

Methods

Beyond Focus Groups: New Methods to Test HIV Prevention Ads (The Queer Eye Media Project)

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Project Description: The overall goal of this pilot project is to adapt commercial advertising research methods into a procedure that is accessible to AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) and public health researchers.

More than 20 years into the HIV epidemic, many ASOs consider it a challenge to develop advertising materials that continue to grab the attention of their clients and nowhere is this more true than among ASOs who are serving urban gay men. Some men report "AIDS fatigue," others frequently no longer see AIDS as an acute crisis and, according to the ASOs that serve them, they are becoming less aware of the many prevention messages around them, especially in light of the many other ads in their community. Yet, with increasing rates of sexual risk-taking, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infections among urban gay men, it is as important as ever for ASOs to get their prevention messages out.

Some ASOs have responded to this challenge by developing more provocative, sexually explicit ads to attract increased attention. However, these ads were recently met with disapproval by the federal government, which disputed the notion that such ads are necessary, and asserted that federal money can not be used to fund "obscene" materials. As a consequence, the San Francisco based STOP AIDS Project had to undergo two separate audits before being cleared of these charges.

Given this tension between the need to develop effective, attention-grabbing prevention messages for gay men and the need to present materials that are acceptable to federal funders, it is crucial that we develop objective, feasible and affordable methods of assessing the effectiveness of HIV prevention ads for this population. To date, most agencies have access only to focus group methods to help them accomplish this objective. Commercial advertising research agencies, on the other hand, have a long history of using alternative methods to more effectively conduct these types of evaluations.

This project has been designed to meet this need by developing cutting-edge, affordable methods to evaluate the reactions by gay men to the many ads that are currently targeting their community. Such methods could subsequently be used to evaluate the effectiveness of HIV prevention ads in a scientifically rigorous, value-free way.

Project end date: October, 2004