

Masculinity, Sexuality and Cultural Production among Urban Ethnic Minority Youth in New York City

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One of the most important limitations in theorizing the sexual decision-making of young people is the lack of knowledge of the framework of meanings around sexuality and sexual behavior for ethnic minority adolescent males. Missing from the literature are adolescents' own thoughts and feelings about sexuality, which constitute their phenomenological experience, spoken in their own voice. For adolescent males, engagement or disengagement from cultural narratives of masculinity forms an important backdrop for constructions of meaning around sexuality and sexual behavior. These narratives of masculinity take multiple forms, from prescriptions from parents and siblings about responsible sexual behavior to presentations of "hypermasculinity" in popular culture that highlight an urban aesthetic of physical strength, athletic prowess, and emotional stoicism in relationships. The extent to which these narratives are adhered to, discarded or are transformed within individual lives, and their effects on behavior, have not been examined in the literature on ethnic minority adolescent males. Understanding cultural narratives of masculinity is critical to advance an effective social agenda that promotes gender equity. In other words, this study will help unpack narratives of masculinity that facilitate or prevent risk but also promote power inequities in the realities of the lives of young people. This study will focus on "listening" to the voices of youth themselves in order to more fully understand their own perceptions – and their own interpretations of the ways in which these macro-structures intersect with the realm of intimate experience.