Meth Madness

Looking at HIV through a crystal ball

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Meet 11 gay men: ten positive, one negative, all white. On camera, each relives the same familiar—nonfictional—script: their first crystal meth high, then their addiction, HIV diagnosis and eventual crash. Todd Ahlberg's documentary *Meth*, which first hit film festivals in February, gives meth its first celluloid close-up. Rates of crystal use are raging. Twenty percent of gay men surveyed by the Centers for Disease Control said they'd used meth in the past year, and the HIV rate among gay users in Los Angeles is triple that of gay nonusers. "It felt like we were gaining the upper hand with HIV," says Ahlberg. "Then meth came along."

Is Ahlberg's take balanced? Perry Halkitis, PhD, a prevention specialist at New York University, says a film about white gay meth users is no longer relevant. "My data show black men and Latinos use as much or more than white men," he says. Indeed, recent studies show men of color constitute 45% of users. Stephan Schell, who is interviewed in the film, counters that its message is universal. "Almost everybody I've known in 15 years of using has tested positive," he says. "HIV and crystal meth just go hand in hand." Cut.

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