

## **SiHLE Evaluation Report**

### ***Focus Group with SiHLE Participants***

**Prepared August-September 2014**

#### **Background**

The Sistering, Informing, Healing, Living, and Empowering program (SiHLE) is an evidence-based, group-level intervention aimed at reducing HIV sexual risk behavior among sexually active, African American teenage females, aged 14-18. SiHLE is led by two peer educators and an adult facilitator in four 3-hour sessions, with an additional 3-hour session added to account for the required Adulthood Preparation Subjects component of PREP. The intervention teaches girls about abstaining from sex, using condoms, and having fewer sexual partners using skills practice, role-playing and group discussions. All of the sessions also emphasize ethnic and gender pride. Website for more information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/prevention/research/compendium/rr/sihle.html>

#### **Purpose of Evaluation Project: Focus Groups with Participants**

The Iowa Department of Public Health asked the University of Iowa to assist in evaluating the SiHLE program. One method of evaluating the program was by conducting focus groups with SiHLE group participants. The focus groups were facilitated by adults and peer educators.

#### **Methods**

Two focus groups were completed with SiHLE participants in June 2014. The first focus group occurred prior to the participants attending a SiHLE program, and the other focus groups were conducted the day after participants completed the program. The focus groups were conducted to assess changes in the participants' responses. Questions were asked by a trained facilitator related to the following topics:

1. Portrayals of African American women in popular culture
2. Female African American positive and negative role models
3. Perceptions of beauty
4. Birth control and condom use
5. Healthy and unhealthy relationships
6. Assertive and aggressive communication and physical fighting
7. Feedback on the SiHLE program [post SiHLE focus group only]

Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Broad themes were generated and organized to provide a broad description of participant responses before and after SiHLE.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Findings from the interviews are described below in the following categories: 1) Stereotypes of black women, 2) Perceptions of beauty, 3) African American role models, 4) Healthy and unhealthy relationships, 5) Communication and physical fighting, 6) birth control, and 7) SiHLE Program Feedback.

### ***Stereotypes of African American Women***

In both the pre- and post-program focus groups, the participants watched music videos from popular African American artists. In the pre-test focus group, they watched a video by the artist Rihanna in which she is portraying a stripper along with other African American women. The lyrics of the song focus on money. After watching this video, participants made comments about the money aspect. One participant said:

*Yeah, that you can pretty much do whatever you want as long as you got money. Yeah. That's how it made me feel.*

Another participant felt that the emphasis on money in the video suggested that African American women have no worth. She said:

*Half-naked...They make the video seem like all we want is they money and my, we just have no worth.*

The issue of money came up again, after participants watched the music video 'Loyal' by artist Chris Brown. In this video, Brown sings about how African American females are unfaithful and are with men for money. Participants made comments like:

*That basically girls out here, basically want one thing from a person who's rich come down here and forget about their relationship and all they want it the money or they want the fame. They don't want them, they want the money and the fame.*

*Yeah I mean like, because people listen to it, the boys automatically going to think that, "Yeah he right. These girls here aren't loyal so I might as well just do me how other hoes on the side, cause I know my girl ain't funna hold me down, especially if somebody gonna come around."*

In the post-program focus group, participants watched an older music video by Queen Latifah. In this video, Queen Latifah raps about love, unity and lifting up one another. After watching this video, the girls listened to the lyrics and took away that the song was empowering to women. One participant said:

*I feel we need to play that video again because we need to see more videos like that now and you know and see how like us black women should stand up to ourselves.*

Also, in the pre-SiHLE focus group, girls spoke of the stereotype that black girls are supposed to physically fight. One girl said:

*I think it's a stereotype, really because people really expect, you know, when girls get in each other faces and they point and like that, we supposed to just like, you know fight because you wouldn't think if the two white girls arguing and stuff they supposed to fight. They'd be like, "ahh, no they ain't gonna fight, they probably gonna hug it out at the end of the day." But when two black people fight, they gonna be like, "yeah, they funna they it's gonna be all that." So....*

### ***Perceptions of Beauty***

In the pre-SiHLE focus group, participants were shown a picture of the musical artist Nicki Minaj and were asked if they thought was beautiful. Many commented on her physical appearance but felt she was not beautiful now because she looked like she had plastic surgery. Participants also commented that her skin color is lighter now than before she became famous. One participant remarked that it made her feel like "you got to be lighter to get somewhere." Other participants commented:

*She look prettier, like healthy looking. Before she got famous.*

*She looks better when she is like covered.*

In the post-SiHLE focus group, the participants described Olympic gymnast Gabby Douglas as beautiful because she is natural; they also liked her smile and skin color. Participants thought she was able to "stick up for herself" in an assertive way when people interviewed her during the Olympics. They also described professional tennis player Serena Williams as beautiful because she is strong, has natural hair and does not need to wear makeup. One participant also said:

*She doin something that she loves to do even like through all her rough goin ups and downs and stuff like that.*

### ***African American Role Models***

#### ***They Are a Role Model***

In the pre-SiHLE focus group, participants described how they were good role models by teaching young black girls the importance of education versus relying on one's appearance to get ahead in life. Two girls said:

*Teaching them that education is important to get somewhere in life and to stay fully clothed.*

*Um, I guess like, telling them that like dressing half naked going anywhere is not going to like get you everywhere you need to go in life.*

In the post-SiHLE focus groups, the participants said they were positive role models to black girls because they provided knowledge and support through relationships and sex, and they offered moral guidance. For example, one participant commented:

*Um, I like since I know about a lot stuff now, I can go out there and like help younger females who are like maybe wondering or struggling like with some things with their boyfriends and like sex problems. I can help them with instead of just keeping all the information to myself.*

### **Positive Female African American Role Models**

In the pre-SiHLE focus group, participants identified Alicia Keys, Michelle Obama and Jada Pinkett as positive role models because of their involvement within the community and their efforts to improve child health and education. For example, participants said:

*I got Jada Pinkett. She's responsible because she's out here making children's books for children to help them read, you know stuff like that.*

*I got one. Alicia Keys. Cause she oh...she do...like she didn't change herself to fit in and like she's more about her career than like she like donates stuff, she's about the world not just about her. That's why I named her cause she cares about everybody else.*

In the post-SiHLE focus group, when the girls were asked what Michelle Obama represented to them, the participants described her as a “black, strong, sista” and a good role model to black girls and women. They also described her as independent, trying to make a difference, and productive. Some girls stated:

*Well she showing young black ladies today that you can be more than the video vixen or singer or you know pop star. You can go all the way to the top.*

*She, um, I don't know, she just not like, she could just be like sittin in the back of the White House like doing whatever she wants to do, you know like just being lazy and everything, but she actually getting around and being productive and like taking time to help people and trying to make a difference.*

Girls also listed Queen Latifah as being responsible because she is helping young, black women. One participant said:

*She's out here. She's starting programs and helping young, female black women and males and she's um- doing like a lot of talk shows and helping people out.*

### **Negative African American Female Role Models**

In both the pre- and post-SiHLE focus groups, girls were asked to list people who were not being responsible. In the pre-program focus group, girls listed musical artists Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj along with Joseline Hernandez and Mimi Faust-- members of the *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* reality TV show-- as not being responsible because of their need to fit in, focus on physical appearance, and inappropriate sexual acts:

*I do, she do, Joseline. Like she, she all about, well she make it seem like all you gotta do is like shake your butt and, or like do something proactive to get a man and keep a man.*

*I don't think Mimi is responsible. I think that you, you should not make a sex tape with nobody, point period blank. Especially with somebody who is not your husband. Thing, Things like, things get leaked, you just, you shouldn't do things like that and you know you have the kid, too. So, I think she was being very irresponsible and not the person [trails off]*

In the post-SiHLE focus groups, one participant again listed Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj as being irresponsible. Nicki Minaj was singled out specifically because she encourages women to have plastic surgery. One participant said:

*Uh, Nicki Minaj ain't responsible because she tells kids these days that uh- when you get, you know, rich or whatever, you can change your body or whatever cause you're not cute the way you used to be.*

### ***Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships***

#### **Relationships in Popular Culture**

In the post-SiHLE focus group, the marriage of Nick Carter and Mariah Carey was discussed as an example of a healthy relationship. One participant stated:

*They don't let people get in their relationship, you know what I mean? They just like put everybody out there, not like get in between them.*

Group members also watched the music video “All of Me” by John Legend and were asked to comment on what the video says about relationships. A couple of the girls described the relationship portrayed in the video as a healthy one. As one participant explained:

*That, um, not all relationships have to be abusive, but some, like, most relations should be like half and half. Like you both give the same amount of effort into the relationship not one is over another or less than another.*

Although most of the participants agreed that the “All of Me” music video represented a healthy relationship, one participant described it as a “moody” relationship with several ups and downs.

In the pre-SiHLE group, there was much discussion about the relationship between two reality TV stars, Stevie and Joseline on the show *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta*. Participants felt like this was an unhealthy relationship because it was based on publicity and not on love and romance, and because the partners were unfaithful. As a couple participants stated:

*It is nothing romantic about that, they is together cause of publicity and money.*

*They ain't even married. They fake that marriage.*

## Perceptions of a Healthy Relationship

In the pre-SiHLE focus group, participants described several qualities that a partner should possess in a healthy relationship. These include being honest, loyal, trustworthy, supportive, not abusive, and responsible. They also described a healthy relationship as having a partner who is exclusive, open with others about their relationship, and willing to spend time together outside of friends or when they want something (e.g., money). A couple girls said:

*Someone who builds you up and supports you. Uhh they gonna keep it straight with you and um like actually care about you.*

*Maybe not all the time with your friends, but a long time you know, just getting to know each other and talk.*

## Communication and Physical Fighting

When the girls were asked questions related to rumor spreading and threats of physical fights, their responses to these types of questions seemed to change from pre to post-program. When asked about physical fighting in the pre-test focus group, many of the girls stated that they liked to fight. They also listed several benefits to fighting, but a couple of the participants did say they would not fight at school because they did not want to get expelled. Participants said things like:

*I feel like if you pickin with me, then you must want, then you must want these hands, so you gonna receive them, I don't care. Either way, you mess with them you probably see, like with me, I have a you know they, you know, at school like different from my life, and then teachers in school. But I 'll fight her because you be pickin on me, you want it so...you funna get it.*

*You get ya props and you know like when other people that's met you at first and they heard that your fight, "Ahh girl I heard that." I'll be like...*

However, in the post-test focus group when participants were asked what they would do if a friend was spreading negative rumors, the participants responded that they would simply ask the friend what was going on or tell them they cannot be friends anymore.

*Um, I would be assertive and actually tell her, like- like, first ask her why would she do that. If she was really my friend, why would she be spreading rumor about me? And then if she, like, doesn't have anything to say about it, I would like just politely tell her, like not really be like, "Oh, we're not friends anymore because you de, de, de, de." Just be like, "Um, yeah we can't hang out anymore, like if this is how you think about me, we can't like hang out." Like I would...yeah.*

Another girl said:

*I would go up to her and just confront her without everybody right there because you know I don't want to call- I would just pull her to the side and say like, "You know why you do that?"*

*Like we're supposed to be sisters. I thought we were sisters and you go around spreading rumors about like..I don't like that." I would just tell her how I felt about it and stuff, like. "If you gonna keep doing that, like I just don't talk to you no more."*

### ***Birth Control***

In the post-SiHLE focus group, participants were asked about concerns related to getting on birth control. Not many participants expressed concerns. Of the three that did, two were concerned about side effects of birth control (specifically, its effect on menstruation and weight) and one was concerned that their boyfriend may no longer want to wear a condom:

*Um, if you're in a relationship and maybe your boyfriend don't think that you can wear condom just because you're on birth control and get pregnant.*

Although there were concerns in the post-test SiHLE focus group about participants' partners not wanting to wear condoms because they were taking birth control pills, a few girls in the pre-SiHLE focus group indicated that they would still insist on their partners wearing a condom. One participant's response was:

*Then I'm gonna be like, "It's still not safe and you funna wear a condom, no matter what and I'm not gonna have no babies." Then I'm going to sign him up to like, I don't know, do an interview at a daycare. Go take care of those kids.*

### **SiHLE Program Feedback**

In the post-SiHLE focus group, the girls were asked to describe what they learned from the program. The following topics were listed by participants as how they benefited from the SiHLE program:

#### ***Positive Relationships and Communication***

Participants reported that the SiHLE Program was helpful for learning how to identify signs of both positive and unhealthy relationships. One participant said:

*Umm...I guess it helped me throughout the [inaudible] healthy relationships and how to get out of those unhealthy relationships and you know, yeah.*

#### ***Negotiating Condom Use***

The girls felt that the SiHLE Program helped them understand the importance of wearing condoms to protect against STIs, and it taught them how to negotiate condom use with their partners. For example, one participant said:

*It helped us out, how to talk to our boyfriends about using a condom and to protect ourselves and that we don't have to take um, every, you know, excuse that our partners yells at us.*

## ***Supporting a Suicidal Friend***

Post-test feedback indicated that the SiHLE program increased the participants' awareness of the severity of suicide. One participant expressed that she would support a friend in getting help:

*I learned that um, if a friend said they gonna kill themselves, don't laugh. Take it seriously and help them.*

## **Conclusions**

The findings from the pre- and post-SiHLE focus groups suggest that the program had some positive impact on participants. Participants described how the program had increased their knowledge related to interpersonal communication within romantic relationships and friendships, birth control, and showing support for a suicidal friend. During both pre- and post-test discussions, participants were also able to articulate the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships and describe the characteristics of a positive female African American role model. After completing the SiHLE curriculum, many participants indicated they would be more likely to resolve problems with friends using verbal communication instead of physical fighting. Participants also described how the program had taught them skills with which to navigate unhealthy relationships.

Findings from the post-test focus group show that a majority of participants have limited concerns about going on birth control. Concerns mentioned were related to menstruation, possible weight gain and their partner's resistance to wearing a condom. However, during the pre-program focus group, some participants already describe their willingness to advocate for condom use with male partners.

Participants were able to identify healthy relationships in pop culture, and they perceived healthy relationships to be full of trust, honesty, support, loyalty and exclusivity. A healthy relationship was described as having partners who take time to get to know one another and who do not use time together only to get something they want, like money or sex.

The music videos that participants watched led to discussion of stereotypes of African American women-- such as they like to physically fight to solve problems, enter relationships with men for money, and use their appearance for personal gain. Participants responded to the videos by emphasizing the need for more positive, uplifting, and empowering videos of African American girls and women, such as the video they watched by Queen Latifah.

Participants' perception of beauty was described as African American women who have a more natural appearance and possess strong and assertive personal characteristics. Participants were successful in identifying positive African American female role models. Women such as Michelle Obama and Jada Pinkett were described as productive and admirable individuals who try to make a difference within their community.