

The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States



**Reconceptualizing & Reinvigorating
Our Work with Gay Men's Communities**

Eric Rofes, Ph. D.



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)

■ Origins

- Gay men's STD movement
- HIV/AIDS prevention
- LGBT health movement
- Women's health movement
- Dallas, 1995: *GLMA Summit* formally identifies need for new generation of gay men's health work



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)

■ Key Events

- Philadelphia, 1997: Transformation of Safeguards from HIV focus to GMH
- National Gay Men's Health Summit I., Boulder in 1999: 300 participants
- National Gay Men's Health Summit II., Boulder in 2000: 500 participants



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)

■ Key Events (continued)

- 2000-2002: Over 25 local & regional gay men's health summits held in the U.S
- Gay Men's Health Summit III., Raleigh, NC in August 2003: 400 participants
- Seattle & San Francisco 2003: Opening of Gay City's Health Clinic and Magnet



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)

- Ideas to consider about the gay men's health movement
 - Theory and research based
 - Strategically planned
 - Principle driven
 - Core issues to gay and bi men of all colors focused upon



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)

■ Characteristics

- Focused primarily on the "G" in LGBTI
- Decentralized, anarchistic and neotribal
- De-professionalized
- Community-based and subculture-based
- Mobilization focused
- Dependent upon the kindness of strangers



The Gay Men's Health Movement in the United States (1997-2004)




■ The Path Forward

- National Gay Men's Health Summit IV. in 2005
- Identification and educating of organizers for diverse gay men's health movements
- Creation of local community-based gay men's health summits, projects, and trainings (i.e. Gay City Health Project in Seattle; Magnet in San Francisco)



Six Foundational Principles




Of gay men's health summits, projects, or campaigns

-  Replace the HIV-centric paradigm of health advocacy for gay men with holistic models that integrate (but do not default to) HIV
-  Exit the crisis paradigm of HIV work and embrace contemporary understandings, meanings, and implications of HIV for gay men of all colors & classes
-  Challenge deficit-based models for work with gay men and replace them with asset-based approaches



Six Foundational Principles




Of gay men's health summits, projects, or campaigns

-  Strategically and politically confront structural forces challenging the well-being of gay & bi men
-  Embrace a “big tent” vision of community, respecting diverse ways of organizing sex and relationships among gay men → *shame and guilt are the health hazards, rather than specific sex practices and sex cultures*
-  Launch only efforts that are neither overtly or covertly sanitizing, sanctimonious or moralistic.



Address the 8 Core Issues




Confronting queer men of diverse generations, ethnicities, races, locations, and social classes

-  Explore the longings for intimacy and connection with other men and the social structures, networks, and ideologies that promote or prevent such connections.
-  Understand the meanings of anal sex, penetration, & the exchange of semen and explore the relationships between various racial, ethnic, and class-based masculinities and anal sex practices
-  Grapple with the emotions, pleasures, & wounds emerging from childhood and adolescent experiences with boys & men



Address the 8 Core Issues



Confronting queer men of diverse generations, ethnicities, races, locations, and social classes

-  Tap into sources of resilience, creativity, determination, humor & playfulness in diverse gay men's cultures
-  Support healing from trauma: violence, abuse, homophobia, racism, poverty, AIDS and addiction
-  Examine the ways transgression, risk, and the taboo interact with queer men's sexual desires, practices, and subcultures



Address the 8 Core Issues

Confronting queer men of diverse generations, ethnicities, races, locations, and social classes

-  Confront ways in which privileged masculinities of youth present challenges to & opportunities for well-being as men age
-  Revive and recreate community rituals, social structures, and networks to replace those lost during the most intense crisis years of AIDS



Key Features of the Gay Men's Health Movement

<i>It is not...</i>	<i>It is...</i>
HIV focused	Holistic
Deficit-driven	Asset-driven
Individual focus	Relational focus
Directive	Informative



Key Features of the Gay Men's Health Movement

<i>It is not...</i>	<i>It is...</i>
Fear-based & Moralistic	Trusting & Celebratory
Monocultural	Multicultural
Self-Esteem Building	Community-Building
Professionalized	Grassroots
Unitary	Multiple



Implications for HIV Research and Prevention

- A powerful gay men's health movement may provide a strong foundation for health promotion related to syphilis, HIV, substance abuse, and domestic violence
- HIV prevention may be most effective by not referencing HIV
- Challenging HIV-centric thinking may do much to strengthen gay men's health



Implications for HIV Research and Prevention

- Non-directive, non-manipulative, non-coercive approaches may be most effective with gay and bisexual men
- Sexual meanings and social identities may be central to sexual practices, subcultures, and communities
- The Gay Men's Health Movement has the potential to catalyze new thinking, create new projects, and mobilize masses of gay and bisexual men