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# Gender-of-Voice Effects in an ACASI Study of Sexual Behavior

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# Study Objective

- To examine whether gender of the ACASI voice affects reports of risky sexual behaviors and number of partners in a sample of men who have sex with men (MSM).

# Challenges to Surveying Sex

- Social desirability effects: deliberate mis-reporting of answers to gain social approval
  - Social desirability effects can occur in different directions for different outcomes in sex surveys.
- Interviewer effects: characteristics of the interviewer influences the extent to which the respondent will provide a socially desirable response.
  - Can occur when the topic relates to an interviewer characteristic and in questions about sensitive behaviors

# Theoretical Models

- Social Distance Model: Respondents would rather confide in someone who is “like them”.
- Social Attribution Model: Is the interviewer the “kind of person” who would be receptive to my true responses?

# ACASI Technology: A solution to Social Desirability Effects?

- Allows respondents to provide their responses privately.
- Removes the requirement for a respondent to report their answers to a human, thereby eliminates the extent to which honesty is compromised by interviewer characteristics. *Or does it?*
  - Some literature suggests computer users ascribe human traits to computers and even subtle cues such as the gender of the computer voice can cause users to react to the computer as they would to another person.

# Does Gender of Voice Matter? Relevant Literature

- No published ACASI studies directly measuring gender-of-voice effects on reports of sensitive behaviors
- Two telephone-ACASI studies found mixed results

# Research Questions

- Does the gender of the ACASI voice effect the number of reports for risky sexual behaviors?
  - If so, is this effect greater for sexual behaviors that are most risky relative to those that are least risky?
- Does the gender of the ACASI voice effect the number of reported partners?

# Study Design

- Part of a larger experiment that examined the effect of presenting the risks of different sexual behaviors in three ways on respondent's behavior intentions.
- Respondents
  - 405 adult men who have sex with men (MSM) from 12 metropolitan areas across the US
  - HIV-negative or HIV status unknown
  - Engaged in unprotected sex within the past 30 days
- Randomly assigned to hear either a male or female ACASI voice

# Dependent Variables

- Number of times in the past 30 days
  - Unprotected vaginal sex
  - Unprotected insertive anal sex
  - Unprotected receptive anal sex
- Each sexual behavior was asked for 3 different types of sexual partners
  - HIV-positive
  - HIV-negative
  - HIV-status unknown

# Results

- Only unprotected receptive anal sex with an HIV-status-unknown partner showed voice effects. Male voice = 1.29; female voice = 4.5
- No voice effects for unprotected insertive anal sex or vaginal sex with an HIV-status-unknown partner.
- No voice effects for any of the sexual behaviors with HIV-positive or HIV-negative partners

# Dependent Variables

- Number of partners in the past 30 days
  - HIV-positive
  - HIV-negative
  - HIV status unknown
- Total number of partners in the past 6 months

# Results

- Male voice yielded higher numbers of partners.

	Female Voice	Male Voice
Partners in past 6 months*†	11.94 (n = 193)	14.05 (n = 210)
HIV- partners in past 30 days*	1.84 (n = 194)	2.95 (n = 211)
HIV+ partners in past 30 days*	.29 (n = 194)	.55 (n = 211)
HIV unknown partners in past 30 days	3.1 (n = 194)	3.2 (n = 211)

\*p<.05

†Two outliers were excluded from the analysis, one from each voice condition.

# Limitations

- Convenience sample
- Excluded women and heterosexual males
- Small sample sizes made it difficult to detect statistically significant differences for unprotected sex with HIV-positive partners and for unprotected vaginal sex
- Neutrality of ACASI voice

# Conclusion

- Few gender-of-ACASI-voice effects found.
- When there was an effect, the male ACASI voice yielded the more “socially desirable” response.
- Results support the typical practice of using a female voice in ACASI studies to mitigate interviewer effects when the study population is MSM.