

Who's cheating?

Agreements about sexual exclusivity
and subsequent concurrent
partnering in Australian couples

The Australian Longitudinal Study
of Health and Relationships

The team

Chief investigators

Anthony Smith, ARCSHS, La Trobe

Marian Pitts, ARCSHS

Juliet Richters, UNSW

Julia Shelley, ARCSHS and Deakin

Judy Simpson, USyd

Staff

Jason Ferris, Research Fellow, ARCSHS

Richard Ryall, Research Assistant, ARCSHS

Concurrency and exclusivity

- Concurrency is a significant driver of generalised STI epidemics
- Do Australian heterosexuals in regular relationships often have concurrent partners?
- What agreements do they have about sex outside the couple?
- What effects do agreements have on:
 - survival of the relationship?
 - sex outside the relationship?

Method

- Representative household sample
- 8656 Australians aged 16–64
- Selected by random digit dialling
- Computer-assisted telephone interview
- Wave 1: recruited 6597 people in regular relationships
- Wave 2: 78% interviewed a year later

We asked about relationship:

- ‘Do you expect to have sex only with her?’
- ‘Do you expect that she would have sex only with you?’
- ‘Have you discussed these expectations with her?’
- ‘And have you both explicitly agreed about this?’

Discussion about expectations

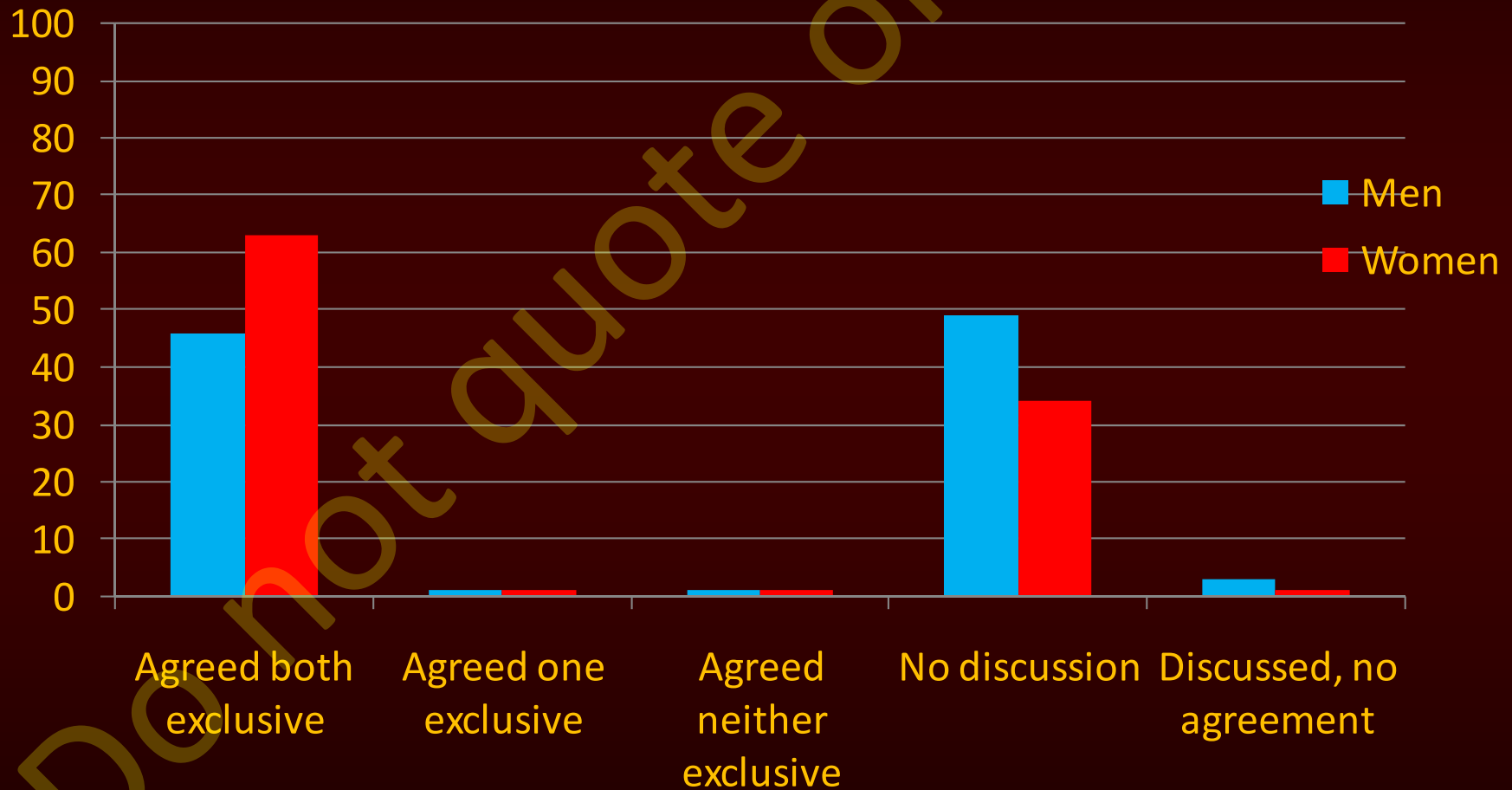
- 51% men, 66% women said they had discussed this
- Huge gender difference!
- Almost all who discussed it had come to a clear agreement (95% men, 98% women)



I don't think we should sleep with anyone else ...

Sleep? No problem

Agreements



A year later (of 78% still in study)

- 11% had broken up

Those who had broken up:

- Younger (<30)
- Shorter prior relationships (<3 years)
- Not married
- Not living together
- Had any agreement about exclusivity

% who had sex with someone else

Agreement category	Men %	Women %
Agreed both exclusive	4	1
Agreed one exclusive	50	30
Agreed neither exclusive	53	44
No discussion	4	2
Discussed, no agreement	5	5

Conclusions

- Australians have strong ethic against 'cheating'
- Sexual exclusivity, even in new relationships, is often assumed and not discussed
- Health promotion advice to engage openly with this topic in order to assess or avoid STI risk may be fruitless