

The relationship of the origins of the proposal for safe sex in AIDS to the multifactorial theory

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In 1982, within a year of the first description of AIDS in the US several theories about the causation of this disease had been advanced. Essentially, all could be placed in one of three categories.

These were:

- 1: A new - or newly recognized infectious agent was responsible, most probably a virus.
- 2: Multiple factors, both infectious and non infectious to which affected individuals had been exposed interacted to produce the disease. This was known as the multifactorial theory.
- 3: Some combination of the above two proposals.

These theories are discussed in an article published in 1983:

THE ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME: A DISCUSSION OF ETIOLOGIC HYPOTHESES

J. A. Sonnabend, Serge Saadoun. *Aids Research*. 1983, 1(2): 107-120. doi:10.1089/aid.1.1983.1.107¹.

In fact the third category is probably unnecessary. As Rene Dubos frequently points out, infection and disease are not synonymous terms. While a single agent may be responsible for infection, whether the infection remains asymptomatic or whether a disease results – as well as the severity of the

¹ <http://www.liebertonline.com/doi/abs/10.1089/aid.1.1983.1.107>

disease if it occurs will depend on several other factors, including the immunological response of the infected person and the presence of other associated conditions. To this extent infectious diseases – as opposed to infections, have also been described as multifactorial in nature. The word multifactorial, as used in the multifactorial theory, proposed to account for AIDS causation in 1983 is thus used in a different sense.

Unlike the single infectious agent theory, the multifactorial theory proposed that the disease develops as a result of an accumulation of exposures, but not from a single exposure. The importance of this regarding disease prevention is that if a condom is used to prevent disease prevention, according to the single agent theory a broken condom could be fatal. In contradistinction to this, according to the multifactorial theory, a broken condom would not have this result.

The publication “How to have sex in an epidemic: One approach” which suggested condom use, was quite explicit in stating that the cause of AIDS was unknown, that there was a single agent theory but the suggestions in the booklet were based on the multifactorial theory . This theory was then described in some detail, so that those individuals who believed that a broken condom could prove fatal might choose abstinence or some form of sexual activity that did not expose one to bodily fluids.

The association of the multifactorial theory and the first safe sex proposals is described in the booklet itself, but also in the following book by Richard Berkowitz.

Stayin' Alive: The Invention of Safe Sex by [Richard Berkowitz](#)

http://www.amazon.com/Stayin-Alive-Invention-Safe-Sex/dp/B000HWZ2KE/ref=ed_oe_h_bargain