**Students, and Brand Names, and Condoms, Oh My!**
By: Michaela Brown

At Thiel College, there is a popular event called Naughty Bingo. This event is just like regular bingo, but the chips/markers have been replaced with condoms. The condoms are always generic ones to save on cost and students are encouraged to take as many as they would like home. However, every year students tell each other not to use the condoms they take because they are "cheap" and probably "do not work." These same generic condoms that cause so much controversy are provided by our Health Services for free. What if they provided name brand condoms instead? This study will look at whether name brand condoms are taken more frequently than generic condoms by college students when offered for free.

## Literature Review

A study by researchers Malekinejad et al. (2017) looked at the effectiveness of community-based condom distribution interventions; they hypothesized that adding co-interventions would increase the effectiveness of these programs. The researchers used databases to find relevant trials to analyze. When the results were narrowed down, they divided the trials into three groups: ongoing, ongoing-plus, and coupon-based. These groups gave unlimited access to condoms, unlimited access to condoms plus holding co-interventions, and coupons to be redeemed for free condoms, respectively. The results showed that each group had its own positive effect. The first group reduced condomless sex, the second reduced multiple sexual partners, and the third reduced condomless sex in females. The hypothesis was not supported, but the co-interventions still had a positive effect. These findings show the significance of having access to condoms in reducing unprotected sex.

A study by Cohen, Scribner, and Bedimo (1999) looked at the impact of prices on condom usage. Researchers replaced the free condom programs of participating businesses with programs that provided condoms at a low cost. To conduct the study, they surveyed participants before the price change, after the price change, and then nine months after the first survey. When participants were first surveyed, 57% obtained free condoms and 77% had used a condom during their most recent sexual encounter. After the price increased, the results decreased to 30% and 64%, respectively. This result demonstrates the importance of having free condoms available because cost is a barrier.

Varman and Sudarvel (2021) conducted a study to look at the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence brand preference in coffee. To obtain data for the study, the researchers designed a questionnaire for coffee consumers which received 400 responses. The respondents answered questions about what brand of coffee they preferred, what motivated them to purchase that brand, where they bought their coffee, what size product they usually buy, and how often they purchase it. Varman and Sudarvel also collected secondary data from journals and websites about intrinsic and extrinsic factors on consumption. The results of the study showed that many respondents preferred BRU brand coffee, social media influences them, many buy coffee from the department store, they prefer to buy 50 grams of coffee, respondents buy coffee weekly, and

intrinsic and extrinsic factors significantly influence brand preference. The outcome of this study implies that perceptions of a brand (intrinsic factors), as well as things like pricing and availability (extrinsic factors) influence what consumers purchase. This research is related to the current research because I will also be looking at how different factors influence brand preference.

Sweat et al. (2012) conducted a study on the social marketing of condoms and how this can increase condom use. To obtain data for the study, the researchers conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions where condoms were sold and marketed through promotional campaigns. The results of the study showed that condom social marketing significantly increases condom use. The outcome of this study implies that proper marketing campaigns can increase safe sexual practices. This research is related to the current research because it shows that there is more to encouraging safe sexual practices than providing free condoms.

Researcher Agha (2003) conducted a study on the effect of mass media campaigns on risk perception, self-efficacy, and several other condom-related behaviors. To obtain data for the study, Agha administered a questionnaire that asked about participants exposure to branded and generic media about condom use, as well as their opinions on personal risk perception, self-efficacy, condom effectiveness, condom availability, and embarrassment in obtaining condoms. The results of the study showed that those exposed to branded media had a greater belief in the efficacy of condoms and experienced less embarrassment in purchasing condoms. While higher exposure to advertising was associated with positive outcomes, exposure to generic media had weaker relationships. The outcome of this study implies that branded media campaigns are also a significant part of promoting condom usage. This research is related to the current research because not only do the brands of products matter, but branded advertisements are important as well.

Tremling et al. (2019) conducted a study to evaluate the quality of condoms in the Dominican Republic. To obtain data for the study, researchers selected eight brands of condoms with suspected quality issues, and two brands of condoms that are known to be high quality. The researchers then tested the condoms for visual defects, freedom from holes, package seal integrity, packaging and marking, lubricant quality, dimensions, and airburst pressure and volume. The results of the study showed that five of the ten brands were of poor quality and posed a serious health risk. The two control brands did not have any quality concerns. The outcome of this study implies that condoms need to be regularly tested for adequate quality to ensure the safety of users. This research is relevant to the current research because if there is not frequent testing of the quality of condoms, then students might be justified in distrusting generic condom brands.

Milhausen et al. (2013) conducted a study on prevalence and predictors of condom use in college students. To obtain data for the study, a survey was sent out to college students. This survey asked students about their preferred contraceptive method and last used contraceptive method, reasons for condom use or non-use, concern about STI and pregnancy, access to

condoms, and sexual health knowledge. The results of the study showed that less than half of participants had used a condom at their last sexual encounter and the largest predictor of condom use was condoms as the preferred contraceptive. The outcome of this study implies that more education on the benefits of condom use could increase safe sexual practices. This research is related to the current research because it shows the low rates of condom usage among college students.

Lake et al. (2019) conducted a study on name brand assessment preferences among human resource professionals and industrial-organizational psychologists, focusing on trust in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The researchers hypothesized that a preference for name brands would be associated with a preference for the MBTI. They also hypothesized that human resource professionals would be more likely to have name brand preference, and therefore a higher preference for the MBTI, than industrial-organizational psychologists. Another hypothesis the researchers made was that an intuitive decision-making style, compared to a rational decision-making style, would lead to increased trust in the MBTI. To obtain data for the study, the researchers recruited 112 human resource professionals and 75 industrial-organizational psychologists. To begin, participants answered a question that asked them to rate the importance of an assessment having a recognizable name. These participants were then given a questionnaire that assessed two forms of trust: cognitive and affective. The results of the study showed that preference for name brand assessments led to greater trust in the MBTI. The results also showed that this preference was stronger in human resource professionals than in industrial-organizational psychologists. This information was surprising to the researchers because both groups of respondents said they did not have a strong preference for name brand assessments. The outcome of this study implies that name brands may have an influence on people that they are not aware of. This research is related to the current research because it shows that even professionals are affected by the influence of name brands, even if they are not aware of it.

Skaczkowski et al. (2018) conducted a study to examine the influence of cigarette brands on the experience of smoking. These researchers hypothesized that the participants' smoking experience when the brand name was known would reflect their opinions of that brand. In this study, there were 93 participants from the ages of 18-39. To obtain data for the study, participants were given a survey before smoking to provide an understanding of their perceptions on brands of cigarettes. They would each smoke two identical cigarettes; one would be in the brand packaging and the other would be presented on a tray. The order these were smoked in would be randomized. After smoking the first cigarette, participants would rate the experience and then take a ten-minute break. The same steps would be repeated after smoking the second cigarette. The results of the study showed that the cigarettes with the brand visible were rated more favorably than the plain ones. They also found that the staleness ratings were higher for the unlabeled cigarette. The outcome of this study implies that brand names can influence, not only the way people perceive the quality of a product, but also the way a person experiences a product as well. This is related to the current research because similar questions are being asked, but different products will be used.

The model study for my research was conducted by Williams et al. (2001). This study looked to see if having a variety of condom brands available would affect the amount taken by participants. In Phase 1, researchers placed a bin in exam rooms of two clinics; the bins were filled with one brand of condoms. During Phase 2, the set up was the same except there were now multiple brands of condoms provided instead of just one. At the end of each phase, the number of condoms remaining was recorded. For one clinic, having a variety of condom brands available doubled the number taken, but there was not a significant difference at the other clinic. My study will be similar in design; I will have bins of free condoms available for participants to take. However, instead of looking at the effect of the variety available, I want to see what difference the brands themselves make. This information can help Health Services better cater to the student body and encourage safe sex practices.

*Current Study*

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the student body and whether they have a brand preference for condoms. By gaining a better understanding, I can assist Thiel College in providing better access to resources that encourage safe sex practices. From personal observations, I have noticed that students seem to have less trust for the condom brands they do not recognize. Previous studies I have found focused on the variety of brands provided; I want to look at the effect of brand names themselves. I hypothesize that students will show a preference for the name brand condoms over the generic condoms.

**Method**

*Participants*

The participants of the experimental portion consisted of Thiel College students currently living in any of the five resident halls on campus. Participants were randomly assigned to a group based on the floor they are living on; however, since I was not able to monitor who takes from the condom supplies, I do not know the exact number of participants or exact demographic information. In addition to the experimental portion of this study, there was also a survey. This survey was sent out via email to the student body at Thiel College; there were 85 people who responded. The respondents were 64% female, 35% male, and 1% chose not to disclose their gender. The ages of respondents ranged from 18 to 26, with the average age being 20.

*Materials*

The materials I used for the experimental study were simple; I used a supply of generic condoms and brand-name condoms that lasted for two weeks of research. This study also required approximately 20 bins to store the condoms on each floor of the resident halls. I also needed adhesive material to hold the bins of condoms when there was not a table available to use. The materials also included some kind of signage indicating that the condoms were free and were meant to be taken. The variables were measured by manual counting of the condoms. The survey was distributed online. It consisted of ten questions about recognizability of condom brands, how likely respondents were to trust specific brands, and if they prefer name brand condoms over generic condoms.

*Research Design*

This study was a post-test-only design. There were two groups: Group 1 was given access to generic condoms and Group 2 was given access to brand name condoms. Participants were randomly assigned to a group depending on which floor they lived on; each floor was assigned to a group using a random number generator program. The independent variable was the brand of condoms assigned to each group and the dependent variable was the number of condoms that were taken from each supply.

*Procedure*

Bins containing condoms were placed on each floor of the resident halls on Thiel College's campus. They were in an easy to see location that the participants frequently walked past. Participants were encouraged to take condoms by signs that indicated they were free. At the end of each day, I counted the condoms left and recorded the data. I made sure to replenish the supplies as needed.

## Results

Before testing the study hypothesis, the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The main study variables included the type of condom and number of condoms taken. The type of condom was operationalized as participants being provided a free supply of either Trojan condoms or CautionWear condoms. The number of condoms taken was operationalized as the total percentage of condoms taken from the original number that was supplied. For the type of condom variable, I calculated the counts and percentages for each group. For the number of condoms taken variable, I calculated the mean, standard deviation, and range. The main study hypothesis was tested using inferential statistics. I hypothesized that participants who received Trojan condoms would take a significantly higher number than those who received CautionWear condoms. The inferential analysis I performed was an independent samples t-test. In the analysis, the type of condoms was the independent variable with participants randomly assigned to two groups. The groups were supplied with Trojan condoms or CautionWear condoms. The dependent variable was the number of condoms taken.

*Descriptive Statistics*

For the type of condom variable, there were three floors in the Trojan group and three floors in the CautionWear group; there were approximately 146 participants in each group. For the number of condoms taken variable, the mean percentage of condoms taken was 77% with a standard deviation of 32% and a range of 0% to 100% taken.

*Inferential Statistics*

An independent samples t-test was computed to assess the effect of the type of condoms on the number taken. There was a significant effect of the type of condoms on the number taken, $t(28)=5.036$, $p=.000$, with the name brand group and the generic group having significantly different mean values. The mean of condoms taken for the name brand group was 98.67% (SD=5.16), while the mean of condoms taken for the generic group was 55.33% (SD=32.92) (*Figure 1*).

*Survey*

After the experimental study was completed, a survey was sent out to the student body at Thiel College. The first question asked respondents to rate how much they recognized the eight brands listed on a Likert Scale of 1-4, 1 being not recognized at all and 4 being most recognizable. The eight brands were Kimono, LeloHex, Trojan, Roman, Lifestyles, ONE, Durex, and B, which were selected from the products available at a local store. Trojan condoms were rated as the most recognizable with a mean response of 3.78 out of 4. Durex condoms were next in recognizability with a mean response of 2.98 out of 4. The other five brands all had mean responses of less than 2 out of 4, the order from highest to lowest being Lifestyles (1.93), Roman (1.92), ONE (1.62), Kimono and LeloHex (1.07), and B (1.02).

The next section of questions asked about respondents' opinions of name brand condoms compared to generic condoms. These questions were answered using a Likert scale of 1-4, 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree. The first question in this section asked if the respondents believed that all brands of condoms are effective; the mean response was 2.7 out of 4. The next question asked if they trusted name brand condoms more than generic brand condoms; the mean response was 3.26 out of 4. Respondents were also asked if they were more likely to use generic brand condoms over name brand condoms. The responses to this question were reverse coded. The mean response to this question was 3.24 out of 4. The next question was also reverse coded; it asked respondents if they thought generic brand condoms were more effective than name brand condoms. The mean response was 3.19 out of 4. The final question of this section asked respondents if they were more likely to buy name brand condoms than generic brand condoms; the mean response was 3.52 out of 4.

The final section of the survey asked respondents to provide their condom brand preference, if they had one, and then to rank the eight condom brands previously mentioned based on how likely they were to use them. 56% of respondents reported that they did not have a condom brand preference, 29.8% of respondents preferred a type of Trojan brand condom, 7.1% of respondents preferred a type of Lifestyle brand condom, and 3.6% preferred Durex condoms. Of the eight brands listed, respondents reported that they were most likely to use Trojan condoms (1.23), followed by Durex (2.25), Roman (4.49), Lifestyles (4.53), Kimono (5.13), ONE (5.19), LeloHex (5.65), and B (7.52).

## Discussion

This research shows that students have a strong preference for more recognizable, or name brand, condoms over less recognizable, or generic, condoms. My hypothesis was supported by the results of this study; students took an average of 99% of Trojan condoms compared to only 55% of CautionWear condoms. The results of this study are supported by previous research on the topic of branding and how name brands affect a person's perception of a product. From the survey, I found that students did not recognize a majority of condom brands available at a local store, and that of these brands, Trojans were the most recognized. Students also reported that they did not believe that all condom brands are effective, were more likely to trust, buy, and use name brand condoms compared to generic brand condoms, and believed that name brand condoms were more effective than generic brand condoms. While the majority of students

reported that they did not have a condom brand preference, those that did have a preference only preferred one of three brands. When asked to rank condoms based on how likely they would use them, most students ranked Trojan condoms as their first choice. In fact, Trojan condoms were never ranked below students' top three choices. These results strongly support the idea of providing specific brands of condoms to students based on preferences.

The cost of the name brand condoms was the biggest limitation in this study. While I was able to receive the generic condoms for free from Thiel College's Health Services, I had to purchase the name brand condoms. The $50 budget was only enough to purchase three boxes (108 condoms) of Trojan condoms. Because of this limited supply of name brand condoms, I had to significantly reduce the number of floors that participated in this study. At the beginning of my experiment, I put out ten condoms on each floor. However, due to the large amounts of condoms that students were taking, and the rapidly dwindling supply of condoms, I had to reduce the number I was providing to five each night. This may have dissuaded some students from taking condoms because of the lower supply. Another factor that may have dissuaded students from taking the CautionWear condoms was that they were labelled as "large fit"; however, this is the standard condom that Health Services provides to students. A possible error in my survey data may have occurred during the reverse coded questions; respondents may have read the questions incorrectly and answered differently than they would have if the question was read correctly. Several responses seemed to have answers that did not line up with the other answers given, which may have led to a skewed mean response.

Future research should focus on whether or not students actually use the condoms provided to them. While students may be taking the free condoms provided, it does not show if there is an increase in safe sex practices. The benefits of providing name brand condoms to students should also be further researched. It would be beneficial to research the cost of these condoms and if the benefits outweigh the cost of the more expensive product. While doing the background research for this study, it was incredibly difficult to find literature on condom preferences and the effectiveness of different brands. There is a large gap in the research about condoms, brand preferences, and effectiveness. Further research should be done to bridge this gap in the literature. Research should also be done on how to best promote the use of condoms, what makes people more likely to use condoms, and how we can best educate on the benefits of using condoms, not only for pregnancy prevention, but also STI prevention.

If Health Services provided free, name brand condoms to students, they would constantly be refilling the supply. While this type of condom may be more effective, it is worth looking into the benefits of providing condoms that students prefer. While this research will probably not change the condoms handed out during Naughty Bingo, it may be a catalyst to changing those that are provided year-round.

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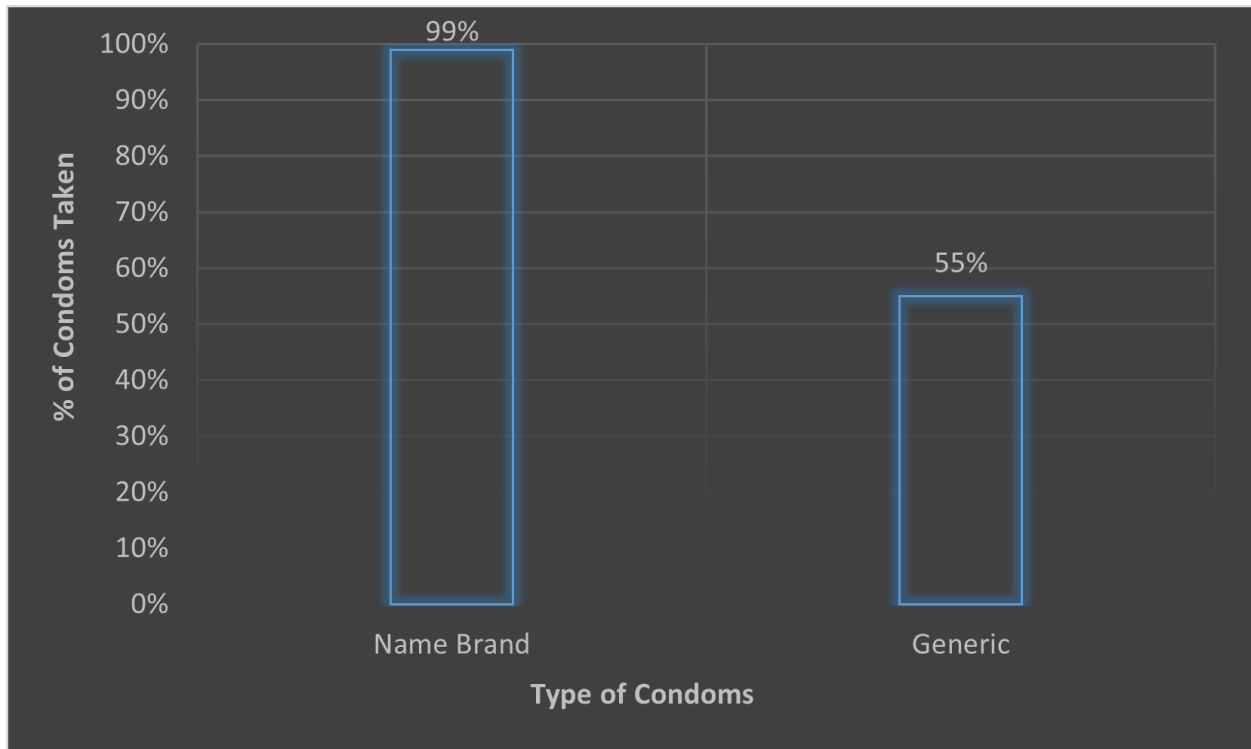**Appendix A**

Bar Chart of Inferential Statistics



*Figure 1.* Correlation between the type of condom and the percentage taken.