

I realize it may be a bit late, but I'm just discovering the wonderful '[The Wisdom of Whores](#)' by [Elizabeth Pisani](#) (and [this is her blog](#)). She's an epidemiologist working on AIDS and the book is full of information on the virus, the way it spreads and the way it is being dealt with. It's (surprisingly given the topic) a very fun read as well as a very informative one and I warmly recommend it. Moreover, it is of relevance to cultural epidemiologists.



At one point she compares different behaviors in order to explain which will be more prone to transmitting the virus (p.134ff). On the one hand you've got Simon who is married but sleeps regularly with a few other women - always the same ones. On the other hand you've got Caspar, who only sleeps with one woman at a given time but changes relatively often (say every year). After 10 years, Caspar will totalize more sexual partners, but he actually has less chances of passing the virus along because the chances of transmission are much higher right after the infection. If Simon gets infected and goes on sleeping with several women in the following weeks, he has a good chance of infecting all of them. But Caspar will mostly have chances to infect the women he's with at the time he gets infected.

I found that was a good example of the importance of taking into accounts details of the network structure and the way things get passed around. It's really straightforward to imagine a similar situation with culture. Imagine some kind of information that you only share with people you are very close to (let's say something only appropriate for pillow talk) but that you forget quite rapidly. Then you'll observe exactly the same pattern as for AIDS in that case.

Anyways. Read the book, it's great - you learn a lot about Indonesian transgendered men, Chinese prostitutes, UN officials and other interesting people.