

Constructing Sex Acts

Stoltenberg's "How Man Have (A) Sex"

Stoltenberg takes a social constructionist position toward the sexes and also sex. He argues that differences between male and female eroticism and sexuality are socially constructed, not biological.

He argues that the sex lives of men ("people with penises") are shaped by the desire to belong "to a sex that is male and not female." Sexuality creates gender: "So much of most men's sexuality is tied up with gender-actualizing—with feeling like a real man—that they can scarcely recall an erotic sensation that had no gender-specific cultural meaning."

Many men think the following are sexy: pressuring someone to have sex, believing women want to be raped, treating women as objects, being aroused by rape and pornography, violence, making yourself important and the other person unimportant, etc.

"When you use sex to have a sex, the sex you have is likely to make you feel crummy about yourself. But when you have sex in which you are not struggling with your partner in order to act out 'real manhood,' the sex you have is more likely to bring you close."

Practical sex tips for men: (1) Consent is absolutely essential, (2) mutuality is absolutely essential, (3) respect is absolutely essential. Also, don't let your sexuality be manipulated by the pornography industry, don't let drugs and alcohol numb your sex life, and don't become fixated on coitus.

Carpenter's "Gender and the Meaning and Experience of Virginity Loss in the Contemporary United States"

Method: Interviews with 61 men and women from diverse backgrounds.

Three main interpretations of virginity loss:

Virginity as gift (with expectation of reciprocity as through love and commitment)

When reciprocity is present, virginity loss is positive. If not, the experience is dissatisfying.

This frame increases power of men.

Virginity as stigma (something to hide and expunge)

This frame tends to empower women (for whom there is less stigma) and disempower men, who may be criticized for their lack of sexual skills.

Virginity loss as step in process of growing up

Gender differences were least pronounced in this frame and neither partner had disproportionate power.

Experiences can be positive even if some parts are negative because sexual knowledge increases.

Enjoyment of and agency during virginity loss depends on gender and interpretation.

Men tended to see virginity as stigma and women as gift, but interpretations were overlapping and changing. Gender differences were less pronounced among younger people. Gay men and women were likely to hold the step-in-process frame.