



# The nature of MSM connectivity in Vancouver, BC and the importance of formative research for highlighting potential 'bottlenecks' among sub-networks when selecting optimal seeds for Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS)

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I have no conflicts of interest.



# The Momentum Health Study

- Evidence suggests that expanded access to HAART may play an important role in transmission reduction (Hogg, et al., 2001; Montaner, et al., 2006)
- Potential of HAART to act as a preventive measure at the population level depends on what happens with HIV risk behaviours (Schwarcz, et al. 2007)
- Two serial cross-sections and longitudinal cohort of MSM in Greater Vancouver
- Enrollment began February 25, 2012 and n=51 of 1,000 to date



# Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS)

- Chain-referral sampling designed to produce probabilistic samples with minimal selection bias (Heckathorn, 1997)
- Particularly useful to reach hidden populations such as MSM where no sampling frame exists
- Begins with a number of purposively selected seed individuals



# Momentum RDS

- Participants are issued a pre-determined number of coupons to recruit others from their social networks
- Waves of recruitment proceed until sample size reached and equilibrium across key demographic indicators is achieved



Momentum RDS Coupon



# Formative Research for RDS

- Defined as pre-planned, systematic and formal use of rapid assessment techniques to explore key issues in implementing subsequent research (Simic, et al., 2006)

For RDS formative research can identify (Johnston, et al. 2010) :

- 1) isolated cliques or sub-networks
- 2) bridges or 'special connectors' linking sub-networks
- 3) 'bottlenecks' arising when recruitment chains remain within highly connected clusters



# Methods 1

- We conducted a series of semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs, n=24) and six focus group discussions (FGDs, n=48) between April and December 2011 with local MSM and service providers to delineate Vancouver MSM networks
- KIIs asked about knowledge of social, culture and economic structures of the MSM communities of Vancouver the contexts in which MSM self-organize



# Methods 2

- FGDs used community mapping and post-mapping discussion to explore participants' understanding of Vancouver MSM community structures and the forces that formed them
- Independent thematic analyses were conducted by two members of our research team, employing an iterative and inductive approach
- All KIIs and FGDs procedures were approved by UBC, SFU, and UVic ethics boards





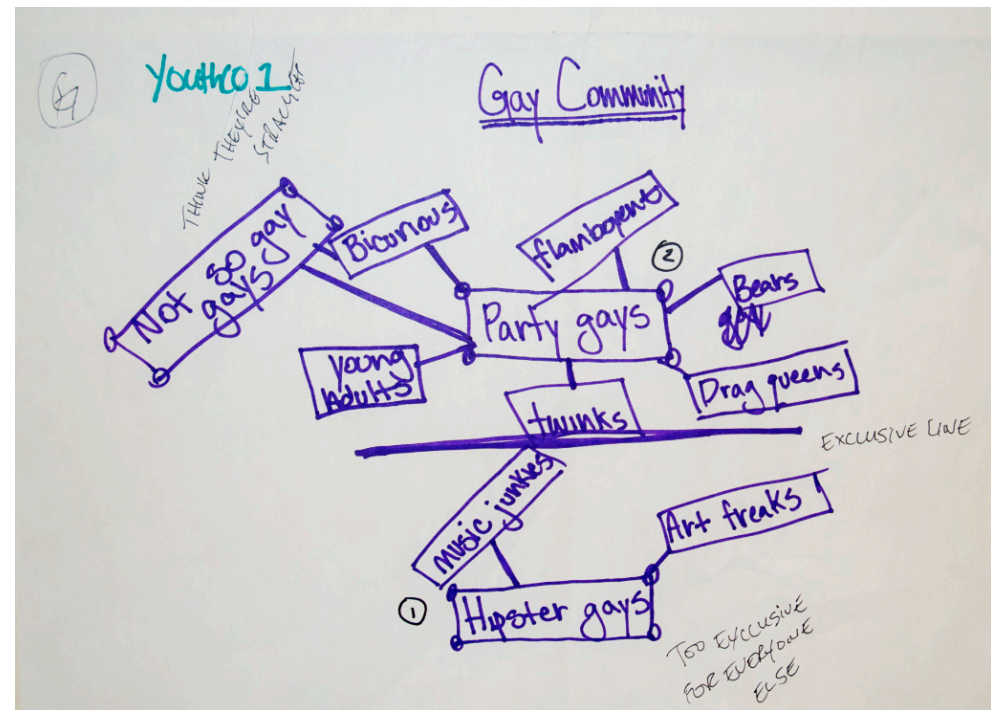
# Results

- Vancouver MSM recognize and connect socially and sexually through online networks, organizations, clubs, bars and cruising locales
- There has been significant increased geographic and social decentralization in Vancouver that may be both a consequence of, and perpetuated by a rise in virtual networks and/or by a general assimilation of gay men into mainstream North American urban culture
- Community mapping helped identify factors by which networks are divided and self-organize



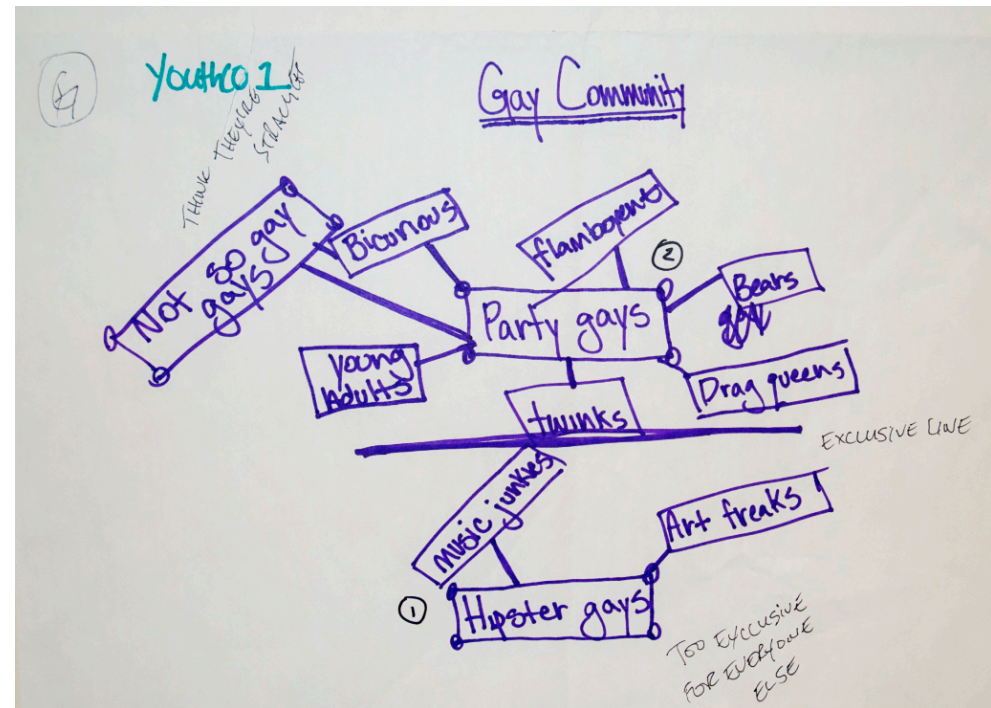
# Community Maps Example 1

- Distinctive sub-networks connect around different 'scenes',
- E.g. 'Party Gays', 'Drag Queens' and sexual preference, ('Bears' and 'Twinks').



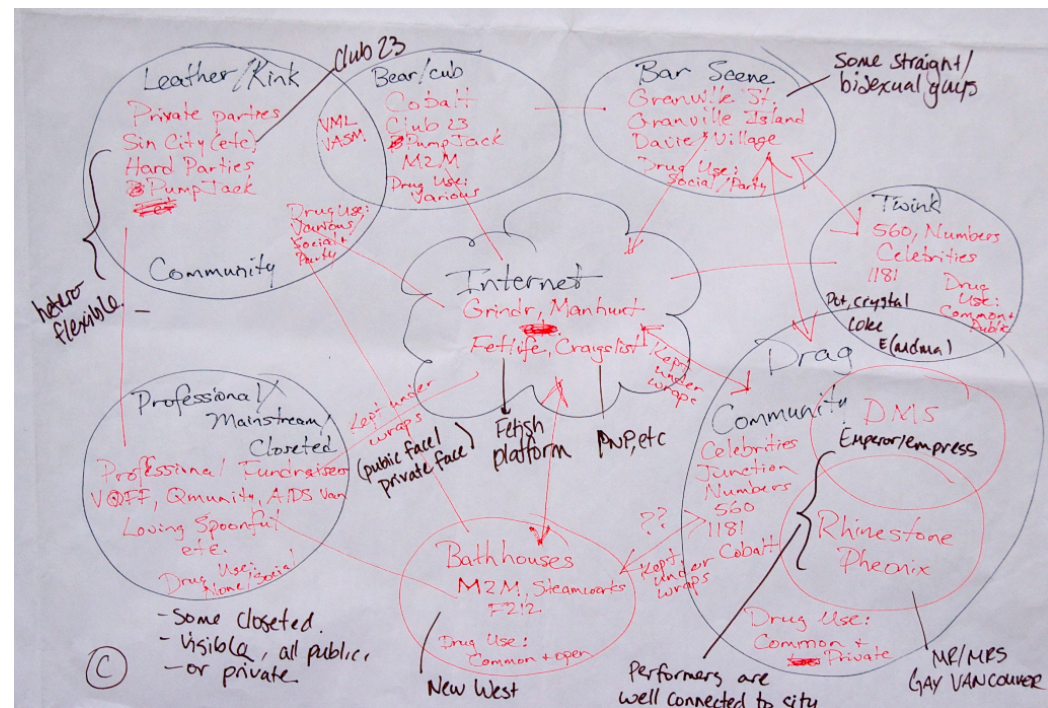
# Community Maps Example 1

- Potential 'bottlenecks' revealed, depicted here by a solid line that separates the networks of 'Hipster gays' and 'Party gays'
- Reflects the geographic and social decentralization of gay men from traditional West End neighbourhood



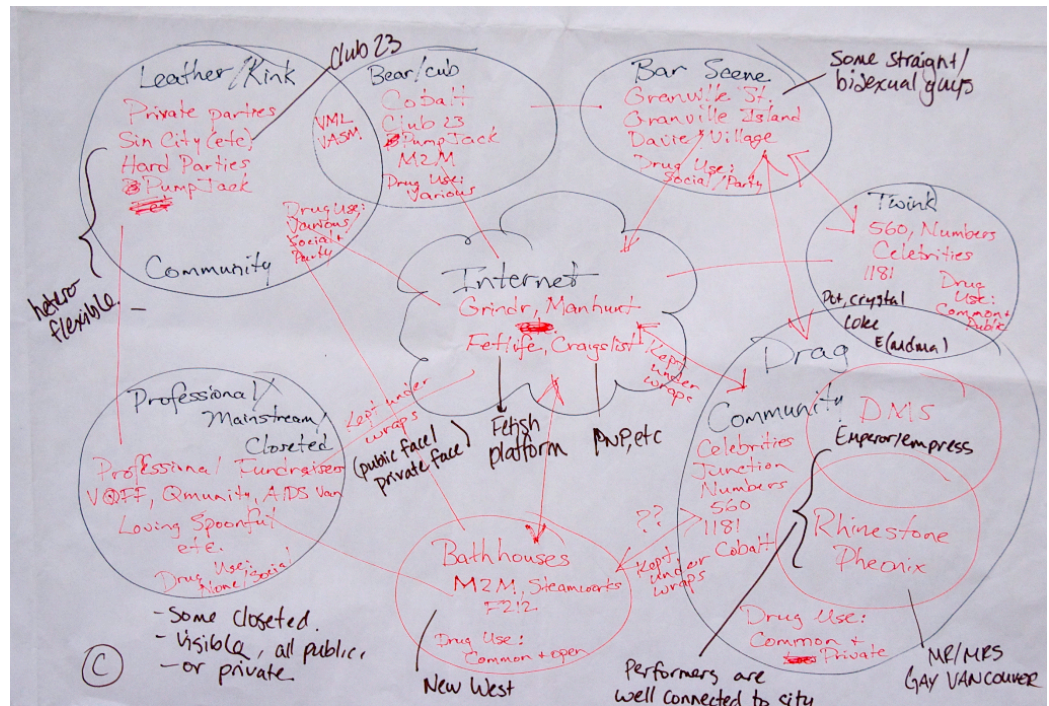
# Community Maps Example 2

- Physical scenes still exist as a part of many networks (e.g. bars, drag shows)
- Virtual networks, facilitated by internet sites and mobile apps, transcend physical 'scenes'



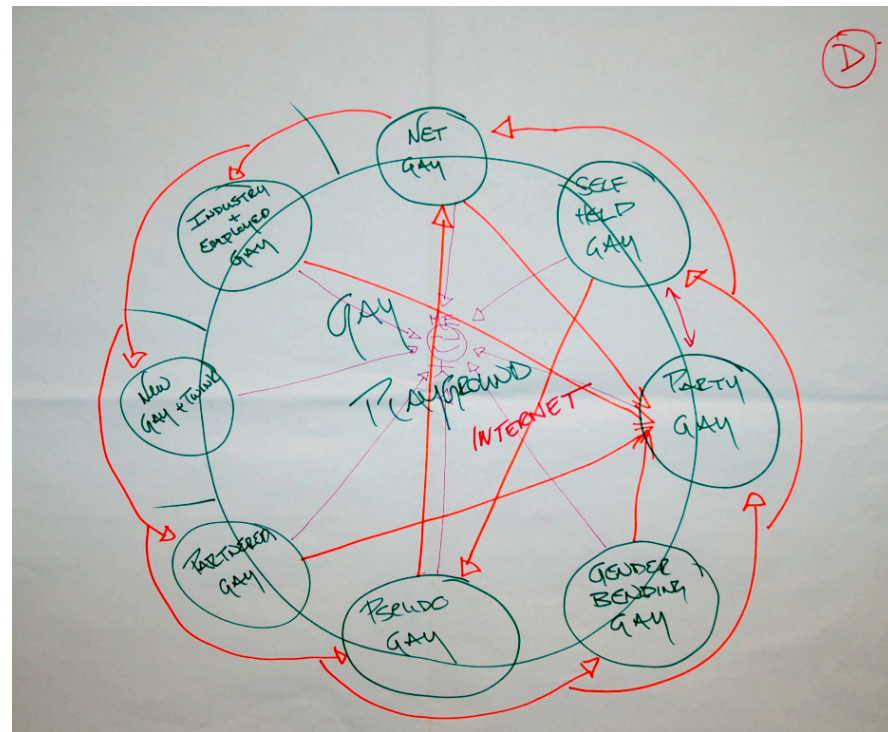
# Community Maps Example 2

- Some sub-groups also associated with particular substance use patterns (e.g. respondent describes an overlapping twink/drag network where coke and MDMA use is common practice)



# Community Maps Example 3

- Movement between sub-cultures or 'scenes' may also be more fluid
- Different behaviours may be associated with different 'scenes' as one individual moves between sub-networks



# Implications for Momentum

- ‘Special connectors’ between sub-groups, who may be important in bridging various networks, included: drag queens, sexually attractive (i.e. ‘A-gay’ guys) and ‘daddies’
- Substance use patterns are associated with particular ‘scenes’ and sub-networks and may be important indicators to monitor as RDS progresses (See poster P198)



# Implications for Momentum

- Importance of virtual networks and online communities prompted Momentum to design both physical and electronic RDS coupons for recruitment
- Informed selection of “seed” participants, to reflect the various sub-networks that exist among communities of MSM in Vancouver





# Conclusions

- Formative research can help understand underlying social structures and networks among the population being sampled by RDS
- Identifying factors which structure social and sexual networks can help avoid ‘bottlenecks’ in sampling and in selecting “seed” participants for RDS recruitment



# Acknowledgements

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# More Information?

For more information on the Momentum Health Study, please contact Jamie Forrest, Project Coordinator at [jforrest@cfenet.ubc.ca](mailto:jforrest@cfenet.ubc.ca) or 604-558-2018

THANK YOU!



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