

Game On! Here's what the Experts say about digital gaming for male sexual health

Gabrielle Darville, PhD, MPH, CHES¹, Charkarra Anderson-Lewis, PhD, MPH², Shemar Little³ and Devorah Mekonnen³

(1)Mercer University, Macon, GA, (2)University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, (3)The University of Georgia, Athens, GA

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Background: In the United States, sexually transmitted disease (STD's) have highest infection rates among adolescents and young adults under 25. More importantly because public health interventions have primarily targeted women, many disparities exist among men. Since men engage in the riskiest sexual behaviors, are oftentimes asymptomatic and transmit STD's at higher rates than females, more public health efforts are needed. Increased gaming rates among men provide innovative opportunities to motivate behavior change.

Objective: This study sought to explore what components should be considered when designing a game on male sexual health.

Methods: Interviews (n=22) were conducted with experts in the field of sexual health, health education, game design and health communication. Using grounded theory, interview data was coded.

Results: Experts indicated that besides gaming mechanics, the game should link players to external resources such as the CDC website, student health center or health department to learn more. They also emphasized that it should be tailored by using plain language techniques and emphasizing health consequences to the ideologies that young adults view as most important. They also highly regarded the notion of having the game linked to their medical records and encouraged the use of social media or a celebrity endorsement to garner initial interest, interaction and sustained in game play.

Discussion: Digital games are a non-confrontational approach to discussing sexual health. Apart from increasing knowledge and influencing behavior change, games provide an opportunity for men to be linked to external health resources that otherwise they would not intentionally seek out.

Communication and informatics Planning of health education strategies, interventions, and programs Public health or related research Social and behavioral sciences

