

Creating Mentoring Relationships among Young, Middle-Aged, and Older African-American Men Who Have Sex with Men

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Background

Young African-American men who have sex with men are at very high risk for HIV infection and are becoming infected at disturbingly high rates. Qualitative studies with this group show they recommend mentoring from older African-American men who have sex with men as a prevention strategy. However, there is little information concerning the formation of mentoring programs between young, middle-aged, and older African-American men.

Objectives

To explore attitudes and concerns of young (18-25 years of age) and middle-aged to older (40+ years of age) African-American men who have sex with men about:

- Issues faced by older men in their youth/issues faced by youth today
- Issues that older Black gay men see young Black gay men facing
- Survival skills needed by young Black gay men to survive
- Concerns about participating in a mentoring program

Methods

Recruitment and Interview

- Participants were contacted via referrals and solicitations at the Sexual Minority Alliance of Alameda County (SMAAC) Youth Center and email list serve groups of Black gay organizations in Oakland, CA.
- Focus groups (N=4) were conducted in private homes and SMACC Youth Center.
- Participants were paid \$50 for completing a survey and participating in a focus group.
- Focus groups were conducted between February and May 2001.

Findings

Issues Faced by Older Men in Their Youth/ Issues Faced by Youth Today

Older Men

Loneliness—you didn't know who was gay among your peers and you could not talk to family members about your feelings

Being taken advantage of emotionally by older men

Negotiating between the Black and gay worlds

Seeing friends get sick and die at an early age

Young Men

Getting "beat down" by family members and police

Being harassed in school and not getting good grades

Finding a job that pays above the minimum wage

Finding it difficult to trust people

Finding it difficult to keep pride in yourself when people are constantly thinking and saying bad things about you

Issues Older Black Gay Men See Younger Black Gay Men Facing

- Young Black gay men are "coming out" and engaging in sex with men at earlier ages
- Young Black gay men seem to embrace and show off their femininity more so today; this may not be best for them in the long run
- There seems to be more poverty among young men today than when we were young
- Crack/cocaine usage is more prevalent among young Black gay men and their families today

Findings (cont'd.)

Survival Skills Reported as Needed by Young Black Gay Men

Older Men

Knowing the importance of making money legally

Getting a good education

Inner strength

Spirituality

Respect for yourself

High self-esteem

Having a role model

Young Men

Knowing how to fight

Being able to take criticism

Thinking positively about yourself

Boosting – knowing how to steal without getting caught

Knowing when to hide your homosexuality

Getting an education

Concerns about Participating in a Mentoring Program

Older Men

Not being able to trust young men

Young men only want money from you

Young men may try to blackmail you

Not having time due to the need of having two jobs to survive in the Bay Area

No formal training on what it means to be a mentor

Young Men

Older men will see the program as an easy way to meet young men for sex

Not knowing what will happen if sexual feelings develop toward mentor

Young men do not want to see constant reminders that they will age and lose their youth

Discussion

- Middle-aged and older African-American men who have sex with men do not know how to go about establishing mentoring relationship with younger African-American men who have sex with men.
- Educational and class differences between older and younger African-American men may result in difficulty of recruiting mentors.

Recommendations

- Mentoring programs can be used as an HIV prevention strategy between young and older African-American men who have sex with men.
- Community-based organizations must understand the unique issues and concerns of both young and older African American men who have sex with men before implementing a mentoring program.
- Curriculum development for mentoring programs between young and older African-American men who have sex with men is needed.
- Professional assistance may be needed to help participants explore their feelings as relationships develop during the mentoring process.
- Safe spaces are needed so that young, middle-aged, and older African-American men can come together to get to know each other in a non-sexual manner.