

Cruising and e-dates: a new context for sexual encounters among young men who have sex with men

Cruising y e-citas: un nuevo contexto para los encuentros sexuales entre hombres jóvenes que tienen sexo con hombres

Cruising e e-compromissos: um novo contexto de encontros sexuais entre os jovens homens que fazem sexo com homens

Arantxa Grau-Muñoz ¹
 Eduardo Pla-Ernst ²
 Josefina Belda-Ibáñez ³
 Amparo Juan-Corróns ⁴
 Elisa Fernández-García ³
 Elena Doménech-Alonso ⁴
 Enrique Galán-Rubio ³
 Fernando Lloria-Paes ⁴
 Trinidad Zafra-Espinosa ³
 Teresa Tasa-Zapater ⁴
 Concepción Santos-Rubio ⁴
 Ignacio Alastrue-Lozcos ⁴

Abstract

This article addresses the rapidly growing use of information and communication technologies in mediating new settings for sexual relations. The specific focus is on cruising among young men who have sex with men via e-dating. The study used a qualitative methodology with peer group discussions on sexuality, health, and risk. The new framework provided by technology is marked by (a) increased access to these practices, (b) greater dissemination of them, (c) greater immediacy of encounters, (d) anticipation of what will be offered during dates, (e) anonymous access, allowing bolder proposals, and (f) openness to a wider range of users. These elements converge in a framework that indicates a new social organization of sexual practice.

Sexual Behavior; Sexuality; Information Technology

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es el de explorar el papel que juega, en la actualidad, la irrupción de la mediación tecnológica de la información y la comunicación en la configuración de nuevos contextos para la relación sexual. En concreto, hemos explorado una práctica determinada, el cruising, entre hombres jóvenes que tienen sexo con hombres contactado a través de las e-citas. Se ha apostado por la metodología cualitativa con la intención de recopilar los discursos sobre sexualidad, riesgos y salud que se generan y construyen entre el grupo de iguales. Según extraemos de nuestro estudio, el nuevo marco que confiere esta tecnología estaría caracterizado por (a) una mayor accesibilidad a dichas prácticas, (b) una mayor difusión de estas, (c) una mayor inmediatez de acceso a las propuestas, (d) la anticipación de lo que será ofrecido en la cita, (e) acceso anónimo que permite propuestas más atrevidas y (f) una apertura mayor a la diversidad de usuarios. Todos estos elementos confluyen en un cuadro que nos lleva a considerar una organización social renovada de la práctica sexual.

Conducta Sexual; Sexualidad; Tecnología de la Información

¹ Universitat de València, Valencia, España.

² Conselleria de Sanitat Universal i Salut Pública, Valencia, España.

³ CIPS Alicante, Conselleria de Sanitat Universal i Salut Pública, Alicante, España.

⁴ CIPS Valencia, Conselleria de Sanitat Universal i Salut Pública, Valencia, España.

Correspondence

A. Grau-Muñoz
 Departament de Sociologia i Antropologia Social, Universitat de València, Avda. dels Tarongers 4b, València / València – 46021, España.
 arantxa.grau@uv.es

Background and objectives

In 2013 the Spanish government's General Directorate for Public Health, Quality, and Innovation reported the following transmission routes in new diagnoses of HIV: men who have sex with men – MSM (51.2%), heterosexual transmission (28.5%), and injectable drug use (IDU) (4.4%). According to the Directorate's report, the incidence trends for new diagnoses differed from 2008 to 2013: IDU showed a downward trend, heterosexual transmission decreased in women and remained stable in men, and MSM showed an upward trend. When cross-analyzing these data with age, the report concluded that the priority target group consisted of men less than 25 years of age. Finally, focusing on the origin of persons diagnosed with HIV, the report stated that 32.5% came from outside of Spain, among whom the largest proportion were from Latin America (16%)¹.

Concerning the reasons for relaxation in safe sex practices among MSM, studies thus far point to the use of alcohol and drugs before and during sexual relations, the optimism fueled by new antiretroviral therapies, and the growing use of Internet to meet sex partners². Of these three factors, we highlight the latter, namely that the increasing popularity of Internet cruising for casual sex has raised the hypothesis that associates this medium with so-called high-risk behaviors³. MSM who cruise for partners on the Internet report having more encounters without condoms when compared to other MSM⁴. In Spain, young MSM are more likely to practice unsafe sex (73% ≤ 25 years of age versus 57% > 25 years)⁵.

Before further addressing our main focus, one question merits particular attention. Although this article does not specifically intend to review the MSM concept, it is appropriate to reflect critically on its use as an analytical category. Ever since the alarms were sounded with the first cases of HIV/AIDS, the medical-epidemiological model has identified population groups that are more (versus less) exposed to acquiring the virus⁶. This approach has assigned a central position to presumed "identities of subjects", considered essential variables in preventive programs. This process is exemplified by the term "men who have sex with men", a category constructed by epidemiological surveillance that focuses attention on the transmission route or mechanism, meanwhile promoting it to an identity category⁶. The acronym MSM can cause confusion if we accept it as an ontological social category, overlooking its epidemiological genesis in the process. Despite its limitations, the acronym's use in this study helps us de-stigmatize the practices

that interest us here (cruising) as exclusive to the gay community, thus responding to studies that point to eroticization via the Internet by men self-identified as bisexual or heterosexual⁷.

Like other authors, our article will delve into the interaction between young men, sexuality, and Internet⁸, but introducing certain nuances while pursuing this analytical perspective. In our view, the contacts' technological mediation transforms the resulting interactions, but we intend to avoid a deterministic view of the Internet as a black box that incites risky sexual practices⁹. We assume a sociological analysis that deals with social risk factors, namely, the social interaction that organizes risk itself and its symbolic construction¹⁰. From a socio-constructivist reading of pleasure and health risk¹¹, young men who use the Internet to contact other men are participating in a social organization of genuine sexuality¹². Our article will analyze a practice that embodies this social dimension, namely cruising, from the perspective of the so-called Network Society¹³.

Ever since 1970, with Humphrey's study on tearooms (public places identified as scenes for encounters between men), numerous studies have focused on the non-private spaces in which MSM contact other MSM for casual and usually anonymous sex¹⁴. This practice is now identified by the English term "cruising". The studies have traditionally focused on identifying locations, processes of recognition and interaction in the scenes, etc.¹⁵. In recent years, with the growth and diffusion of the information and communication society, attention has focused on encounters mediated by the Internet. From this line of analysis, studies have delved into the eroticization of Internet cruising, more common among young men from large cities⁷.

Young MSM are the group that most uses the Internet to mediate their contacts with other MSM¹⁶. Our research has examined the use of online technology as a facilitator of cruising contacts rather than an experience to replace face-to-face encounters. It's about young men that use websites, online sites, and smartphone apps as communication channels, as tools for what we will refer to as e-dates, or contacts using some type of online resource.

In this sense, the main objective of this research has been to analyze the uses by MSM of online platforms to contact other MSM, with the aim of establishing a profile of the new context of sexual encounters resulting from such use. The ultimate objective is to explain the new social organization of sexual relations among MSM. We emphasize that understanding the contexts in which sexual contacts among MSM currently

take place is essential for developing health promotion interventions that have an impact on these groups.

Methodology

Epidemiological data on HIV highlight young MSM as the group with the largest increase in cases¹. These results committed the funding agency to support a study to qualitatively explore the reasons for this trend. The current article covers only one of the lines of analysis extracted from the results obtained by the study. Importantly, the study was conceived with the explicit purpose of compiling information in the three provinces of Spain that form the Comunitat Valenciana (Castellón, Alicante, and Valencia), involving the Centers for AIDS Information and Prevention (CIPS in the Spanish acronym) from these provinces. Participation in the study finally included the CIPS from Alicante and Valencia. Thus, Valencia and Alicante became the reference areas for the fieldwork.

An explanation of the origin of the analytical approach adopted in this article will help shed light on the methodological design.

The research exemplifies an “emergent design”, in which decisions are made over the course of the study that can modify the original design¹⁷. In our case, qualitative analysis of the information compiled during discussion groups pointed forcefully and symbolically to a line of discourse that had not been predicted: the reorganization of sexual relations under the impact of e-dating as a social practice.

The methodological decision to examine this line of discourse in greater depth led the research team to introduce a second phase of fieldwork, not originally planned, namely document analysis of online chat sites for cruising contacts. The objective in the second phase was to address the reality of e-dates within the context in which they take place⁹, thereby complementing the primary discursive information generated in the group dynamics. Importantly, while the discussion groups involved direct presence, thus sparking interaction between participants and the moderator, the approach to the material from the cruising site did not offer any opportunity for conversation between the participants and researchers. The resulting material was treated as a secondary source and submitted to document analysis. In other words, “off-line” group dynamics were used to obtain primary discourses on practices generated by “online” environments. In parallel, we applied non-participant observation and analysis to the group chats generated in an

“online” platform. As we present our results, we will link the information obtained from the two sources. We contend that they are not mutually exclusive; rather, this joint exploration provides a deeper understanding of this social reality.

As suggested by Callejo¹⁸, discussion groups in health studies help identify the particular references of existing social groups: in our case, the positions of MSM concerning health, sexual relations, and technological mediation. Document analysis yields relevant information for our study from primary or secondary documents¹⁹ which frequently operate as containers in which we identify societal traces²⁰. In treating the material collected from the website, we worked with reasonably complex records: the records had been produced privately, but were exposed semi-publicly (a public space limited to site members).

Fieldwork and study instrument

The study population consisted of men who have sex with men, as reported by them to the professionals in the CIPS. The uptake of participants into the discussion groups was done through the Valencia and Alicante CIPS, as well as through the research team’s proximity networks. The health professionals at the CIPS took advantage of the face-to-face contacts with the young men that use those public services to invite them to participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate were contacted later by the persons in charge of the qualitative fieldwork in order to request their participation in the discussion groups.

To conduct document analysis of the cruising sites, we explored webpages used to facilitate sexual contacts among men. The RolloXY site (<http://www.rolloxy.com/foro/>) was chosen because it offered cruising contacts in both Valencia and Alicante.

All the discussion groups were moderated by a man. Based on the predominant gender order²¹ that organizes male-female relations in a society like Spain, we anticipated that when talking about their sexuality, men would feel more comfortable talking with another man rather than with a woman. The moderator used a semi-structured thematic script, leading the debate at some moments towards the target themes, but facilitating as much as possible the spaces for discussion and exchange of opinions among the participants.

As anticipated at the beginning of this section, the primary study’s objectives covered more ground than presented here. To respond to the objectives, six discussion groups were designed and carried out, coinciding with the target profiles identified by the epidemiological informa-

tion. The current article presents an analysis of a subsample of the discussion groups, those that convened a young population and in which the line of discourse that emerged is the one that interests us here.

Table 1 lists the profiles of each of the discussion groups analyzed here.

In the context of the primary research, we identified the schooling variable as a possible defining element for differences in practices, but the subsequent analysis did not confirm schooling as a differentiating factor. Meanwhile, the composition of DG4 deserves explanation. Importantly, *Spanish Royal Decree-Law n. 16/2012* of April 20 excluded undocumented persons from coverage by Spain's national health system²². This situation has impacted the CIPS, with a decrease in the number of foreign users of the service. This reality affected the uptake in DG4. The idea for this group interview was to convene a more homogeneous collective in terms of place of origin and cultural capital, but the difficulties with identification and the response to the invitation led us to accept a much more diverse group. We consider the representation of each nationality in this group merely anecdotal, insufficient to establish differences in the participants' cultural experiences.

Qualitative document analysis of the cruising sites took place from October 2013 to January 2014, aimed at identifying and exploring e-dates as a practice and examining in depth the environment in which the online context currently facilitates cruising.

A critical analysis of the discourses was performed²³ with the explicit aim of addressing practices by the study population. Analysis of the qualitative material used the Atlas.ti workbench version 6.2 for qualitative data (Muhr T. Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany), conducting in vivo coding and following package's the underlying theoretical framework²³.

Results

The results suggest that cruising is now practiced mainly through sites and apps specifically designed for this purpose. Online dating platforms distinguish the sexual relations of young MSM from face-to-face flirting and change the interaction between individuals: *"I think it's just another way of relating"* (DG1).

Analysis of the discourses collected during the fieldwork showed that e-dating has become the facilitating platform for sexual encounters characterized by: (a) accessibility; (b) speed;

(c) immediacy; (d) anonymity; (e) anticipation; and (f) openness. The following sections analyze these characteristics.

Before presenting the results, we wish to address a fundamental issue for understanding our analysis. The Methods section explains the reasons that led our research team to design the discussion groups' profiles. Place of residence, schooling, and citizenship status (Spanish national versus immigrant) emerged as defining factors for the discussion group profiles. However, the qualitative analysis showed that none of these constructs explained any differential use of e-dating or a different experience in the organization of the mediated sexuality.

Increased access to cruising practices

Information and communication technologies have become an integrative element of social interrelations, considerably relevant in the young population. The young MSM interviewed in this study had personal Internet access devices. The group has extensive knowledge of (and contact with) e-dating; even individuals that report not cruising admit that they have explored these Internet resources and platforms.

According to the discussion groups, the online environment is facilitating cruising contacts in two distinct ways: (a) acting as a repository for information (mapping of cruising sites, websites with content on this practice, "radar" apps for identifying candidates... and (b) as a channel for mediating actual offers through apps or sites that post the e-dates. The young men's familiarity with these types of contents reveal greater access to cruising practices, facilitated by new technologies handled competently and actively by this population group.

"You know it, we know it ... even if just for the fun of it, we've all done it sometime. Like, you're at a bar with a friend and grab your cell phone and say, 'Let's see who I've got nearby who's up for ...?' [laughing] Yeah, yeah, it's fun. We've all done it, right?" (DG4).

E-dates spread quickly

E-dates allow issuing invitations that spread rapidly among the young men. A young man makes a proposal for a sexual contact that reaches a large audience in seconds. These accelerated times for proposals (and sometimes for responses) are the result of the medium; online communication allows rapid transmission of messages, expressed as a wide range of dating possibilities. Online cruising thus differs as an experience from face-to-face practice.

Table 1

Profiles of the discussion groups.

Discussion group	Profile
DG1	MSM 18-25 years of age; Mean age 20 years; Residents of Alicante Province, urban area; Complete university education; 6 participants
DG2	MSM 20-25 years of age; Mean age 22 years; Residents of Valencia Province, urban area; Complete university education; 7 participants
DG3	MSM 20-25 years of age; Mean age 23 years; Residents of Alicante Province, urban area; No university education; 6 participants
DG4	MSM 18-25 years of age; Mean age 20 years; Residents of Valencia Province; Latin-American immigrants (2 Ecuador, 1 Colombia, 1 Peru, 1 Brazil); Complete university education 1; Currently enrolled in university 2; No university education 2

MSM: men who have sex with men.

Traditional cruising requires a system of codes (gestures, looks, signs...), activated intentionally by individuals and indecipherable to lay persons. The primary aim of this “Morse code” is to propose contacts and respond to cruising requests in public spaces. This modality of face-to-face contact should be understood as a slow process. The maneuver of distinguishing among the candidates that wish to engage in this practice is subject both to coincidence in space and time (one goes to the cruising scene hoping to find someone) and to the actors’ skill in decoding the messages. As shown in our fieldwork, e-dating shortens these processes of making contact; although the cruising codes system is not totally eliminated (there is still the need to recognize each other as subjects of sexual interrelations), it is true that thanks to the mediation of dates, the system acts to confirm a prior agreement (i.e., that has taken place ahead of time in the online environment).

One can conclude that technological mediation provides both the speed in making contact and the encounter itself that takes place between MSM.

The cruising proposal can be immediate in nature

Our analysis of the websites showed that e-dates generally have an immediate sense. One proposes a date at an actual place and at an actual time, and the time between the proposal and the encounter tends to be very short. Immediacy overlaps speed, which we explored in the previous section, thereby shaping a new concept of cruising. It’s about a new cruising format imbued with the same traits we recognize in the daily life of the Second Modernity: a fast life that demands

fast responses: “*Anybody now in the Tarongers Library?*” (RolloXY site, accessed on 05/Dec/2013).

The adverb “now” in this post summarizes this transformation in cruising practice.

The author of this post is a young man studying in a university library, who launches a proposal for a cruising encounter in the very same place where he is at the moment. The way the proposal is addressed shows that the waiting time for possible candidates is superseded, as is chance intervention in materializing the practice, so that this technological mediation offers the satisfaction of sexual desire at any moment.

Although not all e-dates we extracted from the online sites show this characteristic, many of them do, leading us to consider it an interesting change in cruising scenes.

“*What does [the e-date] do? The minute you feel horny, bingo! You take your phone, and ring, ring, ring [imitates a cellphone ringtone] and here I have you, and not here... wherever it is, and wherever I catch you*” (DG3).

Non-immediate encounters are scheduled for tomorrow, Saturday, this evening, etc., expressions that show planning and anticipation in an activity traditionally conceived as chaotic and disordered.

Anticipation as a characteristic of the new online cruising

The previous section ended by mentioning projection in time as a characteristic of new cruising encounters. This next section will show how planning not only concerns this dimension, but impacts the format of the practice itself, modifying it.

The discussion groups defined face-to-face flirting as an interrelation mediated primarily by

nonverbal communication, in which gestures, looks, and winks serve as signs to identify MSM proposing sexual relations with other MSM in public places. The expectations or desires involved in the relationship are implicit, ignored a priori. Surprise plays a determinant role in traditional cruising, since the nature of the sexual encounter is agreed on and negotiated simultaneously with the practice itself.

E-dating reduces the unplanned to a minimum. Online cruising is expressed in written communication, involving an actual proposal for contact. The person that offers an experience does so explicitly, and the one that accepts knows what is offered ahead of time. This occurs in two ways: in the profiles found on the sites, and in the texts themselves. To participate in a cruising site one has to create a user, and if one wishes, a profile. The profile acts as an image of the identity by which the individual wishes to be recognized (active or passive, young or older, stocky or slim build, etc.). However, since the site targets sexual contacts, profiles also allow participants to have a prior idea of the person they will be contacting, plus the possibility of choosing among an entire “supply” of complexions, ages, appearances, tastes, etc. Anticipation is also expressed in the texts of the online proposals: most of the posts on these sites leave nothing to the imagination, but describe the demand explicitly: “*Tomorrow I’m going to be in Heron City, anyone up for good sex with a young passive man?*” (Rollo XY site, accessed on 02/Dec/2013).

As revealed in the fieldwork, occasionally what is offered on the Internet fails to play out in practice. However, there appears to be tacit agreement to avoid betraying the expectations created in the exercise of anticipation taking place on the web. When the opposite happens, the deal is usually broken off: “*Once I met up with a guy who turned out to be an old man, so I said, ‘Look, let’s just be friends.’ So we had coffee ... and we still see each other, yeah? But only as friends*” (DG1).

The online setting offers a space for anonymity

Anonymity is an inherent characteristic of cruising. This trait assumes an even greater dimension with e-dating.

When users of these platforms create a profile, they do not usually use their real names, but pseudonyms, a kind of mask that offers them the opportunity of not being recognized by others. Meanwhile, online proposals are written, not formulated orally. The mediation of writing offers the possibility of breaking barriers that modesty might assume in the manifestation of desire.

The widespread use of pseudonyms facilitates the creation of one’s own brand, not only for greater access to this practice, but also to express proposals for more daring sexual encounters. Based on the group discussions, “barebacking” (group or individual sexual encounters in which it is agreed in advance not to use barrier methods) and trading sex for money are two such practices that are more difficult to suggest during traditional face-to-face encounters: “*It’s not very common to propose an orgy without condoms ... but of course if you get on one of these chats, people are less inhibited and dare to suggest other things...*” (DG2); “*One time on a chat site, an auntie offered me 300 Euros to fuck with him, but it had to be that very night because his wife was out of town. 300 Euros!*” (DG3).

E-dating provides a space for other kinds of cruisers

“Traditional” cruising has been viewed as reserved for encounters between homosexual men. Although some men that consider themselves heterosexual also use these spaces, such contacts are subject to prejudices and stigmas that depict them as clandestine. The socially negative connotation of cruising discourages non-homosexuals from joining: “*Other men may even feel attracted to the scene, but they see it as dirty, disgusting, something only for old queers*” (DG4).

Meanwhile, e-dating appears to break with this stigmatization. Many user profiles we found in the sites allude to men that present themselves as heterosexual or bisexual and who use the anonymity and anticipation offered by the online platforms to join and participate in these activities: “*I don’t know, but lately I’ve only contacted men that post themselves as ‘heterosexual’, and when you actually meet them ... the encounter turns out to be not only for ... that, but they also let themselves be ‘done’, right, they let themselves...*” (DG1).

The effect of these new profiles is obviously to expand the range of individuals attracted to cruising and the variety of user types.

Discussion

The article has discussed the current role of technological mediation of information and communication in shaping new contexts for sexual encounters. We have explored a specific practice, namely online cruising among young men who have sex with men. We have thus responded to an explicit concern in epidemiology, namely the persistence of sexually transmitted infections, in-

cluding HIV, as health problems in young men ⁵.

MSM users of e-dating cannot be considered a homogeneous group, but diverse and plural in terms of sexual identity ⁷. The results caution against the stereotypes that limit cruising to the self-identified homosexual population and suggest a much more unstable view of gender and sexuality ⁹. A more in-depth exploration of this issue was beyond the scope of the current study, but opens a line of research to be developed in the future.

Our research focused on a qualitative methodology with the aim of compiling discourses on sexuality and use of the Internet among MSM peers ²⁴.

The Internet now plays a determinant role in cruising. The new environment produced by information and communication technology is characterized by (a) greater access to such practices, (b) more widespread use of same, (c) more immediate access to proposals, (d) the possibility anticipating what will be offered in the date, (e) anonymous access that allows bolder proposals, and (f) increased openness to a diversity of users. All these elements converge to suggest a renewed social organization of sexual practice. Our results corroborate Davis et al. ⁹ when they suggest that just as public places provide spaces for sex acts in urban settings, e-dating now constitutes the method for distribution of these acts, with information and communication technology bricolage as the route for their diffusion.

Contrary to studies in the United States ²⁵, our research did not show greater use of e-dating by Latin American immigrants. The same is true for the case of the "level of schooling" construct: although the literature has suggested greater use of the Internet to contact casual partners among individuals with more schooling ¹⁶, our qualita-

tive results did not identify relevant differences. When comparing the resident and immigrant populations, neither the discourses from discussion groups nor the online quotes provided any divergent information. This homogeneity can be interpreted as a sample of the cultural mix that occurs through online mediation in youth sub-cultures: technologically mediated experience of reality is a defining characteristic of youth in the world's large cities. However, such conclusions should be viewed with caution, since (as discussed above) our sample of discussion groups was too small to infer definitive positions on this point, thus leading us to propose a more in-depth analysis in future studies.

In keeping with the scientific literature ¹², we do not contend that either cruising or e-dating per se are risky practices; nevertheless, we do feel that some characteristics of the new online cruising context can lead to relaxation of safe sex practices. As concluded by Silva in his study on barebacking ²⁶, in our study the context in which cruising occurs is characterized not by concern over HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, but rather by the desire to accumulate and heighten experiences: "*Barebacking is connected to a contemporary discourse that refers to freedom of (individual) choice, but also to the need to live the present intensely (and completely)*" ²⁶ (p. 1388)

The new context for MSM sexual encounters is a scenario of relations that is particularly immediate and reaches a wider and more diverse group of subjects. Technological mediation of information and communication permeates the new scenario of sexual encounters, with characteristics that should be identified and taken into account when designing proposals for intervention and promotion aimed at reducing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é explorar o papel que a interrupção da mediação tecnológica da informação e da comunicação desempenha na definição de novos contextos para a relação sexual. Em particular, explora-se uma determinada prática, o cruising entre os homens jovens que fazem sexo com homens contatados via e-encontros. Nossa aposta foi pela metodologia qualitativa, com a intenção de recolher os discursos sobre a sexualidade, a saúde e os riscos que são gerados e construídos entre o grupo de pares. De acordo com o nosso estudo, o novo quadro que oferece essa tecnologia seria marcado por: (a) uma maior acessibilidade a essas práticas; (b) uma maior divulgação das mesmas, bem como (c) um maior imediatismo de acesso para as propostas; (d) a antecipação do que vai ser oferecido no encontro; (e) acesso anônimo que permite propostas mais ousadas; e (f) uma maior abertura para a diversidade de usuários. Todos esses elementos convergem em um contexto que leva-nos a considerar uma nova organização social da prática sexual.

Comportamento Sexual; Sexualidade; Tecnologia da Informação

Contributors

A. Grau-Muñoz participated in the study design, fieldwork, data analysis and interpretation, writing of the article, and approval of the final version. E. Pla-Ernst participated in the study design, fieldwork uptake, and critical revision. J. Belda-Ibáñez and A. Juan-Corróns participated in the study design, fieldwork uptake, and critical revision, correction, and approval of the final version. E. Fernández-García, E. Doménech-Alonso, E. Galán-Rubio, F. Lloria-Paes, T. Zafra-Espinosa, T. Tasa-Zapater, C. Santos-Rubio and I. Alastrue-Loscos participated in the fieldwork uptake and critical revision, correction, and approval of the final version.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the Valencia and Alicante AIDS Information and Prevention Centers (CIPS) for their collaboration, and the persons who participated anonymously in the study.

References

1. Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad. Vigilancia epidemiológica del VIH/SIDA en España. Actualización 30 de junio de 2014. Sistema de información sobre nuevos diagnósticos de VIH. Registro nacional de casos de SIDA. http://www.msssi.gob.es/ciudadanos/enfLesiones/enf-Transmisibles/sida/vigilancia/InformeVIHSida_Junio2014.pdf.
2. Folch C, Casabona J, Muñoz F, González V, Zaragoza K. Incremento en la prevalencia del VIH y en las conductas de riesgo asociadas en hombres que tienen sexo con hombres: 12 años de encuestas de vigilancia conductual en Cataluña. *Gac Sanit* 2010; 24:40-6.
3. Dareback K, Månsson SA, Ross MW. Technological advancements and Internet sexuality: does private access to the Internet influence online sexual behavior? *Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw* 2012; 15:386-90.
4. Lewnard JA, Berrang-Ford L. Internet-based partner selection and risk for unprotected anal intercourse in sexual encounters among men who have sex with men: a meta-analysis of observational studies. *Sex Transm Infect* 2014; 90:290-6.
5. Fernandez-Dávila P, Zaragoza K. Hombres jóvenes que tienen sexo con hombres: ¿un colectivo en alto riesgo para la infección por el VIH? *Gac Sanit* 2011; 25:372-8.
6. Barreda V, Carballo-Dieguez A, Marone R, Balán I, Pando MA, Ávila MM. Prevención del VIH/SIDA en los circuitos de levante HSH: una asignatura pendiente. *Sex Salud Soc (Rio J.)* 2010; 6:41-62.
7. Robinson BA, Moskowitz DA. The eroticism of internet cruising as a self-contained behaviour: a multivariate analysis of men seeking men demographics and getting off online. *Cult Health Sex* 2013; 15:555-69.
8. Labay M, Labay A, Labay M. Internet, sexo y adolescentes: una nueva realidad. Encuesta a jóvenes universitarios españoles. *Pediatr Aten Prim* 2011; 13:225-32.
9. Davis M, Hart G, Bolding G, Sherr L, Elford J. E-dating, identity and HIV prevention: theorising sexualities, risk and network society. *Sociol Health Illn* 2006; 28:457-78.
10. Rhodes T. Risk theory in epidemic times: sex. Drugs and the social organisation of "risk behaviour". *Sociol Health Illn* 1997; 19:208-27.
11. Lupton D. *Risk*. London: Routledge; 2005.
12. Moskowitz DA, Seal DW. "GWM Looking for SERIOUS ONLY": the interplay of sexual ad placement frequency and success on the sexual health of "men seeking men" on craigslist. *J Gay Lesbian Soc Serv* 2010; 22:399-412.
13. Castells M. *La era de la información: economía, sociedad y cultura*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial; 2001.
14. Binson D, Woods WJ, Pollack L, Paul J, Stall R, Catania JA. Differential HIV risk in bathhouses and public cruising areas. *Am J Public Health* 2001; 91:1482-6.
15. Tewksbury R. Men's success in online cruising for male sexual partners. *Electronic J Hum Sex* 2010; 13. <http://www.ejhs.org/volume13/Cruising.htm>.

16. Fernández-Dávila P, Zaragoza K, Lupiáñez-Villanueva F. Actitudes hacia los programas de prevención on-line del VIH y las ITS y perfil de los usuarios de Internet en los HSH. *Gac Sanit* 2012; 26:123-30.
17. Strauss A, Corbin JM. *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London: Sage Publications; 1998.
18. Callejo J. Observación, entrevista y entrevista grupal: el silencio de tres prácticas de investigación. *Rev Esp Salud Pública* 2002; 76:409-22.
19. Ruiz Olabuénaga JI. *Metodología de la investigación cualitativa*. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto; 2003.
20. Callejo J, coordinador. *Introducción a las técnicas de investigación social*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Ramón Areces; 2009.
21. Connell R. *Gender: short introduction*. Cambridge: Polity; 2009.
22. Pérez-Molina JA, Pulido F. Evaluación del impacto del nuevo marco legal sanitario sobre los inmigrantes en situación irregular en España: el caso de la infección por el virus de inmunodeficiencia humana. *Enferm Infecc Microbiol Clín* 2012; 30:472-8.
23. Conde F. Análisis sociológico del sistema de discursos. Madrid: CIS; 2010. (Cuadernos Metodológicos, 43).
24. Knight R, Shoveller JA, Oliffe JL, Gilbert M, Frank B, Ogilvie G. Masculinities, "guy talk" and "manning up": a discourse analysis of how young men talk about sexual health. *Sociol Health Illn* 2012; 20: 1-16.
25. Reisen CA, Zea MC, Bianchi FT, Poppen PJ. Characteristics of Latino MSM who have sex in public settings. *AIDS Care* 2011; 23:456-9.
26. Silva LAV. Barebacking e a possibilidade de soroconversão. *Cad Saúde Pública* 2009; 25:1381-9.

Submitted on 02/Jan/2015

Final version presentad on 17/May/2015

Approved on 03/Jun/2015