

SUSTAINABLE SEX:

A HOT TOPIC FOR A WARMING PLANET

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Introduction

Since the purpose of hormones were discovered in the early 1900's, scientists have worked to invent a pill to prevent pregnancy. In 1957, the FDA approved the first of many oral contraceptives. These oral contraceptives gave women control and freedom, like never before; women could extend their careers and adequately space their children. More recently, however, environmental concerns have been raised. Upon following the movement of hormones out of the body, studies have shown the presence of hormones in waterways¹. Research of specific fish and frog species in hormone-laced water has shown reproductive effects like the feminization of males (through behavior, body size, or sex-change)². If the Pill is beneficial to women, but destructive to some water habitats, what alternatives do consumers have? This research considers the production, use, and disposal of oral contraceptives, condoms, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and natural family planning, to determine the most environmentally sustainable birth control method, without losing sight of the feminist significance of the Pill. A web-based survey was administered to learn about student use of birth control at CSB/SJU, as well as student interest in environmentally sustainable methods. Ultimately, copper IUDs are determined to be the most environmentally sustainable method, without compromising female freedom and pleasure.

Methods

Using peer-reviewed publications and scientific articles, this research catalogued the production, use, and disposal of four methods of contraception: condoms, oral contraceptives, IUDs, and natural family planning. Effectiveness and cost were considered, as both are important details for consumers.

Creating a web-based survey, this research investigated the birth control methods used by CSB/SJU students. Each student received a survey link in their student P.O. Box. One in four students were directly emailed the survey link. Students were asked which qualities were important when selecting a birth control method and if environmental sustainability was important.



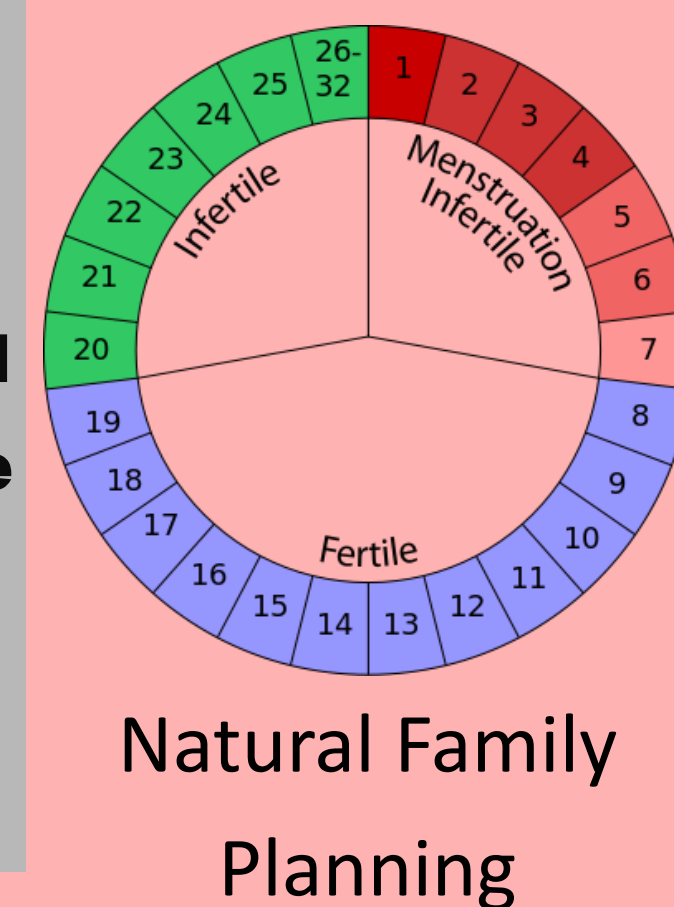
IUD



Condom



Oral Contraceptives



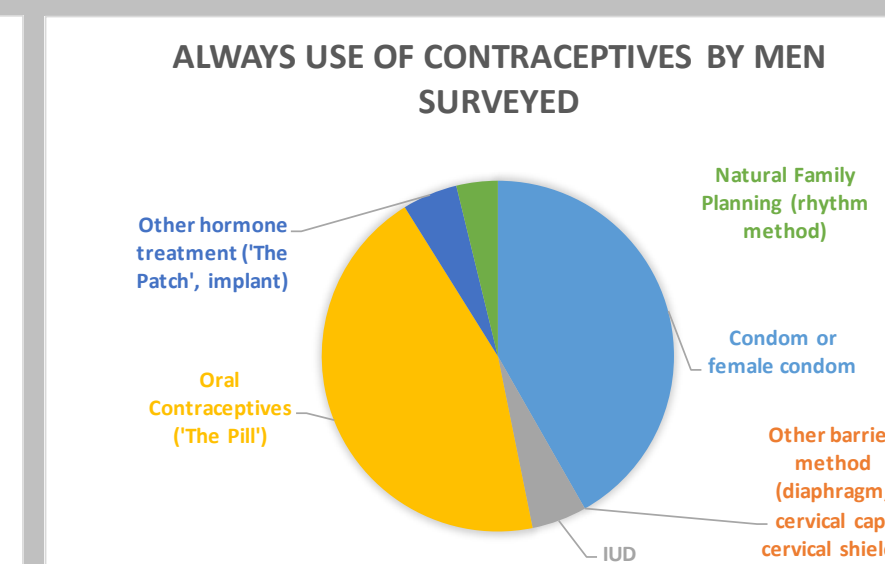
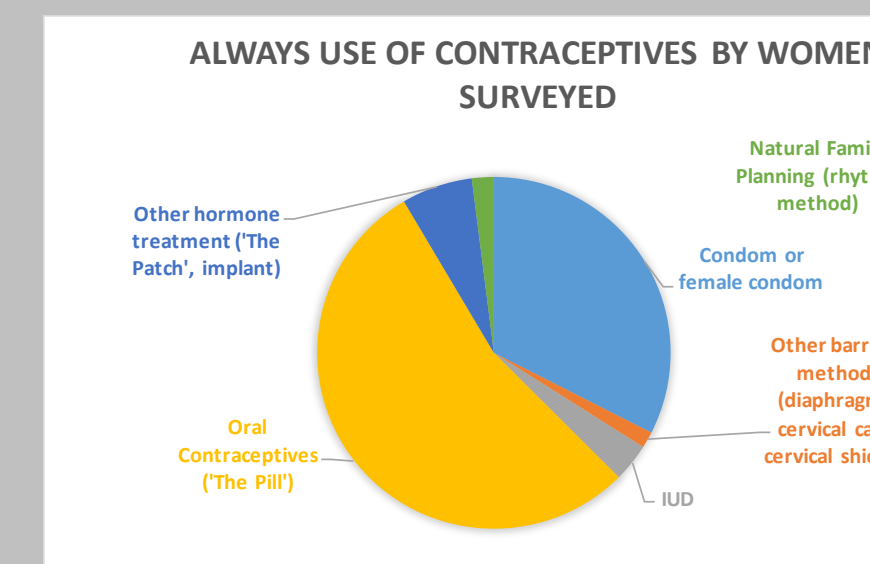
Natural Family Planning

Results

Copper IUDs were shown to be the most environmentally sustainable and feminist method. Both condoms and natural family planning were not feminist, while plastic IUDs and oral contraceptives both release hormones. Copper IUDs, then, were the most viable option. Nonetheless, only 4.1% of sexually active (within the last year) students always used IUDs.

489 students were surveyed. 42% of students were sexually active in the last month.

54% of students were sexually active in the last year.



Of sexually active men and women, oral contraceptives were the most popular for always use.



The majority of students believe the environmental sustainability of birth control is somewhat important or important.

Conclusion

IUDs were one of the least popular methods of birth control for CSB/SJU students. If 54% of students believe environmental sustainability is important or somewhat important, they should investigate using an IUD, especially if they are concerned about the sexual freedom of themselves and / or their partners. All methods analyzed, except natural family planning, can improve the environmental consequences of their product. Future birth control methods can provide even more options for men and women interested in the environmental sustainability of birth control.

Key References

¹ Bell, Alison M. "An Endocrine Disrupter Increases Growth and Risky Behavior in Threespined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*)." *Hormones and Behavior* 108 (2003): 108-114.
² Saaristo, Minna, Craft, John., Lehtonen, Kari., Bjork, Heikki., Lindstrom, Kai. "Disruption of Sexual Selection in Sand Gobies (*Pomatoschistus minutus*) by 17 α -ethinyl estradiol, an Endocrine Disruptor." *Hormones and Behavior* 530 (2009) 530-536.
Zorea, Aharon. *Birth Control: Health and Medical Issues Today*. California: ABC-CLIO, 2012.
Hatcher, Robert Anthony. *Contraceptive Technology*. New York: Ardent Media, Inc. 2004

All images were found on Google images.