

1-1-1999

## Without Women: Masculinities, Gay Male Sexual Culture and Sexual Behaviors in Miami, Florida

Steven P. Kurtz

Nova Southeastern University, [steven.kurtz@nova.edu](mailto:steven.kurtz@nova.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss\\_facarticles](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_facarticles)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### NSUWorks Citation

Kurtz, S. P. (1999). Without Women: Masculinities, Gay Male Sexual Culture and Sexual Behaviors in Miami, Florida. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 60 (6-A), 1-12. Retrieved from [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss\\_facarticles/250](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_facarticles/250)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in CAHSS Faculty Articles by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

PREVIEW

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

WITHOUT WOMEN:  
MASCULINITIES, GAY MALE SEXUAL CULTURE AND  
SEXUAL BEHAVIORS IN MIAMI, FLORIDA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in  
SOCIOLOGY

by

Steven Peter Kurtz

1999

UMI Number: 9936877

Copyright 1999 by  
Kurtz, Steven Peter

All rights reserved.

PREVIEW

---

UMI Microform 9936877  
Copyright 1999, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized  
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

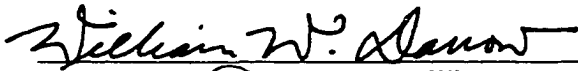
---

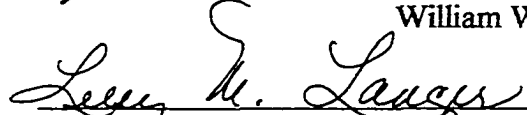
**UMI**  
300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103


To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott  
College of Arts and Sciences


This dissertation, written by Steven Peter Kurtz, and entitled Without Women: Masculinities, Gay Male Sexual Culture and Sexual Behaviors in Miami, Florida, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
William W. Darrow

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lilly M. Langer

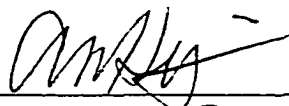
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jonathan G. Tubman

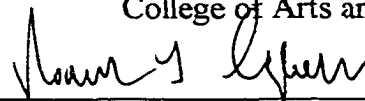
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lois A. West

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Steven M. Fjellman, Major Professor

Date of Defense: June 15, 1999

The dissertation of Steven Peter Kurtz is approved.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean Arthur W. Herriott  
College of Arts and Sciences

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean Richard L. Campbell  
Division of Graduate Studies

Florida International University, 1999

© Copyright 1999 by Steven Peter Kurtz

All Rights Reserved.

PREVIEW

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to  
my parents, for teaching me responsibility;  
to Joshua and Rachel, for teaching me honor;  
to Mario, for teaching me joy;  
to Doug, for teaching me to teach;  
and to all of them, for teaching me love.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my major professor, Dr. Stephen M. Fjellman, and to all the members of my committee for their ever-present insight and encouragement throughout my graduate work. Each of them provided a unique and valuable perspective on this project. It is important to recognize that the encouragement I received in researching these issues remains rare in the American academy. My gratitude also goes to the men who agreed to spend hours with me openly sharing sensitive issues about their lives. Finally, my thanks are extended to Robert Webster for sharing data and findings from the South Beach Health Survey, and to Clara Caval for her assistance in transcribing the interviews.

Certain parts of Chapters IV. and VI. first appeared as "Butterflies Under Cover: Cuban and Puerto Rican Gay Masculinities in Miami" in the *Journal of Men's Studies* 7(3): 371-390, 1999.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

WITHOUT WOMEN:  
MASCULINITIES, GAY MALE SEXUAL CULTURE AND  
SEXUAL BEHAVIORS IN MIAMI, FLORIDA

by

Steven Peter Kurtz

Florida International University, 1999

Miami, Florida

Professor Stephen M. Fjellman, Major Professor

Recent studies have reported alarmingly high rates of HIV infection and risky sexual behaviors among gay men in Miami, Florida. Previous research has suggested that the risky sexual behaviors of many gay men reflect the pursuit of intimacy and love, and that barriers to intimate relationships among gay men may stem from traditional masculinity norms. This dissertation examines the meanings which gay men ascribe to their sexual behaviors, as well as the intersections of those meanings with both traditional masculinity constructions and Miami's gay male sexual culture.

The study is based upon participant observation, print media content analysis, surveys and ethnographic interviews of a purposive snowball sample of 30 Cuban American, Puerto Rican, African American and Anglo gay men who reside in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Analysis of research questions was accomplished through grounded theory methods and descriptive and non-parametric statistics, including Pearson chi-square, Fisher's Exact and Mann-Whitney *U* tests.

The study shows that culturally-specified masculinity norms vary in the relative importance ascribed to heterosexual prowess, economic providership and competitiveness. These cultural differences appear important not only to the timing of sexual awareness and to the strength of homosexual stereotyping as effeminacy, but also to men's strategies in coming out as gay. The meanings men attributed to their sexual behaviors were, however, constructed in response to both inherited masculinity norms and the hypermasculine structure of Miami's gay male sexual culture. In addition to providing an ethnographic account of this subculture, the study elaborates men's issues relative to casual sex and committed relationships. Unprotected anal intercourse with casual partners during the previous twelve months was associated with growing up without one's father in the home, having been teased for effeminacy during childhood, being defensive about one's masculinity, not trusting men, having been cheated on by boyfriends, and believing that long-term gay male relationships are problematic.

It is concluded that the continuing epidemic of HIV infections among local gay men, as well as the hypermasculine form of the gay sexual subculture itself, are nihilistic symptoms embedded in the masculinist gender structure of the larger society.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. KEY CONCEPTS: MASCULINITIES, SEXUAL CULTURES AND HIV-RISK BEHAVIORS .....	6
Masculinities, Male Sexualities and Masculine Development .....	6
Gay Male Sexual Cultures.....	11
Gay Male HIV-Risk Behaviors .....	13
Hypotheses .....	15
III. METHODOLOGY .....	18
Research Site.....	18
Data Collection.....	20
Key Informants .....	20
Sampling .....	20
Protection of Human Subjects and Confidentiality of Data .....	21
Interviews and Surveys.....	21
Sexual Diaries.....	23
Informal Conversations .....	24
Participant Observation .....	24
Content Analysis of Publications .....	25
The South Beach Health Survey.....	25
Data Analysis.....	25
Measures .....	26
Limitations of the study .....	27
IV. INHERITED MASCULINITIES.....	29
Inherited Masculinity Norms .....	33
Marriage and Fatherhood .....	33
Economic Providership .....	35
Competitive Sports .....	38
Sexual Performance.....	39
The Homosexual Stereotype.....	42
Negotiating Masculinities.....	44
Summarizing Inherited Masculinities.....	48

CHAPTER	PAGE
V. GAY CULTURE IN MIAMI.....	55
The Circuit Scene .....	59
Local Gay Public Venues .....	62
Body Image .....	66
Sexual Norms .....	70
Drug Use .....	74
Summary .....	80
VI. CONSTRUCTING A SEXUAL LIFE .....	82
Masculine Self-Presentation Within Gay Culture .....	84
Sex and the Single Man .....	88
Sex, Romance and Commitment .....	92
Intimacy vs. Independence.....	96
Monogamy and the Problem of Sexual Trust .....	98
HIV Risk Behaviors.....	105
Masculinities, Gay Sexual Culture and HIV Risk.....	110
VII. CONCLUSION.....	117
Assessment of Hypotheses .....	117
Suggestions for Future Research.....	121
Proposals for HIV Risk Interventions.....	121
A Prescription for Social Action .....	125
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	129
APPENDICES .....	141
VITA.....	162

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent epidemiological reports have documented alarmingly high rates of HIV infection and risky sexual behaviors in Miami-Dade County, Florida, among men who have sex with men (MSM), including young MSM (YMSM). Holmberg (1996) has estimated that 26,000 MSM aged 18-45 live in Miami-Dade, and that 31.4% of them are infected with HIV. In a recent study of MSM who reside in South Beach, Miami-Dade's gay residential and cultural center, 15% of a probability sample of 100 YMSM (aged 18-29) were found to be infected with HIV using tests of oral fluids (Webster et al 1998). The same study reported that 34.3% of 105 men aged 30 and older (all but 10 of them were 45 or younger) were infected. Almost half (45%) of both age groups reported engaging in unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) during the preceding 12 months. Given these behaviors and infection rates, it is likely that the rate of seroconversions of younger men will grow rapidly, and that prevalence among older men will rise as well.

The rates of HIV infection in South Beach are similar to those found in San Francisco (Hays et al 1997; Osmond et al 1994; Stall et al 1992) and New York (Dean & Meyer 1995), but rates of UAI in Miami are higher. This latter statistic may reflect Miami's large Hispanic population, for whom UAI is common, but open discussion of AIDS is repressed (Almaguer 1991; Diaz 1998; Rich & Arguelles 1985). The commodification of sex in a tourist-oriented economy is a second factor which has been linked to the difficulties Miami's gay community has had in attracting support for both political mobilization and non-entertainment community facilities (Albin 1995; Levin 1996; Halden 1996). Of the party atmosphere on South Beach, with its emphasis on "gym bodies" and designer drugs, Albin (1995:125) says: "The sense of abandon has never been greater, nor the tendency

toward unprotected sex. These are hot rods without brakes, in a free zone where anything goes."

Dowsett (1993:706) has observed that, "the capacity for recreational sex among gay men challenges the prevailing notion of 'privatized' and 'meaningful' sex." Other research, however, raises important questions about the extent to which gay men's pursuit of "casual sex" - sex with partners with whom there is neither emotional commitment nor intimate knowledge - revolves around physical pleasure. Recent surveys report that a large majority of gay men express a preference for long-term committed relationships (Connell 1992; Lever 1994) and sex with "emotional involvement" (Kraft 1996). The few studies which have examined the emotional content of gay men's risky sexual practices suggest that these behaviors often evince the pursuit of intimacy and love (Ames, Atchison & Rose 1992; Hays, Kegeles & Coates 1990; Odets 1994).

Some researchers have suggested that barriers to intimacy found among gay men stem from Western masculinity norms (Horrocks 1994; Levine 1998; Messner 1987). Cross-cultural analyses point out that Hispanic masculinity constructions may serve to heighten such barriers (Carrier 1989; Diaz 1995). Further, the absence of women in gay male sexual cultures may foster the production of a "hypermasculine" (Pleck 1987:31) sexuality among gay men - one which exaggerates traditional norms of male sexual behavior (Donaldson 1993; Kimmel 1990).

In an effort to further understand these findings, the present study was designed to examine the meanings gay men ascribe to their sexual behaviors, and to probe the intersections of those meanings with both inherited masculinity norms and Miami-Dade's gay male sexual culture. The study is a response to the demand, in the pursuit of both successful HIV-risk interventions (Bolton 1995a; Herdt 1992; Parker & Carballo 1990; Rofes 1996) and an improved understanding of the linkages between gender and sexuality

(Connell 1992; Edwards1990), for ethnographic studies which elicit the contexts of sexual behaviors.

The need for explanations which interpret gay male sexual behaviors in sexual meanings, and in the socialization and local cultural processes in which those meanings are embedded, is also confirmed by the recent findings of the South Beach Health Survey (SBHS; Darrow et al 1996). That study showed South Beach men to be well informed about AIDS, highly motivated toward safe sex, and confident about their abilities to practice safer sex. It is likely that the reported high rates of infection and risky sexual behaviors are embedded in more complex processes.

In order to examine these processes in detail, this exploratory study was designed as an ethnographic project involving 30 key informants from a wide variety of backgrounds. As described in Chapter III, multiple data collection methods were employed, and additional sources contacted. Nevertheless, the life histories of these 30 men, as told in semi-structured, in-depth interviews, form the most comprehensive and compelling evidence presented here. Driven by the personal belief that the greatest opportunity to contain the spread of HIV infections is presented among those men who are only now beginning to establish sexually-active lives, the primary focus of the study is younger men, ages 18-25, and on the trajectory of gay cultural norms. However, because older men, particularly 25-40 year-olds, are the most visible participants in the public aspects of gay culture to which younger men frequently aspire, I elected to include older men in the study to examine cross-generational differences.

The central argument of this report is that the continuing epidemic of HIV infections among local gay men, as well as the structure of the gay sexual subculture itself, are nihilistic symptoms embedded in the masculinist gender structures of both the gay subculture studied here and the wider society within which it resides. My interpretation of stories of the men I spoke with is that the hypermasculinity and sexual risk-taking which



characterize the local gay culture are products of lovelessness, which is itself largely sourced in culturally-specified hegemonic masculinities and the homophobia that buttresses them.

Not all gay men, of course, are either intimidated by, or attracted to, the "sex, muscles and drugs" culture which prevails here. As I hope to explain, however, younger men's confrontation with this particular elaboration of gay sexuality and gay masculinity comes not only at a time of life when they are quite vulnerable to peer pressure, but is also set against a backdrop of larger social, and often familial, rejection. The local gay subculture described here, and to which many young men aspire, hardly creates an environment conducive to feeling accepted, safe or lovable.

Many social scientists and popular observers ascribe the characteristics of gay male sexual cultures to biologically-based masculine sexuality. I hope to show here that local gay sexual norms play a key role in the development of men's sexual scripts, and that fostering subcultural change presents great possibilities not only for reducing HIV infections, but for nurturing the development of more fulfilling lives as well. The gay subculture, however, must also be seen as a response to the wider society. With this in mind I argue that the feminist movement must not be concerned only with gender equality, because that equality is too easily gained by women and minorities by adapting to hegemonically masculine standards. Significant change in the operation of masculinist and homophobic cultural ideals will come only as the result of the elevation in status of values traditionally ascribed to women: nurturance, communality, and the responsibility to love.

In the following chapter, I provide a more extensive discussion of the existing sociological literature on masculinities, gay male sexual cultures, and sexual behaviors, including the dominant themes of prior research into HIV-risk behaviors. Chapter III presents a detailed discussion of the design of the study, data collection procedures and analytic methods. Chapters IV, V, and VI report the key findings of the study, as they

relate, respectively, to: inherited masculinity norms and men's diverse strategies for "coming out," a description of Miami's gay male culture, and men's establishment of sexually active lives. This last-referenced chapter on sexual behaviors focuses on meanings attributed to sexual behaviors, as well as on the correlates of those behaviors which risk HIV infection. Chapter VII follows with a general discussion of these results, as well as concluding comments which identify areas for further study and suggestions for risk-reduction interventions.

PREVIEW

**CHAPTER II.**  
**KEY CONCEPTS: MASCULINITIES, SEXUAL CULTURES AND**  
**HIV-RISK BEHAVIORS**

The study was theoretically and methodologically grounded in a "social constructivist" (Schwandt 1994) view of masculinities, sexual cultures and sexual behaviors (Connell & Dowsett 1992; Gagnon & Simon 1973; Levine 1992; Rubin 1975). By focussing on the internalization of norms and the attribution of meanings to the sex and gender realities perceived by the men to be studied, the study followed Laumann and Gagnon's (1995) "sexual script" approach to understanding sexual behaviors. In doing so the project sighted the sexual practices of gay men through a wider-angled lens than traditional health decision-making approaches to the study of HIV-risk behaviors (see Bandura 1994; Fishbein, Middlestadt & Hitchcock 1994; Rosenstock, Stecher & Becker 1994). Instead, the study explores links among current theories of masculinities, sexual cultures, gay male sexual behaviors, and HIV epidemiology. The primary theoretical and empirical outlines of these concepts, as employed in this study, are outlined below.

**Masculinities, Male Sexualities and Masculine Development**

In response to the individualizing discourses of psychoanalysis and the universalizing tenets of sex essentialism, social constructionist (Gagnon & Simon 1973; Rubin 1975) theories of gender have quite powerfully explained that masculinities are embedded in culturally-specified "system[s] of gender relations" (Connell 1995:44). The constructionist position is grounded in both cross-cultural studies which show wide variation in normative masculinities (Doyle 1993; Paiva 1995; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974), and historical research that demonstrates gender to be intraculturally dynamic (Katz 1995; Kimmel 1996).

More recently, the concept of hegemonic - i.e., contemporary, dominant, idealized - masculinities has been advanced to show how masculinities within a particular social arena are differently empowered (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985). While masculinities are certainly structured in relation to socially-prescribed roles of women, this work stresses that masculinities serve, just as importantly, to structure power relationships between men. Race, ethnicity, class, and other significations of social status are reflected in relative valuations of stereotyped and marginalized masculinities (Cheng 1999).

Sexuality as a "nexus of the relationships between genders" (Rubin 1984:28) provides a key point of stratification between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. In modern Western societies "hegemonic" masculinity is defined by physical and emotional strength and by public competitiveness and success (Kimmel 1990). These themes are reflected in normative male sexuality, which stresses sexual variety and objectification, the separation of sex from intimacy, and sexual readiness, prowess and competitiveness (Abramson & Pinkerton 1995; Seidler 1989). Probably related to these norms, men tend to have greater numbers of sex partners than women do (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983; Laumann et al 1994).

Within this socially-produced structure of requisite masculine sexuality, homosexuality provides the clearest marker of marginalization. Not only are sexual relations between men most often construed as the abandonment of masculinity, but homophobia is itself a key buttress of hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995; Lancaster 1995). As Connell (1995:78) observes: "Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness... is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity."

Male homosexualities, like masculinities, are not, however, identically constructed across or within cultures. One particular subject that has received the attention of anthropologists and sociologists in recent years is the elaboration of the social differences

between Latin and North American homosexual identities and practices. Much of this literature comes from Mexico (Carrier 1995), Brazil (Parker 1991; Kulick 1997), and Nicaragua (Lancaster 1995). Murray's (1995a) compilation provides an even wider ranging view of Latin American homosexualities.

The primary theme of these accounts is that *machismo* - the Latin American construction of hegemonic masculinity - produces a stigmatized homosexual identity only for those men who engage in receptive anal intercourse (*pasivos*); inserters (*activos*, or *bugarrónes*) retain their masculinity. Because being sexually penetrated contradicts the masculine ideal - as penetration affirms it - *pasivos*, variously identified in Latin cultures as *mariposas* (butterflies) and *maricones* (faggots; see Murray 1995a for a comprehensive list), are socially cast as highly effeminate men. Kulick (1998:233) argues that effeminate homosexuals, should, in fact, be seen as "shar[ing] a gender with women" in the highly polarized and sexuality-defined gender systems of Latin America.

It is not only the proscription against playing the receptive role in sexual intercourse that is the concern of Latin homosexual men. *Machismo*, in Lancaster's (1995:149) terms, "is [achieved through] constantly asserting one's masculinity by way of practices which show the self to be 'active', not 'passive.' Every gesture, every posture, every stance, every way of acting in the world, is immediately seen as 'masculine' or 'feminine'." Latin masculinity, including requisite *activo* sexuality, must be publicly and continuously reaffirmed (Diaz 1998).

In contrast, North American and Northern European cultures generally consider a person who engages in - or even desires (Lancaster 1987) - any form of sexual activity with someone of the same biological sex to be homosexual; there is no tolerance here for men penetrating other men. This aspect is probably linked to clearly-marked Protestant beliefs about the purely procreational purposes of sex, and about the association of the anus with animality - the "anal-evil link" (Gilbert 1981: 64). Although effeminacy has also

long been associated with homosexuality in Northern American and European cultures, homosexual cultures here have in recent years fought that stereotype with a vengeance through the production of ultra-masculine bodies and the popular rejection of "fems" and "queens" (Kimmel 1990; Pronger 1992).

Kendall (1999) analyzes this process as an attempt to destigmatize male homosexuality by "provid[ing] [subcultural] connections to hegemonic masculinity," thereby minimizing the deviation from the norm. This shift has helped to produce a less gendered "gay" identity, and more egalitarian homosexual relationships (Connell 1992). Protestant-oriented North American culture, traditionally suspicious of all sexual pleasure, also places fewer demands than Latin cultures on men to produce continuing public affirmations of masculine heterosexuality in order to maintain their masculine identities. Silence about sexual behavior is more likely to be accepted here as a proxy for performance of the norm.

The dissimilarities between Latin and North American intersections of gender and sexuality (but similarity of oppression of homosexuality) raise questions about how homosexual men in these cultures experience their masculinities. Because constructionist theory emphasizes the production of gender relations through social-structural phenomena - ideologic, economic and political systems of power relations - adherents have until recently delved little into questions of how individual masculinities are internalized within such systems.

The work that has been done suggests that the sexual and gender identities (and behaviors) of homosexual men tend to conform to the tenets of the systems within which they live (Carrier 1995; Ross 1978; Tan 1995). While this evidence is indicative of the power of cultural ideologies to shape human sexuality, these studies also show considerable individual variation, both within "sex/gender systems" (Rubin 1975) and over time. Based upon ethnographic work, Connell (1992) and others (Gibbon 1995; Harris

1995) propose that masculinities are negotiated according to changes in individual lives and in the social definitions of hegemonic masculinities.

Almaguer (1991) has suggested that investigating the internalized sexual and gender identities of homosexual Latin American populations in the United States would provide an important avenue for understanding how men negotiate masculinities across sex/gender systems. The literature contains almost no research from this perspective; this is true of U. S. immigrant cultures in general, with the notable exception of Manalansan's (1994) work with Filipino immigrants in New York City. Nor is there much in the way of comparative sexuality research across Latin American immigrant cultures. The research that has been done on gay Latinos in the United States has generally focused on the AIDS-risk behaviors of Mexican Americans in the Southwest (Diaz 1998; Murray 1995b) and of Puerto Ricans in New York (Alonso & Korek 1989).

These themes summarize the concepts of traditional masculine sexualities as investigated in the present study. A major purpose of the study, however, is to also understand the "affective dimensions" of gay men's sexual behaviors, which may not be reflected in these cultural standards (de Zalduondo 1991:239). Masculinity norms of emotional independence and strength may produce sexual expression which seeks to *substitute* sex for intimacy due to men's shame about emotional needs (Horrocks 1994; Levine 1998).

The process by which men acquire and internalize masculinity norms may be understood through a psycho-social life-course approach to masculine development - one which recognizes the role of early adulthood in the crystallization of men's masculine self-perceptions (Levinson et al 1978; O'Neil & Egan 1992). This view takes account of the contributions of psychoanalytic theory (Bem 1983; Chodorow 1978), but also acknowledges that such theories fail to explain cross-cultural variations (Herdt 1981; Paiva 1995; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974; Tuzin 1995) and historical changes (Katz 1995;

Kimmel 1996) in the contents of gender categories and normative sexual behaviors. Alternatively, social constructionist theories (Kimmel 1996; Seidler 1994) fail to incorporate "lived experience" - the ways in which opportunities and constraints are woven into *practice* that produces individual lives.

A psycho-social life-course approach potentially combines the advantages of psychological and social constructionist positions, and also acknowledges the culturally-specific meanings attached to particular life stages (Boxer & Cohler 1989; Gagnon 1989). For gay men, who do not confront the content of gay masculinities until "coming out," early adulthood may be particularly salient to their longer-term public performance and private internalization of masculinity. In applying this perspective to an ethnically-diverse sample of gay men, the present study sought to investigate how the establishment of gay sexual identity during early adulthood contributes to the production of sexual practices and meanings through men's confrontation with the expectations, symbols and lore of both inherited masculinity norms and gay male sexual cultures.

### **Gay Male Sexual Cultures**

Although gender and sexuality are conceptually distinct, recent research has begun to explore the ways in which sexualities may be culturally gendered (Edwards 1990; Lancaster 1995). The gendering of gay men has been analyzed as "contradictory": gay masculinity combines the glorification, subversion and parody of heterosexual masculinity (Connell 1995). For purposes of this study, however, it is important to specify the area of study as gay male *sexual* cultures: "the systems of meaning, of knowledge, beliefs and practices, that structure sexuality in different social contexts" (Parker, Herdt & Carballo 1991). While homosexuals have historically been marked as gender *inverts*, modern gay and lesbian sexual cultures have been characterized as gendered *extremes* of their heterosexual counterparts (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Greenberg 1996).



Although gay sexualities and sexual cultures may differ widely even within the United States (Herdt 1989), many modern gay male sexual cultures do appear to share with heterosexual male cultures an emphasis on sexual performance, sexual objectification, large genitals and a "macho" image (Levine 1998; Pronger 1992). Miami's gay media, for example (as elaborated in Chapter IV), provide a singular representation of gay male sexual culture: the muscle-bound hypermasculine body as an object of sexual desire. The absence of other images suggests that Miami's cultural construction of "gay" is largely defined by sexual imagery, behavior, and objectification.

In addition to defining the ideal sexual object, gay male sexual cultures often portray having sex with partners whom one does not know well as normative behavior. The practice of "delivering" condoms to patrons of gay clubs and bars in the interest of AIDS prevention, for example, indicates a presumption that gay men will have sex with men they have just met. Though such interventions have been designed based upon evidence that gay men tend to have many casual and/or anonymous sexual encounters (Gold 1995; Laumann et al 1994), these efforts also reify the stereotypical image of what it means to be gay for young men who are "coming out."

Gold (1995) has suggested that the norms of gay sexual cultures may be very important to young men's long term safer-sex practices. Other studies have also found that early sexual history strongly predicts later HIV-risk behaviors (Stall et al 1992; Siegel et al 1989). Beyond the concern for HIV transmission, HIV-risk interventions which respond to gay sexual culture by aiming only to solve the problem of sexual *safety*, such as through institutionalized safe-sex parties and "masturbation circles," may ignore or exacerbate underlying problems of gay male intimacy (Odets 1994).

This analysis also suggests a high level of variation in the gendered content of the multiple facets of gay male cultures. Gay male *sexual* cultures may reinforce and exaggerate traditional male norms related to sex, while broader aspects of gay cultures