

# Taking Control with Safer Sex: Perceptions of African American Women

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## Introduction / Purpose

African American women continue to experience higher rates of sexually transmitted infections when compared to women of other race/ethnicities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). In one southern state in the United States (North Carolina), African American women ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in rates of primary and secondary syphilis and 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> in rates of gonorrhea and HIV (Johnson, 2018). Controlled safe sex is a concept used globally with women to give them control over their sexual lives. Yet, the concept of controlled safe sex has not been examined by researchers in the conceptualization of a mobile app.

Purpose: Guided by the theory of empowerment (Kanter, 1993) we conducted an exploratory study to examine how the concept and antecedents of controlled safer sex could be used in the development of a mobile app for African American women.

## METHODS

- A sample of 17 women, 18 to 45 years of age, and involved in heterosexual relations participated in semi structured interviews to examine their personal risks involved with controlled safer sex behaviors and mobile app development.

- Interviews were conducted in a primary care office and were transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. Data were analyzed using content analysis.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of controlled safe sex has been explored in few research studies. Alexander and colleagues (2012) explored this concept using Rodgers' evolutionary concept analysis methods. Their analysis focused on cultural influences on sexual practices aimed at increasing women's control over their own sexual safety. The concept does not involve male partner concept (Jones et al. 2001, Minnis & Padian 2001, Harvey et al. 2003, Padian et al. 2007); or a contraceptive device acceptable to a male partner (Harvey et al. 2003, Bird et al. 2004, Weeks et al. 2004, Woodsong & Alleman 2008); but it does involve a female initiated safe sex process.

## RESULTS



### Attributes

1. Conceptive Devices
2. Right to choose
3. Gender expectations
4. Communication
5. Technology

### Antecedents

1. Self efficacy
2. Body awareness
3. Being in charge

### Consequences

1. Power imbalances in the relationship
2. Feeling of loss and rejection
3. Respect
4. Empowerment

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Researchers can begin to identify how women keep themselves safe among risks of sexually transmitted infections including HIV in real time. Globally women can be empowered to take control of their sexual health by using a mobile app to increase their knowledge of reproductive health, enhance body awareness, increase self-efficacy with protective barriers, and competency with sexual negotiations.

Clinicians should assess the individualized health fears held by women in their sexual relationships and engage in holistic discussions that include how they keep themselves safe and use these topics when discussing controlled safe sex.

## CONCLUSION

As an emerging concept, controlled safe sex is virtually absent in the nursing literature. This concept is focused on an individual level. It implies an underlying female passivity and undermines a woman's assertion of individual responsibility for her own sexual behavior. More work is necessary to understand this concept as it relates to technology and empowerment.

MOBILE APP + KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS = EMPOWERMENT

