

MASCULINITY AND SEXUAL PROCLIVITIES: ETHNOGRAPHY FROM GHANA

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Abstract

Using the hegemonic masculinity theory and African feminism, we engaged in observations and individual and group discussions with men from a suburb of Ghana about what we regard as sexual proclivities (sexual ideals and obligations) to understand Ghanaian men's conceptions of manhood and their sexual conduct. We discovered that men's sexual ideals and cultural obligations are not only explained by financial abilities to woo a woman but also revolve around women's approval of manhood, i.e., erectile capabilities, prowess of peno-vaginal sex, and women's approval of their own sexual pleasure with the help of the penis. We conclude that perceptions about manhood in terms of its ideals and obligations have intersectional consequences for men's sexual and reproductive health not only in Ghana but across sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, studies interested in understanding West African men need to pay very close attention to conceptions of the male penis and cultural expectations of it.

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Keywords: Manhood, masculinity, sexual satisfaction, sexual ideals, ethnography, Ghana

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Introduction

Men's perception and women's conception of manhood have been poorly understood due to the intersectional nature of masculinity. Yet, among the multiple facets of masculinity, a significant component of that in heteronormative cultures is the female partner's sexual responses to men's sexual requests and to maintain men's own personal and cultural reputations. Evidence abounds that multiple factors explain masculinity across the world, produced at the intersection of race, class, and a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns. Thus, the need to understand masculinity in and of its own right based on cultural specificity is in order, and this study is a response to such a call. The study focuses on Ghanaian men's sexual knowledge, perceptions, ideals, and obligations to contribute to discussions more broadly about men's sexuality in Africa south of the Sahara.

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The interaction between masculinity and sexual behavior has been a subject of interest globally, transcending cultural and geographic boundaries. Throughout history, expectations of masculinity have evolved, often shaped by medical, sociocultural, psychological, and legal perspectives (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2005) giving rise to diverse sexual behaviors (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Fleming et al., 2016). While numerous studies have explored men's sexual behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2001; Hawkes & Hart, 2000; Traeen & Daneback, 2013), literature has often overlooked the diverse sexual desires of men being shaped by personal and cultural factors. The study focuses on sexual desires and interests (sexual proclivities), taking into account personal and cultural influences. It aims to investigate the methods employed by these men to fulfil their sexual desires and to understand how cultural and societal norms regarding sex influence men's sexual desires, interests, and behaviors.

Within Africa, the discussions intersect with rich cultural heritages and colonial histories, creating a unique lens through which to explore masculinity and sexual behavior (Pelzer, 2016). African masculinity has been intricately linked to communal roles and responsibilities, with traditional practices emphasizing strength, courage, leadership, and the ability to provide for one's family (Barker & Ricardo, 2005; Shefer et al., 2015). These practices influence the way African men perceive and engage with their sexual partners, as well as how they navigate changing gender dynamics. While this is not so different in Ghana, the Ghanaian masculine norm expects men to be emotionally strong, sexually potent, financially strong, leaders, and providers (Adinkrah, 2012; Adomako Ampofo & Boateng, 2007; Fiaveh, 2020; Nukunya, 2016) which transcend into their heterosexual relationships.

Despite the extensive research on masculinity and sexuality globally, there remains a dearth of comprehensive studies addressing how men and women's conceptions of male sexual behaviors impact assessments of what it means and takes to be a man. Thus, the problem statement of this study revolves around the complex connections between masculinity, societal

expectations, and self-sexual construct among men in informing discussions related to sexual health, identity, and well-being within Ghanaian society.

Research into male sexuality in the Ghanaian context provides valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between culture, masculinity, and sexual behavior. For instance, Fiaveh (2020) conducted a study on masculinity and male sexual virility, examining how cultural expectations of male sexuality in intimate heterosexual relationships influence the marketing and patronage of local aphrodisiacs. It was revealed that culture does not only shape the consumption of local aphrodisiacs but also exerts influence through masculine standards that demand men to exhibit sexual potency in order to satisfy women. Krugu et al. (2018) also explored men's sexual thoughts and actions in a suburb of Ghana, Bolgatanga, and found that communication about sex mainly takes place within peer groups, and men engage in multiple sexual partnerships to secure their masculine status (their ability to woo and keep many women in a sexual relationship), emphasising gender-role upbringing (Mayer & Mchugh, 2016). Other studies have also found an association between formal education and the sexual behaviors of men, particularly among young men in Ghana. What has been underreported and ignored from existing studies has been the reasons explaining men's sexual behaviors.

Two theories are used to explain the objectives of the study: hegemonic masculinity by Connell (1987, 1995) and black and African feminism, drawing insight from Patricia Hill Collins, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Stella Nyanzi, and colleagues. The hegemonic masculinity theory is useful in this study because it explains Ghanaian men's sexual knowledge, perceptions, ideals, and obligations and how they achieve these sexual ideals and desires. The theory, however, fails to describe the consequences that accrue to men as they demonstrate their sexual desires and behaviors. The black feminist thought and African feminism are therefore employed to complement the hegemonic masculinity theory to explain how men's perceptions about manhood in terms of its ideals and obligations have intersectional

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consequences for men's sexual and reproductive health not only in Ghana but across sub-Saharan Africa, where practices of masculinity are mainly constructed around women's approval, an important perspective that has received very little engagement from previous studies.

So, we explored the following questions in light of our problematization: How do men understand masculinity? What about men's notions about women's notions about masculinity? How does men's knowledge about masculinity converge and depart? How does such knowledge influence how men perceive their sex roles and sexual ideals in a steady sexual relationship? How are men's sexual expectations and their understanding of women's sexual expectations of men a threat to living as men in Ghana?

Methodology

The study is ethnographic in nature. It explored men's sexual desires, interests, and behaviors to unravel the intricate links between masculine norms about sex and their own sexual desires, interests, and behaviors.

We conveniently and purposively sampled 26 men from a suburb in the Ashanti region of Ghana, Pankrono. Pankrono was an interesting location to research because of the behaviors of the men there (from personal experience) and how the social relationships between men and women in the community portray the policing of particular masculine norms, which is a key focus of this study. Several locations within the community were selected for observations and data collection, including the Pankrono School park, Community Center, game center, the Zongo area, and food joints.

Our initial strategy involved observation as a means to familiarize ourselves with the study environment and establish rapport with both men and women, even though our primary focus was on men. In addition to various forms of observation (participant and non-participant),

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we engaged in informal conversations. These conversations began with less personal topics, such as their views on manhood. This approach was instrumental in sustaining men's interest in the subject and did not make them feel like someone was intruding on their privacy even though the eventual discussion did that. These observations and informal conversations therefore served as the basis for recruiting men for interviews and group discussions through rapport building.

During the rapport-building phase, men who expressed their willingness to take part in the study were approached for informed consent, and their permission was sought for recording the conversations. All interviews were conducted by the first author, AAG, who is female. These interviews and group discussions followed an informal and unstructured format, like lively and highly interactive conversations, yet the interviewer ensured comprehensive coverage of all topics aligned with the study's objectives. The conversations were conducted in Twi, the predominant local language in the Ashanti region. Throughout the data collection process, the interviewer, AAG, leveraged her femininity to capture the attention and willingness of the male participants. It is worth noting that in the Ghanaian context, the presence of a woman inherently commands men's attention (Quinn, 2002), and the interviewer capitalized on this aspect. Her pleasant appearance and warm demeanor, characterized by friendly smiles, made it nearly impossible for men to decline participation.

Except for men who were visibly occupied with their work or engaged in other activities, the men who were approached generally agreed to participate in the study. However, one man stood out as somewhat challenging. Initially, he appeared unapproachable when greeted. Despite this initial impression, the interviewer persisted, and after obtaining his consent, he agreed to participate in the study on the condition that the interviewer would share her phone number with him after the conversation. He remarked, "If you were a man, I would have refused long ago, because I have always turned away young men who come to question

me for their studies since I gain nothing from it." This incident underscores how the interviewer, being a female, often gained easier access and openness, even from "difficult" men. Despite any actions of interest from some men, the interviewer maintained an objective stance. She consistently reminded participants that their perspectives were highly valuable to the study and would significantly contribute to the ongoing discourse about men and their sexuality.

Observations and informal conversations therefore served as two valuable techniques employed strategically to recruit participants, aligning with the study's objectives. Some men were recruited immediately after a single day of observation, while others were observed on multiple occasions before being approached. The decision to approach individuals was influenced by factors such as their occupation, the circumstances during the observation, and the interviewer's discretion of the "appropriate time" and approachability of the person. Each conversation was diligently recorded and securely stored on a recording device solely for academic purposes. Some of the issues we explored related to questions such as: Can you describe your personal sexual desires, interests, and behaviors within the context of your sexual relationships? Could you share the specific means and strategies you personally employ or would want to employ to fulfil your sexual desires and interests in the context of your sexual relationships? How do you perceive the influence of cultural and societal norms about sex on your own sexual desires, interests, and behaviors in your sexual relationship(s)? Can you provide specific examples of this influence in your life?

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast (UCCIRB/CHLS/2022/84).

Analysis

The study comprised 26 male participants. Among them, ten engaged in three group discussions, eleven took part in in-depth interviews, and five individuals (both men and

women) participated in informal conversations. To ensure anonymity while adhering to the naming customs of Pankrono, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. The audiotaped conversations were subsequently translated from the local dialect, Twi to English and transcribed into text format using Google voice typing and saved as Word document, serving as data transcripts. These transcripts underwent multiple reviews to rectify typographical errors and to identify common themes among the diverse experiences (see Yin, 2015). Each transcript was labelled to indicate the type of conversation it represented, whether it was an interview or group discussion, and included participant details such as “IDI: Acheamfour, 20 years, Asante, Christian.” The labelling system provided a quick reference for understanding the content of each document based on the file name. After ensuring all necessary corrections were made, the data was analysed using MAXDA (Version 2020), which was installed on my computer.

The MAXQDA software consist of three primary interfaces, i.e., the Document System, the Code System, and the Document Browser. These interfaces were instrumental in categorising, coding, and presenting participants’ perspectives. MAXQDA was chosen due to its adaptable interface, facilitating the grouping of transcripts, coding, and the creation of a codebook for subsequent analysis. Initially, all transcripts were imported into the Document section and organised based on interviews or group discussions. With all transcripts available within the Document System, coding was conducted using the Code System interface. By clicking on a given transcript, it would be displayed in the Document Browser section. This arrangement allowed for simultaneous reading and coding of the transcripts.

During the coding phase, major and minor codes as well as groupings were established. These were organised according to their corresponding specific objective of the study, and this process was done for each transcript. Subsequently, an Excel-based codebook was created, functioning as a guide for reporting and interpreting participants’ perspectives. From my interactions with the male participants, three primary themes surfaced: men’s sexual

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proclivities, the attainment of men's sexual ideals or proclivities, and the impact of masculine norms on men's sexual behaviors.

Results

The age of the men who participated in the study ranged from 16 to 73 years, even though the data was more skewed towards me, who was aged... Only one man was aged 73 years, and even that... The reasons for the age difference were due to... and this was also reflected in the general age structure of the community I engaged with (see table 1 for details). Generally, younger men were willing to participate in the study compared to older men, mainly because Christianity was more pronounced among the men and, as expected, as the majority of the population of the Kumasi enclaves are, and this also reflected the dominant ethnic group as the Asante due to the purposeful and convenient nature of the selection of the participants. The demographic dynamics were also affected by the fact that the study was conducted in Kumasi, in the Ashanti region of Ghana. Although the participants were largely unmarried, they had been sexually active and had had one sexual encounter or another at the time of the fieldwork. The findings are thus structured along the specific objectives of the study guided by the thematic analysis. Some of the major themes which emerged from the analysis along which the findings are structured were: male sexual ideals, male sexual behaviour,etc.

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The Male Sexual Ideals

Since the study aimed to explore male sexual ideals, desires, and behaviors, it was essential to understand men's individual and cultural inclinations when it comes to their sexual desires, fantasies, and activities that they may find appealing in a sexual context. As a result, probing questions were asked to aid in knowing what men desire and have interest in a sexual

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relationship. For instance, participants were asked whether they have attraction for women or for men. Interestingly, they saw no reason why they as Ghanaian men should not be heterosexual. While some regarded this question as unnecessary, their verbal and non-verbal cues such as their facial expressions, pauses, and laughter, indicated that their upbringing has conditioned them to pursue women rather than men, given their gender identity. Notably, one young man provided an explanation:

I have attraction for women. You know that so far as I am a man, I cannot site my brother. So, the site means seeing a woman and admiring her beauty. But a man cannot be attractive to me (IDI 2: Acheamfour, 20 years, Asante, Christian).

Acheamfour's perspective is rooted in the belief that all males are his "brothers" and he cannot fathom admiring a fellow male in the same way he would for a woman. His use of the term "my brother" illustrates how his cultural upbringing, the hegemonic notions of manhood, instilled from childhood, has shaped his perception and sexual attraction towards women rather than men. His assertion that men are not appealing to him sheds light on the origin of his romantic sentiments and sexual desires towards women and a sense of "brotherhood" he associates with men.

Participants were also questioned about ideals Ghanaian men value in their sexual relationships and whether they differ among cultures. This question aimed to highlight potential distinctions in men's personal inclinations and whether these diverged from their ethnic group or other cultural contexts. However, the findings indicated that participants struggled to pinpoint noticeable distinctions. Instead, they pointed out that their sexual behaviors are largely shaped by cultural norms, which establish their sexual scripts from a young age. Consequently, participants identified factors such as penile erection, sexual initiation, attaining sexual satisfaction, establishing personal authority and respect within a sexual relationship as valued ideals. An example was shared by a young man who clarified this perspective:

One thing I value so much in a sexual relationship is penis erection. Per what I know, every man is supposed to have erection. So, if a man doesn't have erection, then it means he has a fault or problem. Men are supposed to have penis erection every dawn. You are not a man if you don't have erections oo (IDI 8: Ato, 30 years, Fante, Christian).

Not only Ato, but Acheamfour and other participants also emphasized the critical importance of penis erection within their sexual relationships. According to them, a man without an erection is not considered a real man in Ghana. They used local expressions like "ne ho nni ho" and "ontumi nsore" to describe a man facing issues with his "manhood" or experiencing erectile difficulties. In addition to highlighting the significance of penis erection as a valued sexual ideal, participants also pointed out that premature ejaculation is viewed as a source of shame for men, as it signifies weakness and an inability to sexually satisfy a woman. They believed that a man should engage in prolonged sexual activity to win a woman's affection and, more importantly, to establish authority and control over her. In essence, one way of asserting sexual dominance over a woman is through sexual initiation. They explained that since men are typically seen as the initiators in sexual matters with women, it is expected that they take the lead, and any deviation from this norm raises questions. Ekow had this to say:

It is the duty of a man to initiate sex. Most at times, it is the man who initiates sex. A woman who does that is a promiscuous "adwaman" (GD 1: Ekow, 16years).

According to Ekow and other participants, a woman initiating sex is perceived as a sign that she may not be committed to one partner. Some participants also regarded it as culturally inappropriate. Conversely, some participants argued that modernization has altered certain norms, allowing women to also take the initiative in sexual matters. This perspective led to debates, particularly in group discussions, where some men with strong religious backgrounds insisted that it is ordained for men to initiate sex, citing religious texts such as the Bible as evidence of men being the leaders in this aspect. However, other participants held a more liberal

view, asserting that since both partners (men and women) are equal contributors in the relationship, women should have the freedom to initiate sex when they desire. Sexual initiation, penis erection, and ejaculation were therefore identified as the most frequently mentioned sexual ideals among Ghanaian men in their sexual relationships.

Furthermore, it became apparent that the primary and ultimate sexual desire of men was sexual satisfaction. While participants initially highlighted sexual initiation and penis erection as key interests of men in sexual relationships, the overarching objective was achieving sexual satisfaction. Consequently, they aim towards satisfying a woman to gain respect, admiration, and a sense of control. One perspective on this matter is presented below:

Yes, sexual satisfaction is really important to men. As you sit here and a man sends you to the bedroom and does it anyhow “na ototo paapaaso a” or you don’t feel anything, and maybe he comes to pick you next time and you don’t get sexually satisfied again, and he discharges within a twinkle, next time you won’t mind him. Every man expects to satisfy a woman when they go to bed. So, there are some men, when he is going to have sex with a woman he says “meeko pira no” I am going to kill or finish her. That is what makes young men of today take these aphrodisiacs. He wants the woman to know that he is a man, he is able to sustain erection and all those stuffs, but that can be harmful to them (IDI 9: Agya Yeboah, 61 years, Asante, Christian).

As mentioned by Agya Yeboah, participants expressed strong inclination towards satisfying a woman. They emphasised that a man’s masculinity is incomplete without the capacity to sexually satisfy a woman. Consequently, women anticipate and demand nothing than sexual satisfaction from a man, and falling short of this expectation may lead to the dissolution of the relationship.

Achieving male sexual ideals and desires

Amidst the discussions about sexual ideals and desires mentioned by the men, a common thread emerged regarding the means to achieve or maintain them. According to

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participants, certain sexual ideals and desires require some degree of efforts to achieve. More significantly, they cited the use of aphrodisiacs, penis enlargement drugs, smoking marijuana, alcohol intake, diverting focus from sexual activity, and neglecting to address such desires. For example, Owuraku mentioned in a group discussion that smoking “weed” makes him go “high”, making it easier for him to satisfy his partner sexually. In a burst of enthusiasm, he stood up from his seat, took two steps while tilting his head, and exclaimed, “se mehyehye na meeba aa” [Twi, When I smoke and I am coming], “na ekyere seɛ metumi abɔ adwuma no yie” [Twi, then it means I can perform well sexually]. In the same discussion, Paa Kofi stated, “As for me, I take akpeteshi to boost my sexual drive”.

There was however, a different perspective from another group discussion of young men of age 16 and 17 years. Participants in this group mentioned that enhancing the penis aids in sexually satisfying a woman and so, they prefer enlarging their penis to satisfy their potential woman in future. According to them, the intake of herbal bitters to enlarge the penis boosts sexual drive, penis erection, and aids in sexual satisfaction. This is ensued in a group discussion about sexual desires:

Obrempong: I take some herbal enhancing drugs to increase the size of my manhood.

Interviewer: So, have you seen any improvement in your manhood after taking it?

Ekow: Yes, mine is coming small, small. I have not had sex before but I want to do it well when it is time.

Although Obrempong and Ekow are both 16 years old and have never had sex, they had begun working on themselves as they said locally “yeɛye yeho aduro” [Twi, we are preparing ourselves] towards being sexually potent men in future. They assert that as they near adulthood in a few years, they have started diligently preparing themselves to meet the sexual expectations of their future partners. It was fascinating to see how enthusiastic they were about it, as they stated that they wanted to offer their sexual partners the satisfaction they desired

while avoiding being regarded as weak men, so, they resorted to taking herbal concoctions: “ataya”, “kraman kote”, “pokum”, and “toantini”.

Ekow and Obrempong have interest in improving their sexual experiences by enhancing their penis. However, Acheamfour pursued an alternative path to achieve his sexual ideals. His approach centered around the concept of a man’s mental concentration during sexual activities. The connection between this mental “focus” and sexual satisfaction is captivating, as Acheamfour elaborated on it in the following manner:

The focus also counts. When having sex, the focus will determine how long you will last. Some men take their minds off being in a room with a woman and focus on a different thing. Mostly, men do not look at the faces of women during sex. He will be doing the act alright but do not think about it. What I know is that when you focus too much on the sexual act, you release early. (IDI 2: Acheamfour, 20 years, Asante).

In this context, the concept of lack of concentration or not focusing is viewed as a sexual action, as Acheamfour pointed out. Some men choose not to rely on aphrodisiacs or medications for penis enlargement to fulfill their sexual ideals. Instead, they divert their attention away from the sexual act, which helps decrease the likelihood of premature ejaculation.

Moreover, some other men expressed differing opinions regarding how to attain their sexual desires, enhance their sexual stamina, and provide satisfaction to their partners. These men believed that using penis enlargement drugs or aphrodisiacs carried potential side effects, and as a result, they were unwilling to do anything to modify their sexual prowess, even if their partners desired such changes. Kofi Adu added his opinion, suggesting that men should not overly heed women’s suggestions to alter their natural makeup or strength, as these same women might abandon them for another men, should they encounter negative consequences from using aphrodisiacs or penis enlargement drugs. He said:

If I am the one you are dating, me too, this is what I have and what I want, so if you think you don't like the size, you can leave, because I won't do anything about it. If there are any problems after she forces you to take the drugs, she will leave you right away. So as for me, I won't do anything about it. That is how God created me. And also, you cannot alter what God has created (IDI 1 - Kofi Adu, 33 years, Asante, Christian)

Men's sexual conduct

This section explores masculine norms and its impact on male sexual conduct in Ghana.

As participants discussed their sexual desires and interests, it became crucial to uncover the driving forces behind their sexual behaviors. Participant perspectives highlighted that men's actions are not solely guided by their biological attributes but are significantly moulded by prevailing masculine norms and societal expectations regarding male behavior. Participants pointed out instances where their sexual partners would disrespect or mock them if they failed to meet the expected standards of masculinity, particularly in terms of sexual contentment. Agya Yeboah, for instance, offered an example where his wife would subtly convey her dissatisfaction with their sexual activity through nonverbal gestures. He elaborated:

Agya Yeboah: Issues about sexuality and sexual satisfaction mostly lies between you and your wife. It is your wife or sometimes a woman you have sexual relationship with who can see the difference and say that oh Kwadwo papa is weak now, he is no longer a man. That is when you realize that your fufu will be served with a bowl with a different and a big lid. That means you are not being respected, because you are not able to do what she wants for her. Sometimes, the woman can even go the extent of cheating on you because she has seen that you cannot perform your duty as a man.

Interviewer: In such situations, can't the man do anything about it?

Agya Yeboah: Oh, the only thing you can do as a man is to take drugs in order to satisfy her as she expects.

As Agya Yeboah emphasised there exist societal expectation in Ghana that men must effectively satisfy their sexual partners, essentially constituting a sexual script for men.

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Consequently, due to these societal expectations, men are compelled to prioritize preserving their sexual prowess rather than facing disrespect and ridicule as individuals lacking in sexual strength. Agya Yeboah expressed his willingness to resort to aphrodisiacs in order to meet his wife's expectations, as opposed to enduring disrespect. Other participants also noted that the potential negative outcomes of failing to meet the masculine ideals drive them to adopt specific sexual behaviors aimed at fulfilling societal expectations.

Moreover, participants brought up specific masculine norms that shape their sexual desires and interests. Behaviors such as displaying courage, taking the lead in sexual pursuits, possessing physical strength, and demonstrating sexual prowess were identified as specific masculine behavioral norms that shape men's sexual desires, interests, and behaviors. For instance, the societal pressure for men to exhibit sexual potency affects those who feel inadequate, leading them to consider using aphrodisiacs to enhance their sexual strength. This implies that regardless of an individual's unique sexual preferences, masculine norms have a greater influence on men's sexual proclivities.

Discussion

The study explored men's sexual desires, interests, and behaviors, as well as the strategies employed to fulfil them, and examined the influence of cultural and societal norms on these aspects of men's sexuality.

This study's findings suggest that most Ghanaian men are heterosexuals and see men as their fellow "brothers". As noted by Dery, Fiaveh, and Apusiga (2019), same-sex sexualities remain a highly incensed and strongly contested topic in public spaces in Ghana, in popular media, partisan politics, and religious preachings (Dery et al., 2019). Participants' perspectives, such as the assertion that most Ghanaian men identify as heterosexual, can be analysed in light of existing masculinity literature that highlights the intersection of traditional masculine norms

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and sexual orientation. Connell's work on Masculinities (1995) cited in (Arxer, 2011) for instance, underscores how traditional masculinity often incorporates heterosexuality as a central element. In many societies, including Ghana, the concept of being a "real man" is closely tied to fulfilling expected roles, including those related to sexual orientation. This corresponds with Acheamfour's assertion that Ghanaian men are conditioned to be attracted to women, and as a result, any man who expresses sexual interest in another man is perceived as feminine and not considered a true man.

Furthermore, the work of Carrier and Murray (1998) in *Boy-wives and female husbands* provides insights into the complex landscape of African masculinities and sexual interests. While their focus was broader than Ghana, it is still relevant in this article since the book underscores how societal expectations related to masculinity can influence men's sexual interest within culturally defined parameters. In contexts where traditional masculinity and heterosexuality are closely linked, non-heterosexual identities might be less visible due to fear of not conforming to established norms. Thus, as the dominant (hegemonic) and socially recognised sexual orientation for men in Ghana is heterosexuality, men who find themselves doing otherwise are marginalised. We therefore argue that many Ghanaian men might be more inclined to publicly identify as heterosexual to align with the hegemonic notions of masculinity. However, it is important to acknowledge that this might not capture the full diversity of sexual orientations among Ghanaian men.

Concerning strategies men employ to achieve their sexual interests and desires, participants gave varied views, including the use of aphrodisiacs, penis enlargement drugs, and other behavioral approaches. This phenomenon reflects the complicated interplay between masculinity, cultural norms, and individual choices in the pursuit of sexual prowess and satisfaction. For instance, participants' reliance on aphrodisiacs and penis enlargement drugs can be linked to the concept of hegemonic masculinity as discussed by Connell (2005). As the

prevailing concept of masculinity in Ghana frequently highlights qualities such as sexual prowess and dominance, certain Ghanaian men strive to assert control over women by fulfilling their sexual desires. Consequently, men who perceive themselves as falling short of these sexual expectations may feel compelled to take action, resorting to measures like consuming aphrodisiacs, and taking penis enlargement drugs to enhance their sexual potency.

African and black feminists argue that men's pursuit of aligning themselves with cultural and societal sexual norms can be harmful, a concept referred to in this article as the "vulnerability trap." This term signifies that adhering to certain masculine behavioral expectations may effectively conceal men's emotions, rendering them seemingly invulnerable. In "We Should All Be Feminists," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an African feminist, addresses the notion of male vulnerability and the restrictive nature of traditional gender roles. She emphasizes how societal pressures often coerce men into conforming to a rigid definition of masculinity that discourages vulnerability, emotional expression, and a full range of human experiences. Adichie underscores that this narrow view of masculinity hinders men from expressing their true selves and can negatively impact their mental and emotional well-being. For instance, taking aphrodisiacs or penis enlargement drugs to meet societal expectations as mentioned by some participants may lead to adverse effects.

Another interesting approach to achieving sexual ideal mentioned was "not focusing". Acheamfour's approach of "not focusing" on sexual activity to prevent premature ejaculation offers an alternative perspective. It resonates with the idea of alternative masculinities as explored by Nyanzi and colleagues (2009) and Bell (2016), challenging the dominant norms by emphasizing emotional connection and mutual pleasure in sexual encounters. Acheamfour's approach contrasts with the pursuit of physical enhancement and underscores the diversity of masculine strategies. His attitude could be viewed as a form of resilience, adapting to perceived shortcomings in line with the "negotiated masculinity" concept as proposed by (Morrell, 1998).

An unforeseen discovery arose when Kofi Adu confidently expressed his unwillingness to modify his sexual aspirations, even if his partner wanted. While we entered the field without preconceived mindset, the perspectives shared by the most participants regarding masculinity and sexual ideals revealed a portrait of Ghanaian men as primarily heterosexual individuals who exert effort to assert control in all aspects of their relationships with women, particularly in the realm of sexuality. This includes the ability to fulfill a woman's sexual desires. Conversely, any deviation from this perception is associated with societal vulnerability and diminished respect for the man within the community. Therefore, Kofi Adu's unwavering stance against altering his sexual ideal, even if his partner is dissatisfied, reflects a resistance to external pressures. This aligns with the concept of "subordinated masculinity" discussed by Connell (2002), which highlights how some men may resist hegemonic norms and assert their agency (Nyanzi et al., 2009).

Another noteworthy finding that emerged from participants views was masculine norms and male sexual influence. Several studies have established that masculine norms have impact on men's behavior (Connell, 2002; Dery, 2021; Dery & Ganle, 2020; Diabah, 2022; Fiaveh, 2016), yet those studies are silent on some specific masculine norms that significantly influence men's sexual inclinations and behaviors. We found out that masculine script of behavior that expects men to be courageous, leaders, physically and sexually strong influence men's sexual proclivities to always take lead in sexual overtures, and see sexual satisfaction as an ultimate sexual obligation to fulfil in a sexual relationship. In the context of Ghana, where traditional gender roles hold sway, adherence to these masculine norms becomes paramount. As such, men may modify their sexual behaviors to align with these expectations, seeking to embody the attributes associated with dominant forms of masculinity.

In conclusion, it is clear that sexual desires, interests and behaviors of men are rooted in the Ghanaian societal and cultural norms about sex, as well as individual preferences.

Nevertheless, we argue that the impact of societal masculine norms on men's sexual desires, interests, and behaviors is more significant than their personal preferences. This is evident in the persistent use of aphrodisiacs and penis enlargement products, which underscores men's desire to assert their sexual prowess and maintain control over women. Both sexual initiation and satisfaction can be viewed as significant means through which men exercise control over women, even though some men may resist altering their sexual performances. Men who opt not to modify their sexual desires and performance, such as abstaining from using aphrodisiacs and penis enlargement drugs, highlight the substantial influence of religion in shaping the sexual desires, interests, and behaviors of Ghanaian men.

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[Appendix 1: Codebook....](#)

[Insert appendix 1 here](#)

Commented [MOU15]: Respond