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Short report

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Understanding the association between condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse: An assessment of normative, calculative, and habitual explanations^{$\frac{1}{2}$}

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to provide a better understanding of the likely mechanisms underlying regular condom use. In 2009, 1145 sexually active individuals aged 18-65 years were surveyed online, after being recruited via an e-mail message circulated at a large Croatian university and posted on various social networking websites. Participants' mean age was 28.1 years (SD = 8.01). Women constituted a slight majority of the sample (51.6%). The research questions – whether the frequently observed association between condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse could be best predicted by (a) norm-oriented behavior; (b) calculative decision-making; or (c) habit formation – were tested using multiple logistic regression. Only the calculative use, which decreased the odds of condoms being used at both occasions, habitual use, as expected, increased the odds of condom use. In addition, the habitual modality of condom use significantly predicted consistent condom use with both casual and steady sexual partners. Age, being in a relationship, and the number of lifetime sexual partners were negatively associated with habitual condom use. The finding that habit plays a substantial role in consistent condom use suggests the need for further exploration of personality and relational factors associated with the initiation of habitual condom use.

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Introduction

Consistent condom use is of central importance for sexual and reproductive health (Sheeran, Abraham, & Orbell, 1999; UNAIDS, 2009). Exposure to sexual health risks has been well documented and a global rise in STIs and HIV prevalence seems to be particularly evident among individuals under the age of 25 (Inciardi & Williams, 2005). Although there is evidence of increased use of male condoms among young people (Santelli, Lindberg, Finer, & Singh, 2007; Santelli, Morrow, Anderson, & Lindberg, 2006), many sexually active individuals do not use condoms on a consistent basis (Hatherall, Stone, Ingham, & McEachran, 2005; Manderson, Tye, & Rajanayagam, 2005; Measor, 2006). Similar

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0277-9536/\$ – see front matter © 2010 Published by Elsevier Ltd. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.02.030 findings were recently reported in Croatia (Štulhofer, Ajduković, Božičević, & Kufrin, 2006; Štulhofer, Graham, Božičević, Kufrin, & Ajduković, 2007).

Condom use at first sexual intercourse is a good predictor of condom use at most recent intercourse (Hiršl-Hećej & Štulhofer, 2001; Shafii, Stovel, Davis, & Holmes, 2004; Shafii, Stovel, & Holmes, 2007). Several authors have suggested a possible role for habit formation in this association, but alternative causal mechanisms have seldom been considered (Ku, Sonenstein, & Pleck, 1992; Shafii et al., 2004; Yzer, Siero, & Buunk, 2001). Moreover, although "habit formation" seems to be the favored hypothesis, it has not been empirically tested (Hiršl-Hećej & Štulhofer, 2001; Shafii et al., 2007; Sheeran et al., 1999). To the best of our knowledge, the mechanisms responsible for the association between condom use at first intercourse and current condom use have not been systematically investigated.

There are at least three possible explanations for the observed association between condom use at first and most recent intercourse. The first, the "normative hypothesis," suggests that regular condom users can be distinguished from their peers by their strong

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111 adherence to social norms that reflect expectations that sex would 112 (and should) not take place without the use of a condom 113 (Breakwell, Millward, & Fife-Schaw, 1994; Sheeran et al., 1999). 114 A second possibility (the "calculative hypothesis") is that condom 115 use is governed by (quasi) rational decision-making. A complex, 116 highly subjective, and contextual calculation of costs and benefits 117 of using a condom is said to determine whether or not condoms are 118 used (Fisher, Williams, Fisher, & Malloy, 1999). Finally, the "habit 119 formation hypothesis" argues that regular condom use does not 120 depend on positive norms, risk calculations, or communication 121 skills, but is a habit that develops early on (for various reasons, e.g., 122

a strong fear of unwanted pregnancy) and is sustained by the force 123 of non-deliberation. 124 This study explored whether the association between the use of 125 the male condom at first and most recent sexual intercourse could 126 be best predicted by three modalities or motivational determi-127 nants: (a) norm-oriented behavior; (b) calculative decision-128 making; or (c) habit formation. We expected the habitual modality 129 to increase and the normative and calculative modalities to 130 decrease the odds of regular condom use. Using a sample of 1145 131 sexually active individuals aged 18-65 years surveyed online in 132 2009, we tested these hypotheses with the aim of increasing 133 understanding of the likely mechanisms underlying consistent 134 condom use.

136 Method

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Recruitment procedure

140 Participants were solicited via an e-mail message distributed 141 among students at the University of Zagreb and posted on Facebook 142 and several electronic forums and mailing lists. In addition, the 143 study was advertised on a popular dating website (>80,000 144 registered users) by placing a web banner with a brief study 145 description. The e-mail message provided information about the 146 study aims (to investigate the patterns of condom use) and invited 147 individuals who were 18 years and over to follow a link to an 148 Internet-based questionnaire. On the first screen, individuals were 149 asked to consent to participate in a study on condom use before 150 beginning questionnaire completion. All the procedures were 151 approved by the University of Zagreb Faculty of Humanities and 152 Social Sciences Ethical Review Board. 153

154 Participants and data collection 155

156 During two weeks in April and May 2009, nearly 1900 indi-157 viduals accessed the online questionnaire. Exclusion of partici-158 pants older than 65, those who had never had sexual intercourse, 159 and those whose questionnaires contained 10% or more missing 160 data reduced the sample to 1145 participants (mean age = 28.1; 161 SD = 8.01; range 18-65 years). Less than half of the participants 162 (45%) reported being students and 51.6% were women. The mean 163 age of coitarche was 17.8 (SD = 2.08) for men and 18.2 (SD = 2.90) 164 for women. As expected, men reported a higher number of life-165 time sexual partners (median = 10) than women (median = 5). 166 Just under a third of participants were single (30.3%), almost half 167 were married (48.6%), and the remainder (21.1%) were in 168 a relationship.

169 There were several significant differences between the student 170 (n = 560) and non-student (n = 585) subsamples. Students were 171 more than five years younger (p < .001), had fewer lifetime sexual 172 partners (p < .001), and reported more frequent condom use with 173 steady partners (p < .001), than non-students. In addition, the 174 student subsample contained a larger proportion of women than 175 the non-student sample (p < .001).

Measures

The questionnaire contained 73 variables organized into three sections: (a) sociodemographic data, (b) sexual behavior, and (c) reasons for condom use, communication about condom use, and experiences of condom-related problems. All measures in the final section were developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 12 students for comprehensibility; on average, completion took approximately 15 min.

The following measures were used

Condom use was assessed with four questions. Participants were asked whether they had used a condom: a) the first time they had sexual intercourse (yes/no) and b) at most recent sexual intercourse (yes/no). Two questions assessed frequency of condom use: "In the last month, how often did you use condoms with a steady partner?" and "In the last six months, how often did you use condoms with casual partners?" Responses were made on a 6-point scale (from 1 = never to 5 = always/every time; 6 = did not have a steady/casual partner in that period). If a condom was used during every occasion of sexual intercourse, this was coded as consistent condom use.

Lifetime number of sexual partners was assessed with the following question: "How many sexual partners have you had? By sexual partner we mean a person with whom you had oral, vaginal, or anal sex." In multivariate analyses, this indicator was dichotomized into 0 = 1-6 (the median) and 1 (7 or more partners).

Reasons for condom use or motivational determinants were assessed with three scales: the Norm-Oriented Condom Use Scale (4 items, e.g., My friends' opinions influence my condom use), the Calculative Condom Use Scale (5 items, e.g., I use condoms only when I see good reasons for it), and the Habitual Condom Use Scale (6 items, e.g., I developed a habit of using condoms); for the complete list of items for the three scales, see Appendix. Answers were anchored using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 =not at all like me to 5 =very much like me.

These composite measures were developed using exploratory principal component analysis (PCA) of a pool of 42 items, which was compiled by reviewing literature on condom use. Three components with eigenvalues >1 were extracted and then rotated to an orthogonal position using the varimax procedure. Only the non-redundant items with factor loadings >.40 were used for scale construction (factor loadings may be obtained from the authors). The Calculative and the Habitual Use scales had good internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .83 and .85, respectively). Reliability of the Normative Condom Use scale, the shortest of the three, was acceptable (Cronbach's α = .64). Correlations between the three composite measures were in the expected direction. Habitual and calculative use were strongly and negatively associated (r = -.49, p < .001), whereas the correlation between normative and calculative use was positive and moderate in size (r = .35, p < .001).

Statistical analyses

Composites of norm-oriented, calculative, and habitual use of condoms were created by summing the responses to items in the scale. Multiple logistic regression analysis assessed associations between condom use and the three scale constructs, while controlling for moderating effects of age, gender, and relationship status. All analyses were carried out using SPSS 16 statistical software.

Results

To validate the use of the three motivational composites in the various subgroups, exploratory PCA using varimax rotation was carried out separately by gender, age (younger vs. older (\geq 31 years)),

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241	Table 1
242	Habitual, calculative, and normative condom use by gender, age, and relationship status.

		Habitual use		Calculative use			Normative use			
		n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD
Gender	Female	578	17.78	7.12	579	13.54	5.60	579	5.79	2.15
	Male	531	16.88	7.04	541	14.50	5.93	542	6.67	2.8
Age	<31	807	17.85	7.05	815	13.33	5.64	811	5.98	2.4
	≥31	302	16.02	7.04	305	15.81	5.77	310	6.83	2.5
Relationship	Single	538	17.98	6.97	546	15.81	5.77	310	6.83	2.5
status	Married/in a relationship	571	16.76	7.17	574	14.71	5.96	579	6.54	2.6

^aMedian age in the sample,

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and use of condom at most recent sexual intercourse (yes/no) for all 15 items (analyses not presented here). The original three-component structure, characterized by four items loading on the normative, five on the calculative, and six on the habitual dimensions, remained consistent across the groups differentiated by gender, age, and recent condom use. Average scores on the three motivations by gender, age and relationship status are presented in Table 1.

Since participants who were married or in a relationship were significantly older than those who were single (t = -3.89, df = 765.85, p < .001), we used multiple regression to distinguish between the effects of age and relationship status (results not shown here). Controlling for age, the association between relationship status and habitual and normative condom use remained statistically significant ($\beta = -.06$, p < .05 and $\beta = -.08$, p < .01, respectively).

268 In the next step, a logistic regression model was built to confirm 269 the association between condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse (not presented here). As expected, having used 270 condoms at Coitarche significantly increased the odds of condom 271 use at most recent sexual intercourse (OR = 2.01, p < .001), when 272 273 controlling for age, gender, and relationship status (single vs. married/in a relationship). Next, we examined how well the three 274 motivational determinants (habitual, calculative, and norm-275 oriented) predicted condom use at both first and most recent 276 intercourse. We created the dependent variable by recoding 277 responses on condom use at first and last sexual intercourse into 278 a single variable. Participants who reported using a condom on 279 both occasions were coded 1 (n = 308; 26.9%) and the remaining 280 participants (n = 837; 73.1%) were coded 0. Due to positive skewed 281 282 distribution of all three motivational scales, logistic regression 283 analyses were carried out on both log-transformed and raw data. As the results were almost identical, we present only the findings from 284 the non-transformed analyses. 285

Controlling for age, gender, and relationship status, only two of the three motivational determinants were significantly associated with condom use. Higher scores on the Habitual Condom Use Scale increased, while higher scores on the Calculative Condom Use Scale decreased, the odds of condoms being used at first and most recent

Table 2	2
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Correlates of condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse.

	Condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse $(n = 1065)$	
	OR	95% CI
Age	.91*	.88–.94
Gender (referent = female)	1.40	.99-1.9
Married/in a relationship (referent = single)	.83	.59-1.1
Habitual condom use	1.13*	1.10-1.1
Calculative condom use	.89*	.85–.92
Normative condom use	.96	.89-1.0

**p* < .001.

intercourse (see Table 2). The odds increased by 13% with each additional point on the Habitual Condom Use Scale and decreased by 11% with each point on the Calculative Condom Use Scale. Age was negatively associated with the odds of condom use at first and most recent intercourse.

Two multiple logistic regression models further examined if habitual use was a predictor of consistent condom use with casual and steady partners. In addition to age, gender, and relationship status, indicators of lifetime number of sexual partners and frequency of sex in the last month were also included in the models. As Table 3 shows, habitual use significantly predicted consistent condom use with both types of partners. The odds of using condoms consistently with casual partners increased by 21% with each additional point on the Habitual Scale. The odds of consistent condom use in a steady relationship were increased by a similar magnitude (26%). Interestingly, a larger number of lifetime partners was negatively associated with the probability of consistent condom use with a steady partner.

The final regression model (not presented in tables), with age, gender, relationship status, and lifetime number of sexual partners entered as independent variables explored predictors of habitual use. Age ($\beta = -.09$, p < .001), being in a relationship ($\beta = -.08$, p < .01), and a higher than median number of lifetime partners ($\beta = -.08$, p < .05) were negatively associated with habitual use.

Discussion

We tested three possible explanations for the frequently reported association between condom use at first and most recent sexual intercourse: norm-oriented behavior, calculative decisionmaking, and habit formation. Our findings suggest that a routine, non-deliberate behavior regulated by habit is the best predictor of regular condom use.

A conceptualization of consistent condom use as a matter of habit entails two important questions: how does this habit form

Table 3

Odds ratios (95% CI) for correlates of consistent condom use with casual and steady partners.

	Consistent condom use with casual partners (last six months) (n = 597)	Consistent condom use with a steady partner (last month) (n = 1070)
Age	.99 (.96-1.01)	.95* (.92–.98)
Gender (referent = female)	1.42 (.96-2.12)	1.35 (.95-1.94)
Married/in a relationship (referent = single)	1.33 (.85–2.07)	1.03 (.68–1.55)
No. of sexual partners (referent = median (6) or below)	.81 (.52–1.25)	.45** (.30–.68)
Frequency of sex	1.00 (.97-1.04)	.98 (.95-1.01)
Habitual condom use	1.21** (1.17-1.25)	1.26** (1.22-1.30)

*p < .01; **p < .001.

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371 and why do certain individuals develop the habit, while others do 372 not? The first of the two questions focuses on a black box "expla-373 nation" of habit initiation. It is possible that the development of the 374 condom use habit is related to risk aversion, expressed in a partic-375 ularly strong fear of pregnancy or STI infection. For example, an 376 experience of STI infection could initiate the development of the 377 condom "habit" in a person for whom such experience was trau-378 matic (Manderson et al., 2005).

379 Younger participants, those not in relationships, and those with 380 fewer numbers of lifetime sexual partners were more likely to use 381 condoms habitually. The effect of age is most likely a reflection of 382 the well-documented global increase in condom use among young 383 people (Santelli et al., 2007, 2006). The finding that single partici-384 pants had higher scores on the Habitual Condom Use Scale than 385 those who were married or in a relationship highlights the fact that 386 the process of consolidation of a romantic relationship is often 387 marked by the transition from the use of condoms to the use of 388 other contraceptive methods (Macaluso, Demand, Artz, & Hook, 389 2000). The fact that individuals who reported fewer lifetime 390 sexual partners were more likely to use condoms habitually may 391 suggest that a third variable partly explains the association 392 between condom use at first and most recent intercourse. For 393 example, individual differences related to sexual sensation-seeking 394 or conscientiousness may be predictive of whether a condom is 395 used during first (and later) intercourse (Arnett, 1996; Benotsch, 3962 Kauth, Corrigan, & Johnson, 1998; Hoyle, Fejfar, & Miller, 2000; 397 Trobst, Herbst, Masters, & Costa, 2002).

398 Social context should not be overlooked when investigating 399 habitual condom use. The development of other habitual healthrelated behaviors has been associated with socioeconomic status 401 (Lindbladh & Lyttkens, 2002). It is likely that financial resources 402 (access to condoms) and education (learning about the need for 403 condom use) increase the likelihood of habit formation, particularly 404 among "risk-avoidant" individuals.

405 An additional unanswered question is: what happens if the 406 habit of using condoms is "broken" (e.g., related to changes in 407 a relationship (from casual to committed), or to relationship break-408 up)? For example, would an individual who was in the habit of 409 using condoms in a previous relationship need less time to (re-) 410 establish this pattern of behavior in a new relationship? Clearly, 411 a better understanding of the factors that initiate and drive the 412 process of condom use habit formation is needed.

413 We should acknowledge some limitations of our study. 414 Although fairly large and demographically diverse, the non-prob-415 abilistic nature of the sample suggests caution in making general-416 izations. The low reliability of the Normative Scale suggests that 417 this composite measure should be improved, although the low 418 internal consistency may reflect the fact that there are multiple 419 sources of normative influences on condom use (e.g., partners, 420 parents, peers, media, sex education, etc.). Another important 421 limitation was that we did not systematically assess the role of the 422 partner in reported condom use. Clearly condom use is a dyadic 423 behavior, although there have been relatively few attempts to 424 integrate intrapersonal and relationship factors with individual-425 level factors in understanding an individual's decision to use 426 condoms (Harvey et al., 2006).

427 Despite the above limitations, we believe that our findings 428 contribute to a greater understanding of the mechanisms under-429 lying consistent condom use. In contrast to the existing individual-430 level models of safer sex that anchor the promotion of responsible 431 sexual behavior to rational decision-making, consistent condom 432 use may be best explained by habit. In fact, participants who scored 433 higher on the Calculative Scale (reflecting condom use for cost-434 benefit reasons) were less likely to have used a condom at both first 435 and most recent intercourse.

There are practical implications of such a "non-deliberative" model of condom use, particularly for sex education and STI/HIV prevention programs. Our findings support the recent recommendation that these programs should be introduced before the onset of sexual activity (UNESCO, 2009). Using condoms from the beginning of one's sexual life may increase the odds of habit formation. To facilitate the routine use of condoms, educational and preventive programs need to focus on the development of habitual condom use. Although habitual condom use does not represent a realistic goal for all sexually active young people, efforts to encourage the formation of such a habit are fully compatible with the need for a flexible and culturally sensitive approach to STI/HIV prevention.

Appendix. Items from the habitual, calculative, and normative condom use scales

Habitual condom use	I have developed a habit of using condoms Condom use is for me a standard part of lovemaking I do not think about using a condom, I just use it Condom use is not something I negotiate about — for me, sex without a condom is simply unacceptable If I did not use a condom, I would feel awkward It would be impossible to talk me into having sex without using a condom
Calculative condom use	I don't use condoms automatically, without first assessing the risks Whether I would use a condom or not depends on what I know about a partner I do not use a condom without first assessing the need to use it in a particular situation I use condoms only when I see good reasons for it I do not use condoms with sexual partners whose behavior I do not consider risky
Normative condom use	My friends' opinion influences my condom use I do not use condoms because it would mean that I do not trust my partner I use condoms because everybody else is using them I do not use condoms because my religion objects to it

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