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Original Article

Safe Sex and the Debate over Condoms on Campus in the 1980s: Sperm Busters at Harvard and Protection Connection at the University of Texas at Austin

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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, college students in the United States helped to destigmatize the distribution and use of condoms. They shifted their aims from preventing unwanted pregnancy to stopping the spread of sexually transmitted infections including the newly identified acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Two student-led initiatives to deliver condoms after hours at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts and the University of Texas at Austin show regional and temporal differences in sexual mores as awareness of AIDS increased. These male students adopted a non-pharmaceutical intervention to prevent pregnancy and disease in the context of increased marketing of Trojan® brand condoms. Interviews with co-founders reveal how the students grappled with backlash from family members and campus administrators less enthusiastic about their popularization of condoms. Co-founders described how media attention affected their college experiences and how condom companies changed campus culture. Overall, large non-pharmaceutical companies such as Trojan® and small condom-resellers such as those at Harvard and the University of Texas at Austin reshaped cultural norms around safe sex as awareness of AIDS grew between 1985 and 1987.

KEYWORDS: Condoms; History of medicine; Reproductive Health; AIDS Epidemic; HIV Prevention; Harvard; University of Texas at Austin; Non-pharmaceutical interventions; Male Contraception; College Campuses; Safe Sex.

For people who came of age when condoms lay around college dorms in clear glass bowls like candies, it is hard to recall how controversial condoms were in the 1980s. Who should have

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access to them, where and when? Should college students? Should prisoners?[1] Perhaps even more surprising is that if and when institutions allowed condoms, they were often privately distributed, and individuals had to pay for them. In the United States over the course of a decade, condoms went from being a taboo product sold discreetly to a freely circulated necessity. Within a decade, condoms became a mainstream technology to avoid pregnancy and infections without using pharmaceuticals.

Young people were in the vanguard of trying to increase use and access to condoms as cases of a newly defined disease, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) rose from the mid-1980s. College-aged individuals were among the first to come to terms with how their nascent sexual practices would need to shift given the new incurable disease. But college administrators were not always ready for them to popularize condoms. For instance, male students set up condom distribution companies at Harvard University and the University of Texas at Austin (UT) in 1985 and 1986 respectively. They met both resistance and acceptance from college officials as people contested the social acceptability of condoms. College students around the US debated condoms on campus and followed the Harvard Sperm Busters and UT Protection Connection in their student newspapers. In South Carolina, students at Winthrop College read in the campus newspaper how the six freshman who set up a condom distribution company from their dorms at Harvard had to shut down operations. "Harvard busted the sperm busters."[2] Unlike the slightly later UT company, the students at Harvard were just ahead of the curve and met quick reprisals.

With the advent of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s in the US, the scientific information was changing quickly, and the public was unclear as to how to respond to this new incurable disease. Did it mean sex was over, or that it would need to be practiced differently? While their parents were in shock and told them to just avoid sex, and even kissing, college students were soon ready to adapt to the new pathogen. By 1985, student newspapers at least were reporting, "Sex is being talked about openly as never before. 'Condom,' a previously off-color word, is now used freely and without embarrassment. You hear it nightly on news broadcasts and you see it in television and newspaper ads. 'Safe sex' is the watchword for the 1980s."[3]

The students at Harvard and the University of Texas at Austin participated in a new pragmatic effort to make sex "safe" around the world.[4] The student entrepreneurs took up safe sex as the term changed from meaning, from security from violence between sexual partners to reduction in risk of sexually transmitted infections.[5] They were swiftly adapting techniques that physicians and nurses had started to suggest to sexually active patients that were not yet widely taught in US schools by 1985 when they entered university.[6] These students were also mostly White cis-heterosexual men, providing a different story than the now well-documented accounts of the role of gay activists in popularizing safe sex in the US.[7] When compared to European

1 John Gravois, "Texas Inmates May Get OK to Have Condoms: AIDS Panel Also Approves Anti-discrimination language," *Houston Post*, 19 November 1988, A14; Mary Sylla, Nina Harawa, and Olga Grinstead Reznick, "The First Condom Machine in a US Jail: The Challenge of Harm Reduction in a Law and Order Environment," *American Journal of Public Health* 100 (2010): 982-985; Dan Royles, "Tales from Behind the Wall: ACT UP/Philadelphia and HIV in Prisons," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 143 (2019): 391-393.

2 "Harvard Sperm Busters Close Up Shop," *Johnsonian*, 25 November 1985, 3.

3 John Anderson and Kevin McHargue, "Rays of Hope: AIDS Has Changed the Way We Deal with Sensitive Issues," *Daily Texan*, 13 March 1987, 4.

4 J.H. Hubley, "AIDS in Africa — A Challenge to Health Education," *Health Education Research* 3 (1988): 41-47; Hong Shang, Junjie Xu, Xiaoxu Han, Jessica Spero Li, Kelly C. Arledge, Linqi Zhang, "Bring Safe Sex to China," *Nature* 485; 7400 (2012): 576-577; R.W. Connell, June Crawford, G.W. Dowsett, Susan Kippax, *Sustaining Safe Sex: Gay Communities Respond to AIDS* (London: Routledge, 2013).

5 Thomas R. Blair, "Safe Sex in the 1970s: Community Practitioners on the Eve of AIDS," *American Journal of Public Health* 107 (2017): 872-879.

6 L.C. Andrist, "Taking a Sexual History and Educating Clients About Safe Sex," *Nursing Clinics of North America* 23 (1988): 959-973.

7 Blair, "Safe Sex in the 1970s." See also Dan Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2020).

countries, students in the US had fewer avenues for inexpensive contraceptives and less explicit sex education lessons in schools in the early 1980s.[8] Coming of age during the administration of President Ronald Regan (1981-1989), these students circumvented the more conservative approach to shaping teen behavior in schools that included abstinence education and First Lady Nancy Regan's "Just Say No" campaign to teach students to never use drugs.[9]

In the 1980s, the founders of both Harvard Sperm Busters and UT's Protection Connection provided quick access to Trojan® condoms, a brand that was gaining market share in this period. While their parents might have relied exclusively on birth control pills for women, and their grandparents on barrier methods including condoms, these young men were in a sense returning control over contraception to male students.[10] As one Trojan® condom advertisement put it in 1987, "Very often the best contraceptive for a woman is the one for a man."[11] Theirs was a brief moment when young men took more accountability for preventing pregnancy on college campuses. When these companies emerged, it was still highly novel for students to distribute condoms amongst themselves using a call-in night delivery service. With growing concerns over HIV/AIDS, the founders of Protection Connection in Texas were then bolstered in their efforts through government support. US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop published a detailed blue booklet explaining all the ways condoms could be used to prevent AIDS in 1986 and testified before Congress in 1987, mentioning Trojan® brand specifically. This gave greater cover for condom brands to promote and advertise their wares and for campus condom resellers to flourish. Within several years, university campuses across the US widely advocated condom use among students.

Condoms emerged as a type of intervention people could deploy to stop the transmission of diseases without medications. In the initial stages of the HIV/AIDS outbreak in the US there were no clear pharmaceutical interventions to cure or treat the new viral infection. Thus, all the options people had to combat AIDS were non-pharmaceutical and included complementary medicines such as herbs and vitamin supplements to treat symptoms and enhance immunity. Stigma around HIV began to decrease slightly with the advent of pharmaceuticals that could be taken daily to suppress the virus and dramatically extend the life of HIV+ individuals. By the early 1990s, researchers began to contrast these new drugs with non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to prevent the spread of AIDS, including condoms.[12] The term NPI also gained traction with the advent of new drugs to treat influenza in the early 2000s to denote options such as face masks and social distancing used during the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic.[13] With the approval of PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) by 2012 in the US allowing for people to participate in unprotected sexual intercourse with virtually no risk of contracting HIV, cultures of condom use shifted again with people less likely to rely on non-pharmaceutical

8 Alexandra Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S. Government's Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 146.

9 Emily Dufton, *Grass Roots: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Marijuana in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

10 In the 1930s, women in the UK relied on men to purchase condoms. Donna J. Drucker, *Contraception: A Concise History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 41.

11 Carter-Wallace, "Trojan Advertisement," *Ebony*, March 1987, 57.

12 D.M. Gibb, "Reduction of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV Infection: Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions and Their Implementation," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 9 (1998): 19-21.

13 Use of the term NPI increased after the rollout of drugs to treat flu. Hans P. Duerr, Stefan O. Brockmann, Isolde Piechotowski, Markus Schwehm, Martin Eichner, "Influenza Pandemic Intervention Planning Using *InfluSim*: Pharmaceutical and Non-pharmaceutical Interventions," *BMC Infectious Diseases* 7 (2007): 76. This coincided with a wave of research on ways people successfully combatted the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic before antibiotics and many pharmaceuticals. H. Nishiura, "Time Variations in the Transmissibility of Pandemic Influenza in Prussia, Germany, from 1918-19," *Theoretical Biology and Medical Modelling* 4 (2007): 20; Howard Markel, Alexandra M. Stern, J. Alexander Navarro, Joseph R. Michalsen, Arnold S. Monto, Cleto DiGiovanni, Jr., "Non-pharmaceutical Influenza Mitigation Strategies, US Communities, 1918-1920 Pandemic," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 12 (2006): 1961-1964; Howard Markel, Harvey B. Lipman, J. Alexander Navarro, "Non-pharmaceutical Interventions Implemented by US Cities During the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 298 (2007): 644-654.

interventions during sex.[14] Researchers have documented a general decline in condom use among young people in the US as condoms became less popular overall in the early twenty-first century regardless of adherence to PrEP therapies and post-exposure treatments.[15]

This account of condoms at Harvard and the University of Texas at Austin in the 1980s is a little-known case in the histories of non-pharmaceutical interventions and safe sex at the beginning of the AIDS pandemic. It pays attention to minor exchanges of a further class of what historian Projit Mukarjhi terms "nonspectacular" medical devices to provide insights into the popularization of safe sex through student networks.[16] Further, it places the Harvard Sperm Busters and Protection Connection within the history of the efforts of condom brands to increase market share and popularize condoms in the US. The story of campus condom companies from "sperm busting" to "protection" aligns with a major shift in how condom brands such as Trojan® expanded their advertisements from contraception for pregnancy to protection from diseases including HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Together, Trojan® advertisements and the campus debates show how young people adapted to a changing health landscape and made everyday, "small technologies" their own.[17]

CONDOM ADVERTISING: BETWEEN CONTRACEPTIVES AND BARRIERS TO DISEASE

While there is lore about Casanova using animal intestines to avoid impregnating his many lovers in the eighteenth century, condoms were not part of the fabric of modern society until the twentieth century.[18] Beginning in 1931, the US military provided condoms to recruits and worked to provide better education on sexually transmitted infections, then known commonly as venereal diseases.[19] However, with the launch of oral contraceptives, condoms became much less commonly used among US consumers.[20] Arguably, by the late 1970s and early 1980s condoms were not in popular use outside of places such as East Asia. In Japan for instance, the government did not approve use of oral contraceptive pills after the invention of the birth control pill Enovid in 1960, so people there relied more heavily on condoms than those in other countries with wider availability of oral contraceptives.[21] By the early 1980s, over 50% of married women relied on condoms in Japan, whereas only 10% of married women in the US reported condom use.[22] In the US by the 1980s, social stigma surrounded condoms and people felt that intercourse with condoms was less pleasurable.

14 Emerich Jo Daroya, "From Condoms to Antiretrovirals: A Posthumanist Performative Account of Men Who Have Sex with Men's (MSM) Condomless Sexual Practices" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2021); Luxi Lal, Jennifer Audsley, Dean A. Murphy, Christopher K. Fairley, Mark Stoove, Norm Roth, Richard Moore, Ban K. Tee, Nalagafiar Puratmaja, Peter L. Anderson, David Leslie, Robert M. Grant, John De Wit, Edwina Wright, VicPrEP Team, "Medication Adherence, Condom Use and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Australian Preexposure Prophylaxis Users," *AIDS* 31 (2017): 1709-1714; Liam Dacosta, Rebecca T. Pinkus, James Morandini, Ilan Dar-Nimrod, "Condom Use During COVID-19: Findings From an Australian Sample of Heterosexual Young Adults," *Sexologies* 30 (2021): e43-e48; Julien Brisson, "Reflections on the History of Bareback Sex Through Ethnography: The Works of Subjectivity and PrEP," *Anthropology & Medicine* 26 (2019): 345-359.

15 Elizabeth Witwer, Rachel K Jones, and Laura D Lindberg, "Sexual Behavior and Contraceptive and Condom Use Among US High School Students, 2013-2017," *Guttmacher Report*, September 2018, https://www.guttmacher.org/report/sexual-behavior-contraceptive-condom-use-us-high-school-students-2013-2017; Casey E. Copen, Patricia J. Dittus, Jami S. Leichliter, Sagar Kumar, Sevgi O. Aral, "Diverging Trends in US Male-Female Condom Use by STI Risk Factors: A Nationally Representative Study," *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 98 (2022): 50-52.

16 Projit Bihari Mukharji, *Doctoring Traditions: Ayurveda, Small Technologies, and Braided Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 11.

17 Ibid.

18 For more on the history of condoms and diaphragms see, Drucker, *Contraception*.

19 Aine Collier, *The Humble Little Condom: A History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2010); Abigail Cline Appler, "Put a Helmet On Your Privates Because They're Going To See Some Action: The History of Condoms in the Military," *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities* 8 (2016); Paul J Feldblum and Michael Rosenberg, "A Historical Perspective On Condoms," paper presented at the Condoms in the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases: Proceedings of a Conference Held in February 1987 in Atlanta, Georgia, 1989.

20 Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, "How the Pill Became a Lifestyle Drug: The Pharmaceutical Industry and Birth Control in the United States Since 1960," *American Journal of Public Health* 102 (2012): 1462-1472; Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

21 Nigel Hopkins, "Condoms: Facts, Myths and Misconceptions," *The Advertiser*, 25 April 1987.

22 James S. Murphy, *The Condom Industry in the United States* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1990), 89.

Condom advertisements tell us a bit about shifting meanings of protected sex during the 1980s.[23] At the start of the decade, people in the US preferred to use birth control pills over condoms to prevent pregnancy. One avenue to show the added benefit of condoms was to amplify the risks of sexually transmitted infections such as herpes.[24] Then two things came together at the same time for the condom industry, a new incurable sexually transmitted disease and new investment in techniques for manufacturing thinner condom sheathes from latex, and later polyurethane.[25]

Trojan® condoms were the brand of choice for both students at Harvard University and the University of Texas at Austin who set up their condom delivery companies in 1985 and 1986 respectively. The Trojan® condom brand founder Merrill Youngs is credited with improving on a process to dip natural latex and inventing a pliable condom around 1926.[26] From the 1930s to 1960s, Youngs Rubber Company dominated the US condom market. In 1985, Carter Wallace purchased Youngs Rubber Company and began to more widely promote the Trojan® brand of condoms with its improved manufacturing.[27] At that time advertisements for Trojan® focused on their potential to prevent pregnancy and targeted female consumers who now bought about half of all condoms.[28] For instance, an advertisement for Trojan® that ran in the May 1985 edition of the magazine *Working Mother* stressed, "Condoms are still considered one of the most effective methods of birth control ever developed."[29]

Ted Bates Advertising, the company that Carter Wallace contracted with to improve Trojan® condom sales from 1985-2001, played an instrumental role in improving the image and acceptability of condoms in the popular imagination.[30] Particularly, the company lobbied television broadcasting companies to show Trojan® advertisements, something that had not been done before.[31] While their early efforts to get TV ads going were met with firm disapprovals, once the US Surgeon General Koop decided to issue a label that condoms could prevent the spread of AIDS, television stations allowed Trojan® to go on air.[32]

For Ted Bates Advertising, the advent of HIV/AIDS really did present a marketing opportunity. Trojan® print advertisements deployed Koop's statements noting the value of condoms in preventing "sexually transmitted diseases" without using the term AIDS explicitly (until FDA regulations later allowed for it) and no longer focusing on herpes. For instance, an advertisement in the music interest magazine *Spin* with a sincere man photographed looking into the camera read, "Someone whose opinion I respect has been advising me to use condoms. He's the Surgeon General of the United States. To quote the man directly, 'The best protection against infection right now, barring abstinence, is use of a condom…Trojan condoms, the most widely used brand in America, help reduce the risk of sexually transmitted diseases.'"[33] As the Trojan® marketing manager Scott Hoyt put it, it was the "Age of the Condom."[34]

Of course, in the time period it was very dangerous to suggest that the AIDS pandemic was helping condom sales per se. Life Style brand condoms got into a public relations snafu after

23 Paul Jobling, "Playing Safe: The Politics of Pleasure and Gender in the Promotion of Condoms in Britain, 1970–1982," *Journal of Design History* 10 (1997): 53-70.

24 "The Truth about Condoms," *Redbook*, May 1983, 12.

25 Steven D. Pinkerton and Paul R. Abramson, "Condoms and the Prevention of AIDS," *American Scientist* 85 (1997): 364; "Carter-Wallace Debuts New Polyurethane Condom in U.S.," *Contraceptive Technology Update* 20 (1999): 73-75.

26 Pinkerton and Abramson, "Condoms and the Prevention of AIDS."

27 Murphy, *Condom Industry in the United States*.

28 S. Wilkinson, "Selling Condoms to Women: Liberation Plus Legislation Gives New Life to Old Rubber," *Working Woman* 68 (1985): 72, 74.

29 "Trojan Advertisement," *Working Mother*, May 1985, 120.

30 Richard Collier, "'Trusted for over 80 years': Ted Bates and Trojan Advertising, 1985-2001," *CHARM: Proceedings of the Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing* 13 (2007): 60-66.

31 Surgeon General Koop's testimony was pivotal. See *Condom Advertising and AIDS: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment of the Committee on Energy and Commerce House of Representatives One Hundredth Congress First Session* (Washington, DC: US Goverment Printing Office, 10 February 1987), 4.

32 Collier, "'Trusted for over 80 years,'" 60.

33 Carter-Wallace, "Trojan Advertisement," *Spin*, July 1987.

34 Greg Evans, "Observer's Notebook," *Cincinnati Magazine*, June 1987, 18.

the company president remarked that "AIDS is a condom marketer's dream" in an interview for *Time* magazine.[35] The ad company contracted to market Life Style condoms dropped the account and noted, "AIDS is not a marketer's dream; it's a human nightmare, and we choose not to work with anyone who believes otherwise."[36]

For their part, despite a new medical rationale for using condoms, Ted Bates Advertising still had to help customers get over the stigma of buying them. Trojan® print advertisements added humor and play to reduce stress surrounding condom purchasing, particularly for men who ironically relied on woman to purchase their condoms.[37] One print advertisement from 1987 provided detailed description of different styles of condoms with a banner at the foot with color images of boxes of Trojans®, Trojan-Enz®, Trojan-Enz® Lubricated, Trojan Plus®, Trojan Ribbed®, and Trojan Naturalube® (see Figure 1). It also included a cartoon drawing in black and white of a man covering his face while a pharmacist announced he was there to buy condoms in front of other customers. The caption read, "Hey, there's a guy here who wants some information on Trojans." The advertisement went on to explain,



Figure 1: Trojans for Men: Carter-Wallace advertisement c. 1987 (Source: Church & Dwight Co. Inc./*Spin*, January 1987, 77). Used with permission.

35 Dottie Enrico, "AIDS Remark Pushes DFT&P to Quit Condom Biz," *ADWEEK*, 23 February 1987. Story brought to my attention in Paul R. Abramson and Steven D. Pinkerton, *With Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 252.

36 Enrico, "AIDS Remark."

37 Wilkinson, "Selling Condoms to Women."

> Most men would like to know more about Trojan® brand condoms.
>
> But they're seriously afraid of suffering a spectacular and terminal attack of embarrassment right in the middle of a well-lighted drugstore.
>
> In fact, there's no reason for this sort of panic. Most drugstores now provide a convenient self-service rack, where you'll find the whole range of Trojan condoms. (Along with noticeably unembarrassed consumers making their selections.)
>
> But why wait till you get to the drugstore? We herewith offer information on the various different forms of Trojans available…[38]

With these kinds of advertisements, then, men could become informed and confident customers who went in and quickly picked up the style of condoms of their choice with less embarrassment. They could calmly adjudicate the benefits of "partner-pleasuring ribs, reservoir tip, and form-fitting shape" of Trojan Naturalube® and the proprietary "'whisper-light' lubricant" now pre-loaded on many styles.[39] These advertisements also were increasingly queered with use of the term "partner" and boxes that showed couples that were less identifiable as male or female.

Even once condoms went from behind the counter to on the open shelves, male commentators noted remaining anxieties that mimicked the Trojan® advertisement. It was an era where there was still stigma and reticence around discussing condoms or even purchasing them. Condoms were associated in the popular imagination as being "for boys [young men], not for [grown] men."[40] In an article for *Texas Monthly* in 1987, journalist David Seeley described his consternation going to buy condoms. A freelance writer, he "had just returned from a month-long trip around the country, writing about heterosexuality and AIDS for *Playboy* magazine, and had developed a certain calm, quiet terror."

> I tried to relax, to close my eyes to the horrors that lay before me. I scanned the brands from a plain, simple, no-nonsense box, one the checkout girl wouldn't recognize. Fourex Natural Skins were the most unobtrusive-looking, but the sheep on the box disturbed me. Just above them were Excita Extra Ultra-Ribbed with Spermicidal Lubricant and Reservoir End (Extra Pleasure for Both Partners). All the others had pictures of stunning couples embracing on beaches, kissing and laughing in golden sunsets. "Why are they smiling?" I wondered.
>
> I wasn't. I felt a sudden rush of anger. What the hell was I doing on aisle 31B? Why should I, a nice little North Dallas WASP boy, have to buy a box of rubbers? That was the kind of thing my *dad* and his friends had to do back in World War II. Those were things you used to carry in your wallet when you were sixteen and throw away your first week in college.[41]

Seeley captured the anxiety and moral panic that heterosexual (White) men in Texas and across the US might have been feeling as they came to grips with the realization that anyone was at risk of contracting HIV.

While Seeley might have assumed teens threw away their condoms once they started college, in fact a new generation of young men felt that entering college was the very moment to embrace condoms as a way to prevent both pregnancy and spread of the newly identified disease, AIDS. And they found ways to reduce stigma around publicly purchasing condoms in a "well-lighted drugstore" through on-demand call in delivery services at Harvard and the University of Texas at Austin.

38 Carter-Wallace, "Trojan Advertisment," *Spin*, July 1987, 77, https://books.google.mk/books?id=B_38rmDqlLQC&lpg=PA1&pg=PA77#v=onepage&q&f=true.
39 Ibid.
40 Abramson and Pinkerton, *With Pleasure*, 157.
41 David Seeley, "The NO Decade: Where Drugs are Taboo, Drinking is Illegal, and Sex is out of the Question," *Texas Monthly*, June 1987, 104-108, 56-58.

SPERM BUSTERS AT HARVARD IN 1985: "GUARANTEED TO COME BEFORE YOU DO"

By fall 1985, popular understandings of AIDS were limited in the US. News reports in the early 1980s closely associated HIV infections with men who had sex with men and an earlier term GRID (gay-related immunodeficiency).[42] In 1985, everyday people were not closely following the debates as to whether or not all infections related to the same virus and should be known broadly as HTVL. The virus causing AIDS was not fully defined until the 1986 International Committee on Taxonomy and Viruses decided to formally name it HIV. And it took time for these scientific findings to work themselves into popular discourse. For men who had sex with women, they thought their biggest worry was still avoiding an unwanted pregnancy. It was in this context that a service to prevent campus pregnancies emerged in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In 1985, in his first year at Harvard College, Darius S. Zoroufy and five friends set up a new business to distribute condoms to students on campus to spare them the trouble of going in person to buy them at a drug store (see Figure 2). Zoroufy, apparently inspired in part


The freshman SPERMBUSTERS were ready for action yesterday. From left: J.B. BACKSTROM, DARIUS ZOROUFY, GUISEPPE LABIANCA, MICHAEL WHITMIRE, REED MALTZMAN and ANDY OSBORN.
Crimson/Peter H. Schwartz

Figure 2: The Harvard Sperm Busters from left to right: J.B. Backstrom, Darius Zoroufy, Guiseppe ("Joe") Labianca, Michael Whitmire, Reed Maltzman, and Andy Osborn. Note pack of condoms in Backstrom's hands (Source: Harvard Crimson/Harvard Archives, photo by Peter H. Schwartz, 11 October 1985, used with permission).

42 Michael VerMeulen, "The Gay Plague: A Mysterious Immune Disease is Spreading Like Wildfire," *New York Magazine*, 31 May 1982, 52; M.S. Gottlieb, R. Schroff, S. Fligiel, J.L. Fahey, A.Saxon, "Gay-Related Immunodeficiency (GRID) Syndrome: Clincal and Autopsy Observations," *Clinical Research* 30 (1982): A349.

by the recent film *Ghostbusters* released in 1984, opted to call the company "Sperm busters." Their short-lived company had a witty and fun vibe. They sought to get condoms to students quickly when the need arose, taking up the motto, "Guaranteed to come before you do."[43] They swiftly advertised their new company promising to deliver packs of condoms to all who called a number printed on posters plastered across campus. Harvard College officials asked Zoroufy and his friends to cease selling condoms from their dorm rooms citing a restriction on students running businesses from campus housing. It was a short-lived business, a concept that was ahead of its time. But it still attracted media reports given its artful name and slogan. The fleeting business tells us a few things about the difference between campus condom controversies in Cambridge and Austin, Texas in the 1980s including university officials' concerns over propriety at Harvard.

The six friends met as floor mates in their first-year dorm, Thayer Hall South on the Harvard Yard. Recalling how the whole business came about, Joe Labianca and Michael Whitmire, who remained friends for over 35 years, explained that for some reason everyone used to "hang out in Joe's room."[44] They were 17 and 18 respectively and enthralled with being at Harvard and meeting people from all over with diverse perspectives on life. There were some commonalities: Whitmire, son of a physician raised in Houston, Texas was a big fan of the Dallas Cowboys, while Labianca supported the New York Giants. They were enthusiastic enough about football to watch the admittedly unimpressive Harvard team at games.

Their group of six friends from Thayer typically took their meals together at a big round table in the first-year dining hall then called "the Union" just outside the main gated Yard that contained first-year dorms, a few classroom buildings, the campus church, and two libraries. It was sometime in October 1985 during a jovial meal at a large round table at the Union that the six friends came up with the idea for "The Harvard Sperm Busters" to deliver condoms.

> How are we going to do this? Well, you know, we've got a couple of people that can skateboard, and so they can skateboard around the Harvard Yard and deliver these things. We just kept adding one level of ridiculousness on top of another until Jonathan Backstrom stood up and said "Let's do it!" in great Animal House fashion, and so we did it.
>
> As I had mentioned, [Michael] was very, very quiet and reserved. His great contribution after we had been bouncing all this stuff around was to come up with the amazing slogan, "guaranteed to come before you do." I can remember all of us just looking at him and thinking that is so perfect. How did a quiet guy come up with that?[45]

The friends then worked to set their plan in motion. They created a logo of a sperm inside a circle with line through it and used a printer in their rooms to print out flyers. They ordered white t-shirts with the logo and slogan on the front and business model on the back (see Figure 3). The back of the T-shirts read: "It is two in the morning. It is cold outside. CVS pharmacy closed hours ago. Your desk drawer at home is 800 miles away. And you are not psyched to be a parent. Who you gonna call… Sperm Busters (a condom delivery company). Guaranteed to come before you do." A couple of the friends went to stores in the streets outside the Yard to buy boxes of Trojan® condoms, anticipating the needs of their classmates. Their primary concern was preventing sperm from merging with eggs. Their company predated both the naming of the virus HIV and the Surgeon General's warning on AIDS in 1986. Thus, preventing herpes or another sexually transmitted infection with safe sex was not central to the fairly heteronormative Sperm Busters concept.

43 "Condom delivery begins at UT," *The Bates Student*, 6 March 1987, 2.
44 Interview of Michael Whitmire and Joe Labianca, Harvard Spermbusters co-founders, 12 January 2022 by the author.
45 Whitmire and Labianca interview.

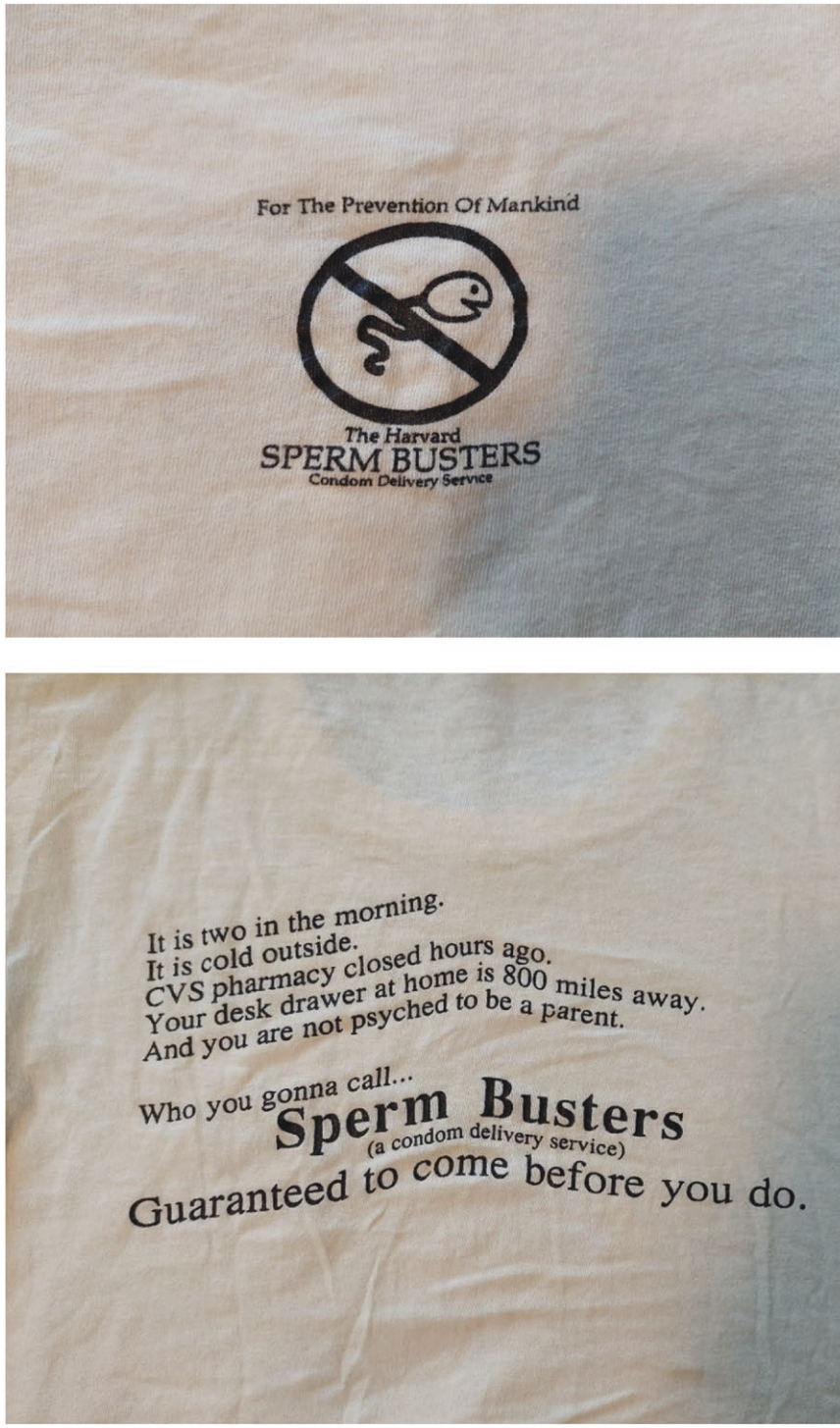


Figure 3: The Harvard Sperm Busters T-shirt, front and back. "For The Prevention of Mankind" (Source: personal collection of Joe Labianca, used with permission).

On Wednesday they put up the posters and by Thursday the phone number, which was Labianca's dorm room line, started ringing with orders. They had two price points – 75 cents for a condom delivered in 30 minutes and $1.50 for a condom delivered within three minutes to any location in the Yard. For a brief two days the campus was caught up in the condom courier craze. Most people requested the three-minute delivery route and had great fun timing the Sperm Busters to see if they could indeed deliver in time. Backstrom was apparently committed to the image and wore a white lab coat as he zipped across the yard on a skateboard. Whitmire recalled running as fast as he could between buildings.

Somewhere around Friday when the campus newspaper ran a story about the new company, the office of the Dean of Students began to get anxious about the Harvard Sperm Busters. Friday evening when the friends returned from dinner at the Freshman Union, Dean Archie Epps was standing in front of their dorm to meet them. He told them they had to stop the business and summoned them to a meeting in his office. At the meeting on Sunday October 13, Epps explained that if the students did not cease and desist immediately, they would be expelled from Harvard and any records of their acceptance and attendance expunged from the record. They were also placed on probation and warned that their extracurricular activities would be monitored. The students found themselves at the receiving end of one of Dean Epps's missions to restore discipline. Always well dressed with a bowtie at the collar, Epps was a tall formidable figure who remained a legend among students at Harvard for decades. He was among the first Black administrative leaders at Harvard and was often summoned to negotiate tricky student cases for the university.

Thirty-five years later, friends Labianca and Whitmire were still a bit annoyed about how Epps worked to close down their short-lived company which he called, a "project that is irresponsible and in poor taste."[46] Was it the rumor that the erotic magazine *Penthouse* was going to run a story about the Harvard Sperm Busters that really got the administration upset? The Thayer buddies were honestly hoping to raise awareness around preventing unwanted pregnancies (stopping sperm). At the time Labianca explained to the campus newspaper, "We don't want unwanted pregnancies at Harvard, and we thought, why shouldn't students have condoms delivered to them."[47] They recalled how friends at Harvard still came to them for advice on contraceptives after they had to officially shut down and they gave away their extra stash of condoms. Clearly, there was a need for better condom distribution on campus. In the 1970s, a candy store in the Union had actually sold condoms but this seemed to no longer be available when Labianca and Whitmire came to Harvard.[48] And by the start of their second year in college the nation became increasingly aware of the value of condoms for stopping not only pregnancy, but also HIV. Back in fall 1985, Harvard university officials justified their actions with the explanation that no students could run a company out of college housing. Furthermore, they presumably did not want the university to be liable for any mishaps that might arise from a Harvard-branded enterprise.

In retrospect, there were definitely other factors at play. Still fairly conservative when it came to male-female interactions, Harvard was in the earliest stages of fully welcoming women to campus and qualms remained around sexual relationships between students. Having co-ed dorms from 1972 was a big transition in a long process to allow more women on the Harvard campus that did not fully end until 1999 when Harvard absorbed sister school Radcliffe College as an Institute for Advanced Study and female students no longer received joint diplomas from

46 "Who You Gonna Call? A New Business," *The Harvard Crimson*, 11 October 1985.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.

both Harvard and Radcliffe colleges.[49] The Thayer Hall friends who founded Sperm Busters recalled that their floor only had rooms for male students with female students on a separate floor, although no one technically stopped overnight guests. Harvard libraries had also been contested spaces. In the early 1960s, Radcliffe students could only access material at the Harvard undergraduate Lamont Library if it was not available at their library. Marny Elliott recalled how she was once able to read a chapter otherwise out of her reach when her librarian made a special arrangement with a Harvard librarian for her to bike over and be escorted to his back office at Lamont Library where she was able to sit in a corner and quickly skim the piece before being taken out of the hallowed space.[50] Even after "1,200 Radcliffe students and 650 Harvard female graduate students" were allowed in Lamont library from 1967, for many years there was a back entrance reserved for women.[51] A campus cartoon suggested that men and women comingling in the library in study carrels would create a whole dating scene that would distract everyone from their studies.[52]

At the same time that Zoroufy and friends were trying to peddle condoms, the campus was also in the grips of one of the first university sexual harassment cases, where faculty member Jorge Dominguez was accused of bullying a female colleague for sexual favors. Dominguez took time away from campus after Harvard officials investigated his case in 1983. In fall 1985, Dominguez had returned to teaching in the Government Department which was notorious for several prominent sexual harassment cases including that between Dominguez and his colleague. Newly emboldened in a changing climate, students were raising objections. The Harvard Sperm Busters emerged at a time when Harvard was in the earliest stages of thinking through consent and power imbalances in sexual relationships between students and faculty, a shift in mores that took several decades.[53]

Conversations on campus about condoms changed more quickly. By the late 1980s, stigma around using condoms was waning. If in 1985 Harvard sought to ban students from selling condoms, just two years later condoms on campus were becoming slightly less controversial and free. *The Harvard Perspective*, a student newspaper, distributed condoms with the March 1987 issue.[54] A local Boston paper followed suit and slipped a condom with instructions and information on sexually transmitted infections into their edition.[55] Students remained circumspect about the campus newspaper free condoms with University Health Services receiving numerous calls asking if they might be defective.[56]

By the time of Harvard's graduation in May 1987, condoms actually came to symbolize what mattered most for graduates of the Harvard School of Public Health who tossed them in the air to start a new tradition. In contrast, graduates of Harvard Business School threw dollar bills into the sky.[57] The celebratory image of packets of condoms cascading into Harvard Yard is a stark contrast to the campus administration's condemnation of Sperm Busters for distributing condoms to classmates across the Yard (see Figure 4). The envelopes even had the Harvard seal,

49 David A. Campbell, "College Honors 25 Years of Yard Co-Residency: Festivities Include Dedication of Gate in Yard," *The Harvard Crimson*, 6 October 1997.
50 Margery (Marny) Ennis Elliott, Radcliffe class of 1964, "Letters: Cambridge 02138, 'Shoddy,' Maskupmanship, American Exceptionalism," *Harvard Magazine*, May-June 2021.
51 Meena Venkataramanan, "Radcliffe Women Share Their Stories: An Ambitious Oral-History Project Captures the Lived Experiences of Alumnae," *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2021; "The Alumni: Yesterday's News," *Harvard Magazine*, 1997; "Yesterday's News," *Harvard Magazine*, January-February 2002.
52 "Yesterday's News," *Harvard Magazine*, January-February 2021.
53 Kristin A. Goss, "Sexual Harassment: Lesson or Legacy? Government Department's Burden," *The Harvard Crimson*, 4 October 1985; Gurvinder Gil and Imran Rahman-Jones, "Me Too Founder Tarana Burke: Movement is Not Over," *BBC News*, 9 July 2020.
54 "Weekly Paper Condom Giveaway Under Way," *United Press International*, 28 May 1987.
55 Ibid.
56 "UHS OK's Condoms," *The Harvard Crimson*, 5 March 1987.
57 "Condoms Become the Symbol of Harvard Health School Graduation," *Associated Press*, 11 June 1987.



Figure 4: Condoms at Harvard graduation 11 June 1987. Original caption: "School of Public Health Grads throw condoms into air during morning exercises in yard. Envelopes had 'safe sex' written in Latin with school seal." (Photo by Mike Quan/Harvard Gazette, 19 June 1987, Harvard University Archives UA V 605.295.8p News Office: Gazette Photo Files 5 June 1987-18 Dec. 1987, Box 3 of 10, used with permission).

suggesting the level of confidence that people now had in condoms and the way that they had become part and parcel of campus life.

Indeed, 1987 was the height of condom enthusiasm in the US. With no cure for AIDS in sight and no viable treatments available, many people began to place a great deal of hope in condoms as the sole avenue to prevent infection through sexual intercourse. The Surgeon General was a fan, and Trojan® advertisements were permeating the media. Harvard's Undergraduate Council successfully won permission to install condom dispensing machines in dorm laundry rooms, despite dissenters who claimed "PUTTING CONDOM dispensers around college campuses is part of [the condom industry's] strategy." "AIDS hysteria has been a Trojan Horse, if you will, through which the marketing gurus of the prophylactic industry have boosted public acceptance and sales of their product."[58] The condom controversies continued, and by 1987 concerns over condom quality in the US prompted health regulators to clamp down on factory processes, particularly for companies connected with competitive Japanese brands.[59]

Carter-Wallace continued to lobby for dominance of Trojan® condoms, even co-sponsoring a campus talk on safe sex with Harvard University Health Services.[60] In 1992, EuroPacific

58 Steven Lichtman, "Political Machines," *The Harvard Crimson*, 10 December 1987.

59 Murphy, *Condom Industry*, 78. Arguably the US condom companies including Trojan were wary of Japanese brand condoms taking over. Michael L. Millenson, "And Now, From Japan, Condoms," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 November 1988.

60 Mark W. Brown, "Dr. Ruth to Come to Campus: Wants Harvard Prudes to Speak Candidly About Sex," *The Harvard Crimson*, 16 October 1991.

International hoped to market condoms with the Harvard name to students there. The business wanted to print condom wrappers using Harvard colors and *veritas* ("truth") seal to sell to students. In a context of increased concerns over condom quality, and arguably donations from Carter-Wallace to the university, Harvard's legal team claimed they could be liable if the condoms leaked or were substandard product and barred the company from moving forward with their plans.[61]

It was not until 1999 that a Harvard student group calling itself AIDS Education and Outreach got funding from the University Health Services and Undergraduate Council to place packs of free condoms in each of the upper-class campus dorms.[62] And it was only in 2006 that students managed to have University Health Services place free condoms in each of the first year dorms as well, finally providing ready access to the devices that the Harvard Sperm Busters had tried to peddle two decades before in the first-year yard.[63]

PROTECTION CONNECTION: DISTRIBUTING CONDOMS IN TEXAS, 1986-1988

Condoms were controversial in the 1980s in Texas as well. At the University of Texas at Austin (UT), outrage followed an article explaining the value of condoms and ways to practice safe sex, including sex between men. The author, Debra Muller, based her story on a campus-wide survey on sex and AIDS. The survey and report hoped to clear up some of the misconceptions on campus by Spring 1987. 45% of those who responded to the campus survey still believed that kissing could transmit AIDS, a myth that the US Surgeon General Koop had been taking efforts to tackle across the country.[64] Part of the process of adapting to the AIDS crisis was determining exactly how people spread the new disease. It was reasonable that UT students remained confused on AIDS and kissing.[65] Scary stories populated the news media with mixed messages such as, "if I could give advice to any teenage girl, I'd say, 'If your boyfriend uses drugs, kiss him good-bye — on the cheek.'"[66] Was AIDS spread only through semen and blood or was "French kissing" now out of the question? It was not until December 1985 that the physician David Ho worked with a team of doctors and nurses at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston to take saliva samples from 71 men with AIDS and show that there was no virus in their saliva.[67] Apparently not all the latest findings like this had caught on at Texas.

According to the campus survey on AIDS, Texas students also tended to think AIDS remained primarily a concern for men who had sex with men. A student in mechanical engineering responded to the AIDS coverage in the UT campus newspaper with the questions, "Why is the Texan so anxious to push the gay agenda? Why have there not been any articles on topics such as abstinence from aberrant sexual acts?" Another in history urged "morals, not condoms." He asked, "Should we find solace in knowing that immorality can be safe with the use of condoms? Further, should we feel sorry for those who fall victim to their own homosexual or heterosexual deviancy?" Others applauded the newspaper for publicizing strategies for safer sex and showing how not only men who had sex with men but also women who had sex with men were at risk of contracting the new virus.[68] Photographs that ran in the special issue on "AIDS on Campus" portrayed condom use in a non-gendered context of intimacy between partners (see Figure 5).

61 Harvard denied two companies in 1991 and 1992 hoping to market Harvard branded condoms. "Harvard Denies Company's Request To Imprint Logo On Condoms," 14 February 1992.
62 Vicky C. Hallet, "Free Condoms to be Available in all the Houses," *The Harvard Crimson*, 13 January 1999.
63 John R. Macartney, "Condom Boxes Erected in Freshman Dorms," *The Harvard Crimson*, 1 May 2006.
64 "AIDS, Saliva Link is Doubted," *Austin American-Statesman*, 19 December 1985, A20.
65 Janice Hopkins Tanne, "Fighting AIDS: On the Front Lines Against the Plague," *New York Magazine*, 12 January 1987, 22-31.
66 Ibid., 26.
67 "AIDS, Saliva Link is Doubted"; D.D. Ho, R.E. Byington, R.T. Schooley, T. Flynn, T.R. Rota, M.S. Hirsch, "Infrequency of Isolation of HTLV-III Virus from Saliva in AIDS," *New England Journal of Medicine* 313 (1985): 1606.
68 "Firing line," *The Daily Texan*, April 1987, 20.

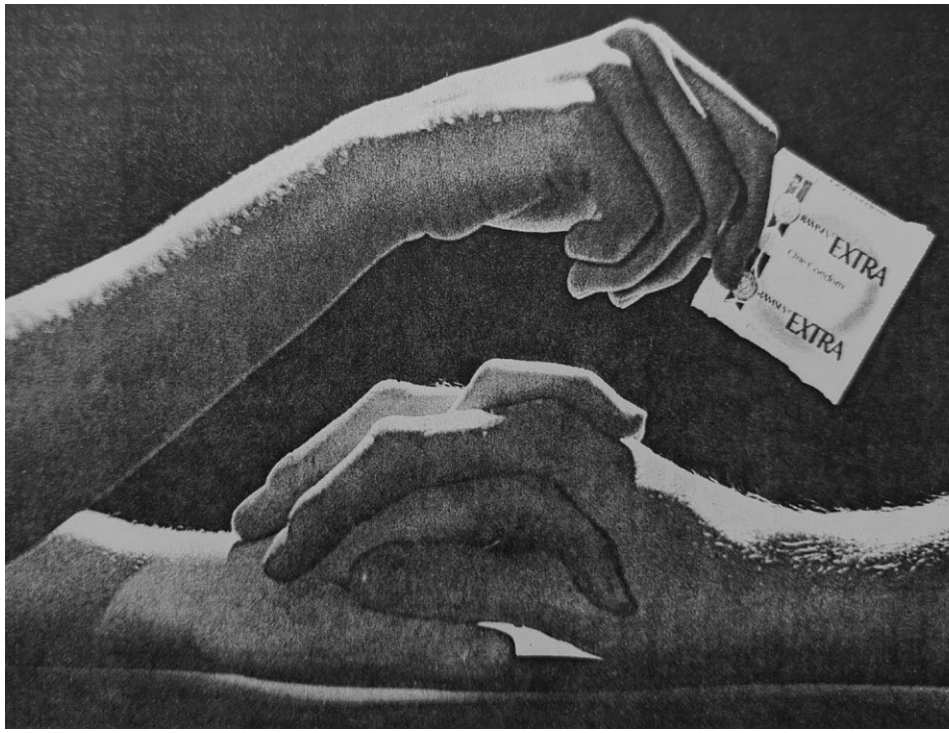


Figure 5: Ramses Extra condom packet photographed for student newspaper the Daily Texan. Original caption: "Medical experts agree condoms should be used for vaginal, oral and anal sex" (photo by Brian Adamcik/Daily Texan Staff. Source: Daily Texan "AIDS on Campus" special issue April 1987, used with permission).

Some young people adapted to the AIDS crisis quickly and innovatively. While their peers flamed each other with letters to the campus newspaper and tried to not even kiss, Christopher Bray, a government major, and Sid Graef, a marketing and film student, were busy with their condom business. Bray and Graef met in their first year at UT in 1985, living on the same hall in a campus dorm. They started working at a popular restaurant together and decided to rent a house nearby with a friend, Christian Taylor who studied mechanical engineering at Austin Community College.[69] Looking back on his college years in the 1980s, Bray recalled how, "We were like the Three Musketeers. We all worked at this restaurant which was pretty legendary for making huge cheeseburgers. We were known for interacting with the guests and being rather cheeky."[70] Bray explained how the three were "young creative somewhat rebellious types" who always tossed around different business ideas (see figure 6). Their college years were a time of protests and change at UT Austin. Students were demanding the university divest from South Africa given the apartheid situation there. Students took over campus buildings. There were also efforts to ban smoking indoors in all campus facilities, a measure that passed in October 1986. It was in this climate that the three friends were learning about safe sex trends overseas, including door-to-door condom sellers in Japan.[71]

69 Keefe Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return," *Daily Texan*, 2 November 1987.
70 Interview with Christopher Bray and Sid Graef, Protection Connection co-founders, 10 August 2022 by author.
71 "Bray says the idea arose last month when one of the partners happened to mention the Japanese tradition of selling contraceptives door to door." In "'Unique' Service Offered," *The Captain's Log: Christopher Newport College*, 20 November 1986, 4, 10.



Figure 6: "We never considered them rivals": Protection Connection co-founders c. 1986, left to right Christopher Bray, Christian Taylor, Sid Graef (Source: Chistopher Bray, used with permission).

As he and Graef recalled in later interviews, one night early in their sophomore year (probably 20 October 1986) they were hanging out and talking about different ways to possibly make money. They came up with an idea to use their motorcycles to deliver condoms to people and decided there and then to make posters at a copy shop on Guadalupe Street opposite campus. Bray came up with the name "Protection Connection." Excited, they ran around campus hanging up their new posters. As legend would have it, within thirty minutes of getting back home, their landline started ringing.[72] Graef explained how "our phone didn't stop ringing for like a month, and you know to our chagrin, at night, sometimes we would just have to unplug it because it would ring all night long and there was only so much we could do." Bray admitted, "It was, without a doubt, a very amateur operation. I don't think we even had an answering machine. I mean we had our home line, basically, so it was like whoever was home at the time, if the phone is ringing and somebody needed to deliver, 'Well okay, I'll go do it,' I said or Christian or another roommate. Then — we all had motorcycles — we would jump on a motorcycle and go."[73] They made around $200 the first weekend but Bray said their profits were never enough to actually cover rent.

Protection Connection priced deliveries from $2 to $20. The company mostly sold condoms in packs of 6 or 12 for guys to use, but they also sometimes delivered contraceptive sponges that women could use for protection from pregnancy.[74] They sometimes ran condoms for 40 hours

72 Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return."
73 Bray and Graef interview.
74 Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return"; Shannon Thurmond, "Who Ya Gonna Call? Protection Connection," *Advertising Age*, 10 November 1986, 106.

a week during the first year, targeting the hours of 3 pm to midnight on weekdays and 5 pm to 3 am on weekends.[75] The AIDS epidemic was very much on their minds. Bray thinking back noted that, "Because we were just coming of age, we were just you know, in the early days of being sexually active and all of a sudden, there was this disease that nobody understood that could kill you if you had unprotected sex. So, this was sort of in the back of my mind." Bray's family was quite supportive of his venture into the condom business. His father was a progressive type who had taught at the University of California at Berkeley and it was not too surprising to him that his son earned a certain notoriety on campus selling condoms as the AIDS crisis dawned.

In contrast, Graef came from a religious, Christian household and did not tell his family about his business. He recalled that his grandmother heard about it when stories about their condom company started appearing in the news when local Texas television companies interviewed them. She thought it was hilarious and told his mom, who was less enthusiastic that her son had become a "purveyor of sex." Graef was afraid, "mom would kill me [so] I avoided going home for a visit for like a couple of months." Graef felt her overall sense was that "the condoms were an evil from the Devil. Sex is bad." He recalled how extreme his family could be at times, even washing his mouth out with actual soap for saying bad words when he was a child. Graef reflecting on this moment in his life had respect for those who preferred to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage. "I mean there's nothing wrong with abstinence but it's so often correlated with ignorance and it's just not a win-win situation, because people have hormones, young people have sex. They need to know how to be safe about it."[76]

Campus health services at UT decided to tacitly sanction the delivery service which was regularly advertised in the campus paper in 1986 and 1987 (see Figure 7). They provided students with information on Protection Connection including flyers with the company's phone number. In return, Bray, Graef, and Taylor helped to hand out campus health service leaflets on



Figure 7: Protection Connection advertisement (Source: *Daily Texan*, 1986, used with permission).

75 Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return."
76 Bray and Graef interview.

sexually transmitted infections to customers.[77] Indeed, the same month Protection Connection launched at UT, US Surgeon General Koop published his important small blue book on guidance for confronting AIDS for Americans including instructions to use "a rubber (condom) during (start to finish) sexual intercourse (vagina or rectum)."[78]

Sherry Bell who worked to coordinate health education for the campus felt Protection Connection was "a real boon for those who are simply too shy or who don't want to bother with going out and buying the products."[79] Unlike their peers at Harvard, the Protection Connection co-founders ran a business off-campus and did not use the UT name in their branding. Ironically, this allowed university employees to better coopt their company and integrate it into campus materials on safe sex. And in contrast to Harvard, UT had integrated women into campus life from the very founding of the school in 1883 as a co-educational institution. These two factors, along with the year delay, may partly explain the relative longevity and success of Protection Connection. Nevertheless, debates still filled the student newspapers with students such as Mark Nash, chair of the Gay and Lesbian Students' Alliance, reminding classmates who opposed condoms, "This is 1987 not 1978. In response to the AIDS crisis, sexual behaviors have changed dramatically."[80]

Protection Connection ran condoms on campus for a couple of years, peaking at profits of $1000 a week.[81] The founders Bray and Graef formally registered their company in Washington, DC and franchised operations to at least fifteen other resellers. They recalled receiving free shipments from condom companies hoping they would promote their brands on campus.[82] The UT outfit was so noteworthy that newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* highlighted Bray, Graef, and Taylor's contributions in their overview of the best of 1987 (from Senator Biden's quips on the campaign trail to mishaps on the set of Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep's latest film): "Three entrepreneurial students at the University of Texas went into business as Protection Connection, offering home delivery of condoms and spermicidal sponges."[83] Bray recalled that Gary Trudeau introduced a character in his popular comic *Doonesbury* who delivered condoms that he assumed was modeled off of their company. An agent from William Morris company floated the possibility of a sitcom pilot based off their condom delivery company concept and they were even interviewed for a story in *People* magazine. Both projects were dropped however. "Ultimately, in both those situations, they backed off because it's such a controversial topic, you know students with condoms. Oh my God."[84]

Zoroufy of the Harvard Sperm Busters expressed some jealousy when Protection Connection at UT gained national recognition and campus support. There was a minor spat between the two companies after a radio show decided to have founders from each talk about their condom delivery services. Zoroufy was sure that his company had priority and that the Austin outfit had copied Sperm Busters. Protection Connection founders Bray and Graef did not remember it that way and felt they had independently thought up the company. Whitmire of the Harvard Sperm Busters noted that he had sent some copies of the *Harvard Crimson* student newspaper article on his company to friends and family in Houston. A lot of his high school friends attended UT Austin, where he had also considered going, so he had always assumed that the story of his company up north might have spread through word of mouth and percolated into the ethos at UT.

77 Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return."
78 *Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Sydrome* (US Public Health Service, October 1986), 17; Murphy, *Condom Industry*, 80-81.
79 Thurmond, "Who Ya Gonna Call."
80 Mark Nash, "Editorials: Railing Won't Cure AIDS," *The Daily Texan*, 22 October 1987, 4.
81 Borden, "Weekend Condom Delivery May Return."
82 Bray and Graef interview.
83 Michael Hirsley, "The 1987 Doobies Characters Who Made the Year Unforgettable," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 December 1987, TEMPO: 1.
84 Bray and Graef interview.

The name Protection Connection definitely stuck and has been used to market condoms in other efforts unrelated to UT. A decade later, Planned Parenthood in Arizona spent over half a million dollars installing condom vending machines as part of what it called "Protection Connection."[85] UT Austin later emerged as a leader in campus condom outreach through a university health program called "Healthy Horns," named after Bevo the live cow that served as the school's mascot and inspired the school motto "Hook 'em Horns." By the 2000s, Healthy Horns provided free condom and dental dam delivery to students living in campus dorms in "discrete envelopes" through a program called "Play It Safe Post."[86]

CONCLUSION: THREE LESSONS FROM CAMPUS CONDOM COMPANY CONTROVERSIES OF THE 1980S

The debates over condoms at both Harvard and UT Austin provide a lens into a moment when social norms were shifting in light of new scientific discoveries around a novel virus. In this case, the leaders and entrepreneurs were young male students starting college who had a new vision. Harvard was not ready for the concept of late-night condom deliveries, but a year later UT Austin was. Revisiting the history of condoms shows how nonspectacular small technologies shape medical history and the function of business interests in transforming public health.

First, the debates over condom companies at Harvard and UT in the 1980s expand our understanding of the history of safe sex to show the role of student entrepreneurs in reselling condoms to their classmates.[87] The advertisements for the Harvard Sperm Busters, "For the Prevention of Mankind," humorously pointed to the primary concern of the students in 1985 —not getting anyone pregnant. This was controversial for Harvard administrators who saw it as being in poor taste as it would require admitting that students were having sex before marriage. HIV/AIDS forced health educators to take a more pragmatic approach that acknowledged both intravenous drug use and unprotected sex. The US Surgeon General Koop, while a Reagan appointee, made it his business to go on television to explain the real risks behind sex without condoms by 1986. That same year, University Health Services at UT Austin integrated student company Protection Connection into their campaign to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, showing how quickly social norms could shift in light of a new disease. On the UT campus, the acceptance of harm reduction practices that incorporated condoms meant college students could write "'Safe sex' is the watchword for the 1980s."[88] But it was still a fraught period and a long road to get everyone on board with condoms. In contrast, older journalists in Texas questioned condom use and still labelled the 1980s the "No Decade: Where Drugs are Taboo, Drinking is Illegal and Sex is out of the Question."[89]

Second, debates over condoms on campus show us how people adapt to new scientific information at different rates. These contests took place at a moment of incredible fluctuation in both popular knowledge of AIDS and scientific research between 1985 and 1987. Recently, people have paid attention to the social disruption that followed the advent of another new incurable virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which causes the disease COVID-19, including conflicts over use of masks and disputes over which treatments work best

85 "Planned Parenthood Wants to Install Condom Machines," *Associated Press*, 3 July 1999.
86 "Healthy Horns: How to Get Free Condom Delivery."
87 Lord, *Condom Nation*; Janice M. Irvine, *Talk About Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004); Julian B. Carter, "Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 213-249; Valerie J. Huber and Michael W. Firmin, "A History of Sex Education in the United States Since 1900," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 23 (2014): 25-51.
88 Anderson and McHargue, "Rays of Hope."
89 Seeley, "The NO Decade."

to alleviate symptoms and prevent the disease.[90] The advent of COVID-19, a new highly contagious respiratory disease prompting the first major global pandemic in over one hundred years, was a significant moment in the history of medicine and highly disruptive. However scientific controversies are common. Researchers in science history and the sociology of science even argue that all science is at its heart a series of controversies and estimate the rate of disputes in scientific research.[91]

Third, campus condom company controversies contribute to the growing field of the history of non-pharmaceutical interventions. Histories of medicine frequently dwell on the advent of pharmaceuticals — cures and vaccines in the twentieth century that created pharmaceutical subjects and remade lives. The advent of HIV and more recently international outbreaks of Ebola, SARS, MERS, and COVID-19 prompted major rethinking in public health around how to stop the spread of emergent viruses before any pharmaceuticals including vaccines might be available. This history of condoms as a barrier to not only pregnancy but also infection highlights the ways that young people adopted a non-pharmaceutical intervention on college campuses. It opens up new ways of thinking about health politics in university settings including more recent debates over face masks to combat the spread of COVID-19. As described here, non-pharmaceutical companies, not just pharmaceutical companies, played a role in reshaping social norms. Through advertisements and lobbying, condom companies were part of minor exchanges and transactions between students who adopted a nonspectacular medical device.

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90 Nicola Perra, "Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review," *Physics Reports* 913 (2021): 1-52; Ronald C. Desrosiers, "HIV/AIDS Vaccine: Why Don't We Have One After 37 Years, But There Are Several for COVID-19 Within Months?" *KXAN*, 18 May 2021.

91 Marcelo Dascal, "The Study of Controversies and the Theory and History of Science," *Science in Context* 11 (1998): 147-154.