Regulatory focus in sexuality and condom use intentions among single individuals

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Rationale/Background: According to Regulatory Focus Theory, individuals in a prevention focus are oriented for security and avoid losses, whereas individuals in a promotion focus are oriented for advancement and achieve new opportunities.

Research Question: In two studies, we extended this to sexual behavior, by developing a new measure of Regulatory Focus in Sexuality (RFS) and testing if and why RFS was associated with condom use intentions.

Methods: In Study 1 we adapted items from two measures of Regulatory Focus to the context of sexual behavior and presented participants with this measure along with other control measures. In Study 2 we presented the final RFS measure, along with a measure of perceived health threat, and condom use intentions with casual and regular sex partners in the next 3 months, along with other control measures.

Results: Results showed the RFS to have good psychometric properties (Study 1). Furthermore, individuals with a predominant focus on sexuality prevention (vs. promotion) indicated greater intent to use condoms with all sex partners. This occurred because individuals were more aware of potential threats to their health (Study 2).

Conclusions: Prevention (vs. promotion) focused individuals are more oriented to avoid risky behaviors to protect their health. This was reflected on the greater intention to use condoms in the next 3 months, as a mean to prevent sexual transmitted infections.

Key Words: Regulatory focus in sexuality, perceived health threat, condom use