

Often, HIV/AIDS interventions focus on persuading individuals to protect themselves from transmission by using a condom correctly and consistently or encouraging abstinence from sex. Many condom-use interventions have yielded positive results (e.g., Jemmott & Jemmott, 2000). However, HIV/AIDS testing may also contribute to inhibiting the transmission of the disease to the extent that individuals who test positive may reduce risky sexual behavior (Marks, Crepaz, Senterfitt, & Janssen, 2005) or choose to engage in sexual intercourse only with others who test positive. According to the CDC (2006), "reduction in viral load through timely initiation of HAART (highly active antiretroviral therapy) might reduce transmission, even for HIV-infected patients who do not change their risk behavior" (p. 6). Furthermore, knowledge of infection may also decrease the likelihood of perinatal transmission. Medical advances have afforded infected mothers the opportunity to protect her unborn child (CDC, 2006; Rotheram-Borus et al., 2001). According to Jemmott & Jemmott (2000), it typically takes 10 years for an HIV infection to develop sufficient clinical signs to warrant an AIDS diagnosis. This implies that a large proportion of the population may go a number of years without developing warning signs of HIV or AIDS infection, thus the infection remains unnoticed and untreated. While safer-sex campaigns should most certainly be encouraged, messages should also address HIV sero-status awareness.

I intend to conduct an experiment examining the relative utility of gain/loss frames and self/other focused consequences for HIV-test promotion. The experimental design is a 1 x 5 between subjects design, where each participant will receive one version of a frame/focal recipient condition. The conditions will be: gain-frame/self-interest,

Evidence suggests that the way in which a message is framed is differentially persuasive. In the domain of health communication, loss-framed messages tend to be more effective for detection behaviors and gain-framed messages tend to be more effective for prevention behaviors. This phenomenon can be explained by the tenets of prospect theory. According to prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), the utility of message framing (in terms of gains or losses) is a function of the level of risk or (un)certainly associated with a behavior. That is, people tend to be risk averse in the domain of gains, and risk seeking when there is a potential loss. Research stemming from Prospect Theory indicates that detection behaviors (e.g., mammography) are associated with risk and uncertainty because screening tests may reveal the presence of disease or illness (Apanovitch, McCarthy, & Salovey, 2003; Rothman & Salovey, 1997). Whereas, gain-frame messages are more appropriate for promoting prevention behaviors, where there is very little perceived risk or uncertainty involved (Devos-Comby & Salovey, 2002).

Unfortunately, there is little guidance in terms of how other message features might interact with the message frame. Much of the research involving framing uses what Rothman and Salovey (1997) refer to as “same consequence” framing. This method of operationalizing framing allows comparison between gain and loss frames in terms of their utility in promoting a behavior by manipulating the frame around a single outcome. Current research offers little guidance with regard to which types of outcomes (consequences) should be the focus of a particular frame. Certainly, if there is something to be gained or lost as a result of a particular action or inaction, there must be someone to enjoy those gains or suffer those losses.

gain-frame/other-interest, loss-frame/self-interest, loss-frame/other interest and an HIV-test promoting control condition.

This study was developed under the supervision of Dr. Robert Hornik with guidance from Dr. Joseph Cappella. The study “Selfish or Selfless? Self-interested Versus Benevolent Framed Messages in HIV-Antibody Test Promotion” received IRB approval (from IRB 8) in July 2007, and was funded by the Annenberg School for Communication’s summer fellowship (\$4,000) in the summer of 2007. This funding was used to support the researcher during the design stage of the experiment. The department also provides \$1000.00 per fiscal year for travel funding.