

Dating and Protective Sex Behaviors of Young Black MSM

Who Use Dating Phone Apps: A Qualitative Study

Danielle Gilliard MPH^{1,3}, Eric Nehl PhD¹, Frank Wong PhD¹, Sophia Hussen MD MPH¹
¹Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health Atlanta, GA, ³Mecklenburg County Health Department, Charlotte, NC

Background

Young Black MSM and the HIV Epidemic

- Blacks continue to experience increasing HIV incidence rates and Young Black MSM (YBMSM), 13-24 years, experience the greatest rate of HIV infections¹⁻³

Internet Dating and Sex Behaviors

- Internet dating has shown to be popular for youth due to its accessibility, affordability, anonymity, and customization^{4,5}
- Higher frequency of using the internet to find sex partners has been correlated with more risky sex behaviors and higher risk of HIV transmission^{4,5}

Dating Phone Apps and Behavioral Implications

- Dating phone apps are also becoming increasingly popular⁶
- Current research findings have concluded that:
 - Most MSM who use dating phone apps use them to “hook up” or seek sex
 - Met recent sex partners on dating phone apps
 - Did not always ask sex partners about their HIV status
 - Reported believing that it was unlikely or very unlikely that they were going to contract HIV¹⁰⁻¹⁶
- The impact of these apps on decision-making around sex behaviors is understudied.

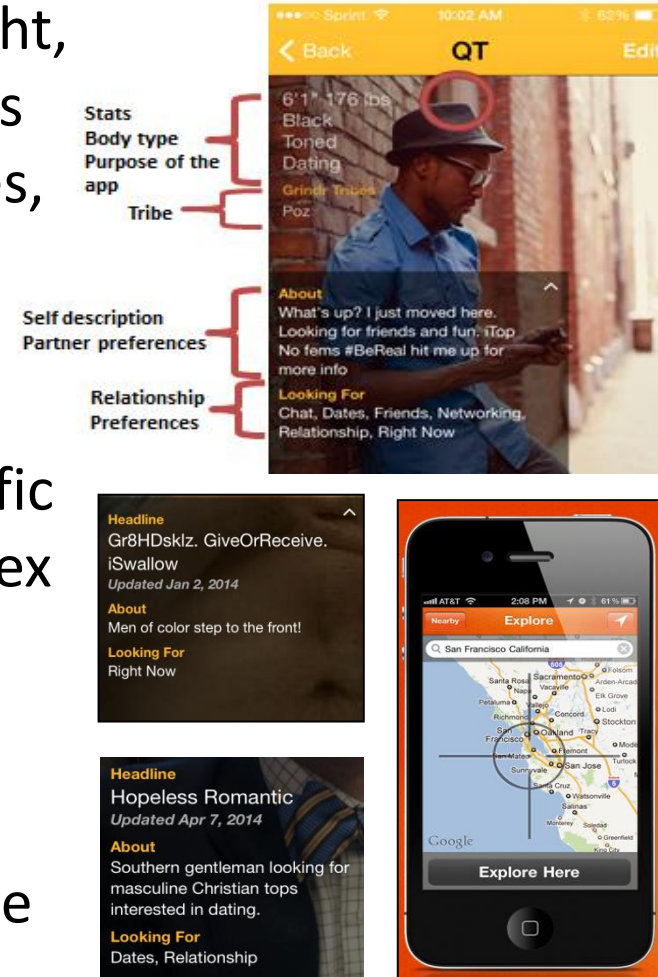
Purpose and Significance

Gain an understanding of the dating experiences and sex behaviors of a group of both HIV positive and negative Young Black MSM who use dating phone apps.

- The importance of these dating phone apps to YBMSM paired with the increasing rates of HIV for YBMSM, suggest a need for qualitative research that will give context to their dating and sex behaviors when using dating phone apps.
- There is a paucity of research addressing the emerging technological contexts in which YBMSM seek sexual partners and engage in protective or risky sex behaviors.
- The information gained from this research has the potential to lead to a better understanding of the context of these young men’s dating and sex experiences and aid in the development of successful interventions aimed at preventing HIV transmission in this high-risk group.

Dating Phone Apps

- Most users share their weight, height, and race; some users include their sex preferences, HIV status, and last HIV test date.
- Dating phone apps’ requirements vary for specific profile fields pertaining to sex related information.
- Profiles may also include information about: sexual preferences and condom use
- Users may also disclose their HIV status, with the options to state their status as positive, negative, never tested, or to list their latest test date in conjunction with a negative status.



Methods

- We conducted 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with both HIV- negative and -positive YBMSM, aged 18-24, who reported regular use of dating phone apps.
- We recruited participants from community organizations and HIV clinics in Atlanta, Georgia
- We used the Integrated Behavior Model to frame our investigation of the potential influences of phone apps on condom use, HIV status disclosure, and HIV testing.
- All interviews were transcribed verbatim. We conducted a thematic analysis of codes identified in transcripts, summaries, and memos. A modified grounded theory approach was used to guide our inductive and deductive qualitative analysis.

Results

Participant Demographics

- 109 respondents
- 25 eligible*
- 20 enrolled (10 HIV+/10 HIV-)
- Average age: 23.05 (SD=1.54)
- At least high school diploma or GED: 85.0% (n=17)
- Average number of sex partners in the past year 8.35 (SD=10.11)

Variable	% (n)	N
Use DPA everyday	65% (13)	N=20
Use DPA often	55% (11)	N=18
Sex with men using DPAs	35% often (7) 35% rarely (7)	N=20

*5 participants unable to reach, missed interview

Results

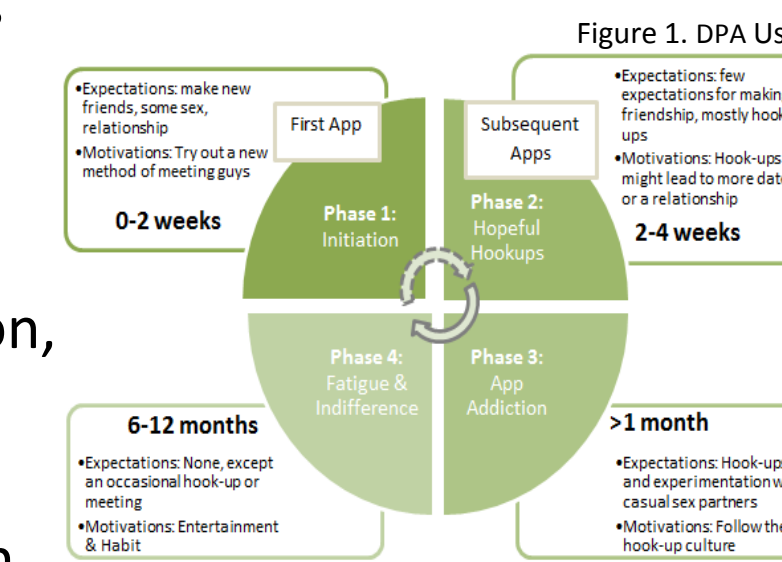
Dating app phone apps and dating experiences revolved around the following four themes:

1. App Description

- Most participants had more than one dating phone app
- They described similarities and differences between apps, app preferences, and expectations

2. Dating Phone App Use (Fig 1.)

Users’ dating phone app criteria depended on usability, target population, reputations in the “Black gay community”, and perceived success rates in meeting attractive men using the apps



Phase 3

And I used them all the time. Yeah and it kind of got really bad where I was like using them. I was on them every single day; [I was] always on them chatting with people. I'm curtailing myself now but there was a point like in the summer when I was trying to hook up with someone and I would just stay on the phone for like 5, 6 hours, all day long trying to talk to people. It was really bad.
 - (Pablo, 24, HIV negative)

Phase 2

At first, because there were stages of this... So I got Jackd originally for sexual purposes. Now I have it to try to find somebody to know better and possibly start a relationship with.
 - (Jimmy, 24, HIV positive)

Phase 4

I don't want to say it's not appealing because otherwise I wouldn't have it on here; but it's not really something I put faith into as I used to, being younger or being exposed to it from the beginning.
 - (Remy, 24, HIV negative)

3. Information Disclosure

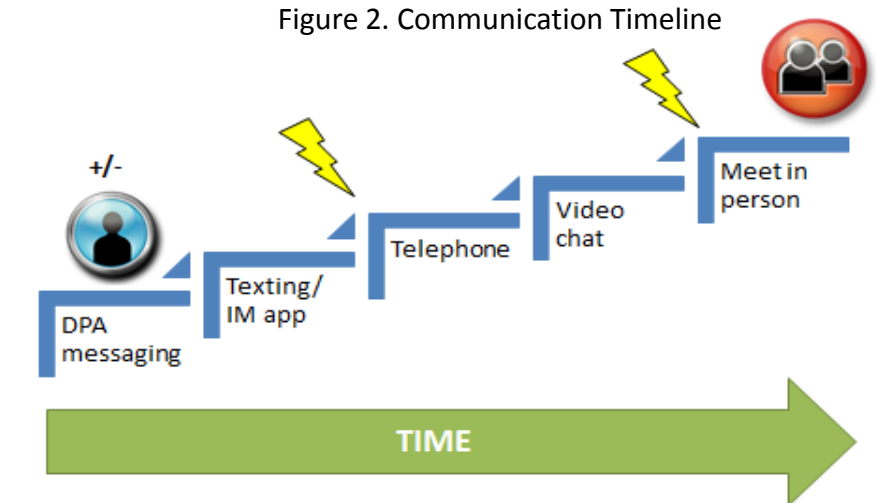
- All participants were concerned about considered confidentiality
- Most participants believed that protecting one’s identity was important
- HIV positive and negative participants had different concerns about disclosing sex-related information, HIV status, and identifiable information

4. Communicating, Dating, and Hooking Up (Fig. 2)

- All participants wanted to communicate with guys before meeting them in person
- The Length of time varied (hours vs. months) and the method of communication varied (text, video chat, etc.) across participants.

Results

- Most HIV+ participants required more communication prior to meeting for safety and comfort level reasons
- Participants that discussed having sex beforehand said they preferred this practice to make sure they established a mutual understanding of expectations from their first in-person encounter
- Perceived norms, attitudes, and self-agency were influential in participants’ intentions of having casual sex with men met using dating phone apps, consistently using condoms, and disclosing and discussing HIV status.
- Perceived hook up cultural norms within the BMSM community and on dating phone apps influenced condom use and HIV stigma in this community affected participants’ intentions of using the dating phone apps to openly disclose and discuss HIV status.



Conclusion

- Using dating phone apps to find partners does affect our participants’ intentions to consistently use condoms, disclose and discuss HIV status, and get tested for HIV.
- Understanding how perceived norms, HIV stigma, and personal-agency influence sex behaviors when YBMSM use dating phone apps is essential to developing future interventions.
- Future research should further explore the relationship between perceived norms and protective sex behaviors for YBMSM who use dating phone apps.

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