

Safer Sex in Personal Relationships

The Role of Sexual Scripts in HIV Infection and Prevention



Tara M. Emmers-Sommer • Mike Allen

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PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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HIV Infection and Prevention

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The Role of Sexual Scripts in
HIV Infection and Prevention

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LEA's Series on Personal Relationships

Steve Duck, Series Editor

University of Iowa

Since its inception, the Personal Relationships series from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates has sought to review the progress in the academic work on relationships with respect to a broad array of issues and to do so in an accessible manner that also illustrates its practical value. The LEA series includes books intended to pass on the accumulated scholarship to the next generation of students and to those who deal with relationship issues in the broader world beyond the academy. The series comprises not only monographs and other academic resources exemplifying the multidisciplinary nature of this area, but also books suitable for use in the growing numbers of courses on relationships.

The series has the goal of providing a comprehensive and current survey of theory and research in personal relationships through the careful analysis of the problems encountered and solved in research, yet it also considers the systematic application of that work in a practical context. These resources not only are intended to be comprehensive assessments of progress on particular “hot” and relevant topics, but also will be significant influences on the future directions and development of the study of personal relationships. Although each volume is focused, authors place their respective topics in the broader context of other research on relationships and within a range of wider disciplinary traditions. The series already offers incisive and forward-looking reviews and also demonstrates the broader theoretical implications of relationships for the range of disciplines from which the research originates. Present and future volumes include original studies, reviews of relevant theory and research, and new theories oriented toward the understanding of personal relationships both in themselves and within the context of broader theories of family process, social psychology, and communication.

Reflecting the diverse composition of personal relationship study, readers in numerous disciplines—social psychology, communication, sociology, family studies, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, personality, counseling, women's studies, gerontology, and others—will find valuable and insightful perspectives in the series.

Apart from the academic scholars who research the dynamics and processes of relationships, there are many other people whose work involves them in the operation of relationships in the real world. For such people as nurses, police, teachers, therapists, lawyers, drug and alcohol counselors, marital counselors, and those who take care of the elderly, a number of issues routinely arise concerning the ways in which relationships affect the people whom they serve. Examples of these are: the role of loneliness in illness and the ways to circumvent it; the complex impact of family and peer relationships on a drug-dependent person's attempts to give up the drug; the role of playground unpopularity on a child's learning; the issues involved in dealing with the relational side of chronic illness; the management of conflict in marriage; the establishment of good rapport between physicians and seriously ill patients; the support of the bereaved; and the correction of violent styles of behavior in dating or marriage. Each of these is a problem that may confront some of these professionals as part of their daily concerns and each demonstrates the far-reaching influences of relationship processes in one's life that is presently theorized independently of relationship considerations.

The present volume follows these precepts and invokes the notion that relational communication is a health-related activity. This is true not only in respect of scripts enacted and developed for individuals in personal relationships but also as regards the personal dilemmas and predicaments that present themselves in those relationships as a result of health concerns (for example, the difficulties of negotiating condom use when each partner is supposed to trust one another and a trusting person would not question the other person's cleanness. The issue of trust runs broadly through personal relationships and in this context its negotiation has many ramifications that the book unfolds for us).

A number of other issues in the conduct of sexuality within personal relationships are also given deep consideration here, whether in heterosexual or homosexual personal relationships. These concern such factors as timing of discussion about sexual diseases (where early mention of the topics might scare off a potential partner), social norms (such as the rule that you do not kiss and tell about previous partners or their sexual conditions), personal privacy, and the awkwardness associated with any discussions about sexual activity. Complications arise here when the partners in long-term committed relationships are in the 15 to 25% of folks who have not have been completely faithful to one another (see the Dunscombe et al., book on marital affairs, also in this series), because any

extramarital activity brings the risks of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases transported into the relationship.

The book is also forthright in considering the elderly population, which is by no means exempt from the risks of sexually transmitted disease. Here also the existing research on relationships has something to contribute to the understanding of best practices with respect to avoidance or management of sexually transmitted disease.

If these topics were not enough to show the relevance of relationships to disease, the book considers the community results of individual relational practices and the ways in which communities of relational networks assume responsibility for the management and care of those with serious sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS. AIDS does not occur only to an individual but also to a community and the book reports research and practical issues that arise from this circumstance.

Preface

HIV and AIDS are global issues that affect us all—not only socially, but culturally, economically, medically, politically, interpersonally, and personally. Many individuals perceive themselves as removed from or immune to HIV and/or AIDS. In some form or another, however, one will be touched and affected by HIV and/or AIDS. The announcement in July of 2004 that the world is losing the fight against HIV infection is sobering—38 million people infected, and 4.8 million new cases expected in 2004 with 3 million persons dying of ARC. The issues of education and prevention have become more important, now more than ever.

Many existing studies on HIV and AIDS approach the phenomenon from a medical standpoint or a largely social standpoint. We applaud these efforts and encourage further works in these domains to increase awareness and understanding of HIV and AIDS. We noticed, however, that much of the extant research was remiss in terms of approaching HIV and AIDS from an interpersonal/personal perspective. Being communication scholars, we were surprised to learn that, although discussions regarding sexual histories, sexual practices, safer sex behavior, and condom use are interpersonal communication phenomena, little existed in the extant literature on the tremendous role that communication has in the discussion and practice of safer sex. Similarly, we noticed that much of the existing research focused heavily on homosexuals or men having sex with men (MSM) and paid less attention to relationship types that also carried potential risk. For example, relationships involving aged or married partners, or with cultural or intercultural components, remain understudied in the literature, but are no less important. Our purpose in writing this book is to approach HIV and AIDS in a variety of close relationship types from an interpersonal, communication perspective. Our goal is to be both theoretical and practical. To accomplish this objective, script theory from a developmental perspective serves as the primary theoretical framework of the book, with related theories subsumed. In addition, we offer practical, prescriptive information that we hope will resonate with individuals involved in close, personal sexual relationships, to increase the awareness and understanding of HIV and AIDS. In a phrase, HIV and AIDS touch and affect us all in some aspect or another.

Although the material covered in this text is applicable to all of us in some form or another, the voice of the book is geared to graduate students

and upper-division undergraduates who are interested in interpersonal and health-related aspects of close relationships. The book is fitting for individuals interested in interpersonal, social, and health related issues working in a variety of disciplinary areas such as communication, sociology, psychology, social psychology, women's studies, and public health.

This book is structured to take the reader on a journey through a variety of close relationship types. To set the stage and tone of the book, chapter 1 brings to the reader's awareness the global enormity of HIV and AIDS and then provides a link between the global and the personal and the need to make HIV and AIDS part of our everyday talk and personal relational structure. The stage is set for script theory providing the developmental and guiding path throughout the text. Chapter 2 addresses safer sex in close, heterosexual dating relationships, focusing on the factors and communication involved in safer sex negotiation and practices. Chapter 3 brings the reader into marital relationships and the importance of safer sex discussion and awareness in marriage. Many consider the legal, social, and institutional nature of marriage to somehow make spouses immune to HIV. Lesser focus is given to spouses who might have entered the marriage being HIV positive or partners who engaged in risky practices (e.g., IV drug use or unprotected sex with a secondary partner) prior to or within the context of marriage. Chapter 4 focuses on safer sex in homosexual relationships and discusses the political, sociopolitical, and personal issues involved in such relationships. Championed in the chapter are how members of the homosexual community brought HIV and AIDS awareness to individuals' social consciousness, the change in sexual practices that resulted in the reduction of new infections among the homosexual community, and the need for younger homosexual males, in particular, to learn from those who preceded them in terms of their legacy of increased awareness and safer sex practices. Chapter 5 addresses HIV and AIDS from a multicultural perspective. Particular focus rests on identifying which messages resonate in what communities, descriptions of cultural variation, and prescriptions for success in increased awareness and safer sex practices. Chapter 6 focuses on HIV and AIDS in aged populations. Many do not perceive the elderly population as an at-risk population, unfortunately. With the onset of menopause and the resulting reduced risk for pregnancy, male-enhancement drug use, and increased dating practices of widows and widowers, many aged individuals are actively dating and engaging in sexual relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to increase awareness of the sexuality of this population and increasing aged individuals' awareness about a phenomenon that was nonexistent many years ago when many first entered the dating/courting aspect of their lives. Chapter 7 examines living with HIV and AIDS. The purpose of this chapter is to increase awareness, understanding, and compassion of those living with HIV and AIDS, and to explore their disclosure of their seropositive

status, their personal relationships, and their engagement in close, intimate relationships of their own. Chapter 8 brings us to the conclusion of the book. Here, our attempt is to synthesize, bring the discussion full circle, and provide a rhetorical statement about just how quickly the face of HIV and AIDS is changing. Indeed, the number of HIV and AIDS cases (and, unfortunately, deaths due to AIDS) increased during the course of writing this text. In the conclusion, the main foci of each chapter are revisited and suggestions for future direction on these phenomena are proposed.

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