aspect that isn't the full part of sex if you're wearing a condom. I just feel closer to someone" (James 30s, PrEP user).

- Exchange of semen as having significant meaning and viewed as connecting partners.

"Receiving his [partner's] primal sexual instinct and sacred intangible energy"
(Ethan 20s, PrEP user)

Conclusions

- Sexual pleasure described in terms more than purely physical sensation.
- A need to attend to the *meanings* attributed to expressions of sexuality, particularly semen exchange.
- Potential to frame sexual health in terms beyond HIV and STI prevention to better serve the needs of the gay and MSM communities.