

## One in 10 male, same-sex Craigslist ads seek men who don't identify as gay

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Online sexual hook-ups present a unique opportunity to explore many factors of decision-making that inform sexual health. A study conducted by Eric Schrimshaw, PhD, at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and Martin J. Downing, Jr., PhD, of the National Development and Research Institutes, found evidence that men having sex with men use the Internet to find sexual partners who do not identify as gay, either to fulfill a fantasy or because it allows anonymous sexual encounters without discovery. The findings are online in the journal, *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, published by the American Psychological Association.

To examine the subgroup of men seeking non-gay-identified (NGI) men in the online sexual marketplace, the researchers reviewed 1,200 Internet personal ads posted on Craigslist and selected 282 for analysis and performed comparisons of two categories of personal ads: those seeking encounters with NGI men, including straight, bisexual, married, curious, and men on the "down low" (those who usually identify as heterosexual but have sex with men); and a contrasting set of ads that did not specifically seek NGI men. Craigslist was chosen because it is publicly accessible, highly trafficked, free-of-charge, and widely used by gay, NGI men seeking men, or men who have sex with men and women to find [sexual partners](#).

Among the ads studied, 11% were placed by men seeking NGI partners. Although men who posted NGI-seeking ads were more likely to self-identify as bisexual, married, and/or discreet and to seek out an

anonymous encounter relative to the ads of comparison men, only 24% of online advertisements seeking NGI men were posted by men who were themselves non-gay-identified. This suggests that many of the posts are placed by gay men seeking NGI men, perceived by some gay men to be more masculine, dominant, or "straight-acting."

Only a small number of ads by NGI-seeking men mentioned safe sex or condom use. The analysis revealed that men seeking NGI partners were significantly less likely to mention that they wanted to have safer sex/use condoms (15% vs. 33%) and were more likely (66% vs. 42%) to omit mention of condoms or safer sex in their advertisements. "This suggests that these men are more likely to be looking for and willing to engage in sex without a condom which may place them at greater risk for HIV/STI transmission than men who are not seeking non-gay-identified male partners," said Dr. Schrimshaw, who is assistant professor of Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health.

Although few advertisements posted by men seeking NGI partners specifically sought anal sex without a condom (1% vs. 2%), they were significantly more likely to seek oral sex without a condom (14% vs. 5%) than comparison advertisements. "Future research on NGI-seeking men could lead to better understanding of their risk behaviors which, in turn, could be helpful for developing and targeting HIV/STD prevention and intervention efforts," noted Dr. Schrimshaw.

"Men having sex with men with characteristics that are devalued in the sexual marketplace such as older, heavier, or less masculine men will perhaps have less bargaining power, or at least perceive themselves as having less power, therefore, they may be willing to place themselves at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases to obtain a sexual partner," said Dr. Downing. These findings suggest that men may be even more willing to do this with NGI men.

The findings have unique implications for sexual health research targeting non-disclosing, NGI MSM and their same-sex partners. The authors note that further investigation is warranted to determine the extent to which NGI-seeking men are successful in finding partners for same-sex encounters who identify as straight or heterosexual, bisexual, down-low, or married as well as the types of behaviors these men engage in and the level of sexual risk.

"Regardless of any study limitations, the research has allowed us to document the existence of a subgroup of men who actively seek out sexual encounters with men who do not identify as gay," said Dr. Schrimshaw. "Moreover, the findings suggest that men with a preference for NGI men attempt to alert such prospective partners through a combination of self-described characteristics, desired partner attributes, and behavioral preferences, all of which serve to attract more discreet and masculine men. Given the attention to the sexual behaviors of NGI MSM, the results of this study support the need for additional research to investigate the behavioral outcomes of NGI-seeking [men](#)'s personal ads."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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