Published in final edited form as:

Qual Health Res. 2013 May ; 23(5): 712. doi:10.1177/1049732313481114.

Where to Go With Barebacking Research

Timothy Frasca¹, Ivan Balan¹, and Alex Carballo-Diéguez¹

¹Columbia University, New York, New York, USA

We appreciate the careful reading by Mr. Shawn Chrisman of our article (Frasca, Ventuneac, Balan, & Carballo-Diéguez, 2012). Chrisman correctly notes that we found intentional pursuit of HIV infection (“bug chasing”) to be rare. In fact, among our sample of 120 sexually active men who reported barebacking with partners met via the Internet, not a single such case was reported.

We concur with the hypothesis that cultural factors might play a role in barebacking choices and asked participants a series of questions about their own ethnic/racial identities; how they displayed them (or not) in their online profiles; and how others, especially sexual partners, reacted to their ethnic self-portrayals either online or in person. However, a careful review of the data did not show significant racial or ethnic differences in barebacking behavior among the sample, and thus this topic was not emphasized in the numerous papers produced from the research. Balán, Carballo-Diéguez, Ventuneac, and Remien (2009) did focus on participants who self-identified as Latinos, but they found only minimal references to the influence of Hispanic ethnicity on either the speakers’ own barebacking-related perceptions and behaviors, or those of their partners.

A fuller account of race-based stereotypes that emerged from the same interviews is provided by Wilson et al. (2009). While the authors of this article explored a number of racial and ethnic influences on the men’s partner choices and sexual practices, they also did not find strong links between race/ethnicity and barebacking practices per se.

The study of sexual compulsivity among men who engage in bareback sex was not an aim of the study. In response to Chrisman’s comments, we conducted a review of the relevant codes from the qualitative data that might have picked up comments suggesting compulsive behavior related to sex. We found very few such references. What did emerge as a recurrent theme was the men’s identification of Internet use, especially cruising for sexual partners, as potentially habit forming. They frequently mentioned the many hours spent in this pursuit, and some participants characterized the time consumed as “excessive” or “wasteful.” This finding might indicate a useful subject to be examined in future research.

Reprints and permissions: sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Corresponding Author: Timothy Frasca, HIV Center for Clinical & Behavioral Studies, 1051, Riverside Dr., Unit 15, New York, NY 10032, USA. frascat@nyspi.columbia.edu.

References

- Balán IC, Carballo-Diéguez A, Ventuneac A, Remien RH. Intentional condomless anal intercourse among Latino MSM who meet sexual partners on the Internet. *AIDS Education and Prevention*. 2009; 21(1):14–24. [PubMed: 19243228]
- Frasca T, Ventuneac A, Balan I, Carballo-Diéguez A. Inner contradictions among men who bareback. *Qualitative Health Research*. 2012; 22:946–956. doi:10.1177/1049732312443592. [PubMed: 22645221]
- Wilson PA, Valera P, Ventuneac A, Balan I, Rowe M, Carballo-Diéguez A. Race-based sexual stereotyping and sexual partnering among men who use the Internet to identify other men for bareback sex. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2009; 46(5):399–413. doi:10.1080/00224490902846479. [PubMed: 19337934]