

# HIV PREVENTION IS 215 FEET AWAY: DEVELOPING GEOSOCIAL NETWORKING INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUNG GAY, BISEXUAL AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

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## ABSTRACT

HIV continues to rise among young gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (YMSM) despite current prevention efforts. Increasingly, YMSM are using smartphone applications (“apps”) to communicate with friends, meet romantic partners and seek information about health. A growing number of apps for YMSM contain a geosocial networking component, allowing users to send text messages, photos and pin drops to other users according to geographic proximity. These apps are becoming increasingly specialized for targeted subpopulations of MSM and attract millions of users worldwide. Our research team used the geolocation feature of a popular app to recruit a probability sample of YMSM (ages 18-24; N = 195) in Southern California. Participants completed an anonymous online survey on a variety of topics, including sexual health and technology use. YMSM in our study were single (87%), educated (85% college degree or higher), gay-identified (87%) and largely out to family and friends (94%). Over three-quarters had used the app to meet a sexual partner and 29% indicated their primary reason for using the app was to “hook up.” However, YMSM also used the app to connect to the gay community (65%), make new friends (80%) and kill time when bored (86%). Eighty-eight percent of users logged onto the app daily (50% logged on five or more times a day); 46% used at least one other gay geosocial networking app and 70% indicated willingness to receive HIV prevention information via smartphone. Results indicate that geosocial networking apps represent a prime opportunity for discreet, targeted outreach for YMSM. Possible functionality could include geolocation-based HIV test finders, automated behavioral and biomedical prevention reminders, gay-specific content on health and well-being and network-based health promotion. Future community-based research with YMSM and smartphone app companies on optimal design and functionality of geosocial networking interventions for YMSM is needed.