

Self-deception does not explain high-risk sexual behavior in the face of HIV/AIDS: A test from northern Kenya

Abstract:

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, there is resistance to changing sexual behavior despite survey data indicating high levels of knowledge about HIV transmission patterns and high-risk behavior. Previous explanations for this paradox emphasize indigenous cultural models. An alternative explanation is that, due to a strong natural selection for sexual gratification, individuals evoke the evolved trait of selfdeception to continue practicing high-risk sexual behavior. This alternative is tested using survey data from an Ariaal community in Marsabit District, northern Kenya. Results indicate that respondents make highly accurate self-assessments of HIV risk, negating the concept of self-deception in this study. These results are discussed within the larger context of the applicability of evolutionary theory to the AIDS pandemic.