

# Influences of Relationships on Heterosexual Young Men's Sexuality

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## Abstract

Stereotypes show young men looking to “hook-up” (Olmsted, 2013) or have casual sex, with the idea intimacy becomes more important only as men get older (Sandberg, 2013). In this study, we aim to find if being in a relationship affects the way in which men view casual sex and the degree to which casual sex is a priority for them. We defined relationship as dating, engaged, or married. Using an interview guide, we asked 15 men in their 20s questions about sexuality in society, sexual development, early sexual experiences, culture, religion, media, peer, and family influences. Through transcription, coding, and microanalysis using NVivo qualitative software, what we found portrays a contrasting account in which young men do not prioritize sex first, most of these men are looking for a connection, trust, and value intimacy. While many studies have explored men's sexuality from different sociological perspectives providing a detailed account of how men view sex, we can start to show that young men value connections over one-night stands, and the importance of intimacy starts at an earlier age than shown in other studies.

## Method

- We conducted in-depth interviews with 15 men in their 20s between October and December of 2014.
- The participants ranged in age from 20-28, with an average of 23.
- Five of the men were white, four were African American, four were Asian and two were Hispanic.
- Nine of the men identified as Christian, one as Jewish and the others as agnostic or not religious.
- We used snowball sampling and recruited through SONA, for which participants received 1-2 credits for their participants depending on the length of their interview.
- Interviews average approximately 90 minutes.
- We asked our participants questions regarding their attitudes about sexuality in contemporary society, their sexual development, as well as how they learned about sex and how they were influenced.

## Background

- Previous research about hegemonic masculinity suggests:
- Masculinity is understood to be dynamic, changing and always in flux (Connell, 1995).
  - Men are initiators of sex
  - Men engage in casual sex or “hooking up” to gain status from peers or within their social groups.
  - They look for more serious relationships later in life as opposed to during their younger years (Kimmel, 2008)
  - Young men are subject to powerful sexual urges fuelled by ‘raging hormones’ that they find difficult to control (Metcalf and Humphries 1985; Seidler 1991, 2006; Holland et al. 1998).

## How do men feel about sex in meaningful relationships versus casual sex?

- We tend to think that men do not need emotional connections to have sex and that it is just a physical experience for them. Through most of our interviews we found similar patterns; that trust and being comfortable is important in relationships.

*“I have to trust them completely, it has to be complete, we have to know each other for a long time... enough to trust each other completely.”*  
– Arjun, 20

*“I feel like sex is very important. Yeah. But not something you should be focused on all the time, like it's fun but it should be—it should be with someone you love, not just someone you want to have sex with.”*  
– Vishan, 24

*“I mean aside from the obvious it does make you a lot more comfortable with the other person. I think like after you've gotten to know their body it's pretty much the closest you can be to a person. I mean outside of the physical pleasure there is also the emotional element to it.”*  
– Drew, 26

From these three quotes we find that men not only think sex is important to their relationships as a physical experience, but that it should be with someone you love. For them, trust is something that is desired and almost needed, in addition to closeness .

- We generally think men want casual sex and want a lot of it. We found that most men we interviewed are not into one night stands, casual sex, etc. While some have stated that if it is their only option they will partake in it, it is not their first choice.

*“I just -- I mean, I'm not really the whole -- a big proponent on just sleeping with every one. That's never been my thing.”* – Jamal, 21

*“I didn't try picking up girls - But I was always content being by myself. Like my friends would take me down to AC and try to get me to hit on girls but it wasn't me. I'm not very good in large crowds”* – Jeff, 28

These men contradict the stereotype that men are always looking for casual sex and it is what is desired often. They along with others stated they preferred sex in relationships or with someone they were comfortable with rather than strangers.



## How do men view sex as a priority when in a relationship and when not in a relationship?

- Men are just as emotionally driven as women are when it comes to sex. It is a priority in a relationship to enhance it and to maintain a healthy connection with their partner.

*“It's a give and take type of thing but it's definitely important especially in a relationship to have that kind of—that connection. To have your own time. It might not even be that it might just be laying in bed talking”*  
– Jeff, 28

- Men value sexual relationships, however, sex is not their top priority. We found that men are first looking for intimacy in relationships.
- “Um, I think it's really important because sex means that we have stepped in another stage in this relationship. Like the first step is to hold hands, then kiss, then touch, then have sex, and then married.”*  
– Donny, 20

*“Sex adds intimacy to a relationship because like when you have sex with someone like your letting them inside you or your letting them around like you trusting them with like your most sensitive body part and like your there naked .And it's like you can't hide nothing so like it's the intimacy thing, like a trust thing.”* – Jerod, 22

We can see here that these men desire intimacy and closeness and that sex was something they valued in their relationships because it helped maintain a better connection.

- Men are perceived as being sexually driven and are always seeking out sex. Through our interviews we found that sex is not something that men go seeking out and that they initiated sex less often than their partners in early experiences.

*“My list of priorities? Well I never go around looking for sex or looking for sexual experiences or anything like that, it's just something that happens and you just walk into a situation and be who you are.”* – Timothy, 25

*“If I'm just single, not -- I'm not like, oh, just looking out here. If it happens, it happens, and sometimes I'll try and make it happen.”* – Jamal, 21

- Men are thought of as being focused on their “natural instinct” which leads them to put sex as a top priority over other important aspects of their lives. While sex was a priority for a lot of the men, their life goals outweighed the importance of sex.

*“My top priority right now is having my career. I'm in college for school, I'm not here for sex, and people are crazy over females and stuff like that.”* – Marcus, 20

## Preliminary Conclusion:

We found young men's relationships influence how they feel about and view sex overall. Even though society tells us that young men, especially college aged men, are out looking for casual sex and that it is something that is high in priority to them our research suggests otherwise. Our data suggests that men are not out seeking sexual encounters as often as we think they are, men are emotionally driven as much as women are about sex, they value their relationships with the need for intimacy and closeness with a partner, and they desire emotional connections.