Overruling Safer Sex in the HIV Era: The Roman Catholic Narrative of Procreative Sex

mauro.fornasiero@plymouth.ac.uk
Research Overview

Objectives:

1. A critical evaluation of the biomedical and sociological approaches in terms of HIV prevention
2. In-depth analysis of gay male representations in media productions
3. In-depth analysis of sexual behaviour among Italian MSM living in Veneto Region
Research Question

What are the socio-cultural factors that influence sexual behaviour, and most specifically safer sex?
Research Methodology

Using of qualitative techniques drawing on the rationale of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008)
Sampling

40 Men who have sex with men (MSM) living in the Veneto Region of Italy (between 2011-2013)
Main Themes

- HIV Fear
- Condom Anxiety
- HIV Denial

NOTE: Data (i.e. interviews) were analyzed following the factors of age, serological status, and relationships
Condom Anxiety

Age (31-35; 36-40)

In these age groups, the assumption of ‘being healthy’ twists the semantic of condom use.
Respondent 15, 36 years old

‘When someone I know wants to use condoms I think there must be something wrong with them, perhaps they are HIV positive … Why would they ask to use them otherwise?’
Comments

This perspective changes the perception of condoms from an HIV prevention technology to indicators that someone may be diseased.

It also highlights that there is not a process of condom acculturation.
Daily Pleasures

Every moment of the day is good to enjoy pleasure in life. In every moment of the day, we can protect our health. Let’s learn to look after ourselves and use condoms.

Hegemonic Narrative

Roman Catholic Church

Italian Republic
Basing itself on the Sacred Scripture, which represents homosexual acts as act of great depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrincically disorded. They close sexual acts to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity.

(Ccc, 2357:2011)
Italian Republic

The Republic recognises the rights of the family as natural society founded on marriage.

(Article 29 subsection I (1))
Word ‘condom’ is forbidden

On World AIDS Day 2011, the word ‘profilattico’ (condom) is forbidden in Italian State Channels RAI
RAI censors view of condom at ‘Concerto per il lavoro’

When singer Luca Romagnoli promoted safer sex live on stage on 1\textsuperscript{st} May 2013, RAI 3 broadcasted an advertisement break.
Often gay sex is seen as a random encounter with a man and perceived with a sense of guilt because it is not part of what we have learnt from our families or from the Roman Catholic Church. Gay men are caught between a sense of guilt and the idea that AIDS is a consequence of their sexuality. When you live sex in this way, almost secretly, it is difficult to implement safer sex. It is obvious that you pretend that AIDS is far away from you...you won't be able to cope with guilt and HIV fear otherwise. (Respondent 35, 50 years)
In Conclusion

1. The Roman Catholic Church - endorsed by the Italian State - generates a hegemonic narrative on procreative sex (i.e. see notion of family)

2. Although findings are not conclusive, they are indicative that the procreative narrative of sex hinders safer sex among Italian MSM living in Veneto Region
Thank you for listening

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