

# The 29th Annual Canadian Conference on HIV/AIDS Research Le 29e Congrès annuel canadien de recherche sur le VIH/sida

Session: **KP4**: Saturday May 2 – 11:00:12:30 – Sexual and Gender Minorities

Track: Social Sciences  
Subject: Gay, Bisexual and other Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)  
Presentation Type: Oral  
Title of Abstract: **How Does HIV Optimism Feature Within the Perspectives and Experiences of Young Sexual and Gender Minority Men? A Discourse Analysis**

Authors and Affiliations: Pierre-Julien Coulaud<sup>1, 2</sup>, Natasha Parent<sup>1</sup>, Rodney Stehr<sup>1</sup>, Caroline Mniszak<sup>1, 2</sup>, Rod Knight<sup>1, 2</sup>  
1. British Columbia Centre on Substance Use, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 2. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

## **Abstract**

### **Background**

Epidemiological research indicates that confidence in the availability and effectiveness of HIV treatment (referred to as HIV optimism) is associated with high-risk sexual behaviour among HIV-negative young sexual and gender minority men (SGM). To date, there is a dearth of critical social analyses interrogating how HIV optimism features within the perspectives, experiences, and HIV-related risk behaviour of young SGM.

### **Methods**

Drawing on interviews with 50 young SGM (15-30-years-old) in Vancouver, we employed a discourse analysis to explore how SGM's sexual risk behaviour is constituted by HIV optimism.

### **Results**

Our analysis revealed three discourses. First, a discourse of realism featuring positive attitudes about the state of the HIV intervention landscape. This discourse featured their knowledge about U=U and personal use of PrEP, including an emphasis on how PrEP has served to reduce their HIV-related anxiety. Second, a discourse of fear regarding the social repercussions of becoming HIV positive featured in descriptions of HIV-related concerns about the perceived stigma that they would experience in the event of seroconversion. This discourse was underpinned by the perceived negative stigma-related impacts of HIV. Third, a discourse of (re)individualization focused on the need for SGM to manage their own HIV prevention strategies, including an emphasis on the need to be “well educated” about HIV. This discourse featured a heavy burden and sense of individual-level responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

Our findings reveal how HIV optimism does not account for a variety of factors that influence how HIV risk is understood by today's young SGM, including the extent to which their concerns about HIV focus on the social implications of seroconversion, rather than the health-related concerns. Future work in this area should more fulsomely address how features of the evolving intervention landscape (e.g., availability of PrEP) may interact with socially-relevant understandings of HIV (e.g., stigma) to influence risk behaviour.