Gender roles and norms play a key role in sexual behavior between men and women. It is often assumed that men should dominate women sexually. This assumption may lead to loss of both power and the ability to control sexual behavior among women and men, as well as lead to increased sexual risk-taking, such as not using a female condom. The new study, by Dr. Lisa Rosenthal from Yale University in the US, and her colleagues, is published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

**Social dominance** orientation is a measure of people's level of support for social power inequalities and hierarchy. The belief is linked to greater hostile sexism, more negative attitudes towards women's rights, a greater tolerance of sexual harassment and a greater preference for traditional gender roles. Rosenthal and team examined whether the extent to which both women and men endorse social dominance orientation explains gender dominance and dynamics in heterosexual relationships.

A total of 357 undergraduate women and 126 undergraduate men from a Northeastern US university took part in the study. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on a computer, next to which there was a bowl of female condoms. The researchers assessed the students' social dominance orientation, the extent to which they believed that men should dominate sexually, how confident they felt in sexual situations, as well as the number of female condoms they took away with them.

Overall, women were less likely than men to endorse the view that men should dominate sexually. The more men and women believed that social power inequalities and hierarchy were valid, the more likely they were to endorse the belief that men should dominate sexually, and the less likely they were to feel confident in sexual situations and consider using female condoms.

The authors conclude: "These findings suggest