

Creating a Video Game to Promote Safer Sex Among Urban Emerging Adults

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THE PROBLEM: *Emerging adults (18-25) have the highest incidence of unprotected sex & very high infection rates for HIV & other STIs.*

- Although exposed to prevention messages since youth, emerging adults still engage in risky behavior.
- Men and young adults who are not in school are a tough audience:
 - Out-of-school emerging adults are understudied compared to college students (Collins, et al., 2005) & are harder to reach with traditional interventions.
 - Tests of popular television programming delivering persuasive safer sex messages found effects on women's attitudes & behaviors, but not men's (Farrar, 2006; Huston, et al., 1998; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).
- Men are less likely to use the media to learn about interpersonal relationships (Huston, et al., 1998).

THE INTERVENTION: *A fun, interactive video game about safer sex & abstinence for urban, ethnically diverse, emerging adults.*

- They play video games, so it is a good medium with which to reach them.
 - About 75% of 15-18 year old African-American and Hispanic males play video games daily.
 - About 50% of white males, African-American females, & white females play daily (Kaiser data).
 - 1/3 of Hispanic females play video games daily.
- Our formative research with the target group suggests they want to learn more about sex & they like the concept of a safer sex game.



Screen shots from Singles & The Sims 2

ADVANTAGES OF VIDEO GAMES

- Learning by discovery
- Potential for long exposure times
- Opportunity to model positive behaviors & show consequences of both positive and negative behaviors
- Content can be tailored based on in-game assessment
- Learning through role-plays & identification with characters



EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GAMES

- Adventure style video games with colorful graphics and engaging storylines are very effective in teaching young children to manage chronic health conditions (Lieberman, 1998, 2001).
- Computer based role-playing can effectively teach interpersonal skills (Holsbrink-Engels, 1997) and improve decision making skills (Taylor et al., 1997).
- School based electronic (Lightfoot & LaCour, 2006), and traditional non-electronic games (Fisher et al., 1999, 2002; Jemmott et al., 1992) have been used effectively for HIV prevention for teens.

MORE INFORMATION ON REVERSE SIDE

GAME CONCEPT

- Game will feature 3-D characters and visuals.
- Players will do “missions,” playing self and different characters in romantic or sexual interpersonal encounters, including within established relationships (e.g. “baby daddy”, “wifey”), transactional (for goods or services, e.g. “sugar daddy”), familiar infrequent (e.g. known personally, friend of friend), and strangers (e.g. “jump off”)
- Game will be tailored by sexual experience, gender, and cultural factors.
- Safe behavior will be rewarded; risky behavior will have negative consequences.
- There will be in-game rewards, meters, and built-in advice givers.
- The video game will ultimately be distributed via the web &/or community organizations.



KEY MESSAGE POINTS & BEHAVIOR CHANGE MODEL

