

HIV disclosure in participant-generated narratives from black sexual minority men and transgender women

Clair Fuller, BA; Kris Rosentel, MSW; Alicia VandeVusse, PhD; Darnell N. Motley, PhD; John Schneider, MD; Brandon J. Hill, PhD

OBJECTIVE Black men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (TW) face a high burden of HIV infection. Understanding how these groups conceptualize and communicate about HIV status with sexual partners may be critical to addressing HIV disparities. This study reports on narratives of HIV disclosure and non-disclosure among a set of participant-generated narratives written by Black MSM and TW.

METHODS Data were derived from the attention-control arm of PrEP Chicago, a randomized controlled trial of a PrEP peer education and knowledge diffusion intervention. In the control arm, participants wrote three fictional narratives depicting encounters that they considered low-, medium-, and high-risk for HIV transmission. Between March 2016 and February 2018, 425 Black MSM and TW (ages 18-35) participated. Participant-generated narratives were each independently coded by two research staff in Atlas.ti.

Table 1. Participant demographic characteristics	n	%
Gender identity		
Male	377	89.1
Female/transfeminine	27	6.4
GNC/genderqueer	2	0.5
Other/transmasc./DK	5	1.2
Blank/prefer not to answer	12	2.8
Sexual orientation		
Gay/lesbian	258	61.0
Bisexual	108	25.5
Queer	5	1.2
Straight	13	3.1
Other (asexual, something else, DK)	20	4.7
Blank/prefer not to answer	19	4.5
Education		
Less than high school	30	7.1
High school/GED	257	60.8
Associates/vocational	75	17.7
Bachelors or graduate degree	22	5.2
Blank/prefer not to answer/other/DK	39	9.2
Age [mean, SD]	26.24	4.3

RESULTS Qualitative analyses revealed a number of distinct themes related to HIV status disclosure and non-disclosure. Different themes arose for stories featuring post-encounter and pre-encounter disclosure.

“Saturday nite, Phazon and Crucial was at the Lakefront. Phazon was test H.I.V positive 2 years ago but been serious with Crucial, Phazon was unfaithful from previous relationship but never felt the need to tell Crucial he was H.I.V. positive. Never using condoms. High risk” (High risk story)

Most narratives featuring serodiscordant characters **did not include status disclosure**

POST-ENCOUNTER DISCLOSURE

- Framing HIV-positive characters as **deceptive or untrustworthy**
- HIV-negative characters experiencing **anger and distress after learning a partner’s status**
- HIV-positive characters experiencing **rejection or stigma after disclosing**

“Andre knew that had tested positive for HIV but he didn't want to tell Yuni. He said that he was negative and that you don't have any reason to worry. 5 months later Yuni got into a car accident and the doctors ran some tests Yuni tested positive for HIV. He didn't know what to do he knew that Andre was his only partner but he said he was negative. Yuni was devastated could Andre have lied to him and knew all along?” (High risk story)

“My friend was dating a guy for 3 mos and just when they [were] about to have sex the guy told him he was Hiv then the guy break up with him cause he was not Hiv+ (Medium risk story)

“Seven & Nine met off Jack'd after talking for a few weeks Seven informed nine that he was positive and on medication. Nine was still interested because he had dated someone that was positive in the past. After a few dates they had sex. They used a condom and made sure they were no ripped. Seven also mentioned that he is non-detectable.” (Low risk story)

PRE-ENCOUNTER DISCLOSURE

- Characters in **committed relationships**
- HIV-positive characters who are described as **undetectable**
- Use of **condoms and/or PrEP**

Narratives with **non-disclosure or post-encounter were generally classified as high-risk** by participants

“John and Alex met on Jacked they hooked up, they shared needles and had raw sex. John was poz [HIV+] and was reckless and didn't care about passing it on. When he told Alex about his stats after they was done, Alex went to get tested and found out he became poz [HIV+]” (High risk story)

“Keith and Melvin are long term partners. They often have sex unprotected. Keith is HIV positive but takes his medicine [every] day so as a result he is [undetectable]. He did inform his partner before they gotten together that he is HIV Positive and [undetectable]. As a result they both take preventable measures to protect each other.” (Low risk story)

In contrast, narratives with **pre-encounter disclosure were generally classified as low or medium-risk** by participants

CONCLUSION HIV-related stigma and anxiety may be common among Black MSM and TW, hindering partner communication around HIV. Partner-focused interventions aimed at improving trust, healthy communication, and knowledge regarding the efficacy of treatment-as-prevention (i.e. U=U public health campaigns) may be valuable.