

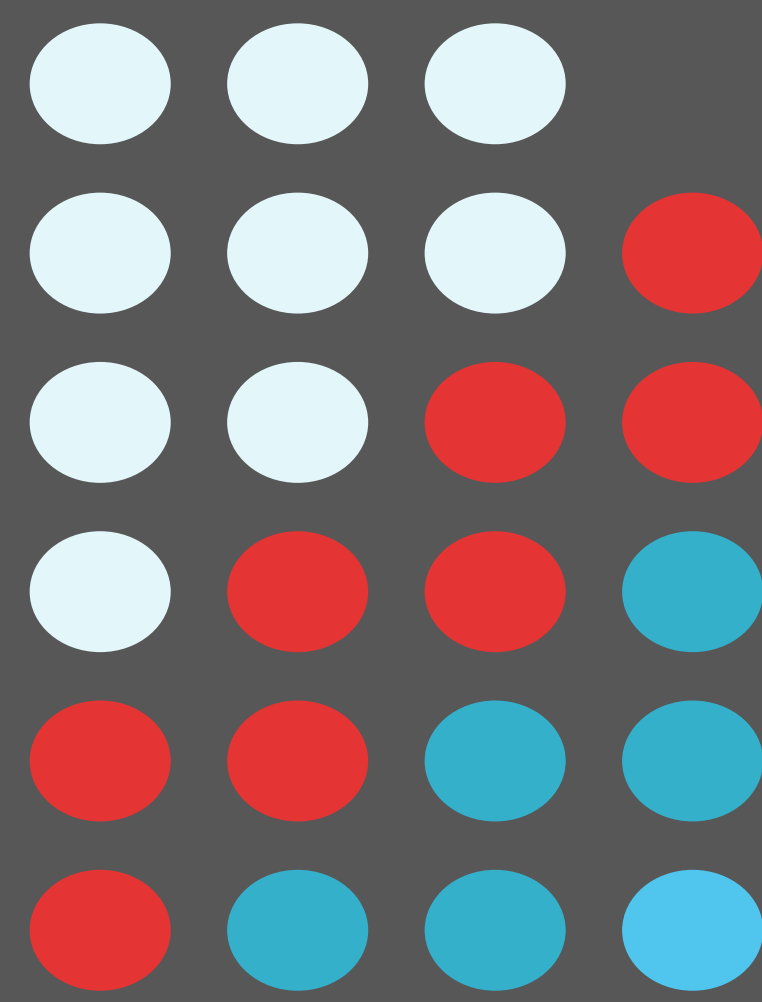
Race-Based Partnering Preferences among Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) in New York City

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Introduction

HIV/AIDS continues to have adverse and disproportioned effects on populations of men who have sex with men (MSM). In NYC, MSM comprise a relatively small proportion of New York City’s population (approximately 5% of all sexually active men), yet accounted for nearly 43% of all new HIV diagnoses in 2009 (NYC DOHMH, 2011). In 2009 the number of new HIV diagnoses among MSM under 30 years old surpassed the number in MSM over 30 for the first time ever with almost 80% of newly diagnosed YMSM being African American or Hispanic (NYC DOHMH, 2011). Racial/ethnic disparities in HIV/AIDS among MSM are not well understood. Various hypotheses have been posed as to the reason for the disparities in research focusing on behavior, environmental and social/cultural determinants (Ayala et al., 2012; Nemoto et al., 2003; Warren et al., 2008).

Previous research on MSM’s use of the Internet for potential partner selection has been well documented. Internet use and subsequent social networks have been linked to sexual decisions and risky behavior in multiple studies (Paul et al.; Raymond & McFarland, 2009; Raymond et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2009).

Although Internet use provides comfort, privacy, and convenience for MSM when in search of casual and long-term partners, selection criteria and sexual preferences may become evident as race-based (Paul et al., 2010). These sexual preferences bring to light racially motivated interactions from skin color preference to deliberate discrimination and racial stereotypes. Such stereotypes have created an online partnering preference racial hierarchy (Raymond & McFarland, 2009; Raymond et al., 2009). These overt preferences, further supported by the anonymity of the Internet, must be considered when exploring race disparities in HIV incidence and prevalence. The determinants of HIV infection among MSM who partner within and outside their respective race are of tremendous importance. The purpose of this study was to address the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent to MSM report same-race sexual & long-term partnering preferences?
- 2) To what extent to MSM report mixed-race sexual & long-term partnering preferences?
- 3) What are the most-preferred racial make-up of sexual and long-term partners among MSM?
- 4) Why do MSM choose to partner within or across races?

Methods

Data were collected on a select sample of MSM from November 2009 through February 2011. Participants were recruited using passive methods online, along with active and passive methods offline, to complete an Internet based-survey at a later time. Eligibility requirements to participate in the study included: 1) Being at least 18 years of age; 2) Sex with a man in the last 3 months; 3) Having logged onto a website, chat room or other social networking site where men go to meet other men; and 4) Current residence in New York City (by zip code).

Methods (continued)

Recruitment

Only passive recruitment strategies were used to recruit men online. A modified time-space sampling technique was used to construct an exhaustive sampling frame that reflected a diverse number of social networking websites where MSM go to meet other men. These websites were contacted for permission to advertise the study. Once gaining permission, members of the research team logged onto these sites and posted passive recruitment materials. These materials included text and images that indicated the purpose of the study and study incentives as well as the website address of the full survey.

In an effort to supplement online strategies, the research team again used time-space sampling to recruit men offline in bars/clubs that catered to MSM clientele. With the permission of the select bar/club, members of the study recruitment team then randomly approached potential participants in the venue and asked them to screen for the online study. Potential participants who screened eligible were alerted to their eligibility, briefly informed of the study’s purpose, given a study card and asked to visit the website to complete the survey

Online Survey/Instrumentation

The online survey was housed on a secure server. The survey took an approximate 15-20 minutes to complete. Survey instrumentation included demographic information, questions from the Sexual Practices Assessment Schedule for MSM (SPAS-MSM) (Carballo-Diguez, 1999) and an original race-based partnering preference schedule, developed by the PI. The original instrument included questions on race preferences of short-term (sexual) vs. long-term partners.

Results

195 men completed the full survey. For the purposes of this analysis, only data from men who reported a self-identified race of White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander or Latino were used. When asked “With whom do you prefer to partner sexually?” 44.1% ($n=49$) of White men reported “Men who share my ethnic identity” while 68.8% ($n=11$) of Asian/Pacific Islander men reported “Men of a different ethnic identity.”

Table 1. Race-Based Sexual & Long-Term Partnering Preferences by Self-Identified Race

Preference	Race			
	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Latino
$n=195$				
Men Who Share My Racial Identity (short-term/sexual)	$n=49$ (44.1%)	$n=4$ (10.8%)	$n=0$ (0%)	$n=9$ (29%)
Men Who Share My Racial Identity (long-term)	$n=51$ (46.4%)	$n=6$ (16.2%)	$n=1$ (6.3%)	$n=8$ (25.8%)
Men of a Different Racial Identity (short-term/sexual)	$n=20$ (18%)	$n=16$ (43.2%)	$n=11$ (68.8%)	$n=6$ (19.4%)
Men of a Different Racial Identity (long-term)	$n=14$ (12.7%)	$n=14$ (37.8%)	$n=10$ (62.5%)	$n=5$ (6.5%)
I Have No Preference (short-term/sexual)	$n=44$ (39.6%)	$n=17$ (45.9%)	$n=5$ (31.3%)	$n=16$ (51.6%)
I Have No Preference (long-term)	$n=45$ (40.9%)	$n=17$ (45.9%)	$n=5$ (31.3%)	$n=18$ (58.1%)

Results (continued)

The majority of self-identified Latino men (51.6%, $n=16$) indicated that they had no preference. Long-term partnering preferences were similar (see Table 1).

White was reported as the most preferred race of short-term (sex) partners among the majority of men in the Black and White groups while self-identified Asian/Pacific Islander and Latin men reported Latin men being the most preferred short-term/sex partners. With regard to long-term partners, only Latin men reported greater preferences of within-race partnerships while the remaining 3 groups reported an overwhelming preference of a White partner (see Table 2). When asked to rank reasons for both within-race short and long-term partnering preferences, the majority of White participants reported physical attributes as being most important ($n=27$, 62.8%), Black participants reported similar socioeconomic status ($n=3$, 50%) and self-identified Latin men reported “sexual performance” ($n=4$, 50%). Among men who preferred both short and long-term partners of a different race and among participants who had no preference, “physical attributes” was ranked as the most important reason by the majority across all groups.

Self-reported men of color (Latin, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander) reporting White men as a primary choice for sexual partners were more likely to report higher levels of risky sexual behavior than those who did not ($p<.01$). There were no statistically significant differences among groups with regard to partnering preferences and HIV/STI infection.

Table 2. Most Preferred Race of Sex & Long-Term Partner

Race of Preferred Partner	Respondent's Self-Identified Race			
	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Latino
$n=183$				
White (short-term/sexual)	$n=76$ (70.4%)	$n=14$ (41.2%)	$n=13$ (44.8%)	$n=9$ (30%)
White (long-term)	$n=79$ (73.3%)	$n=16$ (45.7%)	$n=9$ (75%)	$n=10$ (33.3%)
Black (short-term/sexual)	$n=8$ (7.4%)	$n=11$ (32.4%)	$n=0$ (0%)	$n=1$ (3.3%)
Black (long-term)	$n=5$ (4.7%)	$n=12$ (34.3%)	$n=1$ (8.3%)	$n=1$ (3.3%)
Asian/Pacific Islander (short-term/sexual)	$n=8$ (7.4%)	$n=1$ (3%)	$n=1$ (3.4%)	$n=5$ (16.7%)
Asian/Pacific Islander (long-term)	$n=10$ (9.3%)	$n=3$ (8.6%)	$n=2$ (16.7%)	$n=2$ (6.7%)
Latino (short-term/sexual)	$n=16$ (14.8%)	$n=8$ (23.5%)	$n=15$ (51.7%)	$n=15$ (50%)
Latino long-term)	$n=13$ (12.1%)	$n=4$ (11.4%)	$n=0$ (0%)	$n=17$ (56.7%)

Discussion

These results indicate that there are clear partnering preferences among groups of MSM. While the men in the sample were no more risky than samples of MSM in similar studies, the fact that MSM of color who preferred White men as sexual partners were more likely to report risky sex behavior is of importance. How and why these preferences develop should be further explored, paying specific attention to interracial partnering sexual scripts and HIV risk. Implications for practice include addressing sexual race-based long-standing attitudes and beliefs in health communication and social marketing messages geared toward the health of MSM.