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The Conversant Community:
HIV Health Promotion Work at *Action Séro Zéro*

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The Conversant Community:
HIV Health Promotion Work at *Action Séro Zéro*

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This dissertation is a case study drawn from ethnographic research undertaken at *Action Séro Zéro*, a community-based health promotion organization in Montréal providing HIV prevention services to gay, bisexual and transgender men. The research focuses on how people working at this organization use conversation as a health promotion strategy. The use of conversation in Séro Zéro's work is examined in relation to idealized conceptions of community, common within the health promotion paradigm, as a self-organizing, grassroots civil sector well placed to address fundamental health issues. Such conceptions pose problems for undertaking prevention work within the complex, contested, and far-from-ideal terrain of 'the gay community.' Practices that encourage conversation, and the recurrence of face-to-face talk as a theme characterizing Séro Zéro's work, are analyzed as a significant way in which the organization deals with the discrepancies between the idealized community of health promotion and the constraints of community-based work. In response to calls by some theorists to abandon community as a frame of reference for social analysis and action, a theory of 'conversant community' is developed. This conception is used to argue that Séro Zéro's work develops the dialogic and ethical relations of interpersonal talk as a form of agency important to well-being and health, extending the dimensions of community produced and experienced through the act and the art of conversation.

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1   Introduction

This project is a case study based on my work as a volunteer at *Action Séro Zéro*,[1] a community-based organization in Montréal that develops and delivers HIV prevention and health promotion programs and services for gay, bisexual and transgender (gay-bi-tran[2]) men. My original objectives for the project were twofold: to learn more about the work of HIV/AIDS prevention by working with and interviewing people who develop and undertake this work; and to understand prevention efforts in my local community in relation to concerns that HIV prevention work has been ineffective. Such concerns have been expressed by a number community-based activists and public health professionals, working in a variety of local, national and international settings, throughout the 1990s. By 1994, the conception that safer sex education and HIV prevention efforts had 'failed' had become increasingly prominent in media coverage of AIDS.[3] In North America,

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[1] The organization's official name is *Action Séro Zéro*. For simplicity's sake, and because the organization does so as well, I shorten the name to *Séro Zéro* throughout.

[2] Although it presents the danger of being reductive, I use the abbreviation "gay-bi-tran" throughout most of this document to refer to the constituencies that Séro Zéro works with. My use of this label, however imperfect, is intended to include and differentiate these constituencies using manageable terminology, rather than to suggest that gay, bisexual and transgender men constitute a single and homogenous community.

[3] For a critical account of how epidemiological evidence, starting at the end of the 1980s, was used to construct theories of 'relapse' or 'the second wave' – the idea that gay men were increasingly unable to maintain safer sex practices – see King, 1993: 135-168; Rotello, 1997: 118-134. According to King, the issue first garnered attention in late 1989 with the publication of data on rising rates of STD transmission by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. "Relapse theory" was originally proposed at the VI International Conference on AIDS in San Francisco in 1990. By the mid-1990s, the story had been taken up extensively by both mainstream and gay media and framed as the "failure" of safer sex. For print media examples, see: Doug Sadownick, "Youth: Is Gay Generation X in jeopardy? Has the safe sex message failed?" *Genre* (March 1994: 38-43); "The lost generation: A second wave of HIV infections among young gay men leaves educators worried about the future of the epidemic," *The Advocate* (May 31, 1994: 36-39); "Surviving the Second Wave ... the gay community struggles to make safer sex work again," *Newsweek* (Sept. 19, 1994: 50-51); Michelangelo Signorile, "Unsafe Like Me," *Out* (October 1994: 22-24); Michael Warner, "Unsafe: Why gay men are having risky sex," *Village Voice* (Jan. 31, 1995: 33-36); Mark Shoofs, "Beds, Baths and Beyond: Gay men fight an new epidemic: unsafe sex," *Village Voice* (Mar. 28,

many community-based organizations and, to some extent, policy makers, were scrambling to re-evaluate and re-design approaches to prevention work in light of epidemiological and anecdotal evidence that many gay men were abandoning or having difficulty maintaining safer sex practices and that HIV transmission rates, especially among youth, were on the rise.

Originally, I had envisioned my research and volunteer contribution to Séro Zéro either as helping to produce 'better' communication tools or as producing a video documentary on the organization and its work that would bring debates over problems with safer sex education into focus in relation to a local context. As I became involved with the organization, however, it became increasingly clear that the media and epidemiological frame that safer sex education had 'failed' did not readily describe the volunteer work I was doing or that of Séro Zéro overall. Indeed, the organization had been officially founded in 1994, the year that media and public debate on the 'crisis' in HIV prevention work first came to prominence. Looking closely at the work of Séro Zéro and the issues the organization was facing, I became increasingly conscious of the extent to which media framing of problems with prevention efforts more accurately described the U.S. situation than the setting I was investigating in Montréal.

This is not to suggest that Séro Zéro's work is problem-free. But given its short history, the focus of the organization is not really on rethinking approaches developed in   .

1995: 13); Walt Odets, "The fatal mistakes of AIDS education," *Harper's* (May 1995: 13-17); John Weir, "Blood Simple: More than a decade into the AIDS epidemic, we still haven't learned the ABCs of HIV" *Details* (October 1995: 136-139); Matthew Hays, "The collapse of safe sex: gay men shouldn't be making excuses anymore," *Montreal Mirror* (Nov. 30, 1995: 8); Jesse Green, "Flirting with Suicide: Public health campaigns shout 'Just Say No,' but people don't listen," *The New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 15, 1996: 39-45); "AIDS peril ignored: despite education and dire warnings, youth continue to believe the disease won't get them," *Globe and Mail* (Feb. 15, 1997: A1; A8); Caroline Montpetit, "Homosexualité et sida: des chiffres inquiétants," *Le Devoir* (June 18, 1997); Jeff Heinrich, "Gay sex in city studied: promiscuity is still rampant," *Montreal Gazette* (June 18, 1997: A1-A2); Robert Fleury, "Les « marginaux » imperméables à la prévention du sida," *Le Soleil* (Nov. 22, 1997: A25).

the 1980s that no longer seemed effective. Instead, as I will outline in more detail in upcoming chapters, Séro Zéro is in the process of developing original and locally-oriented approaches to HIV health promotion appropriate for gay and bisexual men in Montréal, informed by local[4] issues and needs as much as by broader issues such as the state and future direction of prevention work. To get at some of the specificity of what was going on at Séro Zéro rather than assuming the work we were doing was somehow 'broken' and needed fixing, I adjusted my focus to participating in and documenting the work of the organization, looking for issues and patterns that, while perhaps speaking to larger debates, appeared important in their own right.

The terrain I navigate in this study speaks to this concern to recognize the significance of local issues and practices, most especially those associated with the concept of "community" – while opening them to critical assessment. The need for a nuanced understanding of community recurs in the work of Séro Zéro as the organization strives to address the complex relations and conditions that border and define the social milieu inhabited by gay-bi-tran men. The volunteer work that I undertook at Séro Zéro often involved questioning categories of social identity and relations of social belonging. Wandering the trails of public parks, for example, talking to men who were perhaps gay, perhaps bisexual, perhaps married with children, discussing with people their ability to

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[4] Elspeth Probyn has deconstructed the usually taken-for-granted term 'the local' and the issue of what constitutes knowledge of the local into three categories: 1) locale – the settings wherein people are positioned and regulated but also actively produce themselves as subjects, generating forms of "individuated knowledge and experience"; 2) local – simply what occurs at a particular time and place, which Probyn regards as no automatic panacea for a more just and democratic politics; and 3) location – the sequencing, ordering and formalized construction of knowledge about a locality, which Probyn argues often circumscribes the individuated knowledge and experience of locale as, in her example, attempts by the pro-life movement to fix categories of ostensibly universal knowledge or belief onto women's bodies after courts have determined that the locale – time and place – of pregnancy belongs to women. (1990: 178; 186-187). With this analysis of the striking down of anti-abortion laws in Canada, Probyn points to the need for an understanding of the complexity of relations of the local, but also to the importance of the informal yet often important knowledge and experience that people develop in their specific locales.

reflect upon and make decisions about having sex and using condoms, then again delving

into issues of self-esteem, social isolation, strong feelings both positive and negative

about 'the gay community,' and various concerns about risk, self-identity, self-esteem, I

came to understand that this was complex, challenging work that went far beyond a

mechanistic effort to transmit messages, distribute information, or shift the variables of

knowledge, attitude and behaviour. In the ways that we had to negotiate definitions of

community – where it began and ended, where people fit in or didn't – our practices

crossed over and grappled with the complex relations of community, self and social

identity, discourse, and interpersonal communication that serve to maintain power and

difference. Who is 'gay'? Who is 'bisexual'? Who is at risk? Where and in what ways

do people locate themselves in relation to 'community?' How is this informed by the

wider social and discursive context? Séro Zéro's work engages with, without necessarily

resolving, many such questions and issues.[5]

A significant pattern that consistently came to the fore in my participation in this

work was an emphasis on 'talk.' Much of the focus of street-level activities in which I

participated was on engaging people in conversation. In the first instance, this use of

conversation had a clear and fairly obvious aim: to talk *about* HIV/AIDS, prevention.

and safer sex and to provide people with the opportunity to ask questions and express

concerns related to these topics. However, there were important ways in which this

emphasis on talk did not seem motivated by the most obvious objectives of health

promotion work. Talk often seemed important for its own sake, linked to the work HIV

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[5] In his 1998 article "Deux solitudes: les organismes sida et la communauté gaie," Séro Zéro's executive director, René Lavoie, brings into focus a number of boundaries that pose challenges for prevention work in Montréal: ideological and logistical gaps that divide community-based AIDS organizations from gay community organizations; and a *"confusion identitaire"* that many gay men face when confronted with an apparent choice between a low-status AIDS identity and even lower-status gay identity (350-354; 340-341).

prevention in a secondary or indirect way. The value of talk, above and beyond its uses in preventing HIV transmission, is also frequently emphasized in Séro Zéro's accounts of its own work and in the programs and materials it has developed and distributed to community and government stakeholders. The work of Séro Zéro situates interpersonal talk as a valued and important aspect of health in its own right, and has developed an agenda of fostering a talkative and thereby healthier community. In short, the organization conceives of and pursues talk not simply as an instrument to accomplish health promotion work or transmit a prevention message, but as an aspect of well-being and health in its own right.

Of course, Séro-Zéro has developed and implemented a variety of programs and services, ranging from individual counselling to social marketing campaigns, since its incorporation as a non-profit organization in 1994. Key endeavours include an ongoing condom distribution and safer sex awareness program anchored in Montréal's gay bars and saunas, an outreach program for youth sex workers and youth in difficulty, and a prevention project designed by and for ethnic minorities. Because the organization addresses a diverse constituency within a number of distinct settings, staff members emphasize the importance of a diversified strategy that encompasses a variety of projects and objectives ranging from education to awareness to frontline and group intervention, as suggested by this narrator:[6]

J: ... pour moi, ces différentes stratégies, c'est ça qui doit être assez mélangé. Comme on a essayé dans les bars de faire des affaires plus un à un ... ça ne va pas si bien que ça. Je me dis, bon, est-que c'est pas mieux de faire des petits *shows*, tu coupes la musique, il y a une *tune* qui se passe, puis on fait un petit *show* 5 minutes, mais t'as interpellé 600

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[6] Following Ross Higgins, I use 'narrator' throughout to refer to the people I interviewed for this project as a way to foreground the contribution that interview participants make to research and to convey a sense that they are "actors in history" rather than just repositories of information (1998: 125, note 1).

personnes à la fois ... au lieu d'interpeller 5 dans ta soirée ...puis le gars dit ... 'c'est bien beau ... j'ai rien à te demander.' ... C'est pas efficace, si c'est juste ça. Fait qu'il a un équilibre là dedans, à penser ... toute philosophie d'intervention ne doit pas se baser sur une approche, mais devrait intégrer plusieurs formes d'approche, parce que ça risque d'avoir différentes efficacités avec différentes personnes dans différents lieux ...

Part of Séro Zéro's vocation, then, is strongly anchored in more conventional health promotion and social marketing goals of making information available and raising awareness of HIV and safer sex issues.

Nonetheless, staff members tend to describe intervention programs involving some kind of face-to-face contact and discussion as having the most long-term benefit and impact. The conversation incited by Séro Zéro's health promotion work itself seemed at times to foster transformative moments, electric, catalytic – as in this narrator's description:

H: .. je me souviens, entre autre, lorsqu'on a cré le petit vidéo sécurisexe, sur le *S and M* puis, bon, sur les pratiques sécurisexe cuir puis un petit peu plus *soft*, puis, je regardais les gens, et les gens, même s'ils ne se connaissaient pas puis qu'ils regardaient le film, je veux dire, se parlaient entre eux parce que, bon, soit que la pratique qu'ils voyaient sur le téléviseur était comme très choquante pour eux autres ou elle était comme bien correcte. Puis, je veux dire, ça donnait juste l'occasion de parler avec le voisin à côté ou de jaser avec la personne ... puis de créer un lien ...

Such notions of 'healthy talk' and the salutary effects of conversation are certainly not new nor are they specific to the work of HIV prevention, extending to health promotion more broadly, to psychoanalysis, and elsewhere. Perhaps because it seems so obvious, the importance of this dimension of health promotion work, either at Séro Zéro or more widely, has not been the focus of much study. This dissertation, therefore, provides an account of how one organization grapples with doing community-based work when 'community' has a variety of often conflicting meanings, and an account of how 'healthy talk' has come to provide an alternative to more narrow conceptions of health education

as a process of information-delivery, raising questions regarding the assumed capacity of talk to promote health and build supportive communities, how talk links people into community and social networks, how organizations attempt to use talk to fulfill their agendas, and how this turn toward talk is informed by and engages with wider social practices, conditions and struggles.

Indeed when the conceptions and practices of 'healthy talk' that have been developed within HIV are closely examined, the claims that underpin them – not to mention their social and cultural implications – seem far from obvious. Even as the idea that conversation can promote health and well-being is now used extensively within HIV health promotion work to generate an agenda for building a talkative and thus 'healthy' community, the social interests served by *inciting* people to talk together have tended to remain unexamined. Indeed, Séro Zéro staff recognize and acknowledge the challenges and limitations of using conversation in their work, particular in a broad social context that erects barriers to talk and in some ways enhances the realities of social isolation even as it creates new possibilities for community.

The theorists most present my discussion of these issues in upcoming chapters, phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas and linguist Mikhail Bakhtin. offer a framework for interpreting the role of talk in the work of Séro Zéro and the social context in which this work takes place in a way that considers critical limitations without dismissing the project entirely. A comparison of the theories of Levinas and Bakhtin was an unexpectedly fruitful and rewarding outcome of this study.[7] Although they write from fairly distinct disciplines and contexts, the similarities in their fundamental ideas are

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[7] I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Kim Sawchuk, for suggesting this comparison and helping to sketch out its implications for my research.

striking and enriching. Levinas, critiquing some very basic assumptions that infuse the western philosophical tradition about what constitutes subjectivity – one's sense of self and one's social construction as a subject – argues that the self should be understood in the first instance as an ethical relation with others and the outcome of contact and interaction among people rather than as an ontological entity that *then* interrelates with others. This is important for my research – as I will discuss through many examples in upcoming pages – in part because the work of Séro Zéro (as well as that of comparable organizations in other places) puts such emphasis on talk, interaction and exchange among people in their everyday lives as aspects of health promotion.

Complementing Levinas, the work of Bakhtin offers fruitful ways to explore this feature of Séro Zéro's work. His social conception of speech communication and elegant analysis of how utterances – both spoken and written – weave important social networks among people, provides a way of interpreting some of the raison d'être of Séro Zéro's approaches, and why this organization has come to emphasize conversation in its work. In a manner strikingly similar to Bakhtin, Levinas also accords speech particular importance, and both theorists point the way to a reconceptualization of community in terms of the social relations of speech – an argument that community needs to be understood not simply ontologically or rationally in terms of populations, territories, institutions, etc. but also as the outcome of ethical and dialogical relations. "Conversant community" is a term that I develop in this text to refer to these relations and to interpret the work of Séro Zéro.

In the next chapter, I review the history and critical debates important to my analysis, chiefly the emergence of community-based health promotion as central

component of a new paradigm for public health over the past several decades, as well as subsequent critiques of this paradigm. Even as health promotion has displaced more traditional, information-delivery models of health education, I argue that it is itself a discourse marked by important tensions, particularly in the way it mobilizes notions of community as a self-organized civil sector that provides a stable frame of reference for social analysis and action.

In chapter 3, in response to calls by some theorists to abandon community as a frame of reference, I develop a theory of contrasting dimensions of community – "conversant" and "rational" – suggesting that community-based HIV health promotion work such as that undertaken by Séro Zéro can be understood as grappling with and addressing imbalances between these dimensions. I draw on a diverse range of scholarship in feminist theory, linguistics, philosophy, communication studies, sociology and other fields that offers theories of how conversational interaction builds social and cultural relations.

In chapter 4, I develop a framework for discourse analysis and ethnography as methods for bringing into focus the understandings of community that inform Séro Zéro's work. I situate my project as a case study that reveals something of the "story" that Séro Zéro's HIV health promotion work has to tell. I describe how I have used ethnographic research methods as a volunteer working for the organization over the course of several years in a number of different prevention projects that took place in distinct locations, while also drawing on a range of textual examples from a number of other organizations. The research tools that comprise my method include participant-observation, the gathering and comparison of a collection of print documents, and the recording and

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transcription of a series of interviews with people doing HIV health promotion work at Séro Zéro. These materials relate to and refer to several different research sites where I conducted participant-observation: a self-esteem workshop, street-level volunteer work, and my participation as a peer educator in an intervention project undertaken in public parks.

I draw on, and present material from all these sources and sites in the following analysis. In some cases, I have included excerpts from the field notes and reflections that I gathered during participant observation; these sections are indicated by the use of italics and the pronoun "I." In using these notes, I have omitted direct references to other people that might serve as a basis for identifying them unless I had their written consent. All people participating in interviews have provided me with their signed consent (Appendix 2). Passages taken from these interviews have been transcribed from audio cassette and are preceded by a single capital letter and a colon to indicate they are attributable to a specific speaker. I refer to people who participated in an interview as 'narrators,' and the letters that I use to distinguish each narrator have been randomly chosen so as to respect the speaker's confidentiality.

My research has led me to identify three significant patterns in understandings of community that inform Séro Zéro's work as these relate to broader tensions in the health promotion paradigm. An analysis of each of these patterns is undertaken in the following three chapters of the dissertation. Chapter 5 examines how the work of Séro Zéro, in programs such as its small-group discussion workshops on self esteem, brings into focus chronic patterns of silence and denial faced by many gay-bi-tran men. These 'structures of silence' are linked to the way many men find themselves in a paradoxical position in

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terms of self-identity and social support, that of a *milieu* offering neither the support of 'family' nor of 'community.' This aspect of Séro Zéro's work provides an important window on the understandings of community implicit in the organization's work.

In chapter 6, I examine a common pattern shared by many of the texts and practices in my research corpus that lead me to characterize them as an 'incitement to talk.' I analyze this as an effort to develop dialogic relations as a form of agency, extending the conversant dimensions of community as proposed in chapter 3. I argue that the incitements to talk common in Séro Zéro's work illustrate its conversant understanding of community, one that emphasizes the "ritual dimension" of communication (Carey, 1992: 18) and the problems and possibilities for community that is generated through primary speech communication.

Chapter 7 analyzes how the conversant understandings of community that inform Séro Zéro's work can be understood as responses to tensions relating to community in the health promotion paradigm. I assess the peer education work I undertook as a Séro Zéro volunteer participating in a prevention project that took place in public parks in Montréal, examining the centrality in Séro Zéro's work of seizing the opportunity to engage people in conversation. I argue that Séro Zéro retains community as a frame of reference despite its limitations and ambiguities by focusing on dialogical and ethical considerations of how to do community work rather than on rational or ontological preoccupations with what communities are.

My analysis of Séro Zéro's assessment of structures of silence and the organization's incitements to talk suggest that an important aspect of Séro Zéro's work involves efforts to develop dialogic relations – the relations between people that speech

communication in its various forms makes possible – as a form of agency. In critically

engaging with rational community as a frame of reference – in contrast to the often

unquestioned acceptance of the rational frame within dominant conceptions of health

promotion – the work of Séro Zéro elaborates a conversant understanding of community

as dialogical and ethical action that contributes to well-being and health.

In this chapter, I review research from a variety of disciplines regarding the relation between health and community, in order to look at certain tensions in the health promotion paradigm related to community. As a paradigm, health promotion informs community-based HIV prevention work such as that undertaken by Séro Zéro both conceptually and politically. Historically, this can be understood as a broad shift within public health policy and practice from 'information-delivery' models of health education towards community-based, participatory models where community organizing and the interpersonal exchange that goes on within community networks and contexts is identified as a source of solutions for the promotion of health and well-being. Although this shift has been widely embraced by governments, health care professionals and activists over the past three decades, it has also been the subject of critical debate. After reviewing the broad lines of the health promotion paradigm and how it has informed social and government responses to HIV/AIDS, I look at some of the tensions within this paradigm. Many of these tensions have to do with the way in which health promotion articulates 'health' to notions of 'community.' I argue that in much of the discourse on health promotion, and particularly in government policy anchored in the health promotion paradigm, the meaning of 'community' tends to be taken for granted. This is problematic given that a significant body of literature and critical scholarship suggests the meaning of

community, and the ways it is understood and experienced within contemporary societies, are far from self evident. The question that is begged is how community can anchor health if the meaning of, and means to develop community remain unclear.

In relation to this larger dilemma, a key question that my research addresses is how people who are said to belong to a "community" – such as people doing community-based health promotion work – actually define and understand community. In later chapters, I present some answers to this question based on my work at Séro Zéro, exploring the ways in which community can be understood as an outcome of communication, produced in part through conversational interaction. rather than simply being the result of identitary, geographical or institutional factors or structures. I examine the ways in which the work of Séro Zéro acknowledges and gives space to this dimension of community. The recent history of health education, public health administration and health promotion form an important backdrop for this analysis. A key aspect of this history has been the ways in which health promotion has challenged more traditional, information-delivery models of health education, and this is the focus of the next section.

'Information delivery' approaches to health education

In an article analyzing the emergence of community-based HIV/AIDS work in Montréal, René Lavoie, the executive director of Séro Zéro, defines HIV *prevention* as

labour-intensive direct intervention on an individual or small-group level with the aim of getting people to integrate safer practices into their everyday lives. Prevention also involves efforts to facilitate access to the *means* of prevention, such as the distribution of condoms or clean needles (1998: 342). Lavoie contrasts the work of prevention 'proper' to the activities of *training*[8] and *awareness*.[9] Training involves the education of professionals and volunteers who then undertake the work of awareness or prevention. The lion's share of Québec government expenditure on 'prevention' has gone to this level. *Awareness* includes mass media social marketing campaigns about HIV/AIDS as well as most programs undertaken in the school system. These efforts seek to raise awareness and transmit basic information to as wide an audience as possible.

Québec government policy and funding structures, according to Lavoie, have tended to overlook the distinctions among training, awareness and prevention. Thus, while frontline and street-level health promotion work as Lavoie defines it is critical to the success of efforts to reduce HIV transmission, it has tended to be poorly funded in the province, particularly in terms of health promotion work developed by and for gay, bisexual and transgender men. Lavoie's definitions locate prevention as a set of activities and issues that extend beyond efforts to raise awareness or transmit information. The issues, pedagogical models and practices that underpin, inform and present challenges to prevention work are, likewise, distinct. Far from recognizing these distinctions, the scope of programs classified by the Québec government as 'HIV prevention' have emphasized awareness and an information-delivery conception of health education.

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[8] *"éducation"* (ibid.).
[9] *"sensibilisation"* (ibid).

Prevention research in Québec, for example, has tended to be focused explicitly or implicitly on questions of how to develop the 'right' messages – those capable of shifting knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in such a way as to reduce rates of HIV transmission. In other words, this research has usually relied on a classic, social-scientific view of health education as a process of information transfer designed to 'move' an audience toward specific objectives. Thus, in a review of 68 HIV prevention research projects targeting youth undertaken in Québec over 12 years, sexologist Joanne Otis observes a clear emphasis on measuring and evaluating the socio-demographic, psycho-social and behavioural variables of sex behaviour (1996: 3; 151) and an implicit understanding of prevention work as a process of targeting messages that will shift these variables (149-150). Noting a lack of qualitative research that steps outside of this framework, Otis calls for expanding the horizons of prevention research and the projects it encompasses (152). Likewise, Lavoie's nuanced definition of prevention suggests that it requires alternative practices focused not simply on *what* is said, but *how* the work is done and the social, political, economic and cultural constraints and struggles that shape the very possibility of doing prevention and health promotion work.

Critical research such as Lavoie's, dealing with the complexity of social and cultural responses to AIDS, has helped to broaden understandings of health education and prevention work, better accounting for these constraints and struggles (I discuss such research in more detail later in this chapter). Nonetheless, a number of researchers have noted the tendency for public health establishments in North America and the UK to maintain an instrumentalist, information-delivery conception of prevention education – a focus on what Lavoie terms 'awareness.' Health policy theorist Peter Aggleton, for

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instance, describes health education as encompassing four basic approaches, the most traditional being the "information-giving" model (1989: 223). The aim of this model, as its name suggests, is to disseminate information on disease and its avoidance, based on the assumption that "people are rational decision-makers" and thus will alter their behaviour in accordance with scientific information they receive from qualified experts. Three other approaches recognize and attempt to address limitations of this information-giving approach. Thus, a "self-empowerment" model acknowledges that people's beliefs and emotions can impede rational decision-making, putting the focus on various forms of self-analysis or group consciousness-raising that enhance people's power and ability to make rational choices. "Community-oriented" and "socially-transformatory" health education approaches go still further, aiming to enhance health through collective action that defines and meets community health needs, or through activism that pushes for broad changes to social conditions that limit well-being. During the 1980s, Aggleton notes. the "information-giving" model remained the most widely used by governments and public health authorities as HIV emerged as a major health concern. Despite the emergence of alternative, community based approaches drawing on feminist conceptions of empowerment and on strategies of health activism used in the women' health movement. information-giving quickly became the dominant paradigm for health education about HIV and AIDS in the UK during the 1980s (224).

Cindy Patton makes a similar observation largely in reference to the North American context (see also Grace, 1991: 329-31; Wolfe, 1997: 411-412), noting that HIV emerged into the social and cultural arena at an interesting time when new media technologies and new theories about communication were re-shaping processes and

understandings of media production and consumption. These shifts were significant to social and cultural responses to HIV and AIDS as they emerged in the mid-1980s in large part because of a dramatic impact that new media technologies had on the arena of sexual representation through such phenomena as cheap and widespread access to porn videos as well as the new possibilities that desktop publishing and video made available to AIDS activists. Within communication and media theory, Patton notes, the "hypodermic model" that portrayed communication as a linear process of injecting information into a mass audience became increasingly untenable under the impact of such interrelated conceptual, cultural and technological shifts. One of the ironies of official responses to HIV and AIDS in the mid-1980s, Patton notes, was that new understandings of media representations and the communication process that were proliferating at the time were scarcely taken up in developing health education about HIV and safe sex. Even as media researchers were extensively rethinking the hypodermic model of communication, government-sponsored public health education persistently turned around a view of information as a "vaccine" that could mechanistically stop the transmission of HIV and slow the spread of the epidemic (1996: 13-17; 101-103; 159).

By the late 1980s, however, the "hypodermic model" had come under scrutiny and was increasingly being challenged by more nuanced and less hierarchical approaches to health education. Tina Wiseman describes this as a slow and partial shift from "top-down" to "bottom-up" approaches. This was accompanied by an increasing appeal to 'community' as the foundation upon which effective health education and prevention work could be developed. The chief limitation of top-down approaches, Wiseman observes, is a tendency to treat people "as the passive recipients of health education

messages" (1989: 212). Largely focussed on issues that policy-makers and educators

define as important, top-down models tend to presume a certain uniformity among the

members of communities they are attempting to reach, and fail to recognize the

importance of community participation in developing and delivering education programs.

Referring to successful sustainable development work undertaken in a number of

countries, Wiseman notes that community involvement in setting agendas and defining

initiatives has been recognized as the "essential prerequisite" for sustained behavioural

change, but that health educators in the west were slow to recognize this insight. Using

the slightly bizarre metaphors of "shower" and "bidet" to contrast top-down and bottom-

up approaches to health education, Wiseman describes the latter approach as one where

the primary initiatives come out of communities and originate in the lived experience and

concerns of community members. The "bidet" model also tends to recognize and

accommodate diversity within communities rather than assuming that all members of a

community share identical needs, perspectives and concerns. Wiseman cites the HIV

education work supported through the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in the UK as an

example of this turn toward bottom-up, community-based approaches, using a variety of

methods of interaction ranging from

> ... workshops, seminars and counselling, to the formation of support groups and the
> invitation of speakers. Some groups have been further assisted by the provision of office
> space ... and financial resources ... In this way, groups such as Refugee Action, the
> National Bureau for Handicapped Children, the Black Community AIDS Team, the
> Chinese Community Health Care Centre ... have been provided with material and moral
> support ... [the THT] has .. demonstrated a flexibility of structures that will allow for a
> variety of interactions and the absorption of many new support groups. Those working
> within the Trust have tried to adapt to their expressed needs by listening and providing an
> arena for discussion. Health interventions are formulated by the groups themselves with
> members of the Trust acting in a facilitory role ... [enabling] them to formulate
> interventions which are appropriate to their needs (1989: 216-217).

Such an emphasis on bottom-up, community-based participation in setting agendas and delivering services has become central to responses to HIV/AIDS, not just in the UK but in Canada and other countries. Of course, conceptions of health education and public health intervention as information-delivery have not completely disappeared and cannot be dismissed as unnecessary. However, they have been increasingly recognized – as suggested by the distinctions Lavoie draws between prevention, training and awareness – as simply one component in a broader universe of activities and interventions that are needed if key health problems such as HIV/AIDS are to be effectively addressed. In the next section, I situate community-based responses to HIV/AIDS in the context of broad shifts in public health and health care policy that have taken place in Canada and elsewhere over the past several decades.

The health promotion paradigm

Sociologist Sarah Nettleton describes health promotion as one of three key strands in a gradual and ongoing shift toward a new paradigm of public health and health care policy that has occurred in the UK, Canada and other countries over the past 30 years. Labelled "the new public health" by Aston and Seymour (cited in Nettleton, 1995: 232).

this emerging paradigm is characterized by shifts from hospital to community-based care, as well as the rise of consumerist models of health care delivery. The new era, according to Aston and Seymour, was preceded by the era of therapeutic medicine or "biomedicine" (1930-1970) that had emphasized biomedical models of disease and its cure, anchoring health care delivery in pharmacology and hospital-based medicine. In contrast to these earlier models, the emergence of community-based health promotion from the 1970s onward has marked an ongoing shift in emphasis from cure to prevention in public health policy and practice (Nettleton: 228).

Health promotion constitutes in part a critique of simplistic and elitist behavioural models of health education -- "give people the information and they'll act on it" (Nettleton: 234) -- that became predominant during the early years of therapeutic medicine and remain in use today. Instead of focusing on information dissemination, health promotion[10] aims to address the complex social and environmental determinants of health and illness through a broad range of activities at a variety of levels (Wong, 1997: 1-2; Nettleton, 1995: 234-235). Although "biomedicine" remains the predominant way of framing, explaining and treating disease within the health care sector overall, the emergence of health promotion as part of a new paradigm attests to the success of activist movements in contesting and challenging the biomedical establishment. As a social movement, health promotion originated in feminist and other activist and academic critiques of biomedical approaches to health care and health education, but it has since become incorporated into mainstream health care practice (Grace, 1991: 329-330;

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[10] Following shifts in the 1980s toward health promotion paradigms, health activists and policy makers have also identified a more recent shift toward "population health" paradigms. It is not yet clear whether population health displaces or complements the previous shift toward health promotion. For a more detailed analysis, see Wong (1997).

Nettleton, 1995: 234; Stevenson and Burke, 1992: S47). Starting in the 1960s, radical

critiques of traditional health care and the success of alternative care models and

movements provided the impetus for the emergence of health promotion as an

increasingly central component of public health policy. Indeed, the strategies and

eventual success of AIDS activists to gain a voice in official policies and programs owes

much to preceding and ongoing struggles by feminist health activists and academics to

redefine the terrain of women's health care and reproductive rights (Wolfe, 1997: 409;

411).

As in the UK (Nettleton: 234), governments across Canada have increasingly

expressed a commitment to community-based health promotion in policy documents and

program development over the past 25 years.[11] Health promotion became an official

strategy of the federal government with the publication of the *Lalonde Report* in 1974.[12]

The "defining moment for health promotion" arrived with the 1986 adoption of the

Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion by 38 countries during the 1st International

Conference on Health Promotion (Wong, 1997: 1). Following the lines of previous

World Health Organization (WHO) discussion papers on health promotion,[13] the Ottawa

Charter defined health promotion as the "process of enabling people to increase control

over, and to improve, their health" (1-2). This was to involve a variety of initiatives,

including addressing the social and environmental prerequisites for health, enacting

health-promoting policies in all sectors of government activity and fostering supportive,

health-promoting social and community environments. Coinciding with the articulation

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[11] For a detailed historical analysis of the various currents of health promotion and how they have informed responses to HIV/AIDS in Canada, see Trussler and Marchand (1997: 16-23).
[12] Lalonde, Marc (1974). *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians* (Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada).
[13] For a summary of WHO definitions of health promotion, see Wiseman (1989).

of this international definition of and commitment to health promotion, the Canadian

government published a new health promotion policy framework by then Health and

Welfare minister Jake Epp, *Achieving Health for All*.[14] The federal framework presented

similar definitions and objectives as the Ottawa Charter, emphasizing the importance of

community contexts and healthy environments to health and outlining strategies to foster

public participation in the development and delivery of community-based services. At

the provincial level, the Québec government's commitment to a community-based health

care system and to the basic tenets of health promotion dates to the 1970s, notably with

the establishment of the CLSC system, preceding the emergence of federal and

international health promotion frameworks (Rayside and Lindquist, 1992: 56).

At least on paper, commitment to community-based health promotion is also

central to specific government strategies for HIV and AIDS. In Canada, both federal and

provincial governments fund community-based organizations that deliver HIV-focused

health promotion programs and services, and such organizations hold a key place within

government AIDS strategies and policies. According to Rayside and Lindquist, social

struggles around HIV and AIDS have in fact accelerated a paradigm shift in Canadian

public health similar to what Nettleton describes for the UK. In their words, AIDS has

been an "agent of transformation" fostering a significant shift in Canada towards a "new

politics" of disease (93). In challenging the power of public health bureaucracies,

medical research establishments and the pharmaceutical industry to set the agenda,

community-based HIV/AIDS activists have fostered a more inclusionary vision that has

had important ramifications beyond the arena of HIV/AIDS. This shift has secured key

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[14] Epp, Jake (1986), *Achieving Health for All: A Framework for Health Promotion* (Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada).

roles for community groups, people living not just with HIV but with a variety of health conditions, and health care professionals in determining how policy agendas are set and health services developed and delivered (Rayside and Lindquist, 1992: 36; 51; 93-94).

In terms of HIV/AIDS, community-based organizations and health care professionals have fought for and achieved significant participation in setting the agenda for provincial and national responses to AIDS in Canada. Among other things, this has contributed to establishing a significant consensus across the country regarding AIDS education "...to educate frankly, to use the school system, to distribute condoms" (92). According to Rayside and Lindquist, the major struggles for HIV prevention education in Canada have not been ideological,[15] but instead have centred on logistics, implementation and, perhaps most significantly, on pushing governments to follow through on commitments set out in policy by funding specific initiatives (92-94).

Despite such problems, Wong describes health promotion as the "driving force behind the community response to AIDS" in Canada (1997: 3). Alongside the community-based response, a tangible example of the federal government's commitment to community-based health promotion has been the AIDS Community Action Program (ACAP). ACAP has funded a wide range of grassroots programs and projects in the areas of prevention, health-promoting care and support services for PHAs as well as initiatives that address issues such as discrimination and poverty that constitute barriers to

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[15] With a very different health care system than in the U.S., and a distinct public response to AIDS, the Canadian climate of debate, activism and policy development surrounding HIV prevention education has also been markedly different. Aside from occasional "family values" and homophobic excesses by some members of parliament and municipal politicians, Canadians have been spared the polarized debates and struggles over safer sex and HIV prevention common in the U.S. Rayside and Lindquist suggest that in contrast to the public discourse and media coverage that Canadians frequently saw coming out of the U.S. or the UK in the early years of the AIDS epidemic, "the view [in Canada] that AIDS was justifiable retribution for an immoral lifestyle has never had as strong a public voice" (1992: 51) – although many may privately have held such opinions.

health (Wong, 1997: 3). The renewal of the federal AIDS strategy at the end of 1997 saw a reduction in funding levels but a reiteration of this commitment to community-based efforts through ACAP. The policy directions of the renewed Strategy, for example, recognize that "much of the work done so far to reduce the spread of HIV ... has been accomplished by non-profit, voluntary organizations and community groups" and recognizes community-based organizations as "a direct link to rapidly changing local conditions across the country" (Health Canada, 1998: 8).

In Québec, the government has oriented the policy framework of the provincial AIDS strategy, also renewed in 1997, around a similar commitment to a health promotion approach. In terms of prevention, for example, the renewed Québec strategy emphasizes the need to address socio-economic issues related to HIV transmission such as poverty, addiction and self-esteem through support for community-based groups and initiatives and diversified programs adapted to the needs of local communities (Imbleau, 1998).

Health promotion has thus brought with it significant reconceptualizations of how people approach their health and decisions they make in relation to it. At the center of this shift is a move away from conceiving health solely in terms of rational decision-making. Instead, health promotion emphasizes ideas of "empowerment" originally developed within feminism. Broadly conceived, the idea of empowerment within health promotion discourse proposes that health maintenance and improvement comes from enabling people to take control of their own actions and decisions in relation to health matters, defining and meeting their own health needs. Health promotion efforts thus tend to focus on helping people improve decision-making skills and on fostering social and community contexts that encourage and enable individual responsibility in assessing and

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making informed decisions relating to health (Nettleton, 1995: 230-240; Grace, 1991:

329-330; Wong, 1997: 1-3).

Health promotion, community, and responses to HIV/AIDS

Also central to the emergence of health promotion as part of new public health

paradigms is an emphasis on "community," and the relocation of key health promotion

initiatives away from hospital or clinical settings toward community contexts (Nettleton,

1995: 11-13). Nettleton suggests that this community orientation in the development and

delivery of health care programs is not simply the result of grassroots struggle, but has

also been motivated by government efforts to reduce mounting health care costs and

render health care delivery more efficient (216-221). This process of 're-location' has

involved a shift in the organizational response to health and illness from hospitals and

centralized medical institutions to more dispersed, decentralized community contexts.

Community in this sense has been increasingly identified as a 'solution' to the woes of

conventional, expensive, hospital-based medicine – a new, more efficient point of access

from which to distribute health services. Within the new discipline of health promotion,

then, "community" has emerged as a key concept anchoring both theory and practice, but

opinions differ as to how much this represents government concerns to cut costs as

opposed to community struggles to gain visibility and voice. In his book *Power and Community*, for example, political theorist and activist Dennis Altman takes the latter view, arguing that community-based organizations (CBOs) have played a key role in the global response to AIDS – locally, nationally and internationally – as a direct result of "empowerment of the people most affected" (1994: 162). Similarly, policy analyst Michael T. Isbell traces the emergence of a new "communitarian model" of disease prevention that has arisen in the wake of the women's health movement and the AIDS pandemic, one that has significantly challenged traditional practices of public health (1993: 159-160).

The idea of "community" as a source of solutions is, of course, neither distinctive to health promotion in response to HIV/AIDS, nor is it a new concept. Indeed, the ways in which community is understood and discussed within health promotion discourse recalls 19th century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' notion of *Gemeinschaft*. For Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* was a form of 'organic' community bond rooted in pre-capitalist, rural folk cultures, a sentiment of "social will" based in shared customs, mores and religious belief that linked individuals to a social totality (1955: 53; 261; 270). Rational, industrial culture and rapid urbanization, however, were gradually eating away the social bases of *Gemeinschaft* and at the same time fostering new forms of association, the "union of rational wills" based in convention, legislation and public opinion, that Tönnies refers to as *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies decried the social shift signalled by the decline of organic forms of community and their replacement by what he viewed as the "artificial construction" of social association and interaction in the modern, urban world, seeing in this shift the emergence of a new and unhappy social order (74). It is but a few short

steps from Tönnies' diagnosis, rooted in 19th century Germany, to late 20th century accounts of community-based health promotion as the answer to the failures of modern, rational, hospital-based technomedicine. Of course, the current discourse on health promotion reverses Tönnies' progression, positing a necessary and healthy move from a discredited *Gesellschaft*-like technomedical establishment back toward meeting health needs through forms of organic community action and engagement. Health promotion advocacy, in other words, comes from a sentiment of too much *Gesellschaft*, the prescription being a return to or reinvention of *Gemeinschaft*.

If the discourse of health promotion echoes some of Tönnies' propositions, such is also the case in literature that considers 'gay community' and its social significance. This parallel pre-dates the late 1960s gay liberation movement that is often presented as the originating context and moment for the emergence of positive, supportive minority sexual communities, evoking Tönnies' notion of *Gemeinschaft*. The work of Evelyn Hooker, for example -- one of the first ethnographers to conduct research within and in service to a gay community[16] -- appears to draw from Tönnies. Hooker acknowledged that the standard sociological definition of community -- "a territorial base with primary institutions, serving a residential population" (1967: 171) -- did not readily describe the dispersed Los Angeles gay community of the 1950s that was the focus of her research. Rather than rejecting the term 'community', however, she calls for an alternative definition not far from Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* :

an aggregate of persons engaging in common activities, sharing common interests and having a feeling of socio-psychological unity with variations in the degree to which

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[16] Hooker originally began her research at the request of gay friends (1967: 170). Although her work was published in the context of a highly problematic body of literature, the sociology of deviance, Hooker's preoccupations depart in significant ways from her contemporaries such as Leznoff and Westley (1967) with their comparatively much dimmer view of homosexual social networks.

persons have these characteristics depending on whether they constitute the core or the periphery (171).

Of course, not all researchers have reached the same conclusions. In the introduction to their recent anthology on the history of gay and lesbian communities in Montréal, *Sortir de l'ombre*, Irène Demczuk and Frank Remiggi invoke the very definition of community that Hooker puts aside.[17] Rather than defining community in terms of socio-psychological unity, as does Hooker, Demczuk and Remiggi understand community more conventionally in terms of space or territorial base. Thus, in reflecting on their choice to focus the anthology on 'community' as opposed to other options such as 'sexual minority,' 'movement,' or 'sub-culture,' they argue that gays and lesbians in Montréal *have* formed communities in the traditional, sociological sense:

On constatera effectivement que les gais et les lesbiennes de la région métropolitaine forment des communautés au sens sociologique le plus traditionnel ... un ancrage spatial clairement déterminé, un réseau d'organismes communautaires et d'établissements commerciaux, des structures politiques et des moyens de communication, sans compter un cohérence socioculturelle ... (1998: 22).

Nonetheless, a significant amount of research, writing and advocacy relating to community-based health promotion, such as Dennis Altman's overview of community-based responses to AIDS, also conceptualizes community in ways that remind one of Tönnies. Altman's work, of course, adds in a sophisticated framework of political theory and analysis and thus cannot be reduced to Tönnies' propositions. For Altman, the involvement and development of the community sector has become critical to the capacity of public health systems to respond to AIDS (1994: 166), and has been a source of crucial intervention and innovation exemplified in Stephen Epstein's observation that

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[17] A more detailed comparative analysis than I can provide here would clarify whether this has more to do with historical differences, differences between urban contexts (Los Angeles vs. Montréal) or substantial conceptual and interpretive differences – or all three.

the gay community "invented" safer sex (cited in Altman: 5). Citing theorist Rowan

Ireland's notion of community as a crucial intermediary between "the politics of the

everyday and the politics of the state" (160), Altman locates community as a sector

within Gramsci's notion of 'civil society' as constituting an expression of political

freedom, often inherently subversive (10). Thus, Altman explicitly anchors his

conceptions of community in a notion of agency, arguing that the emergence of

community sectors around the globe in response to AIDS is an example of a more general

process of "real development" centred on need rather than imperatives of economic

growth. Such development is accomplished through processes of what David Korten

describes as 'social learning':

Social learning cannot be mandated by the pre-emptive action of central political
authority. Nor can it be programmed by bureaucratic procedure. It is a product of
people, acting alone and in voluntary association with others, guided by their individual
critical consciousness ... Its organizational forms are found in coalitions and networks,
which become aggregated in larger social movements, driven by ideas and shared values
more than by formal structures (cited in Altman: 11).

There is a link here back to Tönnies in Altman's use of this definition, and in Altman's

overall framing of community as an expression of human agency and grassroots political

will, motivated and mobilized by ideas and values. Ultimately, although he defines

community in broad 20th century terms far beyond the framework of 19th century folk

culture, Altman still offers a view similar to Tönnies in proposing community as a source

of rooted empowerment and genuine well-being based in shared values, a organic-like

social sector remarkable in its contrast to the bureaucratic, pre-programmed procedures

and agendas of the state and private sector.

In this sense, Altman's account of community-based responses to AIDS and,

more broadly, the argument that community-based health promotion represents a

paradigm shift in the social conceptions of and responses to health and disease, constitute an important example of 20th century thought on community that, at least implicitly, has taken up and reworked some of Tönnies' basic propositions. Indeed, this is an area of inquiry that predates both the AIDS epidemic and the emergence of health promotion. A group of Québec sociologists[18] based at the *Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture* (IQRC), for example, explored the social significance of community in the 1970s and early 1980s and drew conclusions similar to but more general than those proposed by proponents of community-based health promotion. Citing the work of George Lodge, Marcel Rioux – one of the members of the IQRC -- argues that forms of self-managing, grassroots social organization and community participation were growing in importance and in political clout as a result of the social contradictions and ruptures that had led industrial societies into a state of crisis (1982: 53-54; 57).

For Rioux, these new forms of local self-management or *auto-gestion* share some of the characteristics of pre-industrial folk culture and thus in some cases could be seen as a return to earlier forms of 'organic' social organization. At the same time, they are characterized by the adoption and development of new "emancipatory practices" and forms of "popular culture"[19] that facilitate struggles against domination, exploitation and alienation and serve to contest dominant meanings and understandings of social existence set out within scholarly and mass-mediated culture. Drawing on Marxist and existentialist notions of 'praxis' as the struggle to become a "self-created subject," as well

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[18] The research team included Marcel Rioux, Jean-Pierre Dupuis, Andrée Fortin, Gabriel Gagnon and Robert Laplante.

[19] The IQRC's use of the term "popular culture" is distinct from the way it is commonly defined and understood within Anglo-American cultural studies. Within cultural studies, popular culture is seen as part and parcel with mass mediated culture. Rioux, by contrast, regards popular culture as similar to pre-industrial folk culture: cultural forms and practices that are developed and maintained outside of the arena of the mass media (1982: 48-50).

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as Bauman and Simmel's notions of 'sociability,' Rioux argues that *community* has become a crucial level of social existence, intermediating between individual and society, where praxis can flourish (55). For Rioux, the rise of community-based movements in Québec and elsewhere signals the breakdown of mass publics into a middle stratum of autonomously directed communities based in shared values or characteristics, a new social form similar to but more open and evolving than Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*. In many cases, this shift toward a community-based "neo-culture" is organized as a locally-managed self-help movement critical of the dominant culture and rejecting any reliance on the state.

For Rioux, community is also a site where researchers can undertake a promising and innovative form of "meso-sociology" (55), given that it is a site of significant agency:

... pour Marx la communauté est une médiation riche et nécessaire entre l'individu et la société ... Bauman va jusqu'à écrire que ... 'la communauté plutôt que l'humanité, fréquemment définie comme l'espèce humaine, est, conséquemment, la médiatrice et la porteuse de praxis' ... (1982: 55).

In Rioux's view, community remained a blind spot in much sociological literature while also forming an important part of a larger "néo-culture" (58) that was emerging with particular force in Québec. This new culture was seen as a critical rupture with the 'engulfing abstraction' of contemporary bureaucratic and technocratic institutions that 'serialize' individuals and demand obedience to rational norms (ibid). The level of community, and the specific efforts to engender community solidarity and development that Rioux and his colleagues studied, seemed to provide a contrast to, even a rupture with, the history of increasing alienation that characterized western, industrialized societies.

Rioux understood alienation in existentialist and critical terms as any human process or practice that dissociates phenomena that in reality are linked: most obviously, workers from the means of production, but also in a social and cultural sense, the alienation caused by the bureaucratization of everyday life, the separation and dissociation of generations, the abstraction of the concrete and the personal. Community-based movements offered a way forward, a means to combat multiple processes of domination, exploitation and alienation by re-integrating, re-concretizing and re-personalizing the disparate elements of everyday experience.

Rioux points to Québec society as a special case of this global phenomenon, a society that had tended to retain more traditional culture – in his terms, "popular culture" – than elsewhere in North America. Because Québec had retained cultural traditions of communitarianism and self-determination, Québec's new culture of social and community-based movements, emerging as a result of the contradictions and crises of industrial capitalism, was enhanced:

Tout ce passe comme si, à force d'être retardataires, certaines couches de notre société - ont tout uniment conservé à travers les générations un type de culture vers lequel se dirigeaient ceux des porteurs d'une nouvelle culture ... C'est en ce sens que nous pensons que ce "niveau populaire" peut favoriser des pratiques émancipatoires dans la mesure où il combat l'abstraction et l'uniformité de la culture scolaire et mass médiatique. Si, en effet, une 'pratique émancipatoire' vise à re-sémantiser les milieux de vie et de travail, on ne voit pas pourquoi on ne devrait pas prêter attention à ceux qui continue de l'être (59).

Thus, what had once served to stigmatize Québec society as "backward" was now the force catapulting it to an advanced state more quickly than, for example, in the U.S. Both conceptually and in terms of emerging social formations, Québec was more fully equipped to undertake dramatic and progressive social transformation.

Rioux's conception of self-managed, emancipatory praxis seems to have predicted the story of community-based HIV health promotion and, more broadly, AIDS activism. The struggle by PHAs to have an active and meaningful role in health care decision-making on both personal and strategic levels, the struggle to contest dominant scientific and mass media representations of AIDS, and the extent to which communities organized themselves to provide services from palliative care to prevention in the absence of government response, suggest the social shift to which Rioux and his IQRC colleagues were pointing. Indeed, as many AIDS activists and critical scholars have observed, the "AIDS crisis" has often seemed to be not so much the pandemic in itself, but the catastrophic inability of governments and societies to adequately and coherently respond to the pandemic. In a manner similar to Rioux, Altman clearly situates the rapid emergence of community-based responses to AIDS in terms of a rupture in the ability of established institutions to respond, portraying communities as self-organizing and self-managing sectors that are filling the gap and mapping out a new future. Compelling as this vision seems, in the next section I examine a number of critical perspectives that raise important questions regarding the claims for community that underpin the shift toward community-based health promotion. Although my focus is on conceptions of community as these pertain to gay men, I also frame the discussion in relation to more general debates regarding community and its status within contemporary society.

If community-based health promotion offers promise as a new framework for

public health and as a response to AIDS, it is not without its critics. In part, this is

probably because the term 'health promotion' actually encompasses widely varying and

at times disparate strategies, activities and orientations. Rabin and Porter, for example,

include social marketing as a "widespread orientation" within health promotion that

works alongside, rather than conflicting with or replacing, "strategies for broader social

change" (1997: 17). Altman, on the other hand situates social marketing as a minor sub-

category of AIDS prevention -- distinct from health promotion – focused on the "use of

the profit motive to increase the use of condoms" (1994: 44).

Whether or not this indicates any serious flaw in the practice or theory of health

promotion, the most fundamental critique may not be that of the paradigm of community-

based health promotion, but of the relationship between government and community

sectors. A number of scholars have argued that this relationship is not as problem-free or

enlightened as government policy documents might suggest. Cindy Patton and Edward

King, for example, provide detailed accounts of how gay and lesbian communities in the

U.S. and the UK developed highly effective prevention strategies even *before* HIV was

actually identified as the cause of AIDS and this, completely in the absence of any

official government response to the growing health crisis. Government action and

involvement was triggered not by a concern to address the ground-level AIDS crisis but

instead by the identification of HIV in 1983 and the development of an antibody test the

following year that confirmed AIDS was not, in fact, restricted to marginalized

populations such as gay men or Haitians (King, 1993: 47-50, 172-178; Patton, 1996: 10-12, 30-33). Official government involvement in AIDS education and prevention was in many cases a set-back for community-based prevention and health-promotion efforts that up to that point had seen a certain level of success. Government funding often meant that grassroots prevention activists were side-stepped in favour of professionals who often had little understanding of the minority populations most affected by the epidemic.

As in the U.S. and the UK, government response to AIDS in Canada came later than grassroots community efforts to address the crisis, and was only articulated as a coordinated national strategy in 1990 following a great deal of pressure and lobbying by activists (Rayside and Lindquist, 1992: 49-52; 76-82). The first provision of federal funding for community-based education efforts came earlier, starting in 1985, but no provisions were made for any kind of government-run public education program, "in part because health administrators believed that AIDS education would be too controversial" (79). Instead, the government provided funding to the Canadian Public Health Association and to community-based AIDS service organizations. While such funding recognized the role and expertise of these organizations, it "also allowed governments to avoid producing explicit educational materials themselves, and let some politicians continue to keep AIDS issues at arm's length" (86). Thus, despite the overall policy shift towards a community-based health promotion paradigm during the 1980s, the inclusion of community-based efforts in the government response to AIDS was not primarily an enlightened shift that challenged the status quo. Instead, it offered a useful way for a relatively conservative political establishment to keep its distance from the social controversies associated with AIDS.

Policy responses have, of course, evolved considerably since the 1980s, in Canada and elsewhere. As I discussed in the previous section, community-based activists and advocates have succeeded in securing participation in shaping public health strategies for HIV/AIDS. Community-based health promotion is now at the core of both grassroots and officially-funded responses to HIV/AIDS, both federally and in most provinces. In Québec, with a health care system that has, historically, been more decentralized and community-oriented than in other provinces, AIDS activists and community groups have faced a distinct set of challenges gaining a role in the public health response to the epidemic. In contrast to activism at the federal level, these challenges have been less oriented around struggles for community-based reform. Instead, community-based AIDS organizations have faced difficulties in gaining recognition by government and public health officials given a "continuing sense of confidence in the capacity of an ostensibly community-based health care system already in place to respond to any challenge" (Rayside and Lindquist, 1992: 73; 56).

For Séro Zéro's executive director, René Lavoie, the Québec government's slowness in adequately recognizing and partnering with the community sector has been only part of the problem. Lavoie argues that government inaction was exacerbated by the absence of a coherent gay political movement in Québec that could represent the interests and needs of the community. During the 1980s, in his account, the gay male milieu in Montréal grew most dramatically as a commercial context oriented around liberal, individualist preoccupations. Gay men did not organize as a political force articulating a coherent community agenda based on a collectively shared identity. As individuals, of course, many gay men were active in establishing and operating AIDS service

organizations (ASOs). However, there was an absence of concerted gay community organizing around AIDS despite the fact that it had become the single most important health issue for gay men. According to Lavoie, a de-politicization of gay community organizing in Québec during the 1980s led to the absence of a strongly-defined gay political movement that might have directly taken up the interests of gay men in response to AIDS. As a result, Québec ASOs emerged in something of a political vacuum vis-à-vis gay men. As a movement, the community-based response to AIDS arose without any clear anchorage in the gay milieu (1998: 348-355). This contributed to a relative lack of health promotion initiatives and services appropriate and adapted to the realities of gay men and an implicit public message that HIV was of no particular importance to gay men (356-357).

One of the outcomes, according to Lavoie, has been that homophobia and heterosexism continue to shape both the discourse and practices of the Québec AIDS movement (355-357). More starkly, he points to chronic under-funding of community-based prevention programs that specifically address the needs of gay men. Indeed, in Montréal there was no consistent and explicit effort to do prevention work by and for gay men until 1991, and between that year and 1994, one such program was funded. Moreover, with gay and bisexual men continuing to account for nearly three-quarters of new infections in Québec, only 15 % of the provincial HIV prevention budget between 1992 and 1995 went to support prevention projects in the gay community (34-342).

These discrepancies in part resulted from the gap between a "dehomosexualized" and even homophobic network of ASOs on the one hand,[20] and a relatively depoliticized amalgam of gay community organizations on the other. Efforts by Séro Zéro to address the social determinants of health as they relate to gay and bisexual men have thus been limited by the social organization of institutional and funding frameworks. Even as the language of community-based health promotion has been extensively adopted by government, these frameworks have not automatically been anchored in or driven by a clear understanding of community needs. According to one narrator, despite the existence of federal and provincial AIDS strategies, there has never been a strategic plan around AIDS on the regional level in Montréal. As a result, regional planning, where the bulk of funding decisions are made, has moved slowly, out of synch with the quickly changing reality of AIDS:

J: ... t'as tout ces chambardements structurels, bureaucratiques, qui prennent du temps, et quand t'es dans un domaine qui a relativement bougé vite en 10 ans, c'est comme la structure elle court, puis t'essaies de courir après. Donc, c'est comme un peu ça le problème.

This narrator suggests that the structures and procedures that inform government responses to HIV/AIDS have been out of synch with community-based priorities even as governments continue to set the agenda. Thus, policy and funding structures have required Séro Zéro to work within a framework of a single health issue – HIV health promotion – ironically limiting the capacity of the organization to adequately address the spectrum of health issues that underlie the risks and patterns associated with HIV transmission:

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[20] Lavoie follows Edward King (1993: 169-224) and critics such as Simon Watney and Michael Callen in arguing that public health efforts to address AIDS have been systematically 'de-gayed' since the mid 1980s, with serious implications for prevention work aimed at gay men.

J: ... j'aurais beaucoup plus de chance d'aller me chercher de bonnes subventions dans un programme beaucoup plus large en santé des populations au lieu d'être poigné dans le carcan du sida, et là, je pouvais adresser les problèmes de santé mentale, en même temps que tabagisme, en même temps que la toxicomanie, en même temps que la scolarisation, en même temps que la prévention du sida. T'as une philosophie de travailler sur des déterminants majeurs, au niveau de la santé, de problématiques sociales majeures, qui te donnent un espace plus large que juste aller dans des petits projets qui sont d'une étroiteur ... il faut que t'essaies de les vendre 'sida,' là ... c'aurait été pour moi plus intéressant d'avoir développé des programmes dans ce cadre théorique-là que dans le cadre 'promotion de la santé – sida.'

Here, the narrator draws attention to the limitations of a policy framework of health promotion as a platform for actually addressing the issues of HIV and health. The same narrator also expresses strong reservations regarding the progressive and transformative force of Montréal's gay community, particularly its capacity to respond to the health issues facing a diverse spectrum of gay-bi-tran men. Referring to studies of the prevalence of HIV transmission among different sectors of the population, he notes:

J: ... c'est des jeunes pauvres ... des jeunes qui viennent d'un milieu très populaire puis qui ont pas d'argent [qui sont les plus affectés] ... les programmes qui ont été développé dans la communauté montréalaise, ce n'est pas assez professionnel pour pouvoir soutenir ce genre de personnes là qui en a vraiment besoin. C'est plutôt du social entre jeunes, entre hommes blancs de classe moyenne qui se rencontrent pour faire du ski puis pour placoter, mais qu'il n'y a pas, aucun organisme qui a développé une compétence pour soutenir des gens qui ont des difficultés, des problèmes, et qui dépassent juste la notion de, tu sais, je vais t'écouter, on va placoter en prenant un café, là ... le Centre communautaire ... va pas vraiment vers ça tant que ça non plus ... On devrait avoir un centre communautaire gai et lesbien qui offre un multitude de services, y compris de l'écoute ou du soutien psychologique, des groupes d'entraide, des groupes d'estime de soi etc. Puis là dedans, il y a des programmations de prévention du sida. C'est un peu un non-sens comment tout s'est développé.

In terms of a gay and lesbian community movement in Montréal, there is a gap for this narrator between the promise and possibility of community organizing and much of what has thus far emerged in terms of community-based practices, institutions, and services: *C'est un peu un non-sens comment tout s'est développé.* Séro Zéro's work bears the marks of many strategic compromises in accommodating this gap. The various critiques

reviewed above relating to the complex relations between government and community

sectors -- as well as the depoliticized nature of gay community organizing in Montréal --

suggest that community has not automatically or self-evidently presented coherent,

community-based solutions for addressing health issues, as is often assumed within

health promotion discourse.

This is not simply because government healthcare bureaucracies are insensitive to

local needs and realities. How to name community, who "represents" community as

well as who falls within or outside the bounds of given communities are rarely clear-cut

for either decision-makers or for the individuals in whose name "community" is spoken.

If we take Lavoie's assessment to be true, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the

response to AIDS in Montréal has been effectively organized around a 'new' paradigm of

community-based health promotion, despite policy commitments to this effect and, no

doubt, many good intentions.

The Montréal example points to wider questions about the health promotion

paradigm and its appeal to 'community' as the foundation for a new approach to public

health. This problem is evident in a failure, in policy and in practice, to adequately

reflect upon what 'community' actually means and upon the fact that it frequently has

multiple, even contradictory meanings. In Terry Trussler and Rick Marchand's *Taking*

Care of Each Other – perhaps the definitive statement on HIV and health promotion in

Canada[21] -- the term 'community' is actually never defined despite the fact that the book

announces itself, in its title, as a guide to *community* health promotion. This is especially

odd given that the book does conspicuously define other key terms such as health, health

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[21] Published in 1997, the book was jointly sponsored by AIDS Vancouver, Health Canada and the Canadian AIDS Society as a resource guide for community-based ASOs.

promotion, vulnerability and risk. Instead, the book tends to present 'community' as problem-free and inherently positive while implicitly acknowledging that its meanings are varied. In one passage, for example, community is simultaneously associated with a "supportive environment," "people," "social networks," "supportive infrastructure," "partnership," "collaboration," and "networking" (1997: 86-87). Although these various descriptions are used, the book never deals with the difficult issues relating to what community means and the different meanings that it can have. Such a conceptual gap is also present in other important analyses: Michael Isbell (1993) presents a convincing assessment of the impact that community-based responses to HIV/AIDS and earlier forms of community health advocacy have had on traditional approaches to public health, establishing new, communitarian approaches to disease and prevention. Yet Isbell, too, conspicuously refrains from defining community even as it is central to his analysis. Dennis Altman provides a better account of the slippery meanings of community, noting that the term is "one of the most complex and imprecise in the vocabulary of social science" and can be "so all-embracing as to be largely useless" (1994: 7-8). For his part, Altman chooses to live with the imprecision of the term, arguing that its ambiguity and tension are a source of strength (9).

Other researchers have not shared Altman's optimism, suggesting that the conceptual imprecisions of community can have serious, even negative, implications. Gary Kinsman draws attention to the pitfalls of viewing community as a 'natural' phenomenon that simply emanates from a grassroots base:

it is also organized by the police, the mass media and class and State organization ... historically produced through constantly shifting struggles and relationships (1987: 185).

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Research on gay male cruising raises questions about the ways in which sexual identity is often defined according to a narrow conceptions of community, little recognizing that for men who cruise for sex, identities, communities and space are often interlinked in only loose and fluctuating ways. This is not to deny the social significance of community networks organized around sexual identities, possessing a strong territorial base. Notwithstanding, neither the patterns that characterize cruising nor the people who participate in it fit neatly within a classic 'population-institutions-territory' model of community. Indeed, what in part defines gay cruising – an activity that usually takes place in the liminal or 'no-man's' spaces unclaimed by any visible or coherent community – is a slippage of the link between populations, institutions and geographic zones such that cruising is often about escaping, rather than inhabiting, zones of community belonging (Humphreys, 1970; Woodhead, 1995; Ingram, 1997; van Lisehout, 1997; Allen, 1998).

Cindy Patton looks from a broader perspective at how struggles over the meaning and boundaries of community and citizenship have led to conflicting approaches to safe-sex education in the U.S. that in part explain why HIV transmission rates, especially among youth, have continued to climb. Patton centres her critique on the ways in which AIDS education was rendered incoherent and dangerous through its split into two mutually-exclusive and logically incompatible strategies. The first, a "population-wide" paradigm, formed the basis of an official "national pedagogy" for AIDS education. Within this strategy, prevention was framed as a process of partner selection: citizens were exhorted to carefully chose their sexual partners and avoid promiscuity. Explicit prevention information was reserved for a *second* and separate paradigm built around a

"risk-based" approach. This consisted of targeting and addressing only those people considered to be "at risk" of HIV infection, who were encouraged to adopt a "universal precaution" prevention strategy: *always* use a condom, *always* use a clean needle, *always* assume either you or your partner might be infected with the HIV virus. Risk groups were in turn confused with and collapsed into the 'communities' – gay, black, drug user – with which they were identified despite the epidemiological evidence that demonstrated specific practices, rather than membership in a particular group, were the causes of HIV infection (1996: 18-23).

One result was that 'gay community' came increasingly to be evacuated of its rich historical and political heritage, 'flattened' instead into an epidemiological category (Patton, 1990: 99). More broadly, for those at the receiving end of public health education efforts, the outcome was a great degree of incoherence and – as the title of Patton's book puts it – "fatal advice." The implications for youth were especially devastating, since as emerging "citizens" whose potential membership in one or several of the risk groups could not be admitted or accommodated within the dominant discourse, they fell under the purview of the national pedagogy and its inaccurate rhetoric of partner selection. This had especially dire implication for many young gay men, who fell into a kind of pedagogical gap: at school and at home, their potential membership in a 'risk group' went unacknowledged and unaddressed, as did the need for appropriate safer sex education. In Patton's assessment, the decline in the median age of HIV infection and rising rates of HIV transmission among younger gay men throughout the 1990s were not accidental (1996: 35-61).

Other researchers have assessed the U.S. situation somewhat differently but reached similar conclusions. Psychotherapist Walt Odets, for example, argues that the key mistake in approaches to prevention education for gay men in the U.S. was the abandonment of "primary prevention" starting in 1985 when HIV antibody testing became available. "Primary" prevention refers to prevention efforts explicitly targeting uninfected individuals with the aim of enabling them to remain uninfected. During the last half of the 1980s, such prevention efforts became increasingly taboo within the gay community because of urgent concerns to address the stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV and AIDS. Out of the need and desire to build as much community solidarity as possible, "undifferentiated" safer sex and social marketing campaigns were instead developed that targeted both HIV positive and HIV negative men with the same set of generic messages (1996: 121-125). For Odets, the appeal to an overly inclusive definition of community became largely responsible for the continuing high rates of seroconversion among gay men and the difficulty of many HIV-negative men to maintain safer sex practices. Moreover, undifferentiated prevention and an unwillingness to acknowledge and address the specific needs of HIV-negative men often served to confuse gay identity with an 'AIDS identity' that in some ways offered more status and sense of belonging than an often isolated, silenced or guilt-ridden 'negative' identity. As a result, according to Odets, many gay men began to see HIV infection as in some ways inevitable, even desirable (1995: 99-118; 1996: 125-129).

Odets' point of view has been somewhat controversial in that it challenges notions of community solidarity that have been central to HIV/AIDS activism from the beginning. Some critics have charged that Odets' analysis creates the framework for new

set of exclusions that will undermine community support for HIV-positive men. At the same time, Odets' work has had a strong influence on organizations such as Séro Zéro where, for example, a number of programs have been developed over the past several years to specifically address the realities and needs of HIV negative men. Given that Canadian responses to HIV/AIDS, both on the level of government and of community organizing, are distinct from the more politically polarized U.S. context out of which Odets writes, his work has tended to be interpreted in this country not as a threat but as a contribution highlighting important gaps in the practices of prevention work, drawing attention to the importance of including negative men and their needs within a coordinated effort.

If the political and conceptual coherence of community as a basis for policy and practice is at issue for critics such as Patton and Odets, others have raised questions about the subtle mechanisms of social regulation that may be at work within the new paradigm of public health and its emphasis on community-based education and care. A number of researchers, such as Pierre Rivard, David Woodhead and Victoria Grace, suggest that health promotion proposes a false model of empowerment. For these critics, what is labelled as 'empowerment' has in fact involved a shift in the locus of social regulation and surveillance from centralized, public health authorities to dispersed community-based organizations who, within the new paradigm, become responsible for policing individual and collective behaviour.

Social theorist Pierre Rivard raises a larger spectre, applying Foucault's framework to the politics of HIV prevention work:

... le scénario de responsabilisation individuelle ou de Safe Sex s'accommode très bien de la rationalité du pouvoir moderne qui est aussi exercé par ceux qui le subissent. Il s'agit

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d'une vaste entreprise de normalisation ayant pour objectif une surveillance permanente invisible et non identifiable (les campagnes de prévention cherchant à créer chez les sujets une surveillance intériorisée), produisant par et chez le sujet une vérité agissant de façon durable et stratégique sur ses comportements et son identité ... (1992: 139).

Here, Rivard points to Foucault's aims in tracing continuities between historical and contemporary discourses and practices of "self-care" so as to highlight the extent to which individuals are recruited to manage their own actions and behaviour.

From such a perspective, domination is not limited to the operation of external social forces upon the individual but instead extends to "technologies of the self," the self-administered discourses and procedures of which Séro Zéro's workshops and other activities could be considered an example:

... technologies of the self ... permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct , and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault, 1988: 18).

This idea of "interiorized surveillance" can also be extended to the community level. In critically questioning his own work in frontline HIV prevention, for example, David Woodhead argues that the recruitment of community volunteers to do the work of health promotion as part of official public health strategies constitutes a new, "sophisticated and effective disciplining force" that is all the more invisible in its power effects because it is carried out with the cooperation of and in the name of specific communities (1995: 242). Woodhead suggests frontline, community-based HIV prevention programs aimed at gay men may be a new form of "surveillance" enacted by gay communities on themselves:

By training-up an army of cognisant gay men who have the brief to educate others, a situation is arguably being pioneered where a knowledgeable elite is interrupting the practices of those constituted as profane, assuming what is best for them, assuming where they can be found, and assuming they will comply. The volunteer ... becomes a sophisticated and effective disciplining force. Trading on his status as gay, he is able to

dispense unthreateningly the regulatory aspirations of medico-moral discourses in constituted material gay space (1995: 242).

In Woodhead's view, health promotion, even if couched in progressive language, uses community-based volunteers to extend the deployment of dispersed power through new forms of surveillance, to some extent invisible because they involve recruiting individuals and communities to "police" themselves and each other.

More abstractly, Sarah Nettleton cites the work of David Armstrong, who situates health promotion within a broader shift to a "new diagram of power" (cited in Nettleton, 1995: 248). In Armstrong's account, institutional control of health care has shifted from what Foucault describes as 'panoptic power' to what Armstrong refers to as 'dispensary power.' As "an interface between the hospital and the community," dispensaries first arose at the end of the 19th century in the treatment of tuberculosis (ibid.). Armstrong proposes that dispensaries have given rise in the 20th century to "the contemporary invention and importance of community care" (cited in Nettleton, op cit). This is a marked reverse-take on more conventional descriptions of community-based health promotion as a form of community 'empowerment.' Armstrong's analysis resituates community-based care initiatives such as health promotion as new forms of medical surveillance that, far from constituting a bottom-up redistribution of power, in general serve the interests of institutionalized medicine. This is precisely the image that Woodhead brings to mind in his description of gay HIV health promotion workers:

Gay male practitioners (HIV prevention workers, political activists and researchers), armed with the good intentions of empowering, are complicit in sophisticated and subtle modes of self-surveillance (1995: 243).

This suspicion regarding health promotion's claims to 'empower' communities is also found in the work of Victoria Grace. Usually presented as a process of putting

people or communities 'in control' of the determinants of health, Grace argues that 'community empowerment' tends instead to constitute a form of 'pseudo participation' (1991: 333). In her research on health promotion work in New Zealand, Grace observes that the language used by health promotion workers positions communities, contradictorily, as both being 'in control' and being controlled. Needs that apparently originate from the community are actually constructed through the surveys and assessments conducted by health promotion workers (1991: 339-341). Health promotion, for Grace, draws on the discourse and practices of planning and management, and closely parallels marketing in constructing and seeking to manage a 'health consumer' (334-335). For Grace, the alignment between health promotion and marketing is highly problematic: like marketing, health promotion mobilizes a false assumption that it is the 'consumer' who is in control, thereby obscuring the ways in which health promotion initiatives ultimately serve institutional and governmental rather than community-based agendas. In her view, the embrace of the health promotion model by governments has dissipated efforts by community health and women's health movements originating in the 1960s and 1970s to secure more accountability for and participation in the decision-making that affects individual and community-health (329; 341). Health promotion, in short, has gradually been 'captured' and transformed by health care bureaucracies such that its practice is now at odds with its rhetoric.

Stevenson and Burke make a similar case, arguing that health promotion shares the progressive discourse but not the social base of early, community health and social-change movements. Confused with grassroots struggles for reproductive rights, gay rights, or patient-centered PHA care and services, health promotion in their view is

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incorrectly understood as a movement when it is in fact a "bureaucratic tendency" originating in the state that has been incorporated into existing government frameworks for health care. As a result, health promotion is marked by a number of strong contradictions, one of the most prominent being a contradictory pressure that health promotion workers face to ground their work both in positivist, quantifiable data -- as part of government bureaucracy, they are under obligation to provide "data of use to policy makers" -- and in "community-based definitions of need" (1992: S47-S48).

For Stevenson and Burke, this is an "incoherent combination" and the promise of health promotion is further weakened because one of its principal constructs, "community empowerment," relies on a vague, weak conceptualization of community. Community, they argue, tends to be reductively understood as a "sub-system supporting personal health and empowerment." This supports a series of subsequent reductions of social relations to relations within community, and of community relations in turn to "proximate personal exchanges" (S48-S49). For Stevenson and Burke, this is problematic because it evacuates any critical analysis of the social or of the state from the concept of community. With the implicit reduction of social relations and 'community' to 'healthy interpersonal exchange,' structural relations within communities, among different communities, or between communities and the state, are lost to view. Such flaws in the health promotion model are further exacerbated by a tendency to see empowerment as a "plentiful & politically neutral 'commodity'" readily available to communities. In fact, community involvement in health promotion is often minimal and tends to be approached as a "methodological" rather than political issue, limited to including community

representatives on boards of directors or involving community members in research design and execution (S50).

What many of the critics of health promotion suggest, then, is that the appeal to community as the new foundation for health and well-being often skirts the complex questions and issues that the term 'community' actually raises. In particular, 'community' fails to provide the stable conceptual foundation that advocates of health promotion have often assumed it does. Moreover, the 'innocence' of community-based health initiatives – the assumption that they are inherently empowering and unproblematically disconnected from networks of institutional power or social regulation – is deeply suspect for a number of observers.

What these various critical perspectives suggest is that predominant conceptions – going back in sociology to Tönnies' ideal of stable social bonding grounded in an equally stable shared identity – do not readily describe complex, contemporary experiences of community. In the eyes of some, community operates more as a bureaucratic category within contemporary societies than a benign social force, serving to organize and manage everyday life in the interest of large institutional agendas and objectives. Social philosophers Eleanor Godway and Geraldine Finn, for example, rather dramatically observe:

... community itself is in danger of becoming an identity to be managed and secured: a master word, a dead idol to which the living are sacrificed in the logic of its management (1994: 3).

In the same vein, theorist Donna Jowett calls into question 'normative' and instrumental discourses of community that automatically assumes it is good and that advocate its cultivation as a means to achieve positive, democratic social change (1994: 11-12; 15).

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Activist George Smith makes a similar argument, suggesting that community can in many instances best be described as a "conceptual device" used by bureaucracies to coordinate, manage and control local groups and contexts (1990: 639-640). Such critiques constitute a refusal of the apparent innocence of the term "community." For Jowett, the ultimate irony may be that the "unchosen proximity" of community has become oppressive rather than liberatory (1994: 13-16), clearly a contrast to much of the discourse of community-based health promotion and to activists such as Altman (1994), who appeal to community organizing as a process of inherently progressive social emancipation.

If any conclusion can be drawn from these various critiques of the concept of community and the issues it raises, it is perhaps that one cannot easily adopt community as a category of social analysis or social action. Gadway and Finn approach this issue using the tools of post-structuralism, mobilizing Gayatri Spivak's notion of 'catachresis'[22] to point to the way in which community lacks any stable ontology or referent (see also Woodhead, 1995: 237). The meanings of community are clearly multiple and, to some extent, conflicting. The parameters, characteristics, and social relations of community are neither universally consistent nor self evident. This has serious implications for a model of prevention and/or health promotion that invokes 'community' as the privileged site for agency and social change.

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[22] Paraphrasing Spivak, Godway and Finn explain: "Catachresis means there is no literal referent for a particular word; that its definition comes apart, as it were, as soon as we begin to articulate it" (1994: 2; see also Spivak, 1990: 104-105).

This is not to say that community is an untenable concept and should be abandoned. As Woodhead summarizes, drawing on the work of Spivak, Diana Fuss and Iris Marion Young:[23]

On the one hand, community is a device that homogenizes, suppresses internal differences, creates exclusionary boundaries and functions as a dynamo of separatism. On the other, community is a site of resistances, of strategic essentialism and strategic difference ... a shelter, a site of shared injustice, a symbolic representation (237).

The issue, then is not so much whether but *how* the idea of community might be recuperated, and it is this issue to which I will now turn my attention. In the next chapter. I begin an examination of some alternative resources for thinking about community and its relation to well-being and health.

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[23] For a more detailed discussion of feminist strategies for accommodating essentialism and difference, see Gayatri Spivak (1998) *In Other Worlds: Essays in cultural politics* (New York: Routledge); Diana Fuss (1989), *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, nature and difference* (New York: Routledge); and Iris Marion Young (1990), "The Ideal of community and the politics of difference," in L. Nicholson (ed.) *Feminism / Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge).

3   The contrasting dimensions of community

In the previous chapter, I presented contrasting views of community-based health

promotion as, on the one hand, a spontaneously organizing source of social change and

emancipation, and on the other, as a disciplinary technology of "interiorised surveillance"

or new system of management based on a consumerist model. These contrasting views

demonstrate that one cannot easily look to community as a frame of reference for social

analysis or a collective subject of social action given its multiple, even conflicting

meanings. The difficulties in defining community and the challenges posed by its

conceptual and lived limitations have shaped how governments, activists and community

based organizations have responded to the AIDS pandemic.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which community is both a problem and

part of people's worlds. I review a range of critical perspectives on community wherein

community itself is understood to be a source of problems. I use this debate to assess the

value of the concept of community as a conceptual anchor for HIV health promotion.

One possible conclusion to this debate, in the view of theorists such as Iris Marion

Young, is that community should be abandoned as a frame of reference in favour of a

politics of difference. However, I also review the evidence that suggests community is an

important factor for well-being and health that, even as its significance within

contemporary social contexts remains unclear, cannot easily be abandoned. In response

to an apparent paradox in contemporary social conditions in many places – that there is both too much and too little community – I develop an interdisciplinary comparison of theories of community, including perspectives from communications and cultural studies, that brings into focus two contrasting dimensions of community, 'conversant' and 'rational.' Conversant community is community considered in its ethical dimensions as dialogical action rather than ontologically as an 'entity': community as a form of social action, a conversing, collective subject. Clearly a metaphysical conception of community, this definition is supported by the work of scholars who have argued that conversational communication builds significant social networks.

Rational community is community considered in its empirical, ontological and representational dimensions as a set of rational social relations, a collective subject as it has been spoken, that community borne of cognition, reason and representation. This dimension of community, while important, has also tended to overshadow the conversant dimension: within the health promotion paradigm, a rational conception of community in terms of populations, identity, territory, institutions etc. tends to be the frame of reference. In the gay liberation arch-narrative of 'coming out,' the ostensibly emancipatory 'gay community' is frequently indistinguishable from the rationalized commodification of community exemplified in the commercial success of massive Pride celebrations in major cities across the globe. Such rationalized relations of community now predominate as a locus for agency (and commercial gain) in relation to minority sexual identities, with sometimes contradictory implications for anyone unsuspectingly caught in a "lonely crowd" of contemporary, postmodern gay-bi-tran festivity.

These contrasting dimensions of community – because they are coexistent rather than mutually exclusive – help to explain conflicting analyses of community across the literature I review in this chapter: on the one hand, critiques of the overbearing institutionalization and commodification of communities such as those of sexual minorities, and on the other the deep concern for the absence of communities of conversation, dialogic communities where people find agency and support in their interactions with others. In later chapters, I investigate ways in which the work of Séro Zéro articulates a critique of rationalized forms of gay-bi-tran community in Montréal, even as the organization retains community as a frame of reference for its work by understanding community in conversant terms that emphasize the agency of dialogic relations and action.

Problems with community

The material I examined in the previous chapter raises important questions regarding the adequacy of "community" as a conceptual anchor for health promotion. In this section, I extend this analysis by reviewing critical literature that presents community, in particular gay community, itself as a source of problems. A range of research has questioned the notion that communities are spontaneously self-organizing sources of well-being, and a number of authors share the notion that community is as much a source of problems as solutions. For Iris Marion Young, these arguments lead to the conclusion that community should be abandoned as a frame of reference for social analysis and action in favour of a politics of difference.

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Some of the earliest examples of such a focus on the problems of community can be found in literature on the sociology of deviance, where homosexual communities were first analyzed in the 1950s and 1960s. John Gagnon and William Simon provide perhaps the classic perspective on homosexual men within the sociology of deviance framework, arguing that homosexuality is distinct from more individualistic forms of "pathological deviance" in part because it generates a quasi-supportive social structure: the "homosexual community" (1967: 9). A perspective rooted in Durkheim's and Freud's theories of 'improper socialization' to social norms, Gagnon and Simon see homosexuality (like prostitution) as giving rise to a unique social world of sub-cultural social networks outside the mainstream. Although they strongly reject explanations of deviance that see it as something "special or bizarre," Gagnon and Simon's concerns are nonetheless consistent with social attitudes at the time, focused on how the "system effects" of this community served to recruit and entrap individuals within a deviant lifestyle. Homosexual communities are thus implicitly portrayed as an enslaving social structure that comes to shape the social and sexual life of gay men so as to "maintain the deviant career" (11).

One of the earliest[24] ethnographic accounts of a homosexual community was also strongly informed by deviance theory. Two researchers based at McGill University in the early 1950s, Maurice Leznoff[25] and William Westley, offer a portrait of gay community in "Easton"[26] as a profoundly 'anomic' social formation, describing their project as an

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[24] Evelyn Hooker started her work at around the same time (1967: 169).

[25] The study came out of Leznoff's 1954 MA thesis, "The Homosexual in Urban Society." For accounts of Leznoff's thesis project and resulting analysis – somewhat different from the conclusions that Leznoff and Westley later co-published – see Allen, 1998: 84-87; Ross Higgins, "Montréal 1953," *Pink Ink* V(1: Dec-Jan 1984): 31-32; Kinsman, 1987: 116-119. Westley was Leznoff's advisor.

[26] Leznoff and Westley refer to Montréal, the site of the study, as "Easton."

effort to document and understand the "complex structure of concealed social relations" resulting from punishment and social condemnation of homosexuals (1967: 185). The study is thus informed by Merton's theories of deviance and Durkheim's notion of 'anomie,' portraying homosexual communities as the pathological outcome of weak integration with the mainstream social order. The sixty gay men Leznoff and Westley interviewed are framed as anomic deviants, plagued in their weakness by the anxieties of unfulfilled aspirations. The result is an unflattering portrayal of community life whose basis of cohesion is the "antagonistic cooperation" that arises from the frequently frustrated pursuit of sex:

> ... it is the casual and promiscuous sexual contacts between the members of different categories of evasion (i.e. the secret and the overt) which weld the city's homosexuals into a community (1967: 196).

Clearly, we are very far from Tönnies notion of *Gemeinschaft*, the organic self-expression of community as a warm, supportive social and cultural system. But if conceptions of homosexuality as deviance have been extensively challenged by gay liberation and queer activism, it is interesting to find echoes of the deviance perspective within the canons of gay literature. Andrew Holleran's classic 1970s gay novel, *Dancer from the Dance*, for example, portrays the fate of an archetypical gay New Yorker, "Malone," who leads a life of perpetual cruising and partying. Over the course of the novel, the city's gay subculture takes over Malone's life to such an extent that it ultimately seems to consume him. Although we never learn for sure whether Malone drowns in the sea off Fire Island or dies in a fire at the Baths, Holleran's portrait is at once frightening, romantic and contentious: the tragic self-absorption of an out-of-control gay clone. Although Holleran's novel is considered one of the best portraits of

the post-Stonewall, pre-AIDS gay milieu, the story of Malone's death also evokes Durkheim's theory of 'anomic suicide,'[27] where an undisciplined social context leads to self-destructive despair. Holleran explores Malone's decline and fall under a sympathetic eye without really condemning it, yet the novel reiterates a view of gay subculture similar to the one found in classic, mid-century sociologies of deviance: the strong 'system effects' of the subculture entrap individuals and determine their fate. The very title of the book, taken from Yeats, underscores this idea: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance" – suggesting Malone, the dancer, absorbed by the "dance" of gay subculture.

Perhaps more striking than the parallels between Holleran's novel and early sociologies of homosexual community is the more recent and controversial analysis of gay culture offered by gay journalist and prevention activist Gabriel Rotello. Rotello's 1997 book *Sexual Ecology* ignited strong debate in the U.S. in questioning many of the reigning ideas within HIV prevention, such as the promotion of risk-reduction measures like condom use (1997: 106-113). For Rotello, gay prevention activists have turned a blind eye to "ecological" factors within gay culture that have fueled the epidemic: the predominance of repeated sexual encounters with multiple partners and the tendency of subcultural norms to support and promote sexual excess (57-64). Because sexual libertarianism has been so dominant within the gay movement, he suggests, educators and prevention workers have been reluctant to acknowledge and address the ways in which 'liberated' gay culture and community contexts promote unhealthy sexual

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[27] "According to Durkheim, a society that lacks clear-cut norms to govern people's aspirations and moral conduct is characterized by *anomie*, which means "lack of rules" or "normlessness." ... In anomic suicide ... group life fails to provide ... controlling standards of behavior ... life may be unbearable to the anomic suicide because of inadequate discipline." Broom & Selznick (1977), *Sociology* (New York: Harper & Row): 47.

overindulgence. Of course, Rotello's objectives are very different than those of

sociologists in the 1950s; in lieu of pathologizing gay culture and community outright,

he argues for a transition to what he calls a "sustainable gay culture" that creates a space

for both sex and health (244-254). Yet it is interesting that his fundamental arguments

are somewhat similar to deviance theory. Although he stops short of reducing HIV

transmission to questions of culture, he is anxious to question a culture that, in his view,

helps to propagate disease and whose 'system effects' exert enormous influence over the

individual gay men who inhabit it:

> Multiple concurrent partners, versatile anal sex, core group behavior centered in
> commercial sex establishments, widespread recreational drug abuse, repeated waves of
> STDs and constant intake of antibiotics, sexual tourism and travel ... our collective gay
> response to AIDS has never included a sober evaluation of the ways the sexual culture of
> the seventies produced the AIDS epidemic ... Instead, we have sought to minimize or
> even deny these factors, partly in order to preserve as much as possible the gains of the
> gay sexual revolution ... (89-90).

Rotello's views have fueled what Lisa Duggan calls a 'crisis of representation'

within the gay political movement in New York City, a breakdown in the capacity for

'community' to serve as an anchor for social action that has threatened possibilities for a

common voice or activist leadership to represent 'community' for sexual minorities in a

clear or coherent way (1996: xi). By the mid-1990s, gay and lesbian activists in New

York had split over how to 'reinvent' prevention in the face of continuing, high rates of

HIV transmission. The split saw some activists such as Rotello ally themselves with the

city's department of health in taking stringent measures against commercial sex

establishments, measures that were strongly opposed by radical activists who saw this as

an unholy alliance between conservative gays and a repressive city government. The

consequences of this alliance were most visibly embodied in the recruitment of a new

kind of volunteer prevention worker: flashlight-wielding safer sex 'monitors' who began

patrolling sex clubs to ensure patrons were observing city ordinances regulating the sex

behaviour permitted inside.[28]

The dramatic divisions among NYC prevention activists raises questions about

conceptions of community -- such as Altman's and Rioux's -- that present community as

a self-organizing and unproblematic expression of grassroots interests and needs.

Although it is important to note that Rotello organizes his analysis around a notion of

'gay culture' rather than 'community,' his arguments have clearly had an impact on

community organizing and current understandings of community in New York and

elsewhere. Indeed, what is at stake in the conflicts between Rotello and his opponents is

not simply a common vision of how to approach HIV prevention but the very capacity for

community organizing to provide for the well-being of the collectivity on whose behalf

activism of one form or another is being undertaken. If, as David Woodhead notes:

The imagined space *par excellence* in relation to the liberationist aspirations of much gay
and lesbian political mobilization is that of the *community* ... (1995: 236).

the question of whether or not 'community' can continue to provide a ground or focus

from which to realize collective aspirations has come under increasing scrutiny.

Critiques of the way gay culture has been transformed into a 'consumer lifestyle'

have also extended debate over the nature and social meaning of gay identity and

community, with some commentators arguing that urban gay communities have been

absorbed into and distorted by the apparatus of consumer capitalism such that their

capacity to operate as a coherent social and political movement have become eroded.

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[28] For accounts of these events and issues, see Jay Blotcher (1996), "Sex Club Owners: The ... Buck Stops
Here," in E. G. Colter et al (eds.) *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*
(Boston: South End Press): 25-44; Ephen Glenn Colter, "Discernibly Turgid: Safer Sex & Public
Policy," ibid.: 141-166.

The proliferation of categories of sexual minority identity and the rise of deconstructive, combative forms of "queer" activism in the early 1990s have also fueled ongoing criticism of the tendency to regard "gay" identity as self evident, 'natural' and all-encompassing (Seidman, 1993: 127-135). Skeptical about the capacity of identity categories such as "gay" to provide the basis for more 'authentic,' non market-driven forms of community, such critiques often suggest that the early promises of gay liberation have been betrayed as gay oppositional movements have been absorbed into the mainstream – with consumer culture now setting the agenda for what counts and *who* counts as gay (Quilley, 1997; Hennessy, 1995; Binnie, 1995).

A sense that significant problems are emerging *from* these commodified forms of the gay community have also catalyzed high-profile debates in Québec about the status of gay community and the impact of existing community forms on people's well-being and health. In the spring of 2000, for example, the community-based organization Gaie Écoute, which runs a telephone hotline primarily serving gay men, selected TV personality Daniel Pinard as its celebrity spokesperson. The announcement came not long after Pinard's first public disclosure that he is gay, one that gained significant public attention across Québec when Pinard spoke publicly about his experiences of homophobia. As the Gaie Écoute spokesperson, Pinard also caused a reaction in the gay media as a result of statements he made at a press conference to the effect that he believed that there was no gay community and did not identify with what passed for gay community in Montréal. Public debate on the relation between gay identity and community was extended when André Boisclair, at the time Québec's minister of social solidarity, also publicly disclosed that he was gay in an interview published in *Voir*

magazine, while at the same time distancing himself both from the gay village and gay

pride celebrations. In the summer of 2000, openly gay Bloc québécois MP Réal Ménard

contributed to the debate with a strong public statement published in several Québec

daily newspapers critiquing the "boy-toy" objectification of the body commonly

celebrated in the gay media, gay social and commercial venues and the gay circuit party

culture, arguing that the high-profile gay 'community' of the Village and the 'pink

economy' had important alienating and exclusionary aspects rarely acknowledged in the

popular discourse of Pride and its celebratory gay-bi-tran culture.[29]

These examples, and more recently, the resignation of the president of the Centre

communautaire des gais et lesbiennes de Montréal in February 2001 in the face of a

relative lack of interest in the Centre both on the part of government and within the gay

milieu,[30] indicate serious failures of and challenges to the capacity for the concept of

community to offer a viable frame of reference for the diversity of gay-bi-tran people, at

least in the Québec context. Questions regarding the assumed inclusivity of gay

community raised by Pinard, Boisclair and Ménard's controversial public declarations

recall Iris Marion Young's critical analysis of community-based politics, which serves as

the basis for her formulation of a "politics of difference" that she argues is a more viable

form of social mobilization and social relations for people who live in urban contexts

than somewhat antiquated paradigms of idealized, "anarchistic, participatory democratic

communitarianism" (1990: 301). At the time of publication, Young's critique provided

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[29] For accounts of these events, see Carle Bernier-Genest (2000), "Toujours plus!: 600,000 personnes au défilé de la Fierté," Le magazine RG 216 (sep.), p. 11; Jean-Serge Turcot (2000), "Loin d'être un ghetto, le Village gai est un formidable outil de libération," Le magazine RG 217 (oct.), pp. 18-19; Yvan Petitclerc (2000), "L'homme-objet, au-delà des théories: les dessous du «boy toy»," Le magazine RG 217 (oct.), pp. 15-16.

[30] See "Au Centre communautaire gai: Serge Tremblay démissionne," Le magazine RG 222 (mars 2001), p. 20.

a refreshing, post-structuralist tonic against forms of community-based theory and practice that in some cases had become stagnant and orthodox. Her analysis came at around the same time as a short-lived but vibrant "Queer Nation" rebellion in the early 1990s against the middle-class, white mainstreaming of gay-lesbian communities and a binary separatism of gay and lesbian identities that had become predominant. Young argues that the idea of community exhibits a "totalizing impulse" that denies difference (1990: 305; 302), calling for an abandonment of communitarian politics in favour of a politics of difference that better recognizes the "positive experience of the city" (317). Instead of community as a political ideal, then, Young identifies the ideal of a politics of difference to be "the unoppressive city," defined in the first instance by one central norm, an "openness to unassimilated otherness" (319).

Young's critique of community is clearly distinct from the sociological critiques of homosexual community considered at the beginning of this section, yet all of the critical perspectives I have reviewed here raise a common question regarding the assumptions in the health promotion paradigm that community provides a stable foundation for the improvement of people's well-being and health. If Young's focus is politics rather than health, her argument and some of the others considered here pose an important challenge nonetheless for HIV prevention work in complex urban settings where the intimacy of face-to-face community may be oppressive rather than liberatory, or where with equally devastating impact, it may be minimal or absent.

If the analysis presented in the previous section highlighted critical perspectives that in some way put into question the predominance of community as a frame of reference for social analysis and action, this section considers the ways in which an absence of community and persistent patterns of social isolation are also a significant dimension of the contemporary social world. A number of commentators have pointed to the absence or apparent "impossibility" of community as an important social phenomenon, with some arguing that contemporary societies are marked by significant structural conditions that promote isolation, making the concern for possibilities of community all the more important.

For example, a number of scholars have brought into focus the ways in which issues of social isolation shape the lives of many gay men, their accounts of the social experience of being gay often bringing forward haunting images of solitude. In recounting the memories evoked by childhood photographs, for example, Simon Watney brings to life the specificity of gay experiences of marginality:

... gay children tend not infrequently to lead lives of intense privacy, knowing far more than they can ever reveal, ill at ease with other children, who always find us out ... We are there, and we are not there (1991: 30).

Similarly, gay psychotherapist Walt Odets writes extensively about the devastating loneliness and isolation experienced by many HIV-negative gay men (1995: 123-144). Such work raises important questions about the tendency to understand gay identity and experience primarily in terms of community, when the *absence* – even the impossibility – of community may be equally important as social phenomena. It also links questions of

gay identity and community to a broader body of 20th century literature that has examined

social patterns of chronic alienation as a fundamental characteristic of modern societies.

For example, Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*, a mid-century study of

Mexican culture and identity, draws on an eclectic range of social and philosophical

thought to argue that post-colonial Mexican experiences of modernity are marked by

structural conditions that promote solitude rather than community[31] (Santí, 1993: 13-16;

Paz, 1993: 154-155). Paz offers an original perspective,[32] on problems of community and

its seeming absence[33] in 20th century social existence as a way of illuminating Mexican

history and culture. First published in 1950, *Labyrinth* unleashed shock waves of

controversy throughout Latin America for its unexpected and often provocative

juxtapositions of myth, history and cultural analysis that Enrico Mario Santí, borrowing

from James Clifford, describes as "ethnographic surrealism" (1993: 102). Paz draws on

existentialist philosophy and Callois' and Bataille's sociology of the sacred to describe a

modern disconnection from 'resources' for communion and community interaction that

were previously made available through ritual forms of cultural expression (Paz, 1993:

112-113; Santí, 1993: 100-101). In Paz's account, revolution, myth and fiesta all have

offered temporary experiences of community in contemporary Mexico without

overcoming the "promiscuous solitude" that characterizes the modern condition as most

Mexicans live it (Paz, 1993: 352; Santí, 1993: 91-92). I am struck by the extent to which

Paz's work is pertinent to contemporary issues of gay identity and community. For

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[31] As Enrico Santí explains, Paz's work draws together influences from Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Heidegger, but Paz chooses the term "solitude" to refer to a modern condition of alienation and inauthenticity.

[32] Santí observes that the publication of *Labyrinth of Solitude* coincided with that of two other classics on 20th century existential alienation, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and Karen Horney's *Neurosis and Human Growth: the struggle toward self-realization*, both published in 1950 (1993: 17).

[33] Karim Benammar has also described such a paradox: the closest we can come to community at present may be a "passionate" sense of its absence (1994: 40-41).

example, Paz's discussion of the Fiesta and its role within Mexican culture speaks to the rise of Gay Pride celebrations as a central feature of contemporary gay and lesbian communities: both are intense, temporary, corporeal manifestations of community and communion – masses of people partying in the streets to celebrate a common cultural heritage that then dissipate – without resolving – what Paz sees as fundamental conditions of chronic solitude.

An Australian community health worker with the "Inside Out" project, a peer education and participatory community development program for gay youth that incorporates but is not solely focused on HIV prevention, makes similar observations regarding the absence of community for young gay men and its potential implications for health:

Heterosexual young people may hold many things in common which assist them in defining themselves. They may define their sense of 'community' through common peer groups, class, their employment, religious or spiritual belief, family, behaviour and lifestyle, secure accommodation or supportive welfare and social institutions. Such criteria can be painfully absent for young gay men – and this can increase the traumas they may experience when making the transition to adulthood.
    Such feelings may put young gay men at increased risk of contracting HIV. It is important to note, however, that traumas of isolation and denial have a greater impact on the well-being of such young men than the distress associated with accepting a gay or bisexual identity (Knapman, 1995: 27).

The perspective of this health promotion worker, along with Paz' analysis of solitude and the views of Odets and Watney, are in distinct contrast to the views proposed by critics of community such as Iris Marion Young who question the relevance of 'community' for contemporary, urban people. Whatever its limitations, for this community worker, 'community' retains a specific importance for people who find themselves excluded from social resources for identification and networking. The gay community, however difficult it has become to define, remains a crucial, perhaps indispensable part of the

vocabulary of social and cultural mobilization around sexuality, including those around sexual health. Yet the extent to which an ongoing critique of community runs parallel to concern over its apparent absence or imminent demise suggests a tension in contemporary social conditions. How can contemporary society be characterized simultaneously by both too much and too little community?

To answer this question, I develop in the remainder of this chapter a theory of contrasting dimensions of community – 'conversant' and 'rational' – that coexist as distinct modalities of analysis and agency. In later chapters, I will examine how community-based HIV health promotion work, such as that of Séro Zéro, grapples with these two dimensions, attempting to address imbalances between them.

The link between community and conversation

In this section, I develop an interdisciplinary comparison of theories from diverse areas of scholarship that establish strong conceptual links between conversation and community. This scholarship provides initial evidence to ground the theory of conversant community I develop in the conclusion to this chapter (where I draw primarily from the work of Alphonso Lingis, Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin). The common interest in social and communitarian interconnections wrought by speech that is shared by the broad range of literature reviewed here suggests the pertinence of the concept of conversant community for understanding contemporary problems and

questions of community, and for understanding the emphasis on talk in work of Séro Zéro (as I strive to do in later chapters). The theory that communication – and especially face-to-face talk – constitutes community or renders it possible has been developed by scholars in varied disciplines over a number of decades. Although my intention here is not to present an exhaustive review of all such scholarship, the work I look at here can be grouped broadly into four perspectives: 1) cybernetic; 2) polemological; 3) socio-cultural; and 4) socio-discursive.

As an example of the cybernetic perspective, linguist Deborah Tannen has closely analyzed the network-building characteristics of conversation, offering an account of how talk serves to generate interpersonal relationships. Tannen's work draws attention to the ways in which speaking encounters have meaning outside of or beyond the meanings or social information exchanged through speech. One of Tannen's central arguments is that ordinary conversation is composed of "involvement strategies" – patterns of talk such as repetition and the use of reported speech ("constructed dialogue") and imagery – that "reflect and simultaneously create interpersonal involvement" (1989: 2). Tannen thus offers a view of talk as a kind of productive activity, arguing that conversation – when it succeeds in creating common meanings and a shared sense of social coherence – works to produce an "internal emotional connection" that binds people to one another. The sense of involvement generated by talk is, in her words, an "achievement" of conversational interaction. Drawing on Bateson's concept of a communicative feedback-loop, she notes that conversation is in part composed of meta-messages of rapport that generate a sense among speakers that they inhabit the "same world of discourse."

Elsewhere, Tannen examines the way in which there is no guarantee the

relationship or community-building potential of conversation will be realized in any

given conversation. In her popular self-help book *You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen

explores the intersection between talk and gender as a way of understanding what

happens "when ways of talking cause trouble" (1990: 77). The book attributes much of

the miscommunication that goes on between men and women to gender differences in

conversational style. For women, she argues, the predominant style is "rapport-talk";

women tend to use conversation as a way to negotiate relationships and establish a sense

of interpersonal connection. Men, on the other had, tend to approach conversation as

"report-talk," using it as a means to negotiate status and exhibit skill or knowledge. As a

self-help writer, Tannen's concern is not so much to assess the superiority of one style

over the other, but to increase awareness of these distinct conversational styles and enable

men and women to communicate more easily and effectively with one another. In her

scholarly work, however, Tannen has tended to focus on the characteristics and potential

of rapport-talk and the ways in which conversation generates involvement and

interpersonal connection.

In the somewhat different register of cultural studies, Michel de Certeau analyzes

conversation in a similar fashion as one of the procedures or arts of the everyday, offering

a theory of face-to-face talk as one of the everyday practices of popular culture

consumption that has productive and creative force. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de

Certeau offers an account in some ways similar to Tannen's of how conversation operates

as a productive activity, one that generates and reworks social relations, describing

conversation as

... a provisional and collective effect of competence in the art of manipulating 'commonplaces' and the inevitability of events in such a way as to make them 'habitable' (1984: xxii).

As an example of a much more explicitly political perspective, however, his "polemological analysis" of culture – the view that popular culture articulates social struggles – presents a less naturalistic but more aggressive theory than Tannen's somewhat individualistic self-help framework. He analyzes conversation as one of the "procedures of everyday creativity" and "arts of the everyday" along with such things as cooking, reading, and dwelling, that comprise "ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong," ways in which members of society use "popular procedures" to resist "the mute processes that organize the establishment of socio-economic order" (xvii - xiv).

De Certeau, then, offers a political theory of conversation as a potentially powerful and transgressive act. Socio-cultural perspectives are distinct in striving less for an account of spoken language's relation to political struggle than for a grander explanation of the place of speech in the broad historical development of systems of knowledge and communication. Nonetheless, they share a common interest with cybernetic and polemological perspectives in the ways conversational speech builds and supports social and cultural relationships. There are number of important examples within the socio-cultural perspective. If Tönnies was among the first to observe that language is the "organ of understanding" through which the common will of *Gemeinschaft* develops (1955: 54), communications scholar James Carey looks at the relation between communication and community more closely, drawing on the philosophy of John Dewey and the work of Harold Innis, to analyze "different and contradictory notions of the practice of communication" (1992: 6) and take note of the

tendency to overlook the role of communication in producing and maintaining social cohesion:

If we follow Dewey, it will occur to us that problems of communication are linked to problems of community, to problems surrounding the kinds of communities we create and in which we live (33).

The central contrast on which Carey focuses is that between a "transmission" and a "ritual" view of communication. The former understands communication in terms of "the transmission of messages over distance for the purposes of control" (15). By contrast, communication's "ritual dimension" is evident in the etymological roots it shares with words such as "communion," "commonness," and "community" (18). For Carey, the ritual view is that which sees:

... the original or highest manifestation of communication not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action (18-19).

Carey emphasizes that the two dimensions of communication are not mutually exclusive, but coexist simultaneously. At the same time, he notes the extent to which the transmission view has come to predominate both within American communications scholarship and more generally, within mainstream culture. For Carey, this raises the potential for serious problems. In contemporary societies "obsessed with a transmission view" of communication, he argues, the ritual dimension is become increasingly ignored and undervalued, contributing to the "chaos of modern culture" (33) and to deepening problems with community – its fragility, an increasing sense of its absence.

This analysis is similar to that of Walter Ong in his landmark comparison of orality and literacy. Like Carey, Ong analyzes the relationship between communication and community. Ong's focus of interest is on oral cultures that do not possess and have

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never adopted a system of writing, and he also draws attention to the extent to which, historically and cross-culturally, "language is so overwhelmingly oral" (7). Drawing on Malinowski's observation that among oral people, "language is a mode of action," Ong brings to light the way in which verbal performance in oral cultures serves to accomplish not simply the exchange of information, but also activities and courses of social action (44; 68-69). Systems of knowledge within oral cultures are "aggregative" rather than analytic, built up a through formulaic, patterned and mnemonic oral discourse, embedded in narratives with close reference to lived experience (42-43).

Using a framework similar to Carey's, Ong critiques an overemphasis within contemporary literate societies on "chirographic," media models of communication that suggest "communication is a pipeline transfer of units of material called 'information' from one place to another" (176). For Ong, like Carey, this obscures a strong linkage between communication and community, a linkage he largely attributes to the intersubjective, communal power of orality: "Oral communication unites people in groups" (69). Orality draws attention to the way in which:

Communication is intersubjective. The media model is not ... There is no adequate model in the physical universe for this operation of consciousness, which is distinctively human and which signals the capacity of human beings to form true communities where person shares with person, interiorly, intersubjectively (177).

Such immediate, lived experiences of community stand in contrasts to the impact of literacy on social organization and experience. Although literacy fosters large-scale social unity at an abstract level and makes available a "vast complex of powers," Ong brings into focus the ways in which it also fractures a certain potential for the communities or "communal structures" that spoken language makes possible (12; 178-179).

Socio-discursive perspectives, the last category of literature linking community

and conversation that I review here, are similar to socio-cultural perspectives in their

interest in the social implications of systems of knowledge and communication, but

distinct in their more direct engagement with issues of and struggles for discursive and

social change. Ross Higgins' research on the role post-war Montréal gay bars played in

the eventual development of a strong, shared sense of gay identity and community in the

city over several decades shares a common interest with Ong in how spoken language

makes community possible. Whereas Ong maps broad historical processes of social and

technological change, however, Higgins explores this interest specifically in relation to

struggles for gay rights and visibility. Through an ethnographic and historical study of

the city's 1950s bar scene, Higgins adapts the concept of "cognitive schema" to

examines bars as sites of sociability and "discursive spaces" (104):

Ce concept [schéma cognitif] est emprunté à la psychologie cognitive pour désigner les
connaissances partagées dans le cadre de conversations ainsi que les formes discursives et
les genres conversationnels qui caractérise le monde gai (125, note 3).

For Higgins, gay bars fostered a sense of belonging in that they gave access to a

"cognitive universe" through which identity and community took shape: conversations,

vocabulary, topics of discussion, codes and conventions, styles of humour (116-117).

Although bars were not the only places where gay men interacted, they were especially

important in that they moved people beyond private networks or cliques into a shared

cultural space:

... les bars ont permis de dépasser les réseaux privés, de créer une culture spécifique
partagée ... ils fournissaient aux gais des lieux de rencontre pour l'élaboration des aspects
symboliques de la vie gaie, que ce soit sur les plans du vocabulaire adopté, des
conventions discursives ou des thématiques privilégiées ... l'effet cumulatif de ces gestes
a été la construction d'une communauté gaie prête à appuyer les actions politiques qui

s'amorceront à Montréal à la fin des années 1960 et qui prendront leur essor dans la décennie suivante (124).

To grossly simplify, Higgins points to "bar chat" as one precursor to larger scale, more explicit formations of gay community that rapidly emerged during the 1970s. His analysis recalls Ong's emphasis on the ways in which oral communication unites people into groups. Strictly defined, 1950s gay bar culture should not be referred to as oral (Ong reserves the term for cultures that have never used writing systems). Nonetheless, policing and social intolerance at the time limited the possibilities for interaction and expression largely to non-written forms – conversation, body language, style, shared patterns of consumption etc. – at least compared to today. Indeed, there are similarities between Higgins' conclusions and Ong's observation that systems of knowledge within oral cultures are "aggregative" rather than analytic, built up a through formulaic discourse and embedded in narratives. Higgins suggests that contemporary gay communities emerged somewhat in this fashion, the 'cumulative effect' of bar interaction, largely conversational.

Although her focus is on writing rather than orality, Dorrine Kondo evokes a conception similar to Higgins' that cumulative discursive practices can contribute to the emergence of and strengthening of marginal communities. Kondo investigates realist representations of 'home' in Asian-American literature, rejecting simplistic critiques that such representations are politically conservative. Kondo's interest lies in the way home and community -- enmeshed in power relations and contradictions -- are always constructed, provisional and problematic yet at the same time have strong connotations of safety and communal support. In the context of potentially hostile social environments,

Kondo notes, marginalized people "have a continuing need to create homes for ourselves" (97; 116).

In summarizing this tension between the problems of 'home' and its necessity, Kondo cites Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty's feminist and political definition of community, which underscores the extent to which communities are *produced* in relation to specific locations in space and history:

Community, then, is the product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities; and it is the product of interpretation, interpretation based on an attention to history (cited in Kondo, 1996: 97).

Referring to a specific production of the play *Doughball*, Kondo draws on this insight to demonstrate some of the ways in which the piece and its performance, while naturalistic, were also "politically effective" in strengthening Asian American identity and community:

... Perry Miyake's *Doughball* draws our attention to the constructedness of "home," identity and culture, underlining the necessity for people on the margins to create, produce, and assert our identities ... However problematic the notion of home, whatever differences within are effaced, and however provisional that home may be ... we must continue to write ourselves into existence (116).

Kondo's analysis of the play and the context of its production and reception among Asian Americans in Los Angeles recalls Higgins' view of interaction in gay bars, even though the sites, practices and histories in question are evidently quite distinct. To borrow from Kondo's expression, Higgins work suggests not so much to the necessity as the capacity for communities to 'talk ourselves into existence.'

Despite their differences, the various perspectives on the link between community and conversational language examined above are perhaps best understood as complementary rather than competing views. Together, they suggest the need to formulate a 'conversant' conception of community, a conception that I develop as a conclusion to this chapter. My analysis owes a clear debt to James Carey, whose concept of two, contrasting dimensions of communication suggested to me the possibility of related, contrasting dimensions of community. As I will discuss shortly, this is indeed an argument that has been developed within the phenomenological tradition by Alphonso Lingis. I have extended Lingis' argument to postulate 'rational' and 'conversant' as contrasting dimensions of community, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin's rich analyses of speech communication for a set of fundamental ideas – with connections to each of the four perspectives reviewed in the previous section – about how spoken language and interaction among people constitute social networks and offer foundations for ethics and a sense of self. Bringing into focus contrasting dimensions of community – rational and conversant – leads me to argue in later chapters that the work of Séro Zéro is shaped by a critique of rational community accompanied by an emphasis on the conversant dimensions of community. In this way, Séro Zéro's work responds to the tensions related to community in the health promotion paradigm, retaining community as a frame of reference by understanding it 'conversantly.'

'Rational community' is a conception of community proposed by philosopher Alphonso Lingis in *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* to refer to

community produced through rational discourse, collective works and information

exchange that produce things in common and communal identity (1994: 9-10). For

Lingis:

We rationalists perceive the reality of being members of a community in the reality of works undertaken and realized; we perceive the community itself as a work ... to build community would mean to collaborate in industry which organizes the division of labor and to participate in the elaboration of a political structure ... to collaborate with others to build up public works and communications (1994: 5).

Lingis observes that this conception of community leads to a distinct definition of

communication as

the exchange of information ... abstract entities, idealized signs of idealized referents ... communication is extracting the message from irrelevant and conflicting signals – noise (12).

Rational community, to extend Lingis' analysis, might be seen to encompass the

empirical, ontological and representational dimensions of community, understood in

terms of population-identity-territory-institutions. The community-based activist and

health promotion paradigms reviewed in chapter 2, in viewing community as self-

organizing civil sector engaged in what Marcel Rioux describes as emancipatory practice,

tend to define community in rational terms, locating agency in the growth and

development of self-identified populations and institutions, usually with defined

territorial boundaries, through a process of social learning. While Lingis does not deny

the significant social transformations and power made available by rational discourse in

the way it transforms and anchors community as a collective enterprise (5), he also draws

attention to the limitations of communication and community exclusively conceived in

terms of producing something in common, pointing to the importance of "...exposing

oneself to the one with whom one has nothing in common" (10). Lingis thus theorizes an

alternative form of communication that is "other than and prior to our communication as representatives of rational community," a communication that is linked to our need "to appeal to others to make ourselves at home" (18). This is a form of communication, he notes, that is not accounted for in western philosophies of language, yet is nonetheless fundamental in that it enters us into an alternate form of community distinct from rational community – a form Lingis enigmatically refers to as "the other community." For Lingis, the other community is one which

demands that the one who has his own communal identity, who [rationally] produces his own nature, expose himself to one with whom he has nothing in common, the stranger ... (10).

The 'other community' thus refers to relationships among those who share nothing in common aside from their frailty as living beings, a crucial and primary form of interconnection among people that is perhaps increasingly overshadowed, obscured, even hindered by the more exclusionary and impersonal forms of community fostered by western scientific rationalism. Against this trend, Lingis calls for a renewed understanding of the possibilities of community that originates, in the first instance, outside of the purview of identity, geography or institutions. Critiquing the ways in which rational communities are based on the quest for universal, perfect communication – the elimination of noise, the exclusion of empirical inconsistencies – Lingis refers to research within psychology and phenomenology that proposes human perception operates in a fundamental way as the active separation of figure from background. Perception, in other words, must take place against a ground, a "dimension of support." Drawing together these theories, Lingis argues that background, empirical "noise" and the radically other are critical both to communication and community in ways that have long

gone unacknowledged within western philosophy. To the extent that human perception operates in a fundamental way as the active separation of figure from background, Lingis argues that there is an important way in which human communication is fundamentally "an appeal to another for what is not available to oneself" (1994: 87). He notes: "One enters into conversation in order to become another for the other" (88).

Communication is thus more than simply "equivalent exchanges of abstract formulations" – it also involves establishing the "ground" of noise against which such exchanges of abstract information can even take place as acts of perception. The 'other community,' for Lingis, is the community of background noise, conversational interaction and encounters among people that surrounds the purified information exchange of rational communities. People turn to each other not simply to satisfy needs or exchange information, but for support and responsiveness: other people ground us, and this grounding is in fact crucial to making the rationalized activities of daily life possible and bearable.

Lingis' analysis of community in terms of its 'rational' and 'other' dimensions is strongly influenced by phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas points to the importance of understanding human relationships (of people with each other, of people with the world) in terms of an ethics of "proximity." Two of the most important instances of proximity, in his framework, are speaking and sex, language and eroticism both creating the possibility for entering into relations with another person, transcending my subjectivity by placing me in contact with another who is not reducible to my cognition (Hand, 1989: 5). For Levinas, the encounter and relationships between speaking subjects is an encounter of two "singularities," a proximity of fundamentally

different and irreconcilable selves who have meaning for one another prior to anything

being said, thought or known. Arguing against Heidegger's phenomenology wherein the

other with whom I speak is reduced to a phenomenon or object of my cognition, Levinas

insists it is erroneous to understand the act of speech among people in this way. The other

as I come into contact with him or her is not identical to the other as I conceive of him or

her: if this were so, there would be no way to transcend my own subjectivity (Peperzak,

1997: 65).

Levinas' work has been received as a ground-breaking critique of totalization

within the western philosophical tradition,[34] wherein Levinas defines totality as one's

consciousness, the ego or way in which one inhabits the world. In western philosophy,

Levinas' critique goes, this totality has become the measure for the truth and meaning of

the universe even though it is fundamentally untruthful and reductive to view the

meaning and extent of others and of the universe as co-incident and equivalent to the

representation and understanding one has of these in one's consciousness. In response to

this error in judgment, Levinas calls for an understanding of one's relation to others in

terms of "infinity" rather than totality – infinity pointing to the way in which the other is

ungraspable, incomprehensible, non-reducible to cognition, a relation to the other that for

Levinas is fundamentally ethical and religious (Peperzak, 1997: 68-71; Hand, 1989: 3:

6).

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[34]Adriaan Peperzak notes that Levinas is credited with introducing phenomenology to France in the 1930s. Peperzak describes Levinas style as "postmodern, post-phenomenological and post-Heideggerian," noting that his work was seminal for Ricoeur, Derrida, Kristeva and others. Levinas' key philosophical move was to critique the ontological preoccupations of phenomenology, offering instead a "trans-phenomenology" focused on how the other is revealed to me, which for Levinas must start with an ethical rather than ontological description. Peperzak points to the strong influence of Judaic and Talmudic traditions in Levinas' work (Levinas was a noted Talmudic scholar) and the ways in which his thought was shaped by the experiences of the Holocaust and questions about the extent to which philosophical wisdom, post-Holocaust, was still possible (Peperzak, 1996: vi-vii).

Proximity, for Levinas, is the 'contentlessness' of speaking just prior to or regardless of what is said, a relation that communicates a fundamental linkage or bond, a fundamental 'responsibility' to others, "an utterance of the contact with no other content" (Levinas, 1987: 121). The first dimension of speaking, proximity, is the encounter of two "absolute singularities" that has importance simply because people are saying something and not so much because of what is actually being said (Lingis, 1994: 109; 122-123). Notably, linguist Mikhail Bakhtin develops a very similar conception of speaking as an initially contentless encounter between two fundamentally singular speaking subjects.

Bakhtin's interest in the social characteristics of speech communication leads him to an analysis of "speech genres," which he depicts as contentless generic forms of speaking that generate social bonds prior to and regardless of how they are actually filled with words. Bakhtin's analysis of the genres of "speech communion" (1986: 62) takes exception to a predominant view of *"parole,"* following de Saussure, as "a purely individual act." Such a view proposes that specific utterances are "subject only to the individual will of the speaker." For Bakhtin, this conventional view of parole lacks a social dimension, portraying the speaker as a free and disconnected agent who simply strings together linguistic forms out of the available resources – *langue* – of the language system.

This is a false view of how speech communication actually takes place, given that speech is governed by diverse, socially-constituted genres of speech communication, ranging from the single-word rejoinder to the novel (1986: 81-82). In Bakhtin's view, such genres shape speech communication in a fundamental way: "we cast our speech in

definitive generic forms, sometimes rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones ..." (78). Parole, then, is not simply an individualistic act, the exercise of the speaker's free will in using a particular language system. Speech communication is always-already informed by social context, social system, and history as these have given rise to generic speech forms that individuals adopt and adapt for specific utterances: "We do not string words together smoothly and we do not proceed from word to word: rather, it is as though we fill in the whole with the necessary words" (86, note "h").

Both Levinas and Bakhtin, then, provide strikingly similar accounts of speech communication and its social significance that speak to the often imperceptible power of the conversant dimension of community, a power evoked by many of the theorists I have reviewed in this chapter. The similarities in the concepts of these various scholars – their common concern for the alternate, grounding form of conversational or spoken community that coexists alongside rational forms of community – suggest that conversant community may be an important frame of reference for health promotion. Across the work of Levinas, Bakhtin, Tannen, Carey, Ong, Higgins and others, the community of conversational interaction is evoked as a significant form of social action. Perhaps Levinas encapsulates this thought in arguing that *being* unavoidably gives rise to solitude: "... one can exchange everything between beings except existing" (1987b: 42). For Levinas, solitude is a fundamental category of being because being is "absolutely intransitive." To conceive of overcoming solitude involves looking for an event beyond or outside of being, ontology or cognition such as the proximity of speech and touch through which people transcend subjectivity (1989: 149).

The "transcendence of words," as Levinas so eloquently puts it, is the conversant community evoked by the various commentators I have reviewed in the preceding pages. It is community considered in its ethical dimension as dialogical action rather than ontologically and rationally as a "entity." Conversant community refers to community formed by speech as a conversing, collective subject. This dimension of community shares a common resonance across diverse scholarship as a characteristic of conversational communication that builds often significant social and cultural networks, constituting dialogic communities wherein people sometimes find an important measure of agency and grounding from which to approach their lives. Conversant community does not exist in opposition to rational community, though there are evident tensions between the two dimensions that I explore further in upcoming chapters.

The theories presented here provide a way of understanding how contemporary social conditions can be marked, at once, by both over-emphasis on *and* absences of community – where most often it is conversant community that is relatively absent yet compellingly important. They suggest that, while rational or idealized forms of community, as critiqued by Iris Marion Young and others, warrant significant questioning, conversant community may in another sense be indispensable both to immediate concerns such as HIV prevention and health promotion, or more grandly to Young's ideal of the "unoppressive city." My analysis of Séro Zéro, which I discuss in relation to my methodology in the next chapter, proposes that the work of the organization is informed by a critique of rationalized forms of gay community that define community exclusively in terms of shared identity, territory and institutions. At the same time, in response to this critique, Séro Zéro's work has been increasingly shaped by a

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conversant understanding of community focused on the ways in which, to borrow from

Levinas, a "transcendence of words" – however tiny or temporary – can be a crucial form

of social interconnection, understanding and action.

G: ... Donc, ah, c'est quoi ta question? Excuse-moi, Thomas.

T: C'était, um, quel est le défi à laquelle on fait face par rapport au résistance au changement dans ...

G: Ok, ok. Bien, je pense que le défi ... on a plein de choses encore à régler, ok, et aujourd'hui la personne se retrouve dans une situation de vie qui n'est pas toujours propice à, à être bien dans sa peau puis à se protéger puis à être conscient puis aller modifier ses comportements ... la pauvreté, une estime de soi qui est, ah, "loser", tu sais. "Je ne mettrai pas de condom parce que je vais perdre ma baise. Ah, si je parle de ça, je ne suis pas habitué de parler de ça donc je n'en parle pas. Puis je ne le sortirai pas, fait que si l'autre ne le sort pas, on laisse faire, puis de toute façon, rendu là, moi, j'ai plus ce minding là, tu sais, de, mon, mon bien-être global ... tu sais. C'est mon bien-être pour les 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 minutes qui viennent, ok." Donc, là, on a un relapse. Je le comprends, le relapse. Mais, on peut-tu en parler du relapse, ok? ... Moi, je trouve qu'on aurait une conversation sans micro, là, puis tu me dirais des choses, tu sais. ... Mais, on peut-tu au moins parler de ça? Moi, mon but dans les parcs, c'est ça. Ah, on peut-tu au moins juste parler? On peut-tu juste ouvrir ça, ok? Moi, je pense que la modification des comportements, là, les résistances au changement, ah, tout ça. ça se fait au départ par l'expression de tout ça. Genre, on peut-tu parler de ça, ok.

T: Et comment est-ce que ç'a fonctionné comme stratégie, trouves-tu?

G: Ça n'a pas toujours marché ... J'ai essayé plein, plein, plein, plein, plein d'affaires, tu sais, toujours avec le souci de ne pas aller envahir .... une fois que mon ABC est fait, j'essayais des affaires. "Ça te tentes-tu qu'on va parler de ça? Tantôt, tu m'as dit ça, c'est quoi tu voulais dire?" ... Donc, friendly. Friendly, mais rigoureux pareil. ... Tu ne pourras pas parler de température ou de ta mère, etc. sans qu'on ait au moins parlé un petit peu de mes affaires, tu sais. ... "Moi, je m'intéresse à toi, je veux que tu t'intéresses à moi, parce que c'est pas G, G tout nu, là, c'est G de Séro Zéro, tu sais. Donc c'est un gars qui travaille avec Séro Zéro. On peut-tu parler de ça? Ça te tentes-tu? Qu'est-que t'as à dire là-dessus? Qu'est-ce que t'as déjà entendu?" Tu sais, là, il y toutes sortes de stratégies là pour finalement arriver là, tu sais. "Les autres. Parle-moi des autres, si tu ne veux pas parler de toi, tu sais ..."

I have cited this passage, taken from my interview with the coordinator of a summer-long prevention project undertaken by Séro Zéro in Montréal's public parks, as an example of the methodology I have used to explore the understandings of community in Séro Zéro's work – and the responses of the people who contributed to my research. What fascinates me in this example are the multiple layers of conversational discourse that often stood out for me as I participated in and documented the work of this organization. Thus, on one level there is the conversational dimension of the interview itself: my questions, the narrator's replies. This includes the narrator's acknowledgement that this is a certain *type* of conversation, a tape-recorded and transcribed interview, and that under other conditions the conversation might be different: *Moi, je trouve qu'on aurait une conversation sans micro, là, puis tu me dirais des choses...*

At another level, there is an account of the strategies this narrator has used in doing frontline prevention work with gay and bisexual men in public parks (I discuss this project in more detail in chapter 7), strategies that centre on talk: *Mais, on peut-tu au moins parler de ça? Moi, mon but dans les parcs, c'est ça.* The narrator does not so much recount actual conversations as portray, in hypothetical fashion, the kinds of conversation he endeavoured to stimulate, recognizing at the same time that this approach, like any, has limitations: *Ça n'a pas toujours marché.* At the same time, he situates this 'conversational work' in the context of wider social conditions and issues: poverty, low self-esteem, a "*situation de vie*" that is outside of the control of individual people and does not lend itself to adopting and maintaining safer sex practices. This life situation is itself marked by a specific orientation to talk. Thus, the narrator highlights

and typifies situations where talk is at once crucial, difficult and, more often that not, absent: *Je ne suis pas habitué de parler de ça donc je n'en parle pas.* As a strategy for prevention work, talk for this narrator is both deeply implicated in a complex set of social problems, and a starting point for change.

The narrator's focus on talk as an end unto itself points to ways in which Séro Zéro's prevention work in parks departs from a conventional information-delivery conception of health education as discussed in chapter 2. With conversation as the focus, the narrator identifies *talk* as one of the means of prevention, proposing it as a vital – if frequently absent – tool for negotiating the consistent practice of safer sex. This is an example of a health promotion strategy of empowerment: the central problem shifts from message-delivery to one of how to enable and encourage talk, identified as one means for people to exercise more control over the factors and risks that determine their health and well-being. More fundamentally, the absence of talk suggests to this narrator a community that is not inherently supportive -- even an absence of community. He gives a sense that this absence has a great deal to do with health and well-being. Talk, for him, raises a set of tensions and at the same time suggest strategies for addressing these contradictions. In later chapters, I look more closely at how this constitutes a 'conversant' understanding of community that informs Séro Zéro's work and comparable HIV health promotion work undertaken elsewhere.

Before getting to this analysis and interpretation, I review in this chapter how I have formulated my object of study and research methodology, situating my method in relation to recent conceptual and methodological debates within feminist, post-colonial and queer theory as well as cultural studies. I define my project using the framework

provided by Robert E. Stake (1994) as an "intrinsic" case study focused on analyzing the discourse, practices and – to borrow from Elspeth Probyn – the "individuated knowledge and experience" of various "locales" in which the work of one community-based organization takes place. As Probyn frames it, these locales are settings, such as Séro Zéro's outreach work in public parks, where active subjects "[piece] together different signs" to produce "new (and sometimes unsanctioned) meanings" (Probyn, 1990: 182; 185). I have used ethnographic methods at several research sites to investigate this case, gathering a corpus of materials that, despite some limitations, provides a viable basis for my analysis. My particular interest has been in the understandings of community that inform Séro Zéro's work. Working as a volunteer at Séro Zéro while using this methodology has provided a relevant, if complicated, vantage point for understanding some ways in which people *said* to belong to a community actually define and understand community.

The case of volunteer health promotion work

Victoria Grace's research on health promotion workers in New Zealand, which I outlined in chapter 2, offers an example of research on health promotion work comparable to mine. Rather than focusing on the people at the receiving end of health promotion efforts – and taking the nature and characteristics of the actual work of health promotion for granted in the process – Grace interviews health promotion workers in order to do a 'lexicological' analysis of the work and its social implications (1991: 333).

The analysis permits her to bring into focus implicit yet striking links between health promotion and contemporary discourses of marketing and management (334-339). For Grace, the question of how to build better health promotion messages or practices becomes secondary to critically understanding the discursive construction of such work and how it operates to serve specific political and institutional agendas that do not automatically align with community needs and interests.

Similarly, in this project I have deliberately bracketed reception analysis – questions having to do with what people at the receiving end of HIV health promotion efforts make of this work, whether it is effective, etc., largely because including such analysis would have been too ambitious for the resources at my disposal, but also because doing so has allowed me to illuminate issues and conceptual tensions which tend to be overlooked when one conceptually models prevention work in classic health education terms as an information-delivery process. As suggested by the title of this dissertation, I have deliberately used the term HIV health promotion *work*, rather than other possible terms such as 'practice,' to underscore how the organization's efforts encompass both theory and practice. I look at documents produced by Séro Zéro and other organizations as examples of the 'theory' of health promotion work, as well as examining practices of frontline prevention and street-level intervention undertaken by the organization.

My object of study, then, is the case of HIV health promotion work at Séro Zéro, focused on a social analysis of the organization's discourse and practices and some of the story this tells about Séro Zéro. As such, my project can be understood within Robert Stake's framework as an "intrinsic case study." Stake notes that the designation of a research project as a case study is not a question of method, as is sometimes assumed, but

of the researcher's choice of object; a variety of quantitative or qualitative methods, including ethnography, can be used to study a case (Stake, 1994: 236). Regardless of method, however, a case study focuses on a "functioning specific" – an integrated or bounded system"—while contributing to the conceptual production of this system. The vast majority of case studies are "intrinsic," seeking to better understand a particular case such that it "may reveal its story" (236-237). The "functioning specific" in the case of my project is health promotion work at Séro Zéro and my participation in this work as a volunteer.

Stake asserts that the point of an intrinsic case study is usually to reflect on human experience rather than to build theory, emphasizing the extent to which, in so doing, researchers actively *represent* the case, bringing to bear and developing an issue through the case and presenting an interpretation (1994: 240-241). As Stake summarizes:

The case is expected to be something that functions, that operates: the study is the observation of operations. There is something to be described and interpreted. The conception of most naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological case studies emphasize objective description and personalistic interpretation, a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena and empathetic representations of local settings – all blending ... within a constructivist epistemology (242).

Stake thus breaks the process of research and representation for such analysis into a number of key steps: bounding the case and conceptualizing the object of study; selecting research questions, issues, or themes; seeking patterns of data with which to develop issues; triangulating key observations; selecting possible interpretations; and eventually developing assertions or generalizations (244). In the remaining sections of this chapter, I use Stake's "critical path" as a reference point for outlining the way I have undertaken this case study.

In this section, I review how I have bounded the case of HIV health promotion work at Séro Zéro in relation to my research methods. I start with an overview of the organizational context of which Séro Zéro is a part and that constitutes the backdrop for my research setting. I then describe how I undertook an ethnography of the work of Séro Zéro by participating in the organization's activities as a volunteer. I look at both the advantages and limitations of doing research this way, and also situate my method in relation to critical debates on ethnographic methods within feminist, post-colonialist and queer theory as well as cultural studies. I bring into focus a shared conception that the language of local settings work to produce 'the everyday,' a conception that motivates my research, analysis and interpretations.

The broad organizational settings in which Séro Zéro's work takes place must be understood in terms of a distinct history of community-based organizing specific to Québec. Montréal counts not less that 15 community-based AIDS service organizations (ASOs) as well as a number of foundations and hospices. These offer a wide range of programs and services such as emergency assistance, food banks, PHA support groups, counselling, home care, advocacy and so on. While some have a general mandate to serve the population at large, other were founded by and for specific groups living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Only a few focus on prevention work as their primary mandate. Séro Zéro is the only organization established by and for gay-bi-tran men with a specific mandate to do HIV prevention and health promotion work in the gay milieu (Lavoie, 1998: 351-353).

Action Séro Zéro was started in 1990 as a sub-committee of the now defunct C-Sam (Comité Sida-AIDS Montréal), an organization that, at the time, was the largest and most broad-based ASO in Montréal. The aim of this committee was to address a serious lack of prevention efforts focused on the issues and realities facing gay and bisexual men: neither the existing context of gay community organizing nor the ASO movement had been adequately addressing the prevention needs of these groups despite the fact that, year after year, gay and bisexual men made up three quarters of all new HIV infections in Québec. As Lavoie explains it, the strong gay political movement that had emerged in Québec in the mid 1970s had become fragmented and depoliticized during the 1980s just as the AIDS crisis began to build. Ironically, there was an exponential growth of gay community groups and organizations at this time but most avoided politics and instead focused psycho-social support or leisure activities – sports, culture, social networking etc. – and were oriented around specific groups such as youth, students or gay fathers (350). Despite the fact that so many gay men were directly affected by HIV/AIDS, the existing gay community sector in Montréal did not rally around this issue during the 1980s and early 1990s.[35] In this context of depoliticized and fragmented gay community organizing, Montréal AIDS services organizations (ASOs) emerged in the 1980s more or less independently from the gay community. Although many gay men played a leading role in establishing ASOs and in the struggle to catalyze an adequate social and political response to AIDS, Lavoie argues that the absence of a strong gay political movement

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[35] Indeed, Séro Zéro has frequently grappled the indifference both of gay activists and gay community groups and associations to health and HIV-related issues. One of the organization's first initiatives was an outreach program aimed at all gay community groups in the city in 1995. Out of the 36 organizations that were contacted, only 5 accepted to work with Séro Zéro to offer workshops or information sessions to their members (Action Séro Zéro, 1996: 11-13).

organized around the crisis led to the gradual "de-homosexualization" of AIDS and to

persistent homophobia – at times shockingly explicit – with the ASO movement (350).

As a C-Sam sub-committee, the purpose of Séro Zéro was to address this

situation. The committee drew together representatives from gay community

organizations and the public health sector, who began to develop and deliver prevention

services and programs that specifically addressed the needs of gay and bisexual men.[36]

When C-Sam collapsed in 1994 in the wake of a major fraud scandal, Action Séro Zéro

went on to become an autonomous organization with its own board of directors, funding,

staff and network of volunteers.

Lavoie's history suggests that the emergence of Séro Zéro in Québec stands in

contrast to a trajectory of community-based HIV/AIDS organizing typical in most

English-speaking countries in the west. Cindy Patton, for example, has critically

analyzed a shift from activism to "volunteerism" that she argues became characteristic of

American AIDS organizations as they transformed into professionally staffed and funded

organizations from the mid-1980s onwards. The shift, in her words, "... diffused the

political power of community organizing," moving the focus of community organizations

away from grassroots critiques of sexism, racism, homophobia and the unequal

distribution of resources toward a relatively non-political and non-critical altruism. The

professionalization of ASOs fueled a process of "organizational amnesia" such that

original grassroots struggles "were left to atrophy" (1989: 121-122). Dennis Altman

draws similar conclusions regarding Australia. Over the course of the 1980s, in his

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[36] For a detailed history of the emergence of Séro Zéro, see Ken Morrison (1991), "Séro Zéro: L'histoire des interventions en milieu gai montréalais de 1985 à nos jours," in Michael Pollak et al (eds.) *Homosexualité et sida: Actes du colloque international* (Paris: Cahiers Gai-Kitsch-Camp / Université 4): 132-141. Cited in Lavoie (1998): 359.

account, volunteer activists were largely displaced by professionals in the development of AIDS policy and programs, and volunteers were shifted to a support role in the delivery of services. This effectively replicated a tradition of middle-class volunteerism in some ways specific to wealthy, English-speaking countries, one that in the eyes of some critics simply bolsters the status quo (1994: 22-23; 160).

At the same time, in the global context, Altman points to the emergence of diverse kinds of grassroots organizing in response to AIDS that in many cases has led to important innovations to the classic, 'altruistic' Anglo-American model of volunteerism; in India, for example, some organizations have paid their volunteers. Thus there is no universal trajectory that all ASOs and grassroots responses to AIDS have followed although there are many shared characteristics. Séro Zéro, for instance, is in some respects a classic example of the professionalization that Patton critiques: the evolution from a largely volunteer sub-committee mobilized around an immediate need for prevention efforts in the gay milieu to an incorporated organization with a professional staff and corps of volunteers to support the delivery of services. In Lavoie's estimation, however, there was a vacuum in terms of activism when Séro Zéro was created, and there had been little coherent grassroots struggle for gay-oriented prevention in Montréal during the 1980s. This is a different history than the one Patton recounts, one of gay activists in the U.S. who took a leading role in the 'invention' of safe sex even before HIV had actually been identified, who early on developed effective forms of street-level education and intervention, and who were frequently side-stepped from 1985 onward as professional AIDS organizations took shape and developed significant operating budgets.

By contrast, emerging from the wreckage of C-sam – one such 'professionalized' organization – Séro Zéro's focus and its key challenge has in many respects been to construct a more grassroots, community-centric base for its work and to undertake lobbying and activism based on the problems, needs and concerns of the community milieu. Obviously, this is not the stuff of classic, angry AIDS activism. But while formally and professionally organized, Séro Zéro makes an effort to operate – often in the face of community indifference -- as an open forum in which anyone, potentially, can have a voice and a role. One of the tools available to solicit such participation is volunteerism. In some ways, my experience of becoming a volunteer at Séro Zéro felt like participating in a difficult process of re-activation and re-politicization – far from the non-critical process of co-optation, depoliticization and "organizational amnesia" that Patton depicts.

This is not to say that the form of volunteering I participated in at *Séro Zéro* offers some 'pure' way to kick-start and channel grassroots community participation through an organizational structure in order to support social change and enhance social justice. Volunteering is inherently linked to structures and patterns of privilege and exclusion. Not everyone can afford – or would choose -- to become a volunteer, and the existence of volunteering does not automatically guarantee that community interests are being served. In my case, given my research objectives, volunteering offered a privileged opportunity to have contact with a wide range of people, to hear their stories, to learn what they think, to gain academic credentials and so on. That said, the overall profile of volunteers at Séro Zéro does not match Patton's stereotype of the altruistic, middle-class volunteer -- well-heeled, middle class gay men, lesbians and straight women who can,

because of their stable lives, dedicate time to helping the 'less fortunate.' I have found myself working alongside men and women with varied socio-economic backgrounds, life situations and motivations for getting involved.

At the beginning of this project, I was interested in comparatively examining some of the social controversy surrounding safer sex education (for example, I did some preliminary experiments at 'undercover' ethnography, focused on a right-wing anti-safe-sex movement).[37] I had planned to do field work in a number of settings (various community organizations, schools, government agencies) both to look at how prevention work was done and how these efforts were affected by social controversy, but I quickly realized this would not be feasible given the limited resources I had available. The recognition that ethnographic methods are extremely labour-intensive and time consuming led me to focus on one site, a community-based organization. I decided to apply to become a volunteer at Séro Zéro, responding to an ad in *Fugues*, Montréal's most widely read gay monthly. I attended a screening interview with Séro Zéro's volunteer coordinator shortly thereafter, where I explained my interest in doing frontline prevention work and also presented my research project and my interest in doing ethnographic research at the organization. Some weeks later, in several different meetings with Séro Zéro's executive director, staff members and board of directors, I formally presented the outline for my project (see Appendix 1).

I soon became aware that a number of researchers work with Séro Zéro on an ongoing basis and several well-elaborated and well-funded research projects were in

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[37] This work was done during the Human Life International conference held in Montréal in April 19-23, 1995.

progress.[38] Compared to these projects, my approach had a lower profile. Whereas other researchers engaged with the organization primarily as an academic or 'expert' – and this is likely necessary to complete the projects they are doing – in wearing the 'hat' of a volunteer, I downplayed this primary identity as a researcher. This was intentional in that I wanted to follow rather than lead, letting the activities, the setting and the concerns of Séro Zéro shape my project in the first instance. This did create difficulties: inevitably, Séro Zéro staff compared me with other researchers. Most staff are quite familiar with social scientific research methods, protocols, and the role of research within the field of public health. At Séro Zéro, most have participated in and contributed to a variety of formal, university-based research projects. In comparison to more conventional methods such as questionnaires, surveys, and quantitative analysis – tools that connote 'research' – the methods and aims of my project have tended to appear vague and the process rather slow-moving.

This has posed problems in terms of maintaining my credibility as a researcher. The issue of credibility was compounded by the fact that during the course of the project, I began working for Glaxo Wellcome, one of the principle pharmaceutical companies involved in the development and commercialization of anti-HIV drug therapies. In retrospect, this was a highly unique and enriching perspective from which to be doing research.[39] My work at Glaxo was largely clerical and administrative, but in a certain

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[38] Examples of studies conducted at Séro Zéro include Morrison (1996), Dupont (1997), and Kischuk and Beauchemin (1998). In addition, Séro Zéro works in close collaboration with *Cohorte Omega*, a major federally-funded and long-term prevention research project focused on gay and bisexual men currently going on in Montréal.

[39] Had I had more resources and a different research focus, I might have attempted some form of simultaneous ethnography in the pharmaceutical industry and in the HIV/AIDS community sector with which it often interfaced. My work at Glaxo (I have since left the company) offered me a wealth of critical insight and has not doubt informed this project in some way. My main aim in working there, however, was to pay the rent.

way I literally straddled the gulf between community and private sectors. The reality of this was often very stressful as I found myself juggling multiple, conflicting and controversial identities, facing understandable suspicion at Séro Zéro due to my involvement at Glaxo where, meanwhile, I found a range of good intentions, commercial intentions, and some very ugly homophobia. I cannot say I handled this situation in an ideal fashion. I have taken heart from feminist, post-colonial ethnographer Kamala Visweswaran, who openly allows for contradiction and "failure" in her ethnographic work, arguing that both feminism and anthropology have faced significant methodological and epistemological failures – the collapse of 'the native' and of 'woman' as 'epistemological centres.' For Visweswaran, there is a sense that failure can be necessary, as in the collapse of racist and colonialist models of ethnographic representation. Visweswaran's own writing includes accounts and analyses of her own failures, such as screwing up a potentially great interview. My research has certainly been marked by many a mistake and awkward moment, usually indicative of my lack of experience rather than of a larger epistemological crisis.

For example, my project is open to criticism for causing tension at Séro Zéro due to concern over whose 'side' I was really on. At the same time, I did everything possible to ensure my conflicting identities and institutional locations were open to view. Given the type of lower-rung office work I was doing at Glaxo, I'm quite sure my community-based research at Séro Zéro was not exploited to the benefit of a multinational drug company. To some extent, taking on the role of a volunteer helped to counteract these difficulties and gave me a way to establish credibility that might otherwise have been impossible. Working as a volunteer, I was able to contribute a large number of hours to

the organization and assist in delivering its programs and realizing its objectives. At the same time, because volunteer work is negotiated work, based both on the interests of the volunteer and the needs of the organization, I believe it provided an honest framework for ethnography and offered a way for the organization to participate in setting the agenda for my research.

My recording medium has been mainly writing, with some use of still photography. Originally, I had also planned to use video to document the work of the organization, conduct interviews, and perhaps produce a documentary or multimedia project as part of my dissertation. As I became more involved with the organization, I abandoned the video / multimedia component. Video is not a medium that the staff and volunteers at Séro Zéro use in their work to any extent. Most Séro Zéro projects are frontline and take place in public or semi-public settings: bars, sidewalks, saunas, parks. Screening a video – as one might, for example, in a school setting – is not practical or particularly relevant. With this in mind, my plans for a video project seemed to have little connection with the day to day work of the organization. Video is also an invasive medium. In my participation in street-level prevention work, for example, I could hardly have arrived with videocam in hand in order to 'film the action.'

In many ways, my participation as a volunteer became my primary contribution to the organization and the findings and research documents – video or other – that might come out of my research were in some senses supplementary. Indeed, George Smith (1990) proposes an idea of activism as ethnography, where activism rather than ethnographic protocols set the research agenda and the final 'write-up' is a kind of post-script. Smith's work has contributed to the idea of volunteering as ethnography that I

develop in this project (even though he might side with Patton in critiquing a great deal of volunteer work as depoliticized philanthropy). Being a committed, available volunteer on a week-in, week-out basis did involve some serious labour, anything from serving trays of cocktails through many forms of street-level interventions to grueling, 12-hour shifts handing out condoms, lube and large tubes of complimentary *Nair*[40] at all night raves. That said, I was able to amass a large corpus of material through my research activities ranging from field notes, interviews and an extensive file of texts that I have collected throughout all phases: flyers, posters, photographs, booklets, videos, promotional materials, institutional documents, research reports and so on. Most of these are materials that have either been produced at Séro Zéro or are used in the context of the organization's projects and activities. I have also gathered a file of newspaper and magazine clippings and broadcast segments, although I have not done a rigorous analysis of media coverage.

My volunteer work at Séro Zéro extended from 1996 – 1998. I began with the activity into which most new volunteers are recruited: "condom night." One night per week, volunteers gather at Séro Zéro's offices to make up condom packets (sachets containing condom, lube and instructions on how to use them) for distribution in the community – about 2000 are distributed each week, mainly in bars. This was a good basic activity for learning how to take field notes. I drew on suggestions from ethnographic literature and from informal interviews with people I knew who had done field-based research, and would basically run home after each get-together and write down everything I could remember that seemed pertinent: observations (descriptions of

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[40] A depilatory cream – often the key ingredient for the hairless, bare-chested look popular among many gay men who attend large dance parties.

people, surroundings, what went on, key conversations); interpretations (realizations, confusion, questions); and reflection (personal state of mind, notes on my relationships with people, modifications to my research process).

Gradually, my involvement as a volunteer extended to helping out with other Séro Zéro activities in which staff members invited me to participate: helping to run information tables, handing out condoms in bars and at mega-parties, participating in fund-raising activities. At around the same time, I signed up as a participant in a five-week workshop on self-esteem that is offered about eight times a year at Séro Zéro. Two professionally-trained facilitators lead groups of 8-10 men through a discussion of psycho-social issues relating to gay sexuality – experiences of growing up gay, of dealing with homophobia, body image, experiences of the gay community – and of strategies for improving self-esteem. This proved to be an extremely rich experience both as a researcher and in dealing with these issues in my own life. At the same time, my presence as a researcher did raise ethical issues that I had not encountered up to that point. I did not present myself as a researcher to the group with whom I did the workshop, although the facilitators were aware of my project. A formal research survey was already integrated into the workshop format (participants were asked to fill out an extensive, anonymous questionnaire before and after the five sessions); adding my project to the mix in a formal way did not seem feasible or desirable. Moreover, participants and facilitators are asked to commit, at the beginning of the five weeks, that "everything that happens in the room stays in the room." Nonetheless, I took extensive notes at home after each meeting, documenting from recall the activities and the discussion as well as my own experiences dealing with the set of issues raised in the

workshop. Because I did not have the consent of other participants, however, I used these notes in a very limited way in my analysis so as to respect rights to privacy and confidentiality.

The next phase of my participation involved joining a prevention project that takes place each summer in Montréal's public parks. After several weekends of intensive training with six other volunteers and two staff members, I did weekly shifts in various parks where cruising takes place, talking to as many men as possible, striking up conversations that addressed a wide range of issues including safer sex and HIV. As with my participation in the self-esteem workshop, I took extensive notes. The staff and volunteers with whom I worked were aware of my research, but not the men with whom I talked in the parks. Because I did not have their consent, I have similarly limited the use of these notes so as to protect confidentiality.

The last phase of my project involved conducting a series of five tape-recorded interviews with Séro Zéro staff members. Prior to the interviews, I asked each person to sign a consent form (Appendix 2). The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were semi-directed. Although I developed a list of key questions for the interviews, I also modified questions from one interview to the next as I assessed the responses I received. My chief interest was to solicit unexpected information, insights and stories that I had not observed or understood at other stages in my research, and I approached the interviews as conversationally as possible as semi-structured engagements whose importance and meaning emerged as a somewhat collaborative process of sifting, considering, understanding, questioning and recounting.

The research tools that comprise my method, then, include participant-observation, the gathering and comparison of a collection of print materials, and the recording and transcription of a series of interviews. This has provided wide range of materials to draw on for my textual analysis: interview passages, printed text, as well as my own notes, observations, and reflections. I have used a number of techniques -- cut and paste, collage, various kinds of comparative lists, table, grids, and diagrams -- to interweave and interpret the material gathered over the course of my research. Although many of these failed, they moved me progressively through a close analysis of the texts at my disposal, gradually bringing to light certain patterns and tensions. This offered a productive way to measure various documents, field notes and interviews against the broader background of public health policies, programs and discourses that inform HIV health promotion.

Studying health promotion work ethnographically in this project, then, has meant getting involved in a local prevention organization, interviewing people who work in the field, and participating in the work myself. My focus throughout has been on how the work is done and on what people who do this kind of work have to say about it, an interest in conducting research from within community and 'everyday' contexts that I myself inhabit as both a researcher and member. In critically interrogating ethnography in terms of the modernist, colonialist and patriarchal heritage of anthropology, Kamala Visweswaran arrives at some related conclusions regarding the location of the researcher and the objectives of ethnographic research. Visweswaran proposes the idea of "homework" rather than 'fieldwork' as an alternative way of conceptualizing ethnography, drawing on Mary John's notion of 'anthropology in reverse'

(Visweswaran, 1994: 102-103). Visweswaran explains homework as "... speaking from the place one is located, to specify our sites of enunciation as 'home'" (104). Summarizing the work of David Scott, she points out the contrast between this and the classic conception of 'the anthropological journey' involving the withdrawal of researchers to do 'fieldwork' in remote, exotic cultures, followed by a process of return in which the researcher brings back knowledge about the culture she has temporarily inhabited. Visweswaran thus reorients ethnography in terms – "home" – that evoke notions of 'everyday life' and local community.

In a similar fashion, Dorothy Smith has proposed a feminist and activist ethnography, a sociology, in the words of James Heap, that "is knowingly done from inside the world" (1995: xiv). Unlike Visweswaran, Smith's work engages with ethnomethodology and its critique, but the broad lines of her project intersect with Visweswaran's idea of homework as well as the approaches in cultural studies and critical ethnography I reviewed earlier in this chapter. As Heap summarizes:

In asking how it happens to *us*, Dorothy Smith is including herself and the reader in the field of inquiry. Where others talk of practices and members' practices, Smith talks of *our practices as members* ... [her] move returns us to the common ground of daily life, shared with others (1995: xiv).

If a wide range of researchers have redefined ethnography in terms of this 'common ground' of daily life – alternatively glossed as 'everyday life,' 'home,' 'community.' – most have also oriented the ethnographic enterprise in terms of critically understanding the forces that constitute, construct and contest this common ground. Home, daily life, community become powerful intersections of both dominating and emancipatory practices.

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Such a focus on everyday life has also been one of the important hallmarks of critical cultural studies research. In his history of the field and how it emerged, Simon During has points to a pendulum swing of opinion among cultural theorists over the extent to which popular culture constitutes a site of domination or resistance (1993: 2-20) – "cultural studies is a discipline continuously shifting its interests and methods" (20) – such that by the 1990s, researchers were abandoning either-or scenarios and concluding that dominant and resistant structures and practices often co-existed within the same cultural text, site or event. During links such conclusions to a "turn to ethnography" within the discipline (20). Cultural studies ethnography had its beginning in studies of media audiences and reception analysis, such as the work of David Morely, Janice Radway and Ien Ang, and evolved to encompass the more directly ethnographic work of cultural theorists such as Paul Willis and Angela McRobbie, as well as Meaghan Morris' complex, highly self-reflexive ethnographies that involve "two-way transmission" between the researcher and her subject (During, 1993: 22). Increasingly, in During's summary, cultural theorists have come to focus on the way in which "the everyday ... is produced and experienced at the intersection of many fields by embodied individuals" (25).

Many researchers have turned to such approaches in order to come to grips with the very definition of everyday experience[41] while at the same time insisting on the potential for street-level resistance, contestation, or some degree of transformation or emancipation. As During argues, a complex intersection of hegemonic social and cultural relations and individual agency has increasingly been understood to constitute

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[41] As Joan Scott cautions, "Experience is at once always already and interpretation *and* in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self evident nor straightforward" (1992: 37). Meaghan Morris' ethnographic work has especially addressed this concern.

the category of 'everyday life,' and it is here that researchers attempt to intervene.

Michel de Certeau, for example, specifies a study of everyday life where:

... the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline." Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an anti-discipline ... (1984: xiv-xv).

As we have seen, a range of theorists use different vocabularies to develop similar conceptions of ethnography as a critical research intervention that takes place at intersections of hegemony and agency – an intersection that constitutes an arena of everyday life referred to by some – such as Marcel Rioux (as noted in my discussion of Rioux's sociology in chapter 2) – as 'community.'

As a researcher, I have consciously situated myself as a student of the community setting which I inhabit, even as I have grappled with what community actually means and the extent to which I actually belong to so-called communities. I have thus drawn on models provided by Stake, Visweswaran and others who adopt approaches to ethnography that start from an initial site — a locality or situation that the researcher already inhabits – and work outward. The point is not to prove that all settings are like this initial setting, but to understand in some depth what is said and practiced in this particular setting as a first step to understanding what may be going on elsewhere. In situating my research in a community locale, I must specify that this does not make my research 'community-based.' Research *based* in community, as I understand it, involves adding research tools, processes and projects to existing and emerging community-based work.[42] My research project did not contribute to the organization's work in this way,

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[42] Definition provided by Régis Pelletier, coordinator for community-based research at the Coalition des organismes communautaires de lutte contre le sida du Québec (COCQ-sida).

and hence cannot be considered 'community-based.' This does, in fact, offer certain advantages: the possibility for unexpected connections or understandings in the dialogue between an uninitiated observer of health promotion work and people engaged in doing this work. At the same time, a major disadvantage of not having done actual community-based work is that it is not entirely clear how my findings and interpretations may be relevant or pertinent to the organization. Nonetheless, my research, and the conclusions I have been able to draw, resonate in interesting ways in relation to the larger tensions in the health promotion paradigm that I outlined in chapter 2. In the next, concluding section of this chapter, I review how I have interpreted the documentation of Séro Zéro's work brought together during my participant-observation as a volunteer. I point to three patterns in understandings of community that inform Séro Zéro's work that will be analyzed in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Understandings of community in the work of Séro Zéro

The above discussion of where and how I have undertaken my research sketches out how I used volunteer work as a basis for doing ethnographic research. I have pointed to some of the ways in which doing ethnography as a volunteer raised ethical and even political issues, and was thus far from being a problem-free research process. Addressing these issues has been an ongoing challenge that I am far from resolving. At the same time, I expect that most research methods, especially those that are field-based, pose such challenges and my project is not really unique in this sense.

In this concluding section, I outline the research questions that have informed this project, as well as how I have undertaken my interpretation of the volunteer work in which I participated and the many research materials I have gathered. A key question that has motivated my project is how people who are said to be a "community" and involved in community-based work actually define or understand community. This question arises from my review of key literature on the emergence and impact of community-based health promotion as a paradigm for health care policy and practice. As I suggested in Chapter 2, one of the central tensions that has characterized the theory and practice of health promotion over several decades is the extent to which the meanings of community are unclear, varied and even conflicting. My research explores how this tension informs the work of Séro Zéro. I have hypothesized that such tensions are evident, and can be rendered explicit through ethnographic discourse analysis of how people doing this work understand, define, and produce community as a set of textually and discursively mediated social relations.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter provides an example of certain recurrent issues and themes that I have found to characterize my corpus, issues and themes that speak to the question of how prevention and health promotion work at Séro Zéro engages with and produces "community." These include the ways in which the narrator defines his own work as conversational, as well as his evident concern about lack of talk – the silences – that are common in Montréal's gay milieu as elsewhere. My analysis of such patterns is based on an understanding of the work of health promotion as a form of discursive practice that is shaped by and engages with the wider context of social practices and relations.

As argued in chapter 2, paradigms of community-based health promotion have strongly shaped both public health policy in Canada and responses to HIV/AIDS. The idealized community of health promotion is most often one of a self-organizing, grassroots sector that is well-placed to address fundamental health issues. How appropriate is this ideal conception for undertaking prevention work within gay-bi-tran community? Does community even provide an adequate frame of reference for health promotion? Examining the work at one community-based organization cannot, of course, comprehensively answer these questions. Yet the ways in which people doing the work of the organization understand and delineate community may point to the ways in which the organization deals with the discrepancies between the idealized community of health promotion and the constraints of work based in actual community settings. Perhaps the central question this project aims to address is what the recurrent emphasis on conversational themes and practices that characterizes Séro Zéro's prevention work reveals about the understandings of community shared by people working at the organization. In my analysis of this recurrent emphasis on conversation, I have identified three significant patterns in the documentation I have gathered over the course of my research: 1) a critique of psycho-social "structures of silence" that affect gay-bi-tran men in specific ways; 2) the prevalence of practices oriented around inciting people to talk with one another, and; 3) a "conversant" understanding of community. In the next three chapters, I examine more closely each of these patterns.

My research corpus includes three key components: 1) a collection of print material; 2) a journal of personal notes, observations, and reflections compiled while I was doing participant-observation; and 3) interview transcripts. Structuring the corpus

in this way has provided a means to 'triangulate' my observations so as to provide some checks and balances on the biases inherent in my personal observations, notes, and reflections. In selecting interpretations of the work of Séro Zéro based on this corpus and developing the assertions and generalizations provided in chapters that follow, I have worked to tell a story about Séro Zéro. The story is one of Séro Zéro's health promotion work in terms of the understandings of community that inform this work and the significance of these understandings to tensions relating to community that characterize paradigms of health promotion.

5   Structures of silence

J: ... est-ce qu'on a une approche active, point? Ou est-ce qu'on est *proactif*? Plus on est proactif, on amène les gens vers où? ... je pense qu'on doit être proactif et je pense qu'on devrait les amener vers des interventions qui encouragent ce bris de l'isolement, qui encouragent les gens d'aller vers des groupes communautaires ... même d'aller dans un bar, au pire, il va être dans un milieu social où il va être avec d'autres gais, ça fait qu'il n'est plus tout seul.

A central dilemma for HIV health promotion, in addressing the social isolation faced by many gay men, is that the alternatives to isolation are often not readily apparent in the gay milieu. Hence this narrator's question, where do we lead people?: *...plus on est proactif, on amène les gens vers où?* The solution is perhaps a bar, where a person may come face to face with internal and external barriers to communication and interconnection with others. Yet such issues are scarcely acknowledged in the extent that the paradigm of health promotion rests on broad assumptions that community is an unproblematic locale for self-realization, agency, or social action.

This chapter looks at a series of workshops[43] I attended dealing with self-esteem issues faced by gay men. These workshops are regularly offered by Séro Zéro, the community-based organization where I worked as a volunteer (I attended the workshops as a participant rather than as a volunteer, however, as explained further below). As part of my analysis, I point to the ways in which this particular workshop addresses the dilemmas underscored by the narrator above, simultaneously accepting and critiquing the

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[43] I use the term 'workshop' – a translation of *atelier* – to refer to the small-group discussion programs offered by Séro Zéro.

gay liberation project of 'coming out' and putting names to complex and often unspoken issues related to belonging and community that many gay and bisexual men face.

Through programs such as its workshop series, Séro Zéro brings into focus chronic patterns of silence and denial that mark the lives of many gay-bi-tran men, patterns that have not been eliminated and to some extent may be exacerbated in the rapid development of a visible, mainstream gay milieu. The work of the organization thus points to the ways in which many men find themselves isolated in a paradoxical 'position' – that of a milieu that offers neither the support of 'family' nor of 'community.' As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, Séro Zéro's critique of the silence faced by many gay-bi-tran men is one of the patterns in the organization's work that I have examined through my research. Exploring this aspect of Séro Zéro's work has afforded me one important way of documenting how people who are said to belong to a community actually understand and define this community.

Positional subjectivity in the gay milieu

Séro Zéro's small-group discussion workshops are one of its key programs. Over one thousand men of diverse ages, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic levels have participated in these workshops, and the use of the workshop format to address general issues of health and well-being beyond HIV attests to the organization's commitment to a health promotion mandate that includes but is not limited to prevention. With some of them specifically aimed at men who are HIV negative or do not know their HIV status,

Séro Zéro's workshops are also linked to more recent efforts on the part of many HIV prevention organizations and activists to respond to issues such as relapse and the increasing abandonment of safer sex practices among some gay men. The development of workshops in the context of HIV prevention has its conceptual basis in empowerment models of health promotion whose roots in turn lie partly in long-standing practices of feminist consciousness-raising. The guiding theory behind such models and practices is that empowerment derives from critical consciousness-raising that builds self-awareness, self-esteem and the capacity for people to assess and act upon their needs.

In this section, I examine the ways in which the Séro Zéro workshops that I attended articulate the distinct 'position' as subjects that many gay-bi-tran men occupy, one that health promotion efforts must address. I thus draw on Linda Alcoff's definition of subjectivity as "positionality," "a place where meaning is constructed" (1997: 349). In developing this definition, Alcoff emphasizes the need for theories of subjectivity both to acknowledge people as active subjects possessing a degree of agency *and* to account for the ways subjectivity is constructed through social discourses and institutional relations of power. Her definition, as I explain below, offers a way to bring into focus how the work of Séro Zéro articulates gay-bi-tran male subjectivity as a distinct and fluid 'positionality.'

In terms of the Séro Zéro workshop I attended, this distinct position is evident in the first instance in the way the workshop affirms and questions the overall 'project' of self-definition that is the legacy of the gay liberation project. In its ideal form, this project is premised on a liberatory moment of 'coming out' that involves both the adoption of a gay identity and a person's entry into a gay community context. Although

questioned, this concept of coming out is nonetheless a key element both in the workshops and in Séro Zéro's overall approach to gay health:

G: ... je pense que si au départ, on nie l'orientation sexuelle, ou qu'on la vit toute croche parce qu'on la vit selon les modèles que la communauté s'est créés, bien, on passe à côté des belles années de notre vie.

Here, the narrator encapsulates the distinct discourse of the organization, one that sustains the importance of coming out (as opposed to a person negating his or her sexual orientation), while recognizing that gay community contexts offer models for being gay that do not always support a person's well-being and health: *...on la vit [l'orientation sexuelle] toute croche parce qu'on la vit selon les modèles que la communauté s'est créés...*

The discourse of Séro Zéro respects the different ways that people choose to self-identify, encouraging individuals to make informed choices in how they define themselves that best suit their needs. At the same time, coming out is still understood as crucial to long-term health and well-being. The work of the organization rests on the assumption that the ability to affirm one's sexuality in meaningful and expansive ways has a significant impact on self-esteem and on people's capacity to adopt and maintain safer sex practices. In striving to critically rework the meanings of everyday life to better support people's well-being, then, Séro Zéro's discourse retains an emancipatory edge. As one narrator observes, the organization's work is squarely grounded in the tenets of gay liberation:

J: ... nous avons décidé d'avoir une attitude relativement libérationiste ... on ne te dira pas que tu dois avoir fait ton 'coming out' à tout le monde, mais on va te soutenir dans ton processus où est-ce que t'es. Mais, à quelque part on croit que oui, il y a beaucoup d'avantages à être relativement 'out' ...

A kind of emancipatory praxis,[44] an effort to reinterpret the relation between the primary act of gay liberation - coming out - and people's well-being and health, is thus at the core of Séro Zéro's work:

A facilitator explains the background of Séro Zéro's self-esteem workshops, designed specifically to address HIV negative men or men who don't know their status in an effort to create a space for them to affirm an HIV-negative identity. In part, then, the workshops are responses to the sense that the issues facing negative men are less important than those facing positive men; to concerns that for some men, becoming positive is a way of dealing with issues of low self-esteem.

Here, the language of the workshop echoes Walt Odets' conclusions in his analysis of the specific prevention needs of HIV-negative gay men (as examined in chapter 2), in particular his somewhat controversial argument that prevention efforts should strive to bolster an affirmative sense of being HIV-negative. Recognizing that this can only be possible through a corresponding affirmation of gay or bisexual identity, the workshop strives to draw connections between self-esteem, affirmation of sexual identity, and the promotion of health.

Yet if Séro Zéro's activities involve affirming gay identity in some fundamental way, the work of the organization also raises questions about self-affirmation and some of the often unacknowledged challenges a person can face in self-identifying and 'coming out' as a member of a sexual minority. If 'coming out' is truly fundamental to the well-being of gay men, it also marks a person's entry point into the gay community or milieu. If one is to come out, one must presumably emerge *somewhere*. Indeed, one narrator, referring to the experiences of gay Latinos who emigrate to Montréal, uses striking imagery to describe this moment:

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[44] As already discussed in chapter 2, sociologist Marcel Rioux proposes "emancipatory praxis" as a way to understand the work of community-based movements. For Rioux, a central feature of emancipatory practices – diverse as they are – is the way in which they shift the meanings of everyday life: "...une 'pratique émancipatoire' vise à re-sémantiser les milieux de vie et de travail... " (1982: 59).

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K: ... quand un gai s'assume ... quand il passe à travers la rivière, il dit 'mon dieu que je suis fier. Pendant combien de temps que je niaisais?' Et c'est pour ça qu'il n'y a personne, en général, qui s'est assumé, qui va te dire après, 'c'est épouvantable!'

If 'crossing the river' has specific resonance in terms of Latin American immigration to United States, the narrator also evokes here a distinct narrative of coming out as a critical life transition. At the same time, the metaphor begs the question of what lies on the other side.

The frequency with which the 1970s Pointer Sisters' hit *We are Family* is played at Pride gatherings suggests the extent to which, in popular expression, gay-bi-tran community is understood as a replacement or alternative when one's childhood family may no longer be in the picture: within the mainstreamed discourse of gay pride, community has become one's new family. In a sense, of course, this understanding is simply intuitive. As the same narrator observes:

K: ... on se trouve ici sans la famille. Ça fait dur... donc on constitue une petite famille, tu comprends. C'est très rare, par exemple, qu'un gai latino va se trouver seul pour son anniversaire ou à Noël ... et dans le cas des gais en général ... tu va remarquer qu'il y a beaucoup de gais à Montréal qui viennent de l'extérieur, de la région, et qui immigrent à Montréal parce que c'est plus facile. Donc, ces gens là, ils vont avoir une tendance à se faire des amis et former un groupe d'amis, en quelque part une famille ... ils vont faire des commissions ensemble, ils vont passer les après-midi ensemble, et là on exclue le rapport sexuel ... est-ce que les hétérosexuels font ça tellement? Non, parce qu'ils on la famille pour le faire.

Thus, both for Latino men and men from other regions of Québec who migrate to Montréal, networks of friends can provide the social support that would ordinarily be looked for in the traditional family. "Coming out" is thus in part experienced as a process of entering a community space where one finds or brings together a new family. Many gays, of course, build alternate family networks that are quite distinct:

K: ... j'avais 3 mois ici, j'avais trouvé du travail ... et j'au vu une annonce, je ne parlais pas français, presque rien, j'ai dit à un ami ... qui parlait bien, d'appeler ces personnes-là

pour que je deviens leur colocataire et ils ont accepté comme ça ... le fait d'être gai ouvre la porte ... ils m'ont présenté des amis, ils me sont sorti dans les bars, donc cet esprit de familialité ... je connais très peu de latinos gais qui après avoir immigré ici, sont retournés dans leur pays, alors que des familles hétérosexuelles, oui, sont retournées, alors que les gais restent ici.

Here, the narrator points to some of the distinct dynamics characteristic of social relations among gay men in Montréal, which in this case facilitates immigration – ... *le fait d'être gai ouvre la porte ...* – through a dispersed sentiment of familiality that the narrator contrasts to more 'concentrated' forms of traditional family, who may more quickly return to their country of origin because they have not networked to the same extent as single gay men.

If there are some compelling ways in which the gay community or milieu provides social support through programs such as the workshop series, the work of Séro Zéro also raises questions about the adequacy of community as a replacement for support systems not available through people's childhood families. The organization's work gives voice to the ways community, as much as family, is a complex zone of affection and disaffection in its own right, often problematic for gay and bisexual men. Significantly, despite its common-sense connotations of communion and support, several narrators speak of community in terms of solitude and social isolation:

G: ... ce n'est pas sur la rue Ste-Catherine que tu vois les Mercedes puis la Chambre de commerce gai ou lesbienne, etc. Tu vois beaucoup de misère dans le village, tu sais. Beaucoup de solitude, beaucoup d'isolement, beaucoup de pauvreté, beaucoup de maladie, OK ... c'est ça, la communauté gaie, tu sais.

Here, the narrator suggests isolation is endemic to Montréal's gay community, as widespread and serious as other problems such as poverty and illness. Many of Séro-Zéro's street-level intervention programs grapple with the specific ways in which many gay men live somewhat isolated lives and the implications of this for well-being and

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health. People's need to talk together, the good this would do them, sits in contrast to

what ordinarily happens in many bars:

H: ... à un moment donné, le 1er décembre, on remettait des petits rubans que Séro Zéro a
créé, et on s'est rendu compte qu'en donnant de quoi à quelqu'un dans un bar ... que les
gens ont beaucoup à dire, que ils ont beau être dans un bar, mais moi, j'ai l'impression
que c'est une gang de tout seuls qui sont dans un bar, qui prennent un verre ... alors c'est
sûr que si tu parles à quelqu'un, si tu lui donnes de quoi, le sujet c'est un ruban, 'c'est
quoi la signification?' ... À un moment donné tu te rends compte que les gens ont de quoi
à parler, et bon, de ce qu'ils parlent, en général, c'est souvent des co-facteurs qui
influencent les comportements à risque, et dont, entre autres, l'isolement, la solitude. les
dépressions, la perte de famille, les deuils multiples ... ça fait que, les gens ont à parler ...

H: ... les gens ont besoin de parler, selon moi, les gens ont besoin d'éviter la solitude,
parce que les gens, les gens se sentent très seuls en général, dans les bars.

Such social isolation is in some ways linked to the distance – both physical and emotional

– that separates many people from their childhood families. One narrator points to

separation from childhood family networks – whether the result of rejection or not – as a

profound loss, the impact of which many gay men don't acknowledge:

G: ... je pense que j'avais des habiletés pour intervenir pour déjouer la personne qui était
devant moi, puis l'amener à parler: ...'Le rejet, le *coming-out* dans la famille, ça dérange
pas? Ça dérange pas du tout?' 'Non, moi, ça dérange pas du tout.' 'Aimerais-tu les voir
plus souvent?' 'Non.' 'C'est pas important pour toi?' 'Non.' 'As-tu quelque-chose qui
remplace ça?' 'Mais non, ma famille, c'est ma famille.' 'Donc la famille, c'est
important... ?'

Where childhood family networks are unavailable as a support system, the challenge of

finding an alternative network – which for many people involves a move to the big city –

can be daunting:

H: ... dans le milieu gai, souvent quand t'es jeune, t'as pas vraiment une gang, t'es pas
mal isolé à cause de ton homosexualité. Là, tu déménages ... dans un grand centre, puis
là, bien, il faut que tu te crées un réseau, là, et comment faire, se créer un réseau? Il n'y a
pas de mode d'emploi ... dans aucun bar ça va être marqué, 'comment te créer un réseau
gai, sans baiser avec tout le monde', tu sais ... et surtout, que ceux avec qui tu baises, te
rappellent ...

This 'how-to' dimension can be that much more challenging for gay men arriving from other countries:

K: ... les latinos se sentent très orphelins, pour se faire orienter au niveau de l'immigration fédérale et provinciale, les cours de français, se trouver un logement, avoir un téléphone, le bien-être social ... et aussi ... il y en a beaucoup qui font leur *coming out* ici ... la plupart, ils ne se sont pas assumés dans leur pays.

For some, the attraction of Montréal as a metropolitan centre with a large gay population is accompanied by the double whammy of immigration and coming out, what amounts to a profound experience of social isolation even as it offers new measures of social freedom:

K: ... la plupart des gais latino-américains immigrent tout seul ... pourquoi ils immigrent tout seul? Parce qu'ici, c'est le paradis si on compare avec l'Amérique latine ... surtout parce qu'ici ils ne sentent pas jugés par la famille, qui va les juger, qui va les pointer avec les doigts ...

Unlike "family-class"[45] immigration, where new arrivals sponsor other family members and thus constitute a support network in their new country, for the gay men described here immigration constitutes a rupture with family that, however much it is motivated by a desire for freedom – ...*c'est le paradis si on compare avec l'Amérique latine...* – also requires that people find in the community a replacement for the support that would, for others, be available through a family network.

The appropriateness of referring to gay social networks and institutions as 'community,' particularly in French-speaking Montréal, comes into question here given that the people I interviewed often expressed a preference for the term "milieu." Some narrators pointed out that, in popular use, the term 'gay milieu' tends to have more widespread appeal because it is understood by many people as a non-politicized, more open-ended way of referring to gay men and gay culture:

[45] A classification for prospective immigrants used by Immigration and Citzenship Canada.

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H: ... je crois qu'il y a une appartenance à un milieu gai ... qui n'est pas nécessairement, selon moi, une communauté. Je pense que les gens ont besoin de ne pas se sentir tout seuls ... est-ce qu'ils vont appeler ça une communauté ou une appartenance à un milieu gai? Je ne sais pas ... dépendamment de mon degré de scolarité, de mon degré d'intégration au niveau de la communauté gaie ou au niveau de ce milieu social gai là, je vais donner une appellation différente ...

This narrator makes clear that 'community' does not have an identical meaning across class and socio-economic levels, any more than it does across languages, and for many people the term fails to accurately connote their sense – or lack thereof – of belonging. Indeed, in discussing the status of community work and the meaning of the term 'community,' several narrators point to the differences in how the term 'community' tends to be understood by French, English and Spanish speakers:

J: ... je me pose la question, est-ce qu'un jeune gai asiatique de 20 ans, qui vit ici depuis 20 ans, c'est de lui faire un dépliant en vietnamien qui est la priorité? ... pour moi tout ça est ... très axé sur un principe ... les français étaient beaucoup plus, t'arrives en France, tu deviens français ... mais ça veut aussi dire ... que tu t'intègres à la culture, à la communauté française. Ça ne veut pas dire que tu n'existes plus comme personne. Tandis que les anglo-saxons, c'étaient plus par groupe, comme d'identité, d'affinité, qui est beaucoup plus développé ..., la communauté gaie est dans la communauté dans laquelle elle vit, aussi ... on peut regarder des éléments spécifiques de culture gaie ... mais ils sont tous influencés par la culture dans laquelle on vit. ...C'est pas un vacuum.

K: ... *communidad*, en différence du concept qu'on a en français, c'est plus large ... communauté, ici, ça veut dire plus d'esprit, comme quelque chose d'organisé, ok, alors que le même mot en espagnol, *communidad*, c'est l'ensemble ...

Here, the second narrator draws attention to specific connotations for community in Québec, where the term is often popularly understood to refer to grassroots forms of political organizing or social mobilization, with which people often do not identify. In another narrator's view:

H: ... moi, je suis plus à parler de, 'dans mon milieu' que 'dans ma communauté.' ... Communauté fait un peu, 'communauté culturelle,' 'communauté éthique,' 'les noirs, les gais, les ci, les ça,' ...

In contrast to 'community,' this narrator suggests 'milieu' provides a less politicized and restrictive way to indicate a sense of belonging. For some men, the unwelcome or inaccurate connotations of 'community' may lead them to refuse to identify with the city's gay community even when they actively participate socially, culturally or economically in a more loosely defined gay milieu. For others, however, 'milieu' connotes not simply a non-restrictive 'ambiance' or 'environment,' but also literally a kind middle place, the space 'in between'. One narrator uses the term in this sense to describe Montréal's gay Village:

G: Le Village c'est plutôt un milieu de passage ... t'as un pourcentage de gens qui fréquentent le village, puis il y en a qui vont cesser de fréquenter le Village quand ils vont se matcher. Ou quand ils vont penser qu'ils poignent plus. Puis il y en a du monde à 30 ans qui pensent qu'ils poignent plus, tu sais ...

Here, the narrator brings to light the potential loneliness of 'milieu' as an urban space of consumer culture. Although social relations in the Village are certainly more complex than this narrator suggests, one is led to consider the extent to which, for many gay men. "milieu" is indeed an accurate expression of how social forces and individual life patterns locate them in a kind of social and psychological middle ground outside of either family or community.

Séro Zéro's work makes visible this distinctive position that gay-bi-tran men often must come to terms with – a peculiar isolation where 'coming out' actually presents important dilemmas because, although crucial to long-term health and well-being, it can also mean coming out into a "community" that is problematic, alienating, and isolating. This lends credence to Linda Alcoff's insistence that subjectivity is contingent and includes aspects of fluidity, movement, and change. Séro Zéro's work offers a contrast to other conceptions of gay subjectivity that would see gay-bi-tran identity as relatively

"fixed," regardless of the context into which one comes out. From the perspective of Séro Zéro's work, gay-bi-tran subjectivity can be understood as a variable position constituted both through varying social conditions as well as through the exercise of self-reflection and personal agency. In the next section, I look at how the work of Séro Zéro, and in particular the self-esteem workshop I attended, names and explores some of the barriers people can face in exercising this reflexivity and agency.

Structures of silence

The 'positional' conception of subjectivity examined in the previous section brings into focus the ways in which the work of Séro Zéro articulates the distinct position – socially and in terms of the self-identity – occupied by gay-bi-tran men. This distinct positionality is in part evident in the way that for some men, coming out does not so much lead them to the liberation of a supportive gay community as leave them stranded outside of social support systems either of family or community, within a gay social milieu that does not provide systems and structures of support.

In this section, I investigate the ways in which this distinctive position is linked in the work of Séro Zéro to psycho-social "structures of silence." These arise from the structural homophobia that is a recurrent feature of the broader social context, and are also the result of norms of silence and non-expression and among gay-bi-tran men themselves. My analysis is intended to highlight the nuanced way in which the work of Séro Zéro addresses the social isolation with which many gay and bisexual men live.

Rather than simply assuming this is an outcome of social intolerance or repression, the work of the organization links this solitude to complex social dynamics and at times, self-contradictory life strategies. In the context of the self-esteem workshop I attended, for example, isolation was explored not as a passing phenomenon, easily eliminated through integration with a 'community,' but instead as an ongoing problem, linked to wider social structures and tensions as well as self-perpetuated states of being.

I argue that the work of Séro Zéro attributes these dilemmas of isolation, in large part, to structures of silence that are deeply engendered within the broader social context as well as within people's individual sense of self. In proposing this notion of 'structures of silence,' I have drawn on the work of cultural theorist Raymond Williams, who develops the concept "structures of feeling" as a way to define and analyze "the culture of a period" (1961: 48). For Williams, defining culture as a structure of feeling offers a way to accommodate both its "firm and definite" and "intangible" dimensions (ibid.). Thus, the "arts of a period," as instances of "recorded communication that outlives its bearers" (48-49), help to constitute:

...the deep community that makes communication possible... I do not meant that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends. And what is particularly interesting is that it does not seem to be, in any formal sense, learned. One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have 'come' from anywhere (49).

Here, Williams underscores the ways in which culture, understood as a structure of feeling, operates as a "wide possession" that, even as it shifts from generation to generation, constitutes the basis for community in the ways it "makes communication possible."

In my interpretation of the work of Séro Zéro, I have extended this analysis in order to account for what happens to community when communication is blocked. The homophobic "structures of silence" evoked in the work of Séro Zéro in programs such as its self-esteem workshops are perhaps simply variants or aspects of the broader structures of feeling that, for Williams, is culture. Nonetheless, if Williams is correct in linking culture to the possibilities for communities to communicate, the existence of 'structures of silence' as one part of a broader structure of feeling would help to explain the difficult 'position' vis-à-vis community that many gay-bi-tran men inhabit. Structures of silence are those dimensions of a culture – both firm and definite and somewhat intangible – that in blocking communication would to some extent block the possibilities for community. This is a framework of silence that, as with the overall culture, is clearly not 'possessed' in the same way by all individuals, yet nonetheless runs very deep in its impact on and implications for many people within the culture.

The visual emphasis within gay culture on appearance and body image,[46] for example, has often been critiqued for the ways in which it can undermine the possibilities for supportive community among people, excluding those who do not meet media and popular standards for physical attractiveness, a pattern that can compound the exclusions of systemic homophobia in the family, the workplace, and the media. This emphasis on appearance is of course not unique to the gay milieu, being anchored in wider patterns within the culture, as noted by this narrator:

G: C'est le plaisir immédiat, la satisfaction rapide, la non-implication, la non-expression des émotions... puis dieu sait que c'est pas juste dans la communauté [gaie], ça. Non, c'est partout, tu sais. Il faut refouler les émotions. Si je sens quelque chose, il faut que je

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[46] For a detailed analysis of this issue, see Harrison G. Pope, Katharine A. Phillips , and Roberto Olivardia (2000), *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession* (New York: Free Press).

nie ça ou il faut que je le transforme. Il faut pas que je montre que j'ai des besoins affectifs ... Donc, je fais semblant que j'en ai pas, tout ça, et je compense d'une autre façon ... on n'a pas de modèles non plus ... qui sont accrocheurs ... peut être, tu sais, [le modèle] d'une certaine physionomie faciale, la petite boucle d'oreille, la longueur de la queue, des choses du genre, tu sais, mais on n'a pas de modèles qui valorisent ... que tu sois toi-même.

Here, low self-esteem is rooted in some firm and definite yet intangible structures of silence: ...*la non-implication, la non-expression des émotions*. This emphasis on image, exteriors, and superficiality often means that the cultivation of an interior space of the self tends to be overlooked or undervalued:

G: Mais il reste qu'on met quand même peut être un petit peu trop d'emphase la dessus, sur le *look* plutôt que le global. On a travaillé le *look*, mais le globale, il est laissé ... en dedans: 'Je ne me sens pas là en super santé. Je sens que j'ai une apparence soigné, qui plaît, mais mon intérieur, je le présente comment?'

Just as feminists have analyzed the 'male gaze' as a source of alienation and paradox for women,[47] the narrator here points to how the question of 'who's looking' structures the well-being of gay men in potentially devastating ways:

F: J'ai un peu de misère avec les gens qui entretiennent des images, puis des images qui font de la peine à d'autres personnes ... qui vont carrément exclure un paquet de gens ... Je vois bien de parallèles entre les, ce que les féministes ont pu dénoncer, l'image de la femme parfaite ou des modèles féminins ... donc, la même chose avec les, les hommes gais, aussi. On a tous nos petits bourrelets qu'on aimerait ne pas avoir, puis, on n'est pas tout beaux comme les photos ...

The self-esteem workshop provided a forum for discussing the dilemma of multiple exclusions: from families, within the workplace and other public contexts, and among gay men themselves as a result of a visual emphasis in gay culture such that people are valued based on physical appearance.

Emmanuel Levinas argues that an overemphasis on visual experience in western culture too often generates silence rather than interaction among people, a 'closure' to the

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[47] I am grateful to Linnet Fawcett for making this connection.

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other, fostering the illusion that the world is self-complete and limited to the given of what people see. Alternatively, non-visual forms of "proximity," such as conversation, break this silent, self-complete world of vision, generating links among people rather than the silence and indifference of visuality. For Levinas, face-to-face conversation, by virtue of the dialogic and ethical way it situates people in relation to one another, makes it possible for people to transcend the apparently given of what they see and know. Speech breaks the spell of inherent solitude of which each person is, in some fundamental way, a prisoner: the approach of and conversation with another person is contact with an "absolute singularity," another subject who can never be reduced to what I know or have seen of him or her (1987: 115).

For Levinas, the contact and speech between people are what "makes ethics possible" (1996: 106). Speech – "the act of expression" – is more than just a "manifestation of a thought by a sign," because when I speak I am "simultaneously a subject and an object":

To speak is to interrupt my existence as a subject and a master ... the subject who speaks does not situate the world in relation to himself, nor situate himself purely and simply at the heart of his own spectacle, like an artist. Instead, he is situated in relation to the Other (1989: 149).

The important and unique ways in which the relations of speaking situate people as ethical subjects for each other leads Levinas to critique areas of knowledge that ignore this special vocation of speech, while acknowledging that speech has its limitations and does not often live up to its potential:

Contemporary philosophy and sociology have accustomed us to underestimate the direct social link between persons who speak, and to prefer silence or the complex relations, such as custom or law or culture, laid down by civilization. This scorn for words certainly has to do with the way language can degenerate into a prattle that reveals nothing but social unease ... (148).

In Levinas' assessment, the importance of speech lies not so much in its frequent impoverishment but in its possibilities and potential. He notes that the "presence of the Other ... is a presence that teaches us something," because in a conversation the presence of the other "is fulfilled in the act of hearing" (ibid.). Thus Levinas develops an ethical conception of conversation – the intertwined process of speaking and hearing – not as a description of what actually or typically happens in conversation between people but as an imperative: conversation is necessary if relations between people are to be ethical.

In his critique of the focus in western culture on visual experience and his ethical analysis of conversation, then, Levinas traces a link between visuality and silence and why this must have serious social implications. In terms of the specific social dynamics of the gay milieu, the visual orientation of gay culture can be seen, borrowing from Levinas, as a significant structure of silence that affects possibilities for community and social support. The contrast Levinas draws between seeing and speaking points to an inherent logic in one of Séro Zéro's central slogans: *Faut se parler ... on a tant de choses à se dire.*[48] Like Levinas, the work of Séro Zéro draws attention to the need to interrupt the silence of the gaze – to the necessity of conversation.

Levinas' analysis of relations of speaking is remarkably similar to linguist Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of speech communication in terms of "dialogue" and "understanding." Bakhtin describes the understanding that speech communication – viewed dialogically – makes possible, as existing "neither within itself nor for itself, but for another" (1986: 115), recalling Levinas' observation that the "first fact of existence is being for the other" (1989: 149). For Bakhtin, speech communication links people

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[48] The slogan is currently featured on the organization's web site as well as in a number of posters, flyers, and advertisements.

together in ways that are non-linguistic, generating "dialogic relations" that, while they "presuppose a language ... do not reside within the system of language" (1986: 117). Arguing that speech communication actually engenders (rather than simply expressing or supporting) significant social relationships, Bakhtin describes "the word" as "interindividual," arguing against the common linguistic conception that the utterances comprising speech 'belong' to the speaker and that the presence of a listener is of no special consequence. To the contrary, in Bakhtin's view, utterances are distinct from the heuristic units of language commonly analyzed by linguists because of the importance of the "contextual meaning" of any utterance, which always calls for a "responsive understanding" (125).

The social nature of speech, which Bakhtin insists "cannot be reduced to the purely logical or purely thematic," provides for dialogic relations among people that allow for "departure beyond the limits of the understood" (122). Bakhtin thus concurs with Levinas' observation that hearing the words of another involves "a dimension that cannot be converted into vision ... surpassing what is given" (1989: 147-148). Conversely, Bakhtin also draws attention to the "condition of not being heard and not being understood" (1986: 116). Disconnection from the dialogue and understanding that speech makes available, one presumes, would constitute disconnection from one of the most basic and important ways that people develop social relations, the consequences of which can be devastating: "For the word (and consequently for a human being) there is nothing more terrible that a *lack of response*" (127). Thus, as with Levinas, Bakhtin's assessment of the relations of speech makes clear that social and cultural patterns and structures which engender or perpetuate silence can have serious implications, blocking

the rather unique relations of dialogue, understanding and interconnection that speech communication makes available to people.

The analyses provided by Bakhtin and Levinas offer a useful way to interpret the work of Séro Zéro and the way this work strives to bring into focus the power of the 'non-spoken,' the impact of structures of silence on self-esteem, interpersonal relations, and people's overall well-being and health. In the view of one narrator, the gay milieu can to some extent be characterized as an anti-communicative 'community' that often reinforces the very isolation that gay men supposedly overcome in coming out:

J: ... je pense qu'on vit dans une culture [où] ...bizarrement, beaucoup d'éléments de la culture sont anti-social. La structure et les codes gais sont anti-communication, sont anti-social. Ça fait que, tu vas dans des bars, les bars sont structurés comme McDonalds ... puis il y de moins en moins de bars, tavernes, qui étaient des lieux de communication où ...tu pouvais aller rencontrer puis échanger, juste placoter ...Quand t'es au sauna ... tu ne dois pas parler ...c'est comme un code de non-dit ...c'est un lieu de silence ... tu as une culture qui dit, bon, il faut être beau ... une culture de superficialité, ça fait que tu ne veux pas aller en profondeur, vraiment, avec les gens. Ça fait que ... il y a beaucoup de choses à faire sur la notion de communication.

Here, the narrator contrasts the rich yet declining history of gay bars and taverns – *lieux de communication* that promoted conversation and exchange among people – with a more recent history of social relations, spaces and popular culture that discourages interpersonal communication.

Social and cultural structures of silence, of course, extend beyond the anti-communicational dimensions of social life in the gay village, encompassing the extent to which being 'out' and affirming one's identity and interests as a gay-bi-tran man can come at a cost. In a discussion of social entourage in the self esteem workshop I attended, for example, several people spoke about the at times unexpected consequences when close female friends marry, have children, and become less available as friends:

Someone does a hilarious but infuriating mime of meeting his friend's husband, the husband unable to look him in the eye, very threatened and uneasy, shaking hands while twisting his body convulsively away. It seems symbolic to me, in a sense, of the whole issue of entourage. We have been marked by a specific experience of "entourage," we always pose the threat of stigmatization, that we will be the source of discomfort, disruption within an otherwise smoothly running world.

Here, the tensions in the homophobic husband's body language -- the handshake and the reflex to twist away -- literally embody the contradictions of a social context that tolerates without accommodating, a society that would prefer neither to see nor to speak of homosexuality.

The work of Séro Zéro thus serves to render more apparent such social structures of silence, the impact of the non-spoken or the not-yet-spoken on the possibilities for social support and interaction available to many gay-bi-tran men. The workshop in which I participated incorporated an understanding of speech communication as both an interpersonal activity and as a set of broader social practices and structures, allowing people to consider the implications – individual and social – when such communication is absent or interrupted. For one of the workshop facilitators I interviewed, Séro Zéro's prevention work grapples with a social context where open discussion of sexuality and self-esteem issues is still relatively taboo, and the denial of the importance of these issues is a predominant attitude among many gay men:

G: Parce que moi, j'ai des chums de gars gais qui veulent rien savoir de la prévention. Qui veulent rien savoir de l'estime de soi, de l'affirmation, de parler du deuil, de parler du rejet, de parler de la famille, du coming out, etc. Tu sais, 'je n'en ai pas, des problèmes dans la vie,' tu sais. Mais, là, peut-être ton plus gros problème, [c'est] de ne pas avoir des problèmes avec.

The narrator links such denial to wider social and cultural patterns, most importantly homophobia, in the face of which many gay men tend to turn inward:

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G: ... la réalité gaie ce n'est pas que tu te maries, t'as des enfants puis que t'as un chalet dix ans après avoir acheté ta maison ... c'est souvent des déceptions amoureuses, t'as pas de projets de vie, ou si t'en a un projet de vie, tu ne rencontres personne qui veux se matcher là-dedans ou c'est très difficile ... Il faut surtout pas parler de ça, tu sais: 'C'est correct, des gais mon gars, mais raconte-moi pas tes peines d'amour. Raconte-moi pas tes sorties ... '

The relative lack of social space to openly discuss the specific issues and experiences that gay men face exacerbates experiences of isolation while at the same time rendering such patterns invisible or imperceptible within a social context that just does not want to hear or, worse, is openly hostile. Silence and other social barriers tend to enwrap the experiences of some men in layer after layer of denial:

G: Je trouve ... qu'il y a beaucoup de souffrance, tu sais. C'est pas que j'axe là-dessus, ... c'est que je ne veux pas qu'on l'exclut ça ... les gens ont besoin de support là-dedans. Pas moyen d'entrer dans les écoles. Tu veux faire quelque chose avec le gouvernement, ça passe pas parce que c'est l'homosexualité et on veut ... comment est-ce qu'ils disent ça?, ... on veut convertir les hétéros ...

Here, the narrator draws attention to the extent to which issues facing sexual minorities fail to be addressed within the official channels of government and education, where homosexuality is still frequently viewed as undesirable and, especially in regards to youth, potentially 'transmissible.'

Of course, such silence has other aspects, one of them being gender – in particular, popular social definitions of masculinity in terms of tough appearance and impenetrable silence. As one narrator points out:

J: ...on est quand même des hommes gais, éduquer en tant qu'hommes, et ça veut dire aussi, éduquer dans un rôle en communication ... [pas] le rôle de la personne qui va poser des questions, qui va chercher à résoudre les problèmes ... [c'est plutôt] dans un rôle passif de, 'moi je suis là, je parle pas, je suis tough, là.' ... [il faut aborder] le rapport au genre, à la masculinité, à l'homme ... veut, veut pas, avant de sortir à l'âge de 20 ans, pendant 20 ans [un gai] était un petit gars ... et ça t'amène d'avoir une approche, une attitude spécifique.

Predominant conceptions of masculine identity, then, also have a great deal to do with what can and cannot be freely talked about within gay-bi-tran milieus as within the larger society. For this narrator, such structures of silence help to explain why prevention and health promotion cannot be accomplished by mass-mediated social marketing campaigns alone:

J: ... souvent, je pense que on tombe dans la notion du marketing, mais on oublie que le concept de marketing à la base, c'était pour vendre un produit et vendre la santé, ce n'est pas tout à fait pareil. Et vendre les modifications de comportement quand tu ne peux même pas les nommer, ce n'est pas aussi évident.

That said, several narrators suggest that the images and slogans that Séro Zéro has put into public circulation do provide a way to acknowledge and build upon the specificity of gay men's experiences of the group, the family, and family-like groups :

H: ... c'était un des objectifs, entre autres, de ça. De dire, 'écoute, il a y une famille gaie qui existe, qui est présente, là,' ... je ne sais pas si ça peut être une communauté, mais on a comme, un réseau social gai qui est là, parce qu'on a souvent eu à se départir de sa famille et de se créer des nouveaux liens qu'on va peut-être, tu sais, souvent tu vas entendre dire, 'ah, ben c'est mon coloc, mais c'est plus que mon coloc, c'est comme mon frère' ...

J: ... c'est à travers les campagnes plus larges de marketing social, où on a essayé d'avoir une logique qui était de passer d'avoir le droit d'aimer, à dire, bon, on va donner des exemples concrèts de couples ou des réalités ... et la dernière, qui se voulait plus le groupe, la notion d'être en groupe ... puis là, on nous avait fait des reproches, parce que c'est pas tout le monde qui est en groupe ... mais en même temps ... c'est important cette notion de groupe parce que, c'est important face à la solitude, mais c'est important face à la prévention aussi, de ne pas être tout seul, d'avoir quelqu'un à qui parler ... qui vit peut-être des problèmes comme tu vis ...

Indeed, these structures of silence are a central issue that the Séro Zéro's workshop I attended aimed to address, and in consequence the workshop often took on a certain resonance, electricity, and power as a modest space where gay men could obtain emotional and developmental support that were perhaps unavailable elsewhere.

The workshop provided a forum for considering alternative definitions of and approaches to one's relationships with oneself and with others, but also for questioning larger patterns and contradictions that may be at work as people consider these alternatives:

... A facilitator doesn't buy someone's conclusion that some kind of semi-commitment in relationships is ideal. "Your relationship with your friend is actually very convenient to you," he suggests. "The way it unfolds now, it allows you to maintain your isolation from other people."

Here, the facilitator proposes that isolation is not simply an externally imposed state, but something people can actively perpetuate in their lives. Among the participants, the complex, layered and contradictory meanings of gay identity and community was sometimes articulated as a feeling of estrangement and distance from the self:

Someone is having a rough time of it. It's written all over his body language. He tells us he's "pas bien dans sa peau", not comfortable. I have an immediate identification with this expression, not being in one's skin, of the difficulty of being touched ... feelings of being on the outside looking in.

Such discussions in the workshop brought to the fore the persistence of contradictory life patterns that underpin serious dilemmas about how to approach social and intimate relationships and foster emotional well-being:

Someone brings up the contradiction of wanting to be free but not alone ... how after a couple of months, relationships always just seems to start fizzling out ... whether he actually wants to be with someone or is just subscribing to some kind of social ideal ... how scary it is to think about growing old, alone ...

The work of Séro Zéro is striking in its engagement with and attempt to intervene in a complex web of social relations that engender isolation and silence and affect the health and well-being of gay-bi-tran men.

The Séro Zéro self-esteem workshop that I attended articulates social isolation as common pattern of many gay-bi-tran men's lives, one that some men perpetuate

themselves. Far from being blindly self-destructive, such patterns may be expressive of how these men inhabit a milieu outside of conventional constructs of 'family' and 'community,' a milieu constructed and characterized by structures of silence. The response to the social isolation that can characterize this milieu is, at times, self-isolation: one avoids commitment, thus one avoids being hurt. Indeed, one narrator points to structures of silence and denial -- social patterns and paradoxes that split gay men both from the support of conventional families and from a sense of being supporting within a gay community – as a kind of wound:

G: C'est sur qu'on est fonctionnel dans le quotidien, tout ça, mais il y a des choses de fond qui sont, ah, qui sont en train de cicatriser, qui sont en train de guérir, tu sais, toute l'homophobie, tu sais, je veux dire, il y a, il y a 30 ans, un gai ne s'exprimait pas comme il s'exprime aujourd'hui, tu sais. C'est un processus qui est lent ...

A number of examples of the discussion that took place during the workshop point to a contradictory fear among participants of being alone combined with a desire to or habit of isolating oneself:

Several people reflect upon a strong pattern or desire to isolate themselves. The motivations underlying this seem paradoxical, enmeshing, complex, but have very much to do with a strong desire for freedom, an association between isolation and a concept of freedom. 'At last, free from the gaze of others, from social obligation, from ties, constraints, suffocating unconscious patterns.' But at what cost, this splendid isolation?

Someone talks about being told he's egotistical, about not wanting people to fall in love with him, not trusting people who grow close to him, a need for self-isolation that is familiar to me.

Here, tensions relating to belonging, not belonging, and not wanting to belong, feed a tendency to isolate the self, to keep one's distance, hence another structure of silence – in this case more internal – with which some men grapple. Séro Zéro's concern to address the social isolation and solitude that many gay-bi-tran men face is anchored in the insight

that gay men can perpetuate their own isolation – that social isolation is linked to, but not just a result of social conditions.

From this perspective, the work of Séro Zéro might appear simply as yet another example of health promotion masquerading as a form of empowerment while in fact only individualizing the solution to challenges such as HIV prevention the better to efficiently and bureaucratically manage them. Interpreted in light of Williams' ideas and the structures of silence discussed in the preceding pages, as well as Levinas' and Bakhtin's in some ways parallel analyses of speech communication, however, it is not quite so easy to categorize Séro Zéro's work as simply an example of the deeply disguised capture and transformation of movements for social change into forms of neo-liberal management.

If structures of silence – ranging from the emphasis on appearance in gay culture, to the homophobic silencing of gay-bi-tran experience in the wider culture, to self-perpetuated patterns of social isolation – characterize the gay milieu, this may limit the possibilities for community, for ethics, for dialogic relations. The work of Séro Zéro formulates this problem and articulates a response to it. Rather than constructing subjects as 'consumers,' the work of the organization conveys a positional understanding of subjectivity, constituted by social patterns, practices, institutions and the like but also encompassing a dimension of personal agency. Thus, Séro Zéro's analysis of the social isolation faced by many gay-bi-tran men strives to acknowledge the personal agency that is at work and at stake in this isolation, without reducing the causes and meanings of isolation to this dimension.

The work of Séro Zéro in some sense recognizes and situates people as needing to be in conversation with a range of others in their social context – proposing speaking and

hearing as perhaps the most basic form of agency that people can exercise in defining

who they are in the context of the multiple ways they are socially defined. Séro Zéro's

understanding of community, then, is in part an understanding of structures of silence and

their impact on community, where community is understood not simply as the rational

discourse and operations of a grassroots civil sector, but also as a form of ethical and

dialogical agency. In the next and concluding section, I provide several examples of how

Séro Zéro articulates an understanding of community in terms of such agency.

The agency of speaking and hearing

We live our solitude like Philoctetes on his island, fearing rather than hoping to return to the world. We cannot bear the presence of our companions. We hide within ourselves -- except when we rend ourselves open in our frenzy -- and the solitude in which we suffer has no reference either to a redeemer or a creator. We oscillate between intimacy and withdrawal, between a shout and silence, between a fiesta and a wake, without ever truly surrendering ourselves.
(Paz, 1985: 64)

Come, child, let me tell you of this island.
No one comes here willingly.
(Sophocles, 1986: 23)

Sophocles' drama *Philoctetes* (408 B.C.), written three years before his death,

recounts the story of Neoptolemos, a young Athenian warrior brought by Odysseus to the

desolate island of Lemnos during the Trojan War. Some years earlier, Odysseus had

abandoned another of his soldiers, Philoctetes, on Lemnos. Philoctetes was an

exceptional warrior in that he possessed a magic bow, given to him by the demi-god Heracles. But Philoctetes, having been accidentally bitten by a magic serpent, was also the victim of a curse -- an excruciating wound that refused to heal. After enduring Philoctetes' howling attacks of pain for some time, Odysseus and his men eventually feel forced to abandon him on Lemnos.

Years later, a prophecy makes clear that the Athenians will never defeat the Trojans without the help of Philoctetes' magic bow. With the war hanging in the balance and knowing he has little chance of regaining Philoctetes trust, Odysseus recruits the young Neoptolemos to trick Philoctetes into handing over the weapon. In Sophocles' version of events, Neoptolemos struggles both with the dishonesty of Odysseus' plan and the with the strange mindset that has gradually overcome Philoctetes. Here is a deeply suffering man living in desperate isolation on an empty, windswept island, yet when Neoptolemos reveals Odysseus' treachery and implores Philoctetes, nonetheless, to accompany them to Troy, Philoctetes resists. Faced with the opportunity to end his suffering and his loneliness, Philoctetes is prepared to retreat back into them. Classical scholar Gregory McNamee interprets Philoctetes as a statement against assumptions, common at the end of Sopocle's life, that those of noble birth were necessarily endowed with nobleness of character (1986 : 3-4). Neoptolemos is of aristocratic birth, but this does not save him from ethical struggle or the dangers of moral corruption.

In *Labyrinth of Solitude* (published 1950), Octavio Paz uses the story of Philoctetes to a different end as an image that evokes some of the paradoxes of Mexican experiences of identity and modernity. For Paz, the image of Philoctetes, torn between the impulse to rejoin humanity or maintain his painful solitude on Lemnos, serves as a

warning that modernity, in breaking down traditional forms of community, may bring with it painful and irresolvable patterns of social isolation and alienation. He detects and describes these patterns in *Labyrinth*, an innovative and, at the time, controversial examination of Mexican identity, history and popular culture (Santí, 1993: 67; 104).

Paz's interpretation of the story of Philoctetes offers a framing metaphor that, despite gaps in time and culture, seems as pertinent in discussing issues of gay identity and community as it was for Paz in looking at the Mexican condition in the middle of the past century. Working to question community and reconstruct or re-enact it in new ways, Séro-Zéro's self-esteem workshop surfaces a set of tensions in the social organization of family and community and the impact of these on the well-being and health of gay-bi-tran men. Specifically, the workshop makes visible the isolation of many men caught in a 'milieu' somewhere between 'family' and 'community' -- a paradoxical isolation that recalls the story of Philoctetes – while at the same time activating people to confront this situation.

In this section, I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the way Séro Zéro's work, striving to address the structures of silence faced by many gay-bi-tran men, constitutes an important response to the tensions relating to community in the health promotion paradigm. From the perspective of Séro Zéro's work, Sophocles' account of the plight and struggle of Philoctetes and his dialogue on ethics with Neoptolemos provides something of a emblematic image of the social experience of many men, stranded and perhaps wounded yet hesitant to get off their island of solitude, a predicament that is perhaps only resolved through ethical encounter and dialogue with another person. The struggle Philoctetes faces is strikingly similar to the one voiced in

Séro Zéro's own workshops. "An outcast, mistreated, to whom should I talk?" Philoctetes asks himself at one point when considering the idea of leaving his island. Later, Neoptolemos rebukes him for his continuing tendency to withdraw: " It is better, it seems, that I stop talking and you go on living without a cure" (1986: 74; 73).

If Paz adopts the story of Philoctetes as a metaphor for chronic patterns of social isolation he associates with the rise of modernity, then, the story may also speak to the ways in which the work of Séro Zéro articulates the difficult 'position' of gay-bi-tran men as speaking subjects in a community milieu and wider social context marked by structures of silence that foster social isolation. Like many of Séro-Zéro's programs, the self-esteem workshop is informed by an assertion that silence and social isolation are important co-factors that influence people's capacity to maintain health and have protected sex. Séro Zéro has mounted several social marketing campaigns to address issues of isolation and link safer sex to issues of self-esteem and social support through the placement of street-level poster and billboard campaigns promoting positive images of gay men and gay social groups. The winter 1997 poster, for example, featured an image of gay friends gathered together for a birthday party with the slogan: *Ma vie gaie, c'est mes amours, mes amis... Mais c'est d'abord la vie. J'me protège* (fig. 5.1). Presenting an image of a gay family-like group, the campaign aimed to challenge social perceptions and patterns that reinforce isolation by evoking the existence and legitimacy of gay family networks and systems of support. One narrator suggests the campaign literally benefited some who saw it:

H: ... à un moment donné, j'étais ... en train de poser ... une autre nouvelle affiche ... puis après ça il était revenu me voir au bar puis il m'avait dit, 'moi, quand je me sens triste, quand je me sens seul, ou quand ça *feel* pas, je regarde cette annonce-là, puis ça me fait sourire, ça me fait penser que j'appartiens, que je ne suis pas tout seul.'

Figure 5.1   *Ma vie gaie? C'est mes amours, mes amis* ... , social marketing
campaign, (Séro Zéro, 1997. Photo: Cathy Busby)

The importance of breaking patterns of silence and social isolation is also taken up in a booklet Séro Zéro published in 1998. Collectively authored by Séro-Zéro staff members, *Ma vie gaie; le parcours en soi* solicits the active participation of readers in a process of "réflexion sur la santé gaie," in part so as to recognize the links to structures of silence and isolation:

Nous avons prévu des espaces à la fin de chaque chapitre pour noter vos réflexions. Certains sections interpellent des lecteurs plus que d'autres. Certains chapitres traitent de sujets tabous dans la communauté, d'autres confrontent des silences. Le tout, nous l'espérons, contribuera à briser l'isolement.

A kind of print version of Séro Zéro's workshops, the booklet proposes the shattering of isolation and the confrontation of silences as a critical course of social action in which the reader is invited to participate.

One of the silences that is specifically addressed in the organization's work is the centrality of risk in the lives of many gay-bi-tran men and the multiple meanings that risk can have for them – an effort on the part of Séro Zéro that, in Marcel Rioux's definition, would constitute an emancipatory practice, one of those popular practices "[qui] vise à re-sémantiser les milieux de vie et de travail ..." (1982: 59). For example, the workshop discussions served as a forum for renaming 'risk' as a positive aspect of gay-bi-tran men's identities and communities. Against the truism within health education that people must not take risks, the workshop I attended articulates the ways in which risk has distinct meaning for gay-bi-tran men, proposing the idea that growing up gay involves, even necessitates taking risks, often from a very young age. Even as just admitting one is sexually or gender-wise different is a fundamental risk – at times a risk to one's very life – risk is also in many ways a positive thing for gay men and other sexual minorities. Gay sociologist Simon Watney points to the positive dimensions of such risk:

We all took great risks, my generation, because great damage and injustice had been done to us, because we had so much catching up to do, through no fault of our own. In a very brief period of time we have defined our own forms of domesticity, perhaps a little more honest and flexible than those we fled – or that threw us out (1991: 33).

If taking risks can lead to a certain resilience, an additional outcome proposed in the workshops is that many gay men eventually become "numb" to risk. As a result, risky sex does not easily stand out as an exceptional experience. It may have no special resonance or meaning – just one more among a panoply of risks:

J: ... dans la société, les gens prennent différents genres de risque, puis on s'attend qu'un homme prenne plus de risque qu'une femme ... un homme gai va en prendre encore plus qu'un homme *straight*, parce que dans l'ensemble de ces secteurs de sa vie, il va jouer avec le risque de fait qu'il est gai, puis il n'est pas supposé de le dire, puis il n'est pas supposé que ça paraisse, etc. Ça fait qu'il va être dans un rapport de risque constant. Et comment ce rapport au risque là, nous amène à prendre encore plus de risque dans d'autre secteurs ... tu joues dans un univers de risques. Et la culture gaie historiquement, elle était très axée à valoriser ça ... d'ailleurs je trouve que c'est un défi ... d'essayer d'apporter des modifications à ça, sans devenir moraliste ...

Séro-Zéro's workshop participants are incited to consider their own lives in light of this "universe of risk."

By not presenting risk as some kind of aberration or impossible-to-understand 'lapse,' pointing instead to the ways it may be structuring people's lives in both positive and negative ways, risk is significantly redefined. A space is created for recognizing the positive dimension of risk, but also for removing the sense of inevitability that can surround it. Participants are invited to tell a new story about risk-taking as a gay man, one that both confronts and empowers. At the same time, the workshop encourages an active reinterpretation of the safety of sex as a meaningful outcome of one's life experiences, discarding stereotypes of unprotected sex as a senseless self-destructive behaviour by recognizing that it may have positive, highly important meanings for

people. In many cases, as this narrator suggests, both risk and its varied meanings remain

unspoken, a situation the organization's work endeavours to address:

G: ... c'est ça le problème majeur que j'ai rencontré. C'est toujours les autres qui sont à
risque. C'est jamais, c'est jamais la personne ... tu sais, 'Moi, je suis *clean*. Moi, je me
protège. Ah, moi, j'ai pas de problème. Je n'ai pas de comportement à risque. Je
connais un gars qui fourre pas de condoms ... Mais moi, je suis très correct.' Donc, les
tabous. Les interdits. La non-permission de parler de ses *relapses*. De parler de sa
nature humaine qui est vulnérable.

Here, the narrator recalls Walter Ong's observation, "Names ... give human beings power

over what they name" (1982: 33). The need to talk, to name issues the better to deal

with them — ...*de parler de ses relapses. De parler de sa nature humaine...* — comes to

the fore. In projects such as the self-esteem workshop I attended, Séro Zéro offers a

context where participants can give new meaning to their experiences, 'naming' issues

that tend to remain unspoken and reworking personal narratives to tell a new or different

story.

This interpretation of Séro Zéro's work is suggested to me by Jean Jackson's

analysis of the therapeutic approach used at a chronic pain treatment centre in New

England.[49] Drawing on the work of Cheryl Mattingly on the use of story-telling within

clinical practice, Jackson brings into focus the ways the treatment centre's therapy

involves a "collective attempt at constructing a new narrative for each patient" (1991: 6).

Defining narrative as an active social practice that "wrests meaning" from experience and

works to affect "how ... life goes forward" (19), the treatment centre, in Jackson's

account, uses story-telling as a form of therapeutic practice allied to "confrontational"

and "paradoxical" therapy:

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[49] See also Jean Jackson (1992), "After a While, No one Believes You: Real and Unreal Pain," in *Pain and
Human Experience, Anthropological Perspectives on the Lived Worlds of Chronic Pain Patients in North
America*, ed. M. J. Good et al (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Confrontational therapy is oriented to confronting the patient about maladaptive behaviours; for example, saying "if you're paid to be in pain [i.e. receiving disability payments or awards from litigations] you won't improve." Paradoxical therapy is a deliberate attempt to dislodge the patient from a point of view or set of behaviours by disorienting him or her ... (26).

The treatment centre's efforts to construct new narratives with patients, Jackson argues, is primarily focused on leading them to recognize that to a certain extent, they are causing their own pain (15). In her research, Jackson investigates through interviews and participant-observation the extent to which patients reported improvements as a result of participating in such confrontational processes of narrative construction and "cognitive restructuring" (2).

Far from concluding that this is a seamless process, Jackson's findings indicate that some patients at the treatment centre resist its therapeutic approach. In detailed analyses of her own interviews with patients, she finds a range of responses to the centre's story-telling process, including some patients who adopt a multiple, open-ended point of view:

The aggressive therapy at the [centre] in the form of staff suggestions that Tom "needs his pain" may be resisted at the time they are offered, but at another time he looks at these suggestions, plays with them, tries them on, enters into dialogue with them (16).

I noted similar instances of resistance at various points during workshop sessions. For example, when a set of activities aimed at clarifying our "*bilan de vie*" ("taking stock of our lives") was proposed as a key first step to mapping out a direction for the future, one participant quickly rejected the activity based on a philosophical disagreement with its objectives. Thus, like the therapies at the chronic pain centre where Jackson did her research, the work of Séro Zéro incorporates collective procedures of naming issues and constructing new personal narratives, procedures that could have significant impact on

people but did not work seamlessly. Moreover, like the emphasis at the pain centre on how patients can be responsible for their own pain, Séro Zéro's work attempts to bring into focus the ways that gay-bi-tran men can reinforce or perpetuate their experiences of social isolation.

Thus, the discussion that went on during the workshops involved efforts – to use Jackson's terminology – to 'dislodge' a point of view or set of behaviours through confrontational and paradoxical techniques:

... early on, a facilitator asks if I had ever wanted children. I was surprised. I said yes. Then I was surprised at saying yes. He asked what I did with those feelings. I said that I probably sublimated them, transferred them to my work, that my work was in some sense my 'baby.' I was a bit confused by this line of questioning. Eventually ..., we came back to the topic of children. "We're raised to want children," he suggested ... "In my mind, at least, having children is partly about having a reason to live ... as gays, we tend get cut off from that experience [of having children], but we still have the feelings, the aspirations. We've realized in doing these workshops that increasing people's self-esteem can't happen unless we also address what people are living for ... "

Here, offering up an apparent paradox – gay men who want to have kids – a workshop facilitator upsets my expectations regarding 'appropriate' questions to ask about my life. This is a dimension of HIV health promotion, specifically as it pertains to gay men, to which a number of commentators have pointed. In a 1995 article on safer sex relapse among gay men, for example, journalist Michael Warner notes:

... the pursuit of dangerous sex is not as simple as mere thrill seeking or self-destructiveness. It may represent deep and mostly unconscious thinking about desire and the conditions that make life worthwhile ... Unsafe sex ... may be the closest many can come to asking out loud: under what conditions is life worth surviving for? (1995: 35; 36).

The use of confrontational and paradoxical techniques in the self esteem workshop I attended aimed to address the extent to which many gay men have a bleak sense of the

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future, exacerbated by homophobia and the emphasis within gay culture on youth and

physical beauty, making the prospect of growing older seem dismal:

G: ... il y a beaucoup d'hommes qui [n'ont] pas cette conscience de la projection dans le temps, des projets de vie ...c'est absent ... Parce que la réalité du quotidien est écrasante, tu sais ... ça fait que j'arrive pas à me trouver une job, je me suis fait mettre à la porte, parce que [je suis] ...gai, c'est une réalité qui est très présente, tu sais, encore. Donc, je le dis pas que je suis gai ...

As this narrator hints, one of the aims of the workshop is to encourage and enable a sense

of *projet de vie* ("life's project")[50] among participants. In articulating a conception of life

as narrative and encouraging "projets de vie," participants are situated as subjects who

actively contribute to the constitution of their everyday lives. The workshop thereby

appealed to a notion of agency as dialogical and ethical action, often defining this agency

as a form of self responsibility:

I was nervous ... because I wanted to speak... what I like about this nervousness is that it was made clear at the beginning, in the first session, that we all needed to assert ourselves. The facilitators used the verb "se responsabiliser." I guess roughly translatable as "to take responsibility for oneself." We would not be timed and carefully allocated our equal share of speaking time. "If you need to speak... it's up to you to do it."... Structuring things this way is risky, and indeed there were people who dominated the discussion... this was revealing in terms of the different degrees of self-esteem among various people in the group.

Here, the way interactions in the group were structured offered a way for participants to

recognize and experiment with dialogical action as agency: ... *"If you need to speak...*

it's up to you to do it." The ethics of speech as action were also at times the focus:

Our last exercise of the evening was amusing and surprisingly difficult: to divide into groups, thinking up and calling out positive adjectives for ourselves and each other. In

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[50] Compelling as such objectives may be, they are clearly not beyond critique. A number of feminist theorists have critically examined the models of empowerment and self-esteem historically used within feminism, pointing to problems with self-esteem becoming an end unto itself or the tendency for such approaches to construct empowerment as a linear, individualistic pursuit of some idealized form of self-realization. Indeed, the linearity of story-telling and of projecting one's life into the future tends to oversimplify what is actually a very difficult, non-linear project of maintaining a health lifestyle. Thanks to Robyn Diner for this insight.

the wrap up, a facilitator links this to the idea of taking responsibility for oneself, including one's self-affirmation and self-esteem. We discussed briefly what it meant that people have so much trouble articulating their good qualities, and how common it is to fall into the reverse pattern of always denigrating oneself ... how it's perfectly possible to look to oneself, first and foremost, for affirmation.

Here, the exercise stresses the importance of the ethics of one's speech about oneself. Self-esteem is shown to be not simply an attribute that one somehow comes to acquire, but instead is something actively generated by the ethics of the way one speaks.

The agency of speech, and the need to ethically analyze that agency, in the first instance so as to do no harm to oneself, is emphasized in these exercises in self-responsibility. The interest in speaking and hearing evident in Séro Zéro's work is clearly linked to the analysis of structures of silence that takes place in the self-esteem workshops and in other aspects of the organization's work I have mentioned. This focus on structures of silence constitutes a significant way in which people working at Séro Zéro critically understand Montréal's gay community – as a somewhat anti-communicative milieu marked by structures of silence and thus not always conducive to people's well-being and health. It also constitutes an important response to tensions in the health promotion paradigm related to the conceptualization of community. The understanding evident in Séro Zéro's work of the problems endemic silence poses for both individual well-being and possibilities for community development has led it in part to a focus on 'conversational' approaches to prevention and health promotion work. An emphasis on primary speech, the agency of dialogic relations – in short, an 'incitement to talk' – has come to characterize the organization's work and that of other, similar organizations. It is this incitement to talk that is the focus of my analysis in the next chapter.

6   The incitement to talk

H: ... il y aurait un besoin, entre autres, qu'il n'y ait pas juste de la prévention VIH-sida, il y a un besoin ... de trouver ... quelque chose pour que les gens se parlent. Les gens se parlent très, très, très, très peu.

In this chapter, I examine a set of characteristics shared by many of the texts and practices in my corpus and that lead me to characterize them as an "incitement to talk." This incitement is evident in the above quote, where the narrator frames prevention work as activity that addresses a need to incite people to talk together: ...*il y a un besoin ... de trouver ...quelque chose pour que les gens se parlent.* This approach to prevention makes immediate sense as response by Séro Zéro and organizations like it to structures of silence that I brought into focus in previous chapter. Indeed, as I review in this chapter, inciting face-to-face talk -- or as Bakhtin might describe it, "primary speech communication" -- has emerged as significant theme and practice of HIV health promotion work over the past decade.

As I have explained throughout this dissertation, the main argument that I am putting forth in this study is that Séro Zéro retains community as a frame of reference, despite tensions relating to this concept in the health promotion paradigm, by understanding community 'conversantly.' This chapter analyzes incitements to talk in HIV health promotion work as efforts to develop dialogic relations as a form of agency, extending the conversant dimensions of community. I consider how incitements to talk

can be theorized as discursive technologies, and the critical concerns that this raises. However, I provide an alternative interpretation of these calls for conversation in light of theories of primary speech communication that define the dialogic relations of conversation as a form of social agency and interconnection.

Technological critiques quickly dismiss calls for people to talk together as an instrumental use of conversation, a perpetuation of existing relations of knowledge and power. Theories of primary speech, in particular Bakhtin's framework for the social analysis of speech communication, suggest that this technological critique, while important, is not sufficient as an analysis. Bakhtin's theory of speech communication as a network of primary and secondary intertextual chains that generate social linkages, leads to an understanding of how HIV health promotion can operate as a form of agency, articulating subjectivity as the possibility for contact with ones peers, speaking out, enacting an ethics of conversation and interpersonal relationship.

The incitements to talk that shape Séro Zéro's work, from this perspective, are illustrations of its conversant understanding of community, one that is generated through primary speech. They point to an emphasis in the organization's work on the "ritual dimension" of communication (Carey, 1992: 18), an emphasis that cannot simply be dismissed as the deployment of a disciplinary technology, because it is itself a critical engagement with the social structures of silence that I analyzed in the previous chapter. While the analysis of the incitement to talk in HIV health promotion work as a discursive technology provides important insights that I review in this chapter, then, I argue that it is not sufficient. Prior to making this assessment and establishing a link between Séro Zéro's conversational emphasis and the organization's understandings of community, I

provide an overview in the next section of the incitements to talk common in Séro Zéro's work.

Incitements to talk in the work of Séro Zéro

Imagery of talk, a language that underscores the importance of face-to-face conversation, and programs that incite talk are a common feature in print material Séro Zéro has produced and distributed as well as that developed by comparable organizations. One of the organization's program coordinators situates this preoccupation with talk as central to Séro Zéro's mandate:

> H: ... j'essaie de voir comment je peux avoir de l'interaction dans les bars, comment je peux amener les gens à se parler. Je pense que même si on va travailler avec les co-facteurs ... notre mandat, ça sera d'amener les gens à plus se parler.

The distinctiveness of the texts that incite talk that I examine in this chapter is partly evident in their contrast to other HIV/AIDS-related discourses that also address communities with a view to encouraging participation. Perhaps the central example is the slogan "Silence=Death" that served to anchor the strategies of ACT-UP activism in the late 1980s, drawing on the strident postmodern style of AIDS activist art. The rhetoric of ACT-UP certainly constituted an incitement for people to talk or, perhaps more accurately, speak out, as in a 1991 postcard bearing the slogan "Call the White House" (fig. 6.1). Here, however, the imperative to talk is squarely situated in the public sphere rather than as an incitement for people to converse with one another as a way to improve well-being and build supportive community.

DONALD MOFFETT

CALL THE WHITE HOUSE 1990 CIBATRANSPARENCY AND LIGHTBOX 40 × 60 × 6"

108.731 AMERICANS HAVE DIED FROM AIDS-RELATED COMPLICATIONS
AS OF APRIL 1. 1991 ACCORDING TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL.

Figure 6.1   *Call the White House.* postcard (Donald Moffett. 1991)

Even if not officially stated as such in the organization's documentation, the need

for such interpersonal talk is a recurrent theme in many of the evaluation reports on its

programs that Séro Zéro has published. An evaluation of one of Séro Zéro's earliest

outreach programs involving gay groups and associations in the city, for example,

grappled with the problem of people's discomfort in talking about HIV-related issues

(Action Séro Zéro, 1996: 13-14). At the same time, Séro Zéro has identified 'active

listening' as a critical extension of providing basic prevention information, and a number

of Séro Zéro's project evaluations have brought into focus the extent to which many

people actually do welcome the opportunity to talk with Séro Zéro staff and volunteers

about HIV and safer sex (Action Séro Zéro, 1998: 10; 1996: 8).

Surveys conducted as part of these evaluations have also suggested an association

between the ease with which people talk about such issues and their tendency to adopt

and maintain safer sex practices (Morrison, 1996: 39; 44; 48-49). This research has

motivated the organization to develop social marketing campaigns addressing issues

relating to talk, as well as an ongoing series of small-group discussion programs that

provide contexts within which to talk. A number of Séro Zéro's brochures focus on oral

communication skills as an important component of health and point to social isolation

and patterns of silence as key challenges in promoting health among gay and bisexual

men. The organization has also developed strategies to make it easier for people to talk

with Séro Zéro staff in social contexts such as bars. These have included hiring a female

impersonator, "Mme Condom," to do frontline work for Séro Zéro in Montréal's gay bars

over the course of several projects (fig. 6.2). In the words of the coordinator of these

projects:

Figure 6.2   *Madame Condom* (Séro Zéro, 1997)

On aurait pu tenir des kiosques avec des représentants clairement identifiés, mais cela gêne encore beaucoup les gens de s'arrêter et de parler aux intervenants ou de prendre des condoms. Ils ont peur d'être jugés comme séropositifs. Donc, [Mme Condom] ... peut parler de sexualité, de condoms et de dépistage avec beaucoup d'humour, sans que les clients soient gênés.[51]

As this narrator notes, even as facilitating people's ability to talk about safer sex and HIV issues is one of Séro Zéro's key objectives (Action Séro Zéro, 1998: 9), this is not always easy to accomplish. In its public presence in places such as bars, Séro Zéro must deal with the stigma associated with HIV and the ways the organization can unintentionally 'label' people in front of others in doing its work: *Ils ont peur d'être jugés comme séropositifs*. Here, this is accomplished by shifting the 'spectacle' of who is talking back onto the organization and its representative, Mme Condom.

I should note that in bringing this incitement to talk into focus, my intention is not to reduce the work of Séro Zéro and other community-based organizations to such texts and practices. This focus on talk is one of a number of approaches that inform the work of HIV prevention and health promotion at Séro Zéro and elsewhere. An increasing emphasis on talk, however, is evident in the way Séro Zéro's efforts stand in contrast to earlier HIV prevention campaigns undertaken in Montréal. In the earliest of these, the emphasis was on condom use, the first such campaign centering on an instructional slogan -- *Jouez-sûr* (C-sam, 1985-86). The slogans of subsequent C-Sam campaigns, leading up to the incorporation of Séro Zéro in 1994, show an evolution from the imperative mode of *Jouez-sûr* to a more congenial and normalizing *Au sauna, on s'emballe* (1991), and then to a declarative *Le Droit d'aimer sans peur et sans reproche* (1993). The latter, the first campaign to include an outdoor advertising component

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[51] André-Constantin Passiour, "La campagne de sécurisexe dans les bars: Madame Condom!," *Fugues* (février, 1997): 108.

(street-level and subway billboards), was also the first that did not focus on condoms or transmission risks. Instead, the intention was to offer positive representations of gay men and to link health to ostensibly unrelated issues such as coming out and the respect for legal and human rights (Lavoie 1998: 359, note 20).

One of Séro-Zéro's recent social marketing campaign (March 2000) centered on the slogan *Faut se parler: on a tant de choses à se dire* (fig. 6.3). The slogan was one of three[52] to be promoted during the year 2000 through magazine advertisements, the distribution of flyers and postcards, and the organization of community forums across Québec; it also continues to be featured centrally the organization's web site. In the first instance, *Faut se parler* is intended to address issues of interpersonal communication, in particular the way in which many gay and bisexual men make decisions about practicing safer sex not by talking with a potential partner, but instead based on a partner's physical appearance or on the location where the partner is met. The campaign's incitement to talk also draws on research coming out of the Cohorte Omega[53] project that has brought to light a strong correlation between good interpersonal communication within gay couples and the maintenance of safer sex practices. As one narrator summarizes:

J: ... ce qu'on découvre à la recherche, c'est plus que les ententes sont structurées dans le couple autant à l'interne que du côté externe ... plus que les personnes maintiennent les comportements sécuritaires.

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[52] Second and third waves of the campaign have addressed issues of coming out and of HIV-related discrimination.
[53] As mentioned in chapter 3, the Cohorte Omega is a 5-year study of seroconversion among gay men currently going on in Montréal.

Figure 6.3 *Faut se parler*, magazine ad (Séro Zéro, 2000)

At the same time, the campaign is also intended addresses communication issues on the community level. In words of campaign coordinator, Alain Beauregard, *Faut se parler* speaks to:

... l'importance de communiquer pour maintenir une cohésion et pour briser l'isolement dans une communauté longtemps privée du droit de parole.[54]

Visually, the campaign poster suggests this with the inclusion of an image of friends chatting in a bar placed alongside depictions of couples in interaction, as well as with the tagline: "On a tant de choses à se dire." The campaign thus aims to counter the codes of silence that often characterize social interaction among gay and bisexual men, as well as the ways in which the broader social and cultural context has silenced discussion of homosexuality and acted as a barrier to gay men's self-affirmation.

Faut se parler, then, is a logical outcome of the organization's work to confront the social patterns and structuring of silence I discussed in chapter 5. However, rather than understanding the goals and implications of this campaign and Séro Zéro's other incitements to talk as self evident, in the next section I examine these in light of critical theories of conversational discourse. From a critical perspective, the incitement to talk prevalent in Séro Zéro's work and that of other, comparable organizations raises important questions about the interests and agendas served by such calls for people to converse together.

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[54] "Séro Zéro lance sa campagne Faut se parler!" *RG* (avril 2000): 23.

Claims regarding the importance of interpersonal communication to health and well-being have become common in conceptual discussions of HIV prevention. Writing in the *National AIDS Bulletin*, for example, Elizabeth Reid has suggested that the success of prevention efforts is linked to the "availability of social conditions for people to tell their stories" (cited in Altman, 1994: 62). While I would not want to deny that there is a certain truth here, it is also somewhat reductive. The incitement to talk in the name of health perhaps too easily evacuates a nuanced conception of talk as a social practice -- 'listening,' for instance, is presumably an important part of Reid's equation. Indeed, the incitements to talk recurrent in HIV health promotion are not neutral or beyond critique, even as they mobilize a language of empowerment that strives to "give voice" to those who are marginalized. In this section, I examine calls for people to talk together in light of theories of "simulated conversation" as a discursive technology. These theories raise critical questions about the incitements to talk in HIV prevention work, pointing to ways in which telling one's story to others may also serve to perpetuate rather than challenge existing relations of power and knowledge.

In examining the ways in which people living with AIDS have been incited to 'tell their stories,' both to support HIV prevention efforts and in media coverage of AIDS, for example, José Ibañez-Carrasco takes to task the sweeping and sometimes naive claims that are often made regarding storytelling and the 'voicing' of experience. For Ibañez-Carrasco, the assumption that telling one's story is empowering, democratizing,

or politically progressive must be critically scrutinized (1995: 7). Pointing to the

televised AIDS diary of Dr. Peter Jeppson-Young, broadcast daily on CBC Vancouver

from 1990 until Jeppson-Young's death in 1992, Ibañez-Carrasco classifies this and

similar media coverage as the AIDS "confessional," a genre of flattened, non-critical

storytelling that emphasizes the spectacle of AIDS without placing the epidemic in any

kind of critical context:

When a story becomes a confession, it becomes a secret never fully revealed, a flat
narrative that hides the underpinnings of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and classism.
There is nothing intrinsically wrong with Jepson-Young's contribution to the AIDS
canon ... The issue is utilizing the airtime, exhausting people's attention, glossing over
the many issues around HIV and AIDS ... Stories become confessional not only because
one cries and throws a fit in front of a bunch of strangers but also because the audience is
only prepared to listen to it as a confession (8).

Although this immediately brings to mind Foucault's analysis of relations of power

centred on the notion of *l'aveu* – Ibañez-Carrasco does not use the term confession in

reference to Foucault. For Ibañez-Carrasco, the confessional format constructs

storytelling as a media frame– 'the AIDS victim speaks out' – a pre-fabricated form of

self-disclosure that, in catering to audience expectations, reinforces rather than challenges

the power relations structuring the social reality of HIV/AIDS (7-8).

In critiquing the confessional, Ibañez-Carrasco does not categorically reject the

progressive possibilities for and importance of talk and telling stories. Instead, he

contrasts the confessional format to the "testimonial," a form of storytelling present but

less common within HIV prevention work. In Ibañez-Carrasco's definition, testimonials

differ from confessionals in striving to place personal experience in the context of the

wider social and political issues and circumstances that inform it. Testimonials seek to

disrupt the spectacle and contest the status quo, providing a critical and social

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interpretation of personal experience. As the word suggests, testimonials involve 'bearing witness' to and critically interrogating the social context, whereas confessionals work to circumvent such critique, packaging and scripting personal narratives as safe, non-threatening stories of triumph or tragedy (9-10). I look further at this idea of "testimonial," in comparison with Emmanuel Levinas theory of "testimony," in the final section of this chapter.

Some of the specific concerns that Ibañez-Carrasco raises about the AIDS confessional are addressed more broadly in the work of linguist Norman Fairclough. Pointing to the increased use of conversational formats within a variety of discursive practices and contexts, Fairclough identifies this as a process of "discursive change" that has come to characterize contemporary societies, such that conversational forms are "colonizing" discourses in the public sphere, media, and education (1992: 201). Noting the increasingly frequent 'migration' of conversational forms from the private to the public sphere, Fairclough identifies conversation as an emerging discursive technique or "technology" now common in many domains of media, education and business, a technology whereby "simulated conversation" serves to achieve specific institutional objectives or fulfill organizational agendas.[55] He points to a contemporary proliferation of forms of "simulated conversation" as evidence for this shift, an example being the

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[55]The Internet is another sector where the incitement to talk, and the discursive and social trends outlined by Fairclough, seem apparent in a number of ways: the emphasis on the Internet as a forum for and means to develop communities, and the rise of Internet chat which in some sense seems to be the ultimate example of the technologization and commodification of conversational discourse. Indeed, community and conversation have become central themes in online marketing, linked to the emergence of the Internet as a sales and marketing channel. While there is reason to question the rapid commercialization and technologization of conversation and the agendas this serves, I do not believe these trends render untenable a conception that conversation works to build community. Indeed the commercial vigour of conversational forms and technologies on the Internet likely rests upon this relationship, even as it reinforces and 'naturalizes' it.

liberal use of quotation marks and slang in written language such that written forms mimic informal, spoken language.

Fairclough thus opens the way for more general critique than Ibañez-Carrasco of the incitements to talk that have come to characterize HIV health promotion work at Séro Zéro and elsewhere. The recurrent emphasis in Séro Zéro's work on getting people to talk together appears to be one example of a broad shift in HIV health prevention away from presenting health information in a formal or abstract manner, striving instead to deal with HIV and health using informal language, narrative and cartoon formats that mimic the spoken word. Thus, the print material that Séro Zéro has developed and distributed frequently incorporates what Fairclough refers to as 'simulated conversation' and speaks to the broad shift he identifies as a shift to speech-like forms in writing. The title of a resource guide developed by the organization in 1997, for example, sits between quotes, written as if the words had been spoken by the intended reader: « *Ma vie gaie; le parcours en soi* » (fig. 6.4). Some of Séro Zéro's earliest safer sex leaflets were designed as mini 'photo-novellas' (fig. 6.5), a format adapted from the Britain's Terrence Higgins Trust as way to use accessible, non-technical language and to anchor prevention education in the real-life situations that people face. In this case, the photo-novella format clearly serves as a form of simulated conversation, visually depicting both what the characters are saying and what they are thinking. Implicitly, the flyers may also operate as incitement for the reader to talk – to become more conversant in the practice of safer sex -- by providing examples of *how* to talk. Another example, a wall poster that Séro Zéro has placed in a number of Montréal's saunas (also adapted from the THT) is

Figure 6.4   *"Ma vie gaie: le parcours en soi"*, booklet on gay health (Séro Zéro, 1998)

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Figure 6.5 *un duo en risques mineurs.* leaflet (Séro Zéro. 1995. adapted from Terrence Higgins Trust)

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more explicit in its incitement. The poster condenses a simulated 'conversation' into one panel, using cartoon images and thought balloons to focus on the problem of people operating on false assumptions that do not come to light precisely because they remain unspoken, challenging this lack of talk with the slogan: *Qu'on se le dise !* (fig. 6.6).

Beyond the work of Séro Zéro, the use of photo-novella and comic book formats has been widespread within HIV prevention work. The adoption of this pop culture format is, in an obvious sense, motivated by the concern to make prevention education accessible, appealing and non-technical. Perhaps the most notorious example is the *Safer Sex Comix* series produced in 1987 by the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in New York City (fig. 6.7). Designed as a way to eroticize safer sex and to acknowledge a variety of desires, the series became the center of a political controversy after it was targeted by Senator Jesse Helms in his efforts to block federal U.S. funding for safer sex education programs. The use of comic formats with explicit dialogue and imagery to promote safer sex elicited similar controversy in Québec in fall of 1991 when the Montreal General Hospital Community Health Department and *Travail de milieu jeunesse* published *Tête-à-Queue*, a 28-page colour comic book aimed at street youth. The comic book used street language and explicit depictions of sex and drug use, eliciting extensive debate in the media and among politicians, health professionals, and youth workers, many of whom found the magazine too provocative (Cloutier, 1992: 4).

Of course, the use of informal language and conversational forms of discourse in safer sex and HIV prevention materials has not always provoked controversy. Indeed, such discursive forms have been used extensively to suggest, perhaps to 'simulate,' the notion of community members speaking out and 'having a voice,' a notion evident, for

Figure 6.6 *Qu'on se le dise!*, poster in sauna (Séro-Zéro. adapted from Terrence Higgins Trust)
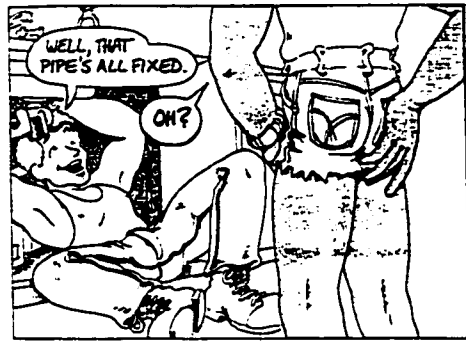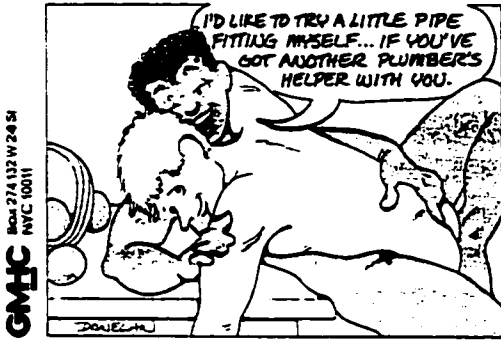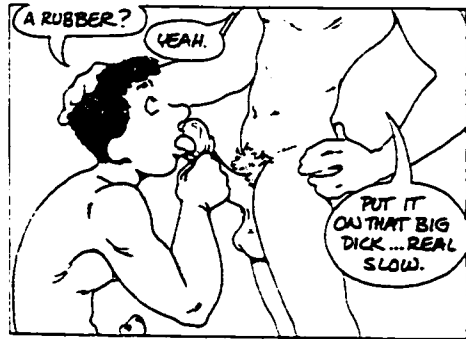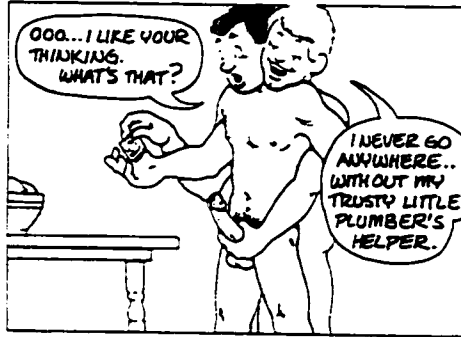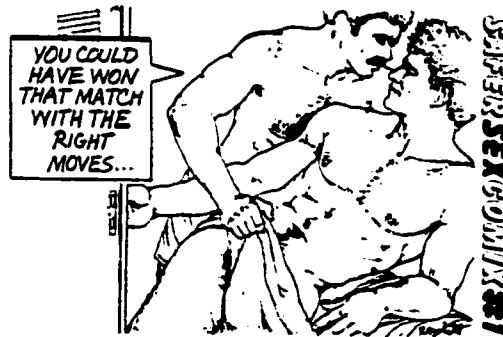
Figure 6.7 *SaferSexComix.* leaflets (Gay Men's Health Crisis, 1986)

example, in the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services guide to safer sex for young gay and bisexual men published in 1995 (fig. 6.8). As the first ever Québec government publication to explicitly address an audience of gay men, the 20-page booklet was written in first-person, narrative form and recounts the story of "Stéphan" and his HIV positive lover, "Carlo." Told in a friendly and conversational way, the booklet explains the basics of transmission, safer sex and maintaining a healthy, self-affirming lifestyle through the story of how Stéphan and Carlo deal with the reality of HIV.

That same year, the Ministry also appealed to notions of conversation and community in an HIV/AIDS social marketing campaign aimed at the public at large (fig. 6.9). Thus, magazine ads that formed part of the campaign featured a warm and fuzzy image of a man (presumably HIV-positive or living with AIDS) sitting in a cafe encircled by two friends with whom he is chatting. The accompanying text addresses the social isolation that people living with HIV/AIDS frequently face as a call to action promoting social acceptance and compassion:

Nous pouvons donc leur serrer la main, les embrasser et les côtoyer comme nous l'avons toujours fait. Comme tout le monde, elles ont besoin de réconfort, d'aide et d'amitié.
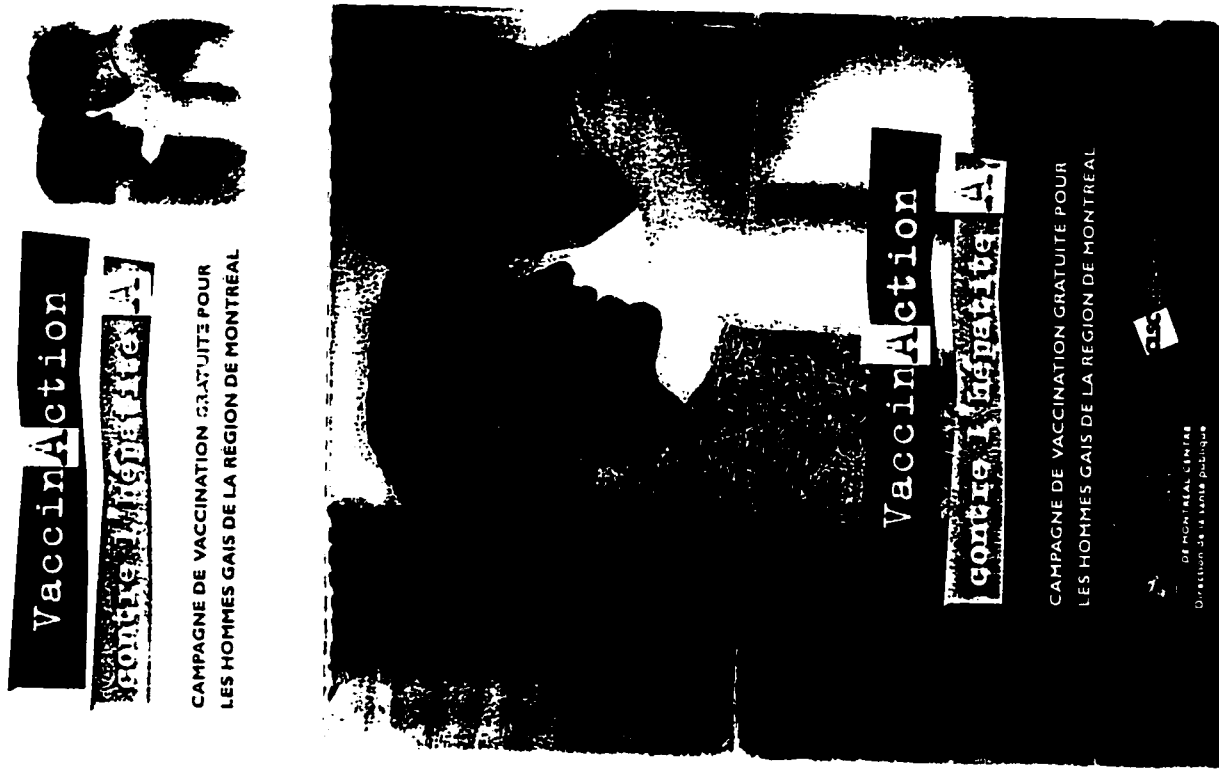
Of course, the use of such imagery of conversation is not limited to the arena of HIV prevention work.[56] In 1996, for example, the Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal Centre and the CLSC des Faubourgs undertook an extensive vaccination campaign in response to an outbreak of Hepatitis A among gay men on the

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[56] Indeed, the Québec government has also run a social marketing campaign aimed at troubled youth, the slogan of which is "Talk: it's the only way to grow."

FOR YOUNG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère de la Santé
et des Services sociaux

Québec ☷

FEELING DIFFERENT

Hi there! I'm Stéphan and I'm 19. Although I've had sex with girls before, I've always been attracted to guys.

In fact, I've always felt a bit different from most of the other boys. Even though I had a girlfriend whom I liked alot, the desire to experience my sexuality with another guy was always there. I couldn't talk about it with anyone or even openly admit it to myself because I had heard all the jokes and I was afraid of being called a "fag" or "queer".

I felt very alone and isolated until the day I finally decided to tell someone whom I felt I could trust. In my case, it was my grandmother.

Actually, she already knew. Often, the people who are closest to us know us better than we think! Talking to her was a huge relief; she

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helped me regain my confidence and slowly, I came to affirm myself — to accept myself the way I am.

Now I understand that I didn't choose to be attracted to other men, that's just the way things are. What I did choose, however, was to express it and to live it — and to feel good about myself at the same time.

If you decide to live it too, that's your choice. You have the right to live and to love; after all, your feelings, your emotions and your sexuality belong to you!

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Figure 6.8   *Safer sex for young gay and bisexual men,* booklet (Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 1995)

VIH-SIDA

Notre amitié sera toujours plus forte.

Trop souvent, les personnes vivant avec le VIH et celles qui ont le SIDA souffrent, en plus, de se sentir isolées. Pourtant, ces personnes ne représentent aucun risque pour nous, à moins d'avoir des relations sexuelles sans condom ou de partager des seringues avec elles. Nous pouvons donc leur serrer la main, les embrasser et les côtoyer comme nous l'avons toujours fait. Comme tout le monde, elles ont besoin de recevoir d'aide et d'amitié.

Québec ::::

Santé Services sociaux

Figure 6.9   *Notre amitié sera toujours plus forte*, magazine ad (Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 1995)

island of Montréal. Postcards and posters used to promote the campaign featured an image of two men quietly talking along with a simulated, handwritten note that, in friendly and conversational language, explained the basics of Hepatitis A infection and how to get vaccinated (fig. 6.10).

Another recurrent 'discursive technology' common in prevention and health promotion work – and an important aspect of that work's incitement to talk – is the use of small-group discussion and consciousness-raising programs. As discussed in chapter 5, Séro Zéro has developed a number of small-group workshop discussion series in which groups of 8-10 men participate over a number of weeks, designed not so much to 'simulate' as to stimulate conversation. The commitment to an incitement to talk is underscored in the promotional flyer for the program, *Être gai, ce n'est pas seulement coucher avec des hommes ...*, where the program is visually depicted using a photo of two men in conversation. Rather than simply outlining the necessary information, the flyer is written as a series of open-ended questions that demand a response from the reader (fig. 6.11). In developing such programs, Séro Zéro has adopted and developed models of "small group risk-reduction education" used across North America in HIV prevention efforts addressing gay men (Myers et al, 1992: 47). The first such project in Canada, appropriately called the *Talking Sex* project, was undertaken by the AIDS Committee of Toronto in 1991. This project was, in turn, based on peer education and small-group discussion programs developed in San Francisco and New York starting in the late 1980s in an effort to address the issue of relapse using new approaches to prevention work.

The extent to which such small group discussion programs operate as a kind of discursive technology is perhaps most evident in the ways they are designed to fulfill

Figure 6.10   *VaccinAction contre l'hépatite A*, postcard (Régie régionale de la santé
et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre, 1996)

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Figure 6.11 *Être gai, ce n'est pas seulement coucher avec des hommes*, promotional flyer (Séro Zéro, 2000)

social marketing objectives. Although community-based health promotion work is

sometimes contrasted with social marketing as two distinct approaches to health

education and prevention (Altman, 1994), researchers such as Steve Rabin and Robert

Porter (1997) define social marketing as a widespread orientation *within* health

promotion that aims to "facilitate target behaviours" (5) such as face-to-face

communication. Social marketing, in Rabin and Porter's account, has its origins in

Lazarsfeld and Merton's foundational research on media effects, where the "supplement"

of face-to-face contact was identified as one of the three key ingredients of an effective

propaganda effort (1960: 510). Along with this foundation in early communications

research, Rabin and Porter underscore the influence of Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman,

who actually coined the term 'social marketing' in the early 1970s. Kotler and Zaltman

are perhaps best known for their 1971 book *Creating Social Change*, where they applied

the classic "4 Ps" of marketing – product, price, place and promotion – along with other

commercial marketing techniques to social causes and problems of social change (Rabin

and Porter, 1997: 4-6). For Rabin and Porter, the 4 Ps framework provides a useful way

to conceptualize and develop AIDS education and HIV prevention efforts, a framework

within which incitements to talk are a key component. Thus, they point to a variety of

theoretical models and actual projects where health education has been understood and

approached as a 'health promotion transaction' wherein social marketers aim to

understand and influence target 'consumer behaviours.' Within these models,

interpersonal, community support networks and the communication that goes on within

them are often viewed as a way of lowering the 'price' of the HIV prevention

'transaction' by, for example, helping to reduce the social stigma associated with

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HIV/AIDS (12; 20). Community networks and organizations are in turn understood as an effective 'place' where social marketing can take place, and interpersonal, face-to-face contact and follow-up are a key element of 'promotion' within the overall 'marketing mix' (13). Meanwhile, "talking behaviour" constitutes one of the key 'products' that AIDS education endeavours to 'sell' (12-14).

The *Talking Sex* project is an interesting example of how this social marketing model structures community-based prevention work even where such work does not appear, at first glance, to be grounded in the discourse of social marketing. The flyer developed to promote the program (fig. 6.12) presents *Talking Sex* as, in effect, a kind of transaction:

The basic idea is simple: Gay men get together to talk. About sex. About health. And about how we're putting it all together. It's not cold facts. It's a chance to meet other gay men. To hash out problems. To find encouragement and support. And to toss around a lot of great ideas for putting sex and facts together. It's ideas from real life. Ideas that can work for you. And it's more than that. We want to find out how well talking about sex can actually help us all deal with changing sex. By getting involved in Talking Sex, you can help us do that.

The flyer goes on to outline, in layperson's terms, the research process that participants will be involved in: filling out questionnaires and participating in discussion groups or, alternatively, being part of a control group that does not participate. Implicitly, then, the project is structured as a transaction, bearing both a 'cost' and a benefit for participants, who are invited to partake of "ideas that can work for you" and enjoy the benefits of mutual encouragement and support in exchange for helping researchers track and evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The incitement to talk is at the centre of this transaction, peer talk being presented as an activity with inherent value both for participants and researchers.

"What ever happened to sex?"

Well, it's changed.

That's not news to you.

Gay men know just how much sex has changed in the last few years. We've had to learn the facts. About AIDS. About the virus that causes it. And about how we can stop that virus.

We've got the facts.

But sometimes facts alone aren't enough.

Sex isn't just about facts. It's about emotions. Needs. It's about things we like. Things we want. Things that can be hard to change.

It's one thing to know what you _should_ do. But sometimes it's another thing to _make it_ happen.

But here's something that might be news to you:

We've been good at it.

Gay men have managed to slow down the spread of the virus.

We didn't do that just by being careful. We did it by being creative. Inventive. By finding new ways to make sex satisfying and keep each other healthy at the same time.

We've been smart about sex. And we talk about it.

We can talk more. We can help each other put it all together.

By **Talking Sex**.

TALKING SEX

LET'S PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

What is it?

Talking Sex is a project of the AIDS Committee of Toronto and Sunnybrook Medical Centre.

The basic idea is simple: Gay men get together to talk. About sex. About health. And about how we're putting it all together.

It's not cold facts.

It's a chance to meet other gay men. To hash out problems. To find encouragement and support. And to toss around a lot of great ideas for putting sex and facts together.

It's ideas from real life.

Ideas that can work for you.

And it's more than that. We want to find out how well talking about sex can actually help us all deal with changing sex. By getting involved in **Talking Sex**, you can help us do that.

How does it work?

To find out how well **Talking Sex** works, we're doing it in a few different ways.

So — we may ask you to spend just **one evening** talking with other gay men, for about three hours.

Or — we may ask you to get together for **four evenings** with the same group of gay men, to talk for about two hours.

Either way, we'll also ask you to fill out a **confidential questionnaire** when you begin, and again three months after your last discussion.

Or — we might **ask you just to fill out the questionnaire for now**. In this case, you'll be involved in a Talking Sex group later on.

All the information you give us on the questionnaire — and everything you say in discussions — will be treated with strict confidentiality.

And whatever you do, you'll be helping us see how well **Talking Sex** works.

Who is it for?

If you're a gay or bisexual man, **Talking Sex is for you.** It doesn't matter if you have a lover, if you're dating or if you're single. It doesn't matter where you live, or how old you are. Most of all, **it doesn't matter what your sex life is like.**

Maybe you're having a lot of sex. Maybe a little — or maybe none at all.

Maybe when you get horny the things you want to do are safe. Maybe they're not — and you do them anyway. And then you worry.

It's better to talk about it. About sex as it really is. What's hot for you and what's not. What works and what doesn't. What you want, and what your concerns are.

We can talk about it.

To get involved — or just to find out more — call **926-8182**. Or fill out the form here and mail it to: **Talking Sex**, Box 55, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2L4

Figure 6.12 *Talking Sex*, promotional flyer (AIDS Committee of Toronto / Sunnybrook Medical Centre, 1991)

Ironically, this brings to light some curious contrasts between the way in which the project promoted 'talk' to participants and the way in which researchers framed and analyzed the social and health implications of talk. If the project's promotional message presented talk as an end in itself -- a departure from traditional health education that offers new ways to improve health and enhance community -- researchers running the project seemed in contrast to understand the talk that went on over the course of the project as a means or instrument for improving traditional forms of health education. Thus, the research report compiled at the conclusion of the project focused on identifying variables in knowledge, attitude and behaviour associated with the adoption and maintenance of safer sex practices and how these could be used to distil better prevention messages and improve the ways in which these are targeted (Myers et al, 1992). The ways in which interpersonal conversation may be of value in and of itself, while acknowledges, are situated in the end as a secondary aspect of the project.

Talking Sex, then, offers an example of what Ibañez-Carrasco critiques as a flattened, "confessional" mode of talk wherein primary speech communication is framed rationally as an instrument -- a discursive technology, perhaps -- for reducing HIV transmission rather than as an opportunity for social critique. Ibañez-Carrasco's critique, along with Norman Fairclough's argument that simulated conversation is an emerging discursive technology that is 'colonizing' public discourses such as health promotion, provide an alternate perspective for interpreting incitements to talk in HIV health promotion and their increasing importance as forms of research and intervention. This perspective requires that one critically assess the emphasis on primary speech communication as, in part, an instrumentalization of face-to-face talk rather than

assuming it is a self evident process of empowerment. An example of what Fairclough refers to as discursive "colonization" can perhaps be found in a 1997 "field guide" to community-based HIV health promotion, *Taking care of each other*, published by AIDS Vancouver with the collaboration of Health Canada and the Canadian AIDS Society. As perhaps the most comprehensive statement of a common Canadian vision of HIV health promotion work, *Taking care of each other* extensively mobilizes incitements to talk as a key dimension of the model of health promotion it proposes. As such, the technology of conversation infuses – perhaps even 'colonizes' – the discourse on health promotion formulated in the book.

Its third chapter, for example, entitled "Listening to HIV experience with research skills," provides an overview of ethnographic research methods and the value such research can offer community-based organizations involved in HIV health promotion work. As its title would suggest, the chapter is centered around a notion of "listening" as a method for developing appropriate prevention and health promotion programs. Community-based ethnographic research is presented as a process of inciting base communities to 'talk' and recording the ensuing discussion as the basis for determining action plans and developing health-promoting programs. Research is defined as "telling the story of an affected group" (Trussler and Marchand, 1997: 65). A number of Canadian projects are cited as examples of this process, including the use of "active" or "transformative" listening techniques by AIDS Community Care Montreal's (ACCM) and the "You, Me and Reality" teen video project undertaken by Vancouver's YouthCo that served "to document what people are saying but also to stimulate further debate" (71).

If my review of the discourse of this book is somewhat sketchy here, it does suggest the extent to which conversation operates as a kind of 'technology' within Canadian HIV health promotion work, structuring this work in important ways and raising questions about the agendas it serves and its claims to 'empower.' In the next section, I weigh the critique of incitements to talk in health promotion as instrumental forms of discursive technology against theories of primary speech communication that define the dialogic relations of conversation as a form of agency and social interconnection.

Conversation as intertextuality and involvement

The emphasis on interpersonal talk and story-telling that is often characteristic of HIV health promotion work, as I have outlined in the previous section, cannot automatically be assumed to constitute a form of grassroots empowerment. Nevertheless, simply dismissing this incitement to talk as the deployment of a disciplinary technology of simulated conversation would ignore the ways in which interpersonal talk can also operate as a form of agency and as a set of social relations that contributes to constituting community. Ibañez-Carrasco points to some of these possibilities in distinguishing between "confessional" modes of telling one's story and a contrasting mode he describes as "testimonial." In concluding this chapter, I examine his concept of testimonial more closely, linking it to an Bakhtin's theory of speech communication as a social and intertextual chain that generates what Deborah Tannen refers to in her research as

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"involvement." This is a dimension of face-to-face talk unaccounted for in the critical interpretations of HIV health promotion's incitement to talk that I have outlined above.

Such an analysis suggests there is a relationship between the emphasis on talk in Séro Zéro's work and the organization's understanding of community. I argue that the use of conversation in the work of Séro Zéro and similar organizations serves as a form of agency that links individual subjectivity to community. To make this argument, I outline a positional definition of subjectivity in terms of ethics and dialogic relations. I thus draw on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who defines selfhood in terms of the possibility for testimonial and "inspiration" by others. From such a perspective, Séro Zéro's incitements to talk can in part be understood as practices that link subjectivity and community to the possibility for contact and conversation with one's peers, identifying this possibility as a key factor determining people's well-being and health. The work of Séro Zéro's work thereby establishes interpersonal talk and primary speech communication as important venues for selfhood and – where these are absent – as a limiting factor that conditions possibilities for personal and collective agency.

In his critique of the "confessional" mode in which PHAs are often incited to tell their stories, Ibañez-Carrasco takes care not to dismiss the very enterprise of story-telling, arguing that it can also take place through an alternate mode, the "testimonial." If for Ibañez-Carrasco, the confessional mode emphasizes the spectacle of AIDS, reinforcing rather than questioning dominant power relations in a flattened, non-critical account of personal experience, he understands the testimonial mode, by contrast, as a disruptive format that contests the status quo through critical, social interpretations of personal

experience. Thus, the concept of testimonial suggests that there is progressive potential

within the incitements to talk that characterize HIV health promotion:

> In its ideal form, an AIDS testimonial is when I come to speak about me – not the grand
> patriarchal me, just me hoping that this will make you think and will make you
> uncomfortable. The addressivity of testimonials is not passive, it is insolent and
> disruptive. It speaks loudly and cynically, rudely and flamboyantly because it has the
> certainty that it most likely does not want to be heard (1995: 10).

While there is never a guarantee that talk, story-telling, and dialogue relating to a health

and social issues such as HIV/AIDS will necessarily be empowering, contributing to

people's health and well-being or in some way to a project of social change, Ibañez-

Carrasco here identifies "disruptive addressivity" as one of the characteristics that

distinguishes an empowering, testimonial mode of telling one's story. In contrasting

confessional and testimonial, he notes that the impact and implications of recounting

personal experience depend greatly on who is speaking to whom, who is in control of

constructing and directing the 'conversation,' and to what end people are talking. While

the incitement to talk offers promise as testimonial, Ibañez-Carrasco makes clear that the

enterprise of getting people to talk together is frequently flattened and evacuated of its

potential to empower those who are speaking and challenge those who listen.

When the conditions for testimonial are in place, however, accounts of personal

experience are transformed because their relationship to problems of social context are

made explicit – much as suggested by the familiar feminist dictum that "the personal is

political." The testimonial is thus a mode of speaking defined not so much by its content

but by the linkages it establishes between a particular person's story and the social

conditions that contextualize and give meaning to that story. Ibañez-Carrasco points to a

critical conception of personal experience that insists one's subjectivity be understood in

terms of one's relationship to others and to the social world, in contrast to a conception of the subjective as a self-contained story one 'confesses' to others who are presumed to play little or no role in the story and its outcome.

Ibañez-Carrasco thus identifies in the testimonial a mode of talking to others that, in some way, breaks with the dominant patterns of instrumentalized talk and discursive technologies of simulated conversation that I reviewed in the previous section – operating instead to contest existing relations of power and knowledge. Yet Ibañez-Carrasco's focus is decidedly one-way, centred on the act of an individual recounting his or her experiences to an audience. If Ibañez-Carrasco provides a way of understanding that talk can have varied modes and implications, linguist Deborah Tannen offers more precise insights on the modes and implications of conversation *among* people (as opposed to a talk given *to* them). In so doing, not unlike Ibañez-Carrasco, her work brings into focus some of the power of talk – a power that often remains unacknowledged or obscured. Like Ibañez-Carrasco, Tannen identifies modes of talk – in her case, face-to-face conversation – that break with instrumentality, understanding talk instead in terms of relations of positionality. Thus, if in the previous section, Norman Fairclough's theories suggest that incitements to talk common in Séro Zéro's work and other examples of HIV health promotion may be one example of emerging discursive technologies of simulated conversation that operate *on* people, Tannen's findings constitute an insistence that getting people to talk with one another is nonetheless an enterprise that can work *for* them.

Conversation, her work suggests, would not be accurately understood if it were simply viewed as a technology that could be 'harnessed' to accomplish some rational

end. The social importance of conversation, in some senses, lies in the non-instrumental avenues of experience and interconnection it opens up for people. The somewhat insidious world evoked by Norman Fairclough's theories – with its mutant conversational technologies 'colonizing' the preserves of public discourse – may be from Tannen's viewpoint an overestimation of the instrumentalist implications of the increasing turn toward informal and conversational discourse in contemporary societies. Indeed, Tannen's analysis of the function of "constructed dialogue" in conversation provides important insights, absent from perspectives that focus on the instrumentalization and technologization of conversation, for interpreting the incitements to talk common in HIV health promotion work. Tannen uses the term "constructed dialogue" to describe how dialogue is reported within conversation – how conversations transmit accounts of other conversations. According to her research, when participants in a conversation tell stories of "what happened," offering each other accounts of some previous dialogue or conversation, these are rarely accurate or literal accounts but instead are rhetorical constructions. In most conversation, the use of such reconstructed dialogue does not serve to literally document what was said on a previous occasion. Instead, 'constructed dialogue' within a conversation is an imaginative reconstruction and readaptation of previous dialogue, and may even "recount" dialogue that was never actually spoken. For Tannen, participants in ordinary conversation use constructed dialogue as a narrative structure that enhances engagement and involvement – in other words, as a way to tell the stories that make for 'good conversation' regardless of whether the stories 'recounted' are accurate or even true (1989: 9-29).

If from Fairclough's perspective, forms of simulated conversation are an emerging trend that is reshaping broad areas of public discourse such as education, Tannen points to "constructed dialogue" not as a new trend but as a common, frequently used feature of everyday conversation, suggesting that apparently new and artificial forms of talk prevalent in HIV health promotion work may in fact be continuous with how people commonly interact in conversation. Thus, much as the use of comic format in health promotion work 'simulates' conversation, for example, this may perhaps be understood as print form of "constructed dialogue," in some ways not substantially different from verbal forms people use commonly in everyday talk.

One of the most striking examples of the use of the comic format among Québec HIV prevention organizations is the *Communi-Gai* series of flyers, produced in 1995 by MIELS-Québec in Québec City and distributed for several years to a variety of gay venues throughout the province. Far from documenting actual conversation in any realistic fashion, these comics construct representations of ordinary conversations in a way that recalls Tannen's notion of "constructed dialogue." The series consists of six different leaflets, each with a distinct narrative that provides an example, albeit in a condensed and simplified fashion, of how people can learn from each other and resolve problems through conversation. The use of the 'constructed dialogue' of comics provides a narrative structure that heightens a reader's engagement and involvement in ways that non-narrative approaches – for example, educational material that simply provide instructions on how to have safer sex – cannot. The comic format offers a way to depict and resolve specific conversational dilemmas that relate to prevention and to living with HIV/AIDS such as whether to tell a partner you are HIV-positive and how to negotiate

the practice of safer sex within a couple. The conversation that goes on between various characters serves not simply to tell a story but also as a way to emphasize the importance of talk in and of itself. Thus, *Guy* (fig. 6.13) converses with a friend over coffee and comes to understand how his relationship difficulties are linked to his low self-esteem. Other stories highlight the pitfalls and limitations of talk, depicting the discrepancies between what people say and what they are thinking (fig. 6.14) or the difficulties that people face when they are unable to talk with one another (fig. 6.15). One leaflet even provides a representation of how frontline prevention workers use talk to promote health (fig. 6.16). Overall, the *Communi-Gai* series tends to portray conversation as a key aspect of achieving and maintaining health and well-being, showing characters who, in the end, work through difficult situations by talking about them. While this may incite some readers to speak up, to talk with others about the often difficult issues that HIV and safer sex can raise, it also provides visible examples of talk that, presumably, might substitute for the real thing when readers are unable or unwilling to engage in such conversation in their own lives.

Clearly part of the intention in producing such comics is to anchor HIV health promotion efforts in concrete, accessible language that people can relate to their own lives, an important strategy within the health promotion paradigm. The use of comic and photo-novella formats in education and social marketing draws on theories of indirect and observational learning or "symbolic modeling" (DiClemente and Peterson, cited in Rabin and Porter, 1997: 11), using youth-oriented and pop culture genres to explore health issues and symbolically represent ways in which readers can approach and resolve complex or difficult life situations so as to protect or enhance their health or well-being.

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Figure 6.13 *Guy* (Communi-gai series, MIELS-Québec, 1995)
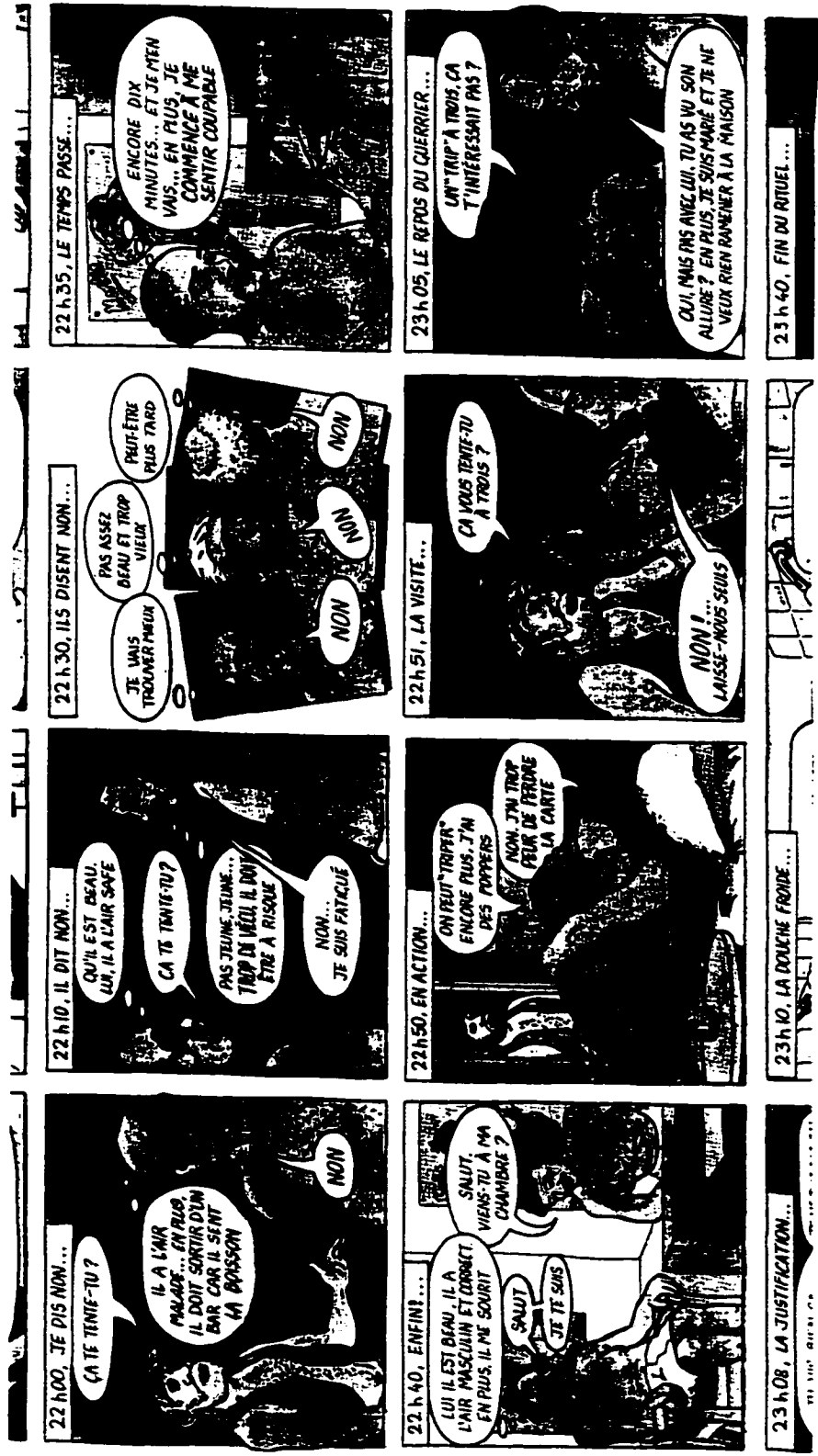
Figure 6.14 *Jean-Marie*, detail (Communi-gai series, MIELS-Québec, 1995)

Figure 6.15   *Gaston et Sylvain*, detail (Communi-gai series, MIELS-Québec, 1995)

Figure 6.16 *Sébastien.* detail (Communi-gai series. MIELS-Québec. 1995)

Scott McCloud offers an additional insight on the appeal and practicality of comics.

"When you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face – you see it as the face of

another," McCloud notes,

but when you enter the world of the cartoon – you see yourself. I believe this is the
primary cause of our childhood fascination with cartoons, though other factors such as
universal identification, simplicity and the childlike features of many cartoon characters
also play a part; the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are
pulled ... an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm; we
don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!" (1993: 36).

The *Communi-gai* series certainly exerts a pull on readers to climb in, inhabit and

identify with a set of situations. McCloud's theory of how comics operate, joined with

Tannen's theory that the "constructed dialogues" of conversation serve to generate

interpersonal "involvement," points to an interpretation of the use of comics in HIV

health promotion work as semiotic "vacuums" that absorb the reader's identity,

heightening his or her involvement and identification in a manner similar to the way

constructed dialogue commonly generates rapport among people engaged in face-to-face

conversation. This, of course, does not throw into question an interpretation of

incitements to talk in HIV health promotion, such as the *Communi-gai* series, as

'discursive technologies' of simulated conversation in Fairclough's sense. However,

Tannen's work in particular presents an important avenue for thinking about health

promotion ideas and practices that emphasize talk in terms of the non-instrumental

agency of rapport they also make available.

Tannen's theory that ordinary conversation is made up of "involvement

strategies" that "reflect and simultaneously create interpersonal involvement" (1989: 2)

is, in part, a theory of agency. Conversation has a certain, obviously limited but

sometimes patently significant power. For Tannen, conversation whose purpose is

involvement establishes an emotional connection between people – a "meta-message of rapport" that is an achievement of conversational interaction (1989: 9; 13). Thus, people engaged in conversation are in fact acting – generating a bond, agreeing to "share communicative conventions and inhabit the same world of discourse" (13). Yet this is a decidedly non-instrumental form of action. It is not a means to achieving some rational end. It is an achievement unto itself, precisely of value because it is not undertaken or achieved for any rational purpose.

This suggests that people exercise agency through conversation, an agency that derives in part from an interaction with others and can, of course, vary in its scope and quality. Such a conception of agency is evident in the incitements to talk typical in HIV health promotion work at Séro Zéro's and elsewhere. Comics such as the *Communi-gai* series are perhaps not the best example of such agency, yet the incitements to talk in HIV health promotion extend beyond comics to encompass a variety of interactive and participatory projects and strategies that focus on the importance of talk and invite communities of readers or participants to converse. The 1993 *Stella Seattle* cartoon series developed by the AIDS Prevention Project of the Seattle Department of Public Health, for instance, used comics as the departure point to generate involvement on the part of readers. Published weekly on postcards and in two weekly newspapers over four months, *Stella Seattle* evolved into a kind of 'interactive' cartoon where reader response was used to determine the future direction of the story.[57]

Participatory projects centered around talk and the sharing of stories have been developed and undertaken by a number of HIV prevention organizations for gay men,

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[57] Dominic Capello (1997), "Stella Seattle Campaign, Washington State." Article downloaded 11/30/1999 from http://HIVInSite.ucsf.edu/prevention/grassroots_programs/2098.27b8.html.

including Séro Zéro. In 1997, for example, Séro Zéro sponsored a short story writing

contest based on the theme *"Être gai à l'ère du sida,"* inviting people to write about their

feelings and experiences in dealing with the realities of HIV, safer sex, loss and

mourning, etc. (fig. 6.17). Winning submissions were published in a local magazine.

The contest was modeled on a similar project developed by the Belgian community-based

organization Ex-Aequo, *Les mots gays contre le sida* (fig. 6.18). A postcard campaign,

the project invited young gay men to send in short pieces of fiction or non-fiction,

submissions which would guide the organization in developing its prevention initiatives.

The postcard slogan, "Racontez-vous. C'est notre histoire", incites a community to

"speak," linking prevention work to storytelling and the sharing of experiences.[58] These

projects appeal to an agency derived from story-telling interactions among people, an

agency also appealed to in projects that explicitly bring people together to talk to one

another in face-to-face contact. They recall both Tannen's account of the ways in which

conversational discourse generates interpersonal involvement and rapport, and the

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[58] One of Séro Zéro's participatory incitements to talk has recently come under attack, a diary posted to the organization's web site, "Journal intime d'un jeune séropositif," featuring texts written by two young, HIV-positive men, "Éric" and "Martin," updated to the site on a weekly basis. When the organization suspended its contract with an editor hired in the fall of 2000 to revise the texts written by "Éric," the editor publicly accused Séro Zéro of censorship and began posting his version of Éric's texts to another web site. Because both versions of the *Journal intime* are still being published, this new development will not be considered in detail in the present discussion, but may be the focus of future analysis. For an account of this controversy, see Denis-Daniel Boullé (2001), "Séro Zéro sur la touche: un écrivain crie la censure," *Fugues* 17 (12: mars): 30-32.

Figure 6.17 *Être gai à l'ère du sida.* magazine supplement (Séro Zéro / Orientations. 1997)

les mots gays contre le sida

EX EQUO

RACONTEZ-VOUS
C'EST NOTRE
HISTOIRE.

Trouvez les mots gays contre le sida

Ceci est un appel aux témoignages en vue de la réalisation d'une campagne de prévention du sida.

Qu'elle soit drôle ou triste, belle, chaude, proche ou presque oubliée.

votre histoire nous intéresse. Ne la censurez pas.

Votre expérience, vos réflexions aideront c'est promis.

La prévention, c'est vous

Port payé
par le
destinataire

Ex Aequo

Rue de Haerne 51

1040 Bruxelles

BOOMERANG Tél 02/558.44.96 bvd. du Midi 25

Ex Aequo est une association de prévention du sida auprès des hommes qui ont des relations sexuelles avec d'autres hommes. Contactez-nous. Tél 02/646 77 81 - Fax 02/646 50 92

Avec l'appui du Funds Levi Strauss, géré par la Fondation Roi Baudouin.

Avec le soutien de l'Agence de Prévention du Sida

Figure 6.18 *Les mots gays contre le sida,* postcard (Ex Aequo, date unknown)

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conceptions shared by James Carey, Walter Ong and Ross Higgins (as outlined in chapter 3) that conversational forms of discourse and the 'ritual' dimension of communication work to generate forms of community. Certainly, Tannen's research provides additional insight relating to Ross Higgins' assertion that the chat and interaction that went on in Montréal's gay bars during the post-war period contributed significantly to the later emergence of a sociologically distinct gay community of population-territory-institutions – an argument wherein Higgins theorizes bar conversation as a form of agency.

One of the potential pitfalls of interpreting the agency of conversational interactions among people as an example of Higgins' "shared discursive cognitive universe" or of Carey's "ritual dimension" of communication, of course, is that it can simplistically attribute a community-building power to talk, implying that conversant community is some kind of inchoate, alchemical process that simply springs into being among people. Linguist Mikhail Bakhtin's social analysis of speech communication provides an antidote to this potential conceptual weakness, bringing into focus the specific relations of "live speech" and how utterances operate to interlink people in important ways, much as suggested by this narrator's account of how Mme Condom establishes a light but important social network across a crowded bar:

H: [Mme Condom] ne pourrait jamais, nécessairement, tirer des conversations très, très sérieuses parce que, tu ne vas pas raconter ta vie à quelqu'un qui est habillé en femme. C'est pas que j'ai des préjugés par rapport à ça, mais, tu sais, j'imagine mal ... mais ça lui est arrivé ... je ne minimise pas son ouvrage ... c'est sûr qu'il y a des gens qui l'abordent, mais ils vont l'aborder beaucoup plus pour le féliciter pour l'ouvrage ... '... c'est le fun, puis bon, t'es belle ...', mais c'est une première approche ... puis les gens aiment ça parler à [Mme Condom] parce que, par après, ils aiment ça être reconnus. Tu sais, les gens, 'ah, ben allô.' Puis le gars va se promener, puis, 'allô, allô, allô.' Il dit 'allô' à tout le monde ... les gens aiment être reconnus par quelqu'un d'autre. Je pense que c'est une des fonctions, les gens vont dire, 'hé, je vis pas tout seul, parce qu'il y a du monde qui me reconnaissent, parce que je suis en interaction avec les gens.'

Here, the "allô, allô, allô" establishes an emotional bond important to people even if, as the narrator admits, the conversations themselves may not be in-depth discussions of HIV, health or prevention.

This portrait of Mme Condom's health promotion work in bars recalls Bakhtin's analysis of how utterances are 'chained' together, such that speech communication generates 'communion' among speaking subjects. Bakhtin develops this conception of interwoven chains of utterances based on his understanding of live speech as "inherently responsive," an understanding that recognizes the "active role of the other in the process of speech communication" (1986: 68; 70). Pointing to the typical shortcomings of most language studies that tend to focus on the speaker's point of view and regard the listener as passive, Bakhtin argues that listeners are as active as speakers within speech communication. Utterances must be understood and defined in terms of their "addressivity" and the active, responsive stance of the listener. An utterance is defined in the first instance by "the possibility of responding to it or ... assuming a responsive attitude toward it" (76). Moreover, the responsiveness and addressivity inherent to utterances points to the extent to which speakers are also, already, respondents: in an absolute sense, no speaker is ever the 'first' speaker.

Thus, Bakhtin strives for a social definition and theorization of speech communication: utterances, as units of speech, are social action that link and demarcate speaking subjects. Language systems provide the resources for this action – and language can be analyzed abstractly in terms of its common and recurrent features – its grammar – but the analysis of grammar systems is not equivalent to a social analysis of language, which for Bakhtin must begin with the analysis of speech communication and

the fundamental social unit of language: the utterance. Bakhtin portrays speech communication or "communion" as a chain of linkages that tie speakers and listeners together in alternating, interchangeable roles: "Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (69; 94-95). For Bakhtin, utterances must thus be studied and understood in relation to one another, as mutually interconnected and informed rather than "indifferent to one another" or "self-sufficient" (91).

Norman Fairclough extends Bakhtin's theories, analyzing the ways in which discursive practices give rise to intertextual chains:

... series of types of texts that are transformationally related to each other in the sense that each member of the series is transformed into one or more of the others in regular and predictable ways (1992: 130).

As an example, Fairclough points to is the way in which a medical consultation, a spoken 'text,' is transformed into another text, the written medical record that documents the consultation, diagnosis, and treatment. For Fairclough, such 'transformational chains' of intertextuality form part of the "distributional networks" into which some texts enter, often in quite a complex fashion, and such chains constitute and important facet of the way in which social contexts are structured:

For example, a theoretical account of non-hierarchical, collaborative classroom practice in a book on educational theory ... may show up in actual classroom practice in the way in which dialogue between teacher and student is organized, and in the staff room ... in metaphors the teacher uses in talking about her classes and her relationships with learners ... (130).

Here, intertextual chains serve to link an originating text (in this case, literally a *text*book) to the various texts, spoken and written, that constitute classroom interaction, such that the textbook theory comes to structure classroom practice.

Although operating in a rather different way than this account provided by Fairclough of how theory informs practice, some of Séro Zéro's incitements to talk – such as its small-group discussion program "*Re-pairs*" – constitute interesting examples of what Fairclough, following Bakhtin, analyzes as intertextual chains arising from certain forms of discursive practice. Thus, some of Séro Zéro's work such as the *Re-pairs* program are informed by an understanding of conversational interaction as a kind of "distributional network" and "transformational chain" of utterances. A peer education program, *Re-pairs* involves recruiting young gay men under 25 to participate in discussion groups on safer sex and health issues and in addition, training them to extend this discussion into their own peer groups through a kind of ripple effect. A narrator explains that the program was designed to address the limitations of more conventional approaches to peer education that have emphasized interaction with Séro Zéro workers but have stopped short of fostering people's interaction amongst themselves:

J: ... on est rendu à avoir fait beaucoup, presque tous les projets dans le fond, dépendent de la notion d'intervention un à un, que ça soit dans les bars, dans les saunas, dans les parcs ... après 2 ans, on voit plus les limites, peut-être. Je pense que c'est important de continuer ça, mais il faudrait que ça soit contrebalancé par des approches qui inciteraient à parler à un groupe de gens dans un autre contexte, pour les amener en interaction, et non pas juste avec un intervenant un à un, mais entre différents individus ...

Promoted in magazine ads as "*une nouvelle façon d'en parler*" (fig. 6.19), the program is one of a number of similar projects that have been developed by organizations in the UK, the U.S., Australia and elsewhere (see Knapman, 1995; Williams, 2001). The project involves bringing together small groups of 8-10 young men who develop an artistic

Figure 6.19   *Re-pairs.* magazine ad (Séro-Zéro. 2000)

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production – dance, theatre, video, etc. – and then present the work at various clubs, raves, or other youth-oriented social events or contexts as part of an awareness and intervention campaign.[59]

Fairclough would probably argue that the potential for conversational interactions to operate as distributional networks and transformational chains is limited given that they happen 'in passing' and are usually not recorded. People may reformulate what someone else has said, or they may report a conversation in the context of another conversation, but Fairclough's emphasis on the way in which textual inscription is necessary to constitute an intertextual chain would suggest that from his point of view, conversations as such are rarely the stuff of complex intertextual series that have significant social impact. Bakhtin's account of speech communication as interlinked utterances that generate communion among speaker and listener is more accommodating to such an assertion, and acknowledges the potential, appealed to in efforts such as the *Re-pairs* program, that conversation itself might operate as a distributional network that, on a small scale at least, could transform patterns of social interaction. Participants are recruited not simply on the basis of their interest in talking with other participants, but also on the basis of their interest in becoming agents of change outside of the context of a *Re-pairs* discussion group, carrying the conversation forward to their own interpersonal milieu through an intertextual chain of talk. Bakhtin, then, provides a more extensive and rich framework for conceptualizing the agency and community-building potential of conversational interaction than notions such as Carey's of communication's 'ritual' dimensions. Bakhtin's brilliant analysis of the inherent responsiveness of the utterance

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[59] For a summary of the project, see "Séro Zéro lance le groupe Re-pairs," *Le magazine RG* 216(sep. 2000), p. 33.

elegantly explains the ways in which the interlinkage and communion established by live speech is the result not of some seemingly magical force or property of communication, but of the very structure of the utterance which for him must be understood as a form of social action that necessarily links together at least two people, often many more.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas raises the stakes both of recounting personal experience – what he terms "testimony" – and of the interlinkages established among people through live speech – in arguing that in the first instance, both speech and subjectivity are ethical relationships among people rather than ontological relationships of being to consciousness (Levinas 1987a: 116; 1996: 101; Hand, 1989: 101-103). For Levinas, speaking is not in the first instance the expression of what people are thinking. It is instead a "contentless proximity" of two "absolute singularities" – two people, subjects, who are ethically responsible to one another, regardless of the eventual topic of their conversation (Levinas, 1987a: 115). This relationship of responsibility generates an "unquestionable bond" among people, and for Levinas is also the very basis for subjectivity (Peperzak, 1997: 67-68). People's sense of self, in his view, derives firstly from ethical relations of proximity such as speech.[60] In the somewhat dense language of phenomenology, Levinas writes:

> ... the presentation of the other to me exceeds all ideas of the other in me. The proximity of this face-to-face relation cannot be subsumed in a totality; rather it concretely produces a relation to the commandment and judgment of infinity ... Ethics arises from the presence of infinity within the human situation, which from the beginning summons me and puts me into question ... consequently, to be oneself is to be for the other (cited in Hand, 1989: 5).

Levinas' ethical analysis of speech as an encounter with others – an analysis he argues must precede any ontological analysis of interpersonal encounters (Hand, 1989: 4-5) – is

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[60] Levinas names "eroticism" as the other key instance of ethical relations of proximity among people (Hand, 1989: 3).

in many ways akin to Bakhtin's analysis of the inherent responsiveness of speech

communication. For Levinas, as for Bakhtin, "a discourse ... is always said by someone

to one or more others ..." (cited in Peperzak, 1997: 61):

The subject of my speaking to another is the I who is responding to the stranger who
visits me. Finding myself facing another awakens me to responsibility: an infinite
responsibility for the Other (ibid.: 87).

The awakened responsibility Levinas evokes here may in part be an awakening to

Bakhtin's inherent responsiveness of speech, a relation with the other that for Levinas

constitutes the self: it is a response to another, for Levinas, that first calls me into being

as a subject. Drawing a similar insight, Bakhtin observes that an utterance, a text,

"always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (1986:

106), insisting that texts be studied in terms of the "dialogic relations" that interlink

utterances and speaking subjects within speech communication (1986: 117-118).

Thus, both Bakhtin and Levinas call for a similar understanding of speech as a

distinct dialogical and ethical relationship among people, one as subtle as it is

fundamental to people's sense of self. For Levinas:

...there is in speech a relationship with a singularity located outside of the theme of
speech, a singularity that is not thematized by the speech but is approached (1987a: 115).

Bakhtin echoes:

Dialogic relations have a specific nature: they can be reduced neither to the purely
logical (even if dialectical) nor to the purely linguistic (compositional-syntactic). They
are possible only between complete utterances of various speaking subjects ... dialogic
relations presuppose a language, but they do not reside within the system of a language
(1986: 117).

For Bakhtin, as for Levinas, speech communication is fundamentally constitutive of the

self and of one's ethical relationship to others and to the world:

An utterance ... always creates something that never existed before ... and moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth) ... created out of something given (language, an observed phenomenon or reality, an experienced feeling, the speaking subject himself) ... what is given is completely transformed in what is created (1986: 120).

Ultimately, such a sense that speech calls people into being and into ethical relationship with one another leads Levinas to theorize subjectivity, in a manner similar to Bakhtin, as, in part, the possibility for "testimony":

...subjectivity as ...the *accusation* that summons me, the unique me, that summons me and not the Ego in me; an accusation that summons me without there being anyone to answer in my stead (1996: 102).

Levinas' theory of subjectivity as testimony – an ethical relation of proximity to and encounter with other people – derives from his critique of western philosophy's tendency to dismiss subjective testimony of one's experience as an inferior, second-hand source of truth and meaning (1996: 97-98). Levinas thus contests the common view that truth and meaning are manifestations or 'disclosures' of being to consciousness, a process for which human subjectivity is just a means. In Levinas' view, this is an ontological conception of subjectivity that is conceptually flawed because subjectivity in the first instance must be understood not as a relation between being and consciousness but as a relation with the "infinite and unrepresentable freedom" of the other that occurs outside of and before any manifestation of its being in my consciousness. Subjectivity, for Levinas, is a relationship of "substitution" (rather than identity) where I am responsible to and "possessed by" the other. Within this frame, subjectivity become *ethical* rather than ontological – a paradoxical, self-alienating substitution brought on by the approach of the other.

For Levinas, the being of another person vastly exceeds my conceptions of him or her – hence, his or her 'infinite and unrepresentable freedom.' My encounters and face-to-face relations with other people, and the subjective story of my own experience that I relate to them, are thus not simply a conduit for the ultimate disclosure of truth and being in my consciousness. Another person's truth and being is instead infinite and will always exceed the traces of them left behind in my consciousness. For this reason, my encounters with others and the testimony we share with one another are always ethical before they are ontological or cognitive. They are challenges to who I think I am and what I think of others in a relationship that, rather than confirming my being as a subject, calls me into being as a subject who exists first and foremost in a relationship of responsibility to the other. Levinas' analysis of speech explicitly in terms of a responsibility to others strongly recalls Bakhtin's insistence that "responsiveness" and the active participation of the other are the key characteristics define and delineate utterances, evoking a conception of speech as a relation of action and response that networks people together as speaking subjects rather than as simply a vehicle or conduit for the flow of information. This inherent responsiveness of speech is perhaps analogous to what Levinas refers to, from the standpoint of ethical analysis, as the "unquestionable responsibility" to the other that characterizes speech. Thus, in a manner not unlike Bakhtin, Levinas portrays both speech and subjectivity in somewhat ecstatic terms as being fundamentally about encounters and relations with others rather that who people are or what they are saying:

In the saying, by which the subject, driven out, leaves its clandestinity, the Infinite comes to pass ... the Infinite thus has glory only through the human adventure of the approach of the other, through substitution for the other, through the expiation for the other (1996: 104).

From such a perspective, "testimony" – saying something about myself at the approach of the other – takes on new importance. Rather than being a prone-to-error filter between being and consciousness, a conception that Levinas extensively critiques in the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, Levinas proposes an idea of testimony as, in the first instance, a kind of "inspiration" (1996: 105). This conception bears some similarities to Ibañez-Carrasco's notion of the "testimonial," a critical interpretation of one's story in terms of how it is informed by wider social, political and cultural contexts. Both Ibañez-Carrasco and Levinas draw attention to the ethical dimensions of speaking encounters among people, and the fundamental importance of this dimension in that the power of speech lies in the way it situates people in relation to one another, establishing – perhaps questioning – the world in which they must live together. "Sound," writes Levinas, "is a ringing, clanging scandal" (1989: 147). Ibañez-Carrasco would seem to concur in noting that the addressivity of testimonials is "insolent" and "disruptive" (1995: 10); for him, such speech provides a form of agency. For Levinas, testimony – the 'inspiration' of words fostered by the infinite freedom of the other and my unquestionable responsibility to her or him – constitutes the first moments of selfhood.

These insights suggest that the incitements to talk common in the work of Séro Zéro and in other examples of HIV health promotion that I have cited can be seen to address issues of agency and subjectivity. Even though these calls for people to converse together – along with the recurrence of talk as a theme and the visual representations of people in conversation that are frequently featured in HIV health promotion literature – can be critically analyzed as discursive technologies of simulated conversation that may in some ways only falsely empower the people who are thereby entreated to talk, they

may also constitute important venues or catalysts for agency, self definition, and meaningful interaction and rapport among people. The incitements to talk common in HIV health promotion work may be expressions of a very deep understanding that people can gain a measure of empowerment through modes of conversation – conceptualized here variously as 'testimony,' 'testimonial,' or 'rapport-talk' – and that perhaps as importantly, people's sense of self only becomes available to them through their interactions with others. Levinas, at times, uses rather alarming language to evoke his admittedly paradoxical conception of non-ontological subjectivity. The infinite world that will always exceed my consciousness, for Levinas:

> ... commands me from my own mouth. Interiority is precisely this reversal: the eminently exterior or the transcendent ... not being able to be "contained," nor being able to appear ... concerns and surrounds me as a commandment speaking from my own mouth (1996: 104).

As suggested here, Levinas' evocation of a self 'possessed' by the infinite world that always exceeds it – and that "commands" the subject from his or her own mouth – is perhaps better understood in terms of the very real social conditions, institutions, discourses etc. that position people as subjects and create identities for them. As an alternative to Levinas' conception of proximity and encounter with others as a relation of 'unquestionable' responsibility, subjectivity is perhaps better understood *both* as a complex process of being "positioned" and as a place of agency – a position from which to contribute and respond. There is clearly a dimension of unquestionability or inescapability to the extent that subjectivity is inherently social and individuals are not the exclusive, or even principal, makers of their own identities. Yet this is counterbalanced by the agency, both ethical and political, that subjectivity derived from positioning and encounter makes available to people.

The incitements to talk examined in this chapter articulate a relationship between primary speech communication, agency and subjectivity, emphasizing the ways in which people's sense of self and self-empowerment are deeply related to what possibilities there are for conversation and testimonial. This points to alternate conceptions of gay-bi-tran identity and community outside of an ontological framework of gay 'being' that so frequently fails as a narrative of 'coming out.' This narrative tends to frame gay 'becoming' as the unproblematic convergence of individual gay consciousnesses with a collective gay 'being' of culture, institutions, and territory, attributing agency – at times falsely – to the mere adoption of a gay identity. By contrast, the incitements to talk common in HIV health promotion reframe identity, community and agency as issues of rapport-building, conversation and testimonial, drawing attention to the significance of talk for well-being and health and also to the sometimes devastating and difficult implications for people's self-esteem and health when barriers to talk – such as the structures of silence analyzed in chapter 5 – block the possibilities for people to give testimony to one another. In the next chapter, I argue that these incitements to talk constitute a response to tensions in the health promotion paradigm related to the conceptualization of community. Calls for people to converse together involve efforts to foster dialogic relations as form of agency. In engaging in these efforts, Séro Zéro has developed a 'conversant' understanding of community as dialogical and ethical action that contributes to people's overall well-being and health.

7   Conversant community: toward an ethics of proximity

As I have argued at various points in the preceding chapters, the main conclusions of my research centre on the responses in Séro Zéro's work to tensions in the health promotion paradigm. I argue that the organization has developed a way to retain community as a frame of reference for health promotion work by focusing on political and ethical considerations of how communities are constituted rather than on rational and ontological preoccupations with what communities are. My analysis of Séro Zéro's incitements to talk suggest that an important aspect of Séro Zéro's work involves efforts to develop dialogical relations as a form of agency. In this chapter. I argue that, in critically engaging with the ways in which the rational dimensions of gay-bi-tran community fail to provide an adequate frame of reference, Séro Zéro has developed a conversant understanding of community as dialogical and ethical action that contributes to well-being and health.

My involvement as a volunteer at Séro Zéro encompassed various street-level or frontiine activities such as helping to run information tables, handing out condoms in bars and at mega-parties, and participating in fund-raising activities. In addition to these, I participated as a peer educator in a prevention project that Séro Zéro undertook during the summer season in Montréal's public parks. This involved completing a training program, followed by weekly shifts in various parks where men cruise for sex, talking to as many of them as possible, striking up conversations that addressed a wide range of issues including but not limited to safer sex and HIV. My participation in the parks

project is the focus of the following discussion, although I make reference to other activities.

The parks project brought together a group of nine staff members and volunteers, varied in age, ethnic background, level of education and socio-economic status. Volunteers were recruited both from the group of volunteers already working with Séro Zéro as well as through advertisements placed in local gay community magazines. Additional advertisements publicized the project and its objectives in an effort to alert park users[61] that they might encounter staff and volunteers from Séro Zéro over the course of the summer. The project was also part of a province-wide program of similar projects undertaken in other cities that also involved researchers from UQAM's department of sexology, who developed research tools to track statistical data on park users and their responses to the project.

From the perspective of doing prevention work, parks are complexly defined public spaces that I attempt to delineate in this analysis. My interpretation draws on elements from my entire corpus: texts; interviews; as well as my own observations and reflections. I examine how Séro Zéro's work accommodates the geography and practices of public sex, and the centrality in the organization's work of seizing opportunities to engage people in conversation. I argue that the work of Séro Zéro in parks is informed by a commitment to issues of difference that redefines 'community' in terms of dialogic relations rather than identity. In response to tensions relating to the conceptualization of community within the health promotion paradigm, Séro Zéro's work is thus argued to be significant in illustrating a way to retain community as a frame of reference for social

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[61] I use the term 'park users' (*les usagers des parcs*) to refer to men who frequent parks to have sex with other men given that this is the term most often used by staff and volunteers at Séro Zéro and is used by my narrators in interview passages quoted in this chapter.

analysis and action by focusing on dialogical and ethical considerations of how people constitute community through communication rather than on rational and ontological preoccupations with what communities are.

The poetic community of parks, prevention, and public sex

As noted above, from the perspective of doing prevention work, parks are complexly defined public spaces. One of the ways in which Séro Zéro has developed a dialogical and ethical understanding of community is evident in the way the organization has shaped its prevention work in public parks to accommodate the complexity of these spaces and the people that pass through them. In the following discussion, I outline what it was like to do prevention work in the specific geography of parks and among the wide range of people who engage in public sex in these settings. I point to the ways in which the work was ethically guided in a manner that recalls Iris Marion Young's central norm for an urban, non-oppressive politics of difference: an "openness to unassimilated otherness" (1990: 319).

Thus, even as we offered resources to some gay and bisexual men who wanted support in terms of coming out, our goal was not to 'assimilate' the men we encountered into the gay milieu in some normative fashion, either in our practices or our discourse. In addition to being guided by this non-assimilationist ethic, our understanding of community was focused on dialogic relations and the potential for conversation. The

community we were interacting with – if indeed it is appropriately described as a community – was defined in the first instance *conversantly*, in terms of those with whom we could potentially talk (as opposed to anyone in the parks at that time who was not looking for a sexual encounter and whom we would not approach), rather than being defined in terms of a specific identity, territory or set of institutions. The following analysis of our prevention work in parks, then, points to Séro Zéro's conversant understandings of community.

Postmodern theories of 'alternate' or popular geography – for example, the work of Michel de Certeau (1993) or in a different register, the 'queered' geography of Gordon Brett Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthilette and Yolanda Retter (1997) – propose that the geography of any space, and in particular of urban spaces, is multiple rather than unitary. Against official geographies such as those of government or private enterprise, ordinary people are seen to superimpose popular and alternative geographies through their distinct language about and use of various spaces and places. In the parks project as with many Séro Zéro activities, our work was strongly informed by popular uses of space, the ways in which gay and bisexual men map sexuality onto geography, and how these form specific contexts for sexual encounters. Many of Séro Zéro's projects are defined spatially or geographically in terms of where they take place (parks, bars, saunas, the street). One narrator situates cruising squarely within broader, historical struggles by sexual minorities to demarcate unpoliced spaces within which to socialize and have sex:

K: ... le premier espace que nous, les gais, on s'est battu pour avoir, c'est l'espace pour notre sexualité ... c'est le premier gain, c'est les premiers regroupements qui étaient pour ça, pour avoir cet espace, d'avoir le droit à notre sexualité, ok. Et au départ ... les droits comme les assurances, les pensions ... on n'a pas pensé à ça, tu comprends. C'était, 'fiche-nous la paix! Laisse-nous danser tranquille. On veut que les rapports homosexuels

ne soient pas considérés comme un délit.' ... c'était ça, les premières luttes. Et ça fait, par exemple, que notre lieu de rencontre, c'est ça, c'est le bar, c'est le sauna, c'est les parcs.

Here, the narrator draws attention to the specific relations between space and sexuality for gay-bi-tran people, and the extent to which struggles for the recognition of basic rights have occurred through the active mapping of sexuality onto space. Specific spaces, including parks and other 'unoccupied' but public zones in the urban landscape, have often become sexually charged as a result.

This recalls sociologist Laud Humphreys' observations that the social group of men who engage in 'tearoom sex' (anonymous sex in public washrooms) constitute an "unstructured collectivity" that in his analysis primarily operates as a silent "marketplace for impersonal sex" (1970: vii; 10). Offering a stronger political analysis than Humphreys, Luther Allen (1998) shares the view of a number of researchers that gay cruising areas must be understood as a specific kind of "gay public space" that has been strategically important for the survival and cohesion of urban homosexual communities. Anonymous cruising in park areas may be the way some men begin integration into the gay milieu even as, paradoxically, it has also functioned for others as a way to *avoid* identification with the gay community (1998: 82).

In terms of the parks project, a great deal of my documentation in field notes and interviews has to do with issues of space: how park spaces are used by men cruising there; the spatial set-up of parks; how these affected or shaped the interventions. The process of interpreting park spaces was one of the key challenges in doing the project. Thus, the first weeks involved mapping the different cruising areas across the city within specific parks or open areas. Unlike park areas where large numbers of gay men go primarily to sunbathe -- popularly known as "*les plages gaies*" -- cruising zones are at

times often more difficult to detect. They include sites where men gather to socialize in the context of cruising, but not necessarily with the intent to have sex; 'fast food' zones where men go to have a quick encounter; zones where men cruise but not necessarily to have sex on site; and at least one area where it is popularly claimed that men go to engage in leather sex. Depending on the site, the logistics of intervening were often quite challenging because of the spatial set-up of the park and the way in which people cruised. At one site, for example, most men cruising at certain times of the day did so on bike. This could be frustrating since we were on foot, and it was hard to find people to approach as everyone biked quickly around the trails.

One of the most interesting ways in which parks users have marked the some of the parks spaces is the stamping out of labyrinth-like cruising paths through the vegetation, especially at some of the sites where tall grasses – 7 to 9 feet high – proliferate; in some cases, these paths re-create the space of the sauna in an outdoor landscape, labyrinthine passages through the foliage leading to smaller *chambrettes* (cubicles) that someone often occupied, waiting for an interesting prospect to come by. The paths marked out in cruising areas recall Michel de Certeau's notion of "walking rhetorics," the idea that walking is a "style of use" or a kind of language:

The art of 'turning phrases' finds an equivalent in an art of composing a path (tourner un parcours). Like ordinary language, this art implies and combines styles and uses (1993: 158).

As a 'walking rhetoric,' cruising gravitates to zones that are abandoned or unoccupied, liminal areas that inscribe an alternate map on the urban landscape distinct from 'official' geography. Such use of 'unoccupied' land is often temporary, coinciding with the mapping of these as 'criminal' areas by city police who may show up suddenly to

interrupt the goings-on. Some areas may be used for cruising for a time, only to be

'reclaimed' by the police, developers or other authorities, whereupon cruising activity

will shift elsewhere. Referring to how people use familiar place-names to give their own

meanings to the paths and places they frequent, de Certeau defines popular language that

describes urban space as a "poetic geography" that people, in their meanderings,

superimpose on a physical geography:

A rich indetermination gives, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of
articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden
or permitted meaning (ibid.).

More generally, de Certeau's theory of popular geography provides a way to understand

how cruising zones emerge through popular practices. Cruising can thus be seen as a

way in which some gay and bisexual men produce social space, one that is distinct from

more 'official' or 'out' mappings of gay sexuality onto the urban geography.

In my notes from the parks project, the naming of some cruising areas does

constitute a kind of poetic geography, evident in knick names, used humorously but also

slightly derisively by some men to refer to certain sites where cruising goes on: *le Piste*

des vilains garçons; *l'île aux fesses*. Indeed, some observers point to the special

importance that space can have for men who cruise in parks and public areas. Laud

Humphreys noted that among men who frequent tearooms:

Participants may develop strong attachments to the settings of their adventures in
impersonal sex. I have noted more than once that these men seem to acquire stronger
sentimental attachments to the buildings in which they meet for sex than to the persons
with whom they engage in it. One respondent tells the following story of his roommate's
devotion to a particular restroom ... 'Do you know what [he] did last Christmas, after they
tore the place down? He took a wreath, sprayed it with black paint, and laid it on top of
the snow, right where that corner stall had stood ... He was really broken up! (1970: 14).

Reflecting on the demolition of a popular cruising area in Montréal known as "the

Fridge" (fig. 7.1), journalist Garth Barriere recounts a similar story:

Years ago, in Montreal, an office building was started but never completed. The frame
and stairwells were in place, but no walls existed. "The Fridge" – as it was called –
quickly became a gay cruising place, what with its different levels and surreal atmosphere
... The structure was demolished recently. A friend of mine was so struck by its loss that
he actually wanted a monument erected near where it had once stood[62] (Barriere, 1997).

Undertaking the parks project within this alternate geography of cruising required

that we think and work outside of the frame of "gay" identity and community. Thus, in

addition to understanding the popular geography of park spaces, the project required us to

expand our understanding of parks users:

G: ... au départ j'étais plutôt mal à l'aise ... j'avais quelque chose à démystifier ... on est
porté à partir tout de suite avec un jugement là-dessus, ... ceux qui vont dans les parcs ...
c'est des pervers. Ce n'était pas ... les mots que j'avais, tu sais, mais ç'allait dans le
même sens ...

As this narrator makes clear, it was crucial to leave aside assumptions about who was in

the parks and why, given that the wide variety of men could be found at any cruising

area. Labels could even become a barrier to doing the work:

F: ... je disais que je travaillais pour Séro Zéro, un organisme qui fait de la prévention
auprès des gars. Souvent, j'arrêtais là. Je ne disais pas que je travaillais auprès des gars
gais ou des hommes gais et bisexuels. Je ne disais même pas. Bien, je l'ai dit quelque
fois au début, puis j'ai senti un refroidissement. Je me suis rendu compte que les gars
avaient peur de ces mots. C'est pour ça que je me suis comme, censuré. Puis ... souvent
à un moment donné, je pouvais glisser plus tard ces mots ... que nous, on travaillait
surtout auprès des hommes gais, une fois que le lien de confiance était là. Mais ça, ça m'a
surpris vraiment.

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[62] Bizarrely, the Fridge also figured in the middle of a controversy between the Québec government and
National Geographic Magazine over a November 1997 feature entitled "Quebec's Quandary." Sylvain
Simard, Minister of International Affairs, denounced the story as "un ramassis de clichés." The article
included a photo juxtaposing the weather-beaten skeleton of the Fridge against the downtown Montréal
skyline (fig. 7.1), with the caption: "Derelict buildings, empty lots and 'For Sale' signs disfigure parts of
Montreal, once Canada's financial capital." At the time of the article's publication, the Fridge had already
been demolished.
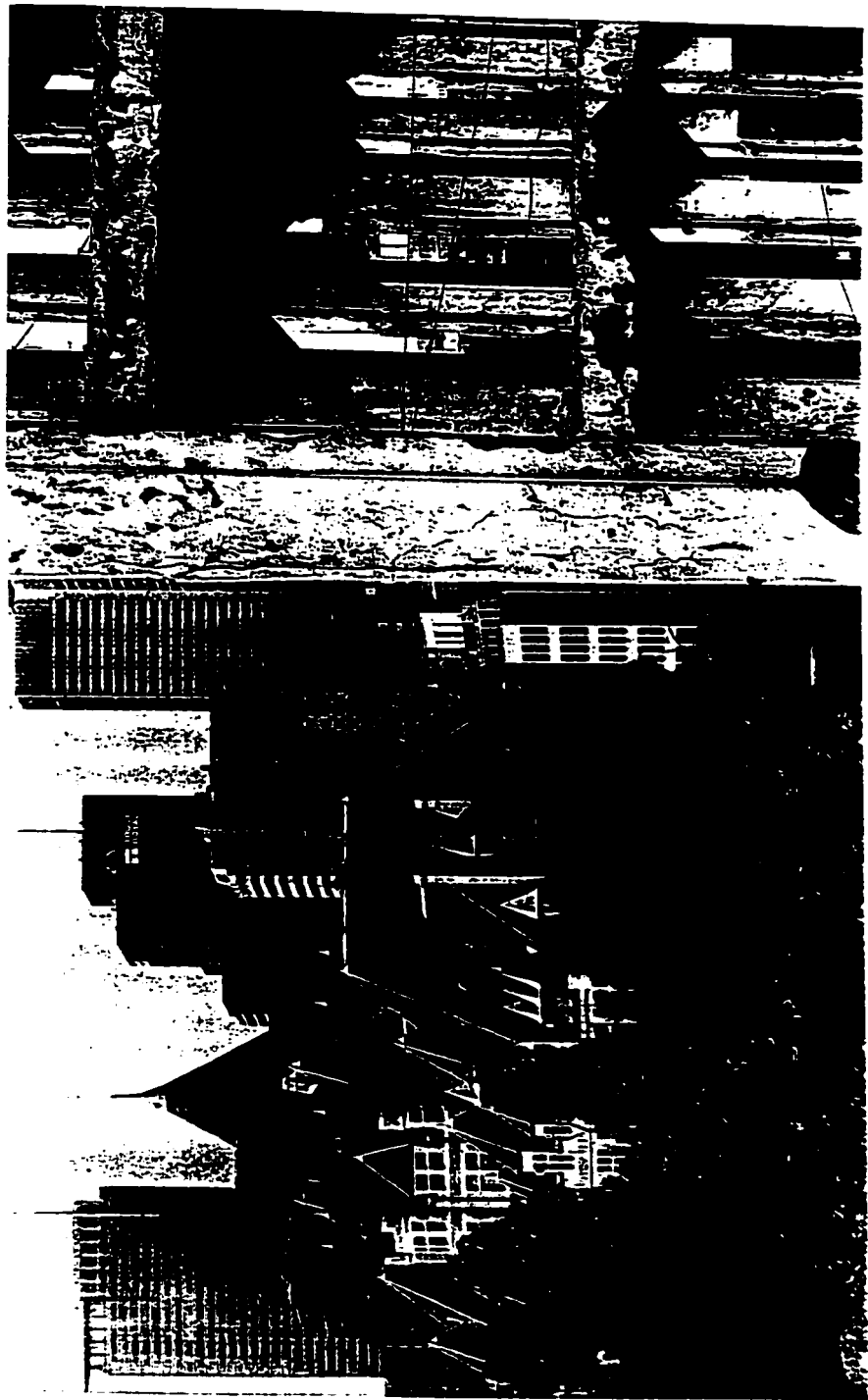
Figure 7.1 *The "Fridge"* (National Geographic Magazine, Nov. 1997)

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Thus, it was important to understand that some park zones were frequented by proportionally more bisexual or gay men who were 'married with children':

F: ... les hommes mariés ... il y en avait une gang. Ça m'a surpris parce que, dans d'autres parcs ... c'est des gens que, ils ont un look un petit peu gai déjà, des jeans, des chandails moulants ou des shorts courts, assez courts, assez sexy. C'est comme des codes ou des modèles qu'on voit dans le village gai, tout ça. ... Mais [ailleurs], c'est tout le contraire. Ils ne connaissaient pas la revue *Fugues*, ils étaient mariés, ils étaient dans le placard.

Project workers wore identical t-shirts marked with the Séro Zéro logo. Identification was necessary both ethically and for security,[63] but it was also tricky in that our t-shirts, in labeling us, could also "label" anyone seen speaking to us as being gay or HIV-positive by association. Our differing strategies of self-presentation and ways of negotiating an identity in relation to park users became quite evident at the end of the summer when notes were compared among staff from different parks projects across the province. The differences were clearly related to the range of identities and labels that parks users themselves preferred. It was not strategic in many regions, and even in some Montréal parks, to use the label "gay" to refer either to project staff or park users, given that many users disliked the label or were simply unwilling to recognize themselves in relation to it.

Approaching people was an art rather than a science, and over the course of the project, we continually faced the risk of rejection. One staff member, for example, found it important to conceive of his work as a "service." This helped him keep a healthy perspective on his role, to cope with rejection and respect differences among various parks users:

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[63] We worked in pairs, but split up to do our interventions. Identification made is easier for project workers to spot one another in case of emergency.

G: ... dans les parcs, mon ouvre-porte, là, moi je suis allé là pour offrir un service. Moi, dans ma tête, ça a toujours été clair. Je vais là pour offrir un service. 'Tu veux pas, c'est ok, mais tu sais que ça existe. Tu veux, mais, ok, donc, moi j'ai ABC pour toi, si tu as DEF, ça vas être parfait.'

Personally, my greatest struggle, perhaps betrayed by some of the preoccupations of this analysis, was the fear that park users would interpret my presence as a form of surveillance. I have experienced this feeling of surveillance myself in my own chance encounters with Séro Zéro's street-level work:

Later, this guy starts chatting with me ... when a Séro Zéro *volunteer whizzes by on roller blades and whips one of their condom packets right between us on the table where I'm seated. The guy blanches a bit and not too long after he leaves, as if I'd somehow come on to him or something ...*

Trying to compensate for these fears led me at times to being too cautious in approaching people. Watching some of the other project workers, I gradually dispelled my concerns, realizing I had to balance being respectful with being direct or nothing much really came of my contact with people.

At the same time, paying attention to difference provided an important basis for making contact with men in the parks in a non-threatening fashion and having mutually respectful conversations with them. This is not to say that the work of Séro Zéro completely dispenses with the classic gay liberation project of coming out. Indeed, both its documents and practices, the organization tends to associate coming out with better health and the best possibility for reducing HIV transmission, suggesting that the well-being of gay men will be affected if they remain in the closet. However, this is mitigated by a concern to recognize and respect the reality that people situate themselves in differing ways in relation to gay identity and community and, regardless of this, to do

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what we could to build people's capacity to adopt and maintain safer sex practices and to address health and personal issues that are frequently ignored in the mainstream.

In working outside the framework of "official" gay geographies and identities, our understanding of community became, almost by necessity, 'conversant.' We had to abandon understandings of community in terms of mainstream geographies and identities, adopting instead, to borrow from Iris Marion Young, "a norm of openness to unassimilated otherness." In so doing, however, our work constituted a kind of 'community as it is spoken.' In a sense, the community we were addressing only existed to the extent that people spoke with one another (or had sex), including or excluding people not in terms of residency or identity but instead in terms of the extent to which we could establish a basis for conversation with them. As de Certeau might put it, the community I am evoking here is perhaps a second, "poetic" community, a community spoken, in this case, through Séro Zéro's work in public parks.

From this perspective, the work in the parks draws attention to the ways in which community is something people "do" rather than simply something that "is." The concept of conversant community provides a way to retain community as a frame of reference for community-based prevention and health promotion work in settings such as public parks, where mainstream geographies and definitions of gay community do not apply. Ethics, rather than space or subjectivity, was most relevant in defining how to "do" this community, seen here for instance in the adoption within the parks project of standards of openness to unassimilated otherness.

My use of Iris Marion Young's theory for a politics of difference to analyze the 'community that is spoken' through the work of Séro Zéro in parks – guided by the norm of openness to unassimilated otherness that she identifies – is somewhat ironic. As discussed in chapter 3, Young proposes the politics of difference as a response to her extensive critique of feminist and 'New Left' ideals and politics of community, which she argues unrealistically idealized face-to-face relations and are motivated by a flawed conception of the 'good society' hearkening back to Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* – the close-knit rural communities that predate urban, industrial society and have been eroded by its arrival. Young points to ways in which the rural communitarian ideal that was, at one point, embraced by many feminists, could be stifling and oppressive in its own way. She thus argues for a politics of difference in part as a means to point out the constraints of intimate, communitarian, face-to-face contact and to recognize the emancipatory dimensions of non-communitarian urban contexts for groups such as sexual minorities for whom the relative anonymity of cities has long provided a haven. In a sense, then, Young is 'against' the idea of community – especially conversant community – and wants to find a basis for non-oppressive urban social relations beyond idealized, *Gemeinschaft*-like, face-to-face models of community. My use of her work is ironic because her interests would seem diametrically opposed to my focus in this research on face-to-face conversation and its relation to community. The ironies deepen given the centrality of Young's norm of openness to unassimilated otherness in Séro Zéro's work, as described in the previous section.

In this section, I reconcile some of these ironies and linkages. I return to the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin, as well as to documents from my research at Séro Zéro, in order to outline a few ways in which enhancing community as it is spoken may in fact be necessary to support a project such as Young's non-oppressive city and to complement a politics of difference. I argue that this aspect of the political strategy proposed by Young must be rethought, and that the work of Séro Zéro provides some evidence for concluding that conversant community – community as it is spoken – is an important component of people's overall well-being that is not automatically at odds with a postmodern politics of difference.

Indeed, despite the aspirations of Young's project to get 'beyond' community, my observations over the course of volunteering for the parks project suggest that even when 'community' is set aside as a normative ideal, there is a way in which community somehow still *happens*, simply by virtue of people speaking to one another. Community may be something that cannot be escaped no matter how much one might want to try. This is not to deny the importance and value of Young's critique of the politics of community, but simply to point out certain blind-spots in her analysis. Taken to their logical conclusion, Young's arguments would lead to the erasure of the idea of community from the practical repertoires and political vocabularies of social activism. Yet the work of Séro Zéro and theories of conversant community I have examined in this study point to important ways in which community is not simply a modern social construct, with overtones of instrumentality and exclusion, that one can take or leave. While this may be one expression of community – one evidently requiring critique as Young makes clear – there is an additional, somewhat more involuntary dimension of

community. Conversant community is community that, in one form or another, simply happens – gradually, and not necessarily grandly or permanently – as people talk together.

I have, of course, pointed to this distinction in the theory of alternate dimensions of rational and conversant community that I presented in Chapter 3. Conversant community is distinct from sociological conceptions of community in that its basis is speech rather than territory or identity. As such, it is not necessarily emancipatory. As Young's critique makes clear, the taken for granted aspects of conversant community can be oppressive – all the more so for sexual minorities. The confinement and violence of small-town life for many gay-bi-tran people is often rooted in the oppression of conversant community – discrimination not by law or even by deed, but instead the discrimination of community as it is spoken, including the isolation of its silences and denials.

Perhaps the principle problem I see in Young's analysis, however, is her implicit assumption that community, especially in its conversant forms, is *inherently* oppressive, inevitably marked by dynamics of homogenization and exclusion. My analysis in the previous section points to at least a few instances where conversant community is not incompatible with difference – where, in fact, conversant community offers possibilities for genuinely inclusive yet non-oppressive urban social relations. Thus, it is possible for conversant community to perpetuate dynamics of homogenization and exclusion, but also possible for it to address and heal these dynamics. There is no necessity that conversant community be oppressive (though there is always the danger). There are moreover some

instances of the work I participated in at Séro Zéro, instances I discuss in more detail below, where conversant community seems in some way emancipatory.

An alternate way, aside from Young's account, for theorizing how conversant community can compel us, in one way or another, toward greater restraint or greater freedom, can be found in a comparison of the work of Emanuel Levinas, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Alphonso Lingis. As discussed in the previous chapter, Levinas defines subjectivity in a somewhat counter-intuitive way as one's relation of unchosen responsibility to and "possession" by others. These concepts are central to the way Levinas analyzes language and, in particular, face-to-face speech. Although seemingly self-alienating, Levinas' definition of subjectivity is based on the ethical argument that other people have meaning prior to and outside of my cognition of them, leading to an analysis of the way in which "speech situates the self in relation to the other" – demonstrating that the "first fact of existing is being for the other" (Hand, 1989: 144). This is part of the broader argument Levinas makes to the effect that subjectivity must be understood in the first instance as an ethical relationship of contact with and responsibility to others.

Levinas closely interlinks this ethical theory of subjectivity to speech, arguing in effect that the beginning of my subjectivity is not what is in my head but is instead to be found in my conversation with others. It is in this context that Levinas situates his somewhat alarming assertions that subjectivity is, in fact, a kind of surrender to others. If this is so, the "surrender" Levinas is referring to is the relatively benign surrender of speech, for in his view, speaking with others is the first and most direct way in which people develop a sense of self. The tone of Levinas' language is nonetheless important.

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It links to Young's concerns about idealized conceptions of face-to-face community and the potential oppressions at play in the speaking of community. Levinas' unchosen responsibility to and possession by others that, according to him, is the genesis of selfhood, is also an apt description of many people's hellish experiences of traditional, face-to-face community: constraint, lack of privacy, discrimination, etc.

Of course, the background of Levinas' work is significantly different: for a French-Lithuanian Jew who lost most of his family at Auschwitz, post-Holocaust, how could there even *be* philosophy? To which Levinas' response is, insistently, only if we now understand ethics to be the first philosophy, and understand philosophy to be not simply the "love of wisdom" but also the "wisdom of love"(Hand, 1989: 4-5; Peperzak, 1997: 71). Hence, although he evokes a subjectivity of surrender and possession – self-negation, it would seem – his underlying concerns are with how people can have ethical relationships with one another, and how any attempt at philosophy must begin by accounting for these relationships. In exploring these concerns, Levinas proposes an analysis of speech in terms of the ethics of "proximity" – a term he develops for referring to the primary ways in which speech is about the relationships of people to one another, not about what is being said or thought. For Levinas, an ethical understanding of speech is one that conceives of it as contact or proximity with another person understood to be an "absolute singularity" who, however much I may represent him or her in my consciousness, ultimately remains unrepresentable to me in the infinity of who he or she is (1987a: 115). The ethics of this conception of speech are thus similar to the norm that guides Young's politics of difference: Levinas calls for a conception of subjectivity and speech that recognizes the infinite and unrepresentable freedom of the other that occurs

outside of and before any manifestation of its being in my consciousness. I should take care, in short, not to reduce others to my thoughts or words about them. As Levinas rather archly puts it: "One can't get alongside an idea. For that, the sensible is needed" (118). Levinas' ethics of proximity, then, is similar to Young's principle of openness to unassimilated otherness in proposing that social relations be governed by the recognition of the absolute singularity and freedom of people in relation to one another, the non-reducibility of people to concepts about people – a refusal, in short, of any social discourse, practice, science or philosophy that dehumanizes the other. Whereas Young calls for a somewhat vague openness, however, Levinas insists that ethical proximity hinges on a rather precisely defined unchosen responsibility to the other, the immediate and unquestionable bond of that arises from contact such as conversation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's social theory of speech communication, as discussed in chapter 6, bears some significant parallels to Levinas' ethics of proximity, and a further comparison here will provide a way to clarify this somewhat daunting notion of 'responsibility' to the other. Bakhtin defines "text" broadly as "any coherent complex of signs" (1986: 103) but also describes it as a dynamic object of study that transcends two poles: 1) a language system 2) an utterance within a chain of utterances. The former consists of the repeatable, reproducible resources of the language that are used to compose the text. The latter refers to the "natural uniqueness" of any and every text – its unrepeatable "performance" that links it dialogically to other speaking subjects and to 'chains' of other texts. For Bakhtin, the performative and dialogical aspect of the text points to its "true essence" that "...always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects." (106) – a description that evokes Levinas' accounts of

speech as the proximity of two irreducible singularities. Indeed, Bakhtin defines the

"understanding" or "comprehension" of a text as an attitude anchored dialogue, which he

contrasts to a non-dialogical view of texts as simply explanation or information:

> To see and comprehend the author of a work means to see and comprehend another, alien consciousness and its world, that is, another subject ...with *explanation*, there is only one consciousness, one subject; with *comprehension* there are two consciousnesses and two subjects ... Understanding is always dialogic to some degree (111).

Bakhtin argues that the key characteristic of utterances is that they are demarcated by a

change in speaking subjects, and as a result are "inherently responsive." In insisting that

they develop on the "boundary of two or more consciousnesses," he contests a view of

utterances as self-contained units that refer singularly back to the person uttering them.

Instead, Bakhtin argues that the inherent responsiveness of utterances is evident in

the way in which speech communication is principally an array of "non-linguistic

interrelations" that "are possible only between complete utterances of various speaking

subjects ... Dialogic relations presuppose a language, but they do not reside within the

system of a language" (117). This notion of dialogic relations evokes a community-

building potential within speech communication:

> ... the layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice, strengthening through merging (but not identification), the combination of many voices (a corridor of voices) that augments understanding, departure beyond the limits of the understood. These special relations cannot be reduced neither to the purely logical or purely thematic ... (12).

Bakhtin's analysis of speech communication is, here, extraordinarily similar to

Levinas' argument that speech and hearing break the self-complete world of vision,

generating direct social links between people; for Levinas, speech very much involves

transcending the given to enter into relation with another. In addition, both theorists seek

an ethical understanding of the dialogical relations of speech communication. As I noted

in chapter 5, this is most poignantly expressed by Bakhtin in his observation, "For the word ... there is nothing more terrible than a *lack of response*" (1986: 127). Bakhtin's analysis of the inherent responsiveness of the utterances that interweaves the fabric of speech communication provides an alternate perspective to Levinas – exemplified in his use of the term "responsiveness" in describing the fundamental characteristics of speech – that contrasts Levinas' rather heavy depiction of speech as an unchosen bond of responsibility to the other. Despite these differences in tone, however, both thinkers point to the ways in which the dialogic relations of speech are more important than is often supposed.

For both Levinas and Bakhtin, speech communication is powerfully generative of social relations. Levinas understands speech as perhaps the primary way that I transcend myself and enter into relations with others. For Bakhtin, speech is a "corridor of voices" that, at times, "augments understanding ... beyond the limits of the understood" as it interlinks speaking subjects. Although neither directly states that dialogic relations generate community, as I have frequently argued, it is implicit in Levinas' idea that subjectivity derives from proximity, especially speech: by extension, community – as a kind of collective subjectivity -- can perhaps also be seen as engendered in proximity. Similarly, the conception that speech generates community is implicit in Bakhtin's analysis of the ways in which dialogic relations, intertextual chains, and speech genres are in fact social relations – and perhaps in some cases generative of community.

Bakhtin and Levinas, then, provide a fuller account of what I term conversant community than Young, who dismisses it perhaps too hastily in her critique of the politics of community. Unlike Young, both Bakhtin's and Levinas' accounts capture the

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ways in which conversant community is somewhat involuntary, imperceptible but for its absence, taken for granted. It is not an enterprise that is intentionally embarked upon, but rather is something that "happens," is "done," if and when people engage in conversation. Indeed, bringing to mind my description in the previous section (drawing from de Certeau) of a 'poetic community' spoken through Séro Zéro's work in public parks, Levinas writes of proximity as the "poetry of the world" (1987a: 119). Judging by the vigour of his writings on the subject, Bakhtin is similarly awe-inspired by the random beauty of the complex constellations of intertextuality that link people together, only in some cases as the result of rational intent.

In making this analysis, I am clearly emphasizing the conceptual similarities between Levinas and Bakhtin. I should note that there are also important differences between their theories, especially in terms of the distinct conceptions each holds of the ontology of the subject. I have avoided potential epistemological conflicts in bringing these two theorists together because I am primarily looking to Levinas for a critical conception of subjectivity, whereas Bakhtin's work is important to my project mainly for his theories of intertextuality. As such, the theoretical differences between the two are not especially important in relation to my study and thus have not warranted elaboration.

The involuntary power of conversant community that Young warns against can thus be usefully analyzed by drawing on Levinas' and Bakhtin's points of convergence. Rather than distancing this aspect of community as an unrealistic ideal based on its potential to stifle and oppress, Levinas and Bakhtin provide ways to reframe 'community as it is spoken' dialogically and ethically as an issue of responsiveness and responsibility. Even as there is an unchosen or taken for granted dimension to this 'responsive

responsibility,' Levinas and Bakhtin suggest, in their own ways, that a commitment to respond that respects the absolute singularity of the other provides an ethical standard that can guide community as it is spoken, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of conversant community to which Young points. At the same time, as noted above, Levinas' ethical analyses of conversant community bring to the fore norms similar to the openness to the Other that Young evokes as the ground for a politics of difference. This possibility for an ethical analysis of speech and proximity underscores the problem with Young's assumption that conversant community is inherently oppressive. Both Levinas and Bakhtin's analyses suggest that, even though conversant community 'happens' regardless, it does not come about uniformly. It is an inherently dialogical and ethical relation, or set of relations, among people that may or may not be guided by standards of justice, safety, freedom, respect, etc. These ethics of speech and proximity shape the productive social force of conversant community, be it in a direction of oppression and constraint or, when people are more attentive to non-oppressive ethical standards – in an alternate direction, one of responsiveness and respect, voice upon voice, as mutually interconnected subjects. Such an analysis suggests that the quality of community as it is spoken may be crucial, rather than incidental, to support a project such as Young's non-oppressive city. Young's critical analysis of community, however insightful, neglects the ethics of proximity and underestimates the important and somewhat open-ended ways in which conversant community links people together. However much community as it is spoken is potentially oppressive, particularly if informed by dynamics of identity and exclusion, it is always, in equal measure, potentially transgressive or emancipatory, a possible vehicle for some aspects of justice, safety, and well-being.

Séro Zéro's work in parks, and the organization's other incitements for people to converse together, appear in a different light if we assess them from this perspective rather than solely on the basis of Young's concern that community as it is spoken is an outmoded basis for progressive urban politics. Séro Zéro's retention of community as a frame of reference in its work, understanding community conversantly in terms of dialogical and ethical relations, does not in any fundamental way contradict Young's postmodern politics for a non-oppressive city. The organization's work may, in fact, comprise an important contribution to such a project. The "transcendence of words" so eloquently theorized by Levinas (1989) was especially evident in our work in the parks. Certainly, this was related to the fact that silence is such an important dimension of gay male cruising. As Laud Humphreys extensively documented in his study of tearoom sex, cruising tends to be a silent activity:

Silence in these settings is the product of years of interaction. It is a normative response to the demand for privacy without involvement, a rule that has been developed and taught (1970: 14).

This is a fairly accurate description of the silent cruising activity we encountered in the parks. In this sense, the parks project was not easy, and in many ways was delicate in that it involved respecting this reality while breaking the silence in order to engage men in conversation. Humphrey's observation that the silence of impersonal sex constitutes in some way a "demand for privacy without involvement" portrays it as the diametrical opposite in human relations to what Deborah Tannen describes as "rapport-talk" – talk that exists primarily to generate involvement. This characteristic silence of cruising created ethical challenges for our work in public parks, where *speaking out loud* meant

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breaking an experience of privacy that brought the other person and yourself immediately into the public domain.

Lest this interruption be seen as unethical, however, it is useful to consider the silence of cruising – and perhaps more broadly the oft-criticized emphasis on looks in the gay milieu – in light of Levinas' critique of the emphasis in western civilization on visual experience, as I also discuss in chapter 5. For Levinas, there is at least potentially something fundamentally unethical about the strong associations of truth and being to the visual, a way in which preoccupation with the visual generates and apparently self-complete world that, in Levinas' critique, is a world quickly limited to the given, a world of silence and closure to the other. This critique of visual preoccupations, and the silence this engenders, is directly applicable to the gay milieu with its emphasis on physical appearance and the silent gaze of cruising.

The work of Séro Zéro reaches just such a conclusion, oriented around practices that interrupt the silent emphasis on 'looks' within the gay milieu. Thus, although there were important ways in which our interruptions of people's silence as they cruised had to be guided by standards of respect, these interruptions also engaged with larger issues dealing with the ethics of proximity among men, challenging the "scorn for words" (Levinas, 1989: 148) that often informs relations of proximity among gay men – and indeed, among men in general. Séro Zéro's work in parks involved going somewhat against the grain of dynamics of identity and exclusion that result not from community as it is spoken, but instead from the visual emphasis in the gay milieu and the closure and silence toward others that visuality often fosters. Interrupting people as they moved silently about the parks, then, served to some extent as a challenge to a visually-biased

ethics of proximity. In this light, it was not simply our interventions that raised ethical challenges; our work engaged with ethical issues of proximity that preceded and exceeded the scope and impact of the parks project.

The specific importance that face-to-face talk can have as a response to the visual emphasis that strongly informs social relations among many gay-bi-tran men was apparent not simply in the way our own work in the parks project interrupted the silence of cruising, but also in the patterns of conversation and sociability that characterized the interactions of some men in the parks. Even while silence and an emphasis on the visual are central features of cruising, one of the things that stood out in my observations of work in parks were the temporary and informal conversant communities that we encountered in doing the project. Most cruising areas had zones that served as meeting spots where people would gather for a few minutes or even several hours to chat. My interview material and field notes suggest that for some men, the talk that goes on in parks provides important experiences of community, such that parks are sites of socialization as much as for potential sexual encounters. Although most contacts between project workers and parks users happened on an individual basis, staff had regular contact with small groups of 'regulars' who maintain informal networks against the backdrop of park cruising.

The strength of community-like ties in the parks was at times surprising; one project volunteer befriended a group of parks users who, each spring, organize groups at one site to clean and prepare trails for the upcoming season. To some extent, this community dimension of park usage was age and appearance-based, with men in their senior years forming the strongest social networks:

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F: ... je les voyais souvent assis sur la même branche les trois même personnes qui parlaient ensemble. ... ils parlaient ensemble puis il y avait quelqu'un, un petit nouveau, c'est sûr qu'ils vont le spotter et puis ils vont discuter là-dessus. Mais c'est pas sûr qu'il vont baiser avec, parce qu'il savent très bien que le petit nouveau recherche généralement un jeune ou un beau gars ou peut-être à la limite un monsieur d'âge mûr mais qui est bien conservé puis ... ils sont comme là plus pour faire du social, et peut-être avoir du sexe si on est chanceux. Ça, ça m'a surpris un peu, oui, de voir que les lieux de drague pourrait en même temps servir des lieux de rencontre, juste des lieux pour placoter, là, puis pour briser ta solitude ...

F: ... ces gars-là, ils vont pas au club de l'âge d'or parce que, bon, l'âge d'or, c'est, c'est comme évident qu'ils se sentent pas bienvenus là puis ils ont pas le goût de jouer aux cartes avec les madames, aussi, puis faire semblant d'être un monsieur hétéro là. Puis qu'ils aimaient parler avec leur chums de gars, puis c'est tout à fait louable. Fait qu'il avait ça, comme socialisation.

One staff member noted a seasonal continuity with the socialization that also goes on in

saunas.

F: ... il y bien de la solitude qui est vécue par les hommes gais parce que, on poigne pas toujours dans les bars ... fait qu'il y a bien du monde qui vont dans les parcs ou dans les saunas ... parce qu'ils répondent pas aux critères du beau gai qui est musclé ... donc, ces hommes-là se retrouvent dans les saunas, dans les parcs pour avoir du sexe ... ils sont beaucoup plus prêt à discuter avec les gars ... Puis peut-être avoir du sexe si ça va bien, si je bande, 'si l'autre bande, puis si on a le goût.'

Be it in saunas or parks, sex for many of these men seemed to some extent to be replaced

by conversation, offering an alternative ethics of proximity that broke the norms of

attractiveness that excluded them.

Against the contrasting backdrops of silent cruising and friendly conversation, our

interventions as peer educators with the parks project were only partly spontaneous.

Training sessions that project volunteers were required to take involved a kind of

scripting and structuring of how we approached conversations with park users. To this

end, the project was endowed with a set of documents, forms, and procedures designed to

structure the "performance" of interventions in a particular way: ethical guidelines, safety

precautions, legal guide-lines, and a step-by-step guide to making contact and directing a

conversation with a park user. Training also encompassed learning technical information about HIV and AIDS with a view to interpreting and translating this information into terms accessible and relevant to parks users.

In particular, a set of evaluative tasks associated with the research components of the project had a strong influence on how we approached park interventions. After each contact, project staff completed a 28-part questionnaire to document information learned from that particular person during the conversation (fig. 7.2). Collected by the UQAM research team studying the project, questionnaire results were incorporated into a database on men who have sex with other men in parks. During training sessions, a fair amount of effort went into ensuring that all project staff completed these forms in an identical manner. Especially for the project staff that put in the largest amount of hours on site in the parks, since we eventually memorized the form (in total, over 700 were completed during the summer), it became a kind of guide that framed our contacts with men in the parks:

G: Une fois qu'on a fait l'ABC du sexe sécuritaire, bien ... la personne parle puis elle ne se rend pas compte de toute l'information qu'elle nous laisse, tu sais. Puis quand qu'on connaît, là, toute, mettons, le rapport quotidien, tout ça. Tous les thèmes qu'on peut aller chercher, juste dans la présentation, là. Moi, j'étais obligé ... ça m'aurait pris du papier puis un crayon, tu sais.

This narrator hints at the ways the questionnaire ("*rapport quotidien*") influenced the questions we asked as we used our conversations to gather as much data as possible for the purposes of the research project.

Clearly, this links the parks project to concerns raised by commentators such as David Woodhead and Pierre Rivard, as reviewed in chapter 2, that community-based prevention work is a kind of 'disciplinary force' complicit with invisible and perhaps

22. Dévoilement (coming out)
— aux ami(e)s
- 1☐ aucun 2☐ un seul 3☐ plusieurs 4☐ je ne sais pas
— aux membres de la famille
- 1☐ aucun 2☐ un seul 3☐ plusieurs 4☐ je ne sais pas
— aux collègues (travail/études)
- 1☐ aucun 2☐ un seul 3☐ plusieurs 4☐ je ne sais pas

23. Réseau social (4☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ principalement homosexuel
- 2☐ principalement hétérosexuel
- 3☐ autant l'un que l'autre

24. Expérience du milieu gai (1☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ autres lieux de sexe sur place
- 1☐ bars/discothèques gais
- 1☐ organismes/associations gais

25. État d'intoxication (1☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ alcool
- 1☐ drogues
- 1☐ drogues par injection

26. Pratiques sexuelles dans les parcs (1☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ «cruise» seulement
- 1☐ voyeurisme
- 1☐ exhibitionnisme
- 1☐ outisme
- 1☐ sexe oral
- 1☐ sexe anal
- 1☐ sexe commercial (prostitution)
- 1☐ autre

27. Sexe sécuritaire dans les parcs (1☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ refus de sexe anal non protégé
- 1☐ condom sur lui

28. Réactions de l'usager à l'intervention
- 1☐ intéressé   1☐ rejetant
- 1☐ surpris   1☐ agressif
- 1☐ hésitant   1☐ engagé/convaincu
- 1☐ indifférent   1☐ séducteur/«cruiser»
- 1☐ fuyant   1☐ achat/multiplicateur

Rapport-quotidien Projet PARCS

- **0. Numéro de rapport** |_|_|_|_|
- **1. Code de l'organisme** |_|_|
- **2. Code de l'intervenant** |_|_| |_|_| |_|_| |_|_|
- **3. Date** |_|_| |_|_| |_|_|
- **4. Achalandage** |_|_|_|
- **5. Heure du contact** |_|_| |_|_|
- **6. Durée du contact** |_|_|

7. Lieu de l'intervention
- 1☐ parc
- 1☐ sentier
- 1☐ halte routière
- 1☐ stationnement
- 1☐ boisé
- 1☐ piste cyclable
- 1☐ camping

8. Initiateur du contact
- 1☐ moi
- 2☐ l'usager-contact
- 1☐ une tierce personne

9. État du contact
	cet été		années antérieures
1☐	1re fois	1☐	jamais vu
2☐	2e fois	2☐	déjà vu
3☐	3e fois ou +	1☐	ne s'applique pas

10. Type d'intervention
- 1☐ individuelle
- 2☐ de groupe # personnes |_|_|

11. Nature de l'intervention
- 1☐ apprivoisement
- 1☐ écoute
- 1☐ soutien/aide
- 1☐ information
- 1☐ sensibilisation
- 1☐ référence

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12. Thèmes abordés
- 1☐ le projet PARCS
- 1☐ mission et services de votre organisme
- 1☐ ressources de la région
- 1☐ dépistage du VIH
- 1☐ traitement du VIH
- 1☐ pour du VIH-sida
- 1☐ pratiques à risque élevé
- 1☐ pratiques à risque réduit
- 1☐ condoms et lubrifiant
- 1☐ négociation du sécurisexe
- 1☐ estime de soi
- 1☐ double vie
- 1☐ relations de couple
- 1☐ rejet et discrimination
- 1☐ dépression/idée suicidaire
- 1☐ aspects légaux
- 1☐ autre

13. Matériel distribué
- 1☐ trousse
- 1☐ condom   (#|_|_|)
- 1☐ lubrifiant (#|_|_|)
- 1☐ seringue (#|_|_|)
- 1☐ carte d'affaire
- 1☐ dépliant d'information
- 1☐ mode d'usage du condom
- 1☐ liste des ressources et services
- 1☐ autre

14. Mode de distribution du matériel
- 1☐ non initiative
- 2☐ à la demande de l'usager

Caractéristiques de l'usager

15. Lieu de résidence (4☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ ville de l'intervention
- 2☐ ville avoisinante
- 3☐ extérieur de la région

16. Âge de l'usager (7☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ < 20 ans
- 2☐ 20-29 ans
- 3☐ 30-39 ans
- 4☐ 40-49 ans
- 5☐ 50-59 ans
- 6☐ > 60 ans

17. Langue maternelle (4☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ français
- 2☐ anglais
- 3☐ allophone

18. Identité ethnoculturelle (9☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ blanc
- 2☐ noir
- 1☐ hispanique
- 4☐ asiatique
- 5☐ autochtone-inuit
- 6☐ juif
- 7☐ arabe
- 1☐ autre

19. Occupation (1☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ travailleur
- 1☐ étudiant
- 1☐ sans emploi
- 1☐ retraité

20. Statut relationnel (4☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ partenaire stable homme
- 2☐ partenaire stable femme
- 3☐ sans partenaire stable

21. Orientation sexuelle (4☐ je ne sais pas)
- 1☐ gai/homosexuel
- 2☐ bisexuel
- 3☐ straight/hétérosexuel
- 4☐ transsexuel
- 5☐ incertain/confus

Figure 7.2   *Rapport-quotidien* (Séro Zéro, Parks Project)

unsettling forms of "surveillance." While ethical codes guided this survey research, ensuring that standards of confidentiality and consent were respected, there was nonetheless an element of what David Armstrong describes as the "dispensary power" of new health care paradigms (cited in Nettleton, 1995: 248), perhaps most evident in the ways the project served to contribute to the construction of potentially powerful forms of knowledge about men who frequent parks for sex. Critics such as Grace, Woodhead and Armstrong suggest that this refutes claims that community-based health promotion empowers individuals and communities, arguing that instead, it has come to serve the agendas and interests of government and institutionalized health care.

These concerns are important, and a critical analyses of the discourse and procedures of health promotion are valuable in demonstrating that community-based health work is not some 'pure' or innocent form of bottom-up empowerment but rather is strongly interconnected with existing structures and relations of knowledge production and hence of power, even when looked at from the perspective of conversant community. Post-structural critique of the operations of health promotion and community-based prevention work is perhaps most useful as a call for anyone involved in such health promotion work to remain critically aware of the potentially invisible implications of such work. However, understanding community-based health work solely in terms of the hidden procedures of power/knowledge, as Rivard and Woodhead do, is unnecessarily reductive. While research instruments such as the parks project questionnaire and database are clearly part of institutional procedures to produce knowledge, they are – at least in the case of our work in parks – equally a set of collaborative procedures negotiated and undertaken by a variety of actors. Community-based health work may not

be as innocent as health policy or popular discourse might suggest, but this is not sufficient to invalidate such work as a dubious form of disguised institutionalized power. The power implications of community-based 'surveillance' are variable and complex, serving a variety of interests. As I have noted elsewhere in this study, Séro Zéro staff are often keenly aware of the extent to which their work operates within, and is constrained by, an arena of institutions and discourses, a set of relations that can lead to collaboration or conflict. This includes an awareness that "community" is not simply an innocent grassroots constituency, but very much a construct that is established and negotiated through institutional and discursive procedures in which organizations such as Séro Zéro are implicated and which shape and constrain its work. Against assumptions that this indicates the bankruptcy or 'bad faith' of community-based health work, the social construction of community health promotion work must be understood as at least in part the outcome of a wide range of interactions (combative, neutral, collaborative) among a variety of self-aware social actors rather than simply as an agentless process of discursive deployment that coldly betrays the innocence and promise of community.

One piece of evidence to support interpreting the parks project as more than simply an operation of surveillance is suggested by the aspects of the work seen as most valuable to project staff. Although staff viewed data collection as important, it figured somewhere down on the list. Of highest value to most staff were the occasions when contact with someone in the parks led to a 'breakthrough' – a contact with a user that permitted extended conversation that was mutually engaging. During debriefings, it became clear that for some project members, these breakthroughs came more quickly than for others. I found it quite a challenge to generate contacts that lasted longer than a

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few minutes, while other project staff had to be vigilant about limiting the amount of time they spent chatting with any given person. These 'breakthrough' contacts provided much of the satisfaction and validation that parks staff gained from doing the project.

Breakthroughs were encounters that somehow got beyond the banal 'thick skin' of everyday life, at times a destabilizing prospect. For some people, coping with profound issues of isolation or loss, meeting a project member could be both a welcome experience and one that brought painful emotions to the surface:

G: ... il y a du monde qui ont pleuré dans le parc, tu sais ... Ce n'est pas drôle du tout .... Je ne suis pas venu ici pour faire pleurer, je suis venu pour faire la prévention ... Que ça fasse quelque chose, que ça déstabilise quelque chose ... n'importe quoi, pour que le lendemain, il y ait une réflexion ou il y ait quelque chose qui soit ajoutée à sa réflexion ... Mais sinon, il ne se passe rien. Puis Dieu sait, il faut qu'il s'en passe des affaires, tu sais .. quand qu'on est rendu insensible au deuil ... mais je dis, christ que la carapace est épaisse.

Here, the narrator's sense that having done his work is associated with the insistence that change occur, that the status quo be broken, that something *happen*, even if for some people this led to strong emotions: ... *sinon, il ne se passe rien.* The need to express the grief of multiple losses due to HIV/AIDS, for example, was an issue that some men faced in their contact with parks project staff members, as in the quotation above. From the perspective of the health promotion paradigm, breakthroughs were most often associated with efforts to demystify issues relating to HIV/AIDS and to confront people's resistances to adopting safer practices. The possibilities for doing this depended in part on the type of exchange that was possible with park users:

F: ... il y a un monsieur avec qui j'ai parlé trois, quatre fois au cours de l'été ... constamment il me revenait sur le même sujet ... la première fois, je pensais que c'était clair ... mais la deuxième fois je me suis rendu compte ... que la vraie histoire du monsieur, c'était ... qu'il avait peur ... je me rendais compte qu'il avait un discours, il me disait des choses un peu pour me plaire. Puis il me disait un peu des choses pour avoir ... une bonne allure ou, en tout cas, un bon citoyen qui, qui va dans les parcs mais qui baise

pas. Puis, je sentais que c'était comme un peu un faux discours, c'était comme incohérent.

As this narrator suggests, breakthrough conversations were not always possible because park users were not comfortable divulging what was really of concern to them, instead telling us what they thought we wanted to hear. Project staff developed a healthy skepticism about how parks users presented themselves, given the tendency of many men to locate the problem of HIV in others and to view themselves as being "outside" the gay community and its problems:

G: Tout le monde dit que c'est important la prévention ... les gens reconnaissent l'importance, qu'il faut faire de la prévention VIH/sida. Puis qu'il faut traiter l'homophobie. ... Mais, c'est pas tout, ça. Il faut que tu te sentes concerné, aussi, là-dedans. Quand tu dis que c'est important pour la communauté, ça veut dire que c'est important pour toi, là, ok? Mais on peut tu parler de toi? Puis moi, c'est ça le problème majeur que j'ai rencontré. C'est toujours les autres qui sont à risque.

Here, the narrator draws attention to the potential impact on their health of the way people situate themselves in relation to community; men who did not see themselves as part of 'the community' often did not see themselves at risk. "Breakthrough" conversations were often ones that problematized a problematic community, rendering explicit a person's own unacknowledged assumptions or, indeed, the patterns of identification and exclusion that had an impact on the person's life. For project staff, the goals was not necessarily to normalize gay-bi-tran communities and bring people into them, but instead to foster a conversational 'space' where community, a person's relationship to it, and the relation of HIV to self and community could perhaps be reformulated in new ways that might contribute to a person's well-being, including but not limited to reducing the risk of HIV transmission.

Breakthrough conversations often provided an opportunity to explore and reflect upon personal and social issues which many men had little opportunity to speak about elsewhere. Depression and isolation were common themes, and when such issues came up, encounters between park users and project staff could be extremely compelling:

G: Il y a beaucoup de gars qui m'ont dit, 'je n'ai jamais jasé de même avec personne, tu sais. J'ai jamais parlé de ça, j'ai jamais dit ce que ça me faisait vivre que ma famille me rejette, j'ai jamais dit ce que ça me faisais vivre, être dans les parcs.' Tu sais, le gars, il est tout nu ... il y a 10 minutes, il espérait désespérément avoir une baise, tu sais ... il est rendu à parler des choses qui le touchent, bien, c'est quelque chose là, ça a déjà un impact.

Here, the narrator illustrates the complexity of doing community-based health promotion work where conversations made apparent the felt absences of community , ways that people felt they did not belong to 'the community.' In these cases, breakthrough conversations could bridge the gap between the 'assumed community' of the health promotion paradigm and people's actual experiences of community that, on many occasions, threw into question its adequacy as a frame of reference.

Another narrator points to the distinction between efforts to transfer information – such as distributing flyers on safer sex – and efforts to engage people in conversation:

F: ... c'est une place primordiale, les conversations qu'on avait avec les gens. Pourquoi? ... ça permettait de, tu sais, le sécurisexe, il peut être un thème très, très flou, très, très désincarné, mais là quand c'est une discussion entre deux personnes, c'est comme plus personnel puis c'est personnalisé ... fait que l'utilisateur pouvait dire, ah, c'est le *fun*, c'est un être humain qui me parle. C'est pas un dépliant qui, qui est anonyme, qui est froid, c'est un autre être humain, disons, qui est chaud, si on peut faire un parallèle entre ce qui est chaud et froid, disons.

Here, the "warmth" and spontaneity of conversation is understood to better accommodate the reality that safer sex can mean many different things to people: ... *il peut être un thème très, très flou.* By contrast, an emphasis on transferring 'disincarnated' safer sex information rests on the assumption that prevention issues are

best addressed by streamlining these meanings. The emphasis on breakthrough conversations in the parks project, then, involved acknowledging and striving to accommodate the diverse meanings of sex and safety. Conversation was not simply another medium for the transfer of information. The impact of encounters that led to conversation lay in the opportunities they provided to contextualize information, to develop additional meanings specific to the people conversing, filling a conversational void by bringing up issues that some people had never before discussed or confronted:

F: ... la ... conversation permettait qu'on aille dans des choses plus personnelles et intimes ... le gars peut te dire, oh, moi je m'en crisse du condom, je ne l'utilise pas, il pète toujours ... Mais des fois derrière tout ça, ... bon, peut-être au niveau de l'estime de soi, peut-être qu'il vient de vivre une peine d'amour, je ne sais pas, ou peut être que le gars se sentait en tant que gai, inconsciemment il considère qu'il ne vaut pas la peine qu'il se protège puis si il se fait infecter, bien, c'est pas grave puis si il meurt, bien, c'est encore moins grave parce que, de toute façon, c'est rien qu'une tapette et puis il vit mal, peut-être, son homosexualité puis, il est comme isolé dans son coin puis, tu sais, là, il ne vaut pas la peine vraiment de se protéger, tout ça. Fait que, je pense qu'en ayant une conversation intime avec le gars, puis ça permettait justement de pouvoir creuser.

The narrator here points to the ways in which conversation allowed people to 'dig deeper' – ... *ça permettait justement de pouvoir creuser* – and begin to address fundamental issues such as self-esteem and social isolation that affected how a person might deal with specific health issues such as HIV risk.

Of course, not all of the talk that went on during the project focused on problems or issues, nor was a strenuous process of introspection and support. One narrator points to the extent to which doing the project also encompassed the *pleasure* of conversation: "*Puis j'ai eu des belles conversations. C'est vrai, aussi. Je parle puis ça me revient.*" Moreover, the discovery that unpaid volunteers were involved in the project had a strong impact on some people we met, provoking a subtle change of perception in terms of what community can mean:

F: ... il y a des bénévoles aussi qui disaient qu'ils étaient bénévoles ... juste le fait de voir que des gens font ça comme bénévolat ... je pense que ça donnait un impact sur le gars ... ça devait renforcer le sentiment de communauté, puis d'une communauté qui se prend en main aussi.

Community building was also attempted in a more classic sense as well, in that project members provided telephone numbers and reference cards, striving to connect people to community-based health and social services appropriate to their needs.

Thus, in a number of ways, the work of Séro Zéro provides examples of the importance Levinas attributes to the "transcendence of words" – the unique ways in which encounters and conversation involve transcending what is apparently "given" in the world by entering into relations with others, generating important social links and reflection among people. I have interpreted the transcendence of words in this study of Séro Zéro's work as moments of 'conversant community' based on a theory that important forms of community are produced through primary speech communication such as face-to-face conversation. I have identified in the preceding chapters the ways in which scholars have described the 'ritual' dimensions of communication that generate rapport and interpersonal involvement, as well as how Séro Zéro's prevention work, emphasizing primary speech communication, understands community conversantly in terms of the way such communication fosters or constitutes community. I have thus brought together examples from both theory and practice that provide for a reconceptualization of community – one that recognizes how community is an outcome of proximity and conversation, focusing on the way in which community is produced through primary speech rather than being solely the result of shared identity, geography or institutions.

Indeed, some Séro Zéro prevention workers identified and held as most crucial this *ritual* dimension of communication – the bonds generated among people through ordinary conversation. One narrator, for example, uses a metaphor of ministering the soul to describe his work:

K: ...quand tu donnes de l'information à quelqu'un ... les gens apprécient beaucoup ça, parce que tu t'intéresses à eux, comme personnes ... je me sens, dans ce sens-là, comme si je sauve des âmes ... Je suis l'intervenant, mais, je ne sais pas, là, je me sens tellement réconforté.

What's interesting in this quote is that the 'ministering' extends to the narrator himself: *...je me sens tellement réconforté*. While I don't want to exaggerate the evangelical dimensions of Séro Zéro's prevention work, the sense of well-being that something so simple yet so difficult as ordinary conversation could foster was palpable, and has merited close analysis in this study. Séro Zéro's work consistently addresses the difficulties gay and bisexual men face on the very basic level of opening up and talking to one another in some kind of supportive fashion. Alphonso Lingis' masterful evocation of the importance of the "community of those who have nothing in common" – a community that is located and experienced in primary speech communication – is an apt description of Séro Zéro's understanding of community. The work of the organization assumes gay-bi-tran men have less in common than tends to be supposed in predominant, somewhat homogenizing conceptions of community – yet more to gain through some form of conversational 'communion' than Young admits within her framework for a politics of difference.

Thus, in its work Séro Zéro looks to primary speech communication as a form of community that can also enact a politics of difference. The work of the organization challenges the conceptual differences between Young, on the one hand, and on the other

Bakhtin and Levinas, over the significance and value of primary speech communication for itself and for community. Séro Zéro's work suggests that the transcendence of words – even with its unchosen dimension and potential to stifle and oppress – can be informed by both an ethics of difference and a community-building dimension of rapport and involvement. Moreover, Séro Zéro's conversant understanding of community resonates with the theories of Bakhtin and Levinas in pointing to ways in which a transcendence of words is fundamental to people's well-being and health because, in a certain sense, it is the primary mode through which a sense of self and certain basic ethics to guide human relations can be established and modified (whether well or poorly). Rather than simply dismissible as ephemeral or even menacing social behaviour, conversant community from this perspective is ethically shapeable and something of a basic need or right. For people facing important forms of social isolation, fostering conditions under which the transcendence of words can take place and people have access to conversant communities can be a significant health promoting endeavour because of the subjective and ethical interactions with others that primary speech communication makes available and the significant negative implications for people's well-being that can result from an absence of conversant community.

In fostering forms of community through talk, the work of Séro Zéro problematizes and attempts to transform patterns and structures of communication within and surrounding the gay milieu. At its most basic level, this includes efforts to equip people with an ability and willingness to talk together, as put quite baldly by one narrator in reference to one of Séro Zéro's social marketing campaigns:

H: ... quand qu'on a mis cette annonce-là, c'était vraiment pour dire aux gens, 'ben, écoutez-là, parlez-vous, là, surtout si vous voulez vous enculer pas de condom.' ...

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The seemingly obvious incitement to talk expressed by this narrator grows in importance against the backdrop of an anti-communicative gay milieu. If we accept Levinas' theory of conversation (along with sex) as "proximity," a reference – in a manner similar to Bakhtin – to one's dialogical and ethical relationship with others that generates subjectivity and social interconnection, conversation may be the only way to open up the subjective and ethical space within which the safety of sexual relations can be worked out, a key way for men to remain healthy as they inhabit and traverse a complex, in some ways hazardous, gay milieu. In a manner similar to Alphonso Lingis in his account of the moment when the "other community" (what I term conversant community) becomes most apparent to us, the narrator here draws attention to the value of saying something – anything – regardless of what is actually said (1994: 116). At the same time, the work of Séro Zéro makes clear not just the importance of saying something, but also the necessity for active listening, given that it is saying and listening – the active link between speaker and listener, that comprises the social dimension of speech communication. Séro Zéro's work also draws clear attention to the implications of the non-said (or unspeakable) for the social relations of speech and community.

8   Conclusion

Conversant community is thus more than simply the backdrop for the rational delivery of health promotion messages. It is an integral ingredient for the very possibility of health promotion and HIV prevention efforts. Notwithstanding Iris Marion Young's critique of community, the work of Séro Zéro suggests that conversant community may be indispensable if Young's 'unoppressive city' is to be a place that enhances health more adequately than at present. Perhaps Young's argument needs to be reworked to acknowledge that an appropriate conversant community for the city of the future is one that is ethically guided by the same central norm of openness to otherness as guides her politics of difference. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Séro Zéro's parks project – a project centred on the possibilities for conversant community in health promotion – is guided by precisely such an ethical standard.

It is important to highlight here the danger that my interpretation reduces the work of Séro Zéro to its emphasis on conversant community. This is not my intention, and the organization's incitements to talk must be contextualized as one instance of a much larger array of social, cultural, political and economic responses to HIV/AIDS. Rather than being the result of a single-minded agenda, the emphasis on talk within the organization's work has emerged gradually as people doing the work have felt their way through the structures and contradictions that mark the terrain of HIV, health promotion, community and identity. If I have emphasized the conversant dimension of Séro Zéro's work, it is

because the work of the organization suggests a way to continue discussion of and engagement with community that does not rely upon or require a stable referent or meaning for community. My analysis, by way of 'conversant community,' provides a way to avoid reducing the work of the organization simply to the discursive operations of health promotion or the activities of data gathering, bringing into focus accomplishments of the organization that tend to remain unexamined and unacknowledged. Indeed, conversation may provide an important analogy for understanding and thinking about the ethics, ontology and dynamics of community. In current social contexts, at least, where the word 'community' is so often spoken while the lived experience of community seems so often to evaporate, it may be that community exists and operates in a way similar to conversation: at once powerful, fragile, temporary and contingent.

In the preceding three chapters, I have indicated ways in which such an understanding of community informs the work of Séro Zéro. It is an understanding that has emerged as people working at the organization – paid staff and volunteers – grapple with rational gay-bi-tran community as a frame of reference, raising questions about the gay liberation narrative that locates agency in communities understood rationally in terms of population-territory-institutions. The work of Séro Zéro directs one to ethically scrutinize proximity among gay-bi-tran men in the rationalized spheres of existing forms of gay community – the commercialized social spaces of "the Village" in Montréal, the commodification of identities and body image, the potentially homogenizing discourse of "Pride" as a marketing vehicle for corporate sponsorships. Séro Zéro's work makes apparent the impact of structures of silence within and surrounding these rational forms

of community, blocking the ritual and ethical dimensions of conversant community that constitute an important way in which people develop a sense of self.

Séro Zéro's critique of community is thus an example of the tensions relating to the conceptualization of community in the health promotion paradigm that I analyzed in chapter 2, where I noted that the "assumed community" of the paradigm – one of a self-organizing civil sector that democratically contributes to addressing fundamental health issues – often fails to fit the complex experiences and meanings of community that must be accommodated in doing street-level prevention work. Séro Zéro's critique of the forms of community that have emerged in the decades following the gay liberation movement demonstrates and testifies to this lack of a fit, making apparent fallacies in the health promotion assumption that self-organizing communities provide a clear frame of reference for addressing and improving health. In response to this lack of fit between what community means in the health promotion paradigm and what it means in practice, I have developed a conversant understanding of community as dialogical and ethical action that contributes to well-being and health. This term provides a way to name and conceptualize the agency at work in these aspects of Séro Zéro's work.

Perhaps one way to conceptualize this agency can be drawn from Michel de Certeau's understanding of the bricolage-like tactics of maneuvering that characterize the 'practices of everyday life' such as conversation, and the way in which 'seized opportunity' is the dynamic that shapes such tactics. Understood in light of Levinas' theory of language and proximity and Bakhtin's analysis of the utterance, de Certeau's theory provides a fruitful way to interpret Séro Zéro's work as a practice of seized opportunities to establish the specific transcendence or community made possible through

the act and the art of conversation. The agency of conversant community in Séro Zéro's

work is the agency of seizing the possibilities for new kinds of intertextual chains: texts

that are transformationally related to one another such as the way a conversation between

a parks project volunteer and a park user can be transformed into conversations that

otherwise might not have occurred between that park user and his sex partners. From

such as perspective, Séro Zéro's prevention and health promotion work in parks can be

understood as a discursive practice aimed at generating intertextual chains of talk.

Conversant community is thus a form of collective textual production[64] that intertextually

links people together through primary speech communication. Such collectively

produced conversant community, generated by project staff and park users, was present

in various ways within the project. One staff member describes being met by a kind of

'welcome wagon' in the parks, a 'regular' who knew the project and would consistently

introduce members of his social network, even bringing people over to learn about Séro

Zéro's services:

F: Ils faut dire aussi des fois que les habitués venaient me voir eux-autres mêmes, puis
des fois il y a un mélange de drague puis de, ils viennent me voir pour de la conversation
... 'Yves viens voir la nouvelle personne' puis là, il faut que je présente Séro Zéro, le
projet, tout ça.

Séro Zéro's work thus involves efforts to foster moments and motivations for conversant

community – such as the example of a ripple effect in this narrator's expanding circle of

encounters – generating opportunities, perhaps unavailable otherwise, for people to

establish or rework both an enhanced sense of self and an ethics of relating with others in

their proximity. The work suggests that these are fundamental to well-being and key to

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[64] One way to analyze discourse practice that Fairclough proposes involves understanding the "social
practices of text production" such as whether a given discourse type is produced individually or collectively
(1992: 233).

accomplishing things like the prevention of HIV transmission, even as they are often denied to people who are marginalized and discriminated against.

Séro Zéro's response to the tensions regarding community in the health promotion paradigm, then, is one that retains rather than rejects community as a frame of reference. But it does so by developing a conversant understanding of community, focused less on ontological and rational preoccupations with what communities are than at the most basic level on how to *do* community conversantly and on the contributions that community, understood conversantly, makes to people's well-being and health.

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Appendix 1: Research proposal presented to Séro Zéro

Projet de recherche proposé

Chercheur: Thomas Haig, M.A. (Media Studies); candidat, doctorat conjoint en communication.

Titre provisoire: *Textes émancipatoires, défis sociaux: un portrait participatoire du travail de prévention du vih/sida.*

Objectifs:

- documenter les pratiques et les discours en prévention du vih/sida comme ils sont réalisés chez Séro-Zero, par le biais de recherche participatoire et interviews.

- entreprendre une analyse socio-politique de ces pratiques et ces discours, soulignant leur placement et leur impact dans la domaine de la communication sociale au Québec et ailleurs.

- soutenir le travail de Séro-Zéro, soit par l'incorporation d'un niveau additionel d'évaluation, par le développement d'un projet d'intervention, par l'élaboration d'un projet médiatique (eg. projet vidéo), ou par d'autres moyens à préciser en consultation avec Séro-Zéro.

Methode:

- participation du chercheur au travail bénévole (préparation des sachets de condom, etc.)
- participation en tant que intervenant bénévole (bars, saunas ou autre projet)
- interviews avec intervenants et bénévoles de Séro-Zéro (écrit, enregistrement audio et / ou vidéo)
- autre niveau de participation et / ou enquête à préciser en consultation avec Séro-Zéro

Cadre théorique:

- la sociologie de Marcel Rioux et de Gabriel Gagnon, qui porte sur l'autogestion communautaire et la notion de "pratiques émancipatoires."
- la sociologie du "texte" de Dorothy Smith

Durée du projet:

La durée proposée est d'octobre 1996 jusqu'au mars 1997, mais cela peut être variable selon l'implication et les objectifs de Séro-Zéro par rapport à ce projet.

Éthique de recherche:

Le projet s'effectuera tout en respectant la confidentialité des gens qui y participent. Les interviews seront proposés aux individus de façon non-obligatoire et respectueuse. Tout document écrit sera soumis aux gens qui participent au projet avant d'être publié, et ne contiendra aucun nom réel ou détail personelle. Tout production médiatique, s'il y a lieu, sera élaboré en consultation et en collaboration avec Séro-Zéro.

Comité d'évaluation:

Dr. Kim Sawchuk (Université Concordia); Dr. Line Grenier (Université de Montréal); Dr. Jacques Rhéaume (UQAM)

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Appendix 2: Interview consent form

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT A PARTICIPER A UN PROJET DE RECHERCHE

Ce document a été préparé par le chercheur selon les recommandations du Office of Research Services de l'University Concordia, suivant les directives de l'article 24 du Code civile du Québec.

La présente confirme que j'accepte de participer a une entrevue avec Thomas Haig dans le cadre de son projet de thèse pour son doctorat sous la direction de Dr. Kim Sawchuk du Département de communication de l'Université Concordia.

A. OBJECTIF

Il m'a été explique que l'objectif de ce projet de recherche est de documenter et analyser la signification du travail communautaire en prévention du VIH et en promotion de la santé sexuelle pour les gens qui s'impliquent dans la communauté, par la biais de recherche qualitative (participation, observation, entrevues).

B. PROCEDURE

L'entrevue aura lieu au domicile du chercheur ou a un autre endroit convenable au participant et au chercheur. L'entrevue durera approximativement 90 minutes, et sera enregistrer sur cassette audio et transcris par le chercheur. Dans le cadre de son analyse écrite de cette entrevue, le chercheur remplacera tout nom réel par un nom fictif, et modifiera toute détail personnelle afin de protéger l'anonymat de toute personne mentionne lors de l'entrevue, ci-inclus le participant.

C. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION

- Je comprends que je peux retirer mon consentement et terminer ma participation a cette entrevue en tout temps sans aucun conséquence négatif.

- Je comprends que ma participation a cet entrevue et confidentielle et mon identité ne sera pas divulguer dans les résultats de l'étude.

- Je comprends que les résultats de cette étude pourraient être publie

- Je comprends l'objectif de cette étude et je sais qu'il n'y a pas d'autre objectif dont je n'ai pas été informe.

J'AI LU LA PRESENTE AVEC SOIN ET JE COMPREND CET ACCORD. JE CONSENS LIBREMENT A PARTICIPER A CETTE ETUDE.

NOM (lettres moules):

ADRESSE:

TELEPHONE:

| Signature du participant | Date | Signature du chercheur | Date |