

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACIAL AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION AMONG TEENS EXPOSED TO DATING VIOLENCE

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Objective: Driven by intersectionality, a central tenet of Critical Race Theory, this study examines the combined associations of racial and gender discrimination, which are interlocking, macro-level social forces, and teen dating violence (TDV).

Design: Self-report surveys were administered via Audio Computer Assisted Self Interview (ACASI) equipment. Logistic regression models were used to estimate associations between racial and gender discrimination and TDV.

Setting: Study participants were recruited during August 2003 to June 2004 from high school health classes and an after-school program located in South Bronx neighborhoods of New York City.

Participants: Non-probability sample of 142 Black and Latino teens aged 13-19 years who reported experiences dating someone of a different sex.

Main Measures: Experienced discrimination based on race and gender adapted from the Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) instrument, dating violence items from the Youth Dating Violence Survey.

Results: Of the participants, 40.1% reported experiencing both racial and gender discrimination, and nearly all (93%) experienced dating violence. Participants reporting both racial and gender discrimination were 2.5 times more likely to report experiencing the highest frequency of dating violence, adjusted for age and sex (95% CI: 1.0-6.7). A dose-response of EOD observed in unadjusted models (P for trend = .024) was no longer statistically significant after adjustment for age and sex (P for trend = .073).

INTRODUCTION

Teen dating violence (TDV) is a significant public health issue¹ associated with a range of short- and long-term mental,² sexual,^{3,4} and behavioral⁴⁻⁶ health consequences that can last into young adulthood.⁷ Youth of color bear a disproportionate burden of TDV. Studies have revealed high rates of dating violence and sexual coercion among Black female and Latina teens,⁸ with several studies finding Black female teens reporting the highest rates of victimization among all demographic groups.⁹⁻¹¹

The root causes of racial and gender disparities in TDV remain understudied. Most studies em-

phasize individual factors such as substance use,^{7,12} depression,¹³ general aggression and justification of TDV,¹⁴ early risky sexual behavior, and prior TDV or child abuse.^{15,16} Other studies examine interpersonal^{13,17} and family factors.^{16,18} These explanations can reinforce stereotypes about marginalized groups with little attention paid to the influence of systemic and institutional structures of inequality.

CONSTRUCTING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY DESIGN

Black feminist scholars¹⁹⁻²¹ encourage the use of Critical Race

Conclusions: Strategies to prevent TDV in this population should not ignore the compounding negative effects of racial and gender discrimination. *Ethn Dis.* 2018;28(Suppl 1):253-260; doi:10.18865/ed.28.S1.253.

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Theory (CRT) tenets and intersectionality in theoretical framing, design, analyses and interpretations of public health studies.²² CRT asserts that racism is ubiquitous in the lives of people of color and “naming one’s own reality” through storytelling helps them resist White Supremacy²³; intersectionality recognizes that social identities, like social inequalities, are interdependent and mutually constitutive.²⁴ This article reports on one part of a

Applying an intersectional lens, this article examines how “the interlocking identities at the micro level reflect multiple, interlocking forms of structural inequality at the macro-levels of society.”²²

broader study examining the pervasiveness and synergistic relationship between racial and gender discrimination among Black and Latino teens who have experienced TDV and the potential of critical consciousness (CC), which is the ability to critically reflect and act on the root causes of social conditions,²⁵ as a moderator of the relationship. Racial and gender discrimination are important to consider because attributing negative events (such as TDV) to external factors (such

as sexism and racism) rather than to individual characteristics can be protective of health.²⁶ Accounting for CC is important because, as hypothesized by Campbell and MacPhail, CC can lead teens “to challenge or resist some of the processes whereby adverse social circumstances place their health at risk.”²⁷

The first author’s observations and interactions with South Bronx teens during several years spent coordinating prevention programs gave impetus to this study. The focus groups she conducted with 32 Black and Latino teens utilized “centering in the margins” and “voice” to document their experiences of TDV and multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination. The teens described these experiences as common, even daily, occurrences in their lives. Themes derived from their narratives informed the development of the study’s conceptual model (Figure 1) and its quantitative arm. Applying an intersectional lens, this article examines how “the interlocking identities at the micro level reflect multiple, interlocking forms of structural inequality at the macro-levels of society.”²² We hypothesized that Black female and Latina teens who experience discrimination based on both race *and* gender would be impacted most by TDV compared with their male counterparts.

METHODS

Study Participants and Procedures

From August 2003 to June 2004, we used purposive sampling to re-

cruit a non-probability sample of Black and Latino teens (N=184) to participate. We recruited participants by posting flyers on bulletin boards and giving brief presentations about the study during high school health classes (n=136) and a community after-school program (n=48). Participants received a free movie pass for their time and referrals to local health and counseling resources. The Internal Review Boards of Hunter College and the New York City Department of Education provided ethics approval. All procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Data Collection

The data were collected via questionnaires, which the teens self-administered using Audio Computer Assisted Self Interview (ACASI) equipment. For teens who reported ever dating (defined as going out with someone of the opposite sex), the questionnaire assessed history of TDV, experiences of racial and gender discrimination, a preliminary 10-item critical consciousness scale, as well as socio-demographics (date of birth, sex, grade, 12-item ethnic identity measure), dating behaviors (age of onset, number of dating partners, age difference of partners, partner who uses drugs or alcohol), and sexual risk behaviors, ie, condom use at last sex (yes/no), number of sex part-

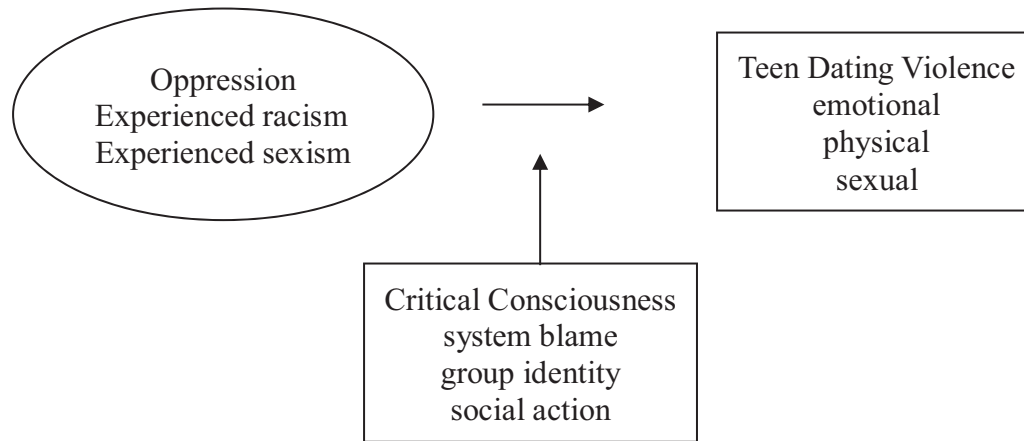


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the impact of racial and gender oppression on teen dating violence as moderated by critical consciousness.

ners, sex while using drugs or alcohol (yes/no), coerced sex (yes/no).

Teen Dating Violence

The outcome, TDV, was assessed via the Youth Dating Violence Survey (Cronbach's α ranged from .88 to .91), which has been widely used to evaluate TDV prevention programs.²⁸ To measure dating violence victimization, participants were asked "How often has anyone that you have ever been on a date with done the following things to you?" Responses referred to specified situations of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Parallel questions measured dating violence perpetration. Participants' responses were dichotomized ("any" or "no" experience with dating violence). The majority (93%) of participants experienced any dating violence, therefore, tertiles of dating violence severity were evaluated and defined as: low ("less than 4 experiences"), moderate ("4-7 experiences"), and high ("8 or

more experiences"). In logistic regression models, the highest tertile of dating violence experiences were evaluated as independent categories of: "less than 8" vs "8 or more".

Racial and Gender Discrimination

The main predictors of interest were experiences of racial and gender discrimination, which were measured with 8 items, adapted from the Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) instrument from the CARDIA study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$ and test-retest reliability coefficient = .70).^{29,30} The items asked whether participants had ever experienced discrimination or been prevented from doing something based on their race (or skin color) or sex (being male or female) in seven different settings including home, school, work, or in stores. An eighth situation ("from the police") was added for race discrimination. Participant responses were dichotomized ("any" vs "no").

If a respondent indicated "yes," they were asked how frequently (ie, "many times," "a few times," or "once or twice") they had experienced the exposure.

To create an intersectional measure of simultaneous exposure to racial and gender discrimination, we created an additional variable with three joint exposure categories: "none," "one" or "both" racial and gender discrimination. We also evaluated independent categories of "no racial and no gender discrimination," "only racial discrimination," "only gender discrimination," and "both racial and gender discrimination." Based on our focus group findings that both female and male teens had reported this experience, we included male participants in our assessments of gender discrimination.

Statistical Analysis

With few ($n=17$) students reporting same sex dating, the analyses in-

Table 1. Characteristics of teens with a history of dating, N=142

Characteristic	All, N=142	Female, n=89 (62.7%)	Male, n=53 (37.3%)	P ^c
Age, years, mean (SD)	16.6 (1.6)	16.2 (1.5)	17.1 (1.6)	.003
Ethnic/racial identity, % ^a				
Hispanic or Latino	73.2	69.7	79.3	.212
Black or African American	34.5	37.1	30.2	.404
Asian or Pacific Islander	0	0	0	n/a
Native American or Alaska Native	2.1	3.4	0.0	.293
White or European	2.1	3.4	0.0	.293
Other	6.3	6.7	5.7	>.999
Currently dating, %	66.7	71.9	57.7	.084
Age at first date, mean (SD) ^b	13.1 (1.7)	13.3 (1.4)	12.8 (2.0)	.151
Racial discrimination experiences, %				
None	31.7	31.5	32.1	.939
Any	68.3	68.5	67.9	
Gender discrimination experiences, %				
None	51.4	44.9	62.3	.046
Any	48.6	55.1	37.7	
Racial and gender discrimination, %				
None	23.2	20.2	28.3	.414
One	36.6	36.0	37.7	
Both	40.1	43.8	34.0	
Teen dating violence experiences, %				
Tertile 1 (Low)	30.3	34.8	22.6	.098
Tertile 2 (Mid)	29.6	23.6	39.6	
Tertile 3 (High)	40.1	41.6	37.7	

a. Participants were allowed to choose more than one, percentages sum to >100%.

b. n=139.

c. P from independent t-tests (continuous) or from chi-square or Fisher's exact (categorical).

cluded only those participants with a history of dating someone of the opposite sex (n=142). Differences in the continuous measures by sex (ie, male, female) were evaluated using independent t-tests; differences in the categorical measures across sex categories were evaluated using Chi-squared tests or Fisher's exact tests for small numbers. Logistic regression models were fit using "8 or more dating violence experiences" as the dependent variable and both intersectional measures of "racial and gender discrimination" as indepen-

dent variables. Models are reported as unadjusted and adjusted for age. Due to differences in both discrimination and dating violence by sex, we further adjusted for both age and sex. We evaluated the P for trend in the intersectional exposure categories of experiencing none, one, vs both racial and gender discrimination using the three-category variable as continuous rather than categorical. The analyses that included gender discrimination were not restricted to female participants because male teens also reported experiencing gender discrimination.

RESULTS

Participant Demographics

Participants ranged in age from 13-19 years, mean 16.6 (SD=1.6). On average, males were older than females (17.1 vs 16.2, P=.001). Two-thirds of participants (66.7%) reported dating at the time of the survey; the majority of participants (62.7%) were female and identified as either Hispanic or Latino (73.2%) followed by Black or African American (34.5%). Overall, 68.3% reported ex-

Table 2. Association between racial and gender discrimination and high dating violence among teens with a history of dating, N=142, dependent variable: high dating violence ^a

	n	Odds Ratio (95% CI)		
		Unadjusted	Age-Adjusted	Age & Sex Adjusted
Independent variable: racial discrimination				
None	45	1.0	1.0	1.0
Any	97	2.0 (1.0-4.4)	1.8 (.8-3.9)	1.8 (.8-3.8)
Independent variable: gender discrimination				
None	73	1.0	1.0	1.0
Any	69	1.9 (.9-3.7)	1.8 (.9-3.5)	1.7 (.8-3.4)
Independent variable: racial and gender discrimination				
None	33	1.0	1.0	1.0
Only racial discrimination	40	2.1 (.8-5.8)	1.9 (.7-5.4)	1.9 (.7-5.4)
Only gender discrimination	12	2.2 (.6-9.0)	2.5 (.6-10.1)	2.3 (.6-9.5)
Both racial and gender discrimination	57	3.0 (1.2-7.8)	2.7 (1.0-7.0)	2.5 (.9-6.7)
Independent variable: Racial and gender discrimination				
None	33	1.0	1.0	1.0
One	52	2.1 (.8-5.6)	2.1 (.8-5.5)	2.0 (.8-5.4)
Both	57	3.0 (1.2-7.8)	2.7 (1.0-7.0)	2.5 (1.0-6.7)
P for trend	-	.024	.053	.073

a. Dependent categories: TDV victimization tertiles 1 and 2 (Reference) vs TDV victimization tertile 3.

perceiving racial discrimination while only 48.6% reported gender discrimination. A greater percentage of females than males reported gender discrimination (55.1% vs 37.7%, $P=.046$) (Table 1). Some 40.1% of participants reported both racial and gender discrimination. Nearly all (93%) participants had experienced TDV.

Discrimination and TDV

Neither racial nor gender discrimination alone was associated with experiencing high levels of TDV. However, the odds of experiencing the highest levels of TDV were for those experiencing both racial and gender discrimination was 2.7 times that of those who experienced neither (95% CI: 1.0 - 7.0). A dose-response pattern existed across categories of none,

one, or both racial and gender discrimination in unadjusted models (P for trend = .024). However, it was no longer statistically significant in models adjusted for age and sex (P for trend = .073) (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support our hypothesis that Black female and Latina teens experience a “double jeopardy” in the context of TDV.³¹ The synergistic relationship between racial and gender discrimination was revealed in a prior focus group study (unpublished work) during which a Black female teen explained that she did not tell her mother about her TDV because she believed her brothers might retaliate against the perpetrator, which

could lead to their incarceration. The disproportionate police surveillance and detention of Black male teens, coupled with teen perceptions and experiences with public authority figures more broadly,³² may have implications for TDV. Being Black and female (social identities) may not only pose greater risk of TDV, but also garner different responses from the larger society (social inequalities), especially if her abuser or her protector is Black and male.³³

Age helped to explain some of this association. This could be due to persons having experienced more discrimination over the life span, their increased maturity with age that leads to greater recognition and reporting of discrimination, or a combination of both. This, combined with the higher percentage of female respondents, might ex-

plain the drop-off in significance when adjusting for age and sex.

Limitations

This preliminary study has several limitations. First, the complexity of intersectionality proved challenging to measure utilizing the constituent categories of race and sex. While our focus on experienced discrimination fits well within ecological approaches, it is generally agreed that additive models are still inadequate for measuring intersectionality.^{24,34} Second, this study was

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further limited by not examining several known risk factors for TDV (eg, alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, history of family violence) as potential predictors. Third, our sample size did not provide sufficient power to control for unmeasured covariates (eg, ethnic identity, skin color,

and dating behaviors). Nevertheless, we believe the study provides insights about how to conceptualize intersectionality and very preliminary data relative to TDV. Including male teens in a study on gender discrimination and TDV may obscure the underlying mechanisms; however, recent studies suggest both male and female teens may be victims of TDV.^{7,35} Finally, our study was biased toward heterosexual teens and did not assess how other identities and social locations (eg, based on sexuality, gender expression, disability, or immigration status) might factor into experienced multiple oppressions and correlates of TDV.

CONCLUSIONS

Teen dating violence was associated with experiencing racial and gender discrimination among Black and Latino teens in this preliminary study. Public Health Critical Race Praxis (PHCRP) pushes researchers to go beyond gathering evidence, but to also act upon the social forces they discover that impede health.³⁶ The infusion of critical consciousness (CC) about social inequalities into youth prevention programs might mitigate the impact of experienced racial and gender discrimination on TDV.³⁷ Our next step will be to refine a measure of CC to determine whether fostering individual and collective transformations ultimately leads to social action and toward justice.³⁸ Future studies of TDV should examine the relationship between experienced racial and gender discrimination, while controlling

for correlates at the individual and family levels, in order to understand and address the disparate impact of TDV on Black female teens.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest to report.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Research concept and design: Roberts; Acquisition of data: Roberts; Data analysis and interpretation: Roberts, Tamene, Orta; Manuscript draft: Roberts, Tamene, Orta; Statistical expertise: Orta; Acquisition of funding: Roberts; Administrative: Roberts, Tamene; Supervision: Roberts

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