

# 'I don't mind watching him cum': Heterosexual men, threesomes, and the erosion of the one-time rule of homosexuality

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## Abstract

In this qualitative research, conducted on 30 gay-friendly, heterosexual, undergraduate men, we examine actual and hypothetical experiences of sexual threesomes, both with two women and one man (FFM), and two men and one woman (MMF). We show a cultural willingness for heterosexual men to engage in not only FFM threesomes, but also MMF threesomes. A year and a half into their university experience, seven of our participants had had at least one FFM threesome, and five of our participants had had at least one MMF threesome. We argue that this threesome experience is a component of cultural progression toward a more liberal, recreational culture of sexuality that encourages play and experimentation instead of a procreative model of sexuality. Thus, this research contributes to the growing body of literature showing that the cultural boundaries of heterosexuality are rapidly expanding for males, permitting more same-sex sexual contact without triggering the one-time-rule of homosexuality.

## Keywords

Group sex, homophobia, masculinity, mostly straight, threesome

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## Introduction

In the latter half of the 20th century, British and American cultures have both recognized that homosexuality exists as a static identity among a proportion of the population and maintained significant antipathy toward gay people (Anderson, 2011). This resulted in a homohysterical culture in which heterosexual men, who could not physically demonstrate their heterosexuality, felt compelled to prove and reprove their heterosexuality (Kimmel, 1994; McCormack and Anderson, 2014). In such a culture, homosexual suspicion, particularly among adolescent men, may result from a violation of gender norms – and this includes engaging in any form of same-sex sexual or semi-sexual activity – a pattern described as the *one-time-rule of homosexuality* (Anderson, 2008).

However, considerable research suggests that adolescent men have increasingly stigmatized homophobia as attitudes towards homosexuality have liberalized, and the cultural inclusion of sexual minorities has become normalized (Anderson, 2014; Weeks, 2007). Adolescent men in multiple countries (Anderson, 2014; Drummond et al., 2014; Southall et al., 2009) are moving away from prohibitive proscriptions related to sexual acts and moving toward one of viewing sex as a leisure activity (Attwood and Smith, 2013). This move appears to be particularly true of British men, who retain their cultural awareness that homosexuality exists but do not maintain antipathy toward it (Magrath et al., 2013; McCormack, 2012; Morris and Anderson, 2015). Accordingly, this increasing acceptance of homosexuality means that men are now also less fearful of recognizing small amounts of same-sex attraction (or their capacity for attraction) in themselves (Anderson and Adams, 2011) and demonstrate this through the adoption of categorical labels such as mostly heterosexual (Savin-Williams and Vrangalova, 2013). Alongside this growing acceptance of homosexuality at a cultural and personal level there is a growing expectation for individuals to have a varied set of sexual experiences (Attwood, 2005; Bernstein, 2001; Hammers and Sheff, 2011), which conceivably may now start to include experiences with members of the same sex.

Drawing on interviews with 30 heterosexual undergraduate men, we examine their experiences of threesomes with two females and one male (FFM) and two males and one female (MMF) to explore what this means for heterosexual identity construction. Threesomes were chosen as a focus because of the relative lack of formal academic investigation into them, as well as allowing us to examine attitudes toward, and instances of, same-sex sexual behaviours amongst straight-identifying men. In finding a cultural willingness for heterosexual men to engage in a MMF threesome, we suggest that these adolescent men promote a more complex version of heterosexuality than traditionally conceived. This research thus contributes to a growing body of literature that suggests that the cultural boundaries of heterosexuality are rapidly expanding for males, permitting more same-sex sexual contact without triggering the enforcement of the one-time rule of homosexuality (Anderson, 2008).

## The one-time rule of homosexuality

Sociological research has shown that men's behaviours have previously been constrained by, and are closely linked to, personal and societal homophobia (Epstein, 1997; Plummer, 1999). Anderson (2009, 2011) contends that cultural homophobia – the fear of being socially perceived as gay for enacting gender transgressive displays – leads to homophobia serving as a policing mechanism for the construction of masculinity by associating the expression of femininity among men with male homosexuality. Accordingly, young men have been highly homophobic and acted in accord with orthodox notions of masculinity in order to distance themselves from being thought gay (Plummer, 1999). Thus, male heterosexuality has been largely demonstrated through violence, aggression, stoicism, hyper-heterosexuality and a host of other gendered characteristics constructed in opposition to perceived femininity and thus homosexuality (Kimmel, 1996).

This form of gender policing applies not only to attitudinal dispositions and behavioural patterns, but also extends to the disavowal or avoidance of any feminine activity, organization or institution (Anderson, 2005). Thus, partaking in the wrong sport, enjoying the wrong type of entertainment, wearing the wrong type of clothing, or entering the wrong occupation potentially compromises a male's heterosexual capital (Bird, 1996). It is for these reasons that Kimmel (1994) has described masculinity as homophobia.

The expectation that heterosexual men disassociate themselves from symbols of femininity and homosexuality can be seen in numerous sociological examinations of men and their masculinity. For instance, Eck (2003) used analysis of nude images to demonstrate that straight men struggled to comment on male pictures without reasserting their heterosexuality. Similarly, Derlega et al. (2001) showed that heterosexual males considered photos of men hugging as significantly more abnormal than photos of men standing beside each other. Even young boys have felt the need to distance themselves from emotional expression, avoiding any demonstrations of fear, pain, or crying in order to avoid feminization or homosexualization (Pollack, 1999).

Furthermore, even a single same-sex sexual behaviour has been conflated with a total homosexual identity in North American and Western European cultures. Heterosexual boys and men wishing to be perceived as heterosexual must conceal any same-sex sexual practices (Lancaster, 1988). Derived from historically-based theories of racial hypodescent whereby anyone with a single 'drop' of African ancestry was labelled as black (Harris, 1964) in American society, Anderson (2008) elaborates on this social condition, describing it as a *one-time rule of homosexuality*. Here, any same-sex sexual act or desire is perceived to mark that person as gay, regardless of sexual history, sexual identity or sexual desire. And because this cultural notion has been established as an *either/or* binary, the rule has traditionally erased bisexuality, heteroflexibility, and such concepts as 'mostly heterosexual' from cultural consideration. When a one-time rule is in cultural operation, one is either 100% straight or 100% gay.

However, Schwartz and Rutter (1998) suggest that the reverse condition does not hold true for gay men; that ‘one drop of heterosexuality in a homosexual life means nothing’ (p. 12). Limited exceptions to the one-time rule have come from institutions where heterosexual sex is unobtainable, such as prison or the military (Bérubé, 1991; Gear and Ngubeni, 2002). The one-time rule has also not applied to women (Diamond, 2008). Thus, the sexual lives of self-identifying heterosexual men have, in general, been more tightly policed than men with other sexual orientations or women.

There is, however, mounting evidence in recent years to suggest an erosion of the one-time rule of homosexuality with regard to both symbols of femininity/homosexuality and same-sex sexual behaviours. Anderson (2014) documented the prevalence of hugging and gentle tactility among American high school students, while Barrett (2015) found significant levels of bodily touch in friendships between gay and straight men. Other research shows men willing to engage in emotional support (Baker and Hotek, 2011; McCormack, 2011), cuddling (Anderson and McCormack, 2015), kissing (Anderson et al., 2012; Drummond et al., 2014) and dancing together (Peterson and Anderson, 2012), all without ostensibly-heterosexual men being homosexualized. In one study, Anderson (2008) found 40% of the athletes in his study had some form of same-sex sexual experience, yet none were homosexualized because of it.

When men are not automatically marked as homosexual for displaying behaviours traditionally associated with femininity, such as affection or emotional support, and when men are able to identify as ‘mostly straight’ because they only engage in same-sex sex practices occasionally (Savin-Williams and Vrangalova, 2013), we have arrived at a point where the one-time rule of homosexuality no longer carries social significance. Indeed, Branfman et al. (this issue) show that heterosexual men are even able to partake in their own anal pleasuring without being socially homosexualized. Thus, young straight men are redefining heterosexuality as they reconfigure masculinity (McCormack, 2012). Men’s acceptance of the term ‘mostly straight’ in describing their sexual orientation suggests that decreasing homophobia has not only expanded the scope of acceptable non-sexual behaviours for men but has additionally allowed them to recognize, acknowledge and even disclose small amounts of same-sex attraction (Anderson and McCormack, 2016). In short, the boundaries of what it means to be heterosexual have expanded.

## **Recreational sex**

Alongside decreasing homophobia and the increasing irrelevance of the one-time rule of homosexuality, other previously-stigmatized sexual and relationship practices are becoming more commonplace. Non-normative relationship styles such as consensual non-monogamy are becoming more noticeable to the general population (Wosick-Correa, 2010) and historical comparisons suggest a convincing liberalization of attitudes in this regard. Other sexual behaviours that were once

reserved for only the most brazen and adventurous of practitioners (oral sex, use of sex toys, anal sex, casual sex, openness to kinky or BDSM sex, and sexual play with more than one partner) are becoming commonplace and even expected (Attwood, 2005; Bernstein, 2001; Hammers and Sheff, 2011). England et al. (2008) even go as far as suggesting that casual sex is now hegemonic compared to the pursuit of romance or a relationship among young adults.

Easy access to pornography has been theorized as part of this progression toward a more liberal, recreational culture of sexuality that encourages play and experimentation in lieu of procreative sexuality (McCormack and Wignall, 2016; McNair, 2013). Different types of pornography are now easily accessible to a broad range of audiences, compared to previous avenues of pornographic consumption that required more deliberate commitment (Attwood, 2010). Ease of pornographic access has been significant in creating opportunity for heterosexual men to be exposed to a diverse range of sexual acts including male-male sexual interaction (Ross, 2005). Anderson (2014) argues that the 'commodification of extreme pornography makes yesterday's stigmatized bedroom activities normal, perhaps mundane' (p. 196), and that this has allowed for the desensitization and normalization of same-sex sexual acts, too.

All of the aforementioned changes are happening alongside a broader trend toward viewing pornography or sexuality itself as a consumer experience, one that people seek out as part of a desire to have different, varied and unique experiences. This 'consumer sexuality' perspective, or what McNair (2002) calls the pornification of society, involves seeking pleasure as a way of bonding with one's friends; of experiencing something different and new; and viewing sex as a harmless, healthy, consensual experience to be consumed as a leisure activity, only sometimes with one's romantic partner (Attwood and Smith, 2013; Joseph and Black, 2012; McCormack and Wignall, 2016).

### **Threesomes in popular culture**

One arena where pornography may have had an influence concerns the cultural acceptability of threesomes. Threesomes are a common category on porn sites. Highlighting their commonness, analytics examining the porn streaming site Pornhub shows that 'threesomes' are the second most commonly searched category of pornography by women (Pornhub, 2014). Even so, the 'deviant' nature of threesomes might be one reason why there are few formal academic investigations of them (e.g. Karlen, 1988; Wernik, 1990). The studies that do exist are dated and do not therefore reflect cultural progress made over the past two decades (Anderson, 2014). Indeed, the few recent studies that pay attention to threesomes are only cursory in their examination of them (e.g. Adam, 2006; Armstrong and Reissing, 2014; Jonason and Marks, 2009; Lasala, 2005). This absence is particularly stark when compared to their growing visibility and social acceptance within popular culture (Adriaens and Van Bauwel, 2014). Highlighting this, Leitch's (2006) article for *Men's Health* suggests that one is supposed to have

had a threesome by age 30; it has thus become a risqué, but socially-accepted and perhaps even expected, part of the evolved person's sexual repertoire of experiences. Accordingly, recent studies looking at the prevalence of threesomes and people's fantasies show that significant numbers of people are engaging with them. For example, Rupp et al. (2014) found nearly 20% of their female undergraduate interviewees had engaged in a threesome. Joyal et al. (2014) found threesomes with two members of the opposite sex to be the third favourite fantasy for men (but only the 13th for women).

Yet there is little social scientific research available on the act of the threesome itself, or those who choose to engage in the act; particularly among heterosexual men. When research has been conducted, it has tended to focus on female-female-male (FFM) threesomes – a practice that is significantly more socially acceptable, even among swingers (Frank, 2008). This previous focus, we argue, reflects homophobia and the one-time rule: sexual culture has eroticized the female-female-male (FFM) threesome, but not the male-male-female (MMF) threesome. Yet, in this research we examine for attitudes and experiences with both types of threesomes in a culture of diminished homophobia.

## Methods

### *Participants*

This research draws on 30 semi-structured interviews with self-identified heterosexual, undergraduate men from a small university in the south of England. We used Savin-Williams' (2014) nine-point scale of sexual identification. We also asked about disgust toward homosexual sex with another man. In order to ensure that the men we interviewed did not overly exaggerate their positive support for gay men and male homosexuality, we drew on data we collected 18 months prior on the same cohort of students. We had distributed Herek's (1988) Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians scale to these students. The survey was administered, anonymously, upon the students' first day of arrival at the university. Results showed wide acceptance of male homosexuality. Accordingly, we have triangulated assessment methods to show that these specific men self-report high degrees of acceptance and low degrees of disgust for male homosexuality. This is an important characteristic of our participants because inclusivity toward homosexuality is requisite for decreased homophobia.

Other demographic information was also measured. Although men were not selected for race, the virtually exclusive white student body of this British university limited our analysis to that of only white men, with one exception who was south Asian. The sample was also populated by participants from self-identified, middle-class backgrounds. We do not therefore conduct a race or class analysis with this research, limiting our findings to that of white, middle-class, heterosexual, undergraduate men from this university, who held inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality.

## *Procedures*

Given the taboo nature of some of the topics dealing with same-sex sexual interactions or contact, we used a sampling strategy deliberately designed to reduce the probability that the interview would cause excessive anxiety and prevent disclosure from respondents (Bahn and Weatherill, 2013). We recruited our sample from a population that had already established a link with the third author; this link was created through his undergraduate teaching prior to study recruitment. Interviews averaged 45 minutes, and were exclusively conducted face-to-face by that author. The benefit of this method was that students had already developed a level of rapport with the interviewer, allowing sensitive topics to be more easily discussed (Hutchinson et al., 2002).

As this research was part of a larger study on men's friendships and sexual activity, participants were eased into a discussion of these more taboo interview topics by first focusing on 'lighter' topics, including questions about friendships and bromances before moving on to potentially more sensitive topics such as sexual behaviour, discussion of sex with friends, threesome experiences, sexual interaction with other men, and hypothetical sexual behaviours. At the end of the interview, students were asked if they would like to read their transcripts and to add to or revise them. All ethical procedures of the British Sociological Association were followed.

## *Analysis*

We followed a grounded theory approach to interview data analysis and the coding of the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews as advanced by Charmaz (2014). One researcher transcribed all of the interviews and conducted a round of open coding to identify general thematic categories. Another conducted independent open coding, confirming that the first researcher's codes were appropriate and that they accurately represented key themes in the data. We report high inter-rater coding reliability since there was only minor variation (10%) on codes. The next stage was a process of focused coding in order to generate sub-topics and patterns within the interview data, and we selected examples from the transcripts to illustrate our key conceptual findings (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## *Limitations*

Limitations to this study are similar to those associated with most interview-based studies of sexuality that use a small selective sample: issues of representativeness and reliability (Gledhill et al., 2008). Emergent research on sexual topics is often necessarily based on a convenience sample rather than a random sample. This is due to the inherent difficulties associated with locating subjects willing to speak about intimate sexual issues (Harris et al., 2008). We therefore limit the generalizations drawn from our findings based on data on 30 participants while

simultaneously noting that without empirical evidence on the attitudes and experiences of young men from other institutions in Britain, we cannot also generalize that other young men are necessarily any different than this sample. More research is needed. Future large-scale surveys can build on our findings by testing the patterns we uncover here among broader, more diverse samples.

### **Normalizing the MMF threesome**

Of the 30 self-identified heterosexual men interviewed in this research, one identified as ‘mostly straight’, 11 self-identified as ‘straight’, and 18 men identified as ‘exclusively straight’. When asked about disgust towards homosexual sex acts, only two men stated that they were sexually repulsed by the thought, while the other 28 males said that they were not repulsed by it. Collectively, they exhibited no hostility toward homosexuality or gay people, with 15 out of 30 identifying as strong supporters of gay rights and the remaining participants noting they had no antipathy toward homosexuals.

Although these men were only 18 months into their university education, one third (10) had engaged in a threesome, and six of those ten had experienced more than one. Considering the sexual opportunities often associated with the university setting, and the timing of sexual experimentation in young adults’ lives, the percentage of men with threesome experience would likely be higher if we interviewed them after three years of university.

Of the ten men who had a threesome, seven had participated within at least one FFM threesome, and five had experience in at least one MMF threesome (two participants had engaged in both). Five participated in only FFM and three in only MMF threesomes. MMF threesomes were not, however, necessarily inclusive of same-sex sex. Instead, we describe the type of interaction that occurs between men in threesomes as semi-sexual: meaning that whilst the men were not intentionally interacting with one another in a sexual manner (although participants did acknowledge that some incidental touching – such as on the shoulder – may have happened), they did engage sexually at the same time with the woman.

The threesomes seemed to develop from a variety of circumstances. For example, both of Rob’s threesome experiences were within the confines of a romantic relationship: ‘I’ve had a total of two. I’ve had one with my girlfriend and a girl who liked her. The other was with someone neither of us knew very well, also a girl, who we met while traveling’. Jacob, however, had threesome experiences that took place both within a casual romantic relationship and outside of it:

I’ve had one with two girls and one with two guys and then I’ve had one experience with a foursome. The two girls was that I was seeing one girl and her friend sort of said, ‘I wouldn’t mind getting in on this’. The [threesome with the] two guys was a girl at a party and she said ‘I can’t really pick between you two’.



Sam said he had ‘four or five’ threesomes, most of which took place once he started attending college:

I had a threesome but not the one I want. I think most straight blokes want two girls but that’s hard to get hold of unless you go for two fat middle-aged women. When I was in college [aged 16–18] I’d get pissed in town and go out looking for sex, and threesomes were part of that.

For the remaining 20 participants who reported no threesome experience, all responded that they would be interested in a FFM threesome. Furthermore, 20 of the 25 men with no experience of MMF threesomes responded that they would be interested in having one. However, most of these men added the same qualifier: Namely, 14 of the 20 explicitly said that they would want the other male to be a close male friend, or bromance, while only 6 of the 20 did not express a strong preference for who the other male would be.

Jack stated, ‘I’d feel completely comfortable being naked around my mates, but I’d feel uncomfortable or weird around a guy I don’t know’. Similarly, Jeremy said, ‘I have more of a connection with a friend than a complete stranger. I’d be like, “I’ve never met you before and now you’re naked, doing the same girl I am”. I might also be threatened’. Tim said:

I would with two women . . . but with two men, who knows if the right situation would come up? It would more likely be with a mate, because you can laugh about it. There would be some banter.

Likewise, Tony felt a stranger did not provide the same level of comfort that a friend would:

I’d prefer it to be someone I knew, definitely someone I knew. I don’t know why, I’d just feel a lot more comfortable. I’d struggle to just meet random people and say, ‘Fancy a fuck? Cool, let’s go’. You never know what the guy’s gonna be like. But if I know the guy and I know how open we are, and I know where I stand, it would be more comfortable.

The 14 men who expressed desire for a threesome with a close male friend used the label of bromance to clarify their preference. They all discussed having a bromance, and all described him as their best friend with whom they demonstrated a similar level of intimacy, emotionality, and tactility to that of their girlfriends, just without a sexual component. For example, these men cuddled (Anderson and McCormack, 2015), kissed (Anderson et al., 2012), and confided their problems with their bromance. And as McCormack (2012) has also shown, part of being in a bromance means comfort in mutual nudity – a requisite for a MMF threesome.

It is perhaps the emotional intimacy that men share with other men that helps an MMF threesome be perceived as normal as a FFM threesome. Some men describe a MMF threesome as the norm. Exemplifying this, Michael said, 'A normal threesome would be great banter'. When asked what a normal threesome was, he said that it would be two males and one female. Alan also assumed a MMF threesome to be 'normal'; when asked if he would be interested in a threesome, he laughed, and said, 'Yes. It all depends on the best friend'. He added, 'Some best friends you can say "Oh, you're fit," and some you don't have that deeper understanding with. If you complement his looks, I'd be most comfortable with that'. We therefore suggest that the cultural normalization of a MMF threesome for these participants in addition to a FFM threesome is permissible according to both the esteem that young men maintain for the notion of bromance and their comfort in being nude around each other, as well as (as we later show) the diminishment of the one-time rule of homosexuality.

### **Homosocial bonding and MMF threesomes**

Despite the entire sample admitting to either having had or desiring a threesome, threesomes or group sex were not part of their fantasies and only one participant mentioned them in their porn consumption. This suggests that the notion of a threesome is perhaps more of a novelty (see Leitch, 2006), as opposed to occupying a position of heightened sexual desire. Illustrating this within our study, when the 20 participants who had no experience with threesomes were questioned about hypothetical threesomes, many talked about it in terms of a 'fun activity' or being 'great banter' rather than an activity aimed at pure gratification of a sexual urge or fulfilment of one's ultimate fantasy.

Threesomes (both hypothetical and real) appear to be less about the pursuit of erotic gratification than about the homosocial bonding experience of consuming a fun, recreational sexual experience together. Tony said:

I've never had a threesome. I've been offered. One of my [male] friends from school. He was dating one of our friends, and he kind of said it was a gentlemen's agreement that if I was going to have a threesome it would have to be with you. Then when I was 16 a girl offered a threesome with a female friend and I turned down both because it wouldn't have been with my friend.

When asked if he would have a threesome, Christopher assumed it would be a MMF threesome, saying 'I wouldn't know unless I was in the situation. Unless he was someone I was comfortable with and it was more of a joke than an actual sexual encounter'. Dane said that he 'definitely would' have a FFM threesome. When asked about whether he would be happy to have a threesome with another male he said that he would, but that it would have to be with a friend: 'A mate would make it more random; more funny afterwards. I would be more comfortable with a mate. If I was going to do a threesome with two lads, I'd prefer it to be with a mate'.

This association of ‘fun’ with threesome sex with a male friend was borne out with those who had had a MMF threesome. Mathew said, ‘It was quite a funny, a good experience. We both had a bit of banter between us. It was quite fun. It was quite enjoyable’. Similarly, Brent said he would have another MMF threesome, adding that he ‘didn’t get much out of it sexually’. Nonetheless he found it enjoyable because, ‘You get to “high five” your mate over her back and that’s about it really’.

Speaking about a MMF threesome, Matt said that, ‘It was quite fun, because it was one of my best mates as well, and it was a good way to bond with him in that sort of way. It was just a new experience’. When asked why his friend had invited him into the threesome he responded, ‘probably because he thought it was funny; and to both get it off our bucket list; and because we’re best mates so we’ve seen each other naked before so that wasn’t much of a bother’. Matt’s understanding of his threesome experience is similar to the experiences of women who attend male strip shows; most often they attend in groups and their behaviour is far more oriented toward having fun, being playful, and the facilitation of bonding among the women than about achieving sexual arousal or release (Montemurro et al., 2003).

Regardless of whether the men have actually had a threesome, it is also important to highlight the casualness of responses to questions posed to them about MMF threesomes. When asked specifically, none verbalized having difficulty or finding it distasteful to watch their friend ejaculate. Exemplifying this, Brent said, ‘I don’t mind watching him cum’. Instead, the interviews pointed to an absence of homophobia and homophobia, a lack of learned homophobic language, and no disgust for the male body. These attitudes alleviate the participants’ need to engage in masculine posturing about how much they loved the threesome for the sexual release with the woman. This contrasts with Anderson’s (2008) older research on threesomes and points to further erosion to the one-time rule of homosexuality.

## **A decline in the one-time rule of homosexuality**

The one-time rule of homosexuality maintains that men are socially homosexualized for engaging in any behaviour associated with homosexuality. This current research, however, suggests that the one-time rule is not in operation in our participants’ youth culture. Out of 30 males, 29 stated that they did not agree that breaking the one-time rule was indicative of homosexuality, while the remaining participant suggested that it meant a percentage of the person might be gay. Further evidencing this position, the entire sample had at some point seen male gay porn (in a variety of forms, e.g. images, videos, etc.) but none felt the need to hide this fact. When asked about the one-time rule, Dane said:

It’s out-dated. Can a guy have sex with a guy and still be straight? Yeah, there is no reason to lie. If someone says they are straight, then I accept that. If they say they are gay, I accept that. People don’t need to lie about it anymore.

By noting that a male would have ‘no reason to lie’ about being gay, Dane suggested that, in his view, homophobia has declined to such a degree that he could not imagine a peer staying in the closet due to fear of homophobic stigma. Illustrating this acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex behaviours, Liam said:

I think now homosexuality is more accepted generally anyway, but I think also there is a lot more experimentation because there is a lot more awareness. You can almost get away with it because there is no right and wrong thing to do. People who are straight can have sex with a guy because they are curious.

Even more interesting is the notion that direct same-sex sexual behaviour is not outside of the realm of possibilities for men who identify as straight. Theo said:

Having sex with a guy does not disqualify one from being straight. At university you definitely do not know what you are and everybody tries something new at least once.

Although not all participants discussed this directly, some suggested that breaking the one-time rule might demonstrate potential bisexuality, experimentation, or an interaction of the two. Leo said:

I say it’s [the one-time rule] quite an old fashioned view. The views of sexuality have changed. If you did it once I wouldn’t say you were gay; it’s almost a mathematics thing. If the guy said ‘I kind of liked it’ then I’d say he’s leaning more toward leaning bisexual than straight.

As stated earlier, the diminishment of the one-time rule is perhaps one reason why 20 of the 25 men who had not had a MMF threesome said that they would if the opportunity arose. If these men are very open to the idea of straight men having sex with other men, having sex with a woman in the presence of another man and potentially seeing their friend ejaculate loses its homosexualized social coding.

Furthermore, some of the men did not shy away from recounting previous same-sex sexual encounters or proposing them as a possibility that might actually arise during the threesome. Alan, for example, said, ‘I wouldn’t be interested in the guy at all... but I might give it a go to have a guy fuck me while I fuck her. A “try everything once” sort-of-thing’. Patrick shared this sentiment, saying:

I’ve had sex with three guys and I’ve looked at it now and I think I’ve got no wants or wills to sleep with another guy, and I’m seeing so many girls that I want to sleep with. So I am not gay. I don’t think one incident defines an individual in any aspect, let alone sex.

Similarly, Bruce said:

An old [male] friend wanked me off, and that was when I was 14. It didn't seem weird at all. It seemed completely and utterly normal... That happened twice. I'm not attracted to guys, but I'm not bothered by it, either.

We suggest that these examples of willingness or experience with same-sex sex reflect a sense of sexual behaviour from the position of a consumer: an activity one does for a thrill, a separation from behaviours and identities, or even sexual desires. From this perspective, these men value same-sex experiences in terms of the self-knowledge that it can realize, as well as the symbolic capital of having wide-ranging sexual experiences and having had 'made the most' of the 'opportunities' open to them.

## Discussion

In this research, we interviewed 30 heterosexual men about threesomes, their friendships, and the one-time rule of homosexuality. The prevalence of general threesome experience (10) was significant enough to suggest that this is a behaviour that is gaining a normalized status, at least amongst men at this university. Although threesomes did not appear to be a dominant fantasy or component of sexual lives, all had either had a threesome or were open to having one. The rich sexual marketplace of the university appears to provide a good opportunity for this type of sexual exploration (Bogle, 2008). Despite participants only being 18 months into their university careers, 5 of the 30 men had engaged in threesomes with another man and a woman and 20 of the 25 of those that had not were open to it. Although hypothetical answers may differ to what happens in reality, their expression of willingness indicates that the semi-sexual, same-sex interaction that comes with these threesomes (e.g. watching a friend ejaculate) is culturally normalized for these adolescent men. In this contemporary context, the men were open to MMF threesome sex as yet another different and unique experience to partake in, as part of the thrill of consuming an alternative sexual practice (Joseph and Black, 2012).

We therefore contextualize a MMF threesome as a homosocial rather than a gay experience. A MMF threesome is often viewed as something to be done before you die, an experiment, and a means to bond with another male friend. Although participants did not demonstrate much interest in interacting sexually with another male in a MMF threesome, the majority did express a desire for the other man to be one of their bromances – one participant turned down a FFM threesome opportunity because it was not with his bromance. The capacity for men to have bromances may be a facilitating factor in men being open to MMF as being comfortable nude in the presence of another man and explicit awareness of other male's sexual behaviours are often fostered within a bromance (Anderson, 2014).

A MMF threesome with a friend could be understood as helping to mitigate feelings of discomfort (compared to a stranger); it might also help safeguard against potential misunderstandings with a male stranger, whose motives and desires for specific sexual behaviours may be unknown. A bromance makes the interaction simpler, more fun, and provides something for the men to reminisce about together. We thus suggest that not only does the MMF threesome between close male friends permit them to share and bond over the sexual experience with a woman, but that a MMF threesome can be viewed as relationship-building within a bromance.

However, a desire to 'share' the sexual experience with a woman is not to suggest that these men were misogynist. We found no overt evidence of antipathy toward women and we found them cognizant of respect for women. Others will, undoubtedly, interpret this research differently. Despite one's interpretation of this, our research confirms other work showing that heterosexual women certainly pursue sex with two men as well (Joyal et al., 2014).

Despite the fact that semi-sexual or direct sexual activity took place as part of these threesomes (or in the context of other male-male sexual interactions discussed), 29 of the 30 participants did not view an individual instance of same-sex sexual behaviour as indicative of homosexuality. In other words, the participants we interviewed did not have their social-sexual lives inhibited by the one-time rule of homosexuality; nor did they wish to inhibit others' lives. Conversely, the one-time rule of homosexuality was seen as 'out-dated'. Participants overwhelmingly stated that sexual behaviour did not determine sexual identity. Instead, participants valued self-identification of sexuality over behaviour; suggesting that in their cultural surroundings, homophobia was perceived by them to be non-existent to the extent that no one would fear coming out, and thus no one would have reason to lie about their sexual orientation.

There were also few heterosexual identity management techniques concerning their desire to have a MMF threesome. When Anderson (2008) interviewed heterosexual American men about MMF threesomes, he found that the men did not reveal their experience or desires for threesomes under interview. It was only in ethnographic observations that men began to open up to him about their desires or experiences; and even then it was all coded as 'for a good cause', meaning that they would engage in a threesome if it facilitated an opportunity to have sex with a desirable female. Men in his older research postulated that they would have a threesome if 'she' wanted one, even though Anderson later showed that this was only a presenting script. However, there is no such presenting script among the men we interviewed. They had no cultural need for one.

We therefore postulate that decreasing homophobia has allowed these straight-identifying men of varying degrees ('exclusively straight', 'straight', 'mostly straight') to expand their range of behaviours to include that which would have once been socially coded as gay. Engaging in these behaviours was not, however, a result of desire for same-sex interaction and it is therefore unsurprising that the majority of men identified as either straight or exclusively straight rather than

mostly straight (Savin-Williams, 2014). Interestingly, we found that only 18 of these men aligned with an exclusively straight label, suggesting that the need to be seen as 100% straight is becoming less important. Similar to other research showing that men are able to engage in what were once stigmatized sexual or semi-sexual behaviours (e.g. Anderson, 2014; McCormack, 2012), these men were able to have bromances, view gay porn, engage in semi-sexual activity with other men, and consent to hypothetical (and sometimes actual) MMF threesomes; all without challenge to their straight identities. None of these men demonstrated antipathy for homosexuality, and without fear of stigma for their behaviours, it allowed them the opportunity to significantly blur the boundary between 'straight' and 'gay' behaviours and identities.

This open view of heterosexuality emerges out of an ongoing, shifting contemporary cultural debate about the meaning and legitimacy of various sexual practices, in which same-sex sexual activity is increasingly viewed as an extension of risk-taking, pleasure-seeking, and erotic exploration for heterosexually-identified men (Frank, 2008). It is not necessarily indicative or revealing of an essentialist sexual orientation as homosexual, bisexual, or any other self-limiting identity (Savin-Williams, 2005). Within this modern view, personal growth and self-discovery can be sought through sexual homosexual or semi-homosexual activity.

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