

# Masculinities, Sexuality, and the Body: Differences in Sexual Functioning and Body Image among Heterosexual and Gay Men in Poland

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## INTRODUCTION & AIM

Sexual functioning is a multidimensional biopsychosocial process influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors (Nusbaum et al., 2003). Previous research suggests that sexual orientation may shape sexual satisfaction, body image, sexual self-esteem, and sexual behaviors (Gil, 2007). In particular, gay men report higher levels of body dissatisfaction and appearance-related anxiety than heterosexual men, likely due to stronger cultural emphasis on attractiveness within gay communities (Carper et al., 2010). Body image and perceived attractiveness are closely related to sexual self-esteem and overall sexual well-being (Snell et al., 1993). Findings concerning sexual satisfaction among heterosexual and homosexual men remain inconsistent across cultures (Peixoto, 2021). Studies also indicate that men who have sex with men tend to report earlier sexual initiation and a higher number of sexual partners compared to heterosexual men (Glick et al., 2012). Despite growing international evidence, there is still limited research concerning young Polish men. Therefore, the present study aimed to compare heterosexual and homosexual young men in sexual functioning, sexual satisfaction, sexual self-esteem, body esteem, and number of sexual partners.

## METHOD

The study included 214 Polish men aged 18–26 years ( $M = 22.20$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ), including 100 gay and 114 heterosexual participants, recruited through Facebook groups, dating apps, and online survey platforms. Participants completed a socio-demographic questionnaire, the Polish adaptation of the Body Esteem Scale (BES), and the Multidimensional Sexuality Questionnaire (MSQ-PL). The BES assessed body esteem across three domains, while the MSQ-PL measured 12 dimensions of sexual functioning. Both instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .67-.94$ ). Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.

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## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The compared groups did not differ in size, indicating balanced samples of heterosexual and homosexual participants. Gay men reported a significantly higher number of sexual partners than heterosexual men, confirming H1 and remaining consistent with previous findings showing earlier sexual initiation and greater sexual activity among men who have sex with men (Glick et al., 2012; Amos & McCabe, 2016; Halkitis et al., 2020). Homosexual participants also scored significantly higher on Sexual Consciousness, suggesting greater reflection on and awareness of their sexuality (Kowalewska et al., 2019). This finding may be related to heteronormative cultural contexts, in which non-heterosexual individuals often undergo a longer process of identity exploration and acceptance (Bojarska & Kowalczyk, 2024; Kubicek et al., 2010; Camp et al., 2020). In terms of body esteem, heterosexual men reported significantly more positive perceptions of Upper-Body Strength and Physical Condition than gay men. These findings partially confirmed H3 and support previous research linking homosexuality with greater body dissatisfaction, appearance-related anxiety, and vulnerability to sociocultural standards of attractiveness (Carper et al., 2010; Gigi et al., 2016). At the same time, no differences were observed in general Physical Attractiveness, suggesting that body image differences may concern specific aspects of physicality rather than global self-evaluation.

Contrary to expectations, no significant differences were found in sexual satisfaction or sexual self-esteem between groups, leading to the rejection of H2 and H4. Despite differences in body image and sexual experiences, both heterosexual and homosexual men perceived themselves as similarly competent and satisfied sexual partners (Carvalho & Costa, 2015; Amos & McCabe, 2016; Halkitis et al., 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The study indicates that heterosexual and homosexual men do not differ in most aspects of sexual functioning, including sexual satisfaction and sexual self-esteem. However, gay men reported higher sexual consciousness and a greater number of sexual partners in the past year. They also more often reported mental health treatment and showed lower body self-esteem in terms of upper-body strength and physical condition. These findings extend existing literature on male sexuality and highlight the need for culturally sensitive mental health support.