

Condom or no condom? It's not what you say, it's how you say it

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Whether it's the man or the woman who suggests using a condom makes no difference to how he or she is viewed. However, how the woman suggests it makes a difference. If she highlights her sexuality by incorporating condoms into the sexual scenario as an erotic and fun activity, other women judge her more harshly than if she simply refuses to have sex without a condom or shares her concerns about sexually transmitted infections. Dr. Michelle Broaddus, from the Medical College of Wisconsin in the US, and colleagues' examination of the effects of the proposer's gender and their condom negotiation strategy on how they are perceived by others is published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

There are approximately 19 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections each year in the US, and nearly half of these occur among young people under the age of 25. Safer sexual practices rely on the use of condoms and there is some evidence that how couples communicate about, and negotiate, [condom use](#) influences how the proposer is viewed and whether or not condoms are actually used during intercourse.

Using two sexuality theories and one social role theory as frameworks, the authors carried out two studies looking at how women who suggest condom use are perceived compared to men (Study 1), and how specific condom negotiation strategies affect perceptions of a woman who uses them (Study 2).

In the first study, 150 undergraduate students were shown one of three videos of sexual encounters where either the man or the woman

suggested the use of a condom, or no condom was suggested. After viewing the scenario, they were asked to imagine how the proposer was viewed by their partner. They were also asked for their opinion of whether or not the filmed couple ended up having intercourse and what the chances were of them using a condom if they did.

The authors found that condom proposers were seen as more mature and less romantic than individuals who did not suggest condom use. The woman was not evaluated more harshly than the man, and in fact, she was seen as less promiscuous when she proposed a condom than when she did not. Participants saw condom use as equally likely no matter who suggested its use.

In the second study, 193 undergraduates looked at written vignettes of a sexual encounter in which the female used one of three common condom negotiation strategies: explanation i.e. sharing concerns about sexually transmitted infections; refusal i.e. no sex unless condom used; eroticization i.e. how hot sex would be with a condom and how uninhibited and sexy she would feel. The students were then asked to give their impressions of the woman's character based on a selection of traits.

Female students rated the female proposer as less nice, more promiscuous and less like the housewife type when she used the eroticization strategy, suggesting that women are harsher on other women who highlight their [sexuality](#). She was also seen as more exciting. Participants also perceived the couple as more likely to have sex when the female used the eroticization strategy. There was no difference in how the female's character was rated whether she used the refusal or explanation strategy - both traditional strategies. Finally, [condom](#) use was seen as equally likely in the three scenarios.

The authors conclude: "This line of research has implications for both

basic research on gender roles ... as well as applied research into the development of sexual risk reduction intervention content for men and women on how to more effectively communicate with partners when the goal is to engage in safer sex practices."

More information: Broaddus M et al (2010). 'It's not what you said, it's how you said it': Perceptions of condom proposers by gender and strategy. *Sex Roles*; [DOI 10.1007/s11199-009-9728-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9728-z)

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