

NYU

IN NYC



PHOTOS COURTESY HIV BIG DEAL

■ prevention

AN ONLINE SOAP OPERA CENTERS ON THE TRIALS OF A YOUNG GAY MAN WHO FEARS HE MIGHT BE HIV-POSITIVE.

OUT OF THE CLINIC

WITH HIV CASES SOARING, RESEARCHERS BRING FACTS—AND FREE SCREENINGS—TO THE GAY HOOKUP SCENE

by Alex Cotton / GSAS '08

It's after midnight on a Saturday and the West Side Club in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood is getting crowded. Men in towels wander through a dimly lit labyrinth of narrow hallways as techno music throbs. Breaking off from the crowd, two men enter a cramped room with blank walls and a bare mattress and shut the door. It's business as usual, until the music suddenly stops. "Welcome to the West Side Club," says a cheerful voice over the speakers. "For free, confidential HIV testing, just follow the arrows...."

The owner of this voice is Demetre Daskalakis, a physician and assistant professor of infectious diseases at the NYU School of Medicine, who runs the first-ever HIV testing venue at a New York bathhouse. Though long a part of the underground sex scene in the United States, as well as nodes of the HIV epidemic, until now no one had brought testing into a New York club. But as the rate of infections continues to climb among gay men—a study by the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene showed New York's rate was three times the na-

tional average—doctors and researchers are increasingly offering information and screenings to those most at risk at the actual sites of hookups, whether it's bathhouses or gay Internet dating sites.

In a private room located at the back of the club, Daskalakis administers rapid HIV tests that deliver results in 20 minutes. The idea is to provide much-needed services and collect groundbreaking data, such as whether or not these men discuss their HIV status with partners. "Other cities have been doing HIV testing in bathhouses, but not in a structured, ac-

ademic way,” says Daskalakis, who, dressed head to ankles in black, with a full beard, shaved head, and silver sneakers, blends well with the club-like vibe.

Since he started in 2006, Daskalakis has tested nearly 1,400 people, both bathhouse regulars and an Internet crowd he has found by advertizing on gay hookup Web sites that post his messages for free. In fact, half of his clients don’t come for the bathhouse at all; they just want to get tested. Daskalakis believes that this is because he offers a judgment-free environment. “By putting it in one of the most stigmatized venues in the city, it kind of neutralizes the stigma,” he says. And he has uncovered some

disturbing statistics: 3.6 percent of the men are HIV-positive and, while a majority of the bathhouse clients had unsafe sex in the past three months, only 17 percent have discussed their HIV status with their partners. “Notice how quiet it gets when the music stops,” he says. “There’s not a lot of talking going on in those rooms.”

professor Francine Shuchat Shaw at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Shaw and Mary Ann Chiasson, a vice president for research and evaluation at the non-profit Public Health Solutions, co-wrote and produced a video soap opera titled “HIV is Still a Big Deal,” which premiered

“learning only occurs through failure,” from theorists like the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. So far, an online viewer survey suggests that after watching the video, people are more likely to get tested for HIV or disclose their status. Chiasson hopes to confirm this through an ongoing rigorous, randomized-controlled

“Traditional HIV prevention methods have failed. I think anything that pushes the envelope and tries something new—to make it entertaining or sexy—is worthwhile,” Daskalakis says.

Ending a certain silence is the goal of another project started by

on their Web site in June 2008. The story follows the misadventures of Josh, a

young man on the make in Greenwich Village. In the first episode, Josh finds a date, Eric, on the Internet, and after sharing many drinks at a bar, stumbles back to Eric’s apartment. The following morning, he finds a cabinet full of HIV medication in Eric’s bathroom. An uncomfortable confrontation ensues and, after a period of denial and missed doctors’ appointments, the second episode ends as Josh gets the results from an HIV test.

trial. “We’re trying to get it out there as much as we can,” she says. “We’ve marketed it to gay porn sites, hookup sites, anywhere we can.” The soap, which was filmed at various locations around Manhattan and Brooklyn with actors recruited through Craigslist, was featured on the PBS show *In the Life*, a documentary series that explores the gay experience. But these successes are just first steps in a long race. Daskalakis envisions branching out to private sex parties, because the bathhouse is, he believes, “the least underground of the underground scenes.” Shaw and Chiasson hope to further Josh’s saga in subsequent episodes, introducing more characters and raising related issues, such as depression, the dangers of other sexually transmitted infections, and the difficulty of staying healthy on antiretroviral therapy. In the meantime, Chiasson, who is also an associate professor of clinical epidemiology at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, awaits the results of her study. And Daskalakis continues to put in late hours at the West Side Club, keeping his clinic door open until 2 AM. “Traditional HIV prevention methods have failed,” he says. “I think anything that pushes the envelope and tries something new—to make it entertaining or sexy—is worthwhile.” ■



PHOTO © JACQUELINE DI MILIA

BY VISITING BATHHOUSES AND ADVERTISING ON HOOKUP WEB SITES, DEMETRE DASKALAKIS HAS PROVIDED HIV TESTS FOR NEARLY 1,400 MEN.

ENNYC

the insider

BEST OF NEW YORK

NYU FACULTY, STAFF, AND ALUMNI
OFFER UP THEIR FAVORITES

by Renée Alfuso / CAS '06

TAKE A BREAK FROM SPRING CLEANING TO ENJOY SOME ITALIAN ICE CREAM OR A CLEAR NIGHT SKY

STAR SEARCH

The bright lights of the Big Apple mean less twinkle in the sky at night, but David Hogg, an associate professor at the Center for Cosmology and Particle Physics, says the pollution, humidity, and proximity to sea level also hinder New York stargazers. So for a better view, Hogg brings his Observational Astronomy students to the roof of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study building on Broadway. But for those not in his class, Hogg suggests heading out on the water or seeking an open area for a more unobstructed view. “You can do better than you would think by just finding a playground or parking lot where the lights of the city aren’t in your face,” says

Hogg, who observed the last lunar eclipse from the playground at Tompkins Square Park in the East Village. Be sure to bring binoculars—which Hogg says are better to start with than a telescope—to catch Saturn’s rings in the southern sky during spring and summer evenings this year, or the Perseid meteor shower after dark around August 12. And if all else fails, the one way to guarantee a stellar show is to check out the **HAYDEN PLANETARIUM** at the American Museum of Natural History. “The planetarium has one of the finest projectors that’s ever been built,” Hogg says of the custom-made Zeiss Mark IX Star Projector—the world’s largest and most powerful virtual reality simulator. “When

they turn it on, it’s just one of the most beautiful things.”

**175 CENTRAL PARK WEST
(AT 81ST), 212-769-5100;
WWW.HAYDENPLANETARIUM.ORG**

FOREIGN FLAVOR

When it comes to finding the perfect gelato, things get pretty competitive between the students and faculty at the NYU summer program in Florence. So when one newcomer became a unanimous favorite, the only problem was having to leave it behind to return to the States—until **GROM GELATO** finally followed them back home, opening two stores in New York City. “I was curious to see whether the quality would be the same, and I have to say—it is,” says the program’s director Stefano Albertini, who is also director of Casa Italiana and clinical associate professor

of Italian. Luckily Grom brought with it the traditional method of making artisanal gelato, which has less than half the butterfat of American ice cream but a richer taste because of its high density. Made fresh daily, Grom’s gelato doesn’t contain any artificial colorants or preservatives, opting instead for seasonal fruit and nuts from the best regions of Italy, such as Amalfi’s Sfusato lemons and pistachios from the hills of Bronte, Sicily, which means that there are new flavors each month. Albertini, who grew up in northern Italy and makes his own gelato at home, knows the sweet treat is only as good as what goes into it. “The ingredients have to be absolutely first quality,” he explains. “Eating it makes you fat, so it’s not good if it’s just filling.”

233 BLEECKER STREET (AT 6TH

HAYDEN PLANETARIUM

CENTRAL PARK

PHOTOS: HAYDEN PLANETARIUM © KORO/AGE FOTOSTOCK; CENTRAL PARK © 2008 LANCE EVANS; COURTESY OF GROM



AVE), 212-206-1738; 2165 BROADWAY (AT 77TH), 212-362-1837; WWW.GROM.IT

DOG DAY AFTERNOON

A cramped New York apartment is a rough place for a dog, so it's important for urban canines to get outside and stretch their paws. "It's a huge behavioral issue because dogs that don't get enough exercise will *find* something to do—like chew your sofa or bark all day," explains dog trainer and animal expert Nikki Moustaki (GSAS '97, '08), who has authored many books on dog care, including the popular *Dogfessions* (HarperCollins). Moustaki lives in Manhattan with her three parrots and two miniature schnauzers, whom she loves to bring with her everywhere. So for the perfect doggie day on the town she sug-

gests getting an early start at Central Park, where the 843 acres offer plenty of space to roam and they can walk off-leash from 6 to 9 AM in certain areas. In addition to special dog fountains for water breaks, from May to September, the park offers monthly Bagel Bark breakfasts, where pooches and their owners gather to enjoy free coffee, pastries, and, of course, dog biscuits. "When dog owners get together, it's a very social thing. It isn't solely for the dogs to run around and play," Moustaki says. And to top off the morning's exercise with some well-deserved shopping, she seeks out stores that allow dogs, such as Barnes & Noble and Bed Bath & Beyond. But for a real treat, she opts for specialty pet store **SPOILED BRATS NYC**, which features organic foods, all-natural

grooming products, and fashionable leashes and clothing for the hippest of pets.

340 WEST 49TH STREET (BTW. 8TH & 9TH AVE), 212-459-1615

BOWLING, OLD SCHOOL

Bowling alleys in Manhattan seem to have morphed into nightclubs that just happen to have some lanes, where traditional nights of beers and strikes have been replaced with apple martinis and booming dance music. Tim Senft, deputy director of strategic communications, remembers when the tiny alley at Port Authority was once a sleazy-in-a-good-way dive, but now calls it "trendy and overcrowded." So for bowling the way nature intended, Senft suggests traveling to the outer boroughs, particularly **AMF 34TH AVENUE LANES** in Woodside,

Queens. "There's no scene to it—it's just a bowling alley," he explains of the 60-year-old establishment that's maintained its original character and charm. Senft says the space is large enough that there's hardly ever a wait, so the pros can bowl alongside those just looking for a fun night of hot dogs and cheese fries, which are essential on weekends when the alley stays open as late as 4 AM. Senft even chose it as the site for his bachelor party 10 years ago and still recommends it to anyone who wants to experience the real NYC, not just a glamorized version. "It's a throwback to the New York of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s that's disappearing," he says.

69-10 34TH AVENUE IN WOODSIDE, QUEENS, 718-651-0440; WWW.AMF.COM/34TH AVENUELANES