Condom Use

An item in Random Samples (12 June, p. 1514) asserts that there has been no increase in condom use among teens. Evidence from two recent nationally representative surveys does not support this conclusion. Analyses of the 1988 National Survey of Adolescent Males indicate that condom use at most recent intercourse among sexually experienced metropolitan males had more than doubled since 1979 when a similar survey was conducted. In 1988, 58% of males 17 to 19 years old reported using a condom the last time they had intercourse compared with 21% in 1979 (*1*). Survey data from adolescent females corroborate the rise in condom use. Comparisons of sexually experienced females 15 to 19 years old interviewed by the National Survey of Family Growth indicate that condom use the first time they had intercourse rose from 23% in 1982 to 47% in 1988 (*2*).

Although reported condom use has risen dramatically in the last decade, the fact remains that large portions of sexually active teenagers have unprotected intercourse. Only one-third of the males interviewed in 1988 used condoms consistently in the last year. Therefore there is a great need for interventions like the one being tested by Elliot Aronson at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Moreover, the recent evidence about rises in condom use suggests that the contraceptive practices of teenagers can shift in response to external influences. Our analyses have found that participation in sex education and AIDS education is associated with modest rises in condom use (*3*).

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NSF and Duplicate Grant Submissions

Joseph Palca's article "Original grants only, please" (News & Comment, 29 May, p. 1275) could be misleading to some segments of the research community. Palca reports on a new policy that was recently announced by the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO) of the National Science Foundation (NSF). The new policy states that "proposals submitted to programs within the Directorate for Biological Sciences cannot be duplicates of proposals submitted to any other federal agency for simultaneous consideration." In his first paragraph, Palca clearly attributes the policy to BIO. Later on, however, the reference to BIO is replaced by a reference to NSF, giving the impression that all parts of the NSF follow the same policy.

Policies adopted by one NSF research support area do not necessarily apply to others. I direct the Division of Biological and Critical Systems (BCS) in the Engineering Directorate. The division includes programs in biomedical engineering and aiding the disabled and in biotechnology. Research proposals in these areas usually entail participation by multiple investigators from diverse disciplines or are directed by principal investigators with multidisciplinary backgrounds. Submitted simultaneously to other agencies, such proposals sometimes lead to joint funding.

For example, last year NSF and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute awarded a number of research grants in response to a joint request for applications. As another example, my division and the National Eye Institute jointly support a research grant for which NSF funds the basic engineering research elements while the National Eye Institute funds the clinical portions. Reviewed by either agency alone, this