

'My kid wouldn't do that' -- study shows parents' difficulty with teen sexuality

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It can be difficult for parents of teenagers to come to terms with the fact their kids may have sex, particularly given widespread concerns about the consequences of teen sexual activity. In fact, a new study from North Carolina State University shows that many parents think that their children aren't interested in sex - but that everyone else's kids are.

"[Parents](#) I interviewed had a very hard time thinking about their own teen children as sexually desiring subjects," says Dr. Sinikka Elliott, an assistant professor of sociology at NC State and author of the study. In other words, parents find it difficult to think that their [teenagers](#) want to have sex.

"At the same time," Elliott says, "parents view their teens' peers as highly sexual, even sexually predatory." By taking this stance, the parents shift the responsibility for potential [sexual activity](#) to others - attributing any such behavior to peer pressure, coercion or even entrapment.

For example, Elliott says, parents of teenage boys were often concerned that their sons may be lured into sexual situations by teenage girls who, the parents felt, may use sex in an effort to solidify a relationship. The parents of teenage girls, meanwhile, expressed fears that their daughters would be taken advantage of by sexually driven teenage boys.

These beliefs contribute to stereotypes of [sexual behavior](#) that aren't helpful to parents or kids.

"By using sexual stereotypes to absolve their children of responsibility for sexual activity, the parents effectively reinforce those same stereotypes," Elliott says.

Parents' use of these [stereotypes](#) also paints teen heterosexual relationships in an unflattering, adversarial light, Elliott says and notes the irony of this: "Although parents assume their kids are heterosexual, they don't make heterosexual relationships sound very appealing."

More information: A paper describing the study, "Parents' Constructions of Teen Sexuality: Sex Panics, Contradictory Discourses, and Social Inequality," is published in the May issue of Symbolic Interaction.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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