

**COMMUNITY, ATTACHMENT, STRUCTURES  
AND THE EPIDEMIC.  
CASE**

A Study of the Importance of Gay Community in the Lives of Gay Men

Submitted by  
Jeffrey Grierson BPsych (Hons)

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Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society  
Faculty of Health Sciences

La Trobe University  
Bundoora, Victoria 3083  
Australia

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Community, Attachment, Structures and the Epidemic maps some of the changes in gay men's experience and conceptualisation of community that have occurred during the AIDS epidemic. Social identity theory has been employed to investigate the social-psychological aspects of gay identity at personal, social and community levels. The study compares three generations of gay men in Melbourne; pre- peri- and post-AIDS. As a starting point, the study employed focus groups to explore basic conceptions of gay community. In the first of two major data collection phases, 32 gay men between the ages of 18 and 40 participated in semi-structured interviews of between 45 minutes and one and a half hours. The interviews explored the men's social networks, past and present relationship to the commercial gay scene, feelings about gay organisations businesses, neighbourhoods, entertainment, aesthetics, the way they see other gay people, their thoughts about the impact of AIDS on gay communities and their aspirations for gay communities. The second phase of data collection utilised a questionnaire developed from the analysis of the interviews. The 55 item questionnaire covered demographic information, coming out history, initial experiences of the gay world, friendship networks, feelings about the institutions, people and conceptual elements of gay community, items concerning practices of gay community, the community attachment subscale from the SAPA study and items on HIV/AIDS. The questionnaire was completed by 432 gay men, 207 recruited at the Midsumma carnival, an annual gay and lesbian event in Melbourne and 225 through the mailing list of the Victorian AIDS Council. Analysis of the questionnaire data uncovered a complex constellation of difference in the conceptualisation and experience of gay community between the groups, particularly with regard to the content and boundaries of the category 'gay community'. The research challenges practice based models of gay community attachment and proposes a more dynamic, fluid and multi-dimensional conceptualisation of gay social identity.

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**Statement of Authorship**

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

The conduct of this thesis has been supported by a Commonwealth AIDS Research Grants (CARG) Scholarship.

All procedures employed in the conduct of this research have been approved by the Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University.

Recruitment procedures involving the membership of the Victorian AIDS Council have been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Victorian AIDS Council.

Signed

Jeffrey Grierson

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*This work is dedicated to the memory of two great heroes of mine both of whom died in 1997,  
Evelyn Hooker and William S. Burroughs.*

“He’s thought about it for a long long time  
About being attracted to his own kind  
He’s ready to take those fantasies  
And make them into something real  
And finally do all the things  
He’s been dreaming of  
He’s joining the cocksucker club.”  
(Pansy Division, *The Cocksucker Club*)