

Magic Johnson: Source salience for African American males

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Objective: This study investigates claims in the U.S. popular press regarding Magic Johnson's exceptional appeal as a spokesperson for HIV prevention among African-American males. We examine how two high-risk groups of African-American men differ in their perceptions of the salience of source attractiveness and credibility (expertise and trustworthiness).

Methods: We conducted interviews with a convenience sample of 47 African-American indigent males in Los Angeles and 50 African-American students attending a large public university in Los Angeles.

Results: All respondent had heard about Magic's HIV status and retirement. Indigent men were more likely to consider Magic a good spokesperson for the African-American community than were students ($t=1.87$, $p \leq .06$). Students were more knowledgeable about Magic's life ($t=2.94$, $p \leq .01$) and were also more likely to have discussed Magic ($t=2.15$, $p \leq .05$). There were no significant differences regarding where respondents received their information about Magic. When asked to chose the best sources for HIV-prevention knowledge, attitude, and behavior messages, the groups were equally likely to select Magic. There were differences in how the groups responded to Magic: being HIV-positive was more important for indigents ($t=3.01$, $p \leq .01$). Factor analyses revealed that both groups found Magic very attractive: indigents found him both trustworthy and expert, whereas students found him primarily trustworthy. Students were more likely to report that appointing white people to advise him would be damaging ($t=2.81$, $p \leq .01$). Neither group responded that joining the President's national commission on AIDS would lower Magic's credibility.

Conclusion: Underlying the widespread appeal of a Magic Johnson to African-American males are group differences. HIV-prevention messages must be carefully tailored to conform to the salient source attributes of specific risk groups.

Schooler, C., Mays, V.M., Flora, J.A. & Cochran, S.D. (1992). Magic Johnson: Source salience for African-American males. Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on AIDS (p.505; abstract no. PoD 5699), Amsterdam, Netherlands.