Transformations in the Medicalization of Sex:
HIV Prevention and the Disappearance of the Human Factor

HIV prevention is one of the principal forms of the medicalization of sex during the 20th century. "In the absence of vaccines and treatments", surveillance and modification of risky sexual behavior represented the major dimensions of medicalization in the first phase of the history of HIV prevention. Increasing knowledge and consciousness of risk placed the "human factor" at the core of this apparatus, which has profoundly transformed the meaning of sexual activity, opposing "protected" and "unprotected" sex, and establishing a hierarchy of practices according to their risk of transmitting infection.

Since the beginning of 2009, with the diffusion of the work of B. Hirschel, we are witnessing a remedicalisation of HIV prevention based on the generalization of the practice of HIV testing, the use of medications (treatment as prevention) and other pharmaceutical products such as microbicides and gels, and surgical prophylactic techniques (male circumcision). The implementation of these techniques, grounded on a belief that psycho-social and behavioral approaches have failed, aims at eliminating the human and sexual factor in the control of the epidemic. Where once surveillance and prevention focused on sexual behavior, HIV prevention is currently based on the permanent surveillance and control of the viral load and infectivity.

This presentation will map the successive forms of HIV prevention and will propose a typology of the different forms of medicalization of sex by taking into account the relationship between behavioral and biomedical approaches. The construction of such a typology is grounded on comparisons with pregnancy prevention and the treatment of sexual dysfunction.

Biography
Alain Giami PhD is a social scientist and is currently Research Professor at INSERM (French National Institute of Health and Medical Research) where he coordinates a group of researchers in the field of sexuality research and social sciences.

He obtained his PhD in 1978 (Sorbonne - Paris) on a "critique of sexual education". Then his academic interests have focused on sex research from a multidisciplinary perspective including: psychology, sociology, history, science studies and public health. His study on the representations of the sexuality of people living with mental disabilities resulted as a book (first published in 1983) that has been reprinted twice and translated into Portuguese (Brazil). Between 1990 and 1994, he served in the French task force on HIV-Aids in the field of social sciences and public health, in which he developed various projects. He carried a research on the representations of Aids and HIV patients among nurses that was published as a book (1994). In 1989, he participated in the French national survey on sexual behavior (ACSF) and was a senior editor of two of the books that were published following this study. In 1998, when the new treatments for sexual disorder were released, he became a consultant to the French Ministry of Health and chaired the National task force on pharmacological treatments for Erectile Dysfunction. He carried a national survey on "sexology as a profession" and the protocol for this study was translated and applied in 6 European countries.

He is currently working on various project analysing the representations of sexuality among health professionals (GP’s, nurses). He is also engaged in a research program in Brasil aimed at a social history of sexology in Latin America and on 2 new projects involving Transgender individuals and new HIV prevention.