Geosocial Networking Apps and Partner Services for MSM

David Katz, PhD MPH
University of Washington
Public Health – Seattle & King County

NCSD Engage
The Marriage of Shoe Leather and Modern Technology: A Skills-Building Workshop for DIS
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Outline

- Discussion re: DIS experiences with apps
- Background
- Geo-Social Networking Apps and Partner Services (G-SNAPS) Study
  - Focus groups
  - Online survey
- Group discussion of results
- Conclusions

DIS & Program Experiences?

- Have you used apps to trace or notify partners?
- How often are MSM telling you that they met their partner(s) on apps?
  - What information do/can they give you about these partners?
  - Are you or they able to notify the partners?
- How is your program working to address these issues?
- Has your program used apps for anything else?

GSN Apps: A Barrier to Partner Services?

- Geosocial networking apps (GSN) are nearly ubiquitous among partner-seeking MSM
- Pose unique challenges:
  - Lack of stable profiles
  - Messages stored for limited time
  - Profiles only visible by location
  - Partners may not exchange other contact information
- Like other IPS strategies:
  - Potential user/owner concerns about health department presence
  - Confidentiality concerns re: disclosing medical info on apps

Building Healthy Online Communities

- Consortium of public health leaders and gay partner-seeking websites and apps
- Focus on HIV/STI prevention online
- Founded by Dan Wohlfeiler and Jen Hecht in 2014
- Website/app owners have expressed:
  - Commitment to promote health of users
  - Interest in collaborating with public health
  - Desire for guidance re: health promotion

http://www.bhocpartners.org/

Supporting App-Based Partner Notification

- Health department profiles on apps to conduct partner services and provide health info
- Apps can make it easier to find previous partners:
  - Stable profiles
  - Longer storage
  - Provide lists of people users have chatted with
- Apps can make it easier to notify partners
  - Provide anonymous message
  - Contact information for health departments
  - Info about partner services

What Do We Need to Know?

What are acceptable/preferred approaches for PN on apps?

How much of a barrier are apps to partner notification?

Will having partner notification on apps affect app use?

What other health services do MSM want on apps?

GeoSocial Networking Apps and Partner Services Study

Study Overview

- Collaboration between Building Healthy Online Communities and UW

- **Objective:** Inform partner notification strategies and sexual health service provision via apps
  - Support health department policies and programming
  - Inform app owners re: user interests and support of app-based partner notification

Study Phases

Qualitative Phase (1)

Online focus group discussions

Community norms

Individual experiences

Inform survey

Quantitative Phase (2)

Online survey

Generalizable data

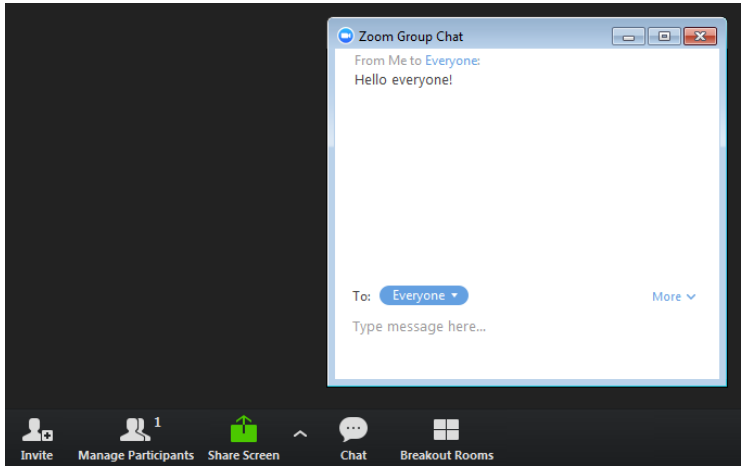
Validate qualitative results

Experiences in sub-populations

Phase 1: Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussion: Methods

- 4 online discussions of 6-8 partners (28 total)
- Chat function of Zoom web conferencing
- Participants = U.S. MSM age 18+ who met a partner via GSN app in last year
- Recruited through Facebook & Instagram
- Stratified by age (≥35 v. <35) and history of HIV/STI



Focus group discussion: Topics

How MSM meet and communicate with partners via GSN apps

Attitudes towards partner services

Thoughts re: health department presence on apps

Thoughts re: strategies for notifying partners using apps

Focus Group Summary

- Felt responsible for telling partners of HIV/STI exposures themselves
- Just want to be notified, regardless of who tells them or how
- Thought notification through health department profile was generally acceptable
  - Need a way to verify authenticity of profile
  - May be less acceptable to those living in rural communities or in anti-LGBTQ political environments
- Health departments need to build trust with the gay community on the apps

Phase 2: Online Survey

Online Survey: Methods

- Participants = U.S. MSM age 18+ who met a partner via GSN app in last year
- Recruited through Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat
- Oversampled MSM of color

Online Survey: Content

Demographics HIV/STI testing/history Sexual behavior	GSN app use
Partner notification via GSN apps	Exchange of contact information with partners on apps
Health department presence on apps	Health services offered via apps

Characteristics of 791 Survey Participants

Characteristic	% or Median (IQR)
Age (Median, IQR)	28 (21-45)
Race	
Non-Hispanic White	53%
Non-Hispanic Black	13%
Hispanic	28%
Other	6%
Census Region	
Northeast	15%
Midwest	19%
South	49%
West	26%
HIV-positive	13%
History of STI	27%

Assessing acceptability and preferences for app-based notification

- **Presented two scenarios:**
  1. Partner diagnosed with syphilis and notifies respondent
  2. Respondent diagnosed with syphilis and notifies partner

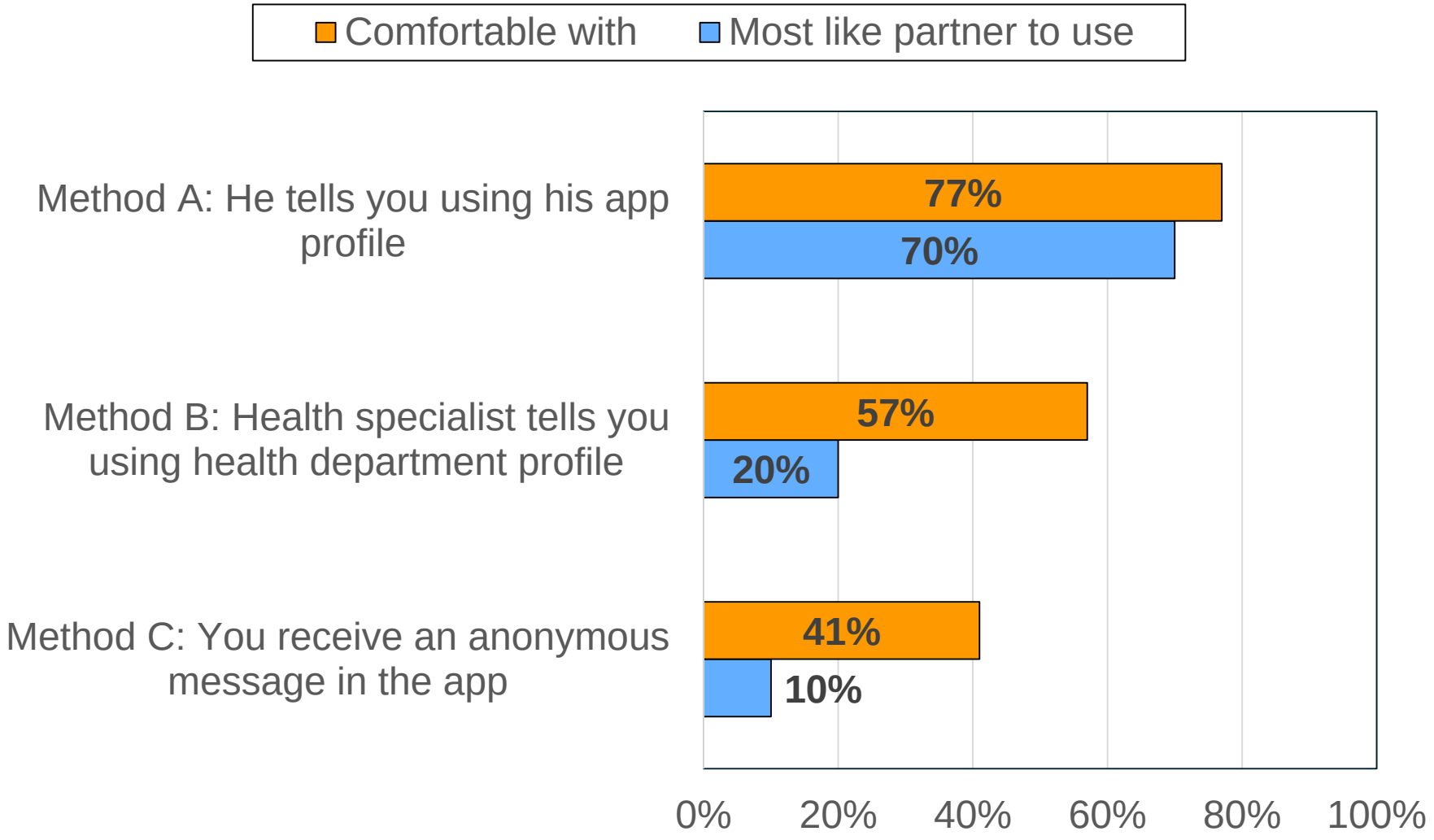
- **Present possible notification strategies**

- **Questions:**
  1. How comfortable would you be with each method
  2. Rank the methods from most like to use/have partner use to least like to use/have partner use

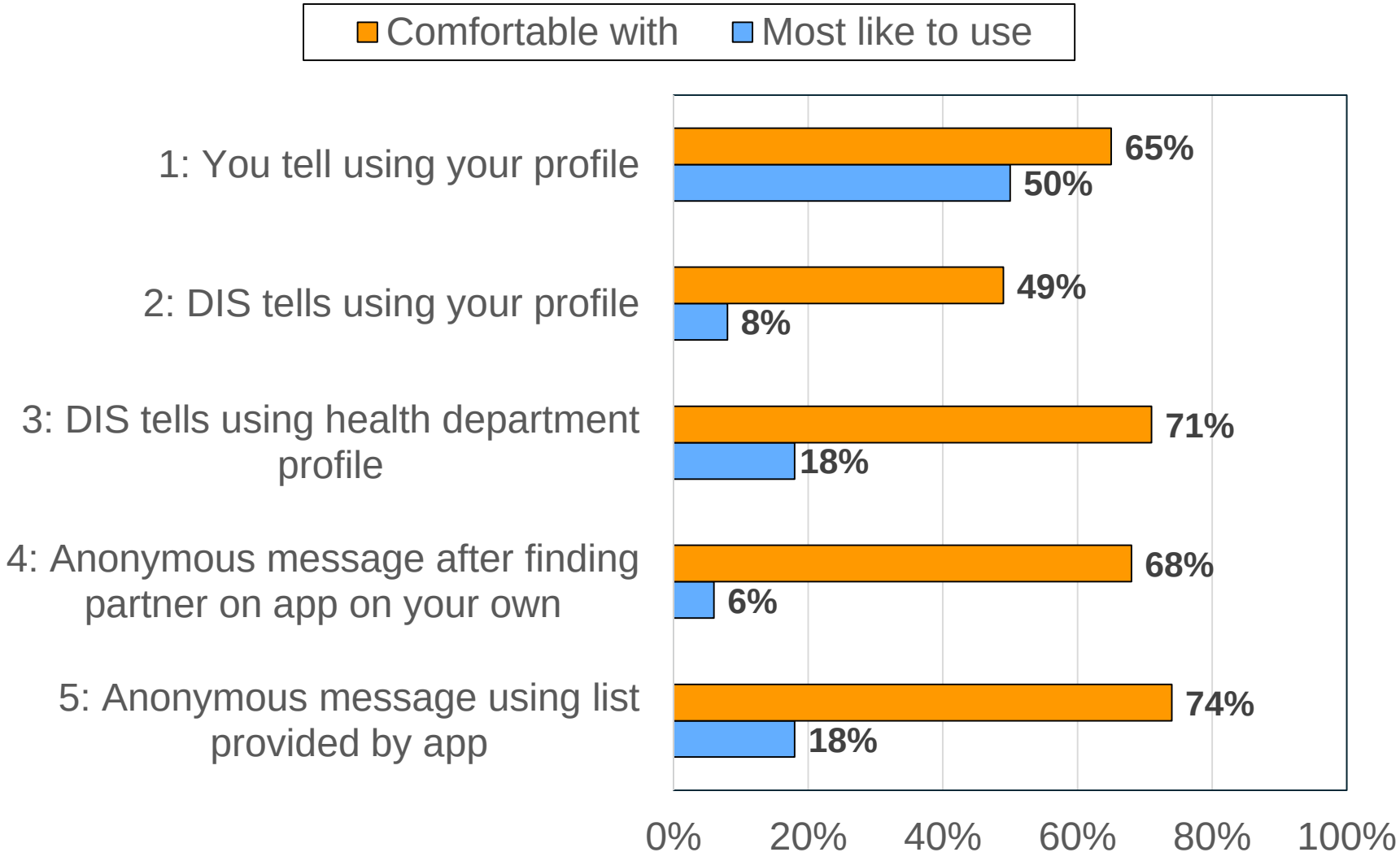
Notification strategies

Partner notifies you	You notify partner
Method A: He tells you using his app profile	**1:** You tell partner using your profile
Method B: DIS tells you using health department profile	**2:** DIS tells partner using your profile
	3: DIS tells partner using health department profile
Method C: You receive an anonymous message in the app	**4:** Send anonymous, pre-written message to partner by finding him in the app on your own
	5: Send anonymous, pre-written message to the partner using the list provided by the app

Acceptability and preferences for being notified by a partner with syphilis

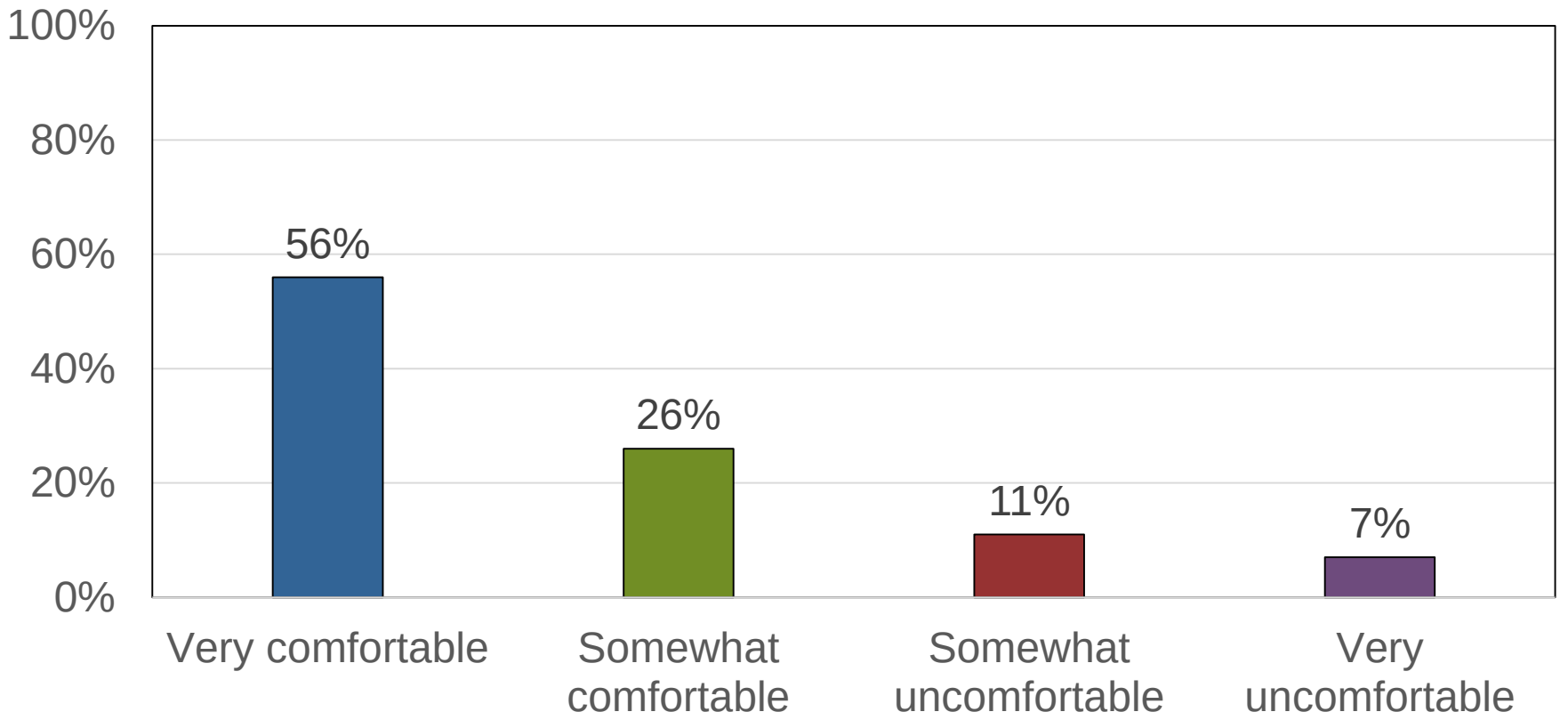


Acceptability and preferences for notifying a partner if diagnosed with syphilis

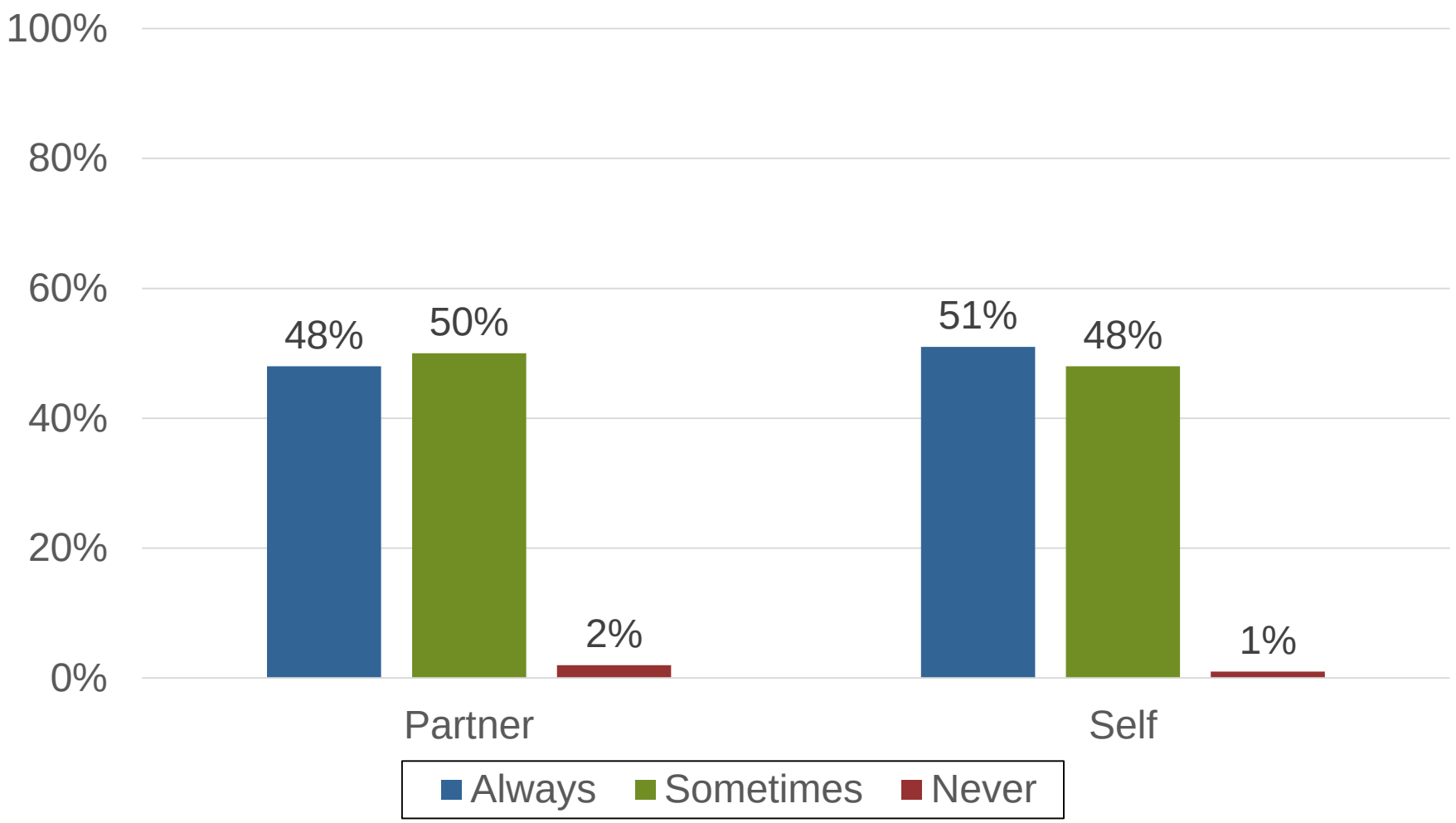


Health department presence on apps

How comfortable would you be with your local health department having a profile on your favorite dating/hookup app to provide health information and services?



How often would partners met via apps is there potential to contact using other info?



Real first and last name, phone number, email address, home address, work, social media handle

Other Contact Considerations

% of partners think could contact again	68%
% of partner blocked on apps	15%
Deleted profile in last year	57%
Keeps track of people might want to chat with again	73%

Survey Summary

- Would prefer to be notified by partner but >half were comfortable being notified by DIS on app
- Would prefer to notify partners on own but generally comfortable with DIS and anonymous messaging in apps
- Most very or somewhat comfortable with health department presence on apps
- Two-thirds thought they could contact partners again

  - Deleting accounts and blocking partners pose barriers

Conclusions

- Health departments should consider conducting partner notification via the apps
  - How profiles look matters
  - Need to build trust with community
- Apps are not always a barrier to other partner notification methods
  - Consider all other options & press for other contact info
- Opportunities for collaboration between public health and app owners to support app-based notification

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National Coalition of STD Directors
Promoting Sexual Health Through STD Prevention

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Contact: dkatz7@uw.edu