

Infectivity: The excess of Shared Responsibility

Niamh Stephenson
n.stephenson@unsw.edu.au

- **Introduction**
- **Project background**
- **The chasm in the 'community of identity'**
- **Bringing infectivity into play – acknowledging the chasm**
- **Infectivity, familiar and unspoken**
- **Suspension-insistence-cosmopolitanism: 3 forms of inclusion**

Damien, “Feeling Infectious”

Damien had wandered around for a month post diagnosis without sex drive, surviving on sleeping tablets as a coping strategy. He travelled to London and was encouraged to go out to The Hoist, a club in Vauxhall, by a good mate. Damien arrived and had a great conversation with a number of rough-looking Germans, one of whom he went home with. As the fumbling began it was clear condoms were not on the agenda, and suddenly the thought of sharing his experience – one to that point of desperate aloneness – with this nameless man, was exhilarating. The thought of being infectious felt like control – it felt like power in a sea of powerlessness. The appalling reality that this is what happened to me struck me deeply.

“The discourse of safer sex is precisely about balancing individual needs and responsibility to others in a community of identity whose organising principle is the avoidance of infection and the provision of mutual support” (Weeks, 1998, p. 44).

Mark , “Feeling Infectious”

...Not having informed Peter about his HIV status and being cornered into a confession a day later, when talk about possibly more dates had started, he felt so dreadful and guilty for days. Not worth the anguish, so [Mark] decided then, to be more forthcoming in future. Soon he experienced the other side of this “truth and bare” decision: being rejected. That hurts. In moments like these, he certainly feels “not the same as”.

Damien: a guy [in a sauna] said to me "you don't want this, don't do this [have receptive anal sex without a condom]". ... And at the time I thought "oh for god's sake", at the time I was actually really irritated. Because I thought "well I'm actually quite enjoying that and ... I wasn't going to let you come up my arse but I wasn't going to let you do this"

Jim: ... Like weirdly enough this experience [of unprotected sex] was probably the first time I really began to deal with my status in the sense of really feeling what it feels like to be positive and the full sort of implications for that. And um I don't think I ever really acknowledged it before.