Tea Time

Southern black gay men recount their life histories—including HIV.

September 1, 2009 By Trent Straube

It’s not a coincidence that E. Patrick Johnson, PhD, chose the title *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (University of North Carolina Press, $35) for his recent collection of first-person narratives of 63 African-American gay men—“tea” is slang for gossip in Southern vernacular.

In reading each colorful story, it seems as if the men are sitting right in front of you.

The subject of HIV weaves throughout the tales in different contexts: coming out, mourning the death of lovers, desiring skin-on-skin sex and faulting the black church for not providing outreach and education about AIDS.

Since Southern gentility typically silences the HIV epidemic, these stories are all the more powerful.

“Black gay men are thankful their [real life] stories have been affirmed,” Johnson says about the public’s response to his book. “People have said, ‘This has given me insight.’” With nearly 46 percent of America’s new HIV/AIDS cases occurring in the South, Johnson is serving the tea right on time.

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