

Help-Seeking Attitudes of Gay and Bisexual Men with Eating Disorders

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Help-Seeking Attitudes of Gay and Bisexual Men who Suffer from Eating Disorders

In the United States, an estimated 5-20% of people with eating disorders are men (Braun, Sunday, Huang, & Halmi, 1999). Men make up 10-20% of bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa cases and as many as 40% of those with binge eating disorder (Jones & Morgan, 2010). Multiple studies have found evidence that homosexual and bisexual men are at a higher risk than heterosexual men for having an eating disorder (Boisvert & Harrell, 2009; Brown & Keel, 2012; Goter & Ferraro, 2011). Homosexual and bisexual men are more likely to have anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa than heterosexual men. An estimated 3-5% of all men in the United States identify as gay, and around 20% of those men have some form of an eating disorder (Anderson, 1999). Research has also shown that there is a higher desire to be thin and smaller than average within the homosexual population (Boisvert & Harrell, 2009), and there is a higher prevalence of body image dissatisfaction, along with a greater amount of eating disorder related symptoms among individuals within this population (Feldman & Meyer, 2010).

When asked to identify their ideal body size, homosexual men reported a greater discrepancy between their real body size and their ideal body size in comparison to heterosexual men (Beren et al, 1996). In another study, homosexual men showed a greater weight discrepancy between their actual weight and their ideal weight in comparison to straight men, despite having a lower BMI than those heterosexual men (Boisvert & Harell, 2009). One might assume that the homosexual men with lower BMI's had more body satisfaction than the other men with higher BMI's, but this was not the case. In fact, some of these gay men with lower BMI's reported feeling more pressure to maintain lower weights, along with an increase in body image dissatisfaction.

However, there is little research founded pertaining to help-seeking within the male homosexual population specifically regarding body image dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Sánchez, Bocklandt & Vilain (2013) found in a study of monozygotic male twins with discordant sexual orientations, that homosexual men are more likely to seek help for issues of mental health than their heterosexual brothers. Therefore, our research will investigate the relationship between eating disorders and the help-seeking attitudes of homosexual and bisexual men. The sample will include university students, ages 18 years or older, who identify as either homosexual or bisexual. We are interested in measuring help-seeking attitudes using the Beliefs About Psychological Services, an 18-item measure with three subscales assessing intent, stigma tolerance, and expertness (Ægisdottir & Gerstein, 2009). We also intend to administer the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale to assess for disordered eating and body satisfaction (McFarland & Petrie, 2012). We believe the Body Parts Satisfaction Scale is ideal for this study in that it is designed to assess in men specifically. Given the compulsory nature of eating disorder symptoms, we wonder if we will find that homosexual and bisexual men who exhibit clinical or sub-clinical symptoms for an eating disorder will be less likely to seek professional help that would prevent them from engaging in symptomatic behaviors. We anticipate having data collected by the end of February 2014.