



Going in Through the Back Door: Challenging Straight Male Homophobia, Transphobia, and Transphobia Through Receptive Penetrative Sex Toy Use

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Abstract

To date, very little research literature exists concerning receptive penetrative anal eroticism in straight men. Of particular interest are its impacts upon other factors relevant to masculinities, sex roles, and the study of sexualities. Several co-constituted features of masculinity are likely to be relevant to straight-male anal sexuality, including masturbatory play with penetrative sex toys. Specifically, this study seeks to explore, “Do men who report greater comfort with receptive penetrative anal eroticism also report less transphobia, less obedience to masculine gender norms, greater partner sensitivity, and greater awareness about rape?” This study uses semi-structured interviews with thirteen men to explore this question, analyzed with a naturalist and constructivist grounded theory approach in the context of sexualities research and introduces transphobia as a parallel concept to Anderson’s homophobia. This analysis recognizes potential socially remedial value for encouraging male anal eroticism with sex toys.

Keywords Sexuality · Receptive anal eroticism · Sex toys · Homophobia · Transphobia · Transphobia

Introduction

While much scholarly work in the study of sexualities has explored the sexual practices of homosexuals and heterosexuals, the topic of straight men who engage in receptive anal pleasure has received limited attention (e.g., Heywood and Smith 2014). In fact, the “first-ever examination of how and how often heterosexual undergraduate men in the United States practice receptive anal eroticism” was only published in 2017 (Branfman et al. 2017, 2). There, Branfman et al. re-examined a blend

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of quantitative and qualitative survey data of undergraduate men to identify and understand the relationships some straight men have with receptive anal eroticism. They interpreted their data through theoretical lenses, including Anderson's homosexualization (2008) and homohysteria (2009), and called for a broader study into the anal erotic practices of straight men (Branfman et al. 2017, 2, 15).

This paper does not seek to satisfy Branfman's et al. specific call for longitudinal data on male anal erotic practices (Branfman et al. 2017, 2, 15). Instead, it draws inspiration from their inquiry and applies qualitative methodology to explore the questions: "Why don't straight men (tend to) use penetrative sex toys on themselves to experience (anal) sexual pleasure?" and "What might change if they did?" More formally stated, this study seeks to open exploration into a related question with a small group of men: "Do men who report greater comfort with receptive penetrative anal eroticism also report less transphobia, less obedience to masculine gender norms, greater partner sensitivity, and greater awareness about rape?" In such, it also develops a notion of (straight male) *transhysteria* in parallel to Anderson's concept of homohysteria and recognizes a potential political divide between Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinity and Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity.

To consider these questions, this study interrogates straight male sexuality through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with thirteen men, most of whom are straight. These interviews seek to identify features of male sexuality as they intersect with masculinity, heteronormativity and homophobia, partner sensitivity, rape culture, attitudes about feminism, and transhysteria/phobia. Ultimately, in addition to adding depth to the questions surrounding (straight) male anal sexuality, this paper explores whether advocacy for and education about straight male penetrative sex toy use could improve expressions of masculinity relevant to these variables. Of course, this sample is small and should not be understood to establish concrete conclusions on these issues. However, the in-depth, interactive approach enabled by working with a small sample suggested interesting and theoretically sound connections which future researchers could pursue.

Though Allan (2016a, 2016b) lays out psychoanalytic theoretical and other considerations that are strongly suggestive of co-constitutive relationships between masculinity vis-à-vis those variables listed above and anality (cf. Pronger 1998), currently there is virtually no scholarly literature that engages the topic of straight male penetrative sex toy directly and substantively. This does not imply the topic is never broached. As noted by Branfman et al. (2017, 2),

Relatively few academic studies have examined how men view, practice, and experience receptive anal pleasure Those studies that do investigate male anal eroticism have largely focused on same-sex penile-anal intercourse, usually ignoring how men might receive anal pleasure during heterosexual play, as well as ignoring all forms of anal stimulation without a penis.

Among these, Branfman and Ekberg-Stiriz (2012) approach the topic in a theoretical and historical way. As summarized by Branfman et al.:

Using feminist and queer theory to analyze the social stigmas around men's anal pleasure, the authors argue that educators can employ the topic of male

anal pleasure to help students critically analyze the social construction of sex, gender and sexuality. (Branfman et al. 2017, 3).

Far more extensive and applicable treatments exist in *The Ultimate Guide to Prostate Pleasure* (Glickman and Emirzian 2013) and *The Adventurous Couple's Guide to Strap-On Sex* (Blue 2007), but as these insightful volumes fall outside of the scholarly canon, not all scholars take them as seriously as they deserve. Finally, although these sources utilize social constructivist models, there remains a conspicuous gap in the research literature. Nothing to date applies a constructivist grounded theory approach to this dimension of sexualities studies in order to interpret (reluctance about) straight male penetrative sex toy use and its relationships with other salient variables relevant to straight masculinities (e.g., partner sensitivity and homo/transphobia). This paper seeks to fill that gap.

Male Anal Pleasure

Cultural perceptions of receptive anal eroticism for straight men tend to be hegemonic (that is, legitimizing the dominant patriarchal order) and negative. In fact, the male anus is generally considered sexually taboo within straight sexuality. Even after advances in “inclusive” masculinities (Anderson 2009), receptive anal eroticism primarily conjures themes from hegemonic masculinity theory, including concerns of “being gay” and co-constituent affective associations that run counter to straight masculinities (Kimmel 2001). While heteronormativity and even homophobia serve as the major underpinnings for these responses (e.g., Allan 2016a; Pronger 1998, 1999), anxieties rooted in Anderson’s more refined concept, “homosexualization” (2008), apply more thoroughly. Under homosexualization, “certain activities are coded as ‘gay’ and hence can throw a man’s heterosexual identity and reputation into question” (Branfman et al. 2017, 4). This includes receptive anal eroticism, which accompanies “the cultural belief that straight men who stimulate their own anus, or willingly allow another to stimulate it, must really be gay” (p. 4). Specifically, they posit,

Culturally, however, there exists a wide assumption that only gay and bisexual men desire or receive anal pleasure. These stereotypes about the male prostate are characterized by two key ideas ... [including] that a man who enjoys receptive anal pleasure is socially perceived as gay and/or emasculated. Even as anal pleasure is stigmatized by its connotations of homosexuality and feminization, so in turn are gay and bisexual men frequently denigrated as dirty, emasculated, or deviant precisely for their cultural association with anal eroticism. (Branfman et al. 2017, 2).

In response, straight men often exhibit what Anderson (2009) terms “homophobia,” which he defines as “heterosexual men’s fear of being perceived as gay, especially when they transgress masculine gender norms” (Branfman et al. 2017, 2). Anderson (2009) describes homophobia as a kind of “social paranoia” that straight men feel results from a loss of masculinity if associated with or identified as “gay”

(cf. Allan 2016b). Thus, to avoid associations with homosexuality, straight men rigidly close off to receptive anal eroticism (cf. Allan 2016b; Connell 1995). Branfman et al. (2017, 5) explain,

This is to say that the social stigma on male homosexuality also limits the sexual and gendered lives of heterosexual men Just as gay men must avoid certain feminized behaviours if they desire to be thought socially heterosexual, so too must straight men.

These findings comport with Kimmel's (2001, 33) observation that masculinity is so intrinsically linked to homophobia that homophobia itself contributes to the development of masculine gender identity through fear, shame, and silence. Indeed, Pascoe (2007) argues that the term "fag" is frequently used to enforce heteronormative, even homophobic masculinity in adolescent boys, who build their masculinity by repudiating a "fag" identity. Further, McNeil (2013) documented how these themes are routinely reproduced in sex education; Burke (2014) identified them within conservative Christian religious practices; and Frank (2008) found them reinforced in (sexually) swinging communities. This all agrees with Pronger (1999), who observed that the homo/heterosexual boundary for straight men is performative and rigidly enforced despite, in reality, being far more complicated than most straight masculinities permit. This creates a marked pressure within straight men to conform to sexual practices that exclude receptive anal play. To address and remediate this problem, scholarship has attempted to decode the processes by which categories of sex, gender, and sexuality are constructed and legitimized, particularly with regard to heteronormativity and trans-exclusivity (Carrera et al. 2012). Still, these problems persist and remain understudied.

Returning to Anderson (2009), homohysteria almost undoubtedly contributes to the taboo sexual status of the straight male anus, for this is the role taboos play in social construction: to enforce boundaries that limit disruptive interaction with that which cultures viscerally fear. Conceptually, homohysteria naturally generalizes, with the same straight-male paranoia as its source, to *transhysteria*, which can be defined in parallel as heterosexual men's fear of losing masculinity as a result of (potentially) accepting trans women's penises. Applying to both concepts, as Branfman et al. (2017, 5) write, "The desire to be perceived as heterosexual and masculine is understandable in a culture that distributes privilege unequally according to gender and sexuality."

The data presented by Branfman et al. (2017) support Anderson's hypothesized roles of homohysteria, homosexualization, and transhysteria in shaping straight male anal sexuality:

We argue that a man's socially perceived heterosexual identity is partially conditioned not only upon sex with "appropriate" (opposite-sex) partners, but also upon "appropriate" sex roles. According to this social norm, heterosexual men who wish to avoid stigma must penetrate women, not stimulate or penetrate their own orifices, or allow their orifices to be stimulated or penetrated by others—even if those others are women. While stimulating one's own anus is not direct sexual contact with another male, homohysteria constructs anal stimula-

tion as a homosexual affair, even if performed in the absence of another male. (p. 6).

These problems therefore exclude receptive anal eroticism—especially *penetrative* anal eroticism—from the permissible sexual repertoires of straight men that create an explicit tension (located in the straight male anus) between inclusive masculinity and themes of hegemonic masculinity (Branfman et al. 2017; cf. Connell 1995). As characterized by Connell, hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees ... the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (1995, 77). More simply, it “embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy” for legitimizing patriarchy and represents the “one form of masculinity rather than others [that] is currently exalted” (p. 77). Particularly, for the anal-unreceptive straight man, penetrative sexual acts are frequently seen performatively as something *to be done by the man* through insertion of his penis into (cisgendered) women.

Not all straight sexual activity, however, relies upon this characterization (cf. Ward 2015). Glickman and Emirzian (2013, 268) observe,

[T]he idea that in sex men have one role and women have another is very restrictive. Men should do all the giving and women should do all the receiving; these roles work fine if your sex life consists only of fucking with the man controlling all the motion. But a lot of people with very satisfying sex lives have roles that are more blurred.

These observations are consistent with the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is interactionally constituted and at odds with inclusive masculinity, especially in situations exhibiting low partner sensitivity (Connell 1995; Schrock and Padavic 2007). Anal-unreceptive straight men do not limit the “doingness” of their sex to penile-vaginal intercourse, however. They often exhibit little hesitance to, or even overt enthusiasm about, inserting their penises into a *woman’s* anus, about which women report a variety of opinions (cf. McBride 2017). Thus, straight men reproduce hegemonic norms of male sexual dominance by inserting their penises into women’s bodies, and expectations about masculinity (compelled ultimately by homophobia and transphobia) dictate and enforce a double-standard regarding anal penetration. That is, although many other forms of anality and anal play exist and interact with masculinity, for many straight men, anal *penetration* specifically is something that they *do* (to cisgendered women) but not something that *can be done* to them (by *anyone*, man, woman, or self).

An interesting partial exception exists to this anal-exclusive rule among straight men: straight male sexuality may not be a wholly rigid category, especially regarding homoeroticism. Some men describe themselves as “mostly straight” (Savin-Williams and Vrangalova 2013; Ward 2015). This phenomenon demonstrates the intrinsic elasticity of nominally straight male sexuality, which has been explored further under the rubric of “straight with a pinch of bi” (Carrillo and Hoffman 2017). For instance, as documented by Silva, some straight men engage in anal intercourse and other normatively homosexual sex acts as “bud-sex,” highlighting the overall “flexibility of heterosexuality” as a category (2017, 51). These subcategories

within nominally straight male sexuality reveal the category as less well-defined than generally assumed (per Carrillo and Hoffman 2017; Silva 2017) and show that heteronormativity often forces bisexual men to perform as straight, to the point of lying (even to themselves) about their sexualities. Nevertheless, sexuality-flexible “straightness” in males may productively challenge orthodoxies about heterosexuality (cf. Beasley et al. 2015) in a playful way (Paasonen 2017) and provide a fitting context into which this research can be theoretically situated.

Sex Toys and Straight Anal Eroticism

One straightforward potential remedy to straight male anxiety about receptive penetrative anal eroticism arrives through experiencing and overcoming these affective responses in a safe, controlled environment. Such “exposure therapy” can successfully address phobic anxieties by inducing carefully controlled exposure to anxiety triggers in safe environments (cf. Foa et al. 1999). Reasonably, then, straight men could overcome some homo/transhysterical anxiety about receptive penetrative anal eroticism in safe “straight” environments through penetrative anal masturbation with sex toys and/or pegging (allowing the female in a straight sexual encounter to anally penetrate the male with a strap-on dildo) with a compassionate partner (cf. Allan 2016b).

There is little scholarly literature available about (straight) male sex toy use, however, as most sex-toy studies explore women’s issues (see Attwood 2005). Few papers exist on the subject, and these typically focus upon introducing sex toys—usually for women—into heterosexual couples’ sexual play (e.g., Watson et al. 2015). For insight, then, popular guides such as Glickman and Emirzian (2013) and Blue (2007) offer clues. Glickman and Emirzian (2013, esp. 198–232) indicate that there are many reasons for men of all sexual orientations (especially straight) to consider receptive anal eroticism, especially penetration (cf. Allan 2016b). This practice can be enjoyable, they contend, and is becoming more commonplace, including by men in heterosexual partnerships. It thus holds transformative potential that can enrich heterosexual relationships, especially when utilized together via pegging of a straight man by a female partner (pp. 233–256) (cf. Allan 2016b; Blue 2007). To facilitate this potential, they address common straight male concerns about homosexualization via penetrative anality:

Receiving penetration is sometimes thought of as the woman’s role in sex. And since a big part of being a “real man” means that you don’t do anything womanly, then of course receiving penetration doesn’t fit. Some men fear that if they get penetrated, they are being feminized—turned into a sissy. (Glickman and Emirzian 2013, 267).

The relationship between anal eroticism and homoeroticism is such a dominant trope in masculinity that Glickman and Emirzian repeatedly return to it (cf. Allan 2016b; Blue 2007, 9–10). Similarly, they engage other issues relevant to the collision of (usually straight) masculinity and receptive penetrative anal eroticism, such

as those impacting partner sensitivity, women's issues (thus feminism), and trans issues (e.g., pp. 18, 98, 182, 258, 271, 291) (cf. Allan 2016b, 185; Blue 2007, 62).

Relationship of Anal Eroticism to Other Straight Masculinity Variables

Theoretical considerations, especially Connell's (1995) work on hegemonic masculinity as reflected off Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinity, lead us to expect that several masculinity variables interact with (straight) male anality and receptive anal penetration. Despite inclusive advances, themes currently dominant in masculinity include problematic trends in partner sensitivity, rape culture, attitudes about feminism, and homo/transphobia in straight men, which may have direct or indirect dependence upon attitudes regarding receptive anal eroticism. Connell, for instance, notes that homosexuality, which is connected with anal penetration in many straight masculinities, represents that which is "the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" (1995, 78).

Consider "partner sensitivity," which refers to the capacity for and performance of sympathetic and empathetic behaviors in one member of a partnership for the other(s), such that they demonstrate awareness of the physical, emotional, and mental states and needs of the other(s). It is so common as to be a trope that straight men in heterosexual (dyadic) partnerships tend to lack in this dimension. Consequences range from frustration to failed partnerships (cf. Burke 2014). More commonly, they include internalized sexism (for the woman) and reinforcement of Connell's (1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) notions of hegemonic masculinity (for the man), reproducing gendered stereotypes, and routine shifts of emotional (and household) labor (onto the woman).

Empirical data gathered by Branfman et al. (2017) bear out some of these observations (cf. Allan 2016b). For example, one of their subjects reported, "Definitely more trust involved in asking to be played with anally than there is in asking to handcuff her or experiment with other kinks" (p. 12). Another noted, "I'm learning what I like in much the same way that females go through the process of learning how they like their clitoris stimulated" (p. 11). Their data suggest that sensitivity to issues relevant to women and women's sexuality—especially including partner sensitivity, attitudes about feminism, and awareness of rape culture—are likely to be positively impacted by receptive penetrative anal eroticism in straight men (Allan 2016b, esp. 177, 186).

Still, virtually no rigorous scholarly work investigates the topic of directly improving straight male partner sensitivity by means of receptive anal eroticism. Glickman and Emirzian (2013), however, argue persuasively that the practice of "pegging" can lead to remarkable increases in partner sensitivity for recipient males. They articulate that when engaging with receptive penetrative anal eroticism, many men experience "the same variety of emotions as women, and learning to deal with them works a lot better than pretending they don't happen" (Glickman and Emirzian 2013, 94). They also observe that the male experience of feeling something enter your body is often novel for straight men and explain that learning the ways in which

“your mood, your emotions, and your physical sensations in that moment” can have dramatic impacts on the quality of the sexual experience (p. 147) (cf. Allan 2016b, 185). Experiences of these kinds are common for those familiar with receptive sex roles, including women and men who are not straight, but they are less common within straight men, for whom the anus is typically (homohysterically) taboo. In these ways, at a minimum, receptive penetrative anal eroticism in straight men may be hypothesized to facilitate greater partner sensitivity.

These issues immediately tip into the broader realm of straight male attitudes about feminism and rape culture, and much has been written on the intersection of these variables with straight male sexuality (e.g., Baker 2015; Blozendahl and Myers 2004; Canan et al. 2016; Glick and Fiske 2001; Hayes et al. 2016; Phillips 2017; Reling et al. 2017; Rentschler 2014). Here, a thorough rehashing of that literature is omitted, though it bears mentioning that Baker (2015) investigates the role empathy plays in connecting masculinity and attitudes about rape culture. Her conclusion is consistent with the preceding theoretical developments concerning partner sensitivity. Specifically, even without extending from parallel research regarding women’s sensitivity to these issues (Osman 2016), there are excellent reasons to entertain the hypothesis that receptive penetrative anal eroticism in straight men (either in masturbation or with a partner by means of pegging) can introduce relevant empathy-generating lived experiences. These, in turn, can improve attitudes about feminism and concern about rape culture.

Core among the myriad concerns raised by the collision of straight male sexuality with straight male anal-sexual paranoia are transhysteria and transphobia, and these linger even in “inclusive” masculinities. One of the clearest links between straight male transphobia/hysteria and homophobia/hysteria was developed by Nagoshi et al. (2008), who performed a detailed study linking transphobia and homophobia across multiple demographics. They found that these are, indeed, linked, especially in (straight) men. Building on Lombardi et al. (2002), who documented that more than half of trans individuals experience pervasive discrimination, prejudice, harassment, or violence, this clearly represents a deeply problematic trend that is co-constituted with straight male sexuality (cf. Anderson 2009). Straight male transphobia, even limited to the common unwillingness in straight men to date or have sex with trans women (especially when still possessing a penis [Weinberg and Williams 2010]), is therefore a serious problem that results in exclusionary and potentially even violent behaviors against trans people (Lombardi et al. 2002).

Ultimately, there are few, if any, non-transphobic/hysterical reasons for straight men to exclude trans women from their dating and sexual interests. Still, the most common fixates upon the trans woman’s genitals, especially when she has a penis (cf. Weinberg and Williams 2010). Indeed, the trans woman’s penis, when she has one, is the specific site of much straight male transhysterical anxiety, as though hegemonic masculinity demands straight men form partnerships only with vaginas, not with women. Ultimately, this concern for the transhysterical male includes the performance of sex acts deemed demasculinizing only because they involve another penis, even when that penis is part of a woman’s body. Among these sexual acts, of unavoidable concern for the transhysterical straight male is the potential threat of receptive anal eroticism from his trans partner if she desires to penetrate him. In

this way, transhysteria presents a significant difference from homophobia: the latter is a paranoia about the self while the former is about the other. Thus, straight male concerns related to receptive penetrative anal eroticism may directly contribute to the problem of straight male transphobia. This suggests that reducing anxiety about receptive penetrative anal eroticism among straight males may ameliorate transphobia in the same.

Branfman et al. (2017) point out, however, that while these are suggestive signs, there also may be limitations to this avenue to transformative politics. They note,

As Branfman and Ekberg-Stiritz (2012) have written, *exploring anal pleasure does not automatically transform straight men's politics or their treatment of sexual and gender minorities*. In fact, if anal pleasure does indeed lose its cultural association with homosexuality and feminization, this decoupling may simply free straight men to explore it without critically questioning their own oppressive beliefs about gender and sexuality. (p. 15, italics added).

It is upon these grounds that they make the recommendations that inform this study:

[W]e suggest that the destigmatization of anal pleasure at least has the potential to open space for critical questions and dialogues about gender and sexual orientation that would previously have been silenced. From a social justice standpoint, we believe that even as decreased homophobia opens space for straight men to experiment with previously homosexualizing activities like anal eroticism, so in turn may increased understanding of anal pleasure help reduce stigma projected onto gay, bisexual, and other queer-identified men. In openly discussing all men's capacity for anal pleasure, receptivity, and penetrability, young men might question accepted gender norms and the stigmas of emasculation, deviance, and dirtiness that are so often used to degrade it. (p. 15).

It is in light of these observations and aspirations, including challenging the orthodoxies of heterosexuality (see Beasley et al. 2015; Paasonen 2017) and investigating the limitations of and challenges to inclusive masculinity, that the present qualitative study was conducted.

Methodology

This study utilizes long-form, semi-structured, in-person casual interviews to gather qualitative data on thirteen men about their relationship with receptive anal eroticism and attitudes regarding the relevant co-constitutive variables discussed above. Interviews were conducted at locations of the subjects' choosing in or around Portland, Oregon, between the dates of August 15 and November 6, 2017. Questions were designed to facilitate open-ended discussions about the variables under examination, while offering the researcher a subjective feel for the individual subjects and their views.

In conducting this study, I interviewed eight straight, two bisexual, and three gay men about their experience with receptive anal eroticism, sex toys, history of and openness to (anal) sex toy use, and topics relevant to other factors under consideration. Though the subject of the study is straight-male attitudes, gay and bisexual men were included to obtain diverse insights from the perspectives of those with other orientations. The sample is small and naturally limits the breadth of conclusions that can be drawn; however, it provides exploratory indications into the ways sexual orientation may interact with these factors.

Given the intimate nature of the interviews and the subject matter, subjects were recruited through word-of-mouth via a snowball sampling method extending from a social network in Portland, Oregon, in which I am situated. That is, I recruited acquaintances and partners of acquaintances and, consistent with snowball sampling, they recruited volunteers from within their social networks. To minimize bias, I recruited few of my own acquaintances and relied more heavily on snowball sampling while specifically seeking diversity of (political) views, as this is known to be associated with attitudes about (male) anality (cf. Pacilli et al. 2011; Terrizzi et al. 2010), and anal sexual experience.

Most interviews lasted ninety minutes to two hours and were based upon fifteen core questions, though subjects were encouraged to wander naturally through the processes of conversation. Subjects were given free range to talk about the core questions and any associations that consequently arose. This semi-structured conversational interview technique was chosen because it enabled applying a combined naturalist and constructivist grounded theory approach to the qualitative data that emerged (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 8–11, 17–26). As McKee (2014) points out, qualitative methodologies can provide more validity (at the cost of reliability) than quantitative methods allow by avoiding reducing subjects to a set of answers and numerical data, as sometimes limits quantitative and other qualitative methodologies. This conversational approach also added an ethnographic element, which benefits from closeness, though it can also be limited by subjective blurring. To correct for this, critical detachment was utilized during post-interview note compilation (per Matthews 2014, 105–106). Finally, the data were analyzed thematically for indications of trans/homophobia (Anderson 2008), feminist attitudes, attitudes about rape and rape culture, partner sensitivity, and inclusive versus hegemonic masculinity (Anderson 2009; Connell 1995).

Interviews began by asking the age and relationship status of the participants. They continued by engaging the following fifteen core questions, which were presented as prompts for a semi-structured approach. The research informing these questions includes the immediately aforementioned together with considerations of their relevance to the topic (in some cases, additional relevant literature is cited at the end of the question):

1. How would you describe your sexual orientation: straight, gay, bisexual, or something else?
2. How would you describe your political orientation?
3. How do you feel about sex toys as a part of masturbation, sex, or sexual play?

4. Do you feel that certain sex toys are suited to particular genders, e.g., are dildos toys for women? Which are which, and how do you tell? (cf. Watson et al. 2015)
5. Have you ever used a penetrative sex toy on yourself in masturbation or sexual play? Have you ever had one used on you by a partner during sexual play? Is this a regular part of your sexual play? Do you like it? (cf. Allan 2016b; Watson et al. 2015)
6. Do you feel that if a man inserts a dildo into his own anus, or has one used on him as such by a partner (e.g., pegging), it robs him of or otherwise damages his masculinity? Does it enhance his masculinity? Or is it unrelated to masculinity? (cf. Allan 2016b; Anderson 2009; Branfman and Ekberg-Stiritz 2012; Connell 1995)
7. Do you feel like there are gendered roles in sex, i.e., “male” and “female” roles? To the degree it is applicable, do you feel like you take on more “male” roles or “female” ones? (cf. Glickman and Emirzian 2013)
8. Would you describe yourself as masculine? In what ways? (cf. Anderson 2009; Connell 1995)
9. Do you think rape culture is a significant problem in society today? (cf. Baker 2015)
10. Should we believe victims of sexual assault, especially rape? (cf. Baker 2015)
11. Do you think your partner(s) would describe you as a “sensitive guy”? Would you describe yourself this way? (cf. Glickman and Emirzian 2013)
12. Are you a feminist? How do you feel about feminism? (cf. Houvouras and Carter 2008)
13. Would you describe yourself as homophobic? Would others describe you as homophobic? (Anderson 2009)
14. Would you date and/or have sex with a trans woman? Would it matter to you and your sexual satisfaction if she has a penis? (If straight), would you say this is consistent with being straight and masculine? (cf. Weinberg and Williams 2010)
15. Would your willingness to date and/or have sex with a trans woman, especially one with a penis, increase if you were more comfortable with receptive penetrative anal eroticism? (cf. Glickman and Emirzian 2013; Weinberg and Williams 2010)

Recording and transcribing such interviews is standard practice, though exceptions exist for when there are reasons to conclude that the act of recording may negatively influence the subjects or data validity (Nordstrom 2015; Rubin and Rubin 2012; Speer and Hutchby 2003; Suzuki et al. 2007). In this case, two subjects refused to participate if recorded because they found the subject matter sensitive and three others expressed discomfort. Thus, to encourage openness, and in the interest of fair and ethical treatment across all subjects, interviews were not recorded (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 35, cf. 178). Instead, extensive, detailed typed notes were kept during interviews and post-interview logging and analysis was immediate and engaged critical detachment (Matthews 2014, 105–106; Rubin and Rubin 2012, 64). All direct quotations were noted as they were spoken and confirmed by subjects for accuracy.

Responses

Interview subjects included eight straight men (Subjects 1–8), two bisexual men (Subjects 9–10), and three homosexual men (Subjects 11–13), all of whom are open about their sexualities. No subjects reported an orientation outside of these three categories. Subjects' ages ranged from twenty-seven to fifty-four. Among the straight men, five (Subjects 1, 2, 3, 4, 7) described themselves as partners in stable long-term relationships, two (Subjects 5, 6) classified themselves as “dating around,” and one (Subject 8) was single. Both bisexual men were in a committed long-term “lightly poly[amorous]” relationship—with each other—and one maintained a “casual but ongoing” relationship with a woman outside the same-sex dyad. One gay man (Subject 11) was involved in a long-term relationship, while the other two were single. Henceforth, in referencing subjects, when clarity is needed the following format will be used: “Subject X[AO],” with X marking subject number, A representing his age, and O his sexual orientation (as S, B, or G, denoting straight, bisexual, or gay, respectively). For example, “Subject 1[31S]” indicates that Subject 1 is being referenced, and he is 31 years old and straight.

In order to minimize a potential bias in the study, I expressly aimed to recruit diversity in the political orientations of the interview subjects via the snowball sampling, as it is known to be associated with beliefs connected with male anality (Pacilli et al. 2011; Terrizzi et al. 2010). Despite screening some potential subjects for this reason, the political orientations of participants still skew generally toward what would be described as “progressive” on sociosexual issues. Only four of the thirteen subjects self-described by terms other than “liberal” or “progressive”; three used “libertarian” (Subjects 2[36S], 3[29S], 5[41S]) and one (Subject 1[31S]) “socially conservative.” This last subject gave the briefest interview (lasting barely thirty minutes) and the briefest answers of all thirteen subjects. Of note, I invited six socially conservative men to participate, but five declined, stating that they, in the words of one, “[didn’t] want to be a part of some stupid liberal study about putting stuff up [one’s] butt.” This necessarily raises questions about how information of this kind could be obtained from socially conservative straight men. It also forces us to ask two questions about Eric Anderson’s (2009) theory of inclusive masculinity: For whom is masculinity inclusive? and (How) is political orientation connected to an inclusive-versus-hegemonic-masculinity divide?

All subjects expressed generally positive attitudes toward sex toys as a part of masturbation, sex, and sexual play, and all felt that certain sex toys are better suited for particular genders. There was, however, more knowing laughter and a broader range of male-suitable toys amongst gay and bisexual subjects. While four straight subjects (Subjects 3[29S], 4[54S], 6[34S], 8[52S]) stated that the intended gender for a sex toy is ambiguous in the case of penetrative toys, indicating openness to receptive anal eroticism and penetration, straight subjects generally believed sex toys for men are meant *to be penetrated* rather than *penetrating* (these including masturbators, sleeves, and molded vaginas). The first association

all subjects had with dildos, for instance, was that they are specifically a woman's sex toy. All but two subjects (Subjects 1[31S], 5[41S]), however, immediately qualified that identification. In the words of Subject 2[36S], "anal play makes it less clear-cut on who can use a dildo." One subject, the socially conservative Subject 1[31S], expressed a problem even with the notion that *any* men might enjoy anally penetrating themselves with sex toys.

Two gay subjects (Subjects 11[40G] and 13[33G]), both bisexual men, and two straight subjects (Subjects 4[54S] and 8[52S]) intentionally had used or regularly use penetrative sex toys for masturbatory anal eroticism. Two further straight subjects (Subjects 3[29S], 6[34S]) had "tried it once to see if there was anything they were missing out on." Only three subjects (Subjects 8[52S], 10[34B], 11[40G]) regularly masturbated with dildos. Among the four straight subjects who had not used a dildo on themselves (Subjects 1[31S], 2[36S], 5[41S], 7[27S]), two mentioned being willing to try it under the right circumstances (Subjects 2, 5) while two adamantly refused (Subjects 1, 7). Among the latter two, Subject 1[31S] (the social conservative) immediately associated it with homosexuality while Subject 7[27S] called the use of dildos for anal eroticism "gross." As he emphatically phrased it, "That hole is exit-only! There's poop up there!" Subject 6[34S], who had tried anally penetrating himself but had done so only once, remarked, "I didn't like it much, frankly. I had had high hopes, but it mostly just felt like taking a shit that never ended and wasn't really pleasurable." The general consensus of all subjects except three (Subjects 8[52S], 9[43B], 12[42G]) is that male masturbators/sleeves constitute a vastly superior male sex toy experience as compared to penetrative toys.

These attitudes frequently matched thematic assessment of subjects' self-identification with occupying masculine gender roles (cf. Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), including expressions of the opinion that using penetrative anal sex toys on oneself diminishes a man's masculinity (cf. Allan 2016b; Branfman et al. 2017; Connell 1995). Most straight subjects (Subjects 1–6) and one gay subject (Subject 12[42G]) expressed this perspective in greater or lesser degree.

The interview data delineated less obvious relationships between anal dildo use and attitudes about rape culture and feminism. There was, however, some apparent connection between these features within the data: those more engaged in self-mediated penetrative anal play seemed generally more feminist and more concerned about rape culture than others. For example, Subject 8[52S], who consistently expressed staunchly feminist attitudes, was also the most open to and enthusiastic about receptive penetrative anal play. He highlighted this connection with his remark, "I play with anal toys a lot and experiment a lot. I've even hurt myself with toys that are too big or too dry." When asked if this bears any associations with rape for him, he commented that he has thought about it frequently and said, "Yeah, it can make you realize how bad a rape has to be, especially anally." Views about feminism were generally supportive but somewhat mixed, except in Subjects 1[31S] and 5[41S], who were also the most socially conservative. All subjects expressed strongly negative views on rape, but six (Subjects 1[31S], 3[29S], 5[41S], 6[34S], 9[43B], 10[34B]) doubted the pervasiveness of rape culture. Other than the social conservative (Subject 1[31S]), both bisexual subjects and those straight subjects who had tried dildos in the past but do not use them regularly held the most skeptical attitudes about rape

culture. The socially conservative Subject 1[31S] unambiguously indicated the most overtly negative attitudes about receptive anal eroticism, and these co-presented with strong negative attitudes about feminism, which he called “man-hating,” and rape culture, which he labelled a “liberal myth.”

Regarding the perception of themselves as homophobic (Question 13), the gay and bisexual subjects merely laughed at being asked the question “because I’m not straight” (Subject 9[43B]), and all eight straight subjects denied it, including the social conservative—indicating significant cultural inroads of inclusive masculinities. Through careful probing with follow-up questions, it became clear that Subjects 1[31S], 2[36S], 3[29S] and 5[41S] appear, as revealed through thematic analysis of language about non-straight orientations (cf. Braun and Clarke 2012, 62–68), more homophobic than they are willing to admit. This (latent) homophobia presented alongside clear trends of having not anally penetrated themselves. Surprisingly, the one straight subject for whom this pattern did not fit (Subject 7[27S]) was also unwilling to try receptive dildo eroticism. He exhibited no signs of homophobia unless one counts the unwillingness to be anally penetrated, for which he attributed his aversion entirely to “hygiene.”

The most interesting and varied responses came from discussing trans women. Only five subjects (Subjects 4[54S], 8[52S], 9[43B], 10[34B], 13[33G]) were clearly willing to date or have sex with a trans woman, demonstrating a limitation of the cultural penetration of inclusive masculinity. Upon specifying that the trans woman has a penis, Subject 13[33G] remarked, “Of course! *That* would be requirement!” Neither bisexual subject expressed any hesitance about dating a trans woman with a penis or one without, though Subject 10[34B] (the one not also dating a woman) mentioned he would slightly prefer if she has one. The socially conservative Subject 1[31S] not only refused to date a trans woman “under any circumstances” but closed this topic of conversation after responding transphobically that trans women “are not women” and “suffer mental illness.” When queried about trans women with penises, he immediately insisted that “so-called ‘ladyboys’ and ‘chicks with dicks’ are not women; they’re dudes with a mental problem.” He even refused to entertain the topic hypothetically, calling it “messed up.” Subject 4[54S], who would date a trans woman, said he would not do so if she had a penis, thereby indicating the genitals/penis to be central to his transhysteria concerns. Subject 8[52S], on the other hand, indicated no particular preference and described himself as “up for anything, so long as it’s fun.” In stark contrast, both gay subjects who were unwilling to date or have sex with a trans woman (Subjects 11[40G], 12[42G]) indicated their sexuality as the reason. In the words of Subject 11, “Why would I? She’s a woman, and I’m a gay man.” This response does not necessarily indicate transphobia/hysteria, as it recognizes a trans woman as being a woman. However, their preference may still be transphobic, trans-exclusionary, and genital/penis-centric, since while these two subjects expressed no qualitative difference regarding whether or not the trans woman has a penis, Subject 12[42G] would not date a trans man and Subject 11[40G] only would if he had a functional post-operative penis.

Insightfully, regarding the roots of transhysteria/phobia, Subjects 2[36S], 3[29S], and 6[34S] indicated negative attitudes toward dating a trans woman generally, yet willingness “to consider it,” in the words of Subject 3[29S], “depending upon the

woman.” For these subjects, however, the presence of a penis was unacceptable, reinforcing the notion that transhysteria/phobia may largely be other-centered and penis/genital-centric. As Subject 2[36S] summarized, “A penis is non-negotiable for me; it’s an absolute deal-breaker, no matter how nice, no matter how attractive, no matter what. Just no.” Subjects 3[39S], 6[34S], 7[27S], and 8[52S], however, were more open to dating or having sex with a trans woman, including one with a penis. This, still, seemed penis/genital-centric and may have to do with their willingness to engage in (and enjoy) regular receptive penetrative anal eroticism, at least in the hypothetical. As Subject 3[29S] put it, “I guess if I was used to it and liked getting it up the butt from someone, I could probably enjoy it from a trans woman if I found her really hot. But it would still be weird.”

Discussing trans women’s penises consistently created the most apparent discomfort for (most of) the (trans/homohysteria) straight subjects. Subject 6[34S], who had tried receptive dildo eroticism but did not enjoy it, remained unambiguously opposed to dating or having sex with a trans woman, especially if she had a penis. Subject 8[52S], who was “up for anything” and who regularly engages receptive dildo eroticism by himself and with (female) partners, was enthusiastically open to the possibility of sex with a trans woman with or without a penis, provided only that he was “into the woman” and that she was “good at what she does.” He remarked that trans women with penises are “very likely to qualify” and that he would seek out such potential sex partners if possible.

Discussion

These qualitative data offer suggestive tentative conclusions about the hypotheses posed here. For example, homo/transhysteria seems to explain some of the observed resistance to receptive penetrative anal eroticism (cf. Branfman et al. 2017), which may be constituted with conforming to hegemonic masculinity and a limitation to inclusive masculinity in anally non-receptive men (cf. Connell 1995). Emergent themes in the data indicate that self-perceived importance of adhering to hegemonic masculine gender roles over inclusive ones was strongly aligned with this attitude. It also appears connected with self-perceptions of not being sensitive in a partnered setting. Of course, although such qualitative data can provide high validity, it places limits on reliability (McKee 2014), and the small sample size limits the strength of these suggestive observations.

This qualitative assessment also suggests the conclusion that there may be significant connections between the masculine trope of “doing sex,” feeling oneself masculine, and resistance to anal receptivity, as Glickman and Emirzian (2013) note and seek to challenge (cf. Allan 2016b; Connell 1995). Specifically, men who reported penetrating themselves anally most frequently and who derive the most pleasure from it seemed to understand receptive sexual roles better than their anal non-receptive peers and were more likely to self-describe as feminists. Similarly, consistent with Glickman and Emirzian (2013), receptive penetrative anal eroticism may improve partner sensitivity in men, especially straight men. With only one exception (Subject 3[29S]), subjects who self-assessed and

thematically exhibited the most partner sensitivity were also those most aware of (and able to enjoy) what it feels like to *receive* sexual penetration. Future research taking partners' evaluations of sensitivity into account would be valuable.

Where it comes to sensitivity about rape culture, the data are barely suggestive, and this ambiguity between theory and thematically coded results provides an avenue for future research. In that the sole social conservative in the study was also the most hostile to feminism and the problem of rape culture, the question of the remedial potential for receptive anal eroticism in straight men to improve views about feminism, rape, and rape culture remains hopeful but mostly open, despite Allan's (2016b, 177, 186) cautious hesitance. Particularly, exploring socially conservative perspectives concerning penetrative anal eroticism and issues surrounding rape would benefit from further detailed consideration.

On the co-constituted topics of transphobia/hysteria, however, the data were the most clearly suggestive. The apparent relationship between sexual orientation and transphobia/hysteria seems clear, noting limitations from the small sample size. Straight subjects exhibited far more transphobic attitudes and transhysteria (especially in being unwilling to date trans women with penises) than the gay or bisexual subjects. Furthermore, receptivity to penetrative anal eroticism consistently arose in the least transphobic/hysterical subjects. Bolstering this conclusion, subjects who presented transphobic/hysterical themes expressed that receptive penetrative anal eroticism is likely to evoke less-transphobic attitudes for them, at least in the hypothetical scenario of receptivity to sex with a trans woman with a penis. Overall, the clear thematic trend across most straight subjects is that potentially transhysterical/phobic attitudes in straight men seem penis/genital-centric, suggesting that receiving another's penis still represents a (hegemonic?) barrier to inclusive masculinities. These data are therefore suggestive that education, destigmatization, and encouragement of receptive penetrative anal eroticism in straight men could partially remediate some significant problems under the transphobic umbrella and may help counter penis/genital-centric transhysteria in straight men.

In conclusion, this qualitative study suggests that men who report greater comfort with receptive penetrative anal eroticism also report less transphobia, less obedience to masculine gender norms, greater partner sensitivity, and potentially greater awareness about rape. Particularly, unwillingness to engage in receptive penetrative anal eroticism seems to arise most commonly (especially in straight men) alongside masculinity features such as heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and trans/homohysteria. This seems to mark a penis-centered limitation to inclusive masculinity and may represent an inherent tension between hegemonic and inclusive masculinity that may relate to political orientation. Particularly from this data, transphobia and transhysteria in straight men exhibit such a close thematic relationship to receptivity to penetrative anal eroticism that intentional anal penetration in "safe" environments may remediate them.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that he/she has no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institution and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments, including standard IRB approval which was obtained for this study.

Human and Animal Rights This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by the author

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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