

**Lust, trust and latex:**  
**Why young heterosexual men**  
**don't use condoms**

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don't use condoms**

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## **Statement of Authorship**

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the relevant Ethics Committee.

Signed ..... Date .....

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## **Abstract**

My research involves a critical analysis of the sexual cultures of young heterosexual Australian men. This research is driven by the need to understand and prevent the heterosexual sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS. I focus on young heterosexual men's understandings and experiences of condom use and non-use, given that condoms are a key means of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV.

I conducted in-depth interviews with seventeen men, using these to explore sexual practices and the meanings and sociosexual relations through which these are organised. This 'close-focus' qualitative approach is oriented to assessing the interplay between men's personal experience and the social relations of sexuality and gender. I draw on empirical feminist investigations of women's relation to HIV/AIDS, the critical scholarship on men and masculinities and masculine sexualities, and sociological scholarship on sexualities.

My research finds that young heterosexual men emphasise five themes in accounting for their non-use of condoms. First, men stress the risk of pregnancy rather than the risks of HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, and they respond to the former risk by relying on their partners' use of the Pill. Second, men perceive that wearing condoms decreases their penile sensation and that condoms are difficult to use. Third, men find that the "heat of the moment" of sexual episodes, their spontaneous and passionate ambience, makes it hard to incorporate condoms and, indeed, condoms destroy this "moment". Fourth, men privilege "trust" as fundamental to their sexual involvements, and they quickly define involvements as "relationships" and therefore as trusting and monogamous, such that they abandon condoms. Fifth, men believe that they are very unlikely to contract HIV because they see their social circles, institutions, the heterosexual community or heterosexual sex *per se* as safe and free of HIV/AIDS, so there is no need to wear condoms.

I compare these findings with the argument in the AIDS literature that heterosexual men's use of condoms is limited by several understandings associated with masculine sexuality and masculinity. I argue that these understandings do not appear to be widespread as the literature claims, some work in contradictory ways and are compatible with safe sex, and other sets of meanings are more influential in heterosexual men's unsafe sex. Men do not represent wearing condoms as feminising or homosexualising, nor as masculine. I conclude by exploring how heterosexual men could be encouraged to use condoms through appeals to notions associated with masculinity and masculine sexuality.

### **Note on textual conventions**

In quotations from research interviewees, ellipses in square brackets are used to indicate that text has been excised. Ellipses without square brackets indicate a brief pause in speech, while the inclusion of “[pause]” indicates a longer pause. In some cases interviews have been rendered more readable through the deletion of repeated words and such features of speech as “sort of”, “um” and “you know”. Emphasis in interviewee quotes is indicated with italics, and all emphases in interview quotes are original unless otherwise stated. Where the men’s words are paraphrased rather than quoted exactly, I use single rather than double quotation marks. Square brackets enclose authorial comment or explanation, to include the indication of aspects of the interviewees’ speech, such as [pause] and [laughs]. The interviewer’s speech is signalled by a paragraph break and “MF:”.