HIV Prevention Through Sexual Agreements Between Gay Men in Couples

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While a majority of gay couples appear to work out agreements on allowable sexual behavior outside the relationship, only about half honor the agreement. A study from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor electronically polled 361 male couples through paid Facebook ads and published their findings in the Journal of Sex Research.

The study found that the men generally discussed their HIV status before having unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) but that they established their agreements after the had UAI. A total of 207, or 57 percent, of the couples reported having such an agreement. Among these couples, 58 percent said that they explicitly discussed the agreement, 84 percent concurred about having the same type of agreement (suggesting a lack of effective communication about allowed behaviors), and 54 percent of the couples had both men actually adhering to the agreement. However, among the couples in which both men concurred about the agreement's parameters, 80 percent of the men kept to the agreement.

"From a public health perspective, we need to encourage gay couples to have more honest and explicit instructions when establishing and honoring sexual agreements," said the study's author Jason Mitchell, assistant professor at the University of Michigan School of Nursing. "Sexual agreements are not only advantageous from a prevention standpoint for couples, but the agreement can also help strengthen their relationship."

To read the study release, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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