

## When the Central becomes Peripheral

### Shifting Identity among 'Young Gay Men' & What it Means for HIV Risk

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Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations  
Leaders in the HIV community response



## 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

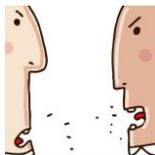
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## Background

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*

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To develop principles informing HIV health promotion targeting young gay men

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## 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

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## 1. Services Scoping Study

Structured interviews with 24 AFAO member orgs & key LGBTI-focussed youth/mental health services

### AFAO Members

ACON  
AACACT  
Gay Men's Health (RASA)  
NTAHC  
QuAC  
TasCHARD  
VAC  
WAAC  
ANA  
NAPWHA

### Non-AFAO Members

Family Planning Queensland  
Gay and Lesbian Health Alliance  
Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships (WA)  
Headspace  
Minus 18  
National Safe Schools Coalition  
Open Doors (Qld)  
Safe Schools Coalition NSW  
Safe Schools Coalition SA  
Safe Schools Coalition Victoria  
SHine  
Sexual and Reproductive Health WA (SRHWA)  
Twenty 10  
YEAH

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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



*Youth participation and ownership*

## 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



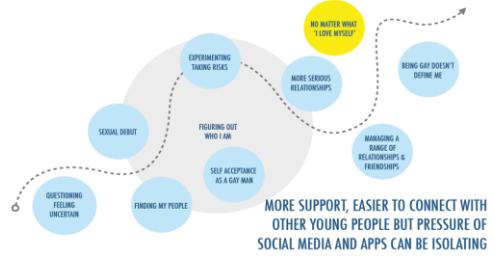
May 2015

## Workshop

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

## KEY MILESTONES ARE SIMILAR TO OTHER GENERATIONS

The current context makes it easier in some ways and more complex in others



> Developmental nature of self & sexuality

## 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 0.2

time for myself	mindfulness	meditation	exercise
jogging	gym	eat well	massage
sleep well	resistance training	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!"

### Synopsis of Young Gay Men HIV Health Promotion Principles

For a full version see page 14

Be Inclusive	Be owned by young gay men	Build social and community connectivity among young gay men	Be Real	Promote Informed Decision Making	Be Evaluated, Efficacious and Responsive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise diversity, specific imagery, and appeal to subcultures or groups</li> <li>• Use language and is supportive, affirming and not judgemental and current usage among young gay men</li> <li>• Avoid stereotypes of men to be 'gay' or many young gay men doing just that</li> <li>• Create safe space for young men to decide for and to have what kind of sex they want to have</li> <li>• Facilitate connection between men and 'gay' friends</li> <li>• Content is in a range of media where young gay men go to get their information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise peer education</li> <li>• Strive for the involvement of young gay men in all stages of campaign development including concept, creation and delivery</li> <li>• Ensure meaningful participation and involvement in decision making</li> <li>• Facilitate spaces for young gay men to 'meet' (including online spaces) and also include young gay men in more broadly targeted events</li> <li>• Facilitate spaces that are interactive</li> <li>• Recognise both the skills young gay men bring with them and build capacity</li> <li>• Empower participants to take control of their health promotion within their broader social networks and relevant agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endeavour to increase young gay men's pride, confidence and agency</li> <li>• Promote a capacity for young gay men to participate in their various communities</li> <li>• Create and support platforms to foster connectivity among young gay men</li> <li>• Provide access to like-minded people and role models</li> <li>• Create safe spaces to 'come out', explore, interact and access support</li> <li>• Facilitate learning from peers</li> <li>• Address stigma</li> <li>• Allow anonymity</li> <li>• Speak to young gay men 'where they're at' in their lives</li> <li>• Provide clear referral to services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be based on a broad understanding of young gay men's experiences and interests</li> <li>• Be relevant, reliable, honest and transparent</li> <li>• Be clear and factually correct (evidence based)</li> <li>• Use genuine and plain language</li> <li>• Tell it as it is, including the gritty bits</li> <li>• Consider using humour and conversational techniques</li> <li>• Motivate</li> <li>• Be delivered to them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase personal skills that enable the application of informed decisions</li> <li>• Recognise the developmental nature of young gay men's thinking and experiences around self, sex and relationships</li> <li>• Use 'sex positive' messaging, while ensuring space for young gay men to become sexually active as their own pace and to regulate the limits of their sexual activity</li> <li>• Engage in relationships of their choosing including 'negotiating safety' with regular partners</li> <li>• Recognise the complexity of HIV risk reduction messaging and strive to communicate current scientific knowledge in a way that makes sense to young gay men seeking to manage their HIV infection risk</li> <li>• Manage serodiscordant relationships in ways that are evidence based, comfortable and non-stigmatising</li> <li>• Promote supportive environments, including physical and online spaces</li> <li>• Address homophobia and HIV-related stigma</li> <li>• Address harm reduction messaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be strategic</li> <li>• Be accessible</li> <li>• Be evidence based</li> <li>• Provide information support as soon as possible</li> <li>• Be progressive and responsive to changing circumstances</li> <li>• Have content that is adaptable across different mediums</li> <li>• Undertake timely evaluation and review</li> <li>• Draw on partners wherever advantageous</li> <li>• Energise and inspire</li> </ul>