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The Hidden Victims of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Women

Theresa Staab

Providence College

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The Hidden Victims of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Women

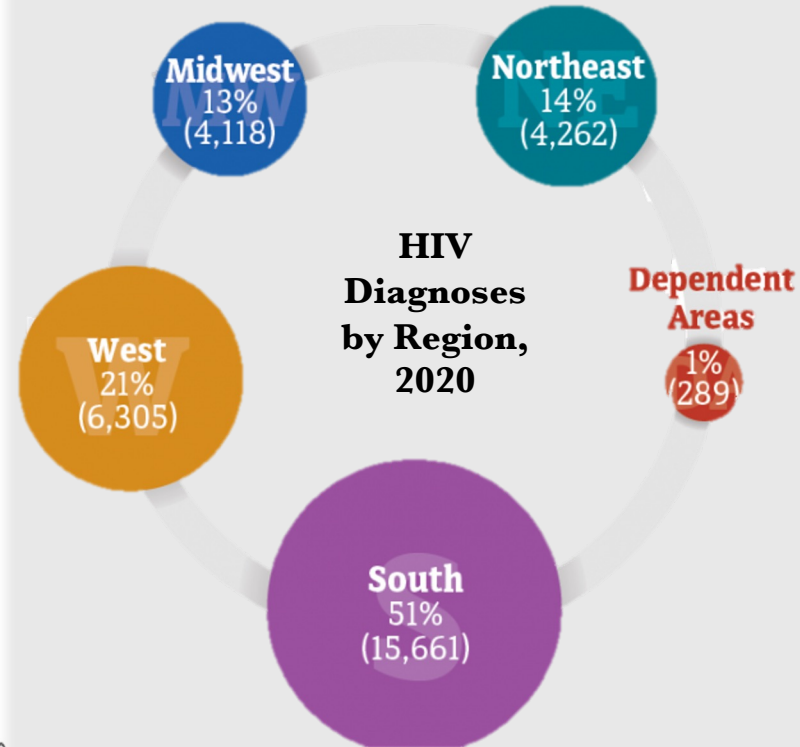
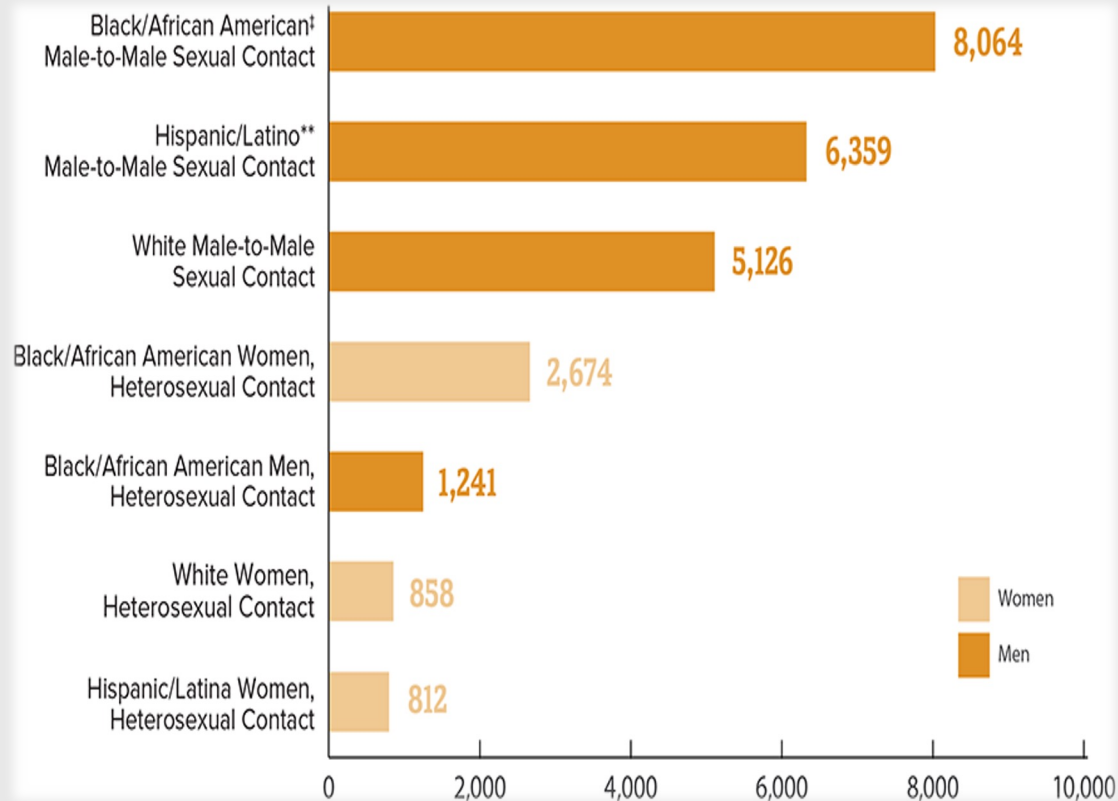
Theresa Staab
Providence College 23
14th Annual Undergraduate Conference on
Health and Society



RESEARCH QUESTION

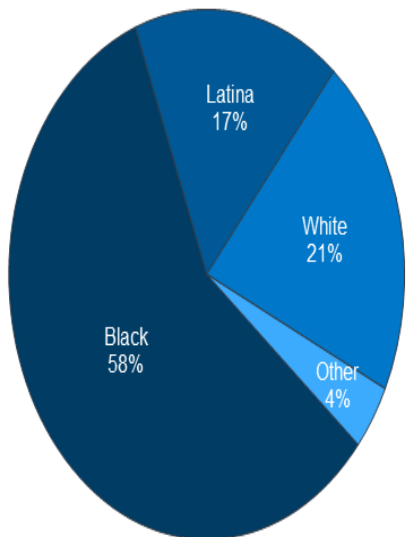
- How did the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS as a gay, predominantly white man's disease impact women?
- What did women have to do to combat the erasure of their initial surveillance in the epidemic?
- How were the experiences of black women different from those of their white counterparts?

STATE of HIV in U.S

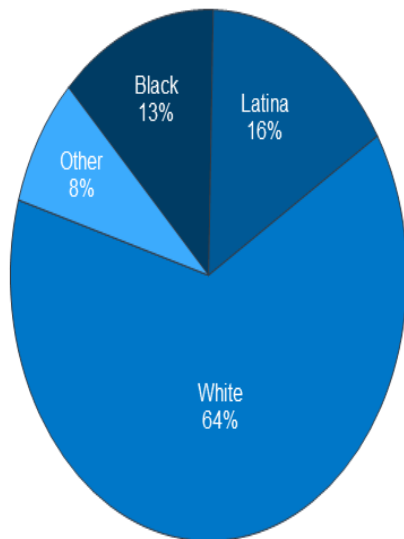


STATE of HIV IN WOMEN

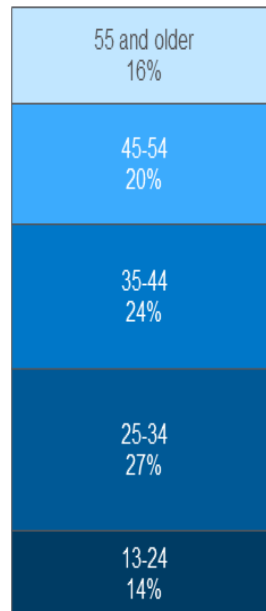
HIV Diagnoses
Among Women & Girls



U.S. Female Population



HIV Diagnoses Among Women & Girls and U.S.
Female Population, by Age and Transmission
Category, 2018



AGE



TRANSMISSION CATEGORY

HIV Diagnoses Among Women & Girls and U.S.
Female Population, by Race/Ethnicity, 2018

STIGMA

- Classification of AIDS as:
 - “Gay Plague” ; “Gay Cancer”
 - “GRID- Gay Related Immune Deficiency”
- Public Label of AIDS being a predominately gay white man’s disease insinuated everyone else not in that group is ‘safe’.
- “The issue of greatest concern to the stigmatized individual is *acceptance*” (Florum-Smith & De Santis, 2012).
 - Homosexuality and hypersexuality were referred to as and persisted to be the roots of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

New Pneumonia Linked To Gay Lifestyle

Atlanta, GA - According to the U.S. Public Health Service's Center for Disease Control, five sexually active gay men, two of whom died, were treated between October 1980 and May 1981 for pneumonia caused by the Pneumocystis carni parasite. The center reported: "The fact that these patients were all

Our Own – VA
1981

"AIDS
IS A
WHITE
MAN'S
DISEASE."

People of Color
Against AIDS, 1990s

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

FINDINGS



EVOLUTION OF CDC DEFINITION

Exclusion:

- 1981: First instance of AIDS called *Pneumocystis Pneumonia*
- 1982: CDC issued their first version of the definition of AIDS, solely related to male symptoms

Inclusion:

- 1993: CDC expanding people at risk to include women and people of color
- Addition of bacterial pneumonia, tuberculosis, and stage III cervical cancer as symptoms



CONCEPT OF VIRTUE

- Criminalization of a women's health status:
 - Inability to negotiate condom use
 - Beaten if they question male partner
 - Blamed if seeking medical advice or testing
- Women could only be either wives, innocent, heterosexual, monogamous or "vectors of disease" (Corea, 1992)
- *The Taboo nature of sexuality*

DON'T GO TO BED WITH COSMO.

Are most women really safe from AIDS?

AIDS is the leading cause of death for women in NYC between the ages of 18-34. Yet Cosmopolitan Magazine tells women that they have nothing to worry about.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 26% of all women diagnosed with AIDS contracted the virus through unprotected heterosexual intercourse with men who were infected. Yet Cosmo prints an article claiming that unprotected heterosexual intercourse with an infected male partner does not pose a risk.

As of January 4, 1988, 50,263 cases of AIDS have been reported to the CDC nationwide with 1,987 reported cases of heterosexual transmission, 1,074 of whom are women.

Yet Cosmopolitan allows Dr. Robert E. Gould to state that the total number of AIDS cases is 35,477 with 1,375 cases of heterosexual transmission. Dr. Gould's statistics are from January 1987 even though CDC prints up to date AIDS information and makes it available to healthcare workers worldwide on both a monthly and a weekly basis.

The Centers for Disease Control, in its weekly and monthly updates on the state of AIDS nationwide, provides gender and race breakdowns of the 19,800 new medical personnel and all interested persons to assess the global status of this pandemic.

Yet Cosmopolitan Magazine has found a doctor who claims "So impressive are the data that no breakdown as to gender has been published."

Why is Cosmopolitan Magazine printing articles that put women at risk for AIDS?

Why is Dr. Robert E. Gould allowed to print an article about women and AIDS when he openly claims that he believes that "there is almost no danger of contracting AIDS through ordinary sexual intercourse" and defines ordinary sexual intercourse as "penile penetration of a well-lubricated vagina" only adding a note about condom use parenthetically and irrelevantly "concern me more whether she has any open sores, lesions or infections" when in fact, most women have infections and internal lubrications that are asymptomatic and often caused by chlamydia, HIV, gonorrhea, herpes, BV, etc without lubrication and other sexually transmitted diseases?

Why is Dr. Robert E. Gould allowed to print an article which completely absolves male responsibility for sexual activity and instead, unilaterally makes the racist statement that cases of heterosexual AIDS in Africa can be attributed to the fact that "most women in Africa take their women in a brutal way, so that some heterosexual activity regarded as normal by them would be classed as rape by our standards?" (Please, name one)

SAY NO TO COSMOPOLITAN.

ACT-UP

AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power • (212) 533-8888



WOMEN'S ERASURE

Selection of Women:

- Prostitutes and female IV drug users were the first women to be mentioned and blamed for HIV/AIDS.
- "The Prostitute Study" , San Francisco 1985

False Sense of Security:

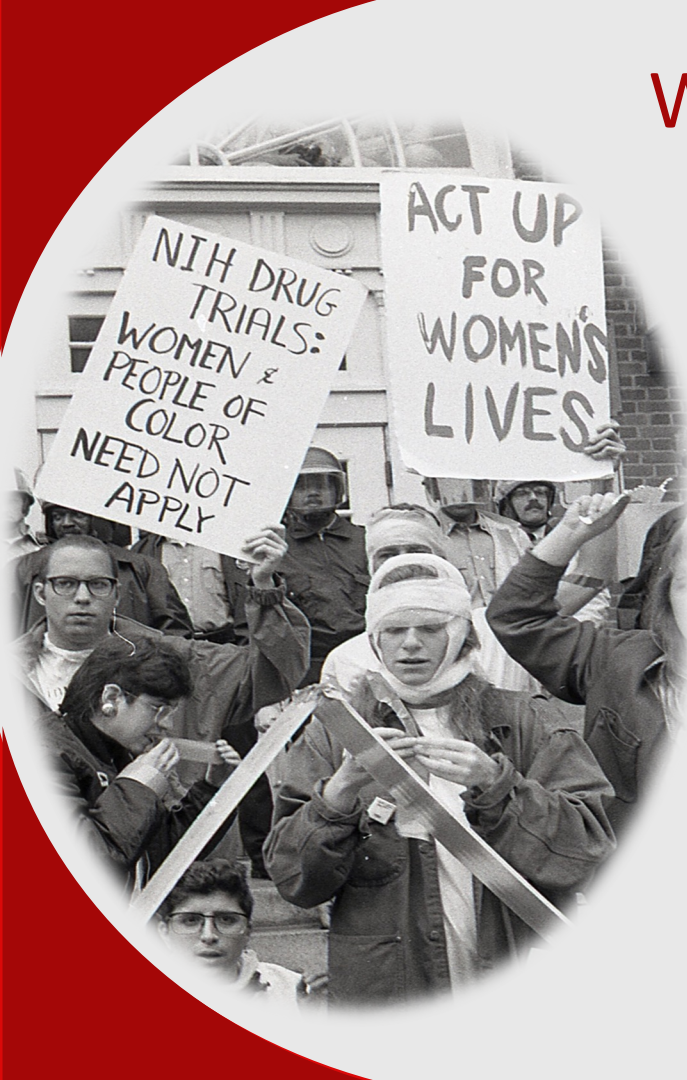
- Trapped women in a dangerous narrative
 - heterosexual and virtuous = safe



WOMEN'S ERASURE

Public Exclusion:

- 1983: Dr. Judith Cohen, epidemiologist for School of Public Health in Berkeley, CA, was told "studying AIDS in women was a waste of time" (Corea, 1992).
- December 1985: CDC advice women to delay pregnancy to avoid fetus transmission
- January 1988: Robert Gould's remarks in Cosmo magazine to the high infection rates within African men "take their women in a brutal way" (Gould 1988, 147).



HEADLINES -1988

Reassuring News About AIDS:

A DOCTOR TELLS WHY YOU MAY NOT BE AT RISK

BY ROBERT E. GOULD, M.D.

If you are a healthy, vital American woman, and just when you've decided to have an active love life, everyone tells you that sex kills. You're cautioned to hold onto chastity for dear life or face the deadly risk of contracting AIDS, the fatal disease. Meanwhile, all about you, policemen, firemen, law court personnel, health-care workers are donning gloves, masks, outer-space wear—and even with the protective gear, they are afraid of being within spitting distance of a person with AIDS or suspected of carrying the virus.

Where does all this panic leave you? Is the hysteria justified? In my opinion and from objective evidence, the answer is no. In all probability, you won't catch the virus by shaking hands, ingesting it, or, more to the point, by having vaginal or oral sex. Even the experts, who have come to specialize in the disease, admit that the fear of AIDS transmission through vaginal intercourse has been greatly exaggerated; that the epidemic is not spreading through the population in this way, though many authorities had predicted it could. In the words of Dr. B. Frank Polk, an AIDS epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health in Baltimore: "A number of scientific leaders in AIDS have overstated the risk in the absence of data." And according to Dr. Harold Jaffe, chief AIDS epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, "Those who are suggesting that we are going to see an explosive spread of the virus into the heterosexual population have to explain why this is not happening.

Why is it not happening, I believe, is that there is almost no danger of contracting AIDS through ordinary sexual intercourse, a conclusion I have reached from my own studies and after having gone over most of the published reports on AIDS, visited hospital wards, and talked with leading researchers in virology. Let me be very specific about what I mean by ordinary sexual intercourse. As I define it, it is penile penetration of a well-lubricated vagina—penetration that is not rough and does not cause lacerations (as it might in rape or violently

macho thrusting or in the presence of severe vaginismus). Assuming that the genitals of both partners are healthy and intact—that there are no lesions or other openings due to infections—the virus, I contend, will not be transmitted during vaginal sex from an infected person to his or her partner. (Anyone not sure whether she has any open vaginal lesions or infectious wounds, of course, be safer and feel more comfortable with her partner if he were to use a condom.) Nor do I believe there is a danger of AIDS transmission by oral sex or deep kissing or the exchange of body fluids. Although not all experts agree with my conclusions, there is no denying that the only unimpeded route of transmission is through direct introduction of the virus into the bloodstream. And I maintain it is the only route. Which is why I believe that if the conditions of heterosexual intercourse as I have outlined them are met, a woman is quite safe from contracting AIDS.

To begin with, the secretions of a healthy vagina are very inhospitable to the AIDS virus, so that normal lubrication from one's own secretions not only serves as a preventive measure against lacerations but would also tend to neutralize the virus if present. In other words, if you are aroused, your own body is the best protection against injury. Nature has arranged this so that sex will feel good and be good for you.

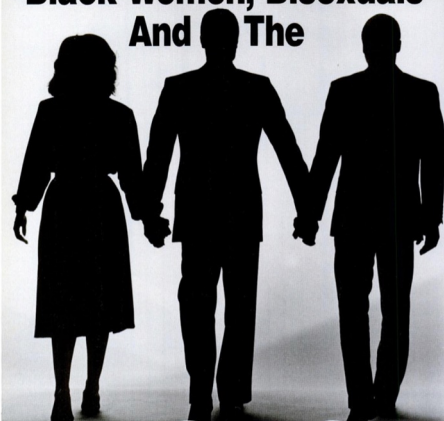
Then, too, in order to become infected with AIDS, you need a really large dose of the virus, because it is so low-grade. As Dr. Howard Berman, director of the Institute for Cancer and Blood Research in Beverly Hills, told me, "The AIDS virus should not be likened to hepatitis B [which it often is], because it takes several thousand times the AIDS virus to equal the infective strength of the hepatitis virus.

Last, you should know that the AIDS virus is very fragile, a medical finding frequently downplayed because of the disease's inevitable fatality. But the severity of the disease should

Cosmopolitan

"There is hardly any danger of contracting AIDS through ordinary sexual intercourse."

The Hidden Fear: Black Women, Bisexuals And The



AIDS RISK


By Laura B. Randolph

Ebony

"...the impact of the deadly virus on women, particularly Black women, is indisputable."


BLACK WOMEN

- AIDS was never a disease impacted just gay white men, it impacted the black community and women.
- Katrina Haslip: founder of AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE) and member of ACTUP
 - “ACT UP’s success simply would not have been possible without women like her” (Alder, 2022).
- She touched the lives of HIV-positive women by leading the charge for the CDC to reclassify AIDS.



**“I am, and have been, a woman with AIDS,
despite the CDC not wishing to count me.
We have compelled them to.”**

Katrina Haslip – HIV Activist



The image shows Katrina Haslip at a protest, holding a sign that reads: "women with HIV get CERVICAL CANCER" and "No Sh NOT Caskets".

THE DISPROPORTION EFFECTS

Society's Claim

- Hypersexualization of the black community, especially women
- Bisexual closeted men
- Increased drug use

Social Inequities

- Growing disparity in healthcare access, employment, & housing
- Lack of leadership and organizational resources
- Historic medical and governmental mistrust
- Immediate racial association with disease
- "Low level of knowledge about the prevalence of AIDS among African Americans" (Quinn, 1993)

Further Erasure of Black Women

- 1983 CDC *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* depicts the disproportionate effect of AIDS/HIV on the black community:
 - *10-12% of the population made up nearly 20% of AIDS/HIV cases* (Cohen, 199)
- In 2021: Black women account for 60% of HIV infections yet made up 15% of the female population. (Ojikutu & Mayer, 2021)





GAINING RECOGNITION

- Black women upheld the role to uplift and lead their community with what is referred to as "black activist mothering" (McLane-Davison, 2016).
- Black women activists combined with the assistance of other organizations and black civil rights movements to advance the cause.
- The lack of overall public AIDS education "*seemed to illustrate the predicament of politically voiceless women depending on others who were more organized, better connected, and financially endowed*" (Quimby & Samuel, 1989).



ACT UP

- The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power is a global grassroots political organization dedicated to eradicating the AIDS pandemic.
- Achievements:
 - Persuaded FDA to alter drug approval process to make them accessible
 - 4 year campaign to change CDC definition of AIDS to symptoms that affected only women.
 - Enabled women to participate in experimental drug trials



A large red circle dominates the frame, set against a white background. The circle is partially cut off at the top and right edges. In the top-left corner, two thin white lines curve towards the circle's edge. In the bottom-right corner, two concentric white lines curve away from the circle's edge.

QUESTIONS?

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