

Myths about men's sexuality and how they affect their behavior

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Abstract

This brief review describes the various myths that are commonly held about man's sexuality, their behavior, beliefs and preferences, and how it affects their and their partners' behaviors.

Key words: sexuality, men, women, myths, beliefs.

Myths about men's sexuality and how they affect their behavior

Men, masculinity, a great sexual appetite, and sexual performances that are reported to border on fantastic are stereotypes about men's sexual desire as reinforced on TV shows, movies, and song lyrics. It is interesting to examine the myths that abound about men's sexuality and explore whether they are based on fact or fantasy. One of the most prevalent myths about men is that they need and want more sex than they have. They are said to be continuously searching for a sex partner and sexual activity. These beliefs may be quite true until the men reach the age of 25, after which a whole slew of life changes are found to impact, negatively, sexual desire. Research explored men's high sex interest and indicated that it related to Testosterone levels, which are high when boys reach puberty, but by age 30 start to gradually decrease, until men reach the age of 65, at which point they may be much less interested in sex, which is referred to as Andropause (Murry, 2019).

Getting older, as well as various life events may lower a men's sexual. The biggest obstacle to a healthy sex drive is most probably having children. Men, who throughout history aimed to capture the woman's heart, inseminate her and enjoy her looking functioning as a mother, are now most likely companions in the delivery room, helping with bedtime routines, picking them up after school, and are involved in many more activities that in the past were seen as the woman's responsibility. As parents know so well, not just helping raise the children, but even knowing that they are around, could be an effective damper on men's sexuality (Murry, 2019).

Becoming an adult is not easy. Murry (2019) wrote about it that "the older we get, the more and more responsibilities pile on. Maybe we get a pet. Or we start paying a mortgage instead of rent, or at least we start paying more expensive rent on our own or with a partner instead of split between five roommates. We get a car. We have a job. We need to pay more bills. And those mounting responsibilities impact on us multiple levels – including our sexual desire" (p. 19). Those mounting responsibilities can be deadly to man's sexual desire, and when men are overwhelmed by their to-do lists, sex may be the farthest from their minds.

It has been well established that relationships change. Being obsessed with our partners frequently occurs in the beginning of the relationship where we want to talk and be with them all the time. Sexual desire is quite high and rampant at this stage. 'Honeymoon phase' is the name it was

given by pop culture. However, as the relationship continues, things begin to change. As time goes on, there is a noticeable decrease in sexual desire, where the desire to sleep may outweigh any desire to engage in sex. And while we may make time to meet with friends, to go to the gym, sexual activity -which used to be so important and exciting- takes a backseat. This stage was referred to as companionate love and is a healthy progression from a permanent passionate love to daily living. The lust that we had turned into a calmer friendship of sorts.

A U.S. study found that approximately 15% of the male population, aged 18 to 59 complained of persistent low sexual desire. The number of women who had that complaint was significantly higher (Brotto, 2010; Rosen, 2000). Low sexual desire in men may be caused by a multitude of reasons such as certain medications, surgeries [i.e. prostate surgery], or due to illness. However, noted Murry (2019) it may also have an adaptive function as it may help the man camouflage such issues as erectile dysfunction or premature ejaculation which is not uncommon for aging men. Rosen (2000) noted that stresses can, and do, play a crucial role in decreased sexual interest, in addition to such factors as lack of erotic thought during sexual activity, restrictive attitudes towards sexuality, sadness, shame or sexual trauma.

Men are thought to commonly want sex much more than women do. We tend to speak of men and women in a dichotomous manner, and indeed they differ biologically, but at the same time we forget that they are on a spectrum, rather than in boxes of "he" or "she" (Murry, 2019). Meston and Buss (2007), in a study they conducted on conducted a study on North American men and women, found 237 reasons people mentioned regarding their motivation for sex. There were some differences between the genders, but the interesting finding was that out of the top ten reasons for men and women to have sex, eight were identical, and going down the list even further, 20 of the first 25 reasons to engage in sex were the same for men and women. It, thus, can be said that the gender gap is closing with regards to men's and women's sexuality. Hyde (2005) found in her research on sexuality and gender differences that men reported only slightly more sexual experiences with more sexual partners, and more positive attitudes towards sexuality than women did. Men, though, engaged more than women in masturbation (Baumeister, Catanese & Vohs, 2001). She concluded that "accepting it as normal for men to have a lower desire and women to have higher desire can reduce judgments and

stress about normal heterosexual variation and lead to more satisfying, authentic sexual experiences” (p. 48).

Another myth that many take as the truth is that men’s desire is mainly influenced by the woman’s physical appearance. That myth disregards men’s deeper thoughts and the complexity of his sexuality. Based on her research on men’s sexuality, Murry (2019) found that men’s sexual desire is more influenced by their emotional and romantic connection with the woman than by her looks alone, an intriguing finding. Obviously, looks matter, but they are not the only thing that does. When asked what attracted them to women, men mentioned the woman’s body or body parts, how confident she may come across, the woman’s attitude towards her body, being in her presence, going away for a walk with her, or just communicating with her. That, for them, leads to a deeper relationship, a better connection and increased desire. Interestingly, noted Murry (2019) “Based on my conversations, in therapy and in research, there is no shortage of men who have mentioned that they are more likely to be interested in having sex during, or following, a romantic date night in some variation of what I just described” (p. 57). Men are significantly motivated to engage in sex in order to provide sexual pleasure to their partner, and it appears that if she is not experiencing pleasure, it very much affects the man’s enjoyment of sex. Men go as far as to claim that they would rather not have sex than do it with a partner who is not into it, does not enjoy it, or fakes satisfaction or orgasm.

Pornography is a multibillion dollar per year industry, which sees thousands of new videos uploaded daily! (Strange but true, 2017). Heterosexual men ate the primary target audience of porn. The assumption is that most men, whose sex drive is said to be high, watch it. Porn watching is a private endeavor and thus, women do not usually know if, or when, their male partner watches porn. However, some couples do talk about their pornographic interests, and may even watch it together. Murry (2019) opined that watching and discussing porn with one’s partner could enrich the couple’s sex life. Since most men seem to watch porn at some points, sharing it with their partners could deepen their mutual understanding, reveal their sexual preferences, and increase their intimacy. Couples may experience desire discrepancies and that may drive men to view porn and occasionally masturbate and relieve their need for sexual release. She goes on to point out that “when we have sex, we tend to spend a lot of time thinking about the other person’s wants and wishes. And two people trying so intimately to read the other person is part of what makes sex so special and intimate. But sometimes, just sometimes, maybe we don’t want to compromise on what sexual position we try... and sometimes it is easier to masturbate on our own to porn than deal with all of that” (p. 89). To summarize, it is becoming clear that men are not as sex crazed as we assumed they are. They want to have sex as a way to connect to another human, and watching porn may enhance just that (Mass, Vasilenko & Willoughby (2018).

One of the most common myths is that women, and only women are desirable, and it is the men who do the desiring. That, actually, indicates that men do not need or even want to feel desirable, and that is a myth. Obviously, women like being desired. And while women evaluate their desirability based on others’ evaluations of their physical appearance, men’s internalization of their desirability is, interestingly, centers around their behavior, such as their social or professional dominance, or their possessions or income (Mass, Vasilenko & Willoughby, 2018). Men feel desired upon hearing their partner tell them how attractive they look, having received a compliment or another validation about their physical appearance. Men also reported feeling desired when they experience their partner engaged and present during their sexual activity. They described it as a huge aphrodisiac.

Another myth has to do with initiation of sexual activity, where it is believed that men are the ones who should initiate it, and that it is the most common pattern of initiation. That myth is so deeply ingrained in our

sexual experiences, that we hardly question it (Masters, Casey, Wells & Morrison, 2013; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). That pattern stems from our teenage years, since “good girls” do not seek sex, nor do they agree to it, men are riddled with the task of courting and initiating sexual activity (Murry, 2019). And this pattern, of men seeking sex and women gatekeeping, does not just disappear when we enter into relationships in our adulthood. And as Murry indicated “In short, *he* knocks at her door, and *she* decides whether or not to let him in” (p. 122). Sociologists speak of a ‘sexual script’, which is basically a set of guidelines or rules, which are present in almost every interaction that we are involved in, and it is used to help navigate interactions in the world around us (Simon & Gagnon, 21003). Dworkin and O’Sullivan (2005) asked men not only who initiates sex, but whom would they want to initiate it. Seventy two percent of their participants indicated that they wanted a more equal amount of initiation between themselves and their sexual partner, since having the sole responsibility for initiating sexual encounters was simply ‘too demanding’ for them. Murry (2019) observed that “men find it really sexy when a woman approaches them out of nowhere, wearing something really sexy (or nothing at all) or by grabbing them below the belt” (p. 123). She added that women forget that men too need to be seduced, romanced, and cared about through women’s sexual initiation.

For ages women were told that men only want ‘one thing’ and were encouraged to reject their advances. Sexual rejection is hard for both genders, who report experiencing negative emotions upon being rejected, including a lowered self-esteem and losing their interest in sex. Specifically, men who experience regular rejection often avoid initiating and may also experience decreased sexual desire (de Graaf & Sandfort, 2004). We grew up with the myth that men are always ready and willing to have sex, while women may complain of ‘headaches’. However, that is far from the truth. Men may refuse sex due to physical illness, exhaustion, and medical complications. It appears that men may initiate and engage in sexual compliance, meaning having sex without a desire, as much as women do. Murry (2019) indicated that men may have sex in order to avoid their partner’s negative reaction which may lead to decreased sexual and relational satisfaction.

The influence of culture on sexual behavior

Biology and evolution, no doubt, play a role in sexual desire and behavior. Biologically, Testosterone levels are related to sexual desire (van Andres, 2012). Evolution has assured that we would want to procreate, as that is how we survive, and moreover thrive as a species. However, modern society expects of us to live by the rules, in order to get along and make communal life possible. Social norms and standards dictate how we should behave, and those change by culture and era (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Social messages, advertisements commonly emphasise men as being big, tough, dominant, and sexually charged. They are shown to be sexually turned on by attractive women, or are already surrounded by them. Consequently, Murry (2019) found that many men are aware of social expectations about the way that they should perform, and when they are around their guy friends, men are more apt to play into those roles. Recent research (Robinson, White & Anderson, 2017) found that men’s close male friendships are actually closer and more intimate than they have ever been reported in the past.

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