AFTER THE WEDDING NIGHT

SEXUAL ABSTINENCE AND MASCULINITIES OVER THE LIFE COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the ways in which men who pledge sexual abstinence until marriage negotiate and assert masculine identities before and after marriage. Using longitudinal qualitative data, this work traces the ways in which men who pledge abstinence until marriage manage a tension between both “sacred” and “beastly” discourses surrounding sexuality. The situational and interactional gendered practices of these men highlight their attempts to resolve the incongruity between practices of sexual purity and hegemonic definitions of masculinity. I argue that a decision to pledge sexual abstinence until marriage is an example of hybrid masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014) in that the postmarriage transition to a more hegemonically masculine status suggests that such practices are not challenging current gendered systems of power and inequality. These findings underscore the potential fallacy in using cross-sectional data to illustrate changes in gender relations, and demonstrate the importance of incorporating life course perspectives when theorizing masculinities.