



# AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR WITHIN MAIN & NON-MAIN PARTNERSHIPS: INDIVIDUAL & PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

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## OBJECTIVE

- To examine both participant-and partnership-level variables' associations with unprotected vaginal intercourse (UVI) in a large sample of African American women.
- Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and previous research specific to African American women provide rationale for our hypothesized participant-level variables
- Theory of Gender and Power (TGP) and previous research on the influence of partner risks provide rationale for our hypothesized partnership-level variables

## BACKGROUND

- African American women are at an increased risk for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
  - Compared to White women, African American women display incidence levels that are 20 times higher for HIV (1), 21 times higher for syphilis, 16 times higher for gonorrhea, and 7 times higher for chlamydia (2).
- Ethnic identity, or the extent to which one positively identifies with one's ethnic group (3), and self-esteem (4) have been identified as potential protective factors against sexual risks.
- However, some predictors of women's sexual risks may vary depending on aspects of their different partners.
  - Condom use is less likely in main versus casual partnerships (5).
  - The Theory of Gender and Power suggests that power differentials in relationships especially may contribute to sexual risks, in that women may not be able to overcome resistance to condom use with these partnerships (6).
  - Each partner will have different (perceived) sexual risks such as previous/concurrent male and female sexual partners, history of injection drug use, previous incarceration which may contribute to decisions to engage in UVI (7).

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

- 718 African American women reported having had vaginal sex in previous 90 days
  - 18 – 74 years old, M = 33.14, SD = 11.08
  - Comparison group within a larger project
- Recently completed HIV counseling, testing, and referral (CTR)

### PROCEDURES

- Service providers at four AIDS Service Organizations or Community Based Organizations in Tennessee, Texas, Missouri, and New Jersey referred potential participants.
- Participants completed online survey (including informed consent process), received \$35 incentive
- Surveys included partnership-level variables of up to three partners in the previous 90 days

### DATA ANALYSIS

- Separated analysis of main partnerships and non-main partnerships
- Outcome: number of instances of UVI with partner in previous 90 days
- Bivariate mixed model regressions with participant as a random factor, using a Poisson distribution
- Variables significant in bivariate regressions were entered into a multiple mixed model regression

## RESULTS

### MULTIVARIATE MIXED REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING TIMES HAD UNPROTECTED VAGINAL SEX

	MEASUREMENT	NON-MAIN PARTNERSHIPS		MAIN PARTNERSHIPS	
		$\beta$	F	$\beta$	F
<b>Participant Level Variables</b>					
Housing Status	Own house/apt vs. Other	-	-	-	-
Marital Status	Never married vs. Other	-	-	-.24	3.94*
Income	Under \$500 vs. Other	-	-	-	-
Employment	Full/part-time vs. Other	-	-	-	-
Age		.01	ns	-	-
Condom Attitudes	8 items, $\alpha = .80$	-.81	12.48***	-.53	30.62***
Peer Norms	4 items, $\alpha = .55$	-.31	ns	-	-
Self-Efficacy to Use Condoms	8 items, $\alpha = .91$	.01	ns	-	-
African American Woman Pride	7 items, $\alpha = .74$	-.07	ns	-	-
Self Esteem (Rosenberg Scale)	10 items, $\alpha = .84$	-.20	ns	.06	ns
<b>Partnership Level Variables</b>					
Age Difference	Calculated from partner's age	-	-	-.02	7.41**
Length of Relationship		-	-	-	-
Condom Negotiation Behaviors	3 items, $\alpha = .74$	-.14	7.20**	-.16	12.49***
Sexual Power	3 items, $\alpha = .84$	-.16	22.82***	-.05	ns
Abusive partner	Ever hit/slapped/physically abused you?	-.25	3.36+	.11	ns
Partner resistance to condoms	Ever insisted on not using condoms?	.37	15.37***	.48	28.17***
Partner had sex with other women	Yes/No	-.03	ns	-	-
Partner had sex with other men	Yes/No	.12	ns	-	-
Partner injected drugs	Yes/No	-	-	-	-
Partner ever incarcerated	Yes/No	.18	ns	-	-
Overall power	In general, who has more power?	-.19	ns	.14	ns

Note: 796 main partnerships from 624 participants, 329 non-main partnerships from 202 participants  
Blank values indicate that variables were non-significant in bivariate models.  
+ p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

## DISCUSSION

- Importance of condom negotiation and communication in sexual partnerships, regardless of relationship type, even for older women
- Women who have never married, even though they engage in sex with main partners outside of marriage, still engage in less unprotected sex within those relationships than married women
- Having partners who are much older in main partnerships may be a risk factor for risky sexual behavior
- In non-main partnerships, however, lack of sexual power may be a risk factor for risky sexual behavior
- Having an abusive non-main partner was marginally associated with unprotected vaginal sex, but the direction of the effect reversed from that of the bivariate results. To examine potential suppressor effects due to multicollinearity, we conducted Pearson and Spearman rank correlations among variables included in the model. The only variable associated with having an abusive partner above .30 was the partner also having been incarcerated (Spearman's  $\rho(328) = .53, p < .0001$ ). Exclusion of partner's incarceration status or exclusion of abusive non-main partner did not change the pattern of results.
- Perceptions of a partner's potential HIV risks did not play much of a role in risky sexual behavior
  - These factors may instead reflect power differentials in relationships, as their effects were outweighed by sexual power, negotiation behaviors, and partner resistance to condoms

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