Personal Values and Meaning in the use of Methamphetamine among HIV-Positive Men Who Have Sex with Men*

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*data presented here from paper to be published in Qualitative Health Review
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&
Community Partners in San Jose, CA
What are some things YOU personally value?
Common value domains

- Family
- Marriage
- Friends/Social life
- Work
- Education
- Health
- Spirituality
- Fun/Recreation
- Community life/citizenship
What do you do to live those values?
Research Purpose

- Problem of Meth use among HIV positive MSM in Santa Clara county
- Concerns of the Meth-Taskforce of Santa Clara County
- Collaborative development of research purpose
  - To better understand issues in this population
  - Inform HIV prevention efforts
- Funded by the Santa Clara County Drug and Alcohol Prevention Department
METHODS

- Grounded theory analysis
- Hypothesis generating not testing

Question Development

- Based on broad interest of community health providers, activists from Meth-Taskforce, and the research interests of the primary investigator
  - Iterative and collaborative
Question Development

Designed to have participants discuss their experience with meth use in several domains:

- Life and relationships
- Barriers to quitting and/or receiving treatment
- Core values
- Self-efficacy
- Use of the internet
Participants recruited from psychiatric and community populations
  - Through provider referrals and fliers at local community agencies

Screened over the phone prior to interview

Inclusion Criteria:
  - HIV-positive, MSM, Recent experience with Meth
### Demographics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>N=22</th>
<th>15 had been diagnosed with AIDS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ranging in age from 25-60</td>
<td>45% use or used Meth more than 1/week</td>
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<td>Ethnically diverse sample</td>
<td>19 had tried to quit with 4 who had not used for more than 1 year.</td>
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<td>Many, although not the majority reported using Meth in sexual situations (41%)</td>
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<td>Other situations included when stress, low energy, feeling depressed or lonely, in social situations, or as a part of their daily routine</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS for more than 10 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 African American</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Asian</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Other (self-identified)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 White</td>
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Results: Contextual Construct

A. Theme: Family Context and Early Use 45%

1. My parents have been there before too, done drugs and everything, and they still do…
2. The majority of people who use meth, well, we’ve all been abandoned in some pasture, whether it’s emotionally, psychologically, physically, or physically abused.
3. Some families are supportive which helps, and some are not, which just makes it all so much harder.
4. It feels like my whole life I’ve been on something (drug)

B. Theme: Community and Life Transitions 36%

1. Most of the gay community are like so many men so little time…
2. What scares me to the point of tears is, I just feel sometimes like my life is winding down
“My family situation was very dark. There was a lot of physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Lots of divorce, lots of alcoholism. You cope with what you learned how to cope with, even if you didn’t know that’s what you were doing. For me, my drinking and drugs came along….”
Community and Life Transitions

“The sad part is I feel like a hollowed out crab shell, still there, but it is all over, and you are still stuck with the shell. You are still stuck with the disease, but all the glamour is gone. All the fun is gone, and all the hot men are gone.”
Results: Meaning Construct 1

A. Theme: Adaptive Use 77%

1. It’s a vacation from loneliness…
2. There were so many reasons to use…
3. What drug addicts are doing self-medicating.

B. Theme: Positive Experiences of Meth Use 100%

1. When you do meth you get more horny and horny and horny and you get more sex and more sex and if you have drugs on you, you get more sex partners
2. When I’m high…
3. My understanding is if you inject it, it’s a cleaner, safer way to do it than snorting it or smoking it…
“Meth was an immediate panacea for all my worries and all my problems. It was euphoria. I was happy and I wasn’t black anymore, hated by the white gay community. I wasn’t a fag in the straight community. I didn’t hate my mother. Everything went away and I was beautiful, I was hip, and cool.”
Adaptive Use and Values

“It’s been good because I’ve discovered aspects of myself that I’m not sure I would have any other way… I’ve learned Janet Jackson’s routines and I learned how to dance… I could sing, man I tell you what, there were a few times that I out did Maria Carey herself, I didn’t know I had artistic potential…”
Positive Experiences of Meth Use

- Most said it increased their ability to focus and have enough energy to take care of daily chores like cleaning, laundry, and running errands.

- Several, although not the majority said they used it for better and more sex and sex partners, sometimes because it was the only way they could have sex with their partner.

- A few said it helped them connect with their sense of spirituality, creativity, nature, etc.
Results: Impact Construct

A. Theme: Mental and Physical Health 73%
   1. Meth creeps into your life like a cancer, and destroys everything
   2. I think I was trying to slowly kill myself, only meth wasn’t doing it quick enough for me
   3. It was the drugs that infected me with HIV.
   4. I used to have really, good coping skills, when I lost everything, I lost my coping skills.
   5. It made me take steps that I thought I would never do.

B. Theme: Methamphetamine Use and Relationships 91%
   1. It totally impacts my intimate relationships. I have lots of sex, but there’s no true intimacy
   2. Using meth has made me have a different secret life.
   3. It could turn violent, and that happened to me in a couple of relationships.
   4. I lost the trust of my mom my dad my trust when I relapsed
   5. I know where I can get it that’s a problem, they’re always there (dealers)…
“When I first moved back I had no job after working for so long. I didn’t know anyone, and was without the guy I loved, everything I knew was turned upside down. Then I called the doctors thinking that I had diabetes and they called back with ‘Oh, you have Hep C and AIDS.’ I was not expecting that.”

“The costs of using methamphetamine were bad choices in sex partners. I think between that and sharing needles, I got AIDS. There’s no doubt in my mind.”
Meth use and relationships

“I still remember the last time when we finally quit it… we had a big fight at the hotel where we were staying. He punched me real hard, it just kind of went black so I reached for whatever I could. I found some scissors and tried to cut him. I’ve never been the violent type like that or anything, but I got scissors and he tried to wrestle them out of my hand. He was just cutting the hell out of me, and we were boxing and fighting. When we saw blood start splattering, we stopped… and that’s when he took off. So I’m chasing him outside and have blood all over me and we run back into the motel that’s how stupid we were. I look at it now and I thought I was so inconspicuous … and here’s the manager sitting there, I just had pajama bottoms on and blood everywhere, and I say “hi how you doing?” … when I got back I just replayed it in my mind and I thought, “God, you know, this is getting out of hand.”
Results: Meaning Construct 2

A. Theme: The Intersection of Meth Use and Personal Values 86%
1. A barrier to living my core values is that when you’re using you do whatever you need to do…
   2. Using meth feeds my sense of not having any purpose in life
   3. I should take full responsibility for my actions when I was using, sometimes I do and sometimes I don’t.
   4. Some type of spirituality in your life is important

B. Theme: Thoughts About Quitting
   1. Some of the biggest challenges in trying to quit were saying goodbye to the people
   2. Motivations to quit were being horribly miserable, lonely, and broke

C. Theme: Disability, Work, and Methamphetamine Use 45%
   1. You have the free time and you have the money, and it’s easier to do the drug…
   2. Work has a lot of positive impact on me… it helps me to wake up, to get up, to keep going…
The Intersection of Methamphetamine Use and Personal Values

“I always thought I was honest, but I wasn’t. I’m an honest person, but I wasn’t living that... I was thinking my values have changed through all this. But it’s like no, they haven’t changed, these are the values that I have always had. They were just getting distorted in this existence that I was living... And so by just having this total kind of transformation allowed me to get to my core values that have always been there.”

“I don’t see any barrier to my core values except getting high. I sort of separate from my inner soul. My inner soul is sort of trapped and it can’t be there for me to help me make the right decisions. I can’t be anything but basically selfish when I am high.”
Disability, Work, and Methamphetamine Use

“I’m not working now either so it’s like I got nothing else to do… I’m not used to being like this, I’ve always worked always done something, a job keeps you more grounded because you know you have to be there at a certain time, you have to be a certain way, to present yourself… Being without a job or anything to look forward to I feel worthless and of no use, and I don’t like the feeling.”

“One of the things that sort of kept me in my active addiction is that I didn’t want to accept the idea that I needed to be on disability, it was a scary thing. I didn’t want to admit to myself that hey, you know, my health has gotten to the point where I can’t work for a living, and so forth, and that’s a scary thing. Thinking…what am I going to do for the rest of my life.”
Surprises

Most didn’t use meth primarily for sex

The internet wasn’t one of the main ways participants found sex or drugs (likely due to the older age range of this sample)
Clinical Implications

- Importance of context/environmental factors in use
- Life meaning and purpose and contribution to society/community
- Adaptive use
  - Use not necessarily counter to personal values
  - Tension for providers
Thank you!

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