



MY BOYFRIEND USED TO SLEEP AROUND. CAN I TRUST HIM?

▶ DEAR JOE

I have been dating my boyfriend for four months and things are getting serious. We are both 25 and we have such a laugh when we are together. He is only the second man I have ever slept with – I only came out two years ago, and I didn't really want to sleep around like all my friends seem to do. I asked my boyfriend how many men he has slept with – and it turns out it has been hundreds. It has left me feeling a

bit inadequate. He says he wants to settle down now – but I just think that if his appetite for men is that huge, sooner or later he is going to want more variety. I am committed to him – but wonder if maybe I should have slept with more men before we got together. I was thinking I might be with him for the rest of my life – but this has given me doubts. Please help.

MARK, MANCHESTER ▶

DEAR MARK

Congratulations on finding a guy with whom you want to spend the rest of your life with!

It is interesting to hear your side of things as I often hear the other side from guys in your partner's position who worry about committing to a newly out boyfriend who hasn't had much experience. The fear is usually that you guys like you, who have just come out, can't commit because everything is new to you.

There is an unwritten rule in the gay community, which is to avoid newly out gay guys as they will need to sow their oats and can't commit. Often the more recently out partner has to go through what I call a 'gay adolescence'. A gay adolescence lasts about two to three years and usually involves a need to make up for lost years from not having an adolescence in which they could express their intimacy needs and develop skills around sex and relationships. Teenagers often have a different boyfriend every month and sexually experiment into their college years. We gay males miss this opportunity and during and after the coming out process we may become hypersexual needing to experiment and express intimacy sexually. This may be what your boyfriend went through, contributing to why he has been sexual with so many guys.

That said, it sounds like you never went through this nor had a need to. That doesn't mean that at some point you won't. He is taking a risk as well by committing to a guy that has not gone through a period of dating and sexual experimentation. However, some gay men don't need this period of time. When I met my

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husband he was newly out and had only been with two other guys. I worried that, over time, he would have a need to express himself but that never happened.

The fact that your boyfriend has slept with so many men isn't an indicator that he will sooner or later want more variety at all. It may all have been part of his gay adolescence. It also may have just been his sexual appetite at the time. This is not necessarily an indicator that it will be something he wants in the relationship.

Wanting more variety occurs in almost every relationship whether you have been with one or one hundred partners. Over time boredom and routine settle into all of our sex lives and there is a need to mix things up. This doesn't have to mean you open up your relationship but rather that you communicate your need for changing things up and trying different things.

It seems like you have some low self-esteem issues. You said you felt inadequate when he told you the amount of men with whom he has slept with. That has no reflection on you at all unless you already have feelings that you won't be good enough for him.

Relationships can bring out the best and worst in us. They are magnets for all of our inner issues. In the beginning they bring out mostly the best and over time the worst comes out. Perhaps you already possess feelings of inadequacy and are attributing it to his past sex life when it might be more about you not feeling like enough to sustain his attention. Is this something you struggle with or felt as a child in terms of not being enough?

I am wondering if you secretly judge yourself against your friends who you report have slept around a lot. Maybe you are comparing yourself and think that it's something you should be doing too. You have to be the type of gay man you want to be and not what you think others might want you - or need you - to be. There is no right way of being a gay man. We all make our own way.

Feelings of inadequacy and doubts might be surfacing because you are thinking of committing more to him. The more we commit to a partner the more we find reasons not to. It is natural and normal to do this.

The best thing to do would be to talk with him about your fears and concerns. Open up to him and invite him to do the same. Making time to have open and honest dialogue is the only way to get past our worst fears and anxieties that are raised in a relationship. None of the things you said in your question are reasons to avoid a relationship. They are reasons to have a discussion, which I hope you do, and continue to do throughout your relationship.

***** DR JOE KORT IS A LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER AND BOARD-CERTIFIED SEXOLOGIST. HE IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF *10 SMART THINGS GAY MEN CAN DO TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES* JOEKORT.COM