

# Beliefs/Myths about Male Sexuality

Everyone grows up in a culture that teaches a certain set of beliefs about sexuality - what it means to be a man or woman and how people should behave in a sexual relationship. In recent years our society has begun to re-evaluate what is expected of men and women, however, traditional gender roles still exert a strong pull.

Following traditional gender roles often meant that men felt isolated and inadequate in their sexual relationships, though they were never supposed to admit it. It still takes very little for a boy (or man) to be labeled “girl” or “wimp” – signifying that he is less than manly or not masculine enough to meet some standard. At the same time males are now expected to be in touch with their feelings and focus on relationships.

The New Male Sexuality is a book written by Bernie Zilbergeld, a sex therapist who has worked with many men. It is a “must read” for anyone who is male or cares about someone who is male (which is pretty much everyone). In his book Zilbergeld talks about the “fantasy model of sex” that we all learn without even realizing it. Although most people have a strong curiosity about sexual matters that starts at a fairly young age, most of our sexual learning does not come from formal courses or books. And, even if we’ve been lucky

enough to get some kind of sexuality education , we’ve also had years of learning through TV, movies, jokes and just observing people around us.

Zilbergeld states, *“We compare ourselves to what we’ve learned, and almost everyone feels that they’ve come out on the short end. No matter what kind of equipment you have, no matter what partner, no matter what you do, no matter what the results – none of it equals what you heard and read about. Good sex is always somewhere else with someone else.”*

Our culture perpetuates these myths regarding sexuality and they still exist because men have traditionally not talked about their sexual feelings and experiences honestly and openly with each other. There have been positive signs recently that this is changing. The men's movement is beginning to redefine what it means to be a man, and qualities of gentleness, caring, and vulnerability are becoming more valued. Some men are beginning to discuss their sexuality more openly, and this can only benefit both the men, themselves, and their partners.

The myths cited here – and others – are explored in more detail in Zilbergeld's book, but these can give you a starting place for thinking about your sexuality in a new way.

**Myth:** Men are always ready and willing to have sex.

**Fact:** Even men who really love sex aren't always in the mood, and don't always want to get into the mood. Sometimes they just have other things on their minds. And while sex can be an important and satisfying part of life, there are other things that are just as important and satisfying or more so, even to guys.

Lack of interest in sex is actually very common among both men and women, and this may be related to the complexity and responsibilities of day-to-day living. In his work, Bernie Zilbergeld has found that 30% of men felt, at least sometimes, that sex was a burden. Yet while we have come to accept that women have a right to say "no" to sex, we sometimes deny men this same right by expecting them to be "sex machines." They're not.

**Myth:** Size matters

**Fact:** This myth is a very common concern for men. If you compare your penis with those of other men you see in the locker room or in porno films, you might conclude that yours isn't "good enough," that it's either too small or too large or not shaped "right."

The fact is that penises and testicles come in a variety of sizes and shapes. When they're not erect, penises appear to be quite different in size, but when they're erect their sizes are much more similar.

Many men don't see each other's erect penises except in porno films. What they're seeing are actors hired on the basis of penis size that is further enhanced through the miracles of filming. Most men really have no realistic basis for comparison. No wonder they may feel inadequate.

The size of your penis has nothing to do with how much pleasure you feel, and it has little effect on your partner's pleasure, as well. In terms of vaginal intercourse, penis size matters very little, since only the outer third of the vagina is richly supplied with nerves and the clitoris is a woman's main organ of sexual pleasure anyway. In addition, the vagina is not an open tube to be filled up; it's more like a very elastic sleeve with the walls touching each other until an object moves them apart.

Regarding anal sex, a smaller penis may be an advantage because the rectum is not very elastic.

**Myth:** Very few men are virgins.

**Fact:** Sometimes guys lie about sex. You probably knew that already, but you may not be aware of just how common it is or how it affects our perceptions of what's really going on.

For example, a Psychology Today survey found that men estimated that only 1% of their peers were virgins, while 22% actually were. A Playboy survey of college students found that 26% had never had intercourse with a partner, and a more recent survey at the University of Alberta put the figure at 24%.

**Myth:** Sex requires an erection.

**Fact:** This is a myth that seems to have become even more ingrained in our culture with the introduction of drugs like Viagra. The fact is, that many men experience a lack of erection from time to time and this doesn't need to be a problem. In fact, being so goal-oriented about sex means that you miss out on a lot of pleasure.

Using your hands, mouth and imagination, there are many things you can do to satisfy a partner and experience sexual pleasure yourself. After all, your skin is your largest sex organ and your mind is the most powerful one.

By the way, putting pressure on yourself to get an erection only makes it less likely that you'll have one.

Remind yourself that the causes of erectile difficulty are often not medical, but may be related to other factors such as:

- fatigue
- preoccupation with other things
- anger
- ill health
- alcohol and other drugs (including prescriptions)
- relationship dissatisfaction
- lack of sufficient stimulation (physical or psychological)

**Myth:** Sex is over when the man comes.

**Fact:** This need not be the case. The couple may slow down, stop and start again during the process of having sex, taking breaks and communicating about their needs and wants. If one partner is not yet satisfied, sexual activity can continue until both are ready to stop. (See the myth "Sex requires an erection.")

And by the way...

There's no reason why every sexual encounter has to include an orgasm. While we may have heard horror stories about "blue balls" and "lover's nuts," they are not harmful conditions. There may be some discomfort if a man doesn't ejaculate, but it passes. He can still have a pleasurable sexual encounter without orgasm, especially once he gets past adolescence.

**Myth:** All orgasms are "explosive, mind-blowing, and earth-shattering."

**Fact:** If you've been living in this culture with its movies and pulp fiction, you may have a very unrealistic idea of what an orgasm is all about. The fact is that orgasms vary in intensity and character. It's perfectly normal for them to feel different from one occasion to the next. Most orgasms are great, but some really aren't that spectacular.

**Myth:** Men in relationships don't masturbate.

**Fact:** This is simply not true. While masturbation tends to be less frequent among those in relationships, many men and women masturbate when their partner isn't available or just for their own pleasure. Some couples find that masturbating together enhances their level of intimacy. Further, masturbating isn't "cheating" on your partner. It's a matter of personal preference.

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These are just a few of the myths about sexuality and sexual relationships.

It's surprising how much these myths can affect us even if we know consciously that they're not true. We would encourage you to be aware of the myths and try to determine what is true about sexuality and sex for you, examining and trusting your own values, feelings and experiences. You may find it very helpful if there's someone you can talk to about these things honestly and openly without fear of being judged.

It's Your Call – Making Sexual Decisions

<http://www.ualberta.ca/HEALTHINFO/Decisions/mythsm.htm>