

# Generational Perspectives of Unprotected Sex and Sustainable Behavior Change in Nigeria

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Amaechi D. Okonkwo<sup>1,2</sup>

## Abstract

Despite the HIV/AIDS pandemic and over two decades of safe-sex communication and condom social marketing in Nigeria, unmarried people continue to engage in unprotected sex. Understanding their perspectives of unprotected sex will be imperative for sustainable policy and intervention design. To realize this objective, the author synthesized Giddens's structuration theory and Rob Stones's structurationist project research brackets to develop a long interview guide used to elicit unmarried university students' perspectives of influences on unprotected sex, and the feasibility of sustainable behavior change in Nigeria. Participants' constructed unprotected sex as prescribed, and the cumulative outcome of complex institutional (structural), interpersonal, and agential influences. Their narratives challenge the popular but narrow loss of control, sensation-seeking, and ignorance theses of unprotected sex. Instead, participants' narratives implicate an interrelated web of persuasive and insidious institutional and agential influences, in a manner that privilege neither structure nor agency. To promote safer sexual practices therefore, stakeholders must concurrently engage with institutional and agential influences on unprotected sex—and not focus on unmarried people's sexual agencies alone, as current interventions do in Nigeria.

## Keywords

Nigeria, unmarried university students, unprotected sex, structure, agency, influences, sustainable behavior change

## Introduction

In Nigeria, unmarried university students continue to engage in unprotected sex (Elegbeleye, 2006; Kabir, Iliyasu, Abubakar, & Kabir, 2004; Odu & Akanle, 2008). This is despite “substantial sums spent on information campaigns, the marketing of condoms” (Cleland & Watkins, 2006, p. 2; Meekers, Van Rossem, Zellner, & Berg, 2004), and a high awareness of HIV/AIDS risk (Momoh, Moses, & Ugiomoh, 2006; National Population Commission [NPC] and ICF Macro, 2009). The need to understand and account for the knowledge, attitude, and practice gap (KAP-gap; see Westoff & Bankole, 1995) described above partly inspired this study. The second inspiration is the need to demonstrate the continuing relevance of structuration theory for the understanding and critical analysis of society and social conduct.

The study is set in Nigeria, where the institutional context is compellingly erotic and romance laden (Smith, 2001). Varied institutions sexualize unmarried people and propagate and normalize risk-prone sexual practices. These include the mass media, pornography, peer sexual ideologies and/or conducts, folklore, gender scripts, dance, and so forth (see Ajibade, 2005; P. I. Okonkwo, Fatusi, & Ilika, 2005). The functioning of these compelling social institutions, and unmarried people's active and purposeful engagement with them, predisposes the latter toward unprotected sex. Consequently, unprotected sex “has become a key life goal

and a source of personal fulfillment” in Nigeria (Jackson & Scott, 1997, p. 559). In particular, heterosexual prowess and sexual conquest have become key indicators of trendiness, a basis for peer acceptance; connote good living; and continue to instigate similar and further conducts.

Moreover, normative sanctions against unmarried people's sexual activities are relatively weaker today in comparison with Nigeria's abstention-oriented traditional past. The weakening of premarital sex sanctions is due to the combined effects of social change, late marriage, human rights gains, increased geographical mobility, and shrinking parental and community surveillance of unmarried people. Family and community sanctions for premarital sex now seem to operate on a *don't-ask-don't-tell* basis, as long as unintended outcomes of unprotected sex, such as unintended pregnancies, do not manifest. Notwithstanding, the institutional environment in Nigeria concurrently constrains unmarried people's sexual conducts. For example, premarital sex is normatively categorized as purposeless and immoral in Nigeria (see Smith, 2004).

<sup>1</sup>Swansea University, UK

<sup>2</sup>Behaviour Change Group Inc., Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

## Corresponding Author:

Amaechi D. Okonkwo, 8, Hooper Crescent, Apt. 114, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T5A 4K7

Email: [amaechiokonkwo@hotmail.com](mailto:amaechiokonkwo@hotmail.com)

Adult valuation of premarital sex as immoral in Nigeria is a form of sexual constraint, which has been conflated with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and sustained by the contradictory valuation of unmarried people as valuable, ignorant, innocent, and at risk from others and to themselves.

In addition, there are organized constraints on unprotected sex, such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—funded abstinence-oriented Zip-up campaign, and organized safe-sex and consistent condom use campaigns by social marketers (see Holmes, Levine, & Weaver, 2004; Meekers et al., 2004). There are additional varied and unorganized Pentecostal, peer and parental sexual surveillance of unmarried people in Nigeria. Despite these sexual constraints, unmarried Nigerian university students continue to engage in unprotected sex (Elegbeleye, 2006; Kabir et al., 2004; Odu & Akanle, 2008).

Based on the foregoing analysis, it is apparent that dominant policies and interventions designed to reduce unprotected sex and mitigate unwanted outcomes in Nigeria have been ineffective. This is probably because interventionists continue to address mostly the agential components of unprotected sex. In the author's view, this conceptual linearity or stakeholders' systemic and ongoing failure to concurrently consider institutional and agential coinfluences on unprotected sex accounts for the perennial ineffectiveness of sexual reproductive health policies and interventions in Nigeria despite over two decades of safe-sex communication, condom social marketing, a high awareness of unintended outcomes, and the normative view of premarital sex as immoral in Nigeria (Cleland & Watkins, 2006; Meekers et al., 2004; NPC and ICF Macro, 2009).

The dominant problematic conceptualization of premarital sex in Nigeria has nurtured several plausible, but linear, studies of influences on unmarried university students' risk-prone sexual practices. Compelling, but narrow, influences reported by investigators as influential include drug abuse by Ambrose Ali University students for enhanced sexual performance and sensations (Okoza & Aluede, 2009). On a different note, Odu and Akanle (2008) concluded that transactional sex is the main motivation for university students' risk-prone sexual conducts, regardless of their awareness of sexually transmitted infections (STIs; see also Momoh, Asagwara, & Meriamu, 2007, for similar conclusions about University of Lagos girls). Furthermore, Omoteso (2006) found that "gender and family background" has more significant influences on unprotected sex, compared with age and religion, in a study of Nigerian university students' sexual behavior (p. 129). Additionally insightful is Okonkwo and colleagues' (2005) peer sexual conduct perception study among female undergraduate students in Anambra State. According to the authors, "almost half (47.1%) of respondents indicated that they were under pressure by friends to engage in pre-marital sex" (P. I. Okonkwo et al., 2005, p. 107). Similarly plausible, but narrow, is Elegbeleye's (2006) study of rape incidence in Nigerian universities, which was linked to social change or "the break down in societal values both at the local and global level" (pp. 43-47).

As can be deduced from the studies cited above, and similar others, each addresses a key analytically influential *external structure* or influence on unmarried Nigerian university students' risk-prone sexual practices without a corresponding inquiry into how the identified structures are interrelated; recursive, how unmarried people (pre)reflexively engage (agency) with the identified sexualizing structures to normalize and promote unprotected sex on one hand, and contribute toward the renewal and maintenance of the original sexualizing structures, on the other (structural duality; Giddens, 1984). This study is an attempt to address this knowledge-gap in literature leveraging structuration theory. The author elicits and interrogates participating university students' gendered perspectives of influences on unprotected sex, the interrelationships among identified influences (if any), and the implications of students' own perspectives on the feasibility of sustainable behavior change in Nigeria. The focus on influences on unprotected sex is justified by the author's conviction that *influences*, once identified, are comparatively easier to manage by stakeholders and youths, before they produce concrete and risk-infused sexual opportunities, which are more difficult to manage or avoid.

University students were chosen because campuses in Nigeria have become critical sites for youth (semi)independent development and self-exploration due to conflated factors. These include social change, increased geographical mobility, intense peer and mass media influence, and so forth. Moreover, nearly half of new STIs are recorded among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years, who constitute about 29% of the Nigerian over 140 million population (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2009; NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). The preceding statistics, despite the dominant categorization of premarital sex as immoral, purposeless, and fornication in Nigeria, elevate scholarly interest in risk-prone sexual practices among unmarried people. It does not imply that unmarried university students' sexual conducts are riskier or safer than other subpopulations in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Clarification

For the purpose of this article, *influences* on unprotected sex approximates those durable institutions, ideologies, attitudes, emotions, (pre)reflexive knowledge, and active and purposive conducts that *predispose* unmarried people to unprotected sex in Nigeria. Structures have two basic components and are comparable with two sides of one coin. On one side are patterned rules and resources from societal institutions, such as those emanating from the mass media or gender norms, which university students differentially *draw-on* and *work-on* for their communication and interpretation of sexual cues, their (re)enactment of unprotected sex, and the rationalization of their conducts within and outside the boundaries of tradition or norms (see de Lauretis, 1990). The other side of

Participants	Lagos	Benin	Nsukka	Abuja	Total
Males	8	7	7	8	30
Females	6	8	7	5	26
Total	14	15	14	13	56

**Figure 1.** Participant selection by site

the coin (structure) is composed of social agents' variable agencies, which are "events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). It is persuasive that university students *could act differently* to avoid unprotected sex and risks by either abstention or consistent condom use.

To robustly specify and explain the operation of influences (structures) and university students' active engagement (variable agencies) with the identified structures, the article assumed the structuration of unprotected sex—itsself an example of social relations that is simultaneously constrained and enabled by structural duality (Giddens, 1984). On one hand, the notion of structural duality requires the consideration, understanding, and explanation of how unmarried students' (pre)reflexively draw upon sexualizing structures to (re)enact unprotected sex in situated interactions (see Stones, 2005). On the other hand, proposing structural duality to elicit, understand, and explain unmarried students' accounts of influences on unprotected sex requires the clarification of how the Nigerian (perhaps, the global) sexual system acquires its compelling and insidious characteristics, and become the active and regenerative repository of intergenerational macro- and microsexual (risk) ideologies and conducts that unmarried people simultaneously draw-on, and unconsciously maintain through their actual sexual risk conducts (see Cohen, 1968; Giddens, 1984).

To achieve the study objectives, broad questions pursued include the following: (a) What institutions and agencies influence unprotected sex ideologies and conducts in Nigeria? (b) How do these institutions and agencies function to influence unprotected sex? (c) Do university students actively or passively engage with the identified institutions and agencies? (d) What are the implications of university students' gendered perspectives of influential structures and agencies driving unprotected sex on sustainable behavior change in Nigeria? To answer these questions, a generational study of university students was conducted. The objective is to elicit students' own accounts of how contextual institutional rules, resources, and variable agencies operate to recommend unprotected sex instead of abstention or consistent contraceptive use, and vice versa.

## Method

### Site and Participant Selection

Purposefully, four Nigerian universities were selected because of their location in four different regions to promote

participants and narrative diversity, in multiple intracountry case studies approach that strengthens research findings. The universities were also selected because campuses in Nigeria (from the author's experience and lay discourse) are critical sites for unmarried students' sexual identity formation, sexual exploration, and performance. Selected institutions include the Universities of Lagos, Benin, Abuja, and University of Nigeria, Nsukka (see Figure 1).

Participants were legal, literate adults (above 18 years in Nigeria) who read, understood, and signed the informed consent form. Snowball sampling was used to select a roughly equal number of male and female students to participate in the study (56 students in total; see Figure 2 for participants' age and gender profile). Although initially unplanned, the author resorted to snowball sampling because female students initially approached refused to participate in an in-depth face-to-face discussion of their sexual conducts with a male investigator. Their reluctance are attributable to probable discomfort over discussing their sexual risk practices with a male investigator (the author), and/or local cultural norms that socialize girls to be reticent about sexual conducts in general. Referrals by trusted peers, who vouched for the author, reduced female participants' reluctance to participate in the study (see Lee, 1993, for discussions on sampling subpopulations).

The main participants' inclusion criteria were age (18-32 years), admission of sexual activity, consent to be interviewed, and their willingness and capacities to discuss their sexual conducts and perceptions of peers' sexual conducts. Each recruited participant was subsequently asked to refer a peer of opposite sex, who is not a relative, girlfriend/boyfriend, or room or course mate. The objective of this sampling stipulation was to accommodate more diverse participants and narratives. Ultimately, samples were drawn from multiple peer networks because of interruptions in the reference chain due to academic demands and/or participants' elective withdrawal from the study. This sample recruitment process and interviews continued until data saturation.

### Interview and Analysis Procedure

Leveraging Stones's (2005) fourfold structuration research brackets, and lessons from an extensive review of Nigerian unprotected sex literature (see McCracken, 1988), the author developed a semistructured interview guide. The objective of the literature review was to familiarize the author with existing literature on unprotected sex and robustly define the research problem. The literature review served an additional

			Participant's Sex		
			Female	Male	Total
Participant's Age	18 - 22	Count	20	17	37
		% within Participant's Age	54.1%	45.9%	100.0%
		% within Participant's Sex	76.9%	56.7%	66.1%
		% of Total	35.7%	30.4%	66.1%
	23 - 27	Count	4	12	16
		% within Participant's Age	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
		% within Participant's Sex	15.4%	40.0%	28.6%
		% of Total	7.1%	21.4%	28.6%
	28 - 32	Count	2	1	3
		% within Participant's Age	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within Participant's Sex	7.7%	3.3%	5.4%
		% of Total	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%
	Total	Count	26	30	56
		% within Participant's Age	46.4%	53.6%	100.0%
		% within Participant's Sex	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	46.4%	53.6%	100.0%

**Figure 2.** Respondents' age and gender profile

function. It clarified (for the author) implicit and taken-for-granted constructs, such as structure-agency, interrelationships that may be latent in Nigerian unprotected sex literature and discourse (see Schutz, 1932/1972).

The interview guide was developed by adapting Giddens's (1984) structural duality concept and Stones's (2005) empirical structuration research brackets to McCracken's (1988) long interview. Stones recommended four interrelated research brackets for a structurationist project. The first research bracket specify the need to elicit from participants what they know about compelling analytically external influences on their unprotected sex, and explain the relationships among identified influences. Second, there is a corresponding need to interrogate and tease out what participants' know about their (pre)dispositions toward unprotected sex, or internal conditions that influence unprotected sex and associated rationalizations that are often within and outside the boundaries of tradition (eccentric subjects; see de Lauretis, 1990). Third, Stones's fourfold research bracket requires the elicitation of what participants know about the influence of their purposive, active, and often (pre)reflexive agencies on unprotected sex; and their linkages to other influential unprotected sex structures. Finally, Stones's fourth research bracket stipulates that investigators unpack what participants know of the intended and unintended outcomes of their conducts (unprotected sex)—especially how these influence further and similar conducts (see Stones, 2005).

The interviews were in an open and *detailed discussion format* (see O'Donnell & Cummins, 1999) and averaged about 2 hr per participant. Participants' narratives were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim (to increase research rigor),

and analyzed with structural hermeneutic analysis (i.e., unpacking participants contexts and conducts; see Stones, 2005)—with the continuous comparative data analysis method. That is, similar narrative themes or influential unprotected sex structures, incidents, meanings, attitudes, and their rationalizations were assigned to each element of Stones's (2005) fourfold structuration cycle, which became the “short-hand designation for various aspects of data” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 164-187). The objectives of this analytic approach are to analyze transcribed narratives and uncover respondents' perspectives of what interrelated structures and agencies influence unprotected sex, which would facilitate a deeper understanding and explanation of what Archer (1995) famously called the vexatious “linkages between structure and agency” in enabling and constraining social practices, such as unprotected sex (p. 1; see also McLennan, 1984).

Excerpts of participants' own voices were quoted in the manuscript to emphasize their perspectives of structural and agential influences on their risk-prone sexual practices; how the identified influences are interrelated, how they operate to cast compelling and insidious sexualizing influences on unmarried people, and how young people actively engage with the specified structures and agencies for sexual risk-taking (structural duality; Giddens, 1984). Participants were also invited to discuss the implication of their perspectives on sustainable behavior change policies and interventions in Nigeria.

### **Ethical Considerations and Orientation of Methods**

The institutional review board of the School of Environment and Society, Swansea University, United Kingdom, approved the study. Participants were informed about, read, and



signed the informed consent document explaining the potential risks associated with the study, such as social stigma, discomfort and/or embarrassment. Curiously, all participants deemed the risks associated with study minimal because unprotected premarital sex is “very common. Everybody does it” on campus (Interview 11, female); or that “everybody around here . . . is doing it” (Interview 16, male). In addition, participants were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. In fact, several participants dropped out of the study, citing competing academic and personal pressures.

Notwithstanding, the author assumed participants may be discomfited by the topic, labeled or stigmatized for participating in the study (Kelleher, 1996; Munson, 2000). To minimize this danger, participants’ anonymity was stipulated and guaranteed in the informed consent form. Respondents were additionally interviewed alone, in a setting of their choice, to guarantee confidentiality of information shared and their narrative anonymity because of referrals from peers who presumably know (a part of?) their sexual history. In practice, participant anonymity entailed the exclusion of personal identifiers, such as ethnicities, religious beliefs, and so on (i.e., culture), from data collected because of their misuse in creating and maintaining risk groups in Nigeria, and globally (see Shoveller & Jonhson, 2006). In fact, during the study, participants labeled peers from two Nigerian administrative states with very high HIV/AIDS prevalence rates as more promiscuous than themselves—drawing on lay beliefs and expert HIV/AIDS prevalence studies (see Federal Ministry of Health [FMoH], 2002). The (un)intended effects of reading culture as a closed system, as above, which is common among lay people and experts is the (re)production of vulnerabilities, social positions, risk labels, and the construction of already marginalized individuals and groups as vectors of diseases, such as HIV/AIDS (see Lee, Kochman, & Sikkema, 2002; Maxwell, 2002).

To protect participants from unintended research harm therefore, the author purposively emphasized broader influences on sexual risk practices (see Douglas, 1992; Lash, 2000), such as the mass media, sexual self-presentations, and so on, in a generalizing presentational approach. What is gained by the de-emphasis of participants’ unique identifiers is the diminishment of old exclusionary labels and “stigmatising boundaries between the ‘at risk’ and the so-called ‘normal’ populations” (Grover, 1987, cited in Brown, 2000, p. 1274). Because personal identifiers were not collected (to protect participants—as stipulated in the informed consent document), and because the study did not produce any harmful discovery, findings were not communicated to participants. Nevertheless, a weblink of this article (when it is published) will be sent to the libraries of the universities covered by the study.

The ethical standing of the study was additionally strengthened by the long interview method of data collection. The long interviews were conducted in English Language (Nigerian official language and medium

of educational instruction). This facilitated respondents’ understanding of the interview questions and active participation in the study “on their own terms” regardless of their various ethnicities and languages (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998, p. 338; see also Fisher, 2004). The long interview additionally accommodated emergent participants’ voices during the study (see McCracken, 1988; West, 2002). For example, contrary to pervasive lay beliefs about near exclusive male sexual adventurism in Nigeria, participants observed that “there is a woman, or women, involved in every promiscuous relationship in Nigeria . . . just that women are smarter and don’t boast about it like men (long laughter)” (Interview 21, female). This opinion influenced the author’s expansion of the interview guide to accommodate this emergent idea about the seeming “democracy” in premarital sexual risk practices.

In line with prevailing ethical conventions (see Bond, 2004), each participant was presented with an opportunity (before the author left the study site) to listen to their own tape recordings, verify and/or refute its contents. Only one female and two male participants accepted this offer. No participant requested changes be made to their taped interview. Participants’ refusal to review their narratives may be due to academic related time constraints, embarrassment, and/or lay confidence in capabilities of electronic gadgets to capture conversations verbatim—maintaining the fidelity of original questions and answers. It may also be attributed to the “rapport” (perhaps, trust) between the author and participants.

It is the author’s opinion that participants’ had mostly positive experiences of the interview. Their comfort during the interview could also be attributed to their referrals from peers who probably share similar sexual values. It could also be attributed to incremental social change in Nigeria, which is demystifying sex as a topic for *qualified* discussion among peers, and with privileged researchers. The rapport between the author and participants was such that he was invited to “come out and enjoy the campus” or to “see for yourself instead of asking so many questions.” Beyond their friendly facade, students’ invitations may constitute a form of *transference*, or participants’ attempts to (un)consciously relate to the interviewer (Feltham & Dryden, 2004). The author’s initial concerns that accepting students’ invitations will compromise the quality of data collected were allayed after consultation with his supervisor/Ethics Committee who authorized a trial attendance (as an observer) of one campus event at each site to determine likely outcomes, and inform future study methods. Limited attendance of students’ events significantly increased participant recruitment and built participant–interviewer rapport.

## Results

### *Participants’ Demographic Profile*

Fifty-six male and female students, in roughly equal ratio, participated in the study (see Figure 2). Participants were

drawn from diverse Nigerian peoples and cultures. Study sample diversity is intended to facilitate plausible comparison of narratives across different Nigerian cultural, ethnic, and religious divides. There are more than 250 ethnicities in Nigeria, and three dominant ethnic groups, namely, the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

### Participants' Narratives

Overall, the study elicited more than 20 interrelated and self-repeating influences (structures) on unprotected sex. Space constraints negate the exhaustive listing and discussions of all findings, and their interrelated ramifications on unprotected sex. Consequently, two examples of each broad institutional and agential influence on unprotected sex are presented leveraging Stones's (2005) fourfold structuration cycle for analytical and presentational purposes. However, it is important to note that influences presented herein exist as a duality in society and in social agents, from where they are (pre)reflexively instantiated in social action (see Stones, 2005). That is, structures influence people and people influence structures.

The first category of influence discussed is analytically external to participants and illustrated with the mass media and the contraceptive revolution. Similarly, the second class of influence presented is analytically internal to participants. These were illustrated with the influence of emotions, sexual curiosity, and predisposition to unprotected sex. The third class of influence presented described and explained the influence of participants' purposive and active agencies in unprotected sex. Participants' illustrated their variable agencies (due to gender and other social asymmetries) with their acknowledged and avoidable capacities to select sexual partners, proposition them, and accept or reject sexual propositions, and their sexual self-presentations.

The fourth class of influence presented is the intended outcomes of participants' unprotected sex, such as sexual pleasure and material rewards, which are often ignored, underestimated, and rendered problematic whenever mentioned in literature and interventions. The selective presentation of intended outcomes partly addresses what Jolly (2007) called the pleasure deficit approach to sexuality by dominant literature and interventions. That is, the tendency for sexuality literature and interventions to ignore or render sexual pleasure and material rewards problematical in conceptions and explanations of unprotected sex. To reiterate an earlier point, more broadly common influences were utilized in a generalist presentation format that de-emphasize participants' unique personal identifiers, such as ethnicities, in a calculated bid to reduce participants' labeling and stigma, which are unfortunate outcomes of narrow application of culture to explain every behavior (see Douglas, 1992; Fenton & Charsley, 2000; Kelleher, 1996). In addition, extracts of transcribed narratives (in participants' own words) are used to illustrate their opinions of each analytical category of

sexual risk influences, their interrelationships, and implications for sustainable behavior change policies and interventions in Nigeria.

### Analytically External Structures as They Influence Unprotected Sex

*Widespread condom and contraceptive availability as external structures.* Participants claim that widespread availability of contraceptives and sexual information in Nigeria paradoxically influences unprotected sex by facilitating their subjectively unconstrained access to contraceptives, such as morning-after pills, condoms, and illegal abortion. In particular, the sexual expertise, products, and services emanating from the contraceptive revolution are believed to have liberated unmarried people from dominant heterosexuality in Nigeria, traditional masculine control of sex, their fears of STIs, and repetitive and unwanted pregnancies. The liberatory influence of the contraceptive revolution, allied to other human emancipatory projects (see Giddens, 1992), transferred sex from its kinship-sustaining base onto individuals (as assets), which are leveraged to negotiate relationships that often culminate in unprotected sex. In participants' own words,

Before, you need you parents and family permission to date or marry a boy. That is now old school. Nowadays, you choose your partner and do whatever you like. You only introduce him if you people want to marry. Parents accept that now. (Interview 11, female)

Your parents might tell you don't do this sex thing, or don't do that! But if that is the trend, and all your friends are doing it, you just have to go along—or won't fit-in. (Interview 36, male)

According to participants, the contraceptive revolution made unprotected sex safer but had the unintended effects of eroding vestiges of their normative fears of STIs and unwanted pregnancies. In their own words, "disease or pregnancy is no longer big-deals. The big deal is use a condom all the time" (Interview 1, male). Ostensibly, due to these prevailing sexual norms, unmarried people claim they cannot abstain from unprotected sex. Reiterative questioning about the sexualizing influence of the contraceptive revolution, which participants primarily experience as peer sexual ideologies, mass media programming/advertisements, and sexual reproductive health interventions, merely reinforced their earlier claims that

Only a *slacker* (fool) just gets pregnant—unless you want to hook the boy . . . because you can always . . . use condoms when . . . unsafe; contraceptives and abortion if all else fail. I cannot get pregnant before marriage. My parents will kill me (laughter). (Interview 11, female)

Disease . . . and pregnancy? They are no longer a big deal; nobody avoids sex these days just because of that. They say *shine your eyes* (be smart), a smart matured girl cannot just get pregnant . . . unless she is trying to hook you. Only AIDS is still a problem. (Interview 31, male)

Notwithstanding the preceding, participants' notions of the contraceptive revolution is controversial because change agents assume (and always proclaim) they promote only safe sexual practices, and not risk-taking with the safe-sex information, condoms, and contraceptives they promote (see Holmes et al., 2004; UNAIDS, 1997). Respondents recognize the contradiction inherent in their claims. According to them,

Condoms and contraceptives are not bad. But yes, they have increased sexual risk taking, because girls are not as scared of pregnancy today as they were before from the stories I have heard. They know what to do when they get pregnant. (Interview 26, female)

They [condoms] help reduce the risk involved in having sex, so far. But not a 100% help. But quite high percentages, like 60-70% help. If anything, they have increased the number of people having sex. (Interview 16, male)

*The mass media as an external institution and influence on unprotected sex.* Respondents were asked whether they think that the mass media (broadly conceived) influence unprotected sex and to illustrate with examples how the mass media influence operates. Without exception, all respondents claim the mass media is very influential on unprotected sex. Components of the mass media identified as strongly influential, in a descending order of influence, are pornography, the Internet, television, mode of dressing, and so forth. According to participants, mass media influence emanates from their nurture of unmarried people's predisposition to unprotected sex and the provision of sexual knowledge and skills through regular programming and advertisements. In respondents' words, the mass media influence operates thus:

I think what girls see in movies and read about love, romance, and relationships in novels like Mills and Boons, Barbara Cartland, etc. influences what they do sexually. These books definitely influenced my expectations and response to males that toast [sexual propositioning] me. In most of these books . . . the women always yield to them in the end (laughter). I think what boys see in movies, Internet, and magazines influences their unprotected sex . . . My boyfriend is always carrying on about this and that sexual position and style he saw somewhere. (Interview 11, female)

It is difficult not to participate in this sex thing . . . from what you watch on TV, to the Internet and even the way these babes dress, guys have to respond. (Interview 51, male)

In response to questions relating to the processes of mass media influence (structural duality), participants admit that mass media influence is not linear, but mediated by other patterned variables, such as unmarried students' predispositions to premarital sex, variable agencies, individuated or collective needs, the prevalent romance standards, their beliefs or experience of positive outcomes from premarital sex, and so forth. Both male and female respondents illustrate the complex interrelationships between the mass media and other patterned influences:

Maybe the media is responsible for 50%. The other 50% belong to young people themselves and other factors. Okay. It is not as if you watch something and decide to do it immediately. I think you must want to do it before and the media just encourages you. (Interview 46, female)

contributes . . . but you can't just say because I watched blue film [pornography]—that is why I take sexual risks. Although . . . images create lasting impressions and ehmn . . . TV, magazines and web-pictures too, movies, music videos, and all that. All these things, there is a way it pressurizes one sexually, it spurs you to indulge in especially risky behavior. (Interview 1, male)

To adapt Duffy and Gotcher's idea, the mass media is a powerful and insidious influence on unprotected sex in Nigeria because it projects sex as "a means and an objective . . . almost the sole focus of life . . . an unquestioned good" (Duffy & Gotcher, 1996, p. 43). Concurrently, participants claim mass media messages and programs often constrain their sexual conducts as well. Respondents associated this seeming dual role of the mass media with their extensive use by reproductive health interventionists to communicate risks, safe sex, and protective products such as condoms and contraceptives in Nigeria (see Meekers et al., 2004). In participants' own words,

Some of the time the messages I see and hear advise you to play safe. I have not seen any that says young people should take sexual risks. Even in the movie *Booty Call* [a movie starring Jamie Fox], the guys there wear condoms. (Interview 16, male)

On TV and radio you continue to hear use condoms, use condoms. Don't trust anybody. But when it comes to it, I don't think anybody remembers condoms. Even

the so-called safe sex is risky. Condoms burst, tear, and leak. (Interview 46, female)

In spite of the commonality of the mass media influence on unprotected sex on university campuses in Nigeria, respondents underscore that the mass media influence is not linear but mediated by other influential structures, such as participants' variable agencies and sexual needs. For example,

Even the Internet, nobody forces people to pay money and log-on to porn sites. You must have sex on your mind before you go there. In fact, that is why most guys browse overnight. The Internet is just like . . . helping you satisfy your need. But people are always looking for someone to blame . . . it's not my fault, the Internet made me do it (laugher). (Interview 39, male)

### *Analytically Internal Structures as They Influence Unprotected Sex*

*Emotions—Trust, commitment, love, and so forth, as influences on unprotected sex.* All participants agree that emotional influences, related to love, affection, trust, commitment, and romance increase the likelihood of unprotected sex in dominant heterosexual relationships. Emotions exemplify those taken-for-granted stocks of sexual predispositions, which are coproduced by participants' socialization, active engagement with social institutions, subordinate statuses in society, roles and behavior expectations, (inter)personal relationships, previous positive experiences from unprotected sex, and associated folklores. According to participants,

If partners trust each other and are committed, why do they need condoms? Maybe when it is unsafe for the girl to have sex. It's complicated I guess. Somehow, condoms suggest sleeping around. (Interview 11, female)

The reason for condoms is for protection. Protection from disease. But if there is disease, it means someone is not faithful, therefore untrustworthy . . . so you should not be dealing with that person at all . . . or you must always use a condom. So in a way, condom use . . . doesn't communicate trust, which is very important nowadays. (Interview 36, male)

In participants view, the influence of emotions on unprotected sex is so powerful that it mitigates concerns about unintended pregnancies. If pregnancies occur, participants admit they purposefully managed them with illegal abortions and/or early marriages. STIs are managed by patronizing community pharmacists and patent medicine vendors (see A. D. Okonkwo & Okonkwo, 2010). The article's findings about emotion evokes Alaka's (2006) contention that

romance, love, and trust recommends sexual partners "not worrying about one's partner's sexual past or present . . . If a pregnancy occurs, the 'love' in the relationship will guarantee a marriage" (p. 115; see also Ugoji, 2011). In particular, either (or both) partners' invocation of emotions, such as love, are said to erode residues of unmarried people's instinctive sexual caution; recommending instead, unprotected sex or what participants called skin-to-skin sex (unprotected sex). According to participants, emotions influence unprotected sex:

Especially for girls. Because love, emotion, romance and all that, that is what girls want at the end of the day, but the boys, it is just the pleasure they can get out of it. (Interview 6, male)

I think sex occurs in most relationships love or no love anyway. But being in love makes it better and something to look forward to. Love puts you in a more receptive mood—I guess. (Interview 11, female)

Furthermore, participants believe that emotions in heterosexual relationships often discourage their preacquisition of contraceptives because such conducts connote preplanning of sexual intercourse, which diminishes prescribed notions of romance and sexual spontaneity. According to participants,

If I have a boyfriend who always has a condom in his pocket, I will be very careful being alone with him. It is as simple as that! (Interview 41, female)

If your girl visits and you guys want to do it, you can't just root out condoms from your wallet. She will get angry and say you have been planning it, which is true; and that can stop action. (Interview 51, male)

The significance of emotional influences on unprotected sex for sexual reproductive health policies and interventions cannot be overemphasized. Female participants were particularly eloquent about the desirability and influence of emotions on unprotected sex. More than *half* (76.9% = 20 of 26) of participating female respondents suggested that when in love, unprotected sex is more acceptable and likely to occur because fidelity and trust are assumed. Elsewhere, literature is unequivocal that young women engage in unprotected sex to prove their love to their male sexual partners (see Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 1998) and/or strengthen or bolster perceived unrequited love (Kaestle & Halpern, 2007), despite normative sexual conventions (W. R. Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992; W. Jankowiak, Nell, & Buckmaster, 2002). In contrast, majority of male participants (83.3% = 25 of 30) agree that emotions are somehow influential, but distrust their acclaimed deterministic influence on unprotected sex. According to masculine perspectives,



It is not that boys don't feel love and all that . . . are human beings too (laughter). Just that, well . . . we don't need to love someone to have sex with them (laughter). (Interview 6, male)

*Sexual curiosity and predispositions as influences on unprotected sex.* Participants admitted they were initially, and continue to be, curious about sexuality in general, and sex in particular. More than half (51.8%) of respondents are certain that sexual curiosity promotes experimentation and unprotected sex habit formation. The other half (48.2%) claim curiosity *somehow* influences unprotected sex. Furthermore, nearly all female participants counterintuitively linked their initial sexual curiosities, current secretive sexual conduct, and ambivalent sexual attitudes with the *normative status of premarital sex as immoral* in Nigeria (see Smith, 2004). Sexual curiosity, as an influential internal state of mind, is conformed by external influences, such as the mass media, peer ideologies, and participants' biology.

Driven by sexual curiosity, and other cofactors, respondents insist they must cultivate and maintain heterosexual relationships (called having a boyfriend or girlfriend in Nigeria), for which unprotected premarital sex is a certain component "unless . . . somebody discovers a steroid that can suppress the hormones in the body" (Interview 16, male). Accordingly, nearly all respondents (98.2% of 56) admit they cannot avoid sex until marriage. Consequently, answers to the questions, such as *As a boy/girl must you have a girl/boyfriend* produced the following responses:

It's necessary, because one day you must get married and you need to know who you are marrying by going out with her. (Interview 6, male)

Oh yes you do. I think you must. That is the only way you can learn about each other, get committed, and possibly marry in future. This safe sex thing you are talking about can only be done in a committed relationship where both parties remain faithful to each other. (Interview 11, female)

Apart from respondents' sexual curiosities and willingness to follow the dominant heterosexual conventions, participants admit they also purposefully initiate, consent to, and maintain heterosexual relationships with unprotected premarital sex. In fact, 80.4% of participants are uncertain they can maintain a nonsexual heterosexual relationship due to complex structural and interpersonal pressures, especially the intended benefits of unprotected sex. These include sexual pleasure, material reward, to secure potential marriage partners, to satisfy sexual curiosity, to gain/give love/affection, to satisfy partner's sexual demands, to confirm or reaffirm personal desirability, to test fertility status, and to gain/maintain peer acceptance/status (see Plummer, 2003, for a similar catalog). In their own words, premarital heterosexual relationships are instituted

for so many reasons. Spur of the moment thing, affection, love, to please my boyfriend, when I have the urge, etc. It depends. It's like some factors may be important today and others tomorrow. (Interview 46, female)

Most guys . . . actually . . . go into relationships for sex and prestige. Maybe along the line, they may fall in-love with the girl and then it grows into something—the next level. (Interview 16, male)

Respondents' curiosity and predispositions to premarital sex particularly predispose them toward other influences, from peers, the mass media, and so forth. However, respondents insist their predisposition to premarital sex does not equate recklessness. They attribute their risk-prone sexual conducts to influences emanating from being active and purposeful members of the Nigerian society. That is, "being-in-the-world" replete with institutional, interpersonal, and personal pressures to seek and nurture heterosexual relationships with premarital sex (Bleicher, 1980, p. 118, citing Heidegger, 1949).

### *Agency as an Influence on Unprotected Sex*

*Purposive sexual partner selection as influences on unprotected sex.* Participants admitted that their varying capacities to purposefully select, proposition, and accept sexual propositions from partners based on cultural, emotional, and material considerations influence unprotected sex. This is "because you can always say no to these things—if you really want to. But it's often difficult. Your mood and circumstances can affect your willpower" (Interview 11, female). However, participants' sexual agencies are gendered and unequal; but agency nonetheless. Unequal sexual agencies are coproduced by gender norms, peer sexual ideologies/conducts, their internal dispositions, sexual folklore, and previous sexual experiences, which govern participants general and specific knowledge of contextual sexual rules, resources, constraints, and opportunities.

Expectedly, participants have a gendered interpretation of the partner propositioning/acceptance process, but agree it could be avoided because it often culminates in unprotected sex "if there is a meeting of minds" (Interview 2, male). For male participants, sexual propositioning entails communicating their suitability over rivals, their

interest and love for the babe or get her friends to recommend you to her . . . for insurance, you can even combine the two methods. (long laughter). (Interview 51, male)

For female participants, sexual propositioning entails

boys lying and saying they love you, they care for you . . . nobody makes them feel the way you do!

(laughter). All lies! Some will even promise to marry you and all that. Meanwhile, we all know what they want. (Interview 56, female)

Regardless, sexual partner selection, acceptance, and rejection evidence agency because it is a highly scripted and gendered sexual conduct that entails conscious and/or emotional assessment of a potential partner's socioeconomic status, physical health, and social standing through personal observation, peer surveillance/referrals, and testimonials for heterosexual relationships. Popular attributes sought by respondents include handsomeness/beauty, physical fitness, trendiness, and course of study. The last, course of study, often translates into future profession. For example, dating a medical student, all things being equal, indicates participants' potentials to marry a medical doctor in future. Other attributes considered include family background, especially known or suspected family wealth. All respondents are certain that unprotected sex cannot take place without partner selection, toasting (propositioning), acceptance, and dating. According to their narratives,

Both boys and girls do things that lead to unprotected sex. Not that they always plan it that way. For example, if a boy does not toast (male sexual propositioning) a girl in this environment, it will be hard for him to have a girlfriend. If he doesn't have a girlfriend, how can he take sexual risks? The same thing goes for girls, if they don't accept your toasting; there is nothing you can do. You can't kill them or rape them! (Interview 16, male)

We all know what it means for a guy or babe to say they have a girlfriend or boyfriend. So when a guy is toasting a girl, she knows that ultimately he will want to have sex. Everybody knows that. The guy too kind of knows he will need to shower the girl with gifts and presents to maintain the relationship . . . and the girl knows that they will have sex to maintain the relationship. If not, generally, they won't last. That is the way these relationship thing work around here, simple. If anybody tells you anything different, they are just lying or deceiving themselves. (Interview 21, female)

*Sexual self-presentations and impression management as influences on unprotected sex.* Participants admit they additionally deploy agency in their routine and symbolic micro-level sexual impression management activities anticipated to attract sexual partners and admirers within and outside the confines of tradition and gender (see Goffman, 1983). Particularly relevant to the study are sexual impression management activities, such as sexy modes of dressing, flirting, and so on. However, there were gendered disagreements about the influence of sexualized modes of dressing on unprotected sex. More than 42% (42.9% of 56) of mostly male participants consider sexy modes of dressing very influential on

unprotected sex, and the other half consider it weakly influential. In male participants' opinions, sexual impression management is a prescribed activity that attracts sexual partners:

Everyone wants to look good and be loved by friends . . . Even on campus here, all these yahoo [419 or advance fee fraud] boys get all the fine girls. Why? Because they have loads of cash, pimped-up rides, laptops, phones, etc. They even live in very expensive hostels. How do you compete with that? Simple . . . you hustle for money. That is why most guys go into crime and this yahoo thing . . . to impress girls and their friends! (Interview 1, male)

You don't just toast anybody. The ways a girl dresses and behaves allow you to know if, and when to toast [proposition them]. That is why the born-again girls don't get happening (trendy) boys on campus, and do it secretly in church with fellow Christian brothers . . . The way these girls dress, talk, and carry bible up and down drives boys away. (Interview 51, male)

Female participants ambivalently disagree with male opinions of sexual impression management, adding that they dress and act sexually based on prevailing standards and personal needs (to look good for themselves and friends), but conceded it also attracts potential male sexual partners. Male respondents added that they often collude with their female sexual partners to sustain scripted sexual self-presentations on campuses because "some boys want their girlfriends to look one way, so they are ready to spend anything to achieve that" (Interview 16, male). Regardless, female narratives about sexual impression management remain ambivalent:

It is not my fault that boys are always staring at my body (prolonged laughter) . . . that is their problem, not mine. I dress the way I like . . . and it is very nice . . . I mean, you feel very good when you know the effect you have on them . . . even some lecturers (laughter). (Interview 2, female)

Well, I still don't think I am responsible for how my dressing makes a guy feel or think. I think it's part of the bad African culture—men trying to control how women dress. I think some boys will love how you are dressed and others won't . . . anyway, girls dress to be attractive . . . It's complicated (prolong laughter) . . . For example, on campus, that is the way most happening [trendy] girls dress, I mean they wear body hugging and other revealing clothes. That is the standard. (Interview 46, female)

Notwithstanding the seeming gendered dissent about sexual self-presentations, it is apparent that participants believe it confers symbolic sexual authority and/or privileged sexual

access on social agents perceived to be beautiful, handsome, gregarious, intelligent, charismatic, and so forth. That is, these ascribed sexual facades endow unmarried people (so perceived) with a capacity to control, influence, and/or coordinate their (similarly, less endowed, and insecure) peers in a social and sexual sense. This is probably why Leary, Tchividjian, and Kraxberger (1994) concluded that sexual self-presentations are invaluable for attracting and sustaining heterosexual attention, falling-in-love; and implicated by this study participants in their risk-prone sexual conducts.

### *Outcome of Unprotected Sex as They Influence Further and Similar Conducts*

*Inconsistent condom use and enhanced sexual pleasure.* Participants admit they engage in unprotected sex in a knowledgeable and purposeful quest for enhanced sexual pleasure, and that consistent condom use interferes with perceived organic sexual sensations. This was the most difficult influence on unprotected sex to elicit from participants because of gender asymmetries and participants' presumption that the meaning and value of enhanced sexual pleasure via unprotected sex is self-explanatory and universally shared. Nonetheless, male respondents readily agree (probably because of ascribed gender privilege in a patriarchal society) that they engage in unprotected sex in pursuit of pleasure. According to them,

Very few things can give you the same pleasure as skin-to-skin [unprotected] sex . . . I think that is why people cannot abstain for long. (Interview 6, male)

Most boys have unprotected sex or any sex at all for pleasure—period! They are not thinking about marriage, sex is just fun and youthful exuberance, I am young, I want to have fun and so that I can tell my kids and those who care to listen to stories of my youthful adventure and all stuff. (Interview 1, male)

Unlike males, female participants were more circumspect in their narratives about the influence of pleasure on unprotected sex. Their reticence was probably due to embarrassment and/or normative double standards governing sexual conducts in society (see Lips, 2003; Social Science and Reproductive Health Research Network [SSRHRN], 1999). Most talk about sex obliquely, as *doing it*. Furthermore, their narratives about sexual pleasure were more complex. For example, female participants suggested that the quest for enhanced sexual pleasure was one of the multiple drivers of unprotected sex, which transcends gender bifurcation:

As soon as youths know they will have a nice time by having sex, they will continue to do it. Although pleasure is very important, it is not the only reason why

youths have sex. Sometimes there is the mood thing, maybe during festivals and celebrations like Christmas. Even burials, you cannot believe the amount of sex going on in the background. (Interview 26, female)

Well . . . yes pleasure is important. We are human beings too. You can also do it to get someone to call your own, care for you, and all that. Some people also believe it is what you must do if you are in a relationship or care about someone. (Interview 46, female)

To secure maximum pleasure from their sexual activities therefore, participants use condoms inconsistently—mostly to avoid unintended pregnancies. As a female participant framed it,

Condoms are artificial barriers . . . and it is not the same thing using them compared to not using them . . . no matter what anybody says. But it is the spread of disease that is making their use popular. (Interview 21, female)

Abdulraheem (2009) drew similar conclusions in the study of prevalence and correlates of HIV risk behaviors among young people in Nigeria—citing *decreased pleasure* as the primary reason for unprotected sex. Notwithstanding participants' risk-prone sexual conducts, they disagree with dominant literature assertions that they are ignorant or reckless (for example, see Wagbatsoma & Okojie, 2006). Instead, participants claim multiple and interrelated societal and (inter)personal influences instigate and normalize unprotected sex. Therefore, notions that they are ignorant or reckless were considered:

fallacious. I could die when I drive on Lagos-Asaba road [one of the most dangerous roads in Nigeria] . . . and I still do it. Does that mean I am reckless? Life is a risk . . . generally speaking . . . eh. (Interview 1, male)

Young and reckless . . . maybe, but no young person really wants to die. Some people pray or hope they will not get pregnant or disease . . . Even the so-called safe sex is risky. Condoms burst, tear, and leak (laughter). (Interview 46, female)

*Material rewards as intended outcome and influences on further and similar conducts.* All participants admit that the lack of material possession, allegedly linked with poverty, is an influence on unprotected sex to accrue material rewards. More than half of the participants (58.9% of 56), agree that poverty directly influences unprotected sex while 41.1% (of 56) agree that poverty is *somehow influential* along gender lines. Although no participant admitted poverty, or that their sexual conducts were influenced by poverty considerations,

there was a general agreement nevertheless, that poverty influences more young females than males because females

tend to need the money more desperately . . . They tends to want to do more money intensive things than the guys. (Interview 16, male)

Ambivalently, the study participants further qualified the above assertion:

It is not as if girls are generally poorer than boys, or feel the lack more. But then, they are the ones that can do something about it with their bodies (laughter). (Interview 21, female)

Regardless, all participants are aware that transactional sex is risky because

the more gifts, money, and favors, a girl receives, the more there will have unprotected sex, if that is what the man wants or the cash/gifts will stop. (Interview 56, female)

The preceding narratives emphasize female respondents' active (although bounded) sexual agencies within the constraints of Nigerian patriarchy, political economic, and gender asymmetries. That is, young females who perceive themselves as lacking symbolic social goods may seek out wealthier men and peers willing to offer cash and gifts in exchange for unprotected sex. A further testimony to bounded and varied agencies is that not all girls who perceive themselves as lacking in symbolic material goods succumb to societal and (inter)personal pressures to assuage their wants through transactional or cross-generational sex:

[An] individual like me will finally decide to do this or that. Your friends can put pressure, but it is up to you to resist it or not. Do you know how many times I have been invited to the government house for parties? They have recruiters in the hostels that go about inviting girls to big-men parties. They send their luxury cars down every weekend to pick up girls who return with plenty of cash the following week. So do I just go because I am broke? So their opinion is important to some extent. But if you mean do they tell me what to do, no. Although you can be pressured to have sex, but finally doing it is your choice. (Interview 46, female)

Furthermore, female respondents agree that

sex is a way for a girl to say thank you to a boy who gives her attention, gifts, and . . . material support. That is the only thing boys want from girls around here . . . no matter what they say. (Interview 41, female)

Male participants ambivalently agree,

I think so. But it is not nice to think about it that way. Where is the love in all that? (laughter), but the reality is that if you like a girl and you want to have sex with her, you give her gifts and money first to impress her. If she is impressed, she will let you have sex and pretend you pressured her. That is how the game is played. (Interview 6, male)

Curiously, the giving of cash and gifts emerged as vehicles for masculine demonstration of love and affection for a female partner, rather than obvious sexual domination of female partners, whose receipt of the cash/gifts reassures her of the male's continued interest in the relationship, commitment, care, and love. This latter role of cash/gifts implies that overgeneralizations about the material facade of heterosexual relationships ought to be reexamined in sub-Saharan Africa. According to respondents, cash/gift giving is

part and parcel of relationship building. I cannot think of a relationship where a guy does not spend money on recharge-card (for mobile phones), hair, gifts, and even outright cash giving. That relationship won't last. But it can also be because of poverty . . . It is also about relationship building . . . no . . . maintenance. Yes, relationship building and maintenance. (Interview 1, male)

Well, some people give gifts as a sign of affection or love. But I don't think it should matter, although it does matter in this environment . . . Gifts are part of relationship give and take. I give my boyfriend gifts too. But cash, no . . . I guess girls need these small gifts for reassurance that the relationship is still appreciated. Nothing very major. It is the thinking behind it that matters. (Interview 46, female)

## Discussions

### *Practical and Theoretical Implications of Findings*

Generally, participants' narratives were underscored by tensions, contradictions, assertive but variable agencies, which undermine the dominant bifurcation of structural and agential influences on unprotected sex by literature and interventions in Nigeria. Furthermore, respondents were unequivocal about their awareness of risks associated with unprotected sex and available mitigation measures in Nigeria. Nevertheless, participants admit they engage in unprotected sex induced by interrelated institutional and (inter)personal influences that are often insidious and compelling. A few interrelated influences they implicate in sexual risk practices include the mass media, peer influence, personal needs, the influence of the gender structure, emotions, sensation-seeking,



the influence of the romance structure, and so on—perpetually jostling among themselves to recommend unprotected sex instead of safe-sex or abstinence. Consequently, participants' narratives challenge entrenched beliefs among sexual reproductive health stakeholders that unprotected sex is driven by unitary factors, such as ignorance or sensation-seeking alone (see Onoh, Mbah, Chukwuka, & Ikeme, 2004), and surmountable with safe-sex communications, empowerment, and contraceptive promotions (see UNAIDS, 2000).

Moreover, participants' narratives have theoretical and practical significance for sustainable behavior change interventions in Nigeria. Findings imply that young people cannot simply *Zip-Up* their pants or *Just Say No* to unprotected sex (agencies). Neither are young people's sexual conducts mere lifestyle issues (see Davison, Frankel, & Smith, 1992; Davison, Smith, & Frankel, 1991). This is because several insidious, competing, and compelling institutional and (inter)personal coinfluences are always at play, such as marriage ambitions, peer pressure, sensation seeking, and so on. Furthermore, participants claim that the Nigerian society categorization of premarital sex as immoral recommends its secretive and risk-prone conduct away from parental and societal gaze. Drawing on participants' perspectives, stakeholders will begin to appreciate why earlier agential abstinence pledges and safe-sex resolutions crumble before dynamic contexts, sexual opportunities, peer pressure, emotions, (inter)personal needs, and so on.

Participants describe influences as perpetually jostling among themselves to normalize and recommend unprotected sex; instead of abstinence or consistent condom use. They claim that sexual themes from external structures, such as the *mass media*, act as subtle pressures on young people, and as normalizing influences on unprotected sex by (in)directly teaching sexual knowledge and skills through ubiquitous sexual discourse, the promotion of sexual risk mitigation measures, and so on, to affect and shape their sexual *habitus*, that is, young people's variable emotional and practical predisposition toward unprotected sex that are wedded to their highly sexualized worldviews and values.

Notwithstanding, participants claim external influences are not deterministic because young people routinely *draw-on* and *work-on* their sexual worldviews, values, emotions, and knowledge of their contexts, with active, purposive, and often variable agencies, to initiate and accept sexual relationship propositions that *they know* culminates in normative sexual interactions and practices (i.e., unprotected sex). Interestingly, participants claim their sexual conducts are instigated for varied individual and/or dyadic intended benefits but sometimes produce unintended outcomes, which they covertly manage with sexual reproductive health technologies available in society. Crucially, participants' mostly positive experiences of unprotected sex filter back into society through the mass media, peer sexual ideologies, and folklore to (re)affect the external world by (re)

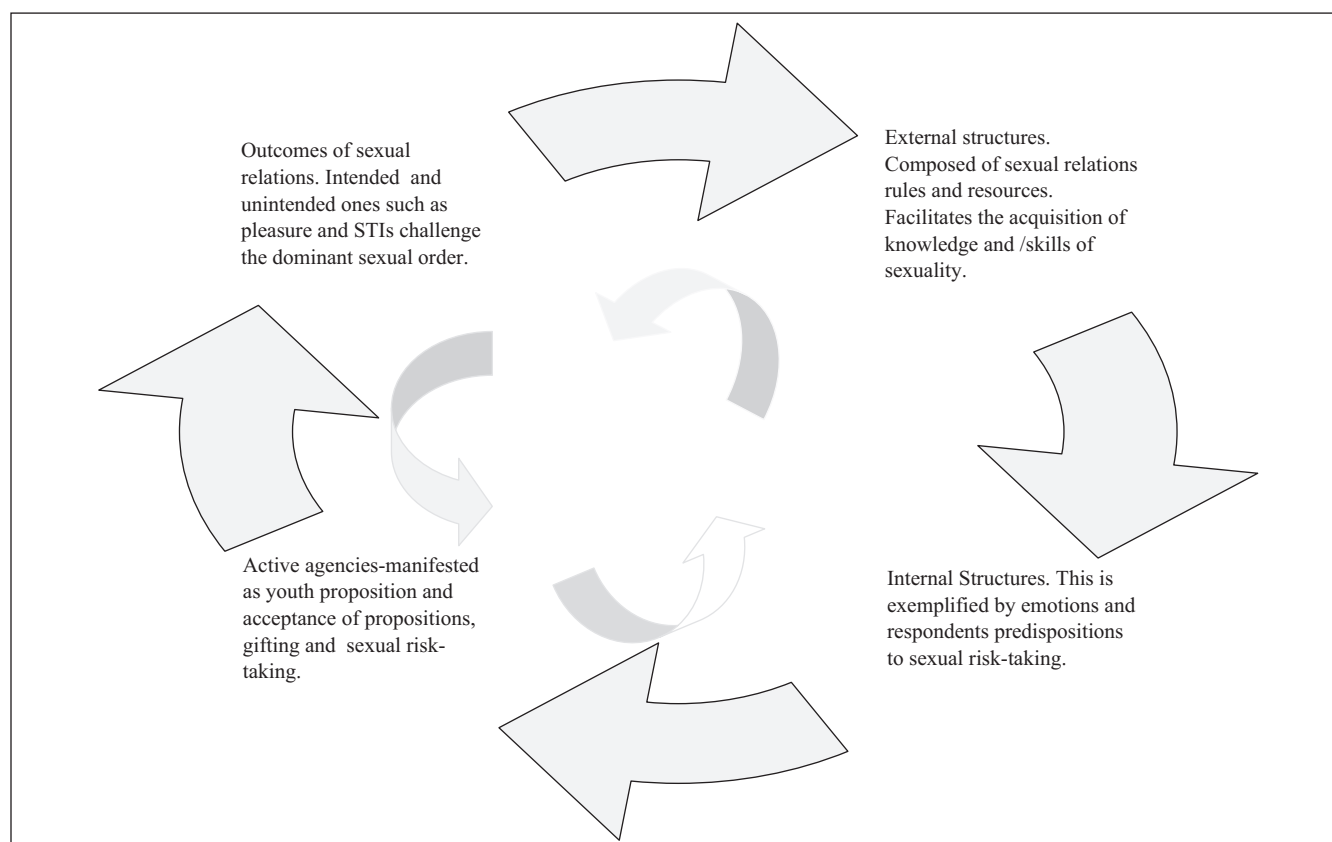
influencing internal structures, sexual agencies, outcomes, and external structures anew—in a dynamic and interrelated process in which all four analytical categories of influences play varied roles, and so on. This is how extant sexual risk structures and agencies become “deeply layered in time and space, stretching through many decades and over large or fixed domains” that “pre-exist and post-date the lives of individuals (unmarried students) who reproduce them, and thus, may be resistant to manipulation or change” (Thompson, 1989, pp. 61-73). Figure 3 depicts the structuration cycle of unprotected sex.

Under the influence of multiple and often insidiously dynamic societal and (inter)personal influences already outlined, unprotected sex seems highly prescribed. It is not attributable to one influence alone. Participants' context and conducts equally matter. Their context matter because societal institutions, such as the mass media, sexualize unmarried people. Similarly, participants' conducts matter because they purposefully draw-on and work-on prevailing sexual standards, from social institutions, peer models, and so on, to (re) enact unprotected sex in pursuit of intended outcomes such as pleasure and peer esteem. It is against this seemingly contradictory and duality of influence background that behavior change interventionists must function in Nigeria.

### Study Limitations

Several methodological issues limit this study. The first is that the hermeneutic stance of the study implicates the author's preunderstanding of, and allied prejudice for, or against, risk-prone sexual practices in the choice of topic, theory, research methods, and the interpretation and presentation of findings (see England, 1994; Schwandt, 1997). This is an inevitable product of the author “being-in-the-world” (Bleicher, 1980, p. 118, quoting Heidegger, 1949). Furthermore, the sensitive nature of the research topic constrained the initial recruitment of female participants for the study. Topic sensitivity and allied participant recruitment challenges paradoxically recommended snowball sampling for a more efficient sample recruitment from extended peer networks, and to reduce participants' discomforts. Although initially unplanned, snowball sampling was used because female students initially approached refused to discuss their sexual practices with a stranger and male investigator. Regardless of its inherent merits, snowball sampling render findings unrepresentative of Nigerian youths and their risk-prone sexual practices.

Moreover, peer referrals may have constrained the author's access to participants in same-sex relationships, which are normatively condemned in Nigeria. During the interview, same-sex sexual relationships research themes evoked strong verbal hostilities among participants. In fact, several self-styled born-again Christians terminated their interviews, and promised an impending divine wrath on people (like this author) who promote Western immoralities—the dominant view of same-sex relationships in Nigeria.



**Figure 3.** Recursive sexual risk-taking influence cycle

Note: Author-developed figure with input from Stones (2005) empirical structurationist research brackets

The topic derailed several interviews to the extent that the author elected to drop it. In the future, better funded and more generously timed studies would benefit from a more inclusive sampling of participants.

In addition, snowball sampling probably influenced participants' narrative insurgency—especially in an abstention-until-marriage-oriented context like Nigeria. Participants' narrative insurgencies are likely due to personal, in-group, and contextual pressures to conform with, challenge, (re)produce contextual sexual conducts, and/or reenact sexual fables. Regardless of participants' motivations for their narratives, we are cautioned by Freeman (1998) that “the self is indistinguishable from the life story it constructs for itself out of what is inherited what is experienced and what is desired” (cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). Furthermore, participants' statements about their sexual practices accurately describes unmarried people's sexual practices reported in literature, minus the gendered agency components (see FMOH, 2002; NPC and ICF Macro, 2009), and have internal coherency (see Czarniawska, 1999), which is determined by iteratively comparing transcribed narratives.

Notwithstanding the discussed challenges, the study methods facilitated the author's access to participants, their sexual contexts, conducts, worldviews, and allied rationalizations.

With this privileged access, the author was able to understand and explain generational perspectives of sexual risk practices and sustainable behavior change in Nigeria as the study participants did, utilizing their own words as much as reasonable. Consequently, findings could inform an evidence-based understanding, explanation, description, and plausible theoretical generalizations (see Yin, 1984) about influential and interrelated structures and agencies that predispose unmarried people to sexual risk practices on a broader national scale in Nigeria—without mistaking “local conventions for universal truths” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1032).

## Conclusion

Against the background of conflated institutional and agential influences on sexual risk practices previously outlined, university students emphasize that abstention and consistent condom use injunctions are not realistic options for unmarried people. The suggestion was made that safe-sex stakeholders ought to accept serial monogamy; that is, focus on making unmarried people's trending tendencies to maintain one sexual relationship at a time safer. In addition, participants argue that abstention expectations and pledges complicate their (especially girls) access to safe-sex information

and products. Howell (2001) drew similar observations about U.S. abstention-led programs (see Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2007, also). More critically, participants stress that previous beliefs about contraceptives, access to them, and positive dispositions toward contraceptives are poor predictors of their actual use in premarital relationships because of multiple and dynamic societal and (inter)personal influences previously outlined.

In particular, participants claim interventionists' failure to acknowledge and work-on conflated influences on unprotected sex accounts for limited behavior change in Nigeria (or the perennial KAP-gap). To correct this anomaly, participants suggested that interventionists endeavor to understand emotions, sexual curiosity, and pleasure, especially their influence on unprotected sex. Their sentiments corroborates Alaka's contention that "much sexual and reproductive behaviour is motivated by emotional states that can suppress prior knowledge, services, or agency" (Alaka, 2006, p. 107); and Higgins and Hirsch's (2008) analysis that "clear links exist between the forms of pleasure respondents seek and their contraceptive practices" (p. 1803; see Rosenthal, Gifford, & Moore, 1998, also). For participants, emotions collude with compelling and competing modern romance ideologies to recommend sexual spontaneity—which often mean unprotected sex. Emotion discourages contraceptive preplanning and use among participants, recommending instead, the relinquishing of rational sexual control for love and/or romance. Similarly, attention ought to be paid to participants' claims that the dominant taboo against premarital sex and feminine pursuit of sexual pleasure in Nigeria (see Smith, 2001, 2004) paradoxically elevates their sexual curiosities and secretive risk-prone sexual practices despite (perhaps, because of) the categorization of premarital sex, especially women's pursuit of sexual pleasure, as immoral.

Further attention ought to be paid to the reality that participants value the unique benefits, independence, and sense of achievement their sexual relationships confer. In this regard, participants contest adult presumptions that they are uniformly reckless, suggesting instead that unprotected sex is acceptable within their dominantly heterosexual subculture that is governed by serial monogamy, romance, commitment, and partners' mutual expectations of fidelity (their subcultural attempts to manage sexual risks). Therefore, patronizing safe-sex and abstention messages that are governed by notions of sexual danger, predatory masculinity, and passive femininity, which are allied to developing nations' HIV/AIDS pandemic and population control concerns, will continue to be ineffective (see Jolly, 2007). The foregoing analysis invites commentary on the gendered facade of collected narratives, which concurrently corroborated and challenged essentialists' conception of gender in Nigeria (see Oyekanmi, 1994). Contrary to essentialists' versions of women as sexually passive and men as sexually voracious, participants were unequivocal that both sexes desire sexual pleasure and actively

participate in its prescribed pursuit. Accordingly, gender in heterosexual relationships is recast after Butler (1999) as performative—or indistinguishable from the various prescribed and learnable conducts socially constructed as masculine or feminine.

More significantly, participants claim that sexual risk-infused structures and their variable agencies do not *predetermine* their unprotected sex conducts. According to them, influential sexual structures present unprotected sex as one compelling option, among several sexual conduct alternatives in Nigeria, such as abstention and consistent contraceptive use. Conversely, their agential choices and conducts were presented as impossible without structural enablement in the form of sexual rules and resources within a context of increasingly weak sexual constraints. Based on participants' generational perspectives, rarely does one variable operating alone, for example the mass media or peers, determine the occurrence of unprotected sex. Therefore, rather than simply reading off the presented influences as narrowly corresponding with others, or as simply multifactorial, it is more robust to read participants' perspectives of influences as interdependent and complex—facilitating the pursuit of subcultural, perhaps, contextually compelling goals, such as enhanced pleasure, peer esteem, securing future marriage partners, social exchange, and so forth. More crucially, the relative influence of different structures (influences) identified, especially their (re)combinations, often vary with individuals or subpopulations, felt-needs, social fads, time, and space.

To conclude therefore, behavior change strategists in Nigeria must come to terms with respondents' modalities for learning, interpreting, and incorporating patterned sexual rules and resources into their lives within the context of modern romance ideologies, structural inequalities, emotions, and purposive and active sexual agencies. This is because unprotected sex "is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled [and constrained] by the tool lying there" (Butler, 1999, p. 145).

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Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

### Bio

**Amaechi D. Okonkwo** is a PhD graduate of Swansea University, United Kingdom, and currently engaged in development research with Behaviour Change Group, Edmonton, Canada. His recent publications include the investigation of the impact of “The Lower Niger River Dredging on Indigenous Wetland Livelihoods in Nigeria,” which was published by *Environment, Development and*

*Sustainability* journal (2012); “Gender and Sexual Risk-Taking Among Selected Nigerian University Students” published by the *Sexuality and Culture Journal* (2010); and a collaborative study of the roles of “Patent Medicine Vendors, Community Pharmacists, and STI Management in Abuja, Nigeria,” which was published by the *African Health Sciences* journal (2010). He is currently working on two research projects, including a theoretical reimagining of institutional and agential influences on grand corruption in Nigeria, and a critical analysis of the primacy of ethnicity in explaining Nigeria’s failed state status.