‘PrEP is like an adult using floaties’: meanings and new identities of PrEP among a niche sample of gay men

Jaime García-Iglesias

Department of Sociology, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a novel HIV prevention strategy. Highly efficacious, its development and delivery has caused significant debate. This paper explores the ways in which PrEP is signified and some of the new identities it gives rise to through the analysis of PrEP discourses among ‘bugchasers’. Bugchasers comprise a niche group of gay men who eroticise HIV and fantasise with or seek to get infected. The research explores how bugchasers negatively conceptualise PrEP as a barrier to thrill and masculinity and discusses PrEP as a positive intervention that allows them to understand their own desires for risk-taking. Finally, it addresses a new identity position, the ‘poz pleaser’ who identifies as a bugchaser yet uses PrEP. Findings link to current debates about PrEP meanings and signification by using bugchasing as a niche yet illustrative example of how men make sense of this intervention based on their existing frameworks. Discussion highlights how this helps us understand how people make sense of biomedical interventions, the importance of emotional ‘side effects’, and the development of new identity positions. In so doing, it advances existing work on PrEP signification and contributes to ongoing debates about bugchasing.

Introduction

Approved by the US Federal and Drug Administration in 2012, PrEP has crystallised debate about sexuality and HIV prevention among the gay community. PrEP, the acronym for pre-exposure prophylaxis, refers to the use of anti-retroviral medication to prevent infection in HIV-negative people at risk. Some have hailed the revolutionary potential of this new prevention tool to end new HIV infections (Brown et al. 2017), while others have argued that PrEP is a ‘lifestyle drug’ which may lead to a higher incidence of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—as it only prevents HIV (see Jaspal and Nerlich 2017). Currently, the implementation of PrEP faces two major challenges: low uptake by certain key groups, and poor adherence among those already taking it (Spinelli et al. 2020). This discussion proceeds from the assumption that delivering PrEP effectively ‘require[s]’ understanding how individuals and communities
comprehend it’ (Auerbach and Hoppe 2015, n.p.). Thus, this article explores the ways in which PrEP is signified by a niche sample of bugchasers as a barrier to masculinity and as a ‘training wheels’. The article also considers the appearance of the new identity of the ‘poz pleaser’. Finally, it discusses how these narratives are useful to understand PrEP adherence and discontinuation.

Bugchasers are gay men who eroticise HIV,2 renaming HIV as ‘a gift’ or ‘bug’ and hoping to become part of a ‘poz brotherhood’ meaning a ‘brotherhood of HIV positive’ men. Historically difficult to locate, bugchasers thrive online (García-Iglesias 2020b) where platforms allow them to find likeminded partners, exchange pornography and engage in meaning-making processes (Reynolds 2007; Lee 2014). Bugchasing has been termed as a ‘subcultural’ phenomenon that raises questions about the meaning of HIV and its potential to be perceived positively as a source of connection and kinship in a society where fear of the virus is prevalent. Researching these online processes of signification and meaning-making grants us insight into how mainstream PrEP discourses are appropriated and resignified by bugchasers.

Bugchasers are a niche group (Dean 2009; Moskowitz and Roloff 2007a; García-Iglesias 2020a). However, it is this characteristic that makes it interesting to consider how they generate new PrEP narratives via a small-scale but highly metaphorical view of the process of PrEP signification. This information may be useful when drawing conclusions about how PrEP is perceived at a larger scale. In particular, exploring bugchasers’ views of PrEP may provide indirect insight and guidance on how to approach health messaging about PrEP at an individual level.

This paper first provides an overview of PrEP and, then, explains bugchasing and its characteristics. Following this, it summarises the methodology of using materials from an online forum. Then, it explores two juxtaposed narratives of PrEP among bugchasers: a negative one which considers PrEP as ‘emasculating’ and a more positive one that describes it as providing ‘training wheels’. Third, this paper explores how out of these two narratives a new identity arises of the man who is a ‘poz pleaser’, meaning that he engages in sex with men living with HIV but also takes PrEP. Finally, it discusses how these findings can contribute to broader discussion concerning PrEP implementation and use.

**Current debates on PrEP**

PrEP is an HIV prevention strategy that uses anti-retroviral drugs to protect HIV-negative people from HIV infection (Peabody and Nutland 2018). It normally consists of a combination of tenofovir and emtricitabine under the brand name Truvada. Trials have focused on efficacy and effectiveness (see Grant et al. 2010; Molina et al. 2015; McCormack et al. 2016; Fonner et al. 2016). These trials have evidenced high efficacy (meaning the intervention works in ideal situations) but the effectiveness (real-life implementation) of the strategy has been threatened by consistent low adherence, as some people do not take the medication in the manner prescribed (Haberer et al. 2015; Krakower et al. 2019; Shover et al. 2019; Macapagal et al. 2020; Spinelli et al. 2020). Moreover, PrEP is inconsistently available throughout the world: in the USA, some health insurance providers cover the costs (Marcus et al. 2016) whereas, in the
UK, access remains problematic with uneven provision policies (Nagington and Sandset 2020).

Current debates about PrEP focus among other issues on the possibility of risk compensation among users and the rise of other STIs (Golub et al. 2010; Molina et al. 2015; Carlo Hojilla et al. 2016). Risk compensation refers to the belief that individuals on PrEP will increase their risk-taking behaviour as they perceive a decrease in the risk of HIV, leading to a higher incidence of other STIs, not prevented by PrEP. Other debates focus on eligibility (Gallagher et al. 2014), accessibility (Brooks et al. 2011; Marcus et al. 2016) and the (non)existence of support infrastructure (King 2014). Despite these debates, available research suggests that PrEP is effective not only in protecting against HIV, but also in alleviating anxiety around HIV and sex, as well as ingrained apprehensions and fear (Koester et al. 2014; Carlo Hojilla et al. 2016). It has also been shown as having potential to enhance interpersonal relationships (Grant and Koester 2015). PrEP has also had a major impact on gay culture and sexual practices (see Varghese 2019). For example, Dean (2015) argues that ‘condom free sex is mediated by Truvada even when the participants are not on it, because the drug has crystallised as a mediating idea about what worry-free sex between men in the 21st century might be’ (229). While PrEP is a key player in current debates, it is but the latest in a number of biomedical interventions in sexuality, including the development of anti-retroviral medication, the anti-conceptive pill, condoms and messages about undetectability (Persson 2010; Myers and Sepkowitz 2013).

Scholars have also focused on the effects of PrEP on cultural discourses. Dean (2015) and Preciado (2015) have theorised the ‘biopolitical side effects’ of PrEP and the role of medicalization through biomolecular ‘soft’ technologies, while Felicianonio (2017) has suggested that PrEP may serve as a tool for ‘new collective political possibilities’ centred around the re-appropriation of sex outside of medical models and HIV discourses by gay men (n.p.). Similarly, Girard et al. (2019) discuss the development of biosocialities based on debates about PrEP and undetectability. At the same time, discourses of promiscuity and slut-shaming that had already been attached to previous prophylactics have also been considered in the case of PrEP. For example, Spieldenner (2016) and Gonzalez (2019) discuss the term ‘Truvada whore’, initially used derogatorily to characterise those using PrEP as promiscuous and irresponsible. Mainstream media have constructed a moral binary between PrEP as a ‘revolutionary tool’ and as a risky biomedical intervention to be used by reckless individuals as a ‘lifestyle drug’ (see Jaspal and Nerlich 2017). These opposing views have generated public debate about PrEP, termed the ‘Truvada Wars’ (Belluz 2014). This article seeks an intervention in these debates by considering how PrEP is made sense of by a niche group of men and how their processes of resignification can illuminate larger debates around PrEP meanings and identities.

**What is bugchasing?**

Bugchasing is the eroticisation of HIV among gay men⁵ who may either fantasise about it or engage in offline sexual practices to contract the virus (García-Iglesias 2020a).⁴ While its origins are unclear (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Freeman 2003),
bugchasing seems to have a close relationship to the Internet, social media and forums (Tomso 2004; Grov 2006).

Bugchasing has been the object of research and diverse theories have arisen about its origin and significance: for some scholars, bugchasing is a response to the historical imposition of ‘condoms’ and the fear of HIV (Dean 2009) especially given the current status of HIV as a manageable chronic condition (Cheuvront 2007; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Gonzalez 2010). Other authors have suggested that bugchasers are more concerned with foreclosing the anxiety caused by the seemingly ever-present risk of HIV infection (Hammond, Holmes, and Mercier 2016; Dean 2011). However, recent research on PrEP seems to complicate (if not debunk) this approach. Some scholars suggest that bugchasing may be a form of community-building, addressing survivor guilt and establishing transhistorical connections (e.g. Morris and Paasonen 2014). It is worth noting, however, that bugchasing remains a foggy subject, with almost no empirical research available and a high degree of stigmatisation (for example, see a notorious yet influential early article on the subject by Michael Scarce [1999]).

Bugchasing has been approached from both media studies (Lee 2014) and quantitative sociological viewpoints (Moskowitz and Roloff 2007a, 2007b). Worth noting is Dean’s ongoing research on bugchasing, subculture and kinship, as well as on bugchasing’s relationship to barebacking, meaning the eroticisation of condomless anal intercourse among gay men (Dean 2002, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2015, 2019). Holmes and Warner (2005) have explored the practice from a perspective based on embodiment and territorialisation, and Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz (2013) has approached it from queer theory. More quantitative studies on bugchasing by Tewksbury (2003, 2006), Grov (2004) and Dawson et al. (2005) have established that bugchasers are extremely rare among online users even if they remain a highly-vocal group.

Research has not considered the interplay between bugchasing and PrEP. It would be easy to think that PrEP has little interest for bugchasers, as their seeming goal is to contract HIV. This would be supported by statements like those present in some of Treasure Island Media’s productions, a studio well-known for producing movies that court with the idea of bugchasing. In 2016, it released the movie Sick Fucks in which one of the performers comments that ‘guys on PrEP are pussies’ and that ‘back in the day, when you took a load, got your fingers crossed and hoped it didn’t do it’ (Hunter 2016). The studio makes it seem as if bugchasing is only about contracting HIV and, thus, suggests that PrEP would be of no interest to these men. Yet recent research suggests that bugchasing is a fluid, complex and highly individual set of practices and meanings (García-Iglesias 2020a). Thus, it is important to consider how the men involved negotiate PrEP meanings and how processes of resignification can illuminate broader processes of meaning-making about PrEP for the general population.

**Methodology**

This article relies on an online ethnography conducted on the main bugchasing section of an online forum catering to bugchasers and barebackers and featuring over 64,000 users. This section of the forum is one of the most popular platforms for bugchasing discussions online worldwide, despite the fact that the majority of the posts
are written in English and reflect the realities of the Global North. All the posts studied were publicly available in the public section of the forum (there is a private section only available for registered users). Information about users was limited to a username (and sometimes included age, location, profile image, and HIV status). Comments can be posted by full registered users or by ‘guests’ who undergo a simpler registration process. For the purposes of this study, information about users was not collected. 800 posts with the most replies (using the forum built-in tool) were selected and screened for information about PrEP. In total, 9 threads were identified, totalling 231 individual posts. These were analysed with the aid of NVivo 12. All threads were initiated between January 2014 and March 2018. In this article, posts have been lightly rephrased to preserve anonymity but maintain their original character.

Previous research by Grov (2004) has established the significance of online forums for bugchasers. In addition, the use of a forum facilitates the exploration of these negotiations of meaning as they take place in a space that is seemingly anonymous. It is this anonymity that allows for experimentation with meanings and desires. Zhao (2005) argues that ‘anonymity’ makes it ‘easier for people to develop online intimacy and trust’ (401). Other scholars have established the role of the Internet in facilitating negotiation and experimentation (Mowlabocus 2010a, 2010b; Race 2010, 2015; Tziallas 2015). The role of online sites in bugchasing has also been well established by previous researchers such as Grov (2006) and García-Iglesias (2020b).

There is a broader question about how the data should be understood. While it is true that anonymity may lead to experimentation and playfulness (Paasonen 2019), this is not a drawback of the data. Rather, these comments to the forum are taken as ‘narrative truths’ in line with Plummer’s approach to sex stories (Plummer 1995). These stories may contain experimentation and playfulness and may not correspond to users’ actual offline behaviours. However, they contain a narrative truth about the processes of meaning making and signification of PrEP that this article is concerned with.

**Narratives of PrEP among bugchasers: from emasculating to training wheels**

**PrEP as emasculating prophylaxis**

Jaspal and Daramilas (2016) suggest that gay men’s understanding of PrEP is informed by existing knowledge and narratives. This is evidenced in the forum, where users seem to make sense of PrEP by resorting to pre-existing constructions of prophylaxis and masculinity. One user writes about how PrEP allows him to move between engaging in bugchasing and just fantasising about it:

> Over the past three years, PrEP has allowed me to enjoy bareback without fear. But I missed something. I love being fucked raw and taking loads, but it’s not the same as taking them off PrEP. I missed the rush, so I stopped taking PrEP this year. I’ve been seeking poz guys to breed6 me, same as before but now with actual danger. It’s amazing, I’m so scared: I don’t want to be poz, but feeling a guy cumming inside my ass knowing the possibility is there to change my life… skating on ice… I’m terrified but I’ve never felt more turned on.

In this excerpt, the user explains how PrEP took away a sense of risk and thrill and, in doing so, allowed him to realise that it was this sense of thrill and uncertainty that
was the main source of arousal. The appeal of uncertainty for bugchasers is well established: Moskowitz and Roloff (2007a) argue that ‘in general, barebackers seem to be looking for the pleasure of freedom derived from unprotected sex—bugchasers, for the uncertainty and the risk’ (353). When the same user is questioned by others about what he would do if he were to contract HIV, he replies:

I don’t know what I’ll do, I guess I’ll deal with it like everyone else. The idea of being poz itself is not for me, I have poz friends and I know the financial and health issues that come with it BUT the limbo I’m in… playing Russian roulette… I love this and I hope it lasts long. This is what I missed when on PrEP.

He emphasises that the arousal of bugchasing, for him, comes from the uncertainty of potential infection, a point echoed by other users who comment on the same thread. One of them, for example, argues that ‘sex on PrEP is decaffeinated, it doesn’t have the same thrill’ (February 2017). Risk and thrill-seeking have long been considered from a sociological perspective, such as in Beck (1992). In this way, Mythen (2004) suggests that there exist ‘subcultural performances that utilise risk taking as a technique of fulfilment and a mechanism of integration’ (146). Risk-taking and its associated thrills are of paramount importance for bugchasers. Researchers have suggested that this is so because risk-taking can be considered as a form of self-care by overcoming the fear of HIV that paralyses sexuality (Cheuvront 2002, 2007) or because it is appealing in its irrationality (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999).

Analysing the data from a series of focus groups about barebacking, Diaz and Ayala (1999) suggest that risk-taking may be associated to a lack of self-control that is constructed as masculine, a point that could well be applied to bugchasing.7 Masculinity and risk taking are clearly associated in the forum, for example in the following exchange in June 2017:

User 1: Being on PrEP is cheating. I’ve stopped taking it and been getting loaded to be a real man to fuck raw without being on PrEP.

User 2: LOL, so I’m not a real man because I have fun while protecting myself?

User 3: Being on PrEP is like an adult using floaties, embarrassing and a massive turn off.

These users’ comments reveal the association between masculinity and risk-taking for bugchasers: risk is not accepted begrudgingly but embraced as arousing and masculine. The use of images such as ‘real man’ and ‘floaties’ serve to reaffirm these notions. It is also worth noting here how the first man in the dialogue conceptualises PrEP use as ‘cheating’ perhaps returning to the essentialist view of bugchasing discussed in the introduction, whereby bugchasing is seen as profoundly interrelated with the risk of HIV. Forum users do discuss this in terms of being a ‘poz pleaser’ (see below) but, interestingly, the idea of ‘fake bugchasers’ (men who say they are bugchasing but are actually on PrEP) is not discussed in any significant way (which may be a silence worth exploring itself in future work).

The two excerpts presented above establish a connection between thrill-seeking and arousal, but also between risk-taking and masculinity. PrEP, which cancels this potential risk, is also perceived to negate the potential pleasure and masculinity to be derived from it. Thus, bugchasers do not oppose PrEP in and of itself, but because it dismantles the risk and thrill that both arouses and masculinises them.
**PrEP as ‘training wheels’**

In the previous section, forum users have been shown developing negative discourses of PrEP as a barrier to thrill and masculinity. Other uses, however, provide more positive views of PrEP. One such user argues:

The amount of men who do bareback has exploded in my city. I love their face when they feel a raw dick fuck them for the first time, the joy they will feel with an ass full of poz cum.

Here, the user refers to the argument that PrEP has increased the number of men willing to engage in condomless anal intercourse. Research has evidenced that men taking PrEP are not more likely to engage in condomless anal intercourse or do so with more partners than before they started taking PrEP. Despite this, the idea of PrEP enlarging the potential pool of bugchasers is a major theme in the forum. In particular, debate develops around the idea that PrEP not only allows more men to engage in condomless sex, but that it eventually entices them to engage in bugchasing:

User 1: I think PrEP has acted as training wheels for a lot of people. Once you get comfortable taking any load, you kind of miss the thrill and want it back, so you may start to skip PrEP.

User 2: I like the idea of ‘training wheels’. PrEP took away the fear of HIV but also the danger and I missed that. I don’t want to have HIV but I wanted to be able to get off the risk of sex, and PrEP made me realise that.

These users generate new images of PrEP as training wheels for bugchasers but do so resorting to existing narratives of risk. In particular, they echo one of the hailed benefits of PrEP (namely, that it forecloses anxiety around sex and HIV) but turn this on its head to argue that it is exactly that absence of thrill that made them realise it was the excitement that was arousing for them all along. PrEP acts as training wheels because it helps men discover what is arousing for them and come to terms with it. This representation of PrEP as a facilitator is supported by a poll conducted on the forum which asked users to vote whether ‘PrEP is a turn-off, same as a condom, it’s not real sex’ or whether it is ‘great because it’s getting more guys to bareback and chase.’ These options represent the two discourses described in this article so far: PrEP as a barrier to excitement, and PrEP as a positive device. The former option, PrEP as a turn off, obtained 35% of the votes, whereas the PrEP-as-facilitator option accounted for 65% of them. This suggests that many bugchasers may think of PrEP in positive terms but do so by re-appropriating existing narratives of it. However, out of these two discourses, a third narrative emerges in the forum that focuses on the ways in which PrEP generates new identities.

**‘Poz pleaser’: a new category of bugchaser?**

Besides the positive and negative approaches to bugchasing discussed above, a third narrative emerges in the forum that addresses the increasing number of men who engage in bugchasing while also openly taking PrEP, referred to as ‘poz pleasers’, meaning they are HIV-negative and taking PrEP. The notion of poz pleaser is reminiscent of Kane Race’s exploration of the role of ‘undetectability’ as a prevention category among gay men using dating apps. Race identifies how some men reject the HIV-negative/positive binary to identify themselves as ‘undetectable’ and argues that
‘the appearance of undetectability as an explicit identity mobilised to mitigate any alarm associated with HIV-positivity—that is, as a prevention identity in itself—is a relatively new phenomenon’ (Race 2015, 263). The popularity of this option is evidenced, he argues, by its inclusion in the pre-designed filters in many apps. In the same way that people living with HIV appropriate the scientific notion of ‘undetectability’ to generate new positionalities, bugchasers in the forum negotiate the idea of PrEP and the appearance of a new position of bugchasing:

User 1: My friend has been neg on PrEP for six months. He’s been taking loads like crazy, and he’s gotten into being fucked by poz guys. I thought maybe there’s a difference between fantasy and real risk but I think it’s something more, beyond the risk of infection, is there something about pleasuring a poz guy, his status being his sex appeal? Do we need a new term as ‘bugchaser’ doesn’t work anymore?

User 2: bug-pleaser, someone who gets off pleasing poz guys?

User 3: poz pleaser?

User 1: I like poz pleaser, it’s person oriented, maybe we can get the forum to add it as an option?

Here, forum users engage in the negotiation of the meaning of poz pleaser. User 1 initiates the discussion by arguing that traditional binaries of fantasy/reality may not easily accommodate men who go through the motions of bugchasing and hold bugchasing desires but also take PrEP and thus are not at risk of infection. In particular, he refers to men who express a preference for men living with HIV even though the possibility of infection is negligible. Of the different options provided by other forum users (bug-pleaser, bug-taster, poz-seeker, etc.) the term poz pleaser is almost unanimously accepted. The agreement on a new terminology is not as revealing as the fact that users feel there needs to be a new term because ‘bugchaser doesn’t work anymore’ for everyone, somehow suggesting that the term bugchaser is currently uneasily encompassing both those who seek HIV actively, those who enjoy flirting with the risk, and those who seek to minimise risk altogether.

Throughout this discussion, users of the forum are generating a new positionality or identity category that can account for both bugchasing desires and PrEP taking. This new term allows us to see how bugchasing is a fluid and contextual practice that moves between those seeking HIV offline and those simply fantasising with it. At the same time, PrEP is a strategy for HIV prevention that is supposedly limited to periods during which someone is at heightened risk of HIV (known as ‘seasons of risk’) (Carlo Hojilla et al. 2016; Elsesser et al. 2016). In this way, as PrEP becomes more established and widely available, it will be interesting to look at how the identity of ‘poz pleaser’ develops over time.

PrEP meanings and identities

This article has provided two examples of how bugchasers attach new meanings to PrEP and how forum users have generated a new identity position (‘poz pleasers’) for bugchasers using PrEP. First, it explored the perception of PrEP as emasculating in its capacity to foreclose the uncertainty that lies at the heart of the risk that bugchasers find arousing and masculine. Second, a more positive notion of PrEP as training wheels
was discussed: here PrEP is conceived as a way for men to engage in more condomless sex and, eventually, realise that the thrill of risk and uncertainty is their main source of arousal. Finally, it considered how users of the forum developed the idea of men who label themselves as bugchasers but take PrEP as a new identity position. The meanings and narratives identified in the article are specific to bugchasing groups, which remain a niche and largely stigmatised subculture. Thus, the ways these men develop and negotiate narratives of PrEP can illuminate larger debates around PrEP, but only indirectly. Processes of negotiation of meaning are bound to happen differently in each community and group. That said, there are lessons to be learned for how individual messaging delivered through sexual health advice and counselling might usefully approach PrEP.

First, it is important to recognise that people make sense of PrEP based on pre-existing narratives and accommodate PrEP within these discursive frameworks: thus, we may see PrEP being thought of as ‘training wheels’ or as ‘the same as condoms’. Because of this, when it comes to PrEP implementation, we need to remain aware of a person’s pre-existing narratives to better understand how they will perceive it. Second, PrEP is less important for bugchasers because of its capacity to prevent HIV as for its other ‘side effects’: foreclosing thrill, risk and masculinity, or facilitating a movement towards bugchasing. Given that PrEP rollout has been marred by poor uptake among key populations (such as men who engage in condomless anal intercourse), it is important to consider the ways in which individuals and groups conceptualise PrEP beyond the biomedical narratives provided by healthcare practitioners. Third, the establishment of a new identity position (poz pleaser) reveals how PrEP disrupts existing positionalities. While this identity may be limited to bugchasers, the process of generating new labels and identities can be seen also in larger populations. One early example of that is the ‘Truvada whore’. To date, relatively little research has been done on other identities, such as ‘neg+ on PrEP’ which are so common that they have also been included as pre-designed filters in dating apps such as Grindr. Each of these new identities will come with its own assumptions (largely based on individual backgrounds) and stereotypes. To be effective, the implementation of PrEP should address these identities (both existing and emergent) and consider their meaning for PrEP delivery and adherence.

As PrEP becomes more widely available, issues around its ‘side effects’ and ‘identities’ will need to be addressed to consider why and how key groups adopt or fail to adopt PrEP and adhere, or fail to adhere to it. As indicated earlier, bugchasers are a niche group, and as such any conclusions are limited in their scope, but their narratives within the online forum nonetheless reveal the ways in which PrEP is signified and understood. PrEP discourses are far more complicated than ‘take-it’ or ‘not-take-it’. They signal multiple, personal, emotional and experiential meanings, oftentimes contradictory, which define the ways in which men relate to PrEP.

Notes

1. While the focus here is on the relationship between PrEP and gay sexuality, PrEP has been identified as an useful prevention intervention for other groups too, including HIV serodiscordant couples, sex workers, people in contexts that prevent them from negotiating condom use, and injection drug users.
2. The use of the term bugchaser is controversial. My own research suggests that bugchaser may not be a consistent identity or label (see García-Iglesias 2020a), and rather more of a ‘practice’. However, the decision to use this term here responds to three reasons: first, it is the term used in the headings and titles of the sections in the forum examined, therefore supposedly recognisable for forum participants; second, it is a way of linking to previous research on the subject; and third, because even if the men participating in the forum are not interested in bugchasing all the time, they are interested during the time when they contribute to discussion online (see García-Iglesias 2020b).

3. Current evidence suggests that bugchasing is limited to gay men (see Moskowitz and Roloff 2007a).

4. Existing research is ambivalent about whether bugchasers are aroused by the virus itself or the risk of transmission. For the purpose of this article, I suggest that these options are not exclusive, and the focus of arousal may be highly personal. Thus, the definition seeks to provide a general view of bugchasing.

5. Scarse’s article is cited here because of its influence in shaping discourses around bugchasing. However, the article itself is ridden with homophobic and serophobic constructs, linking ‘bugchasers’ to HIV-transmission rates. However, the author fails to discuss how HIV transmission is related more closely to poor access to healthcare, poor education, institutional homophobia and racism. Current studies of bug chasing suggest that rates of intentional transmission among the men involved may be lower than previously expected (see García-Iglesias 2020a, 2020b).

6. ‘Breeding’ is slang for internal anal ejaculation.

7. The relatively small amount of data analysed in this paper suggests a strong connection between risk-taking and masculinity in discussions about PrEP—and this is the argument of this section. However, other sections of the forum evidenced more complex and fluid takes on masculinity and its relationship to risk-taking, infection, connection and romantic love (see García-Iglesias 2020c).

8. Meaning HIV negative and currently taking PrEP.

Funding
This work was supported by a School of Social Sciences studentship at the University of Manchester.

ORCID
Jaime García-Iglesias http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8841-5635

References
Auerbach, J. D., and T. Hoppe. 2015. “Beyond ‘Getting Drugs into Bodies’: Social Science Perspectives on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV.” Journal of the International AIDS Society 18 (4 Suppl 3): 19983. doi:10.7448/IAS.18.4.19983
Beck, U. 1992. Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity. London: SAGE.
Belluz, J. 2014. “The Truvada wars.” BMJ 348 (jun24 19): g3811. doi:10.1136/bmj.g3811
Brooks, R. A., R. L. Kaplan, E. Lieber, R. J. Landovitz, S.-J. Lee, and A. A. Leibowitz. 2011. “Motivators, Concerns and Barriers to Adoption of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV-Prevention among Gay and Bisexual Men in HIV-Serodiscordant Male Relationships.” AIDS Care 23 (9): 1136–1145. doi:10.1080/09540121.2011.554528
Brown, A., P. Kirwan, C. Chau, J. Khawam, N. Gill, and V. Delpech. 2017. Towards the Elimination of HIV Transmission, AIDS and HIV-Related Deaths in the UK - 2017 Report. London: Public Health England.
Carlo Hojilla, J., K. A. Koester, S. E. Cohen, S. Buchbinder, D. Ladzekpo, T. Matheson, and A. Y. Liu. 2016. “Sexual Behavior, Risk Compensation, and HIV Prevention Strategies Among Participants in the San Francisco PrEP Demonstration Project: A Qualitative Analysis of Counseling Notes.” *AIDS & Behavior* 20 (7): 1461–1469. doi:10.1007/s10461-015-1055-5

Cheuvront, J. P. 2002. “High-Risk Sexual Behaviour in the Treatment of HIV-Negative Patients.” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 6 (3): 7–25. doi:10.1300/J236v06n03_02

Cheuvront, J. P. 2007. “Attaining Meaning in the Face of Sexual Risk Taking and Risk-Taking Consequences.” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 8 (1): 69–85.

Dawson, A. G., M. W. Ross, D. Henry, and A. Freeman. 2005. “Evidence of HIV Transmission Risk in Barebacking Men-Who-Have-Sex-With-Men: Cases from the Internet.” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* 9 (3-4): 73–83. doi:10.1300/J236v09n03_05

Dean, T. 2002. *Beyond Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dean, T. 2008. “Breeding Culture: Barebacking, Bugchasing, Giftgiving.” *Massachusetts Review* 49 (1-2): 80–94.

Dean, T. 2009. *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dean, T. 2011. “Bareback Time.” In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, edited by E. L. McCallum and M. Tuhkanen, 75–99. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Dean, T. 2015. “Mediated Intimacies: Raw Sex, Truvada, and the Biopolitics of Chemoprophylaxis.” *Sexualities* 18 (1-2): 224–246. doi:10.1177/136360715569137

Dean, T. 2019. “The Raw and the Fucked.” In *RAW: PrEP, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking*, edited by R. Varghese, 257–281. London: Zed Books.

Diaz, R. M., and G. Ayala. 1999. “Love, Passion and Rebellion: Ideologies of HIV and Latino Gay Men in the USA.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 1 (3): 277–293. doi:10.1080/136910599301021

Elsesser, S. A., C. E. Oldenburg, K. B. Biello, M. J. Mimiaga, S. A. Safren, J. E. Egan, D. S. Novak, D. S. Krakower, R. Stall, and K. H. Mayer. 2016. “Seasons of Risk: Anticipated Behavior on Vacation and Interest in Episodic Antiretroviral Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Among a Large National Sample of U.S. Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM).” *AIDS & Behavior* 20 (7): 1400–1407. doi:10.1007/s10461-015-1238-0

Felicianantonio, C. D. 2017. “The Political Economy of Gay Sex under Homonormativity: Bareback, PrEP and Welfare Provision.” *Society + Space*. Accessed September 1, 2020. https://societyandspace.org/2017/10/31/the-political-economy-of-gay-sex-under-homonormativity-bareback-prep-andwelfare-provision/

Fonner, V. A., S. L. Dalglish, C. E. Kennedy, R. Baggaley, K. R. O’Reilly, F. M. Koechlin, M. Rodolph, I. Hodges-Mameletzis, and R. M. Grant. 2016. “Effectiveness and Safety of Oral HIV Preexposure Prophylaxis for all Populations.” *AIDS* 30 (12): 1973–1983.

Freeman, G. A. 2003. “In Search of Death.” *Rollingstone.com*, January 23.

Gallagher, T., L. Link, M. Ramos, E. Bottger, J. Aberg, and D. Daskalakis. 2014. “Self-Perception of HIV Risk and Candidacy for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis among Men Who have Sex with Men Testing for HIV at Commercial Sex Venues in New York City.” *LGBT Health* 1 (3): 218–224. doi:10.1089/lgbt.2013.0046

Gamarel, K. E., and S. A. Golub. 2015. “Intimacy Motivations and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Adoption Intentions among HIV-Negative Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM) in Romantic Relationships.” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 49 (2): 177–186. doi:10.1007/s12160-014-9646-3

García-Iglesias, J. 2020a. “Wanting HIV Is ‘Such a Hot Choice’: Exploring Bugchasers’ Fluid Identities and Online Engagements.” *Deviant Behavior* 41 (10): 1232–1243. doi:10.1080/01639625.2019.1606617

García-Iglesias, J. 2020b. “Writing Bugchasing Ethnoperformance: Creative representations of online interactions.” *Sexualities*. doi:10.1177/136360719896967.

García-Iglesias, J. 2020c. “Viral Breedings: HIV as Pregnancy among Bugchasers.” *NORMA*. doi:10.1080/18902138.2020.1744408

Gauthier, D. K., and C. J. Forsyth. 1999. “Bareback Sex, Bug Chasers, and the Gift of Death.” *Deviant Behaviour* 20 (1): 85–100.
Girard, G., S. Patten, M.-A. LeBlanc, B. Adam, and E. Jackson. 2019. “Is HIV Prevention Creating New Biosocialities among Gay Men? Treatment as Prevention and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis in Canada.” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 41 (3): 484–501. doi:10.1111/1467-9566.12826

Golub, S. A., W. Kowalczyk, C. L. Weinberger, and J. T. Parsons. 2010. “Preexposure Prophylaxis and Predicted Concom Use among High-Risk Men Who Have Sex with Men.” *Epidemiology and Prevention* 54 (5): 548–555.

Gonzalez, O. R. 2010. “Tracking the Bugchaser: Giving ‘The Gift’ of HIV/AIDS.” *Cultural Critique* 75: 82–113.

Gonzalez, O. R. 2019. “Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), ‘the Truvada whore,’ and the New Gay Sexual Revolution.” In *Raw: PrEP, Paedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking*, edited by R. Varghese, 47–70, Chapter 2. London: Zed Books.

Grant, R. M., and K. A. Koester. 2015. “What People Want from Sex and Preexposure Prophylaxis.” *Current Opinion in HIV and AIDS* 11:3–9.

Grant, R. M., J. R. Lama, P. L. Anderson, V. McMahan, A. Y. Liu, L. Vargas, P. Goicochea, M., et al. 2010. “Preexposure Chemoprophylaxis for HIV Prevention in Men Who Have Sex with Men.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 363 (27): 2587–2599. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa1011205

Grov, C. 2004. “Make Me Your Death Slave’: Men Who Have Sex with Men and Use the Internet to Intentionally Spread HIV.” *Deviant Behavior* 25 (4): 329–349. doi: 10.1080/01639620490427683

Grov, C. 2006. “Barebacking Websites: Electronic Environments for Reducing or Inducing HIV Risk.” *AIDS Care* 18 (8): 990–997. doi:10.1080/09540120500521137

Haberer, J. E., D. R. Bangsberg, J. M. Baeten, K. Curran, F. Koechlin, K. R. Amico, P. Anderson, et al. 2015. “Defining Success with HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis: A Prevention-Effective Adherence Paradigm.” *AIDS* 29 (11): 1277–1285. doi:10.1097/QAD.0000000000000647

Hammond, C., D. Holmes, and M. Mercier. 2016. “Breeding New Forms of Life: A Critical Reflection on Extreme Variances of Bareback Sex.” *Nursing Inquiry* 23 (3): 267–277. doi:10.1111/nin.12139

Holmes, D., and D. Warner. 2005. “The Anatomy of a Forbidden Desire: Men, Penetration and Semen Exchange.” *Nursing Inquiry* 12 (1): 10–20. doi:10.1111/j.1440-1800.2005.00252.x

Hunter, P. 2016. *Sick Fucks*. Treasure Island Media.

Jaspal, R., and C. Daramilas. 2016. “Perceptions of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) among HIV-Negative and HIV-Positive Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM).” *Cogent Medicine* 3 (1): 1256850. doi:10.1080/2331205X.2016.1256850

Jaspal, R., and B. Nerlich. 2017. “Polarised Press Reporting about HIV Prevention: Social Representations of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis in the UK Press.” *Health* 21 (5): 478–497. doi:10.1177/1363459316649763

King, N. 2014. “Are Health Care Providers Prepared?” *Clinical Correlations*. Accessed September 1, 2020. https://www.clinicalcorrelations.org/2014/09/24/are-health-care-providers-prepared/

Koester, K. A., K. Rivet Amico, A. Liu, V. McMahon, S. Hosek, K. H. Mayer, and R. Grant. 2014. “Qualitative Findings from the iPrex Open Label Extension (OLE) in the US.” Paper presented at the 20th international AIDS conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Krakower, D., K. M. Maloney, V. E. Powell, K. Levine, C. Grasso, K. Melbourne, J. L. Marcus, and K. H. Mayer. 2019. “Patterns and Clinical Consequences of Discontinuing HIV Preexposure Prophylaxis during Primary Care.” *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 22 (2): e25250. doi: 10.1002/jia2.25250

Lee, B. 2014. “It’s a Question of Breeding: Visualizing Queer Masculinity in Bareback Pornography.” *Sexualities* 17 (1-2): 100–120. doi:10.1177/1363460713511099

Macapagal, K., A. Kraus, A. K. Korpak, K. Jozsa, and D. A. Moskowitz. 2020. “PrEP Awareness, Uptake, Barriers, and Correlates among Adolescents Assigned Male at Birth Who Have Sex with Males in the U.S.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 49 (1): 113–124. doi:10.1007/s10508-019-1429-2

Marcus, J. L., L. B. Hurley, C. B. Hare, D. P. Nguyen, T. Phengrasamy, M. J. Silverberg, J. E. Stoltey, and J. E. Volk. 2016. “Preexposure Prophylaxis for HIV Prevention in a Large Integrated Health
Spieldenner, A. 2016. “PrEP Whores and HIV Prevention: The Queer Communication of HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).” *Journal of Homosexuality* 63 (12): 1685–1697. doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1158012

Spinelli, M. A., N. Laborde, P. Kinley, R. Whitacre, H. M. Scott, N. Walker, A. Y. Liu, M. Gandhi, and S. P. Buchbinder. 2020. “Missed Opportunities to Prevent HIV Infections among Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Users: A Population-Based Mixed Methods Study, San Francisco, United States.” *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 23 (4): e25472. doi:10.1002/jia2.25472

Tewksbury, R. 2003. “Bareback Sex and the Quest for HIV: Assessing the Relationship in Internet Personal Advertisements of Men Who Have Sex With Men.” *Deviant Behavior* 24 (5): 467–482. doi:10.1080/713840245

Tewksbury, R. 2006. “Click here for HIV”: An Analysis of Internet-Based Bug Chasers and Bug Givers.” *Deviant Behavior* 27 (4): 379–395. doi:10.1080/01639620600721346

Tomso, G. 2004. “Bug Chasing, Barebacking, and the Risks of Care.” *Literature and Medicine* 23 (1): 88–111. doi:10.1353/lm.2004.0014

Tziallas, E. 2015. “Gamified Eroticism: Gay Male ‘Social Networking’ Applications and Self-Pornography.” *Sexuality & Culture* 19 (4): 759–775. doi:10.1007/s12119-015-9288-z

Varghese, Ricky, ed. 2019. *Raw: PrEP, Paedagogy, and the Politics of Barebacking*. London: Zed Books.

Zhao, S. 2005. “Through the Looking Glass of Telecopresent Others.” *Symbolic Interaction* 28 (3): 387–405. doi:10.1525/si.2005.28.3.387