“I want to be valued for my femininity, to find a true voice for our creativity.”

Performance, Women, Ageing & HIV

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Overview

• Setting the scene

• Snapshot of project

• Selected output

• Reflections & opportunities
Setting the scene
Women living with HIV

• Different biosocial realities
  – gender norms
  – gender-based violence
  – reproductive transition

• Representation in clinical trials <25%\(^1\)

• Going beyond motherhood paradigm

• Paucity of qualitative data

Source: 1. Curno et al. (2016)
Cultural representations of HIV
“Where are the stories of women being healthy and powerful with HIV?”

Silvia Petretti, Deputy CEO Positively UK
Project
Aims

1. Using methodologies from applied theatre, to explore experiences of HIV & womanhood

2. To disrupt existing representations of HIV in the cultural imagination

3. To encourage dialogue between participants and the PRIME Study
Jan  

March  

April

Performance at RCSSD

Creative workshops
Fortnightly
Average 12-18 participants
In their own words...
The Press
Suppress
Our stories of happiness
They choose to define us
as ‘suffering headliners’
No-one writes when the virus
Has helped refine us.
Given us gratitude
A loving attitude
The media just wants to undermine us.

Concentrate on the criminality
The shock and shame of our sexuality
I want to be valued for my femininity
To find a true voice for our creativity
To show we are all wonderful women,
Much more than our status
Who deserve to be reported with dignity
To be respected
Celebrated
Honoured and Appreciated.
HIV Positive & Stigma Free.
“In our homes, silence is prevailing.”

“Redefining our value. Reclaiming our identity.”
Reflections
Reflections: Kat

• Self-representation
  – a move away from redemption narrative

• Reciprocity

• Difference in the space/atmosphere

• Challenges
  – creating a space for difficult stories
  – time & flexibility
Reflections: participants

“There are not many opportunities to work in a way which is not so cerebral. HIV is a visceral thing; it lodges in your body. We need to find forms to express this. If we are always made to feel like a problem, where do you find ways of understanding what your health could be?”
Reflections: participants

“We amazing set of women who achieve many amazing creative things beyond belief.”

“Don’t you feel ‘lighter’?”

“We need to find ways into experiences that liberate you. The creative workshops made me so happy.”
Silvia @HIV_SpeakingUp

So excited to see so many women with HIV here to perform, being visible and... our poems in a booklet! #IWD2016

Mel Rattue @MelPainter2014 · Mar 3

Thank you @CSSDLondon for performing my poem and @Positively_UK for the creative project #IWDHIV Wonderful evening

OutboxTheatre @Outbox_Theatre · Mar 3

Wonderful event creating theatre with women living with HIV @Positively_UK @katlow17 @CSSDLondon Inspiring stuff
“One of the most successful & meaningful engagement projects we've ever had.”

Silvia Petretti, Deputy CEO Positively UK
Reflections

• Core group of women engaged in theatre-making

• Supportive of addressing suggested themes

• Partnership established with Positively UK

• Interdisciplinary methodology
Acknowledgements

• All our workshop participants

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• Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
  – Research Office & Drama, Applied Theatre & Education students

• Positively UK