



Anal sex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID:	bmjopen-2014-004996
Article Type:	Research
Date Submitted by the Author:	04-Feb-2014
Complete List of Authors:	Marston, Cicely; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Department of Social and Environmental Health Research Lewis, Ruth; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Department of Social and Environmental Health Research
Primary Subject Heading:	Sexual health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Qualitative research, Public health
Keywords:	Sexual health, Young adults, Anal sex, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Peer review only

Anal sex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK

C. Marston¹, R. Lewis¹

Word count: 3, 162

Keywords: anal sex, sexual behaviour, sexual health, young adult, qualitative research

¹ Department of Social and Environmental Health Research, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 15-17 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SH

Correspondence to:

Dr. Cicely Marston

Department of Social and Environmental Health Research

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

15-17 Tavistock Place

London WC1H 9SH UK

Cicely.Marston@lshtm.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Objective

To explore expectations, experiences and circumstances of anal sex among young people.

Design

Qualitative, longitudinal study using individual and group interviews.

Participants

130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds.

Setting

Three contrasting sites in England (London, a northern industrial city, rural southwest).

Results

Anal sex often appeared to be painful, risky and coercive. Five key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why young people have anal sex despite this: men ‘copying pornography’, ‘it’s tighter’, competition between men, the claim that “people must like it if they do it” (made alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women) and, crucially, normalisation of coercion and ‘accidental’ penetration. It seemed men were often persuading or coercing reluctant partners. Safer, less painful techniques were not discussed.

Conclusions

Interviewees frequently cite pornography as the ‘explanation’ for anal sex, yet their accounts reveal a complex context for anal sex with availability of pornography being only one element: crucially, young people circulated ideas that promoted coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. This study suggests an urgent need to talk about anal sex with young people to discuss safer and less painful techniques, to emphasise consent, and to challenge views that promote coercion.

Strengths and limitations of this study

- This study uses a large qualitative sample from three diverse sites in the UK and is the first to capture a wide range of circumstances around and reasons for engaging in anal sex among men and women between the ages of 16 and 18.
- Analysis explores experiences in depth, going beyond simplistic explanations linking motivations for anal sex with pornography
- The study shows that young people circulated ideas about gender and sexual practices that normalised coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. These ideas could be addressed in health promotion work.
- This study was conducted in the UK and further work is needed to assess the extent to which the same discourses operate among young people in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

Anal sex is increasingly prevalent among young people, yet anal intercourse between men and women – though commonly depicted in sexually explicit media – appears unmentionable in many social contexts and is usually absent from mainstream sexuality education.

Surveys suggest young men and women – and older adults – are engaging in anal intercourse more than ever before.¹⁻⁴ Sexually explicit media depictions are often mentioned as affecting how sex is viewed and practised by young people⁵⁻⁷ with anal intercourse one of the ‘risky’ or ‘undesirable’ practices thought to be promoted by such media,^{8,9} although evidence about the influence of pornography on anal practices is thin.⁵ Studies of anal practices, which are generally of over-18s,¹⁰⁻¹² suggest anal sex might be desired by young men more than women, and may be used to avoid pregnancy,^{12,13} or vaginal intercourse during menstruation,¹² while often being unprotected with condoms.¹²⁻¹⁴ It may be painful for women,^{12,13,15} and may be a pleasurable part of sex.^{16,17}

Very little is known about the detailed circumstances around or reasons for engaging in anal sex among under 18 year olds anywhere, or what implications these might have for health. This study looks in detail at anal practices among under-18s and draws out global lessons for sexual health promotion.

METHOD

Design and data collection

We collected data on anal sex as part of a longitudinal, qualitative mixed methods study (the “sixteen18” project) which explored the range and meaning of different sexual activities among a diverse sample of 130 young people aged 16-18 in three contrasting locations in England: London; a medium-sized northern, industrial city; and a rural area in the southwest. From January 2010 we conducted nine group interviews and 71 depth interviews (wave one: 37 women, 34 men), re-interviewing 43 of the depth interviewees one year later (wave two), until June 2011. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine ethics committee approved the study and all participants provided written consent.

For the depth interviews, we used purposive sampling to maximise variation in social background. Within each location we sampled from a range of settings including: schools/colleges (n=23 depth interviews), youth work services targeting young people not in education or training (n=9), youth organisations (n=8), a supported housing project for young

1
2
3 people living independently from their families (n=4) and informal networks (n=3). We also
4 used 'snowball' sampling (n=17) and, in the rural southwest, we approached people directly
5 in a town centre (n=7).
6
7

8 We highlighted in our information leaflet and our conversations with potential interviewees
9 that we were keen to speak to any young person, whatever their experiences. Although
10 participants varied in terms of the range of activities they had experienced, and the number
11 and nature of their sexual partnerships, the majority reported opposite-sex partners only.
12
13

14 In the depth interviews, we asked interviewees about what sexual practices they had engaged
15 in, the circumstances of those practices, and how they felt about them. We deliberately left
16 'sexual practices' undefined, to allow for young people's own definitions to emerge. In the
17 group discussions, we asked general questions about what practices they had heard of, their
18 attitudes to those practices, and whether they thought young people their age would generally
19 engage in particular practices, and if so, under what circumstances. Many of our interviewees
20 spontaneously talked about anal sexual practices (whether they had engaged in them or not)
21 and so in wave two, we specifically asked all of our participants about their perception, and if
22 relevant their experience, of anal practices. Our aim was to explore the key discourses
23 surrounding anal sexual practices among this age group, and to elicit detailed accounts of
24 specific experiences.
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33

34 **Data analysis**

35
36 We recorded and transcribed all interviews. We used iterative thematic analysis¹⁸ to develop
37 our understanding of the data. This involved 'coding' transcripts¹⁸ and extensive discussions
38 between researchers to come to a shared interpretation of young people's accounts of anal
39 sex, taking into consideration our own characteristics (e.g. white, middle-class, educated,
40 women older than the interviewees) and how these may have affected the data collected. We
41 made constant comparisons across cases and themes, and sought deviant cases to challenge
42 our emerging interpretations. Throughout the analysis, we simultaneously engaged with
43 theoretical literature to put the work in context.
44
45
46
47
48
49

50 We use unique identifier pseudonyms throughout. Quotations are from one-to-one interviews
51 unless otherwise indicated, with omissions marked [...].
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

RESULTS

Anal practices reported most commonly involved penetration or attempted penetration by the man with his penis or finger (15 and eight of the 71 in-depth interviewees respectively – 19 of 71 reported anal practices in total), and with one exception were between opposite-sex partners. Although a small minority of interviewees said anal sex (i.e. penetration with a penis) was exclusively ‘gay’ it was widely understood as also occurring between men and women.

Women reported painful anal sex:

As soon as the whole incident happened where he didn’t warn me it just hurt. It was just pain [*laugh*]. It was just like: no. No one could possibly enjoy that. It was just horrible [...] I guess he could have used lube, maybe that would have helped, but I don’t know. Apparently if you’re tense it hurts more, I guess, which makes sense really, but I don’t see how you couldn’t be tense [*laugh*] in that kind of situation. (Emma)

The men, while often keen on anal sex in principle, were sometimes unenthusiastic about the physical reality: “I thought it was going to be a lot better to be honest” (Ali); “sometimes it does feel better [than vaginal sex] but I wouldn’t say I preferred it” (Max).

Risks

Anal sex was also often risky; condoms were only sometimes used, and then for basic hygiene, not STI prevention: “so you don’t get shit on your dick” (Carl). Some interviewees incorrectly stated that anal STI transmission was impossible, or less likely than for vaginal intercourse.

There were marked gender differences in how anal sex was described: its benefits (pleasure, indicator of sexual achievement) were expected for men but not women; its risks – interviewees rarely mentioned risks of STIs, focusing instead on risk of pain, or damaged reputation – were expected for women not men. It was not described as a way to preserve virginity or avoid pregnancy.

Key themes

Five key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why the practice continued despite women’s reluctance, expectations of pain for women, and apparent lack of pleasure for women and men: men ‘copying pornography’; ‘it’s tighter’; competition between men;

1
2
3 the claim that “people must like it if they do it” (alongside the seemingly contradictory
4 expectation that it will be painful for women); and – crucially – normalisation of coercion
5 and ‘accidental’ penetration.
6
7

8 ***Men ‘copying pornography’ and “it’s tighter”***

9
10 The two main reasons given for young people having anal sex were that men wanted to copy
11 what they saw in pornography, and that “it’s tighter”. The implication was that “tighter” was
12 better for men and was something men were said to want. Women were expected to find anal
13 sex painful, particularly the first time. The ‘pornography’ explanation seems inadequate, not
14 least because young people only seemed to see this as motivating men, not women. We found
15 other important explanations and motivations in young people’s accounts, as we will see
16 below.
17
18
19
20
21

22 ***Competition between men***

23
24 Men said they encouraged one another to try the practice, and both men and women said men
25 wanted to tell their friends they had had anal sex. Men in a group discussion said anal sex
26 was “something we do for a competition”, and “every hole’s a goal”. Even the men saying
27 they found the idea of anal sex repulsive did not always rule out trying it. By contrast, both
28 men and women said women risked their reputation for the same act; a sexual double
29 standard familiar from previous literature.¹⁹
30
31
32
33
34

35 ***“People must like it if they do it”***

36
37 Despite asserting that anal sex is inevitably painful for women, interviewees often expressed
38 the seemingly contradictory view that it was in fact enjoyable for women:
39
40

41 Obviously people do enjoy it if they do it. (Naomi)

42
43 There’s quite a few, a lot of girls enjoy it. But I think most girls
44 would like, I think they might do, on the quiet. (Shane)
45
46

47 Commonly, women experiencing pain were depicted as naive or flawed. Both men and
48 women said that women needed to “relax” more, to “get used to it”:
49
50

51 I think that the boy enjoys it. I think it’s definitely the boy that pushes
52 for it from watching porn and stuff, they wanna try it. The girl is
53 scared and thinks it’s weird, and then they try it because the boyfriend
54 wants them to. *They normally don’t enjoy it because they’re scared*
55 and I, I know that like with anal, *if you’re not willing, you don’t relax,*
56 like if you have, you have control over two of the muscles that are
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 closest to the outside and then inside it's like involuntary and if
4 you're scared or you haven't eased them off like they stay tight and
5 then you can rip 'em if you try and force anal sex. (Mark [our
6 emphasis])
7

8 9 *Normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration*

10
11 The idea that women would generally not wish to engage in anal sex seemed to be taken for
12 granted by many participants. Even in otherwise seemingly communicative and caring
13 partnerships, some men seemed to push to have anal sex with their reluctant partner despite
14 believing it likely to hurt her. In most men's and women's reports of anal sex events
15 'persuasion' of the woman featured to a greater or lesser degree, with repeated, emphatic
16 requests from men commonly mentioned.
17

18
19 Women seemed to take for granted that they would either acquiesce to or resist their partners'
20 repeated requests, rather than being equal partners in sexual decision making. Being able to
21 say 'no' was often cited by the women as a positive example of their control of the situation.
22

23
24 Some men also described taking a 'try it and see' approach, where they anally penetrated a
25 woman with their fingers or penis and hoped that she would not stop them.
26

27
28 Shane said he used digital penetration to see if a woman was likely to agree to anal sex and –
29 if she said no – “I can be very persuasive. Like sometimes you just keep going, just keep
30 going till they just get fed up and let you do it anyway”.

31
32 'Try it and see' generally either hurt the woman or was 'unsuccessful' (from the man's point
33 of view) in the sense of not penetrating “it just didn't go in really”. (Jack) A verbal 'no' from
34 the woman did not necessarily stop anal penetration attempts:
35

36
37 He tried putting it there.
38

39
40 [Interviewer] Right
41

42
43 And I just said 'no'.
44

45
46 [Interviewer] Had he asked you first or did he just try it?
47

48
49 Um, he kept asking me at first. I'm like 'no', but then he tried it and I
50 said 'no way'.
51

52
53 [Interviewer] Right
54

55
56 'No chance'. (Molly)
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 In some cases, anal penetration of the woman – digital or penile – is described as happening
4 accidentally (“it slipped”).
5

6
7 It is difficult to assess the extent to which events described as ‘slips’ were genuinely
8 unintentional. One man however described a ‘slip’ at first interview, which he said to the
9 interviewer – and said he had told his girlfriend – was an accident, a story which he amended
10 at second interview. He did not seem troubled by talking about having apparently attempted
11 to penetrate his girlfriend against her wishes:
12
13

14
15 [Interviewer] I think you said [...] in the first interview that there had
16 been a time where [...] you said it slipped.
17

18
19 Well I, I tried, and I said it slipped.
20

21 [Interviewer] So it hadn’t actually slipped? It wasn’t an accident?
22

23
24 No, no, no it wasn’t an accident. (Jack)
25

26 Describing events as ‘slips’, then, may enable both men and women to gloss over the
27 possibility that penetration was deliberate and non-consensual.
28

29 30 **Complexities: a case study**

31
32 It is important to state that anal sex was not a simple matter of men pressuring/women
33 resisting. Alicia exemplifies some of the complexities. She described a fairly common
34 pattern: her partner asked for anal sex, which she first refused but later agreed to. She found it
35 painful, and also had a second experience where her consent was questionable (“it just kind
36 of slipped in”). She was atypical, however, in that she related the story in a positive way and
37 described how she had subsequently enjoyed anal sex which both she and her partner
38 initiated.
39
40

41
42 Alicia described her relationship in very positive terms, and said she was more sexually
43 driven than her partner: “I’m not saying that I’m like wanting sex [all practices, not only anal
44 sex] all the time, but I’d say I go for it more. I’d initiate it more”.
45
46
47

48
49 Her partner had had anal sex before. The first time she had anal sex with him was “really
50 painful”:
51

52
53 I didn’t wanna try it [anal sex] initially, well I was unsure about it
54 initially. But I kind of, he didn’t, he said ‘that’s fine’, but I still
55 wanted to try it for him because I was interested. I think I was
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 interested to why he was interested. I was curious about it [...] So I
4 think that's [...] I just sort of tried it for him.
5

6 She described the second occasion they had anal sex differently in the first and second
7 interviews, suggesting some discomfort with how the event had progressed:
8
9

10 [First interview] We were having [vaginal] sex another time and it
11 [his penis] just kind of slipped in [into her anus] that way.
12

13 [Second interview] He just sort of slipped in [...] I think he thought it
14 would make it less painful for me. And I think he thought he can
15 make me like it like that.
16
17

18 At first interview, Alicia was ambiguous about what happened, describing the event as
19 though it were accidental “it slipped in”, perhaps reluctant to draw attention to not having
20 been involved in the decision. At second interview, she was clearer that he had deliberately
21 penetrated her (she may also have spoken to her partner about it between interviews). She
22 presents it in a somewhat positive way (“he thought he can make me like it”) but her consent
23 remains unclear.
24
25
26
27

28 At both interviews, she emphasised how much she enjoyed subsequent anal sex with the
29 same man, and that either of them might initiate it.
30
31

32 Alicia was the only woman we interviewed who described experiencing physical pleasure,
33 including orgasm, from anal sex.
34
35

36 Yeah. I quite like it because I think I quite like the feeling of him
37 against my bum, like against the meat of your bum, like it's kind of
38 cushiony. So yeah, I think that's what I like about it, I'm not sure.
39
40
41

42 DISCUSSION

43 Few men or women reported finding anal sex pleasurable and both expected anal sex to be
44 painful for women. This study offers explanations for why anal sex may occur despite this.
45
46

47 Interviewees' accounts frequently cite pornography as the 'explanation' for anal sex, yet only
48 seem to see this as a motivation for men. A fuller picture of why women and men engage in
49 anal sex appears in their accounts. It seems that anal sex happens in a context characterised
50 by at least five specific features:
51
52

53 First, some men appear unconcerned about consent for anal sex. Interviewees often spoke
54 casually about penetration without consent (“you can rip 'em if you try and force anal sex”;
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 “you just keep going till they get fed up and let you do it anyway”) suggesting that not only
4 do they expect coercion to be part of anal sex (in general, even if not for themselves
5 personally), but that many of them accept or at least do not explicitly challenge it. Some
6 events, particularly the ‘accidental’ penetration reported by some interviewees were
7 ambiguous in terms of whether or not they would be classed as rape (however defined), but
8 we know from Jack’s interview that ‘accidents’ may happen ‘on purpose’. The men who
9 described apparently coercing their partners seemed oblivious to, or uncaring of, their role as
10 possible rapists.
11

12
13
14
15
16
17 Second, badgering women in order to obtain reluctant consent to anal sex appears to be
18 considered normal.
19

20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
Third, the commonly circulating ideas that ‘everyone’ enjoys it, and that women who do not
are either flawed or simply keeping their enjoyment secret, help support the erroneous idea
that a man pushing for anal sex is simply ‘persuading’ his partner to do something that ‘most
girls would like’. Even Alicia’s narrative contains some of the coercive features of anal sex
that other women report in negative terms, despite Alicia reporting enjoying anal sex.

Fourth, anal sex today appears to be a marker of (hetero)sexual achievement or experience,
particularly for men.²⁰ The society our interviewees inhabit seems to reward men for sexual
experience per se (“every hole’s a goal”), and to some extent reward women for compliance
in sexually ‘adventurous’ acts (enjoyment signifying not being naive, unrelaxed etc.),
although women must balance this with the risk to their reputation.

Fifth, many men do not express concern about the pain for women, viewing it as inevitable.
Less painful techniques (such as slower penetration) were rarely discussed.

Currently this apparently oppressive context, and indeed the practice of anal sex itself,
appears to be largely ignored in policy and in sex education. Attitudes such as the
inevitability of pain for women, or men’s failure to recognise or reflect on their own
potentially coercive behaviour, seem to be unchallenged.

Sexuality education, and specifically what it should contain, is the subject of global debate.²¹

²² Prevention of STIs, HIV, and violence are priorities for health promotion worldwide. Yet
sex education, where it exists, rarely addresses specific sexual practices, such as anal sex
between men and women – despite its potential for disease transmission and, as these
accounts reveal, coercion.

1
2
3 This study was conducted in the UK and further work is needed to assess the extent to which
4 similar coercive discourses operate among young people in other countries. This is a
5 qualitative study, with an in-depth analysis of a smaller sample than would be usual for
6 epidemiological studies, but which spans three locations and diverse social groups. Whether
7 or not the concept of ‘generalisability’ should be applied in qualitative research is a matter of
8 debate, but we would argue that this study provides useful, credible working hypotheses or
9 theories about anal sexual practice among young men and women that are likely to apply
10 outside our group of interviewees.
11

12
13 Previous work has suggested gendered power may operate differently for different sexual
14 activities, and that sexual ‘scripts’ (i.e. expectations about how practices will be done) for
15 anal intercourse may not be as well established as for vaginal intercourse.¹³ Our findings
16 suggest that coercion may be emerging as a dominant script for anal intercourse.
17

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 **CONCLUSION**

26
27 Anal sex among young people in this study appeared to be taking place in a context
28 encouraging pain, risk, and coercion. Harm reduction efforts targeting anal sex may help
29 encourage debate about consent, reduce risky and painful techniques and challenge views that
30 promote coercion.
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Kaye Wellings and Tim Rhodes for their role in the project design, and Amber Marks and Crofton Black for their comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

CONTRIBUTORSHIP STATEMENT

Both authors (CM, RL) meet all four criteria for authorship as detailed in the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. No individual(s) meet the criteria for authorship who are not named on the manuscript. Only the listed authors (CM, RL) meet the criteria for contributorship: both CM and RL contributed to the planning, conduct, and reporting of the work described in the manuscript. The lead author (CM) agrees to act as guarantor for this manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work and/or the conduct of the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Both authors (CM, RL) meet all four criteria for authorship as detailed in the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. No individual(s) meet the criteria for authorship who are not named on the manuscript. Only the listed authors (CM, RL) meet the criteria for contributorship: both CM and RL contributed to the planning, conduct, and reporting of the work described in the manuscript. The lead author (CM) agrees to act as guarantor for this manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work and/or the conduct of the study.

DATA SHARING STATEMENT

Further data are available from the lead author (CM). Participants gave informed consent for anonymised data sharing in the final reports from this study.

REFERENCES

1. Chandra A, Mosher WD, Copen C, et al. Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual identity in the United States: data from the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2011:1-36.
2. Gindi RM, Ghanem KG, Erbeling EJ. Increases in oral and anal sexual exposure among youth attending sexually transmitted diseases clinics in Baltimore, Maryland. *J Adolesc Health* 2008;**42**(3):307-8.
3. Johnson AM, Mercer CH, Erens B, et al. Sexual behaviour in Britain: partnerships, practices, and HIV risk behaviours. *Lancet* 2001;**358**(9296):1835-42.
4. Mercer CH, Tanton C, Prah P, et al. Changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain through the life course and over time: findings from the National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). *Lancet* 2013;**382**(9907):1781-94.
5. Flood M. Youth and Pornography in Australia Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects. Bruce, Australia: The Australia Institute, 2003.
6. Horvath MAH, Alys L, Massey K, et al. “Basically... porn is everywhere”: A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People. London: The Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2013.
7. Owens EW, Behun RJ, Manning JC, et al. The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research. *Sex Addict Compulsivity* 2012;**19**(1-2):99-122.

- 1
2
3 8. Braun-Courville DK, Rojas M. Exposure to sexually explicit Web sites and adolescent
4
5 sexual attitudes and behaviors. *J Adolesc Health* 2009;**45**(2):156-62.
6
7
- 8 9. Haggstrom-Nordin E, Hanson U, Tyden T. Associations between pornography
9
10 consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *Int J STD AIDS*
11
12 2005;**16**(2):102-7.
13
14
- 15 10. Baldwin JI, Baldwin JD. Heterosexual anal intercourse: An understudied, high-risk sexual
16
17 behavior. *Arch Sex Behav* 2000;**29**(4):357-73.
18
19
- 20 11. Gorbach PM, Manhart LE, Hess KL, et al. Anal intercourse among young heterosexuals
21
22 in three sexually transmitted disease clinics in the United States. *Sex Transm Dis*
23
24 2009;**36**(4):193-8.
25
26
27
- 28 12. Halperin DT. Heterosexual anal intercourse: prevalence, cultural factors, and HIV
29
30 infection and other health risks, Part I. *AIDS Patient Care ST* 1999;**13**(12):717-30.
31
32
33
- 34 13. Roye CF, Tolman DL, Snowden F. Heterosexual anal intercourse among black and latino
35
36 adolescents and young adults: a poorly understood high-risk behavior. *J Sex Res*
37
38 2013;**50**(7):715-22.
39
40
41
- 42 14. Smith G. Heterosexual and homosexual anal intercourse: an international perspective.
43
44 *Venereology* 2001;**14**(1):28-37.
45
46
- 47 15. Štulhofer A, Ajduković D. Should we take anodyspareunia seriously? A descriptive
48
49 analysis of pain during receptive anal intercourse in young heterosexual women. *J Sex*
50
51 *Marital Ther* 2011;**37**(5):346-58.
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 16. Makhubele B, Parker W. Heterosexual anal sex amongst young adults in South Africa:
4
5 Risks and perspectives. Johannesburg: Centre for AIDS, Development and
6
7 Evaluation, 2013.
8
9
- 10 17. Štulhofer A, Ajdukovic D. A mixed-methods exploration of women's experiences of anal
11
12 intercourse: meanings related to pain and pleasure. *Arch Sex Behav* 2013;**42**(6):1053-
13
14 62.
15
16
- 17 18. Corbin J, Strauss A. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for
18
19 Developing Grounded Theory (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008.
20
21
22
- 23 19. Marston C, King E. Factors that shape young people's sexual behaviour: a systematic
24
25 review. *Lancet* 2006;**368**(9547):1581-6.
26
27
- 28 20. Lewis R, Marston C, Wellings K. Bases, Stages and 'Working Your Way Up': Young
29
30 People's Talk About Non-Coital Practices and 'Normal' Sexual Trajectories. *Sociol*
31
32 *Res Online* 2013;**18**(1):1.
33
34
35
- 36 21. Stanger-Hall KF, Hall DW. Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: why we
37
38 need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. *PLoS One* 2011;**6**(10):e24658.
39
40
41
- 42 22. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. International Technical
43
44 Guidance on Sexuality Education. Paris: UNESCO, 2009.
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

BMJ Open

Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK

Journal:	<i>BMJ Open</i>
Manuscript ID:	bmjopen-2014-004996.R1
Article Type:	Research
Date Submitted by the Author:	25-Apr-2014
Complete List of Authors:	Marston, Cicely; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Department of Social and Environmental Health Research Lewis, Ruth; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Department of Social and Environmental Health Research
Primary Subject Heading:	Sexual health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Qualitative research, Public health
Keywords:	Sexual health, Young adults, Anal sex, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Peer review only

Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK

C. Marston¹, R. Lewis¹

Keywords: anal sex, sexual behaviour, sexual health, young adult, qualitative research

¹ Department of Social and Environmental Health Research, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 15-17 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SH

Correspondence to:

Dr. Cicely Marston

Department of Social and Environmental Health Research

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

15-17 Tavistock Place

London WC1H 9SH UK

Cicely.Marston@lshtm.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Objective

To explore expectations, experiences and circumstances of anal sex among young people.

Design

Qualitative, longitudinal study using individual and group interviews.

Participants

130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds.

Setting

Three contrasting sites in England (London, a northern industrial city, rural southwest).

Results

Anal heterosexual often appeared to be painful, risky and coercive, particularly for women. Interviewees frequently cited pornography as the 'explanation' for anal sex, yet their accounts revealed a complex context with availability of pornography being only one element. Other key elements included competition between men; the claim that "people must like it if they do it" (made alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women); and, crucially, normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration. It seemed men were often persuading or coercing reluctant partners. Safer, less painful techniques were not discussed.

Conclusions

Young people's narratives normalised coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. This study suggests an urgent need for harm reduction efforts targeting anal sex to help encourage discussion about mutuality and consent, reduce risky and painful techniques and challenge views that normalise coercion.

Strengths and limitations of this study

- This study uses a large qualitative sample from three diverse sites in the UK and is the first to capture a wide range of circumstances around and reasons for engaging in anal sex among men and women between the ages of 16 and 18.
- Analysis explores experiences in depth, going beyond simplistic explanations linking motivations for anal sex with pornography
- The study shows that young people's narratives about anal sex contained ideas normalising coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. These ideas could be addressed in health promotion work.
- This study was conducted in the UK and further work is needed to assess the extent to which similar discourses operate among young people in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

Anal sex is increasingly prevalent among young people, yet anal intercourse between men and women – though commonly depicted in sexually explicit media – is usually absent from mainstream sexuality education and seems unmentionable in many social contexts.

Surveys suggest young men and women – and older adults – are engaging in anal intercourse more than ever before.¹⁻⁴ Sexually explicit media depictions are often mentioned as affecting how sex is viewed and practised by young people⁵⁻⁷ with anal intercourse one of the ‘risky’ or ‘undesirable’ practices thought to be promoted by such media,^{8,9} although evidence about the influence of pornography on anal practices is thin.⁵ Studies of anal practices, which are generally of over-18s,¹⁰⁻¹² suggest anal sex might be desired by young men more than women, and may be used to avoid pregnancy,^{12,13} or vaginal intercourse during menstruation,¹² while often being unprotected with condoms.¹²⁻¹⁴ It may be painful for women,^{12,13,15} and may be a pleasurable part of sex for men and women.^{16,17} Almost one in five 16-24 year olds (19% of men, 17% of women) reported having had anal intercourse in the past year in a recent UK survey.⁴

Very little is known about the detailed circumstances around or reasons for engaging in anal sex among under-18-year-olds anywhere, or what implications these might have for health. This study looks in detail at anal practices among young people aged 18 and under, develops hypotheses for further study, and makes suggestions for sexual health promotion.

METHOD

Design and data collection

The narratives about anal heterosex presented here emerged as part of a longitudinal, qualitative mixed methods study (the ‘sixteen18’ project) which explored the range and meaning of different sexual activities among a diverse sample of 130 young people aged 16-18 in three contrasting locations in England: London; a medium-sized northern, industrial city; and a rural area in the southwest. From January 2010 we conducted nine group interviews and 71 depth interviews (wave one: 37 women, 34 men), re-interviewing 43 of the depth interviewees one year later (wave two), until June 2011. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Research Ethics Committee approved the study and all participants provided written consent.

1
2
3 For the depth interviews, we used purposive sampling to maximise variation in social
4 background. Within each location we sampled from a range of settings including:
5 schools/colleges; youth work services targeting young people not in education or training;
6 youth organisations; a supported housing project for young people living independently from
7 their families; and informal networks. We also used ‘snowball’ sampling and, in the rural
8 southwest, we approached people directly in a town centre. The sample was diverse in terms
9 of economic and social background, and less diverse in terms of ethnicity (most participants
10 were white). See Lewis et al 2013 for further details.¹⁸ We highlighted in our information
11 leaflet and our conversations with potential interviewees that we were keen to speak to any
12 young person, whatever their experiences. Although participants varied in terms of the range
13 of activities they had experienced, and the number and nature of their sexual partnerships, the
14 majority reported opposite-sex partners only.
15
16

17
18 In the depth interviews, we asked interviewees about what sexual practices they had engaged
19 in, the circumstances of those practices, and how they felt about them. We deliberately left
20 ‘sexual practices’ undefined, to allow for young people’s own definitions to emerge. In the
21 group discussions, we asked general questions about what practices they had heard of, their
22 attitudes to those practices, and whether they thought young people their age would generally
23 engage in particular practices, and if so, under what circumstances. Many of our interviewees
24 talked about anal sexual practices unprompted (whether they had engaged in them or not) and
25 so in wave two, we specifically asked all of our participants about their perception and, if
26 relevant, their experience of anal practices (about a quarter of our in-depth interviewees
27 reported anal sexual experiences). Our aim was to explore the key discourses surrounding
28 anal sexual practices among this age group and to elicit detailed accounts of specific
29 experiences.
30
31

32 **Data analysis**

33
34 We recorded and transcribed all interviews. We used iterative thematic analysis¹⁹ to develop
35 our understanding of the data. This involved ‘coding’ transcripts¹⁹ and extensive discussions
36 between researchers to come to a shared interpretation of young people’s accounts of anal
37 sex, taking into consideration our own characteristics (e.g. white, middle-class, educated,
38 women older than the interviewees) and how these may have affected the data collected. We
39 made constant comparisons across cases and themes, and sought ‘deviant cases’ to challenge
40 our emerging interpretations. Throughout the analysis, we simultaneously engaged with
41 theoretical literature to put the work in context.
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 We use unique identifier pseudonyms throughout. Quotations are from one-to-one interviews
4 unless otherwise indicated, with omissions marked [...].
5
6

7 8 RESULTS

9
10 Anal practices reported usually involved penetration or attempted penetration by the man
11 with his penis or finger and, with one exception, were between opposite-sex partners. Anal
12 practices generally occurred between young men and women in ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’
13 relationships. Although a small minority of interviewees said anal sex (i.e. penetration with a
14 penis) was exclusively ‘gay’ it was widely understood as also occurring between men and
15 women.
16
17
18
19

20 Initial anal sexual experiences were rarely narrated in terms of mutual exploration of sexual
21 pleasure. Women reported painful anal sex:
22
23

24 As soon as the whole incident happened where he didn’t warn me it
25 just hurt. It was just pain [*laugh*]. It was just like: no. No one could
26 possibly enjoy that. It was just horrible [...] I guess he could have
27 used lube, maybe that would have helped, but I don’t know.
28 Apparently if you’re tense it hurts more, I guess, which makes sense
29 really, but I don’t see how you couldn’t be tense [*laugh*] in that kind
30 of situation. (Emma)
31
32
33

34 Young men in our study, while often keen on anal sex in principle, were sometimes
35 unenthusiastic about the physical reality: “I thought it was going to be a lot better to be
36 honest” (Ali); “sometimes it does feel better [than vaginal sex] but I wouldn’t say I preferred
37 it” (Max).
38
39
40

41 From the young people’s accounts, it seems that condoms were not often used, and when they
42 were it was usually for basic hygiene, not STI prevention: “so you don’t get shit on your
43 dick” (Carl). Some interviewees incorrectly stated that anal STI transmission was impossible,
44 or less likely than for vaginal intercourse.
45
46
47

48 There were marked gender differences in how anal sex was described: its benefits (pleasure,
49 indicator of sexual achievement) were expected for men but not women; its risks –
50 interviewees rarely mentioned risks of STIs, focusing instead on risk of pain, or damaged
51 reputation – were expected for women not men. Our interviewees did not describe anal sex as
52 a way to preserve virginity or avoid pregnancy.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Reasons for anal sex

The main reasons given for young people having anal sex were that men wanted to copy what they saw in pornography, and that “it’s tighter”. The implication was that “tighter” was better for men and was something men were said to want, while women were expected to find anal sex painful, particularly the first time. The ‘pornography’ explanation seems partial at best, not least because young people only seemed to see this as motivating men, not women. We found other important explanations and motivations in young people’s accounts, as we will see below.

Key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why the practice continued despite women’s reluctance, expectations of pain for women, and apparent lack of pleasure for women and men: competition between men; the claim that “people must like it if they do it” (alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women); and – crucially – normalisation of coercion and ‘accidental’ penetration.

Competition between men

While not all young men in the study wanted to have anal sex (e.g. saying it was ‘not for them’), many men said they encouraged one another to try the practice, and both men and women said men wanted to tell their friends they had had anal sex. Men in a group discussion said anal sex was “something we do for a competition”, and “every hole’s a goal”. By contrast, both men and women said women risked their reputation for the same act; a sexual double standard familiar from previous literature.²⁰

"People must like it if they do it"

Despite asserting that anal sex is inevitably painful for women, and despite not usually linking pain to any sexual pleasure, both men and women often also expressed the seemingly contradictory view that anal sex was in fact enjoyable for women:

Obviously people do enjoy it if they do it. (Naomi)

There’s quite a few, a lot of girls enjoy it. But I think most girls would like, I think they might do, on the quiet. (Shane)

That it ‘must’ be enjoyable was typically suggested as an explanation by those who had not engaged in the practice.

Women experiencing pain were often depicted as naive or flawed. Both men and women said that women needed to “relax” more, to “get used to it”:

1
2
3 I think that the boy enjoys it. I think it's definitely the boy that pushes
4 for it from watching porn and stuff, they wanna try it. The girl is
5 scared and thinks it's weird, and then they try it because the boyfriend
6 wants them to. *They normally don't enjoy it because they're scared*
7 and I, I know that like with anal, *if you're not willing, you don't relax,*
8 like if you have, you have control over two of the muscles that are
9 closest to the outside and then inside it's like involuntary and if
10 you're scared or you haven't eased them off like they stay tight and
11 then you can rip 'em if you try and force anal sex. (Mark [our
12 emphasis])
13
14
15

16
17 Note that Mark refers, almost casually, to the idea that a woman might be “scared” or “not
18 willing” in a scenario in which anal sex is possibly taking place, seemingly assuming a shared
19 understanding with the interviewer that this would often be the case. Elsewhere in the
20 interview he talks about having hurt his partner during an anal sex ‘slip’ (see below), and so
21 his talk about ‘easing off’ may reflect his own – perhaps more recent – understanding of how
22 it ‘should’ be done.
23
24
25
26

27 ***Normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration***

28
29 The idea that women would generally not wish to engage in anal sex, and so would need to
30 be either persuaded or coerced, seemed to be taken for granted by many participants. Even in
31 otherwise seemingly communicative and caring partnerships, some men seemed to push to
32 have anal sex with their reluctant partner despite believing it likely to hurt her. Persuasion of
33 women was a feature to a greater or lesser degree of most men's and women's narratives
34 about anal sex events, with repeated, emphatic requests from men commonly mentioned.
35
36
37
38

39 Women seemed to take for granted that they would either acquiesce to or resist their partners'
40 repeated requests, rather than being equal partners in sexual decision making. Being able to
41 say ‘no’ was often cited by the women as a positive example of their control of the situation.
42
43
44

45 Some men also described taking a ‘try it and see’ approach, where they anally penetrated a
46 woman with their fingers or penis and hoped that she would not stop them.
47
48

49 Shane said he used digital penetration to see if a woman was likely to agree to anal sex and –
50 if she said no – “I can be very persuasive. Like sometimes you just keep going, just keep
51 going till they just get fed up and let you do it anyway”.
52
53

54 ‘Try it and see’ generally either hurt the woman or was ‘unsuccessful’ (from the man's point
55 of view) in the sense of not penetrating “it just didn't go in really”. (Jack) A verbal ‘no’ from
56 the woman did not necessarily stop anal penetration attempts:
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 He tried putting it there.

4
5 [Interviewer] Right

6
7 And I just said 'no'.

8
9 [Interviewer] Had he asked you first or did he just try it?

10
11 Um, he kept asking me at first. I'm like 'no', but then he tried it and I
12 said 'no way'.

13
14 [Interviewer] Right

15
16 'No chance'. (Molly)

17
18
19
20 In some cases, anal penetration of the woman – digital or penile – was described by both men
21 and women as having happened accidentally (“it slipped”). Mark, mentioned above, for
22 instance told us about a time when he ‘slipped’ during vagina-penis intercourse and
23 penetrated his girlfriend anally.

24
25
26
27 Because of the nature of the data – we rely on reports at interview – it is difficult to assess the
28 extent to which events described as ‘slips’ were genuinely unintentional. One man however
29 described a ‘slip’ at first interview, which he said to the interviewer – and said he had told his
30 girlfriend – was an accident, a story which he amended at second interview. He did not seem
31 troubled by talking about having apparently attempted to penetrate his girlfriend against her
32 wishes:

33
34 [Interviewer] I think you said [...] in the first interview that there had
35 been a time where [...] you said it [his penis] slipped.

36
37 Well I, I tried, and I said it slipped.

38
39 [Interviewer] So it hadn't actually slipped? It wasn't an accident?

40
41 No, no, no it wasn't an accident. (Jack)

42
43
44
45 Describing events as ‘slips’, then, may enable both men and women to gloss over the
46 possibility that penetration was deliberate and non-consensual.

47
48
49
50 The narratives suggested little expectation that young women themselves would initiate anal
51 sex. Many young men on the other hand clearly described wanting to penetrate a woman
52 anally. This mismatch may help explain why ‘slips’ and ‘persuasion’ of the woman were
53 common features of the narratives about anal sex.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Anal sex and pleasure

Among those who had had anal sexual experiences, few of the men and only one woman among this young age group referred to physical pleasure in their accounts. Alicia, the only woman narrating pleasurable anal penetration, exemplifies some of the complexities involved in women's navigating (and narrating) anal sexual practices. She described a fairly common pattern: her partner asked for anal sex, which she first refused but later agreed to. She found it painful, and also had a second experience where her consent was questionable ("it just kind of slipped in"). She was atypical, however, in that she related the story in a positive way emphasising her own agency ("I was curious about it") and described how she had subsequently enjoyed anal sex, suggesting they had found a mutually satisfactory way to engage in the practice.

Her partner had had anal sex before. The first time she had anal sex with him was "really painful":

I didn't wanna try it [anal sex] initially, well I was unsure about it initially. But I kind of, he didn't, he said 'that's fine', but I still wanted to try it for him because I was interested. I think I was interested to why he was interested. I was curious about it [...] So I think that's [...] I just sort of tried it for him.

She described the second occasion they had anal sex differently in the first and second interviews:

[First interview] We were having [vaginal] sex another time and it [his penis] just kind of slipped in [into her anus] that way.

[Second interview] He just sort of slipped in [...] I think he thought it would make it less painful for me. And I think he thought he can make me like it like that.

At first interview, Alicia was ambiguous about what happened, narrating the event as though it were accidental ("it just kind of slipped in"), perhaps reluctant to draw attention to not having been involved in the decision. At second interview, she was clearer that he had deliberately penetrated her (she may also have spoken to her partner about it between interviews). She presents it in a somewhat positive way ("he thought he can make me like it") but her consent remains unclear.

1
2
3 'em if you try and force anal sex"; "you just keep going till they get fed up and let you do it
4 anyway") suggesting that not only do they expect coercion to be part of anal sex (in general,
5 even if not for themselves personally), but that many of them accept or at least do not
6 explicitly challenge it. Some events, particularly the 'accidental' penetration reported by
7 some interviewees, were ambiguous in terms of whether or not they would be classed as rape
8 (i.e. non-consensual penetration) but we know from Jack's interview that 'accidents' may
9 happen 'on purpose'. The men who described apparently coercing their partners seemed
10 oblivious to, or uncaring of, their role as possible rapists.

11
12
13
14
15
16
17 Second, badgering women in order to obtain reluctant consent to anal sex appears to be
18 considered normal.

19
20
21 Third, the commonly circulating ideas that 'everyone' enjoys it, and that women who do not
22 are either flawed or simply keeping their enjoyment secret, help support the erroneous idea
23 that a man pushing for anal sex is simply 'persuading' his partner to do something that 'most
24 girls would like'. Even Alicia's narrative contains some of the apparently coercive features of
25 anal sex that other women report in negative terms, despite Alicia reporting enjoying anal
26 sex. Women may also be under pressure to appear to enjoy or choose certain sexual practices:
27 Gill describes a "postfeminist sensibility", where women are expected to present themselves
28 as having chosen behaviours that conform to heterosexual male fantasy.²⁴ We hope to explore
29 such expectations and their effects in future work.

30
31
32
33
34
35
36 Fourth, anal sex today appears to be a marker of (hetero)sexual achievement or experience,
37 particularly for men.¹⁸ The society our interviewees inhabit seems to reward men for sexual
38 experience per se ("every hole's a goal"), and to some extent reward women for compliance
39 in sexually 'adventurous' acts (enjoyment signifying not being naive, unrelaxed etc.),
40 although women must balance this with the risk to their reputation. The common portrayal of
41 anal heterosex in terms of men breaking women's resistance can be compared with narratives
42 about first vaginal intercourse²⁵ and perhaps have superseded them to some degree in the UK
43 context where premarital vaginal intercourse is considered normal and so perhaps less of a
44 'conquest'.
45
46
47
48
49
50

51
52 Fifth, many men do not express concern about possible pain for women, viewing it as
53 inevitable. Less painful techniques (such as slower penetration) were rarely discussed.
54
55 Currently this apparently oppressive context, and indeed the practice of anal heterosex itself,
56 appears to be largely ignored in policy and in sexuality education for this young age group.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Attitudes such as the inevitability of pain for women, or men's failure to recognise or reflect
4 on their own potentially coercive behaviour, seem to be unchallenged. Alicia's case
5 demonstrates how women might absorb potentially negative experiences into an overall
6 narrative of control, desire and pleasure, all of which she emphasises in her account. We do
7 not suggest that mutually pleasurable anal practices should not happen among this age group.
8 Rather, we wish to emphasise how mutuality and pleasure are often absent in narratives of
9 anal heterosex and how their absence is not only left unremarked and unchallenged, but even
10 seems expected by many young people.

11
12 Previous work has suggested gendered power may operate differently for different sexual
13 activities, and that sexual 'scripts' (i.e. expectations about how practices will be done) for
14 anal intercourse may not be as well established as for vaginal intercourse.¹³ Our findings
15 suggest that coercion could emerge as a dominant script for anal intercourse at these young
16 ages if left unchallenged.

17
18 Further work is needed to assess the extent to which similar coercive discourses operate
19 among young people in other countries. This is a qualitative study, with an in-depth analysis
20 of a smaller sample than would be usual for epidemiological studies, but which spans three
21 locations and diverse social groups. Whether or not the concept of 'generalisability' should
22 be applied in qualitative research is a matter of debate²⁶, but we would argue that this study
23 provides useful, credible working hypotheses or theories about anal sexual practice among
24 young men and women that are likely to apply outside our group of interviewees.

25
26 Sexuality education, and specifically what it should contain, is the subject of global debate.²⁷
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
841
842
843
844
845
846
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885
886
887
888
889
890
891
892
893
894
895
896
897
898
899
900
901
902
903
904
905
906
907
908
909
910
911
912
913
914
915
916
917
918
919
920
921
922
923
924
925
926
927
928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982
983
984
985
986
987
988
989
990
991
992
993
994
995
996
997
998
999
1000
1001
1002
1003
1004
1005
1006
1007
1008
1009
1010
1011
1012
1013
1014
1015
1016
1017
1018
1019
1020
1021
1022
1023
1024
1025
1026
1027
1028
1029
1030
1031
1032
1033
1034
1035
1036
1037
1038
1039
1040
1041
1042
1043
1044
1045
1046
1047
1048
1049
1050
1051
1052
1053
1054
1055
1056
1057
1058
1059
1060
1061
1062
1063
1064
1065
1066
1067
1068
1069
1070
1071
1072
1073
1074
1075
1076
1077
1078
1079
1080
1081
1082
1083
1084
1085
1086
1087
1088
1089
1090
1091
1092
1093
1094
1095
1096
1097
1098
1099
1100
1101
1102
1103
1104
1105
1106
1107
1108
1109
1110
1111
1112
1113
1114
1115
1116
1117
1118
1119
1120
1121
1122
1123
1124
1125
1126
1127
1128
1129
1130
1131
1132
1133
1134
1135
1136
1137
1138
1139
1140
1141
1142
1143
1144
1145
1146
1147
1148
1149
1150
1151
1152
1153
1154
1155
1156
1157
1158
1159
1160
1161
1162
1163
1164
1165
1166
1167
1168
1169
1170
1171
1172
1173
1174
1175
1176
1177
1178
1179
1180
1181
1182
1183
1184
1185
1186
1187
1188
1189
1190
1191
1192
1193
1194
1195
1196
1197
1198
1199
1200
1201
1202
1203
1204
1205
1206
1207
1208
1209
1210
1211
1212
1213
1214
1215
1216
1217
1218
1219
1220
1221
1222
1223
1224
1225
1226
1227
1228
1229
1230
1231
1232
1233
1234
1235
1236
1237
1238
1239
1240
1241
1242
1243
1244
1245
1246
1247
1248
1249
1250
1251
1252
1253
1254
1255
1256
1257
1258
1259
1260
1261
1262
1263
1264
1265
1266
1267
1268
1269
1270
1271
1272
1273
1274
1275
1276
1277
1278
1279
1280
1281
1282
1283
1284
1285
1286
1287
1288
1289
1290
1291
1292
1293
1294
1295
1296
1297
1298
1299
1300
1301
1302
1303
1304
1305
1306
1307
1308
1309
1310
1311
1312
1313
1314
1315
1316
1317
1318
1319
1320
1321
1322
1323
1324
1325
1326
1327
1328
1329
1330
1331
1332
1333
1334
1335
1336
1337
1338
1339
1340
1341
1342
1343
1344
1345
1346
1347
1348
1349
1350
1351
1352
1353
1354
1355
1356
1357
1358
1359
1360
1361
1362
1363
1364
1365
1366
1367
1368
1369
1370
1371
1372
1373
1374
1375
1376
1377
1378
1379
1380
1381
1382
1383
1384
1385
1386
1387
1388
1389
1390
1391
1392
1393
1394
1395
1396
1397
1398
1399
1400
1401
1402
1403
1404
1405
1406
1407
1408
1409
1410
1411
1412
1413
1414
1415
1416
1417
1418
1419
1420
1421
1422
1423
1424
1425
1426
1427
1428
1429
1430
1431
1432
1433
1434
1435
1436
1437
1438
1439
1440
1441
1442
1443
1444
1445
1446
1447
1448
1449
1450
1451
1452
1453
1454
1455
1456
1457
1458
1459
1460
1461
1462
1463
1464
1465
1466
1467
1468
1469
1470
1471
1472
1473
1474
1475
1476
1477
1478
1479
1480
1481
1482
1483
1484
1485
1486
1487
1488
1489
1490
1491
1492
1493
1494
1495
1496
1497
1498
1499
1500
1501
1502
1503
1504
1505
1506
1507
1508
1509
1510
1511
1512
1513
1514
1515
1516
1517
1518
1519
1520
1521
1522
1523
1524
1525
1526
1527
1528
1529
1530
1531
1532
1533
1534
1535
1536
1537
1538
1539
1540
1541
1542
1543
1544
1545
1546
1547
1548
1549
1550
1551
1552
1553
1554
1555
1556
1557
1558
1559
1560
1561
1562
1563
1564
1565
1566
1567
1568
1569
1570
1571
1572
1573
1574
1575
1576
1577
1578
1579
1580
1581
1582
1583
1584
1585
1586
1587
1588
1589
1590
1591
1592
1593
1594
1595
1596
1597
1598
1599
1600
1601
1602
1603
1604
1605
1606
1607
1608
1609
1610
1611
1612
1613
1614
1615
1616
1617
1618
1619
1620
1621
1622
1623
1624
1625
1626
1627
1628
1629
1630
1631
1632
1633
1634
1635
1636
1637
1638
1639
1640
1641
1642
1643
1644
1645
1646
1647
1648
1649
1650
1651
1652
1653
1654
1655
1656
1657
1658
1659
1660
1661
1662
1663
1664
1665
1666
1667
1668
1669
1670
1671
1672
1673
1674
1675
1676
1677
1678
1679
1680
1681
1682
1683
1684
1685
1686
1687
1688
1689
1690
1691
1692
1693
1694
1695
1696
1697
1698
1699
1700
1701
1702
1703
1704
1705
1706
1707
1708
1709
1710
1711
1712
1713
1714
1715
1716
1717
1718
1719
1720
1721
1722
1723
1724
1725
1726
1727
1728
1729
1730
1731
1732
1733
1734
1735
1736
1737
1738
1739
1740
1741
1742
1743
1744
1745
1746
1747
1748
1749
1750
1751
1752
1753
1754
1755
1756
1757
1758
1759
1760
1761
1762
1763
1764
1765
1766
1767
1768
1769
1770
1771
1772
1773
1774
1775
1776
1777
1778
1779
1780
1781
1782
1783
1784
1785
1786
1787
1788
1789
1790
1791
1792
1793
1794
1795
1796
1797
1798
1799
1800
1801
1802
1803
1804
1805
1806
1807
1808
1809
1810
1811
1812
1813
1814
1815
1816
1817
1818
1819
1820
1821
1822
1823
1824
1825
1826
1827
1828
1829
1830
1831
1832
1833
1834
1835
1836
1837
1838
1839
1840
1841
1842
1843
1844
1845
1846
1847
1848
1849
1850
1851
1852
1853
1854
1855
1856
1857
1858
1859
1860
1861
1862
1863
1864
1865
1866
1867
1868
1869
1870
1871
1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880
1881
1882
1883
1884
1885
1886
1887
1888
1889
1890
1891
1892
1893
1894
1895
1896
1897
1898
1899
1900
1901
1902
1903
1904
1905
1906
1907
1908
1909
1910
1911
1912
1913
1914
1915
1916
1917
1918
1919
1920
1921
1922
1923
1924
1925
1926
1927
1928
1929
1930
1931
1932
1933
1934
1935
1936
1937
1938
1939
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945
1946
1947
1948
1949
1950
1951
1952
1953
1954
1955
1956
1957
1958
1959
1960
1961
1962
1963
1964
1965
1966
1967
1968
1969
1970
1971
1972
1973
1974
1975
1976
1977
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
1983
1984
1985
1986
1987
1988
1989
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026
2027
2028
2029
2030
2031
2032
2033
2034
2035
2036
2037
2038
2039
2040
2041
2042
2043
2044
2045
2046
2047
2048
2049
2050
2051
2052
2053
2054
2055
2056
2057
2058
2059
2060
2061
2062
2063
2064
2065
2066
2067
2068
2069
2070
2071
2072
2073
2074
2075
2076
2077
2078
2079
2080
2081
2082
2083
2084
2085
2086
2087
2088
2089
2090
2091
2092
2093
2094
2095
2096
2097
2098
2099
2100
2101
2102
2103
2104
2105
2106
2107
2108
2109
2110
2111
2112
2113
2114
2115
2116
2117
2118
2119
2120
2121
2122
2123
2124
2125
2126
2127
2128
2129
2130
2131
2132
2133
2134
2135
2136
2137
2138
2139
2140
2141
2142
2143
2144
2145
2146
2147
2148
214

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Kaye Wellings and Tim Rhodes for their role in the project design, and Amber Marks and Crofton Black for their comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

DETAILS OF FUNDING: Funding for this study was obtained from the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) RES-062-23-1756.

DETAILS OF CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE NAME OF THE GUARANTOR: Both authors (CM, RL) meet all four criteria for authorship as detailed in the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. No individual(s) meet the criteria for authorship who are not named on the manuscript. Only the listed authors (CM, RL) meet the criteria for contributorship: both CM and RL contributed to the planning, conduct, and reporting of the work described in the manuscript. The lead author (CM) agrees to act as guarantor for this manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work and/or the conduct of the study.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT: All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: all authors had financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the submitted work; no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

Ethical approval was granted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Research Ethics Committee (Application #5608). All participants gave informed consent prior to taking part in this research.

DATA SHARING STATEMENT: Further data are available from the lead author (CM). Participants gave informed consent for anonymised data sharing in the final reports from this study.

DETAILS OF ETHICAL APPROVAL:

EXCLUSIVE LICENCE: The Corresponding Author has the right to grant on behalf of all authors and does grant on behalf of all authors, a worldwide licence to the Publishers and its licensees in perpetuity, in all forms, formats and media (whether known now or created in the

1
2
3 future), to i) publish, reproduce, distribute, display and store the Contribution, ii) translate the
4 Contribution into other languages, create adaptations, reprints, include within collections and
5 create summaries, extracts and/or, abstracts of the Contribution, iii) create any other
6 derivative work(s) based on the Contribution, iv) to exploit all subsidiary rights in the
7 Contribution, v) the inclusion of electronic links from the Contribution to third party material
8 where-ever it may be located; and, vi) licence any third party to do any or all of the above.
9

10
11
12
13
14 **DETAILS OF THE ROLE OF THE STUDY SPONSORS:** The funder had no role in the
15 design of the study, nor in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of the data it produced.
16 The writing of this manuscript was undertaken by the listed authors (CM, RL) alone and
17 without interference from the funder. The decision to submit this research for publication was
18 entirely that of the authors (CM, RL).
19

20
21
22
23 **STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE OF RESEARCHERS FROM FUNDERS:** Both
24 authors declare that they are independent from the funder.
25

26
27
28 **ACCESS TO DATA:** Both authors (CM, RL) had full access to all of the data in the study
29 and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis
30

31
32 **TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT:** The lead author (CM) affirms that this manuscript is an
33 honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important
34 aspects of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned
35 (and, if relevant, registered) have been explained.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

REFERENCES

1. Chandra A, Mosher WD, Copen C, et al. Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual identity in the United States: data from the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2011:1-36.
2. Gindi RM, Ghanem KG, Erbeling EJ. Increases in oral and anal sexual exposure among youth attending sexually transmitted diseases clinics in Baltimore, Maryland. *J Adolesc Health* 2008;**42**(3):307-8.
3. Johnson AM, Mercer CH, Erens B, et al. Sexual behaviour in Britain: partnerships, practices, and HIV risk behaviours. *Lancet* 2001;**358**(9296):1835-42.
4. Mercer CH, Tanton C, Prah P, et al. Changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain through the life course and over time: findings from the National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). *Lancet* 2013;**382**(9907):1781-94.
5. Flood M. Youth and Pornography in Australia Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects. Bruce, Australia: The Australia Institute, 2003.
6. Horvath MAH, Alys L, Massey K, et al. "Basically... porn is everywhere": A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People. London: The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013.
7. Owens EW, Behun RJ, Manning JC, et al. The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research. *Sex Addict Compulsivity* 2012;**19**(1-2):99-122.

- 1
2
3 8. Braun-Courville DK, Rojas M. Exposure to sexually explicit Web sites and adolescent
4
5 sexual attitudes and behaviors. *J Adolesc Health* 2009;**45**(2):156-62.
6
7
- 8 9. Haggstrom-Nordin E, Hanson U, Tyden T. Associations between pornography
9
10 consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *Int J STD AIDS*
11
12 2005;**16**(2):102-7.
13
14
- 15 10. Baldwin JI, Baldwin JD. Heterosexual anal intercourse: An understudied, high-risk sexual
16
17 behavior. *Arch Sex Behav* 2000;**29**(4):357-73.
18
19
- 20 11. Gorbach PM, Manhart LE, Hess KL, et al. Anal intercourse among young heterosexuals
21
22 in three sexually transmitted disease clinics in the United States. *Sex Transm Dis*
23
24 2009;**36**(4):193-8.
25
26
27
- 28 12. Halperin DT. Heterosexual anal intercourse: prevalence, cultural factors, and HIV
29
30 infection and other health risks, Part I. *AIDS Patient Care ST* 1999;**13**(12):717-30.
31
32
33
- 34 13. Roye CF, Tolman DL, Snowden F. Heterosexual anal intercourse among black and latino
35
36 adolescents and young adults: a poorly understood high-risk behavior. *J Sex Res*
37
38 2013;**50**(7):715-22.
39
40
41
- 42 14. Smith G. Heterosexual and homosexual anal intercourse: an international perspective.
43
44 *Venereology* 2001;**14**(1):28-37.
45
46
- 47 15. Štulhofer A, Ajduković D. Should we take anodyspareunia seriously? A descriptive
48
49 analysis of pain during receptive anal intercourse in young heterosexual women. *J Sex*
50
51 *Marital Ther* 2011;**37**(5):346-58.
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 16. Makhubele B, Parker W. Heterosexual anal sex amongst young adults in South Africa:
4
5 Risks and perspectives. Johannesburg: Centre for AIDS, Development and
6
7 Evaluation, 2013.
8
9
10
11 17. Štulhofer A, Ajdukovic D. A mixed-methods exploration of women's experiences of anal
12
13 intercourse: meanings related to pain and pleasure. *Arch Sex Behav* 2013;**42**(6):1053-
14
15 62.
16
17
18 18. Lewis R, Marston C, Wellings K. Bases. Stages and 'Working Your Way Up': Young
19
20 People's Talk About Non-Coital Practices and 'Normal' Sexual Trajectories. *Sociol*
21
22 *Res Online* 2013;**18**(1):1.
23
24
25
26 19. Corbin J, Strauss A. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for
27
28 Developing Grounded Theory (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008.
29
30
31 20. Marston C, King E. Factors that shape young people's sexual behaviour: a systematic
32
33 review. *Lancet* 2006;**368**(9547):1581-6.
34
35
36
37 21. Marston C. What is heterosexual coercion? Interpreting narratives from young people in
38
39 Mexico City. *Sociol Health Illn* 2005;**27**(1):68-91.
40
41
42 22. Richardson D. Youth masculinities: compelling male heterosexuality. *Br J Sociol*
43
44 2010;**61**(4):737-56.
45
46
47 23. Holland J, Ramazanoglu C, Sharpe S, et al. The Male in the Head: Young people,
48
49 heterosexuality and power. London: The Tufnell Press, 1998.
50
51
52
53 24. Gill R. Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *Euro J Cult Stud*
54
55 2007;**10**(2):147-66.
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 25. Holland J, Ramazanoglu C, Sharpe S, et al. Deconstructing virginity - Young people's
4
5 accounts of first sex. *Sex Relation Ther* 2000;**15**(3):221-32.
6
7
8 26. Whittemore R, Chase SK, Mandle CL. Validity in qualitative research. *Qual Health Res*
9
10 2001;**11**(4):522-37.
11
12
13 27. Stanger-Hall KF, Hall DW. Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: why we
14
15 need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. *PLoS One* 2011;**6**(10):e24658.
16
17
18 28. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. International Technical
19
20 Guidance on Sexuality Education. Paris: UNESCO, 2009.
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For peer review only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21 | **Anal sexheterosex among young people and implications**
22 | **for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK**
23
24
25
26
27

28 C. Marston¹, R. Lewis¹
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 | **Word count: 3,162**
36

37 Keywords: anal sex, sexual behaviour, sexual health, young adult, qualitative research
38

39 ¹ Department of Social and Environmental Health Research, London School of Hygiene &
40 Tropical Medicine, 15-17 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SH
41
42
43

44 Correspondence to:

45 Dr. Cicely Marston

46 Department of Social and Environmental Health Research

47 London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

48 15-17 Tavistock Place

49 London WC1H 9SH UK

50 Cicely.Marston@lshtm.ac.uk
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

ABSTRACT

Objective

To explore expectations, experiences and circumstances of anal sex among young people.

Design

Qualitative, longitudinal study using individual and group interviews.

Participants

130 men and women aged 16-18 from diverse social backgrounds.

Setting

Three contrasting sites in England (London, a northern industrial city, rural southwest).

Results

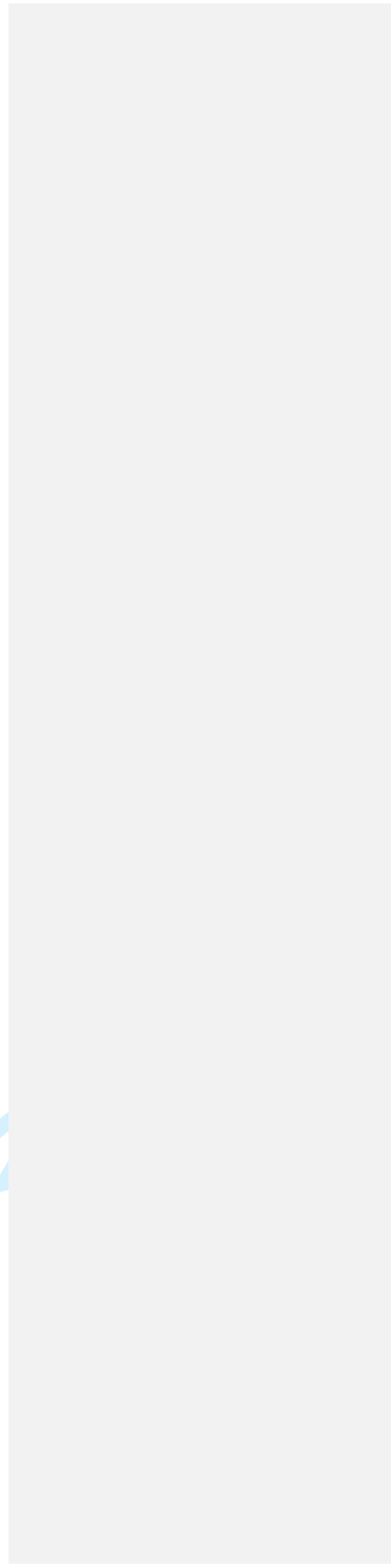
Anal ~~sex~~heterosex often appeared to be painful, risky and coercive. ~~Five key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why young people have, particularly for women. Interviewees frequently cited pornography as the 'explanation' for anal sex despite this: men 'copying pornography', "it's tighter", yet their accounts revealed a complex context with availability of pornography being only one element. Other key elements included~~ competition between men; the claim that "people must like it if they do it" (made alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women); and, crucially, normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration. It seemed men were often persuading or coercing reluctant partners. Safer, less painful techniques were not discussed.

Conclusions

~~Interviewees frequently cite pornography as the 'explanation' for anal sex, yet their accounts reveal a complex context for anal sex with availability of pornography being only one element: crucially, young people circulated ideas that promoted~~ Young people's narratives normalised coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. This study suggests an urgent need for harm reduction efforts targeting anal sex to talk help encourage discussion about anal sex with young people to discuss safer mutuality and less consent, reduce risky and painful techniques, ~~to emphasise consent, and to challenge views that promote~~ normalise coercion.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For peer review only



Strengths and limitations of this study

- This study uses a large qualitative sample from three diverse sites in the UK and is the first to capture a wide range of circumstances around and reasons for engaging in anal sex among men and women between the ages of 16 and 18.
- Analysis explores experiences in depth, going beyond simplistic explanations linking motivations for anal sex with pornography
- The study shows that young ~~people circulated ideas about gender and sexual practices that normalised~~ people's narratives about anal sex contained ideas normalising coercive, painful and unsafe anal sex. These ideas could be addressed in health promotion work.
- This study was conducted in the UK and further work is needed to assess the extent to which ~~the same~~ similar discourses operate among young people in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

Anal sex is increasingly prevalent among young people, yet anal intercourse between men and women – though commonly depicted in sexually explicit media – ~~appears unmentionable in many social contexts and~~ is usually absent from mainstream sexuality education. ~~and seems unmentionable in many social contexts.~~

Surveys suggest young men and women – and older adults – are engaging in anal intercourse more than ever before.¹⁻⁴ Sexually explicit media depictions are often mentioned as affecting how sex is viewed and practised by young people⁵⁻⁷ with anal intercourse one of the ‘risky’ or ‘undesirable’ practices thought to be promoted by such media,^{8,9} although evidence about the influence of pornography on anal practices is thin.^{5,5} Studies of anal practices, which are generally of over-18s,¹⁰⁻¹² suggest anal sex might be desired by young men more than women, and may be used to avoid pregnancy,^{12,13} or vaginal intercourse during menstruation,¹² while often being unprotected with condoms.¹²⁻¹⁴ It may be painful for women,^{12,13,15} and may be a pleasurable part of sex for men and women.^{16,17} Almost one in five 16-24 year olds (19% of men, 17% of women) reported having had anal intercourse in the past year in a recent UK survey.⁴

Very little is known about the detailed circumstances around or reasons for engaging in anal sex among ~~under-18-year-olds~~ anywhere, or what implications these might have for health.

This study looks in detail at anal practices among ~~under-18s and draws out global lessons~~ young people aged 18 and under, develops hypotheses for further study, and makes suggestions for sexual health promotion.

METHOD

Design and data collection

~~We collected data on~~ The narratives about anal ~~sex~~ heterosex presented here emerged as part of a longitudinal, qualitative mixed methods study (the ~~“sixteen18”~~ ‘sixteen18’ project) which explored the range and meaning of different sexual activities among a diverse sample of 130 young people aged 16-18 in three contrasting locations in England: London; a medium-sized northern, industrial city; and a rural area in the southwest. From January 2010 we conducted nine group interviews and 71 depth interviews (wave one: 37 women, 34 men), re-interviewing 43 of the depth interviewees one year later (wave two), until June 2011. The

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine ~~ethics committee~~ Research Ethics
8 Committee approved the study and all participants provided written consent.

9
10 For the depth interviews, we used purposive sampling to maximise variation in social
11 background. Within each location we sampled from a range of settings including:
12 schools/colleges (~~n=23 depth interviews~~); youth work services targeting young people not in
13 education or training (~~n=9~~); youth organisations (~~n=8~~); a supported housing project for
14 young people living independently from their families (~~n=4~~); and informal networks (~~n=3~~).
15 We also used 'snowball' sampling (~~n=17~~) and, in the rural southwest, we approached people
16 directly in a town centre (~~n=7~~).

17
18
19
20
21 . The sample was diverse in terms of economic and social background, and less diverse in
22 terms of ethnicity (most participants were white). See Lewis et al 2013 for further details.¹⁸

23 We highlighted in our information leaflet and our conversations with potential interviewees
24 that we were keen to speak to any young person, whatever their experiences. Although
25 participants varied in terms of the range of activities they had experienced, and the number
26 and nature of their sexual partnerships, the majority reported opposite-sex partners only.

27
28
29 In the depth interviews, we asked interviewees about what sexual practices they had engaged
30 in, the circumstances of those practices, and how they felt about them. We deliberately left
31 'sexual practices' undefined, to allow for young people's own definitions to emerge. In the
32 group discussions, we asked general questions about what practices they had heard of, their
33 attitudes to those practices, and whether they thought young people their age would generally
34 engage in particular practices, and if so, under what circumstances. Many of our interviewees
35 spontaneously talked about anal sexual practices unprompted (whether they had engaged in
36 them or not) and so in wave two, we specifically asked all of our participants about their
37 perception; and, if relevant, their experience; of anal practices; (about a quarter of our in-
38 depth interviewees reported anal sexual experiences). Our aim was to explore the key
39 discourses surrounding anal sexual practices among this age group; and to elicit detailed
40 accounts of specific experiences.

41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Data analysis**

48
49 We recorded and transcribed all interviews. We used iterative thematic analysis^{18,19} to
50 develop our understanding of the data. This involved 'coding' transcripts^{18,19} and extensive
51 discussions between researchers to come to a shared interpretation of young people's
52 accounts of anal sex, taking into consideration our own characteristics (e.g. white, middle-
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

class, educated, women older than the interviewees) and how these may have affected the data collected. We made constant comparisons across cases and themes, and sought ‘deviant cases’ to challenge our emerging interpretations. Throughout the analysis, we simultaneously engaged with theoretical literature to put the work in context.

We use unique identifier pseudonyms throughout. Quotations are from one-to-one interviews unless otherwise indicated, with omissions marked [...].

RESULTS

Anal practices reported ~~most commonly~~ usually involved penetration or attempted penetration by the man with his penis or finger ~~(15 and eight of the 71 in-depth interviewees respectively—19 of 71 reported anal practices in total), and~~ and, with one exception, were between opposite-sex partners. Anal practices generally occurred between young men and women in ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’ relationships. Although a small minority of interviewees said anal sex (i.e. penetration with a penis) was exclusively ‘gay’ it was widely understood as also occurring between men and women.

Initial anal sexual experiences were rarely narrated in terms of mutual exploration of sexual pleasure. Women reported painful anal sex:

As soon as the whole incident happened where he didn’t warn me it just hurt. It was just pain [*laugh*]. It was just like: no. No one could possibly enjoy that. It was just horrible [...] I guess he could have used lube, maybe that would have helped, but I don’t know.

Apparently if you’re tense it hurts more, I guess, which makes sense really, but I don’t see how you couldn’t be tense [*laugh*] in that kind of situation. (Emma)

The Young men in our study, while often keen on anal sex in principle, were sometimes unenthusiastic about the physical reality: “I thought it was going to be a lot better to be honest” (Ali); “sometimes it does feel better [than vaginal sex] but I wouldn’t say I preferred it” (Max).

Risks

~~Anal sex was also often risky;~~ From the young people’s accounts, it seems that condoms were ~~only sometimes not often~~ used, and ~~then~~ when they were it was usually for basic hygiene, not STI prevention: “so you don’t get shit on your dick” (Carl). Some interviewees incorrectly stated that anal STI transmission was impossible, or less likely than for vaginal intercourse.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 There were marked gender differences in how anal sex was described: its benefits (pleasure,
8 indicator of sexual achievement) were expected for men but not women; its risks –
9 interviewees rarely mentioned risks of STIs, focusing instead on risk of pain, or damaged
10 reputation – were expected for women not men. ~~It was~~ Our interviewees did not
11 ~~described~~ describe anal sex as a way to preserve virginity or avoid pregnancy.

14 **Key themes**

15
16 ~~Five key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why the practice continued~~
17 ~~despite women's reluctance, expectations of pain for women, and apparent lack of pleasure~~
18 ~~for women and men: men 'copying pornography'; 'it's tighter'; competition between men;~~
19 ~~the claim that "people must like it if they do it" (alongside the seemingly contradictory~~
20 ~~expectation that it will be painful for women); and – crucially – normalisation of coercion~~
21 ~~and 'accidental' penetration.~~

25 ***Men 'copying pornography' and "it's tighter"***

27 **Reasons for anal sex**

28
29 The ~~two~~ main reasons given for young people having anal sex were that men wanted to copy
30 what they saw in pornography, and that "it's tighter". The implication was that "tighter" was
31 better for men and was something men were said to want. ~~Women, while women~~ were
32 expected to find anal sex painful, particularly the first time. The 'pornography' explanation
33 seems ~~inadequate~~ partial at best, not least because young people only seemed to see this as
34 motivating men, not women. We found other important explanations and motivations in
35 young people's accounts, as we will see below.

36
37 Key themes emerged from our interviews that help explain why the practice continued
38 despite women's reluctance, expectations of pain for women, and apparent lack of pleasure
39 for women and men: competition between men; the claim that "people must like it if they do
40 it" (alongside the seemingly contradictory expectation that it will be painful for women); and
41 – crucially – normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration.

47 ***Competition between men***

48
49 ~~Men~~ While not all young men in the study wanted to have anal sex (e.g. saying it was 'not for
50 them'), many men said they encouraged one another to try the practice, and both men and
51 women said men wanted to tell their friends they had had anal sex. Men in a group discussion
52 said anal sex was "something we do for a competition", and "every hole's a goal". ~~Even the~~

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 ~~men saying they found the idea of anal sex repulsive did not always rule out trying it.~~ By
8 contrast, both men and women said women risked their reputation for the same act; a sexual
9 double standard familiar from previous literature.⁴⁹²⁰

10
11 *"People must like it if they do it"*

12
13 Despite asserting that anal sex is inevitably painful for women, ~~interviewees and despite not~~
14 ~~usually linking pain to any sexual pleasure, both men and women~~ often also expressed the
15 seemingly contradictory view that ~~anal sex~~ was in fact enjoyable for women:

16
17 Obviously people do enjoy it if they do it. (Naomi)

18
19 There's quite a few, a lot of girls enjoy it. But I think most girls
20 would like, I think they might do, on the quiet. (Shane)

21
22
23 ~~Commonly, women~~ That it 'must' be enjoyable was typically suggested as an explanation by
24 those who had not engaged in the practice.

25
26 Women experiencing pain were often depicted as naive or flawed. Both men and women said
27 that women needed to "relax" more, to "get used to it":

28
29 I think that the boy enjoys it. I think it's definitely the boy that pushes
30 for it from watching porn and stuff, they wanna try it. The girl is
31 scared and thinks it's weird, and then they try it because the boyfriend
32 wants them to. *They normally don't enjoy it because they're scared*
33 and I, I know that like with anal, *if you're not willing, you don't relax,*
34 like if you have, you have control over two of the muscles that are
35 closest to the outside and then inside it's like involuntary and if
36 you're scared or you haven't eased them off like they stay tight and
37 then you can rip 'em if you try and force anal sex. (Mark [our
38 emphasis])

39
40
41 Note that Mark refers, almost casually, to the idea that a woman might be "scared" or "not
42 willing" in a scenario in which anal sex is possibly taking place, seemingly assuming a shared
43 understanding with the interviewer that this would often be the case. Elsewhere in the
44 interview he talks about having hurt his partner during an anal sex 'slip' (see below), and so
45 his talk about 'easing off' may reflect his own – perhaps more recent – understanding of how
46 it 'should' be done.

47
48
49
50 *Normalisation of coercion and 'accidental' penetration*

51
52 The idea that women would generally not wish to engage in anal sex, and so would need to
53 be either persuaded or coerced, seemed to be taken for granted by many participants. Even in
54
55

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 otherwise seemingly communicative and caring partnerships, some men seemed to push to
8 have anal sex with their reluctant partner despite believing it likely to hurt her. ~~In~~ Persuasion
9 of women was a feature to a greater or lesser degree of most men's and women's ~~reports of~~
10 narratives about anal sex events ~~'persuasion' of the woman featured to a greater or lesser~~
11 degree, with repeated, emphatic requests from men commonly mentioned.

12
13
14 Women seemed to take for granted that they would either acquiesce to or resist their partners'
15 repeated requests, rather than being equal partners in sexual decision making. Being able to
16 say 'no' was often cited by the women as a positive example of their control of the situation.

17
18 Some men also described taking a 'try it and see' approach, where they anally penetrated a
19 woman with their fingers or penis and hoped that she would not stop them.

20
21
22 Shane said he used digital penetration to see if a woman was likely to agree to anal sex and –
23 if she said no – “I can be very persuasive. Like sometimes you just keep going, just keep
24 going till they just get fed up and let you do it anyway”.

25
26
27 'Try it and see' generally either hurt the woman or was 'unsuccessful' (from the man's point
28 of view) in the sense of not penetrating “it just didn't go in really”. (Jack) A verbal 'no' from
29 the woman did not necessarily stop anal penetration attempts:

30
31
32 He tried putting it there.

33
34 [Interviewer] Right

35
36 And I just said 'no'.

37
38 [Interviewer] Had he asked you first or did he just try it?

39
40 Um, he kept asking me at first. I'm like 'no', but then he tried it and I
41 said 'no way'.

42
43 [Interviewer] Right

44
45 'No chance' ~~:-~~ (Molly)

46
47 In some cases, anal penetration of the woman – digital or penile – ~~is~~ was described by both
48 men and women as ~~happening~~ having happened accidentally (“it slipped”). Mark, mentioned
49 above, for instance told us about a time when he 'slipped' during vagina-penis intercourse
50 and penetrated his girlfriend anally.

51
52 ~~Because of the nature of the data – we rely on reports at interview – it~~ is difficult to assess
53 the extent to which events described as 'slips' were genuinely unintentional. One man
54
55

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 however described a 'slip' at first interview, which he said to the interviewer – and said he
8 had told his girlfriend – was an accident, a story which he amended at second interview. He
9 did not seem troubled by talking about having apparently attempted to penetrate his girlfriend
10 against her wishes:
11

12 [Interviewer] I think you said [...] in the first interview that there had
13 been a time where [...] you said it his penis slipped.

14 Well I, I tried, and I said it slipped.

15 [Interviewer] So it hadn't actually slipped? It wasn't an accident?

16 No, no, no it wasn't an accident. (Jack)
17

18 Describing events as 'slips', then, may enable both men and women to gloss over the
19 possibility that penetration was deliberate and non-consensual.
20

21 Complexities: a case study

22 ~~It is important to state~~ The narratives suggested little expectation that young women
23 themselves would initiate anal sex ~~was not a simple matter. Many young men on the other~~
24 hand clearly described wanting to penetrate a woman anally. This mismatch may help explain
25 why 'slips' and 'persuasion' of men pressuring/women resisting the woman were common
26 features of the narratives about anal sex.
27

28 Anal sex and pleasure

29 Among those who had had anal sexual experiences, few of the men and only one woman
30 among this young age group referred to physical pleasure in their accounts. Alicia, the only
31 woman narrating pleasurable anal penetration, exemplifies some of the complexities involved
32 in women's navigating (and narrating) anal sexual practices. She described a fairly common
33 pattern: her partner asked for anal sex, which she first refused but later agreed to. She found it
34 painful, and also had a second experience where her consent was questionable ("it just kind
35 of slipped in"). She was atypical, however, in that she related the story in a positive way
36 emphasising her own agency ("I was curious about it") and described how she had
37 subsequently enjoyed anal sex ~~which both she and her partner initiated,~~ suggesting they had
38 found a mutually satisfactory way to engage in the practice.
39

40 ~~Alicia described her relationship in very positive terms, and said she was more sexually~~
41 ~~driven than her partner: "I'm not saying that I'm like wanting sex [all practices, not only anal~~
42 ~~sex] all the time, but I'd say I go for it more. I'd initiate it more"~~
43

44 **Formatted:** Space After: 0 pt, Adjust space
45 between Latin and Asian text, Adjust space
46 between Asian text and numbers

Her partner had had anal sex before. The first time she had anal sex with him was “really painful”:

I didn't wanna try it [anal sex] initially, well I was unsure about it initially. But I kind of, he didn't, he said 'that's fine', but I still wanted to try it for him because I was interested. I think I was interested to why he was interested. I was curious about it [...] So I think that's [...] I just sort of tried it for him.

She described the second occasion they had anal sex differently in the first and second interviews, ~~suggesting some discomfort with how the event had progressed:~~

[First interview] We were having [vaginal] sex another time and it [his penis] just kind of slipped in [into her anus] that way.

[Second interview] He just sort of slipped in [...] I think he thought it would make it less painful for me. And I think he thought he can make me like it like that.

At first interview, Alicia was ambiguous about what happened, ~~describing~~narrating the event as though it were accidental (“it just kind of slipped in”), perhaps reluctant to draw attention to not having been involved in the decision. At second interview, she was clearer that he had deliberately penetrated her (she may also have spoken to her partner about it between interviews). She presents it in a somewhat positive way (“he thought he can make me like it”) but her consent remains unclear.

At both interviews, she emphasised how much she enjoyed subsequent anal sex with the same man, and that either of them might initiate it.

Alicia was the only woman we interviewed who described experiencing physical pleasure, including orgasm, from anal sex.

Yeah. I quite like it because I think I quite like the feeling of him against my bum, like against the meat of your bum, like it's kind of cushiony. So yeah, I think that's what I like about it, I'm not sure.

Alicia's case was also unusual in how she presented herself in relation to her partner as more sexually driven: “I'm not saying that I'm like wanting sex [all practices, not only anal sex] all the time, but I'd say I go for it more. I'd initiate it more”.

In previous work, we have shown how interpretations of apparently coercive events can change over time²¹ and it is possible that better, later experiences in the context of a continuing relationship had allowed her to incorporate the initial, less enjoyable ones into a

Formatted: Space After: 0 pt, Adjust space between Latin and Asian text, Adjust space between Asian text and numbers

narrative of personal sexual growth within a stable relationship, particularly as she came to enjoy the practices that she had found painful at first.

Despite being generally positive, Alicia's account also contains indications of reluctance ("I didn't wanna try it [...] I was unsure"). It is possible that even as she talks about enjoying the practice, her narrative was shaped to some extent by social expectations about women resisting anal sex. Similarly, some men avoided talking about not enjoying anally penetrating a woman, only mentioning it after a series of questions, supporting other work describing an onus on men to articulate only a positive view of sex.^{22 23}

DISCUSSION

Few young men or women reported finding anal sex pleasurable and both expected anal sex to be painful for women. This study offers explanations for why anal sex may occur despite this.

Interviewees' accounts Interviewees frequently cite pornography as the 'explanation' for anal sex, yet only seem to see this as a motivation for men. A fuller picture of why women and men engage in anal sex appears in emerges from their accounts. It seems that anal sex happens in a context characterised by at least five specific features linked with the key explanatory themes described above:

First, some men appear unconcerned about men's narratives suggested consent for anal sex was not always a primary concern. Interviewees often spoke casually about penetration without consent ("you can rip 'em if you try and force anal sex"; "you just keep going till they get fed up and let you do it anyway") suggesting that not only do they expect coercion to be part of anal sex (in general, even if not for themselves personally), but that many of them accept or at least do not explicitly challenge it. Some events, particularly the 'accidental' penetration reported by some interviewees, were ambiguous in terms of whether or not they would be classed as rape (however defined), i.e. non-consensual penetration but we know from Jack's interview that 'accidents' may happen 'on purpose'. The men who described apparently coercing their partners seemed oblivious to, or uncaring of, their role as possible rapists.

Second, badgering women in order to obtain reluctant consent to anal sex appears to be considered normal.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 Third, the commonly circulating ideas that ‘everyone’ enjoys it, and that women who do not
8 are either flawed or simply keeping their enjoyment secret, help support the erroneous idea
9 that a man pushing for anal sex is simply ‘persuading’ his partner to do something that ‘most
10 girls would like’. ~~Even Alicia’s narrative contains some of the coercive features of anal sex~~
11 ~~that other women report in negative terms, despite Alicia reporting enjoying anal sex~~ Even
12 Alicia’s narrative contains some of the apparently coercive features of anal sex that other
13 women report in negative terms, despite Alicia reporting enjoying anal sex. Women may also
14 be under pressure to appear to enjoy or choose certain sexual practices: Gill describes a
15 “postfeminist sensibility”, where women are expected to present themselves as having chosen
16 behaviours that conform to heterosexual male fantasy.²⁴ We hope to explore such
17 expectations and their effects in future work.

18
19
20
21
22
23 ~~Fourth, anal sex today appears to be a marker of (hetero)sexual achievement or experience,~~
24 ~~particularly for men.~~²⁰ ~~The society our interviewees inhabit seems to reward men for sexual~~
25 ~~experience per se (“every hole’s a goal”), and to some extent reward women for compliance~~
26 ~~in sexually ‘adventurous’ acts (enjoyment signifying not being naive, unrelaxed etc.),~~
27 ~~although women must balance this with the risk to their reputation.~~

28
29
30
31 Fourth, anal sex today appears to be a marker of (hetero)sexual achievement or experience,
32 particularly for men.¹⁸ The society our interviewees inhabit seems to reward men for sexual
33 experience per se (“every hole’s a goal”), and to some extent reward women for compliance
34 in sexually ‘adventurous’ acts (enjoyment signifying not being naive, unrelaxed etc.),
35 although women must balance this with the risk to their reputation. The common portrayal of
36 anal heterosex in terms of men breaking women’s resistance can be compared with narratives
37 about first vaginal intercourse²⁵ and perhaps have superseded them to some degree in the UK
38 context where premarital vaginal intercourse is considered normal and so perhaps less of a
39 ‘conquest’.

40
41
42
43
44 Fifth, many men do not express concern about ~~the possible~~ pain for women, viewing it as
45 inevitable. Less painful techniques (such as slower penetration) were rarely discussed.

46
47 Currently this apparently oppressive context, and indeed the practice of anal ~~sex~~heterosex
48 itself, appears to be largely ignored in policy and in ~~sex~~sexuality education for this young age
49 group. Attitudes such as the inevitability of pain for women, or men’s failure to recognise or
50 reflect on their own potentially coercive behaviour, seem to be unchallenged. Alicia’s case
51 demonstrates how women might absorb potentially negative experiences into an overall
52

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 narrative of control, desire and pleasure, all of which she emphasises in her account. We do
8 not suggest that mutually pleasurable anal practices should not happen among this age group.
9 Rather, we wish to emphasise how mutuality and pleasure are often absent in narratives of
10 anal heterosexual and how their absence is not only left unremarked and unchallenged, but even
11 seems expected by many young people.

12
13
14 Sexuality education, and specifically what it should contain, is the subject of global debate.²¹
15 ²²Prevention of STIs, HIV, and violence are priorities for health promotion worldwide. Yet
16 sex education, where it exists, rarely addresses specific sexual practices, such as anal sex
17 between men and women—despite its potential for disease transmission and, as these
18 accounts reveal, coercion.

19
20
21
22 This study was conducted in the UK and further
23 Previous work has suggested gendered power
24 may operate differently for different sexual activities, and that sexual ‘scripts’ (i.e.
25 expectations about how practices will be done) for anal intercourse may not be as well
26 established as for vaginal intercourse.¹³ Our findings suggest that coercion could emerge as a
27 dominant script for anal intercourse at these young ages if left unchallenged.

28
29
30 Further work is needed to assess the extent to which similar coercive discourses operate
31 among young people in other countries. This is a qualitative study, with an in-depth analysis
32 of a smaller sample than would be usual for epidemiological studies, but which spans three
33 locations and diverse social groups. Whether or not the concept of ‘generalisability’ should
34 be applied in qualitative research is a matter of debate,²⁶ but we would argue that this study
35 provides useful, credible working hypotheses or theories about anal sexual practice among
36 young men and women that are likely to apply outside our group of interviewees.

37
38
39
40 Sexuality education, and specifically what it should contain, is the subject of global debate.²⁷
41 ²⁸Prevention of STIs, HIV, and violence are priorities for health promotion worldwide. Yet
42 sexuality education, where it exists, rarely addresses specific sexual practices, such as anal
43 sex between men and women – despite its potential for disease transmission and, as these
44 accounts reveal, coercion. In the UK, where this study was located, discussions of pleasure,
45 pain, consent and coercion are included in good sexuality education but such education
46 remains isolated, ad hoc, and non-compulsory.

47
48
49
50 Previous work has suggested gendered power may operate differently for different sexual
51 activities, and that sexual ‘scripts’ (i.e. expectations about how practices will be done) for
52

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 ~~anal intercourse may not be as well established as for vaginal intercourse.¹³ Our findings~~
8 ~~suggest that coercion may be emerging as a dominant script for anal intercourse.~~
9

10 11 CONCLUSION

12 Anal sex among young people in this study appeared to be taking place in a context
13 encouraging pain, risk, and coercion. Harm reduction efforts targeting anal sex may help
14 encourage ~~debate~~discussion about mutuality and consent, reduce risky and painful techniques
15 and challenge views that ~~promote~~normalise coercion.
16
17
18

19 20 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

21 We thank Kaye Wellings and Tim Rhodes for their role in the project design, and Amber
22 Marks and Crofton Black for their comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

REFERENCES

1. Chandra A, Mosher WD, Copen C, et al. Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual identity in the United States: data from the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2011:1-36.
2. Gindi RM, Ghanem KG, Erbelding EJ. Increases in oral and anal sexual exposure among youth attending sexually transmitted diseases clinics in Baltimore, Maryland. *J Adolesc Health* 2008;**42**(3):307-8.
3. Johnson AM, Mercer CH, Erens B, et al. Sexual behaviour in Britain: partnerships, practices, and HIV risk behaviours. *Lancet* 2001;**358**(9296):1835-42.
4. Mercer CH, Tanton C, Prah P, et al. Changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain through the life course and over time: findings from the National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). *Lancet* 2013;**382**(9907):1781-94.
5. Flood M. Youth and Pornography in Australia Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects. Bruce, Australia: The Australia Institute, 2003.
6. Horvath MAH, Alys L, Massey K, et al. "Basically... porn is everywhere": A Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effect that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Children and Young People. London: The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013.
7. Owens EW, Behun RJ, Manning JC, et al. The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research. *Sex Addict Compulsivity* 2012;**19**(1-2):99-122.

- 1
2
3
4
5
6
7 8. Braun-Courville DK, Rojas M. Exposure to sexually explicit Web sites and adolescent
8
9 sexual attitudes and behaviors. *J Adolesc Health* 2009;**45**(2):156-62.
- 10
11 9. Haggstrom-Nordin E, Hanson U, Tyden T. Associations between pornography
12
13 consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *Int J STD AIDS*
14
15 2005;**16**(2):102-7.
- 16
17
18 10. Baldwin JI, Baldwin JD. Heterosexual anal intercourse: An understudied, high-risk sexual
19
20 behavior. *Arch Sex Behav* 2000;**29**(4):357-73.
- 21
22
23 11. Gorbach PM, Manhart LE, Hess KL, et al. Anal intercourse among young heterosexuals
24
25 in three sexually transmitted disease clinics in the United States. *Sex Transm Dis*
26
27 2009;**36**(4):193-8.
- 28
29
30 12. Halperin DT. Heterosexual anal intercourse: prevalence, cultural factors, and HIV
31
32 infection and other health risks, Part I. *AIDS Patient Care ST* 1999;**13**(12):717-30.
- 33
34
35 13. Roye CF, Tolman DL, Snowden F. Heterosexual anal intercourse among black and latino
36
37 adolescents and young adults: a poorly understood high-risk behavior. *J Sex Res*
38
39 2013;**50**(7):715-22.
- 40
41
42 14. Smith G. Heterosexual and homosexual anal intercourse: an international perspective.
43
44 *Venereology* 2001;**14**(1):28-37.
- 45
46
47 15. Štulhofer A, Ajduković D. Should we take anodyspareunia seriously? A descriptive
48
49 analysis of pain during receptive anal intercourse in young heterosexual women. *J Sex*
50
51 *Marital Ther* 2011;**37**(5):346-58.

- 1
2
3
4
5
6
7 16. Makhubele B, Parker W. Heterosexual anal sex amongst young adults in South Africa:
8 Risks and perspectives. Johannesburg: Centre for AIDS, Development and
9 Evaluation, 2013.
10
11
12
13 17. Štulhofer A, Ajdukovic D. A mixed-methods exploration of women's experiences of anal
14 intercourse: meanings related to pain and pleasure. *Arch Sex Behav* 2013;**42**(6):1053-
15 62.
16
17
18
19
20 18. ~~Corbin J, Strauss A. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for~~
21 ~~Developing Grounded Theory (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE,~~
22 ~~2008~~Lewis R, Marston C, Wellings K. Bases, Stages and 'Working Your Way Up':
23 Young People's Talk About Non-Coital Practices and 'Normal' Sexual Trajectories.
24 *Sociol Res Online* 2013;**18**(1):1.
25
26
27
28
29
30 ~~19-19. Corbin J, Strauss A. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for~~
31 ~~Developing Grounded Theory (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2008.~~
32
33
34
35 20. Marston C, King E. Factors that shape young people's sexual behaviour: a systematic
36 review. *Lancet* 2006;**368**(9547):1581-6.
37
38
39
40 ~~20. Lewis R, Marston C, Wellings K. Bases, Stages and 'Working Your Way Up': Young~~
41 ~~People's Talk About Non-Coital Practices and 'Normal' Sexual Trajectories. *Sociol*~~
42 ~~*Res Online* 2013;**18**(1):1.~~
43
44
45
46 ~~21-21. Marston C. What is heterosexual coercion? Interpreting narratives from young people~~
47 ~~in Mexico City. *Sociol Health Illn* 2005;**27**(1):68-91.~~
48
49
50
51 22. Richardson D. Youth masculinities: compelling male heterosexuality. *Br J Sociol*
52 2010;**61**(4):737-56.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3
4
5
6
7 23. Holland J, Ramazanoglu C, Sharpe S, et al. The Male in the Head: Young people,
8 heterosexuality and power. London: The Tufnell Press, 1998.
9
10
11 24. Gill R. Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *Euro J Cult Stud*
12 2007;**10**(2):147-66.
13
14
15
16 25. Holland J, Ramazanoglu C, Sharpe S, et al. Deconstructing virginity - Young people's
17 accounts of first sex. *Sex Relation Ther* 2000;**15**(3):221-32.
18
19
20
21 26. Whittemore R, Chase SK, Mandle CL. Validity in qualitative research. *Qual Health Res*
22 2001;**11**(4):522-37.
23
24
25
26 27. Stanger-Hall KF, Hall DW. Abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates: why we
27 need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. *PLoS One* 2011;**6**(10):e24658.
28
29
30 2228. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. International
31 Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. Paris: UNESCO, 2009.
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 **EXCLUSIVE LICENCE:** The Corresponding Author has the right to grant on behalf of all
8 authors and does grant on behalf of all authors, a worldwide licence to the Publishers and its
9 licensees in perpetuity, in all forms, formats and media (whether known now or created in the
10 future), to i) publish, reproduce, distribute, display and store the Contribution, ii) translate the
11 Contribution into other languages, create adaptations, reprints, include within collections and
12 create summaries, extracts and/or, abstracts of the Contribution, iii) create any other
13 derivative work(s) based on the Contribution, iv) to exploit all subsidiary rights in the
14 Contribution, v) the inclusion of electronic links from the Contribution to third party material
15 where-ever it may be located; and, vi) licence any third party to do any or all of the above.

16
17
18
19
20 **COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT:** All authors have completed the ICMJE
21 uniform disclosure form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: all authors had
22 financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for the submitted
23 work; no financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the
24 submitted work in the previous three years; no other relationships or activities that could
25 appear to have influenced the submitted work.

26
27
28
29
30 **DETAILS OF CONTRIBUTORS, AND THE NAME OF THE GUARANTOR:** Both
31 authors (CM, RL) meet all four criteria for authorship as detailed in the International
32 Committee of Medical Journal Editors Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting,
33 Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals. No individual(s) meet the
34 criteria for authorship who are not named on the manuscript. Only the listed authors (CM,
35 RL) meet the criteria for contributorship: both CM and RL contributed to the planning,
36 conduct, and reporting of the work described in the manuscript. The lead author (CM) agrees
37 to act as guarantor for this manuscript and accepts full responsibility for the work and/or the
38 conduct of the study.

39
40
41
42
43 **DETAILS OF ETHICAL APPROVAL:** Ethical approval was granted by the London
44 School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Research Ethics Committee (Application #5608).
45 All participants gave informed consent prior to taking part in this research.

46
47
48
49 **DETAILS OF FUNDING:** Funding for this study was obtained from the Economic and
50 Social Research Council (UK) RES-062-23-1756.

51
52
53 **DETAILS OF THE ROLE OF THE STUDY SPONSORS:** The funder had no role in the
54 design of the study, nor in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of the data it produced.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7 The writing of this manuscript was undertaken by the listed authors (CM, RL) alone and
8 without interference from the funder. The decision to submit this research for publication was
9 entirely that of the authors (CM, RL).
10

11 **STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE OF RESEARCHERS FROM FUNDERS:** Both
12 authors declare that they are independent from the funder.
13

14
15 **ACCESS TO DATA:** Both authors (CM, RL) had full access to all of the data in the study
16 and take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the data analysis
17

18
19 **TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT:** The lead author (CM) affirms that this manuscript is an
20 honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important
21 aspects of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned
22 (and, if relevant, registered) have been explained.
23
24

25
26 **DATA SHARING STATEMENT:** Further data are available from the lead author (CM).
27 Participants gave informed consent for anonymised data sharing in the final reports from this
28 study.
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

BMJ Open

Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK

C Marston and R Lewis

BMJ Open 2014 4:

doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996

Updated information and services can be found at:
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/8/e004996>

These include:

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material can be found at:
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/suppl/2014/08/18/bmjopen-2014-004996.DC1>

References

This article cites 21 articles, 0 of which you can access for free at:
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/8/e004996#BIBL>

Open Access

This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 3.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt and build upon this work, for commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited. See:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Email alerting service

Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Topic Collections

Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections

[Press releases](#) (131)
[Public health](#) (2321)
[Qualitative research](#) (722)
[Sexual health](#) (157)

Notes

To request permissions go to:
<http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>

To order reprints go to:
<http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform>

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
<http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/>