The Sexual and Reproductive Health Content of African American and Latino Magazines

Melissa A. Johnson  
North Carolina State University  
Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Alyse R. Gotthoffer  
University of Miami  
Coral Gables, Florida, USA

Kimberly A. Laufer  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida, USA

This study investigated the sexual and reproductive health content of 16 Latino and 5 African American magazines distributed in the United States. Three hundred and seventy-three articles and items from 194 issues were analyzed. The most frequently covered topics were pregnancy and sexual activity. Least mentioned were abortion and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. Generally, ethnic magazines did a poor job of covering sexual and reproductive health topics that are relevant to the African American and Latino communities, despite epidemic rates of HIV/AIDS and STDs and pregnancy rates 80%–90% higher than those of Anglo Americans.

KEYWORDS Latinos, Hispanics, African American magazines, Latino magazines, sexual health, reproductive health content

This research presents some of the findings from two studies commissioned by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The authors would like to recognize Kim Walsh-Childers, Debbie Treise, and Alyse Gotthoffer, who were investigators for the large-scale English-language magazine study, a portion of which included the African American publication content analysis. The Walsh-Childers et al. coding sheet was modified and translated into Spanish for the Latino magazine study. The authors also thank Tina Hoff and Molly Parker of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation for their input.

Address correspondence to Melissa A. Johnson, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, North Carolina State University, Campus Box 8104, Raleigh, NC 27695, USA. E-mail: Melissa_Johnson@ncsu.edu

The Howard Journal of Communications, 10:169–187, 1999  
Copyright © 1999 Taylor & Francis  
1064-6175/99 $12.00 + .00
n the last three decades, general market media have focused more on sexual activity than on the health consequences of such activity, especially unintended pregnancies, STDs, and measures for preventing pregnancy or disease. Yet sexually active adolescents and adults are experiencing STD epidemics, including HIV/AIDS, the leading cause of death for U.S. adults ages 25 to 44 and the sixth highest cause of death for those 15 to 24 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997). Although teen pregnancy rates in the United States are down slightly, unintended births continue to be a societal problem. For these reasons, sexual and reproductive health topics remain high on the public health agenda.

Sexual and reproductive health care for African Americans and Latinos is a growing concern of U.S. health care providers for a number of reasons. First, African Americans and Latinos comprise approximately 23% of the U.S. population, compared with 72% non-Hispanic whites, but have lower median ages. As such, Latinos and African Americans are in the prime of their sexual and reproductive lives. Second, because of age and other factors, African Americans and Latinos have pregnancy rates that are radically higher than those of Anglo Americans, with African American rates 90% higher than Whites and Latina rates 82% higher than Whites (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995, 1998). Although pregnancy rates for Hispanics and African Americans are somewhat similar, their pregnancy outcomes differ. Birth rates are higher for Latinas; induced abortion rates are higher for African Americans. The pattern is replicated among teens. Teen pregnancies are highest among Black teens (an estimated 217 per 1,000, compared with 180 for Hispanics and 85 for Anglo Americans), but births are higher for Hispanic teens (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995). Black women are significantly more likely to begin intercourse before age 18 than Latinas or Anglo American women. In addition, there is evidence that as Latinas became more acculturated they may adopt riskier health behaviors (Molina & Aguirre-Molina, 1994; Sabogal, Pérez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hiatt, 1995). For instance, the adolescent birthrate for Latina immigrants (12.5% of births) is less than half that of Latinas born in the United States (25.6%) (National Center for Health Statistics, 1995).

The promotion of abstinence is challenging among teen subgroups with high levels of sexual activity and pregnancy (Pittman, Wilson, Adams-Taylor, & Rudolph, 1992), so an increase in contraception use is one way to attack the aforementioned problems. Although condom use in particular is up among young and unmarried people in the United States, Latinas and Black women are less likely to use contraception in their first intercourse and have higher rates of failure when using contraception (Aneshensel, Fielder & Becerra, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1995; Levy et al., 1995).

Third, alarming STD statistics are another concern for Latinos and African Americans. HIV/AIDS and non-HIV STDs strike Latinos and African Americans at greater rates than Anglo Americans (Aruñó, Coverdale, & Vallbona, 1991; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997; Marcell, 1994; Nyamathi, Lewis, Leake, Flaskerud, & Bennett, 1995). As of March 1991, Blacks accounted for 28% of U.S. AIDS cases, and Hispanics accounted for 16%. African Americans constituted 45% of new AIDS cases in 1997 (Kicklighter, 1998). Impoverished Hispanic and African American women compose 78% of the U.S. women who have AIDS, and more than
half of the children under 14 who have AIDS are African American (Nyamathi et al., 1995; Pittman et al., 1992).

In short, Latinos and African Americans (especially teens) are more likely than their Anglo American counterparts to get pregnant or contract STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Mass media are key sources of information about sexual and reproductive health, but U.S. general market media have not paid much attention to Latinos and African Americans (Subervi-Vélez, 1994). Consequently, Hispanics and African Americans may turn to ethnic media to supplement or substitute what is available in general market media. This raises the question of whether Latino and African American media are covering sexual and reproductive health topics and providing relevant minority health information.

This study looked at one medium likely to provide sexual and reproductive health information—ethnic magazines. Ethnic magazines serve specific racial or ethnic communities or both by providing the information and entertainment desired by the group and helping to cement ethnic identity. “Ethnic media” will be used in this paper to describe mass media primarily targeted to specific cultural or racial groups.

The purpose of this article was to review in detail the sexual health content of 21 African American and Latino magazines distributed in the United States to determine whether issues of most relevance to the communities’ health status were covered. The research widens the realm of health communication research by bringing into the arena segments of the U.S. population who are ignored as well as the mass media that cater to these groups.

Sexual health is used in this article to refer to topics concerning human sexuality and reproduction that affect or are affected by health status. This includes topics associated with contraception, emergency contraception, abortion, planned and unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and STDs (other than HIV/AIDS). Sexual activity encompasses nonhealth aspects of sexuality such as sexual techniques or sexual decision-making. Sexual content refers to editorial coverage about sexual activity or sexual and reproductive health or both.

**Review of the Literature**

**Mass Media and Sexual Health**

Research studies from communication, public health, and medical disciplines support how important mass media are in communicating health information. U.S. respondents to surveys since the 1970s have said that media were a principle source of health and medical information (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1994; Brown, Walsh-Childers, & Waszak, 1990; Pettegrew & Logan, 1987). Most of the mass media studies about sexuality and sexual health have focused on television, and studies from the late 1970s through late 1980s show that television’s sexual activity is increasing in quantity and explicitness (Brown & Steele, 1996; Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996; Shidler & Lowry, 1995). But the 1980s studies that investigated sexual health topics found few mentions of the health consequences of sexual activity (Lowry & Towles, 1989a, 1989b). Greenberg, Brown, and Buerkel-Rothfuss
predict sexual content in the future will be more prevalent as media compete increasingly for audience and reader segments (1993).

Whereas television’s sexual content has been studied extensively, sexual content in magazines largely has not, except for a recently large-scale study by Walsh-Childers, Treise, and Gottho\(\text{é}f\)er (1997). Nevertheless, magazines can be important sex educators, especially for women readers. Adolescent girls use magazines to help construct their identities as young women and sexual beings (Brown, White, & Nikipoulos, 1993). Survey respondents have identified magazines as important sources of information about sex and birth control (Halpern & Blackman, 1985; Kaiser Family Foundation, 1995, 1996), and in general they are regarded as vital sources of health information (Babakus, Remington, Lucas, & Carnell, 1991; Moyer, Greener, Beauvais, & Salovey, 1995; Worsley, 1989). With slick, high-quality reproduction and targeted marketing, magazines have the potential to provide information and model positive or negative sexual health behaviors. Teens and adult females are two important audiences for this medium.

**Cultural Values and Sexual Health**

Health research has underscored the necessity of understanding cultural values in order to achieve successful sexual health outcomes (Bullough & Bullough, 1982; Doval, Duran, O’Donnell, & O’Donnell, 1995; Mays & Cochran, 1988; Mikawa, Morones, Gomez, Case, Olsen, & Gonzales-Huss, 1992; Molina & Aguirre-Molina, 1994; Sonnenstein & Stryker, 1997; Witte, 1992; Yep, 1992). Additionally, cultural norms, values, and beliefs play specific roles in the sexual and reproductive health status of Latinos and African Americans. For example, many Latinos are reluctant to discuss sexual behavior or contraception, making it difficult for health practitioners or peers to share information (Aneschensel et al., 1989; Molina & Aguirre-Molina, 1994). Some African American and Latino subgroups particularly may be affected by religious beliefs. For instance, the Bible plays a role in discussion of illness and disease among some lower-class African Americans. An illness may be judged to be God’s punishment (Williams, 1986). Because many Latinos are Roman Catholic, some women are Roman Catholic, some women are affected by the church’s positions on contraception and abortion, although this may vary depending on degree of religiosity, socioeconomic factors, and level of acculturation (Amaro, 1988; Mikawa et al., 1992). Some Latinos are fatalistic, relinquishing individual control over health status to God or simply “fate” (Domino & Acosta, 1987). And many Latino or African American subgroups have been found to be family oriented and collectivist rather than be as fiercely individualistic as Anglo Americans (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Ho\(\text{s}t\)ede, 1980; Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989). In addition to cultural norms, access to health care and health insurance among some Latino and African American subgroups is poor, exacerbating health problems. In summary, “effective prevention messages must be highly specialized, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities” (Myrick, 1996, p. 243).

Latino media are more able to achieve identity for Hispanic readers because the readers who are writing to advice columnists or writing letters to the editor mostly have Spanish surnames; the writers and editors write from a Latino perspective, and the images are of Latinos. In fact, cultural maintenance is a key reason that English-
language-speaking or bilingual Latinos consume ethnic media (Ríos, 1994; Ríos & Gaines, 1997; Subervi-Vélez, 1994). African American publications provide similar cultural orientations for their readers, providing images and information specific to the interests of their readers and serving as a reference point for their communities (Pride & Wilson, 1997; Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1995; Wolseley, 1990).

**African Americans and Mass Media**

Like Latinos, African Americans read Black publications because general market media have not presented African Americans and Black issues favorably. News about Blacks is more likely to be negative and stereotypical, as are portrayals in entertainment media (Campbell, 1995; Dates & Barlow, 1993; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994; Gandy, 1998; Gandy & Matabane, 1989; Martindale, 1986). Although Black magazines have a century-long tradition, the post-World-War-II consumer and women’s books are the success stories. The classic magazine, *Ebony*, for example, started in 1946. African American magazines are superior to Black newspapers in circulation size, high quality printing, and ability to use color (Wolseley, 1990). They are better able than newspapers to provide a national identity and forum for African Americans. For instance, it is estimated that *Essence*, almost 30 years old, reaches 75% of U.S. African American women ages 18–49 (Mastin, 1996). In addition to general men’s and women’s magazines, there are many widely circulated African American specialty publications, including literary, religious, political, fraternal, scholarly, regional, and trade magazines.

**Latinos and Mass Media**

Depending on acculturation levels, proportion of years in the United States, preimmigration media use, language levels, age, education, income, concentration of Hispanics in a community, and self-identified ethnicity, U.S. Latinos may be informed or entertained by Spanish-language media or English-language general market media (Johnson, 1996; Kim, 1989; Ríos, 1993; Shoemaker, Reese, & Danielson, 1985; Subervi-Vélez, 1986; Zmud, 1992). Evidence indicates that 70% of Latino consumers are exposed to some form of Spanish-language media at least once a week and that more than 50% are exposed to at least an equal amount of English-language media (Taylor & Bang, 1997).

Periodicals published by and for Latinos have been around since the eighteenth century, although most of the literary-based periodicals have vanished (Subervi-Vélez, 1994). Recently, trade publications have portrayed Latino magazines as one of the hottest media genres of the 1990s (Ballon, 1997; Beam, 1996; Fest, 1997a; Garigliano, 1996; Kelly, 1997). Unlike traditional Spanish-language media, whose role has been to help new immigrants acculturate, these magazines target second- or third-generation Latinos who want to preserve some aspects of their culture to prevent broader assimilation.

Editors have launched new publications in order to provide culturally relevant alternatives, but the bulldozer pushing this growth is advertiser and publisher recognition of Latino market power (Charlesworth & Hudes, 1997; Fest, 1997b; Fitzgerald, 1996; Maso-Fleishman, 1996; Mediati, 1996; Zbar, 1996). Growing African American market power has sustained Black magazines as well and enabled
some launched in the 1980s (e.g., Black Elegance and Ebony Man) to cater to special niches. Although African Americans constitute just 12% of the population, they represent a greater proportion of consumer spending (Dates & Barlow, 1993; Snyder, Freeman, & Condry, 1995).

The exclusion of communities of color in general market media, including entertainment, news, and advertising, has meant that English-language and Spanish-language ethnic media have gained important niches in the U.S. and global media markets that are predicted to increase (Greenberg & Brand, 1994; Navarrete & Kamasaki, 1994; Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1995; Subervi-Vélez, 1994).

In summary, despite the problematic sexual health status of some of the African American and Latino subgroups in the United States, communities of color have not been the focus of the health communication literature. In addition, the role ethnic media play in health communication has not received attention, despite growth in the genre. Given what we know about mass media and sexual health and the role of African American and Latino magazines, the following research questions were explored in this study.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Given disproportionate HIV/AIDS infection rates among African Americans and Latinos, how often and how extensively did ethnic magazines cover this topic?

RQ2: How often and how extensively did ethnic magazines cover STDs, given increases and disproportionate STD infection rates among African Americans and Latinos?

RQ3: How often and extensively did African American and Latino magazines cover contraception?

RQ4: How often and extensively did African American and Latino magazines cover emergency contraception and abortion?

RQ5: How often and extensively did African American and Latino magazines cover pregnancy, both planned and unplanned?

RQ6: How did coverage of sexual health compare with coverage of sexual activity?

RQ7: How often is positive self-efficacy featured in sexual health coverage?

RQ8: What causes or solutions are featured in sexual health coverage?

**Method**

Issues of Latino magazines published between March 1997 and February 1998, and African American magazines published between July 1995 and June 1996 were analyzed in this study. Tables 1 and 2 provide publication information for each title. Because the data were collected separately by different research teams, the methodologies are described separately.

**Methodology for Latino Magazines**

The sample encompassed every Latino-targeted women’s or teen magazine that met circulation and distribution criteria. If originating outside of the United States, it
### Table 1: Latino Magazine, Estimated U.S. Circulation, Primary Language, Frequency of Publication, and Publisher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Estimated U.S. Circulation (Thousands)</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
<th>Frequency of Publication</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenhogar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa/Hearst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmopolitan en Español</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa/Hearst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristina la Revista</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Hachette Filipacchi Presse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eres</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estylk</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>Mandalay Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper’s Bazaar</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa/Hearst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Essence Communications, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Bride</td>
<td>New</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>THINK Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Style</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>Latina Style, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Claire en Español</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa/Marie Claire Album</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderna</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>Hispanic Publishing Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ser Padres</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>Guner &amp; Jahr Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanidades</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
<td>Editorial Televisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vogue España</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Conde Nast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: African American Magazine Publishers, Circulation Size, and Readership of Publication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Circulation (Thousands)</th>
<th>Readership (Thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Elegance</td>
<td>Starlog Communications, Inc.</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebony</td>
<td>Johnson Publishing Company</td>
<td>1,928</td>
<td>12,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence</td>
<td>Essence Communications, Inc.</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>6,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart and Soul</td>
<td>Rodale Press, Inc.</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet</td>
<td>Johnson Publishing Company</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>9,721</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
had to have a U.S. circulation of at least 20,000 (the circulation of the magazines in the sample ranged from 20,000 to 400,000) (Whisler, Nuiry, & McHugh, 1997). Magazines had to be available on newsstands or through a subscription in the United States. In all, 164 issues (books) were included in the study.5

Latino magazines in this study fell into three categories: publications whose content originates from Mexico City and Miami offices via the media conglomerate Editorial Televisa; international publications (e.g., Harper’s Bazaar or Vogue) whose Spanish-language editions are distributed independently or through arrangements with Editorial Televisa; and U.S.-based publications specifically targeted to Hispanics. Table 1 provides a list of the specific Latino magazines used in this study.

Each article relating to sexual health or reproductive health or both was coded.6 Topics included contraception, pregnancy, abortion, emergency contraception, STDs (non-HIV/AIDS), HIV/AIDS, and general sexual activity. Prior health communication studies have been criticized for limiting their focus to news and feature articles (Atkin & Arkin, 1990). The data in this study included sexual or reproductive health surveys, advice columns, letters to the editor, and other types of stories. At least one-third of the content of an article or item had to be about sexual activity or sexual health to be included in the sample. When articles were featured in both Spanish and English, the longer article was coded. (This usually was the English-language version in bilingual publications.)

A number of steps were taken to boost reliability of analysis (Lacy & Ri, 1996; Ri, Lacy, & Fico, 1998; Stempel & Westley, 1989; Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). Definitions of variables that included any subjectivity were listed in a coder instruction manual. All three coders had at least three hours of coder training in addition to follow-up consultation with the principal investigator. Two coders were native Latinos (Dominican and Puerto Rican), and one had an undergraduate degree in medical anthropology. A third coder whose undergraduate degree was in Spanish had lived in Chile for two years and had experience in rural health.

Eight percent of the articles were selected purposively for blind doublecoding (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorf, 1980). Intercoder agreement was 96% for the 208 variables included in the Latino dataset, excluding text and space estimates. The average range of agreement on text estimates in the Latino magazines was 12.5%, and the average range of agreement about space estimates per Latino magazine article (text plus graphics, illustration, and photography) was 9%.

**Methodology for African American Magazines**

Table 2 lists the 5 African American magazines analyzed in this study. Six months were randomly selected from June 1995 to May 1996, yielding a sampling frame of 30 magazines. The same issues were coded for each of the 7 magazines: May 1996, April 1996, January 1996, October, 1995, August 1995, and June 1995.

If a magazine was published more than once a month, the issue coded was that published the first full week of the selected month. In some cases, magazines combined issues for two months (e.g., the April/May issue); if both those months had been selected for sampling, only the one issue was coded. This strategy was chosen as the best way of fairly representing the amount of reproductive and sexual health information, on average, to which the readers of the magazines would be exposed.
The coding sheet used for the African American study was very similar to that used for the Latino study. Additional topics coded in the African American study were sexual orientation and general reproductive health care. Eight trained coders analyzed the magazines. Items were coded if they concerned any reproductive or sexual health issue directly related to sexual activity. In addition, items that focused primarily on other sexual health topics (e.g., articles offering advice on how to improve the reader’s sexual performance) were coded for information on a wide variety of reproductive health topics.

To test for intercoder reliability, a sample of 10% of the magazines was blindly double coded, meaning the coders were not aware which issues also were being coded by another coder. The overall agreement rate was 86%.

Results and Discussion

The analysis provides insight into the sexual health information available to U.S. readers of Latino women’s and teen magazines and African American women’s magazines. Forty-nine articles from African American magazines and 324 articles from Latina magazines composed the sample. Overall, some magazines covered sexual and reproductive health regularly and extensively, others rarely or briefly.

The most popular sexual and reproductive health topic for both African Americans and Latinas was pregnancy, which was followed by STDs for African Americans (8.2%) and AIDS/HIV for Latinas (6.5%). STDs were the third most popular reproductive health topic for Latinas (3.7%), while AIDS/HIV, reproductive health care, and abortion ranked third for African Americans at 2% each. Abortion was the fourth most popular topic for Latinas (2.5%).

HIV/AIDS and STDs

Coverage of HIV/AIDS topics by these magazines was limited for both African Americans and Latinas, with only 2% of African American magazine articles mentioning HIV/AIDS and 6.5% of Latina magazine articles mentioning HIV/AIDS. Sexual transmission of HIV and AIDS was the most popular topic for both African Americans (8.2%) and Latinas (5.9%). Methods of prevention seldom were addressed by any of the magazines. See Table 3 for coverage of HIV/AIDS topics.

STDs were not a common topic in either sample of magazines, with 8.2% of African American articles and 3.7% of Latina articles mentioning them. The only STDs that were mentioned in the African American sample were syphilis (4.1%), herpes (4.1%), and nonspecific STDs (4.1%). However, all coded STDs were present in the sample of Latina magazine articles, ranging from 0.3% to 7.1%. Prevention of STDs was not mentioned at all in the magazine articles in the African American sample, and it was mentioned in only 2.8% of the articles in the Latina sample. See Table 4 for STD and related topic coverage.

Contraception, Emergency Contraception, and Abortion

Contraceptive use was covered more widely in the Latina sample than in the African American sample, although overall coverage was minimal in both. General,
Table 3  Mentions of HIV/AIDS-Related Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>% of Articles Latina Magazines*</th>
<th>% of Articles African American Magazines**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual transmission</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsexual transmission</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condoms and/or spermicides as prevention</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstinence as prevention</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education as prevention</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates/risks of infection</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access issues</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(where to get care, language barriers, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 324. ** n = 49.

Table 4  Mentions of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and STD-Related Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STD or topic</th>
<th>% of Articles Latina Magazines*</th>
<th>% of Articles African American Magazines**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhea</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis B</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herpes</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPV or genital warts</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PID</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichomoniasis</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonspecific STD</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of HIV risk</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health consequences</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD rates/risk of infection</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access issues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 324. ** n = 49.
nonspecific use of contraceptives was discussed in the African American sample in only one article; however, the topic of general, nonspecific contraception was addressed in 6.2% of the Latina articles. Likewise, specific contraceptive methods were more likely to be addressed in the Latina sample. Birth control pills were not discussed at all in the African American articles, but 9.3% of Latina articles raised this topic. Condom use was mentioned in 6.1% of the African American sample and 9% of the Latina sample. Contraceptive methods including abstinence are described in Table 5.

Emergency contraception and abortion seldom were mentioned in either sample of magazines. In fact, emergency contraception was not mentioned at all in the articles in the African American sample. In the Latina magazines, the morning-after pill RU486; the IUD as an emergency contraception device; and the effectiveness and risks of emergency contraception were each mentioned in 1% of the articles. Topics related to abortion were uncommon in both samples, with only 2.5% of articles in either sample mentioning the topic. In the African American sample, nonspecific, nonsurgical methods of abortion were mentioned in 2% of the articles. However, in the Latina sample, surgical abortion was discussed in fewer than 1% of the articles and nonsurgical methods, including metrotrexate, RU486 or mifepristone, or other methods, were discussed in 1.9%.

**Planned and Unplanned Pregnancy**

Coverage of pregnancy, both planned and unplanned, was the most common sexual and reproductive health topic in the magazines. Pregnancy was mentioned in 16.3% of articles in the African American sample and in 19.8% of articles in the Latina sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>% of Articles Latina Magazines*</th>
<th>% of Articles African American Magazines**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth control pills</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condoms</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norplant</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depo-Provera</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaphragm, cervical cap, and/or sponge</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUD</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spermicides</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubal ligation</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasectomy</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm method/natural family planning</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstinence</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (including breast feeding)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 324. ** n = 49.
Planned pregnancy was a more frequent topic than unplanned pregnancy. Planned pregnancy resulting in birth was a topic in 4.1% of the African American sample and in 8.6% of the Latina sample. No articles in the African American sample addressed the topic of planned pregnancy ending in abortion, and fewer than 1% in the Latina sample did. Miscarriage of a planned pregnancy was a topic in 4.1% of the African American sample and 0.3% in the Latina sample. The health risks of a planned pregnancy were discussed in 4.1% of the African American sample and 3.7% of the Latina sample.

Unplanned pregnancy was discussed mostly in reference to its results and implications. Unplanned pregnancy resulting in birth was a topic in 6.1% of the African American articles and in 3.4% of the Latina sample. Unplanned pregnancy resulting in abortion was discussed in 4.1% of the African American sample and in 4% of the Latina articles. Latina magazines offered more information about the risks of experiencing unplanned pregnancy or health risks related to unplanned pregnancy than did African American magazines. No mentions of these risks were made in any articles in the African American sample. Four percent of the Latina articles discussed the risks of experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, and 1.5% addressed the health risks of an unplanned pregnancy.

Consequences and Responsibilities

Fewer than 2% of articles in both samples addressed the emotional, social, or financial consequences of the sexual and reproductive health topics. For example, despite the enormous annual cost of treating HIV/AIDS, financial consequences were not mentioned at all in the African American magazines and in only 0.6% of the Latina magazines. Although 4.1% of the African American articles discussed the emotional consequences of having an abortion, 1.9% in the Latino sample did so. More than 5% of the African American and Latino samples addressed the emotional implications of unplanned pregnancy.

Male or female responsibility for preventing HIV/AIDS or STDs rarely was discussed in either sample. Fewer than 2% of articles in both samples mentioned responsibility for decision-making about abortion. Female responsibility for contraception was discussed in 3.1% of the articles in the Latina sample, but male responsibility for contraception was a topic in fewer than 1% of the articles. No discussion of contraception responsibility was present in the African American sample.

More Sexual Activity than Sexual Health

Coverage of sexual health issues pale in comparison to sexual activity topics in the magazines in these samples. Sexual and reproductive health topics, including pregnancy, abortion, STDs, AIDS/HIV, and reproductive health care, totaled only 30.6% of articles in African American magazines, compared with the 49% that discussed sexual activity. (Note: The remaining 20.4% of the articles dealt with other miscellaneous sexual health topics, such as sexual orientation and breast cancer as it relates to sexual activity.) In the Latina sample, the discrepancy was similar, with
45% of articles addressing sexual and reproductive health topics and 55% dealing with sexual activity. These results suggest that despite the disproportionate number of African Americans and Latinas suffering from sexual health problems, ethnic magazines still are focusing on sexual activity without reference to potential negative consequences.

**Individual Control, Cultural Values, and Sexual Health**

Thirty-seven percent of the articles in the African American sample and 65.1% of articles in the Latina sample exuded messages of self-efficacy, saying the individual could cope with the problem. Fewer than 10% of the articles in each sample expressed messages of external control (6.1% African American, 8.6% Latina) or no human control over the reproductive health issue at hand (8.2% African American, 4.9% Latina). However, a large percentage of the articles offered no discussion of self-efficacy or control over the issues (20.4% African American, 34.6% Latina), suggesting that this is an area for improvement.

Potential causes or solutions or both for reproductive health problems also were coded. Individual behavior was cited in 18.4% of African American articles and 76.2% of Latina articles. Communication with a partner was the second most common topic in both samples, mentioned in 16.3% of articles for African Americans and 46% of articles for Latinas. Families composed 8.2% of the causes/solutions in African American articles and 8.6% in Latina articles.

A majority of U.S. Latinos are Roman Catholic, and the church has been outspoken about sexual health topics such as contraception and abortion. In addition, some African American churches have partnered with public health practitioners to improve the health status of African Americans. However, church or religion was noted as a factor in only 2.8% of the Latino articles (and not coded separately in the African American articles). Schools or other social institutions (including the media) rarely were mentioned. Articles were more apt to point to health professionals (10.2% of African American items and 23% of Latino items) as causes or solutions of health problems.

**Role of Ethnic Media**

Overall, given the disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinas who suffer from HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unplanned pregnancy, issues related to these topics were sorely underaddressed by the magazines in both samples. These magazines are similar to their general market counterparts in their coverage of sexual and reproductive health. They tended to cover—or not cover—the same topics in proportions similar to general market magazines that cater to women or teen readers (Walsh-Childers et al., 1997).

The results support other scholars’ assessments that ethnic media are not necessarily better than general market media when it comes to coverage of certain issues (Gutiérrez, 1987; Riggins, 1992; Ríos, 1994). However, because these magazines are specifically targeting communities of color, they have a responsibility to educate them appropriately. Mass media can play a positive role in public health campaigns
ethnic media have the opportunity to play a substantial role.

The results also suggest that media researchers cannot assume that ethnic magazines in the United States serve their audiences in the same way that the more commonly studied ethnic broadcasting and newspapers do. These magazines are not community based, similar to many ethnic newspapers, radio stations, or regional magazines. At the very least they are distributed in major U.S. markets, and many have international circulations. Their perception of their readers may be more of a "market" or virtual community than a community grounded in geography and community values.

It is important to point out that if we explored other subjects in this same set of magazines (e.g., articles on fashion, food, music, parenting), we might have arrived at very different conclusions. In addition, some of the magazines gave almost no attention to sexual activity or sexual/reproductive health. We also cannot assume that all readers will interpret information in the same ways. Similarities in media messages do not predict similarity in the way they are received. Brown et al.’s 1993 study of how girls use media to construct sexual identities is one such example. But if one is saturated with similar media content over long periods, there may be fewer visible choices, especially if other personal contacts or social institutions are not filling the gaps.

Finally, it is important to note that ethnic media can represent only part of the solution. Other factors, including religious beliefs, income, familial values, and governmental intervention, also play a role in the sexual health decisions of minority women. Because many of the most affected Blacks and Latinos have low incomes and may qualify for public assistance, the economic impact of allowing STD, HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy rates to escalate is substantial. This also does not limit the ability of ethnic media to affirm the role of the family or collective in its delineation of sound individual practices. For instance, partners practicing contraception could be praised for the family orientation in spacing pregnancies, which improves the family’s financial well-being and the health of mothers and children. In addition, communication with one’s partner was another positive feature of African American and Latino coverage because of the public health improvements that result (Valente, Poppe, & Merritt, 1996).

This ever-growing genre of ethnic magazines has opportunities for improving the sexual health knowledge, and potentially the health status, of its readers by providing more detailed sexual and reproductive health information. Continued references to self-efficacy and individual behavior, along with stepped-up discussions of minority health statistics and information relevant to ethnic communities, are ways to achieve it.

Notes

1 The words Latinos and Hispanics are used interchangeably in this study to refer to residents who self-identify with the indigenous or Spanish-speaking cultures of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central America, or South America. Hispanics are also of European Spanish origin. Portuguese-speaking Brazilians may also self-identify as Latin American (although normally not as Hispanic). Latina, the feminine form of Latino, refers to Latin American women. The use of these broad terms for the purposes of this study does not mean to slight the ethnicity of Latinos who are more apt to self-identify in relation to a
country or indigenous group (e.g., “I am Puerto Rican, I am Mexican, I am Quechua”). African American, Black, and Black American will be used interchangeably to define an American of African or Caribbean descent who self-identifies as Black. Anglo American refers to a non-Hispanic White person of European descent.

2 The U.S. Census recorded a 53% increase in documented Hispanics between 1980 and 1990, and Latinos currently compose more than 11% of the U.S. population. See Byerly & Deardorff (1995). By 2020, 25% of the U.S. population may be Latino. See Huntington (1996).

3 The higher incidence of STDs in minorities is correlated with poverty, access to quality health care, health care seeking behavior, illicit drug use, and living in communities with a high prevalence of STDs, according to the Division of STD Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For example, gonorrhea rates among Hispanics are 69.0 cases per 100,000, compared with 25.9 cases in non-Hispanic Whites and 825.5 in African Americans. Syphilis was reported in 1.9 Hispanics per 100,000, compared with 0.6 for non-Hispanic Whites and 30.2 for African Americans (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1997).

4 Not all of these values are prevalent in all Latino and African American subcultures. Individuals may vary from subculture norms.

5 Two magazines that started in 1997 (Estilo and Latina Bride) were part of the sample although they began distribution after March. Eight were monthly publications, 2 were published 26 times per year, 3 were quarterly publications, and 2 were published bimonthly. One women’s magazine (Latina) started publishing as a bimonthly but switched to a monthly publication in midyear. Two magazines were Spanish-language teen magazines, and 14 were women’s magazines.

6 Sexual health and reproductive health included topics associated with contraception, emergency contraception, abortion, planned and unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and STDs (other than HIV/AIDS). Sexual activity included articles about sexual techniques, orgasm, sexual decision-making, masturbation, celibacy, virginity, impotence or other sexual dysfunctions, sexual orientation, and other sexual activity topics.

7 A woman undergoing an abortion aborts a fetus that is confirmed to be present. Emergency contraception refers to the effort to prevent a fetus from forming, usually by preventing a woman’s egg from being released and then fertilized by a man’s sperm. Emergency contraception pills must be taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.

References


