

The Partner Study: Sexual Risks and HIV

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Social Norms and Condom Use: An appraisal

We tested the theory that people use condoms because others expect them to. We found little support for this theory, even in a population at high risk for the sexual transmission of HIV. We found no overall association between condom use norms and condom use behavior. While both peer rewards and peer punishments predicted the perception of a condom use norm and the acceptance of that norm, neither predicted the use of condoms. We estimate that only 23-37% of persons are influenced by norms.

Testing the AIDS Risk Reduction Model

We tested a comprehensive model to explain people's choices of behaviors to protect themselves from AIDS and other diseases—the use of condoms. Concern about HIV and norms of condom use lead a person to think condom use is a good idea. This belief, along with self-efficacy, lead to the commitment to use condoms. Both of these contribute to protection by condom use, but this is partially counteracted by the person's enjoyment of sex.

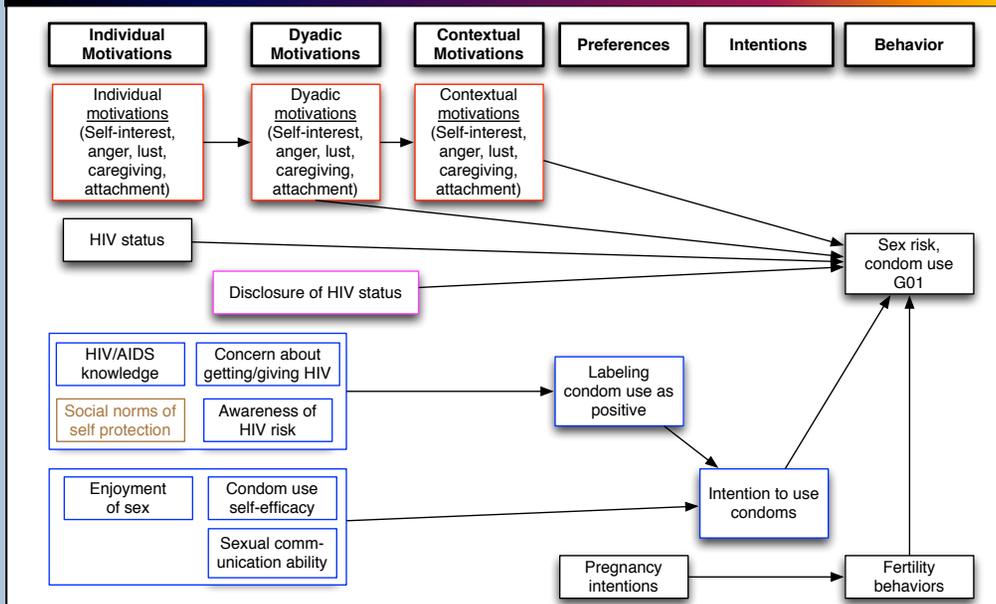
Why Do People Use Condoms—And Why Not

Participants were asked if they thought about 45 distinct factors when making decisions about condom use. Self-protection, caring about partner, and concern about pregnancy were associated with condom use. Concern about pleasure, ability to communicate with partner, and fear of partner's reaction were associated with not using a condom. People did not select embarrassment, efficacy, or other people's opinions as affecting their condom use decision.

Disclosure

We applied communication privacy management (CPM) theory to understand rules couples have for disclosure of the positive partner's HIV status. People have two competing privacy management needs reflecting connections with others (which leads to openness) and degree of separate-ness (which leads to closedness). We studied privacy rules and the impact of coordination and negotiation of privacy rules between the HIV+ and HIV- partners. When HIV+ partners had higher levels of privacy needs they were more likely to stipulate their privacy rules, worry about possible disclosures of their status, and to think that disclosures by their HIV- partner would be a breach of their privacy rules. The HIV+ partners' perceptions of potential for privacy breakdowns and the HIV- partners' conditions of rule adherence impact the way privacy management is enacted as a whole.

Theoretical Framework



Partner Study Research Methods

The Partner Study is a five-year project funded by NIH. The study focuses on specific high-risk groups: partners in HIV-discordant couples (one HIV+, one HIV-) and persons with multiple sex partners. Data were collected in 2 – 3 hour one-on-one private computer-assisted interviews. We interviewed 114 HIV-discordant couples and 146 HIV- persons with multiple sex partners, for a total sample size of 374.