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Barry D. Adam
University of Windsor

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Neoliberalism, masculinity, and HIV risk

Abstract

Health science research on HIV risk focuses strongly on psychological traits of individuals as determinants of health and vulnerability. This paper seeks to place these findings in a larger social context marked by neoliberalism to provide some insights into the arenas of vulnerability to risk. These arenas are shaped by shifts in the environing political economy which generate subjectivities concordant with the pressures of the neoliberal turn to increasing marketization, individualization, and responsabilization. These pressures create cultures of expectation that accentuate particular trends defining success, masculinity, and risk in contemporary societies. In other words, the 'risk factors,' identified in the now voluminous research literature on HIV, cumulate in particular social locations that, at least in part, articulate with masculine gender performance in marketplaces. These intersections affect the expression of sex between men and vulnerabilities to risk, providing an alternative understanding to the deficit models current in health science research.

Keywords: neoliberalism, masculinities, HIV, risk, syndemic, gay men, men who have sex with men

Some thirty years of health research identifies a series of 'risk factors' that are predictive of vulnerability to HIV infection. The cumulating evidence on such factors as depression, social isolation, migration, personal turmoil, alcohol and drug use, and social anxiety (Adam, Husbands, Murray, & Maxwell, 2005; Mustanski, Newcomb, Du Bois, Garcia, & Grov, 2011) as predictors of condomless sex and acquisition of HIV has over time showed some emergent patterns. Many of these factors prove to be associated with each other and they occur with some frequency among a minority of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. HIV risk is far from randomly distributed among men who have sex with men as a category, but rather concentrates particularly among the 10 to 20 percent of those caught in a syndemic of intersecting conditions (Bruce, Harper, & Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions, 2011; Dyer et al., 2012; González-Guarda, Florom-Smith, & Thomas, 2011; Kurtz, Buttram, Surratt, & Stall, 2012; Stall, Friedman, & Catania, 2007). Recent research demonstrates that men with multiple syndemic factors are 8.7 times more likely to sero-convert (Mimiaga et al., 2015) compared to those without. Condomless sex, higher numbers of sex partners, and sero-conversion are particularly associated with: (a) drug use, especially frequent use of such drugs as crystal methamphetamine, ketamine, GHB, and cocaine, (b) adverse childhood events, including sexual abuse, homophobic and racist bullying, and later intimate partner violence, and (c) psychological distress such as depression, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and anxiety. A good deal of the research on syndemic conditions has been conducted in populations of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men in major US cities and have strong, sometimes majority, representation of African American and Latino men. Indeed, elevated rates of infection are as well associated with multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization related to race, social class, and migration (Arreola, Ayala, Díaz, & Kral, 2013; Díaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004).

Many of these research results come out of epidemiological and psychological studies built out of applying psychometric constructs which are then statistically associated with 'unprotected anal intercourse' or HIV sero-conversion. These psychometric measures are typically placed in a tacit landscape of incipient psychopathology. Much less common among these findings is documentation of these risk factors as lived experience (but Halkitis, Siconolfi, Fumerton, & Barlup (2008) is a notable exception) and even less reflection has turned to how these risk factors play out in the socio-historical contexts which impose particular patterns of exigencies on men if they are to survive or thrive in the societal game plans in which they are the players. These social logics largely define the 'goods' of societies, the rules of their acquisition, the moral reasoning defining the capable player, and the (often limited) set of choices for advancement. For persons socially located as men, many of these rules and discourses add up to the 'masculinities' that construct the expectations, limitations, and potency of the self-possessed male-identified actor in the world. This paper contends that the array of masculine obligations and aspirations, and its insertion into particular political economies, provide some insights into sketching a map of nodes of vulnerability to risk. The 'risk factors,' identified in the now voluminous research literature on HIV, cumulate in particular social locations that, at least in part, articulate with the exigencies of masculine gender performance in contemporary economies. In other words, this paper contends that deficit or proximal risk factor approaches to HIV risk provide somewhat limited and decontextualized understandings of HIV vulnerability and management, and that neoliberal exigencies and constructions of masculinities matter for more fully understanding HIV risk among gay and bisexual men.

Neoliberalism as governance

A dominant trend in contemporary political economy is neoliberalism. While primarily conceived as a set of economic policies, recent scholarship has been interested in the question of how neoliberalism as a strategy of governance in governments and economies extends into realms of culture, ethics, and subjectivities. This study of the ramifications of neoliberalism raises the question of how large socio-historical trends like neoliberalism may exert pressure in areas like masculine gender performance, sexual health, and the syndemic conditions that underlie a significant amount of HIV risk. That social pressure may as well elevate some discourses of responsibility and ethical conduct over others that find their way into cultures of sexual interaction.

Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados (2014, p. 119) note that “neoliberal doctrine sprang from a group of right-wing economists in Europe and the United States in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, notably Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. This group rejected Keynesian economics and the welfare state” in favor of a strong reassertion of the unfettered market as an ordering principle of capitalist economies. Adopted in the mid-1970s by the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, neoliberalism came to be a virtually hegemonic policy instrument when taken up by the Thatcher government of the United Kingdom and the Reagan administration in the United States in the 1980s and extended globally as economic policy enforced by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The results of this policy shift have been far-reaching in reordering and delimiting state priorities, sharply decreasing taxes on corporations and the highest one percent of income earners, de-funding and privatizing public services, and increasing competition and insecurity in labor markets (Centeno & Cohen, 2012; Harvey, 2005). The social implications of these changes have stimulated a wave of scholarship on the ways in which the governance of populations has

been transformed (Foucault, 2008), new regimes of incentives and disincentives have come about, and subjectivities have been articulated with market discourses (Ong, 2006). Indeed, to come to grips with the pervasiveness of these changes, the use of the term 'neoliberalism' has become so widespread across many disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that some recent critics (Flew, 2012; Venugopal, 2015) warn that it is a concept that risks dissolving into conceptual incoherence.

For the purposes of making sense of health research on sexuality and HIV risk, of interest here are the implications of neoliberalism as a form of governance that accentuates a particular regime of incentives and expectations that affect risk-related conduct. As Flew (2012, pp. 56-57) argues, neoliberalism imposes as a guiding framework for institutions,

the enterprise form as a model for society as a whole; legal and regulatory frameworks that promote competition, rather than acting to restrict it in the name of other social goals; social policy that acts as a support rather than as a corrective to the market economy; policy actions to promote markets and competition; and judicial activism to limit the discretionary application of state power.

For the contemporary citizen who must navigate within this social system, there are expectations to be met, even an ethic to be learned. For contemporary social theorists like Giddens (1991), Bauman (2000), and Beck (2009), the citizen consumer of this latest version of advanced capitalism becomes increasingly "disembedded" from ties of community and kinship, thereby becoming more individuated and held responsible for their own health and well-being through the management of risk. The neoliberal ethic diverts responsibility from states, corporations, and societies. The implication for health management is the reduction of social investment "in the prerequisites of good health, such as income, shelter and

food...[Rather] the framework for health promotion was quickly reverted back to the individualized lifestyle approach” (Ayo, 2012, p. 102). This responsabilization of the individual has implications for the construction of a (masculine) subject accountable for his sexual health and for the navigation of risk.

Neoliberalism and gender

These then are the traits required of persons most directly exposed and adapted to the public sphere in capitalist societies, especially those characterized by the neoliberal turn of the last thirty years, if they are to survive and succeed. They are the responsible, self-initiating citizens postulated by the neoliberal state and the entrepreneurial, empowered agents determined to win in the competitive marketplace (Acker, 2004; Brown, 2003; Phoenix, 2004). Perhaps not surprisingly these traits turn out to be in good part the traits that infuse current iterations of masculinity. As women, too, increasingly enter into and become integrated into the marketplace, they find themselves challenged to negotiate these same demands in conjunction with longstanding notions of femininity constructed as the embodiment of alternative non- or pre-capitalist traditions of trust, care, and domesticity. Heterosexuality itself tends to be imbued with the significations of this gender differentiation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, pp. 26, 58-61).

The intersection of masculine norms with industrial capitalism has a long and complex history. In the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci (1971, p. 292) remarked the new industrialism “wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction....The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the most perfected automatism.” In the current era, Raewyn Connell (2005, p. 256) posits that there is now the rise of a “business masculinity”

aligned even more with entrepreneurialism and less with kinship expectations; she speculates that it is “therefore not surprising that the homophobia so prominent in older hegemonic masculinities is reduced, even absent.” Hooper (2001, p. 151) argues that “by the 1970s, hegemonic masculinity was organized around technocratic rationality and calculation sustained by the hyper-masculine myth of toughness, power and strength, competitiveness, confidence, and ability to face down opponents.” Other observers of masculinity are less sanguine about its potential to let go of homophobia, contending that the neoliberal regime reproduces and reinforces the gender order even if surreptitiously:

By prescribing the ‘facts’ of neo-liberal market society as desirable characteristics in the human subject (competitiveness, efficiency and individualism, for example), and thereby proscribing other less desirable characteristics (effeminacy, weakness, indecisiveness) through reference to its own wider organising principles (marketisation, flexibilisation, deregulation and privatisation), neo-liberalism is able to conceal the gendered contingency of its key assumptions through apparently abstract, value-neutral economic markers (Griffin, 2007, p. 230).

Current gender regimes, then, continue to be shaped by production relations and the neoliberal turn inflects the latest iterations of hegemonic masculinity (Acker, 2004; Elias & Beasley, 2009). Still these business masculinities are best not read as totalizing; masculinity as lived experience continues to be refracted through a wide range of social fields, social classes, and racial and ethnic social locations (Coles, 2009).

Men who have sex with men find themselves positioned at a crossroads of conflicting demands in this nexus of political economy and gender. Conventional gender analyses tend to pass gay men off in a few sentences as the subordinated or excluded form

of masculinity. Newer commentary positions them as increasingly indistinguishable from other men in a rhetoric of declining significance of homophobia, whether because of business masculinity which supposedly does not care about such things, or because of marriage triumphalism that reads the legalization of same sex marriage across north/western Europe and North America as the end of homophobia, or because of the new cool and ostensibly un-homophobic pose of young British men (see Anderson (2009) and McCormack (2012) but also de Bois (2015)). Others speculate that while homophobia may continue to be reproduced as a form of gender policing, actual gay identified men may be succeeding in availing themselves of a civil rights discourse that permits social citizenship insofar as they embody the “power, competence, emotional stoicism,...and dominance” (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016, p. 415) if not heterosexuality, of masculine performance. Homophobia continues, then, to reproduce the gender regime by repeatedly invoking the spectre of failed masculinity while some gay men are granted a (perhaps precarious) exemption by conforming sufficiently to other aspects of dominant masculinity.

Gay men can scarcely escape the exigencies of heteronormative gender performance nor the ratcheted up competitive individualism of neoliberalism, at the same time as the desire that defines their identity runs against the grain of these social requirements with its impetus toward attraction, care, and love between and among men. In this, gay and bisexual men find themselves buffeted by forces that press them to be both *more* masculine and *less* masculine than their counterparts among men. They are arguably among the most directly exposed to the exigencies of the modern marketplace and thus held to the standard of neoliberal-inflected masculinity insofar as they may be cut adrift from their communities and families of origin, either through “push” factors such as family disaffection or a need to escape the homophobic disapproval of communities of origin, or through “pull” factors of

urban migration to putatively more hospitable social niches (Gorman- Murray, 2009; Lewis, 2014). These factors may be exacerbated for racialized men by micro-aggressions experienced in family, community, and workplace that penalize their ethnicity or sexuality, and hold them to an exacting standard of respectable masculinity (Bowleg, 2013; Collins, 2004; González López, 2005; Rhodes, Hergenrather, Vissman, Davis, & Alonzo, 2011). They are, then, very often thrown fully into the marketplace where they must make their own way.

Gay men, over the several hundred years of the rise and triumph of capitalism, have found each other and constructed their sexual and intimate relations on the territory of the public sphere, usually without benefit of kin or community ties as sources of, or supports for, personal relationships (Adam, 1985; D'Emilio, 1983). What is most remarkable about the rise of gay worlds in urban environments has been the degree to which men have been able to re-found new networks and find intimacy on the *gesellschaftliche* grounds of the public sphere. At the same time, these worlds still bear the traces of the market logics out of which they have emerged. The discourses of contemporary gay men, talking about how gay spaces and relationships work, whether in interview or in online forums, tend to show a weave of communitarian speech about community solidarity, care, and romance on one hand and marketized speech on the other, where each man is held to be an autonomous—even adventurous—actor responsible to himself for his own well-being (Adam, 2005; Mutchler, 2000; Rangel & Adam, 2014). Indeed critics like Lisa Duggan (Duggan, 2002, 2003) have argued that this trend has coalesced into a new “homonormativity” where mainstream movement organizations in the United States employ neoliberal rhetoric and seek only inclusion and conformity to neoliberal institutions as the objectives of legal reform.

At the same time, gay men have long been constructed as less masculine. This is, of course, the less surprising argument in societies where gay men are identified with gender dissidence or abjection and where “fag discourse consists of jokes, imitations, and threats on which young men rely to publicly signal their rejection of that which is considered ‘unmasculine’” (Pascoe & Bridges, 2016, p. 415). Gay men must, of necessity, become adept at the demands of performing the requirements of fully rounded human beings; they cannot make do with the demands of a single gender. They cannot avoid domestic labor or other female-identified tasks if only because they cannot rely on ready-at-hand female labor. Of course, some gay men have acquired a reputation for making a virtue of this reality by excelling in the decorative arts and caring professions, and some gay men to a greater or lesser degree internalize and value feminine traditions of esthetics and nurturance. This gender flexibility or gender mixing is manifest in a range of masculine styles and indeed some forms of male femininity.

These constructions of sexuality between men are themselves socially and historically located and do not express the full range of cultures and modes of being. Indeed, these images of homosexuality grow out of the first world urban subcultures of major cities, enclaves that continue to coalesce in major cities around the world like Mexico City, Bogotá, and São Paulo. What must be noted, nevertheless, are the indigenous and small town forms of same-sex bonding that have long existed and likely predate the overlay of the modern economic marketplace (Murray, 2000). In Mexico, the *muxe* of Tehuantepec are one notable example (Miano Borruso, 2002). At the opposite extreme is the impact of the growth of the internet on homosexualities which makes it increasingly possible to stay home and find other men interested in men while remaining embedded in kin and community networks. In recent years, the urban enclaves of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) peoples and their associated movements have become increasingly de-centred. The singular gay urban concentration and overarching movement have given way to a proliferation and fragmentation of LGBT communities as people have increasingly organized themselves where they already are: at work, in voluntary organizations, in religion, in the arts, in ethno-cultural communities, and so on (Adam, 1995). There is today much speculation about the ways in which the internet may be accelerating this process toward an ostensibly imminent demise of urban social enclaves as gay men become connected to each other through dyadic encounters facilitated by the privacy of home computers and phone apps, and may be losing a sense of themselves as a social collectivity with a geography (Ghaziani, 2014; Lea, de Wit, & Reynolds, 2015; Reynolds, 2007). Over time, this social integration may mean that LGBT people come to be viewed as less distinctive and more like the people around them, with the “boundary” between heterosexual and homosexual men becoming increasingly permeable as more men permit themselves to discover connection with other men.

These multiple social dislocations, combined with the exigencies of masculine performance demanded by the neoliberal labor market and sometimes overtly homophobic gender discipline, make up the immediate backdrop for health science findings of an elevated rates of social isolation, migration, personal turmoil, or social anxiety reported by gay and bisexual men.

Gay masculinities and risk

How does this relate to the complex array of risk factors associated with HIV transmission?

Minority stress theory identifies several indices where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people show elevated rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance abuse compared to general populations in large surveys and traces these conditions to

various forms of discrimination and social exclusion such as sexual minority-specific victimization and a heightened sense of insecurity experienced in unsupportive or hostile social environments (Burton, Marshal, Chisholm, Sucato, & Friedman, 2013; Feinstein, Goldfried, & Davila, 2013; Goldbach, Tanner-Smith, Bagwell, & Dunlop, 2014; Lea, de Wit, & Reynolds, 2014; Meyer, 2013; Russell, Everett, Rosario, & Birkett, 2014; Wight, LeBlanc, de Vries, & Detels, 2012). While these elevated rates are statistically significant, it is important to note that like the syndemic indices, these indices still turn up among a minority of LGBT people. The question that arises here is whether these ostensibly psychological traits identified as 'risk factors' are simply personality variations or whether they can be traced to responses to the social contexts in which gay men live. Minority stress theory assigns the difference between rates to the effects of homophobia and no doubt there is much to support this interpretation but, at the same time, it is worthwhile taking a look at the contexts, demands, and practices that make up homophobia and indeed the larger socio-historical landscape of sexualities constructed on the terrain of contemporary masculinities.

A closer look at three sets of factors associated with HIV risk: migration and social isolation, urban drug cultures, and neoliberal moral reasoning, gives some clues in this regard. Migration, social isolation, and perceived lack of social support all figure repeatedly in the research literature on predictors of HIV risk (Carrillo, 2004; Dilley, McFarland, Sullivan, & Discepola, 1998; Magis-Rodríguez et al., 2009; Martin & Knox, 1997; Myers, Javanbakht, Martinez, & Obediah, 2003). What all of these factors have in common is a root in social disruption of the networks and bonds usually presumed to be present in family and community. While to a large extent an endemic condition of advanced capitalist societies as a whole--as observed by social theorists like Giddens, Bauman, and Beck--and exacerbated by the increased pervasiveness of market logic characteristic of neoliberalism, this kind of

disruption is a particularly widespread experience among LGBT peoples who must often find social connection on new ground without always being able to rely on the support of family and communities of origin and who experience migration, social isolation, and personal disruption in making the transition toward gay worlds and modes of life. It is a transition of very considerable variation. There is no lack of men who explore sexual connection with other men as a sideline hidden from a home base that is a family of origin, heterosexual marriage, or ethno-cultural community. Others leave town or even migrate to another country to breathe the comparative freedom of urban anonymity. For men of Latino, Asian, African, or Caribbean origins, a sense of dislocation may be exacerbated by participation in community networks that devalue gay relationships and by participation in gay scenes that devalue men of color (Bowleg, 2013; Crichlow, 2004; Decena, 2011; Poon, Ho, Wong, Wong, & Lee, 2005). It may be a transition toward finding a long-term partner or spouse, a network of friends, and a supportive social environment, but such things are often not easily or quickly acquired. Homosexually interested men typically enter into a new world of gay venues—increasingly in virtual space—where they must forge connections with other men in a world of strangers. While a great many men find the gay world to be a realm of opportunities and solace in which they acquire friends and partners, others continue to struggle with, or reconcile themselves to, the difficulties of transitioning from social isolation to social support (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran, & Beail, 1998; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009; Prieur, 1990).

Also associated with HIV risk is multi-drug use: alcohol for one, but particularly a combination of “club drugs” such as ketamine, GHB, crystal methamphetamine, along with erection-enhancing drugs, and amyl nitrate (Colfax et al., 2004; Hirshfield, Remien, Humberstone, Walavalkar, & Chiasson, 2004; Klitzman, Greenberg, Pollack, & Dolezal, 2002;

Koblin et al., 2003; Purcell, Parsons, Halkitis, Mizuno, & Woods, 2001). The most obvious interpretation of this persistent research finding is that substance use impairs judgment and increases vulnerability to condomless sex and HIV transmission. Of particular interest, though, are the reasons that club drug users give for their own practices. The attraction of the “clubs” and circuit parties and of the experience of this particular set of drugs is the promised sociability, the sense of belonging, the feeling of being embraced by a tribe of men (Ghaziani & Cook, 2005; Slavin, 2004; Westhaver, 2005). For some, these more drug-infused circuits of the gay world do deliver enduring connection, pleasure, and support networks (O'Byrne & Holmes, 2011; Race, 2015). For others, the experience is less satisfactory, as drug use can disrupt work and relationships, and the feeling of connection promised by drug circles may prove illusory in the long run. The research literature finds statistical associations between drug involvement and social isolation, depression, personal disruption, and childhood abuse (Stall et al., 2007). Drug subcultures may offer an apparent point of entry to a sense of community belonging, but they also often fail to offer enduring connections, ultimately exacerbating a sense of isolation.

Homosexualities are perhaps particularly prone to falling into the norms of the marketplace where men are expected to construct themselves as rational actors operating in an environment of other masculine rational actors (Siconolfi, Halkitis, & Moeller, 2014). Men interested in men are less likely to find each other through family, in their neighborhood of origin, at school, or at work, compared to their heterosexual counterparts. And once a relationship is found, they are less likely to be able to count on the public acknowledgement in communities of origin or to expect religious or legal support that societies have developed to hold heterosexual relationships together. (It remains to be seen if the newfound embrace of same-sex marriage in some countries will change this for

the upcoming generation.) Gay men are at the forefront of a trend where sexual and romantic connection has become increasingly disembedded from kin and community. Max Weber's observations of early 20th century European society where he noted that each sphere of life, the economic, political, spiritual, and esthetic, was increasingly becoming a specialized arena disintegrated from each other, remain particularly relevant a century later as the erotic comes to be increasingly disaggregated from kin, community, and household (Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. XIII.7). Gay men's sexual fields often show characteristics of market logic where strangers come together with few, if any, pre-existing social ties in a transactional environment. This context means that the aspiration for enduring connection often attempts to ground itself on the potential for romantic inspiration starting from a singular encounter. Sexual connection between men perhaps best exemplifies the contemporary social trend identified by Giddens (1992) as the "pure relationship," a relationship developed for mutual satisfaction but increasingly divested of the supports and assumption of durability associated with traditional marriage.

In sexual environments particularly marked by the norms of the marketplace, such as settings where quick sex is available, there is a tendency for men to presume themselves and the men around them to be adult risk-takers capable of making their own determinations about their health and vulnerability (Adam, 2005). While ostensibly democratic, voluntarist, and responsible, the other face of this masculine, market discourse is a lack of recognition of the potential vulnerability of the other person, of emotional need, or the dynamics of the search for intimacy. It is also a construction of masculine subjectivity that covers over conditions documented in the syndemic research literature such as heightened risk posed by depression or early trauma or the desire to overcome social isolation.

The marketplace and its effects on masculine subjectivity are nevertheless never totalizing, that is, they do not contain and determine the full array of human (or specifically gendered) experience and aspiration. Perhaps especially remarkable has been the rise of LGBT communities, with their social networks, voluntary organizations, and of course, social movements that in more and more places have succeeded in creating social space for, and in winning legal recognition of, same-sex relationships (Weeks, 2007). This development is apparently paradoxical, or better said, dialectical, with neoliberal doctrine that brings the ethics of the marketplace to the personal and intimate space of the life-world. Gay men have shown considerable creativity in their innovation of relationship forms that embrace masculine discourses of autonomy and adventurism along with enduring intimate partnerships (Adam, 2004). In terms of HIV risk, however, no easy opposition can be postulated between casual and long-term relationships. Even when a personal connection is made with a partner, romantic relationships can be another well-documented site of vulnerability for HIV transmission. Men and women, whether heterosexual or homosexual, show a similar pattern: in the context of an intimate relationship, condom use tends to decline as partners come to trust each other. Without taking the precaution of determining the sero-status of each partner in advance, this movement to condomless sexual practice can prove to be a moment of HIV vulnerability.

Conclusion

While the masculinities ascendant in advanced capitalist societies marked by neoliberalism cannot be read as directly “causal” or determining, they nevertheless provide discourses for men dealing with work and relationships in the public sphere. These discourses prescribe a gender performance that demands rationality, powerfulness, capability, and competitive

individualism. While men must be mindful of these demands, embody them, or perform them, they nevertheless are associated with a range of limitations and consequences that preoccupy gender studies. They can run counter to the search for, and expression of intimacy; they encourage an instrumental approach to people that can be unfeeling and uncaring. At the extreme, they take up and rejuvenate the hyper-masculine figure of the warrior--willful, dominating, manipulative, and violent--a figure still identified as heroic in popular culture.

These forms of masculinity do not fully determine or explain risk, whether in the context of HIV transmission or elsewhere. Nevertheless, they shape the social environment and narratives available to men to understand and govern their lives. Just as they leave men more prone to mortality through accidents and a range of other health problems, they also influence HIV risk, including the HIV risk of men having sexual and intimate relationships with each other. Risk itself may be a masculine value (Lyng, 1990; Rhodes et al., 2011, p. 145) and it may even have crystallized as a sexual subject position for a few gay men (Ávila, 2015). The heroic masculine figure takes risks, sometimes extraordinary or foolhardy risks that, if successfully navigated, add to his social capital. Male workers who refuse workplace safety measures because they are 'men,' end up with unnecessarily elevated rates of accident and injury, by avoiding the supposedly 'feminine' implications of fearfulness or caution.

The rational, aggressive, competitive individual of the capitalist marketplace has a set of survival skills that intersect with social constructions of masculinity and which are part of making oneself into a man who is credible, worthy, even desirable. This powerful convergence of forces has a series of consequences for HIV risk in particular. It is a narrative with some protective power. Health science typically presumes a rational actor who will act

in the interests of protecting his health over time (Adam, 2006), and indeed this presumption may be borne out in the fact that the majority of gay and bisexual men do take measures to avoid HIV like practicing safe sex. It is also a narrative that presumes a certain progressivism, that is, the idea that goals are attainable and life can be made better. HIV prevention is consistent with, and even depends on a somewhat class-based notion that one does something now in order to preserve oneself for the future. But masculine discourses and performances can also heighten risk. They value risk-taking in and of itself. They typically disregard or deny the need and search for intimacy and the kinds of trade-offs or risks to be run in order to get it. They also tend to devalue ethics of mutuality and care—of being “one’s brother’s keeper.” While masculine values prescribe protective care for “weaker” women and children, they prescribe competition, even aggression, towards other men. Men bonding with each other, whether socially or sexually, tends not to be integrated into a coherent script in mainstream society, but rather resides in subterranean silences and nonverbal cues and there, miscommunication and presumption can lead to vulnerability (Adam, Husbands, Murray, & Maxwell, 2008; Fontdevila, 2009; Harper, 2000; McCune, 2014).

In short, the array of psychometric measures that have gone into defining syndemic conditions that appear to be predisposing factors to HIV risk in the health sciences turn out to be indices tapping larger social forces in the historical movement of political economy and gender performance. Certainly one way of reading these predisposing factors is that they indicate deficits to be remedied by therapeutic approaches in order to increase individual resilience. The provision of therapeutic and counseling services to LGBT populations, as well as access to new prevention technologies, tends to be uneven and fragmentary at best. Almost half of gay and bisexual men are not "out" to their health care

provider (Dulai, Le, Ferlatte, Marchand, & Trussler, 2011, p. 10). The apprehension or experience of demeaning, judgmental or simply uncomprehending health care provision inhibits disclosure of sexual practices. Physicians rarely ask about the sexual orientation of their patients and feel unprepared to provide culturally competent care to sexual minorities. Several studies have documented a desire among physicians for better training in sexual minority health (Ng et al., 2014; Stott, 2013), but very little is currently included in medical curricula. In short, structural reform in the interests of addressing the health inequities of LGBT people is one significant implication of syndemics research, a reform that would run up against neoliberal reconstructions of public health. But investigation of the social locations of gay and bisexual men in contemporary gender and political economy suggests even more deep-rooted structural implications.

Gay and lesbian worlds have largely flourished in the era of neoliberalism. They have made themselves primarily in advanced capitalist societies (and now increasingly in the global metropolises of the world system) on the terrain of the market, and more recently in the virtual world of internet connection. Gay men in particular find themselves in a world which now facilitates potentially intimate and emotional connection among men yet at the same time marks these encounters with the logic of the market. While gay men now have multiple sexual fields they can traverse (Adam & Green, 2014), these fields often exemplify sexual efficiency that run counter to the development of ongoing (time-consuming) deeper connection. Still contemporary gay worlds embody a paradox of (post)modernity: in neoliberal times characterized by market competition, efficiency, and instrumentalism, they create the immanent potential for solidarity, network building, community, care, and indeed love.

Gay worlds of the contemporary era create the crucibles in which an ethic of bonding between men can be recovered and developed, but even these places offer limited spaces for open and public reflection on the cultures that have emerged on these terrains. While perhaps most exposed to the pressures of the neoliberal marketplace, they nevertheless subvert or queer the competitive individualism that regulates normative relationships among men and build the personal spaces and networks that create a culture of resilience. The challenge here is how (and whether) HIV risk can be reduced through community building and the strengthening of personal support and networks of solidarity, a trajectory with some potential to diminish many of the “risk factors” identified in HIV research.

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