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GAY MASCULINITIES

Gay Masculinities

Edited by

PETER NARDI

RESEARCH ON MEN AND MASCULINITIES

Published in cooperation with the Men's Studies Association,
A Task Group of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism



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PART ONE
 MASCULINITIES IN GAY RELATIONSHIPS

2
 Seeking Sexual Lives
 Gay Youth and Masculinity Tensions

MATT G. MUTCHLER

Revealing Gay Sexualities

Few activities elicit as much anxiety, pleasure, or confusion as sex. Even in the age of prolific public debates about sex "scandals" and talk shows depicting shocking sexual deviants, surprisingly little is known about some sexualities. This research reveals some of the unarticulated complexities of gay male youth's sexual lives and gives young gay men the rare opportunity to speak about their sexual stories in great detail.

Consider the following interview excerpt with Todd, a 19-year-old white gay man studying music and theater at a college in a medium-sized city on the West Coast:

Todd: The first time I had sex was when I was 16 and sadly enough, it was in a bathroom, and basically it was me getting a blow job.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This research is supported by a grant from the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at UCSB, the Martin P. Levine Memorial Award given by the Sex and Gender Section of the American Sociological Association, and a Predoctoral Fellowship from the University-Wide AIDS Research Program, University of California. The author wishes to thank Beth Schneider, Peter Nardi, Andrew Sanchez, John Baldwin, the LARS research team, and members of the ongoing feminist pro-seminar at UCSB for their valuable and insightful feedback on this work.

Matt: So, how did this happen?

Todd: Oh, actually, I was there one day going to the bathroom. And, oh, there was writing all over the stalls . . . about sticking it under the stalls, and that's how it happened. Actually, I was pissed at myself for doing that. That's one of the reasons why anal sex is going to wait until I'm in a relationship, because I fucked up with my first sexual experience. . . . At the time, I was hurting and I thought it would make me feel better. It didn't at all, it made me feel worse. I was thinking, this will make me feel better about who I am, and what I am, and it didn't like I thought it would.

Todd's story introduces the themes of anonymous sex, relationships, and emotional tensions regarding sex explored in this chapter.

The stories these young men tell reveal how four dominant sexual scripts guide and frame their sexual experiences.¹ These scripts are romantic love, erotic adventure, safer sex, and sexual coercion. My purpose is to show how these young men learn and use sexual scripts; I also explore how their erotic lives are accomplished through learning and innovating sexual scripts and behaviors in complex, diverse social contexts. I highlight ambiguous and problematic stories as well as those narrated by these dominant patterns.

This work draws on recent developments in sexual scripts theory (Laumann & Gagnon, 1995), theories of gender (Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987), and research on ethnicity and sexuality (Almaguer, 1991; Diaz, 1998). My theoretical approach is informed by social constructionist and queer theorists' assertions that sexuality is socially and culturally produced in complicated and pluralist ways (Duggan, 1992; Plummer, 1981; Weeks, 1986). I analyze how these men practice erotic lives shaped and constrained by gendered sexual scripts and by *masculinity tensions*. Through the process of analyzing these data, I develop and define the concept of masculinity tensions as sites at which gay men experience conflicts, contradictions, ambiguities, and struggles in and between their experiences of gendered sexual scripts. I examine significant differences between white and Latino young gay men and discuss implications for HIV-prevention policies. My aim is to make the sexual experiences of young gay men less obscure and shameful and more available to youth forming their sexual lives and to others wishing to help them do it safely.

Thirty Sexual Stories

The stories that follow are from interviews I conducted with 30 (15 white and 15 Latino) gay youth between the ages of 18 and 24.² Respondents were drawn from the cities of Modesto, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara (all in California) through a snowball sampling procedure.³ To ensure a diverse set of interviews, contacts were made at a variety of venues (gay cafes, parks, gay restaurants, and youth shelters) and through social networks.⁴ I met these young men at their convenience and asked them to tell me their stories in confidential interviews.⁵ Some of the respondents were referred to me by the young men I interviewed and by friends. All respondents identify as gay men, and the sample includes men from a range of class backgrounds. The Latino men were selected to represent various facets of gay male Latino populations, including recent immigrants from Mexico, first- and second-generation Mexican Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Rican Americans, and Cuban Americans.

Sexual Scripts

This chapter explores the scripts found in gay male youth's stories about their sexual desires and behaviors. The narratives young gay men told about their sexual experiences compose the sexual stories in this project. They were free to elaborate on the raw material of these stories; they described contextual details, supporting actors, and personal reflections about their sexual experiences without identifying sexual scripts per se. The use of the sexual scripts metaphor is an analytical tool I imposed on their stories to clarify the ways in which scripts produce their sexual stories and to examine how young gay men revise and edit scripts in the context of their own experiences. Plummer (1995) argues that sexual stories are the conceptual link between people's lives and their society or culture. Thus, this effort examines intersections between gay youth's everyday sexual lives and the historical, social, and cultural forces shaping these lives.

A sexual script is a type of sexual discourse focused at the level of examining sexual behaviors. Scripts are conceptually useful for getting at how sex is accomplished in specific interactions. Sexual script theory posits that individuals construct sexualities in direct collaboration with the social and cultural structures shaping their lives (Gagnon & Simon, 1973;

Parker & Gagnon, 1995; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). These theorists view scripts as metaphors for conceptualizing the social production of sexual behavior. Sexual scripts exist at three related, yet distinct levels:

cultural scenarios (the instructions for sexual and other conduct that are embedded in the cultural narratives that are provided as guides or instructions for all conduct), *interpersonal scripts* (the structured patterns of interaction in which individuals as actors engage in everyday interpersonal conduct), and *intrapersonal scripts* (the plans and fantasies by which individuals guide and reflect upon their past, current, or future conduct). (Laumann & Gagnon, 1995, p. 190)

Cultural scripts exist at the collective level; they guide interpersonal scripts and proscribe patterns of sexual conduct (with whom, what, why, when, and where sex is done). Recent developments in the field leave room for individual "sexual actors" to actively change and innovate sexual scripts at every level in light of shifting local social/sexual environments and complex (sometimes contradictory) cultural norms (Laumann & Gagnon, 1995). I use script theory with the assumption that individuals actively learn, employ, and innovate scripts for their own sexual behavior.

Traditional cultural scripts for sex derived from dominant sexual discourses in Western, industrialized countries are based on assumptions about heterosexual relationships. For example, a model of such scripts includes procreative, recreational, and relational sex. These dominant cultural scripts prescribe and proscribe how sex should be practiced. The procreative script for sex mandates that sex be done for the purpose of procreation with a husband or wife. Recreational sex is marked by a pattern of sexual behaviors with casual or anonymous partners practiced primarily for its intrinsic pleasurable sensations. Sex in a committed relationship (practiced for a number of reasons) is the relational script. These scripts are culturally available to most individuals growing up in the United States. For instance, some Catholic officials advocate sex for the purpose of procreation only, and family planning classes in public schools sometimes advise students to stay abstinent until they are married. At the same time, adolescents are potentially exposed to multiple messages about relational and recreational sex through the media in television programs, song lyrics, and popular movies in which characters enact procreative, recreational, and relational scripts sometimes simultaneously. These scripts are potentially available at the level of culture for heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals to draw on.

The traditional sexual scripts model presumes the heterosexuality of sexual actors, since lesbians and gay men cannot legally marry and do not procreate when they are engaging solely in same sexual encounters, but these scripts can be adapted and modified by gay men and other sexual minorities. Gay youth, for instance, may pick up on relational, recreational, or procreative scripts for sex found in movies or books in dominant heterosexual culture or gay male subcultures, although they necessarily must rewrite the scripts to account for two male sexual actors. The fact that heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couples report high levels of affairs and nonmonogamy indicates that traditional scripts, such as relational sex, are not followed uniformly by heterosexuals, gay men, or lesbians (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994). Traditional sexual scripts fail to adequately theorize the complexities and contradictions in the erotic lives of gay and straight individuals.

Scripts for sexual behaviors are further gender based. The traditional script for doing "feminine sex" is referred to as romantic love. In line with this script, girls are encouraged to save sexual intercourse for a special person. Women are also expected to take responsibility for birth control, reproduction, child care, pleasing their sexual partners, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Women are expected to play the passive role, saving sex for romance and marriage. The traditional script for men is referred to as the adventure script. Men are expected to play the active role, seeking sex for adventure. Young males and females are also exposed to multiple, contradictory sexual scripts during their socialization experiences, however. For example, young men are simultaneously expected to settle down in a monogamous marriage and to prove their manhood by "sowing their oats."

These gender-based sexual scripts are culturally institutionalized for gay men as well as heterosexuals. Gay men, much like their straight counterparts, are taught in self-help books that seeking out sex for pleasure is an integral part of being a man (Rose, 1996). The assumption of heterosexuality, however, is that the gendered scripts for women and men will eventually converge in a marriage in which a husband and wife will procreate and live happily ever after. The gaps in heteronormative scripts, supposedly filled by a wife, are left open for gay men to fill in. When women are absent from the picture, how do gay men improvise scripts for sex? Traditional scripts for sex provide the basic building blocks for gay men to form their own intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts for sex, but the question of what forces drive their actual sexual practices remains.

Doing Gender and Sexuality

Connell's (1995) conception of masculinity assumes that gender is an institutional structure that is recreated through social practices. Among other practices, this arena includes sexual activities. Connell's notion of masculinity is linked closely to West and Zimmerman's (1987) theoretical reconceptualization of gender as an accomplishment embedded in daily interactions and as a dynamic process. Recasting gender as something that is *done* in social interactions provides a conceptual bridge between thinking about gender as an institution existing somehow outside of real people and thinking of gender as practiced by people. Doing gender is unavoidable because individuals are held accountable to "gendered" behavior appropriate to their sex. As West and Zimmerman point out, "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (p. 136).

Whereas women may be stigmatized for indulging their sexual desires, men are rewarded for sexual accomplishments. Adolescent men who do not have sex with women are held accountable (stigmatized as fags or losers). At the same time that individuals do gender on a daily basis, gender is also done to individuals. Individuals with more power or gender status may be in positions to force others to do gender in relation to their own desires (as in the case of rape). In the case of two gay men having sex with each other, both partners learn to be accountable to some masculinity scripts for sex such as romantic love and erotic adventures. Gay men's sexualities are done in the context of socially and culturally produced masculinity expectations.

Gay and bisexual men are subordinated in the hegemonic masculine hierarchy because they violate the explicit requirements of heterosexuality (Connell, 1992). Even though gay men fundamentally fail to be "masculine" men, they may still engage some aspects of masculine sexual scripts. For instance, *what* gay men can do (having sex for love or pleasure) reflects masculine scripts for men in general, but *who* they do it with and thus *how* they do it is unique to gay men. It is difficult to sustain a feminine model of sex for gay men without losing a sense of gay men's experience of the world as men. Gay men are not accountable to feminine scripts. For instance, they are not expected to procreate or "save it" until marriage. At the same time, it remains true that heterosexuality is a fundamental feature of masculine sex. Holding this paradox of gay men and sex in mind, I sug-

gest that the rich array of young gay men's sexualities can be viewed as complicated gay masculinities marked by masculinity tensions.

Some gay men, known as "gay clones," played out the hypermasculinized adventure script for sex (focused on anonymous, recreational sex with multiple partners) during the sexual liberation era (Levine, 1998); "clones" composed one primary cultural model for what and who gay men were. In that context, gay men in romantic relationships were largely absent from popular representations and public discussion. Nevertheless, data on gay men's sexual behaviors during the pre-AIDS, gay liberation era document dating patterns and romantic love relationships quite distinct from the mythic "clone" image (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Adam (1992) notes, "AIDS has drawn upon and developed a cultural trend which has made visible the gay men engaged in caring relationships who had often been overlooked" (p. 181).

Contemporary sociological research on popular images and discourses of gay men and lesbians reveals that their social support networks and interpersonal relationships became more acknowledged during the AIDS era (Nardi, 1997), but the complexities and implications of gay men's sexual lives during the 1970s have never been fully theorized. Sociological studies of gay youth thus far primarily examine sexual *identity* formation processes (Trolden, 1988). The rich array of sexual *behaviors* enacted by gay males growing up in the era of AIDS is only now being documented by sociologists (Herdt & Boxer, 1993). There is still a great need to understand the diverse range of sexual patterns encountered and lived by gay male youth, especially those outside of formal youth groups. In this chapter, I analyze a broad range of gay male youth's sexual stories.

Race and Ethnicity Matter

What counts as appropriate femininity and masculinity varies across circumstances and among actors situated differently in terms of their social positions. Race and class intersect with gender to produce hierarchically situated, multiple genders (Collins, 1989; hooks, 1984). Notions of appropriate sexual behaviors for individuals situated as Mexican men, for example, look different from the expectation in the United States that sex between men is always suspect. The white men and a few of the Latino men I interviewed grew up accustomed to the assumption in the dominant U.S. model for homosexuality that men who have insertive or receptive anal sex with other men *are gay*. In some cases, however, men

growing up in Mexico or in Mexican American families may engage in sex with men as long as they are in the *activo* role (insertive anal sex) without facing social stigma. Men who are in the *pasivo* role (receiving anal sex) are considered to be unmasculine and may be stigmatized as *jotos* (fags).

Complex cultural factors such as machismo, religion, and family loyalty shape the scripts for sex encountered by many Latino gay men (Diaz, 1998). The Latin scripts for sex, though, vary across regions, countries, and time (Murray, 1995). Gay white men are accountable to similar social pressures to be heterosexual, especially those from families abiding by Western religious dogmas. Many gay Latino men in the United States are accountable to particular "raced" scripts for sex deriving from Latin cultures *and* to the U.S. models for sex. Studies document that Latino gay men believe they are under more extreme pressures from their families and ethnic cultural backgrounds to live out the heterosexual procreative scripts for sex—at least in the public eye (Diaz, 1998). Indeed, there are many rich and diverse ways in which masculinities are constructed, enacted, and resisted among men who are differently situated with respect to race or ethnicity, class, and age (Kimmel & Messner, 1995). This research adds to the body of work documenting these diverse masculinities in the arena of sexualities.

Gay Youth in the AIDS Era

Gay youth growing up during the AIDS era, referred to as the AIDS generation, come out and form their sexual lives in the context of a social world already changed by AIDS, the gay and lesbian movement, and reactions to these (Adam, 1987; Altman, 1986; D'Emilio, 1983). They must deal with the specter of AIDS on top of the web of problems associated with heterosexism, homophobia, and coming out (Mutchler, 1994). The safer sex script is an ideal-type example of a cultural script for sex produced purposely by gay men to guide sexual behaviors during the era of AIDS. Safer sex scripts, focused on avoiding behaviors that could transmit HIV (such as unprotected anal sex), while emphasizing the erotic aspects of safer behaviors (such as anal sex with condoms, hot oil massage, and oral sex) continue to drive HIV-prevention efforts targeting gay youth. Safer sex scripts do not proscribe recreational sex between men as long as condoms are used for anal sex. In fact, eroticizing safer sex campaigns are explicit about asserting that safer sex allows for sexual liberation and sex for pleasure. AIDS, nonetheless, requires gay men to take safety and cau-

tion into account. Even though gay men of the AIDS generation were born when this cultural script was already culturally produced, rates of unprotected anal intercourse and HIV infection are alarmingly high among young gay men (Hays, Kegeles, & Coates, 1990; Lemp et al., 1994; Osmond et al., 1994). Latino men who have sex with men are disproportionately infected and affected by AIDS (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1997). And the new treatments made available during the 1990s raise concerns that gay youth will no longer view AIDS as life threatening. This chapter provides more in-depth knowledge about how gay male youth use safer sex scripts, if at all, and discusses implications for HIV-prevention policies aimed at them. Because it is salient in virtually any sexual encounter for these young gay men, I analyze safer sex scripts throughout the sections on romantic love, erotic adventures, and sexual coercion.

Gay Men and Romantic Love

Contrary to the stereotype of gay male promiscuity, the dominant sexual script found in all these young men's stories centers around romantic love. All of the young gay men in this study have or want boyfriends in their lives.⁶ Much like the relational script for heterosexuals, this model for sex rests fundamentally on the notion that sex is for two people in love. This section explores sexual experiences shaped predominantly, but not exclusively, by the romantic love script for sex. The four most common variations on the theme of romantic love among gay male youth in this study are "Waiting for Mr. Right," "Finding Mr. Wrong," "I'm Ready for My Close-Up Now," and "Fringe Benefits." These four ways of doing romantic love exemplify how young gay men draw on this script in creative ways, at different moments in their sexual careers, and in the context of experiencing masculinity tensions.

Waiting for Mr. Right

Three individuals in this study (all of them Latino) remember always wanting to have sex only with the right man. Mario is waiting for Mr. Right. He has never had sex with a man (or woman), although he has an active fantasy life involving masturbation, men, and pornographic videos. Mario is a 24-year-old Cuban American male who came out at the age of 20 while pursuing an undergraduate degree. This young man has been

actively engaged in gay life. He regularly attended a gay men's rap group at college. Dancing at gay clubs became a favorite pastime for him. In fact, he earned the title "Dancing Queen" from his acquaintances for his undying devotion to *Abba*. At the same time, Mario is "holding out" for the right guy. Although he meets many men, he claims that "it just hasn't felt right inside." He uses traditional, heterosexual concepts to discuss his sexual desires. For example, he says, "Before I came out, I was afraid that I would be alone for the rest of my life, but now, I almost see myself living that American Dream except that instead of having a wife, there will be a husband." Mario seems committed to the idea of being a husband. Although this script sounds like the traditional feminine script for sexuality, it is at the same time a choice that Mario makes as a man. In addition, he is very clear that he wants a "real" masculine man. In fact, Mario's fantasies and crushes on men are rich with images of masculine, muscular, and "straight-acting" gay men. He has a secret fetish for bulging biceps. "Waiting for Mr. Right" is a cultural script for sex, appropriated here by a gay man who has incorporated it into his (intrapsychic) fantasies and personal wishes for future sexual activities.

Finding Mr. Wrong

Another version of the "Waiting for Mr. Right" theme involves the individual who always wanted romantic love, but instead finds a series of boyfriends who are actually Mr. Wrong for one reason or another. The level of interpersonal scripts tends to complicate ideal-type cultural and intrapsychic scripts when individuals engage in relationships with real (and by definition complicated) human beings. Rafael, for instance, is clear that he wants to be in a monogamous relationship, even though he gets pressure from his gay male friends to "play the field" first. Rafael is a 23-year-old Latino who works as a restaurant manager in a small, conservative city in Southern California. He fell in love with his first boyfriend, but the relationship turned physically abusive after a few months. Rafael's boyfriend maintained a heterosexual public life and a relationship with a girlfriend for the duration of their relationship, but he promised his love to Rafael. Rafael wanted this romantic relationship to work out enough to endure the abuse. Eventually, he left the relationship because the abuse did not end, but Rafael shuns casual sex and still waits for Mr. Right. The third individual who remembers always wanting Mr. Right, Julio, has only encountered sexually abusive men and men who lie to him about wanting romance when they only want casual sex. Julio is looking for romance and love. In

this study, all of the young men who always remember wanting only romantic love are Latino.

I'm Ready for My Close-Up Now

The most striking pattern among these men is their tendency to sow their oats and then decide that they want serious relationships.⁷ This is the pattern among all of the white men (except for one individual, who fell in love with his first sexual partner and now wishes that he could explore recreational sex) and 12 of the Latino men. Rick's story illustrates the most common version of romantic love among young men in this study. Rick is a 22-year-old white man who grew up in the Los Angeles area. After having a number of unsatisfying recreational sexual experiences with "tricks" met at a bar, Rick decided that these encounters were meaningless to him. He said, "Not until I met my boyfriend did I really realize that I could love sex, with my boyfriend, where it was mutual pleasure, that really turned me on." Steven, a 21-year-old Mexican American, is a particularly striking example of this pattern. Steven works three part-time jobs to get by and is trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. During the process of coming out, Steven had a broad range of sexual experiences, including having sex for money, coercive sexual experiences, and sex with a boyfriend who was HIV positive. Although Steven was forced into having unprotected anal sex with a trick, it was his HIV-positive boyfriend who taught him how to practice and enjoy safer sex. Steven is now adamant about having sex only out of an emotional commitment. He says, "It [sex] should be done because two people love each other; it should be done because the emotions come into it. It shouldn't be done because I met you at a bar and you bought me a drink." Steven's boyfriend died of AIDS. He wants a boyfriend eventually, but is not ready yet. The pattern of wanting a loving relationship after having a series of casual sexual encounters is the most dominant one among both white and Latino men.

Fringe Benefits

A fourth pattern of romantic love is the gay man who wants recreational sex in addition to relational sex. For some gay men, the two scripts pose contradictions. John, a 23-year-old white gay man, met his boyfriend, Jake, while in college. Jake was also John's first sexual partner. When asked about sex with his boyfriend, John said,

Discussing it doesn't come up much because a lot of my fantasies involve other men and not always him there. Any time I tried to bring that up, he would get defensive and pissed off and very depressed, and thinking that I just didn't love him anymore and he didn't satisfy me.

For John and Jake the tension between competing scripts is not easily resolved, because one partner wants to have sex outside the relationship whereas the other does not. At the same time, John loves Jake and does not want to leave the relationship.

Other individuals deal with this tension differently. For instance, Brian, a white 23-year-old gay man, was in a 2-year relationship with his boyfriend, but cheated on him during a summer they spent apart from each other. He reflects:

I had been faithful the whole summer, but of course, because I had never been a single gay man, I always like kind of was turned on by . . . the intrigue of doing something wrong, and I had a physical crush on this guy who was beautiful. [Afterward], I just finally broke down and confessed to him [his boyfriend] because I was feeling so guilty. He told me that he had cheated on me, too!

These partners want romantic and recreational sex. Brian did not want to lose his partner by bringing up his potentially threatening desires, but he felt that he was missing some of the gay, single experience. Brian and his boyfriend were actually relieved to discover that each of them wanted to explore recreational sex. The violation of trust between them led to the eventual end of their relationship, however.

Some young gay couples handle the issue of sex in addition to a relationship with creative solutions. For example, Charles and his boyfriend (both white gay men), openly discussed recreational sex outside of their relationship. After about 3 months, they found a third partner. Charles describes a particular erotic interchange:

I can tell you the highlight of my sexual experience, ever, I mean the best. It was one night with my boyfriend, a third, and I. We just had this revolving setup going where one person would lay down, the other two would kind of be on top sucking off, and then we'd revolve and keep going. We did that for a couple of hours and it was amazing. We had music in the background. I just was definitely in love with my boyfriend, and I was falling in love with the third.

Charles added that they all agreed to have safer sex (oral sex rather than anal sex), since they were having sex with an additional person, although

he did not always practice safer sex with his boyfriend.⁸ This three-way affair lasted a couple of months, but eventually dissolved because the emotional issues became too complicated for them to handle. Six of the young men I interviewed have experienced or wish to experience such fringe benefits in addition to being in romantic relationships. All six of these young men are white; none of the Latino men want to be in open relationships.

Erotic Adventures

The adventure script is alive and well among gay men in the AIDS generation; I defined it as sex with casual or anonymous partners for the purpose of seeking pleasure. Most young gay males go through a period of sexual experimentation before seeking more committed relationships. Erotic adventures include sexual activities performed in public sex environments, sex clubs, and a broad range of additional contexts. Although it is possible for gay men to use environments such as gay bars, sex clubs, and public sex scenes (parks, bathrooms, abandoned industrial sites) for social purposes, they are primarily organized around recreational and anonymous sexual encounters. All of the white young men and 12 of the Latino men experienced or wanted to experience sex with casual partners throughout the course of their sexual lives. Many of these experiences revolve around meeting men at gay bars. This section, however, focuses on their sexual encounters in public cruising areas and at circuit parties. Public cruising areas are places, such as parks or rest rooms, where men meet to have sex. I illustrate five types of erotic adventures here: "Bathroom Breaks," "Industrial Sector Sex," "Afternoons in the Park," "Leather Club Sex," and "Party Boy Sex." Nine of the Latino men and four of the white men experienced sexual encounters in public sex environments such as parks, beaches, and bathrooms. Their adventures demonstrate how they learn sexual scripts in public encounters, but also illustrate their complex reactions to these scripts.

Bathroom Breaks

Todd's story about getting a blow job in a bathroom, introduced earlier, was not the only time he engaged in anonymous sex in such a setting. Even as he felt tremendous anxiety and ambivalence about having sex in this way, Todd pursued sex in the college public restrooms for a couple of

years. He accounts for the apparent contradiction between his desires for a relationship and anonymous sex by pointing out that these encounters were extremely erotic and temporarily met his needs for intimacy. He shared this story about his most erotic adventure in a public sex environment:

Todd: It was that [names bathroom]; there's three stalls and there's urinals, but um, I can't believe you're asking me to do this. They were occupied, all the stalls, and then someone walked in and he walked up to the urinal and started playing with himself and you could see through the cracks of the stall doors.

Matt: So, you were in one of the stalls?

Todd: Yes. He was actually in one of the urinals right in front of my stall. And um, I looked through. He was nice looking. He was about my age, cute, you know. Actually had one of the biggest penises I've ever seen in my life, it was sort of scary. Then, I opened the stall door and I started giving him head and then continued for 5 to 10 minutes and then I came and he came and then it was over.

Todd was reluctant to share this story because he was embarrassed about having sex in the restroom and about sharing the details with me. His sexual story contains the elements of danger, eroticism, and anonymous sex. The men's bathroom environment was not set up for unprotected anal sex because of the constant flow of traffic and threat of interruptions. Quick and easily abandoned sex acts such as exhibition, masturbation, and oral sex are more supported by such an environment. This practice is not producing sex at high risk for HIV transmission, but it is a dangerous place to meet men, a place in which sex is illegal and getting caught can bear serious consequences. More relevant to Todd's story, though, is the tendency for young gay men to feel emotionally ambivalent about these encounters after they climax.

Industrial Sector Sex

Roberto, a Mexican American gay male, grew up in a medium-sized, conservative city near Los Angeles. There were no gay organizations or establishments to his knowledge in this city while he was growing up. But there was a cruising area in an industrial part of the city. This public

sex site was largely abandoned at night. Roberto explains how sex happens here:

People would cruise in their cars and check each other out, and they'd pull over and kind of talk to each other, and then they'd go somewhere else. To me, it was kind of funny because it seemed so convenient, it was almost like drive-up. You don't have to make the effort and buy drinks for everybody, you can just kind of cruise around and scope out who is in the area, and after a while, you're kind of like, that one! Then, you just kind of make eye contact and get them to talk to you and stuff.

The rules for interaction here compose a particular erotic adventure script. This script must be learned and followed to do sex appropriately in this public sex environment. Roberto stumbled on this scene shortly after coming out and believed at the time that it was the only place where he could meet men. Although he is bitter about the fact that his city offered no other resources for gay men, Roberto's stories about his public sexual experiences flow with erotic passion.

Typically, Roberto says, men were cruised there during all "hours of darkness." Most of the men he encountered there were open to doing anything. Some men go there for quickies, and some are there for the "long haul." Roberto would keep looking until he found someone who would take the time to enjoy the experience. He had a preferred spot to have sex. He says, "There were certain areas which I would particularly favor, like this train yard area with a loading deck. During the day, it was used for some kind of commercial transport, and during the night, it was completely empty." When asked to describe his most erotic experience there, Roberto shared this story:

The most erotic involved some kind of risk of discovery, I guess. . . . One of the most erotic, so to speak, was this kind of big guy, he and I went to the loading dock place, which was a bit far away, and kind of got into the sucking stage and right in the middle of him going down on me, the train started going by, and there we are in light, basically, and it bordered the train yard, and here we are, me sitting on my car or his car, I don't remember, and him going down on me, and the train going by and blowing his horn and scaring the hell out of us, because I guess they could kind of see us from where they were, but that kind of thrill just stood out in my mind.

Roberto expresses strong, mixed feelings about his experiences in this public sex environment for men. On one hand, he enjoyed the excitement

and eroticism of the danger and risk to be found in this after-dark world of endless, anonymous sex in this bleak, industrial setting. On the other, he explains, "You have to find your own way among all this ugly, darkness, basically." Roberto is HIV positive, and he attributes his status to his sexual activities in this social world of hypermasculine sex. Condoms were not part of the script in this scene.

Afternoons in the Park

Manuel's story is more typical of the experiences of young gay men and public sex. Manuel is a 23-year-old Latino who grew up in Los Angeles and who went through a public sex "phase" after he broke up with his last boyfriend. He learned about men having sex in a park area near Hollywood and decided to explore the environment. For about 6 months, Manuel visited this site four or five times a week and had sex with somewhere between 50 and 100 men. Manuel routinely practiced oral sex and mutual masturbation with the men he met at the park. Although Manuel did not practice unprotected anal sex in the park, he did worry about the possibility of being infected from the numerous unprotected oral sexual encounters he indulged in there.⁹ Manuel describes this park as an extremely exciting and erotically charged environment where he could meet hot guys and live out his fantasies. Eventually, though, the emotional experiences of having public sex became unbearable for him. He almost always walked away from these experiences feeling guilty and emotionally empty. Because of these negative side effects, Manuel wants to change his behaviors. He is seeking a long-term relationship, but not with someone he meets at the park.

Leather Club Sex

Jesus, a 20-year-old Chicano who grew up in Los Angeles, went through a self-proclaimed "stage" of sexual adventures in leather sex clubs from age 15 to 17. Growing up in Los Angeles, Jesus was exposed to a large spectrum of gay- and lesbian-sponsored organizations, HIV-prevention services, and clubs. He enjoyed dressing up and experimenting with sex and power in the scene:

Jesus: I used to work at an S/M club so things were always very erotic and I was a very dominating person, you know, so I was involved in bondage and stuff.

Matt: So, you would tie people up?

Jesus: Hmm-hmm.

Matt: Where would you meet people?

Jesus: At the club. . . . But see, what I think was really cool, was the whole leather sex is very safe. I think that's why I felt very comfortable doing that, because there's not really much body contact. There is, but there's more power, more role playing.

Matt: Tell me what you would do with an example.

Jesus: Well, see, remember how I told you I went through a dressing-up phase? Okay, well, I would like dress up, do role plays, like in S/M drag, it sounds weird but it's still like keeping your male identity, but I would wear like thigh-high leather boots and like leather underwear, bondage belts, and a harness, and the whole bit and just kind of walk around. And guys who liked to be dominated over, like.

Matt: So, they'd do what?

Jesus: There's all kinds of things. You know, like I'd tie them up, and they'd be oh, you know, like I'd tease them a lot, make them worship me. You know, you want me, how bad do you want me? I may even go so far as grinding up against them, groping their bodies, and kind of just teasing them the whole time, and never let them do anything.

Jesus is self-conscious about maintaining his male identity while dressing up in leather drag; he is also comforted that rules surrounding safety and consensual sex are built into formal S/M club scenes such as this one. Although his sexual experiences are clearly about playing with men and power, they are in a controlled environment in which power is shared rather than exploited. Jesus uses his power as a desirable, young male to gain the upper hand (and other assorted body parts) on men who were typically older and potentially more physically powerful than he is. At the same time that he is playing with his status as an object of male desire, he also engages multiple, male partners in erotic sexual interchanges involving power, safety, and pleasure. Besides a little bit of embarrassment he felt about sharing his experiences there with me, Jesus does not have bad feelings about these experiences. Even though he grew tired of the scene, he still revisits it to play now and then.

Circuit Sex and Other Club Scenes

Circuit parties have become a routine feature of gay male culture in large, urban cities across the United States in the past decade (Signorile, 1997). Annual circuit parties, such as the White Party in Palm Springs, are expensive and exclusive affairs held every year in large hotels or abandoned buildings where gay men pay fees to party all night or all weekend. Typically, large dance floors play techno music and are packed with mostly hard body men with no shirts on. Food, music, and entertainment are available. Many participants use drugs (crystal, ecstasy, and marijuana) regularly and visibly. These parties tend to advertise hot, young men and to attract "circuit clones." Men are expected to wear all white clothes at the White Party and groups of men frequently show up dressed uniformly at other theme-based circuit parties. Large cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco provide many additional gay club scenes; these bars are open every night and cater to broad interests (leather clubs, Latin clubs, country western clubs, neighborhood clubs, etc.). Medium-sized cities tend to have only a few bars (generally a dance club and a neighborhood bar). The climate at gay bars ranges from social clubs to "meat markets."

Some young gay men use gay bars as their outlet for meeting friends and having fun. Others experience gay bars as intimidating places in which they are constantly forced to deal with sexual passes. Richard, a 23-year-old white gay man who grew up in a large city with many gay clubs and organizations, enjoyed being a "Party Boy" at popular gay clubs for about a year. He shares the following story:

For me, like drinking and drugs, it's more because of who I associate with, part of me, for me, was in school, I didn't have a lot of friends. So, when I came out, it was like, oh, there's this whole life and I know a lot of people and people want to get to know me, and okay, right on! Okay, I'm gonna be "A-listed," I'm gonna meet as many people as I can, I'm gonna be little party boy, and make up for all this lost time, whatever. Then, there was a big light, whoa, what am I doing, what am I doing?

Richard found himself having unprotected anal sex with a man he met at a gay club. He explains he did this because he was "drunk and horny," but later he adds that he just got all caught up in being popular in the scene. Richard left the area to live with his parents and rethink his priorities re-

garding sex and relationships. He is celibate now, but wishes to find a meaningful relationship.

Other young men are able to safely negotiate the circuit club and bar scenes while getting the enjoyment they want out of them. Marvin, a Puerto Rican American, frequently visits West Hollywood from a small city nearby. He parties recreationally at many gay clubs and circuit scenes with his friends and strongly insists that he is able to use crystal and be in control of his (safer) sexual behaviors. In fact, he thinks that gay men who blame drugs for their unsafe behaviors are just being irresponsible. Later in the interview, though, Marvin remembered a time when he had unsafe sexual experiences initiated at club scenes. Marvin enjoys partying in the circuit club scene, but he relies on his male gay friends to protect him from having sex while he is under the influence of drugs and alcohol. His gay male friends enforce restrictions on his sexual behaviors in these scenes rather than encourage casual sex. This socially enforced restraint on Marvin's behaviors runs counter to the popular image of gay men engaging in unrestrained sexual adventures at circuit parties.

Latino men in this study are more than twice as likely to have sex in public environments compared to their white counterparts. Four of the white gay men shared stories about experiences in public sex environments, but only one of them continues to revisit the public sex environment for extended periods of time. The three who stopped visiting such environments characterize the experience as both exciting and emotionally meaningless. Brian, for instance, said he feels bad about acting like a "dumb stag," and he walked away from the experience with an "emotional hang-over." Todd's experience of bathroom sex corroborates this finding. The one white man in this study who continues to enjoy having sex on the beach a couple of times a month reports no feelings of shame associated with his behaviors. All nine of the Latino men, on the other hand, participated in public sex environments for extended periods of time, ranging from a couple of months to their entire sexual histories (up to 8 years). Jesus is the only Latino who does not feel shame about having public sex at the leather club, because, he says, he knew what he wanted there. The vast majority of men in this study, though, who indulge in erotic adventures at public sex environments tend to experience intensely mixed emotions about their behaviors there, ranging from excitement and pleasure to fear and shame.

Coercive Sex

More than half (18 out of 30) of the young men in this study told of feeling pressured or forced into having sex that they did not completely want. Nine of these individuals were raped by boyfriends, family members, or other men. Coercive sex is defined as sexual interactions involving some form of force or persuasion and resulting in activities unwanted by one or more participants. Stories where sex was forced and clearly unwanted by these young gay men are defined as rape, date rape, or boyfriends who rape. Other instances, in which their feelings are mixed or their desires were unclear, are harder to define; I decided to name these stories ambiguous acts. Of all the masculinity tensions expressed by gay youth during interviews, their stories of being coerced and raped by other men are the most disturbing.

Ambiguous Acts

The most common stories of sexual coercion describe situations in which gay youth feel "taken advantage of" by dates. For example, one white young man tells about meeting a 40-year-old gay man over the Internet:

I felt like out of control; all of the circumstances were really odd. I had gotten this idea that he was going to pick me up and we'd go back to his house, but instead he drove me up to (an inspiration point). . . . From then on, I felt off balance, all my expectations were off, yet I was really horny, so it was the combination. . . . [They had unprotected anal sex]. I was afraid he'd get mad at me or something, I don't know. It was pretty stupid, I don't feel good about it; it's a pretty bad way of treating a person, but it's pretty common in the gay world. When I went to [the gay bar], it sort of felt like the people were circling me like hawks.

Stories like this one, with slight variations, are repeated by 11 of my 30 respondents.

Other gay youth with whom I spoke have not been pressured into sex by sexual partners, but have felt pressures from their peers to be sexually active and adventurous while they are still young. Sex can pose complicated dilemmas for gay youth when they are not sure what they want. Consider the following story told by a 20-year-old white man about sex with a date:

I was going, oh my god, no sex, but I said okay, and then I told him no sex, but we, he felt me around and I felt him, and I can't blame him because I wanted a piece of it, and I'm easily persuaded . . . that's why I like older guys; they're not messed up. They know what they're doing.

Even though some gay youth do want to learn about sex with more experienced gay men, they also feel taken advantage of when they end up doing sexual acts that they had not really or only partly wanted, especially if they do not believe that they can say no. The line between being used and being raped is fuzzy under such conditions.

Rape: A Case Study of Sexual Violence

One individual in this study was sexually abused and raped for 3 years (between the ages of 7 and 10) by his stepfather. Julio, a 20-year-old Latino, grew up in a small town in Mexico. He recalls the experience:

In the beginning, he just force me to do a blow job on him. Then, when I was 9 years old, his friend was force me to do a blow job. . . . [pause]. . . He make love to me [forced him to receive anal sex]. . . . After that, they always come to me and force me to do things, like sexuality, and stuff like that. It was really, really hard. Now, I feel guilty, I really do, I don't know why and I fight every single day to survive this, you know, to let it go, but still it's pain in my heart, it's pain in my life. It's pain because I'm always paying in my life for this, for this shit, and I mean, why?

Julio ran away from his stepfather and came to the United States to get away from his village. Here, he has learned that gay men play both active and passive roles in anal sex, but he has been reluctant to have any anal sex at all because of the fact that his first sexual experiences were violent rapes. Four of the young men I interviewed were raped by men other than boyfriends.

Boyfriends Who Rape

Five of the men in this sample said they were raped by their boyfriends. David, a 24-year-old white gay man, was raped by his boyfriend a few months into their relationship. He reflects:

It was a rape. He [his boyfriend] was very mentally abusive . . . he had me at the time so fucked up in the head, we had gotten into a big fight. He had a problem

with me not being a virgin. . . . Then he wanted to have sex, and I kept telling him *no*, and somehow I got talked into it. And he did not have a condom on and started fucking me and I told him *stop*. And he didn't stop until he got off . . . at that moment, I definitely hated him.

Although David's boyfriend forced him to have unprotected anal sex, David's experience was that of a victim who defines the act as a raping script only on reflection after the event. This experience illustrates in vivid detail how confusing sex can be when contradictory scripts, such as love and rape, are operating simultaneously.

Interpreting Young Gay Men's Sexual Stories

My interviews with these 30 young gay men revealed rich and diverse types of sexual stories framed by romantic love, erotic adventure, and sexual coercion scripts. Their sexual lives are further complicated and elaborated by ethnic differences, safer sex scripts, and gender expectations. The following discussion sections explore similarities and differences between white and Latino stories, masculinity tensions among the three dominant scripts, safer sex techniques employed by gay youth in this sample, and implications for theorizing gay youth and HIV-prevention policies, sexual scripts, and masculinities.

Comparing White and Latino Stories

The Latino gay men in this study are more committed to romantic love and relationship scripts than are the white gay men, but they are also two times more likely to go to public sex environments. The differences here reflect recent research findings that sex in Latin cultures is organized around rigid religious and patriarchal scripts about family obligations and machismo. The traditional model for sex in Mexico gives Latino men some flexibility to have sex with men as long as they are the active partners. For example, the men who raped Julio in Mexico retain their privileged status as heterosexuals, whereas Julio was stigmatized as the passive recipient of such acts. This social stigma was forced on Julio before he was old enough to form any kind of social sexual identity. With the exception of Julio's experience, however, the Latino men in this study do not practice this kind of dichotomy in terms of sex roles. They are gay Latino men who engage in both insertive and receptive anal sex depending on the circum-

stances. The U.S. Latino gay male sexual stories more closely resemble the dominant U.S. model for mutuality between gay men. This pattern reflects the influences of acculturation among Latino men in the United States and generational changes due to the increasing influence of U.S. gay models for sex in Latin American countries.

Latino gay men in this study have not departed entirely from Latin cultural scripts for sex; they are still much more committed to notions of romantic love and to monogamous relationships than the white young men in this study. The difference between white and Latino gay men is likely a reflection of cultural values centered around the importance of family obligations and monogamous relationships inherent to Latin cultures and Catholic belief systems. Although some of the white gay men who want monogamy in this study also identify as Christian, none of them cited religion as the reason why they want monogamous relationships. Close to half of the white young men have experienced open relationships in which they engaged in sex with their boyfriends and with casual partners. This tendency for white gay men to play with models of recreational and relational sex is not present in the stories told by Latino men in this study at all. The differences are that the Latino men perceive their families to be more rigid about adhering to the family values of the Catholic Church and they express greater degrees of obligation to at least appear to fulfill these heterosexual expectations compared to the white men. Being a good Latino man, even for transgressive gay men, involves maintaining intrapsychic wishes for and the public appearance of monogamy.

Latino gay men's sexual stories indicate their deep commitments to monogamous relationships, but the fact that they are more likely than white men to have sex in public sex environments is not explained by the Latino monogamy model for sex. More likely, this practice builds on the cultural norm for secrecy around homosexual activities. Also, since espousing a social identity as a gay man is still highly stigmatized in Latino cultures, some gay Latino men in this study say that they went to public sex environments because they needed to hide their sexuality from their families (and preserve their status as good Latino men). Some of the white gay men go to public sex environments to keep their sexualities anonymous as well. Public, anonymous sex is easier to hide than casual dates. Models for Latino gay male sex in the United States are not about drawing on dichotomous sex roles, but they are frequently about Latino gay men trying to adhere to strong cultural and familial values placed on marriage and monogamy. For many white and Latino gay men, sexual practices are also still largely shaped by gender-based expectations for sex and institution-

alized homophobia and heterosexism. The phenomenon of rape among gay youth was experienced equally by the white and Latino men in this sample.

Masculinity Tensions

The sexual stories represented here are told in the context of male erotic relationships and masculinity assertions for sex. These sexualities operate among men who can have access to sex in ways unique to gay men. Public sex environments, for instance, are models for sex available for many young gay men to consider. For instance, the physiological possibility of sticking an erect penis through holes in bathroom stalls for a blow job is unique to gay men in the context of a sex-based system for separating restroom facilities. "Bathroom Breaks," for instance, are not available to heterosexual men or lesbian women in such contexts.

At the same time, gay men must sort out contradictory gender-based scripts for sex and power dynamics in relationships. These gender-based scripts are driven by assertions about what men do sexually. Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists assert that men are physiologically wired to relentlessly pursue copulation for the purpose of procreation (Wilson, 1979). The assumption of the spontaneous male sex drive, however culturally constructed,¹⁰ is so ingrained in industrialized Western cultures that it has become a cliché frequently used to explain and justify men's sexual activities. This cliché colludes with deep-seated homophobia in U.S. society to perpetuate the myth of gay male promiscuity.

The sexual desires and practices of young gay men reveal sites at which traditional gender-based scripts for sex break down and where gay men experience conflicts with respect to masculine models for sex. I define such sites as masculinity tensions, where these men experience contradictions, ambiguities, and frustrations within and between sexual scripts and experiences. For instance, while Mario is waiting for Mr. Right, he is also deeply frustrated because he is feeling peer pressure from other gay men to have sex while he is still young and not to wait around for something that may never happen.

Looking for Love. The romantic love script, although rooted in ideologies about heterosexual procreation, is espoused by all of the gay male youth in this study. Some are clear at the outset that they are searching for Mr. Right. Once committed to the romantic love script, most young gay men in this study have a series of short-term boyfriends who are

Mr. Wrong. Both patterns produce deep frustrations for these young men, who want love but have not found it. These tensions are not unique to the members of this study, but this struggle complicates difficulties they face as sexual minorities. When members of a couple have discordant desires in terms of whether or not to add recreational sex to their relationship, compromises can leave certain desires unmet, result in a breakup, or lead to creative solutions to live harmoniously. The "Fringe Benefits" case in this study where Charles and his boyfriend brought in a third partner left all of them without a relationship, however.

The implication of these tensions is that many young gay men feel frustrated by their attempts to find romantic love. Some, such as Steven and Brian, also feel emotionally unsatisfied from casual sexual experiences. Contradictions between emotional needs and physical gratification, in these cases, can lead to cycles of shame in which gay youth's self-esteem suffers. One man, John, found Mr. Right in his first boyfriend, yet now yearns for extramarital affairs with other men. The conflict experienced by John in the context of a relationship reveals how gay men experience another masculinity tension in which romance and erotic adventures are simultaneously desired. Although this is sometimes also a dilemma for lesbian and heterosexual couples, gay male couples face it from the perspective of being two men trained and held accountable to masculinity assertions for sex. Individuals in this study commonly referred to the assumption, derived from gendered beliefs about men, that they are naturally more sexually polygamous than women. Regardless of whether or not this belief is true, the fact of its existence gives gay men more space to consider and justify allowing for fringe benefits in their relationships. Masculinity tensions framed by romantic love pose complex challenges for gay youth desiring romantic love and erotic adventures.

Thrills, Frills, and Emotional Hangovers. Many of the gay youth in this study enjoy the pleasures associated with unlimited opportunities to have sex with other men met at public sex environments or gay bars. At the same time, many of them feel threatened and unsafe in these spaces. Although many gay youth I interviewed crave attention from men to bolster their self-esteem, they often mistake sexual conquests for emotional affection. Gay men in this study say that public sex is erotic because it is dangerous or anonymous, yet how sex gets done in public sex environments involves highly scripted behavior, illustrated by "Bathroom Breaks" and "Afternoons in the Park." The lack of caring and intimacy in these impersonal, public sex scripts often leaves the men in this study

feeling "emotional hangovers." They frequently approach such sexually charged public environments with ambiguous desires and mixed messages about what to do there. This kind of masculinity tension leaves many gay youth with feelings of excitement, shame, and confusion. The consequence for them is that sex becomes associated with these complex emotions. "Leather Club Sex" stands as a model for sex in which Jesus engaged in safer, exciting, and anonymous sex without experiencing tensions. This young gay man minimized such tensions by learning how to identify and get what he wanted in a safer sex supportive environment.

Masculinity Troubles. Being raped by other men puts young gay males in a disturbing and complicated position. In terms of their gendered status in such acts, they are at once men having sex with other men and also men being dominated and violated by other men. The victims of sexual violence are typically imagined to be women in the public arena. A rich tradition of intellectual work and activism focuses attention on making men who rape women accountable to these acts as crimes of violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Ellis, 1989; Russell, 1975), but very little parallel work is focused on gay men as victims of sexual violence. The few studies on sexually abused males do not focus attention on rape between gay-identified males (Mezey & King, 1993). Gay men are rarely thought to be the victims of date rape, for instance, and are scarcely ever prepared to deal with this situation as men in our society. This paradox of gender for young gay men operates like a trap into which many fall with very little or no institutionalized way of responding. Although domestic violence between men is documented (Island & Letellier, 1991), rape and sexual abuse between men, with few exceptions (Bartholow & Doll, 1994), is still underacknowledged in the research on gay men, sex, and AIDS.

Sexual violence between men calls the explanatory power of sexual script theory into question and represents a unique kind of masculinity tension. Is rape a logical extension of the erotic adventure script, or is it a product of institutionalized gender and male power? Julio's experience, for instance, is partly shaped by masculine scripts for sex found in Latin cultures and linked to patriarchal systems of power. The *activo* and *pasivo* roles of sex are related to the gendered nature of each individual's acts. Do men learn and actively use raping scripts for sex, or are these encounters motivated by gay men's relationships to male power and privilege in which men are trained to feel entitled to sex? None of the men in this study said that they had ever forced anyone else to have sex, and none of the in-

stances of rape included using condoms for protection. It is highly unlikely that considerations about the safety or pleasure of these young men were taken into account at all.

Another masculinity tension between men is exemplified by the instances of date rape and rape between boyfriends in these stories in which young men are forced to engage in unwanted practices. Because men are expected to want sexual adventures, it may be more difficult for gay men to recognize and confront sexual partners who force unwanted sexual activities. Experiences of rape deeply challenge sexual script theory to account for the ways in which masculinity and power structure sex for gay men as well as heterosexual women.

Writing Sexual Scripts in the Time of AIDS

Half of the men in this study engaged in unprotected anal sex at some point in their sexual lives.¹¹ This study examines the social contexts of these unsafe acts.¹² Nine out of 30 young men in this study practiced unprotected anal sex with their boyfriends without communicating about HIV status with each other. Practicing oral sex recreationally and unprotected anal sex only in a relationship is a dominant safer sex guideline among the young men in this study. One young man in this study developed a plan with his boyfriend to be monogamous, wait 6 months, get tested, and begin having unprotected anal sex after they received negative results (the Australian Method). Another young man described experimenting with eroticizing safer sex techniques, such as using hot oils, differently colored condoms, and sex toys. At the same time that trust and intimacy are crucial aspects of romantic love for gay youth, not openly communicating about safer sex and HIV transmission can be potentially fatal. The issue of whether or not to use condoms for anal sex between boyfriends raises a paradox for young gay men who desire intimacy and trust with their lovers, yet also must decide if and how to practice safer sex with them.

The second most common pattern of unprotected anal sex among gay youth in this study is coercive sex. Sexual stories in which young gay men are persuaded or forced to engage in unprotected anal sex indicate that many of them are not prepared to negotiate safer sex scripts in coercive situations. Another less common context for unprotected anal sex is in public places. Almost all of these young gay men, with the exception of the three Latino males who only want sex in romantic love, indulge in erotic adventures with casual partners for the sheer pleasure of the experiences.

Some public sex scenes, such as the "Industrial Sector Sex" scene allow for unprotected anal sex, but "Bathroom Breaks" and sex in no-tolerance sex clubs do not allow for such practices. Roberto continued to engage in unprotected anal intercourse at the "Industrial Sector Sex" scene due to the fact that this practice was facilitated by private spaces and codes of silence regarding sexual practices there. Richard, too, put himself at risk of infection while immersed in the "Party Boy Sex" lifestyle, but changed his behaviors by removing himself from that scene and adopting the romantic love script. Jesus, however, took on the dominant role in an S/M scene where sex is inscribed with socially sanctioned rules about sharing power, personal safety, and safer sex.

Findings in this study indicate that young gay men need to be made aware of sex education resources when they are becoming sexually active. This education should train them how to effectively negotiate safer sex in a variety of realistic social and situational contexts, such as relationships, date rapes, and public sex environments. Since education in the schools may not reach all young gay men, every city should develop community-based HIV-prevention programs designed by and for gay youth to provide safer sex educational spaces (Kegeles, Hay, & Coates, 1996; Mutchler, 1995).

Insights Into Gay Youth's Sexualities: Sites for Social Change and Changing Sexual Sights

This research illustrates gay male youth's diverse sexualities in the time of AIDS and contributes to theories in the fields of sexual scripts, masculinities, gay studies, and HIV prevention. Drawing on masculine scripts for romantic love, erotic adventures, sexual coercion, and safer sex, the young men in this study learn, use, and rewrite dominant cultural scripts for sex as they form their sexual lives. The central concept developed here, masculinity tensions, links sexual scripts theories with gay male youth's sexual experiences. Masculinity tensions are defined as sites at which gay men experience conflicts, contradictions, ambiguities, and anxieties within and between their experiences of gendered sexual scripts. Masculinity tensions and assertions drive the ways in which young gay men use sexual scripts.

I suggest that masculinity tensions in the models for sex available to gay youth can be viewed as sites for change and development. Gay male youth experience frustrations in their attempts to find romantic love, conflicts

between romantic love and erotic adventures scripts, anxieties and ambiguities regarding erotic adventures, failed attempts at safer sex, and painful repercussions when they are raped. Despite the complexities of their sexual experiences, many of the young men in this study also gain tremendous pleasure from their erotic adventures, find romantic love, learn from their sexual experiences, and manage to negotiate pleasure and safety in multiple sexual situations. The tensions between their frustrations and desires are sites at which young gay men may innovate or change their sexualities to form healthy and safer models for sex. These stories make clear the need to acknowledge the diversity of young gay men's sexual experiences from a public health point of view. HIV-prevention policies must aim at changing gender practices, erotic subcultures, and educational policies to support safer sex models for gay youth. The common thread found in all of their stories is that all of these young men want to explore their sexualities and wish to be loved.

Notes

1. Dominant scripts were identified as those found in more than half of the young men's stories. Additional scripts, such as sex for money, were also identified in some of their stories.

2. Interviews typically lasted for 2 hours, allowing me to develop rapport and trust with the young men. Frequently, this technique led to fruitful discussions about sexual stories and the young men's reactions to their sexual experiences that could not have been anticipated with survey questions. Interviewing methods are inherently limited in the type of information that can be gathered. For example, the oral history method documents only what the interviewee tells the researcher about his life and relies on respondents' memories to recall past experiences. Their actual experiences may be too difficult to remember (Rubin, 1986) or too embarrassing to share. I tried to compensate during the interviews with explicit guarantees about confidentiality; I stated that my interest in their experiences was from a nonjudgmental standpoint. Also, I designed the interview schedule to maximize validity by asking for information with differently worded questions and carefully planned probes. The stories these men tell, I assume, tell us what they believe to be true about their sexual lives, and what they believe to be true bears real consequences in terms of how they feel about themselves and what they do sexually.

3. It is not possible to generate a random sample of gay youth, because the population is impossible to reach. Many gay youth are not out yet, afraid to be out due to sexual politics, or very difficult to reach.

4. Because many studies on gay youth are biased toward including individuals associated with gay service institutions, I wanted to be sure that this study also reported the voices of the harder-to-reach kids who are more independent. Half of young gay men in this study participated in at least three consecutive support groups for gay youth, whereas the other half had very little or no experience with such groups.

5. I collected data using semistructured, in-depth interview schedules; all interviews were conducted during 1997 and 1998. Ethnographic data gleaned from field site visits to

gay establishments and sex environments mentioned by respondents also inform this project.

6. For the purpose of maintaining a narrative style, I use "all," "many" or "most," "half," "some," "a few," and "none" as descriptive markers of the extent to which particular patterns or sexual scripts are used by the members of this study. "Many" or "most" means that the majority of men use a given script. "Half" means that exactly or very close to half of the young men's stories draw on a particular pattern or script. "Some" means that a minority of the individuals use a particular script or pattern. "A few" means that one to five interviewees use the script.

7. Fourteen men in the sample are having casual sex while waiting for Mr. Right. Eight men are having sex with their boyfriends, six are saving sex for Mr. Right, and two are not actively looking for boyfriends because they are too busy for a relationship right now.

8. This individual had unprotected anal sex with his boyfriend without knowing his boyfriend's HIV status because he "trusted him."

9. Although research is still inconclusive about the risks of transmitting HIV through oral sex, it is theoretically possible. This work asserts that oral sex, however, is safer sex (compared to unprotected anal sex). This individual's comment reflects his concern that having oral sex with multiple partners increases his risk because the number of encounters increases the likelihood of the transmission of HIV through oral sex. Having oral sex with multiple partners increases the risk of transmitting other sexually transmitted diseases. Some of these are easier to transmit than HIV (such as herpes, genital warts, hepatitis, and syphilis).

10. Cross-cultural studies of sexuality challenge the stereotype of the biologically driven male with evidence of cultures, such as the Arapesh and the Trobriand Islanders, in which it is argued that men and women respond to external situations rather than spontaneous desires (see Mead, 1935).

11. This percentage counts only the cases in which the young men engaged in unprotected anal sex with casual or regular partners, but did not wait for their partners HIV test results after 6 months of no other high-risk behavior (unprotected anal sex).

12. Young gay men's reasons for not engaging in safer sex are reminiscent of those given by gay men in the early part of the AIDS generation (Seigel & Levine, 1992). They tend to either provide justifications (it was with a boyfriend) or excuses (it was out of my control).

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