UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

PEZ
Person Environment Zone Projects

DISPENSER

Fall Newsletter October 2006

Special points of interest:

- Renew or discover interest in PEZ Projects with seasonal newsletters.
- Reflect with Dr. Sondra Solomon.
- Review PHASE I participant characteristics and preliminary results.
- Receive updates on PEZ team members and activities.
- Read about and support the PHASE II project.

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PEZ Greeting

Hello to all PEZ Projects participants and supporters! We are excited to introduce you to our first of many seasonal newsletters. We hope to maintain regular contact with you to distribute project and personnel highlights and updates. We would like to thank each and every one of you for making our PHASE I Project a success! We recruited the 200th participant for our NIMH funded "Rural Ecology and Coping with HIV/AIDS Stigma" study this past April. As you know, our research team led by Drs. Solomon, Miller and Forehand have been examining how individuals cope with the stigma of HIV. We were particularly interested in how living in a rural environment affects the experience of living with HIV/AIDS. Since our study began, we have presented preliminary findings at conferences nationally and internationally, including the American Psychological Society, Society for Behavioral Medicine, XVI International AIDS Conference and the NMAC United States Conference on AIDS. We are presently working on papers to make study findings available to the public. We have included some preliminary study results in this newsletter and will continue to notify you as results are interpreted. We are also preparing for PHASE II of our Coping with HIV Project (read more on pg4).

PEZ Research Team (from l to r): Adam Gonzalez, Jan Bunn, Tracy Nyerges, Sondra Solomon, Dan Cassidy, Rex Forehand, Carol Miller, Susan Varni, Alex Cruz

Our research space in Dewey Hall at UVM.

Reflections from Sondra

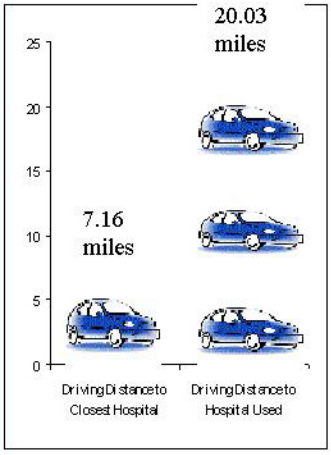
Hello my friends,

The long road that we have traveled together began two or three years before the National Institute of Mental Health funded the "Rural Ecology and Coping with HIV" study in January 2004. Long before we started our current project most of you were telling us your stories about living with HIV/AIDS in Vermont and other rural areas in New England. Translating those early disclosures into a project that NIMH could support would not have been possible without your patience, consideration and participation. During this journey I have been challenged to think about scientific research and the power of community in a new light. Our team has been challenged to consider our initial questions about HIV/AIDS stigma and to develop more detailed ways to examine the intricacies of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion some of you face every day. Of course many of you are thriving! Your story is ultimately one of survival, resilience and grace under pressure. Also, our story and work is not done. We are moving forward with continuation studies, following our current participants, recruiting new participants and including the friends and families of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in our work. HIV/AIDS research in rural communities is an ever changing landscape. Thank you for your support and I look forward to working with you as we continue to examine the assumptions regarding HIV/AIDS stigma.

Cheers, Dr. Sondra

Project News: PHASE I Participant Characteristics

Shown here are characteristics of the 200 individuals living with HIV/AIDS that participated in our PHASE I study. The average age at time of participation is 43. The average amount of time since diagnosis is 11.5 yrs. 47% were not sexually active in the 90 days prior to participation. On average, participants drive three times as far to the hospital they use for healthcare than to the closest hospital to their residence (below).

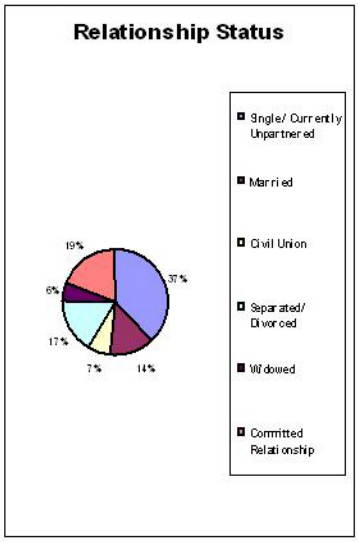


People cope with their perception of HIV/AIDS stigma in different ways. The present study differentiates between two kinds of coping:

Engagement Coping, which is a strategy to relieve stress by exerting control over the situation or self (e.g., problem solving, emotional regulation) and/or by adapting to stressful conditions (e.g., cognitive restructuring); (Mean = 2.54, SD = 0.62).

Disengagement Coping, which is a strategy to relieve stress by separating oneself from the stressor physically and/or cognitively (e.g., avoidance, denial); (Mean = 2.25, SD = 0.65).

Distributions of participants' engagement and disengagement coping strategies are presented in Figure 1.



Gender Identification

Male	144 (72%)
Female	56 (28%)

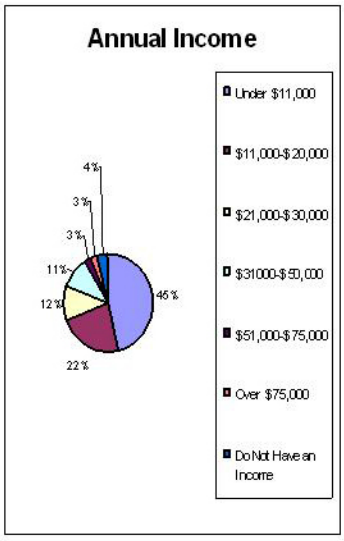
Sexual Identity

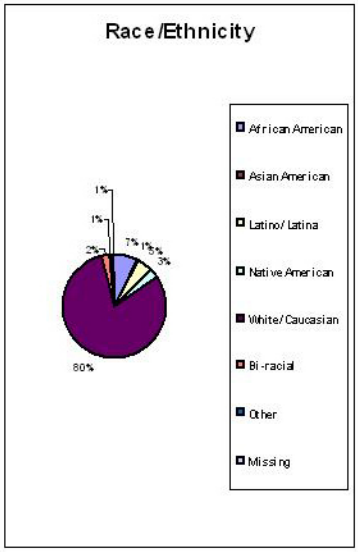
Hetero-sexual	83 (41.5%)
Bisexual	34 (17%)
Lesbian/ Homosex-ual	83 (41.5%)

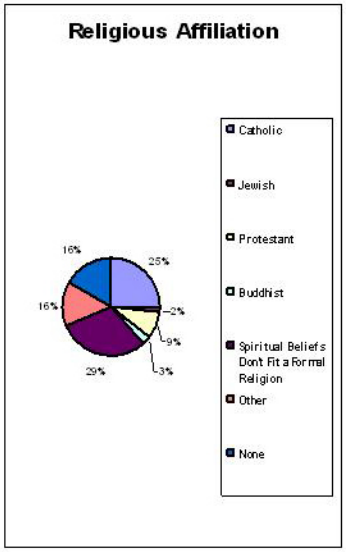
Disease Stage (by CD4 Count)

< 200	73 (36.5%)
200-<500	71 (35.5%)
500+	38 (19.0%)
Missing	18 (9.0%)

"I am not living with AIDS, HIV is living with me. It actually has made me stronger in the sense that I'm ok with this. You know, it's just, I mean there are worse things in the world. And I am sure that there are people with issues out there that are far more devastating than this will ever be to me" (personal communication).







Project News: PHASE I Preliminary Results

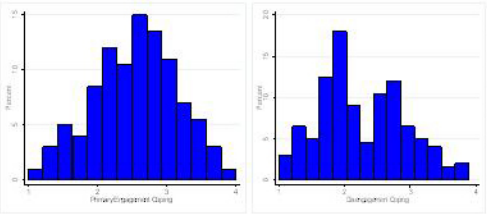
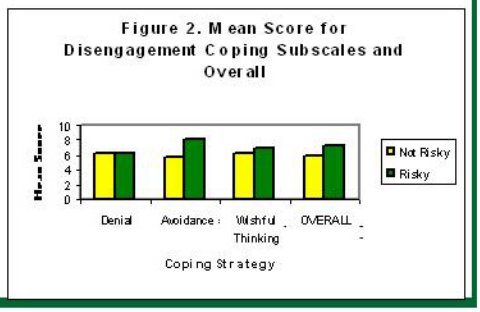


Figure 1

Our current study hypothesized that the use of disengagement coping to deal with the stigma of HIV/AIDS would predict engaging in risky sexual behavior. Results point to a significant overall difference in the utilization of disengagement coping strategies between risky and non-risky individuals (Figure 2). The use of disengagement coping is associated with an increase in the odds of HIV/AIDS risk behavior (*OR* = 1.79, 95% *CI* = 1.22, 2.62). For every 1 point increase on the disengagement coping scale, the odds of engaging in risky sex (no condom) increased by 1.79.



PEZ Projects Profile: Who is Jan Bunn?

Janice Y. Bunn, Ph.D. is a valuable member of the PEZ research team. She is a Research Assistant Professor in the Medical Biostatistics Department at UVM. Jan works as the Biostatistician for many grant-funded projects, including the "Rural Ecology and Coping with HIV/AIDS Stigma" study, which she claims to be her favorite. Because of her background in Preventative Medicine and Statistics, Jan brings a unique perspective to our team. She has amazing knowledge of health-related issues and statistical procedures. Jan has acted as a PEZ projects consultant and uses her stats expertise to analyze and interpret the data we collected from study participants. She keeps her sanity as a self proclaimed "numbers person" by staying active. She is an avid runner and hiker. Just recently, she ran in the Florida afternoon heat after presenting at the NMAC United States Conference on AIDS. Jan is also a devoted wife and mother of two who gets a kick out of the interaction between her two dogs and bird. Jan maintains a healthy diet but can't pass up the chocolate. She is a very friendly and talkative person, who always has a smile on her face. She also finds the time and has the ability to make some of own clothing. We are proud to work with Jan and to introduce her to our study supporters and participants. Thanks to Jan for all her hard work!

Jan happily working away on study results in a vest she made herself.

PEZ Feature: Vermont CARES AIDS Walk 2006

On Saturday September 29th, Vermont CARES held its annual AIDS walk in Burlington, Vermont. Vermont CARES is one of the oldest AIDS Service Organizations in the state, providing multiple services to people infected with HIV/AIDS in Vermont. As a member of the PEZ Lab, I put together a team of walkers called UVM Cares, composed of psychology graduate students and the Asian-American, Latino, African-American & Native American (ALANA) community of the University of Vermont. The team raised over $800.00 to support the work being done at Vermont CARES. Many enthusiastic walkers came out to support Vermont CARES, marching through the streets of Burlington, while holding signs promoting safe sex and the end to HIV/AIDS stigma. Join us next year as we make our faces known and voices heard in support of ending HIV stigma and promoting safe sex behaviors. If you or someone you know would like to make a donation to Vermont CARES, you can log on to the following website http://www.vtcares.org/fundraising.htm. -Adam Gonzalez

"As a member of the PEZ Lab, I put together a team of walkers called UVM CARES..."

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Thanks to all study participants for receiving and/or completing our 10 month follow-up mail survey. We were unable to reach everyone 10 months after participation, so let us know if you would like us to send you the survey and packet of materials.

Please contact us with comments on our Fall Newsletter, suggestions for upcoming seasonal newsletters, and if you would like to be removed from, or know someone who would like to be added to, our mailing list. We could send newsletters via email also.

Thank you again for your interest in our projects! We are always available for any questions/comments/concerns you might have at:

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Burlington, VT 05405

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Toll Free: 1 (866) 532-7183
Email: pez@uvm.edu

HAPPY HALLOWEEN

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

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PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

PEZ Personal: Goodbye from Tracy

As I reflect on two years as a PEZ research team member, I have such wonderful memories of all the people I worked with, interviewed, and met. My position as Project Coordinator has been both demanding and rewarding. I will not forget the long and fulfilling hours participants devoted to our study while sharing their stories with me. I now say farewell to study participants and supporters in hopes to build on the skills and experience I have acquired from organizing one of many amazing projects from the PEZ lab. I anticipate that you will continue to support future projects from the PEZ team and welcome my replacement once he/she is designated. I look forward to hearing updates while exploring my new career adventures in Seattle, WA beginning this December. Thanks to you all for the memorable two years!

Good luck and best wishes,
Tracy Nyerges

COPING WITH HIV/AIDS PROJECT
PHASE II

- To continue to study HIV/AIDS stigmatization in rural New England, Dr. Sondra Solomon and the Person Environment Zone Projects (PEZ) team are submitting a continuation grant. We hope to receive funding to expand our project to more people living with HIV/AIDS throughout rural New England.

- Please support our attempt to better understand how people cope with the stigma of HIV/AIDS by contacting us via mail, phone, or email and giving us your current contact information. **The information below that you provide will be stored and used confidentially for PHASE II recruitment efforts.** Your participation in previous and future PEZ Projects will assist us in developing and implementing interventions for coping with HIV/AIDS.

Contact me for the **PHASE II PEZ Project!**
(Please mail/phone/email this optional information to us)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____

Phone: (H)_____(C)_____(W)_____

Is it OK to leave a message on your voicemail (circle)? YES NO

Email:_____

The best way to contact me is by (circle): MAIL PHONE EMAIL

I have a friend or family member who would be interested in participating in an upcoming PEZ Friends and Family Project (circle): YES NO MAYBE DON'T KNOW

Comments:_____

_____

_____

Look for us on the web soon at www.uvm.edu/~pez

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