

# Study counters stereotypes of black men most at risk for HIV/AIDS

February 9 2015, by Michael Greenwood

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A new study by researchers at Yale School of Public Health and George Mason University provides an in-depth look at the positive aspects of sexual encounters among black men who have sex with men (MSM) versus MSM of other races in the United States.

Findings from this study, published online in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, counter dehumanizing stereotypes of black MSM and demonstrate that patterns of pleasure, affection, and love are similar

regardless of race.

The study, led by Sarah Calabrese, an associate research scientist at Yale, used data from an Internet-based survey of over 20,000 black, white, Latino, and Asian MSM residing in the United States, who were recruited from online websites facilitating social or sexual interactions with other men.

"Given the disproportionate HIV burden experienced by black MSM, as well as sensationalized media portrayals of the 'down low' subculture, a lot of the press and research surrounding the sexuality of Black MSM has been devoted to sexual risk-taking and disease," said Calabrese. "We were interested in exploring more positive dimensions of sexual wellbeing among this group."

The study, conducted in collaboration with Online Buddies Inc., found that nearly all black MSM whose most recent male-partnered sexual event occurred with a primary-relationship [partner](#) reported loving their partner at the time they had sex (96%), feeling loved by their partner (97%), and having told their partner that they loved him (89%). In addition, black MSM commonly reported kissing, cuddling, and experiencing pleasure during their most recent sexual event, regardless of whether they shared the event with a primary relationship partner, a casual partner, or someone new.

Joshua Rosenberger, an assistant professor at George Mason University and one of the study's co-authors, added, "In the United States, black men's sexuality has historically been stereotyped as being primitive, predatory, and uncontrolled. We see that objectifying stereotypes of black men persist in modern media. These findings contradict these dehumanizing images by suggesting that warmth and affection may be common elements of black men's same-sex sexual experiences, particularly in primary relationships."

The study also compared patterns reported by black MSM versus white, Latino, and Asian MSM. "In contrast to animalistic stereotypes suggesting that [black men](#)'s sexuality is somehow lacking intimacy or affection, these findings reveal largely similar patterns of pleasure, affection, and love among black MSM as compared to MSM of other races," says Calabrese.

Rosenberger added, "If the field of [public health](#) truly wants to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it not only needs to focus on the biological aspects of the disease, but also on the sociocultural elements that contribute to continued stigma and marginalization of minority populations, such as the misinformation associated with the sexuality of black MSM."

**More information:** "Pleasure, Affection, and Love Among Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) versus MSM of Other Races: Countering Dehumanizing Stereotypes via Cross-Race Comparisons of Reported Sexual Experience at Last Sexual Event." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* January 2015. [DOI: 10.1007/s10508-014-0405-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0405-0)

Provided by Yale University

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