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# Sexual Racism in a Gay Community on the U.S.- Mexico Border: Revisiting the Latin Americanization Thesis Online

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Sexual Racism in a Gay Community on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Revisiting the  
Latin Americanization Thesis Online

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## **Dedication**

This is in dedication to all the people who have ever been turned down for not being lucky enough to have been born a certain race or lighter skin tone. Seas Blanco, Negro, Moreno o cualquier tono de piel, tu eres hermoso y merecedor de amor. Nunca lo olvides!

Sexual Racism in a Gay Community on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Revisiting the  
Latin Americanization Thesis Online

by

Jesus Smith, B.A.

THESIS

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

While there is extensive literature examining the influences of race/ethnicity in the heterosexual population, there has been less attention given to how these factors operate in the gay community. A goal of this study is to analyze how race/ethnicity influences sexual activity among men who have sex with men (MSM) on and offline. In particular, one objective is to examine how the social construction of race intersects with sexuality. To achieve this goal, I will be expanding upon Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and associates' (2002) *Latin Americanization Thesis* of tri-racial stratification that posits that the U.S. will reflect a three tier racial structure with the White race on top, then an intermediary group of Honorary Whites and a Collective Black category at the bottom. This study will expand upon Latin Americanization Thesis by examining the intersection of race/ethnicity with sexuality within the context of the U.S./Mexico border. Specifically, I will add to this thesis by illustrating how sexuality influences the social construction of race, which in turn has implications for mate selection and sexual health in homosexual communities.

The second objective of this study is to investigate how racism and the social categorizations of race and sexuality influence mate selections and sexual health risks, particularly condom usage among men who have sex with men (MSM). Past research has investigated the possible reasons why MSM may engage in unprotected sex including a desire for condom less sex (Raymond & McFarland, 2009; Klein, 2010;) and the need to please a partner (Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004; Dilley et al., 2002; Mansergh et al., 2002). Recent studies suggest online dating sites may play a significant role in unprotected sex (Klein, 2010, 2008) by allowing for a venue where those interested in unprotected sex can meet privately and discuss this desire online. Still, there are no studies that analyze whether there is an association between the role of race in MSM communities and condom usage. The examination of how racial constructions and racism affects the condom usage habits of MSMs will contribute to this literature. In general, by addressing the construction of race in sexual relationships, it is possible to

examine the intersections of race and sexuality and how it may influence sexual health practices. When I refer to sexual health practices, it is in regards to condom usage and how using condoms decreases the chances of sexually transmitted infections and HIV infection.

To address these objectives, I will begin with a discussion on the historical and contemporary implications of sexuality and racism in the U.S. and Latin America. Following this section, I will describe the data and methods utilized for this study. Then I will discuss the result of the content analysis and results from 16 qualitative in-depth interviews with White, Black, Latino, and Mixed-race MSMs. Lastly, I will revisit Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization Thesis' application towards the analysis of racial hierarchy in MSM communities, the influence that sexuality has on the racial hierarchy, and the implications of these social constructions on sexual health behaviors.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this section first, I will describe the legacy of racism in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, and the implications of this racial legacy for MSMs. I will then examine the literature on Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization Thesis including how this perspective accentuates the utility of color-blind racism for the maintenance of white supremacy. Lastly, I will discuss the implications of the intersections of race and sexuality on sexual health practices.

### **2.1 Race in Latin America**

Race in the U.S. is a complex issue that continuously evolves. Adding complicity to the Black-White racial perspectives is the increasing presence of Latina/os, Asians, and mixed race people to the United States (U.S.) (Qian, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2004). With the changing racial demographics in the U.S., Bonilla-Silva and collaborators (2006) argued that the U.S. will adopt Latin American customs towards race spaces and race relations. In particular, Bonilla-Silva argued that "race" in the U.S. is becoming similar to racial dynamics found in Latin America, in particular the color-blindness and racial categorization that extends beyond Black and White.

To fully understand this Latin Americanization Thesis, I will first discuss how race in Latin America is socially constructed. Of particular interest is Mexico because of the long history of migration of people from this country to the U.S. (Durand & Massey, 2002) and the Mexican influence in border cities such as El Paso and Ciudad Juarez where this study takes place. An illustration of the color-blindness in Mexican history is evident in the lack of acknowledgement of the role of Africans in Mexican society. Africa became a part of Mexican history since the 1700s with the onslaught of slavery and the acquisition of slaves. Yet, Mexico largely denies the historical role of African culture (Sue, 2009). For instance, people of color are mostly associated with being indigenous and not African (Sue, 2009). Race in Mexico has been a recent issue of debate among Mexican scholars. To a great extent, Mexico is "rediscovering" its racialized past and in particular people of African ancestry (Vasquez,

2010). Color-blindness or the disregard of race as a means of avoiding the topic of racism, and accusations of racial discrimination is an ideology that assumes we are living in a post-racial world where race does not matter, when in fact it does and is still a tremendous issue (Chang, 2004). Color-blindness is then used to hide racist ideas and beliefs. Indeed, Mexico does not keep data on race, making it difficult to understand the complexities of racial inequality (Sue, 2009). As such, Mexicans may argue that race does not exist in their country and that all the residents are of the same ethnicity, hence color-blind.

Despite the color-blindness, the idea of colorism is inextricably linked to the Spanish in Latin America. Slaves were transported from the port of Veracruz, Mexico primarily to other parts of Mexico and Latin America (Sue, 2009). As Bristol (2007) argued, Spanish theories about color, honor, and religion helped give and take away opportunities and roles in New Spain for some Africans. In order to differentiate Spaniards from non-Spaniards, hierarchies were established by the Spaniards to classify and define residents of the colonies (Bristol, 2007). This differentiation many times involved cultural practices, categorizations of free or slave, and of skin color (Bristol, 2007). Even today, the legacy of racial stratification based on skin color still exists in Latin American countries because of the Spanish systems of colonization in the U.S. Sue (2009: 3) found through varied interviews that many of the Black Mexicans of Veracruz desired light skin and preferred to “limpiar o mejorar la raza” or clean, whiten, and improve the race. With the overwhelming value of “whiteness” in Mexico, many Veracruzanos preferred people with less distinct African features than themselves and dating or marrying people of lighter skin was a goal of many (Sue, 2009). Although *mestizaje* or mixed race suggests racial blending, the people strove to whiten themselves and their next generations within the mestizo category. The objective is to be phenotypically White as opposed to pure White (Sue, 2009). Racism and *mestizaje* combined in order to allow for both racial mixing through a whitening process that valued Whiteness over all else.

Another illustration of the different utility of race in Latin American versus the U.S. is evident in the one-drop rule. For instance, in Mexico, one drop of white blood meant upward mobilization and desirability. In contrast, Marta Cruz-Janzen (2001: 5) argued that “regardless of skin color and physical appearance, in the United States one drop of nonwhite blood makes the person 100 percent nonwhite, while in Latin America one drop of White blood makes the person whiter or at least no longer black and Indian” (Cruz-Janzen, 2001; Telles, 2006). In Latin American, racial “impurity” can be cleansed whereas in the U.S. racial impurity affects future generations, defining them as unfit and undesirable.

## **2.2 The Latin Americanization Thesis**

As mentioned above, Bonilla-Silva (2003) predicts that the U.S. White-Black racial system will be expanded to a tri-racial stratification system with “Whites” at the top of the racial hierarchy, an intermediate group of “Honorary Whites,” and a “Collective Black” group at the bottom (Bonilla-Silva et. al; 1997, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010). This tri-racial hierarchy system is sustained through color-blindness or language used to hide or shield racist beliefs and intent and the “Honorary White” category is there to help sustain white supremacy. Most of those benefitting from white privilege subscribed to the principles of white supremacy by establishing the intermediate racial group, the honorary Whites, to buffer racial hostilities (Bonilla-Silva, 2005). This racial hierarchy regrouping is based on skin color, class, and acculturation in the case of Latina/os. Particularly relevant to this study, is the classification of Anglo Americans and Caucasians in the top White strata, light-skinned acculturated Latina/os, multiracials, and others as “Honorary Whites,” and dark-skinned Latina/os and Blacks in the “Collective Black” category (Bonilla-Silva, 2005) (figure 1). These categorizations of race resemble the racial stratification system in Latin America where race is thought of as a continuum from White to Black and individual constructs of identity are not considered (Graham, 1990). Support for the Latin Americanization thesis has been found among a nationally representative sample (Forman et al (2002). Figure 1 illustrates Bonilla-Silva’s (2002) thesis:

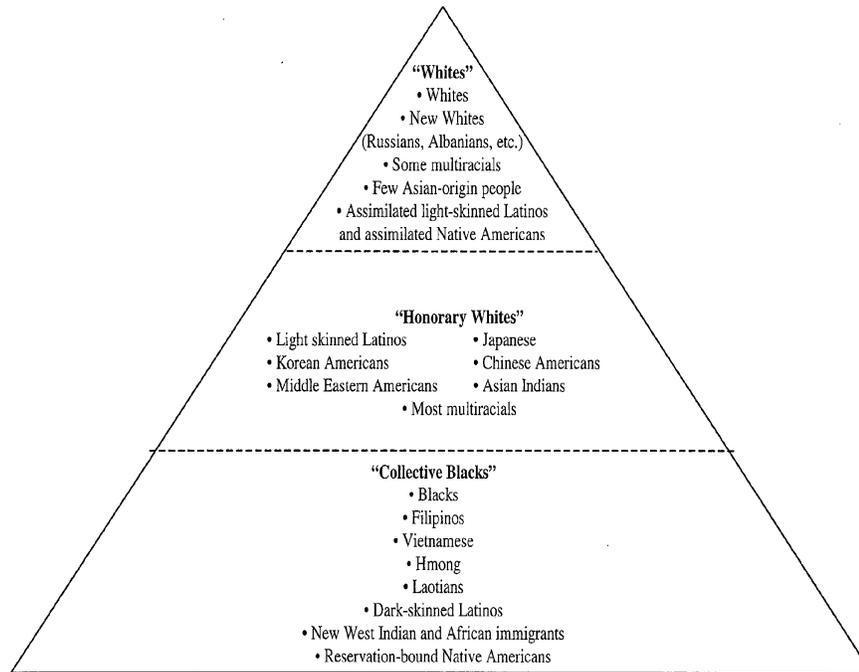


Fig. 1. Preliminary Map of Tri-Racial System in the USA.

This racial hierarchy is supported by color-blindness. Bonilla-Silva (2010) emphasizes that this “new white supremacy has also produced an accompanying ideology that rings Latin America all over: the ideology of *color-blind racism* (2010: 184).” Through color-blindness, racist ideology and racism is disguised. As mentioned above, Latin American countries, such as Mexico, do not keep data on race, making it difficult to be accountable to racism (Sue, 2009). Similarly, this racial ideology is becoming more salient in the U.S. specifically with the denial of the impact of race and proclaiming that “We are all Americans” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Consistent with the language of color-blind racism is the insistence of non-racism in the face of racist beliefs. As Bonilla-Silva (2010:3) makes clear, during the Jim Crow era, racial inequality was enforced overtly through signs on doors saying “No niggers welcome here.” Color-blind racism today takes a very different approach. Instead of blatant disrespect by saying Blacks and Latinos are “lazy” and that is why they are at the economic end of the spectrum, a more subtle approach is suggesting the economic issues racial minorities face today is due in large part by their lack of a cultural work ethic. Another example is instead of saying intermarriage is “ungodly,” it is more common for their children to be unwanted (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This places mixed race people in a marginalized status. Case in point, one may argue that 2012 Republican candidate Newt Gingrich won the South Carolina primary by exploiting racial resentment towards Blacks in the highly contentious state. Gingrich wittingly lampooned Barack Obama; the U.S.’s first Biracial President as a food stamps president and suggested that because of government handouts, work ethic among poor Black kids was questionable (NY Times, 2012). In 2010, a Louisiana Justice of the Peace Judge Bardwell refused to marry an interracial couple, stating that White and Black communities were incapable of accepting the offspring from interracial relationships. In retort to comments suggesting he is racist, the judge responded by saying, “I’m not a racist. I just don’t believe in mixing the races that way,” Bardwell told the Associated Press. “I have piles and piles of black friends. They come to my home, I marry them, and they use my bathroom. I treat them just like everyone else.” As both examples demonstrate, by masking their racial resent in carefully articulated language the racism is unidentifiable. As Bonilla-Silva wisely asserts, “color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era (2010: 3).”

Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) color-blind racist theory is grounded in four central frames: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. First, abstract liberalism surrounds ideology of ‘equal opportunity’ or individual choice (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Specifically, by

arguing that people have a choice then individual explains are used to explain why people prefer light skinned lovers while social influences against interracial unions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Second, naturalization suggests racial practices are natural occurrences because people gravitate towards those that are most similar to themselves. This suggests that preferences are biologically driven, which allows for racial preferences to be rationalized as nonracial since it is an inherit quality in ALL groups (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Third, cultural racism relies on culturally-based arguments to justify minority standing in society today. During Jim Crow, the belief was that Blacks were biologically inferior to Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Today public perceptions of Mexican as “lazy” and Blacks as “not wanting to succeed” are examples of cultural racism. Minimizing racism in this manner suggests that discrimination is no longer a factor affecting minorities, as it did in the past (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). As Bonilla-Silva (2010) demonstrated this would eliminate the racism behind the death of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas, the slow response to Hurricane Katrina victims, and the Rodney King beatings, as non-racial while still accusing minorities of using the race card when demanding justice.

While these frameworks are useful, missing from these is set of frames is the way in which sexuality is used for and against MSM of color. As Bonilla-Silva’s work mostly focused on racism in a heterosexual world, sexuality becomes a powerful framework in which to focus racial tensions in the gay community. Here, sexuality may allow overly masculine Black men the opportunity to ascend the racial hierarchy during sexual liaisons (Logan, 2010) and therefore allow Whites or white structures to displace racism. Another concern is found by Murguia & Saenz (2002) who argued that a tri-racial system has historically existed in the U.S. and thus is not new. For instance, newly arrived immigrants to the Americas such as the Irish and Jewish communities occupied a middle group of Whites not as privileged as the Whites already residing in the Americas (Murguia and Saenz, 2002). The newly arrived immigrants were allotted access to this elite sphere only after long periods of time in order to maintain a

class of elites and to give the illusion that upward mobility could be granted through time (Murgia & Saenz, 2002). This kept a racial revolution from taking place among Blacks.

### **2.3 Elements in the History of Sexual-Racialism**

As mentioned previously, racial dynamics within the homosexual community have not been fully explored, leaving a gap in research addressing the intersections of race and sexuality. Yet we can draw from historical analyses that reveal a complex relationship in regards to race and sexuality within the heterosexual community. Patterns of sexual- racialization or racial sexual stereotypes are rooted in our American history, as evident in the sexual exploitation of slaves during the 1700s and 1800s. Nagel (2003) revealed how hyper-sexualized depictions of slaves are embedded in society. The sexual excessiveness of savage African slaves painted them as nymphomaniac animals, as “claims and concerns about the physical sexual endowments of Black men and the sexual appetites of Black women circulated back and forth across the Atlantic in the minds and publications of Europeans who settled the America’s” (2003: 11). Patricia Hill Collins (2004) also argued that, “men of African descent were also seen as hypersexualized beings (2004: 4).” She maintains that “African men’s sexuality was seen as dangerous and in need of control (2004:4)” particularly in regards to slavery. D’Emilio and Freedman (1998:107) also found that during the Jim Crow Era “by labeling them [Blacks] sexual savages, Whites reassured themselves that their own race was indeed the civilized one it aspired to be.” As can be seen, social construction of whiteness associated with heroism against the “beastly” Black slaves, reinforcing the racial hierarchy between colonizers and the colonized (Collins, 2004). Since White men historically were the protectors of White women from Black sexuality especially during Jim Crow, this legitimized their social role over Blacks lawless behavior and uncontrolled actions. African men were perceived as violent, with an overwhelming sex drive (Collins, 2004). Nagel further investigated how hyper-sexualized depictions of Blacks embedded in society fueled sexual fantasies, desires and fears of Whites participating in sexual liaisons with Blacks (Nagel, 2003).

Race and ethnicity became sexual boundaries or limitations for Whites forming a “solid barrier to assimilation” (Nagel, 2003: 12). Legislation was established to enforce the boundaries amongst the races. Statutory proclamations in the South especially illuminated the so-called “sinfulness” inherent to interracial liaisons. Whites argued that Blacks lusted after White women as an excuse to subjugate them to lynching (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1988). Despite laws and the stigma assigned to those who had sex outside their race, interracial sex still took place. Many times this was through recreational sex or sex with no strings attached because it limited the risk of being penalized for interracial sex (Nagel, 2003). There was constantly an “emphasis on African sexuality and savagery” that seems certainly linked to colonialism during the era of the slave trade (2003: 11).

Gay sexuality produced a particularly different result. While heterosexuals feared Black sexuality, comparatively White gay men today desire Black men’s perceived sexual dominance and unrestraint (Logan, 2010; Baldwin, 1985). The American ideal of sexuality, as Baldwin (1985) notes, is rooted in the ideal of American masculinity. Racial stereotypes interacted with notions of masculinity to produce a desire for hyper-masculinized Black men amongst White, gay men (Logan, 2010). Black men who conformed were sought after and those that did not were penalized (Logan, 2010).

#### **2.4 Color-blindness and Desire in Gay Communities**

Although the influence of color-blind racism in the gay community has received less attention, we can gain some insights from the literature on race and sexuality. The gay community is considered by many Whites as “a welcoming place of gays and lesbians of color” (Han, 2008: 11). Yet today, as many gay rights advocates apply civil rights rhetoric (i.e. “we are all equal”) to the fight for gay marriage, some “‘gay’ organizations and members of the ‘gay’ community continue to exclude men of color from leadership positions and ‘gay’ establishments” (Han, 2007:11). Similarly, members of the gay community subtly deride men of color or ignore the discrimination they may face. Han (2007), for instance, argued that within the fight for marriage equality is the reality that men of color either feel

isolated by Whites in their communities or are invisible. As Darieck Scott (1994) denotes, “‘Blackness’ especially male Blackness, is almost definitionally masculine and constitutively heterosexual” with the vast majority of images of gay men corresponding to that of White men (1994: 301). As exclusivity has allotted for the creation of White only gay spaces, the men excluded although gay, did not fit the stereotypical White norm of “gayness” (Scott, 1994). The lack of visibility of gay men of color has even been noted by Black film maker Marlon Riggs stated in his film *Tongues Untied*, “I pretended not to notice the absence of Black images in this new gay life, in bookstores, poster shops, film festivals, even my own fantasies....I was an invisible man” (Riggs, 1989). Riggs directs our attention to the invisibility of Black men from the gay world and how this even affects him at an individual level. This absence of Black images in gay oriented media contributes to the marginalization of Blacks and other men of color. This arguably contributed to the development of *sexual racism* (Plummer, 2005) or sexual discrimination based on race.

An example of sexual racism can be seen online in the mass media, such as film, television, DVD and most importantly the internet which have enabled Black images to enter the homes, social spaces, and bedrooms of a large number of people (Collins, 2004). Sexual racism utilizes mass media to “reproduce and disseminate” its ideology (Collins, 2004). Pornographic films and images of the Black thug hustling the innocent White male (McBride, 2005) help “manufacture the consent” of racial hierarchies as “natural, normal, and inevitable (2004:6).” The media has become saturated with Black images in music videos, billboards, and the internet, putting Black sexuality everywhere (Collins, 2004). This has even effected online dating.

To date, sexual relations and race have largely been examined through the literature on interracial marriages (Quia, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2004), while less attention has been given to the influence of race in dating relationships. An exception is national polls that have suggested more of a willingness from youth to engage in interracial dating (Gallagher, 2002, Ludwig, 2004). Yancey (2009)

similarly revealed a fairly high acceptance of interracial dating amongst all racial groups. Sweeney & Borden (2009), found, in a non-comparative study that heterosexual Black and White singles are willing to date “any race.” This may be due to people being more willing to date interracially for the short term as opposed to being in an interracial marriage for a long term (Fujino, 1997). Sweeney and Borden (2009) also found that Blacks were more likely to select both White and Blacks as potential partners than Whites, illuminating the sexual racism that exists for both groups. Despite the fact that most respondents stated race was not an issue when it came to dating, Mendelsohn and his colleagues (2011) online research showed that more than 80 percent of the contacts initiated by White members were White and only three percent were Black. Similarly, Mendelsohn et al. (2011) found Blacks are ten times more likely to establish contact with Whites than Whites are to contact Blacks.

Some interesting research has highlighted racism in the gay community. In particular, Han (2007) revealed that gay organizations worked towards acceptance from the mainstream rather than liberation from it through “various whitening practices.” These practices introduced gay America to the mainstream by excluding men of color and selling gay as White to gain economic power and make profit (Berube, 2001: 246). Discrimination in admittance to bars, in advertisements, and in employment are all noted (Loiacano, 1989). Standing in the way of acceptance of Black men in the gay community are White bias standards of beauty (Loiacano, 1989). To maintain this Whiteness, racial limits that restricted interracial relationships were established including sexual borders that restricted sexual activity amongst the races. Through the means of both racial and sexual restrictions, subtle forms of racism could then be enacted without the stigma of being seen as a racist and buffered through color-blind racist language. For instance, commenting on the gay market place of desire, McBride (2005: 92-93) contends that:

...there is no better place to come to understand and to appreciate the ways in which the legacy of the U.S. society’s profound primal experiences with race have permeated all aspects of life in this country right down to and including our sexual desires, than to examine our behaviors in our

most unscripted or personal moments such as pornography and personal ads to see how people express and characterize their desires under cover of privacy and anonymity...

Through his work, McBride (2005) uncovered several Craigslist personal ads that expressed racial desires as well as pornographic films that did the same in racist ways. For example, McBride (2005) noted that in pornography, Black and White Men had limited interactions with a vast majority of Black performers being on top thus portrayed as hyper-masculine. Earlier research reaffirmed this position by thoroughly examining 2,400 male craigslist ads (Phuan & Kaufman, 2003). Findings supported that race was still a very big indicator in mate selection and that a hierarchy existed as evident in the preference for Whites versus Blacks. Indeed, race was a *bigger* issue in the gay community versus heterosexuals in terms of mate selection online (Phuan, V., Kaufman, G., 2003). Specifically, gay men were 3 times more likely to report a racial preference for a partner than heterosexual men in a comparative study (Phuan, V., Kaufman, G., 2003). Due to these attitudes Black gay men state that they are viewed as inferior members of the gay community (Loiacano, 1989).

## **2.5 Racial Construction and Sexual and Gender Performance**

Ehlers (2006) suggested that race be considered in Judith Butler's (1990) work on gender performance. Butler (1990) demonstrated how Drag Queens performed gender by being men who portrayed women in hyper-feminine style, dress, mannerism, and speech. Ehler's (2006) application of performativity to race is relevant to the way we use our bodies to present ourselves in different ways. To be considered of a certain race has more to do with performance than with anything biological. In other words, if one acts or behaves as "Black," their Whiteness would be considered illegitimate. Hence, the desire to assimilate and take on a White racial performance is in order to disassociate with Blackness.

Perhaps, nothing is more symbolic of the status of Blackness, then the black body. Charles Johnson (1993) further explored the relationship between the construction of race and its connection with the body in his work the *Phenomenology of the Black Body*. Here, Johnson makes it clear that what

is ascribed to the Black body contributed to the marginalization of Blacks. The appearance of a Black body through the eyes of a White spectator means the soul was stained. White fears were projected onto Black bodies, the fears to “contain or confront: bestial sexuality, uncleanness, criminality, [and] all the purported ‘dark things’ (1993: 127).” This “stain” was even attributed to black blood. Black blood accordingly carried within itself the ability to transform Whites into Blacks, giving them the characteristics stereotypically associated with Blacks like crime and low order animalism. U.S. mulattos, similarly, even though possessing White Blood, were still depicted as dangerous because their exterior bodies did not accurately reflect their stained interior Blackness (Johnson, 1993). Johnson’s examination of the Black body and its “stain” help us to understand why Black men may be socially less desired than other races.

One of the best forums in which to see gender and racial performance is online within MSM dating sites. The invention of the internet and the occurrence of online dating as suggested above have greatly altered the social organization of desire through mass communication and the erosion of traditional institutional controls of sexuality (Green, 2008). Erotic websites and dating sites operate as spaces for different desires and sexual practices (Green, 2008). Considering sexual contexts, such as internet websites and building on the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1980) and Martin and George (2006), Green (2008) developed what he terms “*sexual fields framework*” as a tool to highlighted self-presentation and sexual practice to specific erotic schemas (Green, 2008). To this end, his research revealed that “Black gay men engaged in a pattern of effective and behavioral negotiations,” that includes taking up Black sexual stereotypes that have been created by White society such as emphasizing penis size and deemphasizing their Black facial features, to increase their erotic capital. Also the Black men would take up “the enactment of sexual practices to offset sexual marginality (Green, 2008:27)” such as engaging in unprotected sex with more desirable White men.

A useful term first utilized by Green (2008) is *erotic capital*. Particularly, erotic capital refers to “the quality and quantity of attributes that an individual possesses, which elicit an erotic response in another (Green, 2008:29).” In the case of Black men, Green (2008) argued they use erotic capital as currency in exchange for mobility up tiers of desirability. The tiers of desirability are influenced by bodies, fashion, media, sexual practices and sexual identities that stratify the groups based on physical, affective and stylistic features (Green, 2008). By adapting their appearance, behavior, or demeanor, particular classes of actors are able to elevate their status within the tiers of desirability (Green, 2008). Therefore, Blacks who are more masculine in appearance can be above feminine Blacks in desirability (Green, 2008). Hakim (2010) asserted that erotic capital is composed of 6 elements: beauty or more exactly facial beauty, sexual attractiveness, the social-ability to get people to like you, liveliness or a mixture of fitness and energy, presentation like style of dress, and sexuality itself or sexual competence like condom usage for instance.

The role of race in the concept of erotic capital has been under-examined. Previous studies on erotic capital have examined the role race plays in desire in the realm of how it influences sexual attractiveness (Martin & George, 2006; Green, 2008). While Green (2008) discusses race and social exchange, he discusses race in a dichotomous fashion, ignoring that the racial lens of the U.S. I propose that by examining the racial hierarchy we can analyze how erotic capital is utilized to maneuver through interactions with members in different places in the racial hierarchy.

## **2.6 Sexual Racism and Sexual Health and Mate Selection**

Sexual racism is more than ideology; it can translate into behavior including sexual risky behavior. Efforts have been made to explain the rise in HIV/AIDS among MSM of color (e.g., Choi et al., 1999). For example, sexual health research focusing on Asian Pacific Islanders (API's) found that increasingly unsafe sexual behavior can be attributed to sexual norms found in some Asian cultures (Choi, Coates, Catania, & Lew, 1995). For example, gay Asian males are racially and sexually

constructed as the feminine, passive, and anally receptive partner during intercourse (Han, 2008). Because of the risks associated with being the “receptive bottom” during anal intercourse (Mass et al., 1987) exposes the gay Asian male to HIV/AIDS more often (Choi et al, 1999). Others reasons for higher infection among Asians include lack of culturally relevant or linguistically appropriate intervention material (Inouye, 1999), lack of integration into the mainstream gay community (Kanuaha, 2000), and internalized homophobia (Ratti, Bakeman, & Peterson, 2000).

Of particular relevance to this study is the work of Han (2008) who attempted to directly link sexual racism in the gay community with HIV risk among API MSM. He found that among Asian and Pacific Islanders “racism in the gay community leads to socially and contextually prescribed sexual roles for gay API men that contribute to the practice of unsafe sex” (2008: 827). As such, it can be argued that condom usage is racialized given that Asian men are more likely to take health risk due to their subordinate racial status. I speculate that some of these same behaviors may be found among other men of color such as Blacks, Latinos, and multiracials mixed with Black and Latino and Black and White. Thus, the question arises, are members of the “Collective Black” racially constructed as less desirable than “Honorary Whites” and Whites and therefore more willing to engage in condom-less sex in order to increase their number of possible partners?

In order to tease out the influence of racism on sexual health behaviors it is important to consider other factors that contribute to these activities. For instance, HIV/AIDS among MSM has been attributed to the belief that partaking in unprotected sex is an individual choice (Adam, 2005; Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004), the belief that AIDS/HIV is less of a concern now because of better medication (Halkitis, Parsons, & Wilton, 2003; Sheon & Crosby, 2004), being afraid of losing a partner who does not like sex with condoms (Sheon & Crosby, 2004), and finding sex without using condoms to be more pleasurable (Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004; Dilley et al., 2002; Mansergh et al., 2002). In addition, there are those who are tired of constantly worrying about getting infected and so

decide to partake in unprotected sex so to not worry any longer (Dilley et al., 2002; Halkitis et al., 2003), and those who feel more intimacy is tied to condom-less sex with a partner (Mansergh et al., 2002; Theodore, Duran, Antoni, & Fernandez, 2004) and those that feel unprotected sex is associated with masculinity (Halkitis, Green, & Wilton, 2004; Halkitis & Parsons, 2003; Ridge, 2004).

In part due to the tremendous impact of the internet, many men who have sex with men use MSM internet websites to find people to engage in unprotected sex. Bolding and associates (Bolding, Davis, Sherr, Hart, & Elford (2004), for instance, found an association between men's risky sexual behavior and internet usage to find sexual partners. Indeed, men preferred the internet over bars and other venues to find partners. Similarly, Bull, MacFarlane, Lloyd, & Rietmeijer (2004) found that 97 percent of men who use the internet as a way to find partners for sex met someone online and 86 percent used the internet at least once a week. Moreover, Klein (2010:426) conducted a content analysis of online profiles from a MSM website for men seeking unprotected sex and found that "When MSM use [websites] to locate potential sex partners, they tend to be looking for partners with whom they can engage in very risky behaviors (2010: 426)." Klein's (2010) research also found connections between race and sexual risks. When analyzing the profiles of those who specifically seek unprotected sex partners via the internet, Klein found that the most popular profiles were those placed by non-Caucasians (Klein, 2010).

I predict that in the border town of El Paso, Texas, many of the same factors that contribute to the rise in condom-less sex within some Asian cultures and internet usage will also arise here. While the studies above provide some important insights as to how sexual behaviors are shaped by marginalized racial statuses, we do not know if and how they interact with the new racial constructions. For instance, is it possible for "Honorary Whites," such as light-skinned Latino gay men, may be expected to be the submissive sex partners to Whites who perceive them as racially subordinate? On the other hand,

“Collective Black” MSMs may participate in unprotected sex as a means to achieve upwardly mobility along the tri-racial stratification system.

### Chapter 3: Data and Methods

The data for this study comes from men who have sex with men (MSM) in El Paso, Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S.-Mexico border provides an important context to observe current patterns of how race and sexuality may continue to shape who we choose to have sex with. As argued by Campbell (2007), “the play of fantasy and imagery, the manipulation of cultural representations, erotic construction of the other and the performance of stereotypes as well as power imbalances are all critical to cross border sexual exchanges” (2007: 276). Although U.S. Americans were not interviewed about looking for lovers across the border in Mexico or vice versa, Campbell’s quote none the less helps put into focus how sexual encounters take place *on* the border. While the majority of studies have focused on areas like Seattle, Washington, and San Francisco (e.g., Plummer, 2005; Han, 2008), we know very little about the gay communities along the U.S.-Mexico border or in regions with a majority Latina/o population. As such, the context of this study is of value. El Paso is one of the largest ports of entry between Mexico and the United States (Lorey, 1999). Moreover, El Paso is popular for its reputation for being a ‘sin’ city during prohibition due to their close proximity to Mexico where bars and casinos were legal (Lowrey, 1999). This border region has become the region where “anything goes” including being the site to experiment with globalization (Morales and Bejarano, 2009). Furthermore, El Paso is home to Fort Bliss, the Army’s second largest installation, which contributes to the diversification of the region. El Paso’s demographics can be summed up as Mexican Americans, African Americans, and non-Hispanic Whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Specifically, according to the 2010 census, the Mexican-origin makes up the majority of the inhabitants, at 82%, with Whites (non-Hispanic) coming in second with 14% and Blacks 3<sup>rd</sup> with 3% (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Many MSM’s first experience with the gay community takes place online (Klein, 2010) because it allows for more anonymity if the person is not quite out of the closet and provides access to more MSM without having to go to a gay club or bar. In order to contextual the gay community and to begin

to analyze the intersections of race and sexuality I began with a qualitative content analysis of MSM websites. Content analysis or the “interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings (Berg 2009:338)” allows for an analysis of online written materials and pictures. I did this through craigslist. Craigslist.com is a free online network that allows for classified advertisements including jobs, housing, and personals. To provide some context to this study, I searched “no Blacks” on craigslist on April 4, 2012. The personals section breaks down into men seeking men, men seeking women, women seeking men, etc. There is also a section for casual encounters, broken down again into men for men. The popularity of the website for gay men has been included in the works of Plummer (2005), Han (2007, 2008) and McBride (2005). Plummer used websites and profiles for group discussions on the effects of sexual racism on men of color (Plummer, 2005). Han analyzed the discourse content on discussion blogs in regards to gay men and their racial desires as a means to understand the way exclusion is implemented online (Han, 2008). McBride gathered a few craigslist ads to lay bare the sexual racism present within them (McBride, 2005). I utilized minor aspects in all their methods within this study including gathering a few craigslist ads to illuminate race online, understanding how the racial preferences of profiles affected participants, and examining the content to understand the methods of exclusion. I analyzed ads that specifically requested certain races and those that emphasized skin color pigmentation. The second website was adam4adam.com (A4A). A4A is an American online dating website designed to meet other men for, as it describes on its website, “friendship, romance or a hot hook up (“Adam4adam.com,” n.d.)” The website was ranked as the most used gay personals site in March 2007 by Hitwise (Dawley, 2007). It is distinguishable from other sites because it is free to users and pays for its self through online pornography ads that litter the sides of the website when users peruse it, much of which is racialized porn. A4A allows its users to create profiles in which they could describe themselves in terms of weight, height, penis size, skin color, whether they are out or not, can host at their place or not, and it

allows them to post images of themselves and make them private, public, or not post one at all. The users may also post their sexual health practices, and their sexual health status. Below is an example of an A4A profile:



- Send This Profile to a Friend
- Add Him to MY FRIENDS
- UNLOCK My Private Pic For Him
- Don't show my LAST VISIT

[Redacted] is  
Online 

USA - Texas [Redacted]  
8 miles  
[Contact](#)

### Profile



**19, 5'9", 225lb, 39w, Muscular, Brown Hair, Hairy Body, Other Ethnicity, Looking for Friendship, 1-on-1 Sex, 3some/ Group Sex, Relationship.**

I go party with friends every now and then, i love to have fun and go places, I am also on the dl so please keep it discrete.



**Alternative, Out No, Smoke No, Drink No, Drugs No, Zodiac Aries.**

**Top, 7" Cut, Safe Sex Only, HIV Negative, Prefer meeting at: Public Place.**

Figure 2. A4A profile example.

Here with a sample profile in which the location and name is blocked to protect the identity of the user, we see how the users may put up a picture if they so choose, describe their age, weight, height, hair color, race or ethnicity, what they are online for in terms of relationship, and anything about themselves. Particularly, they can put their penis sizes if they so choose, their sexual practice and whether it is safe sex or otherwise, and their HIV status as well as where they want to meet. The option to put their sexual practice and health status is also available. It is worth noting that the users are required to state their height, weight, race and other demographic characteristics but have the option to put their sexual practice or sexual health status, meaning many may opt out of even mentioning their practice or status. Participants were also recruited from A4A.

I also viewed ads from Craigslist allowing for greater understanding of how race and sexuality exist among the gay community. Given that Craigslist ad users expressed their own skin color, it provides a useful tool to examine the utility of race in the sexual market place. An example of an ad or profile considered to have colorblind content was “Sorry not into Blacks, not racist just a preference” although not as blatantly racist as signs saying “No niggers allowed,” help to illustrate how some people may racially discriminate in terms of partners but not see this as racism.

In-depth interviews were also collected with 16 MSMs. The men interviewed reflect the largest racial groups represented in El Paso, specifically, Latinos (N=4), Blacks (N=4), Whites (N=4), and mixed race (Black and Latino and White and Latino, and Black and White) (N= 4) (Table 1). One Black participant opted to describe himself as American rather than Black. The participants were between the ages of 20 and 58. I recruited two research assistants to help collect the data and conduct the interviews to minimize race of the interviewer effects where my own racial identity can influence the results. Particularly, I was concerned about “race of the interviewer effects” with my Afro-Latino racial identity. Hence, I matched the interviewees and to the respondents by race. Therefore, one of the research assistants was a Mexican male who was a member of a gay men’s fraternity. His participation in the

organization, as well as his work in an El Paso queer organization, gave me access to several more potential respondents interviewed and included in my study. He conducted interviews with Latino men in public spaces. One of the participants he interviewed identified as Latino but when asked to describe himself racially, he stated he had a Mexican mother and White father. This was unbeknownst to the Latino interviewer and because of this; we categorized this respondent as mixed-race. The second assistant was a straight White male educator. In order to recruit White respondents, he created a profile on A4A with a disclaimer that he is heterosexual but looking for White MSMs to interview for a study on race and sexuality. His profile was initially picture less with only the disclaimer visible. This resulted in very few men taking interest in the study despite our efforts to assure users online that someone would be interviewing them in person. After this, we adjusted the profile by adding his picture and keeping the disclaimer to assure the users that this was a legit study and that the person interviewing them was in fact the person on the profile. Both interviewers were given notebooks to carry during the interviews so that they were able to write down what they noticed during the interviews including the responses participants had to certain questions. I conducted interviews with Black men and mixed race (specifically Black and Latino MSMs). For the interviews, I began data collection with a purposive sampling technique. I posted ads online with the disclaimer to recruit participants. I posted on craigslist.com within the men seeking men section. Postings were announced in the city's gay magazine titled Bloke, on my profile on facebook.com, and through e-newsletters for Metropolitan Community Church (El Paso's sexually inclusive church). Both assistants were trained on how to interview the participants, how to probe for clarity, and how to maintain control of the interview. After each interview, I would debrief with the interviewers to make sure every question was asked and probed, if any questions made participants uncomfortable, and if they noticed certain questions elicited certain responses such as asking a question about racism and the respondent takes a lot of time to think about the question before answering or something similar. I also examined their notebooks to see if anything

was picked up on during the interview process that may be important to the study if any of which was included in this paper.

Table 1. Frequencies on Sample Characteristics

Age	f
20-29	5
30-39	4
40-49	4
50-59	3
60-69	0
Occupation	
Professional	8
Service	4
Retail	1
Manual Labor	1
Student	2
Racial/Ethnic Identity	
Black	3
White	4
Latino	4
Black and White	2
Latino and White	1
Black and Latino	1
no answer	1
Sexual Identity	
Gay	14
Straight	0
Bisexual	1
no answer	1
Gender Identity	
Masculine (masc)	8
Feminine (fem)	0
In between (masc & fem)	5
both (more fem)	1
both (more masc)	1
no answer	1
Socio-economic Status	
High Class	1
High middle	5
Middle	6
Lower Middle	1
Working Class	3

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. This was done purposefully so that any long pauses in between questions and responses could be understood in the context of the question. For example, a question regarding condom usages might garner a slight hesitation from respondents, suggesting unease with the questions. By transcribing everything, every pause, stutter, switch back and forth in a story and repeat of questions, I was able to get a better grasp of how participants felt and responded to questions, precisely because I was not there during the Latino, White, and mixed Latin and White participants interviews. The transcribed interviews were assigned pseudonyms and coded and analyzed through NVivo qualitative analysis software. At the onset of the transcribing process, I began picking up early themes about experiences in the gay community in terms of race and sexuality. Later using NVivo allowed me to generate more thorough themes that I could systematically organize relating to the intersections of race, sexuality, and sexual health practices into a clear format for me to read and follow. Interviews lasted approximately an hour. I received IRB approval for this study and all of the respondents provided written informed consent to participate in this study.

The questionnaire guide included demographic questions that allowed me to access participants' backgrounds (Appendix A). It was adapted from Plummer's (2005) instrument within her study on sexual racism but was modified by me with questions regarding the locale of my study on the border, race and condom usage, and online profile identity. The guide began with easier demographic questions in the beginning and led into harder questions about race and condom usage towards the end. This was purposefully done in order to establish trust at the onset and not push participants away that may have been with more difficult questions at the beginning. This also allowed for me to negotiation taboo subjects like unprotected sex and racial preferences in partners within my study by reserving them towards the end and building up to them. Regarding the type of questions, I immediately sought to gain an understanding of how respondents identified in terms of race/ethnicity and sexuality by asking them about their racial identity and sexual identity. Other questionnaire items included socio-economic status,

experiences in the gay community and perceptions of race in the gay community versus the straight community and condom usage, and perceptions about race and condom usage. In order to deal with sensitive subjects, I probed with various questions that could be seen to the participant as unrelated to the topic of race and sexuality, such as asking about preferences in partners that included everything from body build, to SES, and even their gender performance in order to facilitate a more conversational like atmosphere to the interviews.

At the end of the interview, participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions related to the subject matter addressed in the interview. They were also given the chance to ask the interviewer any questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

The following section is a breakdown of the results from the study addressing the initial research questions. It begins with the online environment and examines racism and racial constructions in the gay online community. From there I explore colorblind racism, and how race and sexuality interlock with sexual health, increasing sexual risk among the Collective Black. Lastly, I discuss the implications of the findings on sexual racism on sexual health.

### 4.1 Racism in Cyberspace

The internet presents the single largest venue for MSM to meet for friendship, dating, long term relationships, and sexual liaisons. As a venue for meeting people, online is increasingly popular and therefore online presentation of identity is equally important. For many MSMs, it is their first exposure to the sexual market place, their only interaction with other MSM, and their first exposure to sexual racism. As such, online social networking sites become the most vivid environments in which to examine racialization in a sexual setting, investigate the color-blind language used, understand the way race is performed in sexual contexts, lay witness to the exchange of erotic capital for racial mobility, and analyze the impact of sexual racism on sexual health. For this reason, the internet cannot be overlooked when addressing the questions in this study.

As previously noted, a dating website like A4A pays for itself using pornographic images of “Black Thugs” and “All American [White] Boys” (adam4adam.com, n.d.). Images taken from A4A demonstrates how Whiteness is constructed as American. In particular, White men are illustrated with six pack abs, light skin, and masculine demeanors and a sign that says “All American.” Graphic illustrations such as this personify White male’s sexual dominance of the other male. In contrast, the pornographic imagery representing Blacks depicted them with backwards caps, big penises, tattoos, and aggressive attitudes.

Online, Blacks and those mixed with Black MSM's deal with blatant racism, are not as desirable as sexual partners and many times are invisible to other MSMs. White MSMs, on the other hand, use the internet and colorblind racism to justify sexually racist preferences and beliefs, suggesting once again a tri-racial system of stratification does in fact exist within the realm of desire. To contextual this study, several craigslist.org ads from El Paso, TX were used to examine the intersections of race and sexuality. This method of examining craigslist ads and critiquing them is similar to the method used by McBride (2005). In the gay realm of craigslist ads and adam4adam.com profiles sexually racist requests ask for only White lovers and absolutely "No Blacks." Below is an example of the craigslist ads that reveal elements of race and desire in the gay community:

**Bottom for Top- white a plus - 21 (East)**

Bottom [receptive partner] hosting tops [insertive partner]. White preferred. Military is hot too. 21, one Hund forty[140], 5'9 hispanic, light skinned. GL[Good Looking] Clean [HIV negative] and ddf [drug and disease free] plz [please]. Stats [characteristics] first. Then pix [pictures]. I will reply with mine. I host.

We can see from the ad how that poster uses his erotic capital to gain partners. The way in which he describes himself as a "light skin" Hispanic helps to illustrate how Latin Americanization of the gay community takes place online through skin color segmentation. This highlights his Honorary White status. Plus his ethnicity and Whiteness is an example of the sexual attractiveness element of erotic capital being that he is exotic as a "Hispanic" but not dark enough to be unattractive. The way he describes his height and weight being proportional to his body suggests physical fitness, another element of erotic capital. Last, the way that he describes himself as "clean" and "drug and disease free" (ddf) illustrates the manner in which sexual health influences the sexual market place of desire.

Here we see how the White ad poster also highlights all the ways he fulfills different elements of erotic capital by emphasizing his “good looks,” muscular body, Whiteness and being the assertive partner during sex.

**Now? - m4m - 32 (El Paso)**

Anyone looking right now? Good looking, masculine, muscular White top guy here. looking for a vers or bottom guy for some hot fun. I prefer twinks [young, smooth men], jocks [athletes], average guys either White or Latino 18-32, just my preference. I can travel or host. HMU asap!

His ability to define what he desires and state his preferences suggest he is at the top of the racial hierarchy of desire. Most explicit is his preference for White or Latino partners, clearly rejecting Black men. Despite this blatant form of sexually racist discrimination, the poster responds that this is “just my preference,” expressing colorblind racism with an individualism framework.

The “soldier” is an interesting ad because he borrows the racialized term “down low” to describe himself even though it is consistently associated with Black and Latino men (Gonzales, 2007). Down low or undercover was a term used to describe Black men that had sex with men secretly but otherwise live a heterosexual life, many times even having female partners (Gonzales, 2007).

**Fuck my ass - 23**

I'm a soldier trying to keep on the downlow [straight acting, not out]. I want to be fucked in my ass. I don't usually suck dick but I'm not saying I won't. Send you age height cock size and please no black guys I'm just not into them. Send a face and cock pic or no reply

Despite his usage of a term used to describe MSMs of color, the ad poster demonstrates his sexually racist preference for “no black guys.” Still, he defends the comment with, “I’m just not into them,” cushioning the racism with colorblind racist ideology. This ad is also racist due to the essentializing of all Black men into a simple “*them*,” borrowing Black terms for his own benefit and rejecting Blacks at the same time. The ad below demonstrates how being Honorary White allows you to make sexually racist requests of potential partners such as demanding if they are Black that they must have a big penis, a racial stereotype.

### **Any Blk guy there? - m4m - 38 (All El Paso)**

Hi

I want to be with a nice blk guy, I'm mexican, 6'1, 34 w, white skin, cut, versatile, ddf, and hiv neg. and Clean.

You be: Black Guy, with Big D[Penis] Cut[circumcised], ddf, hiv neg, and Clean lets go play and have a great time together.

Hope to hear from the nice blk [Black] guy soon.

The ad poster is a Mexican man with "white skin," emphasizing his erotic capital as an Honorary White. The poster demands strictly a Black lover with a 'Big D' or penis. Here the poster expresses sexual racism by requesting Blacks for the sexual stereotypes associated with them.

What can be seen in this ad is the way the White poster loses elements of erotic capital by being a cross dresser, effecting the sexuality element of erotic capital but also his age, effecting the beauty element associated with youth.

### **hosting for big black cock - m4m - 50 (central)**

x [cross]dresser submissive white male seeks bbc [Big Black Cock] to suck then fuck if want my ass.. i am older but i do like making my man happy my lips are his ,,give me a try big dicked daddy

The loss of erotic capital for being too old and effeminate by cross-dressing has diminished the White respondent's desirability within the sexual market place of desire, decreasing his pool of potential partners. As a result he does not sexually discriminate against Blacks. Interestingly enough, the poster requests a "big black cock," demonstrating that no matter the loss, whiteness still gives you the power to choose a partner based on sexually racist stereotypes.

Lastly, even Black men can demonstrate sexual racism. By expressing his height, weight, and HIV status, he can use them as erotic capital that allows him access to White men.

### **Black guy 4 white - m4m - 29 (East El Paso)**

I am looking to hangout with a white guy around my age (maybe (hopefully) more) I am a top, ddf, 185lbs. 5 foot 7 I have pics for trade. Send pics please. Friends with benefits would be cool.

Still, the Black respondent can expect a one time, sexual tryst but can only “hope” for more when it comes to relationships. In the end, he may have to accept being “friends with benefits” is ‘cool’ enough.

As we can see from the ads, some White men and Honorary White men reject Blacks based on their skin color and how men of color have come to represent undesirability. Still, other White men may request men of color to fulfill sexual fantasies in a single night tryst while not having the commitment of long term relationships. Blacks, on the other hand, may face blatant racism, sexual racism, be sexually stereotyped and purposefully ignored. When White and Honorary White men do request them it is usually due to sexually racist stereotypes associated with the Black male body. Consequentially, a Black man may choose to take on the “hung” thug stereotype associated with him in order to elevate himself in the hierarchy of desire. This is an example of Hakim’s (2010) erotic capital. If the Black MSM chooses not to be racially stereotyped as “hung” or thug he is more likely to be subjected to racism. In regards to Latino men, they may emphasize their desire for White men by suggesting they are “GL” or good looking enough to attain a White partner due in part to their “light skin.” A “white skin’ Mexican is considered “Honorary White” and uses his privilege racial status over the Collective Black by even requesting a Black partner with a “Big D” or large penis, associating the Mandingo myth with Blackness. In order to get around the sexual market place of desire, erotic capital is used as currency. Online profiles are then used for the marketing of desire, adjusted and edited in order to maximize desirability and increase chances of finding a partner. As with the Jim Crow Era, seeing signs that say “No Blacks” returns in the form of craigslist ads in the new millennia. Yet this time, the “no blacks guys” is quickly cushioned with the color-blind response, “I am just not into them,” removing the racist intent behind the statement. Color blindness is a racial ideology that uses “collective understanding and

representation produced by social groups to explain their world” (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). As previously noted, it says race does not matter when it comes to relationships. With the craigslist ads, we see just how prevalent race is and the existence of a racial hierarchy despite the fact that color-blind racism denies the importance of race in society, pretends that social inequality has no ties to race, and vilifies those that mention race (also see Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Results from the in-depth interviews also revealed the prevalence of sexual racism online.

Specifically, many of the participants found ways in which to navigate the sexual marketplace of desire online within the creation of their profiles. When asked how they identify online, Josue, a Latino MSM stated:

Josue: when you set up your profile it asks you questions like what’s your race and what’s your body type and of course you could always omit those but I feel like if you fill those out it helps the person to kind of measure you up as far as like maybe putting your age or height, your weight. It helps with saying like oh well this is how this person is, you know, like this is their body type or whatever, so I do put those but I don’t emphasize one over another. Like I just simply fill them out from the drop box and that’s it... Sometimes people lie about their age, especially in the gay community, but I’m not ashamed of my age. I put body type to be average, black hair, brown eyes, um I don’t think it asks if you’re masc or fem, cus I don’t remember putting anything for that... so I just put that as bottom... And what I’m looking for I put “dates,” I put “sex, relationship,” well actually I put “one on one sex” because some put group and I don’t put that...

Josue helps us understand the mechanics of the online realm that allow users to use drop slots with answers to questions pertaining to weight, height, penis size and race. While in the physical world allows for only so much expression of racial and sexual desire, the online realm fosters environments of racial and sexual stratification through the mechanisms of the profiles. Quantifying one’s body, as Josue explains, “Helps the person to kind of measure you up,” of course, at a distance where one can maintain ideals associated with race without having to be confronted with them in person. Lying about your age represents how youth is valued in the gay marketplace of desire and older age may represent a loss in erotic capital.

**Latino Interviewer: Do you show pictures of your face or your body?**

Ricardo: just my face.

**Latino interviewer: Why do you choose to present yourself in this way?**

Ricardo: Because I would expect the same from someone else. I want to know who I'm talking to. I don't want to be talking to a nipple, to a chest, or to an ass crack, you know. So that's my face and that's how I would talk to someone if I would talk to them.

Ricardo, a 30 year-old light skin Latino, posts a picture of himself on his profile in hopes of attracting guys with pictures on their profiles as well. Still while some may place their 'pics' and 'stats' on their profile in hopes of getting the same, the race of the user may effect who talks to them and effectively shut them out of the equal trade. When asks if racial dynamics were the same online, Damarcus stated:

... No no no no no. No I don't think they're the same because this is the funny thing, when I first moved here, I had an adam4adam account and on my profile you couldn't see my face just from here up, just the chest right. And the funny thing was I put that I was Black on there and I didn't get as many hits. As soon as I put mixed, (snaps fingers) hits came from everywhere, hits came from everywhere, which was the funny thing. And the number 1 question was, "What are you mixed with?" Same body same picture, the only thing I changed was Black to mixed....

Damarcus explains how as a Black gay man associating with whiteness or anything that "brightens the race" helps him gain mobility up the hierarchy of desire. Deshawn, a 40 year-old Black-Mexican man, felt like the online realm allotted more upfront racism. Specifically, he stated:

...Because I think, I think um, that the people, I think online have a definite idea of what they want. But if you're not what they want, they let you know. Or if you don't fit a certain mold, they let you know and they move on. Um, you know, so I think online, it's easier because you're not in front of that person so they can be more of their own selves, you know, like... all they see is the picture and they're like, uh, no. To where I think if they were in front of you, they'd try to be politically correct and maybe, you know, polite....

When asked if the people they were attracted to in the past changed in the present, the majority of the participants said yes. Despite this admission, what we desire may change from one moment to the next, as Deshawn explains; people still go online with "a definite idea of what they want." The responses about the online realm seem to suggest that seeking a partner for sex or relationships online creates an

environment where desire is fixed. Thus, people may express what they want more blatantly without remorse. When asked if racial dynamics are the same online, Xavier a half Latino and half Black MSM responded:

Xavier: No. I feel like online you create like a pseudo person that represents you but isn't really you. And so you get to, if you so choose, to be harsher and be stricter on what you're looking for.

McBride (2005) discussed a veil of anonymity online as the means for people to be as open and honest about their feelings and desires as they want because no one will know. Xavier, in the above quote, seems to have touched upon this very same veil in his discussion of racial dynamics online. Clearly, the veil is used to subjugate members of the Collective Black to blatant forms of racism. Similarly, Josue discusses the blatant forms of racism online shielded with the veil of anonymity:

I think they are probably even worse. Like people are crude online and they tend to say a lot of nasty things. Like the online world acts like a little mask for you and people feel more empowered to say what they want to say and so people would say things online that they would never say in person so yeah I think the racial dynamics is probably even worse. If you go online you see on there like I don't like Blacks I don't like Whites, don't be Asian, like don't talk to me, just very negative. I see that a lot.

Both Xavier and Josue mention how your online profile may represent a different you that is not "really you" and so expressing racial desire despite the possibility that that could change is allowed if you "so choose." While the veil of anonymity is used by those occupying the higher stratas to express blatant racism towards the Collective Black, once the racism is confronted, the Honorary White and White use colorblind racism as a means to minimize the racism or make it nothing more than an individual preference.

It is the reality that most men will meet online and the mechanism of the online world that foster racial environments where sexual racism exists. Despite the hostility that may be found online, a vast majority of the participants felt online dating was one of the main methods to meeting other men,

leaving other options off the table for MSM and thus forcing them to be exposed to the racialized realm of cyber space. Miguel, a 31 year-old working class Latino claimed:

Unfortunately, here in El Paso, we don't have so many options so it's either online or at the bars for most of the part. I mean I'm pretty sure you could find someone at school sometimes or at work, or at the store, it depends, but it's also high percentages of just bars and online.

Miguel, clearly felt other options of meeting men were out of the picture and that it came down mostly to online. In this environment race and sexuality interlock shaping the hierarchy of desire.

Participants manage their identities online in order to present themselves in such a way that promotes an equal social exchange. Yet sexual racism locks men occupying the bottom strata out of a fair exchange and may force some to manipulate their profiles in an effort to get more notice as we saw with Damarcus.

#### **4.2 Racial Hierarchy in the Gay Community**

In this section I expand upon Bonilla-Silva's (2010) Latin Americanization Thesis of tri-racial hierarchy to examine the intersection of race in the gay community in El Paso. Furthermore, I expand upon the Latin Americanization Thesis by analyzing how sexuality intersects with the three proposed racial categorizations. Is it possible for the Latin Americanization Thesis to be projected in the form of a hierarchy of desire? When considering desire and sexuality is there a re-ordering in Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization thesis? In this section I will address the questions above.

To reiterate, according to Bonilla-Silva's Latin Americanization Thesis Blacks and dark-skinned Latinos occupy the Collective Black category at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, multiracial and light-skinned Latinos occupy the middle strata as Honorary Whites, and Whites occupy the top strata. Evident of the Collective Black racial category, Will, a 57 year-old dark-skinned man felt uncomfortable with identifying as Black. In particular, he states:

In terms of race and ethnicity I have always called myself an American and that is the way it will always be. When I was younger, just to elaborate, when I was younger I noticed a trend in

America where they had to classify everybody and I don't like labels and I don't like classifications. And there was a time when being called "Black" was actually an ethical slur. And being Afro-American is actually inappropriate because at that time there was no proof, even though everyone says, "Oh well you can draw your lines back to Africa." There's no proof of that. Just because you have dark-skin does not mean you're from Africa it just means that that's the easiest place we can put you in and I don't agree with that at all. So in my family, because we are mixed at a certain level, now whose line do you really want to follow? And which path do you really want to follow? So I was born an American, I am an American, and that's the bottom line. And that's where I'll draw the line and stop there so any further than that is irrelevant.

Will resists the racial labels and perceives that he is racialized as African due to his dark-skin.

Moreover, he chooses instead to not identify as "Afro-Americans," a dated term for Blacks, but simply identifies as "American" alone. This is in line with colorblindness reference that Bonilla-Silva (2010:23)

refers to as "We are all Americans." When asked if he always had those beliefs or if he learned them,

Will replied:

... it was something I learned from readings because kind of like a scientist, you have to have proof before this is a definite. So in speaking to all of my generations of family members that I knew of, there was no proof we were from Africa. It was an assumption and so we left it at that. The sad part is a lot of history or culture at some point, you can say, that a lot of dark-skinned people especially in the 1800s or 1700s, if you had dark skin the assumption is you are a slave and slaves were treated a certain way. They were bought and sold so you really lost track of a certain lineage in history and so my family when the slave came in we had families from different races...Anglo...you name it we had it in our family so which side do we follow? Well obviously the dominate side is my parents, but when you go back and follow my parent's roots it's that connection...

Will's response is extremely contradictory saying at first there is no proof of African lineage but then mentioning African ancestry and its ties to slave lineage. Significantly, Will acknowledges that historically dark skin has been associated with slavery, and even mentions how being Black was at one point an "ethnic slur." Despite being a dark-skin man, Will specifically makes reference to his ancestry as being part Anglo. Will's reflections on his decision not to associate as Afro-American may be associated with *internalized racism* where members of exploited groups internalized and acted upon those negative perceptions about themselves and other members of their own racial/ethnic group (see

Padilla, 2004; Morales 2011). In this case, Will has ascribed to societal views of Blackness as undesirable, even though he could not so easily escape this association.

Not only does racial self-identification matter but also how others perceive you due to your race. Tyrone, a light-skinned, 55 year-old, Black school teacher perceives that Black men are at the bottom of the hierarchy of desire. When asked if and how his race impacts his sexuality, he mentions, “I guess when I was growing up, you would meet guys in the clubs and they’ll talk to you, but they wouldn’t walk out with you. Then you would see them in the store, and you know they’re ready to meet, discuss, and do things.” Tyrone felt that because of his race potential mates were embarrassed to walk out of the club with him and preferred to establish a connection outside of the gay spaces. White racial biases in standards of beauty are reflected in Tyrone’s story. Here, Tyrone suggest that as a Black man he is not considered a suitable mate for a relationship but ok to be seen with in non-gay spaces, possibly even ok for sex but not a relationship. As such, Blackness is an undesirable characteristic in the gay marketplace of desire suggesting that the Latin Americanization Thesis that posits Collective Blacks at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Another display of the tri-racial stratification system in the gay community is evident in the manner in which participants prioritized their sexual identities and racial identities. Many of the Black participants felt like they had no choice in the matter and were at the mercy of the perceptions of others. When asked if he would prioritize your racial identity over your sexual identity? Jaden responded: “Yes, because it’s obvious (laughs) um you know people always ask about racial identity as opposed to sexuality, and well as an African American you don’t have a choice. You’re Black when you’re seen, so that’s first. That’s always first priority. It’s how you’re perceived.” Jaden, a 47 year-old stresses how the ability to choose racial identity over sexuality is not available to Blacks. Will echo’s the sentiment by Jaden:

One of the challenges that a lot of dark skinned people have, I think in America, is they don't have a choice. You go for a job interview they see your skin and automatically they make assumptions, they hear you speak, they make assumptions; they see how you're dressed and make assumptions. You can hide your sexuality but your race you can't hide. So what I learned through the period of time is to accept myself for who I am and be happy and not really care about what others think.

Again, the ability to choose is not within reach for those who are Black reaffirming the literature (Plummer, 2005) that asserts this. Will also helps illuminate the way in which race extends beyond skin color. Being Black, according to Will, says something about the "way you speak" and "the clothes you wear" that may lead to "assumptions," giving weight to the argument that race is a performance. When asked how his race/ethnicity impacts his sexuality, Damarcus, a 31 year-old bar tender explained:

Damarcus: Well I think people consider me to be...they expect me to be more ghetto, rough, and thuggish, based on the way that I look. These are the things that I have gotten since I've been here. But it's...I hear it a lot when they get to know me they tell me I'm nothing about what I look like.

**Black interviewer: hmm I wonder what that means.**

Damarcus: it's just like well look how big I am, then you hear me talk and it's like a softer voice and things like that.

**Black interviewer: Ok um what other ways do you think it has impacted your sexuality?**

Damarcus: Well a lot of people automatically assume me to be this straight up "top".

**Black interviewer: Yea**

Damarcus: You know what I mean but it's like I'll bottom every once and awhile. I consider myself more verse. But when it comes to that that is what I have encountered too...

Damarcus too explains how being Black means more than just your skin color and goes into the realm of performance. Specifically, being Black is a personification of things "ghetto, rough, and thuggish."

Although Damarcus identifies as "verse" or willing to be the dominate and passive partner during sex, he is almost always assumed to be the "top" or aggressor. Similarly, when asked how race /ethnicity impact his sexuality, Jaden responded:

um well it impacts it in ways that people perceive you based on stereotypes. Um of course. In an average society you're perceived as dominant, um you have a big dick, athletic, um so it impacts it from that perception. For me personally, it...it...it's just normal. I mean it doesn't matter. Now

I can't say I don't play on it sometimes (laughs) like when I use to live in Juarez [Mexico].

One again, Jaden supports the previous statement by Damarcus albeit with a slight caveat, he sometimes “plays” on it like when he was residing in Juarez, Mexico. As the literature helps us understand, Blackness is still an undesirable “trait” to have in Mexico and may also occupy the lowest strata of desire, but the stereotyped dominance and “big dick” perception give some Blacks who ‘play” into the stereotype erotic capital, allowing them access to the higher stratas which give its occupants greater choices of sexual partners. This realization may allow a refiguring of the tri-racial stratification triangle.

Mixed race men and light-skin Latinos reveal ways in which they are also not occupiers of the top strata, but are not as undesirable as the Collective Black. As Bonilla-Silva suggests, perceived light skin Latinos and mixed race people are considered “Honorary White” and thus given some of the benefits of white privilege in contrast to individuals categorized as “Collective Black.” Some of the interviews revealed such privilege. Josue, a light-skin, middle class 26 year-old described how his race impacts his sexuality stating “I honestly don't think it impacts it a whole lot in terms of society. I think it impacts it more culturally, like what family, as far as how family accepts it and what they think of it, but society, in this society, I don't think it has much of an impact.” Josue gives us insight into the world of an “Honorary White” who has the privilege of not feeling like his race impacts his social status “a whole bunch.” Where the Black participants had internalized racism perceived they were not given an option of whether to prioritize their race over their sexuality, and since they were going to be seen in racialized ways some decided to “play” into the stereotype to acquire erotic capital. Josue, on the other hand, felt his race did not impact him socially. Despite this privilege, Josue does in fact admit it affects him culturally, a reference to his Mexican heritage and the ties to his family who may or may not be accepting of his sexuality. While the literature affirms Latino MSMs experience homophobia and racism in a similar capacity to Black MSMs (Diaz et al., 2001), in this study, taking skin-color into account illustrates that light- and medium-skinned Latinos such as Josue and Tony occupy a higher position in

the racial strata than dark-skinned Latinos and Blacks (Demarcus). Tony, a 44 year-old medium-skin Latino, also furthers the hypothesis. When asked how race and ethnicity impact sexuality he stated: “Hmm...it’s definitely a limiting factor in those that choose me and to some degree I tend to choose partners, sexual partners or relationship partners either off of them being Latino or being white.” Tony illustrates internalized racism. He perceives that his partners loss status when they get involved with him because of his race/ethnicity. Tony makes it very clear his race or ethnicity may impact his sexuality by being a “limiting factor in those that choose me.” Simultaneously, Tony is not colorblind; rather he is overt about his racial preferences and did not try to hide them. Tony’s fit body, medium-skin complexion, and masculinity give him erotic capital and thus the option to choose explicitly sexual partners or relationships with partners that are “Latino” or “White.” Tony does show a sign of being an “Honorary White” given he had the access to choose a partner from the top of the strata, namely Whites. As such, “Honorary Whites” have the power to choose sexual partners, unlike many “Collective Blacks” but their access to the top strata is still very limited in that they may also not be desired because of their race/ethnicity and thus subjected to sexual racism.

Lastly, Derek, a 20 year-old mixed race (a Scottish and Egyptian dad and African American mother) explains the multiple ways his race and sexuality collide:

Because I’m mixed I think I fall into a kind of niche kind of thing because you know you’re reading craigslist ‘Black don’t apply, femmes don’t apply,’ I think because of my [race] like I would get tossed aside because of what I look like in a way, and that’s just by hooking up and things like that. Because I think we all have a certain type of people that we look for and whether or not we want to say it or not we are all racist in identifying the traits we all look for, like I personally don’t find Black people attractive. There’s a few that I do but for the most part I don’t find them as attractive. If I was in a room with a White guy, Latino guy, and a Black guy, I would go for White, Latino and then Black. Unless it was Denzel, not even Denzel, I don’t even know.

Derek’s comment is very telling of how sexual racism affects the gay community. Being a mixed race man, he understands that he could face sexual rejection based on race, but he acknowledges that

everyone has some sort of preference when it comes to attraction. Indeed, he admits to not finding Black men attractive even though he is mixed with Black. This revelation demonstrates how sexual racism can result in internalized racism. Derek also explains that when given the option between different races, he prefers White first, Latino second and unless the man was “Denzel,” Black last. And even if the man was in fact Denzel Washington, a Black sex symbol, Derek still does not know if he would prefer him more than Whites or Latinos, thus establishing a *racial hierarchy of desire* where Whites are the most desire, the Latinos and last Blacks. Here he reiterates the tri-racial system in the gay community that is reminiscing of the Latin Americanization Thesis, but now we get a sense of how it manifest into sexual racism.

**Black Interviewer: Um what are your experiences as a mixed male in the gay community here?**

Derek: Um there’s been certain when people will be like, “oh you’re Black I like you.” Like my first boyfriend had a thing for Black guys, which now I’m like oh so cuz I got a big nose that’s good... I think I’ve had far more positive than negative because of my lighter skin intonation so I guess like because I guess I don’t look more African American, that’s kind of a good thing in that sense, for where we are not that being dark is a bad thing honey, but just because I know in my opinion I think being Black is a fetish in El Paso because it’s so uncommon and it’s such, cause when your Black in El Paso there’s very few people who look like me, ...Black, your either super, super, super like you’re actual Black, like there’s no in between usually in El Paso, so I think that’s why it kind of benefits in a way because I don’t completely fall into the niche of being that fetish. Like I’ve never had anyone say, “Oh you Black I don’t like you,” but I’ve heard people say that about Blacks...like me myself for example, I can personally say I don’t find Black people attractive so I know there has to be other’s that feel that way.

Derek clearly explains how his light skin gives him “Honorary White” status compared to the Collective Black. Derek first acknowledges that his race may get him “tossed aside” had it not been for his “lighter skin intonation.” And although he clarifies with the dark skin interviewer, “not that being dark is a bad thing honey,” he makes clear there’s “very few people who look like me,” once again reinforcing the tri-racial system of stratification. Despite all this, Derek still chose to identify as an African American.

Derek perceives that his Blackness provides erotic capital in El Paso because he is seen as racially exotic in a predominately Latina/o city.

For those in the top racial strata, such as Whites, they perceive that their race does not matter when it comes to everyday societal experiences. As White males who American society immediately dubs as attractive and the most desired because of their skin complexion, their erotic capital gives them the power to choose their partners and the privilege of how they want to identify, all the while ignoring the racial realities of the other two lower stratas. A plurality of the White participants interviewed would prioritize their sexual over their racial identity and felt like their race did not impact their sexuality at all.

**White Interviewer: Would you prioritize your race over your sexual identity?**

Sam: No.

**White Interviewer: No. Okay, um, how do you think your race impacts your sexuality?**

Sam: It doesn't.

**White Interviewer: It doesn't at all?**

Sam: No.

**White Interviewer: Okay. And uh...**

Sam: It may contribute to how often I get some but no...

Sam, a White 30-year-old who is HIV positive highlights how he does not believe his race impacts his sexuality at all. Precisely so, he does not prioritize his race over his sexuality, yet when probed a little more he does sheepishly state "it may contribute to how often I get some but no." Although the majority of White participants felt their race did not impact their sexuality, Sam, reveals a moment of recognition that it may in fact impact those that find him attractive and how often he is able to have sex. Conversely, Sam admitted to getting 'lots of hate' for revealing his HIV status on his online dating profile and deciding to leave this out of his identity online. This suggests that while he may be desired because of his race, he is also lowered in desirability hierarchy due to being HIV positive. This suggests that if the Latin Americanization Thesis is useful in examining the hierarchy of desire a refiguration is necessary noting the influence of sexual health in gay community. Thus, sexual health can shape the loss or gain of erotic capital which can also aid in ascension or descention in the racial hierarchy of desire. Keeping in mind that Hakim (2010) theorizes everyone has erotic capital in some form of one or more of the six elements, we can see how some men may use their erotic capital to move up the tri-racial stratification system and others may be moved down depending on their lack of erotic capital. Hence, Sam maybe

White and his whiteness maybe constructed as the most desired on the racial hierarchy, but since he is HIV positive, this reflects a lack of the “fitness” element of erotic capital and therefore decreases his desirability and lowers him on the racial hierarchy of desire.

Despite the belief by many that we are living in a post-racial world (Wise, 2010), blatant forms of racism are still taking place in the gay community. This is especially true for those considered Collective Black. The racism was in overt forms like racial slurs hurled at members of the Collective Black and in more covert forms of racial preference for partners (i.e. sexual racism). When asked if respondents have seen racism in the gay community, unanimously all the Black respondents answered with a yes. Indeed, some even gave explicit detail of their trials and tribulations of being Black MSM in the gay community. As Michael states:

.... Just like I was talking to you earlier about being called a “nigger” and stuff like that but it’s you...I know that if I were to react on to those people and fight with them I could get this bar shut down just because of my actions so it’s kind of like you’re damned if you do and you’re damned if you don’t. But I’ve seen it and even beyond that, even other Hispanic people calling other Hispanic people racial slurs like “wet back” and stuff like that and certain sayings that I can’t remember now in Spanish that are racist and that are you know towards White people that as well. I mean you hear it all the time. Like sometimes they are just saying it because they think its ok to say it but once you get too much alcohol it does turn into a negative thing, you know. They start using it to degrade you, to hurt you, and stuff like that. I hear a lot of that. Just being at the bar and listening to conversations...

Michael, a 31 year-old Black man, makes it clear that not only has he experienced racism, but he experienced it in its most blatant form, even being called a “nigger.” Michael also expresses how the racism has not just been directed to other Blacks but also from Latinos to other Latinos. The derogatory term “wetback” and its association with citizenship status are being used here to insult other Latinos presumably of a lower status. Michael suggests that his working class status might place him in a compromising situation in regards to dealing with racial epithets. The closing of the bar due to a violent outburst from Michael meant you’re “damned if you do and you’re damned if you don’t” because it

would mean that he either puts up with the racism or he is short on tips due to closing the bar early. As Michael's response demonstrates, many Blacks feel they must deal with overtly racist language or face losing their jobs.

Even being Latino and mixed with Black meant that some of the respondents experienced blatant racism. Black-Latino mixed respondent Xavier felt like he also experienced racism but in a more subtle fashion than full Black Michael. When asked if he experienced racism, Xavier responded with:

Yes. Well like I was saying earlier, online, no Blacks, um or no Asians or I prefer Whites and I would say I see that kind of racism.

**Black interviewer: Well do you consider that racism?**

Xavier: Yeah because it's discriminating someone based on who they are it is something that they can't control, like I was born Black, I shouldn't be found unattractive because of that. Oh my god, I feel like ... Like these...these things that I'm describing shouldn't um influence your decision on whether I'm attractive or not. It should be based on who I am and my color is part of who I am and so is my race, however, you should look past the surface into what is inside.

While there were no blatant racist name calling shouted at Xavier in contrast to Michael, he did feel the inability of some to see him as an entire person and others not being willing to look past the color of his skin as racism. Xavier uses online profiles as examples of this racism, where preference is argued by some as an "individual choice" and not part of a larger system.

### **4.3 Color-Blind Racism**

Although overt forms of racism are still present, particularly for those in the Collective Black group, racism also arises as colorblindness. The Latin Americanization Thesis of tri-racial stratification is sustained through the ideology of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). While Latin Americanization promotes a tri-racial system of stratification, colorblind racism is used to shield racist beliefs or languages and scorn those who mention race, thus maintaining the oppression through covert language and beliefs. I found evident of all four of the frames of color blind racism (individualism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism).

An illustration of colorblindness as individualism can be seen in Brad, a 23 year-old who is Latino mixed with White. When asked about whether finding someone attractive because of their race is the same as other physical characteristics, Brad felt that everyone had their own type:

Um no. To be honest with you it's not but I mean everybody has their own type just because one person finds somebody attractive somebody else might not. You know it all just depends on that person and whether you think their attractive or not. Like I can look at a bunch of Mexican guys and be wow their attractive and I can look at a bunch of other ones and be yeah their attractive. You know? It's just it just depends on the person

**Latino Interviewer: Would you say that racial preferences are a form of racism?**

Brad: Well I don't think I would go so far as to say it's racism but I mean you do exclude a good amount of people or say a possible date or boyfriend or partner that might be really good for you or you could connect on and you might not even give them the chance just because of their skin color so you know it's like discriminating but I wouldn't call it racism.

Brad hesitated when he's comment about "everyone has their own type" which is a phrase that is frequently used to justify racial preferences, suggesting individual factors are the main reason for racial preference. Again, a larger racial structure that may influence *who* we desire and *why* is ignored. This employs an individual choice framework of colorblind racism to insist that racial preferences are based on choice and not a form of racism.

On the other hand, many of the White respondents and one mixed with White respondent were either unaware of any racism in the gay community or reluctant to associate racially motivated behavior with racism, employing the minimization of racism framework of colorblind racism. Kraig, for instance, stated when asked about:

I am probably a poor judge because I have always been colorblind you know, I really am. It is just that growing up as a minority I tend to get that way but um...that's a good questions and I saw some in the 80s again but its more and again with the environment I was in I was always in bars in the gay community because there wasn't...for me there wasn't much else to see you know...

Kraig, a 47 year-old, White, middle class gay man, felt like racism was a thing of the past more so than the present. Kraig even describes himself as colorblind because of his numerical minority status in the city and his inability to speak Spanish in this predominately Latina/o city. Yet despite the articulation of

the Black participants to the racism they faced, Kraig suggested racism was a past phenomenon, minimizing the racism. Similarly, a second White participant did not believe that racism currently existed in the gay community. Specifically, Chris stated, “Um I would probably say no I have never experienced it. I would probably say if there is racism it is probably miniscule because the city is not a racist city as a whole. The respondent Chris, who described himself as a 31 year-old lower middle class Anglo, held colorblind notions of race in the gay community in contrast to the Collective Black. In response to a question asking about his experiences as a White gay male in the gay community along the border, he responded by saying he was, ‘an oddity or the minority, and so... often times I’m the, since it’s not what most people are, it’s what most people desire.’” While Chris denies racism in the gay community, he admits that his white privilege contributes to his erotic capital by making him a desired “oddy” He did not mention his height, or weight, or anything else, rather it is his race that makes him desirable.

Chris also illustrates an example of colorblindness as naturalization (framework that allows Whites to naturalize racial inequality as inevitable). Chris mentioned:

Um..I think that if there is racism in this city, it is probably much worse in the “straight world” versus the “gay world” because there are some other factors and dynamics that go into play. There are a lot of Black people that live on the northeast, a lot of Hispanic people in the lower valley, and a lot of White people on the Westside. And because primarily people are, a majority of people are straight; there is probably more racism in the straight culture of society versus the gay.

Chris suggests that if racism is in the city it is much more of a heterosexual problem than a homosexual issue, suggesting that the naturally larger heterosexual community has more racism than the gay community and using the self-segregation of races as an explanation of how this naturally happens. The respondent suggests that racism does take place in the neighborhoods of the city. While he suggests that racism is just a thing that befalls heterosexuals, he fails to mention that the “Black people that live on the Northeast” or “Hispanic people in the lower valley” may also be gay and therefore experiencing not only

homophobia but racism as well. Chris employs the naturalization framework to describe the racism that naturally happens more in the straight community and he promotes the mythology that the gay community is not racist.

Another form of colorblindness is cultural racism where the situations Minorities are in are based on their cultures that promote laziness or poverty and not on a structural system of racism. When asked about his experiences in the gay community, Mark, a 58 year-old had this to say:

Um there are two or three things I can point out. One is the Latino culture has uh an interesting reverence for people whom they put into authority figures so because of my age I am treated with a lot more respect than I would be if I were closer to the age of uh the average gay man that I meet in public. Uh the second thing is there seems to be some kind of uh not respect I don't know what the correct word is, for uh Whites versus Latinos. That it has seemed to me that uh Latinos look at White people as being authority figures. As being wealthier, as being more educated, as being more powerful there are a number of other adjectives that demeans themselves as a race. Now I don't know if that's automatic I think it's uh subconscious. But I think that there is something built into the Latino culture particularly on the border where Whites are revered a little bit more than they should be.

Mark's searched for the right words to communicate his white privilege. His comment helps us to understand how he views himself as a White man, and how he thinks the Latino community perceives him. Mark believes that Latinos, especially those along the border, have a certain reverence for White wealth, education, and power in stark contrast to other Latinos. Overall, we see how Latinos may occupy a higher strata than Blacks, but they are shut out of the top strata that Whites occupy because of the way, according to Mark, they "demean themselves as a race." Accordingly, there is something "built into Latino culture" that gives Whites their prestige "more than they should be." Here, the system that keeps Whites at the top and people of color at the bottom is not mentioned and instead the weight of White oppression is shifted to Latinos to take the blame. Mark then employs cultural racism to defend his position.

In sum, the respondents here suggest that racism is a phenomenon of the past, more of a problem for heterosexuals and not for homosexuals, and even though some practices may be discriminatory, they

would not go as far as to call it racism. Some may even suggest that culture is to blame for the racism. This is opposite to the experiences of Blacks and mixed with Black respondents who have been blatantly insulted with racial slurs, not desired as potential lovers and made to feel invisible. Colorblind racism is used to justify their beliefs and positions on matters, suggesting once again a tri-racial system of stratification does in fact exist.

#### **4.4 Sexual Health**

Racial and sexual ideology in the gay community impacts risky behaviors that influence sexual health such as condom usage during sexual intercourse. As previously noted, the research suggests that several factors affect condom usage such as individuals perceiving that it is their right to choose to partake in unprotected sex (Adam, 2005; Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004), the belief that medication has improved to the extent that it has lessened the fear of HIV/AIDS (Halkitis, Parsons, & Wilton, 2003; Sheon & Crosby, 2004), being afraid that you may lose a partner who does not like sex with condoms (Sheon & Crosby, 2004), finding that condom-less sex feels better (Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004; Dilley et al., 2002; Mansergh et al., 2002), wanting to stop worrying about getting infected (Dilley et al., 2002; Halkitis et al., 2003), and feeling like intimacy is tied to condom-less sex (Mansergh et al., 2002; Theodore, Duran, Antoni, & Fernandez, 2004). Han's (2008) work linked sexual racism in the gay community with an increase in the risk of HIV infection among API. My findings suggest that sexual racism may indeed play a role in condom usage and safer sex for Honorary Whites and the Collective Black.

Many of the respondents reported some of the same reasons as the above for why some MSM may not use condoms during sexual intercourse including feeling like condom less sex feels better, not worrying about infection and wanting to please a partner. Despite this, a majority of the respondents felt these reasons did not vary by race. Still, I found that those occupying the top White strata were the most prepared to use a condom for sex. Possible explanations for this suggested sexual racism or racial

discrimination during sex played a role. For instance, when asked which race is most likely to have sex within their own race, a majority of respondents answered the White race. When probed why he felt like this was the case, light-skinned Latino Tony said, “I think the degrees of racism within this country still exist, maybe not as strongly but still are around.” Tony clearly felt racism had a role to play with why there are racial preferences when it comes to sexual activity and that Whites preferred other Whites over Latinos and Blacks. With Whites selecting each other for sex and rejecting other groups, they may be keeping the bottom two stratas out of the top strata, where condom usage occurs more frequently. Deshawn, a Black and Latino mix, also felt Whites did not participate in sex with Blacks and other minorities because of sexual racism. Deshawn responded:

Because there’s a few people that...you know that I’ve met and they’re really nice people but they’re like, you know what, you’re just not my type. It was that way of them telling me, I don’t date black people. And so I would definitely say, not even white, let’s just say Caucasians because that would take care of a whole large group of people.

Again, Deshawn demonstrates how the selectivity of Whites for other Whites results in his rejection. This suggests that the bottom two stratas may not have access to the top where condom usage occurs frequently. If you are sitting at the top of the racial stratification system, you have the power to be the most selective in choice of partners. This may make Whites the most attractive to other MSMs and therefore the most desired because of their sexual power to choose partners. Does this then mean that if Whites are constructed as the most desired and Blacks the least, then a Black man may participate in unprotected sex with a White man if he asks in order to please his White partner and have more access to other White men in the top strata? Black participant Tyrone’s response seems to suggest so.

**Black interviewer: Okay the next section is for sexual health risks. What factors do you believe may cause someone to not use a condom?**

Tyrone: The attraction.

**Black interviewer: The attraction?**

Tyrone: Yeah...I'm just going to tell you, I'm telling you the truth.

Tyrone makes it clear that “the truth” is attraction may have a large role in the decision to use condoms or not. The reference to attraction points out that those who are found to be most attractive may have the power to negotiate condom usage with others found to be less desirable, as suggested by Han (2008). The interviews suggest many of the reasons why some men may engage in unprotected sex vary in accordance with the literature (Adam, 2005; Carballo-Diequez & Bauermeister, 2004). I argue, the connection between someone’s attractiveness which, is tied to their position in the tri-racial stratification system and their erotic capital, influences condom usage.

When asked if the respondents felt condom usage varied by race, all unanimously said “no.” When asked if condom usage was higher with certain races than others, most respondents said “no” with a few stating Whites used condoms more often. Sam, a white MSM, for instance, when asked if condom usage varied by race said “Um yes and no, coming from other cities and having lived in other cities and growing up not from here, I’ve noticed that in a lot of cities a lot of white people will use condoms.” Sam, who is White HIV positive MSM expressed that no race, in particular, was more willing to engage in condom less sex more than the other. Still, he felt in that in “a lot of cities White people will use condoms.” Similarly, Chris, a White respondent, responded to the same question, “Um (Long pause) I do believe that probably that’s kinda going along with the last question that minorities, Hispanic or African American or any minorities probably are less likely to use a condom than people of...than Anglos.” Chris, who initially did not believe there was a racial difference pertaining to condom usage, then, for no clear reason changed his response at the end of the interview believing that minorities are probably less likely to wear condoms than Anglos. The long pause in his response may signify his unease with the question.

While both White participants held this position, Josue also felt Whites were more prepared for sex. Specifically, he claimed:

Yeah, I actually do I would say that Caucasians are probably the most careful group, the ones that I have been with I always say like oh well I have a condom or I ask them, do you have one and they're like oh yeah, yeah of course and they're always ready whereas sometimes with other races they don't always have condoms. I always carry them, but if I ask them, oh do you have a condom they might not always so I would say Caucasians are probably the race that is more prepared.

While the data does not demonstrate a strong relationship with race and condom usage, the pattern developing tends to be Whites who consistently use condoms and minorities who may not be as prepared or have as much access to protection.

It was imperative also to see if the online realm affected condom usage. This is an important question that Klein (2010) explored but entirely within websites specifically designed for men who seek unprotected sex i.e. barebackers.com. I attempt to answer this question in regards to a popular website (Adam4adam) that caters to a larger variety of men and a racially diverse group of men. When asked if they think men who meet online are less likely to use condoms, the responses were mixed. Tony, a medium skin Latino, claimed that men who meet online are not less likely to use condoms, specifically:

Well for one thing on the profiles a lot of them have a section that you can check if it's safe sex or no condoms or bareback or whatever. But um it's prevalent in a lot of the sites; adam4adam, manhunt, whatever, they have a section you can check it off [what your sexual practice is]. So it's there in your face all the time as your looking at it.

On the contrary, Tony, an Honorary White felt the online forum was set up in such a way that made it easier to engage in safer sex versus unprotected sex. The fact that it was always "in your face," according to Tony, made it easier to say "no to unsafe sex." Derek, a mixed White and Black man, on the other hand, felt different about it. Specifically, he felt that meeting online fostered an environment more susceptible to unprotected sex:

Because when you meet someone online for sex... you know what you're going for and that's what you want. If I met you face to face like I wouldn't be like, "hey you want to fuck," like I've never, well I've had that happen but it's never escalated to that point, but when your meeting someone online, it's like ok this is what we're going to do, you're going to pull your pants off and you're going to put your dick in me. I think that um there is more barebacking with people who meet online because you talk about it more and I think people will go online specifically for sex and know that they like to put their dick up someone's asshole with no condoms on. Like they will go for what they want because they know they can get it somehow there. If someone came up to me and were like, "so what's up want to fuck," talking to me face to face I would probably be like ok put on your condom because it's something that's not talked about as much in person as it is online kind of thing.

Derek's unabashed comments show how the online forum allows for people who are looking to engage in unprotected sex to have an avenue to find others who also want to participate in this risky behavior.

The social constraints present in the physical world do not allow for open conversations about condom usage in contrast to online. Derek's comments give us a small glimpse into the world of sexual liaisons online, where conversations about unprotected sex may very well take place more freely without the restraints of open society. While Derek felt the online forum created a space for some to talk more openly about a desire for unprotected sex, Sam, felt his expression of a desire for unprotected sex or barebacking, resulted in harassment and alienation from other gay men. Sam admitted to getting 'lots of hate' for revealing his HIV status on his online dating profile and therefore decided to leave this out of his identity online. This suggests that while he may be desired because of his race, he is also lowered in desirability within the racial hierarchy due to being HIV positive.

These findings suggest that a reconfiguration of the Latin Americanization Thesis is useful in examining the hierarchy of desire particularly noting the influence of sexual health in gay community. Thus, sexual health can shape the loss or gain of erotic capital which can also aid in ascension or descention in the racial hierarchy of desire. Keeping in mind that Hakim (20010) theorizes everyone has erotic capital in some form or another, we can see how some men may use their erotic capital to move up the tri-racial stratification system and for others it may result in downward mobility. For instance, even though Sam is White and his whiteness maybe constructed as highly desirable on the racial

hierarchy, he is HIV positive which lowers his erotic capital and therefore decreases his desirability on the hierarchy of desire.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

While Bonilla-Silva and associates', (Bonilla-Silva, Forman, Lewis, Embrick, and Goar, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010) Latin Americanization Thesis develops a framework to understand the social construction of race and the hierarchies associated with those categorizations, we are left wondering how this framework intersects with other stratifiers such as sexuality. The objective of this study was to address that question among men who have sex with men (MSM). The data for this study is based on content analysis of the online websites used by MSMs which allowed me to assess the manner in which racialization takes place in the everyday life of MSMs. The content analyses of these social networking sites allow me to provide further context to my study. The main data source is 16 in-depth interviews with White, Black, Latino, and Mixed-race MSMs. Latin Americanization Thesis of tri-racial stratification is utilized to shed light on the evolving racial hierarchies in a gay community in El Paso, Texas, its color-blind racist ideology, and influence on sexual health.

I began the analysis with an examination of MSM social networking sites. Here I find that an overwhelming majority of the participants expressed that the most common way to meet other MSMs was online. Participants manage their identities online in order to present themselves in such a way that promotes an status in the hierarchy of desire by noting physical attributes such as their weight and height and body type in hopes of getting the same in return from potential partners. Yet sexual racism locks men occupying the bottom strata out of the sexual market place of desire and may force some to manipulate their profiles in an effort to get more notice. Moreover, the online realm enables users to use the veil of anonymity as a "mask" that hides who they really are in an effort to freely express what they desire, which is usually in the form of profiles that say, "No Blacks" or "White only." The content analysis of the online material illustrated how the Latin Americanization Thesis works online. Specifically, MSM communities online perpetuates sexually racist norms that objectify men of color and relegates them to the lower statuses in the hierarchy of desire. Another major finding was that sexual

racism from online profiles and personas enforces white supremacy by maintaining White men as the most desired lovers, with other light-skin men of color following next, and a marginalized category of Collective Black MSMs in the lowest tier. Consequently, this forces MSM of color to capitalize on the racial sexual stereotypes assigned to them like being sexual aggressors such as the hyper-masculine Black or a spicy Latino lover, in order to gain traction in the market place of desire. For example, in order to increase communication with more men they might change the race of their profiles from Black to multiracial. This analysis was useful to provide a context for how race and sexuality intersect among the gay community in El Paso.

A second major finding comes from the in-depth interviews that reveal that a tri-racial system exists in the gay community in congruence with the Latin Americanization Thesis. Specifically, the Black MSMs described how Blackness is a performance associated with “ghettos,” poor communities of color, that dark skin symbolizes slavery, and the prevalence of “ethnic slurs.” Latinos and mixed race MSMs or “Honorary Whites,” on the other hand, experience situations where their race may impact their sexuality, but more in cultural terms dealing with family acceptance. “Honorary Whites” such as Latinos and mixed race MSMs still found themselves in situations where their race may affect their availability of partners. White MSMs overwhelmingly felt that their race did not impact their sexuality giving their gay identity precedence over their racial identity. Furthermore, while Whites felt their race had no impact, their interviews revealed ways in which white privilege contributes to them having higher selectivity of sex partners. Taken together, all the responses from the participants revealed that there is a racial hierarchy in the gay community with Blacks occupying the bottom strata, Latinos and mixed race people the middle strata, and Whites at the top.

A third finding is that color-blind racism could be extrapolated from the interviews with several of the men, majority being White men and Honorary White men, using the four frameworks of color-blind racism. What is most revealing about this is how some men in the Collective Black strata

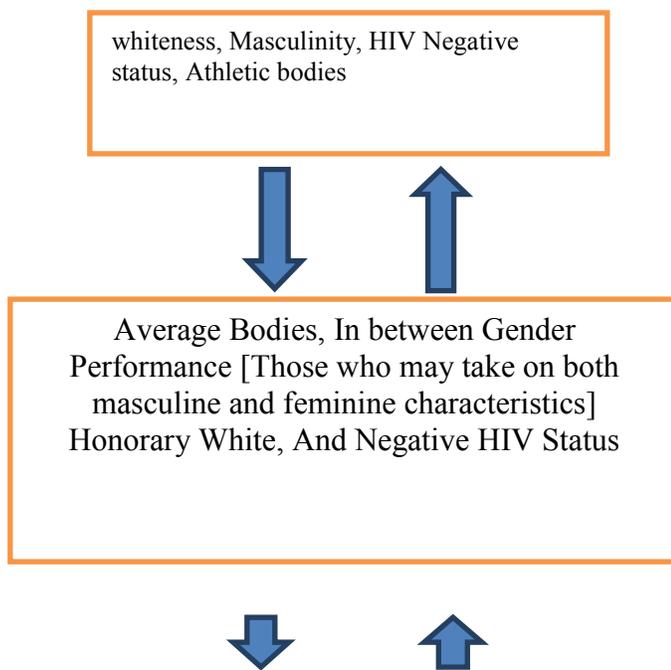
manipulated the sexual stereotypes assigned to their race to their benefit, using it as erotica capital that allowed them to trade masculinity for sex and companionship with White men or light-skin men. This exchange of erotic capital allowed for the movement up the hierarchy of desire, despite their racial status, if not permanently at least momentarily. This is consistent with literature on the social construction of race where race is fluid and contextual (Saenz & Aguirre, 2004 ). While Bonilla-Silva's triangular representation of each racial strata only emphasized skin color and acculturation, by incorporating sexuality into this framework I can highlight how sexuality intersects with race. Specifically, erotic capital gives weight to masculinity and therefore Black men who are stereotypically hyper-masculine with 'rough' appearances and "big dicks" may have access to the top strata as oppose to more feminine Black MSMs. Therefore, this research adds to the literature by examining the manner in which sexuality, more specifically erotic capital and sexual health provides mobility upward the racial hierarchy.

Given the findings of this study I propose a reconfiguration of the racial hierarchy needs to include intersections with sexuality and health. I argue that race and sexuality intersect in a manner that produces sexual racism or sexual discrimination based on race from the higher racial stratas towards the lower racial strata, maintaining the tri-racial system of stratification in the realm of desire. Erotic capital (Hakim, 2010) is used as a form of currency that allows members of the Honorary White and Collective Black to move upward and down the racial hierarchy of desire. The lack of erotic capital, such as beauty, sexual attractiveness, social ability, fitness and energy, presentation, and sexuality itself (Hakim, 2010) results in a move downward for those occupying the top White and middle Honorary White stratas. This reworking of the tri-racial stratification system allows for the examination of how mobilization up the racial hierarchy is possible for those who occupy the bottom racial strata.

Interestingly, health also shapes the racial hierarchy among gays. Few participants did reveal that Whites who occupy the top strata participated in safer sex more often than those in the lower stratas.

Reasons for participating in unprotected sex ranged from drugs and alcohol, to penis size, and even being with an attractive partner. As to whether or not the internet played a role in risky sex, the results were mixed with many suggesting it does not and several suggesting the internet creates a space in which the discussion to have unsafe sex becomes more feasible. Moreover, White men's erotic capital gives them more access to condom usage than Honorary Whites and the Collective Black. Their desire for mostly only other Whites keeps men of color out of the top strata and keeps access of condom usage from the rest. White men whose health was compromised with HIV, were lowered in desirability. The power to choose partners was then minimized, resulting in a more openness to sex and relationships outside their race. Light-skinned Latino men who were masculine tops or the insertive partner and acculturated were given power to choose their partners. Among mixed race men who did not clearly define their gender performance, they were also penalized and lowered in the Honorary White strata.

Given the role of erotic capital and health in the hierarchy of desire, I am proposing a reconfiguration of the Latin Americanization Thesis. Figure 2 illustrates the factors that add and subtract erotic capital among MSMs.



Collective Blacks, Fat men, effeminate men, HIV positive, Dark Skin  
Latinos

Figure 3. Movement Up & Down the Tri-racial Hierarchy of Desire:

Instead of the triangle figure that limited the access to the stratas the rectangles represent the more space allotted for flowing up and down the racial hierarchy and the arrows represent those men who are allotted access to the higher stratas based on their erotic capital but whom the sexual color-line keeps from permanently residing within the top strata as well as the men whose gender performance. Being HIV positive diminishes erotic capital forcing the downward mobility in the racial hierarchy. It is this combination of the Latin Americanization Thesis of tri-racial stratification along with erotic capital that more accurately describes the sexual environment for MSM.

The final major finding of this study is the revelation from some of the participants that White men are perceived as more prepared for sex and having more access to condoms than men of color. This suggest that those who occupy the bottom and middle stratas of Bonilla-Silva's tri-racial stratification may be limited in their contact with those in the top strata that seem to more commonly practice safer sex. This revelation has major implications for health researchers who are interested in the way race and sexuality relate to sexual health. Examining the online realm and how the participants create their profiles may reflect the online sexual market place of desire, where race, body type, age, and gender performance suggest erotic capital. The participants are given the option to reveal their sexual status and sexual practice, allowing for an environment where sexual practice may be discussed more freely in contrast to public spaces. This also means that those who are looking for unprotected sex online specifically may communicate that desire with other users and may come to an agreement that

unprotected sex will occur in the event of a sexual tryst. Previous research (Klein, 2010) has examined primarily websites where MSM can converge to discuss a desire for unprotected sex on sites that cater to that sexual behavior, but none have really examined a prolific website, such as adamadam.com, where a variety of users may participate on the site which caters to more than just those who want unprotected sex. In finality, where previous research mostly examined sites for those who desire bareback sex, this study examines an immensely popular site that caters to multiple people and not just those looking for one particular purpose. S a result, we are given a glimpse of how sexually risky behavior may occur in more popular sites for all MSM.

## **5. 1 Limitations**

A limitation to this study concerns the sample size ( $n = 16$ ), although small in size, I was able to asses saturation with several questions. One of the difficulties in recruiting a larger sample size for a project is the sensitivity of the subject matter, asking personal questions about race, sexuality, preference, the number of partners a person may have had in their lives and their experiences with condom usage. Also, the recruitment of participants from an online forum where many MSM meet to find sexual partners meant many of the participants expected sex in turn for their participation. Therefore, at the onslaught of all conversations that took place online, it was clearly explained to all potential participants the purpose of the study. Some potential participants intentionally mislead the interviewers by agreeing to the study and then not showing up for the interview or dissolving all communication. As a result, we would have to find a new participant. Also, the fact that the White interviewer's face was on his profile may have presented a selectivity biased. In particular, respondents recruited through this method may have a greater desire for White men. Also, several men felt more comfortable giving the interview online and not in person, something we felt IRB would not allow because of signature consent to use the information. Plus, the burden of proving the profiles were real representations of actual people would be too difficult a burden. Despite this small sample size, patterns

did emerge from the discussions. Also, the diversity of the population in age and race gave weight to the argument. Another unseen factor that may have affected the results was the thoughts of the White interviewer himself on racism. Although all interviewers were trained properly on how to conduct in-depth interviews, probe for clarification, and watch for leading answers, the White interviewer seemed to consciously avoid clearly asking the participants about racism in regards to preference. There could be several possibilities of why he did this but as researchers who are trying to limit the race of interviewer effect, we must also remember that systemic racism effects everyone, especially White men and so he may have had difficulty with the questions because they call into question his own views on racial preferences or they may not. Point being, we must be aware of this possibility and devise ways to circumvent it. Despite this, the White interviewer conducted all interviews the exact same, probed when he felt he needed to, and recruited the most diverse set of men to the study thanks in part to his online profile and his appearance that matched the moniker, “no fats, fems, or Blacks.” Despite these limitations, the participants recruited and the data used represents a variety of backgrounds and experiences, helping strengthen the study.

## **Chapter 6: Implications for Future Research**

Future researchers must begin to examine more thoroughly the interconnectivity of race and sexuality online in order to lay witness to how sexual racism is manifested through the Latin Americanization of the gay community off and especially online as well as how it affects sexual health and practice. The awareness of how some men are shut out of the top strata where condom usages is more often practiced may be due to race, suggesting that more policy needs to be crafted reflecting this data. An analysis of condom negotiation at the micro level is an important next step. Content analysis of online profiles as well as statistical correlations between the race of the profiles and sexually risky behavior may help us understand the sociological implications sexual racism has in the internet age. By capitalizing on newer forms of technology that improve online methodologies, such as Skype, this may ameliorate the difficulty with online identity in profiles and real identity. Plus, it allows for those who are not as comfortable with face to face interviews, such as men who are not fully out, to still engage in scientific studies. As researchers, we must also understand that although there are structural issues that maintain racial stratification such as sexual racism, erotic capital allows for more MSM of color to have autonomy in deciding to play into a sexually racist stereotype in exchange for sexual capital. This gives some MSM the knowledge of how to maneuver the sexual market place of desire. Also, doing a study on women who have sex with women would be beneficial. Similarly, conducting cross border interviews with men who have sex with men in Spanish can help shed light on how cross border sexual exchanges take place. Lastly, investigating the role of class within the intersections of race, sexuality, and health is significant in how people position themselves online as potential mates.

In sum, this study allows for us to see firsthand how race and sexuality work in real world setting and specifically online. We see that even as the problem of Dubois' color-line may not be as evident, the sexual color-line remains in cyber space, allowing for sexual racism to stratify the races into a tri racial system reminiscent of Bonilla-Silva's (2002) Latin Americanization Thesis. This study also helps us

understand how erotic capital allows for movement up the racial hierarchy, and down depending on the capital lost. We also see how those in the highest strata of Whites may more consistently use condoms than the bottom two strata of MSM of color. This study can help us prepare to understand more about race, sexuality and sexual health online in future research.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

#### 1. Demographics

How long have you lived in El Paso? Juarez? Las Cruces?

Where do you spend most your time?

Are you a student?

Are you employed?

What do you do?

What is your socioeconomic status? (Higher class, High middle, Middle, Lower Middle, working class)

Professional status? (Like you're a managers, owner, employees, supervisors)

How old are you?

How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?

#### 2. Identity

What is your sexual identity? (I.e. gay, straight, bisexual, queer)

What about your gender identity? (I.e. masculine, feminine)

Would you prioritize your racial identity over your sexual identity? Prompt: being black over being gay? Being gay over being white?

How do you think your race/ethnicity impacts your sexuality?

What are your experiences as a (White, Latino, Black, or Other) man in the gay community here at the border?

#### 3. Friends

How many people do you consider acquaintances versus friends? What's the difference?

How many people do you consider friends versus close friends? What's the difference?

What do you look for in friends? Close friends?

What is the racial makeup of your friends versus your close friends?

4. **Partner Preferences**

Are you currently dating/in a relationship, partnered?

What do you consider a long term relationship versus a short term? Have you had either one?

What kind of people were you attracted to in the past?

What kind of people are you attracted to now?

Do you have any preferences like body type, age, job, race, socioeconomic status, skin color?

Masc or femm? Top or bttm? etc?

What's your ideal person you see yourself with in the future?

Do you have these same preferences when just looking to make friends?

Do your preferences change if you're looking to date versus a relationship?

Do you have these preferences when it comes to sex?

Prompts: any preferences they have not brought up like race, body type, age, political philosophies, education, SES, top/bottom/versatile.

What kind of people have you had sex with in the past? (Race, body type, age, education, political philosophy)

Have you ever had sex with women?

How many partners have you had?

Have the type of people you have had casual sex with changed through time?

5. **Racial dynamics in the gay community**

Have you seen any racism within the gay community? Explain.

Have you noticed any differences in general race dynamics in the gay world versus the straight?

6. **Racial dynamics in sexual contexts:**

Does race matter when choosing someone to date? Sex? Relationship?

Which race do you think is most likely to exclusively have friends, sex, date, long term relationships with their own race?

Have you ever been with someone outside your race? If yes, what type of relationships was it? Which race?

Was there a response from the rest of the gay community?

Do you think that racial dynamics are the same online? Explain.

When it comes to attraction, is finding someone attractive because of their race the same thing as finding them attractive because of other characteristics like body type or hair color, or are racial preferences something more?

## 7. **Social sites**

Do you ever use social networking sites? If yes, which ones and for how long have you used them?

Have you ever used adam4adam.com? If yes, what is your purpose for using it? Prompt: do you use the social networking sites for casual dating? Casual sex? Committed relationship? Open relationship? Domestic partnership?

How do you identify yourself on your online profile? Prompt: Do you emphasize your race/ethnicity? Being light skinned or dark skinned? Your height or weight? Your masculinity or femininity?

Do you show pictures of your body?

Face?

Why do you choose to present yourself in this way?

Why do you choose to present yourself in this way? Do you do it to increase the number of partners? To keep away people you're not interested in meeting? To show your personality?

What sexual stereotypes have you noticed online about different races/ethnicities here on the border stereotypes like Black thugs, big dicked blacks, feminine Asians, Abercrombie and Fitch white males.

What are other ways of meeting gay men?

## 8. **Sexual health risk**

What factors do you believe may cause someone to not use a condom?

Do you believe these behaviors vary by race? Explain.

Do you perceive that condom use is higher with certain races than others? If so, which ones? Explain.

Do you think gay men who meet online are less likely to use condoms?

9. **Conclusion**

Is there anything that I did not ask about race and sexuality in the gay community that you want to bring up?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you

## Vita

Jesus Gregorio Smith was born and raised in El Paso, TX. He received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of Texas at El Paso in May of 2010.

During his tenure at UTEP, Jesus helped start the Queer Leadership and Academic Development Conference as the Rainbow Minor Initiative Intern at UTEP and the Queer Prom, with proceeds going to the Rainbow Miner Scholarship for UTEP students. He was awarded the Women Studies Gender Warrior award in 2009 for his dedication towards social justice, won the Student Leadership Award at the Rainbow Graduation Reception in 2010, and was named the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Stonewall Gala's Man of the Year in 2011, where he was also awarded a \$1500 scholarship award.

Jesus received a University Diversity fellowship in 2012 in order to continue his education at Texas A&M University, where he will work towards a Ph.D. in Sociology. He hopes to continue his work as a researcher of race, sexuality, and health.

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This thesis was typed by Jesus Gregorio Smith.