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# Vibrating Female Condom Could Help a Lot of Ladies Orgasm, But Would They Buy It?

***The female condom has never been trendy.***

By [Carrie Weisman](#) / [AlterNet](#) | May 6, 2015

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When Brian Osterberg announced his plan to introduce a vibrating female condom, the response was impressive. He told me over the phone, “I’ve been giving interviews left and right. I’ve been in the condom business for almost 25 years, and when I let this cat out of the bag—so to speak—it became a bit of a sensation.”



*Photo Credit: Shutterstock*

Osterberg is the founder of [IXU](#), a Michigan-based company specializing in barrier contraception development. More simply put, they make condoms.

The company’s latest endeavor revolves around the VA w.o.w., a female condom that can be “accessorized” in a variety of ways. Osterberg explains, “You can put a mini vibrating device, something that has, say, blinking lights, something that emits a pulsing, or a sound, anything to stimulate any of the senses.”

All those options will appeal to certain segments of the market. But the idea that draws the most interest is the strategically placed vibrator, which Osterberg says could even be activated by a smartphone.

When I ran the idea by Zhana Vrangalova, a sex researcher who teaches human sexuality at NYU, she said she was "all for it."

For those unfamiliar with the design, the female condom is a pouch that can be worn on the inside of a woman's body. It comes with thick inner and outer rings. The inner ring is designed to hold the condom in place during sex, and is inserted deep into the vagina. The outer ring stays outside the vaginal opening during intercourse.

Vrangalova explained, "[The outer ring] kind of comes out and sits just above the clitoris, depending on the woman and how you place it. That ring, in and of itself, can add stimulation, especially in certain positions."

She added, "A lot of couples introduce things that can stimulate the clit that are 'hands-free' while having penetrative sex." She suggested that a vibrating female condom could allow for "easy, hands-free" clitoral stimulation during intercourse.

To test the effectiveness of the VA w.o.w., a user study was conducted in which [50 couples](#) were asked to use the condom during intercourse. By the fourth usage, 100% of female participants reported having experienced an orgasm.

But as fun as it is to talk about vibrators and orgasms, there's another part to this story. The female condom has yet to take off on the retail market. In contrast to the variety of male condoms lining store shelves, there is just one FDA-approved female condom available in the US, the FC2, a product of the [Female Health Company](#).

Vrangalova told me, "We've normalized male condoms; they're everywhere and they're easy to access. Most people have never seen a female condom. I think most people have heard that they exist, but have never actually had a chance to see it, so they just feel very uncomfortable with what it is and how you use it."

She added, "Whenever people get some sort of sex ed that includes condoms, they'll show them how to put a [male] condom on a banana or something, but no one ever shows how to put on a female condom. It's just not as cognitively accessible to people."

Vrangalova said that many women have some reticence about exploring their

bodies sexually. “[Many women] don’t have the experience of doing that. They don’t masturbate. They don’t touch themselves. They don’t put their fingers inside their bodies, so doing that for a condom is just as problematic, if not more problematic. Also, they don’t quite know what they’re going to encounter in there.”



There’s also the fact that female condoms aren’t exactly seen as “sexy.” (One blogger writes, “It looks a bit like a floppy, clear [elephant trunk](#).”)

Osterberg hopes to change that. He said, “That’s what we’re trying to make —a female condom, but make it sexy. I think through proper design, and

through incorporating some available miniaturized tech, I think we have all the ingredients necessary for a sexy female condom.”

It’s not all about aesthetics. Research has shown that female condoms are associated with [increased use of protection](#) and lower levels of sexually transmitted infections, especially in developing regions.

As Osterberg told me, “Obviously we need a more attractive looking and more user-friendly female condom. If you get it at the right price, then you’ve got a product that changes the world of sex completely. And that’s what we’re after.”

He added, “We’re really trying to put this in the hands of woman, [so] that they have greater control over their health and safety.”

A handful of product reviews help drive that last point home. One Amazon user felt compelled to share her enthusiasm about the female condom, writing, “Love these!!! A must for any sexually liberated woman who wants to remain in charge of her own sexual health decisions.”

“ModernGirl” was so happy with her Walgreens purchase she wrote, “The guy will like the break from the traditional condom and the girl will enjoy being in charge of the contraception.”

VA w.o.w. stands for “Worn of Women.” If you’re like me and figured “VA” stood

for “vagina,” you stand to be corrected. Osterberg explained that VA is “basically just an alignment of a couple letters so that when we’re introducing it into regions of the world where they’re not literate or speaking English, we can have a very simple symbol of what the condom is. It’s more of a symbolic type of thing.”

More recently, Indus Medicare Ltd. of India has partnered up with IXu. Osterberg continues to look for new partners to help complete development and bring his product to market. He hopes to introduce the VA w.o.w. to the European market in 12 to 18 months.

Osterberg is optimistic about the future. As he told me, “We’re not interested in just developing just one female condom. There has to be a line—a whole product line—of many different female condoms that have different features. Light, sound, vibration—whatever sex toy you would like to incorporate, that would be a particular type of model of the female condom. There are hundreds of different male condoms; if we could have just a few dozen female condoms, that would be a goal. That should be achievable.”



*Carrie Weisman is an AlterNet staff writer who focuses on sex, relationships and culture. Got tips, ideas or a first-person story? [Email her.](#)*

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