

# How feeling good about your lover might be bad for your sexual health

February 15 2016, by Blake Eligh

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A new study from U of T Mississauga psychology researcher John Sakaluk has found that the better you are bonded to your partner, the less likely you are to practice safe sex with them.

The three-part study surveyed heterosexual subjects online and in a lab setting, and asked participants to recall times when they held secure, anxious or avoidant [feelings](#) about another person. Once the mental mood was set, Sakaluk and co-researcher Omri Gillath asked participants a variety of questions to gauge feelings about [condom](#) use during sex.

According to Sakaluk, respondents who reported feeling more secure

with their partner also reported that they were less likely to use a condom. The more ambivalent they felt about their partner, the more likely they were to practice safe sex.

"Sex doesn't happen in an emotional vacuum," Sakaluk adds. "It's happening between two people. Even in a one-night stand, people are pursuing some kind of psychological and physical connection. There are a lot of feelings involved. "

"We used experimental methods to manipulate people's feelings about how secure they felt in their relationships," he says. The team then measured how those feelings of attachment or closeness might affect attitudes towards condom use.

According to Sakaluk, setting the mental mood helps to ensure better accuracy in responses. "Much of the data we have on psychology and [safe sex](#) is assessed through self-report surveys," he says, adding that that self-reporting can provide inconclusive data. "There's often the assumption that when a person has a positive attitude toward something, it will mean they'll engage in that behaviour, but it isn't always true."

Sakaluk's research found that when participants expressed [positive feelings](#) of security about a partner, they reported feeling that the other person was generally well-intentioned and trustworthy. These assumptions can have repercussions on attitudes towards sexual safety, he says.

"We see that they perceive sexual partners as less of a threat to their health, which results in more [negative attitudes](#) toward condom use," Sakaluk says. "If you feel generally good about other people's intentions, you'll be less likely to be concerned about unintended pregnancy or [sexually transmitted diseases](#). It's irrational, but you feel like you can trust the other person and bad things aren't going to happen."

"Security is generally a good thing—we want secure attachments in relationships, so it's interesting to see that feelings of security seems to promote unsafe sex," he says.

Canadian stats show reported rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea and infectious syphilis have been rising since the late 1990s, and this trend is expected to continue in Canada and other similarly developed countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom.

"My research shows that we have to consider the emotional context and how people might feel about those relationships as a part of the decision-making process to use a condom," he says. "When it comes to gut feelings about [sexual attitudes](#), it has real medical health consequences."

"The Causal Effects of Relational Security and Insecurity on Condom Use Attitudes and Acquisition Behavior" was published in the February 2016 edition of the Archives of Sexual Behavior.

**More information:** John Kitchener Sakaluk et al. The Causal Effects of Relational Security and Insecurity on Condom Use Attitudes and Acquisition Behavior, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2015). [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-015-0618-x](#)

Provided by University of Toronto

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