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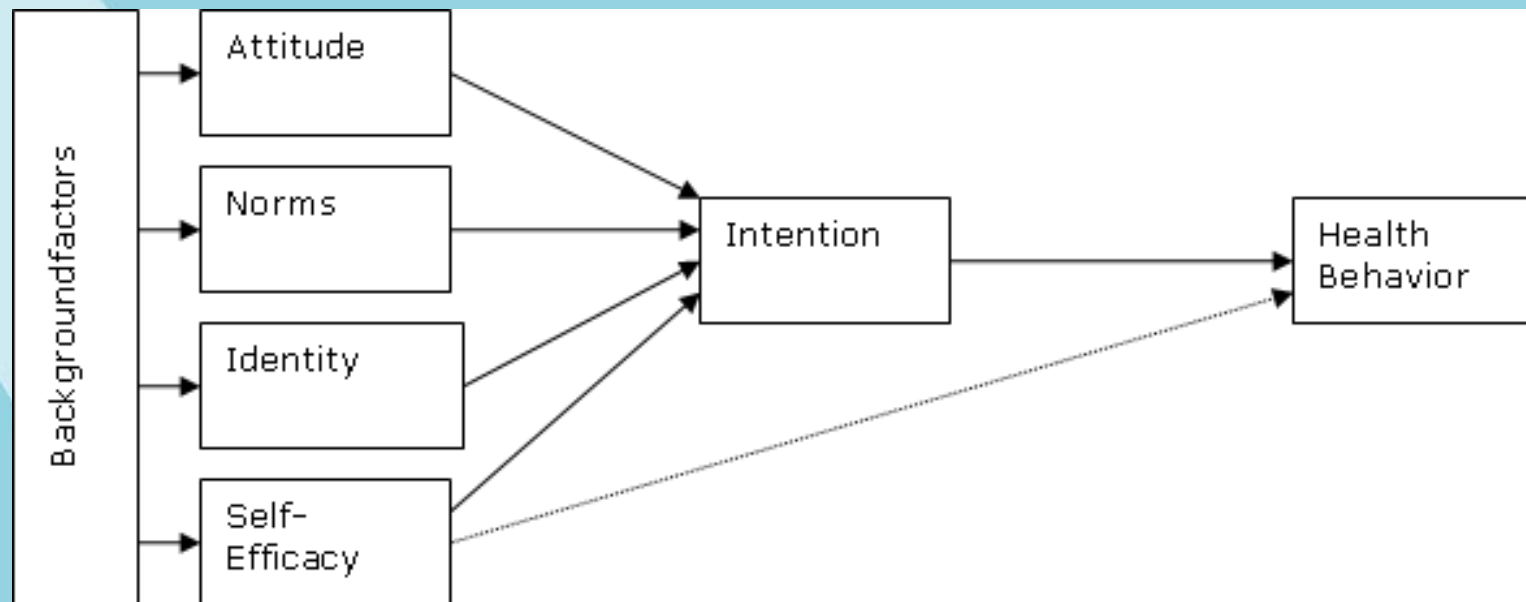
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Key Skills and Competence in Sexual Health

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Traditional model of health behavior¹



¹ Abraham, C., Sheeran, P., & Johnston M. (1998). From health beliefs to self-regulation: theoretical advances in the psychology of action control. *Psychology and Health*, 13, 569-591.

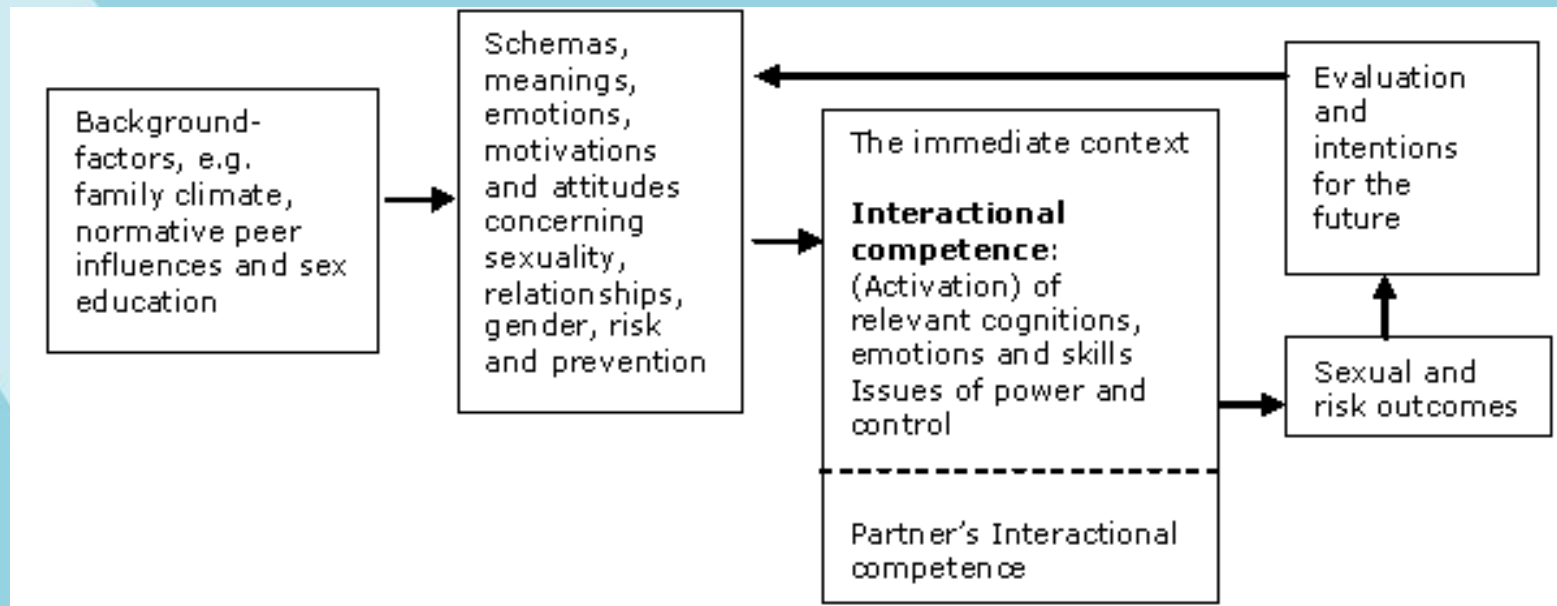


Comments on this model

1. Intentions are only moderately related to actual sexual behavior
2. These models assume a certain level of control, whereas control is often missing
3. Social-cognitive factors are not fixed items, but vary with circumstances
4. Sexual health is the result of an interaction, not of an individual decision



An integrated view of Sexual Health²



² Vanwesenbeeck, I., Zessen, van, G., Ingham, R., Jaramazovic, E. & Stevens, D. (1999). Factors and processes in heterosexual competence and risk: an integrated review of the evidence. *Psychology and Health*, 14, 25-50.



Interactional Competence as a key concept

Interactional competence is a complex of communicative and social skills, capacities, sensitivities and mental and behavioral strategies that help people to arrange their sexual encounters in a mutually rewarding way.

We are still looking for a better label.....



Key skills according to the model

- Pre-planning;
- Timely and clear discussion of contraceptives;
- Knowing how to use contraceptives/condoms;
- Being able to set one's limits;
- Being able to articulate desires;
- Being able to tune in to the needs of the partner;
- The capability to control oneself;
- The ability to deal with conflict;
- Sensitivity to the needs of a specific situation;
- The ability to evaluate and learn from experiences.



Interactional competence resembles social competence

Some Key skills of Social Competence:

- The ability to use a variety of social behaviors that are appropriate to a given interpersonal situation and that are pleasing to others in each situation;
- The capacity to inhibit egocentric, impulsive, or negative social behavior;
- The ability to understand others' emotions, perceive subtle social cues, "read" complex social situations, and demonstrate insight about others' motivations and goals



Key Skills according to Schalet³

- **Sexual Autonomy** (own and control sexual decision-making process; know when and how to say “yes” and “no”; anticipate and adequately prepare for sexual activity; strive for pleasure and enjoyment of sexual contact)
- **Build good romantic relationships** (get to know each other, build trust over time, deal well with conflict, strive for power equality, enjoy each other’s company)
- **Conconnectedness between adolescents and their parents (or other caregivers)** (honesty and integrity in the relationship with parents and other caregivers)

³ Schalet, A.T. “Beyond abstinence and risk: A new paradigm for adolescent sexual health.”



Additional Key Skills in the Literature?

- The ability to deal with ambivalence;
- The ability to perceive subtle and non-verbal refusals.



Key skills are gendered

- Boys and girls encounter different barriers to sexual health, e.g. assertive girls run the risk of being called 'slut', whereas reluctant boys run the risk of being called 'gay';
- Some key skills have different meanings for boys and girls, e.g. 'control' means being able to get sex for boys and being able to refuse sex for girls;
- The same behavior will be interpreted differently for boys and girls, e.g. doing nothing means 'no' for boys and 'yes' for girls;



Gender specific key skills⁴

For girls:

- Acknowledge sexual desire
- Develop a sense of comfort with own sexuality
- Feel entitled to pleasure and sexual experiences

For boys:

- Acknowledge emotional feelings associated with sexuality
- Resist peer pressure to objectify girls and sex
- Having access to images of male sexuality other than sexual predation

Both:

- Resistance to gender specific pressures

⁴ Tolman, D.L., Striepe, M.I., & Harmon, T. (2003). Gender matters: constructing a model of adolescent sexual health. *Journal of Sex Research*, 40, p. 4-12.



Summary of Key Skills

- Preparation
- Awareness of limits and desires
- Being able to articulate limits and desires, beyond simply “yes” or “no”
- Being able to tune in to the needs of the partner
- Flexibility
- Learning abilities
- Connectedness to important others
- The ability to resist gender specific pressures



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