Black Churches and HIV Prevention for Young African American Men Who Have Sex With Men

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Overview

• Background
• Guiding Research Question
• Methods
• General Trends
• Variable Approaches to Teachings About Homosexuality
• HIV Prevention In Different Church Settings
• Implications and Conclusion
Background: Epidemiological perspective

• In 2005:
  • 50% of AIDS cases African Americans nationally
  • In Alameda County, 43.6% of cumulative AIDS cases African American MSM
  • In LA city, average rate (per 100,000) of AIDS diagnoses for men 62 AA, 25 L, 18 W and 5 A
  • 79% of AIDS diagnoses among men in LA - MSM sexual contact
Background: Cultural perspective

• Previous CHRP-funded study AAMSM
• 2002-2003
• 19-30 YO
• 31 young AAMSM in Oakland and LA areas
• In-depth interviews
• Religion & Spirituality prominent themes
• Religion & Spirituality separate (though related) entities
• **Rejection**: Some YAAMSM talked about feeling rejected by people at church because of being LGBT:

  “They [the minister and congregants] said that…if you’re gay then you’ll get HIV. The church really fucked me up for a while. Just that head game – that’s why I didn’t mess around until I was in college. I believed it. I was scared.” (20 year-old, gay, HIV-negative)
Background: Cultural perspective (continued)

• **Support**: Some YAAMSM talked about spirituality as a fortifying force in their lives; something that helped them through their trials and tribulations:

• “Spirituality is my inner strength, as far as how I deal with things; how I deal with people when I'm down, what picks me back up, or if I need to really get things accomplished what's really going to get me through it…” (28 year-old, gay, HIV-positive)
Guiding Research Question and sub-question

• What is the fit between evidence-based HIV prevention and Black churches?

• What are the parameters for HIV prevention in different church settings?
Methods

• 17 (of 20) interviews conducted
• Only moderately conservative to radically inclusive churches
• >300 members on roster
• >~40% African Americans
• Pastors and HIV/AIDS ministry leaders interviewed
• In-person
• 1-2 hours
• Protocol with probes
• Digitally recorded and transcribed
• Weekly analysis meetings
• Grounded theory analytic approach used
• Analysis memos capturing interesting themes
General Trends

• Churches generally quite supportive of HIV prevention
• One size does NOT fit all
• Fit between context and program
Variables Approaches to Teachings About Homosexuality

• The different patterns of acceptance to emerge were…

1. Non-condemning
2. Accepting
3. Open and Affirming
4. “Radically inclusive”
Characteristics of…
Non-condemning Black Churches

- “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” philosophy
- Homosexual women and men & homosexuality never discussed explicitly
Non-condemning Black Churches and HIV Prevention

- Reluctant to conduct programs specifically for YAAMSM
- Averse to engaging in HIV testing
- Uncomfortable with condom distribution
Characteristics of…
Accepting Black Churches

- Sexual orientation never publicly discussed
- “gay-friendly” & covertly accepting of homosexuality
- Sexual identity mostly expressed outside of church
- “Open Closet” phenomenon
Accepting Black Churches and HIV Prevention

- Reluctant to launch programs for YAAMSM
- Moderately supportive of HIV testing, but not on church property,
- Against distributing condoms
Characteristics of…
Open and Affirming Black Churches

• Church bylaws
• Openly gay clergy
• Many openly LGBTQ members
• Ministries for gays and lesbians
• Activism & visibility mostly within church context
Open and Affirming Black Churches and HIV Prevention

• Open to having support groups for YAAMSM
• Hesitant about conducting HIV testing on church property
• Reluctant to distribute condoms
Characteristics of…
Radically Inclusive Churches

• Differ from “Open and Affirming” churches in these ways:
  • Inter-denominational
  • Diversity of sexual orientation, sexual identity, theology, and race
  • High visible in “gay circles” and mainstream religious and political circles
  • Engaged in social activism
  • All forms of sexual self-expression equally validated.
Radically Inclusive Churches and HIV Prevention

• Quite amenable to having groups for YAAMSM

• Supportive of having church-based HIV testing on church property

• Open to distributing condoms
Implications and Conclusions

• Churches limited regarding what they can formally endorse
• Churches supportive of HIV prevention
• Interventions - malleable; tailored to specific church’s environment
• Utilize formal and informal networks to disseminate information
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Please direct all questions and comments to:

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