

Selected Studies for Social Norms and Sexual Behavior

Title: **Gender-specific Normative Misperceptions of Risky Sexual Behavior and Alcohol-related Risky Sexual Behavior**

Authors: [Lewis, M. L.](#), [Lee, C. M.](#), [Patrick, M. E.](#), [Fossos, N.](#)

Source: [Sex Roles](#), 2007, 57, 81-90

Abstract: This research examined gender-specific perceptions of risky sexual behavior norms among college students and their relationship with one's own sexual behavior. We expected that students would misperceive the risky sexual behavior of their peers and that these perceptions would positively relate to their sexual behavior. Undergraduate students from the United States (N=687; 57.6% female) completed measures assessing perceived sexual behavior, sexual behavior, and other behaviors (e.g., marijuana use, alcohol consumption). Findings demonstrated that students perceived that others engaged in more risky sexual behavior than they do and that perceived norms were positively associated with one's own behavior. The incorporation of personalized normative feedback regarding risky sexual behavior into brief interventions aimed at reducing risky sexual behavior is discussed.

URL: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/w50707364x1w786j/>

Title: **Differences Between Actual and Perceived Student Norms: An Examination of Alcohol Use, Drug Use, and Sexual Behavior**

Authors: [Martens, Matthew P.](#); [Page, Jennifer C.](#); [Mowry, Emily S.](#)

Source: [Journal of American College Health](#), 2006, 54, 5, 295-300

Abstract: Researchers in the social norms area have previously focused primarily on alcohol consumption, paying comparatively less attention to drug use and sexual behavior. The major purposes of this study were to (1) compare perceptions of peer norms in the areas of alcohol use, drug use, and sexual behavior with actual behavior and (2) determine if a relationship existed between a student's perceptions of normative behavior and a student's actual behavior. Participants were 833 college students at a large, public university in the Northeast. Study participants overestimated alcohol use, drug use, and sexual behavior among their peers. There was also a positive relationship between actual behavior and perceived peer norms, although the effect sizes for all behaviors were small to moderate. The authors provide further support for the tenets of social norms theory and suggest that social norms interventions are appropriate both campus-wide and to targeted high-risk groups.

URL: <http://heldref-publications.metapress.com/media/m3pnthqwwpbgl114fatn/contributions/q/5/0/4/q5044j0185x1961u.pdf>

Title: **Using social norms theory to explain perceptions and sexual health behaviors of undergraduate college students: an exploratory study**

Authors: [Scholly,K.](#); [Katz,A.R.](#); [Gascoigne,J.](#); [Holck,P.S.](#)

Source: [Journal of American College Health](#), 2005, 53, 4, 159-166

Abstract: The authors and associates conducted a social norms-based intervention targeting high-risk sexual behaviors among undergraduate students at 4 college campuses. Social norms theory predicts that widely held misperceptions may encourage risky behavior in a misguided attempt to conform to perceived norms and that information correcting these misperceptions will lead to a decrease in such behaviors. Students overestimated their peers' levels of sexual activity, numbers of partners, incidence of sexually transmitted infections, and rates of unintended pregnancies, but underestimated rates of condom use. Rates of HIV test taking, however, were accurately estimated. Although some components of sexual risk behaviors lend themselves well to social norms-based interventions, others, specifically inconsistent condom use and avoiding HIV tests, do not. Although no changes in reported beliefs or practices were apparent at the end of a 9-month intervention period, longer or modified interventions may be needed to make a fair assessment of the efficacy of this approach.

URL: <http://www.mendeley.com/research/using-social-norms-theory-to-explain-perceptions-and-sexual-health-behaviors-of-undergraduate-college-students-an-exploratory-study/>

Title: **Psychosocial predictors of delay of first sexual intercourse by adolescents**

Authors: [Carvajal,S.C.](#); [Parcel,G.S.](#); [Banspach,S.W.](#); [Basen-Engquist,K.](#); [Coyle,K.K.](#); [Kirby,D.](#); [Chan,W.](#)

Source: [Health Psychology](#), 1999, 18, 5, 443-452

Abstract: This investigation predicted adolescents' delay of intercourse onset from attitudes, social norms, and self-efficacy about refraining from sexual intercourse. Age, gender, ethnicity, and parental education were also examined as predictors and moderators of the relationships among the 3 psychosocial determinants and onset. The participants (N = 827), part of a cohort initially surveyed in the 9th grade, reported at baseline that they had never engaged in intercourse. The multivariable proportional hazards regression model suggested that adolescents with more positive attitudinal and normative beliefs, as well as those with a parent who graduated from college, were less likely to engage in intercourse in the follow-up period (up to approximately 2 years). Interventions that include an objective to delay onset may benefit from addressing psychosocial determinants, especially attitudes and norms about sexual

intercourse.

URL: http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=fulltext_journal&jcode=hea&vol=18&issue=5&page=443&format=PDF

Title: **Adolescent Oral Sex, Peer Popularity, and Perceptions of Best Friends' Sexual Behavior**

Authors: [Prinstein,MitchellJ.](#); [Meade,ChristinaS.](#); [Cohen,GeoffreyL.](#)

Source: [J. Pediatr. Psychol.](#), 2003, 28, 4, 243-249

Abstract: Objective: To provided initial descriptive information regarding adolescents' engagement in oral sex and to investigate adolescents' perceptions of their best friends' sexual behavior and peer-reported popularity as two social mechanisms that may influence engagement in oral sex. Methods: A total of 212 tenth graders reported their engagement in oral sex and intercourse, number of sexual partners, and use of sexually transmitted infection (STI) protection, as well as perceptions of their best friends' sexual behaviors. Sociometric assessment yielded peer-reported measures of adolescents' preference- and reputation-based popularity. Results: Adolescents were more likely to report engagement in oral sex than intercourse, report more oral sex partners than intercourse partners, and were unlikely to report use of STI protection during oral sex. Perceptions of best friends' behavior were significantly associated with adolescents' own oral sex behavior, but not intercourse. Adolescents who reported sexual activity had high levels of reputation-based popularity, but not likeability among peers; however, sex with more partners was associated with lower levels of popularity. Conclusions: Implications for prevention programs are discussed.

URL: <http://jpepsy.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/28/4/243>

Title: **Influences of social power and normative support on condom use decisions: a research synthesis**

Authors: [Albarracin,D.](#); [Kumkale,G.T.](#); [Johnson,B.T.](#)

Source: [AIDS Care](#), 2004, 16, 6, 700-723, England

Abstract: A meta-analysis of 58 studies involving 30,270 participants examined how study population and methodological characteristics influence the associations among norms, control perceptions, attitudes, intentions and behavior in the area of condom use. Findings indicated that control perceptions generally correlated more strongly among members of societal groups that lack power, including female, younger individuals, ethnic-minorities and people with lower educational levels. Furthermore, norms generally had stronger influences among younger individuals and among people who have greater access to informational social support, including males, ethnic majorities and people with higher levels of education. These findings are discussed in the context of HIV prevention efforts.

URL: <http://home.ku.edu.tr/~tkumkale/aids scare.pdf>

Title: **Reported adolescent sexual norms and the development of a social marketing campaign to correct youth misperceptions**

Authors: Messer, L.C., Shoe, E., Canady, M., Sheppard, B.K., & Vincus, A.

Source: Journal of Children and Poverty, 2011, 17(1), 45-63

Abstract: Adolescents are powerfully influenced by their peers and tend to match their behaviors to what they perceive to be the social norm among other youth. Sexual behavior is one area where common misperceptions exist. Social marketing techniques to achieve positive behavioral change may correct these misperceptions. Here we describe an innovative approach to altering teen pregnancy prevention norms – the development and implementation of a social norms marketing campaign. The campaign is undertaken as part of a larger pregnancy prevention program in the Taking Responsible Actions in Life (TRAIL) project. The TRAIL project, implemented among seventh- through ninth-grade students, includes adolescent pregnancy prevention education, youth development programming, and parental involvement, in addition to the norms marketing campaign. This paper describes how local norms data were collected, the empirical associations that were found to exist between reported norms and youth sex-related behavior, and the ways in which the social marketing campaign supported appropriate behavior – and corrected the normative misperceptions – among these students.

URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10796126.2011.539197>

Title: **Social norms and general sexual satisfaction: The cost of misperceived descriptive norms**

Authors: Stephenson, K.R. & Sullivan, K.T.

Source: The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 2009, 18 (3), 89-105

Abstract: Past research has identified important correlates of sexual satisfaction, but more theoretically driven research is needed to integrate these findings and identify the causes of variance in sexual satisfaction. The purpose of the two exploratory studies presented here was to examine the utility of Social Norms Theory in understanding the impact of misperceived norms on general sexual satisfaction in unmarried college students. The findings of Study 1 indicated that, consistent with previous research, participants overestimated the sexual activity and permissiveness of their peers and thus perceived self-other discrepancies. Overall, larger perceived discrepancies predicted lower general sexual satisfaction. Study 2 showed that a brief educational intervention could alter these misperceived discrepancies such that participants exposed to the intervention showed smaller self-other discrepancies with concomitantly higher levels of general sexual satisfaction. The theoretical implications of the findings are discussed.

URL: http://www.sieccan.org/pdf/stephenson_cjhs2009_misperceived_norms.pdf

The following sites may also be of use to you:

1) **Alan Berkowitz's Social Norms Approach to Violence Prevention** examines social norms and males' attitudes and behaviors towards sex, including 1) men's misperceptions of other men's sexual activity, 2) incorrect beliefs about other men's support of rape myths, and/or 3) false assumptions about other men's comfort with degrading language towards women.

www.alanberkowitz.com/articles/BPI.pdf and

<http://www.alanberkowitz.com/Preventing%20Sexual%20Violence%20Chapter.pdf>

2) **The Bacchus Network Sexual Responsibility Week Campaign**

<http://www.bacchusgamma.org/sexual-responsibility-week.asp>

3) **Planned Parenthood of New York City's "Think Again...The Truth Is" Sexual Responsibility Campaign**

<http://www.socialnormsresources.org/CaseStudies/youthpregprev.php>

4) **James Madison University's "A Man..." Sexual Assault Prevention Campaign**

<http://www.socialnormsresources.org/CaseStudies/sexassaultprev.php>

5) **Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCAPP) Topic in Brief on social norms**

The April 2004 edition of ReCAPP focuses on "perceptions of social norms." Social norms are an important topic in adolescent reproductive and sexual health because adolescents tend to match their own attitudes and behavior to what they perceive to be the norm among their peers. Since norms are often misperceived as being riskier than they really are, correcting misperceptions may be a powerful tool for helping adolescents avoid risky behavior.

This edition of Topic in Brief includes the following sections: Definitions of terms related to social norms, Overview of the issues, Tips for Educators, (including: Social Norms Theory, Terms, and Applications, Collecting Social Norms Data, Interpreting Social Norms Data, Translating Norms Data into Concrete Concepts and Promoting Healthy Norms)

<http://www.etr.org/recapp/index.cfm?fuseaction=pages.topicsinbriefdetail&PageID=36#author>