



# AIDS & ANTHROPOLOGY

## BULLETIN

The Newsletter of the AIDS and Anthropology Research Group

Vol.4 No.1 April-June 1992

AARG PAPER PRIZES BEGUN

### AIDS SESSIONS HELD IN MEMPHIS

AIDS-related sessions continued to play an important role at this year's Society for Applied Anthropology annual meeting once again. The meeting was held in Memphis, Tennessee in March. The American Anthropological Association Task Force on AIDS held a half-day meeting of its members, in which several on-going projects (a teaching manual, a women and AIDS publication, a possible multi-site research project, and a position paper on HIV vaccine trials in developing nations) were discussed. An additional committees meeting was held the following day to plan future activities. Six new members were nominated and elected by the membership for appointment to the Task Force. The meetings were chaired by Merrill Singer (Hispanic Health Council).

The AIDS and Anthropology Research Group (AARG) held an informal roundtable discussion on AIDS, attended by 21 anthropologists, a steering committee meeting, a business meeting, and hosted a cash bar reception. The meetings were chaired by Douglas A. Feldman (University of Miami). Douglas S. Goldsmith (Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc.) chaired an all-day session on "Anthropological Perspectives on AIDS Research and Interventions Among Drug Injectors." William L. Leap (American University) chaired a roundtable forum on "Building a Lesbian/Gay Agenda in Applied Anthropology," in which Carole E. Hill (President of the SfAA) welcomed the participants.

The Ethnographic Film Series included a film on "AIDS in Africa." The Graduate

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The AIDS and Anthropology Research Group (AARG) has inaugurated two new paper prizes for professional anthropologists and for anthropology students writing about AIDS from an anthropological perspective. The purpose of the awards is to encourage HIV-related research and publications by anthropologists. The winners of both annually awarded prizes will receive \$100 each.

Papers should be original, 15-30 double-spaced typed pages, and the sole or first author must be an AARG member and an anthropologist, anthropology graduate student, or undergraduate anthropology major. All papers need to be in press, submitted to press, or unpublished.

Submit four copies to: Merrill Singer, Ph.D., Chair, AARG Paper Prizes Committee, Hispanic Health Council, 98 Cedar Street, Hartford CT 06106 USA by the October 1, 1992 deadline. Please indicate whether it is for the AARG professional prize or for the AARG student prize.

AIDS AND ANTHROPOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP

(continued from page 1)

Officers:

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AIDS & Anthropology Bulletin:

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Editorial

Assistant: Donna Rayburn

AARG is a Special Committee of the Society for Medical Anthropology, a unit of the American Anthropological Association. AAB is published quarterly and is the official newsletter of AARG. To contact the Chair of AARG or the Editor of AAB, write: Douglas A. Feldman, Ph.D., Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Miami School of Medicine, R-669, P.O. Box 016069, Miami, FL 33101 USA; (305) 547-6559. To become a member of AARG and receive AAB, write: Moses B. Pounds, Ph.D., 5224 Even Star Place, Columbia, MD 21044-1832 USA; (301) 328-8334. Membership for 1992 is \$15 payable to AARG. It is free to anthropologists in developing countries, unemployed anthropologists, and anthropology graduate students actively involved in AIDS research or activities.

Student Poster Session included two posters on AIDS. Robert T. Trotter II (Northern Arizona University) chaired a session on "Ethnography in the AIDS Epidemic: Prevention Processes and Street Strategies." Next year's SfAA meetings will be held in San Antonio, Texas.

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**AARG NOMINATIONS SOUGHT**

Nominations and self-nominations are currently being sought for the positions of AARG Chair-Elect and Steering Committee member (four openings). The Chair-Elect serves in that position for 1993 and automatically becomes AARG Chair for 1994. The Chair-Elect nominees must be an AARG member and have a strong research or administrative record in the field of AIDS and anthropology. The Steering Committee members serve a three year term (1993-95), and must be AARG members with a strong on-going interest in AIDS and anthropology.

Nominees should send a letter of interest stating why they would like to run for election and a one paragraph biography by the June 30th deadline to: Douglas A. Feldman, Chair of AARG, at the address listed in the left-hand column.



**ETHNOGRAPHY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:  
AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO REACHING DRUG USERS**

Claire Sterk Elifson  
(Georgia State University, Atlanta)

The HIV infection rate among drug users continues to increase and the number of AIDS cases among injecting drug users in the United States is the second largest of all categories (CDC 1992). Channels traditionally employed by the public health system to deliver prevention and intervention messages often are not appropriate for reaching drug users. They have been considered "difficult-to-reach," though "different-to-reach" seems more appropriate.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have increasingly become involved in the "fight against AIDS" (e.g., Feldman 1990, Herdt and Lindenbaum 1992), and have shared innovative strategies for reaching individuals, such as drug users. Anthropologists typically focus upon the sociocultural context in which behaviors occur, including the political and economic situation. Such an approach allows for a broad understanding of the situation and the development of comprehensive interventions. The research methods require establishing extensive contact with the group under study, building trust relationships, and identifying key respondents. Social scientists focusing on HIV have begun employing several key respondents as outreach workers. They, ideally, are persons who are familiar with the communities included in the study.

In a recent research project among drug users in the Atlanta area, the following design was employed. During the first stage, communities in which drug use occurred were identified utilizing targeted sampling and social mapping. This allowed the researcher to become familiar with the communities and to identify key respondents and outreach workers. Four outreach workers carried out the social mapping and reported their findings on daily log sheets (in a form similar to the fieldnotes traditionally written by ethnographers). The outreach workers spent many hour conducting informal interviews and observing the activities of

people. During the next stage, the researcher and the outreach workers conducted street intercept interviews, which screened for active drug users living in the Atlanta area and not in treatment. The final stage involved in-depth interviews with the eligible subjects at a storefront location.

Two-thirds of the 382 street intercepts were found to be eligible and participated in the in-depth interviews. The mean age was 34.5, and the majority were multiple drug users, with alcohol and crack the most common combination. It became clear that drug use was but one of many problems in these communities. While a focus on HIV risk reduction among drug users is relevant, the possibility of being able to modify their behaviors increase with the level of community involvement in comprehensive intervention efforts.

References

CDC (1992) HIV/AIDS Update. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control.

Feldman, Douglas A. (ed.) (1990) Culture and AIDS. New York: Praeger.

Herdt, Gilbert and Shirley Lindenbaum (1992) The Time of AIDS: Social Analysis, Theory, and Method. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.



## ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN HIV RISK BEHAVIORS

Michele G. Shedlin  
(Sociomedical Resource Associates)

During 1991, Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc. in New York City and Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe in El Paso, Texas received funding from the Centers for Disease Control to carry out research on ethnic differences in HIV risk behaviors. I was responsible for designing and carrying out the qualitative/ethnographic research at both sites, and will be analyzing data at the two locations. Working closely with Latina outreach workers, we have interviewed prostitutes, clients of prostitutes, madames, drug users, drug dealers, law enforcement professionals, drug treatment professionals, and others who were able to describe and interpret the context of lives and the behaviors of individuals in their communities which place them at risk for, or protect them from, HIV/AIDS.

The influence of the Dominican Republic in New York City and Mexico in El Paso is clear, yet dramatically different in scope and depth. The "cultural character" of even the highest-risk segments of these communities reflects basic traditional values and attitudes, which work both for and against HIV infection and transmission.

For the Dominicans, the family was cited frequently as a stabilizing force in all aspects of their culture. Living up to the expectations of parents was seen as an essential, life-long goal (often not achieved by the subjects of this study). While it was felt that the family would care for and protect its' own, there was great emphasis placed upon protecting the family from shame and embarrassment. Homosexuality, in particular, was hidden to avoid bringing shame to the family; so was drug dependency and prostitution.

Among Dominican women, drug use was perceived as "wrong," as a sign of weakness, as a lack of self-control and moral character. Interestingly, it is not seen as being as "wrong" to sell drugs as it is to use drugs. This is especially true if money is being sent home to their family in the

Dominican Republic, or being saved for their return.

In El Paso, the Mexican women prostitutes were different in many ways from their Mexican-American counterparts who were working the same bars and streets. The transsexual prostitutes, mostly Mexican nationals, were also different, not merely in biological gender, but in attitudes, drug use, sexual practices, and HIV status. Nine of the ten transsexual prostitutes we interviewed in-depth at the county jail, for example, were injecting heroin users. Subjects reported lower condom use with their clients with increasing use of drugs and alcohol.

The Dominican prostitutes at the small brothels (bayus) of New York City had an aversion toward drug use, especially if it involved needles. Even the hard-core Dominican drug users were rarely found to be injecting drug users. Condom use among the Dominican brothel prostitutes was frequently reported, and was a major concern of the women. Poverty, rather than drugs, seemed to be the major reason for prostitution, in contrast with many of the female and transsexual prostitutes in El Paso. Data from this study are currently being further analyzed.



## THE BENEFITS OF UNSAFE SEX

E.J. Sobo

(Case Western Reserve University)

This report describes pilot research concerning impoverished inner-city African-American attitudes toward safer sexual practices. The study is being conducted as a preliminary step in a proposed five year AIDS education project that involves three different AIDS education curricula, and uses a combination of biomedical, sociological, and anthropological approaches to evaluate them.

Several of the ongoing discussion groups organized by one of Cleveland's social welfare agencies are participating in the study. Group members frequently talk about personal issues between themselves, as well as in front of agency personnel. This has allowed us to avoid the communication problems that can make typical focus group research so limiting.

We visited each group four times, in which open-ended discussion was focused on a different AIDS-related topic according to a four-part topic schedule. General beliefs about AIDS, beliefs about the costs and benefits of both safer and unsafe sex, peoples' sense of vulnerability to AIDS, and gender-linked considerations (such as heterosexual power dynamics) were discussed.

After the four weeks of group discussion, an AIDS educator was brought in. We knew that the project would provoke certain questions from the participants; to leave these unanswered would have been unethical. Also, having an AIDS education session allows us to gage the participants' response to the standard curricula. The rapport built during the focus group phase should increase the reliability of the data to be collected through one-on-one interviews.

The data collected so far suggests that the expressive, rather than the instrumental, benefits of unsafe sex lead people to it. We are now looking at the psychocultural dimensions of "careless" behavior and the

roles of denial and rationalization. For women, maintaining the idea that relationships are monogamous and full of love and trust is essential for self-esteem and status. Men are more concerned with the link between condoms and disempowerment (see Handwerker n.d.). Full and final conclusions will be reported at the next meeting of the AAA.

### Reference:

W. Penn Handwerker. n.d. "Gender Power Differences May Be STD Risk Factors For the Next Generation," unpublished.

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### AARG POLICY STATEMENTS

AARG will support policy positions, developed by its membership, relevant to the concerns of anthropologists involved with AIDS/HIV research and activities. Written policy positions will be considered by the AARG Steering Committee for possible support. These may be sent to Douglas A. Feldman (Chair, AARG) at the address on page 2 at any time.

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### IS IT CORRECT?

Please check your listing for accuracy in the revised membership list. Send corrections to Moses B. Pounds at his address on page 2 by the June 30th deadline.



## AIDS AND DISCRIMINATION

M. Pauline Herrmann  
(Hunter College, CUNY)

A symposium on "Race, Gender and Immigration in the AIDS Epidemic" was organized by the Anthropology Clubs of Hunter College, CUNY, with a small grant from AARG, and held last May 1991. The symposium was divided into two sessions. The first session included: a) AIDS and discrimination under U.S. immigration law, b) the concept of immigrant health and the access to health care based on ethnicity, racial categorization, and social and economic status, and c) applied anthropology and the strategy of long term involvement in local communities for problem solving.

The second session included: a) the cultural approach to HIV/AIDS and how this approach has created an impediment to efforts to prevent the spread of HIV, b) transnationalism among Haitian-Americans in New York City and the racism exhibited in the CDC's designation of Haitian-Americans as a high risk group for HIV/AIDS, c) the impediments to the study and treatment of AIDS for women, and d) a report on HIV in South Africa, and an examination of the factors which contribute to, or hinder, AIDS programs in that country. Francis Conant (Hunter College, CUNY) served as a discussant. The symposium was significant because it brought academics and practitioners together to discuss the societal problems of the AIDS pandemic and how to effectively assist persons with AIDS, and established networks to serve as a springboard for future work in this area.

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### AARG MEMBER NOTES

AmFAR (American Foundation for AIDS Research) has awarded AARG member Vincent E. Gil (Southern California College) a research grant to continue his work among low-income Latinas at risk for HIV. Dr. Gil's research is one of the few behaviorally-oriented, and culturally targeted research projects funded by AmFAR. His project site is San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he will examine AIDS

infection access by Latinas from low-income neighborhoods, as well as strategies involved in sexual negotiation by these women with their sexual partners.

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### KEEP US INFORMED!

Send us your hot-off-the-press research reports (300-500 words), your brilliant think pieces (200-300 words), your announcements, requests for cooperation, employment opportunities, positions wanted, and startling discoveries! Our next deadline is June 30th.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY SUPPLEMENT

The AIDS and Anthropology Bibliography Update, prepared by Ralph Bolton and Gail Orazco (Pomona College), is included as a supplement to AARG members with this issue of AAB.

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### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

June 14-17, 1992: NCIH International Health Conference, Arlington, Virginia, USA.

July 19-24, 1992: VIII International Conference on AIDS/III STD World Congress, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

December 9-11, 1992: VII International Conference on AIDS in Africa, Yaounde, Cameroun.