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Denk na, vrij veilig

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1995

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bakker, A. B. (1995). *Denk na, vrij veilig: Descriptief en experimenteel onderzoek naar attitudes tegenover condoomgebruik*. s.n.

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Summary

This dissertation aims at finding starting-points for optimizing persuasive communication about safe sex from a theoretical perspective. Within social psychology, several theoretical models have been proposed to explain which factors determine whether people have safe sex. In *Chapter 2*, the model of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the health belief model (Janz & Becker, 1984) and the protection motivation model (Rogers, 1983) are compared in terms of their ability to predict people's intention to use condoms. The results showed that this intention was most accurately predicted by the model of planned behavior. The intention to use condoms was particularly a function of perceived behavioral control, social norms and attitudes towards condom use. These findings correspond with other studies in which the model of planned behavior was tested (Richard & Van der Pligt, 1991; Terry *et al.*, 1993). Moreover, a longitudinal analysis of actual condom use among subjects who had engaged in at least one new sexual relationship during the year after the pretest, showed that the model of planned behavior has predictive value for condom use as well (*Chapter 3*). A plausible explanation for the relative success of the model of planned behavior is that interpersonal processes are central to this model (the social context), whereas the health belief model and the protection motivation model emphasize intrapersonal processes (such as perceived vulnerability to and severity of the disease).

In *Chapter 3*, a refinement of the normative component in the model of planned behavior is suggested by making a distinction between injunctive and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms concern the perceived expectations of the reference group and refer to what one should do. This form of social influence can motivate behavior because deviation from the prevailing group standards can result in sanctions. The descriptive norm concerns the perceived behavior of the reference group and refers to what is appropriate in a specific situation. This form of social influence can motivate behavior because people may accept the fact that everyone behaves in a certain way as guiding information about the objective reality. The most important finding in this study was that the descriptive

norm is a direct determinant of the intention to engage in AIDS preventive behavior, that is independent of the impact of the injunctive norm (*cf.* Cialdini *et al.*, 1990). Strikingly, the descriptive norm was the most important predictor of intentions to use condoms among high-risk individuals. Apparently, abstinence from condom use can be encouraged by knowing that friends and acquaintances engage in unprotected sexual encounters.

In *Chapter 4*, two studies are reported on the determinants of (unprotected) extramarital sexual relationships from the perspective of the investment model (Rusbult, 1980). According to this model, the more individuals are satisfied with their relationship, the fewer alternatives they perceive, and the more they have invested, the stronger their commitment will be to maintain a steady relationship. Previous studies have shown that commitment has a negative effect on the decision to leave a relationship (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). It was reasoned that people will also feel less inclined to engage in extramarital sexual involvements when they feel a stronger commitment to the steady partner. In accordance with this line of reasoning, the present studies showed that commitment had a negative impact on the intention to engage in extramarital sex and that the effects of relationship satisfaction, perceived alternatives, and investment size were mediated by commitment. Moreover, it turned out that commitment had a positive effect on the intention to use condoms during sexual intercourse with someone other than the steady partner, and also on the intention to protect the steady partner against possible HIV infection after unprotected extramarital sex.

In *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6* two experiments are reported on attitude change following persuasive communications about safe sex. On the basis of social judgment theory (Sherif *et al.*, 1965), it was predicted that a message about the necessity of condom use would be most effective when the discrepancy between the advocated behavior and the behavior that the receiver considers acceptable is neither too small, nor too large. In addition, on the basis of previous studies with the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) it was expected that the relation between discrepancy and attitude change depends on the intensity of information processing. In accordance with the predictions, results showed that people who were highly motivated to elaborate (high involvement and high need

for cognition subjects) were more inclined to change their attitudes when the message was moderately discrepant than when the message was slightly or highly discrepant. The explanation for this finding is that extensive elaboration of information that is slightly discrepant will lead individuals to conclude that the message does not differ from what they already thought. Extensive processing of highly discrepant information presumably has led to contrast effects and negative thoughts, resulting in the absence of attitude change. Such messages are threatening because they suggest that one's own attitude is incorrect. Because receivers do not have a clear-cut opinion about attitude positions that are moderately discrepant from their own attitude, such messages will be most effective. The present research does not clarify whether and in what way peripheral processing of discrepant information can result in attitude change. Nevertheless, the results show how a central variable from social judgment theory, namely discrepancy can be integrated in the elaboration likelihood model.

In *Chapter 7* the results of the present research are discussed in a wider theoretical context. The practical implications for persuasive communication about safe sex are also highlighted. It is suggested that future AIDS preventive campaigns should aim at changing control beliefs that are related to condom use and at changing social norms. As perceived behavioral control can be strengthened by providing people with information on how to achieve safe sex (*Chapter 5*), it is recommended that people be provided with more concrete condom use strategies, such as how to communicate and negotiate about condom use without being embarrassed. There also seems to be a need for good arguments that enable people to persuade the partner about the necessity of condom use. In addition, the present research has shown that information about actual behavior (the descriptive norm) can be a fruitful starting-point for persuasive communication about safe sex. Providing people with information about AIDS preventive behavior of comparable others (i.e. people of the same age, sex and social background) seems to be a promising persuasion strategy. Finally, the persuasion experiments demonstrated that it can be useful to tune safe sex messages to existing attitudes in the target group. Particularly messages about condom use that are perceived as being too extreme generally appear to overshoot the

mark. With the emergence of new media such as Compact Disc Interactive (CD-I), the application of "tailor made" messages seems to be within reach.