

“HOW DO WE AS YOUNG BLACK GAY MEN STAND STRONG?”

The healthMpowerment online intervention as a space to engage with stigma related to HIV, sexuality, and race

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BACKGROUND

- Young Black men who have sex with men (YBMSM) in the U.S. experience increased HIV infection.
- HIV incidence is linked to multiple forms of stigma including sexuality-, race-, and HIV-related.
- Internet-based interventions can offer spaces for sharing stigma experiences and gaining social support.

METHODS

- In the healthMpowerment (HMP) randomized controlled trial, intervention YBMSM (n=232) posted content in three support spaces: a discussion Forum, an HIV physician question and answer area (Ask Dr. W), and a multi-media stories area (Getting Real).
- Informed by gender and sexuality, race, and HIV stigma theories, we systematically coded and analyzed all stigma-relevant posts.

CONCLUSIONS

- HMP fostered dialogue about multiple stigmas, primarily challenging stigma, but also perpetuating stigma.
- Social media interventions should be attentive to opportunities to challenge stigma, while ensuring measures to reduce stigma perpetuation.
- The format of online spaces may bring out different aspects of stigma.
- Future studies could test if online support for challenging stigma ameliorates the impacts of multiple stigmas on HIV risk behaviors.

RESULTS

62 YBMSM CONTRIBUTED 1497 POSTS, OF WHICH 61.1% (N=915 POSTS MADE BY 48 PARTICIPANTS) WERE STIGMA-RELATED.

STIGMA CONTENT OF POSTS

	HIV Stigma	Gender, Sex, Sexuality Stigma	Race-ethnicity Stigma
Total Posts (n=915)	196 (21.4%)	733 (80.1%)	202 (22.1%)

NATURE OF STIGMA POSTS

	Perpetuating Stigma	Experiencing Stigma	Anticipating Stigma	Challenging Stigma
Total Posts (n=915)	429 (46.9%)	133 (14.5%)	81 (8.9%)	689 (75.3%)

HMP FORUM

The Forum had more posts that challenged stigma (76.0%, 610/803), while Ask Dr. W had proportionally more posts of anticipatory stigma (45.5%, 15/33).

F

7/28/2014 8:44:31 AM

Peoples opinions about gay black men

Do you feel bad being gay because it is unnatural and has huge risk for incurable diseases? Reading the message ima paste below made me think. I always felt bad for being gay and it isn't fulfilling because I want children and respect from my family and community. It feels like I am a waste being gay. It is a long read but it is very informative and true. This is how our heterosexual community feels about black gay men.

M

10/19/2014 6:31:06 PM

Well they are mislead by bad experiences and invalid opinions of what it means to be gay. These days it seem like the heterosexuals are gayer than the gays. I think that being black and gay is only bad because people try to pinpoint HIV to us. That's not the case, if EVERYONE got tested then we could see what race or gender is the highest at risk.

d

10/21/2014 7:49:16 PM

Well I feel like myself, this is who I really am inside I'm a gay African American make and I love who I am I'm a unique human being

“Do you feel bad being gay because it is unnatural and has huge risk for incurable diseases?”

“this is who I really am inside I’m a gay African American male and I love who I am.”

YBMSM used HMP to respond to stigma by: correcting misinformation and stereotypes; seeking information and support; promoting positive norms; interrogating media portrayals of YBMSM; and encouraging each other.

“It’s so refreshing to have intelligent conversations or questions and be able to share our stories... I’ve been very informed on a lot of things on this site and I hope a lot of others have been empowered as well.”

ASK DR. W

Q:

Positivity living in the Plus sign

Because of the location, people, and the enviroment and people like me have a hard time adjusting and staying positive in a negetive world, how are we as young black gay men stand strong?

A:

Response from - Dr. Hightow-Weidman

Hi there Thank you very much for your very honest and important question. I want to try and answer as honestly and completely as I can. So with that, my own truth is that I am a White HIV-negative lesbian woman who has not lived and can never fully experience what life is like as young black gay man. What I can say is that I have been providing care for HIV+ and negative young black men for over a decade. I am always so humbled by the resilience and strength that the men I care for have, even in the face of many obstacles put in their paths by society, not only from their HIV diagnosis (if they are positive) but from the multiple other layers of stigma and negatively related to them being gay, black or both.

YBMSM described significant stress and distress in relation to layered and intersectional stigmas.

“The stigma and open rebuke generated through the ‘black church’ mixed with the traditional pressures associated with society's depiction of The Black Man, would make some to believe it’s almost impossible to identify as a black American citizen and a member of the [gay] community”

GETTING REAL

1

3/17/2015 3:21:22 PM

I think site really is the only one of its kind as far as people connecting with each other but nothing is about wanting to hookup or asking the same questions about physical stats and all that mess, its just all about opinions on subjects that we think about. I think I could care less if I saw yalls face b/c the conversations we have are what is on our minds - not saying yall are busted or anything but you know what I mean.

M

3/17/2015 4:19:35 PM

lol got that right cuz I am SO FINE, busted is not in my vocab

b

3/18/2015 12:41:09 AM

I definitely agree, it's so refreshing to have intelligent conversations or questions and be able to share our stories on this site instead of trying to find sex or trying to figure out if you're a top or a bottom. I've been very informed on a lot of things on this site and I hope a lot of others have been empowered as well. Thank you HMP lol

d

1/29/2014 12:26:34 PM

Unfortunately, through our chosen history and internal challenges the African American male endured and created; it is very difficult to associate the words gay, bi, trans, queer and BLACK within the same sentence. The stigma and open rebuke generated through the "black church" mixed with the traditional pressures associated with society's depiction of The Black Man, would make some to believe it's almost impossible to identify as a black American citizen and a member of the community. If the day should arise, it will truly take a centered act of reflection, an open mind for "self" forgiveness, unwavering attitude towards being EDUCATED, and a lifestyle of respecting diversity, from OUR very own black community.

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