

“Presenting yourself too ‘loud’ could get you killed”: Understanding Jamaican Masculinity and the Cultural Rejection of Effeminate Gay Men

Orlando O. Harris, PhD, RN, FNP

University of Rochester, School of Nursing

January 14th, 2015

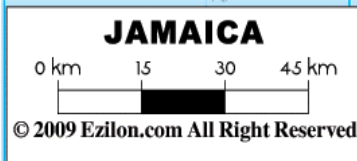
MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER



Funding Sources & Support

- United States Department of State, Institute for International Education (IIE)
 - Fulbright Scholars Program
 - US Embassy- Kingston, Jamaica
- Center for AIDS Research (CFAR)
 - University of Rochester Medical Center
- University of the West Indies, Mona Campus
 - Institute for Gender Development Studies

Map of Jamaica



CARIBBEAN SEA



18°

MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER



UNIVERSITY of
ROCHESTER
MEDICAL CENTER

Overview of HIV in Jamaica

- Jamaican population = 2.8 million
 - Adult HIV prevalence rate is 1.8%
- HIV prevalence rate for JMSM is 38% (up from 32% in 2010)
 - 2/3 are unaware of their (HIV+) status
- Approx. 32,000 people living with HIV
 - Majority of the cases are among men
- HIV infections cluster in two urban areas: Kingston/ St. Andrew & Montego Bay (St. James)
- JMSM accounted for 53% of all new HIV infections in 2012

(Ministry of Health, 2010; UNAIDS, 2012)

4

Jamaican Masculinity

Colonial Jamaica

- Masculinity in Jamaica is centered around biological and social indicators
 - Gender, class, economic status, and cultural
- Afro-Jamaican male sexuality was perceived as animalist
 - Male slaves were not given the opportunity to love
- Marriage or fatherhood was not considered to be a part of the colonizer's plan for the Afro-Jamaican male
- Even though British colonial occupation ended in 1965, these views around masculinity persist today

(Chevannes, 1999; & Tafari-Ama, 2006)

5

Jamaican Masculinity

Post-Colonialism

- Men are perceived as sexually irresponsible, uneducated, proponents of violence, and dodgers of fatherhood
- Economic hardships allow for girls to attend school while boys are required to provide income for the family
 - Boys “make life”, “juggle”, or “hustle” the streets
- Masculinity is synonymous with violence in the inner-city
 - Rise of the “hyper-heterosexual” male or “*rude boy*”
- Violence against women and homosexuals, and sometimes male-on-male violence provide legitimate evidence of masculinity
- Homosexuality is seen as “un-Jamaican”

(Chevannes, 1999; & Tafari-Ama, 2006) 6

Enforcement of Jamaican Masculinity

Dancehall Culture

- Disrespectful to towards women and violent towards homosexuals
- The gun and the penis are synonymous
- Vulgar sexually explicit lyrics contribute to the hetero-normative discourse

Community

- Mostly artists from poor inner-city communities
- The definition of a “real man” in popular culture is a man from the ghetto
 - “Dons” (gang leaders) are expected to have many women
 - Any male (i.e., homosexuals) who does not fit in this category should be *terminated*

(Hope, 2010, & Stanley-Niah, 2006)

Jamaican Masculinity

Violent Homophobia

- Homophobic violence is common
 - Violent mob attacks are often preferred way to project fear
 - Societal and Cultural condemnation of homosexuality has created a hostile living environment


- Discrimination towards JMSM is sanctioned by law
 - The “buggery” (sodomy) law punishes homosexual sexual behavior with imprisonment (maximum of 10 years)

Research Purpose

1. The purpose of this inquiry was to understand the circumstances that place JMSM at risk for HIV
2. Explore how they navigate their environment to enhance their personal safety

Methods: Design & Recruitment

- **Qualitative Description**
 - Individual semi-structured interviews
 - Focus group discussion
- **Participants were recruited from**
 - A local university
 - One community-based organization
- Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic content analysis



Understanding the Sexual Health of Jamaican Men

The purpose of the study is to speak with Jamaican men who have sex with men in order to understand their experiences and views regarding their cultural and social environment.

You May Participate In This Study If You Are:

1. Biological male
2. 18 years and older
3. A man who have sex with other men
4. Jamaican born

You will be asked to complete: 1. A brief demographic and behavioral survey, 2. An HIV knowledge questionnaire, and a 1:1 interview with the researcher.

1876-818-0589; orlando_harris@urmc.rochester.edu

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sexual Health Study 1876-818-0589

Sample

- Participants self-identified as
 - Gay (60%)
 - Bisexual (40%)
- Age of first sexual experience ranged from 7-24 years

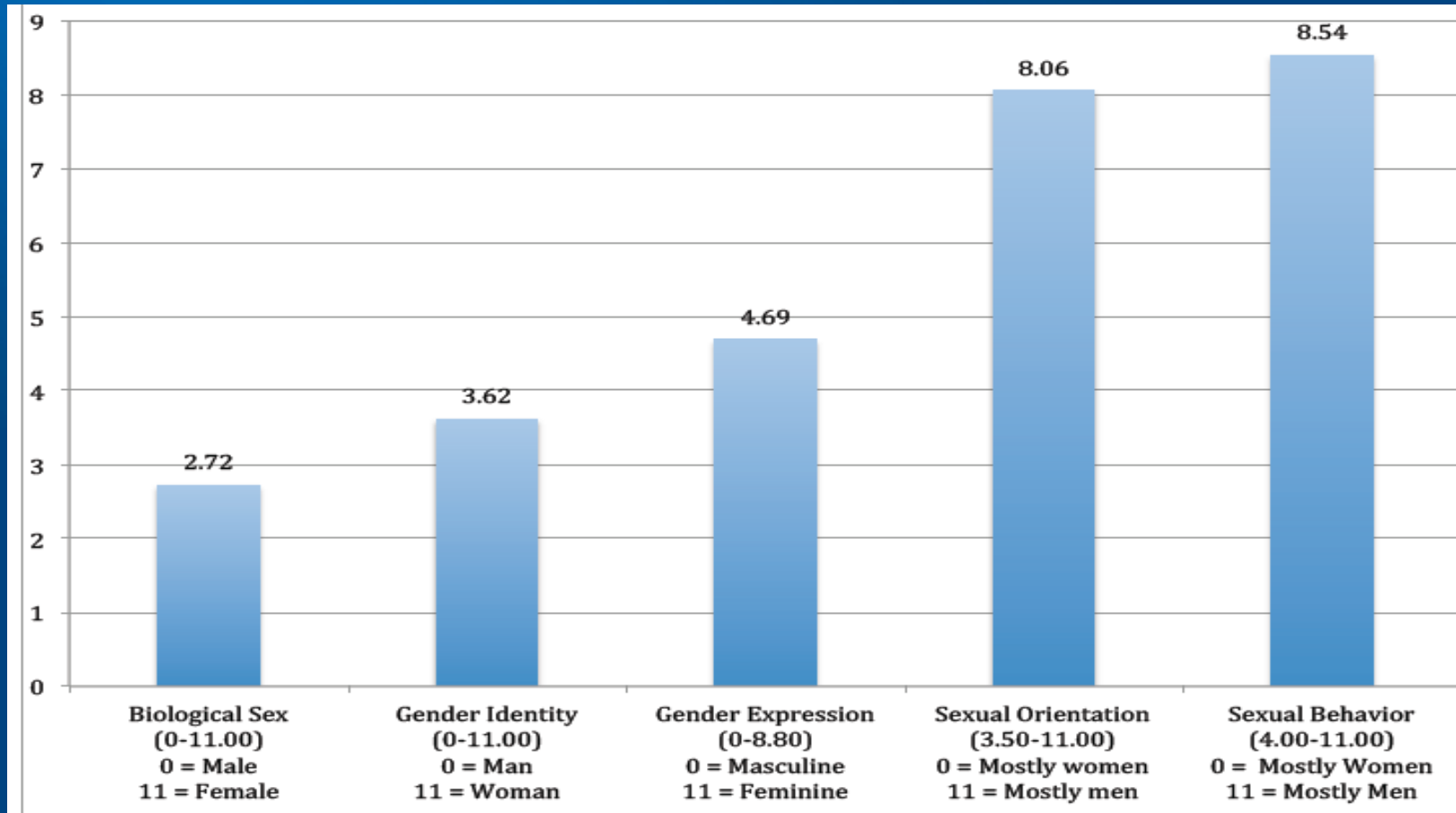
	n	%
Parish of Residency		
St. James	1	3
St. Catherine	7	23
St. Andrew	5	17
St. Thomas	1	3
Kingston	16	53
Age		
18-20	8	27
21-24	16	53
25-29	6	20

Sample

	n	%
Religion/Spirituality		
Christian	26	87
"Spiritual"	1	3
Atheist	2	7
None	1	3
Levels of Education Completed		
Grade School	1	3
Some High School	8	27
High School Diploma/GED	4	13
Some College	9	30
Associates Degree	3	10
Bachelor's Degree	5	17

12

Gender Expression and Behavior



13



The Cultural Rejection of Effeminate Gay Men

14

MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER



Community-Level Acceptance

- This level of homophobia common in inner-city areas
- If you can pass or have family in the community... You stay
 - Gender nonconforming behaviors are overlooked
 - This privilege only applies to men who were born and raised within the space

If you were born and grew up in that community, they not going to trouble you... but if you are new there, and they see you move certain way, they might tease you and probably try to mob you.

Sean (age 20)

Community-Level Acceptance

With limitations:

If a group of men are hanging out in the community... and you know when they hangout, they drink and smoke. As feminine as I am, I can't go there and drink with them...I don't want them to kill me...I can't go there and drink with them because they would say 'battyman fi dead.' I know my place so I won't really go there to hang out. You understand? I would probably hang out more with the girls, so if the girls are drinking, me and them will drink and smoke.

Zack (age 21)



16

Rejection of Effeminate Gay Men

- Gay men and trans women who refuse to conform to Jamaica's explicit gender expectations have this heightened awareness of their environment
- Gender bending or gender nonconforming presentation increases homophobia and HIV vulnerability in this context

We are aware and cognizant of our surroundings, so we are not going to present ourselves so 'loud' because it could get us killed. I remember when I was in primary school there was one guy in our community who people found out was gay because they caught him with another guy.... They stoned him... so he had to leave the community... So it was then that I realized that you have to know your surroundings. *Mark (age 23)*



17

Rejection of Effeminate Gay Men

- Gay youth are not exempt from community-level homophobia

I left the country and came to Kingston to live with my mother. I couldn't tolerate teasing coming from community members so I decide to run away after I was attacked. I guess I was too feminine to live there... so then my mother and siblings told me to cut down on my femininity and man-up. I love my make-up you know... so someone sent word to my mother saying that our safety was in jeopardy... so because I didn't want anything to happen to them or have the house destroyed... I left... I was 15 years old. *Arron (age 24)*



18

Always on the Move

- Those who were forced to leave their communities found refuge in abandon homes
- Engage in this “cat and mouse” relationship with law enforcement
- Only to be forced out again by middle class people who do not want deviants in their upscale neighborhoods



19

Building Community

- Many of those men/youth find each other through word of mouth
- Have created agency for themselves through building of a strong support network
- Many found a home in the sewer system after being chased out of derelict buildings
- These networks also provide protection and financial support



Beauty, Safety, and Survival

- Providing for each other often includes participation in
 - Commercial sex work
 - Often older gay youth would engage in this activity to provide for the younger MSM
 - Criminality (scamming, theft, etc.)



Resilience, Love, and Companionship



22

MEDICINE *of* THE HIGHEST ORDER

Survival Trumped HIV Concerns

- Potential HIV infection was measured through a distal and proximal risk assessment.
 - Proximal risk involved not being immediately concerned with HIV infection during intimate contact with their partners
 - Distal risk involved the possibility of being caught in a “compromising situation” with their partners, or any other circumstances that might affect their personal safety.

Protection In Public Spaces

Changing your appearance or dressing more masculine

- “I try to act masculine in public to create an edgy version of myself around others who I know are against homosexuals.”
- Avoiding being in the presence of more feminine JMSM in public

In most cases I would just try to act masculine in public. I create a edgy version of myself in public and around others who I know are strictly safe or who are against homosexuals... so basically just act rough or toughen up myself more than the *real* me... I'm never real unless I'm around good friends...I dress more clean, nothing that draws too much attention to anyone, just average. *Kevin (age 21)*

Implications: Clinical Practice

- Advocate for the removal of structural barriers, including legal barriers, that inhibit access to prevention services
- Sensitization and education of more culturally competent health care providers around issues related to
 - Gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, and sexual orientation
- Improve public healthcare facilities so that they are accessible and welcoming
- Screen for childhood sexual abuse and mental health disorders

25