

There is more than one way to say 'no,' researchers find

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Kristen Jozkowski. Credit: University of Arkansas

A team of researchers looked at the ways students communicate refusal of sexual advances and found that, just as in conversations seeking consent for everyday activities, people express their refusal in a variety of ways beyond a direct verbal "no."

The team of U of A researchers led by Kristen Jozkowski, associate professor of [public health](#) in the College of Education and Health Professions, published the findings earlier this year in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*

The study was done through an anonymous paper-and-pencil survey administered to 773 heterosexual college students aged 18 to 25 at two large universities.

What the study found was that both men and [women](#) express their refusal to engage in sexual activity in three ways:

- Direct non-verbal refusals, which include turning away or otherwise physically distancing themselves from their partner.
- Direct verbal refusals, which include verbal expressions of refusal that include the word "no."
- Indirect non-verbal refusals, which includes using body language to refuse sex, such as not responding or touching the partner back.

"We communicate about sex the same way we do about anything else," Jozkowski said. "When someone asks us if we want to see a movie, we

don't shout 'No!' and leave the room. It violates our culture's norms of conversation."

Refusals could also involve delays in answering or giving excuses, rather than outright rejections, according to the study.

Jazkowski explained that sexual-assault prevention programs, in focusing on the explicit "no," place the responsibility on women to verbally say "no." This potentially implies that if a woman doesn't say "no" clearly enough, she may be at fault if she is sexually assaulted.

Jozkowski pointed out that there is also a risk in being too explicit. "Women walk an emotional tightrope." She explained. "If we refuse too forcefully, we're called crazy or, worse, risk angering the perpetrator, which may escalate into violence."

Provided by University of Arkansas

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