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## **Young Gay Men's Stories in the States: Scripts, Sex, and Safety in the Time of AIDS**

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**Abstract** Surprisingly little is known about how young gay men structure their sexual behavior in the era of AIDS. This research examines the sexual stories told by 30 White and Latino gay men between the ages of 18 and 24 based on data collected from semi-structured interviews. Four dominant sexual scripts (romantic love, erotic adventures, safer sex, and sexual coercion) frame their sexual experiences. These stories illustrate how gay male youth use and adapt gendered sexual scripts encountered in particular social, cultural, and situational contexts. The author examines how interpersonal dynamics, social contexts, and masculinities shape and constrain their sexual experiences. The findings suggest new approaches to studying sexualities based on wedding sexual scripts and queer and gender theories, and accounting for agency and constraint. Directions for HIV-prevention policy-making in light of these newly revealed sexualities conclude this article.

**Keywords** gay, HIV/AIDS, masculinity, sexuality, youth

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## Young Gay Men's Stories in the States: Scripts, Sex, and Safety in the Time of AIDS

### Understanding gay male youth's sexualities

Scholarly research identifies how gay male youth negotiate sexual identities and politics (Troiden, 1988, 1989), but sociological work on the diverse array of gay male youth's actual sexual behaviors is only beginning to surface (Herdt and Boxer, 1993). There are still glaring gaps in understanding how young gay men form their sexual lives and how these lives are socially and culturally shaped. AIDS makes understanding their sexualities in rich, sociological detail imperative. This article explores sexual stories told by 30 (15 White and 15 Latino)<sup>1</sup> gay men between the ages of 18 and 24 about their actual or imagined sexual behaviors with other

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men to understand how a diverse sample of young gay men form their sexual lives.<sup>2</sup> Asserting that these young gay men draw from and construct complex and contradictory gay masculinity scripts, this research examines a wide range of gay male youth's stories about their sexual lives and serves to undermine prevalent stereotypes about gay men's sexualities.

The stories these young men tell reveal how four dominant *gendered* sexual scripts guide and frame their sexual experiences: romantic love, erotic adventure, safer sex, and sexual coercion. My purpose is not to show how all of these young men's lives fit into these dominant patterns; rather, I explore how their sexual lives are accomplished through learning and innovating these sexual scripts in complex, diverse social contexts. Thus, I highlight ambiguous and problematic sexual stories as well as those narrated by these dominant patterns. I analyse how these young men use and adapt sexual scripts encountered during their sexual socialization experiences and theorize how specific interpersonal and social conditions facilitate and restrict gay youth's creative and mundane uses of sexual scripts.

## The creative convergence: sexual scripts and sexual stories

This work looks at the scripts found in young gay men's stories about their sexual desires and behaviors. In this project, the stories gay youth tell about safer-sex socialization processes are windows into their sexual lives illustrating how they learn about sex, form sexual patterns, and account for what they do sexually. These stories are produced at the nexus between individuals and the historical settings within which they live. Stories are tools that individuals use to impute meaning to their daily lives and, at the same time, they are constrained by social and cultural factors such as homophobia, heterosexism, and masculinity. These stories, then, are more than the narratives told by the young men. They are the culmination of individual experiences lived in particular historical settings and recounted during interpersonal interview processes.

The stories are the product of multiple, complex interpretive and structural constraints and acts of expression mediated by analytical frameworks I bring to bear as the researcher. In their interviews, the young men 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 in order 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. Thus, their narratives about having sex in a public environment are framed by me as erotic adventure scripts. Their stories are presumably also based on lived experiences; these experiences exhibit characteristics of particular scripts such as information about their sexual partners, where sex happened, and how sexual behaviors unfolded. Such factors lead me to identify specific scripts in their stories. Sexual stories are the creative convergence of lived experience told and interpreted in particular settings and for certain interpretive purposes.

### *Sexual scripts theory re-visited*

A sexual script is a type of sexual discourse focused at the level of examining sexual behaviors. Thus, sexual scripts are a useful means of 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 and Simon, 1973; Parker and Gagnon, 1995; Simon and 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 which 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 *intrapsychic scripts* (the plans and fantasies by which individuals guide and reflect upon their past, current, or future conduct). (Laumann and Gagnon, 1995: 190)

Cultural scripts exist at the collective level; they guide intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts and proscribe patterns of sexual conduct (with whom, what, why, when, and where sex is done). While the intrapsychic level of scripting allows for agency in theorizing models for sex, the question of *how* agency works in sexual practices still eludes the explanatory power of sexual scripts theory.

### *Queering sexual scripts theory*

Sexual scripts theory is best used with the assumption that sexualities are not rigidly produced by structural factors. Individuals actively shape and re-produce scripts in multiple ways. Thus far, the sexual scripts paradigm fails to adequately theorize *contradictions* and *differences* among sexualities. Why do some sexual actors engage particular scripts when others do not? Queer theory provides a useful lens for such analyses. As Plummer states, 'Processes are at work which recognize difference, relativities, changes: potential chaos yet enormous possibility' (1992: 13) for the production of diffuse (homo)sexualities. Queer theorists explore

differences and relativities among sexualities, especially with respect to *identities* (Duggan, 1992; Plummer, 1992), but how sexual *practices* are produced amid an era characterized by increasing change, risk, and relativity is less articulated. Constraints on actors' sexual practices are obscured by the fluidity and relativity associated with sexuality in queer theory paradigms.

I use script theory with the assumption that individuals actively learn, employ, and create scripts for their own sexual behavior; sexual actors have agency within certain constraints. Queer theory brings the concepts of differences and fluidity to the mix of theorizing sexualities. Assumptions from both theoretical paradigms are useful for understanding sexual behaviors. However, the question of how particular social and cultural conditions allow for creative and mundane uses of sexual scripts remains under-theorized. This work begins to fill in these gaps by bringing together advances in sexual scripts and queer theories in an analysis of how agency and constraint operate in gay youth's sexual stories.

### *Safer sex: a modern invention*

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 them (Mutchler, 1994). Safer sex proscribes high-risk behaviors (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) in order to prevent the spread of HIV among gay men. Even though gay men of the AIDS generation were born when these scripts were already articulated, rates of unprotected anal intercourse and HIV infection are alarmingly high among them (Hays et al., 1990; Lemp et al., 1994; Osmond et al., 1994). Latino men who have sex with men are disproportionately infected and affected by AIDS (CDC, 1997). Understanding the complexities of young gay men's sexual lives is crucial to efforts aimed at curbing the second wave of infections among them. My analyses of these sexual stories pay attention to how young men in this study negotiate safety in relation to scripts for romantic love, erotic adventures, and sexual coercion.

Safer sex is an example of a recently innovated cultural script written by gay men for the purpose of guiding their sexual behaviors in the wake of the AIDS crisis. Though individuals may wish to follow such scripts, their intrapsychic fantasies are not always realized in actual interpersonal scripts with sexual partners (who may be engaging with different scripts). 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 and Gagnon, 1995). For instance, it is possible for sexual actors to reject culturally prescribed scripts and form their own intrapsychic versions (or develop new cultural scripts such as safer sex). However, the theory thus far does not explain contradictions such as why sexual actors fail to realize intrapsychic wishes or how innovations and differences develop. For instance, consider the fact that all of the young men in my sample express high levels of knowledge and commitment to practise safer sex, yet over half of them have failed to do it. I argue that the agency and constraint framework provides some explanatory power for thinking about such problems.

## Hybrid models: heteronormativity and gay masculinities

Traditional cultural scripts for sex, derived from dominant sexual discourse in western, industrialized countries, are based on assumptions about heterosexual relationships. The traditional, 19th-century procreative script for sex mandates that sex be done for the purpose of procreation between one man and one woman who are married. Though this model presumes the heterosexuality of sexual actors (since lesbians and gay men cannot legally marry or procreate when engaging *solely* in same sex encounters),<sup>3</sup> traditional scripts are available at the level of culture for heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals to draw upon. The fact that heterosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals report high levels of affairs, premarital sex, and non-monogamy indicates that culturally prescribed scripts, such as procreational sex, are not followed uniformly by any group (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Michael et al., 1994). Traditional sexual scripts fail to adequately theorize the complexities and contradictions in the erotic lives of gay and straight individuals, but they do provide building blocks from which sexual actors, such as the young men in this study, may write their own scripts for sex.

These heteronormative, traditional 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, childcare, pleasing their sexual partners, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, 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. However, young males and females are also exposed to

multiple, contradictory sexual scripts during their socialization experiences. For example, masculinity scripts dictate that young men will prove their manhood by 'sowing their oats' *and* settling down in a monogamous marriage. Such gender-based sexual scripts are culturally institutionalized for gay men as well as heterosexuals (Rose, 1996). It is clear how systems of gender differentiation position women and men differently in relation to dominant heterosexual sexual discourses (Hollway, 1996), but very little parallel work is focused on theorizing gender inequalities and power differences between *two men* having sex. This work seeks to identify how young gay men form sexualities from their unique social and historical locations.

Gay men, much like their straight counterparts, are taught that seeking out sex for pleasure is an integral part of being a man.<sup>4</sup> The gaps in heterosexual 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? Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists assert that men are physiologically wired to relentlessly pursue copulation for the purpose of procreation.<sup>5</sup> The assumption of the spontaneous male sex drive, however culturally constructed,<sup>6</sup> is so ingrained in industrialized, western cultures that it has become a cliché frequently used to explain and justify men's sexual activities even when they are not procreating. This cliché colludes with deep-seated homophobia in American society to perpetuate the myth of gay male promiscuity. Even among gay men, such as some of those in my study, this *masculinity assertion* operates in the form of the assumption that having lots of sex is '... just what men do'. At the same time, alternative masculinity scripts are culturally produced for gay men to encounter. For instance, gay men in recent years are also accountable to safer sex scripts linked to culturally prescribed notions of what it means to be a 'good' gay man.

Gay and bisexual men are subordinated within the hegemonic masculine hierarchy because they violate the explicit requirements of heterosexuality (Connell, 1995).<sup>7</sup> Even though gay men fundamentally fail to be 'masculine' men, they may still engage masculine sexual scripts.<sup>8</sup> 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 suggest that young gay men's sexual behaviors reflect complicated, gender-based sexualities. It makes sense to think about these 'hybrid' sexualities in relation to, but departing from, traditional notions of gender to which women and heterosexual men are accountable. Heterosexuals and lesbians also uniquely experience gendered sexualities due to the fact that they encounter sexual behaviors from particular sex and sexuality-based subject positions. The particularity of these young gay men's sexualities is based on their dual positions as *males* having sex with other men who are solely

accountable to masculine scripts for sex, and on their positions as *gay* men experiencing sexuality in the context of a gay liberation movement which has produced unique sexual outlets and ideologies (such as public sex environments).

## Counter-intuitive sexualities: gay men and romantic love

Before coming 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.

This scenario is counter-intuitive because it is the wish of a young gay man, Mario, for whom the American Dream was never meant. Mario is a 24-year-old Cuban American male who came out at the age of 20 while pursuing an undergraduate degree. He has never had sex with a man (or woman). While he meets many gay men, he claims that '. . . it just hasn't felt right inside'. He uses traditional, heterosexual concepts to discuss his sexual desires. Since Mario is a gay *man* waiting for 'Mr Right', his wishes run counter to popular stereotypes of gay male promiscuity, and indeed, against the grain of hyper-masculine assertions about the male sex drive.

Some gay men, known as 'gay clones', played out the hyper-masculinized 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 and Weinberg, 1978). Adam noted, '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' (1992: 181). Gay men did romantic love in the 1970s, but the more dramatic 'clone' image obscured *their* sexualities. 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). Contrary to the stereotype of gay male promiscuity, the dominant sexual script found in all the young men's stories is romantic love. All of the young gay men in this study have or want boyfriends in their lives.<sup>9</sup>

The other dominant pattern of doing romantic love among men in this



study emerged from the stories in which young gay men shared sexual experiences or desires involving both romantic love and recreational sex: 'fringe benefits'. For some gay male couples, the two scripts pose insurmountable 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 while the other does not. At the same time, John loves Jake and does not want to leave the relationship. In this case, John's desire to practise recreational sex is constrained by his commitment to prioritize romantic love with his partner who refuses to consider recreational sex.

Some young gay couples handle the issue of 'fringe benefits' with creative solutions. For example, Charles and his boyfriend openly discussed recreational sex outside of their relationship. After about three 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 set-up 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.

This story illustrates the possibility of doing both romantic and recreational sex simultaneously where both partners agree to integrate the two models and create a hybrid version of the 'fringe benefit' script. They further nuance this script by agreeing to practise safer sex in this encounter and avoid anal sex.

### *Erotic adventures*

The adventure script (sex with casual or anonymous partners for the purpose of seeking pleasure) is also alive and well among gay men in the AIDS generation. Most young gay males in this study 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 (including sexual play with peers). These stories illustrate some of the ways in which gay youth navigate sexual scripts in particular settings organized around erotic adventures.<sup>10</sup> This section focuses on their sexual encounters in

public cruising areas. Public cruising areas are places, such as parks or restrooms, where men meet to have sex. Laud Humphrey's groundbreaking ethnography, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, illustrated how men (gay and heterosexual) learned the rules and roles of doing public sex in the 1960s. The stories here, 'leather club sex' and 'industrial sector sex', reveal how young gay-identified men encounter public cruising areas during the era of AIDS.

### *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 until he was 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 are 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 comforted that rules surrounding safety and consensual sex are built into formal S/M club scenes such as this one. While his sexual experiences are clearly about playing with men and power, it is 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) with men who were typically older, and potentially more physically powerful than him. 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. This model of 'leather club sex' illustrates how one young gay man adapted culturally supported guidelines for sharing power and safety to meet his own desires to be in control and to be desired.

### *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 unique script for sexual behaviors in this particular public sex environment. Roberto stumbled upon this scene shortly after coming out, and believed, at the time, that it was the only place where he could meet men.

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 were 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.

As Roberto explained, men could get anything they wanted in the 'industrial sector sex' scene. The context is open and fluid here, allowing men to locate quasi-private areas, such as the loading dock, in which to have sex relatively free from the public censure about safer (or consensual) sex.

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 a 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 hyper-masculine sex. He recalls his first sexual encounter there:

It was some ugly guy who had a van . . . and him not wanting to use any lube and just kind of sticking it in. It was just awkward because I could tell he must have had a family because the van was full of familial litter. I remember being really uncomfortable and not liking the situation once it got started and I remember him telling me, you don't need any lube, you've done this before, fucker!

The 'industrial sector sex' model did not provide social or cultural support for engaging in erotic adventures safely. Following this experience, many additional unsafe sexual encounters ensued at the industrial center. In contrast to 'leather club sex', 'industrial sector sex' illustrates how social context can impede rather than facilitate the engagement of the safer sex script. This model also exposes the thin line between erotic adventures and sexual coercion.

### **Coercive sex**

While all of the young men in this study expressed desires to have recreational sex for fun and pleasure, 18 of them also told of feeling pressured or forced into having sex which they did not completely want. Boyfriends, family members, or other men raped nine of these individuals. 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 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.

### **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 met a 40-year-old gay man over the Internet and tells about the experience:

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.

This individual wanted to experiment sexually, but he did not know what he wanted to do. He felt pressured into engaging in unwanted sex, though he stops short of calling it a rape because he was not sure if he did not want it. However, the incident makes vivid how other men's scripts, especially in private spaces lacking social support for safety or consensual sex, can write gay youth's sexual stories. 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 which 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 three years (between the ages of seven and ten) 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 blowjob on him. Then, when I was nine years old, his friend was force me to do a blowjob . . . 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 to the United States to get away from his stepfather. Here, he has been reluctant to have any anal sex at all because of the fact that his first sexual experiences were violent rapes. Family members or other older men raped four of the young men I interviewed.

#### ***Boyfriends who rape***

Five of the men in this sample said their boyfriends raped them. 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.

While 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 upon reflection after the event. His story demonstrates how one's wishes for sex (romantic love) can be dramatically altered by someone else's script (rape).

## The ironic trajectory: desire in the underworld

Gay male youth's sexualities change and develop over the course of their evolving lives. Consider the following case study of a 23-year-old White gay man who grew up in nine cities within five separate states. Sean remembers realizing his desires for men during high school and coming out to supportive friends there. However, his mother reacted by saying that he was 'doomed to hell' and his father was not 'capable' of speaking to him about personal matters. Sean was cut off from familial support at a very early age. He learned about 'gay life' from a closeted older boy in high school who told him about 'the parks'. He describes his first sexual experiences there:

*Sean:* So, I remember I went to the park and I did meet men, mostly older. And we messed around, so I think that pattern, then, that's how I figured I would meet men, would be in the parks . . . I had no idea there was any other place you could . . .

*Matt:* So, what would generally happen in the parks in terms of sex?

*Sean:* Well, I was so terrified of everything. I was so new, I didn't know how to have anything. I didn't have anal intercourse until later. In the parks were mostly guys giving me blowjobs, stuff like that. They would drive me somewhere and give me a blowjob. If they were younger or cute, I might give them the same.

*Matt:* How did you generally feel about those interactions when they were going on?

*Sean:* Guilty. While it was going on, horny. Afterwards, though, guilty, really bad. Like, if I came first, I wouldn't even wait. Unless we drove somewhere and I had to wait. I would just leave. I think most of the time I felt like they wanted more from me than I was willing to give them, to the point of frustration, and I would be afraid, I didn't know anything.

Sean's experience of having sex in the park illustrates the tensions he felt between needing an outlet for meeting men and feeling guilty and terrified. In the context of silences about gay male cultures or learning what

men do for pleasure, Sean encountered a sexual scene in which he was not prepared to deal with these contradictory pressures. At the same time, he learned about gay sex clubs and bars in West Hollywood through conversations with men there. From his perspective, living in a conservative and homophobic city, the image of 'Boys' Town' felt like a dream. He says, 'It was like this huge thing, it was the biggest force of being gay, it was all I heard about, SEX, SEX, SEX. I was so curious, so I ventured forth and found the place.' Sean made a series of pilgrimages out to Los Angeles and eventually moved there with no means of supporting himself. Though he was living on people's couches at first, the allure of being in a gay mecca was more appealing than staying home where his options were 'hell', silence, or tensions in the park.

Sean's sexual experiences are interlaced with the multiple, interconnected dominant scripts of romance, erotic adventures, safer (and unsafe) sex, and sexual coercion; his sexual stories represent the most complicated and divergent experiences told by men in this study. This case study is revealing because it is based on the most unruly, and therefore theoretically challenging, sexual stories. His stories also introduce a less common script for sex: sex for money.<sup>11</sup> They are further complicated by the fact that the various scripts are sometimes seamlessly and simultaneously embedded in the fabric of his sexual history. For instance, Sean almost always had a boyfriend while he lived in Los Angeles (between the ages of 19 and 23), even while he engaged in erotic adventures and sex for money. Sometimes, these boyfriends were fellow hustlers and sometimes they were also the source of sexual abuse. He looks back and reflects that he really only had five boyfriends, but in the beginning he says he defined everybody as a boyfriend. One boyfriend stands out in his memory:

The first one would have been my first love . . . we fell in love that week and he moved to another city. Every single day I would have a letter from him in the mailbox, and I loved him so much! Every other guy before him was just so interested in having sex with me, and likewise for sure, but he would sit and talk with me about everything under the sun. I remember one night, I had the fireplace going, we ordered pizza and salad, and I gave him a massage, and that was still the most erotic night I've ever had in my entire experience being gay so far. We just clicked very well together.

This first boyfriend broke up with Sean after he entered the Army because of pressures to be straight there. Sean was devastated. He says, 'You know, I think now, can someone be totally in love with somebody and so much in love with them that only they matter and nobody else can really matter, and with him I had no interest in others.' This memory still guides Sean's intrapsychic wishes, but the realities of his sexual career took very different turns.

Sean's boyfriends can only be described as 'Mr Wrongs'. They all physically abused him and introduced him to increasing degrees of alcohol and drug abuse as well. Within a year, Sean was drug and alcohol addicted and living on the streets of Los Angeles. His fourth 'boyfriend', a hustler, introduced him to the game of sex for money. He describes to me the scene at a gay bar known for its hustling clientele:

You walk in, have a drink, stand around, wait for someone to approach you, have a conversation, and it leads into what are you looking for? How much? Usually, the first price most guys will say is \$150. I think what I usually left with was \$100 an hour. I would never do anything more than oral on me. Or, I would tell them to use a condom if they wanted me to go down on them. That usually turned them off and they didn't want to do that. I had guys pay me to have sex with other young people, like other hustlers in the bar, just to watch. It was weird. Looking back, it was a whole underworld, all these images of dancing, and parties, and crystal, and sex, and older men, and money, and it kind of all runs together.

In this 'underworld', Sean learned his lines for getting what he wanted from older men, but his sexual interactions with younger men were less controlled in terms of safer sex concerns. He had unsafe sex with another hustler during a business call. He says, '. . . this guy actually wanted both of us which was great because this other guy was a young, hot, Latino guy. I didn't usually care as much about younger people because I didn't think I could get it from them.' Sean allowed this other hustler to fuck him without a condom while the John watched. They were paid extra for this activity, but Sean wanted it anyway. He believes that he contracted HIV during this episode because he turned up HIV-positive a few months later (and 'never' had anal sex with his tricks).

After learning of his HIV status, Sean entered a homeless shelter for gay youth in Los Angeles. There, he tried to stay clean and sober. His hustling activities evolved from the walls of the notorious club in which he learned the trade and into the boulevard near where he was staying in the youth shelter. Here, men pulled him over from their cars and propositioned him for money. Sean tried to resist, mostly because he had a boyfriend in the shelter, but there were a few instances where he went along because he needed the money. On one instance, he was raped:

I was on the boulevard, and it was hot, and I took off my shirt, and I wasn't really intending to pick up anybody. But somebody pulled me over and asked me where I was going and I told him to West Hollywood, and he said you want a ride, and I said sure. Then, he made me an offer and back then I didn't have a job, and the offer sounded really good, but I told him I'm not into anal sex and I won't do it. We went back to his place and he did do more; he did fuck me against my will. I totally did not want it. He kept saying, well, I'll pay you



more. He never did. He fucked me anyway. It was painful, it hurt. I hated it! It was hard for me to do anything besides just being scared. I couldn't move or do anything. I was crying, I was so upset about the whole thing.

The confluence of four contradictory scripts (sex for money, romantic love, sexual coercion, and unsafe sex) can only be understood in the context of his life history as a young man who left a homophobic family to explore the excitement of densely packed opportunities for selling sex and seeking love.

Sean experienced the seemingly dichotomous boundaries between scripts of sex for money and sex for love as fluidly interconnected in his practices. One of his boyfriends introduced him to sex for money. Throughout this three-year period in which Sean had sex with numerous men, he also maintained a wish for love. He says, 'I think I've always been relationship-oriented; I've always wanted a boyfriend whether I stayed monogamous with them or not.' Sean's sexual stories are rife with self-acknowledged desires for sexual excitement and romance. While he was victimized by his boyfriends who beat him and by drug and alcohol abuse, Sean struggled to make sex work for him. Even while he rigidly enforced safer sex restrictions on his tricks, he failed to practise safer sex with other hustlers and with his boyfriends. Sean does not feel like a victim, though, because he owns his own desires. He is now living with HIV, coordinating an HIV-testing program for gay youth, and trying to stay away from drugs and prostitution. Sean believes in romantic love because he still loves his first boyfriend, but he leaves open the possibility of being in a non-monogamous relationship only because he doesn't think that he will ever be with 'the love of his life'. Ironically, his stories are predominately shaped by social, situational, and cultural constraints even while they initially read as if he has tremendous agency due to the multiplicity of his sexual experiences.

## Conclusions: control and constraint

The sexual stories in this study reveal sites at which young gay men use and innovate gay masculinity scripts for sex. Their stories reveal how particular social, cultural, and situational contexts mediate their uses of these scripts. The degree to which young gay men are able to control their sexual lives depends on their abilities to learn sexual scripts, navigate in particular sexual situations, and negotiate for what they want and do not want with sexual partners. Their sexual lives, then, are struggles to gain control over scripts, interpersonal encounters, and specific social contexts. I argue that social context, interpersonal dynamics, and gender also drive how and *if* young gay men are able to use and adapt sexual scripts.

*Social contexts: options and adaptations*

Sexual scripting options made available by social context drive the ways in which sexual actors engage scripts. Sexual agency is mediated by actors' exposures to particular social contexts, and thus to specific sexual possibilities. For instance, how young gay men employ safer sex scripts, if at all, is directed by the scripts in their sexual situations. Sexual environments where safer sex scripts are socially supported, such as the 'leather club sex' scene, enable young gay men to draw on socially sanctioned norms for safety and consensual sex as they enact their erotic adventures. Jesus' adaptation of exhibitionism is a creative use of local scripts for eroticism and safety. Jesus' agency in this context was made possible by his proximity to multiple options for sex in a large city populated by visible gay communities. Agency is an individual's creative adaptation of sexual scripts in specific context.

In contrast, public sex contexts, such as the 'industrial sector sex', scene allow for unsafe sex to happen in private enclaves in the larger context of silence and freedom *from* social accountability for safer sex. Roberto's intention to practise safer sex and erotic adventures were thwarted in the context of a public sex environment where a private encounter led to rape. His history is characterized by a lack of options in the context of growing up in a strictly heterosexual community where alternative opportunities to meet men were hidden. These stories make clear that private situations are much more conducive to unsafe sex than public venues where safer sex scripts are socially supported.

Sean's case study reveals how sexualities are contingent upon learning sexual scripts in particular localities and in the context of specific sexual histories. His stories also demonstrate agency; he cultivated multiple, complex scripts such as sex for money, romantic love, and safer sex simultaneously to meet his needs at particular moments in his sexual career. His experiences support my finding that young gay men tend to dismiss safer sex prescriptions with their boyfriends or peers and experience rape (and unsafe sex) in the context of sexual situations where scripts are loosely organized. For instance, he controlled the scripts for safety in the context of exchanging sex for money in a club where the scripts are explicit and socially understood. When he engaged in sex for money on the boulevard, where the script was less defined, he lost control of the script and was raped.

*Interpersonal dynamics: intimacy and gay masculinities*

Constraints, as well as creativity, in the practice of sexual scripts are mediated at the level of interpersonal scripting. A number of interpersonal dynamics structure these young men's sexual lives. For example, while Charles and his boyfriend incorporated safer sex into their version of

'fringe benefits', most of the young men in this sample failed to incorporate safer sex into their sexual practices with their boyfriends. These young men justify their unsafe behaviors<sup>12</sup> with assertions that they trust their boyfriend not to infect them and desire intimacy above concerns about HIV. Mario has not found a partner to position in his romantic love model, and thus, his intrapsychic fantasies are at the mercy of interpersonal realities. John's desire to wed romantic love with recreational sex is confined by his partner's wish to be monogamous. While Sean wishes to be monogamous with 'the love of his life', the object of his affection has decided to lead a heterosexual life. Even while Sean's sexual stories demonstrate the fluidity of his movements between cultural scripts (romantic love, erotic adventures, sexual coercion, safer sex, and sex for money), they also expose interpersonal boundaries at the level of realizing his intrapsychic desires for romantic love and safer sex. Gay male youth's complex relationships to masculinity and intimacy drive how they use sexual scripts.

### *Masculinity troubles: gay men and sexual violence*

Rapes happen in the context of private, interpersonal situations in which one partner abuses his power over another. Being raped by other men puts young gay males in disturbing and complicated positions. 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, however, are typically imagined to be women. A rich tradition of intellectual work and activism focuses attention on making connections between female rapes and culturally instituted male sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Ellis, 1989; Russell, 1975). The few studies on sexually abused males do not highlight rape between gay-identified males (Mezey and 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 in which they have very few or no institutionalized ways of responding. While the topic of domestic violence between men is documented (Island and Letellier, 1991), rape and sexual abuse between men, with few exceptions (Bartholow and Doll, 1994), is still under-acknowledged 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 paradox. Is rape a logical extension of the erotic adventure script, or is it a product of institutionalized gender and male power? Julio's experience of rape, for instance, is structured by masculine scripts for sex in Latin cultures and linked to patriarchal systems of power. The *activo* role of insertive anal sex affirms the active partner's masculinity and power while denigrating the

passive partner's masculinity. Such instances raise a number of questions for sexual script theorists to consider. Do men learn and actively use raping scripts for sex? Are these encounters motivated by gay men's relationships to male power and privilege? Even though rape can be scripted, it is not always clear whether or not it is sexual.

Experiences of rape, illustrated by Julio's story, deeply challenge sexual script theory to account for the ways in which masculinity and power structure sex for gay men. The case of 'boyfriends who rape' also highlights the controlling aspect of rape between boyfriends. 'Ambiguous acts' reveal how young gay men are disempowered to negotiate what they want from sexual acts, especially when unsafe sex is the outcome. None of the instances of rape included using condoms for protection, further revealing the dangerous aspects of such acts. 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. Of course, it is possible that gay youth may fantasize about rape scripts. However, masculinity and power sometimes make gay youth's intrapsychic scripts (including rape *fantasies* and romantic love scenarios) irrelevant in concrete, interpersonal situations and mark the boundaries of script theory. When individuals are raped, their sexualities are forced by power rather than formed by their own desires; in these cases they experience violence and not sex.

### *New paradigms of (gay) sexualities*

Besides illustrating rich stories about their diverse sexualities, this work lays to rest assumptions in mainstream culture that gay men only engage in erotic adventures. These young gay men desire intimacy and are raped. Young gay men's erotic lives are struggles to learn, interpret, and construct sexualities in negotiation with particular social contexts, socially and culturally produced scripts for sex, masculinities, and their relationships with other men. Their sexual stories are as different as the young men in this study, and their sexual practices evolve under specific contexts and in relation to changing desires and needs over time. However, while these young men form hybrid versions of sexual scripts (such as 'fringe benefits' and 'leather club sex'), their stories do not reveal new dominant scripts. Rather, these young men creatively and mundanely draw on pre-existing sexual scripts (romantic love, erotic adventures, sexual coercion, safer sex, and sex for money) inherited from traditional heterosexual models and from pre-existing gay male cultures.

The sexual stories told by gay youth here reveal a number of theoretical insights. First, sexual scripts theory has not become outdated. Young gay men do, in fact, use sexual scripts. Indeed, their sexual lives are structured by recognizable cultural scripts; none of their histories revealed

fundamentally new scripts, such as safer sex in the preceding generation, which compose distinctive components of how sex gets accomplished (who, where, what, how, why sex is done). Second, sexual actors have temporal agency. These young gay men's sexual lives evolve over time and each story is unique.

Third, this analysis furthers understanding of how agency and constraints shape sexualities. Queer theorists' assertions that sexualities are diffusive and relative are corroborated by these stories; the processes of diffusion and difference are contingent on particular social contexts, interpersonal dynamics, and (constrained) agency. Gay youth form hybrid versions of dominant scripts in particular localities through dynamic interpersonal processes. They innovate hybrid versions of sexual scripts in creative combinations and also adapt scripts in particular social and situational contexts. For instance, Sean developed his own method of sticking only to receiving blowjobs in the parks. Yet, there are limits to the degree of fluidity in actual sexual experiences. Sean's unique and complex sexuality is confinable within recognizable cultural boundaries produced by historically specific sexual scripts and social contexts. Sexualities are constrained by dominant cultural scripts and by masculinity. Sexual actors' agencies are limited by their choices at particular historical moments. For instance, the Greek script for man–boy love was predominant during the Classical Age, but is not in these stories at all. Finally, understanding the complexities of gay men's sexual behaviors requires a wedding of sexual scripts and queer and gender theories into an integrated paradigm capable of theorizing both agency and constraint.

In the era of AIDS, more is at stake than merely revisions to scripts! Knowing how gay youth use multiple scripts for sex in concrete situations provides insight into how unsafe sex is accomplished, and therefore how it can be mitigated. Since education within the schools may not reach all young gay men or *any* effectively, every city should develop community-based HIV-prevention programs designed by and for gay youth to provide safer sex educational spaces (Kegeles et al., 1996; Mutchler, 1995). HIV-prevention education should train gay youth how to effectively negotiate safer sex in a variety of realistic social and situational contexts such as relationships, rapes, and public sex environments. Theorizing and changing how men do sex and masculinity are essential projects for gay culture building and HIV-prevention projects in the future. Men of all sexual orientations must unlearn culturally enforced links between violence, masculinity, and sex. The masculinity assertions that men are entitled to sex and the assumption that gay men are not raped need to be challenged; gay male youth need to learn how to stop unwanted advances. The 'leather club sex' and 'fringe benefits' stories provide models of agency for young gay men learning how to adapt local scripts to meet their needs safely.

Given the alarming amount of rape and unsafe sex found in these stories, it is clear that gay youth must learn better how to control the discourses of sexual scripts on their bodies in order to enact safer, consensual, and satisfying sexualities.

### Notes

1. I examine differences in the stories told by White and Latino men elsewhere.
2. The stories you will read about here are from interviews I conducted with 30 (15 White and 15 Latino) gay youths between the ages of 18 and 24. Respondents were drawn from the cities of Modesto, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara (all in California) through a snowball sampling procedure. I contacted these young men at gay bars and gay youth hangouts (such as cafes, parks, and restaurants) and asked them to tell me their stories in confidential interviews. 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 American, and Cuban American individuals. The analysis draws on Plummer's model for studying sexual stories (Plummer, 1995).
3. Lesbians and gay men do procreate via a number of creative methods such as co-parenting and sperm donation (which may be practised in the context of homosexual sex).
4. Complex cultural factors such as race/ethnicity, religion, and geography shape the scripts for sex encountered by gay men. My analysis of these factors is not included here in the interest of focusing on sexual adaptations and constraints in these sexual stories, but analysis of racial/ethnic differences appears in other forthcoming articles including 'Gay Youth's Sexual Stories: Interpreting Sex Acts' in the *Journal of Homosexuality* (Mutchler, forthcoming).
5. See Wilson (1979).
6. However, cross-cultural studies of sexuality challenge the stereotype of the biologically driven male with evidence of cultures in which men and women respond to external situations rather than spontaneous desires (Mead, 1935).
7. 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' (1987: 136). Thus, gay men are stigmatized as fags or losers because they do not engage hegemonic masculinity properly.
8. 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.
9. 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. 'All' means that all of the young men report using a particular script. '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 between one and five stories illustrate a particular script. 'None' means that none of them use it.

10. The other main theme of erotic adventures is a sexual play script involving 'childhood' sexual experimentation. This script is not addressed here because I am focusing on their post-adolescent stories.
11. Dominant sexual scripts are defined as those found in the majority of cases. Only three of the young men I interviewed in this sample told of having sex for money.
12. It is possible for two men in a committed relationship to have unprotected anal sex safely through the 'Australian Method' (essentially this involves both partners getting tested, practising safer sex, getting tested again after six months, and then negotiating unprotected anal sex with each other), but most of the young men in this study did not take such precautions.

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### **Biographical Note**

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