“We’re Not Even in the Picture”: Transmasculine Perceptions of PrEP Marketing and HIV Prevention Messaging

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Background: Despite increased visibility of HIV prevention efforts, transmasculine individuals–those assigned female at birth and identifying across a spectrum of masculine identities–remain underrepresented and underserved in PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) campaigns. Existing public health messaging frequently centers on cisgender men who have sex with men, often excluding or tokenizing transmasculine people and failing to address the intersecting structural, social, and informational barriers they face. This disconnect undermines trust, limits engagement, and contributes to persistent disparities in HIV prevention. This study aimed to examine how transmasculine individuals perceive current PrEP advertisements (ads), assess perceived strengths and limitations of ads, and identify community-informed strategies to promote inclusive, affirming, and effective HIV prevention messaging.

Methods: Three virtual focus groups were conducted with transmasculine individuals (n=12, ages 22-34) in Philadelphia, PA. Using image elicitation techniques, participants were asked to evaluate five real-world PrEP advertisements and imagine alternative messaging approaches. Guided by critical health literacy and intersectionality frameworks as sensitizing concepts, data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify message strengths, deficiencies, and recommendations for adaptation.

Results: Participants consistently identified barriers to engagement rooted in exclusionary representation, unclear messaging, and perceived tokenization. Four themes emerged around current messages: Lack of Clarity and Presumed Prior Knowledge, Hypersexualization and Alienation, Invisibility and Tokenization, and Respectability vs. Promiscuity in Sexual Framing limited education and credibility of PrEP ads, and reinforced binary assumptions about relationships and mistrust. Community Care as a Resonant Ethic and a desire for messages grounded in mutual responsibility, intimacy, and collective well- being emerged as theme for messaging. Participants emphasized that effective campaigns should offer clear information, reflect diverse bodies and experiences, and be created with meaningful transmasculine input.

Conclusions: This study highlights the urgent need for public health campaigns that move beyond surface-level inclusion to authentically center transmasculine people. To advance equity in transgender health, PrEP messaging must be educationally accessible, emotionally resonant, and co-created with the communities it aims to reach. Community-led campaign development grounded in gender affirmation, intersectionality, and collective care can strengthen trust, increase uptake, and support more affirming, evidence-based HIV prevention strategies.