

## A Qualitative Study of MSM Who Use Internet Chatrooms

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**Project Description:** We are continuing to conduct semi-structured, on-line interviews with Internet-using MSM to explore the role of the Internet in MSM's sexual lives. Current recruitment efforts are focusing on substance-using MSM. We also conducted telephone interviews with CBOs nationwide to describe their current online HIV-prevention efforts and recommendations for future programs. We will use these pilot data to create and test the feasibility of new and innovative online HIV prevention efforts.

**Significance:** The Internet has created new opportunities for MSM to engage in a variety of sexual behaviors. Data from our survey of young MSM in three Southwestern cities demonstrate that the men who spent the most amount of time on-line reported the greatest number of sexual partners and the most instances of unprotected sex.

**Interesting Findings:** Preliminary analysis from a small number of our first interviews revealed that: The Internet plays an important and multi-faceted role in the lives of the men in our study. Many expressed that the Internet has been vital to their sexual identity development and self-expression. The Internet allows them to socialize and access resources and support in a safe and anonymous manner. Many study participants have developed and sustained supportive interpersonal relationships via the Internet. Nearly every respondent mentioned that using the Internet has increased their number of sexual encounters and partners. Some respondents expressed concern about the impersonal nature of many online encounters, frustration with men who misrepresent themselves on-line, and concern about spending too much time on-line.

Overall, respondents have expressed that their online activities do affect their sexual behavior, in terms of number of partners, in how they express themselves sexually, or in types of sexual practices. A variety of HIV risk-reduction strategies with Internet partners was reported, including: 100% avoidance of anal sex; 100% condom use for anal sex with no discussion of HIV status/safer sex; 100% condom use for anal sex after mutual disclosure/discussion of safer sex. Less safe examples include men who: engage in occasional unprotected anal sex (without discussing HIV status or condoms); use condoms with their Internet/casual partners, but engage in unprotected sex with "known" partners; have unprotected anal sex with Internet partners after mutual disclosure of HIV negative status; and have unprotected sex with Internet partners with no discussion of HIV status or condoms unless their partners insist. Nearly all men said that they would participate in on-line prevention programs but were unaware of current projects.

**Project Web Site:** <http://www.keeptrack.ucsf.edu/ms/cybersex/>

**Project end date:** 2004