

Sex and Drugs

Community-Based Research at ACT

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Community-based research at the AIDS Committee of Toronto

www.actoronto.org/research

Purpose

- Provide support for programs and services
- Support for ACT's strategic priorities
- Promote/facilitate community development
- Build research capacity among staff, communities and community partners

Guiding principles

- **Support for ACT's strategic plan**
Research activities based on direction and priorities outlined in Strategic Plan
- **Working with other community members**
Work with communities and other stakeholders to identify opportunities and undertake projects that address community needs
- **Respect for research participants**
informed consent – privacy and confidentiality – justice and inclusiveness – maximize benefits, etc.
- **Sharing knowledge** with service providers, communities, researchers, policy makers, etc

Party Drugs in Toronto's Gay Dance Club Scene

Objectives and methods

Qualitative study to (a) understand the circumstances, reasoning process and contextual influences associated with drug use in relation to sex, (b) inform development of HIV prevention education.

- Participants were recruited through gay dance clubs and events, advertisements in the gay press, and Internet-based posters.
- Initial 10-minute screening interview to ensure eligibility and track the interview targets.
- Audio-taped 60-90 minute in-depth interviews with 74 gay and bisexual men.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded for analysis

Sample

Ethno-racial background	%
East & Southeast Asian	13.5
South Asian	5.4
Caribbean	17.6
Latino	12.2
Aboriginal	4.1
White	36.5
Mixed	9.5
Other	1.4
Total	100.0

Sample

- 54% were college or university grads
- 51% aged 25-34 years
- 30% earned \$40,000 or more annually

How gay and bisexual men experience the Gay Dance Club scene

1. Energy – music, dancing

I usually really like the music. I actually like the, sort of the physical workout aspect of dancing when I ... You know, when we are there, I'm usually on the dance floor virtually the whole time. I'm not sort of off in the lounge you know sitting and talking to people or whatever. (White, 40-44)

Uhm, the energy ... Uhm, it's. I find the experience is very communal in the sense that everyone is sort of sharing uhm the moment ... and the music ... I guess there's sort of an air of, of naughtiness to it, you know. I mean you shouldn't be taking drugs and uhm so I mean there's sort of a danger aspect to it (White, 30-34)

2. Sense of community

In the gay environment the socio-economic distinctions are not really a factor ... most of those people share the same characteristics, they are gay. (E/SE Asian, 40-44)

Take yourself out of that context and that's where the separations happen ... You have no common ground [whereas] in the clubs you do. (E/SE Asian, 30-34)

If you catch eye contact with a guy, you know if in a straight club. You don't have to worry about him beating you up or like, you know, saying something. There's way less things to worry about and it's just comfortable. (White, 20-24)

3. Sexualized atmosphere

... the sort of almost sexual nature ... You know, just the kind of, you know, hugging and massaging and whatever goes, you know, that sort of stuff on the dance floor. That's, that's fun.

(White, 40-44)

The reason why I'm going to nightclubs is to find somebody ... Find company, that's the reason why I'm going. Sometimes I'm going because I, I like to relax. But most of the time I'm going because I want to find company. (Latino, 25-29)

4. Diversity/uniformity

A different crowd, like I know not just the same old type, like circuit boys or whatever. It has some kind, some more variety in terms [of] the type of people that go. (E/SE Asian, 25-29)

What I like about [club], it's very gay, straight, bisexual, and gay men. Everybody is there for a good time. (Aboriginal, 25-29)

Aside from the steroid driven muscle sort of uhm atmosphere, the idea of, if a, of white being beautiful or the, the tall muscular blonde, etc., etc., which of course I don't ascribe to and I don't look that way either. But I, I don't think nowadays it's as bad as it was before. (E/SE Asian, 30-34)

Drug use in the Gay Dance Club scene

Main drugs used by participants

(Drugs used by more than one-third of participants)

	Used from time to time (%)	Used Last Time clubbing (%)
Ecstasy	82.4	54.1
Marijuana	63.5	23.0
Ketamine	54.1	13.5
Coke	52.7	16.2
GHB	36.5	13.5

1. Obligation and peer pressure

The people that you hang out with and the people, or the people that you go to the club with have, also have an influence on your mood. So if you're going there with a bunch of straight-edge people, you being the only one on like, cocaine, is not gonna be too good for them or you because they don't feel your vibe and it just doesn't mesh. So if you go with a whole bunch of people, it kinda sounds like, like you're adhering to, I guess um, peer pressure. (Caribbean, 17-19)

I try not to do as much drugs when I go out. But sometimes it's difficult. Like uhm, when you go out to say [club], you almost feel that your kind of obligated to do it, otherwise you are not going to have fun, especially if the people around you are all doing it. Which is why sometimes I just go to [club] because somehow there, I don't feel as much pressure, maybe because it closes earlier. (East/Southeast Asian, 25-29)

2. Boosting confidence

From my experience, I've gone to clubs before with like nothing and you just feel like an outcast. I felt like an outcast. So it's part of the gay clubs and that ... it helps you feel more included ... pretty much on the same wavelength of other people. (Latino, 25-29)

3. Enhancing the atmosphere and experience

[Drugs heighten] *the sensation of music, and, and, the tactility and, and, and the um, the escape and everybody's riding this nice wave.* (White, 55-59)

... enhances the high. So if it's good music being played, it'll take a good high and turn it into a great high. (Caribbean, 25-29)

Patterns of consumption

[I] dropped half at about 11:30 ... and then you drop the other half at about 12:30. So it'll take you all the way maybe up until 1:30 and then I, maybe have another half. And that would probably take me up until 2, 2:30 ... and then I drop the other. I do it in half intervals ... Because I find like, for me, the stuff that I get, it's potent. (Caribbean, 25-29)

I set up with the G. I get to the club. I drop my E and then about two hours later ... I take another vial [of G] and then that should take me until about three or four in the morning and by that time, I either, I may do another G but I won't do anymore other drugs. And then if I have it I might do a bump of coke about four in the morning or something to give me a little boost because that's when I get mentally tired, even though my body can still go (White, 30-34)

Uhm, smoked a joint before I went there [to the club]. I went there. I had a few drinks and then I went to [bathhouse] and smoked some more grass and did poppers and sex and then went home. (White, 35-39)

Harm avoidance

I enjoy alcohol. Uh, but I never, never, never, never mix. It doesn't even interest me. And uh, I'm older and in my teens it was booze and I can't do booze anymore because the hangovers uh, kill me. (White, 55-59)

If I'm going to do drugs, I'm probably not going to maintain drinking and spending money on alcohol and then do drugs, especially if I'm on something like GHB. That would depend on if I'm going to do any that night because you really shouldn't drink when you're doing drugs. (Caribbean, 25-29)

Drugs and sex

High-risk sex

Unprotected anal intercourse with a man whose serostatus was unknown or different from the study participant's

- 10 participants (13.5%) reported high-risk sex associated with their last clubbing occasion
- 12 participants (16.2%) reported high-risk sex the last time that they had sex while high on drugs

Circumstances and context – 1

Drug use

- polydrug use or mixing drugs and alcohol
- use of crystal meth
- may impair safer sex decision-making

Drugs intensify sexual performance and enjoyment

... it feels different because of the fact that you're high ... but because you're on Ecstasy, that feeling you have of, of pleasure and sexual desire, it's 10 times higher. (White, 25-29)

Circumstances and context – 1

Sex is integral to their dance club agenda

Personally, for my boyfriend, he loves the dancing, and I like the dancing a lot too. But I wouldn't go out if there wasn't sex at the end. (White, 45-49)

It's more like a ritual. Like, you do the clubs and then you go to the bathhouses, you have sex or you just come down off them [drugs]. Or you go home, or you go home with somebody. (White, 25-29)

Low commitment to safer sex

He thinks that because he's a top and he's negative that he's not going to get it [HIV]. So I'm just like 'that's your choice' you know. (Aboriginal, 25-29)

Everybody wants to be juiced. They want to fuck something and they want to come inside something. Not inside a piece of plastic ... The fact of the matter is nobody really wants to fuck with a condom. (White, 45-49)

Racialized experiences in the club scene

I think gay is defined by what is given to you ... that is uh, a white middle-aged, or white, 20 to 30 year-old man. And that is not me. And I may be light-skinned but like, it's still, I'm not white and that is what quintessentially is defined as gay. (Caribbean, 25-29)

Look at 'Queer as Folk'. There's a certain set of boys that you see ... and they're all white. And if they're of colour they're put as someone getting fucked or someone fucking. (Caribbean, 25-29)

It's very hard to be gay. It's very, very hard. Uh, some, sometimes it's not very acceptable in my culture and also I find very hard time to, sometimes get to know people in different nationalities, especially Caucasians ... Yeah, that's why maybe, that one of reason I couldn't really have relationship right now. Because I really into, I really into Caucasians. I, I attract to them so I, being a South Asian, find sometimes difficult to, not always but most of the time I find it really difficult to uh, develop friendship or relationship. (South Asian, 25-29)

Implications for HIV prevention

Components of HIV prevention education

- Venue-based and tailored to different types of venues
- Drugs and health
- Safer sex
- Community
- Ethno-racial issues

Acknowledgements

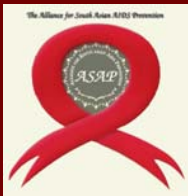
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- Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAP)
 - Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS)
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The full report, *Party Drugs in Toronto's Gay Dance Club Scene: Issues for HIV Prevention for Gay Men*, is available at:

<http://www.actoronto.org/partydrugs>