THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT OF RESILIENCE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK MEN

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There are no conflicts to report.
Resilience is:

- A quality of the social environment (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009).
- “Process of harnessing biological, psychosocial, structural, and cultural resources to sustain wellbeing.” (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2010).
- Interaction with the social environment (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014).

Resilience research identifies:

- When, how, and for whom do specific resources matter.
- Contexts, relationships, and processes.
BACKGROUND –
AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK MSM

• Health and social disparities among African American/Black MSM compared to other MSM
  • HIV prevalence (CDC 2009)
  • More cocaine and crack use (Hatfield et al. 2009)
  • Incarceration (Harawa et al. 2008)
  • Victimization (Mays et al. 2004)

• Lack of adequate social support due to homophobia or religious involvement
  (Mays et al. 2004; Balaji et al. 2012; Fullilove and Fullilove 1999; Miller 2013)
Examine elements of resilience utilized by vulnerable African American/Black MSM with histories of heavy substance use and HIV transmission risk.

Specifically:
- Multiple elements that contribute to resilience
- Co-occurring and interwoven resilience resources
- Expressions of agency
THE ROOM STUDY

• Project ROOM study - randomized intervention trial to reduce substance use and HIV transmission risk among men who have sex with men.

• Ages 18-55.

• Eligibility:
  • 1) Condomless sex in past 90 days
  • 2) Substance use at least 3 times in the past 30 days

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METHODS

- 21 interviews with African American/Black MSM
- Interviews were approximately 90 minutes
- $50 stipend
### Characteristics of Study Participants at Project ROOM Baseline (N=21)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education (≥ 12 years)</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employed full-time</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Homelessness – past year</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HIV-positive</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52.4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Days high</strong></td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anal sex partners</strong></td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Condomless anal sex frequency</strong></td>
<td>25.1</td>
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* Past 90 days
RESULTS – INNER STRENGTHS

• Inner Strengths – individual attitudes, values, behaviors, and lessons learned from previous experiences.

• Participants described inner strengths as:
  • “Strong-willed”
  • “Independent”
  • “Strong work ethic”
  • “Strength”
  • “Humility”
  • “Motivation to succeed”
  • “Desire to learn”
RESULTS – SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

• 15 men described social support largely made up of family and friends.
  • “My sister and my mom, they’re my resources.”
  • “I have a good number of friends. Financial support, emotional support, talking back and forth, but you know, I mean, my social network is solid.”

• 4 men described social support largely made up of other gay/bisexual men.
13 men described the benefits of having diverse experiences:

“*My neighbor used to take me and my brother downtown, and her friends were professional people...You know me, I'm an African American man and you know seeing Black men in suits and, you know, and meeting the presidents of companies and mangers, you know, seeing all of these positive people I'm like, ‘Wow!’ ‘Wow!’ This is what I want.*”

5 men described connections to the gay community as diverse experiences.
12 men described religion and spirituality as being a key part of their lives.

- “What has really carried me through life is my faith. Even dealing with the HIV and all, it has kept me going.”

- “I went [to church] Sunday. When I got home it was so peaceful...It helps you clear your head and say, ‘Okay, now I know what’s really important.”

Religious/spiritual involved also offer tangible resources.
RESULTS – ALTRUIISM

• 6 men expressed a desire to help others.
  • Volunteering in a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, and animal shelter.
  • Offer free computer and writing classes at a neighborhood community center.

• “I would like to be in a place where maybe I can prevent someone from going through some of the things that I’ve had to go through. That’s one of my aspirations is just to be able to help someone else.”
RESULTS – CREATIVE OUTLET

• 5 men reported having a creative outlet, including poetry, design, photography, fashion, and dance.

  • “I think I would go mad if I can’t express myself in some form of writing.”

  • “It’s kind of like a second chance to do it again. You don’t have to really talk and you just visualize a form of art and click the camera, and I like doing that.”
CONCLUSIONS

- Elements of resilience include: inner strengths, social relationships, diversity of experience, religion/spirituality, altruism, and creativity.

- Elements of resilience are interwoven, with each one contributing to a unified whole.

- Diversity draws attention to resilience resources and fosters agency.
CONCLUSIONS

• The provision and utilization of social support varied among study participants: family/friends vs. gay community.
  • When, how, and for whom do resources matter?

• Agency was expressed by making connections to the gay community.
  • How can agency be used to negotiate for further changes?

• Altruism and creativity are examples of agency
THANK YOU

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