Socio-Contextual Factors of Substance Use During 1st Few Same-Sex Events among Black Gay/Bisexual Adolescent Males

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Substance Use in Sexual Minority Youth

• Studies suggest sexual minority (GLB) adolescents report more frequent and higher initial rates of substance use than heterosexual teens; and this increases over time (Marshal et al, 2009).

• Stress derived from one or multiple minority status’ such as race and/or sexual orientation may lead to maladaptive coping strategies like substance (ab)use (Meyer, 2002).
Young Black Gay & Bisexual Men

• Young Black Gay & Bisexual Men and other MSM are less likely to report prevalent use than White peers, but are more likely to experience health disparities as a result of substance use (Millett et al., 2007).

• Syndemic theory suggests that social conditions (i.e. homonegativity, social isolation) promote substance use in order to hide sexual behaviors that are socially unacceptable.
First Sex

• First few sexual experiences in adolescent males can be a time of anxiety, stress, & fears related to sexual performance (Zilbergeld, 1999).

• For Black gay and bisexual men, first sex occurs in isolation, without access to information, and emotional support from families (Arrington-Sanders, In Press).

• Despite evidence of substance use by gay and bisexual adolescents to cope with stress and anxiety (Goldbach et al, 2014), no prior work has examined the role & function of use during first same-sex.
Purpose

• To describe substance use experiences during first same-sex sexual events (FSSSE) in a sample of Black Gay/Bisexual adolescents males living in Baltimore, MD.
Methods

• Recruitment:
  - Clinics: School-based, STD (2) & Adolescent (2)
  - Outreach at local venues and LGBT events
  - Internet sites (Jack’d, Facebook)
  - Snowball sampling technique (participant referral)

• Baseline visit:
  - 10-minute, Audio Computer Assisted Survey Interview (ACASI)
  - 90-minute, in-person In-depth Interview
Analysis

- Interviews
  - Coded independently by two team members
  - Transcript double coded until coding had high inter-rater reliability (Cohen’s Kappa >0.80 )

- Thematic Development
  - Inductive open coding to connect emergent concepts across interviews and major themes

- Analysis
  - Grounded by phenomenological approach
Demographics (N=50)

- Mean Age: 17.7 (SD 1.3)
- Race:
  - Black/African American N=48 (96%)
  - Other N=2 (4%)
- Sexual Orientation:
  - Gay N=31 (62%)
  - Bisexual N=17 (34%)
- Transgender Gender Identity N=4 (8%)
ACASI Survey Findings

• Mean age at first sex: 13.9 (SD 2.7)
  – Mean age at first oral sex: 13.6 (3.2)
  – Mean age at first anal sex: 14.7 (1.9)

• Mean number of sexual partners:
  – Lifetime partners: 13 (14.5)
  – Past 6 months: 3.7 (5.1)

• Prior history STD/HIV diagnosis:
  – History of STD diagnosis 9 (18%)
  – History of HIV diagnosis 4 (8%)
Substance Use History

Participants were asked if they “ever” used:

- Alcohol          N=40 (80%)
- Marijuana        N=29 (58%)
- Injection drugs  N=1  (2%)
Drinking Alcohol (N=40)

• Frequency of alcohol use:
  – Only during special occasion: N=32 (80%)
  – 2-3 times a week: N=2 (5%)
  – Once a week: N=1 (2%)
  – Other: N=5 (12%)
Marijuana Use (N=29)

• Frequency of Marijuana smoking:
  – Used once a week or more: N=13 (45%)
  – Only during special occasion: N=10 (34%)
  – I don’t smoke marijuana regularly: N=6 (20%)
Substance Use Before Sex

- About half of the sample (46%) reported smoking marijuana and/or drinking alcohol before sexual events.
In-Depth Interview Findings

• Participants reported experiences with substance use before/during first few same-sex sexual events along a spectrum
A Spectrum of Use

- Tried for 1st Time
- To Enhance Sex
- Social Norm

No Use, Experimental, Event Driven, Recreational, Habitual
Substance Non-Use

• Joe, 19 year old, gay male said:

"I'm always worried about drugs and alcohol. My parents are big about that, and I'm scared myself. I don't want to do drugs or drink anything"

– Age at first sex 16 y/o
Experimentation

- Alonzo, 19 year old, bisexual male shared:

> “It was a guy in drag. He was getting high [marijuana]. He told me I think you should try it too. I said okay maybe I should do it for the first time. So we were in his car smoking…”

- Age at first sex 13 y/o
Corey, 17 year old, bisexual male shared:

“Well me personally, if I’m under intoxication or high, it makes sex better for me, It just gets me more horny, I get hornier when I smoke a blunt”

– Age at first sex 14 y/o
Recreational & Habitual Use

- Prentice, 18 year old, bisexual male shared:

  "...every setting that I’m in-- well, not every setting, but every social setting with friends is always something drinking or smoking involved."

  – Age at first sex 15 y/o
Most participants described use of substances before/during 1\textsuperscript{st} few same-sex events as positive and could be grouped into four (4) themes:

- Relaxation during sex
- Aphrodisiac effects
- Dissociative Effect
- Disinhibition
Relaxation During Sex

• Milton, 18 year old. gay male shared:

“I usually smoke before I have sex. It takes the edge off. It makes everyone relax and it hurts less. It feels much better. We’re both smoking usually”

– Age at first sex 14 y/o
• Robert, 17 year old, bisexual male said:

“Well me personally, if I’m under intoxication or high, it makes sex better for men, It just get me more horny, I get hornier when I smoke a blunt”

- Age at first sex 15 y/o
Aphrodisiac Effects

• Phillip, 19 year old, gay male shared:

“…when I'm sober, I don’t really be in the mood to have sex…It just don’t feel like how when I'm drunk and high. Like, *when I'm drunk and high, you gettin’ all that but if I'm sober, it’s gonna be just regular.*”

– Age at first sex 16 y/o
Dissociative Effect

• Troy, 19 year old, bisexual male said:

“We did it in the back of his car and I felt like everything was slower, everything didn’t hurt. I felt like I was just floating instead of feeling that pain.”

– Age at first sex 13 y/o
Disinhibition

- David, 18 year old, gay male shared:

“I didn’t care what was going on because I was drunk. So, I didn’t try to think about okay we should use a condom, I don’t care what’s gonna go on…”

- Age at first sex 13 y/o
Negative Themes About Use

- Dis-inhibition was viewed both positively and negatively
- Others described discontinuing use because of negative side effects of substance use including:
  - Poorer sexual performance while intoxicated
  - Lack of control
    - “Well I was drinking and smoking and I winded up having sex with somebody and I didn't know if they could've had it [STD] or not....” (15 y/o)
Unplanned & Risky Sex

• John, 19 year old, gay male reported:

“It was this one time, I was messing with this boy older than me still and he got me high and we had sex.”

-Age at first sex 16 y/o
Conclusion

• This work suggests that substance use may be a key contextual factor for some first same-sex sexual experiences in gay/bisexual youth.

• Youth described using substances to:
  – Relax, heighten sexual sensation, and to relieve stress during first sex.

• Feelings of disassociation & disinhibition – historically understood as ‘risky’ were viewed very positively by some youth.
Harm Reduction Approach

• This work suggests that providers may need to:
  • Focus on how to prepare young Black gay and bisexual men for first sex, including relaxation techniques and knowledge of non-maladaptive coping strategies
  • Acknowledge the potential perceived benefits of substance use during first sex that some gay/bisexual youth may experience
Next Steps

• Understand whether substance use during first sex predisposes some youth to continue use later in adult life, during sex and/or other periods of stress.

• Broaden the sexual health paradigm provided for sexual minority youth, especially Black gay/bisexual men and other young men who have sex with men who may be particularly isolated and predisposed to use.
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