

## **Sexually adventurous subculture and drug use influence unprotected anal intercourse among Latino men who have sex with men (MSM)**

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### **Abstract**

We examined both general cultural influences ( U.S. acculturation and involvement in gay community) and sexual subcultural influences (cruising venues and recreational drug use) on sexual risk behavior of Latino MSM, specifically condom use for anal intercourse. Results indicated that there was a greater likelihood of unprotected sex among those who reported going to cruising venues and using recreational drugs during sex. Acculturation into U.S. society and the gay community failed to yield an effect on adventurous sexual risky behavior, which may be due to their more distal position. Sexual subcultural factors, in contrast, have a more proximal relationship to specific sexual behaviors, including condom use.

### **Background**

Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) in the U.S. represent a group at high risk for HIV and other STIs (CDC, 2004). Because Latino MSM are embedded in multiple cultures (e.g., Latino, gay, U.S. dominant culture) their behavior can be affected by influences from various cultural norms. Research has shown that acculturation into the U.S. can influence Latinos' attitudes about condoms, sex roles, and sexual expression (Díaz, 1998; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2004; Marks et al., 1998; San Doval et al., 1995). Incorporation into gay subgroups can also shape attitudes and behaviors. Kippax et al. (1998) noted that seroconversion was more likely among MSM who were part of a sexually adventurous subculture. In such subcultures, a constellation of behaviors may place men at risk. For example, men who frequent gay cruising venues are also more likely to use recreational drugs in conjunction with sex (Parsons & Halkitis, 2002). In addition, in a sample of English-speaking Latino gay and bisexual men, greater sexual risk-taking was found for those involved in substance use and sexual cruising (Díaz et al., 1999).

This study examined both general cultural influences ( U.S. acculturation and involvement in the gay community) and sexual subcultural influences on sexual risk behavior of Latino MSM, specifically condom use for anal intercourse. Involvement in a sexually adventurous subculture was assessed through the practices of going to cruising venues and using recreational drugs in conjunction with sex.

### **Methods**

One hundred and twenty self-identified MSM Latino participants (Brazilian N=40, Colombian N=40, Dominican N=40) from the pilot study, were surveyed by means of computer-assisted interviews with audio enhancement (A-CASI) as part of a larger study concerning contextual influences on sexual risk behavior. This report addresses questions concerning condom use

for anal intercourse in the preceding three months, as well as questions concerning drug use during sex and sexual relations with men in cruising places, such as adult bookstores, public bathrooms, parks, or other public places. Scales assessing acculturation into the U.S. and involvement in the gay community were also included.

## Results

A model predicting unprotected anal intercourse in the last three months was tested using logistic regression. Predictors included acculturation into U.S., involvement in the gay community, having sex in gay cruising venues, using recreational drugs in conjunction with sex, as well as the control variables of age and HIV status. Results indicated that there was a greater likelihood of unprotected sex among those who reported going to cruising venues (Wald Chi-Square=5.39,  $p < .05$ ) and using recreational drugs during sex (Wald Chi-Square=11.57,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, there was a significant effect of age, such that younger men were more likely to have anal sex without a condom (Wald Chi-Square= 5.42,  $p < .05$ ). The cultural variables of U.S. acculturation and gay community involvement and the control variable of HIV status were not significant.

Additional chi square analysis revealed no differences among Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican participants in the probability of unprotected anal intercourse. Although country of origin was not related to sexual risk, the small sample size limits the generalizability of this finding.

## Discussion

Although this study failed to demonstrate an effect of general cultural influences on sexual risk behavior, involvement in a sexually adventurous subculture was associated with a greater likelihood of anal sex without a condom. Latino MSM who are involved in a subculture of sexual adventurism which involves cruising and recreational drug use may encounter cultural norms that are not conducive to safe sexual practices. Cultural influences from U.S. society and the gay community may affect some sexual norms and attitudes, but the failure to find an effect of these factors on sexual risk may be due to their more distal position. Sexual subcultural factors, in contrast, have a more proximal relationship to specific sexual behaviors, including condom use.

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