



BACKGROUND & HYPOTHESIS

- ❑ An increase in the use of geo-social networking (GSN) dating applications has changed the ways sexual minority men (SMM; gay and bisexual men, men who have sex with men, and same-sex attracted men) both meet other SMM as well as how they portray their online identities.¹
- ❑ Despite the cultural shifts caused by the introduction of mobile dating apps, a large portion of mobile-app research has focused on HIV/STI risk among SMM app users.²
- ❑ While there has been an increase in qualitative research exploring the personal experiences of app use among this population³, there remains a lack of research exploring whether experiences vary by age and/or generation.
- ❑ As online dating site and mobile dating app use among older adults has increased significantly in the past decade⁴, this study aimed to find if there are generational differences in attitudes towards GSN app use among SMM.

METHODS

- ❑ As part of a larger study exploring app use for sex-seeking (*Project iSMASH [Implications of Social Mobile Apps on Sexual Health]*), four focus groups with SMM ($n=20$) were conducted in NYC to explore the experiences of SMM who use these apps.
- ❑ Each focus group session ran for 90 minutes, and semi-structured questions were used to elicit participants' attitudes towards using apps to meet other men.
- ❑ Audio from focus group sessions was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in order to find any generational differences in attitudes towards these apps.
- ❑ All comments related to generational or age-related differences in attitudes were observed, recorded, and four major themes identified.

FINDINGS

- ❑ Theme 1: *Ambivalence/Reluctance*. While older SMM have migrated towards using GSN dating apps to meet other SMM, these findings suggest this movement may be a result of the shift towards these apps within the larger SMM community rather than due to preference.
- ❑ Theme 2: *Social Skills/Communication*. Older SMM expressed concerns related to GSN dating app use and their effects on younger users' social abilities.
- ❑ Theme 3: *Comfort/Safety*. Younger SMM expressed feeling more comfortable and safe while using GSN dating apps as there was less perceived risk while using these apps in comparison to other forms of dating.
- ❑ Theme 4: *Bar Culture*. Both older and younger SMM have observed changes in bar culture due to the widespread use of these apps.

Theme 1: Ambivalence / Reluctance

"To me that was more fun... in the 90's you had to depend on having social skills and you'd know what you like when you see it. Computer or the phone for me is a last resort... it's convenient, but it's not my preference." - Derek, 43

"I go through these periods of 'I'm going to delete everything. I'm going to sign off, cut the apps, cut the icons' because in reality I'd rather be meeting people on the street, you know, or just walking down the street or going for coffee." - Chet, 56

"Technology separates us even though it's designed to connect us... in the past we used to put more effort into it." - Vincent, 35

Theme 2: Social Skills / Communication

"I've had occasions where I've been on a date and they're on their phone because they're checking an app... people have lost the ability to communicate." - Juan, 32

"Well I'll go ahead and say it. I find a lot of them don't have any conversation skills in person because, let's say we meet and have a drink, and they're panicky and they're typing the whole time because they can't even look you in the face and have a conversation whereas with older guys that's not so much the case." - Chet, 56

"It requires no courage. Just send a text saying like I want to see you whatever the message is. The same goes with the app." - Vincent, 35

Theme 3: Comfort / Safety

"I guess it's easier... say if we were to go to a bar and approach somebody and the person doesn't like you and blows you off and you take a hit to your self-esteem. But if on the app and somebody just doesn't respond you're just like okay whatever." - Charlie, 26

"The first people that I came out to when I was like 16... were people that I met online back then on MySpace. And ever since that I feel that the Internet makes me feel safe, you know, because you know like it was my first experience." - Curtis, 27

"Maybe it's because I'm just young... I know like if someone blocks my profile, temporarily I feel like shit." - Ronnie, 24

Theme 4: Bar Culture

"I think people still go to bars and are on Grindr or are on something else, so they're just standing at the bar counter on their phones." - Ronnie, 24

"...you really got low-lives in bars now... The people left in the bars are really a mess. You know the big time drug addicts, the illiterates." - Corey, 47

"People have the app running in the backgrounds and they're in the bar. I've been in a gay bar and gotten a message from someone in the bar... And they don't even come over and say 'hello.'" - Stan, 56

"When you're in a bar you see people on their apps... I roll my eyes—I think that's the stupidest exercise." - Vincent, 35

CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

- ❑ These findings may offer insight into understanding age-related differences in attitudes towards GSN app use for SMM. As older SMM continue gravitating towards dating apps due to circumstance rather than preference, exploring their experiences with these apps can shed light on an otherwise understudied portion of the SMM population.

REFERENCES

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