



Project ÔRÉ: A Social Psychological Approach to HIV/STI Interventions and Outcome Construction

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Background

There is a clear link between adolescent peer relationships and health risk behavior, including sexual behavior. While many types of friendships may be influential, neighborhood friendships are particularly important for African American inner city youth. The present studies, which are focused on social psychological factors in sexual behavior, had two primary goals. The first goal was to conduct a preliminary test of a friendship-based intervention that aims to change sexual norms and behavior among adolescents living in a high risk neighborhood and the second goal focused on identifying important sexual constructs that can be used to further tailor interventions and guide measurement development.

STUDY ONE

Introduction

Innovations are needed to increase the effectiveness of social influence interventions. One promising method is conducting friendship-based programs.

Method

Our 5-hour program was delivered to sexually active youth with their friendship group at a site in the community.

We recruited African American youth through outreach in community (14-21 years old).

We conducted 20 groups (n=10 male; 10 female). Youth completed pre-, and post- questionnaires, participated in a process evaluation (focus group) immediately following the intervention, and completed a 3-month follow-up questionnaire.

Results

Feasibility: We recruited 20 friendship groups (3-8 youth/group; N=78), thus demonstrating the practicality of this network approach. We maintained an 86% cooperation rate at 3-mo. follow-up (N=67).

Program Acceptability: Qualitative process evaluation demonstrates high acceptability of the program. The positive aspects of attending with close friends were increased: comfort attending an HIV/STI workshop, self-disclosure, and confidentiality within the group.

Program Efficacy: Quantitative data provide support for the efficacy of the program. Because the intervention is delivered in the friendship network we controlled for cluster effects in all analyses.

Post Test (N = 78)

Increased Knowledge	p < .01
Increased Perceived Risk for HIV	p < .01
Increased Perceived Risk for STIs	p < .01
Safer Peer Norms (for Sex)	p < .001
Increased Condom Use Intentions	p = .05

Follow-up	Pre-Int.	3 mo. FU
Decreased sexual activity	65%	55%
Decreased number of parties	3.4	2.0
Maintenance of consistent condom use	—	67%
Increased condom use among inconsistent users	—	33% (p < .01)

Future Directions

We are currently conducting a group randomized controlled study to vigorously evaluate this friendship-based HIV intervention with inner-city African American females.

STUDY TWO

Introduction

Our second goal was to begin building a body of research to identify: 1) important sexual constructs for inclusion in intervention programs and, 2) areas for measurement development. Our primary focus was on cultural and social factors affecting sexual roles (i.e., perceived or proscribed roles specific to sexual behavior).

Method

Using qualitative methods, we examined sexual role related themes in a purposeful sample of sexually active African-American youth and their close friends.

Youth were recruited through street outreach and by referrals from community youth services. The first youth contacted was designated a “seed”; seeds were residents of low income communities, African American, 15-18 years old, heterosexually sexually active, and had close friends who they were willing to recruit (up to 2).

A total of 27 youth, representing 10 friendship groups, completed interviews (1.5-2 hours) on sexual roles, sexual behavior, and the ways in which close friends impact roles and behavior.

Interview Content/Themes

The interview was structured in a way that encouraged youth to talk about their experiences and feelings through storytelling. A number of areas were covered in the interviews (e.g., boy/girlfriends/sex partners; friendships; future expectations, dating/relationships, meaning of sex, etc.). The present analyses were focused on the identifying salient themes that may have relevance for tailoring interventions.

Results

Three sexual role-related themes emerged as important: the meaning of sex, expectations about sexual fidelity, and social consequences of sex. Strong gender differences emerged, but these were not universal. Members of the same friendship group tended to have similar views of these sexual role issues. Respondents’ stories reflected substantial sexual risk behavior.

Future Directions

Several important themes have emerged to date and we will continue our thematic analyses with the goals of identifying important sexual constructs to be considered in future programs. Additionally, we are working toward the development of a culturally relevant model of sexual roles and sexual behavior among low-income youth.

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