

Not all gay men have anal sex ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I just found your site after reading an article in the May issue of *Men's Health*. I read many of your previous Q&As, especially those regarding homosexuality.

I am gay and found your answers to be very appropriate and right on the money. Perhaps when you respond to further questions about homosexuality, you could mention this:

All gays do not engage in anal sex. I know many men who prefer not to engage in this sex act. I don't think enjoying anal sex is synonymous with homosexuality. This might comfort some of the straight men who write you and say they enjoy anal stimulation. I believe being gay is about having emotional relationships with men and not necessarily about the type of sex acts one engages in. I also want to make it clear to those young men who are just coming out. I think they feel pressured to engage in anal sex, especially if they view pornography. Porno stars show this to be mandatory for a male-to-male relationship. Quite frankly, it's not necessarily a very pleasurable experience for novices.

— My two cents

Answer

Dear My two cents,

Thanks for your confidence in *Go Ask Alice!* and for helping maintain its accuracy. As you've indicated, there's a difference between an individual's sexuality and their sexual behaviors, and it's good to note that sexual behaviors don't necessarily indicate a person's sexuality. Similarly, a person's sexual orientation doesn't limit them to a prescribed playlist of sexual activities — it's much more complex than that. For example, anal sex isn't a prerequisite for being a gay man. Further, being a gay man isn't a mandate for enjoying anal sex. In fact, oral sex and mutual masturbation are more commonly reported behaviors than anal stimulation among gay men in long-term relationships. And while some people stereotypically view anal stimulation as an act associated with gay men, anal sex is a sexual behavior, not tied to a group of people or a specific sexual orientation.

The way that a person defines their sexuality is a profoundly individualized and unique experience. Not only are there a myriad of gender identities and sexual orientations, but how that translates to sexual behaviors also varies from person to person. Individuals may feel a certain label reflects their experience, while others reject labeling their sexuality altogether. For instance, men who have sex with men (MSM) may or may not identify as gay. People who identify as asexual, meaning they don't experience sexual attraction, may still be romantically attracted to others without feeling the desire to engage in sexual acts. At the end of the day, physical, emotional, social, and sexual attractions, not behaviors, are key factors in understanding sexual orientation.

In terms of anal sex specifically, it's good to reiterate that not all gay men enjoy anal penetration, and many folks who *don't identify as* gay men really enjoy anal sex. People of all sexual orientations could fantasize about and enjoy anal penetration or anal stimulation while masturbating or during sex play, while others dislike it. It's also possible that pornographic films contribute to certain misconceptions about sexual behaviors. Much of the pornography available, marketed toward people of any sexual orientation, provides extreme and stylized examples of fantasies. As a result, it's easy to assume that these images are representative of how many people have sex, when in reality they don't always accurately portray sexual activity. It's also worth noting that because there's less accessible information out there about what queer sex looks like, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people might have trouble imagining what sex might look like for them, outside of stereotypes, porn, or other media representations. If parents or guardians aren't an option for this information, having a safe, trusted adult or informed medical provider to be a resource for information on sexuality, communication, and safer sex may be a way to prevent negative sexual outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth.

The last point you make is helpful, as well. No matter the fantasies or images portrayed, it's critical to remember that sexual behaviors are learned. If partners do choose to engage in any new sexual behavior, including anal sex, it may be uncomfortable in the beginning. It's likely going to take some time, trial and error, communication, and practice until these new activities result in pleasure. For those who don't want to try or have anal sex, you may consider exploring other sexual activities that are enjoyable to everyone involved. Another option may be to open up the relationship so each person can seek what they're interested in sexually, even if that means abstaining from sex altogether, while maintaining intimacy. No matter what a person does sexually, it doesn't make their identity any less real.

Critical readers, such as yourself, help *Go Ask Alice!* maintain its accuracy as it provides information, perspective, and resources on healthy sexuality. Thank you again for taking the time to clarify these points.

Alice!

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