

# New study finds gay and bisexual men have varied sexual repertoires

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A new study by researchers at Indiana University and George Mason University found the sexual repertoire of gay men surprisingly diverse, suggesting that a broader, less disease-focused perspective might be warranted by public health and medical practitioners in addressing the sexual health of gay and bisexual men.

The study, published online ahead of print in the *Journal of [Sexual Medicine](#)*, tapped the largest sample of its kind in the United States to examine the sexual behaviors of [gay](#) and [bisexual men](#). In collaboration with the OLB Research Institute at Online Buddies, Inc., researchers were able to include feedback from nearly 25,000 men. While gay [study participants](#) reported 1,308 unique combinations of behaviors, the most commonly reported behavior was kissing a partner on the mouth.

From a public health standpoint, say the researchers, this study provides professionals with data on the behavior of men having sex with men (MSM) that was missing from the [sexual health](#) discussion.

"Due to the disproportionate impact of HIV among MSM, the majority of research on gay and bisexual men's [sexual behavior](#) is situated within the context of disease. This emphasis has resulted in a body of literature about gay and bisexual men that is risk-focused, with limited understanding of the diversity and complexity of these men's sexual lives," said co-author Michael Reece, director of IU's Center for Sexual Health Promotion.

"In order to provide clinicians and public health professionals with the necessary tools to promote sexuality in a positive and healthy manner, a more nuanced understanding of an individual [sexual experience](#) was needed."

Lead author Joshua G. Rosenberger, professor in the Department of Global and Community Health in the College of Health and Human Services at Mason, said the study is one of the first to explore sexual behavior at the event level among a national sample of gay and bisexually identified men.

"As such, this study was focused primarily on a single sexual event -- the most recent -- and therefore these data are able to provide a level of detail about MSM sexual behavior that has not previously been documented," he said.

The study will appear in the November print issue of the Journal of Sexual Medicine. Authors include Rosenberger from Mason's Department of Global and Community Health; Reece, Vanessa Schick and Debby Herbenick from IU's Center for Sexual Health Promotion, which is in the Department of Applied Health Science in the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation; Barbara Van Der Pol and J. Dennis Fortenberry with IU's School of Medicine; and David S. Novak from Online Buddies, Inc. Online Buddies, Inc. is one of the world's largest operators of Internet websites for men who seek social or sexual interactions with other men.

Consistent with other recent studies that have examined similar issues among heterosexual men and women, the study findings demonstrate that gay and bisexual men have very diverse sexual repertoires.

The data revealed some interesting information on the types of sexual behavior that MSM reported, including that less than 40 percent of men

engaged in anal intercourse during their most recent sexual event.

"Of all sexual behaviors that men reported occurring during their last sexual event, those involving the anus were the least common," Rosenberger said. "There is certainly a misguided belief that 'gay sex equals anal sex,' which is simply untrue much of the time."

Additional key findings include:

- More than 40 percent of the study's participants reported that their most recent sexual partner was someone they were dating, their boyfriend or their spouse/partner. In comparison, an earlier study of predominantly heterosexual participants found that rate to be just over half.

- There is immense variability in the sexual repertoires of gay and bisexual men, with more than 1,300 combinations of activities during their most recent sexual events.

- Evaluations of the most recent sexual event with a male partner were mostly positive, with ratings of both pleasure and arousal being highest among older men.

- Nearly half of participants who engaged in anal intercourse during their most recent sexual event indicated a condom was used.

- About 82 percent of men report that they had an orgasm at the most recent sexual event, and men were significantly more likely to report orgasm if their sexual partner was a relationship partner.

Provided by Indiana University

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