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**ETHNOSEXUALITY: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF RACIALIZED
SEXUAL ATTRACTIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

PSYCHOLOGY

by

Brandon Balzer Carr

March 2021

The Dissertation of Brandon Balzer Carr
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Abstract

Ethnosexuality: A qualitative exploration of racialized sexual attractions and

experiences

Brandon Balzer Carr

In the nineteenth century, homosexuality shifted from being understood as an act to

an essentialized category of human, and then in the twentieth century, homosexuality

shifted again to become an identity. Now in the twenty-first century, a groundswell of

sexual identities beyond those based on gender attraction have sprung forth. Despite

the socially constructed history of homosexuality and the proliferation of new sexual

identities in psychological research literature, little empirical work has interrogated

racialized sexual attractions and experiences, what I call ethnosexuality. Across the

research literature, there is considerable evidence that race factors into human

sexuality. Racialized sexual stereotypes, such as the Jezebel or China doll, have been

documented in psychology, while historians have traced their roots to slavery or

colonialism. Research on sexual preferences for racial groups reveals a clear

privileging of White people, fetishization of Asian women and Black men, and

marginalization of Asian men and Black women. Scholarship on sexual racism, erotic

capital, and gender-race prototypicality informs these trends in desirability. Research

on interracial dating and marriage shows that it is correlated with diversity in one's

milieu and demands engaged racework to maintain. Finally, the literature on White

privilege shows that racial difference is often invisible to White people, and

discussions of it provoke distress. I brought this cross-disciplinary scholarship to bear

in order to investigate how 21 participants considered their ethnosexuality in their sexual lives and identities. My thematic analysis of in-depth, two- to three-hour interviews revealed several consistent themes: essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity. Codes for ethnosexual essentialism revealed that people drew from stereotypes of racial groups to interpret and explain their own sexual preferences or their perceptions of other people. Participants also recognized and endorsed a consistent hierarchy of racialized (and gendered) desirability, and they worked their ethnosexual capital within this stratification. Everyone in the study emphasized finding common ground and shared experience, and although White participants rarely thought of this in ethnic terms, most people of color saw the importance of ethnosexual culture. Similarly, participants of color often spoke with ethnosexual authenticity, whereas White participants struggled and shut down the conversation. I connected these themes to an array of real-world issues, such as creating a family, developing self-esteem, and perpetuating de facto eugenics. I also applied essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity themes to the study of homosexuality. Instead of conceptualizing sexual attraction as an intrinsic drive toward an essentialized target, researchers could consider how all dimensions of sexuality are socially constructed through essentialized stereotypes about different groups, the capital afforded different bodies and ways of being, the cultural connections that love and passion rely on, and the savvy and awareness that people need to make sense and meaning out of all of it.

giving me faith that we can change the future. I continue to discover how much you mean to me. To Ella Ben Hagai, Sona Kaur, Christy Starr, Sarah Harsey, and Mike Vallerga, thank you for creating community and brilliant research in the lab with me. To Ethan Chang, Saugher Nojan, and Brittany Young, thank you for creating community and institutional change in the lab with me.

Thank you to everyone who has made me the scientist and scholar that I am today. There are truly more people than I could count that have brought me to this point in life. I am eternally grateful to everyone who has played some part, whether big or small, in me earning my doctorate. Please know that your lessons and labors flow through me and everything I do.

Introduction

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was

transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior

androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a

temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.

Foucault (1976/78, p. 42).

Those who are called or who consider themselves heterosexuals are, in

all likelihood, tall-blond-Wasposexual, short-curly-haired zaftig-

Jewishosexual, African-American-with-a-southern-accentosexual,

erotically excited only by members of their own ethnic group or only

by those outside that group.

Chodorow (1992, p. 38).

Social constructionist research and scholarship has drawn from medical,

psychoanalytic, and juridical texts to show how homosexuality emerged in the

nineteenth century as a type of human being that is defined by gender attraction and

gender nonconformity. Conceiving of homosexuality as a human category was a

divergence from older conceptions of same-sex desire as sodomy or buggery:

depraved but also transient and atoneable behavior (Foucault, 1976/78). Then during

the twentieth century, the essentialist representation of homosexuality as gender

inversion gave way to an identity construction that emphasized the social location

behind individual difference (Halperin, 1990; Seidman, 1993). This shift was uneven

across both time and place, but also perspective, with everyone from Jerry Falwell to

Lady Gaga hypothesizing about whether homosexuality is an individual choice

(Falwell, 1980), inextricable essence (Gaga, 2011), genetic aberration (Hamer, Hu,

Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993), evolutionary adaptation (LeVay, 2010), stunted

development (Freud, 1905/1962), shunted alternative (Herek, 1986), manifestation of

human diversity (Kinsey, 1948), or triumph over social adversity (Rich, 1980).

Homosexuality captured the popular imagination, producing a dizzying array of

proposed origins, but also morphologies. The same thoughts and behaviors moved

from an act (something one does) to an essence (something one is) to a representation

of the self (something with which one identifies); which is all to say that

homosexuality is socially constructed. In this study, I draw from in-depth interviews

to show how racialized attraction and experience is socially constructed as well.

Although interracial marriage has been legal in the United States since the

1960's (*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967), over 90% of marriages today are still homo-racial-

sexual (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012). History and science show that

sexuality has been heavily racialized (e.g., eugenics; Gould, 1981), and sexual

stereotyping is a prolific dimension of racism (e.g., Jezebel and China doll

stereotypes; Collins, 1990; Prasso, 2009). Research also shows that sexual desirability

is dramatically impacted by race, with White people being viewed as universally

desirable (Rudder, 2014), Asian women and Black men as narrowly desirable (Buggs,

2017), and Asian men and Black women as undesirable (Feliciano, Robnett, &

Komaie, 2009). This White supremacist sexual hierarchy has been termed *sexual*

racism (Bedi, 2015) or *erotic capital* (Green, 2008b), and it includes a White standard

of beauty (Smith, Morales, & Han, 2018), gender-race prototypicality (Galinsky, Hall, & Cuddy, 2013), and racial fetishization (Silvestrini, 2020). Research also shows that interracial relationships bring unique dynamics that affect satisfaction, conflict, and longevity (Steinbugler, 2012); and attitudes toward interracial relationships are correlated with prejudice and other sociocultural factors (Herman & Campbell, 2012). Taken together, race dramatically impacts sexuality and intimacy on a behavioral and cognitive level, but the hegemonic cultural conceptualization of race is to frame it as neither an act, nor an essence, nor an identity. The mainstream view is instead to pretend it does not exist at all. Racialized sexual attractions and experiences are thus concealed by White colorblindness, de facto segregation, and guilt (McIntosh, 1988/2020).

The preponderance of research and scholarship on racialized attractions and experiences reveals it to be a profoundly impactful phenomenon, but this academic work has not interrogated how people make sense of their interracial or intraracial desires and relationships. Social psychology has documented the centrality of identity to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other queer people (Meyer, 1995). Social psychology has also shown that the attribution of a phenomenon, such as to biological or social origins, shapes social attitudes like prejudice (Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). And, qualitative psychology has emphasized the interpretative component of interpersonal experiences to differentiate an event from the meaning attached to it (Thorne, 2000). Social psychology plays a critical role in sexuality, but racial attraction has generally lacked this lens because most of the work on it comes from

history, philosophy, critical race or gender studies, sociology, and political science (i.e., disciplines that do not study the social human mind). To address this shortcoming, I analyzed data from interviews in which I asked people about their racialized attractions and experiences, the connections between them and their different identities, the attributions they made for those attractions and experiences, and the meaning that they drew from all them.

For the sake of brevity, I have labeled racialized attraction and experience *ethnosexuality*, a term I borrowed from another researcher (Nagel, 2000). In her scholarship, Nagel frames interracial relationships as *ethnosexual frontiers*, defining them as, "surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging sexual links with ethnic 'others.'" Nagel uses the concept to discuss how protection of "our women" from ethnic others or the assumed sexual depravity of another people has been used to justify war, genocide, and other geopolitical cleavages (i.e., the politicization of interracial relationships). I draw from Nagel and a wide array of other research and writing to consider the political but also personal aspects of ethnosexuality.

I have organized the relevant literature into four sections that match my eventual interview themes. First, *ethnosexual essentialism* covers 1) scholarship on social historical constructions of sexuality, and 2) modern research on sexual stereotyping. Second, *ethnosexual capital* reviews 1) structural analyses of racial desirability, 2) research on racial preferences, and 3) research on gender-race prototypicality. Third, *ethnosexual culture* discusses 1) demography of and attitudes

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toward interracial or intraracial relationships, and 2) factors that improve or impair interracial relationship quality, such as *racework*. Fourth and finally, *ethnosexual authenticity* investigates research on White privilege and the anxiety that surrounds it. After reviewing this relevant research and identifying my research questions, I analyze my interview data to show how race and ethnicity shape beliefs about the sexual nature of a group (essentialism), how desirable people feel themselves and view others to be (capital), the capacity for people to connect and foster intimacy (culture), and the silence and dread that occurs over discussion of sexual attractions and experiences (authenticity). In other words, I show how sexuality is socially constructed vis-à-vis race.

Ethnosexual Essentialism

Essentialism is an intrapsychic process in which someone perceives human difference in categorical, immutable, and deterministic terms (Bastian & Haslam, 2005). Ethnicity, for example, is a complex web of cultural and biological factors that produce a multitude of human differences (e.g., language, skin color, diet, height, identity), which would amount to a convoluted mess of taxa if placed in a typology. Ethnicity defies taxonomy because its variation occurs in degree not in kind (i.e., exists on a continuum instead of in categories) and is fluid across time (i.e., constantly changing through cultural events and sexual reproduction). Ethnicity is thus not an essence that resides in a uniform manner across populations but is instead idiosyncratic, continuous, and in-flux.

Race, on the other hand, is a historical construction that collapses ethnic diversity into three categories— Black, Asian, White—and thus downplays differences within them, exaggerates differences between them, and ignores the existence of indigenous people from North and South America, the Middle East and North Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and the pacific islands. The origins of race are essentialist in nature (Gould, 1981), as the concept emerged during colonialism to advance a racist ideology that White people are inherently, universally, and categorically superior to other humans. Today, race is understood as meaningful only because of the societal effects of historical stratification along these contrived lines (e.g., US slavery) and because the reverberations from racial essentialism persist to the present (e.g., racial income inequality). Although race has meaning because of how it has shaped history and therefore society today, it is also socially constructed and perpetually disrupted through interracial relationships, the existence of ethnic groups occluded from race, and wide cultural and individual variation within racial categories. Race is spurious and ethnicity is fluid, so essentialist conceptions of either are baseless.

Despite the logical flaws in racial essentialism, beliefs about the categorical, immutable, and deterministic nature of Black, Asian, and White people have dramatically shaped recent human history and continue to shape modern life through stereotyping. Racial essentialism has also centered sexuality, subsuming eugenic beliefs about the sexual nature of Black people, colonial beliefs about the sexual nature of Asian people, and Enlightenment assumptions about the sexual nature of

White people. In the following sections, I unpack the sexual essentialism of all three racial groups, in each case disaggregating by historical versus modern times. In so doing, I show the profound role that essentialism plays in social life, both today and yesteryear, and in turn show the role of ethnosexual essentialism for modern sex and romance.

Eugenic Constructions of Blackness

The origins of much Black racial essentialism lie in the Enlightenment, eugenics movement, and transatlantic slave-trade. Starting in the 1700's, Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Hobbes, and Locke advanced a moral and political ideology of democracy that was founded on the inherent equality of humans (Israel, 2011). These notions toppled empires, founded new countries, and more broadly revolutionized society toward a belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people. The Enlightenment also occurred during the height of imperialism and the transatlantic slave trade (Israel, 2011). The mass abduction, subjugation, indoctrination, execution, and rape of people from Africa happened in tandem with the birth of modern egalitarian ideals. The eugenics movement emerged in this period, and it conveniently reconciled the West's moral posture with its immoral behavior. Eugenicists crafted bogus biological theories about the genetic superiority of the White race and fomented fears of racial taint or societal decay stemming from integration and especially miscegenation (Gould, 1981). All humans are created equal and thus deserve freedom, but if Black people are imagined to be subhuman, then they do not need to be treated equally and granted freedom. Moreover, eugenics cast

slavery as a moral good because it supposedly civilized an inferior people and maintained the genetic purity of White people.

Constructions of both Black women and men naturally flowed from a biological telos of slavery. Anthropologists used craniometry and later psychologists used intelligence testing to repeatedly test a hypothesis that Black people are intellectually deficient yet physically proficient (Gould, 1981). These pseudo-biological theories were deployed to advocate for slavery, in that Black people were depicted as beasts of burden, intellectually uncapable of freedom and citizenship yet bodily suited for hard, manual labor (Buss, 1976; Bashford & Levine, 2010). Thus slavery-justifying myths propagated notions of Black numbness to pain, superhuman strength and stamina, absence of willpower, and inferior cognitive faculties (Gould, 1981). The eugenics movement promoted biological essentialism to advocate for White supremacy, and this essentialism diverged across gender.

White supremacist fantasies about the biology of Black women ascribed fecundity and hypersexuality to their supposed racial essences (Crais & Scully, 2009; Gould, 1981; Wiss, 1994). A powerful case study in Black woman essentialism is the abuses perpetrated against Saartjie Baartman (i.e., the so-called *Venus Hottentot*). Saartjie had large breasts, buttocks, and labia, so she was enslaved and forced to perform in freak shows as a scientific curiosity and an imagined archetype of Black womanhood (i.e., a Venus; Crais & Scully, 2009; Wiss, 1994). Baartman's body was treated as a slate unto which various stereotypes about Black women were inscribed, including notions that they are licentious (which justified rape) and fertile (which

justified forced childbearing), because of her purportedly exaggerated sexual features. Scientists referenced Baartmen's body when making eugenic arguments about the inherently inferior sexual nature of Black women (de Gobineau, 1853).

Constructions of Black men's sexuality emerged through slavery but reached an inflection point after the Reconstruction because of lynching (Cooper, 1988; Rosen, 2009; Wells & Duster, 1970). Eugenicists conjured up images of Black men as essentially tall, muscular, and bestowed with a large penis, yet lacking mental acuity, and thus framed them as brutish and rapacious (Gould, 1981; Rosen, 2009). Then after Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan framed successful Black men for rapes of White women, using the fabricated crime as an excuse to murder people, terrorize their communities, and shackle Black empowerment (Cooper, 1988; Rosen, 2009; Wells & Duster, 1970). Through slavery, eugenics, and the Ku Klux Klan, Black men's and women's sexuality was forged in the popular imagination of the United States: dangerous, excessive, unrestrained.

Black Sexual Stereotypes

The images of Black men and women drawn from slavery perseverate through to today. In a seminal Black feminist text, Collins (1990) argues Black women's bodies and lives are socially controlled through prescriptive stereotypes: the mammy (i.e., faithful domestic servants), sapphire (i.e., strong or angry Black woman), and Jezebel (i.e., promiscuous woman). The Jezebel stereotype of a hypersexual Black woman who deceives men through her sexuality aligns with and has roots in the same eugenic and slavery origins as the Venus Hottentot. Although the construction is

centuries old, the stereotype remains a part of everyday life. The sapphire stereotype also has roots in slavery, through the strength and resilience needed to survive it, and the formerly enslaved suffragist Sojourner Truth is one of the earliest targets of the construction (Collins, 1990). Moreover, the sapphire stereotype was retooled through the Moynihan report (1965), an influential and profoundly racist sociological argument that Black women were domineering and abrasive, leading their husbands to leave their families, and in turn causing high crime rates through absent fatherhood. Taken together, stereotypes about Black women have disturbing beginnings that still shape their textures today.

Research in social psychology supports the contention that Jezebel and sapphire stereotypes are still held within individuals' minds. Factor analysis of a wide range of anti-Black stereotypes suggest covariance among beliefs that Black women are undiscerning and lascivious sexual partners (i.e., Jezebel) and emasculating henpeckers (i.e., sapphire; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). Research using these scales shows that the internalization of them is correlated with greater media exposure, poorer ethnic identity development, low self-esteem, and among men, normalization of violence against women (Cheeseborough, Overstreet, & Ward, 2020; Childs, 2005; Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, 2017; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010; Wallace, Townsend, Glasgow, & Ojie, 2011). People exhibit an implicit association between Black women and animals to a greater degree than White women (Anderson, Holland, Heldreth, & Johnson, 2018), which has eugenic undertones. And in the same article, the researchers used eye-trackers to

show participants focus on Black women's sexual body parts more so than White women's bodies. People with hostile views toward Black people rated Black women as promiscuous and manipulative, matching Jezebel stereotypes (Collier, Taylor, & Peterson, 2017). Interview research shows people endorse Jezebel and sapphire stereotypes to parlay their attraction—or lack of attraction, respectively—to Black women (Silvestrini, 2020). Priming participants for Jezebel stereotypes also causes them to rate Black women interviewees in a similarly stereotypical fashion (Brown Givens, & Monahan, 2005). Interview research on colorism shows that Black women recognize that sapphire and Jezebel stereotypes are more pronounced for dark-skinned Black women than for light-skinned Black women (i.e., colorism; Stephens & Thomas, 2012). And finally, Black women rape survivors are more likely than White women survivors to be thought of as *asking for it* (Donovan, 2007).

Another analysis of Black stereotyping is Bogle's (1973) *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. In this work, Bogle maps several stereotypes of Black men, including what he labels the *big Black buck*, a sexually threatening and physically imposing Black man. Thus the buck construction is the eroticization of the same eugenic myths discussed earlier. Media studies scholars have connected this trope to the *Mandingo* film of the 1970s (Shimizu, 1999). Others have analyzed primetime television to show the prevalence of the buck stereotype today (Washington, 2012). The literature is sparse on Black men's sexual stereotyping, but there is a bevy of work showing related stereotypes of Black men as thugs (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, 2011; Smiley &

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Fakunle, 2016; Tyree, 2011). Taken together this work shows a through line between the horrors of slavery to the oppressions of today. Colonialism and neo-colonialism played similarly dominant roles in the emergence of Asian sexual constructions, as well as their persistence through oppressions of today.

Colonial Constructions of Asian Women and Men

The dual images of the Far East as either a mysterious source of bounty (Wisenthal, 2006) or a dangerous threat to sovereignty (Marchetti, 1993) emerged in the West through colonialism. Beginning with the *Silk Road*, Western Europe began to learn about the existence of China and other Asian countries, and through this trade, constructed an image of them as mysterious and full of wealth, the source of silk and spice (Wisenthal, 2006). Marco Polo famously traveled to China, Japan, and India in the thirteenth century, bringing back to Western Europe various material riches, harrowing stories of conflict and politics, and cross-cultural exposure (Bergreen, 2008). As colonialism expanded in the following centuries, Asia and the Pacific islands were framed as backward and "uncivilized" yet abundant with treasure to be exploited, thus motivating expeditions to conquer and colonize the region (Wisenthal, 2006). The armed conflicts that occurred because of colonialism also cast Asia as a threatening and untrustworthy adversary. For a millennium, the Far East has existed in Western popular imagination as an alluring but perilous faraway land.

Images of Asian bounty and danger have been transposed onto women's bodies to construct them as either China dolls or dragon ladies (Feng, 2002; Kang, 1993; Marchetti, 1993; Tajima, 1989; Wisenthal, 2006). Sometimes alternatively

called the lotus blossom or geisha construction, the depiction of Asian women as China dolls portrays them as innocent, beautiful, and hyperfeminine (Feng, 2002; Kang, 1993; Tajima, 1989; Wisenthal, 2006). An exemplar of the China doll construction is the widely popular opera *Madame Butterfly* (Wisenthal, 2006). According to Wisenthal,

> 'The Orient' is entirely a cultural construct of white, Western nations
>
> that were vigorously engaged in the attempted conquest of other parts
>
> of the world during the period in which the Butterfly myth has
>
> flourished. (Wisenthal, 2006, p. 3).

Wisenthal (2006) points out that three Western countries popularized the Butterfly myth—France, Italy, and the United States—around the turn of the twentieth century, and he reviews over a dozen works that evidence the myth. In all cases, a Western man travels to a mysterious Asian country, meets a beautiful yet naïve young woman, romances her, and takes her with him back to his home country. This recurring narrative was an allegory for Western colonization of Eastern countries: China dolls represented the supposedly underdeveloped (i.e., infantilized) yet resource rich (i.e., beautiful) allure of 'the Orient', which Western peoples ostensibly should take for their own gain (Wisenthal, 2006).

An alternative construction that emerged in this time is the dragon lady. Whereas the China doll construction was the sexualized manifestation of colonial exploitation, the dragon lady was the personification of "yellow peril," a belief that Asian countries represent a treacherous rival that could supplant Western faith,

values, and geopolitical dominance (Marchetti, 1993). As such, the dragon lady construction depicts Asian women as seductive and conniving. Although yellow peril has existed throughout colonialism, its manifestation through the dragon lady has been documented mostly in the twentieth century (Feng, 2002; Kang, 1993; Marchetti, 1993; Tajima, 1989). Modern American film has reified the dragon lady construction through depictions of Asian women as antagonists that tempt a White male protagonist but ultimately die or are otherwise defeated (Marchetti, 1993). As with the China doll, this construction encapsulates Western neo-colonial views of Asia: a mysterious but precarious "other" who needs to be defeated or indoctrinated.

The least comprehensive sexual construction discussed in the extant literature is for Asian men, who have been depicted as castrated chauvinists (Eng, 2001; Marchetti, 1993; Prasso, 2009; Wisenthal, 2006). This self-contradictory construction frames Asian men as frustrated patriarchs who hold regressive beliefs about gender but are emasculated in relation to White men. The castrated chauvinist construction is implicated in the Butterfly myth, as the White adventurer is typically written as rescuing an innocent Asian woman from an evil but sexless Asian man (Wisenthal, 2006). David Eng (2001) calls the modern construction of Asian masculinity "racial castration." Marchetti (1993) documents twentieth century films that depict Asian men as castrated chauvinists through a consistent absence of love interests in martial arts films, antagonists that attempt but ultimately fail to rape White women, and feminized domestic laborers. Prasso (2009) points to Chinese immigrants' relegation to domestic labor to construct an image of emasculated Asian men. Although the

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image of inept patriarchy originates in colonialism and served to uphold White

imperialist beliefs, Asian male constructions of sexuality have been charted in

twentieth century media (Wisenthal, 2006).

Modern Stereotypes of Asian Women and Men

In relation to those of Black women, there is a dearth of research on the sexual

stereotyping of Asian people. Most of the current research on Asian stereotypes

consists of either "the model minority" belief that Asian people have transcended

oppression or that Asian people are socially awkward (e.g., Lin, Kwan, Cheung, &

Fiske, 2005). Most works on China doll, dragon lady, and castrated chauvinist

constructions lie within philosophy, media studies, and history disciplines already

heretofore cited (Feng, 2002; Kang, 1993; Marchetti, 1993; Prasso, 2009; Tajima,

1989). There are a few exceptions of current work on Asian sexual stereotypes.

Analysis of television shows the reoccurrence of both dragon lady and China

doll stereotypes in modern primetime dramas (Washington, 2012). Analysis of

pornography shows Asian women are less likely to be aggressed against (e.g.,

choked, slapped, or kicked) and express sexual agency (e.g., touch their own bodies

or initiate sex) than White performers (Zhou & Paul, 2016). The trend for Asian

women to be depicted as innocent in pornography, either through less violent sex or

less sexual activity, conforms to the China doll stereotype. Lastly, research on Asian

and White couples shows that Asian women are framed as innocent and waiflike,

conforming to China doll stereotypes, and Asian men are framed as masculine

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through economic but not physical or sexual dominance, thus conforming to castrated chauvinist stereotypes (Nemoto, 2009).

Assumptions of Whiteness

Unlike for Black and Asian people, there is no sustained analysis interrogating historical constructions or modern sexual stereotyping of White people. Although there is a dearth of scholarship on these phenomena in name (i.e., directly naming these tropes as specifically descriptive of White people), there is a trove of work that assumes whiteness when investigating constructions and stereotypes of women and men generally (Dabhoiwala, 2012; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lacqueur, 1992). Women have been viewed as chaste virgins or nefarious sirens, and men have been viewed as dominant conquerors. The siren is a beautiful yet dangerous woman who uses her sexuality to control men, the virgin is an innocent and pure woman, and the conqueror is a virile and dominant man who owns women through feats of strength.

Women have historically been constructed as "sluts or prudes," wanton or chaste (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). The siren half of this construction, in which a woman is hypersexual and predatory, can be traced back millennia (e.g., the biblical Eve or succubus). Sex script theory implicates this binary through the competing roles women must play when gatekeeping men's sexual advances, alternating between siren and virgin (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Research on ambivalent sexism shows that prejudicial attitudes toward women can be either hostile or benevolent, and hostile sexism includes the notion that women use their sexuality to control men

(and that feminism has gone too far; Glick & Fiske, 1996). The siren construction was particularly prominent before the Enlightenment, when biologically essentialist social attitudes began to emphasize innocence and purity through women's role in pregnancy and childrearing (Lacqueur, 1992).

The construction of women as perpetual virgins whose value is through childrearing and domestic labor has existed for millennia (e.g., The Virgin Mary), but this construction gained prominence in the 1700's (Dabhoiwala, 2012) through the Enlightenment. Contemporaneous medical texts also show a shift around the Enlightenment from viewing biological sex as a continuum to viewing it as a binary, and this cooccurred with a greater social emphasis on women's gender roles that were couched in reproductive biology (e.g., suffragists claiming feminine purity and interdependence as mothers; Dabhoiwala, 2012; Lacqueur, 1992). And today, norms for feminine purity when gatekeeping sex or benevolently sexist attitudes toward women persist and perpetuate the virgin construction (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The conqueror is a depiction of men as patriarchs who capture and own women. This construction emerged through practices of raping and enslaving the female populations of defeated military adversaries and patriarchal practices of owning women through marriage (Rubin, 1975). The Conqueror depicts men as sexually active agents who use their wealth and prowess to beat out other men for a female prize, who is then treated as the property of the sexual champion. Research on

adversarial sexual beliefs shows that men are more likely than women to regard sex as a game where oppositional parties must outplay or outwit each other to win power and sex, adding evidence to the notion that some men see themselves as sexual conquerors (Burt, 1980). Likewise, research on heterosexual scripts shows that men are prescribed a sexually active social role wherein they are expected to pursue women, using their prowess to acquire sex (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

The Jezebel, dragon lady, and siren are all images of seductive femininity, but their contrasts highlight their racialization: the Jezebel is the most oversexed and wanton, the dragon lady is the most dangerous, and the siren is the most beautiful and pure. Likewise, the China doll is more infantilized than the virgin, and the closest Black construction of chastity is the sapphire, which repositions sexual purity as independence from men. And for men, the buck and conqueror constructions both center sexual aggression, but the former is framed as animalistic and rapacious; and the castrated chauvinist emasculates Asian manhood in relation to White and Black. Taken together, analysis of racialized social constructions of sexuality reveals theoretically insightful convergences and divergences.

Ethnosexual Capital

Ethnosexual capital is the term that I am adopting to label and investigate racialized sexual attractiveness, including a White standard of beauty and racial fetishization. I discuss the erotic capital conception in greater detail in the upcoming section on structural perspectives of sexual attraction, but the general idea is that societies leverage media and cultural narrative to eroticize particular groups in

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particular ways, which in turn privilege those who match them and marginalize those who deviate from them (Buggs, 2017). The overarching theme for ethnosexual capital is that White people are regarded as universally desirable, Black men and Asian women are fetishized as stereotypically desirable, and Black women and Asian men are denigrated as undesirable (Bedi, 2015).

In the proceeding sections, I build on essentialism to show how ethnosexuality is not only founded in stereotypes but also shaped by desirability standards. First, I review research on individuals' racial preferences online to show the hierarchy of ethnosexual capital. Second, I interrogate three select works that all frame ethnosexual capital as a structural oppression as opposed to an individual choice or prejudice. Third, I review social psychology research on gender-race prototypicality to identify a key mediational mechanism behind ethnosexual capital: assumed gender conformity. Forth and finally, I exhaust the immense trove of research on ethnosexual capital within queer men's community, as the vast majority of the work on the topic lies within this context and because sexual roles in gay communities highlight the interplay between capital and essentialism.

Individual Sexual Attraction

Research on online dating shows a persistent privileging of White people and to a lesser degree Black men and Asian women. Researchers have analyzed thousands of online dating profiles, coding for whether people made specific mentions of racial or ethnic groups they would refuse to date, as well as mentions of racial or ethnic groups they would prefer to date (Feliciano, Lee, & Robnett, 2011; Feliciano,

Robnett, & Komaie, 2009; Rudder, 2014; Lin, & Lundquist, 2013; Lundquist & Lin, 2015; Robnett & Feliciano, 2011).

The founder of dating website OkCupid published a book in 2014 about trends on the platform (Rudder, 2014), and his findings set off a media firestorm (Online dating stats reveal a 'Dataclysm' of telling trends, 2014; Paumgarten, 2014). In his book, Rudder reports on a wide array of user behaviors and profile information, but race was the dimension that garnered the most attention. He found that White people of all genders were the most likely to be messaged and replied. He also found that Black women and Asian men were the least likely to be messaged and replied. When discussing race in an interview, Rudder explains that, "Black users, especially, there's a bias against them. Every kind of way you can measure their success on a site—how people rate them, how often they reply to their messages, how many messages they get—that's all reduced," (Online dating stats reveal a 'Dataclysm' of telling trends, 2014). Although his data showed Asian men were also marginalized, Rudder emphasizes how Black people in general—but Black women especially—are sexually marginalized. The intense media scrutiny that this book incited suggests not only is the trend real, it evokes strong reactions from the populace.

In another study of online dating, White women who indicated racial preferences were most likely to exclude Asian (South and East) and Middle Eastern men, whereas White men were most likely to exclude Black women (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009). This supports the contention that Asian men and Black women specifically are marginalized through ethnosexual capital. White women were

also twice as likely as White men to indicate that they would only date a White person. In a subsequent analysis of the same data, the researchers found that White and Latinx people were more likely to express interest in each other than for Black people, revealing a privileging of White and Latinx daters over others (Feliciano, Lee, & Robnett, 2011). And again using the same dataset, the surveyors compared the racial preferences of all groups, finding that White daters were the least likely to indicate willingness to dating interracially, and Asian men and Black women were the most likely to be excluded in dating profiles (Robnett & Feliciano, 2011).

Other researchers have found the same trends. A study of messages sent and replied over online dating websites showed that women of all racial groups were most likely to respond to messages from White men and least likely to respond to Black men (Lin, & Lundquist, 2013). Latino and White men responded the most often to Asian women, Black men responded the most often to White women, and all non-Black men responded the least often to Black women. The researchers later studied straight and gay websites to compare across them, and they found that straight men and lesbian women are the most likely to message someone from a different race, followed by gay men, and finally straight women (Lundquist & Lin, 2015). They also found that all sexuality and gender groups of White people messaged fellow White people more than other racial groups. The evidence for a hierarchy of desirability is exhaustive, but this work is generally atheoretical, failing to interrogate why it exists and what that means for society.

Structural Sexual Attraction

Although sexual attractions are often individualized as personal preferences, a number of scholars have considered the structural dimension of racialized beauty. In 1976, a little-known sociologist wrote a fascinating book about *Sexual Racism*, which is an idea that possession of White women is the core of White-Black racial animus in the United States (Stember, 1976). Stember evidences his argument that racialized sexuality produces all of the other racialized social cleavages by citing White supremacist propaganda contemporaneous to his writing. In documenting these periodicals, newspaper clippings, and various other media, Stember shows an omnipresent obsession with Black masculinity corrupting White femininity. For example, Stember states that,

> The march on Selma was widely interpreted in the extremist press as an interracial sexual orgy. "The Fiery Cross", organ of the Ku Klux Klan, presented affidavits from presumed witnesses to such activity. [:] "This one particular couple on St. Margaret's lawn were engaged in sexual relations, a white woman (a skinny blond) and a Negro man. After they were through she wiggled out from beneath him and went over to the man lying to the left of them on the lawn and started kissing and caressing his face." … "I saw James Forman, Executive Director of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; Freedom Riders], and a red haired girl whose name is Rachel on one of the cots together." (p. 18).

And several other racist canards, including one where a Black man and White woman have sex "on the floor of the church" and children "stood around and watched, laughing and joking." Stember argues that this characterization was how most White supremacist periodicals covered Bloody Sunday. Stember also points to these and other quotes to show how sexuality was used to debase powerful Black men (e.g., naming Black leaders, depicting the women as promiscuous, sex in public and sacred places). Through these and other texts, Stember documents how segregationists fixated on sexuality and resisted sexual or sex-proximal integration, in turn claiming that fear of sexual corruption animated their racially hostility.

A book review of Stember's account points to the radicalism of the argument for its time. Lederer (1976) calls the analysis "controversial" and devotes half of the review to the part of Stember's argument about a White standard of beauty. He said, "given the emphasis on the desirability of white women past and present in American society, it is understandable that black males should seek to sexually possess them," and that, "Black women certainly realize this state of affairs; considerable resentment towards black males results." Thus the reviewer misses the crux of the argument to instead preoccupy himself with that part about how White women are socially constructed as the most beautiful race. What Stember and—in his own way—Lederer show, is that far from protecting White womanhood, White supremacists profiteered a myth of Black men lusting after White women to claim "our women are better than your women." Thus White women are dehumanized as sexual objects and human bait. Thus Black men are dehumanized as violent sexual perpetrators. Thus Black

women are dehumanized as unwanted. And in telling the narrative, White men thus dehumanize themselves.

A political scientist and legal scholar has recently adopted the same term *sexual racism* to theorize about a larger scope of racialized sexual attraction and desirability (Bedi, 2015). In Bedi's words, "I argue that prioritizing individuals as romantic partners in a way that reinforces ideas of racial hierarchy or stereotypes is not just a private or moral wrong but an issue of social justice," (p. 998). The author draws on the aforementioned scholarship on racial attractions and connects it to the manifold ways that feeling desired and finding a partner affects wellbeing, income, and other matters of justice. Notably, Bedi argues that sexual racism specifically refers to attractions that reinforce racial hierarchy, thus differentiating it from racial attractions that are not structural. It is when preferences or stereotypes about a racial group neatly line up with their disenfranchisement that a society has a matter of justice (Bedi, 2015).

In two concurrent articles, a sociologist applies Bourdieusian theory to consider an erotic habitus (Green, 2008a) and erotic capital (Green, 2008b). In Green's (2008a) scholarship on the erotic habitus, he applies Bourdieu's theory of the habitus (i.e., people unconsciously act out class norms en masse, thus producing a false impression of their essential character) to sexuality. As with a class habitus, the erotic habitus is the individual, visceral reproduction of a social structure through individual behavior. Here, Green argues that the quotidian domination of women by men through sex is a part of a patriarchal sexual habitus. In Green's (2008b) second

article, he uses Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to analyze how erotic capital was deployed among Black gay men in New York. According to this theory, social contexts carry standards for desirability, and when individuals match those standards, they have greater capital to access sex and other resources that it confers (e.g., self-esteem). Erotic capital can be hegemonic but also idiosyncratic and intersectional. In Green's fieldwork, White men fetishized Black men as hypermasculine, but this erotic capital was only bestowed if the Black men were tall, muscular, and dark. Moreover, Black men who differed from normative masculinity were viewed as less desirable than White men who differed from normative masculinity, and Black men who were normatively masculine were still viewed as less desirable than normatively masculine White men. Green's research showed that erotic capital affected condom use, as men who had less of it struggled to resist pressure to have less safe sex.

Lastly, researchers have recently connected sexual racism and erotic capital to analyze the experience of queer Black men (Smith, Morales, & Han, 2018). In this work, the researchers consider the disproportionate capital afforded Black men in a racist social structure, documenting sexual discrimination, stereotype internalization, and counterexamples.

Gender Prototypicality

A burgeoning body of research in social psychology explains a central component of ethnosexual capital: gender prototypicality. Research shows that Asian people are gendered feminine and Black people are gendered masculine, so Asian women and Black men are racially gender prototypical whereas Asian men and Black

women are racially gender atypical (Galinsky, Hall, & Cuddy, 2013; Schug, Alt, & Klauer, 2015; Schug, Alt, Lu, Gosin, & Fay, 2017; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Asian women and Black men are represented more frequently in magazines than Asian men and Black women (White people of both genders were represented the most overall; Schug, Alt, Lu, Gosin, & Fay, 2017). People are more likely to describe a Black man when asked to imagine a Black person and describe an Asian woman when asked to imagine an Asian person (Schug, Alt, & Klauer, 2015). Experiments have found that statements made by Black women and Asian men are less likely to be remembered by participants than statements made by Black men and Asian women (Schug, Alt, & Klauer, 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Taken together, these findings suggest that Black people are gendered masculine and Asian people are gendered feminine, leading to a cognitive association that affects recall and representation.

One study in this field connected prototypicality to capital. In a multipart study, Galinsky, Hall, and Cuddy (2013) first found that Asian people are rated as more feminine than other races, and Black people are rated as more masculine than other races. In their follow-up, they also found that straight men are more attracted to femininity and Asian women (as compared to masculinity and Black women), and straight women are more attracted to masculinity and Black men (as compared to femininity and Asian men). Finally, their mediational analyses revealed that racial attractions were mediated by gender attractions: men's attraction to Asian women over Black women was mediated by preferences for femininity, and women's attraction to Black men over Asian men was mediated by preferences for masculinity.

Although only one study, this research suggests gender prototypicality and eroticization of gender conformity produce ethnosexual capital.

Case study: Queer men

There is an impressive trove of research on ethnosexual capital and essentialism among gay, bisexual, and queer men (Callander, Newman, & Holt, 2015; Green, 2008b; Han, 2009; Lick & Johnson, 2015; Lundquist & Lin, 2015; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009; Phua, 2007; Smith, Morales, & Han, 2018; Tsunokai, McGrath, & Kavanagh, 2014; Wei & Raymond, 2011). Queer men offer a unique context to understand ethnosexuality because many identify as either tops (i.e., sexually insertive in anal sex) or bottoms (i.e., sexually receptive in anal sex). Because topping is normatively considered a masculine sexual role and bottoming a feminine sexual role, racial gender prototypicality interacts to produce an ethnosexual trend: Black men as tops, Asian men as bottoms, and White men as either. Thus beyond simple privileging of White men over Black men over Asian men, there is also a dynamic whereby race sorts queer men into sexual roles.

Ethnosexual capital shapes queer men's sexual relationships in ways similar to those of straight people. Online dating profiles of queer men show that they are most likely to message and reply to White men (Lundquist & Lin, 2015). An analysis of gay Asian men showed that they were most likely to respond to messages from White men (Tsunokai, McGrath, & Kavanagh, 2014). And a large survey of queer men found high rates of explicit racial preferences, with White people being the most

desired, and they found that these preferences were correlated with overt racism (Callander, Newman, & Holt, 2015)

When queer men were asked to list traits associated with being Black, Asian, White, masculine, feminine, a top, or a bottom, there was considerable overlap between several categories (Lick & Johnson, 2015). Specifically, the traits listed for Black, masculine, and top were similar to each other, and the traits listed for Asian, feminine, and bottom were also similar to each other. This trait overlap suggests that queer Black men are thought of as indicative of masculinity and topping, whereas queer Asian men are thought of as indicative of femininity and bottoming. Research also shows that Black men are more likely to prefer being a top and Asian men are more likely to prefer being a bottom (Wei & Raymond, 2011).

Interview and ethnographic research shows that Black men are assumed and expected to identify as tops, and Black men who do not adhere to the role or do not have hegemonically masculine traits are sexually marginalized (Green, 2008b; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009; Smith, Morales, & Han, 2018). Likewise, qualitative studies of Asian men show that they are pigeonholed into bottoming through assumptions of femininity (Han, 2009; Phua, 2007). One interview study was rife with striking quotes from queer Asian men that exemplified these assumptions about them, such as, "Asians are not considered men… Asians are simply physically too smooth and soft and act so differently," (Phua, 2007, p. 914). Taken together, research on queer men shows a tendency to view White men as

universally desirable, Black men as masculine tops, and Asian men as undesirable or feminine bottoms.

Ethnosexual Culture

Unlike ethnosexual essentialism and capital, which foregrounded racism and White supremacy, culture covers the intimacy and human connection dimensions of sexuality. Sexual attraction is significantly interwoven with other desires, such as to be vulnerable together, share a life, or start a family, and through these factors becomes heavily racialized. Research on attitudinal correlates of interracial relationships and their changes across historical, regional, and other demographic contexts reveals the profoundly cultural nature of ethnosexuality (Herman & Campbell, 2012). A less robust but still noteworthy body of work on interracial couples counseling and interracial relationship quality shows that not only desire to have but also success within mixed race relationships is related to sociocultural factors, including their capacity to do racework (Steinbugler, 2012). Although this research assesses how cultural factors shape intimacy and commitment—as opposed to sexual attraction—it offers a good theoretical foundation to later explore the interplay between one's cultural milieu and ethnosexuality in my study.

Interracial Relationship Demographics and Trends

Research on rates of interracial relationships suggest they are far less common than intraracial relationships yet not an insignificant share. For example, the 2010 United States Census found that ten percent of marriages were interracial (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012). Interestingly, they also found that 20 percent of

unmarried relationships were interracial, so there is survey support for the contention that relationships become more monoethnic as they become more intimate. Analyzing data from the American Community Survey, researchers have found that 15 percent of new marriages are interracial, so the gap between interracial marriages and relationships appears to be shrinking (Wang, 2012). This analysis also found that people of color were more likely to marry interracially and—in alignment with capital—Black men and Asian women were the most likely to marry someone of another race. Socioeconomic data lend a sliver of insight into these differences, as White and Asian couples had higher earnings than all other couples, and White women who married Black or Latino men had lower incomes than White women who married White or Asian men (Wang, 2012). White and Asian people tend to have higher incomes, so they may be integrating through their middle class and wealthy milieus (e.g., at work), and White women who are lower income may be more likely to integrate with Black and Latino men in working class settings (Wang, 2012). A nationally representative, longitudinal survey showed that rates of interracial relationships decrease with age (Joyner, & Kao, 2005). This may be because older relationships tend to be marital, and interracial marriage is less common than interracial dating. This may also be because younger people tend to live more racially integrated lives through schooling. For example, students at more racially diverse universities were more likely to date interracially (Bowman, 2012). Pew found that about one in ten babies born in the United States is interracial, so these trends appear in childrearing too (Parker, Horowitz, Morin, & Lopez, 2015).

Survey research on attitudes toward interracial relationships shows higher affirmative rates than for actually being in one, but large shares of people still refuse to date interracially. A nationally representative sample of White people reported low rates of willingness to date people of color (Herman & Campbell, 2012). For White men, 43% would not date a Black woman and 27% would not date an Asian woman; and for White women, 57% would not date a Black man and 55% would not date an Asian man. Interestingly, White women were overall less likely to endorse interracial relationships, but White men saw a familiar split between Asian and Black women, endorsing the former to a much greater degree. Herman and Campbell (2012) also asked about willingness to cohabitate with, marry, or have children with people of color, and they found lower agreement with each successive step toward intimacy. Additionally, their multinomial regressions revealed that being male, young, highly educated, liberal, nonreligious, a Northerner, and warm toward people of color predicted willingness to have interracial relationships (Herman & Campbell, 2012). A recent study helps to explain lower rates of interracial relationships among White women as compared to White men (Stillwell & Lowery, 2020). In an experimental setting, being in an interracial relationship caused White women (but not White men) to be perceived as lower status, and this effect was mediated by perceived gender deviance (i.e., White women who date interracially are seen as more gender deviant than White men). Thus, lower experience or willingness to date interracially among White women may be due to gender roles (e.g., feminine purity).

Although rates of interracial relationships are lower among White people (Wang, 2012), White people report greater willingness to date interracially than people of color (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). A survey study found that White people's exposure to interracial relationships in media is correlated with positive attitudes toward them and willingness to have one (Lienemann & Stopp, 2013). Bonam and Shih (2009) found that multiracial people were more comfortable dating and marrying interracially than monoracial people, and this correlation was mediated by belief that race is socially constructed. Thus, multiracial people may be more likely to date interracially because they reject essentialist notions of race. They also found that all participants were more comfortable working or befriending interracially than dating or—especially—marrying interracially (Bonam & Shih, 2009).

Qualitative research adds nuance to quantitative studies of interracial relationships. For example, in-depth interviews with Black women revealed a complicated set of factors shaping desire for and quality of relationships with White men. Ethnosexual essentialism and capital themes emerged in the interviews, such as a White standard of beauty and stereotypes about the sapphire, but so did culture. Respondents connected dating Black men with racial pride and resisting oppression, for example saying, that interracial dating is, "definitely a problem in the Black community because it takes away from us, and we're already struggling to succeed as a people," (p. 550). Black women also explained that they would struggle to relate to and connect with a White man, and they talked about the social stigma of supposedly being a racial "traitor" (p. 551). Another interview study, this one with Black men,

reveals that they leverage Black essentialism and capital in the interracial relationships (e.g., "player talk") but also disrupt it through humanizing themselves and their partners, using the intimacy of relationships to defy stereotyping (Wilkins, 2012). These studies show the complicated array of cultural dynamics that impact ethnosexuality, such as the social mobility, stereotype prevalence, and collective identity of one's race or ethnicity.

Interracial Relationship Quality

Research on satisfaction and dissolution of interracial relationships shows that attitudinal factors play a meaningful role, as does one's willingness to engage with ethnosexual dimensions of their relationship. Survey research shows that interracial relationships are more likely to be dissolved than intraracial ones (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2006). The researchers explained this phenomenon by pointing to lower rates of public disclosure, social support, and familial awareness and acceptance of one's interracial relationship, meaning external factors affected their private lives. Somewhat diverging from this finding, another study assessed a wide array of relationship quality factors, such as satisfaction and conflict, and either found equivalent rates or better rates (e.g., higher satisfaction, lower conflict) among interracial relationships than intraracial ones (Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006). Although interracial relationships may be societally stigmatized, affecting relationship quality, the people who have them may be more resilient or otherwise able to overcome cultural stressors.

A study of interracial couples in therapy found that the most common challenges they faced were the same ones as monoracial couples, but they faced unique challenges as well (Leslie & Young, 2015): social rejection of their relationship (e.g., family, community, media), privilege differences between partners (e.g., White partner existing in privilege when alone but not when together), racial identity struggles (e.g., anxiety over thoughts of rejecting one's race), and microaggressions (e.g., whether they happened or how to respond to them). Steinbugler drew from her practice as a couples' counselor to discuss these themes, and she labels interracial relationship maintenance racework (2012). Racework is a process whereby people in interracial relationships, both sexual and platonic, work to address racial difference and maintain intimacy across it. Steinbugler's elements of racework include boundary work (differentiating one's relationship from stereotypes and preconceptions), visibility management (how much to conceal in public), emotional labor (unpacking privilege), and navigating racial homogeneity (dealing with microaggressions). She uses interviews with interracial couples and adopts a structural perspective to show how sustained engagement with race dynamics in relationships supports interpersonal satisfaction and wellbeing.

Ethnosexual Authenticity

In Stember's (1976) aforementioned pioneering book on sexual racism, he opens with a brief discussion of his methodological choice to analyze texts instead of people, and in so doing, he illustrated the final theme of my study: authenticity. He stated that,

Though hundreds of hours were spent interviewing selected informants

on tape, individually and in groups, blacks and whites, men and

women, little of real value emerged from this effort. While the

transcriptions provided an occasional insight or clue, the motives and

attitudes of central importance to this study were nowhere near the

level of awareness for most respondents. Though respondents were

selected for their involvement in interracial sex relationships, few were

able to understand, much less express, their motives, feelings or

sources of gratification. Many were actually defensive and seemed to

hide relevant impulses, even from themselves. (p. xiii)

In 1976, a researcher tried asking people about racial attraction, and after investing

hundreds of hours of his life, he was left with nothing and then forced to start from

scratch using a different method. Even during a period of time when blatant racial

prejudice was more common, participants were unwilling or unable to discuss their

racial attractions. Although he did not report quotes of these responses in his book,

Stember nevertheless documented a central aspect of ethnosexuality. Having a racial

preference is stigmatized (Silvestrini, 2020), talking about race in any context

provokes distress (McIntosh, 1988/2020), and sexuality is taboo in and of itself as

well (Foucault, 1976/78). I review research on White privilege to provide insight into

how and why people may be inauthentic in their discussions of ethnosexuality.

White Privilege

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Research shows that White people often do not see race and react with hostility or anxiety when asked to consider how race has privileged or otherwise affected their lives (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1994; McIntosh, 1988/2020; Phoenix, 1996; Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, Phillips, & Denney, 2012). The privilege knapsack is a concept developed by McIntosh (1988/2020) to demonstrate all of the ways that White people experience privilege without realizing it. The knapsack includes not getting pulled over by police for no reason and not having one's citizenship erroneously questioned, which are factors of privilege that are invisible to White people until they see how different life is for people of color (McIntosh, 1988/2020). Dyer (1997) describes the invisibility of Whiteness as due to its presumed normativity, in that White people, "are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard" (p. 11). When White people have been shown the privilege knapsack in focus groups and interviews, many participants responded with aggression, guilt, or denial (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001).

A special issue of the Journal of Social Issues was devoted to research on White privilege, and a central aspect of the psychological processes behind it is the lack of awareness and negative reactions to being made aware (Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, Phillips, & Denney, 2012). Older interview studies have shown that White people are less aware and more defensive of White privilege than people of color (Frankenberg, 1994; Phoenix, 1996). One of the studies of ethnosexuality showed that White people respond to the discussion with guilt, denial, and

defensiveness, thus showing how White privilege shapes sexuality too (Silvestrini, 2020).

Research Questions

My research questions are informed by the extant work on historical constructions of sexuality, modern sexual stereotyping, rates of racial sexual preferences, structural perspectives on racial sexual preferences, racial gender prototypicality, ethnosexuality among queer men, rates and attitudes toward interracial relationships, quality of interracial relationships, and White privilege. In conducting and analyzing interviews, I aimed to understand:

1) Which racial groups will participants find attractive and why?

2) Which racial groups will participants have dated and why?

3) What attributions will participants make for their racialized attractions and experiences?

4) How will participants relate their ethnosexuality to their own racial and other identities?

5) How will participants characterize the sexuality (e.g., behavior) of different racial groups?

6) To what extent will participants report experiencing fetishization or another sexual difference because of their race, and if so, how?

7) How will participants react to being asked about racialized attractions and experiences?

Method

I conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with 21 adults about their sexual attractions to and experiences with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Interviews were audio-recorded, and my research assistants transcribed them verbatim. We open-coded eight transcripts and consensus coded six transcripts, and then I coded the remaining fifteen by myself. I obtained human subjects research approval (HS3251) from the University of California Santa Cruz Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited into the study through publicly posted flyers. We advertised the research project as the "Sexual selves study: What we're into and why we're into it," and all materials included a statement that "This is an interview study about what types of sex you are into, what types of people you are attracted to, and what you think causes your attractions." Flyers indicated that participants would receive $25 for taking part in the two-hour study and also provided the IRB protocol number, basic study details, participant risks and rights, and an email address to inquire further. We posted physical flyers in local coffee shops, sex shops, and community centers, and posted digital flyers on Facebook and Craigslist. I chose to pay participants $25 for two hours of their day in order to thank them for their time without unduly coercing them into a sex study (i.e., I only wanted to recruit people who genuinely wanted to participate).

When participants emailed the address on the flyer, a research assistant would provide a more detailed description of the study, screen them for eligibility (i.e., 23 or older), and confirm their interest in participation. The detailed study description stated that interview questions would cover the participant's gender, race, and sexual orientation, and how they shape the participant's sexuality; the participant's preferences for all types of sex, both specific acts and the kind of energy of that sex; the participant's preferences for types of people, including personalities, body types, genders, and races; the participant's experiences of being desired or not desired by other people; and the participant's explanations for why they have their attractions. Then, the research assistant would schedule a time and location to conduct the interview. Participants were given the option to take part in the study in a room on the university campus (n=12), in their own home (n=5), or at a local community center (n=4). In all cases, participants were in a private setting when being interviewed. We recruited participants until we reached saturation (Saunders et al., 2017), meaning we kept admitting new people into the study until the same themes began to consistently reemerge in interviews. Some individual codes did not meet saturation, including several that I developed after terminating data collection, but I found exhaustive evidence of each theme generally.

Participants

Participants were a convenience sample. The gender breakdown was mostly even across binary options: 11 identified as men (all cisgender), nine identified as women (eight cisgender, one transgender), and one identified as a non-binary gender.

Most participants' racial or ethnic identities were White (14), followed by Latinx (3), mixed heritage (2), and Black and Asian (1 each). Fourteen people in the sample identified as straight, followed by six who identified as either bisexual or queer, and one person who identified as both asexual and straight; but many people who labeled themselves straight had same-sex experiences and attractions. Ages were diverse, with one person in their 70's, three in their 60's, five in their 40's, seven in their 30's, and five in their 20's. Demographic information is displayed in Table 1. All participants were older than 22, not incarcerated or institutionalized, and cognitively capable of giving informed consent.

Table 1: Participant pseudonyms and demographic characteristics

Pseudonym	*Race/ethnicity*	*Gender*	*Sexual Orientation*	*Age*
Arturo	Latinx	Cis man	Straight	20s
Beatrice	White	Cis woman	Asexual, Straight	40s
Catherine	White	Cis woman	Bisexual	30s
Conor	White	Cis man	Straight	40s
Donna	White	Cis woman	Bisexual	40s
Faye	Asian	Trans woman	Straight	30s
Frank	White	Cis man	Bisexual	60s
Gage	White	Cis man	Straight	30s
Gerald	Black	Cis man	Straight	60s
Gwen	White	Cis woman	Bisexual	30s
Kevin	White	Cis man	Straight	20s
Marshall	White	Cis man	Straight	30s
November	White	Non-binary	Queer	30s
Ronald	White	Cis man	Straight	60s
Salvador	Latinx	Cis man	Straight	30s
Samantha	White & Asian	Cis woman	Straight	40s
Shannon	White	Cis woman	Bisexual	20s
Terrance	White	Cis man	Straight	40s
Vanessa	Latinx	Cis woman	Queer	20s
Violet	White	Cis woman	Straight	70s
William	White & Native Am.	Cis man	Straight	20s

Participant pseudonyms, races or ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and age ranges.

Procedure

When a participant arrived to be interviewed, I would first re-read the short study description provided to them during pre-screening to ensure that they were fully aware of the question topics. Next, I had participants read and sign an informed consent form that explained their rights as participants, potential risks and benefits to participation, and how their confidentiality would be maintained. They then completed a short demographic questionnaire that included questions about their race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Finally, I asked for the participant's permission to audio record them, turned on the recorder, and began the interview. Interviews were advertised as lasting one to two hours, but some participants opted to continue for longer, so in practice they lasted one to three hours.

Because of the stigmatized nature of my questions (i.e., asking about sex, asking about race, and asking about the combination of both), I took particular care to develop rapport with participants and conducted the interview like a conversation, with significant back-and-forth between us. If participants disclosed a stigmatized attraction or they expressed unease, I would normalize the experience, drawing from the literature, other interviews, or my own experience to validate their response. As such, the findings here should be understood as co-constructed between me and each participant.

The interview protocol began with an identity map procedure in which participants drew and then discussed their different identities, using Venn diagram

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circles of various sizes and overlaps to represent their importance and intersections. Next, I would go through their identities to inquire about how each relate to sexuality, usually starting with gender and sexual orientation, then age, then race, and then all others. Asking about identity and sexuality in vague, open-ended terms such as these was instructive because it revealed eagerness and fluency with the topics. I then asked about sexual preferences for and experiences with different people (e.g., genders, races, body types, personalities) and ways of having sex. In practice, participants described their preferences and experiences in terms of their partners, so I would often ask about individual people and what attracted the participant to them. I would then flip the question to ask how the participant is perceived by others, such as if they have felt fetishized or unwanted because of an identity. Finally, I asked participants to muse about why they hold certain preferences, including for social (e.g., media), developmental (e.g., childhood crushes), or biological (e.g., pheromones) reasons. Although the content for this study focuses on experiences with and attractions to racial and ethnic backgrounds, participants discussed their experiences and attractions to other identities, such as gender. I ended the interview with a question asking participants to dream up their sexual revolution, which allowed them to reprise their interview in expressly political terms.

Upon completion of an interview, participants were given $25 and a sheet of community mental health and sexuality resources. I would also memo immediately afterward to organize my thoughts and identify preliminary themes. The memos were also an opportunity for me to preserve information that participants shared before or

after being recorded, was communicated non-verbally, or would aid in transcription and analysis. Immediately after each interview, I transferred the audio file to a secure computer and encrypted server, and I filed physical demographic questionnaires and consent forms in a locked cabinet. At the start of an interview, I would speak a randomly generated ID number that was printed on the demographic questionnaire in order to later match both datasets without identifiable information.

Research assistants transcribed all interviews except for one that included especially sensitive information, which I transcribed. Many participants volunteered information that could be traumatic to transcribe, such as that they had survived or perpetrated sexual assault, so I provided a brief synopsis of the interviews and gave my research assistants the choice to pick which one they wanted to work on. All research assistants were aware of the nature of the study before being hired, and all of them wanted the job because of the challenging study topics. I held weekly laboratory meetings with all research assistants, during which they would give updates about their progress and the whole team would give feedback and guidance. This included issues with comprehension of participant talk, use of various conventions (e.g., denoting ambiguous utterances), punctuation, and preliminary thoughts on emergent or a priori themes. After a research assistant transcribed an interview, I would check the transcript for accuracy and make necessary corrections. Because I conducted all interviews, my checks allowed me to rely on my memory to reconcile indecipherable speech.

Codebook

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I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) to code the data and organize codes into themes. Because I conducted all interviews myself, and both of my other coders transcribed several (five at minimum) transcripts, we were able to gain a deep familiarity with the data before formally analyzing them. I also shared sections of my dissertation proposal and engaged in conversations on study topics with the research assistants, so they could familiarize themselves with the data in conversation with planned analyses.

Next, we open-coded eight transcripts for talk about race and ethnicity, paying particular attention to question stems for racial attractions, but we analyzed the entire transcripts to identify other mentions and more subtle themes. Open coding consisted of carefully reading printed transcripts and writing free-form notes in the margins and on separate sheets of paper (if necessary). Open coding included identification of and musings on a priori themes in the texts, but we also highlighted and annotated any excerpts that sparked curiosity or touched on race in ways that I had not induced. After open-coding a transcript independently, we would meet as a group to talk through our codes, looking for fidelity between them, exploring novel disjunctures, and sussing out complicated or counterintuitive text. I would write notes during these meetings, which along with my open codes, became the source material for my initial codebook.

After open coding, I then drafted a codebook with codes organized by two preliminary themes: essentialism and culture. I initially binned ethnosexual capital within ethnosexual essentialism, as a subcode, because mentions often cooccurred.

The ethnosexual capital subcodes were initially categorized as either fetishization or de-eroticization. The initial ethnosexual culture code consisted of either shared or unshared culture but was generally vague in terms of what constituted culture. We then reviewed the codebook as a team and piloted it on two transcripts, upon which we identified the need for capital as its own theme and more specific codes for culture. We added capital codes for preferences and features and identified several individual culture codes: values, practices, norms, marginality, experiences, and locales. We then coded two more transcripts, which 1) netted the identification of the authenticity theme and codes, and 2) revealed that granular culture codes should simply be binned into experiences (while retaining a separate code for locales). We again coded two transcripts, and through this process identified codes for biology and canards within essentialism, recognition within capital, and prohibitions within culture. After making these modifications we formally close-coded the data.

We independently coded six transcripts. In this phase of the analysis, we each applied the code book to our transcripts, highlighting text and denoting each code and subcode. After coding a transcript, we met as a group to share our results, and during these meetings, we discussed each coder's codes to identify consistencies and inconsistencies. Upon discovering an inconsistency, we asked each coder why they did or did not code a mention, and we reconciled differences. Typically, inconsistencies were caused by one or more coders noticing a subtle code, so consensus was achieved simply by pointing it out, and then we would agree to include it. Through this process, we were able to develop a hermeneutic community

(i.e., an intellectual community that deeply understands the codebook and interprets the data in a similar way), one that consistently agreed upon mention and meaning of codes (Josselson, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from consensus coding additional transcripts, so I coded the remaining fifteen transcripts by myself. This process resulted in four themes, displayed in Table 2.

The essentialism theme includes talk for the ways that participants made claims about the sexual morphology of racial and ethnic groups, either through *generalizations, tokenism, biology, or canards*. Generalizations were instances where participants would describe an ethnic or racial group as generally homogenous, often times but not always in a manner that aligned with stereotypes. The tokenism code was reserved for moments when participants would describe a stereotype conforming person as a response to my questions about race or otherwise indirectly communicate a stereotype through an individual. Biology codes consisted of the few mentions of physiology or genetics affecting racialized sexuality. Canards were bogus stories that had low face validity but were also reductive or essentializing. We subcoded all essentialism codes for the particular ethnic or racial group being described, using the participant's original terminology instead of binning them into larger racial groups. We did this because, for example, one participant spoke at length about distinctions between Asian versus Indian men, two categories that would fall under the same larger bin.

Ethnosexual capital codes referred to the manner in which participants placed unequal value on the sexual desirability of different groups. The code for specific

Table 2: Code definitions and counts.

Ethnosexuality	Participant Count	Definition
Essentialism	12	Universal claims about racialized sexuality
Generalizations	10	Stereotypes or other statements about racial group homogeneity
Tokenism	7	Racial stereotype conforming responses about individuals
Biology	4	Racialized sexual attribution to physiology or other biological factors
Canards	4	Bogus and reductive stories about racial groups
Capital	17	Unequal racialized sexual desirability
Preferences	17	Individual preferences for racial groups
Features	14	Individual preferences for racialized characteristics
Recognition	9	Awareness of unequal racialized sexual desirability
Culture	17	Desires for shared and unshared racialized experiences
Experiences	13	Values, norms, practices, marginality, and other cultural aspects of racialized sexuality
Locale	16	Racialized sexual opportunity from geographic location
Prohibitions	5	Cultural taboo for interracial relationships
Authenticity	15	Straightforwardness and defensiveness of responses about racialized sexuality
Contradictions	9	Inconsistencies in statements about race
Platitudes	13	Vague equivocations about race
Counterquestions	3	Questions as responses about race

Participant counts of themes and their corresponding codes, along with brief definitions for each.

racial *preferences* defined discussion of participants' personal endorsement of one or another group being more or less sexually desirable (e.g., "I like Asian women"). We also coded for racialized *features* (e.g., blonde hair or large lips) that were not

explicitly described in terms of race but nevertheless cued to it, particularly when a participant later disclosed an explicit preference. The *recognition* code defined the times when participants would describe a socially understood hierarchy without necessarily endorsing it personally (e.g., "I hear the whole Asian girl thing"). In all coded text, we subcoded for the ethnic group being described, along with whether they were viewed as having *high* or *low* capital.

Culture included codes for wanting sexual partners because of their shared or unshared *experiences*, the pragmatics of shared *locales*, and formal *prohibitions* against dating someone from another ethnic group. Cultural experiences could be values, practices, privileges, oppressions, and life stories that were racially or ethnically grounded, even if the participant did not articulate them as such. The code for locale consisted of both geographic proximity and the interpersonal proximity of people living in segregated neighborhoods or working in segregated occupations. Prohibitions were explicit cultural expectations to date one's own racial group. Again, we subcoded for the racial or ethnic group being described (when mentioned directly) or attempted the most accurate possibility (when inferring from racialized cultural markers).

The codes for ethnosexual authenticity covered the various ways that participants displayed their comfort or discomfort with being asked about racial or ethnic patterns among their partners and desires. We coded for whether people gave vague *platitudes¸* particularly equivocations between all races or statements that they do not see race. We also coded for *contradictions¸* which was when a participant

would give discrepant answers that suggested inauthenticity. Lastly, we occasionally coded for when participants would give *counterquestions*, as these appeared to be a way of avoiding answering the question. Again, we subcoded for the racial group or groups being discussed, but the mentions for these codes more often included general statements about race without labeling specific groups. I also chose to code for authenticity because much of the talk on race was high inference and thus required what Josselson (2004) terms a hermeneutics of suspicion, so I wanted to read the data with an intentional eye for believability. Though less likely for a sample of sex study volunteers, talking about race and sex is taboo, and my codes for authenticity helped me understand how the taboo affected the data.

Analytic Style

Multiple codes for multiple themes wove in and out of each other throughout the transcripts, so a given utterance would often touch on several of the themes. I simply multi-coded the same speech to address this issue during coding, but for writing up results, I wrestled between totally disaggregating a single mention into each constituent code or comprehensively displaying every divergent code in a single utterance at once. To split the difference, I have separated the data into each of the four themes and the individual codes that make them up, but I have also woven in analysis of other codes and themes if they played a role in how the primary one appeared in the transcript. For example, if a participant endorsed a generalization about a group (essentialism) and stated they found that group desirable because of the

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generalization (capital), I would choose the theme that seemed most central between the two, report the excerpt in the section for the more central theme, and describe and analyze both themes. In practice this means that some analysis of a given theme will occur in different sections than the one formally designated for that theme. Because participant talk was fluid, and people frequently touched on multiple themes and codes within a given response, I made the analytic decision to retain complete responses and highlight how codes flowed from one to another. In a similar vein, I typically use longform quotes in order to provide context and nuance. I did not disaggregate by subcodes because they were too variable (e.g., specific racial categories like Asian or Indian).

Results

Ethnosexual themes of some type emerged across all 21 participants. For essentialism, we coded 12 people for at least one code, including ten for generalizations, seven for tokenism, and four each for biology and canards. We coded capital somewhat more frequently, assigning 17 participants one or more codes: 17 for preferences, 14 for features, and nine for recognition. We also coded 17 interviewees for culture, and this included 13 for experiences, 16 for locale, and five for prohibitions. For the last theme of authenticity, we identified codes among 15 people, and this was made up of nine participants with contradictions, 13 with platitudes, and three with counterquestions. All names are pseudonyms. I provide demographic information (i.e., race or ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and age) for

each participant upon their first mention in the results but not thereafter, for the sake of brevity. Full demographic information is provided in Table 1.

Ethnosexual Essentialism

Ethnosexual essentialism consists of instances when participants depicted sexual attractions and other human differences as immutable and categorical. The first code for this theme is *generalizations*, which refers to explicit articulations of stereotypes about racial or ethnic groups. Express generalizations were striking when they occurred, but their occurrence was less common as compared to more subtle themes. *Tokenism* was when participants used an individual person as a stand-in for a racial group, particularly when a stereotype conforming person was produced as an answer to racial and ethnic attraction. Tokenism was the most frequent code for essentialism, but the code was higher inference than the others. Although far less central than I had hypothesized, some participants expressed *biological* essentialism of race, attributing their attractions to genetically determined factors, such as pheromones. Finally, participants shared explanations for their racial attractions that seemed absurd. These *canards* were clearly bogus stories that portrayed ethnosexual attractions as essentialized through bad dreams, family conflicts, or other sources with low face validity. Altogether, the essentialism theme illuminates how stereotypes and misconceptions shape attractions to and experiences with racial groups.

Generalizations

One of the most frequently spoken generalizations was the notion that Black and Indian men are attracted to voluptuous or "curvy" women. For example, Ronald,

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a straight, White, cis man in his 60s, talked about going to an Indian restaurant with "a big girl, and she says, 'Indian guys, they love me,'" so they receive unusually good service. After this experience, Ronald states that Indian men "like bigger women; it's just what they like." Gwen, a bisexual, White, cis woman in her 30s, spoke in much greater detail.

Gwen said, "the Indians fucking love me. The Black guys love me, like with the ass, and with the curves. That's their ideal, and the ideal body shape for those—." I asked her to clarify whether particular racial groups are especially attracted to her, and she said, "I feel like they should be." Gwen and Ronald's generalizations, however innocuous and derived from first-hand experience, adhered to the Jezebel construction. Black women have historically been cast as over-sexed, not only in terms of demeanor but also physiology, with large breasts, hips, and buttocks regarded as the physical manifestation of their lasciviousness (Crais & Scully, 2009). The belief that Black or other dark-skinned men of color prefer voluptuous women thus aligns with stereotypes about the body shapes of Black women—with assumptions of intraracial sexual preference as a mediator. Additionally, Gwen's language choices of "their ideal" and "they should be" conveyed constitutional racial difference, an essentialism that was not necessarily biological but could nevertheless be viewed as deterministic. This sort of diffuse generalization without a clear causal agent was common in interviews; people spoke of racial groups as fundamentally sexually different, but they did not provide consistent attributions for that difference.

Although Gwen invoked essentialized language to explain her generalizations, she later pointed to culture and primary observation: "My sister's very best friend is Indian, and she was made fun of for being too skinny, and she wished that she had more curves, so I'm pretty sure this is a cultural thing." Here, Gwen discusses racialized beauty standards and personal experience to show how generalizations can be grounded in ethnic norms. Her explanation for Black men was also based on personal experience and cued to cultural difference. Gwen explained, "I hear about the Black men loving the ass, and I have definitely experienced some of the Black men who appreciate my ass." Gwen thus attributes generalizations about men of color to societal tropes or cultural norms that her individual experience corroborates.

As we explored different explanations for the patterns Gwen described, she offered an eclectic mix of attributions: essence to culture to discourse to personal experience. The etiology of a behavior may be paramount to scientists, but laypeople are generally not invested in the identification of falsifiable causal mechanisms behind observations. Biology is a rational explanation for essentialism, but people's beliefs about everyday things are not necessarily rational.

The ethnosexual attributions provided by Gwen were later complicated when she spoke about White people's attraction to curves. Gwen said, "Black guys love my ass, but some White guys love my ass; some of the White women love my ass." This talk reveals how observations can be mediated by prior beliefs, such that a Black man who is attracted to voluptuous women is interpreted as a generalization, but a White person who is attracted to voluptuous women is interpreted as an individual

difference. In other words, social attitudes that argue Black and Indian men are attracted to buxom women sort corroborating experiences into trend-lines and contradictory ones into error terms. Gwen's talk about the sexual preferences of Black and Indian men reveals theoretically felicitous individual experiences (i.e., viewing men of color as attracted to Jezebels) but without the pejorative framing or biological attribution that hallmarked eugenic ideas from which the original construction was birthed (i.e., that Black women are biologically more voluptuous and thus suited for producing children).

Samantha (straight, White and Asian, cis woman, 40s) communicated generalizations about Indian men too, but hers depicted Indian men in India, whom she contrasted from Israeli men in Israel; and hers focused on infantilization and emasculation more so than hypersexuality. Samantha ascribed particularly high sexual capital to men from, "Israel; I feel like it's a very sexual culture. Men and women are just so earthy and just so straight-forward." As with other respondents, Samantha attributed her generalizations to cultural norms. She went on to say that "they're sort of that dark, brooding [type]," and that "the way [Israeli men] are in life is the way they are as lovers: I would say that they're very strong and sexy." This picture contrasted from the one that Samantha painted of Indian men:

> Whereas Indian men are certainly not like that. They're just meek, and
> they all cum really fast 'cause they don't have sex. It's so repressed,
> and it's probably amazing that they're even seeing a White woman
> naked. They're so young. So, so young. No matter what age."

Here, Samantha touches on tropes of femininity (i.e., meek) and backwardness (i.e., repressed) to make sense of her individual experiences with Indian men abroad. These significantly diverge from that of Israeli men, who Samantha generalized as masculine—"earthy," "brooding," "strong"—and desirable. Although Samantha's generalizations were grounded in her lived experience as an Ashkenazi Jewish and South Asian woman who had spent years touring India and Israel, she also used essentialized language: "so young, no matter what age." As with Gwen, Samantha's generalizations were founded on real personal experiences and real cultural differences, but she drew from societal stereotypes to make meaning out of them.

Samantha also had experiences in India with men who were not meek. She explained that, "I was alone, and there was like four men on this side and three men here, just starting at me. They don't try to hide it; just staring at me the whole time, like the whole eight-hour train ride." Despite scenarios such as these, Samantha did not shake her evaluation of Indian men. When I asked if she was scared, she said that she was used to it and described the experience as "uncomfortable." Again, Samantha's evaluation was grounded in experience, but those experiences are interpreted through an entire nexus of beliefs that shape how they are understood. And crucially, these nexus affect partner choices and other sexual behavior, socially constructing sexuality through generalizations.

The one person to explicitly essentialize White men was Donna (bisexual, White, cis woman, 40s), who offered the construction as an explanation for why she "wish[ed] I wasn't attracted to the White guys." Donna explained that, "I could be

attracted to a lot of types of people, but I always end up choosing the same type… a lot of Latino and White guys, which I kinda hate." When I asked why she hated that, Donna said, "because they're always trouble," and "they feel entitled to whatever." Donna thus depicts White men as high capital—a common theme across interviews– and then frames that capital as entitlement. As an example of this, she talked about "this one guy who expected me to go home with him just because he bought me a drink," and who was "mocking and making fun of me, but most of the time when I have sex, it's consensual." In describing this man as acting privileged to her body because he is White, Donna's story aligns with the conqueror construction, wherein White men gained sexual access through social status and force of will. Again, the beliefs about racial groups that people bring to their individual interactions mediate how their behaviors are understood. Ethnosexual essentialism, as an intrapsychic conduit through which stimuli are interpreted, affects sexual desire by superimposing cultural representations onto interpersonal interactions. If White men's sexual aggression is regarded as entitlement, but men of color's sexual aggression is recognized for what it is, then White men become the less scary and dangerous race, which in turn can facilitate intimate connection with them—and reify stereotypes about men of color. This is one datum from one study—and Donna made no claims about men of color—but it nevertheless points to a potential important societal phenomenon: essentialized representations of White and Black men shape how their sexual aggression is interpreted, imputing criminality into Black men to a greater degree than for White men.

William, a straight, White and Native American, cis man in his 20s, drew from stereotypes about sexually aggressive dark-skinned men to interpret how he was racialized by others. He was, "hanging out with these Chinese girls" in a bar, and someone came up to them to see if they were okay, so he "wonder[ed] if they're pulling some kind of strategy where they have checkers," and "wonder[ed] is this a race thing?—like I have big hair and look sternly and stuff like that; I could kind of look aggressive." William further supported this idea by relaying another time when two women came up to him and an acquaintance to say that, "we're checking on the most aggressive-looking people at the party right now to see if everything's okay." William thought, "the [other] guy has got the big hair, I got a big hair thing going on too, and darker skin too you know… I mean the whole Middle Eastern rape scare kind of thing." William thus expressed a fear that because of his racial phenotypicality, he would be viewed as Middle Eastern and therefore a dangerous, aggressive perpetrator. In both of these cases, William is simply producing an answer that could explain the situation, not directly endorsing the stereotype himself nor providing concrete evidence of the stereotype motivating anyone's actions. Yet this conundrum about whether or not a prejudice actually resides within an individual is the rule more so than the exception for how racial bias emerges. Exactly who holds the prejudice is ambiguous, but it exists in the ether, so it can be interpreted within anyone. This ambiguity bedeviled me as well.

Tokenism

Tokenism refers to instances where participants treated individual people as fungible with a stereotyped racial group. The reasons behind tokenism were ambiguous, but in many instances they appeared to be driven by essentialism. A straight, White, cis man in his 40s, Conor, mentioned that he, "had a girlfriend that [if] you fell asleep, she'd put [her finger] in your butt," which he relayed as a joke to explain a neurosis he had about his anus. In explaining why she would do this, Conor said that, "I think she's a princess—or something, to be honest—of one of those Middle Eastern countries. I think it was a dominance thing for her a little bit." Through the statement that his Middle Eastern girlfriend was a princess, Conor implicitly communicates notions of eastern exoticism and backwardness, but without endorsing stereotypes himself. Additionally, Conor's concern that this woman would emasculate him as "a dominance thing" conforms to the East Asian stereotype of the dragon lady, an exotic and dangerous woman who uses her feminine wiles to gain power over men. Despite the identifiable stereotype in his speech, Conor does not make an explicit claim about Middle Eastern women generally, so whether he truly held any bias is subjective. We used the tokenism code for moments like this, in which participants volunteered racially stereotyped responses about token individuals but without making a claim about the given racial group.

William also tokenized a Middle Eastern woman as a mysterious yet perilous princess. He met, "this one girl; she's from Dubai and amazingly pretty," and she "gives me her name as [name], which means princess in Arabic. And that's not really her name, I think. She just introduced—'I am a princess' is how she introduced me to

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her and how I called her." Unlike Conor, William did not state that the Middle Eastern woman he met was a princess, but his point that she would ask him to call her as such matches the same dragon lady construction. As William continued relaying the time that she took him to her apartment, he described her canopy bed as a "princess layout," and explained that he left without having sex because, "she's got a boyfriend, though, an Arabic boyfriend, and I'm like that kinda puts the fear in me." By emphasizing her palatial apartment and that her boyfriend was Arabic, William further utilizes essentialized representations of the Middle East (i.e., Islamic patriarchy stifling women's ebullient sexuality) to make sense of his life. Both Conor's and William's essentialism of Middle Eastern women as alluring but dangerous princesses demonstrated the meaning making that social attitude provides: stereotypes about groups are cultural tools to understand others' thoughts and behaviors. And for William, that cultural tool shaped his own behavior, in that he declined sexual involvement with a woman because she and her boyfriend were Arabic, an ethnic group he thought might be sexually controlling and vengeful.

On two very striking occasions, White women spontaneously referenced Black men to talk about rape, and this could be seen as tokenizing. When at the end of the interview I asked a straight, White, cis woman in her 70s, Violet, my question about her sexual revolution, she gave an answer that conspicuously aligned with racism but without clear racist intent:

I'd like to see all these sexual harassment suits stop… This one this

morning—who was it?—some Black guy. And some girl said that he

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put his hands on her breasts at a bar. Well, what the hell? You're in a

bar. Fuck. You know you're there to get fucked.

This was the only time in the interview that Violet mentioned anyone's race, and

when I directly asked her about her own racial and ethnic attractions, she explained

that she "preferred her own group," so this racial evocation was unique within her

interview. Although she did not endorse the stereotype herself, Violet's tokenization

of a Black man when discussing sexual assault mirrors segregationist fabrications

about dangerous Black bucks assaulting innocent White virgins.

Gwen talked about a painful violation of consent, which she did not label

rape, for her response to my question about attractions to or experiences with

different racial groups. What happened to Gwen was horrible, sexist, and I would

have labeled it assault. Gwen's reply also met the criteria for the tokenization code,

again through the construction of big Black bucks:

I have a new lover who's Black. I've had a couple others. I had a not-

so-great experience with a Black guy and his friend… I like some

roughness, but it was too rough. And I would ask them to back off, and

they would back off for a minute, but then they'd get excited again and

just pound me too hard. I was sore. It wasn't great.

When I asked about ethnosexuality, Gwen briefly mentions a new lover and a couple

others, and then she pivots to a time when she was abused by her partners. I could not

tell from the interview why Gwen brought this story up as an answer to my specific

question about racialized attraction and experience, and this could have simply been

her most vivid experience with Black men, but it was also tokenizing. Interestingly, Gwen attributed her Black partners' violation to them "get[ting] excited," a word-choice that implies lack of intention instead of a choice to ignore her withdrawal of consent. Whereas Donna generalized White men's sexual aggression as entitlement, Gwen discussed a token experience with Black men's sexual aggression, which she attributed to poor self-control. I am not certain that the conqueror construction of White masculinity and the big Black buck construction of Black masculinity are what caused Donna and Gwen to frame sexual aggression so differently, but their responses cohered to racialized sexual stereotypes in theoretically cogent ways.

Catherine is a bisexual, White, cis woman in her 30s, and she also talked about a Black man in ways that appeared tokenizing. When I asked her about racial or ethnic patterns in her sex and dating history, Catherine spoke at length about, "the one year that I lived in Seattle. I dated a Black boy while I was there." Catherine referred to all her other male lovers as "guys" or "men," and with a few exceptions (e.g., "I'm a girl and you're a boy"), she did not use the word "boy" to talk about romantic partners. Although not necessarily intended by Catherine, the labeling of Black men as "boys" has historical roots in slavery because it constructs them as infantile and requiring a paternalistic master.

As she continued, Catherine introduced themes of culture and capital to illustrate how exposure to racial groups, or lack thereof, can facilitate desire through an experience of novelty. Catherine explained that,

I remember the first time we had sex. It was embarrassing 'cause he'd

probably been with enough—I mean plenty of White women… I

remember the first time we had sex, being so distracted by how cool it

looked. I'm like, what? [I: Just like the color?] Yes! And having to

point it out, like this looks so rad, like I couldn't. I kept on just

watching, like he had a great face, but I was like, 'dude just look at it!'

He was very, very dark, and I found that very beautiful.

Through her attraction to his contrasting skin tone, Catherine reveals how sexually

segregated society produces erotic novelty when individuals break color lines.

Catherine found her lover's color contrast to be new and beautiful, but this dimension

of their sex overtook the others, thus collapsing their human connection down to the

novelty of White on Black skin. As shown here, racial fetishization is a benevolent

belief in the desirability of a group that can nevertheless be objectified.

Catherine returned to themes of essentialism, bringing them up by name to

both question and reify their legitimacy. Catherine had, "been with a couple of Black

dudes, but the penises were really big; and a couple of Black girls, and their butts

were really big. And I know that those are stereotypes, but I was like 'cool.' Getting

exposure to the stereotypes in this way." As with Samantha and Gwen, Catherine

attributed her token responses to lived experience, but here she also labels it a bias. In

this moment, Catherine wrestles between physical differences between racial groups

and the broad societal tropes that amplify and essentialize those differences.

Racialized cultural and physical difference exists—although in a far more variegated

and fluid manner than social tropes would suggest—so token experiences that match stereotypes, in absence of ones that disrupt them, also reify stereotypes. In other words, limited exposure to racial groups inhibits recognition of diversity within races.

Catherine later explained that her family is racist, with for example an uncle who, "had the confederate flag up in the garage." To confront their racism, Catherine took,

> that Black boy home to meet Uncle [Name] when I was up in
> Washington too. It was a pretty amazing moment. [I: How did that
> go?] I think it went great! He was respectful, he came out with his
> shotgun to meet him, like total classic southern cowboy. And then he
> was very polite, just said, "don't you hurt my niece." But I could see in
> his face 'cause I didn't tell him before.

Although Catherine framed this moment as, "a fuck you to the way that everyone around me treated people of color and would talk about people of color," she also put her partner in danger to score points against her racist family. She surprised her uncle, who owns a confederate flag and shotgun, with the fact that his White niece is with a Black man for the first time in her life. This narrative shows yet another way that stereotypes of racial groups mediate sexual attractions and experiences; here, by turning the big Black buck construction on its head to troll racist White people who subscribe to it.

Biology

Biological attribution was an original cornerstone of my research and interview questions, but it generally did not bear fruit in the study. There were, however, select prompted and unprompted occasions when participants discussed their sexuality in relation to their physiology or genealogy to essentialize. In response to my question about "why you are into what you are in to," Samantha joked that, "I just love myself, only people like me," so, "my attraction to Indian men: I'm always like, oh shit, is that 'cause my dad? 'Cause you look at pictures of my dad when he was younger, he looks like an Indian man." Here, Samantha suggests an attraction to familiarity, a desire to have sex with someone who is genetically similar to oneself.

Conor also attributed his attractions to his heritage, but he provided a different causal mechanism. After initially demurring about racial preferences, Conor said that, "if I was gonna pick one… [it would be] redheads. You start hearing stories about, 'oh your great grandpa [Name], he loved red heads.' And you're like, 'what?' And then you start thinking about shit, and you're like, 'oh fuck.' I see I have a type." Conor attributed his preferences to inherited attractions, implying a genealogical essence behind his desires. Whereas Samantha attributed her preferences to an inborn attraction to her own lineage, Conor attributed his preference to a reproduction of their attractions.

The concept of pheromones was mentioned in two interviews, and it was used to argue both for and against same-race attraction. Violet only touched on the concept briefly, as an explanation to intentional intraracial dating: "I've also learned that people are attracted by smell, by their pheromones." I asked if smell was important to

her, and she said "Yeah, a certain kind of nice cologne, aftershave or something. You know it could even remind me of my dad… Put it on, feel good about it, and give me a big hug, so I think it probably goes back to that." Violet shared a mélange of attributions to consider her intraracial preferences, referencing not just pheromones but also implicit associations from childhood intimacy. This inconsistency again shows the trouble with sexual attribution: Violet did not appear to have an a priori lay theory about her ethnosexuality, so she produced conflicting explanations as she analyzed the phenomenon on the fly.

When I asked Shannon, a bisexual, White, cis woman in her 30s, about who she finds attractive, she responded that, "I'm just not really attracted to guys that look like me, so I notice that I'm a lot more attracted to the blonde, blue-eyed type of dude and really attracted to dark, caramelly men of color." As a brown-eyed brunette, Shannon framed attraction to blue-eyed blondes and men of color as an ethnosexual attraction to genetic variation. When I asked why this was the case, she explained that "there's different pheromones, and they're connected to peoples' different ethnicities based on their long-term lineages… You're not supposed to find people that are genetically similar to you attractive." Unlike Samantha and Violet, Shannon advocates for an essentialized attraction to biological difference as opposed to similarity. Shannon's biological explanation was the most cogent out of the set (i.e., pointing to genetic defects from inbreeding), but this line of inquiry was sparsely represented in the data. Biological attributions were a peripheral explanation for sexual essentialism, in that participants provided a ramshackle and sometimes self-

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contradictory set of causal explanations for their ethnosexuality. People simultaneously endorsed biological, cultural, developmental, or ipso facto attributions for their racial essentialism, probably because they had never thought about it before.

Canards

On select occasions, interviewees would provide answers to my questions about ethnosexuality that had very little face-validity, so I coded them as canards. Although I do not trust the authenticity of these codes, they were deeply essentializing and thus worth interrogating. Gwen's canard was by her own admission a product of racism. She said that,

> when I've had dreams of giving birth, the baby has always been
>
> brown, and I don't want a baby. So that's made me a little bit scared to
>
> be with brown people, which I'm sure is an indicator of ingrained
>
> racism.

In a respectably self-aware and earnest manner, Gwen tells a canard and then immediately undercuts it. She recognizes her nightmare to be a product of living in a racist society but nevertheless attributes her ethnosexuality to it. As with other participants' cultural or anecdotal explanations for their preferences, Gwen's canard shows that biological essentialism predominates scientists' attributions more so than laypeople's. Additionally, Gwen's talk shows how participants gnawed on the concept of racialized sexual experience, seeking explanations for a phenomenon they had rarely had to contend with and therefore struggled to convey.

Catherine told a canard as well, which she used to explain why she was not attracted to Asian men. She initially said that, "there's not a lot of people of color in my sexual history, but I'm very attracted to people of color." I asked her if she meant all people of color or particular races, and she said,

> All people of—you know what? Not a lot of Asian attraction. My stepmom is Indo-Chinese though. So, my stepmom came into my life when I was like [a child], and I was spending a lot of time in Chinese food restaurants 'cause her and all her cousins lived in the area and worked in different Chinese food restaurants. I think that there's a whole—I fucking hated being in the Chinese food restaurants, and I didn't understand what anyone was saying, and they wouldn't speak English to me. They would speak Mandarin to me. It was very scary, and it smelled weird, and I saw rats.

In this talk, Catherine attributes her low valuation of Asian men to a cognitive association from Chinese restaurants and her strained relationship with her stepmom. Catherine found Asian women attractive, which along with the poor face validity of the story, was why we coded this portion of her interview as a canard. Moreover, her canard seemed to convey foreignness as "scary" or "weird" to explain why it produced her aversion, which aligns with Asian stereotypes.

I followed up with Catherine on her attractions to Asian men later on in the interview. When I asked a second time, she replied that,

I think I need more eyes to look at in a man, even with women I kind

of crave a little—[I: you had mentioned liking bright eyes]. Yes. Yeah,

I like to be able to look into someone's eyes. And with my stepmom, I

can remember growing up, she would be mad at me, and I would look

into her eyes, and I couldn't fucking tell. Her eyes were dark.

Here, Catherine attributes her ascription of low capital to a phenotypic East

Asian eye-shape. But, Catherine's word choices about looking someone in the

eye also mirrors the dragon lady construction of mysterious Asian people,

with eye shape acting as a physical manifestation of foreignness. This final

canard again shows how people draw from social constructions of racial

groups to interpret their lived experiences. And, potentially, this and other

canards reveal the profound discomfort and inexperience many people have

with discussing ethnosexuality.

Across all of the instances of ethnosexual essentialism in these

interviews, three through lines consistently emerged. Instead of biological

attribution, participants presented an idiosyncratic and sometimes incongruous

array of explanations for racialized sexual difference. Genetics are a cogent

explanation for universal differences between ethnic groups, but people do not

think about racialized sexual attribution enough to come up with cogent

explanations. Although there was little empirical support for biological

essentialism of sexuality, I was easily able to identify the prior research and

literature on social constructions of race (e.g., Big black bucks and dragon

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ladies) in the study narratives with significant fidelity. Established stereotypes about racial groups frequently occurred in participants' talk about ethnosexuality, even if participants did not endorse them personally. Finally, the essentialism codes showed that stereotypes play a role in sexual attraction and experience. Sexuality is socially constructed through tropes about racial and ethnic groups: they superimpose eroticized or de-eroticized images onto human bodies or yield divergent interpretations of people's behavior. If, for example, White sexual assault is interpreted as entitlement and Black sexual assault is interpreted as poor self-control, then the same behavior can be understood in dramatically different terms, and this can impact with whom people will have sex. Stereotypes and prescriptive attributions show that human attraction is shaped by cultural tropes, but they are not the only sexual phenomena to be social in nature.

Ethnosexual Capital

Ethnosexual capital included instances in which participants conveyed a hierarchy of desirability through their attractions to racial groups (i.e., *preferences*) or racialized characteristics (i.e., *features*), or when they acknowledged the hierarchy but without endorsing it personally (i.e., *recognition*). The hierarchy, which was generally meted out through a White standard of beauty and gender-race prototypicality, placed White people at the top, then Asian women and Black men in the middle, and finally Asian men and Black women at the bottom. Although participants often adhered to this specific stratification, they would occasionally reject

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or undermine it, which I report as well. I labeled this phenomenon racialized erotic capital instead of racial preferences to highlight the normative and structural manner in which said individual attractions are socialized and regimented. And I used erotic capital instead of sexual racism—the more common structural approach to racial preferences in the literature—in order to prioritize the power and privilege dimensions of the phenomenon over the prejudice component (which was better encapsulated through essentialism). By emphasizing how societal eroticization— either through universalized beauty standards or narrowly fetishized ones—imbues differential desirability onto different bodies, I aim to talk about racial attractions as structural without presuming racist intent within individual participants. Society creates the hierarchy and people work the capital within it, often reifying it.

Preferences

Fetishization of Asian women, a la yellow fever, was the prototype for my original theory of sexual essentialism, but this concept was articulated more clearly through capital. The three people who endorsed Asian woman fetishism to any degree were men of color, as the White men in the sample generally avoided discussion of racial attractions. (An equal number of people, two women of color and a White man, acknowledged the trope's existence but then rejected its legitimacy.) Salvador, a straight, Latino, cis man in his 30s, provided the most notable discussion on the topic.

Salvador framed much of his interview around having "a lot of bad experiences with people, and specifically women," and he connected this to his sexual preferences:

I do prefer women that are a probably a bit more compassionate than I

would say most others because I have a very deep trust issue with

women, solid chunk of them. So I mean my significant other feels a

similar way in that she does not view women as trustworthy initially,

out of the gate. Or just sort of like—let's say we just both share that

viewpoint. And so because of that, I'm very fortunate because she has

that compassion to be able to say, "well, I kinda don't blame you."

Salvador attributed his mistrust of women to an overbearing mother, a coworker who

filed a sexual harassment complaint against him, a childhood babysitter who would

only spend time with him if paid, and other slights. Although compassion was

Salvador's literal answer to my question about who he finds attractive, he defined that

compassion as mistrusting women. As such, he communicated a desire for a partner

who holds negative views of other women. A common dimension of yellow fever is a

belief that Asian women are desirable because they are socially regressive, including

that they believe in patriarchy (Nemoto, 2009).

Salvador explained that, "there's a fair possibility that hentai [Japanese

animated pornography] kind of steered me towards a huge Asian fetishism," but also

that, "I do recall being attracted to Asian girls before I was looking at hentai." He

talked about other racialized features that he found attractive as well: "the less body

hair the better… I like very little to no hair," "I would say how they dress is sort of a

big thing for me because my partner dresses very conservatively, and I do like that,"

and "Asia on the whole is very fascinating to the both of us." And, he pointed out that

his Asian girlfriend "has just had a very sheltered existence." The constellation of factors that Salvador discussed, including wanting a conservative, innocent, smooth-skinned woman who is uneasy about other women, all fit within the China doll stereotype, but Salvador did not connect these dots. Instead, he attributed his fetish to hentai and a cultural explanation discussed later.

Gerald, a straight, Black, cis man in his 60s, also assigned higher capital to Asian (and White) women, and his talk on the subject began with racialized features, but he eventually stated an explicit preference. Gerald explained that, "I'm attracted to thin women," which he described as a "runner's body." In turn, he was "not a fake boob man," nor did he describe himself as a "butt man." When I then asked if this described his ex-wife, Gerald said, "yes she was. She wasn't necessarily a runner, but she was small. She was Filipino, so she had a small frame; that was that. A majority of Filipinos, especially the females, have smaller frames." These preferences extended to "facial features… probably the Asian [phenotypic face]; I like that look." In this telling, which we double-coded for essentialism, Gerald connects attraction to body types and other physical features (small frame) to notions about an ethnic group (Filipina women) to explain his ethnosexual attraction. In pointing to biological variation in body size and shape, Gerald attributes his ethnosexuality to tangible morphological differences between ethnicities, but these legitimate differences could potentially be distorted through social attitudes—homogenizing a diverse group, essentializing sex difference—that exaggerate and concretize fluid genetic variation.

Arturo, a straight Latino cis man in his 20s, also viewed Asian women as having high capital. He described a previous girlfriend who "was Mexican, but for some reason she looked Asian. [I: Really?] Yeah, that got me into her… She wasn't Asian, but the looks attracted me." Unlike the other participants who specifically endorsed attraction to Asian women, Arturo's preferences for racialized features did not align with preferred races. He was attracted to a phenotypic Asian face but also women with, "wide hips, thick thighs, big butt." This disjuncture was reconciled by the fact that his partner occupied both phenotypic and non-phenotypic Asian features (i.e., a curvy, pale-skinned woman, with an "Asian face"). When participants drew from personal romantic experiences with people of color, the idiosyncrasies and ephemerality of ethnicity sometimes disrupted monolithic representations. In other words, Arturo described attraction to divergent ethnic features because his ex-girlfriend had both.

When I asked Gerald directly if he was especially attracted to Asian and Filipina women, he said "I like both. My last girlfriend was White. I've had a marriage to [an] Asian [woman], and actually the last two women that I've gone out with were Caucasian." Although Gerald expressly connected his preferred body type to a representation of Asian women, he also would date White women, and he made no claims about a normative White physique. This mention adheres to the erotic capital conception that White women are sexually neutral, capable of adhering to desired features but not assumed to hew to them.

After discussing Asian and White women, I asked Gerald about Black women, and his explanations moved away from body type to cultural connection. Gerald said,

> The Black women that I have met tend to be a little more—I mean I
>
> haven't met—well, I've maybe met one or two that kind of grew up in
>
> the same kind of environment. You can tell because of the way that
>
> they are… I think it comes down to how they are raised, so most of the
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> Black women that I have met, they've been from Oakland or you
>
> know that side. They weren't raised like I was, so I didn't connect with
>
> them as well.

Gerald pointed to upbringing in a historically Black, industrial city to describe his lack of experience with Black women, which was a divergence from how he talked about Asian and White women. Attributional idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, Gerald implicitly communicated hegemonic erotic capital: Asian women eroticized as high capital, Black women de-eroticized as low capital, and White women free from erotic preconceptions.

When I asked Conor about interracial attraction and experience, he mentioned mixed-heritage women as a specific preference:

> I find the mixes to be the most sexy. Like this with that, or this with—
>
> it's kind of like a mutt... I'm not one of them that's one hundred
>
> percent this or that, so I really don't know why I have to talk about it,
>
> but I find mixes to be—takes the edges off.

In Conor's initial response to my question, he stated that he likes all races equally, mentioned mixed-heritage women specifically, and countered my question about the topic. Each of these answers could be seen as ways of talking about racial attractions that do not require making specific claims about particular groups. But after I asked about particular mixes of ethnicities, he gave answers that either cued to or aligned with normative sexual capital. I asked Conor which mixes of ethnicities he finds attractive:

> Oh, well lots of them because I'm a fan of so many, but I'm finding a lot of the Asian mixed with— is yikes! It can be just phenomenal. Anything Mexican mixed with—, and that was my original childhood fantasy: Salma Hayek. And she's actually Spanish [I: yeah]. Yeah. Anyway, the older I get, Middle Eastern women mixed with anything is just like—. I mean they're all just rolodexes. I'm a guy, I look at photos, I'm on Instagram.

Although Conor subverts the concept of racial preference by refencing mixed-heritage women, he eventually, implicitly communicates consistent applications of ethnosexual capital. He opens with and gives particular emphasis to Asian women; lists off his attraction to most major non-White racial and ethnic groups except Black women; mentions a White woman as an example of a desirable woman of color; and lists ethnic groups that are often categorized racially as White. Moreover, Conor's depiction of mixed-heritage people as "taking the edge off," along with the occlusion of White people from his list of mixes of ethnicities, conveys a notion of White

people as sexually neutral. Although Conor's interest in mixed-heritage backgrounds was expressly due to their genetic diversity, his probed answers cohered with hegemonic erotic capital. I also coded this talk for authenticity (given the platitudes and contradictions) and essentialism (given the depictions of mixed-heritage women as "mutts").

The human diversity personified in some participants' interracial relationships (e.g., Arturo's) stands in stark relief to the narrow representations of racial and ethnic groups that exist in pornography. Ronald did not have first-hand sexual experiences with people of color, so I asked about pornography. He said,

> Sometimes I'll look at Japanese porn 'cause the women—I mean this
> sounds so horrible, but just do it; if you ever look, you'll see—they
> make this noise and it's a whole different aesthetic… In Japan, it's all
> like this. And I'm certainly not saying Japanese people are like this.
> I'm just saying, culturally, their porn: there is a whole thing where the
> woman is very passive and also the way that she cries out in pleasure
> is just different… Very, ultra-feminine, and I don't [watch them] all
> the time—and loud. There is something about that. I will literally click
> on Japanese. Other ones would be hit or miss based on the body.

Although Ronald bestowed high capital on a representation of Japanese women, he was clear that he understood the representation to be contrived (i.e., both a recognition of normative capital and an individual endorsement). Pornography bins human ethnic variation into keywords and drop-down menu selections—except for

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White people, who are the default category. By turning an ethnic group into a commercial product that is sold on its appearance and behavior, the pornography industry introduces market forces that reinforce essentialism. Once Japanese pornography is taken to mean films with a woman who is passive, hyperfeminine, and squeaks in pleasure, producers risk false advertising if they do not deliver a product that perpetuates China doll stereotypes. The pornography must all look the same, and because the films are defined by race, the racial groups must all appear the same too.

Asian women were generally viewed as high capital, but the opposite was true for Asian men. Samantha built on her earlier discussed essentialism themes to articulate a compelling example of ethnosexual capital. She connected racialized desirability to sexual assault victimization through their interplay with rape culture. Samantha organized much of her interview around the litany of occasions in her life when she had unwanted but technically consensual sex. She gave several explanations for this tendency: "[Saying 'no'] is definitely not my comfort zone," "I'm very much a self-sacrificer," "it's just a trait in women in general, and I definitely am part of that stereotype," and "[I am] using sexuality or the sexual act as a form of payment." From all of these instances, Samantha communicated a pattern in which forced or coerced sex with a group that has low capital (e.g., Indian men) was not experienced as assaultive, whereas it was experienced as assaultive for a group with high capital (e.g., Israeli men). This occurred in contexts that were not explicitly racialized (e.g., with women versus men), but the main flashpoint for the distinction was race.

Aligning with constructions of Indian men as "meek" and Israeli men as "strong," Samantha talked about unwanted sex dramatically differently depending on the capital of the perpetrator. Samantha said that,

> I was travelling in India, and there was this young shopkeeper, and we were friends, knew each other. And then I remember having sex with him and being like, oh this is a pity-fuck, like I really don't want to be doing this. I was doing it, so obviously there was a part of me that wanted to do it, but it was like, wow, this is for him… On that same trip, after him, I was in an act with a guy that I was friends with, and I didn't think that I was attracted to him. And we started hooking up one night, and then I realized I really didn't want to have sex with him, and I stopped it, which is pretty unusual for me.

In both cases, Samantha did not want to have sex, but in the former, with an Indian man, she pities him and has sex for him; but in the latter, with an Israeli man, his sexual interests are perceived to be more active and forceful, so something needs to be resisted. When I followed up about the second encounter and how it differed, Samantha explained that,

> I felt like it was on me. Like, that didn't feel good—but did it? Just horrible, just so yucky after that one. Whereas the pity-fuck: I was like, yeah, I guess I'll get over that. Like, that was funny. Like, that's gonna be a good story or something. [I: Yeah sounds like you had a little more agency in the pity-fuck one too.] Yeah, yes, yes, definitely,

definitely. And I was travelling, so I was the White foreign woman

who had all the power.

When Samantha is with an Indian man and can play the "White foreign woman," she is agentic and can have sex "for him." However, with Samantha's Israeli traveling companion, who has equivalent or more capital than her, the sex becomes forced, putting it "on her" to negotiate whether she really wanted it.

Shannon's talk on ethnosexuality confounded the premise of racial groups, but nevertheless, she still communicated some common themes. She explained, "I'm really attracted to Indian dudes and Native American dudes… Not so much—some Asian men. One in particular I can think of, and that was the only one, but Filipino men? Yes." Shannon brought nuance to her capital by differentiating between South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian men; and she invoked individual differences that disrupted notions of universal erotic capital. In so doing, Shannon rejected the notion of an essential Asian category and thus any sort of capital that could be found within it. At the same time, non-Indian and -Filipino Asian men were depicted as low capital in her speech; with one exception to prove the rule. So, Shannon subverted essentialism, but the capital baked within it persisted in a more complex form.

Although Asian men were often sexually marginalized in my interviews, there were three instances of them being described as having high sexual capital, through a counter-hegemonic conceptualization. In all cases, participants leveraged eroticized femininity to frame male gender-nonconformity as desirable, which along with unquestioned gender-race prototypicality, produced an alternative framework of high

ethnosexual capital for Asian men. Beatrice (asexual and straight, White, cis woman, 40s) mentioned an early crush she had on a, "brilliant dancer, and he was kind of petite, and he had the cool Asian pop star haircut." In ascribing high capital to an Asian man, Beatrice points to traditionally feminine characteristics: dancing ability, small size, and cosmetics. Incidentally, Beatrice was also attracted to "genderplay for sure" because of "the fluidity itself, like maybe just the lack of boundaries." In so doing, Beatrice resisted normative ascriptions of low capital to gender-nonconformity while also reifying the hegemonic elements of gender-race prototypicality.

William shared a similar instance where an Asian man was characterized as particularly desirable because of his assumed femininity. He explained that "maybe I'm not heterosexual; maybe I'm a somewhat heterosexual," given that he, "always liked women that push the gender boundary, like women that have shaved heads," and had sex with a transgender woman. When I asked William if he had ever found a man attractive, he answered affirmatively and said, "he was a Japanese guy [I: okay]. I do kinda think maybe just the face is somewhat more attractive to me for Asian people, and you know shaved people, not having any kind of facial hair and that kinda thing." William thus highlighted a general attraction to androgyny and referenced a man's Asian descent to explain why he found him erotically desirable, further pointing to hairlessness as a causal mechanism. In unpacking the reason for desiring a phenotypic male Asian face, William touched on gender-prototypicality and made a comparison to a transgender Native American person: "This two-spirit person; it's the reason why she passes as—her face has got—I mean I look at her, and

I see distinctively feminine features to her." William thus genders both Native American and Asian people as feminine, ascribes high capital to the femininity, and then leverages this pattern to explain why he found them attractive or they passed well. When I asked William to clarify if he thought Asian faces were more feminine, he said, "pretty much." Although presumed femininity among Asian men may produce lower capital among people attracted to masculinity, that same femininity can be desirable for a mostly straight man who is primarily attracted to women.

The final instance of Asian men being depicted as high capital came from Faye, a straight, Asian, transgender woman in her 30s. She said, "you know how some Korean popstars look really effeminate? I like that kind of look." In more direct terms than either other participant, Faye connects an Asian ethnicity to feminine appearances, and then she endorses them as desirable for that very reason. Faye's primary motivation behind expressly preferring fellow Asian people was cultural and is discussed later, but here she portrays Asian men as desirable for their presumed gender-race atypicality. Importantly, as a transgender Asian woman who had previously outwardly identified as an Asian man, Faye's relationship to this ascription is more personal and complicated. These complications notwithstanding, Faye provides another instance of counter-hegemonic ethnosexual capital for Asian men, one that again subverts eroticized gender-conformity but not the other elements of the construction.

Unlike Beatrice, William, and Faye, Vanessa (queer, Latina, cis woman, 20s) bestowed Asian men with low capital but was still attracted to femininity. She replied

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to my questions about men of color to say, "Asians I've never really been attr—you have to be really cute." This was despite her explicitly assigning high capital to androgyny: "I don't like macho dudes, and I don't like—it's gotta be a healthy mix. Like I said, the ideal guy for me is Lou Reed because he was so queer. The dude painted his nails and is bisexual." Although she viewed an androgynous White man as attractive, she still viewed Asian men to be unattractive. The low capital assigned to Asian men may derive from more than simple gender-race atypically. Additionally, Vanessa's point that only exceptionally handsome Asian men are desirable mirrors Shannon's earlier comment about finding just one Asian man attractive. Notable counterexamples disrupt the letter of ethnosexual capital while retaining the gist.

Features

Racialized features interwove throughout participant's explicit preferences for racial groups, but occasionally people exclusively talked about racialized features in absence of any named category, which I report in this section. Kevin (straight, White, cis man, 20s), for example, listed several features he found undesirable that matched the Jezebel stereotype. He said,

> I don't think I have a racial or ethnic preference for people. I think
> there are some features that I find more and less attractive, but I don't
> think it's one of those things where one thing just stands out too big.
> And if it is something like that, it usually doesn't have to do with the
> person's race. Although there are a few features that do have to do
> with race that I just don't feel that in love with I suppose. [I: Either

racialized or non-racialized ones, would you be comfortable with

sharing what those features are?] Well, the one that comes to mind is

really, really big lips on a woman. There's that. I don't like that. I just

can't feel like—it doesn't feel like just weirdly home to me. Also

really large, fake boobs. That's something that really bugs me, and I

do have a certain body type that I like, or I like to see. I guess I like

that sort of hourglass view of a woman's body, and it doesn't

necessarily have to be that. I just like when a waist curves and slopes

inwards probably more than when it curves or slopes outwards. It's

just more sleek and desirable to me.

In my initial and follow-up question about racial and ethnic attractions, Kevin did not

speak any identities by name, but through his depictions of features, he implicitly

communicated hegemonic ethnosexual capital. Many of the traits he listed matched

the Jezebel construction—big lips, large breasts, large waist—and thus implicitly

communicated an ascription of low capital to Black women. His talk was also notable

because of his word-choice of "home," to imply that his devaluation was based on

unfamiliarity (i.e., an ethnic "other").

Blondes and redheads were two common ways that participants

communicated attraction to whiteness without labeling it as such. For example, Kevin

talked about a childhood infatuation with a girl who, "had this long, blonde hair, and

that was what I really liked. That's what everyone liked. She just had this long,

golden, gorgeous bow running down her back… It just looks like gold." In lurid

detail, Kevin depicts a girl as universally desired (i.e., "what everyone liked") and having metaphorical wealth (i.e., "gold") through her implicit ethnosexual capital (i.e., "blonde hair"). Terrance's (straight, White, cis man, 40s) "perfect person" would be a "big, tall, strong, blonde girl with a soft side." And, when I asked Shannon if she preferred butch or femme women, she said, "I definitely used to like more feminine: blonde hair, big boobs, stereotypical super-feminine women. It's fucked up that blonde hair is stereotypically feminine, now that I hear that come out of my mouth." Shannon not only provided another example of whiteness qua blondeness, she also pointed out how sexual capital can be reinforced through particular beauty ideals that are only accessible to particular races. Moreover, the mediational factor (i.e., femininity) highlights again how presumed gender-conformity cleaves desirability.

Conor, on the other hand, said, "I'm not into blondes, but that doesn't mean I don't think that they're beautiful creatures. So literally, I like all races [I: okay]. Women are all fucking gorgeous." But as we continued to talk, he eventually landed on redheads: "a unicorn was the unattainable: a redhead, specifically. I like redheads. That's my favorite if I was gonna pick one." Blonde and red hair color assume whiteness—not exclusively or immutably, but mostly—so racial preference is baked into common eroticized features. Conor's earlier talk about mixed heritages is notable in relation to this eroticized feature because red hair is a recessive trait that would be suppressed among mixed-heritage children.

William discussed dating a woman who was half Black and half White, but he had reservations about her, some of which were racialized, whereas others were not.

He explained that "this person I'm with has kind of a deep voice. She's half Black and has a real kind of Black woman voice," and when I asked him if this was attractive, he said that "her talking voice isn't really that much of a turn-on to me," but he liked her singing voice. William also listed other potentially racialized features, including that, "she is into this hard drug use and is really domineering, just like into this managerial [style], and I feel like I wouldn't wanna be your employee;" and also that "she's a chubby and full-bodied woman," which he clarified was not attractive to him. William was attracted to and had experience with people of various ethnic backgrounds, stating that, "I think Asian, Native American, Mexican, like brown skin is attractive to me… although redheads and White skin is really attractive to me too." Of the different people that William talked about, the only Black woman was described as the least desirable, which may have been happenstance, but he also evoked racialized features: raspy voice, domineering attitude, and full figure. That being said, William explained that, "I really like her kinky hair, like the feeling of her kinky hair on my hair," so not every racialized Black feature was negative for him.

Recognition

Frank, a bisexual, White, cis man, in his 60s, opened his discussion of ethnosexuality with an authenticity code before moving to a recognition of capital and finally a preference. He said, "Races? No, not particularly… If they're fit, whatever I find. Black people, Asians, whatever. Sexy." Frank was explicit that because he was in his 60's, he could not be choosey about men, so his own lack of age-related erotic

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capital superseded his partners' ethnosexual capital. But as Frank continued, he both

recognized the normative trend and eventually conceded it, stating that,

> I know there are people—I've definitely heard it out there: no Asians,
>
> no Asians. Other people are just not attracted to them, and I don't
>
> exactly—I kinda maybe know what there is sort of a type, but I'm like,
>
> okay, they may not be as high on the list or whatever, but that's fine. I
>
> haven't had bad experiences.

After initially rejecting ethnosexual capital, Frank eventually acknowledged the

theme and then volunteered a personal attraction, but again he framed it along the

lines of who would be an option for him. Notably, Frank identified much of his

sexuality around being a top, and Asian men are sometimes fetishized as bottoms

through assumed femininity (Phua, 2007), but he still assigned lower capital to them.

This may have been because Frank also explicitly sought out men who were

traditionally masculine. Frank finished his answer to my question with a statement

that, "as far as I know, my race hasn't played into it greatly with the other person

either. It might've."

Vanessa was the only participant to reject the premise that Asian women have

high capital. She said, "I've never really liked Asian women. It's funny because it

always just feels like they're very cute, but I feel like they're so fetishized [to] where

I'm like, just no." Thus the only clear counterfactual to yellow fever in my sample

was deliberately communicated as a recognition and rejection of yellow fever. In a

similar fashion, Vanessa disrupted the White standard of beauty because of its

standardization. "They're very pretty, but I don't think White women are attractive. I think they all kind of look the same. And it's not that they're unattractive. I guess they look nice, but unless one really stands out." By framing them as attractive but generic, Vanessa cues to the universalization of White desirability in portraying White women as low capital because they are boring. Vanessa's remarkably consistent inconsistencies translated to Black women too. She said that, "I am attracted to Black men and Black women particularly," and talked about a time at a club with, "maybe six Black women, And they were all beautiful… I don't know what it is. If it's the features, or the dark skin, or just the personality, but there was a woman there that I couldn't take my eyes off of. I was just watching her." Again flipping the script, Vanessa fetishizes Black instead of Asian women. I coded all of this talk for recognition of capital because in each case Vanessa communicated a savvy understanding of the social hierarchy in order to undermine it.

Only two participants in the study occupied normatively fetishized racial categories (i.e., Faye and Gerald), and Gerald was the only one to have experienced fetishization first-hand. Gerald said that, "there are women who I know that are more attracted to Black men than their own race or something else," so "as I got older, then I got a little wiser: oh, okay, it can be a positive thing too." In framing racial fetishization as something he discovered later in life and could be "a positive thing too," Gerald infers that the baseline case for his racial experience is negative and thus casts fetishism as the silver lining to oppression. When I asked Gerald to describe how he found out that these women were particularly attracted to Black men, he said

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that "it is a little ambiguous, but it's just the way that they respond," and that he had noticed patterns in his partners' dating histories. In many cases, fetishization lurks beneath the surface with only the ripple effects detectable to the target. Gerald ended this portion of the interview by stating that, "there are women that are really, really like that. I mean just that's all they would date, or there's people that maybe—a little bit on both sides." Without explicitly naming the phenomenon, Gerald suggested that for other women, his blackness foreclosed romantic prospects. A fetishized standard of beauty is narrowly defined and thus attracts a narrower audience than a universalized standard of beauty. In other words, a small group of people really want Black men for presumed essential characteristics, but everyone wants White men for their individual, personal characteristics.

Faye was the only Asian woman in the sample, but she also had not had sex before, and her talk was primarily about issues related to being transgender. When I asked Faye if she had ever felt fetishized, she said that,

I'm sure there's people who fetishize Taiwanese women. I don't think

I've experienced that myself. I was talking to a college friend, and he

gets really annoyed when people say they really like the Asian culture,

but it turns out they just like the Asian women. They don't really care

much for the culture.

So although Faye had not experienced fetishization herself, she recognized the erotic capital hegemony. In so doing, Faye demonstrates that although social norms prescribe a particular version of reality, individual experiences are idiosyncratic and

people have agency to endorse, reject, or reimagine them. In charting these trends, I document a norm but do not claim it is inevitable.

When I asked Ronald about his racial attractions, he recognized but resisted personally endorsing ethnosexual capital and essentialism. He responded that,

I don't know what to say about that really. To some extent, I think in an alternate world, it would have been nice to have experiences with not just more, different people but also different types of people, but I did not. Do you get interesting answers about that? 'Cause I mean there is a whole racial thing about—people have an idea of race and sexuality… People definitely do have—not just preferences based on what they like, but also—perceptions. Particularly on Asian women, there's one stereotype over here. And Black women, there's another stereotype. They're both sexual, but they're different… I believe it's even truer in the perception of men of different races. Again, Asian on one side, Black on the other.

As this quote shows, people have become aware of sexual racism. Ronald recognized the differential capital imbued within racialized gender groups, and he used the recognition to answer my question without talking about himself.

The ethnosexual capital theme revealed an uneven but consistent enough pattern for a racial hierarchy of eroticism. White people were rarely degraded, but Black women and Asian men were consistently mentioned in

responses for low capital. Asian women and Black men were eroticized more so than the other gender of their racial group, but these were often essentialism-driven and endorsed by a smaller subset. And, the racial capital that participants assigned was often mediated by gender, through a process that casts Asian people as feminine and Black people as masculine. The capital and essentialism dimensions of ethnosexuality reveal a stigmatizing and inequitable part of racial and ethnic attractions, but other aspects of this phenomenon were more affirming in nature.

Ethnosexual Culture

The culture theme illuminates the ethnic components of romantic connection and intimacy. Every interview included some talk about wanting a partner who has a similar or at least a relatable way of existing in the world, and these distinctions covaried with race and ethnicity. Culture thus emerged naturally from the interviews, particularly among people of color, who described a desire for a partner who shares their experiences. Shared cultural *experience* could include a desire for someone with the same interests, values, practices, marginality, or some other cultural aspect of living one's life. Although White people rarely touched on cultural experience in explicitly ethnic terms, White culture could still be identified in their interviews. Participants would occasionally point to their *locales* to explain why they had more or less experience with a racial group, and sometimes people would mention the socializing force of these locales or the segregation within them to add complexity to simple proximity. Finally, participants mentioned explicit *prohibitions* against dating

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outside of one's group, particularly within immigrant communities, which was a novel if limited manifestation of culture facilitating or foreclosing ethnosexuality

Experiences

Faye was the clearest, most direct discussion on shared cultural experiences. During the identity map, Faye paid particular attention to her ethnicity, explaining that she is, "Taiwanese American. It's pretty big. Sometimes it feels a little hypocritical because I was born here, but I care a lot more about the Taiwanese part than the American part;" and that "I don't really feel right staying in America. Eventually I want to move to Taiwan." Faye's ethnic identity was incredibly important to her, powerful enough to push her to move to a completely different country in order to feel more embedded within it. She went on to explain, "that's why if I had to choose a romantic partner, I don't think I could choose anyone other than a Taiwanese person… It's not just the ethnicity either. He'd have to be able to speak Mandarin well and be part of a culture, not like a person who doesn't know how to use chopsticks." In just the first few minutes of the interview, Faye spoke fluently about her racial and ethnic attractions, bringing them up before I asked about them and grounding them explicitly in shared identity and practices. Faye's homo-ethnosexuality was not grounded in stereotypes or any standard of beauty; instead, her ethnosexuality was a logical dimension of her goals in life and how she wants to live it.

Later in the interview, Faye described other characteristics that were important to her in a partner, showing that being Taiwanese was not the only culture that affected her sexuality:

> Raising kids, yeah, it'd be important as well. And, I think the most important thing is having similar theological values and just not being ashamed of the fact that I am transgender… I'd have to tell the guy that I can't have kids, and he would have to be okay with adopting… It'd be important to be able to raise the kids, teaching the child Mandarin first and then English.

For Faye, her ethnosexual attraction to Asian men was bundled up with her desire to have children who speak the language. Taken together, Faye's interest in Asian men was intimately connected to other desires and facets of her life, illustrating how ethnosexual attraction is interwoven within individuals' values and dreams for the future. Faye wanted a life for herself, one in which she could have a family in another country, raising children in her faith and ethnic culture, and to get there, her partner would need to accept her being transgender. She ended her interview by stating that, "even if it's a person from another ethnicity who is basically Taiwanese—like maybe he grew up in Taiwan, but he's like White or Black or whatever—I think that's fine." Faye was clear that a shared cultural background was her main goal.

Vanessa's narrative was also an exhaustive depiction of ethnosexual culture. She partitioned her sexual history into three phases: dating within her mostly Latinx town; dating White men through online apps; and finally dating fellow people of

color after swearing off White men. For these periods, cultural themes dictated the textures within and shifts between each. Vanessa was raised in a small town where, "there are a lot of people in similar situations to me," and she described it as, "very agricultural, and it's a migrant community, immigrant community, so everybody there is kind of in the same boat. We're all in this together kind of thing." From the outset, Vanessa pointed to a shared experience of marginality to emphasize her connection to her locale. Before discovering online dating, Vanessa was, "bouncing from partner to partner, or relationship to relationship with a lot of local people," and she briefly married a man she met in town who "was also a dark-skinned, punk rock dude." Although Vanessa cued to shared experience in her talk, ethnic and otherwise, she directly attributed her initial ethnosexuality (i.e., dating Latino men) to her locale, the geographic reality of living in an agricultural community: "There's no White guys in [hometown]!"

After her divorce, Vanessa, "went through this really weird phase where I was dating White dudes." She explained that, "it was just a novelty at first. It started off as a novelty: like okay, let's see what's up with these White dudes." For Vanessa, part of the appeal of White men was experiencing a culture and life-path that was unlike her own. Although the novelty of White men could also be grounded in essentialism—the alluring other—Vanessa attributed her attraction to wealth and power. She described her first relationship with a White man as, "I'm here on this end, where I live in this little—I'm from this small town, and I grew up living under the poverty line. And he just comes from a privileged background; he's a transplant; he's not from around

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here." Vanessa found the relative wealth of her White partners both enticing and troubling, explaining that, "I'm very materialistic and I like nice things," and, "when I date guys, I always complain like men are trash, or I can't date this guy; he's such a scrub;" but at the same time, "it can be really feeding into the patriarchy when we look for partners who do provide." Vanessa pointed to the literal life-changes that could occur if she were to marry a successful breadwinner, and she viewed that success through whiteness. Crucially, Vanessa was torn about her desires because she simultaneously wanted to be handed a ticket out of poverty and to earn that ticket herself.

Although White men captivated Vanessa for a period of time, she ultimately decided,

> I don't want to date White guys anymore. I'm so done and fed up with
> them. They can't connect with me... I need somebody who I can relate
> to when I'm really looking for a partner. I need somebody who shares
> the same background too or has an idea. And at this point, it's not even
> about—maybe it is about the color, about their skin, but I think that
> right now what I'm looking for present day is somebody who shares
> those same stories and ideals and can fuck with whatever it is
> politically how I feel... [I: You need common ground, yeah?] Right!
> Yes, yes, absolutely. And I think color of skin has a lot to do with that.

Whereas White men initially held appeal because of their unshared cultural experience—and the privileges that came with it—Vanessa eventually found them

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insufferable for the same reason. As with most people, Vanessa wanted a partner that she could relate to, and through ethnosexual culture, "skin color has a lot to do with that." Vanessa exemplified this sentiment with a story in which she had a conversation with her ex-boyfriend about White privilege, and,

> he didn't get it. He had even gone as far as telling my best friend who
> does his hair, "Oh, [Vanessa] doesn't want to hang out with me
> because I'm White," and I'm like, that's not exactly why, *but it has a*
> *lot to do with those arguments*.

Unlike Faye, who emphasized shared practices and values, Vanessa expressly articulated a desire for shared struggle, or at least awareness and openness to learning what that struggle is and how it operates. This led to the next phase of Vanessa's ethnosexuality.

At the time of her interview, Vanessa had recently resumed dating men of color. One of these relationships started as a friendship that entailed,

> these really cool conversations about growing up oppressed and how
> White people don't get it. And at the time, he was dating a White girl,
> and he was like, "she's so frustrating. I try to tell her about her White
> privilege, and all she does is cry" … White women tears can be
> inherently toxic because that's all she knows; because she can cry to
> get out of things."

Through these conversations, they developed a romantic connection predicated on a shared experience of marginality and frustration with colorblind or guilt-ridden White

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people. Because racism exists and discussions of it are often unsettling for those with privilege, interracial relationships with White people can be difficult, demanding meaningful racework (Steinbugler, 2012).

Vanessa was also exploring her queerness, and this had strong ethnosexual themes too. She had, "been in a few sexual relationships with other married women in the town," who were, "all mothers too." Their shared experience with motherhood led to a sexual encounter: "we started talking about our tits, and we're pulling out our tits, and then it just turned into that. We're like, 'Oh, you know when they grow when you breastfeed?' And then we're all feeling them." The catalyst for their sexual relationship was literally motherhood—feeling each other's breasts to compare size changes from lactation—but Vanessa was clear that the connection was deeper than this. As with her straight attractions, Vanessa stressed that, "all these women are also Latina, grew up in [rural town] in poverty, and we all share the same struggle." Intimacy born out from kinship facilitates romance, thus producing ethnosexuality. Shared—and, for a period of time, unshared—background, values, social strata, and skin color was a through line from the start to finish of Vanessa's interview, and she eventually, at least for a time, found herself to be sexually oriented more to race than to gender.

Arturo brought up machismo cultural norms during his discussion of dating Latina women. He explained that after a woman had rescheduled their first date several times, he got in a verbal argument with her over the phone, during which he said, "am I barking up the wrong tree? Am I wasting my fucking time? And I guess

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she took it as like, am I not good enough for you, and that's when she eventually [said] 'yeah, let's go out.'" When I asked what it was about the exchange that changed things, he said that she was,

> waiting for me to put my dick on the table, and just like: you're going to go out with me, whether you like it or not. I guess it's a Mexican thing. [I: What do you mean?] Well, I'm Mexican too, so there's no racism whatsoever.

Arturo went on to describe the "Mexican thing" as, "the men, they're the top of the pyramid kind of thing, and the whole women did the cleaning type of shit, and men take charge, and females are very nurturing." Thus from Arturo's perspective, there is a cultural expectation for Latino men to "take charge," so he needed to "put his dick on the table" if he wanted to date this Latina woman. In so doing, Arturo showed how sex scripts can differ from one culture to the next—although not necessarily all that much from White ones—so clueing into a given group's stylization can facilitate romance. He ended this portion of the interview by clarifying that he, "knew about [machismo], but I didn't want to do it, but I just got really mad... That's when I grew balls." Having shared Mexican cultural values, even ones that individuals may be uneasy with or outright question—and many Latinx people question machismo norms—gives people fluency to interpret each other's actions and anticipate what their partner thinks or wants. Additionally, this excerpt highlights the absurdity of human life: people deploy norms without subscribing to them or formally reject

norms while informally perpetuating them (e.g., not wanting to be a machista yet also "growing balls").

Gerald is a Black man who grew up in a predominantly White and Asian city, and he primarily dated White and Asian women, which he occasionally attributed to geographic access and shared experience (along with essentialism and capital, discussed earlier). He, "only dated a few Black women, I think probably 'cause of proximity. There's not that many in the area where I was at. Mostly it's Asian and White." He also framed this trend around cultural markers, including that "I never spoke Black," and his relatives "thought 'you speak so properly,' so I didn't fit in so well." Gerald worked in the technology industry, questioned whether racism still exists in society today, and grew up primarily around Asian and White people, so the net effect for Gerald was to fit in better with people of a different race then his own. He ended this talk saying that, "it would really be nice to have that person that was Black and that met all those things." Although the earlier discussed portion of Gerald's narrative suggests that his aversion to Black women was more than cultural, his capstone on the topic nevertheless communicates a desire for shared identity (Black) and culture (White), just his desire happens to be atypical (culturally White Black man).

People of color strongly informed the codebook for ethnosexual culture, as they were forthright and loquacious in their speech, but after I developed the codes from their candor, it was easy to apply them to the unspoken instances among White participants. White people spoke about how they met their partners, what attracted

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them to those partners, and other details that were laden with cultural experiences and locales, but they were rarely expressed along racial or ethnic lines.

November (queer, White, 30s) identified as non-binary, and in explaining their journey along to this identity, they illustrated tacit ethnosexual culture.

During my college and post-undergraduate-degree exploration, a lot of people in my friend group started to identify as non-binary, which I didn't know was an option. And [a romantic partner] was actually the first one to go through the process… I was always like, "yeah that's great! I support you! Oh, that's not me though." And then like after about a year and a half, I was like: actually [I am non-binary].

When pointing out that they were initially unaware that non-binary identification "was an option" and that they gained exposure to said option from their university social circles, November shows how sexual and gender expression can be classed. Non-binary identification requires an alternative understanding of gender from the one broadly prescribed, and although these options can be found in a variety of other communities (e.g., Southeast Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander), higher education is a central one in the United States. Additionally, most people understand their sexual attractions in terms of binary genders (e.g., gay, straight, bisexual) and thus would require exposure to sexual identities that include non-binary attraction (e.g., pansexual, multisexual, queer) in order to identify themselves as capable of dating someone like November. As a non-binary person, November lies outside of the vast majority of people's definition of who they can be attracted to, so they are

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limited to dating people who have constructed alternative definitions, which tends to be queer people who are both college educated and White.

November was also in polyamorous relationships with four other White people, and they had very limited sexual or romantic experience with non-White people. When I asked about race, they said that, "I do seem to be in a bubble of mostly White people, which I don't like. I would like to change that. The problem is the demographics of [my city] are not great for that." November emphasized that they were attracted to all races equally and prioritized human connection over appearances, but their talk highlighted how forging relationships from friendships can inadvertently lead to an intraracial relationship history, particularly when someone is mostly friends with people of the same race. They, "actually tend to date my friends… Normally I meet someone, we become friends, and then we maybe become involved after," and they attributed this to being, "demisexual: just that piece of really needing to trust someone and feel safe with them before I want to get involved with them." November pointed out that the people who they date "tend to be non-binary or trans," because they "give me that comfort energy. Give me that energy, like we're in this together, like we understand each other; and it just makes me feel safer." Through this talk, November showed how shared cultural experience and social bubbles facilitated their romantic involvement, significantly because they needed a sense of "we're in this together" safety with their partners. Although they attributed their ethnically homogenous dating history to regional demographics (i.e., not because of shared experience), they also emphasized a need to share transgender and queer

culture with their partners (i.e., because of shared experience). November attributed to shared experience the preponderance of queer people in their relationships but to simple locale the preponderance of White people. Not only their town, but also their friend groups and sociopolitical ideology steer November toward Whiteness, and not only in terms of numbers and access, but also identities, values, and experiences to bond over.

As another example, Gage (straight, White, cis man, 30s) was living and well-integrated within the same small town that he grew up in, so his sexual relationships were intimately intertwined with his mostly White community. He met his wife, "when she's 13, and I was 11; middle school." Together they

> dabbled in some swinger stuff with another married couple with a
> similar story. They got together at the same time we did… Actually,
> the husband in that couple and my wife had dated as teenagers. We're
> a part of the same friend pool, so that happened, so they had already
> had sex at least a handful of times.

From the high school sweetheart to the swinging with old friends to the shared experience of getting married young in a small town, Gage's sexual interactions were grounded in a shared experience of growing up in a mostly White town. If somebody marries their high school sweetheart, and their high school was all White, then they will necessarily marry a White person. Connections made through early life can be a powerful means to build intimacy, one that is only accessible under a shared (and often segregated) locale.

Locale

Most instances of ethnosexual cultural experience were also coded for locale, but in some instances, locale took center stage. Catherine framed much of her interview around repeated experiences of rape and other abuse from her male partners, which would typically precede a period of dating women as a form of sexual healing. She characterized the men who abused her as, "the don't give a fuck dude, you know? He looks mad maybe. He's yelling at someone for no reason on the phone… The alpha male who is degrading to his female partner." Catherine described a former intense attraction to these men, and although she never specified their race, she nevertheless cued to it: "I dated guys who were homophobic or who were uncomfortable with people of color. I grew up in [conservative mountain town]; it's not my fault." And she offered other florid details:

> the typical [liberal beach town] guy. I mean I grew up here my whole
> life. The [beach town] guy look is the khaki cut-offs or denim cut-offs
> and a white t-shirt, maybe a baseball cap with your own town on it…
> Vans [shoes], you know? Or if it's up in [mountain town], there's the
> guys who wear camo and dirty painter's pants… All my life, I
> would've thought [that] was so hot.

Without naming the race of her former partners, Catherine offers depictions that loosely map on to White working class or suburban masculinity, such as camouflage fatigues or skate shorts and shoes. She explicitly characterized these men in terms of masculinity and not race, but masculinity is cultural and intersectional, with White,

Black, and other variants. When people are oriented toward a given gender (e.g., hypermasculine alpha male), and the locally accessible manifestations of that gender are racialized (e.g., rural hunters in camouflage fatigues), people are implicitly sexually socialized into attraction toward a racial group. If hunters in camouflage is what masculinity looks like in your community, then attraction to masculinity nets attraction to whiteness. As such, ethnosexual culture not only includes desires for shared or unshared experience but also fixations derived from one's milieu.

Gerald also communicated a fixation from his milieu when he said, "I think I was influenced by Charlie's Angels… I had a poster of Cheryl Ladd in my room." The sexual attractiveness exemplars that exist around people can create a fascination with them. And when those exemplars are White, so is the fascination. Gerald mentioned Bo Derek and other mainstream, White paragons of feminine beauty that he fixated on during his early childhood in a suburban, White community that was saturated with White media.

Terrance had a girlfriend who he, "met in New Orleans, and we were both living there, but we're both from… the same part of the world." Terrance and his girlfriend hailed from a mostly White part of the Northeast United States, and New Orleans is a majority Black city. He went on to say that shared culture was "why I ended up with the girl I'm with now from New Orleans. [It is] 'cause someone from the same part of the country, and we met down there." Race can be identified in this excerpt, but it is never stated. One could infer that someone from a majority White area would only be able to connect over a shared birthplace if the other person is

White, but this pattern slides beneath the surface without being named or even considered. What this and many other instances of ethnosexual culture bring to the fore is the reality that all of the things that foster sexual and romantic relationships are deeply cultural, deeply regional, and therefore also deeply ethnic. Just as race and ethnicity color every other aspect of social life, they too color sex and dating.

When I asked Terrance directly about race, he said that "you just end up meeting more of the people in your group, even if you're in more of a blended area. You're still likely, probably to end up." When Terrance points to same-race relationships even in blended areas, he highlights that de facto segregation is alive and well in the United States, stratifying people even when they are proximal. People often live in physically racially-segregated neighborhoods, work socioeconomically racially-segregated jobs, and consume aesthetically racially-segregated media, all of which funnels people into racially-segregated dating pools.

Prohibitions

Another way that culture emerged in conversation with ethnosexuality was in terms of formal or informal prohibitions against dating outside of one's ethnic or racial group. After Beatrice briefly touched on shared local—"there weren't a lot of African American guys in my school"—she said that, "I was attracted to a lot of Latino guys… I noticed that era, [there] weren't a lot of Latino-women [relationships]… I think there might've been a lot of pressure, spoken or unspoken, to not date outside." Although not certain of whether this was actually the case, Beatrice

talks about an expectation in ethnic minority and immigrant communities, policed externally and internally, to avoid interracial relationships.

Ronald brought up another way that prohibitions can affect ethnosexuality. He did not "have experience with other races, just in a sexual way," and he attributed this to "being less confident; I certainly wouldn't have had the confidence in those days to ask a Black woman out." Thus Ronald points to broader experiences of segregation and poor intergroup contact to show how pursuing a potential partner can be inhibited by lack of comfort with people of that background, not out of intentional prejudice but insecurity. Either through explicit familial rules against dating other races or through the confidence needed to break color lines, people can experience an ethnic group as off-limits to them. The two White people offered these explanations as conjecture, but the two people of color who brough it up provided details.

Salvador gave the most exhaustive depiction of prohibitions. He pointed out that many of the Asian women he grew up around,

> speak English, and they eat the same food; they do the same things that
> we do, but because they've only been here about a generation or two—
> let's say three—because of that, they are still really close to their
> family units. And so everything goes through the family, everything.
> So, you typically couldn't go out with an Asian girl if you were
> Mexican.

In Salvador's initial musings on the topic, he attributes the prohibition to familial control, an ethnosexuality exercised by disapproving parents; although he also

intersperses generalizations about Asian people as perpetual foreigners. As Salvador

continued, however, he provided a more detailed account of the phenomenon. He had

made friends with Indian people who,

> think I'm Indian, so we hang out after class, we talk, and they never
>
> suspected I was Mexican… One of the girls in the group, I was kind
>
> of trying to feel her out and be like 'what's up,' and she would talk to
>
> me quite a bit, and then she found out I was Mexican, and then eighty-
>
> six back.

Whereas capital and essentialism foreclosed romantic prospects through appearances

and assumed behavior, this instance was one in which identity itself produced an

ethnosexual aversion. Interestingly, Salvador attributed his Asian fetish to this

deprivation, explaining that, "it's the thing you can't have I think that gets fetishized."

The analysis of Salvador in earlier sections strongly suggests his Asian fetish was

more complicated than simple dispossession, but this quote nevertheless shows how a

prohibition against a group can feed an obsession for a group. Again, culture becomes

more than shared or unshared experience to a lifelong infatuation sprung from shared

or unshared experience.

> As Salvador continued, he clarified that,
>
> I don't want to say that they're racist, but I do think that there is a level
>
> of consciousness that you have to be aware of with the parents when it
>
> comes to culture. Because if you're like first generation, second

generation, they're gonna be like, "oh well we want you to marry

inside," or "we want to approve who you're gonna bring."

Cultural norms among immigrant communities for their children to date within their

ethnic group are a unique instance of ethnosexuality. Immigrant communities may

prohibit interracial relationships because of prejudice or xenophobia, but this may

also occur out of a desire to keep one's culture and heritage thriving in a foreign

place. Sometimes, however, prohibitions are patently racist.

Gerald talked about when he was much younger and he "had a girlfriend that

worked in the [Las Vegas] circus, and she was White." They were out on a date

together, and "there was these guys there that didn't like the fact that I was with this

person… [and] they were making little comments and stuff." Eventually, "it got to the

point where enough was enough, and it was like 'okay, we're gonna go outside,'"

which resulted in a security guard escorting the hecklers away. Prohibitions to stay

within one's group can also be an ideological opposition to miscegenation (i.e.,

racism).

The codes for culture introduced a deductive theme, one that was painfully

absent from my original research questions. The importance of common ground was

endemic to people's talk about sexual and romantic relationships, which is probably

obvious on its own, but the interplay between race and finding that common ground is

more novel. The tendency for people to date intraracially is often not a bias but a

matter of culture, whether a de jure prohibition or the de facto effect of wanting

shared experience and needing a shared locale. Despite these non-racist explanations

for homo-ethnosexuality, participants still communicated distress when asked to discuss them.

Ethnosexual Authenticity

The final theme for ethnosexuality is authenticity, which refers to the tense and suspicious responses that emerged when I asked participants about race. Authenticity is unique from the other themes because it centers the manner in which participants engaged with the interview as opposed to their experiences with study topics themselves. Mapping out the ways in which respondents toiled over their responses or gave seemingly bogus ones enabled me to show the silence and dread that exists around the subject, which is an insightful theme in and of itself. Given that race played a powerful role in partner choices and other aspects of sexuality, coding for suspicion showed that the role is also stifled by the stigma carried with it. By coding for the authenticity in people's replies, I am making inferences about the nature of the phenomenon itself (i.e., it is stigmatized).

I coded for avoiding answers to questions through aggressive *counterquestions*¸ providing vague *platitudes* that evade detailed replies, and clear and significant *contradictions* between participants' statements. Authenticity codes can be found throughout the previous sections, such as Conor's platitude about liking all races equally, followed by his contradiction that he likes redheads the most. This section is short and not broken up by codes because the content coded for authenticity is already reported in other sections. I do not report any definitive statements about accuracy or an overall measure of error; only how people spoke in seemingly

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inauthentic ways. I used authenticity codes to show how inaccuracy occurred in interviews as opposed to quantifying the degree of it. That being said, I also found coding for authenticity to be a valuable and informative process because I was able to read the transcripts for believability specifically.

Throughout his interview, Kevin shared insights that we coded for every theme, but his response to my direct question about race started with platitudes and ended in counterquestions. Kevin said, "whiteness versus blackness or brownness I suppose. I'm sure these all have some level of interest to me, but when you're asking about your own brain, the things that are stable are often hidden until you really look," which we coded as a platitude because it portrayed his attractions as invisible to him yet capable of being discovered. He went on to state that,

> It's hard for me to say one thing that I can say that's actually me. Or
> that's maybe just something that I'm thinking about at the moment, but
> that's probably what your research is trying to unveil, right? So could
> you just tell me what you want to do with this research exactly?

Kevin eventually participated more earnestly, but his initial avoidant platitudes and counterquestions communicated a tension around the topic and a lack of desire to name it.

One of the more straightforward instances of ethnosexual authenticity was when Violet countered my question about racial preferences:

> For what purpose is my question? For what purpose would I find a
> racial group more attractive? To have sex with? Is that what you

mean? Is that what you mean? [I: Yeah, yeah.] Yeah, I would stick

with my own race.

Before replying to my question, she quickly asked me five of her own, and

then provided the most succinct ethnosexual identification in the sample.

Because her eventual response could be read as racist, I inferred that her

counterquestions were a means of avoiding her answer.

November's interview proved to be one of the most striking

engagements with ethnosexual authenticity because they were easily the most

straightforward, well-versed participant when it came to gender attraction,

gender identity, and polyamory, but they struggled to describe their

ethnosexuality. November had gone through a profoundly rigorous process of

self-discovery for their non-binary, pansexual, queer, demisexual,

polyamorous, and kinky identities. For example:

When I was thirteen, I started identifying as bisexual, and that seemed

closest to what I was experiencing… And then I was like, "oh I want

to know more about the breadth of gender identity," and I was like,

"okay, I'm pansexual." And then I really fell in love with "queer," the

umbrella political stance of it, like the "queer fuck you" sort of thing…

It's a very complicated thing that I've had to think about for many

years and figure out.

November shared similar stories for many of their other identities, but they had not

analyzed their tendency to date fellow White people until I asked about it. They had

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completed immense identity work but not for interracial attraction. As sexual and gender identity discourses have exploded across the United States, introspection about one's gender attractions—and others like kink and polyamory—has become an all but ubiquitous component of adolescent identity development, but sexuality remains largely colorblind for White people. November discovered their bisexuality at the age of 13 and had iterated it several times since, but they discovered their ethnosexuality during the interview in their early thirties.

When I asked about experience with non-White people, November explained that their dearth was not intentional, but their reply began with conspicuous omissions for racial terms:

> I am certainly not seeking that out, and it's not that I'm not attracted to other people. So it's just that that's just how it's played out. But it's definitely not that I'm un-attracted to—because I mean there's a lot of really gorgeous people who are—yeah… I might be a little blocked for—especially 'cause I do have a lot of close Latinx friends.

After providing several platitudes that stumbled past identity labels, November eventually said,

> For like a person of color, like a Black person or something, I think I might have a concern that I'm going to contribute to something painful for them by interacting with them. So I'm instead on the sidelines trying to do everything I can to lift up their voices.

In contrast to how they spoke about gender, November was challenged by this portion of the interview. They appeared to initially struggle to mention people of color in name, using pauses as stand-ins. November then volunteered ethnic and racial terms, but they also contradicted themselves when they stated that their interactions with people of color would hurt them. November is avowedly anti-racist and works to heal people, especially people of color, through their professional interactions, so they do not actually believe that contact with people of color would inflict pain. This contradiction emerged, I think, because November cares deeply about racism and White privilege, is profoundly engaged in the sexual politics of their own life, and was asked to contend with their tendency toward intraracial dating for the first time. There has been a proliferation of sexual identities in the turn of the twenty-first century (e.g., Diamond, 2008), and November personified many of them, but for White people, race is still shrouded in a pall of colorblindness, and this is despite relationships being consistently segregated. Bringing ethnosexuality to the fore, particularly with individuals who have politicized their sexual relationships along other lines, produces inauthenticity.

    Gage was remarkably candid about heavily stigmatized sexual interests (e.g., consensual non-consensual feminization, pegging, flogging), but when he answered my questions about race, he contradicted himself.

> I've only had the chance to play with White people. I've never played
> with a Mexican chick or Black chick. I would love to. It would just
> never really—they don't really seem to [be] integrating where I am,

and where I am is extremely fucking limited. I'm not going out

meeting people and shit. I'm not hitting up online for anything. I'm

busy. I'm full. I'm not taking in any new candidates right now. I have

a wife, I have a girlfriend, and I have a third partner.

Gage initially attributed his monoethnic sexual experience to his locale, but then he

further evidenced it with being busy, not wanting to go online, and having enough

partners already. Later on in the interview, Gage brought up several new partners,

including, "a guy in town, who we have talked about the possibility of hooking up,

and it just hasn't happened yet. The stars haven't aligned on that one. [I: How did that

happen?] I put out a thing on Reddit." Gage was comfortable disclosing his desire to

experiment with men (and other non-normative desires), so he could overcome a fair

amount of stigma, but for race, he gave a self-contradictory answer that he was too

busy and not going online. Something about ethnosexuality triggers suspicious

responses.

Beatrice's interview offered a unique lens to identify contradictions. Beatrice

had not experienced partnered sex, but she watched gay male pornography and wrote

gay male erotica. She spoke at length about specific pornography studios, films, and

performers that she found attractive, which enabled me to verify their identities.

Beatrice had, "a few favorites: when Tayte Hansen from Cocky Boys had long hair,"

"this guy Shane Ericson who I liked watching," "this guy named Hunter Scott," "Levi

Carter," and other performers who were White. Beatrice also mentioned that, "I kind

of have a hockey fetish," so "I was trying to go for the [pornography performers] that

sort of resemble hockey players." Ice hockey is a significantly White sport, so

performers who looked like them would most likely be White. From these statements

and other talk in Beatrice's interview, she conveyed an attraction to White individuals

and groups, but when I asked directly about racial and ethnic attraction, she said, "I

don't know; I definitely had a lot of attraction to Asian men, like even in high school,

there was a guy in one of my English classes." After sharing a list of White men,

Beatrice replied to my direct question about race by contradicting the pattern she had

previously articulated. I pointed out that pornography tends to be White, and she

replied: "which is annoying, like especially in the beginning when I was watching a

lot of [the] Belami [pornography studio]. I know everyone is Eastern European, but

it's like surely there must be a person of color there or something." Beatrice then

talked about a video she had stumbled upon in a vintage pornography store that had

an Asian man on the cover, but she was unable to provide names of performers or

studios, like she did earlier. Unprompted, Beatrice talked about preferences for

individual White men, but once she was clued into the ethnosexual politics of her

interview, she contradicted herself by railing against a White-supremacist industry.

I circled back to race near the end of Beatrice's interview, and her reply

illustrated one of the mechanisms behind White homo-ethnosexuality. I asked her

pointedly if she watched pornography with people of color performers, and she said,

It never felt right, even like dildos and things that are flesh-tone

colored. It's just something that feels like: what ethnic group do you

want to date? It's just like no, so I've never been—sometimes I'll look

at the covers maybe, the Asian themed ones, and think maybe I

shouldn't objectify somebody like that, but I'll look twice.

In her own way, Beatrice answered the question about race, stating she does not

consume non-White pornography. When she replied, "no," to her rhetorical question

about making a conscious decision to masturbate to a specific race, Beatrice showed

how refusing to see race in sex and dating can perpetuate racial inequality in sex and

dating through colorblind segregation. In pornography, people of color are relegated

to racial fetish categories (e.g., Black porn, Asian porn, interracial porn), whereas

White people are universal, the unstated racial category behind non-racial porn. In

explicitly avoiding human fetishization, Beatrice implicitly orients herself toward

fellow White people because most non-racial-fetish pornography is White.

Pornography is a striking example of this, but the banal segregation of everyday life

produces the same effect: White people will generally not fall in love with a person of

color if they do not make a point to interact with them. Because whiteness obscures

itself through its privilege and ubiquity, ignoring race and ethnicity in sexuality

stymies exposure to people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. When the

alternative to fetishizing people of color is to marginalize them, people construct a

false dichotomy of two problematic options.

Between the authenticity codes in this and the other sections, participants

communicated a profound sense of alienation to the subject of ethnosexuality. Several

participants, mostly White, were asked to contend with the reality that their race

impacted their sexuality in ways they had never considered before. And as with so

many other conversations about race, many people fumbled through it haphazardly yet highly conscious of how their answers would look to me or a reader. The inauthenticity behind ethnosexuality pinpoints a key reason why so many other sexual identities have proliferated while race remains invisible. People do not want to talk about race, and the models of human sexuality that are available to them do not work. A biological essentialism argument (i.e., innate attraction to one's race) sounds like eugenics. A sexual diversity argument (i.e., everyone has individual racial preferences) is undermined by the uniformity in people's same-race relationships. And an oppression argument (i.e., people are indoctrinated into same-race attraction) literally attributes one's behavior to internalized racism. Without an option that makes sense or signals virtue, people are left to assemble a jumble of explanations on their own. People in my interviews appeared to be searching for a discourse with which to understand and communicate their racialized attractions and experiences (or at least answer questions about them when probed).

Discussion

Race played a central but often invisible role in participants' sexual experiences and attractions, particularly among White people. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviewing, I have identified four aspects of how this happens. First, ethnosexual essentialism included stereotypes and other beliefs about the nature of racial and ethnic groups' sexuality (e.g., China doll and big buck stereotypes of Asian women and Black men respectively). Second, ethnosexual capital was made up of recognitions or endorsements of a racial hierarchy of attractiveness (i.e., White

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people on top, Black men and Asian women in the middle, and Asian men and Black women on the bottom). Third, ethnosexual culture consisted of desires for partners with shared or unshared values, practices, and other experiences, as well as who is geographically and interpersonally available. Fourth and finally, ethnosexual authenticity reflected the comfort and candor with which participants could talk through racial and ethnic patterns in their sexual partners and desires, as well as the sociopolitical intersections among them. I believe that by mapping out the manner in which sexuality is impacted by racial and ethnic social attitudes, structured privileges, normative ways of being, and topic fluency; I have been able to illustrate a novel phenomenon and fill a gap in the literature. Moreover, I believe—and will heretofore argue—that these four themes show how not only ethnosexuality but all sexuality is socially constructed through essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity. Below I review and interpret my findings, discuss implications for the psychological study of sexuality, and discuss limitations to the work.

Essentialism Summary

Participants in my study essentialized racial groups' sexuality, but not entirely in the ways I had anticipated. Gwen, Catherine, Violet, and William reproduced the big Black buck construction but in subdued, indirect ways. Samantha and Catherine essentialized Asian men as castrated but not patriarchs, simply feminizing them without ascribing social dominance. William and Kevin essentialized Black women as sapphires, but Kevin was the only participant to produce an instance of the Jezebel stereotype (the most prolific in the literature). Salvador, Gerald, Faye, and Vanessa

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either endorsed or recognized China doll constructions, but Catherine was the only person to provide a dragon lady construction of East Asian women. People essentialized Middle Eastern people more than I had anticipated (Conor and William), and they differentiated between South and East Asian people to a stronger degree than I would have expected (Shannon, Samantha, Gwen, Ronald). Taken together, I found strong evidence of societal stereotypes and sociohistorical reverberations in participants' conceptualizations of racial groups, but I found limited evidence for the belief in particular essences analyzed in the research literature. This may be because of my small sample size and suggest that I terminated the study before reaching saturation for every one of the essentialism codes.

In understanding how beliefs about the physical or sexual nature of a group shape sexual attraction, it is important to look at the media. Through sexualized media (e.g., pornography, movies and tv, video games), people fixate on a particular representation of a social group (e.g., the China doll). This fixation objectifies the person, casting them as caricatures of themselves, by presenting them in reductive ways and divorcing them from their context. Media depictions of any group, racialized or otherwise, produce assumptions about a group's sexuality and desirability that lead to a fetishization or marginalization grounded in erroneous beliefs in their morphology.

Capital Summary

Study participants communicated the fundamentals of ethnosexual capital, but they also added nuance. Many participants ascribed low capital to Asian men (e.g.,

Catherine, Samantha, Frank, Shannon) and, to a lesser degree, Black women (e.g., Conor, Kevin, Gerald). Alternatively, participants assigned high capital to White people (e.g., Donna, Conor, Terrance), Asian women (e.g., Salvador, Arturo, Gerald), and Black men (e.g., Vanessa, Catherine). Other responses were disjunctures. Vanessa flipped the hierarchy for women, assigning low capital to Asian and White women but high capital to Black women, showing how the discourse around capital can lead people to reconceptualize it. William, Faye, and Beatrice assigned high capital to Asian men by framing femininity as desirable, flipping the outcome but not the mediator. Throughout my study, capital was a consistent theme that closely hewed to the literature, and the divergences were often equally as theoretically compelling as the trend itself.

Although my participants evidenced a racial hierarchy of desirability, it was my choice to frame that hierarchy as capital, as opposed to simply a preference or sexual racism. Capital is a midpoint between the two, one that enabled me to avoid frames of attraction as a freedom of choice or willful discrimination. Sexual racism perspectives do not offer much in terms of solutions, in that resolving the injustice would entail policing sexual attractions. Because attractions are both incredibly intimate and generally not experienced as volitional, sexual racism shuts down the conversation, claiming 80-90% of White people are discriminating against people of color by not dating them. Socioeconomic class models recognize that capital has tangible value that needs to be equally accessible, but also that capital is socially constructed through an inherently problematic economic system. Meting out sexual

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value to ethnic groups—eroticizing Whiteness, fetishizing gender-race prototypicality, and marginalizing gender-race atypicality—is an inherently problematic sexual system, but it also has immense real-world value to people. Sexual desirability operates as a broader form of capital in that it is a gateway to social desirability, economic prosperity, and creating a family. But, sexual desirability is shored up unevenly between people, including because of their race. So, in addition to destroying the system (capitalism or objectification), agents of class-based approaches to social change need to argue for a redistribution of wealth (economic or sexual). From this perspective, the solution to ethnosexual capital is to militate the overarching structure (an obsession with appearances) and effectuate equitable outcomes within the structure (eroticize people equally), without demonizing people for existing within the structure (assigning high capital to eroticized groups).

Ethnosexual capital theory also demonstrates one way that inequality is reproduced in instances without intentional discrimination or prejudice: privilege. In societal contexts where some individuals are apportioned greater economic opportunity because of their cultural savvy, inequities can persist without anyone actively trying to undermine a group, simply because some groups are bestowed a more privileged life. This framework lends itself to analysis of sexual desirability, in that one's racial or ethnic attraction to any particular group is rarely couched in prejudice or discrimination, but all the while, the most privileged members of society are broadly regarded as the most desirable: gender-conforming White people. A privilege framework also offers a discourse to interrogate one's ethnosexuality,

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particularly for White people who have only dated fellow White people. Instead of demanding that they leave their spouses and date people of color—which would be dehumanizing in its own right—ethnosexual privilege enables individuals to consider how they profit from erotic capital even if they do not intend to discriminate against people of color.

Culture Summary

The cultural dimensions of ethnosexuality were not a part of my thinking at the outset of the study, but the moment that they emerged, they became painfully obvious. Participants described desires for a common bond with their partners, and language, food, music, and other ethnic phenomena racialized those attractions. Even more than the explicit endorsement of sharing cultural markers, people spoke of the geography of dating pools, fixations on early childhood crushes, and more broadly, a sexual life story replete with an array of characters and subplots that was set in racially distinct locations. The essentialized and capitalized dimensions of ethnosexuality made the topic deeply taboo, but the cultural sides made it ubiquitous.

In my interviews, multiple participants of color explicitly stated preferences for intraracial dating for cultural reasons. Faye wanted her future children to speak Mandarin. Vanessa wanted a man who understood structural racism. Arturo leveraged his insider knowledge of machismo sexual scripts to successfully pursue a Latina girlfriend. Desires for someone like oneself—someone who speaks the same language, identifies with the same politics, or has a similar set of values—were

ubiquitous, but White people rarely brought them up in explicit racial terms, including when I asked pointedly about race.

Although race could be read into participants' hopes for their futures, cherished moments from past loves, and connections that maintained intimate bonds through thick and thin; many participants did not view culture in racial terms. The invisibility of racialized culture dovetails with the fact that de facto segregation lives on in the United States, with people living in ethnically homogenous neighborhoods, going to ethnically homogenous schools, clocking in at ethnically homogenous workplaces, and finding partners in ethnically homogenous dating pools. For example, participants fixated on childhood crushes (e.g., Kevin, Gerald), related over a shared time and space (e.g., Terrance), and married their high school sweethearts (e.g., Gage). Interestingly, online dating and travelling abroad were common disruptions to participants sexual milieus (William, Vanessa, Samantha), which then offered an analytically useful counterfactual. Only once a different cultural experience and a different race was brought to the fore, did it become apparent that the fish had been in water the whole time. Or more literally, the White person realized they had been in the suburbs the whole time. When whiteness is invisible and people are segregated, White people date intraracially without realizing it.

Authenticity Summary

Participants in my interviews expressed dramatic differences in how comfortable, eager, and believable they were when discussing ethnosexuality. Vanessa and Faye brought up race immediately and expounded on it consistently

throughout their interviews. Conor and Salvador did not want to talk about their own race, let alone have a methodical discussion of racial attraction. Women were generally more open, and in turn disclosed more stigmatized thoughts and experiences (e.g., Gwen, Catherine). Although many participants in my interviews were able to speak to their ethnosexuality, I came away with a distinct impression that society needs a discourse from which to understand one's racialized attractions and experiences.

One of the things about ethnosexuality that makes it so unsettling for people is that sexuality is often framed as a visceral drive. When race is then applied to sexuality, the visceral drive discourse implies that people are oriented intrinsically to a racial group, and this is unsettling for people. A more nuanced conceptualization of ethnosexuality, one that interrogates essentialism, capital, and culture, removes shame and enables people to make sense of their ethnosexuality in a manner other than innate orientation to White people.

Assessing the four ethnosexual themes together illuminates the manner in which modern social life orients people toward their own race (i.e., a social construction of ethnosexuality). Essentialism dehumanizes the other, casting them as undesirable pariahs or objectified fetishes. Capital stratifies people, limiting their options and preferences. Shared culture gives people something to bond over, a set of mutual experiences and values. Authenticity stifles the conversation, so everything cycles and recycles unquestioned. In four divergent ways, sexuality is socially constructed. Racial "orientations" and interracial or intraracial experience are

impacted by the essentialized stereotypes about groups, the capital afforded them, the cultural connections they rely on, and the savvy and awareness that people have of them. This is what it means for sexuality to be socially constructed: shaped by social attitudes, societal structure, cultural milieus, and dominant discourses.

Limitations

My study has a number of limitations that are worth noting. First, the sample is too small and unrepresentative to make strong claims about human psychology or modern society. Many of the participants in my study communicated something unique about their sexuality that seemed to motivate participation: Ronald wanted to confess a lifetime of cheating on his wife, Beatrice wanted someone to know she wrote erotica under a pseudonym, Conor wanted to talk about his wife's desires to have an open marriage, Faye wanted to share how her gender attraction changed during hormone replacement therapy, and Donna wanted to know if she was a sex addict. My study would not have produced a representative sample even if I had more participants and a systematic sampling technique because most people do not want to talk to a stranger about the intimate details of their sex lives. That being said, my reliance on a small, convenience sample recruited mostly through Craiglist made the sample even less representative.

I adopted a semi-structured interview approach that resulted in significant differences between interviews. Race or some aspect of it was more central for some participants, so I followed their natural interest and knowledge, going in further detail with people who had more to say. Likewise, some participants were deeply unsettled

by race or gave bogus responses, so I did not press the subject with them. As such, my analyses relied heavily on a subset of people who were more open and honest. The sample was also too White and Latinx in relation to Black and Asian people, which is problematic in general but worse here because of the theoretical centrality of Black and Asian people in ethnosexuality. My results are a better depiction of how loquacious White people (especially women) and people of color generally experience ethnosexuality.

Study Implications

The racial stratification of sexual partners and practices has profound implications for individual lives and collective society. Sexual attraction is a core component of finding and building a family, which is something people hold dear on its own, but through marital and bloodline contracts, ethnosexuality is bound up with untaxed transfers of wealth and other socioeconomic advantages of marriage and family. Feeling desired is central to self-esteem and other aspects of psychosocial wellbeing, showing how ethnosexuality shapes self-concepts. Media depictions of sexuality are highly racialized, essentializing groups and privileging White people. Finally, cracking open ethnosexuality could, in a matter of a few generations, fundamentally reorganize race and racism.

Through tacit, socially facilitated decisions to have same-race children, people reproduce a de facto eugenics of choice. Because White people generally fall in love and bear children with other White people, they reproduce—and pass down privilege to—more White people. If people left their ethnically homogenous sexual and

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romantic bubbles, they would scramble centuries-old genetic differences in a matter of generations, and in turn, reorganize the attitudinal and structural inequities that come along with them. Cultures and identities—things to be cherished—would get lost in this sort of reshuffle, so the mass mixing of ethnic groups would bear costs, but there is a fundamental truth: reorganizing ethnosexuality would scramble racism as we know it. This is not to say that racialized skin color, ancestry, history, and law would cease to exist, but a society made up entirely of mixed-race people would necessitate a more nuanced understanding. Extinguishing de facto eugenics would supplant essentialized racial category with fluid racial difference (e.g., colorism).

Beyond illuminating exceptional human thoughts and behaviors that interweave sex, dating, marriage, childrearing, pornography, film and television, self-esteem, social identity development, and a plethora of other aspects of social life, ethnosexuality also exposes shortcomings in normative conceptualizations of gender attraction. Homosexuality has been viewed as an intrinsic drive that culture turns on or off (e.g., LeVay, 2010), and this model has been applied to other, newer sexual identities, such as asexuality and polyamory (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004). However, the intrinsic drive conceptualizations of sexuality are a poor fit for ethnosexuality, so this reveals a drawback in the theories that rely on them. Applying the themes from my study—essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity—not only provide a better model for ethnosexuality, but these same themes can inform theory of gender attraction. The societal essentialism of men and women exaggerates sex difference (Bem, 1993), creating polarized opposites that become eroticized, thus

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funneling people into monosexuality. The capital imbued within different bodies, especially gender conforming ones, likewise demonstrates how exaggerated, binary differences are eroticized and thus socialize individuals toward monosexuality. The cultural component of gender attraction—desiring a gender group because of a shared experience, such as masculinity or women's oppression—can be identified in lesbian feminism and homophilia (Rich, 1980). And finally, the authenticity with which people can engage in discussion of their ethnosexuality shows that although everyone has a race, not everyone constructs a sexual identity around race. The way in which identity work and introspection shape gender attraction can be implicated in research on straight men who have sex with men (Ward, 2015). In the final pages of my study, I investigate how gender attraction has been defined by the psychological literature as an intrinsic drive that is moderated by culture, and then I apply ethnosexual themes to elucidate other ways that psychology could conceptualize gender attraction.

If the 1800s birthed the homosexual subject and the 1900s interrogated him, the turn of the 2000s has replicated the homosexual, discovering and rediscovering the same personage within newly emerging sexualities. Researchers have begun to investigate bisexual and pansexual experience (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, Plowman, 2012), life course sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008), the asexuality spectrum (Fahs, 2010; Gressgård, 2013), polyamory as an orientation unto itself (Emens, 2004; Ritchie & Barker, 2006), and identification with kink and BDSM (Bauer, 2014), all as newfangled sexual identities. Curiously, these works have reforged oldfangled biological and cultural models of homosexuality to analyze all of

the new ones being discovered. Studies of the biological antecedents of asexuality and bisexuality have tested whether the exact same genetic and hormonal markers associated with homosexuality are also associated with the new sexual deviations (e.g., asexual people must be gay men, bisexual people must be gay men, all other sexual weirdos must be gay men; Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capiluppi, 2004; Van Wyk & Geist, 1995). From another perspective, scholars have adopted Rich's (1980) theory of compulsory heterosexuality to assail compulsory monosexuality (Caldwell, 2010), compulsory allosexuality (i.e., non-asexuality; Fahs, 2010), and compulsory monogamy (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). From two very different viewpoints—one socially constructed, the other biologically essential—analysts have managed to superimpose homosexual theory onto all other sexuality. But, missing in the ideological skirmishes over whether bisexuality, asexuality, kink, sexual fluidity, and polyamory are biologically or culturally determined is the history and lived experience of racialized sexuality.

Despite the fact that all relationships are racialized, researchers have not adopted biological essentialism or cultural oppression arguments for racialized attraction and experience. Although I do not know why this is the case, I can guess. A biological essentialism model argues that people are normatively attracted to a different gender, but a unique set of epigenetic factors will lead someone to deviate from the norm, becoming attracted to their own gender (LeVay, 2010). Given that 80-90% of relationships are intraracial (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012), the most empirically prudent corollary theory for race would be that people are

biologically determined to desire their own race, and some set of genetic or hormonal factors causes interracial daters to deviate from the norm. I think the biological essentialists have not applied their perspective to race because it creeps dangerously close to eugenics, resulting in a belief that people are intrinsically predisposed to date within their own group. Also, the stronger biological argument would be to view the non-normative choice (interracial sex) as superior (through genetic diversity), but this subverts their field's assumption that the normative is the biological ideal. On the other hand, the cultural oppression argument when applied to race would state that people are indoctrinated into normativity (intraracial desire). This theory actually lines up well with research showing that overt racism and a segregated milieu predict aversion to interracial relationships (Herman & Campbell, 2012). Although there is some empirical basis for a cultural oppression model of ethnosexuality, I think that there is no scholarship arguing for compulsory intraracial sex because it positions many liberal White people as indoctrinated into White supremacy. The dominant perspectives on sexuality are thus a poor fit for ethnosexuality, either empirically or personally. I believe my themes not only better map ethnosexuality, they can also inform other aspects of sexuality.

Sustained inquiry into ethnosexuality illuminates a bias in psychology and society to assume that human sexuality consists of an intrinsic drive that social factors either suppress or support (LeVay, 2010). November, a participant in this study, exemplified this belief. At the tail end of their interview, November reappraised their sexual life narrative, stating that they spent adolescence and emerging adulthood

"really getting to the bottom of what was going on inside of me." For November, this meant discovering their non-binary gender identity, polyamorous relationship needs, demisexual arousal patterns, submission and consent kinks, and pansexual orientation to gender non-conformity. Although November eschewed the concept of biology and did not frame "what was going on inside of" them as an intrinsic biological drive, they still saw these factors as core to their being. What differentiates racial attraction from all of the other dimensions of sexuality that people identify with is that ethnosexuality is not viewed as something one needs to get to the bottom of. Identifying racial and ethnic attractions is not a part of sexual self-discovery in the way that gender attractions, or—starting in the 21st century—many other sexual differences have become. The baseline framework for gender attraction, whether it be biological or social, assumes it to be an intrinsic drive directed toward an essentialized target. With contemporary sexual identities, such asexuality, polyamory, and pansexuality, the essentialized target goes away but the intrinsic drive does not. How else could gender attraction be conceptualized, if not as an intrinsic drive that social norms moderate? Essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity all offer insights into the psychology of sexuality.

The ethnosexual essentialism theme revealed how beliefs about racial groups can affect desires for and experiences with those groups, and the same phenomenon holds true for gender. Many modern sexual identities (e.g., straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual) are both grounded in and uphold gender essentialism. For example, the identity label of gay man does not differentiate between attraction to male

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physiology, masculinity, or simply people who identify with manhood. Attraction to normative male physiology could include people who do not identify as men (e.g., non-binary transgender people) while excluding people who do (e.g., transgender men). Attraction to masculinity could include some women (e.g., butch) yet exclude some men (e.g., femme). Attraction to people who identify as men avoids the conflation of sex and gender, but it is also out of touch with lived experience, in that people tend to be attracted to male body parts and masculinity more so than the identity label of man. In a world of gender essentialism, these disjunctures are invisible because everyone who identifies as a man also has a normatively male body and performs hegemonic masculinity. In this way, the dominant categories for human sexual identity rely on and reify the essentialized assumption that all men are masculine and have cismale bodies. Through ostensibly commonsense ideas that men are a discrete category of person with which one is intrinsically attracted, gender essentialism facilitates sexual experience with gender-conforming cisgender people while marginalizing everyone else. If sexuality were socially constructed in a manner that did not essentialize gender, people might instead conceptualize their attractions as directed toward sexed body types, gender performances, and gender-sex identity labels, which could all vary independent of each other. Instead of collapsing the breadth of gender and sex diversity into two binary categories of which one must choose between, sexual attraction to men, women, and everyone else could be just as complicated and idiosyncratic as ethnosexual attraction.

Gender essentialism dovetails with gender capital, in that a narrow experience of womanhood or manhood is not only essentialized but also eroticized. A linchpin of gender-race prototypicality is the sexual privileging of gender conformity, in which the closer individuals hew to essentialized representations of women and men, the more they are deemed desirable. In ethnosexuality, this cleaves racial desirability across binary gender, with Asian women and Black men cast as attractive and Asian men and Black women cast as unattractive. This concept includes race, but it also transcends race, imputing differential desirability into bodies that either deviate from or tack to gender norms. As with a White standard of beauty in White supremacist societies, gender conformity standards of beauty are meted out in heteropatriarchal societies through pornography, film, television, video games, and other objectified media. By lifting up gender-conforming White people as paragons of desirability, societies produce ideas about what it means to be attractive qua normative. Whereas skin lighteners and hair straighteners reveal racialized erotic capital, gym memberships and breast implants reveal gendered erotic capital. When societies produce and enforce standards for beauty, individuals must choose between assimilation (which empowers the individual while reifying the structure) or repudiation (which disempowers the individual while undermining the structure). In other words, women can choose between shaving their legs to find a partner or letting their hair grow out to fight the patriarchy, but it is hard to do both.

Gender norms are by definition cultural; they constitute different practices (e.g., independence versus interdependence), values (e.g., career versus family),

social strata (e.g., privilege versus oppression), and even locales (e.g., fraternities versus sororities). The socialization of people into these two distinct gender norms produces measurable differences in how men and women relate to the world and interact with each other. As with ethnosexual culture, gendered sexual culture provides a set of common experiences and lifeways through which people can bond, and this can facilitate homosexual attraction. Most notably, the lesbian feminism movement of the '70s and '80s sought to awaken within all women their latent homosexuality or homophilia. Through a shared experience of sexism and femininity, lesbian feminism leveraged gendered culture to stimulate same-sex attraction. In a different vein, bisexual people can experience a pressure to choose between living as either a gay person or a straight person (Caldwell, 2010); and although this is a false dichotomy, homophilia or heterophilia can inform the choice. So for example, if a bisexual man connects more easily over masculinity, then he may prefer to live and date in a gay milieu over a straight one. Finally and going in the opposite direction, unshared cultural experiences can be fetishized across gender too. Scholarship on the feminine mystique (Frieden, 1963) or the dark continent of womanhood (Irigary, 1985) postulates an eroticism of enigmatic femininity. From this frame, different cultural experiences of men and women, along with gender segregation, create an exoticism of a domestic, as opposed to foreign, other. Although exoticization or relatability may not be enough to make people straight or gay, gendered sexual culture can shape how gender attraction is expressed, and in select historical moments or among select individuals, produce tangible differences.

Finally, ethnosexual authenticity, as an index of fluency in sexuality discourses, shows how sexual attractions and experiences are mediated by introspection, identification, and narrative familiarity. Emergent research on straight men who have sex with men shows how identity can supersede behavior, with people adopting an outward label that is dissonant with their sexual experiences and attractions (Ward, 2015). Research on straight identity development shows that although dominant groups often do not recognize their identities, they still undergo processes of experimentation and self-discovery, just in a manner that is invisible to them (Morgan, 2012). More broadly, the extent to which people think about, apply labels to, and form communities around their sexual experiences and attractions can have an impact on those experiences and attractions.

Human sexuality is a kaleidoscope of social difference. Historical epochs produced temporally grounded sexual constructions of racial and gender groups (e.g., Madame Butterfly, Venus Hottentot) that reinforced contemporaneous social cleavages (e.g., colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade). In turn, modern society reproduces historical constructions as sexual stereotypes (e.g., China doll, Jezebel), which are doled out through the media and body politic. Standards of beauty stratify desirability across race and gender, among other factors, so people are left to work their capital within an unfair (i.e., White supremacist and heteropatriarchal) system. Shared cultural experience fosters intimacy whereas unshared cultural experience incites infatuation, and geography socially constructs sexuality in both prosaic (e.g., simple proximity) and provocative (e.g., childhood fixation) fashions. Individual

engagement with discourses and identity labels for sexuality can produce wildly different interpretations of the same behavior or operate as arbiters of behavior in and of themselves. Gender and racial attraction are socially constructed through essentialized beliefs about social groups, a hierarchy of erotic capital impressed upon human bodies, customs and axioms that link lives together, and the narrative savvy to make sense of and meaning out of experience and attraction. Psychological research on sexuality has proliferated to subsume not only gender attraction but also polyamory, asexuality, kink, and fluidity. Introducing race into the mix not only offers another category of inquiry into the social construction of sexuality; it also uncovers assumptions about what it means for sexuality to be socially constructed. By illustrating the manner in which sexuality is constructed through essentialism, capital, culture, and authenticity, ethnosexuality illuminates new dimensions of sexual attraction and experience to be interpolated in both the old and new categories. And, these themes further beg the question: how else is sexuality socially constructed?

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