

# RECTAL MICROBICIDE ADVOCACY AND ANAL INTERCOURSE IN A HOMOPHOBIC NATION: THE PROBLEMS OF THE SEXUAL ACT AS SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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- Jamaica is a fabulous, culturally rich country with an HIV infection rate about 2%(0.8-2.4)% which is higher in tourist areas and about 10% among sex workers. Among MSM the rate is estimated at about 25% (no official statistics).It is a homophobic country and I want to dedicate my presentation
- to Steve Harvey, my protégé.

- The Buju Banton song Boom Bye Bye in a Batty boy head, essentially tells people to take gay men (the pejorative batty boy) and shoot them in the head. Steve was taken to the top of a hill and murdered shot in the head because he was gay.

- Through the work of the Jamaica Aids Support for Life which has historically worked with msm, a rectal microbicide advocacy group was formed.
- However, there were many problems that had to be addressed:
- The presence of “an expert” on microbicides discussing anal intercourse in a society of deeply embedded homophobia generated a tendency to feel embarrassed, ashamed and silenced.
- Facts had to be managed so that they did not appear accusatory.

- Even the presentation of anal intercourse as not necessarily practiced only by msm and that msm had sexual interactions that were far more varied served to abate the “secret and shame” minimally.
- My own status as heterosexual female and privileged also contributed to the discomfort. The complexities of identity - male, Jamaican, homosexual were exacerbated by a homophobia which they themselves did not completely reject.

## My own role in this advocacy group was problematic on many fronts:

- How to negotiate my role as a female discussing intimate msm behavior
- How to negotiate my role as a female as an authority with men who have more authority simply because they were male –
- How to negotiate my role as trustworthy to msm in a society which gave me more privilege because I was heterosexual,
- How to negotiate discourse on homophobia when the victims of homophobia were themselves homophobic.

- Microbicides advocacy is human rights work, social justice work.
- You cannot take on this task without ideological and political and sometimes radical positions.
- HIV has shown us what we don't know and what we are not doing
- Limited science on women's bodies and hardly any functioning ngos on the ground on women's issues
- The work on homophobia in developing countries is heroic work that is marked by a paucity of "heterosexual" support and enormous risks taken largely by gay men and women.

My work on rectal microbicide advocacy is based  
on many core ideas.  
I will discuss the three most important

- Trust.

If the members of the rectal microbicide group do not trust me we cannot build a constituency for rectal microbicide advocacy. I am Jamaican, I have been working on homophobia conspicuously and inconspicuously and put my privilege on the line. They know me and know where I stand.

- Capacity building

Leadership must come from within the membership of the group. My role is temporary. I must constantly work on building capacity of the members to have their own voice and to understand their own agency

- The project of homophobia.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is addressing the issue of homophobia and the essentialising idea that heterosexuals and homosexuals consciously or unconsciously define the sexual orientation of persons based on the acceptability of a sexual act. My long years in HIV work have led me to questioning this in a very radical way. In his book *One hundred years of Homophobia*, David Halperin argues

- That sexuality is not the sort of thing that comes in two kinds, hetero or homo- nature is not exhausted by these two possibilities of sexual object choice... we must realize how idiosyncratic and various, how unsystematic sexuality is -is a gay woman into S/M more like a gay woman who is not or a straight woman who is. And to the extent that we define gayness as a kind of lifestyle or outlook or set of values rather than as the performance of certain sexual acts, to that extent we acknowledge that it is something more than a sexual reflex.

The more I work in HIV the more this radical view makes sense to me. The project of making the members of the rectal microbicide group feel that access to rectal microbicides is a human right and that they should not allow their identities to be defined largely by their sexual desires and sexual performance is a “long walk to freedom”

Undoing this belief is still one of the ambitious objectives Of this project so that rectal microbicides could be available to all human beings regardless of sexual orientation.