

SEXUAL NETWORKING APP USE IN ADOLESCENT SEXUAL MINORITY MALES & ITS ROLE IN SOCIALIZING ADOLESCENTS TO HIV RISK AND PREVENTION

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SEXUAL NETWORKING APPS (SNA) AND PREP IN GAY, BI, AND QUEER TEEN BOYS

- Research on the use of online sexual spaces including SNAs has focused on adult sexual minority men (e.g., Goedel & Duncan, 2015; Grov, Breslow, et al 2014; Gudelunas, 2012)
- Teens* explore and experiment with things that are technically “off-limits” – and it’s developmentally normal to do so!
- GBQ teens have low rates of PrEP use, stemming from limited awareness, access, stigma, other structural barriers (Thoma & Huebner, 2018; Macapagal, Kraus, et al, 2020)



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Pretty sure teenage son is using Grindr. How to address the issue? (self.askgaybros)

submitted 2 years ago by grindr_mom

I'm a 35 year old single mom. My son turned 15 in January. Last night I was at a party, and a gay friend of mine was showing me some funny messages he got on Grindr. It buzzed a couple times while we were looking at it and I realised I have been hearing those tones in my apartment.

It's not really a shock to (kind of) find out my son is gay. I've kind of had my suspicions. What I don't know is what to do now. On the one hand, I don't want to force him to say anything to him until he's ready, but on the other hand I don't want him using Grindr (I have nothing against it, I use online dating sites myself, he's just too young).

I'm going to have to say something about it, but I'd appreciate any advice about how I should go about this.

If he's sharing explicit photos of himself he could find himself in a whole world of legal trouble. He could be charged with making and distributing child pornography. Anybody who receives those images could find himself in a load of trouble. If he actually meets anybody, that could be a legal nightmare for the person too.

Those are only the legal issues. Others have already pointed out the other dangers. If your son is gay you need to give him a different kind of sex education. He needs to be educated about the importance of condoms, about the dangers of hooking up with people he meets on apps, and about the risks involved in messing around with older men.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are gay, bi, and queer teen boys' experiences with sexual networking apps?

What role do online sexual spaces play in their (socialization to) HIV risk and prevention, including PrEP?

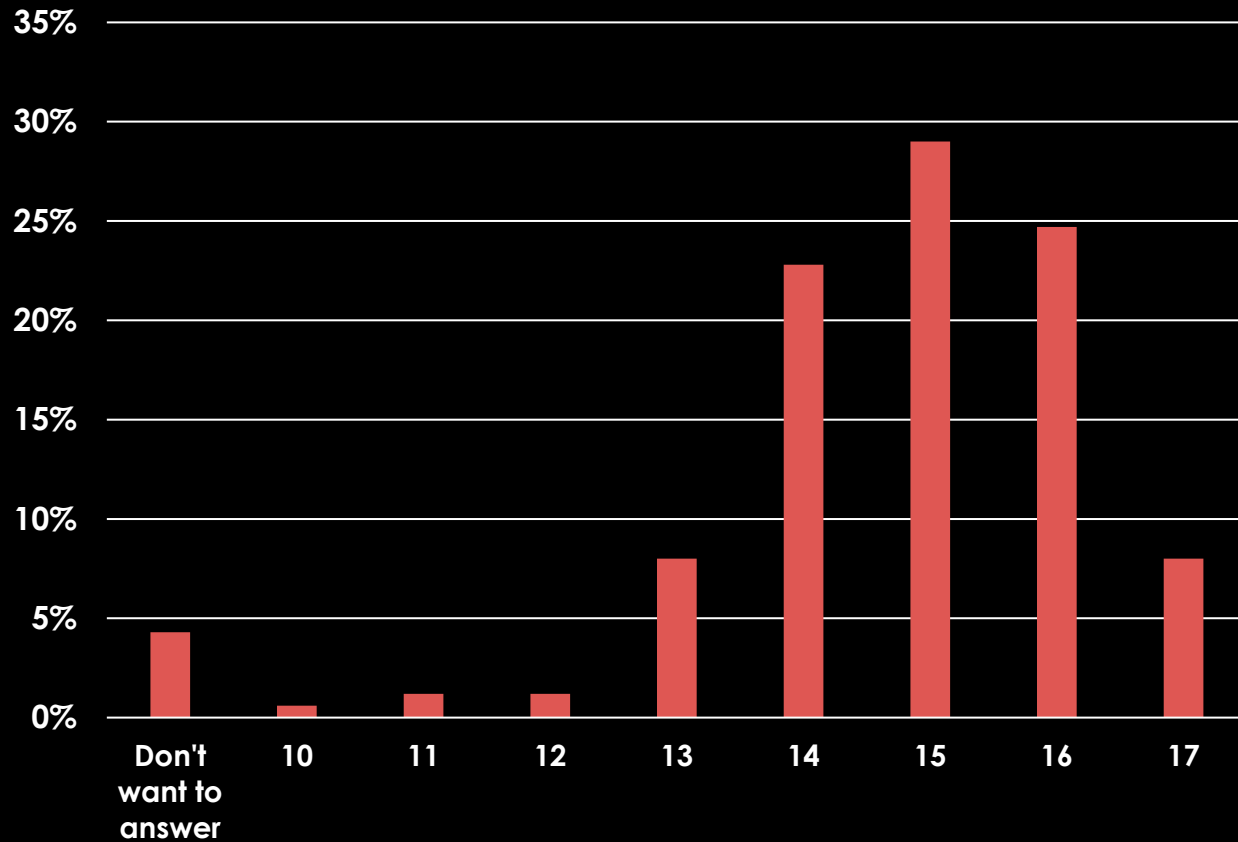
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SNA USE IN GBQ TEEN BOYS?

- The percentage of gay, bi, and queer teen boys who have ever used sexual networking apps varies widely by study (39% to 70%; Macapagal, Kraus, et al 2019a, Macapagal, Moskowitz, et al 2018, Nelson, Gordon, et al 2020)
- Without sex education that acknowledges teens use SNAs for adults, many develop a DIY approach to managing their safety online (Jozsa, Kraus, et al., 2021)
- SNAs offer an easily accessible albeit imperfect way for teens to learn about their sexual identity, interests, and HIV prevention (Owens, Shrodes, et al, 2021; Suto et al, 2020)

WHAT DOES APP USE LOOK LIKE IN GBQ TEENS?

(MACAPAGAL ET AL., 2018, 2019, 2021; OWENS ET AL, 2021)

Age at first app use (N=156)



- First use of SNAs in middle adolescence (M=15 years)
- First app most commonly Grindr (75%), but also seek partners elsewhere online
- “App use” involves range of activities from lurking to actively engaging with others
- Lower-risk sexual activities more common (digital-only, hand/blow jobs)

WHY DO GBQ TEEN BOYS USE AND STOP USING APPS?

(MACAPAGAL ET AL, 2018; OWENS ET AL., 2021)



- Many briefly use and then discontinue apps
 - **Most common reasons to start** were to find dates/serious partners (30%), have sex (28%), be less lonely (22%)
 - **Most common reasons to stop** were receiving overly sexual messages (30%), got into a relationship (19%), could not find enough people nearby (15%)
- “[it’s] gross because almost everyone is there only for sex or nudes and not for a legit relationships”*
- “weird because it is just a bunch of older men trying to get with me”*

ONLINE SEXUAL SPACES CAN SOCIALIZE TEENS TO SEXUAL WELLBEING AND PREVENTION

Such spaces allow for teens to learn about sexuality, identity, and sex in a private and anonymous way

“I’ve met a bunch of guys on there who explained to me what sex was like and the terms that are used within the LGBT community.”

Some GBQ teens initially learned about PrEP through SNAs

- 3% (Moskowitz et al, 2020), 8% (Matson et al 2021), 17% (Macapagal et al., 2019)

SNAs may play a role in normalizing HIV testing, PrEP use, and disclosure

- Teens who reported using SNAs had significantly higher rates of HIV testing than those who do not (in one study, 30.8% vs 13.3%), more likely to report PrEP with online-met partners than with offline-met
- In one study, most teens had positive perceptions of self-disclosure of PrEP use on SNAs (Pinch et al., 2021)

“I believe [disclosing my PrEP use] will increase my chances of landing a guy and it could be helpful.”

ONLINE SEXUAL SPACES CAN SOCIALIZE TEENS TO RISK

- Some teens may be skeptical about online partners' HIV/STI status while many others may assume status (Jozsa et al., 2021; Macapagal et al., 2019)

“I think STDs can always be lied about and sometimes I've met some real creeps on these apps who are old and pining after an obviously underage guy.”

- GBQ teen boys who ever used SNAs perceived higher HIV/STI risk than those who had not (Macapagal et al., 2018, 2019)
- SNA use unlikely to cause condomless sex, but online sexual spaces may attract those who may engage in more risk behavior (e.g., Grov et al., 2013; Jenness et al., 2010; Macapagal et al., 2021)

HOW SHOULD WE MITIGATE RISKS OF ONLINE SEXUAL SPACES WHILE PRESERVING THEIR BENEFITS FOR TEENS?

- **We cannot wait for queer-inclusive sexual health information to make it into traditional school-based sex ed**
- Information about sexual health and wellbeing should meet teens where they are
- Online sexual spaces should make sexual health information accessible to all users
- We can design resources and tools for teens to learn how to navigate SNAs safely **if they choose to**

A TOOL CALLED HUMPR

- How can we acknowledge the reality of online partner seeking in teens and equip them with skills to do so safely?
- Get ahead of the game and teach them.
- HUMPR is available through SMART, our online HIV prevention program for GBQ teen boys (Mustanski et al, 2020)



WHAT CAN ADOLESCENT HEALTH PROVIDERS DO?

- Reduce shame
- Provide developmentally appropriate spaces for identity exploration
- Counsel about legal and social factors
- Advise teens on sexual health/HIV prevention strategies
- Advocate for policy changes & different safeguards online

Suto et al., 2020, JAACAP

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES

Geosocial Networking Application Use Among Sexual Minority Adolescents

Daniel J. Suto, BS, Kathryn Macapagal, PhD, Jack L. Turban, MD, MHS

The following clinical scenario is a composite case that illustrates clinically important phenomena based on several patients.

Kevin is a 15-year-old male-identifying patient with no formal psychiatric history who is brought to the emergency room by his mother following an intentional acetaminophen overdose. Following medical clearance, he discloses to the emergency room psychiatrist that he

conservative estimate that approximately 1 in 4 SMAs are using GNAs. Given that a substantial proportion of SMAs use GNAs, clinicians should be familiar with how to counsel SMAs who use these platforms.

Psychological Dynamics

Clinicians should be aware that SMAs may be drawn to GNAs because they can fulfill key developmental needs.

CONCLUSION

- Online partner seeking is related to **developmentally normal** needs for social and romantic connection, sexual exploration, identity development among LGBTQ teens
- Use of online sexual spaces has its pros and cons for teens' sexual health and wellbeing
 - + May promote use and awareness of sexual health services like HIV testing, PrEP
 - + May offer teens a safer way to explore sex and identity
 - -- May learn inaccurate information about sexual health and behavior
 - -- May put teens in sexual situations they are unprepared to navigate
- Addressing teen HIV prevention and sexual wellbeing is absolutely needed in online sexual spaces – how can we make this a reality?

THANK YOU!

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