



Bathhouse Outreach to the Gay Asian Diaspora in Toronto

Nalini Mohabir

Volunteer, Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS)
and co-authors

Richard Utama

ACAS' Gay Men's Strategy Officer

Daniel Le

Programme Coordinator at Action AIDS Singapore

Peter Ho

Social Worker, Regent Park Community Health Centre, Toronto

Ryan Tran

ACAS' Men's Sexual Health Project Coordinator

Brian-Bao Ly

ACAS' Gay Men's Outreach Worker

Abstract

One might wonder how this short reflection on outreach to East/Southeast Asian Gay Men who use Bathhouses in Toronto fits within the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*. Firstly, the Caribbean is a diverse space, with diasporic East Asian (Chinese) and Southeast Asian (Javanese) communities. Secondly, the Caribbean itself is not tied to geography, and may be found wherever its diasporas are located (e.g., Toronto). When we migrate our diasporas are made, un-made and re-made, coming together in ways that move across boundaries. For example, while Richard, Daniel, Peter, Ryan, and Brian are East/Southeast Asian men, Nalini is not (her family is from the Caribbean). However, as 'Asians' or 'people of colour' (collectivities borne of migration histories), we work across the multicultural silos and gendered borderlines that seek to separate and contain us. Despite recent critiques of solidarity, we still need each other. In that spirit, this essay explores the practice of community-making in a 'fugitive space' (the bathhouse) through the peer outreach activities of Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS – a community organization) located in Toronto. We thank the editors of this special issue for the opportunity to think across locations, multiple identities, and community-building practices in the diaspora(s).

Keywords: Bathhouse, Caribbean, HIV, sexuality, masculinity

Introduction

Over the last 25 years or so, community agencies which grew out of activist agendas have come under increasing pressure to act as social service delivery agents, with services delineated by the goals of funders. In the process of accountability (to funders, not necessarily communities), programs are strictly assessed through tools like logic models or outcome measurements. Such an auditing of experiences obscures the richness of our community conversations, struggles, and sources of strength; it fails to scratch the surface of our emotional lives, or speak to our political investments.¹ Consequently, ACAS has undertaken this short reflection piece primarily to share the values that stand behind our 'outcome measurements.' We hope to spark further reflection on the cultural as well as interpersonal context that belies a deceptively simple question — what is peer outreach?

History of ACAS

ACAS opened its doors in 1994, following the integration of three HIV/AIDS programs in Toronto serving the East and Southeast Asian communities. However, our roots are much longer, nurtured by Gay Asian activists in the city, whose activism was driven by the need for survival (both emotionally and physically). In the words of Dr. Alan Li, one of the co-founders of Gay Asian AIDS project in Toronto (an ACAS predecessor):

I remember the first client of Gay Asian AIDS Project, Chris, who was referred to us by Public Health after being found starving and lying on his apartment floor, despairing in isolation with no available support. With almost no staffing, we mobilized great community volunteer effort to help him fulfill his last wish: to be reunited with his family... Two nights before Chris embarked on his journey home, I brought Chris some congee for supper. He asked me why I “was so

nice to him.” I answered, rather instinctively, “We are a family, a community, if we don’t help each other, who’s going to help us?” It was that sense of family and community that inspired and drove the passion that built first the Gay Asian AIDS Project and eventually ACAS.²

The impact of similar encounters over time informs our objective to work in a *culturally appropriate* manner. We provide support, education, and outreach services to diasporic Asians, and Asians with HIV/AIDS, in a collaborative, empowering, and non-discriminatory manner.

These aims are more than just words in a report; they breathe life into our programs. Consider the Bathhouse Outreach Program, which has been part of ACAS’s complement from the beginning. Looking back, Peter Ho (our first bathhouse peer outreach worker) recalls that the organization was operating in crisis mode due to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in the early ‘90s.³ Agency staff and volunteers were deeply affected, many in mourning due to both personal and professional losses in the community. With pressing resolve (and desperation), we felt the weight of responsibility to go beyond HIV/AIDS as a public health concern. It was a scary and uncertain time that required what community, at its best, can offer — an embrace of acceptance and a refuge of understanding. We explore the innovations of health promotion/ sexual health outreach practices emerging out of this experience below.

Why the bathhouse?

ACAS provides sexual health and health promotion workshops to East and Southeast Asian men living in the diaspora (Toronto), and distributes free condoms and lube through bathhouses. The main goal of outreach in this setting is to reduce stigma among patrons, and promote safe sex.

“A Gay bathhouse is a business establishment (that may be open 24/7) in which Gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) meet for consensual sex and/or to socialize with other men. For some, it is part of the rites of passage into the Gay culture. ... Most bathhouses have lockable rooms with a small bed, a dark area for cruising, a lounge area where Gay video porn is shown or a small bar/snack area.”⁴

A bathhouse is for sex, first and foremost. It is a space that allows for casual hook-ups within confined spaces. One can rent a locker or a room cheaply for a short period, instead of going to a hotel, or a park, or a stranger’s home. As one patron says, “There’s also a sense of security because people see you check in, and if you go missing in the bathhouse, the person you went with would be questioned. So it’s about safety for me.” There is also an etiquette to bathhouse encounters: “I am outgoing. But sometimes I’m not that way. It seems like in the bathhouse there’s more possibilities. If you’re not interested in someone, you can just tell them you’re not interested. In the bathhouse, you just go, sorry I’m not interested. You can be very direct, instead of beating around the bush.” Because it’s clear you’re looking for sex, the approach is straightforward, as is the rejection. Brian Ly, our Outreach Worker, describes the environment: “This is a place where you should be free to do whatever you want — like “Hey you’re cute, you’re hot, you’re sexy — and not care how your personality is outside of the bathhouse.”

Gay bathhouses first came to the wider public attention of Toronto during the aggressive police raids of 1981.⁵ Moral indecency and sexual deviancy charges against patrons of bathhouses spurred the mobilization of Toronto’s Gay community, and an organized movement was born (our Stonewall moment). However, raids on Toronto bathhouses continued well into the ‘90s; so ACAS was working within a relatively underground setting, in the beginning.

It is difficult to explain why the bathhouse became a site of outreach for Gay Asian men or Asian MSM without understanding the experience of diaspora. The details of lived experiences (both immigration and sexual journeys) are documented in a groundbreaking collection of thirteen oral histories of Toronto's Gay Asian community.⁶ *Celebrasian* represented the recovery of Asian Gay men from invisibility on the Toronto Gay scene. Peopled with individual life stories that doubled as shared experiences (e.g., expectations of professional success in Canada from family members, isolation due to separation from family as well as the twin impact of homophobia and racism), these stories were also an important recovery of the self, in relation to others.

Several of the individuals interviewed in the collection mention the bathhouse as a site of sexual discovery. In this context, it is important to remember that the '90s was still a challenging time, since there were few places for men to meet men — a bar, a public park or a bathhouse. Although immigrants comprised over 40% of Toronto's population at the time, the Gay experience was (is) portrayed as dominantly white. So for new immigrants who may or may not identify as Gay, a bathhouse offered a relatively private space. The softly lit showers and roomettes of a bathhouse are a space unlike any other. And community health outreach practices in this space must acknowledge the reality of private questionings, sexual tensions and desires of patrons (the personal) while simultaneously engaging in conversations about sexual health and well-being (i.e., public health). A personal account of the first time in a bathhouse provides a vivid description of the dynamics:

... It's intimidating. Like I was excited, but also very nervous. I didn't know whether other patrons would be interested in me, maybe I'm too Asian or something like that. I went the first couple of times there by myself. I was maybe 20 or 21. At that time, I wasn't very secure in myself. There was a lot of low self-esteem there, for myself. It was a way to kind of build-up that esteem. Maybe some guy would be interested in me? At the same time, it's such a weird conflict,

because you still feel self-conscious when someone doesn't want to hook up with you. ...There would be nights where I would be walking around the halls for hours, like waiting, hoping someone would try to pick me up, eventually I felt like my standards would lower, and I would just hook up with anyone.⁷

A bathhouse in Toronto can be a place of pure sexual liberation or sexual nightmare when facing rejection due to your skin colour or body type.⁸ Many of the issues that stem from racism can be seen in the bathhouse by Asian men. Rejection ranges from verbal to non-verbal gestures coming from the mainstream (white) community when cruising in the bathhouse. Hence, some Asian men — even more so for newcomers — who have been rejected many times would have no negotiation power when it came to safe sex in this setting. In the next section, we discuss the values behind our peer outreach program prompted by this complex environment.

OUR VALUES

Community-Specific Outreach within a Bathhouse

Bathhouse users comprise a unique community, one that is different from those in the 'Gay village.' As Ryan Tran (our Men's Program Coordinator) explains, individuals who go to bathhouses tend not to be a part of the party or clubbing scene, or for that matter any other Gay scene -- except the bathhouse. Perhaps they live in the suburbs. They might be more isolated. Some might not be "out of the closet," and have female partners or family obligations. Or perhaps they feel unable to come out to their friends or parents. A bathhouse offers a private space, but also a rare social connection with others like themselves. Yet their visit might be anonymous and sometimes associated with guilt or shame. For this reason, ACAS places a priority on confidentiality. Most of the men who attend our 'Asian Bathhouse night' are older (approx.

35-50yrs, although some younger men do attend). Many are immigrants, or men visiting Toronto on business trips, or those who are simply curious. As Brian says, "a bathhouse is kinda like a bucket list thing for being Gay, you have to go once just to experience it."

Although the Gay Asian bathhouse user population is not homogenous, there can be a labeling of those who use the bathhouse as 'slutty,' casting blame for the spread of HIV/AIDS or STIs:

People say, can't you get an STI just from sitting on the seats? People associate it with back alley way kind of situations. The bathhouse is lower level than Craigslist. If you're willing to put yourself in a bathhouse, then it's like oh, you really don't care about yourself.

Despite this stigma among the wider community, the bathhouse can be a crucial place to be oneself (or to reconcile the pain of not being fully oneself). It is a private place where some Asian men feel safe and interact with familiar faces. It's a culture of its own. While it is a place for sex, it is also a space of freedom:

Ever since I found a bath-house, I went every day. Any excuse you find. It was very exciting for me. I haven't seen men with men before. When you go to the steam room, you actually see people doing it, so it was exciting. You could join in too, it was neat. But most of the time I did not feel comfortable about joining in because I knew, in the back of my mind, about AIDS. ...But I enjoyed the environment in the bath-house and bars, because that's where I can be Gay. I can say this, I can say that.⁹

While freeing, the bathhouse is not necessarily inclusive. It is, like the rest of Canadian society, a normatively white space ("I was an Asian immigrant living

in a white western culture, where blondness and blue eyes were features to have. I had neither").¹⁰ Hierarchies of desirability place white Gay men at the apex, and power dynamics flowed through preconceived racial and sexual stereotypes. These stereotypes served in subtle and not so subtle ways to disadvantage Gay Asian men, or to limit interactions within predefined roles (sex is often a dance with power). For example, Asian men (in the Canadian diaspora, but also the Caribbean) have been stereotyped as weak, under-sexed or sexless (i.e., undesirable), and to a large extent invisible within the Gay community.¹¹ So how do Gay Asian men see themselves as liberated but also disempowered within this space of the bathhouse? How do they negotiate inter-racial sexual relationships in this setting? These questions were important considerations in designing our peer outreach strategies.

Mindful of the marginalization of Asian sexualities as well as alienation within white Gay networks, ACAS prioritized visual strategies as part of our outreach program. Relying on trans-national networks (with images coming from Asia to Canada), and building on the strength of volunteers with creative skills, ACAS designed posters portraying Asian Gay men's sexual intimacies (akin to 'Black is beautiful' campaigns). These posters were displayed inside the bathhouse, even though at first they were repeatedly torn down (reflecting an initial resistance to see difference within Gay identity).¹² However, ACAS staff persisted, feeling it was important to send a message that "Asian men were not eunuchs." Reclaiming sexiness, Asian men had a legitimate right to the space. In other words, visual images serve to tell us our place of belonging in the world.¹³ The posters became part of an activist intervention to promote positive images of Gay Asian sexuality—and humanity—among bathhouse patrons.

Visual messages embracing Asian masculinities and sexualities remain an important strategy to this day. We continue to use posters, changing them every month. However, we've modified our approach. As Richard Utama, our Men's Sexual Health Coordinator notes, "representation can be a double-edged sword." The original posters reflected Asian models with chiselled bodies, or the

standard norms of desirability with a different face. It was a needed intervention at the time into Toronto's bathhouses due to the dearth of Asian men represented as sexy. But with feedback from participants of the Asian Bathhouse Night, we're now using images of our "sexpert" volunteers (peer educators). They represent real people, with real bodies; our interventions are constantly evolving, responsive to community needs.

You might question whether posters are necessary with new technologies and hook-up apps like *Grindr* or *Jack'd*, one would think there are more opportunities to see and be seen. However, Grindr users not infrequently specify undesirable traits, such as: "No Asians/No Fats/No Femmes."¹⁴ As Ryan tells us, "From what we see on *Grindr* and *Jack'd*, there's a lot of stereotypes about being Asian: you're too small, too skinny. You don't see a lot of stronger images for Asian men, or attractive Asian men. We're always the smart geek." In the bathhouse, as well as online, rejection and discrimination intertwine.

Therefore, there's an ongoing need to counter stereotypes that devalues one's racial/sexual being, even more so in a bathhouse — an inherently sexual environment where one's self-esteem is directly on the line (Is he going to look you up and down, only to turn away?). With that in mind, ACAS has collaborated with Spa Excess, a Toronto Bathhouse, to host monthly Asian Bathhouse nights since 2006. And as one patron says: "We have made the space our own."

At Work and Play

"We try to make Asian bathhouse night as open and non-judgmental as possible. As friendly as possible. ...A typical bathhouse night is more intimidating, you're usually by yourself, the lighting is dim. With Asian Bathhouse night, we have volunteers to

greet you. They will talk to you. It's creates a comfortable, social environment."¹⁵

The bathhouse can be a liberatory space breaking down the walls between the public and the private. However, this also presents challenges for a peer model of outreach because the bathhouse is a transgressive space, a place where certain lines have already been crossed. Taking this into account, ACAS strived to develop a peer outreach model (i.e., recruiting staff and volunteers who use bathhouses) that merge both personal needs with public health imperatives.

For one, this means recognizing sexual confidence as central to one's health and well-being. By tailoring our outreach activities to the community (e.g., sharing erotic tongue-in-cheek tips such as how to give the best blow job, playing suggestive games with fruit, or providing water massages), ACAS consciously incorporates fun activities (conducted in English with the help of volunteer interpreters) that include a sexual playfulness. For example, on Asian Bathhouse night we might offer sea salt scrubs to participants. "It's an opportunity for guys to touch each other (non-genital contact), to practice enjoying their bodies and to express their admiration of other body types. It exfoliates skin, and promotes a healthy body image. And it helps make people comfortable with different body types — older, younger, bigger, smaller." Games also help counter the awkwardness of public health strategies, like handing out condoms and lube — they break the ice. Another game, "Fist for an egg" involved "a box with a picture of a guy bending over, there's a hole where his butt is, so you have to stick your hand into the hole and grab an egg, and inside the egg was a condom or a candy, and a question on HIV."¹⁶ The game gets lots of giggles, but it also helps us to assess the knowledge of patrons around STIs (some individuals for example, think you can get HIV by kissing). It allows us a point of entry to address misinformation and design workshops outside of the bathhouse to elaborate on sexual health.

All in all, these activities serve a dual purpose. For one, they help to counter stereotypes of Asian men in mainstream society as boring, one-dimensional model minorities. Secondly, they encourage communication. In the bathhouse, much communication between sexual partners occurs through non-verbal cues. In such an environment, assumptions can go unspoken. But to negotiate safe sex, it's important to be able to speak up and to be heard. Flirty, enthusiastic, playful communication (e.g., What kind of condom do you like? What flavour? Ribbed or unribbed for your pleasure?) can be an opening to build sexual acceptance and assertiveness through an affirming approach — because if you don't feel desirable and confident, you just might feel increased pressure to have sex without a condom.¹⁷

Relying on a peer model also means that a bathhouse is a place of both work and play for staff and volunteers. In the beginning, staff would wear a towel and T-shirt with a badge identifying themselves as outreach workers to make a clear distinction between themselves and patrons. However, in recognition that the T-shirt created a sense of difference and separation, staff now dress the same as anyone else in the bathhouse, wearing a towel (though with underwear underneath); an ACAS badge is pinned to the towel. “We're trying to incorporate ourselves, and blend in, so that we seem more approachable. We try to follow the rules of the bathhouse. And be comfortable with how we look.”¹⁸ It took a few dialogues to make the parties involved including Toronto Public Health (who recognize ‘bathhouses present public health challenges’) to agree on our ‘blending in’ strategy.

Daniel Le, the former Men's Sexual Health Promoter, who initiated this special ‘dress code’ adds, “Peer led programs only work if we and volunteers conform to the target population environment. At the Asian Bathhouse Event, the volunteers and staff should not stand out from the people and environment we work in.”

The philosophy underlying this is similar to the reasoning behind the posters — both are an embrace of the Gay Asian man's body in sexual settings. A peer outreach model recognizes and reveals a certain vulnerability (e.g., wearing only a towel even if one doesn't have 6-pack abs) as a necessary component of breaking down hierarchies — a way of relating through the body.¹⁹ The outreach worker then is not only concerned with public health, but is also a member of the community. However for this to work, staff and volunteers must be clear on ethics, codes of conduct (e.g., no sexual contact during work hours), and the organization should have a sexual harassment policy that covers staff as well as volunteers as part of a wider understanding of safe spaces.

Volunteers

We encourage our volunteers to be comfortable in the bathhouse setting, as it might not be for everybody. One volunteer, for example, tried it out, but felt that the constant eyes on him were “too judge-y.” He decided it was not the right environment for him. In addition to the gaze, which can serve to police the bathhouse space for bodies of certain sizes, shapes and colour, there is also the issue of body contact. A patron might walk by and lightly brush up against your arm. Volunteering in a bathhouse also depends on one's comfort level with touch. Another volunteer who started off with some anxiety due to body image, actually began to embrace it, claiming himself a Panda (an Asian version of a Bear). So for some volunteers it might be an empowering space of self-acceptance, even inner peace. We also try to ensure our target population, including volunteers, has better negotiation skills by attending our workshop and eventually co-facilitating workshops. By taking ownership of the event, they run and control their environment.

Empowerment

Race and racism are issues that cannot be ignored in the daily lives of our participants. It is ever present, and can fray one's nerves. In a bathhouse setting, however, participants are coming primarily for pleasure (rather than to attend an anti-oppression workshop). As an organization, we have learned that there is a time and place for consciousness-raising around anti-oppression. "Angry Asian" outrage (which we embrace) is an important and necessary catalyst for change, but as Daniel notes, one of the ironies of anti-oppression is that it can be oppressive. Many immigrants and newcomers to Toronto come here with dreams. These dreams of the future might be their only source of protection against the unexpected humiliations and setbacks of being a queer, racialized newcomer. Thus rather than focusing on discussing and analyzing oppression, Daniel focused firstly on "carving out a space for myself and others like me." In the bathhouse, we focus on nurturing what's positive, being comfortable with one's self and one's community. In other words, we support each other in the journey of coming into ourselves, to give each other strength. And on a practical note, starting with heavy issues and problems could be considered 'being too serious' for some and might become a deterrent for them to join the bathhouse night. Moreover, there are other avenues to have those discussions.²⁰

Finding Community within Anonymity

It might seem paradoxical to build community out of a space valued for anonymity. After all, if you go to a bathhouse, you're going for sex. Socializing is secondary. However:

We want to show support for everyone. We want to show support for people who want to stay anonymous. Like making sure, even though you don't want to be seen in the Gay community or be exposed, there is still a space where you can have a small social

interaction: to have that kind of connection with at least somebody in the community. Because it's anonymous, people think it more dirty than it would be through messaging. Through messaging, you might talk to a person for a while and know them. But in a bathhouse, you might just hold them in, have sex with them, and leave. That's one of the stigmas, that it's anonymous, not social. That it's just dirty, raunchy hook ups. But it's not really. Sometimes it's really rewarding, you meet someone new and really nice if you're willing to be social. But most people go for anonymous hook ups, so there's a back and forth with it.²¹

In addition, within our Asian communities, especially among family, many don't know anything about LGBT issues, "like they only think it's their child who happens to be Gay, so we're trying to raise visibility."²² "There's still a lot of stigma in the Asian community, it's still taboo. We're trying to shed light on the fact that there are other Gay Asians, queer Asians".²³ Being a bathhouse patron does not necessarily mean one eschews a sense of communal identity; there is potential for community belonging, even in the most anonymous or fleeting of connections.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND PEER OUTREACH:

Grounding our Values

The values that underpin our outreach program are grounded in sex-positive attitudes and promotion of positive body image, as well as a collaborative and mutually supportive approach. These values matter because collectively they form part of the everyday process of resistance that empowers sexual health among racialized, stigmatized, and minoritized communities. They also matter because they drive our outcome measurement results — According to the Sexperts survey, our bathhouse volunteers reported safer sex behaviour

with both regular and casual partners, having shared knowledge about safer sex behaviour almost every time they had sex in the past six months at survey period, and having their stronger sense of belonging to the workplace, church, school, their community, the bathhouse itself, and Gay groups.²⁴ Further, on average, four to eight Asian Men get tested for HIV during the Asian Bathhouse Event. Volunteers and their peers verbally stated that the testing is accessible and would consider to get tested during the Asian Bathhouse Event.²⁵

Our outreach program works on a personal as well socio-cultural level to inform our imagining of ourselves, as well as claiming spaces of belonging, while taking control of our sexual health. Although we are committed to social transformation, we emphasize that revolutionary change rarely happens overnight. Change requires an investment over a long period of time, and occurs in barely perceptible ways that gradually accumulate over time. This work flows through our inner selves — through the courage of sharing our stories, revealing our flesh, and opening our communities. We believe in the importance of going inwards (hence this paper), to give voice and make visible the things that are sometimes seen as private, as integral to a strategy of combatting homophobia and racism. From the book *Celebrasian* to the Bathhouse Outreach Program we work to know ourselves in our own skin, and through our relations with others. We stress our interdependence.

The examples discussed are nuanced forms of community empowerment responding to the specifics of community, not a model which seeks to replicate technocratic or prescriptive pathways to “participation,” “training” and “leadership.”²⁶ Peter, who started the ‘Sexpert’ peer educators program by recruiting those who are bathhouse patrons, placed the importance of peers as sexual health educators and experts. However, this is not a model of leadership training that incorporates “transformation.” Richard is suspicious of this term, with its coded colonialist connotations (akin to bringing progress or civilization). As Richard says, “We are not to be converted, nor are we butterflies. We already came here with skills, we need to build upon what we already possess. It’s about

using what's available to you." Rather than transforming diasporic community members into "enlightened" leaders who ultimately serve to reinforce power structures through the concession of token leadership roles, Daniel worked from the basis that what we have in common can be a diffuse catalyst for wider social change (e.g., breaking down boundaries for queer racialized groups) in ways that are measured, as well beyond measure. Ryan and Brian, as a younger generation taking the program forward, continue our emphasis of working with all available resources (including personal networks) to build community ("many volunteers didn't have other Gay Asian friends, we've now become tight-knit, because now it's also their social circle"). Over twenty-five years of bathhouse outreach, we realize we cannot work with distance from the community, because we belong to the community too.

This brief discussion suggests that the response to the question of how one locates oneself as both a sexualized and racialized person in the diaspora does not necessarily have to be through gradual acclimatization to a mainstream queer identity. Taking into account the social positioning of diasporic racial and sexual 'minorities' cannot be dismissed as identity politics, rather this work acknowledges that race and sexuality are corporeal and visceral lived experiences that come to be embodied in particular spaces (like the bathhouse). Some of the diversity of community experiences which sustain Toronto (such as the Asian bathhouse night) occurs deliberately outside of mainstream norms. This deserves to be valued, at the very least, because it gives us a delicious friction between bodies, and against bodies, that are alive to the process of our collective liberation.

¹ As Janice Stein pointed out over a decade ago, a 'cult of efficiency' (measuring effectiveness quantitatively through numbers served, incidence reduced etc.) cannot address the full scope of accountability, and can even detract from accountability by channeling energies towards checking boxes rather than thinking about human relations. See Stein, J. *The Cult of Efficiency* (Toronto: Anansi, 2001). Many argue that placing numbers before people is part of a wider project management strategy borne out of neoliberalism.

² Li, A.. 'A Journey of Love and Pride,' in *ACAS 15th Anniversary* (Toronto: ACAS, 2009).

³ While recent films, such as *How to Survive a Plague* (2013) and *We Were Here* (2011) have highlighted the AIDS crisis and activist/community responses in New York and San Francisco respectively, they have neglected the experiences of immigrants in the context of difference and social hierarchies within Gay communities, even though both cities have large immigrant populations (New York is often called a Caribbean city, given the size of the diaspora residing there). In Toronto, the AIDS crisis became the genesis of LGBTQ NGO's for people of colour.

⁴ Brian Sebastian and Daniel Le. *Bathroom Night Event Resource Manual* (Toronto: ACAS, 2009).

⁵ Police raided 4 bathhouses in Toronto in 1981, resulting in the largest mass arrest in Canada since the Front de Libération du Québec kidnapped two government officials, killing one, causing Prime Minister Trudeau to implement the War Measures Act. In response, the Gay community mobilized and Toronto's first Pride Parade was held the year after. The mass arrest numbers were not surpassed until the G20 Summit in Toronto in 2010.

⁶ *Celebrasian: Shared Lives. A Oral History of Gay Asians.* (Toronto: Gay Asian Toronto, 1996).

⁷ Tran, R. Pers. Comm. June 25, 2014.

⁸ For further discussion on how body image ideals impact racialized Gay and Bisexual men's well-being, see David Brennan, Rusty Sonleymanor, Kenta Asakura, et.al. *Colour Matters: Body Image, Racism and Well-being among Gay and bisexual Men of Colour in Toronto.* (Toronto: Imagine Men's Health Study, 2013)

⁹ Ho, P. *Celebrasian: Shared Lives. A Oral History of Gay Asians.* (Toronto: Gay Asian Toronto, 1996).

¹⁰ Goh, A. *Celebrasian: Shared Lives. A Oral History of Gay Asians.* (Toronto: Gay Asian Toronto, 1996).

¹¹ For a personal account of negotiating the perceived effeminacy of Gay Asian men in Toronto (or a 'Rice Queen' dynamic), see Alexis Carrington's story in *Celebrasian* (pp.5-6).

¹² For a discussion on the impact of the visual void of Asian Lesbian and Gay sexual representation, see (Chinese- Trinidadian-Canadian scholar/film-maker): Fung, Richard. "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn." In *Bad Object-choices* (Eds). *How Do I Look? Queer Film & Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991, pp. 145-168).

¹³ To quote the insights of Questlove from the band, The Roots (though he is speaking in the context of hip hop):

Resistance here doesn't mean revolution. ... Resistance means using art for the things that it does best, which is to create human portraits and communicate ideas and forge a climate where people of different races or classes are known to you because they make themselves known. ... It opens the circuit of empathy. <http://www.vulture.com/2014/05/questlove-part-6-does-black-culture-need-to-care-about-hip-hop.html>

¹⁴ See Artrip, Nick. "College Feminisms: No Fat, No Femme: The Politics of Grindr <http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/no-fat-no-femme-the-politics-of-grindr/> <November 8, 2013>

¹⁵ Tran, R. Pers. Comm. June 25, 2014

¹⁶ Ly, .B. Pers Comm. June 25, 2014

¹⁷ For data on condom usage see: Poon, M. K., Wong, J. P., Sutdhibhasilp, N., Ho, P. T., & Wong, B. (2011). Condom use among East and Southeast Asian men attending a Gay bathhouse in Toronto. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 20(3), 67-74.

[T]hese men chose not one but, rather, a combination of reasons for engaging in unprotected anal sex. It is thus important to develop holistic and culturally relevant strategies that address other risk-related issues such as substance use and social isolation ... Our findings nevertheless showed that many of the participants had multiple sexual partners and had engaged in unprotected anal sex with at least one casual partner in the past six months.

¹⁸ Le, D. Pers. Comm, 2014.

¹⁹ "Most Gay men in the U.S. are so concerned with physical shape. I feel the Caucasian male is naturally in better shape. Usually the Asians have smaller bone structure. So the Asian Gay male can easily be intimidated...."; a telling interview on the importance of body image in *Men of Color: A Context for Service to Homosexually Active Men* (New York: Routledge, 2012, p.129).

²⁰ "If we want to do a workshop like that, we kind of have to mask it, like Daniel's workshop "Taste the Rainbow" – it's cute. This workshop was focused on expanding your [inter-racial dating] preferences." (Ly, B. Pers. Comm., 2014)

²¹ Ly, B. Pers. Comm, June 25, 2014.

²² Tran, R. Pers. Comm, June 25, 2014.

²³ Tran, R. Pers. Comm. June 25, 2014.

²⁴ Ho, P., Sutdhibhasilp, N., Poon, M., Brown, G. et. al. *Characteristics of Asian Bathhouse Users and Distinguishing Characteristics of those Willing to Become Sexperts*. (ACAS: Toronto, 2006).

²⁵ *Asian MSM Project Report* (ACAS, June 2013), submitted to funder (AIDS Prevention Community Investment Program).

²⁶ See for example: Chun, Lipsitz & Shin "AIWA Takes Stock of Itself: Immigrant Workers at the Center of Social Change" *Kalfou* . (2010, pp. 127-32).



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>