

The Ins and Outs of Brojobs Across Metro Atlanta and the Southeast, USA

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Abstract

This portfolio-style thesis has three components: a case study, my own autoethnographic work, and the analysis of Doublelist casual encounter ads. It explores hookup culture across Metro Atlanta and the Southeast among down low and discreet men beginning with an examination of the masc 4 masc subculture where MSM assert their hypermasculinity in an attempt to stay on top of the heteropatriarchy. I then explore brojobs, how the definition can fluctuate, and participants' past sexual conquests. Sexual fluidity and identity correlate for some, while it is distinct for others. Lastly, the secretive nature of the down low and discreet culture are analyzed through means of sexual behaviors.

Keywords

hookup culture / down low / discreet / masc 4 masc / MSM / brojobs / sexual fluidity

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

I’ve always felt like an outsider among my peers. Even at a young age, I knew there was something different about me. In fact, I’ve self-identified as *bisexual*¹ since around the age of eleven at the onset of puberty, but I kept this a secret for many more years. I was often called “gay” because I was seen as more feminine than most other Georgian boys. I disliked this aspect of my personality, and looked at my more masculine peers with envy, and sometimes attraction. Despite my self-loathing, I experimented sexually as a young teen, and at times I liked what I experienced. A few years later, I started to explore *hookup* websites.

Before mobile apps devoted to gay and bi encounters such as *Grindr* became available, *we men who have sex with men (MSM)* had Craigslist Casual Encounters, a website where men of all backgrounds would post ads looking for *no strings attached (NSA)* hookups. I was sixteen-years-old the first time I used Craigslist. I hooked up with men who were in their twenties, thirties, and even forties. I wanted to be made to feel that I was attractive. Growing up in Lawrenceville, Georgia, a then² “conservative” suburb of Atlanta, I had fairly low self-esteem. I felt I had to be *discreet* about these encounters, especially given my young age and the fact that I wasn’t yet out of the closet.

Many of the men whom I met this way would identify as either discreet or “on the *down low*” (*DL*). Most of them were not single; they had girlfriends and wives. Some identified as straight or bisexual, while others were just interested in short term gratification, not labels. Some

¹ Words that are italicized are defined in the glossary section.

² Lawrenceville is now considerably more liberal today than when I was in high school (2008-2012). We can see this shift politically re: Gwinnett County going blue for the first time in the 2016 election (Yeomans 1).

had stopped having sex with their significant other, and so they looked elsewhere. For many of them, I became a frequent partner. Craigslist was ideal for this type of arrangement as it required little if any personal information. A photo was not expected, so it was the perfect anonymous spot.

I'd always felt labels for sexual preference or identity were unnecessary. Why did I have to pigeonhole myself in this way? Why was Western society obsessed with knowing the intimate details of one's sexuality? I am proud to be bisexual and this identity has shaped who I am, but it was also frustrating for me as an adolescent that I had to "pick a side". As I grew older, I didn't connect with many people on an emotional or romantic level. The last time I truly had feelings for someone was when I was a freshman in college, so I turned to NSA hookups. I was lonely. I wanted to be told that I was attractive, so I started to submit to men more and more. Sex, in a way, became a coping and validation mechanism. I still wanted to date women, but there was a lot of reluctance on their part due to my bisexuality, while the men I would hook up with weren't interested in anything serious as the majority were down low or discreet. I really didn't want to date a man either, I just wanted sex with them. I was constantly told that I was gay: according to much of society, bisexuality wasn't even a real thing, at least among men. Even my dad asked me if I was "just gay" when I came out as bisexual at the age of twenty. *Bi erasure* was something I'd become accustomed to years ago. Even though I identify as bi today, I began to identify more with my *queerness* because it seemed more nuanced and helped me realize my authentic self.

Grindr became more popular while I was a sophomore in college (2013-2014). Even though Craigslist was still very active, Grindr became the main sexual hub for hook ups among MSM. Younger men started to use Grindr more than Craigslist. I even found a *friends with*

benefits (FWB) on Grindr, and Grindr usage became a part of my daily routine. I would frequently check the app to see if there were any new users in my area. Being discreet and down-low on Grindr was just as common as on Craigslist. Some of the men, however, were more interested in trading explicit pictures than meeting in person.

In early 2016, I became close to an online friend named Dean. He was straight but curious. I ended up flying to Orange County, California to meet him. He told me he was interested in receiving a *brojob*. This was the first time I had heard the term for oral sex in real life. He wanted a *bro*, me, to help another bro, him, out. To Dean, receiving oral sex was no big deal and it did not change his sexuality: he was still straight. Dean preferred women. A brojob was just between two friends and no one else would know about the sexual encounter(s). Even though the majority of our sexual acts involved me going down on him, he gave me a brojob the first night we met. He later denied this happened as he was under the influence of marijuana at the time. Dean and I did make out, had some *shower play*, and grinded. But Dean wouldn't engage in anal sex because that was "too gay". A brojob was the furthest he would go. When I left Southern California, my relationship with Dean changed. He blocked me on *Snapchat*. I wondered if this had anything to do with the brojob. I had developed some feelings for Dean, so this was difficult for me emotionally. We would later become long distance friends again, and this did include some flirting, and we met again in 2020 in Los Angeles. But we did not engage in any sexual activities as we did not have much time on that visit. I also had to promise him that I would not tell any other online friends that we were meeting up again because he still identified as straight.

I have lived in many places around the globe, from South Florida, Metro Atlanta, Western Illinois, and Baltimore, to Australia, South Korea, and now Newfoundland. I've noticed

there are a lot of similarities in MSM hook up cultures in different locales. Even though the term “down low” was not commonly used outside North America, there were regional versions of discreet encounters. What I have come to understand is that anonymity is central to the discreet/DL culture. There are often high stakes at play for the MSM involved.

1.1 Research Questions, Goals, and Rationale

The idea for this thesis grew partially from my own lived experiences as a bisexual man who grew up in Metro Atlanta. Over the years, I have often been curious about the discreet or “down low” men I have hooked up with. Why are these men seeking a brojob? Is a brojob merely a self-contained sexual act or does it, in part, define one’s sexual identity? What does a brojob offer that a *heterosexual* encounter cannot? Can a brojob exist *without* discretion? What are the backgrounds of the men who are receiving brojobs? Brojobs may be a simple diversion to some men; however, can brojobs potentially change men’s social standing within Southern society? These are all questions that gave rise to my *case study*. Finding answers to these questions, and other aspects of my methodology, are an attempt to understand and document often suppressed and highly stigmatized narratives of everyday performances of masculinity. These are stories that both highlight and complicate the codes of *heteronormativity* and *hegemonic masculinity*, demonstrating the limitations of these gender and sexual categories, and the power of terminology to help erase the diversity of ways of performing masculine sexualities.

In spring 2016, I was a senior at Goucher College when I took WS 300: *Black Queer Studies*, taught by Dr. Mel Michelle Lewis. I wrote my senior research paper on Black men on the DL. This in turn sparked my interest in researching bi/gay male hookup culture, especially since this is not a common research topic within the field of Gender Studies. In essence, I wanted

to undertake a comparative study of hegemonic and *queer masculinities*. Then, during my four years of academic hiatus, I became more curious about discreet and down low men, including those who received brojobs. This thesis on brojobs, then, will further my academic career and main research focus: bi/gay male hookup culture. In fact, there are many other elements of bi/gay male hookup culture, including discrimination, such as racism and body shaming, on gay/bi dating applications (see Whitesel 2014 and Riggs 2017), gay for pay (see Kiss and Morrison 2021 and Brennan 2022), and Grindr and mental health (see Gibbs and Rice 2016 and Obarska et al. 2020) —all topics I would like to research in the future as a Ph.D. student and beyond.

As acceptance of a more fluid concept of sexuality (*heteroflexibility*) is becoming more widespread in the American South, sexual exploration among bi-curious men is an increasingly popular topic within online discourse (Carrillo and Hoffman, ““Straight with a Pinch of Bi”” 91). Despite this, men are still expected to uphold a “hetero” persona, especially within “bro culture”, which, according to educator Joseph R. Jones, “epitomizes the attributes of masculine behavior” (102). Examples of bro culture may include fraternities and sport teams. Typically, bro culture participants want to be seen as “one of the boys” and they are often accustomed to being at the top of the *heteropatriarchy* (J. Jones 102). Even in these *hegemonic masculine* locales, it is nonetheless possible for experimentation to take place. According to feminist scholar Jane Ward, “some men who have sex with men prefer to do so within *gay/queer* cultural worlds, others indicate a greater sense of belonging or cultural ‘fit’ with heterosexual identity and heteroerotic culture” (“Dude-Sex 416). Bro culture participants are a part of the latter. For example, a straight man wanting an interaction with another straight man might choose to “help a ‘bro’ out,” which might involve giving or receiving a “brojob”—“a play on the term blowjob”—that refers to oral sex given by one straight-identifying man to another (J. Jones 101). This may occur between

otherwise platonic friends or total strangers. Whether the two men meet in a fraternity house or through an app such as Grindr, discretion among participants is often an essential part of the arrangement. This is true anywhere, but especially so in socially conservative regions such as the Southeastern United States, where I grew up.

My research builds on the literature of hookup culture as it occurs on social media by asking: *what are the roles of brojobs in online hookup culture among discreet and down low men in the American South?* I examine what brojobs might tell us about online hookup culture while identifying and focusing on risks and anxieties experienced by “bros” who seek brojobs. What consequences, for instance, would follow if their brojobs become public knowledge? I also explore the concept of the “down low” and its operation in online hookup culture in general and brojobs in particular. Finally, I attempt to examine how brojobs affect communities differently in relation to *intersectional* identities and in what ways brojobs reproduce or challenge existing power hierarchies amongst MSM (men who have sex with men). To investigate these questions, I began with a Grindr/Reddit case study in Metro Atlanta, Georgia, setting out to survey around forty men and interview eight to ten men between the ages of 18 and 50 about the function of brojobs in their everyday lives. By seeking men from different ethnicities and backgrounds, I aimed to apply an intersectional lens to my study. I researched my hometown of Metro Atlanta specifically because of its diverse population and my familiarity with its ethnographic makeup. While the majority of the participants are white, the study critically interrogates whiteness alongside other racial identities. The term “down low,” which has historically been applied to discreet hookup culture among Black men, has been expanded (some would say *appropriated*) to include men from other races/ethnicities, including White, Asian, Latino, and others. I consider participant reflections on this shift in meaning. Exploring how participants situate brojobs within

the down low culture is an essential part of my research. As these were my plans going into the study, I had to be flexible as situations arose in which I had to shift my course of action, for example in moving my case study from Grindr to Reddit. I discuss this more in the Methodology, Methods and Research Design (1.4) section of this thesis.

1.2 Review of Literature

In this literature review, I explore bro culture and brojobs even further, including a look at both offline and online hookup culture. Although Grindr and Reddit are the social media platforms used in my case study, I also review the literature concerning a wider array of platforms. In this way I can explore differences in the ways MSM interact and hook up with one another across platforms. There is, for example, a distinction between hooking up through in-person *cruising* on the one hand and through using a website or application on the other. The different hookup mechanisms tend to cater toward their own particular crowds. A review of these mechanisms also sheds light on the history of hookup culture and how it has changed over time.

1.2.1 Bro Culture and Brojobs

Bro cultures tend to emerge among groups of boys starting at a young age and are embedded in hegemonic masculine endeavors, whether it is playing football or hazing in the locker room (J. Jones, 102). A *bro code* develops and according to Joan Chrisler it “is enforced by the ‘masculinity cops’, people who accept its rules and behavioral scripts, including the parents, brothers, teachers, coaches, male friends, and even female friends of boys and young men” (J. Jones 811). Men are expected to adhere to specific norms if they want to be considered a “bro”. These “masculinities are embedded and have weight in the social order as a whole”

according to Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (9). In fact, “hegemony refers to cultural centrality and authority, to the broad acceptance of power by those over whom it is exercised” (Connell 13). Bros typically assert their power and try to stay in command. *Bro culture* doesn’t end after graduation, but rather “continues in adulthood in places of employment, places of recreation, and places of entertainment [such as] country clubs and civic organizations” (J. Jones 102). One’s hetero identity helps maintain these institutional links and power dynamics.

Since many men want to be deemed a bro, terminology surrounding gay sex is often mixed with “bro language”, which enforces heteronormativity. This can be seen through *dude-sex*, which entails “getting the kind of sex that all straight men want from women, but can only get from men—uncomplicated, emotionless, and guaranteed” (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 421). There is also *bud-sex* which is a “specific type of male-male sex that reinforce[s] rural masculinity and heterosexuality” according to sociologist Tony Silva (“Bud-Sex” 51). For some, forming “friends with benefits” relationships with other bros is a means of maintaining “safety, comfort, and convivence” yet both parties might be willing to “harm them or reveal their identity” (Silva, *Still Straight: Sexual Flexibility* 74–75). Thus a “brojob” may be another social construction, which “reinforces society’s belief systems against non-heterosexual identities and how masculinity and ‘bro culture’ continue to define non-heterosexuality” (J. Jones 101). In examining the literature, I have found little research on brojobs *per se*. While the term “brojob” appears on hookup applications or in classified advertisements, its use has not spread much beyond those confines—and certainly not to academic literature. Moreover, bro culture and hegemonic masculinity are typically not associated with gay sex acts; consequently, when two men participate in a brojob, it “remove[s] the femininity and subordinate nature of the act” because it can still be masculine (J. Jones 102). Discussing brojobs within bi/gay hookup culture

adds a multifaceted layer, which includes hetero and queer discourse, to the literature on this topic.

1.2.2 Offline Hookup Culture (Pre-Internet)

Cruising

According to sociologist Laud Humphreys³, in the 1960's and 1970's, MSM used public arenas such as “movie theaters, automobiles, behind bushes” as meeting grounds (2). They were men seeking “impersonal sex, shunning involvement, [and] desiring kicks without commitment” (Humphreys 2). These meeting grounds were often called “true tearooms”, designated places “where homosexual encounters” took place (Humphreys 2). Eventually, public restrooms became the most common place to cruise because they are “accessible, easily recognized by the intimate, and provide little public visibility” (Humphreys 2-3). Restrooms in communal areas such as “public parks and beaches [and] rest stops set at programmed intervals along superhighways” frequently attracted MSM (Humphreys 3). These *cruising* grounds became public knowledge as places MSM could visit if they were seeking casual sex. Truckers also were known for cruising rest areas and being verbal about their needs/desires, although they had to be cautious of the men they met in order to avoid being robbed, as Jay Corzine and Richard Kirby mention (183). This cruising directly influenced the ways MSM hook up today. Importantly, spontaneous sex is not something new. I explore the connection between brojobs and (virtual) cruising in today's world to see if they typically go together.

³ It should be noted that some of Humphreys' tactics were not ethical. He would interview subjects at their homes while telling them it was a health care survey. There were no clear ethical guidelines regarding informed consent during this time (Lenza 23).

Classified Newspaper/Magazine Ads and Phone-Chat Lines

Before the Internet was generally available, it was common for queer men to use gay newspapers to find potential hookups according to Adrian Thorne and Justine Coupland (234). In fact, these printed ads helped queer men with an “entry to a contact network for people with specific interests or sexual proclivities” (Thorne and Coupland 236). It also provided an alternative to gay bars/clubs, as not all men felt comfortable going to such public spaces (Thorne and Coupland 236). During the same time period, it also became very common for Black gay men to use the telephone to communicate with one another. One Midwestern phone-chat line was called the BeeHive (later known as the Bi-Blade) where Black gay men would “‘gag’ with several other young, gay black men” according to critical race, gender, and sexuality theorist Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr. (“Doin’ the Down Low” 199). Phone sex was one of the main features of the service. For some it was sexually liberating and it was anonymous as well (McCune, “Doin’ the Down Low” 20). Some would use these calls to find out about queer life in Chicago: it was informative (McCune 200). Others used this platform to cope with “‘coming out,’ the *black church* and gay persecution, and ‘how can you tell a *bottom* from a *top*’” (McCune, “Doin’ the Down Low” 200). I am intrigued by how these past phone-chat lines may have influenced modern hookup applications.

1.2.3 Online Hookup Culture (Internet)

Craigslist

Before Grindr and other mobile apps existed, MSM in the Internet age mainly used Craigslist *Casual Encounters* to find others for hookups. Established in 1995, Craigslist helped pave the way for later applications such as Grindr (Rosenbaum et al. 506). Craigslist became a

platform that allowed “for quick and easy cruising with less risk of getting caught than conventional offline cruising,” as both Wendi E. Goodlin-Fahncke and Kelly Anne Cheeseman Dial note (129). Craigslist was one of the first websites that enabled people to pre-plan their sexual encounters. It was typically used with “NSA” conditions, which created an atmosphere of casual sex and anonymity (Goodlin-Fahncke and Dial 126). In particular, Craigslist did not require people to post any pictures with their ads, so discretion was easier than on some other websites. Goodlin-Fahncke and Cheeseman Dial’s Craigslist study consisted of 3,000 participants and the average respondent age was 33.74 (132). The median age of a married man was 40.38 (Goodlin-Fahncke and Dial 132). Goodlin-Fahncke and Dial found that “married men were more likely to desire a mutual hand job than those who were unmarried or did not state a marital status” (135).

Sex advertisements were easy to come by for middle-aged men. According to Joseph R. Jones there were also “numerous personal ads that offered or solicited brojobs” such as Craigslist (101). Craigslist helped form a lot of the language peculiar to MSM encounters (e.g., “discreet”, “down low”, etc) (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 224). In fact, “the anonymity Craigslist provides and the site’s ability to effortlessly and inexpensively unite users, who may share varied health, lifestyles, and interests, can be a panacea for people who have difficulty meeting people for dating, interpersonal, or intimate encounters” as Rosenbaum et al. note (506). Additionally, Craigslist has also led to sex work for gay and bi men, where it opened opportunities that were not always present before (Rosenbaum et al. 506). Since *Craigslist Personals* closed in March 2018, *Doublelist* (a fairly new website) has become the primary ad posting alternative for MSM (Doublelist, Everybody Wiki 1).

Reddit

Like Grindr, Reddit is a platform where people can post nude pictures of themselves. However, unlike Grindr where conversations are mostly kept private, Reddit is a more open forum where much of the discourse is available to the general public. Rhiannon Bury and Lee Easton discuss the subreddit, “r/MassiveCock”, as a place where men post pictures of their penis for praise or gaze, that is, “for the spectorial pleasure of other men and commenting on other men’s dick pics [which] threaten to disrupt the hetero-homo *binary*” (6). This subreddit moves away from male heterosexual domination into a place that welcomes all types of men and where people are expected to be “kind and civil” to one another, as negativity has no place in the forum (Bury and Easton 8). This makes the space more inclusive than many other platforms. There is also the subreddit, “r/TotallyStraight”, which is a sub for “guys who identify as straight but get off on gay porn,” according to sociologist Brady Robards (54). If one shames other users for being gay or bi than this can lead to “comment removal and you’ll likely be banned” (Robards 54). Also, like Grindr, it is a “safer virtual space for gay and bisexual men to dick gaze” without constant judgment (Bury and Easton 8). Men may use Reddit as a way to view pornography and discuss one another’s penis size before actually hooking up. Reddit is a good source for exploring how heteroflexible men may act online prior to hooking up. It’s also a place where people can find actual hookup encounters. One such place is “r/r4r”, short for “Redditor for Redditor”, a subreddit where users can place personal ads, for example to find a friend or partner” according to Robin De Pril (10). Like Craigslist, users could post an ad and Redditors could private message (PM) them if interested.

Squirt

Unlike other websites and applications, *Squirt* helps MSM find cruising sites in order to have sex in person. It helps “provide member generated listings of places where such activity might take place,” and openly queer men as well as discreet and down low men both use these locales for casual hookups, according to Ben Light (10). For some MSM, outdoor play can be a personal *fetish* (Light 4). The main difference between *Squirt* and other sites is that *Squirt* “emphasises communities of sexual play” whereas others such as Grindr may highlight more private modes of hooking up (Light 12). Examples of cruising spots include “parks and canal sides, and ‘cottages’ – located at road sides, in shopping malls and town centres for example” (Light 10). Proximity is also important because hook ups tend to happen very much in real time, when one is near a park, for example, in contrast to hook ups that are planned (Light 11). There is also a “privacy that cruising affords [which] allows individuals who may face serious repercussions from openly engaging in same-sex relationships to access their sexuality with a sense of protection from judgement and social outcast” according to Zoi de la Peña (11). There is a risk factor when using *Squirt*, though, as cruising and outdoor sex can lead to charges of public indecency if one is caught, depending on local laws in much of North America (Light 4). For this reason, *Squirt* has a rating system for cruising spots, to let users know how safe specific areas are (Light 10). Greater anonymity is also possible on *Squirt* as “members do not know who has looked at a cruising listing unless a user leaves a comment” (Light 10).). Unlike other sites/apps, “photography does not [surround] pictures of the face” as members tend to be older and more discreet (Light 7). To date, *Squirt* is one of the only sites that are tailored for public cruising. It has helped to ensure cruising is still a viable option in the twenty-first century.

Grindr

According to Eric Filice et al., Grindr helps MSMs find potential hookup partners by using global positioning system (GPS) technology (190). Grindr provides alternative ways for MSMs to form relationships, as it is marketed as an online dating application for gay, bisexual, questioning, trans, and queer folks. However, it is generally used as a hook up service and it's the most mainstream app for MSM. Unlike Squirt, which deals primarily with cruising, Grindr offers "a sense of relative safety and security" (Filice et al. 205). Men can show as little or as much of themselves as they want, and they can choose who may view specific photos. A lot of the descriptions discovered on Grindr represent a "departure from social norms" because MSMs may feel more comfortable sending more risqué photos and flirting more directly with other men than they would in real life (Filice et al. 204). Grindr does help MSMs build more confidence when talking to others. Most Grindr users know what to expect when using it (Filice et al. 205). It is known as a "'quick fix' [and an] 'ace' for locating sexual partners" in times of sexual need according to Rusi Jaspal (7). Grindr also lets MSMs be more open about their identity (heteroflexible, bi, gay) as a result of being a part of "a community of like-minded others" than they would be in their everyday lives (Jaspal 3). MSMs may also have more in common with other users and this may "bolster their feelings of differentiation from others" (Jaspal 6).

There is a perception, however, that men must "appear attractive to other users, on the one hand, and to maintain an appropriate level of 'identifiability' on the application" as Grindr is also a competitive space. Men must therefore look their best at all times (Jaspal 3). However, according to Meanley et al. and their study on mental health, "over 30% were exposed to race-based sexual discrimination and over 60% to appearance-based sexual discrimination" (418).

When it comes to my brojob case study, men's hookup preferences will be a part of the analysis.

Both racism and discrimination are commonplace on Grindr, but it is coded as “personal preference” (Meanley et al. 427). There used to be a website entitled, “Douchebags of Grindr” which was a “name and shame Web site [as] it was calling people to account for their fat phobia, fem phobia, racism, and so on” as queer media studies professors Shaka McGlotten and Katherine Sender recall (1). I will refer back to this in section 2.6.

1.3 Theoretical Approach and Significance

The research starts with the fundamental premise that sexuality is not biological; it is merely a social construct (Jackson and Scott 5). My theoretical approach consists of thinking with and through the following concepts and literatures: sexuality and its intersections, private and public interactions, Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self (1988), and Black Geographies.

Traditionally, while some scholars have focused on “binary oppositions to distinguish gay from straight,” queer theory is fundamentally designed to highlight the complexities of sexuality beyond overly simplistic binary models, according to April S. Callis (220). There is a “*compulsorily monosexuality* [which states] that U.S. society mandates that every person be attracted to just one sex and denies that a person can be attracted to both” (Callis 218). This is significant for my thesis because bisexual and heteroflexible male identities are often disregarded in academic discourse and are “repeatedly overlooked ... or understood to be a combination of heterosexuality and homosexuality without maintaining a unique [bisexual] identity of its own” (Callis 217). Men who engage in brojobs should not necessarily be defined in a homo/hetero identity, but should be considered possibly outside the binary lens.

1.3.1 Theorizing Sexuality and Its Intersections

Heteroflexibility

“Heteroflexibility” can be defined as “behaviors [that] are often unpredictable, random or accidental (‘shit happens’); but regardless of a person’s behaviour, it is possible to still be certain about one’s sexual orientation (‘I’m straight’)” according to Jane Ward (“Born This Way” 94).

One can be straight while sometimes engaging in experimentation; a sexual act (such as receiving a blowjob) does not necessarily define one’s identity. As Ward describes them, there are plenty of

people who are happy living straight lives – people who enjoy straight sex, feel deeply at home with heterosexual culture, would never want to be gay or even bisexual, and have no sense of alignment whatsoever with queer subculture – are also people who have same-sex sexual experiences and queer desires. (Ward, “Born This Way” 94-95)

This view of sexuality stands in contrast to the *essentialist* belief that people are born either straight or gay. In my case study, I looked at how many down low or discreet men identify as heteroflexible, and their reasons, if any, for this choice. Heteroflexibility often permits men to identify as heterosexual, thereby remaining in the sexual majority, while being flexible in behaviors from time to time. In this way, one can examine how the heteroflexibility label influences one’s private sexual life.

From my personal experience as a bisexual man who grew up in the American South, sexuality was held by most in my vicinity to be binary. According to this view, a man is strictly either gay or straight. Identifying as bisexual or “heteroflexible” is not an option for many men, because a man is deemed “gay” if he has any sexual attraction to other men. I have had women tell me they were not interested in me simply because I had hooked up with men previously.

Sociologists Héctor Carrillo and Amanda Hoffman note, “by not adopting the label ‘bisexual’ those youths also signaled that their sexual interest in both women and men need not transfer out of the heterosexual category; they sought to indicate that same-sex desires and behaviours are not altogether incompatible with heterosexuality” (“Straight with a Pinch of Bi” 93). There may be “no social advantages to abandoning [the straight identity]” as those doing so would marginalize themselves (Carrillo and Hoffman, “Straight with a Pinch of Bi” 98). In this case study, I specifically look at bisexual, *pansexual*, heterosexual, and heteroflexible men. I explore how men try to stay on top of the *hegemonic domain* while still having same-sex encounters on the side.

Heteroexceptionalism

Heteroexceptionalism describes the fact that for some people who identify as heterosexual, same-sex encounters or desires will result in no social *stigma* or punishment because their typical daily behaviors are not associated with these acts (Ward, “Born This Way” 97). It helps “justify and normalize the same-sex desires and sexual experiences of heterosexuals” (Ward, “Born This Way” 91). Their same-sex sexual encounters often “remain culturally meaningless, structurally inconsequential and scientifically distinguishable from ‘authentic’ homosexuality” (Ward, “Born This Way” 92). For example, if a straight, married man mutually masturbates with a male friend while watching pornography, he may still be viewed as a heterosexual man despite the same-sex encounter. Heteroexceptionalism, in turn, “expands the range of behaviours permissible within normative heterosexuality” (Ward, “Born This Way” 97). I apply the concept of heteroexceptionalism in my research when exploring whether or not participants experienced social stigma as a result of their actions.

Down low

Lawrence Bryant describes the concept of *down low* (DL) which “has become synonymous with men who identify as heterosexual but secretly have sex with other men unbeknownst to their female partners” (Pettaway et al. 210). Society at large considers the cultural phenomenon of DL to be a form of sexual deviancy according to Brandon Andrew Johnson and Salvador-Vidal Ortiz (224). The term has historically been linked to African American men in heterosexual relationships who hook up with men on the side (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 224). Through a MSM perspective, being down low equates to being black and masculine, while being black and gay is seen as more feminine. Black men on the down low keep up their *masculine persona* (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 236). In fact, down low men are often known for their “hyper-masculine encounter[s], possibly to reinforce the conflation of being masculine with being straight” (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 236). By identifying as heterosexual, down low men are able to remain in the sexual majority. Down low men have “sex/relationships with women [which helps] maintain their heterosexuality” (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 237). In reality, “DL-identified MSM were 10.6 and 7.9 times more likely to report having female partners in the past 6 months and in the past 30 days, respectively, compared to non-DL MSM” according to Wolitski et al. (522). As Richard N. Pritt Jr. notes DL Black men are often seen as:

boogey-men [as] they weren’t seeking loving, long-term relationships [and were often seen] ignoring media messages about condom use and sexually transmitted disease. They frequented environments where alcohol and drugs were pervasive. (256)

While DL black men were seen as a *deviant* community, the same could not be said about white MSM. White MSM who were in similar situations as black men “described themselves as

otherwise moral men trapped in a society that would not let them express themselves freely” (Pritt 256). There has been more empathy towards white MSM in comparison to black DL men. Throughout this thesis, I directly analyze the down low with Black MSM. However, it will also include men of other races due to the appropriation of the term “down low”. “Down low” has become a universal term in that not only Black men use it, but also white, Latino, and Asian men. DL Black men may be expected to act a certain way (not gay) and the same could be said regarding their sexual partners as well (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 232). I examine how the down low looks in non-Black communities.

Queer Masculinities

Robert Heasley states that “many straight men experience and demonstrate ‘queer masculinity,’ defined here as ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine” (Heasley 310). Straight-queer men are often labeled as “deviant [and] isolated” as they may be outside the traditional group (Heasley 312). In my research, I use the lens of queer masculinity to examine the experiences of down low men and discreet men. In other words, I look at how these men use concepts beyond straightness and heteronormativity. I study the label “straight” more broadly as well, as the term can be more fluid than society currently generally accepts. Sexual fluidity is a key theme within this thesis as I asked my case study participants how they identify, and if that self-identification has changed over time. There may be more to being hetero-masculine than meets the eye. These nontraditional “straight” men are often absent from sexual discourse. Straight-queer men may exist within the hegemonic *dominant* culture, but may be excluded from its privileges based on systems of power and oppression. They are often “othered” if they show any sign of difference. Any public variation

from the norm puts a straight-queer person “in a position of being threatened, stigmatized, or violated as a result of association with gayness” (Heasley 316).

Private and Public Interactions

In the *public sphere* (Instagram posts, for example), one typically does not have an expectation of privacy. When a queer person “comes out,” their sexuality is considered public domain, especially when it is done virtually. Benjamin Haber notes that on “the ghosts of dangerous Internet, where one wrong move can ruin you forever, are repurposed normative behavioral expectations designed to keep women, people of color, and queers out of public space” (Haber 1074). This is why Black men, especially, have to be careful about who they meet, in order to protect their anonymity. In these *private spheres*, “a straight identity is portrayed as essential for one’s public, outward self-presentation, with a bending of that rigidity only allowed in an anonymous, private, safe space that permits curiosity and exploration” according to Chris VanderStouwe (134). In some ways, there are a limited number of private, online safe spaces that allow down low men to explore their sexuality. These spaces are often where these men feel the most at ease, owing to the opportunity for discretion such spaces offer. This is in contrast to the physical world, where, for example, in cities like Atlanta, MSM may have a multitude of gay bars to choose from. This is not the case in every city, especially in more rural areas, where gay bars may no longer exist. But down low men may not feel comfortable at gay bars due to their open and public nature. They may prefer meeting other men through apps. A down low man may have “four or five companies/[apps]” to select from when hooking up and this could offer more variety depending on one’s locale (Haber 183). Every MSM has their own distinct hookup path. Through my surveys and interviews, I looked directly at how MSM arrange brojobs with respect to their efforts to maintain anonymity. For instance, applications such as Grindr, an object of

study in itself, helped one experiment and explore one's sexuality privately without having to physically travel to "gay-centered" hotspots.

Foucault's notion of technologies of the self (1988)

Foucault helps to "analyze the tensions between the reproduction of (bodily and gendered) hegemonies and the emergence of new (bodily and gendered) categories" according to Begonya Enguix and Erick Gómez-Narváez (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 116). Folks try to "transform themselves to reach a 'state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'" as New Zealand educator Tina Besley explains (78). MSM want to "develop relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, [and] self-examination [for] the use of pleasure" (Besley 85). Selfies posted on Grindr have an impact on perceptions of masculine bodies and intimacy. Posting pictures of themselves that they feel good about can help MSM improve their self-confidence. Therefore, MSM may be more apt to send more risqué photos. However, pictures posted or sent to other users can also be judged (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 114). Some images are considered acceptable and others deemed not appropriate. Selfies "show the narcissism of contemporary social media norms in which bodies become 'the ultimate accessories'" (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 116). Gay and hegemonic perceptions of masculinity often agree: the more muscular a man is, the more masculine and straight he appears to be (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 117). If a guy appears feminine on Grindr for instance, he is not regarded highly by many. Muscular bodies are more likely to pass as heterosexual, and will be more popular for adhering to heteronormative standards (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 117-118). In fact, according to Erick Alvarez the muscular gay bodies are often "desired and sometimes required from their potential partners and friends" (2). In my work, I explore what happens before the act of the brojob in terms of selection of partners. Physical features are often a huge

factor. For example, one's penis size may influence whether a hookup occurs or not since a large penis is often equated with being more masculine.

Black and Queer Geographies

Cultural geographers, specifically in the South, such as Latoya Eaves, view the construction of power in relationships through Black Geographies (81). A Black sense of place becomes central to Black Geographies (Eaves 81). Black subjects have agency and help generate space (Eaves 81). In particular, “the South as a region is often constructed as an easy repository for all that is backward and hurtful in the United States, past and present” (Eaves 82). Black Geographies often have some form of “a metaphysical component that cannot be rigidly mapped” (Eaves 84). Lived experiences are central to Black geographies (Eaves 87). As Adam Bledsoe, Latoya Eaves, and Brian William note, one must understand that “innovative practices of Black survival and resistance [have] been inseparable from the production of southern spaces” (7). In actuality, “racism is not just a *southern* problem, but the political landscape of the South has long mattered in historical, social, political, and economic processes of radicalization” (Bledsoe et al. 7). Queer geographies can rely on public life or “the structure of home life” (Eaves 87). However, this often goes against hegemonic standards and they are deemed anti-normative (Eaves 87). In fact, “queer scholarship seeks to subvert, challenge, and critique a host of taken ‘stabilities’ in our social lives” (Eaves 87). Queerness is being formed “through power relations” (Eaves 87). Queerness together with race is not often considered when examining geographic knowledge (Eaves 87). It is vital to know that according to sociologist Camilla Hawthorne, “there are many overlapping and intertwined genealogies of spatial thought, ways of knowing, and modes of knowledge production” (9).

Queer geographies became central to my own life, in fact. Geographer Gavin Brown explains that, “men experience acts of cruising and public sex in ways which can revitalize their lives and destabilize preconceived notions of identity” (916). As a bisexual teen, I frequented a Lawrenceville park. I may not have cruised per se, but I would meet MSM from Craigslist there and partake in *car play*. I was able to explore my sexuality in this space, something I could not do elsewhere. I became “fully present in that space” (G. Brown 919). In fact, “a whole set of affects and emotions were at play, alongside the sensations of the touch, smell and sight of each other’s body” (G. Brown 919). I became fully immersed in the act(s). It was a full body experience. Car play helped me to learn my likes and dislikes in a space that I was familiar with and deemed safe. This suburban enclave was something that I was accustomed to, and I took advantage of this familiarity. The park wasn’t just a place of exploration, but it became my second home through such intimate encounters.

Through my work, it is important that I look at each man’s background and relationship to both Metro Atlanta and the Southeast (the case study location) when analyzing down low and discreet Black men in the South. The sense of place is very important when it comes to Black communities. Even if a Black man is from a different neighborhood in the city, his identity can be shaped by that specific space in which he grew up. The same can be said about other participants who may be of different races as well. In areas that have fewer Black folks, blackness and whiteness are still present and help create that space. It is important when analyzing other races in terms of their geographic space that blackness still be studied and included through a comparative lens.

Religion is a major factor that influences Black folks across the Southeast. There are “negative attitudes towards same-sex attitudes [as] this stigma is frequently replicated and

supported in other domains of these young men's lives, including their relationships with family, friends, and the larger African American community" according to Alexandra Balaji, Oster, Viall, Heffelfinger, Mena, and Toledo (1). Homosexuality is often seen as a "'white man's disease,' potentially 'catching,' and a source of the HIV epidemic" (Balaji et al. 3). A lot of Black men have been on the down low or discreet "as a means of managing and reducing their exposure to overt prejudice and discrimination" (Balaji et al. 3). It should also be noted, however, that in larger and more liberal cities like Atlanta, it has been "reported [that Black men are] able to relax normative constraints they typically imposed on their behavior; specifically, they could be more open with their sexuality and show affection toward other men" (Balaji et al. 3). However, even openly Black queer men may not be out to their family due to "fear of family rejection, stigma, and isolation" (Balaji et al. 5). The stakes are higher for down low and discreet men, as many are in relationships with women, and risk losing their own families.

Katherine Hankins and Steven R. Holloway state that Atlanta has been considered a relatively prosperous city for black folks for years, as it is "the country's '*black mecca*'" according to Ebony Magazine in 1997 (236-237). Throughout 1990 and 2010, "two thirds of the almost one million new Black residents of the city moved into suburbs outside the historic urban core" (Hankins and Holloway 223). Markley et al. state, however, that there is a huge black-white wealth gap, finding the "median wealth of white households to be close to 20 times that of Black households" according to the 2011 Pew Research Center report (311). A recession and housing crisis in 2007-2008 did not make matters any better, as "half of the wealth owned by Black households in the United States was destroyed." (Markley et al. 310). In fact, while "home prices had rebounded in many white areas by 2014, they remained depressed in predominantly Black areas" (Markley et al. 315). Historically, Midtown Atlanta has also been viewed as the gay

neighborhood of the city as “white elites abandoned this neighborhood in favor of more modern suburbs, gay men” started to bring life to these “sketchy area[s] [and helped] largely restore [the area]” according to Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Heiss (265-266). By the 1990s, Midtown was known as the “center of gay life” not just in Atlanta, but in the South (Bitterman and Heiss 266-267). This helped to make Atlanta seem more liberal and progressive, and Atlanta remains a gay hub today.

1.4 Methodology, Methods and Research Design

In this research, I apply a queer methodological lens. My approach also includes a queer of color lens, methodology in form of identity, *autoethnography*, and ethical formations. It is important that I consider the implications of my research, especially regarding the protection of the anonymity of the participants, as I dealt with DL men for whom the stakes can be high. Finding people to participate in my survey and interview took time and was gradual.

As Nick Rumens suggests, “methodologies can be queered whereby we can destabilise and disrupt the methodological norms that currently govern how organisational research has been and ought to be carried out” (Rumens 5). So, even if down low participants do not identify as queer, the researcher can still queerify their sexual experiences such as brojobs. It is important to look at these experiences through a queer lens: knowledge production may take place outside the hookup. One of “the main dilemma[s] when sampling [DL] men is that we do not have much of an idea, anywhere, of the boundaries to populations of [DL] men; nor might we ever find real boundaries” according to Gary W. Dowsett (424). It is vital that this lens be intersectional in nature as I am exploring how sexual activities are impacted and determined by intersecting factors such as culture, race, age, sexual identification, and religious experience.

Further, queer methodologies help “contest long-standing configurations of power between researcher and researched, subject and object, academics and activists, and also across places” according to Kath Browne, Banerjea, McGlynn, Bakshi, Banerjee, and Biswas (1377). This is important in my thesis and case study because as an academic researcher, I built trust between myself and the subject (the down low participant) and anonymity is an important part. However, there are ways to balance the power relationships between researcher and the interviewees. Once I got to the Reddit portion of my case study, participants had the power and authority to approach me (more on this in 1.4.3). This gave agency to the participant: the ball was in their court to decide whether they want to be a part of the study. When one is approaching positionality, it is vital that the participant and researcher work on this project together to help mitigate issues surrounding power dynamics (Browne et al. 1392). It may be impossible to erase *all* power imbalances between myself and the participants. However, by giving the interviewees the lead when it came to their interviews, there could be more of an equal grounding.

My personal experiences are shaped by the fact that I am an openly bisexual, white, middle class, *cisgender* male. I may not be aware of the “observation of the everyday tactics and strategies of black queers, in a number of locations [even Atlanta which] holds that sites of resistance and self-making” according to anthropology professor Jafari S. Allen (221). It is vital that I go beyond the lens of my own lived experiences when doing this research. I lived in Metro Atlanta since 2004, but my experiences may be significantly different from those of queer people of color. Petra L. Doan and Ozlem Atalay explain that Atlanta is really “two largely separate cities: a mostly white north side of town, where economic activity is vigorous and expanding, and a mostly black south side that is divided between the very poor and a thriving black middle class” (255). The south side is a large and highly populated region that may remain hidden from

mainstream queer discourse. It is necessary to “facilitate understandings of ‘pseudo’ heteronormative spaces as fluid temporal queer space” as Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash note (58). When looking at *Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)* down low men, for instance, their lived experiences may differ greatly from one another. A level of discretion that is adequate in one community may not be so in another, for example.

1.4.1 Methodology in form of identity

As Daniel Noam Warner states, “a methodology [should] understand the performative nature of identity and does not seek to found the social in the biological” (Warner 335). In my research, participants were not classified as gay, but rather somewhere on the fluid spectrum: bisexual, heteroflexible, or straight. One can also be *sexually fluid* without adhering to any specific label. Sexual identities and sexual acts such as brojobs need not always align. There is a “body of knowledge about how these [MSM] come to be, and are lived, on a daily basis” and it is part of my job to investigate this through my research (Warner 335). I can show patterns of hookup culture without identifying or classifying any of the men in my study.

Although there is sometimes a “belief [in queer research] that by surrendering privacy and exposing themselves to our [queer] gaze and categorization system, their life, and the lives of people in similar situations, will improve,” it often proves false (Warner 335). Going into a case study with an assumption that I will improve a down low man’s life is misleading, as I only did a cultural analysis. What I can do, however, is give participants the opportunity to share their past experiences with MSM. For a lot of these men, they were never given the platform to open up about these encounters. I provide a space for this.

Grindr and Reddit are tools that have helped me to bond with participants “due to openness about [our] common experiences” according to Blackwell et al. (1125). However, it is

important to respect boundaries when dealing with participants in my case study. The “ethical formations speak to the pre-existing ethical positionality of the researcher” (Browne and Nash 168). Beyond the obvious respect for participant anonymity and research discretion, I placed certain restrictions on how much I could know about my interviewees to avoid any unintentional harm (Browne and Nash 169). Although I do have unique lived experiences and my perspective was crucial to analyzing my study, I needed to remember that there are limitations when interviewing DL men. This meant, among other things, maintaining a strict boundary between being a researcher and a user seeking casual sex. While engaged in my case study, both on Grindr and Reddit, I remembered that I was on these platforms purely as a professional academic. I did not want to come across as an “insider” making it harder for participants to open up (Blackwell et al. 1125).

1.4.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be defined as “cultural analysis through personal narrative” according to Robin M. Boylorn, Orbe, Mingé, Sterner, Roberts, T. Adams, A. Johnson, Hao, Alexander, Yomtoob, Morella-Pozzi, de la Garza, and Crawley (17). In autoethnographic work, “its central feature is the central position of the researcher – their experiences, feelings and views are a central part of the process of autoethnography” as Hayes and Fulton state (5). In my case, my lived experience as a bisexual man, my story, which includes my past hookup encounters, is a key component of this thesis. This can “involve the turning of the ethnographic gaze inwards on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur,” as Norman Denzin notes (qtd. in Boylorn et al. 17). I therefore have “research[ed] [myself] in relation to others” (Boylorn et al. 17). Positionality is important: I am an insider to a degree. I am “writing about [my] culture, be it the culture of [my]

work, or of [my] everyday life” (Hayes and Fulton 6). My hookup experiences with DL and discreet MSM give me a unique insight into these types of encounters. As I am not DL or discreet myself, I am also something of an outsider. Also, the culture of the DL influences my own personal accounts because our narratives may intertwine. It is not the LGBTQ+ community that is being discussed here; MSM is a distinct group and the men come from a variety of backgrounds, races, ethnicities, religions, classes, and sexual orientations. I am part of this MSM group, but I can “acknowledge[e] difference, which influences how we see and experience the world” (Boylorn et al. 18).

One “writing genre” that helps “explain autoethnography” is *native anthropology* which my thesis incorporates (Boylorn et al. 17). Native anthropology can be defined as “people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group” (Boylorn et al. 17). Instead of remaining simply a subject, I became a researcher who is studying my own hookup culture and the hookup culture of the MSM that surround me. I am part of the focal point of my thesis. I analyze my own distinct sexual experiences in relation to the MSM in both my surveys and interviews. Since I am from the ‘culture’ of Metro Atlanta and the Southeast, and while it is by no means a monolithic culture, I can analyze it with an insider’s perspective, knowing its language, social climate, and its religious and political overtones.

1.4.3 Methods of the case study

According to political science professor John Gerring, a case study can be defined as a method that is “(a) qualitative, small; (b) that the research is ethnographic, clinical, participant-observation, or otherwise ‘in the field’; (c) that the research is characterized by process-tracing; (d) that the research investigates the properties of a single case or (e) that the research investigates a single phenomenon” (342). I decided to employ a case study approach so that I

was able to get an in-depth look at the role of brojobs among DL men. My case study is in two parts: a survey and an interview. It started in November 2021 and lasted until around February 2022.

For the survey portion of the study, I created a Qualtrics Form for participants to fill out. Like many survey applications, Qualtrics is fairly easy to use and “one can have multiple choice options, check boxes, scale, grid, text, and so on” according to V.N. Raju and N.S. Harinarayan (6). Once participants finished the survey, they were asked if they would like to have an interview about their brojob/hookup experiences. The survey, in a sense, was a starting point. There were men who were interested only in filling out the survey and not interested in participating further in the research. However, they were able to answer short questions such as “Tell me about your first sexual encounter” which allowed for in-depth analysis. Their data is still valuable because it provided me with similar themes and stories. The survey was also a way to obtain insight from DL and discreet men in a manner in which they felt comfortable. For those who chose only to partake in the survey portion, participation and data were completely anonymous as long as no contact info was given. Of the 40 men, 8 decided to participate in an interview. There were also some men who said they were going to interview, but didn't.

Once participants reached the interview portion, I offered two format choices: chat (usually on Reddit or Discord) or audio/video chat (via Zoom). The text interviews were carried out on the platform and “analyzed directly” on the site (Blackwell et al. 1123). I took screenshots of each text-based interview upon completion. The audio/video conversations had to be “recorded with participant permission and transcribed” (Blackwell et al. 1123). I used transcription applications, such as Otter.ai, to convert the audio to text. Of the 8 interviewees, only 1 MSM decided to Zoom and it was audio only for anonymity reasons. I had emphasized

that video was completely optional. The chat option proved the more popular among DL men, most likely due to a greater perception of anonymity.

For those who interviewed, the level of anonymity was dependent on the interview method they chose. For instance, those who chose text-based interviews were able to be completely anonymous as long as they did not give any identifying contact information. For the one man who chose to do the audio interview, his contribution was not completely anonymous due to the fact that I was recording his voice. Participants were able to choose a pseudonym or to let me choose their pseudonym for them. The majority let me pick. I made every reasonable effort to ensure their anonymity as no real names were included in this thesis or any reports. The interview data was also safeguarded with password protection, as this was combined with the pseudonyms to anonymize the interview data.

I first decided to use Grindr as my recruitment tool. The reason I used Grindr is because it “remains the most popular [MSM application, as] 3.8 million daily users in every country in the world” (Filice et al. 190). A 2015 survey found that “38% of Grindr users used the app to locate casual sex partners compared to 14.1% who sought a boyfriend or romantic partner” (Filice et al. 207). In other words, Grindr is used primarily for hooking up, making it a suitable platform for seeking down low men who participate in brojobs.

As I live in Newfoundland currently, I used the Grindr Unlimited service, which, for a fee, lets one talk to Grindr users from around the world. This is quite expensive, unfortunately. I spent around \$113.84 USD for a three month trial (Grindr 2021). This allowed me to interact with potential interviewees in Metro Atlanta. My profile indicated my academic research interest. It also had a link to my recruitment document and survey link (via Bitly).

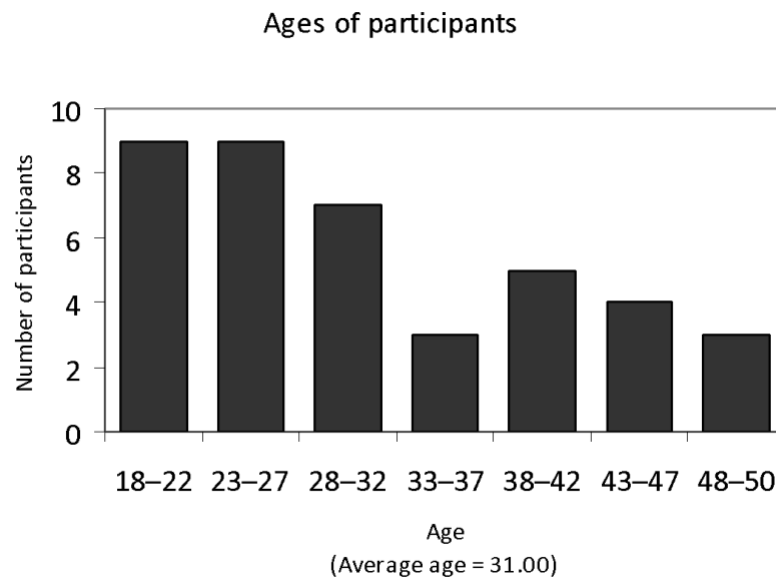


Figure 1: Ages of Participants

Going into this study, I wanted MSM who were interested in sharing their own stories. Some of these men may have never had the opportunity to open up about these issues before. I specifically sought men who were 18–50 years of age because I realized I need to cast a wide net in order to achieve a sufficient sample size. Having a fairly open age range helped to broaden the scope of my case study. I have a wide age diversity sample, with the mean age being 31 years old. I also selected only men who self-identify as somewhere on the sexually fluid (bi, pan, heteroflexible) scale or straight, as opposed to gay, as this was a focal point of the study.



Figure 2: Grindr Researcher Ad

Grindr let me “direct contact with potential participants” as Yasin Koc notes, so I was able to converse with each DL and discreet man (28). I was able to scout potential discreet and down low men to message, asking if they would be interested in participating in the study. Using this direct method helped “enable ‘one-to-one’ interactions with participants and the opportunity to answer their questions regarding the studies” (Koc 28). Anonymity is very crucial in my study, and Grindr helps DL men “conceal and manage their identities easily” so that the men in my study do not have to worry about being outed (Koc 29). Grindr also “lets users classify themselves into various ‘tribes’, such as discreet, geek, *daddy*, poz (i.e., HIV Positive), clean-cut, leather, and *bear*, to show their interests to other groups” (Koc 28). I used the discreet filter, so I could find DL and discreet men more easily. This helped narrow my selection process without having to go through each individual man.

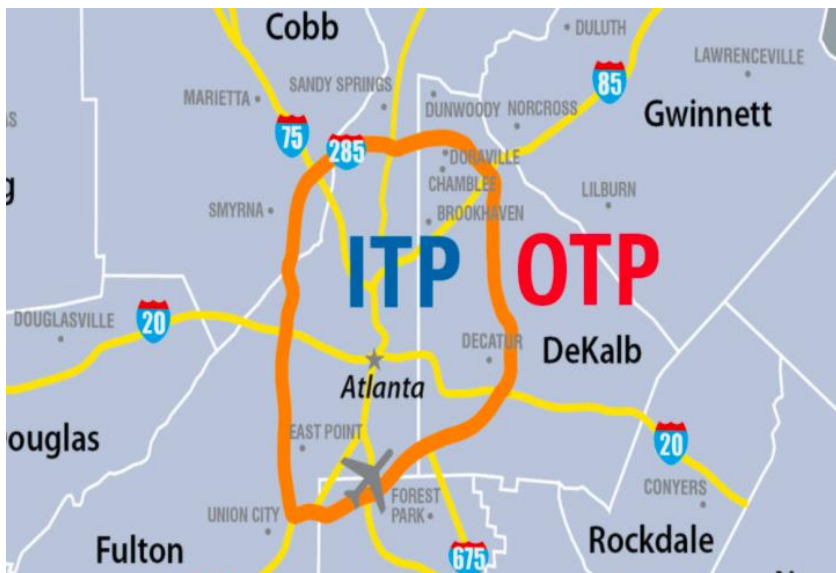


Figure 3: Map of Metro Atlanta

Metro Atlanta was the primary case study location due to my familiarity with the area. *Inside the Perimeter (ITP)* and *Outside the Perimeter (OTP)* help differentiate the surrounding city and Metro area. ITP refers to “the Atlanta city limits perfectly outlined by Interstate 285, which performs a loop around the city [whereas] OTP contains the suburbs of Atlanta, all with their own characteristics and personalities outside I-285” according to Know Atlanta: The Premier Relocation Guide (1). In reality, ITP is not a very large area. The OTP suburbs can vary tremendously in socioeconomic background, race, religion, political leanings, and proximity to the city. For example, Lawrenceville (in Gwinnett County), where I’m from, tends to be more middle class, ethnically diverse, and in recent years more liberal. In contrast, North Fulton tends to be more white, upper class, and homogenous, by comparison. Since anonymity is crucial in my study, I was able to ask participants if they were from ITP or OTP. This was more general than asking for their exact location, but it allowed my participants to remain discreet and it still gave me an idea of where they’re from.

Since I purchased Grindr Unlimited, I was able to talk to MSM from Metro Atlanta. As I was in Newfoundland, the men were not able to view my profile and I had to reach out to them. Unfortunately, within three days of starting my Grindr case study, I was banned from the app. I wanted to try the Grindr case study one last time. Thus, I went home to Georgia for Winter Break and was banned 24 hours after my last attempt. Grindr does not tell users why they are banned, but after reading their community guidelines it became clear that “request[ing] to participate in survey or studies” is not allowed (Grindr 2022).

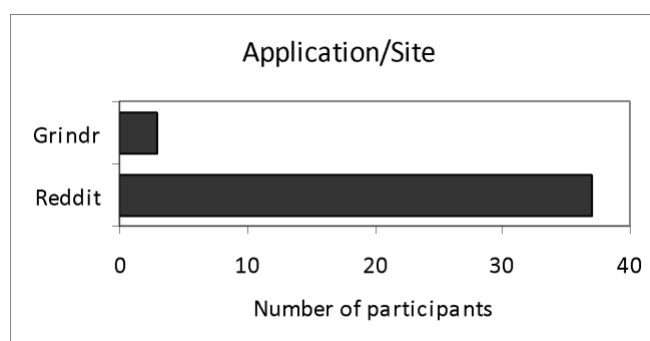


Figure 4: Application of origin

Since Grindr did not work out, I had to find a secondary recruitment tool. Reddit became my main source of recruitment (92.5% of participants came from Reddit) during this 2021–2022 case study. Reddit is a widely used site “as of February 2019, it is the 17th most popular website worldwide and the 6th most popular in the United States according to the Alexa web ranking” (De Pril 18). The site is divided into “subreddits” which have their “own topic, internal culture, and community rules” (De Pril 18). As discussed in section 1.2.3, there is a main “Redditor for Redditor” subreddit, but there are also r4rs that are geared towards local and state communities. So, I was able to post messages on subreddits such as “r/atlantar4r”, “r/TampaR4R”, “r/CLTR4R”, and “r/alabamar4r”. These are geared towards people who want to hookup and even though there is a predominantly MSM crowd, is it not a exclusively MSM as there are men

seeking women and vice versa present as well. Once I posted my message, members were able to view it and take the survey directly on Qualtrics. Unlike Grindr, I had no direct communication with most of the survey participants.

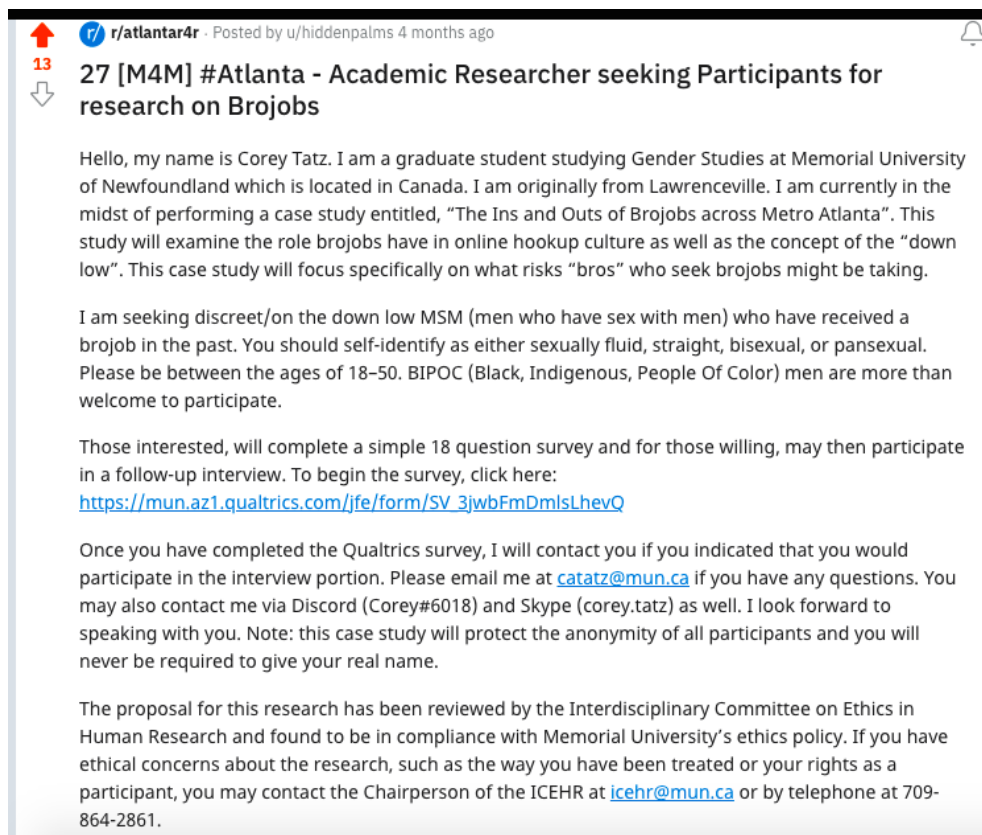


Figure 5: Reddit Recruitment Post

I also used some more general subreddits such as "r/bisexual", "r/pansexual", "r/BisexualMen", "r/RandomActsofBlowjobs", etc. to attempt to reach the sexually fluid MSM. However, the problem with these subreddits is they have a broader geographical base. Thus, when I posted there, I got respondents from around the world. I had to filter out a lot of the users who took the survey for this reason. Moreover, since Reddit has such a wide scope in comparison to Grindr, I decided to widen my case study from Metro Atlanta to the Southeastern United States, including Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

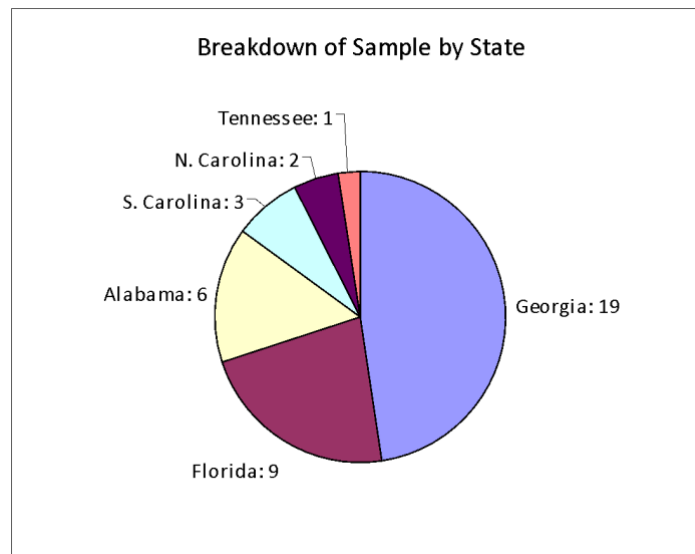


Figure 6: State Breakdown

Even though I did broaden the geographic scope of my study, 47.5% of my participants were from Georgia. Florida had the second highest response with 22.5%. Tennessee only had one participant; however, they were one of the eight to interview. I did advertise the study as centric to Metro Atlanta and never did rebrand it. It remained “The Ins and Outs of Brojobs across Metro Atlanta” until I added the Southeast after the study. Had I changed the title earlier, I may have been able to get more participants from the surrounding states.

There were some drawbacks to my case study methods. Since I was located in Newfoundland for the vast majority of the recruitment process, I did not have the level of access to participants that I might have had in a local study. I could, for example, have tried using other apps such as *Scruff* or *Jack’d*, but because of the geolocation functionality built into these apps, I would not have had access to my potential participants. I also had less than three months to carry out this case study, partly as a result of difficulties with Grindr, etc. Also, one limitation of Reddit was the fact that if I posted *too* frequently, some users could find the repetition annoying

and spam-like. For this reason, I chose to post once every couple weeks, so as not to be perceived as flooding the subreddit. This meant, of course, that many potential participants never saw my post. Finally, this was a qualitative study, and “for these finds to have an impact, they must be situated in a larger interpretive context, and they must be presented in an accessible and usable form in the real world of practice and policy making” according to Sandelowski et al. (365). Therefore, one can look at my research results from a micro perspective, but one cannot make larger assumptions based on this data. With a fairly small sample size, I was able to focus on each of the eight MSM I interviewed. I was able to share their stories and their lived experiences.

1.5 Portfolio-style thesis

This is a portfolio-style thesis. There are three core chapters: “Masc 4 Masc”, “Brojobs and Sexual Fluidity”, and “Down Low/Discreet Men”. My data includes my case study, my own autoethnographic work, and the analysis of some Doublelist casual encounter ads. I decided that I needed to tell a story: not just my story, but those of the MSM whom I interviewed. It was the first time that a lot of these MSM were given the chance to talk to someone else about their hookup encounters. “The plot of a personal narrative is not entirely ‘new’ even though it is based on an experience that is seemingly personal and developed in a story that is seemingly idiosyncratic” as folklorist Sandra K. D. Stahl points out (14). These stories may not be novel for all readers, but each interviewee had the chance to be their authentic selves. Each of our lived experiences are important and deserve to be heard. This includes my own story which was silenced. There are “heteronormative discursive practices which insist on binary conceptualizations of gender and sexuality produce negative views of bisexuality [or any sort of

heteroflexibility] or outright denial” as Judith Butler illuminates (Duffin 486). This thesis challenges such practices by going against binary norms and the idea that sexual behaviors are equated to identity. This is significant as it helps to dispel the essentialist notion that “one is born gay”.

It’s helpful to show these hookup ads as well, to inform readers what they look and sound like. Unpacking them can provide a glimpse into the posters’ ideal hookup partners or scenarios. Analyzing Doublelist ads allows us to consider the “exact ramifications of such a free sexual advertisement service on MSM’s sexual health and sexual risk-taking behaviors” according to David A. Moskowitz and David W. Seal (402). These ads are often suggestive in nature. The language and slang used is employed for a specific reason: to find a hookup. Language usage can differ between *submissive* (bottoms) and dominant (tops) MSM. A bottom may be looking for a *hung* dick while a top may seek a thick ass. The language used can often be decoded mainly by other MSM, thereby creating a sort of insider group.

The colloquial language I use in my thesis is necessary. When I talk about “getting fucked” or “*busting a nut*”, the word choice is deliberate. Thus, “when one attempts to demonstrate one’s own fit to a social group, one seeks to enhance the self by gaining approval from and inclusion within the social group” as J.C. Turner puts into light (Hall and France 163). This includes vernacular especially. If I just say “having sex” or “an orgasm”, the words lose their intended meaning. I must fit in with the other MSM by using the same slang. Also, since my story is also intertwined with the interviewees, our language should coincide as well. My use of language may not seem the most scholastic, but it is the most fitting. By matching my vernacular to other MSM, I disrupt and challenge the norm, and this helps to queerify my work. I did not want to adhere to the heteronormative guidelines of academia nor did I want to uphold

the hegemonic domain in any way. This thesis is about stigmatized sexual practices. Part of de-stigmatizing sexuality and sexual practices includes de-stigmatizing language. The words used here are a significant part of both the ethnographic document, as well as the process of power regarding such discussions. According to folklorist Herbert Halpert, this is why “what the individual in any society considers obscene is determined not only by his conditioning in his social group, but by his private taboos or inhibitions,” and by making this private taboo public, it helps normalize the language used (191). For years the use of sexual folklore has been censored, ostracized, and othered, when this vernacular is “uncontaminated and authentic” which is why it must be used, as folklorist Gershon Legman explains (208).

Bro culture helps straight men stay on top of the heteropatriarchy. And when men start to experiment and partake in activities such as “brojobs” or “dude-sex,” they often still want to hold on to that hetero label. The sexual act won’t necessarily change their conception of their sexual orientation. DL and discreet men have a masculine role to play: fitting in with the hegemonic domain of society. Without this straight label, power may be lost. In regions like the Southeast, confidentiality is a must, especially if DL men have girlfriends or are married. Grindr, Squirt, and Craigslist have become online safe havens for DL men, where no one outside will know about their “deviant” acts. I hope the following three chapters provide a view into the lives and stories of some, as well as to provide some context to help interpret their meanings and significance.

List of Interviewees

Hank: 34/Asian/Atlanta (ITP)
Mr. Ser Vay: 45/Caucasian/Alabama
TJ: 50/Caucasian/Metro Atlanta (OTP)
Amir/41/African American/Metro Atlanta (OTP)
Kyle/27/Caucasian/Tennessee
Colin/39/Caucasian/North Carolina
Joey: 45/Caucasian/Alabama
Luke: 21/Guyanese/Atlanta (ITP) & Toronto



Growing Up In The Bible Belt

Swimming pools and tall palm trees,
 Big green lawns and SUVs.
 Life in Florida's South was good,
 I always knew just where I stood.
Well away from the Bible Belt!

Then my parents brought the news,
 They didn't care about my views.
 Off to Georgia we were movin',
 Not a path to life's improvin'.
Moving to the Bible Belt

Thoughts sat heavily on my head,
 The peach state then was solid Red.
 Red necks, red trucks, red voters too.
 What was a boy like me to do?
Growin' up in the Bible Belt

Straight and manly, had to be,
 Fittin' the norm, that was key.
 But I just couldn't be that way,
 Even teachers called me gay!
Whipped and beaten by the Bible Belt

Bullied and teased and called a fag
 The homophobia made me gag.
 Finally I came out as bi
 On wings of truth now I can fly!
Proud to wear the Bible Belt

Chapter 2 – Masc 4 Masc



Figure 7: Lawrenceville, GA home (2011)

2.1 Social Outcast

As a closeted bisexual teenage boy growing up in the right-leaning suburb of Lawrenceville, Georgia in 2011, I did not seem to fit in with my peers. At times, I felt like a social outcast. My limited friend group consisted mostly of girls. One of them was Lizzie, for whom I quickly developed feelings. We had been in the same French class for a couple of years and grew close, but she did not have any romantic feelings toward me. Lizzie wanted a guy's guy, and I was nowhere near as masculine as she would have liked. I was a typical theatre kid: loudly flamboyant. Femininity in guys was considered a major weakness in Southern society (Bollas 3). Those who failed to act sufficiently masculine were often othered for potentially being gay. Culture theorist Sianne Ngai notes that while women “learn to lisp [and] totter in their walk” these mannerisms made me stand out and become a target at Grayson High School (54).

This can be viewed as a matter of coding. There was a double standard at play. For women, these behaviors are “essentialist ideals of femininity,” but for men they are deemed abnormal (Library Kind 1). I was ostracized for not fitting into a *hypermasculine* box. I talked with my hands. I sometimes walked with my hands at the side of my hip. I spoke at a rapid speed. Peers repeatedly “felt [it] necessary to establish [my] gayness, because that one aspect of [my] personality is held to give [me], and explain, the rest of [my] personality” according to film theorist Richard Dyer (358). These mannerisms affected the perception of my masculinity and peers questioned my sexuality. I began to loathe myself as my very existence was called into question. This resulted “in negative feelings toward [myself],” as Glenda M. Russell and Janis S. Bohan affirm (345). I found myself unable to fit within the heteronormative constructs of my school; being an outcast became a way of life.

Although I was labeled a queer outsider, I still tried to blend in. I joined the swim team where I was a member for three years. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo states that “the firm, developed body has become a symbol of correct *attitude*, it means that one ‘cares’ about oneself and how one appears to others,” and so my teammates would work out for hours to make sure they were in shape (195). Appearance and maintenance was an important part of the Grayson Swim Team culture (Scott 145). The other male swimmers had “strength and muscular development,” which according to physician William A. Schonfeld, “are paramount features of the male identity” (380). I, on the other hand, was looked down on for not appearing toned, lean, and athletic like my teammates. I was more husky than the other boys. I did not *look like a swimmer*. My body was still a work in progress. I also suffered from a mild version of *gynecomastia* (enlarged male breasts) which made me stand out even more (Schonfeld 380). The “enlargement of the breasts is [a] characteristic of the female,” and I was already seen as

feminine acting, I did not want the other boys to become aware of my plump chest (Schonfeld 380). When I got out of the swimming pool, I would conceal my chest and swiftly change in the locker room so others wouldn't notice. To make things worse, I wasn't one of the stronger swimmers on the team. The upperclassmen would compete with each other, often seeing who could swim the fastest. I swam in "Lane 6," the slowest lane. Because I was subpar at swimming, I became 'the feminine' on the team. In the locker room, guys would goof off. They would hit each other with their towels while using gay slurs to insult one another. They tried to see who could become the most assertive; the alpha. I began to feel insecure about my body and my sexuality, and I was aware that no girls were finding me attractive at the time. I felt like an outsider. As a result, my self-confidence declined. This is when I started to experiment with my sexuality by posting and responding to m4m (men seeking men) Craigslist casual encounter ads and having NSA hookups (Goodlin-Fahncke and Dial 126).

2.2 Meeting Tex

When I was browsing these classified ads, I knew that I had to project masculinity when seeking other men for casual sex. I also wanted a masculine man, someone who could show me the ropes. On Craigslist, men would often give stats to describe themselves. It was commonplace to see men using "masc" as a descriptor. Tex, a forty-something Georgian man, had replied to my ad seeking *fun*. He was quite aware of my age at the time and we decided to meet in person. I had my dad drop me off at a local park. Tex arrived in a bright red truck with a Confederate flag on his license plate. I should have interpreted that as a warning, but I entered his truck. Perhaps supporting the Confederacy could be seen as "masculine"? Tex had a deep voice and appeared very Southern. With my more masculine appearance, it was not hard to mask some of my

feminine traits. His masculine persona and straight-acting behavior puts him completely outside the gay realm (Robinson and Ortiz 224). If he were openly gay, or adopted behaviors and mannerisms associated with gayness, he would most likely lose his hegemonic power, including position and reputation within the local community (Demetriou 341). Tex grabbed my crotch while driving his truck, and told me I was *hot* as we made out at the stop sign. We proceeded to his bungalow where we exchanged *head* and fucked.

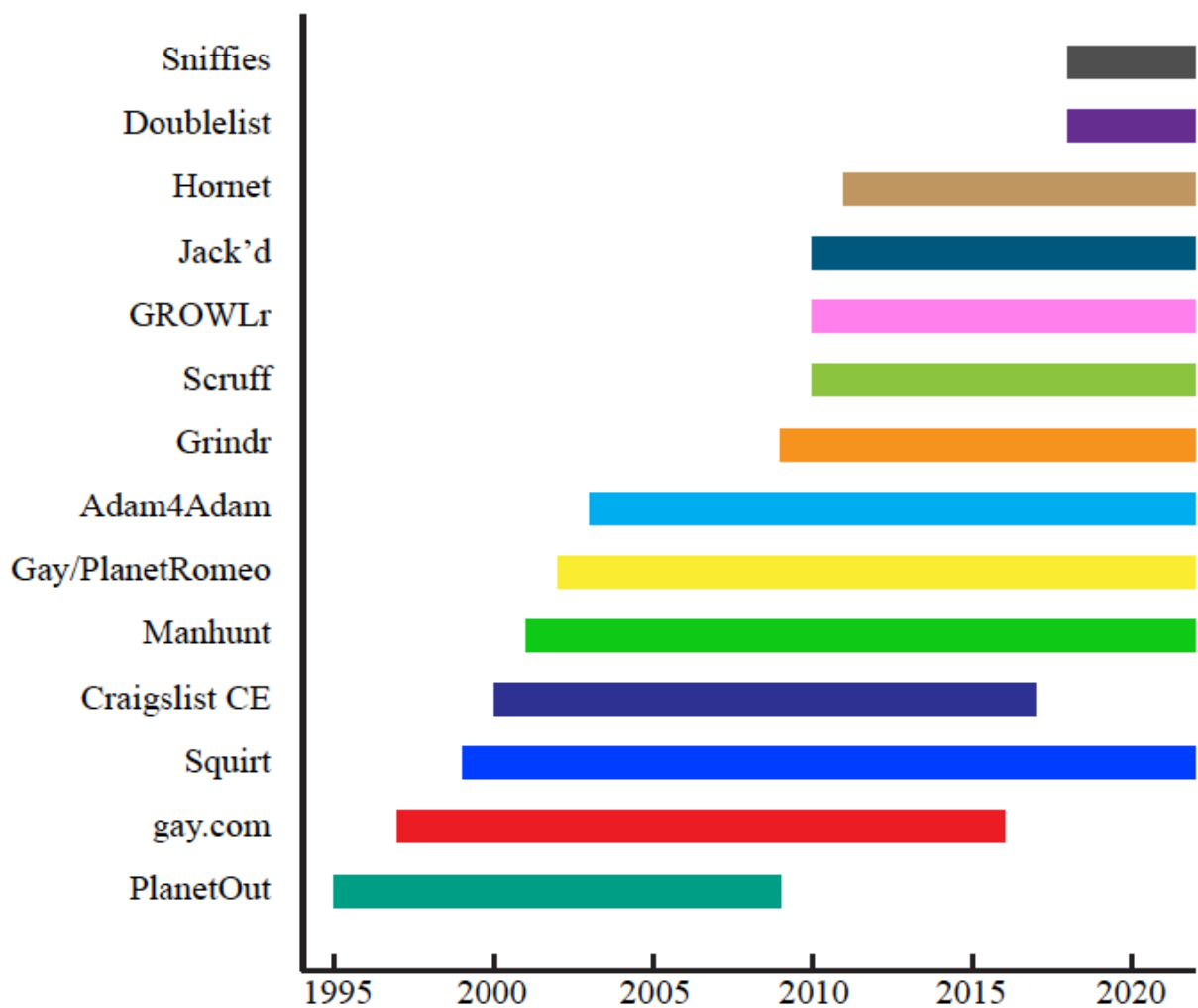


Figure 8: History of MSM Hookup Applications

2.3 History of NSA hookups

What Tex and I had experienced was nothing out of the ordinary for most MSM. Throughout history, gay and bisexual men have had to find creative ways to meet sexual partners as described in Alexander Löwstedt Granath's work (4). Cruising was commonplace in the United States especially in the "1970s and early 1980s [where MSM had a] very expressive sexual freedom" according to criminology scholar Richard Tewksbury (8). It became "necessary for [MSM] to know that activities occur, and to know where, when, and how such activities occur" (Tewksbury 4). There were certain public places which became known for this purpose, such as public restrooms, rest areas, parks, etc (Tewksbury 6). These public cruising locations were often known to have same-sex activity, so MSM knew where to look to have their needs met. Also, there were "protected environments for casual and recreational sex [such as] sex clubs, baths, and gay bars" which were safer spots for a lot of MSM due to their (MSM) friendly nature (Tewksbury 4).

Cruising also was seen as "more masculine [which] might suggest parallels with the ideals of heterosexuality," as a lot of MSM who cruised thought that cruisers were "self-identified heterosexuals" (Tewksbury 8). This is also because these MSM were "likely to venture into the more easily permeable setting of the public park than they are to cross the boundaries that maintain more recognizable gay settings (such as gay bars and baths)" (Tewksbury 8). MSM were able to uphold heteronormative ideals while they cruised, which explains the choice of public venues⁴: they did not have to put themselves in situations where they might be outed.

⁴ Even though cruising has been in decline in the US, it still exists and provides a vital role outside the n. For instance, in Guangzhou, China, cruising is quite popular among MSM. The People's Park is the "largest public gay cruising ground in South China" and most of the cruising would occur at the two restrooms (Qian 78). There is also a "locational advantage of the park [which] fostered its queering, since it is connected conveniently to other.

However, according to sociologist David Aveline, during the 1980s when “AIDS became an epidemic [which] for men who engage[d] in unsafe anonymous sex, cruising the wrong person [could] lead to HIV infection” (202). This led to a decline in popularity of public cruising among MSM owing to the high risk factors.

During the 1990s, hookup culture started to shift online. Chat rooms [such as AOL] emerged, which allowed “users to have private conversations with others via ‘instant messaging’ or email, and add other gay and bisexual men to their ‘buddy lists’” as Christian Grov, Breslow, Newcomb, Rosenberger, and Bauermeister note (392). In addition to AOL, other sites such as gay.com and planetout.com allowed MSM to find each other (Grov et al. 392). With the advent of the Web, it became “socially acceptable to meet someone off the Internet without first exchanging digital photos [due to] the infrastructure of the Internet and limited available technology in the 1990s fostered anonymity by default” as Eric Benotsch, Kalichman, Cage explain (qtd. in Grov et al. 392-393). By the early 2000s, it became the norm for MSM to meet online according to British researchers Graham Bolding, M. Davis, Hart, Sherr, Elford (Grov et al. 395). At this time, MSM largely used a “method of interacting with other web users involved using a physical computer (desktop or notebook)” (Grov et al. 399). The investigators found that more MSM’s first same-sex encounter had “met their first sexual partner on the Internet” (qtd. in Grov et al. 395).

Over time MSM moved from computers to mobile devices and tablets in order to find hookup encounters (Grov et al. 13-14). In today’s world, MSM will use internet based applications (or “apps”) which run on both mobile devices and tablets (Granath 4). Grindr is one of the most popular and mainstream apps among MSM (Granath 4). However, Grindr is not the

parts of the city via public transport” (Qian 778). The park is a place that allows for same-sex encounters (especially among discreet MSM) outside the mainstream (Qian 778).

only place to find other MSM. There are other similar apps such as Adam4Adam, Jack'd, Sniffies, and Scruff. These apps⁵ tend to focus on particular demographics. For instance, Scruff is “a geosocial network targeted primarily at bears (and their admirers)” as communications scholar Yoel Roth states (2113). There are also websites like Doublelist, Reddit, and Squirt that assist MSM in finding casual hookups. On Doublelist, one can post and respond to classified ads seeking casual sex. On Reddit, there are subreddits that are dedicated to hookup posts. Squirt, is a modern day cruising website, where users can find public spaces (such as a local park) to meet other men. In order to maximize one’s chances of success in finding a partner, it helps to appear or act in accordance with certain criteria. These apps and websites are competitive spaces and hierarchies can emerge (Granath 4). Certain subcultures can also exist on these sites, and particular traits might make one more or less popular within that subculture. One such subculture consists of men who advertise themselves as *masc 4 masc* men who “declare themselves as ‘masc’ and only seek other ‘masc’ guys” (Granath 19). These are self-identified hypermasculine men who want to hook up with other hypermasculine or *straight acting* men (Granath 19). This helps reinforce heteronormative norms and “reject[s] the stereotypical archetypes of a gay man” as men must exhibit a masculine persona, according to communications scholars Nathian Shae Rodriguez, Jennifer Huemmer and Lindsey E. Blumell (248). This masculine persona includes both physical and character attributes. The *masc 4 masc* subculture is often “perpetrated largely by white, muscular, cisgender men” who seek a position of dominance on the apps by “creat[ing] exclusive and discriminatory spaces online” (Granath 5).

⁵ It should be noted that there are apps for women who have sex with women (WSW) as well such as HER and Pink Cupid (Bryon et al. 507).

2.4 Hegemonic Masculinity

Within this masc 4 masc subculture, hegemonic masculinity comes into play. This can in turn embody Southern masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity “embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men,” according to sociologists R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (832). In the case of the U.S. Southeast, hegemonic masculinity is embodied by white heterosexual or straight acting (presenting) men who tend to dominate over *any* marginalized group. They must assert power over those in their communities. Even in 2022, Southern men are expected to take charge and present as a domineering force. These men are expected to get married, have kids, and become the “head of households” of their families. Showing signs of femininity or queerness is equated with weakness. And a perception of weakness is often associated with a loss in power and status. An openly queer man of color will be viewed as less than a white hetero man. Those men who do have power must make it known to those around them. In fact, “men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). Many men fit into the mold of hegemonic masculinity well enough that they easily benefit from it even if they are not part of the statistically relatively small hegemonic group (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). These men became attached to the dominant group because they wanted to remain highly respected. They still benefit from the notion that men are superior to women even if they do not adhere to it (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). This can consist of androcentric ideals “which informs not just how men think about themselves, but also how social groups relate, access resources and prescribe and proscribe particular behaviours” according to Jeffrey Hearn, Nordberg, Andersson,

Balkmar, Gottzén, Klinth, Pringle, and Sandberg (qtd. in Jewkes et al. 113). Hegemony could after all “be supported by force; [but also] it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). This is why we see Tex assert his masculine presence through the use of the Confederate flag on his license plate, which embodies his Southern (white) culture. It is not just a sign of manhood, but demonstrates his urge to stay within this white supremacist masculine force. Education scholars Susan L. Schramm-Pate and Richard Lussier explain that not only does this “glorify hostility and racism, it is also very much a reflection of the way our society constructs masculinity as competitive, pack-oriented, and reflexively supportive of the home team,” and by home team one can infer this to mean the white, cis-hetero man (63).

Historically, in the South, being queer has been seen as both feminine and weak. Being hetero and masculine has been the default. There has been this “physically powerful and hypermasculine image of Jesus [that] evangelicals promoted” according to Georgian historian Craig Friend (xix). Religion, which includes one’s morality, is intertwined with hegemonic masculinity. Because of their religious upbringing, “Southern men often found themselves wondering how far they could go in satisfying the demands and enjoying the pleasures of male culture without violating the standards of evangelical morality” (Friend xix). This is partly why MSM feel they must present as masculine: they must abide by Southern (white) societal norms. This includes men who aren’t necessarily religious themselves; the culture in which they live rewards those who follow traditional gender norms. MSM will feel more masculine if they find other men with similar physical, material, and attitudinal features. This can include adhering to a rebel, conservative “Make America Great Again” attitude which makes them part of this insider group. Within this group, asserting one’s masculine attributes is important. And being more

masculine is usually code for acting straight and less “gay”. It is, of course, easier to maintain these appearances when relationships between men are presented as friendships rather than sexual or romantic ones. If MSM hookup with or date more feminine men, they may feel less secure within the hegemonic culture of the South. People may start to question the nature of their relationship if both men aren’t up to the same standards of masculinity.

2.5 The meaning behind “Masc 4 Masc”

During my case study, numerous men identified as fitting within this “masc 4 masc” label. Of the eight men I interviewed, the vast majority sought a masculine man to have “fun” with. Kyle⁶, a twenty-seven-year-old bisexual man from Tennessee, is one example. He notes that “I’m most interested into more masculine guys. They don’t necessarily have to be muscular, but at the very least *HWP* [*Height Weight Proportional*]. I am also into the *twink* body type, but not necessarily the feminine mannerisms” (Kyle 2021). If a man is too feminine presenting or not athletic enough, he does not fit the “masc 4 masc” mold; it creates an “us” (masculine) versus “them” (feminine) mentality. And when men advertise themselves on apps, “gay [and bisexual] males both assert their masculinity and emasculate others to reify the power structure of hegemonic masculinity, thus creating a hierarchy of masculinities” (Rodriguez et al. 248).

For some men, their preferences are more explicit than others, as exemplified by Joey, a forty-five-year-old bisexual man from Alabama. He states, “I don’t like gay fem guys at all. Masc. For sure” and he also prefers their appearance to be “natural though. Not shaved or stubby” (Joey 2021). This creates a space in which we see “the role of the body as a tool for negotiating masculine hierarchies”, as masculinity can be defined by “gym use and athletic

⁶ Kyle is a pseudonym. All participants were given pseudonyms. More of this was discussed in 1.4.3

prohess” which helps situate these men on the top of the masculine hierarchy (Rodriguez et al. 254). Ensuring that they remain in the upper echelons of this hierarchy allows masc 4 masc men to exercise power and status on these apps/websites. Again, Kyle exemplifies this when he seeks out a “guy who sorta looks like me, a more masculine, straight-presenting, so I guess a slight preference to white guys but I would not say it is an exclusive preference by any stretch” (Kyle 2020). By having a white, masculine man as a playmate, Kyle may be trying to keep his place in the heteropatriarchy.

The expectations for masc 4 masc men go beyond physical appearance: they must also act manly. A masculine man is expected to act straight. This includes “speaking in a deep voice, playing and watching sports like football and basketball, beer drinking [because] one must act and represent yourself in a way society expects a man should behave” as John Ersing reports (Ersing 1). It is important a masc 4 masc man does not appear to be queer. This is not only viewed as a feminine quality, but also, ultimately, as a weakness. Masc 4 masc men want other hypermasculine men “because they’re uncomfortable with a guy who ‘acts like a girl’—which is telling of the way our society treats those who act feminine (including all women)” (Ersing 1). If a masculine presenting man has sexual intercourse with another masculine presenting man, he may be considered “less gay” due to the fact his partner is also masculine and “acts like a man”. Luke, a twenty-one-year-old bisexual man from Atlanta/Toronto, specifically seeks masculine presenting men. He is very particular about the type of man he is attracted to: they must be “masc, hairy, my height (6 feet or taller)” (Luke 2021). Throughout the interview, Luke has to reassure me that he is indeed very masculine. In fact, he says, “I am very masculine. I play football as well so it’s my kind of thing” (Luke 2021). He tells me that he is very dominant, likes to be serviced, and always the *top*. (Luke 2021).

Although I may not be the most masculine person in my everyday life, I am able to put on a masculine persona while I am on these hookup apps/websites. I use codeswitching to talk to other MSM in “bro talk” essentially. When I am online I can become Corey, the bro, Corey, the dude. This is why “through chatting online, where temporal gaps allow for greater consideration of typed responses, identities can become flexible and unfixd” as media scholar Charlie Sarson notes (901). When another man messages me on a hookup app, I can alter how I come across in response to their interests. I am able to “provide the opportunity to construct an identity via chat that is either a true reflection of the offline self, a slightly modified version of the offline self, or an identity that is removed completely from the offline self” (Sarson 901). When I am in the Southeast, my Grindr display name is usually “Bi Dude” to display a certain level of masculinity. My first message to another MSM is usually “what’s up man?” If I am perceived as masculine or straight-acting, my chances of a hookup are significantly increased. This can be “recognized as a script and, like most scripts, can then be rehearsed and performed by social actors – in this instance, [I am] wishing to act straight in order to secure sex with other men via hook-up apps” (Sarson 905). It is also much easier to act straight while on an app or website than in person. There are thus two parts to this script: the online script and the IRL (in real life) script. I must present masculinity in both types of scenarios.



Figure 9: Fun and Nails (2022)

Recently, my roommate Doroteja painted my nails bright pink and dark purple. In the past, I would not have considered doing this because it is considered feminine. When I just matched with a DL dude on Bumble (a dating app), I immediately thought that I might have to remove the nail polish because I appeared less masculine and more *fruity* or queer. I ended up asking my match if my nail polish was “okay” if we were to hook up. I had to make sure I was still masculine enough for him. I guess my beard helped. I had a “fear [of] being labelled ‘effeminate’ because of [my] sexuality – where ‘gay’ is still regularly equated with ‘feminine’” (Sarson 906). This is why I usually attempt to act more straight. I need to “distanc[e] [myself] from a style that is considered to look ‘gay’” (Sarson 906).

The gatekeeping of my masculinity and gender expression started well before I identified as a bisexual teenager. As a little boy, I liked feminine or “girly” products such as glitter, lip gloss, and nail polish. My grandmother told me that other kids would make fun of me for wearing anything that was considered to be “for girls”. And throughout my childhood in both

South Florida and Metro Atlanta, I had trouble fitting in. I was bullied. I was considered an outcast. As I grew older, I wanted to experience sex just like anyone else, and that meant appearing masculine. I do feel like there are parts of myself that are masculine, but being in the “Masc4Masc” subculture means stripping away all feminine qualities. I grew up middle class, white, and cis-gendered. I am therefore considered privileged in certain ways, so it is easy for me to mask feminine qualities and to try and present as solely masculine. Therefore I am still part of this cis-heteropatriarchy even though I am openly bisexual/queer.



Figure 10: Douchebags of Grindr

2.6 Douchebags of Grindr

In Figure 1, we see that Robert has a masculine superiority complex and he is hunting for another masculine man. The target of his search must be similar to him; he points out that he is

“ALL MAN” to emphasize that he is not feminine acting. It is also interesting to note that he describes himself as “young and successful”. He is twenty-five-years-old and affluent, attributes which are part of this hegemonic masculine presentation. He wants to maintain his place in the hierarchy and so he wants someone in a similar position as himself. His background is a beach setting, which shows that he has the means to travel, abundant leisure time, and is probably well off. Additionally, one can see in the image that Robert’s body positioning is centered, while his gaze meets the camera directly. He wants other Grindr users to know that he is dominant, masculine, and in charge. When he states that he is “ALL MAN” it means that he views himself as hypermasculine, without any noticeable feminine traits. On apps such as Grindr, one finds a “politics of belonging [which] involves a reproduction of the boundaries of community by hegemonic powers and discourses that aim to strengthen who is included and who is excluded” as Matthew Conte notes (72). Robert requires a “sameness” in his future sexual partners, and this includes a certain standard of machismo: he must look and act like a “man” (Conte 72). Social capital, which here means that “membership in a group [is] rewarded to queers on Grindr who embody whiteness, muscularity/thinness and/or masculinity” drives a desire among mainstream users to become part of this norm (Conte 72). If a man fits these expectations then they are more likely to find a hookup or partner. On Grindr “judging something [or in this case, someone] ‘interesting’— the mere act of singling [them] out as somehow worthy of everyone’s attention— is often the first step in actually making it so” (Ngai 47). However, in this case, interesting is often synonymous with being muscular, heteronormative, and youthful. Anyone who does not fit Robert’s desires (usually “fat, femme and radicalized queer bodies”), automatically becomes othered and barred from the Grindr mainstream (Conte 72). This ad is not atypical on apps like

Grindr. MSM must continually assert their masculine prowess on Grindr and other hookup apps. One can be less successful at finding partners if one does not fit into this standard of masculinity.

2.7 Bodies and Grindr

Since the Grindr user base consists of men who want to hook up with other men, most users “desire to touch users on ‘the other side of the screen’” as Carl Bonner-Thompson states (1617). Often men do not share face pictures on Grindr in order to preserve their anonymity, so one’s torso and “the exposed skin becomes the site of importance [due to the] hypersexualised idea of a profile image” (Bonner-Thompson 1617). In fact, Joey won’t ever show his face owing to his need to be discreet. He wants “a guy that wants to get off and get me off [as he doesn’t care about one’s] face or mak[ing] love” (Joey 2021). The body is deemed more important, more essential. Muscular bodies are seen as having “the features of a ‘good body’ [which] conform to contemporary [and hegemonic] ideas of desirable western masculine embodiment” and men frequently use their bodies, often sending nude photos, in order find hook ups with likeminded individuals (Bonner-Thompson 1618). Masc 4 masc men usually display “traditional signifiers” when seeking out sexual partners such as “hair and body size” according to Begonya Enguix and Erick Gómez-Narváez (117). Masculine bodies “can easily ‘pass’ as straight” and therefore are easily “valued whereas masculine femininities (‘effeminacies’) are stigmatized” (Enguix and Gómez-Narváez 118). In a 2018 Center for Humane Technology and Moment (“a screen-time tracking app”) study linked “Grindr with the highest rate of unhappiness, making it the most unhappiness-associated app” (Goldenberg 362). This may be due to perceptions of not meeting the high masculine ideals with regard to physical appearance. Instead of having affirmation about

their bodies, Grindr users may become insecure after rejection which can further appearance-related anxieties.

2.8 Binary Terror

Interpretations of how masculine or feminine a person is are completely subjective. Drama scholar Rebecca Schneider's *binary terror* can be defined as "the terror that accompanies the dissolution of a binary habit of sense-making and self-fashioning is directly proportionate to the social safety insured in the maintenance of such apparatus of sense" (Schneider 13). This can be seen in the way men are viewed on Grindr: feminine or masculine. The "obsession with masculinity and femininity that so many 'straight-acting' gay [and bi] men carry reveals a lot about the origin of gender instructions: gender instructions to gay [and bi] men come from an adherence to the gender binary" as Michael LeClaire explains (5). There is no in-between stage of being "masc-fem" as "the rigidity of our social binaries are sacred to our Western ways of knowing" (Schneider 13). Masc 4 masc men do not just want men who have *some* form of masculinity, they are expected to maintain all the masculine traits a hetero man typically has (Schneider 13). Any slight sign of femininity, whether it is a lisp or a feminine physical feature, directly labels a man as non-masculine which makes him appear more feminine.

2.9 Heterotopias

Heterotopias are places that "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" according to Michel Foucault and Miskowiec (24). Heterotopias are real places that expose the artificiality of the world around us. They often

critique an aspect of society (Meininger 28). For instance, Foucault discusses how brothels are necessary for the construction of monogamy (Foucault and Miskowiec 27). There are people who cannot fully obey or embody society's codes, definitions, and imagination of itself as "civilized". The need to view monogamy as natural can only exist if we find and create places outside of this structure that allow us to temporarily escape and authentically be ourselves. Brothels allow men to fulfill undeniable sexual desires while telling themselves and society that they are monogamous.

Heterotopias, then, are real temporal places that allow one to hold onto an image of civilization. They can also include public cruising spaces, such as parks, restrooms, or even online tools to support clandestine MSM activities (brojobs and DL culture). MSM "constantly behave in ways, whether through sexual practice or aesthetically transforming one's body that defy the conventional sex/gender system" as Angela Jones notes (2). These are temporal spaces that allow MSM to be who they really are, while maintaining, supporting, and enforcing the official narrative – the imaginary of Southern masculinity. This model suggests that if participants did not have this type of space to connect with other MSM (physical place or virtual leading to physical encounter), they would not be able to perform or support Southern masculinity and Southern imaginaries. This heterotopia is what makes life livable for MSM, and it is why public cruising exists in every part of the world, no matter how strong the enforcement, policing, and punishment of MSM bodies is.

Another example of a heterotopia is a psychiatric hospital. They can be defined as heterotopias of deviation, "those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault and Miskowiec 25). It is a place to put people who

could not fit within what society imagined society to be. In some communities today⁷, MSM can still be placed in a psychiatric hospital, a real place that allows society to continue the imaginary that MSM do not exist. It helps deny the existence of MSM.

2.10 Political “Masc” and “Fem” Attributes

There’s also a binary when it comes to American politics. Republicans tend to be considered more masculine, whereas Democrats are considered to be more feminine, at least according to political scientist Nicholas J.G. Winter (591). More masculine and Republican traits include: “issues as defense, dealing with terrorism, and controlling crime and drugs”; more feminine Democratic traits include: “education, healthcare, helping the poor, protecting the environment [as] these are all also associated with women” (Winter 591). These feminine attributes can be labeled “weak and defensive,” while the masculine attributes are thought of as “statesmanlike and efficient” (Winter 595). Southern heritage, the rebel flag, and white hegemony are all attributes of Southern masculinity. In my experience, I have been looked down upon by white Georgian men for voting Democrat. My leftist views have feminized me just like my queerness, especially once I move outside the Metro area. I have always felt myself to be an outsider even as a Georgia resident.

When participants in my survey were asked about their political views, quite a few had voted for Donald Trump (R) in the 2020 Presidential Election. For Joey, voting Republican was just another normalcy (Joey 2021). Kyle explained, “I am economically conservative and socially moderate to liberal depending on the issue” (Kyle 2021). Mr. Ser Vay, a forty-five-year-old from rural Alabama, agreed with the sentiment that he was “doing better out financially

⁷ In Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, Egor Panin’s mother continually sent him to the psychiatric hospital for being gay (Khazov-Cassia 1)

under Trump so I didn't mind if he stayed in there" (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). When I asked Mr. Ser Vay if his bisexual identity affected how he voted, he answered that it did not (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). LGBTQ+ rights and other social issues were not at the forefront for a lot of these men. Kyle even noted that had he not voted for Trump he "otherwise would have voted for Kanye [West] and threw my vote away, and I vote in Tennessee," as he did not think his vote mattered since TN is a red threshold state (Kyle 2021). However, he did note that other than Trump he voted Democratic down the ballot, so it depended on the candidate (Kyle 2021). Ultimately these MSM did not rely on LGBTQ+ rights because the heterotopia of bro culture already provided the space that they needed to exist within this community.

2.11 Black "d@ddy" top looking for masculine white bottom

Atlanta | guys for guys

Black "d@ddy" top looking for masculine white bottom →

Black d@ddy top looking for a masculine white bottom.
All masculine white bottoms are welcome ... hairy guys are a plus.

***** Only into SAFE play -- no raw / bb *****

Can host at my place or travel to you.
Daddy is in Decatur.

52 yo 6'4 230# bald

Likes likes oral and likes to f*ck

Looking to connect TODAY -- not during the "weekday", or next week or when you get in town two months from now.

Details: 52 years old, in D@ddy's place in decatur or at your place.
Looking for 25 - 69 yrs old.
Posted 1 day ago.

Figure 11: Doublelist Ad #1

In this classified ad, a mature older man (a top) is seeking a masculine bottom to play with. The poster states that “hairy guys are a plus” because a man’s hairiness often equates to being more masculine. He also shares his stats (6’4, 230, bald) to show that he has a beefy build and is likely in good shape. Even by stating that he is bald, it asserts his power and dominance. There has been “research [that] suggests sexual minority men experience pressure to conform to a lean and muscular physical ideal” as Phillip L. Hammack et al. explains (1). It is also apparent that he wants a NSA hookup in the moment (he wants to “connect TODAY”) and not days/weeks later. He is seeking a one-time sexual encounter as the poster highlights the fact that he “likes oral and likes to f*ck”. The poster is not looking to email back and forth thus “to be more conversational is a liability due to the mixed messages that would be sent out, where being conversational is tied to an investment in establishing friendly connections or a desire to date” (Sarson 901). He does not wish to get to know this person; he just wants to have some quick *fun*. As long as the potential hookup meets his minimum designated criteria (ie: white masculine bottom), he is good to go. He is not *too* selective and just wants someone to get him off.

The fact that he can *host* in Decatur (a city within Metro Atlanta) also indicates his willingness to have a MSM at his place. He makes it known that he is a “d@ddy,” which shows that he is seeking a more dominant role in the casual encounter. In actuality, “Black MSM inhabited a unique MSM culture that lay at the intersections of racial and sexual identities. Unlike White men, ‘straight’ Black MSM state[s] their race explicitly” as communications scholar Chelsea Reynolds notes (225). He is not just a d@ddy; he is a Black d@ddy. He makes it known that he is Black in the title of his ad, thus showing his desire for authority over the potential white MSM. And even though this individual identifies as a Black d@ddy and he is seeking a white man, this white man still must present masculine in order to stay in the masc 4

masc subculture. This is important: he says he is looking for a “masculine white bottom” not just in the title of the ad, but in the body of the text. However, just because the white man must *appear* to be masculine, he still must be subordinate to the Black d@ddy during the encounter. This subverts the white supremacist racial hierarchy that pervades the area. As the Black d@ddy wants to be in charge, he is the top and will be the one who does the fucking. Moreover, it is important that that the designated hookup be between the ages of 25-69, which can indicate that the poster is definitely looking for a “man” and someone who is of the age that they have had a sufficient sexual history. Masculinity and maturity go hand in hand. Therefore, “with age, sexual positioning identity and practice change as a result of personal growth related to increased experience, increased confidence, and increased self-awareness” as Pachankis et al. explains (qtd. in Dangerfield et al. 877).

Black MSM have typically been at the bottom of the MSM hierarchy, solely due to their race. There is a reason why according to David Malebranche, Fields, and Bryant, “many defined Black masculinity as lacking equal power as White masculinity and how lower social expectations of Black men become the norm of this [Atlanta] society’s culture” (99). So, the domination over the white body is not something that is purely sexual: it’s a way for the Black man to gain control, have some power of his own. The white man’s subordination to the Black man helps give the Black man ownership.

Lastly, this poster makes it known that they are only into “SAFE PLAY – no raw/BB” which means they will only have sex with condoms. There is a fear among Black MSM that they are more likely to contract HIV and they are also seen as more “at risk” due to factors such as “racism, stigma, and racial segregation within urban settings” as Patrick Sullivan, Rosenberg, Sanchez, Kelley, Luisi, H. Cooper, Diclemente, Wingood, Frew, Salazar, Del Rio, Mulligan, and

Peterson illuminate (“Explaining Racial Disparities” 453). And in a 2015 study, “Atlanta, MSM and especially young black MSM face high incidence epidemics of HIV. Overall incidence among MSM in Atlanta was 3.8% – higher than the estimated incidence for MSM in the United States overall. More than one in 10 young black MSM Atlantans acquired HIV each year during our study period” (Sullivan et al., “Explaining Racial Disparities” 451). And older Black MSM (such as the poster) were also at risk for HIV even if the risk is not as high as for younger Black MSM (Sullivan et al., “Explaining Racial Disparities” 453). Sociologist Kevin Moseby declares that “HIV/AIDS became a black disease,” which led to the stigmatization of Black men (1079). And the poster himself was a teenager during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980’s. This may be a reason why he is seeking a white man, because of a misconstrued notion that white men are less likely to get HIV and pass on the disease.

Among MSM, *PrEP* (*pre-exposure prophylaxis*), an HIV prevention drug, has helped “reduce the risk of acquiring HIV” according to Remy and Enriquez (2). Although among “black MSM, knowledge of PrEP may be lower or inconsistent” as Kelley et al. notes (1592). So the poster may not have the same familiarity with the drug as white MSM. Also “black MSM were estimated as less likely than white MSM to have access to healthcare” (Kelley et al. 1594). And for those who do have healthcare access, there is also some reluctance to prescribe PrEP among health care providers, and some providers simply do not know enough about the drug as it is still fairly new (Remy and Enriquez 2). There is also a possibility this poster could be married to a woman. It is unlikely a married man would take PrEP, as their wife could find out via their health insurance and they likely would not want to disclose their sexual behavior to their primary doctor. Either way, the poster had his reason(s) for wanting to play safe and it was something that was considered essential if he was going to hook up with another man.

Ultimately, men who seek to be a part of masc 4 masc culture want to stay on top of this masculine hierarchy. It is important for these men to be seen as hetero, so they can continue to exert their authority. The more feminine one appears, the lower one is positioned on this hierarchy. On Grindr and similar apps, there is a constant need to proclaim one's masculinity (which is called macing), so "they could control how their masculinity was perceived by others" (Granath 21). This is why when masc 4 masc men are looking for masc partners, they seek other men who will assert the same level of hypermasculinity. They wish to be able to have sex with other men while keeping up a masculine facade. This may be a case of *internalized homophobia* because femininity is equated with being gay, or it has more to do with their sexual behavior than any particular identity. Whatever the reasons, if their hookup partners are also masculine, they will not become "othered" and viewed as less than heterosexuals. Being "masc 4 masc" is more than a subculture, it is a way of life for some MSM.

Chapter 3 – Brojobs and Sexual Fluidity

3.1 Meeting Jason

I met Jason on Tinder. He was in his mid-30's, bald, Southern, and had an on-again, off-again girlfriend. He wanted to be serviced. He wanted a guy to give him head because his girlfriend "wasn't into it". He told me that he *might* return the favor if he felt so inclined. He made it very clear that he would go no further than oral sex. So, after my class ended, I drove twenty minutes to his "crib" as he liked to call it. Once I got to his suburban Georgian house, I sent him a text message indicating that I had arrived. He brought me inside his vacant garage and wanted me to blow him there, but I asked if we could go to his bedroom. His house was getting renovated, so it was a bit of a mess. Once I got to his room, I noticed the clutter. He had tons of clothing on the floor and across his bed. He started to put on some rap music and I got to work. There was a definite power dynamic at play, as he was about ten years older. He was in charge, dominant, and ultimately our "play" revolved around his needs. He did jack me off while I blew him, but it was secondary to the blowjob which he was receiving. Our encounter wasn't just about his "sexual desire [and] had more [to do] with establishing dominance over men" (Ward, *Not Gay* 117). Jason established this dominant role, so that I would know my place. He was the one calling the shots. It was clear that I was not only his sub, but his bitch. If he wanted me to deepthroat him, I was expected to do what I was told. As a matter of fact, "what was paramount to [Jason's] masculinity was not what [he] did sexually, but how [he] did it" as Tony Silva suggests ("Bud-Sex" 64). As the one receiving head, he was able to maintain his straight identity. It made little difference whether a man or woman was giving Jason head; the end goal was the same (an orgasm) and he just wanted to be pleased. Jason was able to "talk about pussy [which

included his sex life with his current girlfriend and] maintain a clear emotional boundary [with me] that draws upon the model of adolescent friendship,” as we were becoming acquainted (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 421). I continued to blow him while he relaxed in comfort. Once he came, he continued to jack me off so I could also have an orgasm. After a few minutes, he gave up and the encounter was essentially over. I said goodbye and drove back home. We hooked up once or twice after that, but the ritual was always the same. I blew him. He jacked me off and sometimes I came. Jason never did go down on me: that was a boundary he would not cross. I figured that would probably never happen and was content with our few sessions. For Jason, “sex with men is simply a way for [him] to fulfill sexual desires without affecting any other part of [his life]” (Silva, “Constructing Normative Masculinity” 67). He did not want any dramatic changes in his life. He was not looking to start dating a guy or form any kind of attachment. When I went down on him, it was purely an act of short term physical satisfaction. I was simply a bro helping out another bro in a time of need.

3.2 Defining Brojobs within a Bro Culture World

A brojob can be defined as oral sex between men, especially when at least one participant does not identify as gay. For some, calling a blowjob a “brojob” makes the act less “gay”. I was just getting Jason off; he was not the one blowing me. I was the one participating in the “gay” act. Even though he was curious about giving me oral, ultimately he did not go through with it. Moreover, he would not kiss me because that was deemed “too gay” and personal. He did not want to jeopardize his role as a dom. Jason wanted to remain part of a hegemonic culture which “suggests that men must reach the ideal level of masculinity to be accepted within the community, in turn, continuing the patriarchal dominance that exists within society” (J. Jones

102). So, when Jason decided to continue our encounters, he had to abide by the standards of “bro culture” (see section 1.2.1) which included adhering to a specific masculine dominance. Bro culture emerges at young ages: from football practice to *rushing* in a fraternity. Boys are expected to be hypermasculine at all times. Being part of a bro culture isn’t mandatory for all boys, but it *is* highly encouraged. It helps “create experiences where males develop supportive bonds with each other” as assimilation starts to occur (J. Jones 102). Bro culture doesn’t just end after adolescence and academia: it is still prevalent “in the military and other male-dominated professions” such as STEM where the term *tech bros* has become part of the mainstream discourse (J. Jones 102). Even though they may be in different fields, both military men and tech bros are expected to display similar tendencies towards dominance, lack of emotional display, physical strength, and hetero exhibition. Within bro culture, brojobs can become acceptable “by allowing men to embrace masculine identities while engaging in practices that traditionally would be labeled non-heterosexual and deviant by patriarchal standards” (J. Jones 102). Jason did not want to lose his place within the heteropatriarchy. He therefore had to “display appropriate dominant attributes [so he could be] accepted within [his] communit[y]” at all times including his same-sex leisure activities (J. Jones 102).

3.3 (bi)Sexuality Record

The belief that a person must adhere to the behaviors and practices aligned with labels of specific sexual orientations is a relatively recent historical phenomenon and centered within the *Global North*. Michel Foucault explained that back in Ancient Greece for instance, “they did not recognize two kinds of ‘desire,’ two different or competing ‘drives,’” as we know bisexuality today (188). Sex and sexuality were not directly correlated. They thought, “instead what made it

possible to desire a man or a woman was simply the appetite that nature had implanted in man's heart for 'beautiful' human beings, whatever their sex might be" (Foucault 188).

Citizens were able to sleep with whoever they deemed were attractive without any stigmas. According to the Institute of Development Studies, in modern societies, "the labels [LGBT] themselves are also seen to reflect particular 'western' identities that do not speak to the diversity of the meanings attached to same-sex desiring and gender non-conforming people in other parts of the world" ("Sexuality and Social Justice: A Toolkit" 1). Even within North America, labels are still a rather new concept. And when identities did emerge, one was assumed to be either homosexual or heterosexual with nothing in between. According to sociologists Arielle Kuperberg and Alicia M. Walker, "the idea that same-sex sexual behaviors constitute an 'identity' only fully emerged in the mid-twentieth century" (Kuperberg and Walker 1389). It wasn't until 1978 when Fritz Klein's book *The Bisexual Option* helped construct bisexuality through means of sexual categorization as Ulrich Gooß explains (11). This is why "up until that point, bisexuals had largely ascribed the status of non-existence" (Gooß 11). But even when bisexuality became a valid identity, there was still a "never-ending complaint about the lack of recognition, or even the invisibility, of bisexuality and bisexuals [and this can include pansexuals today as well]" (Gooß 11). But not all non-gay MSM identify as bisexual or pansexual. Some of these men do in fact identify as heterosexual, and receiving a brojob doesn't necessarily change that.

3.4 Dude-Sex intertwined with Bro Culture

Jason is able to maintain a strong barrier between his sexual identity and a few brojob encounters. Some may say he is just "closeted" and that "same-sex practices among

heterosexuals signify sexual oppression, or a failure to be honest about who one *is*, and the sexual community or culture in which one belongs” (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 415). However, this is not always the case. Jason may in fact feel a “greater sense of belonging of cultural ‘fit’ with heterosexual identity and heteroerotic culture” than he would in queer spaces (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 415). Jason identifies more with bro culture and his hetero side. When he received a brojob from me, it was also, in part, an experiment. He was exploring his sexuality to a degree, but he was able to keep his identity as a straight man intact, especially since no one in his social circle knew about the affair. He simply saw me as a bro, and I was giving him a brojob within the constraints of our newly formed friendship (with benefits). He was not “repressed,” as his experimentation was an “attempt to *express* a ‘true self’ – or one’s strong sense of identification with heteropatriarchal white masculinity – in the context of having sex with men” (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 416). Regardless of who was going down on him, man or woman, Jason acted within the confines of the heteropatriarchal society. He wanted to have fun with another guy, but didn’t want to lose his place in society.

As a masculine-presenting, white cis-man, hegemonic masculinity has shielded me in a way. I can engage in bro culture without being an active member. Even though I was a sub in my fling with Jason, I faced no consequences after blowing him. I do not have to be a bro in order to benefit. After all, a brojob “epitomizes the attributes of [my] masculine behavior” (J. Jones 102). This can also be known as the patriarchal dividend (coined by sociologist Raewyn Connell) which has been “appropriated by men, fuelling the processes of masculine hierarchization, which mainly operates and enforces itself within the psyche of each man as a question of ontological ‘normalcy’ or ‘identity formation’” as Norwegian sociologist Øystein Gullvåg Holter states (338). I can appear hetero given my appearance and can also hide my queerness/mannerisms

when I feel like I'm in a non-*queer friendly* environment. I can easily "man up" if I need to, depending on the social setting. The fact that my social positioning has shielded me and awarded me with immense privilege is something that should not be taken lightly.

A brojob is a type of "dude-sex" (see section 1.2.1). Dude-sex can be "described as hyper-masculine ('man to man') daredevil behavior to be endured like a 'champ'" (Ward, *Not Gay* 143). Jason was able to "get the kind of sex that all straight men want from women, but can only get from men—uncomplicated, emotionless, and guaranteed" (Ward, "Dude-Sex" 421). There were no strings attached to our encounter(s). He did not have to see me afterwards. There was no romance involved, as we were just bonding with one another. I was pleasuring him and giving him a chance to unwind after working all day. Both brojobs and dude-sex can be seen as "as a kind of sex that bolsters, rather than threatens, the heterosexual masculinity of the participants. Only those who are 'man enough' and 'chill enough' will want dude-sex or be able to handle it" (Ward, "Dude-Sex" 421). And since Jason was the one who received the brojob, it was not gay on his part, nor did it threaten his masculinity in any way. I was just a dude willing to help him out and get him off, while he sat back, listened to some music, and relaxed.

In his everyday life, Jason was an "everyman" and "regular dude" and he was a "symbol [for] financial and culture power" (Ward, "Dude-Sex" 429). And receiving a brojob was not going to change his position and status in society, as long as it was kept secret. In fact, "given the ways in which systems of white racial dominance construct whiteness as natural, invisible, and non-racialized, sex between white men is likely to be experienced as deracialized and 'natural', possessing none of the 'difference' or racial fetishism expressed in cross-racial sexual encounters" (Ward, "Dude-Sex" 429). A brojob is "nothing out of the ordinary" (Ward, "Dude-Sex" 430). It is seen simply as a bonding activity between two bros. Jason is able to identify as

straight because to him there is a clear difference between romantic connections and sexual acts. His desire to receive a brojob had nothing to do with his identity. This is why “sex practices are not useful guides for delineating the boundaries of queer and non-queer, or establishing political alliances with queer stakeholders” (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 430). For some MSM, their same-sex encounters do not define their sexual orientation. The two do not always correlate as one would expect.



Figure 12: Becoming Queer (2017)

3.5 Masculinity and Queerness

The fact that I am a queer man myself is not simply a result of who I am attracted to. Being queer is a huge part of who I am outside the bedroom. For some, queer is an umbrella term for the LGBTQ+ community. However, for others it is political. I personally “want nothing to do with the status quo [as I am all for] opposition to normative sexuality and society,” (Kemp 8). There are political and social issues that I do care deeply about, but like Jason, there is a

difference between my identity and my sexual experiences. I can be a bro, a dude, or one of the guys. I am attracted to these bro-y, masculine, straight-acting men. I choose to assimilate myself within this bro culture so I can get laid. I am more than a willing participant. There is a reason why “identities are formed [including my own] in response to the cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny” according to performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz (5). I can conform easily, especially when my needs are met. I do not have to worry about being discriminated against while I am on Grindr or Tinder. As long as I keep my masculine appearance intact, I will attract other men who are interested in me for staying within the confines of the heteropatriarchy. These white MSM want to stay within this heteropatriarchy as well, so they will sleep only with other masculine, hetero presenting, macho white men. And yes, this can include me.

3.6 Discrimination on Hookup Apps

On the other hand, Black MSM and their bodies are often fetishized and seen as “exotic, muscular, hypersexual, and violent” according to communications scholar Ronald L Jackson (75). Like Black MSM, Asian MSM are also othered, “simultaneously desired for [their] mysterious exotic and erotic features” as Matthew Conte notes (38). BIPOC MSM may have a harder time fitting into the world of bro culture because they do not fit within the same niche as white MSM. And if they are not being fetishized, some BIPOC MSM are being openly discriminated against. There’s MSM who have openly state their racial preferences (no Blacks, no Asians) on their Grindr profiles (Hutson et al. 73:2). In a 2015 study which was conducted by Chong-suk Han, Ayala, Paul, Boylan, Gregorich, and Choi, “found that 84% of gay and bisexual men from minority racial backgrounds had experienced racism within gay communities, and

65% of those respondents reported resultant stress” (qtd. in Hutson et al. 73:5). This, in turn, can lead BIPOC MSM to “view themselves as less attractive or desirable” (qtd. in Hutson et al. 73:5).

Feminine men are also often looked down upon within the MSM community. In actuality, “queer femininities are often construed as artificial, inauthentic, and stereotypical – a particularly relevant point for gay men who are denigrated for being a gay ‘stereotype’ by performing male femininity” according to queer scholars Adam Davies, Karen Blair, Rhea Hoskin, and Ulrika Dahl (3). There is a push within MSM to alienate feminine men regardless of their sexuality. And femininity isn’t just something that is purely physical. Some MSM “refused to be shamed and boxed into norms through their celebration of camp and parody – traits traditionally associated with gay femininities – despite their ‘bear’ esthetics (e.g. body hair, expansive beards, leather attire)” (Davies 4). Being a bro is more than just appearing to be masculine. It is more important that one *act* like a bro. This is vital on hookup apps such as Grindr where one will be excluded for being too feminine or not muscular enough. There’s an overarching theme of homogeneity among MSM, as being masculine, buff, and hetero presenting to which other MSM are supposed to adhere. MSM have rejected me for being too stocky, too hairy, and too short. So even though there isn’t much I can do to change my appearance, I can appear to *act* like a bro. Sometimes if I act like I am ingrained into this bro culture, hooking up with another bro becomes easier as I am an *insider*. This is why “in society, males must display appropriate dominant attributes to be accepted within their communities. Because of this, hegemonic masculinity plays a tremendous role in the ways that men exert their own power over others who are perceived to be weaker,” and anything that is deemed feminine is equated to

being weaker. In order to be a part of this “bro culture” one must “display antithetical effeminate behavior” (J. Jones 102).

3.7 Perceptions of Brojobs

For a lot of MSM, brojobs can be part of their sexual awakening, or something they do for fun on the side. Everyone has different experiences though, and since the term “brojob” is socially constructed, what constitutes a brojob can vary among individuals and is usually fluid. My definition may not be the same as other MSM as it is a fairly new term. In my case study, 31 participants (out of a total of 40) were familiar with the term “brojob”. TJ was a fifty-year-old man from suburban Metro Atlanta. He defined a brojob as “two guys that swap head and are private about it ... but can still be cool when in public” (TJ 2021). According to him, there was a clear difference between a brojob and a hook-up. He said that “bro implies friend,” so the two men must be friends and not strangers (TJ 2021). A hook-up is more casual than a brojob. He said a brojob happens once you have met said person “more than three times” (TJ 2021). Mr. Ser Vay, a forty-five-year-old from rural Alabama had similar ideas. He believed that your brojob counterpart should be “somebody you got along with, even if it was for five minutes” (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). He continued and said this could be “anybody that you meet that you get along with that is like a potential friend or somebody you could watch a ball game with” (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). For Mr. Ser Vay at least, this usually didn’t include guys he would meet on Reddit. A brojob is more than a “booty call”. (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). However, for him, a brojob could still occur within the first interaction as long as this individual could become a “potential friend” or just someone he could share a beer with (Mr. Ser Vay 2021).

Not everyone has standards as rigid as TJ, though. Amir, a forty-one-year-old from suburban Metro Atlanta, was not as familiar with the term. He had “never used it [and] just seen it online,” (Amir 2021). He viewed it as, “a casual meeting for oral sex between two guys” (Amir 2021). And Luke, a twenty-one-year-old who used to live in Atlanta, had a similar definition. When asked what a brojob entails, he said that it’s when “a guy that sucks me off NSA, no talking straight to the point and leaves” (Luke 2021). So, for him, a brojob usually lacks intimacy. He wants a guy to get him off just like Jason. And even though he did say it’s more fun to play with friends, it wasn’t his initial reaction when asked to define a brojob. Other interviewees such as Hank, who is a thirty-four-year-old and also from Atlanta, had a more straightforward answer to my question. Hank suggests that a “brojob is oral sex with a dude and that’s it. Mainly hedonistic” (Hank 2022). Like a lot of these men in my case study, Hank did not use the term in his daily life, but he recognized the term (Hank 2022).

Learning about brojobs is easily accessible online. It was even popular on the social media platform, *Yik Yak*. In fact, “a number of anonymous postings read, ‘My girlfriend is out of town, and I need head. Anyone want to give a brojob?’ [or] ‘Frat boy needs brojob, who can help out’” according to Joseph R Jones’ research (101). Like so many of the men in my study, a brojob has been seen as an easy fix. When a bro is horny, he can find another bro for assistance. Joey found the term while he was “searching for porn” and he thought “it allowed a genre of MSM guys an acceptable window into getting head or giving head without fear of the [gay] label,” but he also does not use the term himself. (Joey 2021). According to a 2016 study conducted by the Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney and the Heterosexual HIV Service and the New South Wales Ministry of Health, instead of just being pigeonholed and marked gay, a lot of these men are just “sexually curious who want to experiment and try

something different or who are seeking sexual experiences and practices that might not be acceptable in their heterosexual relationships” (Persson, Newman, Manolas, Holt, Callander, Gordon, and de Wit 702). For a lot of these MSM, brojobs are merely a part of experimentation, becoming aware of their likes and dislikes sexually. For others, it did help them discover their sexuality. Even though each MSM has experienced a brojob in my study, they all experienced the act differently from one another, including how and when they got their very first brojob.

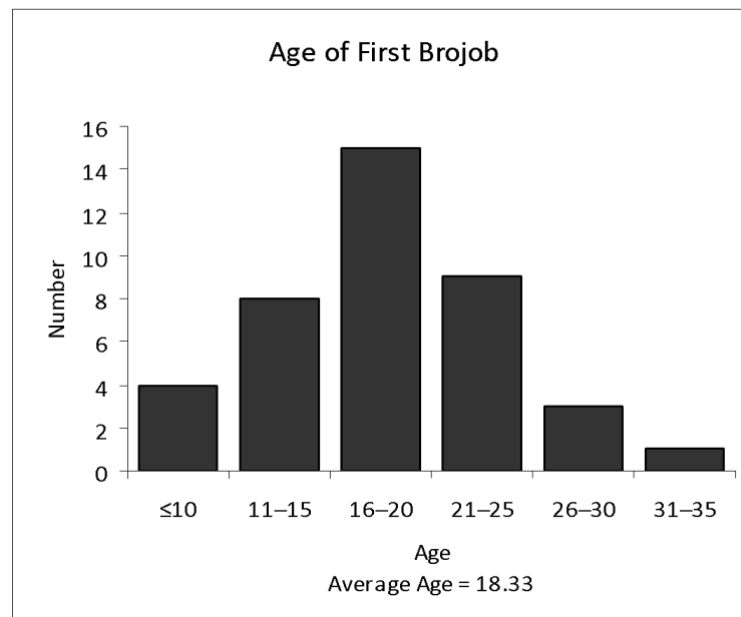


Figure 13: Age of First Brojob

3.8 First Time Brojob Encounters

In the survey portion of the case study, participants were asked at what age they first had a brojob or same-sex experience. The average was 18.33, which is the typical age of a college freshman. According to sociologists Arielle Kuperberg and Alicia M. Walker there was “one study of college students [that] found 19% of men who identified as heterosexual reported same-sex attraction” (1387). College is usually the time to experiment sexually without having the

need to establish one particular identity. Identity is still in development at such a young age, thus “research found that the gender of individual’s sexual interest can shift over their lifespan or in certain contexts” (Kuperberg and Walker 1389). Despite heteronormative expectations, sexuality is fluid and not rigidly defined, and it may fluctuate throughout both adolescence and adulthood.

In the late 1980’s, Mr. Ser Vay started experimenting when he was 12 years old. It was with his best friend at the time. He explained, “it happened all within a weekend. I didn’t know anything. I didn’t know what was happening...But you know, I had the experience and things got started,” and their foreplay continued throughout their teenage years (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). This included his first brojob which happened later that same year. I asked him if he considered him his boyfriend, and he said “we were practically brothers [who] shared virtually every experience. We were together all the time” (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). They had this brotherly bond even though they were sexually active together. He clarified it was not romantic in any way. The two were just exploring each other’s bodies (Mr. Ser Vay 2021).

Like Mr. Ser Vay, Kyle gave and received his first brojob with his best friend. However, Kyle was in his mid 20’s when this occurred just last year. He was bi-curious prior to the event having “watched gay/bi porn [and he also] looked at guys for their looks” (Kyle 2021). Kyle explained that the encounter was “kind of prearranged” and it happened because his friend “started opening up to me about [his] sex life [with his girlfriend] and he inadvertently let something slip, and I of course pried. We had already a pretty no boundaries friendship and we brought up jerking off together, it just sorta happened” (Kyle 2021). His friend stopped in his college town and Kyle explained that they “just sorta did it [and] I received head first since I had the longer *dry spell*” (Kyle 2021). He explained that this brojob experience essentially confirmed that he “wasn’t 100% straight” as he would later realize that he was bisexual (Kyle 2021).

3.9 What is the ideal brojob?

Kyle then “started going on dates” and was able to have his “first hook up with another bi guy” which helped him explore his sexuality further (Kyle 2021). He received more brojobs and thought “guys seem to know what they’re doing and each guy who has blown me seemed more capable of doing different things while women just sorta did the same thing over and over” (Kyle 2021). According to him, his ideal brojob would be the following:

He comes over and we chat for a bit to just be comfortable. While I am [on] top, he would start kissing me as we move toward my bedroom. We would explore each other’s bodies as we strip. At some point, I would want him to get on his knees and finish pulling off my shorts and begin giving me head, working my cock slowly and taking all of me in. He would pay attention to my balls and as he sucked, he would look right into my eyes (eye contact drives me crazy). After a bit, it’d be my turn and I do everything to him that he did to me and even finger him too. After a bit, we’d move to the bed and start 69ing and knowing when just to stop to edge each other. It would end with him worshiping my cock as I hold his head and thrust into his face while he looks at me when I’d bust. I would then return the favor (Kyle 2021).

For Kyle, a brojob is something that is mutually beneficial. Even though he may be a tad more dominant, he wanted to make sure his partner was also satisfied which included pleasing him. This can be seen when he explains that he would want to “69” and “return the favor” meaning he would also give a brojob as well. Moreover, Kyle just doesn’t want to get into the act without conversation. For him, a brojob is more personal, something done once one gets to know one’s partner. For other MSM, their ideal brojob may be more casual. Kissing, for instance, would be way too intimate for a lot of MSM.

Not every guy wants to return the favor, however. This is the case with Luke who wants to be the alpha: the one in charge. Since he is “attached,” he doesn’t want anything other than a NSA hook up (Luke 2021). He wants a man who is willing “to be face fucked, choked, slapped, and swallows” (Luke 2021). He explains that he “usually lets guys come over or we do it in my car. I have a truck, so there’s a lot of space. I pick them up, we get straight to it and say bye” (Luke 2021). He uses his dominance and “same-sex sexual behaviour as a way to release urges, act on cravings, or needs for sex” (Silva, “Helpin’ a Buddy Out” 85). Even though Luke identifies as bisexual, he must “pass as heterosexual” in his everyday life by keeping his “same-sex sexual activity a secret” (Silva, “Helpin’ a Buddy Out” 85).

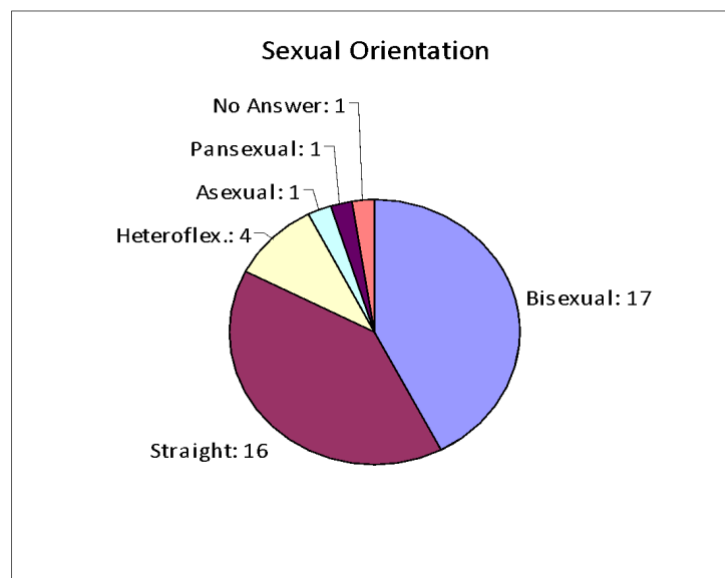


Figure 14: Participants’ Sexual Orientation

In my survey, the vast majority of participants were either straight or bisexual (although I did not look at gay men). In actuality, “sexual orientation exists on a spectrum, rather than in categories” (Silva, “Helpin’ a Buddy Out” 69). And according to psychologists Ritch Savin-Williams and Zhana Vrangalova’s 2013 review which centered on “mostly heterosexual as a distinct sexual orientation group”, “about 3.6–4.1% of men are ‘mostly straight’, in that they fall

between bisexuals and heterosexuals on many measures of sexual orientation,” so it needs to be understood that the “complexity of sexual orientation indicates that sexual identities are not comprehensive enough to account for sexual diversity, explaining in part why some men with a degree of same-sex sexuality identify as straight” as sexuality is not something that is innate or fixed (Silva, “Helpin’ a Buddy Out” 69). Today, there is a common perception that one is born gay. In reality “it was a matter of seeing how an ‘experience’ came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a ‘sexuality,’” (Foucault 4). Being hetero became the norm. This then “found support in religious, judicial, pedagogical, and medical institutions” which helped back up this fallacy (Foucault 3-4). The notion of sexual categories such as homosexuality and bisexuality “were produced through the creation and application of medical labels” according to Chloë Taylor (237). These are modern ways of thinking.



Figure 15: Bi Pride (2019)

3.10 Disidentification

The concept of sexual orientation, including labels, is now engrained within the Global North. Heterosexuality is assumed as the “normal” sexual orientation and only those who are not hetero are expected to “come out” at a certain age. Despite this expectation, many people resist such labeling. José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of *disidentification* can be used to think about this because it helps us to go against the primary belief system. Something that at first glance may not be designed to fit, but it can be amended. According to Muñoz, “one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11). So, for instance, I am attracted to people (men, women, and nonbinary folks) regardless of their gender identity. Thus, some people may refer to this as pansexuality. However, I do *not* identify as pansexual. I have self-identified as being bisexual since I was thirteen years old. Since I have a strong physical attraction to men and a more heteroromantic connection with women, the bisexual label has always made the most sense for me. Being bisexual is a more mainstream sexual category as “pansexual people may face exhaustion from having to explain their identity to others, and thus may avoid doing so,” which is why identifying as bisexual may be easier, according to Corey E. Flanders, LeBreton, M. Robinson, Bian, and Caravaca-Morera (51). Pansexual individuals also “are generally grouped under the bisexual umbrella but have been found to report different experiences of stigma within queer community than those reported by bisexual people,” as their lived experiences can differ significantly (Flanders et al. 40). In my survey, seventeen MSM identified as bisexual and only one MSM identified as pansexual. Bisexuality has definitely become the default for lot of MSM even though there are many sexual identities other than hetero and gay, such as pansexuality and omnisexuality (Flanders et al. 40).

It should be noted that disidentification is not always a conscious decision. For instance, some men who were “straight-identified engaged in sex with men furtively, and were perceived as being in denial about their bisexual or gay orientation, making them ‘hard to reach’ with HIV prevention messages” according to Preeti Pathela, Hajat, Schillinger, Blank, Sell, and Mostashari (qtd. in Carrillo and Hoffman, “From MSM to Heteroflexibilities” 923-924). HIV risk was often ignored by MSM, not by any real or objective risk, but rather because of the thought, “that doesn’t apply to me – I’m not gay”. Perhaps, for some there was a subconscious knowing that this was untrue, but there’s a level of denial and stigmatization at play. There was often an inability to even consider that one might be part of this group, even if one’s physical actions prove otherwise.

3.11 Sexuality as a Spectrum

There were fifteen respondents who identified as straight, despite their same-sex experiences. Hank is one of them. When asked why he was straight and not bisexual or heteroflexible, he said, “Hmm, I dunno. I’m like 95% but 5% adventurous,” and he later would explain that he had only slept with men “like 3 times probably. Maybe 5” (Hank 2022). He was primarily attracted to women and had just a few experiences in which he was “horny and went on Craigslist” (Hank 2021). He liked being “wanted [and] an object of desire” (Hank 2022). Colin, a thirty-nine-year-old straight man from North Carolina, noted that he was “romantically attracted to women and only somewhat sexually attracted to male sex organs but not the rest of the man” (Colin 2021). To him, hooking up with men is more like a “fetish” or “forbidden fruit [because] it feels good and naughty letting a guy do it” (Colin 2021). And for Mr. Ser Vay, he viewed his sexual identity a bit more complex. He noted that, “because of my lack of experience.

I'm a complicated thing," as he had never gone beyond a brojob (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). But he still self-identified as bisexual. He could not be open about his sexuality though, owing to the fact that he lived in a small rural conservative Alabama town (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). He explained that, "For me identity is really as much self-identity is also reflected in where I live, it always has. Like if I moved to Atlanta today, then I would be more of a much more open person," (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). And he also insinuated that if he were younger, he would be more inclined to be open about his sexual identity. For him, his age and location were the biggest factors in why he was not open about being bi.

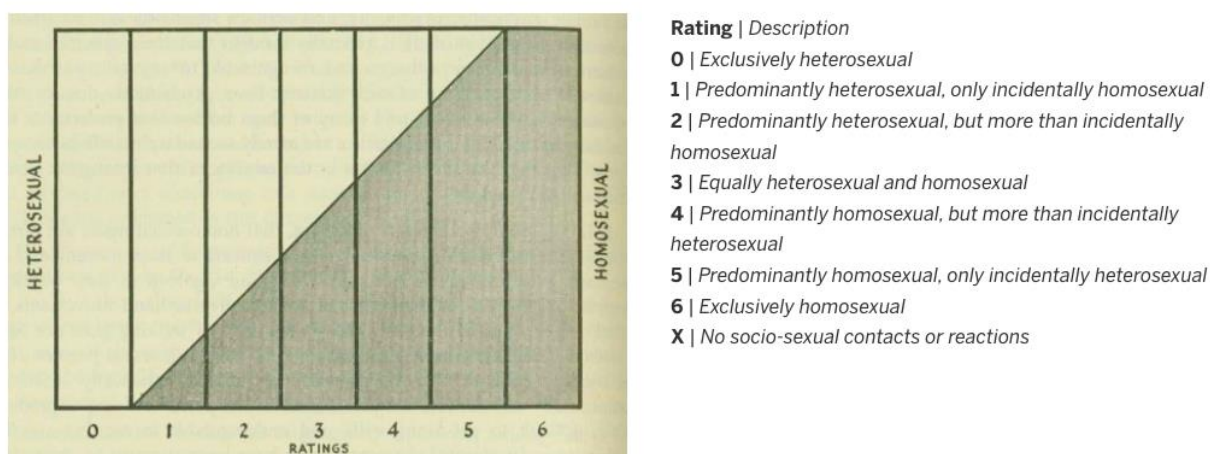


Figure 16: The Kinsey Scale

3.12 The Kinsey Scale

Biologist and sexologist Alfred Kinsey created the scale which bears his name, a "(heterosexuality–homosexuality) scale, first published in 1948, [which today] has become a method for Internet users to mark and to discuss their sexuality with others in forums and through quizzes" as historian Donna Drucker notes (241). As an adolescent and even a college student, I was able to use this scale to help determine my own sexuality. It helped "create my

own numerical place on the scale [which helped] articulat[e] the fluidity of sexual identification that Kinsey intended” (Drucker 242). I took *Kinsey Scale* quizzes online with friends so we could compare where each of us matched. If I recall, I was somewhere between a 3–4 on the scale. I have been interested in the Kinsey Scale ever since then.

I wanted to ask my participants where they fell on the scale. Their answers differed. TJ said that he was a 3; however, he explained that “sex is sex and it’s the connection in the bedroom and out of the bedroom for me” (TJ 2021). Kyle said he was a 1 before his first same-sex experience, but today he would be “ a 3–4 depending on the day” (Kyle 2021). Joey and Luke would also say they were a 4 (Joey and Luke 2021). Mr. Ser Vay thought he “would be a strong 5” and made a point to explain that, “If I’m just being honest with myself, It has nothing to do with friends, family or anything or where I am, I would say a 5” (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). Some of the men had an easier time placing themselves on the scale than others.

Although the Kinsey Scale may be viewed as a way to help explain the fluidity of sexuality, it can also be problematic. Instead of choosing an appropriate label for sexual orientation, one must choose a number/rating, collapsing what may be a complex part of one’s identity to a point on a one dimensional scale. This, in turn, pigeonholes one into a box and category just like traditional (bi/pan/gay) labels. Some of my participants had trouble picking a rating. Amir said he was “maybe a 3,” but he sounded unsure of himself (Amir 2021). Similarly, he said he was heteroflexible because it “just sounded a bit better.” He continued that, “I don’t think of guys like myself I guess when I think of those terms. I used to think of myself as orally bi, but I don’t know how to properly label it” (Amir 2021). So just as Amir had trouble labeling himself a specific sexual identity, the Kinsey Scale wasn’t very helpful either.

3.13 Sex with men, but no LGBTQ+ label

More MSM are avoiding labels such as “bisexual” or “gay” in their everyday lives, so they do not situate themselves within the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, “it has become commonplace and even clichéd for young urban (white) gays to claim that they do not like ‘labels’ and they do not want to be ‘pigeon holed’ by identity categories” according to queer theorist Jack Halberstam (*In a Queer Time and Place* 19). Not identifying as queer helps them situate themselves at a higher position in power structures. Colin has had sex with other men while *not* identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community. He said, “I do support the community and participate in [Pride] parades, rallies, and vote on issues on their behalf so I thought that made me an ally, not a real member” (Colin 2021). So, for Colin, there was a clear difference between his own sexual acts and identity. Receiving a brojob from another man did not change his sexuality. He even told me, “if there wasn’t a stigma, I would present as bisexual” (Colin 2021). Like Colin, Joey does not feel like he is a member of the LGBTQ+ community. He explains, “I’ve had more gay friends discredit bi [men] and honestly if the community continues to add options and letters, they are going to alienate themselves and no one will feel they have a place” (Joey 2021). Not being able to find a place within the LGBTQ+ community, a place where these MSM have a voice, can cause them to disassociate from the group altogether. They can still use their straight identity while maintaining social dominance even when they are having sex with other men (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 429). If men like Colin and Joey were to come out as bi/pan, they might no longer maintain the same amount of social dominance as before. This is especially true in smaller communities in the Southeast, where one’s reputation [as hetero] is highly important, and coming out may not be worth the risk to one’s social standing.

3.14 Internalized homophobia

For some of these MSM, internalized homophobia affected how they viewed their sexuality. Even though Joey was 45, he said that it wasn't "really until about five years ago did I accept I'm bisexual. Before it was something I fought and lost every month. I had a once or twice a month habit on dick" (Joey 2021). He explained that "being judged and the shame of what I did that no one knew about really limited my potential. I've suffered anxiety and low self-esteem and self-worth for sure," and I was able to empathize with Joey (Joey 2021). Having grown up in the Southeast in the mid-2000's, I was tormented by my presumed (gay) sexuality. I would hook up with random older men via Craigslist, so I could feel valued. I wanted someone to tell me that I was hot, that I was attractive. Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz asserts that sexuality is as often "an expression of who one is and what one enjoys doing, of one's being [as] it is an expression of freedom," and choosing to hook up with these men was an act of defiance in itself (Grosz 73). I did not want to "constrain [myself] to options already laid out" by southern society, which encouraged waiting until marriage to have sex, and pretending to be hetero (Grosz 73). As I was unwilling to constrain myself, my queerness became a form of self-formation or active existence so to speak (Grosz 73). This also led to shame, as feminist theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains "shame can be seen as good because it preserves privacy and decency, bad because it colludes with self-repression or social repression" (64). My same-sex experiences separated me from my straight peers, as I experienced something they did not (Sedgwick 63). However, they recognized my shame and used this to question me even further which, in turn, isolated me more. This urge to publicly come out was something I was not ready to deal with, especially when I was a teenager. It did not matter that I was bisexual because "while straight men are 'walking dildos,' gay men are simply 'faggots' and embody all the worst traits of

patriarchy because they are men who love men and have no use for women,” and being a bisexual man was thought of in the same way as being gay: both were deemed faggots regardless of whether or not I actually liked women (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 109).

3.15 Bi erasure

Over the years, even when I have come out to my friends, this has remained true. As a teenager, there were several times when I had to convince even my best friend Christa that I was bisexual. She often wondered how I could sleep with so many men, but still be attracted to women. Communications scholar Jessica Lingel explains that while “a sexual binary is still enforced, however, there is a parallel insistence that the only options are gay or straight love,” and because I had only been with men up to this point in my life, Christa had assumed I was *choosing* men, when in reality, I had never had the opportunity to be with a girl sexually just yet (Lingel 383). I did not need to have sex with women to “prove” my bisexuality. Mickey Eliason reports that historically “people who identify as bisexual have historically not been very visible in society,” especially in the South (Eliason 140). I’ve never known many bisexual men nor had any bi role models growing up. As an adolescent, the amount of bi erasure I have experienced has greatly impacted my state of being. But as a twenty-eight-year-old man, I’ve started to care less about how other people view me and more about how I view myself. A hookup is not going to change my bi identity.

If a bro wants to receive a brojob from another man, it does not necessarily mean that he is fluid, or part of the LGBTQ+ community either. Experimentation is a part of life. Some of the men in my survey didn’t fool around with other men until they were in their 30’s or 40’s. Sexuality is not fixed and can change over time. Having been recently married, Amir hadn’t

hooked up with a guy in several years (Amir 2021). This does not mean he doesn't browse on the web for MSM content. One also doesn't have to be "on the prowl" all the time. For Kyle, when he first started experimenting with men, he would "swing hard for guys" and thought he could be gay and not bi. (Kyle 2022). However, Kyle explains "as time passed, I sorta just live in the middle. I definitely feel more attracted to guys on an average day, but I also feel like there are more guys who exist that are my type, while women I seem to have more specific things I am attracted to" (Kyle 2022). Like Kyle, there are times where I am more attracted to men and other times when I am in the mood for a woman. Sexuality isn't static; it can change from month to month or from year to year. This is also why one should be mindful when labeling MSM because it just doesn't work for everyone. We should instead encourage sexual fluidity, without needing to mark oneself as anything in particular.

Chapter 4 – Down low/Discreet Men

4.1 Meeting Reggie

In the summer of 2021, I met Reggie through Grindr. He was Black and in his early thirties, at least 6'2, built like a football player, and he had a girlfriend. He lived inside the Perimeter and drove to residential Lawrenceville for some play. Lawrenceville is a suburb about a forty-five minute drive from his home: far enough that he wouldn't run into anyone he knew. Reggie was on the down low and had only been with a man once or twice before. His friends and family did not know about his side activities. He was somewhat apprehensive about meeting me, but I assured him that our encounter would stay between us. I had no intention of telling anyone; I just wanted to get laid.

4.2 Defining DL

I define “down low” (DL) as MSM who are typically married or have a girlfriend, while hooking up with men in secret. These men typically present as both hetero and hypermasculine. The DL is typically “a complex depiction of masculinity intertwined with secretive same-sex sexual behavior” (Robinson and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz 224). Chong-suk Han, Rutledge, Bond, and Lauby explain that “down low men may be a way for black men to identify with their homosexual behavior but not with a ‘gay’ identity that is largely perceived to be white” (91). Black men are more likely to call themselves “down low” because it is a “way of creating and claiming a new sexual-identification rather than a way of hiding one’s sexual orientation” (Han et al. 91). Since there is substantial stigmatization around homosexuality in the Black

community, “it is possible that men self-identify as being down low in order to reject the label ‘gay’ [or even bisexual] rather than hide their sexual orientation” (Han et al. 91). In fact, the “down low” originated as a term primarily for Black men. The DL has “allowed black men to have privacy over their sexual behaviors which they viewed as being of no concern to others, and an attempt to conform to masculine norms” (Han et al. 92). In contrast to being openly gay or bi, the DL helps to ensure one’s position within the heteropatriarchy is secure. Reggie was able to maintain his straight identity as he was just having some “fun” on the side. He could “lead an outwardly heterosexual lifestyle (also termed non-gay identified MSM by Martinez & Hosek)” as Maria Knight Lapinski, Braz, and Maloney explain (613). There was a distinct difference between public image and private play. It was likely that sex with me was a “last resort” for Reggie (Silva, “Helpin’ a Buddy Out 84). He claimed he wanted to experiment since his girlfriend did not give him head, so he thought his needs could be met with men, specifically me. In fact, “those who conform to normative expectations are accepted or rewarded by society and those who deviate from the norm are punished,” thus it was crucial that no one find out about his same-sex activity, as it would not be accepted within his circle (Lapinski et al. 611). His power and authority would be immediately diminished if he were outed.

4.3 Getting Fucked

Reggie had received brojobs before, but had never gone further than that with men. Once he entered my parent’s house rather quickly, he exchanged no pleasantries. He kept his non-surgical mask on as he went up the stairs and straight to my bedroom, which featured a horse themed decor that had not been changed since I was ten-years-old. Reggie may have noticed this, but it didn’t seem to bother him in the slightest. He slowly got on my queen size bed as I took his

sweatpants off. He had to have been at least eight inches; *cut*. There was an awkward silence as I began to go down on him. He started to moan as I blew him. He became more comfortable when he started to rest his hands on the top of my head. We both then decided that we wanted to fuck. Reggie had fucked a girl in the ass only once prior to this, but never a dude. He was a self-identified top though due to his “penis size [as] men reporting above average penises were more likely to identify as tops, and this was largely responsible for formal deviations from their ideal preferred sexual position” as David Moskowitz & Roloff note (qtd. in Pereira 59). Furthermore, according to Steven Underwood, “self and partner-penis sizes, specifically the concerns about penis size during intercourse, have been expressed as influential over how one self-labels,” and this held true in our experience (qtd. in Moskowitz and Roloff 275). His hung dick overpowered mine which helped him assert his dominance as a top even further.

I then put a Trojan Magnum condom on his cock. Unfortunately, neither of us had lube, so we had to use some lotion that I had laying around. He was ill-prepared. He didn’t know what he was doing as it was his first time going all the way with a guy. He tried to shove his dick up my ass. He was quick to show his dominance over me. I had to tell him to slow down as I needed to get accustomed to the size. He then fucked me, missionary style, for approximately two to three minutes as I looked up at my childhood trophies. As a top, he became the more domineering sexual partner, while I became the more subservient and passive counterpart. Due to our height difference (I am only 5’6), we had to switch to doggie. Reggie finally was able to hit my prostate, but before I knew it, he busted a nut. He quickly left through my garage and drove off at once. I never heard from him again. My house became a place that “allow[ed]” Reggie the opportunity for “experimentation: ‘doing’ without necessarily ‘being’ in an anonymous setting” as Ross et al. illuminates (70). It was private and secluded enough that

Reggie didn't have to worry about anyone ever finding out. After he got his "fix", he deleted his Grindr account after our casual encounter. This was a common practice among DL/discreet men. We hooked up once (twice if I was lucky) and then we went our separate ways. It was pretty likely that Reggie was just "looking for someone in the here-and-now" as he didn't have any other motives (VanderStouwe 131). I never expected more than this given the situation of MSM like Reggie. Our lives would only intersect for a brief period of time.

4.4 Black men and the DL

The term "down low" has historically been associated with Black men. It has "focused on black men (gay or not), by turning black women into the victims of a DL sexual identity 'struggle'" (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 224). There are negative connotations of homosexuality within their community. This is in part due to black queerness being perceived as weak, powerless, and appetitive. Black men are pressured to appear to be hypermasculine at all times (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 227).

Reggie is not open about his same-sex experiences due to the negative stereotypes of DL men. There is a "template of the DL type: a black man who has sex with men, who lies to his wife/girlfriend, putting them at risk for transmitted diseases" according to Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr. (*Sexual Discretion* 27). Black DL men are seen as traitors to their community as they are thought to transmit "disease and pathology" to black women (McCune, *Sexual Discretion* 27). They become othered, demonized, and "dysfunctional—substantiating the urgency, of a moral and health crisis" (McCune, *Sexual Discretion* 27). These DL men are perceived as perpetrators who "exposed black women to the risks of HIV/AIDS infection" as media scholar Shaka McGlotten highlights (590). Ultimately they are blamed for the "major vector of HIV/AIDS contagion

within the black community” (McCune, *Sexual Discretion* 28). Black DL men have been “constituted as a threat” to everyone around them (McGlotten 591).

Even outside the USA, Black men were seen as the perpetrators of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Folklorist Diane Goldstein recounts a 1991 Newfoundland urban legend that painted a white Newfoundlander girl as “pure, respectable, and proper”. She decided to visit Florida for a vacation (Goldstein 106). While in Florida, she fell in love with the “man of her dreams [and] during their last night they slept together” (Goldstein 101). She received a “small gift-wrapped box [from her admirer in which he] told her not to open it until she got home” (Goldstein 101). The Newfoundlander was too ecstatic, so she “decided to open the gift on the plane” (Goldstein 101). The gift turned out to be a “small coffin with a piece of paper saying ‘Welcome To The World of AIDS’” (Goldstein 101). And in these fictitious stories, Black Americans were often the ones who gave HIV to the Newfoundlanders (Goldstein 106). This type of story was frequently “told by mothers or friends as a warning when they were about to travel,” as a precautionary tale (Goldstein 106). Black men became the warning, the menace even from afar.

Black men have been disparaged long before the 1980’s and 1990’s though. From 1932–1972, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study took place in which “hundreds of African American men, 439 with late stage syphilis and 185 controls without the disease were watched, but not supposed to be treated” according to historian Susan M. Reverby (2). These Black men were left to fend for themselves in what is “seemingly [a] never-ending story of the denial of care: lack of insurance, deliberate cutoff of benefits, or some opposition to a particular kind of prevention” (Reverby 5). Black people have frequently been denied adequate health care, both in the past and the present. According to the Georgia STD Epidemiology 2012 STD Annual Report, “there are approximately 60,000 new STI diagnoses in the state each year with approximately half

occurring in Atlanta, and the majority of syphilis diagnoses are among African American men” (Sullivan et al., “Understanding Racial” 2). Black men are still acquiring syphilis at a much higher rate than other racial groups today as they continue to be overlooked.

So among Black men, MSM are marginalized. The blame often gets placed on MSM for spreading diseases. This may be an important factor in their decision to be on the DL. Discovery of their practices could reflect poorly not just on the individual but their entire family, which explains why they consider it vital that sexual encounters be kept under wraps (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 227). There is no need for DL men to “come out” when they are satisfied with being able to appear hetero (whether they are or not) while sleeping with men on the side. It is common for Black DL men to be “constructed as ‘dreadful bisexuals,’ they are simply reduced to dangerous ‘men who have sex with other men’” (McCune, *Sexual Discretion* 37). If a Black man identifies as bisexual, he may choose *not* to come out due to the negative connotations that are associated with the label. There is the potential for backlash within the Black community if Black MSM are seen to adhere to *any* non-hetero identity. Thus, “African-American MSM may experience a great deal of alienation, and to avoid such treatment they may choose to conceal or minimize their same-sex sexual behavior” as Reginald D. Tucker-Seeley, Blow, Matsuo, and Taylor-Moore highlights (254-255). A participant in Julius Maurice Johnson’s 1982 study one said, “I can pretend not to be gay, but I will always be very black” and this still holds true (Tucker-Seeley 24).

4.5 The Black Church

A lot of the homophobia and biphobia has roots in the Black Church, a prominent influence for a lot of African Americans. From 1929 onwards, pastors such as Rev. Adam

Clayton Powell, Sr. deemed homosexuality a social threat to American society, according to sociologist Angelique C. Harris (262). Even during the civil rights movement, leaders like such as MLK Jr. advisor Bayard Rustin were blackmailed, had their sexuality weaponized against them, and were forced to resign (A. Harris 262). Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins and theologian Kelly Brown Douglas both “agree that the discomfort with homosexuality among black church leaders stems in large part from their discomfort with human sexuality in general” and there were few texts on homosexuality as a lot of the material in the Black Church was censored (A. Harris 265).

Sexuality is still a controversial issue within the Black Church today. As of 2008 “all seven of the historically African American Protestant denominations⁸ still view homosexuality as an ‘an abomination’ and do not see it as an acceptable ‘lifestyle’” (A. Harris 263). There are reasons for this: “negative perceptions and beliefs about the African American body, or Africans’ sexuality in general, helped fuel the conservative stance of many black churches and communities towards what they considered sexual ‘depravity’” (A. Harris 265). Homophobia in the Black Church may stem in part from “hands of whites surrounding issues of sexuality [as] whites’ negative perceptions about African American sexuality also affected the ways African Americans saw themselves” (A. Harris 265). Being bi or gay is a white problem whose “sexual perversion spilled over into the African American community,” and is therefore looked down upon (A. Harris 266). According to philosopher Michel Foucault, “all forms of sexual oppression

⁸ African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church
 African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church
 Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church
 National Baptist Convention, USA Incorporated (NBC),
 National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA),
 Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC)
 Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (Harris 255)

are based in power struggles, oppressing the body and sexuality of another individual, control is enacted over her or him,” and for centuries white folks had that control over Black Americans (A. Harris 265). Therefore “the black middle class, especially church members, attempted to regain control over the black body and sexuality by emphasizing decency and ‘responsibility’” (A. Harris 266).

4.6 Respectability Politics

Respectability politics has disproportionately impacted communities of color including Black neighborhoods across the USA. In August 2011, Philadelphia, which like Atlanta has a large Black population, had “a violent flash mob, which numbered several hundred black youths, that destroyed property and physically assaulted innocent bystanders in the city’s business and commercial center” as political scientist Fredrick C. Harris noted (35). Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter, demonized the Black youth in a speech by stating that they, “made shame of our race [and that they needed to] take those doggone hoodies down and buy a belt” (F. Harris 35). He even “declar[ed] a curfew for teens. He also promised to criminalize parents whose children break the law” (F. Harris 35). During the speech members started to “chant” in agreement with Mayor Nutter, “Buy a belt! Buy a belt!” which further put him in a positive light within the community (F. Harris 35). Black Americans had to act a certain way. There was pressure for them to uphold “family values” even from actor and comedian, Bill Cosby. Cosby “excoriate[ed] young black men to pull up their sagging pants” which is who Mayor Nutter was trying to emulate during his 2011 speech as sociologist Herman Gray acknowledges (197). Cosby thought Black Americans needed to “cleanse their culture, embrace personal responsibility, and reclaim the traditions that fortified them in the past” and he wanted to focus on building “strong families

and communities” according to Ta-Nehisi Coates (15). Cosby may have helped put these values at play, but “even” President Barack Obama agreed with his dress code sentiment “on occasion” (Gray 193). Therefore, respectability politics became the norm in the Black community, which helped take “moral form in the stance of some black churches and congregations that enforce the boundaries of hetero-normative sexualities, gender, and heterosexual marriage by refusing to recognize and condone black lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) members” (Gray 193). Anything that wasn’t up to code of the Black Church would be considered deviant, and MSM would certainly fall under this umbrella.

4.7 Participants and Culture Upbringings

Among the participants in my study, Amir grew up Episcopalian and the churches his family attended were “were usually majority black” (Amir 2021). He explained that his “parents are religious and I was raised a bit sheltered [and he] grew up with a perspective on sex that it was reserved for marriage and anything aside from that wasn’t a good thing” (Amir 2021). Amir never had a time or a place to explore his sexuality growing up. And when it was time for “the talk, [his] dad handed [him] a cartoon book about it and told [him] to let him know if I had questions” (Amir 2021). He did consider himself DL as an adult. He was able to explore his sexuality, something that would have been difficult when he was younger.

As a Guyanese Muslim man, Luke grew up in an even more conservative household. He stated that “it is considered a sin to be anything but straight” (Luke 2021). He thought his parents wouldn’t take the news well, due to his religious upbringing (Luke 2021). And even though being LGBTQ+ is more accepted in the Global North, he pointed out this is not the case in some less developed countries, as violence can occur (Luke 2021). Christopher Carrico’s 2012 study

explained the “criminalization of non-heterosexual relations creates an environment in which sexual minorities in Guyana must regularly contend with ‘harassment, abuse, arrest, prosecution and conviction of crimes’” (Trotz 356). And so even though he didn’t grow up in Guyana, Guyanese views and their values impacted his parents and family’s attitudes towards same-sex encounters. Although he spent his adolescence in both Toronto and Atlanta, cities which would be considered pretty liberal and progressive, Guyanese and Muslim culture was still very prevalent in his upbringing. The only person in his circle that knows he is bisexual is his best friend, someone with whom he had actually hooked up in the past (Luke 2021).

4.8 Latino Men and the DL

Latino MSM have also been part of this DL group on websites/apps especially in “sites from large urban centers, [which] typically name Latino and African American ethnicities side by side with references to *DL* sexualities” according to Chicano Studies scholar M. Alfredo González (35). This is because Latino and Black Americans are able to relate to one another as they “occupy comparable subaltern positions which their voices and opinions cross-fertilize” (González 43). And there are also “some Latino groups [that] have closer historical, racial, and geographical links to African Americans than others” (González 43). For instance, in Atlanta, Mary Odem and Irene Browne explain that “as far as Dominicans and other Afro-Latino immigrants are concerned, ‘black’ in Atlanta is no longer the lowest racial category, associated with poverty, something to avoid,” as Black Georgians are often associated with the city’s wealth (83-84). Therefore, “just as race does, social class molds sexual experience” (González 43-44). Latinos often do not fit in “The United States ‘mainstream’ gay community and movement [which is] greatly informed by white middle class style and socio-cultural priorities” regardless

of their own class position (González 46). And this is why “For many Latino/as ‘to come out of the closet’ implies making hard choices that prioritize the individual over the communal self” (González 46). The “down low” gives Latino MSM the ability to sleep with other men without necessarily putting an identity label on their sexuality. However, “active roles (i.e., ‘top’) among [MSM] identified Latino men are often associated with social and cultural construction of masculinity” according to Gail Agronick, O’donnell, Stueve, Doval, Duran, Vargo, and Alex Carballo-Diéíguez , Dolezal, Nieves, Díaz, Decena, & Balan (qtd. in Dangerfield et al. 877). Meanwhile bottoms, the “passive role”, were considered more feminine and “woman-like” (qtd. in Dangerfield et al. 877). Latino men were more likely to adhere to a top role while they were “less likely to consider themselves ‘gay’” (qtd. in Dangerfield et al. 877). It was vital for Latino MSM to remain on the DL, so they could “retain full membership in their ethnic group” (González 46).

4.9 White Men and the DL

Historically, identifying as DL was not as common among white MSM. In a “Wolitski et al. (2006) study, [the researchers] employed a convenience sample from 12 [coast to coast diverse US] cities (N = 455)” (Lapinski et al. 613). This included Southeastern cities such as Atlanta, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami (Wolitski et al. 520). They “found 20% of MSM in their sample identified as being on the DL; African-American and Hispanic men were more likely to report being DL than White men” (Lapinski et al. 613). But today this has changed and more and more white men are considering themselves DL across hook up apps and websites. The term “DL” has now been appropriated to include men of all races according to journalist Benoit Denizet-Lewis (1). DL has become “trendy [due to the] appeal because it refers less to sexuality

than it does to masculinity. It's an alluring term for men who identify as butch or masculine. The DL sounds more powerful, more empowering. It also sounds like a secret group, or club" (Denizet-Lewis 1). The fact that more non-Black men are identifying as DL has helped normalize it to a degree. Part of this is due to Grindr, which has become so conventional that DL men have the opportunity "to take [MSM geared] space with them wherever they go, one that is clearly related to accessibility, yet distinct in its own right, as mobility might at times create accessibility" as communications scholar Brandon Miller states ("They're the Modern" 480). Even though there is definitely still some stigma attached, other groups of men have been able to clutch on to the DL, making it more universal. Through my own qualitative study, the DL has become commonplace from college students to successful working professionals. According to Siegel et al., "research indicates that substantial number of White men are also non-gay identified, non-disclosing, and bisexually active" and these men often categorize themselves as being on the DL (721). Limiting the definition of DL to encompass only Black men may alienate and "disregard the experiences of White non-Hispanic" MSM (Siegel et a. 721). Also, there aren't as many misconceived connotations surrounding DL men as there are with men who "come out of the closet" or identify as "gay", terms which can feminize them (Denizet-Lewis 1).

4.10 DL as a Sexual Behavior

It is important to understand that DL is not a sexual identity, but rather a way to categorize men who sleep with men. Tony Silva explains that a lot of MSM are able to "separate a sexual encounter from feelings or emotions, they can categorize that, yeah, this is just to get together for sexual release" ("Straight Men's" 48). It is often nothing more than "blowing a load." This is often because MSM are more "readily available" for such activity than women

(Silva, “Straight Men’s” 48). Hence “oral and anal sex were common while a claim of masculinity and DL or ‘straight acting’ was taking place, simultaneously, begins to show that some [MSM] do not conflate sex acts with sexual identity” (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 234). The social pressures in Southern society discourage the more conventional labelling of these acts, as some of these same-sex experiences can range from experimentation to occasional fun. Foucault explains that “The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation – to refuse, in other words, the categories that are imposed upon us as the truth” (qtd. in Weeks 192). MSM should not have to be confined in any one sexual identity “in a society where all values are socially constructed” (62). The DL is not a community. There is no “down low” pride flag or membership card. While DL embodies a specific type of MSM, it is a description of behavior, not identity. The DL subculture is easy for men of all backgrounds to resonate with because there’s no outward declaration of queerness. One’s heteronormativity is not questioned on the DL. Their lives stay mostly intact.

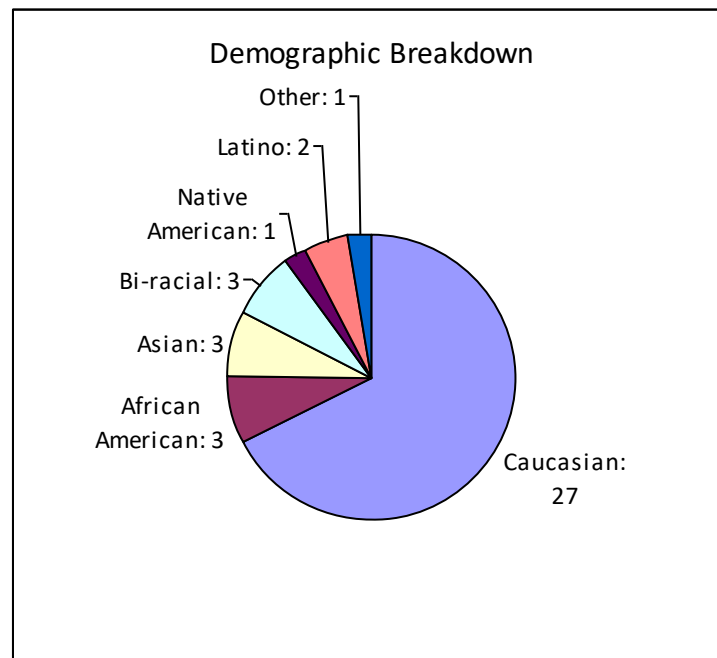


Figure 17: Demographic Breakdown

In my 2021–2022 study, 67.75% of my participants were white and considered themselves either DL or discreet. This is an important factor when studying the data as it may be biased toward a white point of view. It is important to listen to those BIPOC voices that were able to share their lived experiences with me.

4.11 Asian Men and the DL

Hank, who grew up outside the Perimeter, was the only Asian who participated in the interview portion of study. Within “Georgia, Asians are more than 4 percent of the population, up from less than half a percent in 1980” (Tavernise 1). In my home county of Gwinnett, “12 percent of the population is of Asian heritage,” which is relatively high for the Southeast, but Asians are still a minority group (Tavernise 1). Hank believed his race was a factor in NSA hookups with other DL MSM. He thought of himself as a “rarity/novelty [as] Asian[s] may be difficult to come by” (Hank 2022). He believed himself to be fetishized by a lot of [presumably white] MSM (Hank 2022). He explained, “I like being wanted I guess” as it was a turn on to be an “object of desire, giving something to someone to make them happy” (Hank 2022). Jay Paul, Ayala, and Choi indicate that “older White men” were often the ones who would objectify Asian MSM (534). And if Asian MSM were not being fetishized, they were often being discriminated against. In a 2005 Los Angeles study, some Asian MSM “felt that there was much greater latitude or social acceptability for individuals online to specify ‘no Asians’ in personal ads or profiles, whereas explicitly stating ‘no Blacks’ would be more likely to be perceived as racist” (Paul et al. 533). Asian MSM are often disregarded and othered as non-white. A lot of the time, Asian men are excluded from the DL due to their “appeal [which] is rooted in culturally determined, essentialist notions of Asian passivity or femininity. Asian guys are seen as more

‘gentle’ or agreeable than white guys, so an interracial match is seen as complimentary” according to author Daniel Gawthrop (qtd. in Poon and Ho 259). Thus, since the DL is often thought of as a hypermasculine behavior, Asian MSM are then excluded from the mainstream narrative because of both stereotypical notions of feminization and fetishization.

4.12 Perceived Meanings of the DL

The majority of my participants did not know the historic meaning of DL. When Amir first moved to Metro Atlanta, he had read an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article about DL men which referenced Black men and he acknowledges “it’s more so a term that was started by black men” (Amir 2021). However, from his own lived experience he said that “it applies to all races” and not just Black men. Even though the term has been appropriated, Amir is “cool with it” as a Black man himself and it’s not something he’s very concerned about (Amir 2021). Colin, who is white, said he was “not qualified to go into the psychology of Black men in ATL looking for oral sex from other men, but the term DL has widely [been] used and accepted in the Black community. Non-Black men accepting sexual favors from other men also described themselves as DL,” and he agrees with the general consensus that even though the term may have been applied historically to black men, it is not exclusively so anymore (Colin 2021). His own definition of DL is that it “mean[s] straight-presenting, but bi in the bedroom” (Colin 2021).

4.13 Discreet

On hookup apps, the term “DL” has become synonymous with being discreet, as “DL” and “discreet” are used almost interchangeably. There are, however, subtle differences between the terms, and one’s definition(s) can vary depending on the individual, social class, and

geographic locale. I define “discreet” as the situation in which MSM are not completely open about their same-sex experiences. They usually demand some degree of anonymity, but this can vary. It does not necessarily mean they have a girlfriend or wife which “DL” typically implies. There may simply be parts of themselves or their lives that they do not want shared. The stakes aren’t usually as high when the encounter is described as “discreet” as opposed to “DL”. Moreover, one can be discreet in certain settings and open about one’s sexuality in others.

Kyle, for example, states that on Grindr he is “not out publicly” as he prefers to stay discreet on the app (Kyle 2021). This means it is important that some NSA hookups stay private. However, he says that he is out as bisexual to around “15 or so friends” as it has been a gradual and rather novel process for him (Kyle 2021). He essentially wants a buffer zone between people he meets virtually and in real life. His family does not know about his sexuality, but he plans on coming out to them if he were “to ever get a boyfriend” (Kyle 2021). It needs to be pretty serious for him to take the next step (Kyle 2021). Until then, he will remain discreet, and open to a select group of people.

As a college student, like Kyle, I had some close friends who knew that I was bisexual. However, I was still discreet with most people. I did not come out to my family until I was almost twenty-one. They were unaware of my numerous hookups. When I was home, I would “sneak out” by telling my parents I was going for a walk in the park when in reality I was going to the house of a person I’d just met online for a hookup. In my case, however, discretion was *not* synonymous with being on the DL, as I’ve never been in a committed relationship with anyone, male or female. As a white cis-man with liberal Jewish and Italian parents from New York City, I never had to worry about what would happen if they were to find out about my same-sex encounters. I knew there was no risk of getting kicked out or being disowned. The

stakes were never that high for me, which is a luxury, since this is not the case for all MSM, especially those of color. In fact, according to a 2019 National Democratic Institute “(NDI) public opinion survey, only 27 percent of the [Georgian] population believe[d] that protecting LGBTQI+ communities’ rights is important” (1). Thus, not all MSM, inside or outside the LGBTQ+ community, will have the ability to *not* be discreet about their same-sex relations.

Although I was discreet at times as a youth, I never was part of the “discreet” culture of Grindr or any other app. This is because according to Evan T. England, on Grindr itself the category “‘discreet’ expresses the user’s desire for discretion above all other identities that they might relate to,” and this was never true of me (10). It was never part of my identity as a bi man nor did I use my discretion as a means to hook up with someone. I did, however, hook up with a lot of MSM who were discreet just because they were “more likely than the average user to be looking for quick and casual sexual connections” something we had in common (England 13). And even though I did respect those who were discreet or DL, I never had to “embrace the values of discretion and anonymity” myself (England 10).

The concept of discretion can vary among individuals. TJ was once married to a woman, but is now married to a man. He is still attracted to women and considers himself a “sexual being [with] no boxes, no labels,” however he thinks most of his inner circle of friends would label him as gay owing to the fact of his same-sex marriage (TJ 2021). Since he does live in Georgia, he is discreet about his husband and personal affairs when it comes to his professional life. He notes that “being a professional, either I dodge the question or mislead a customer’s direct question” when asked about his personal life (TJ 2021). TJ could easily lose business if he was open about his sexuality, which is why he prefers to stay discreet in many situations. And it wasn’t until the 2020 Supreme Court Case, *Bostock v. Clayton County* that it was ruled “an employer who fires

an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII” (Supreme Court of the United States 1). But even though one cannot be terminated now for their sexual orientation or gender identity, it doesn’t mean everyone will view LGBTQ+ people positively.

For some MSM, their significant others are aware of their same-sex history. Joey is currently married to a woman and they used to “play together” so his wife knew first-hand about his experiences with men (Joey 2021). But he said unfortunately it “got out of hand and she stopped it all [and because of this] now we barely have sex and it makes my acting harder to keep in check” (Joey 2021). They do not have an open marriage, but it seems like he has fooled around with other guys without his wife knowing (Joey 2021). He tells me that he “miss[es] Craigslist. It had a lot of curious and married guys” (Joey 2021). He also made it very clear that he hooks up only with other men due to them being more “straight forward. They say what they want or do what they want to do. You know if they came. Just easier” (Joey 201). He also attends both Alcoholics Anonymous and Sex Addicts Anonymous and he has been able to find solace within this group of men. He explained, “it was clear that a percentage of guys were acting out with other guys. I think we all felt misunderstood and now there are options for others to talk openly and not feel shame” (Joey 2021). So even though Joey is indeed discreet in most of his daily life, there are occasional times where he can be open about his sexual past.

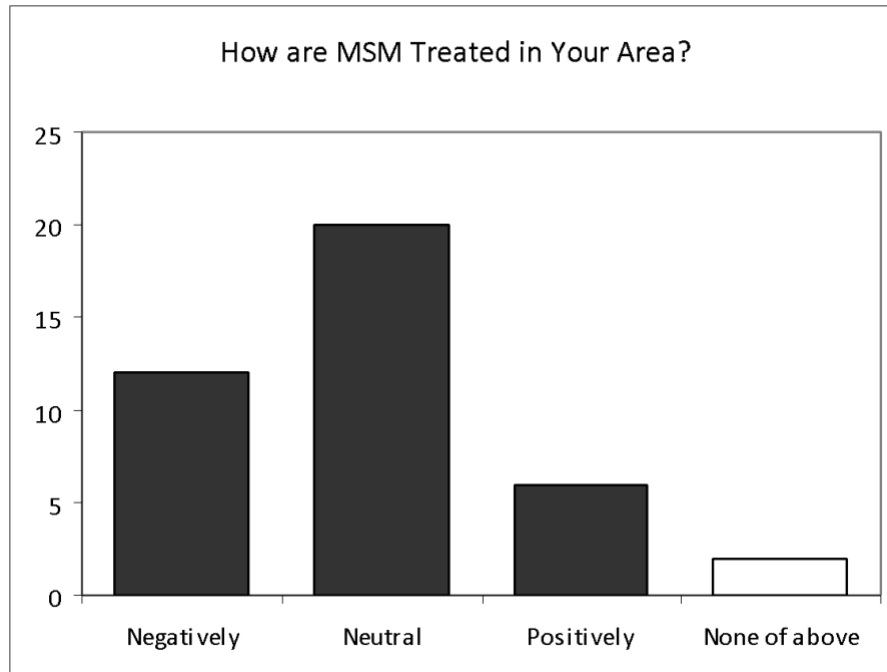


Figure 18: MSM Friendliness in Local Area(s)

4.14 MSM Treatment across the Southeast

The majority of participants in the survey thought MSM were treated neutrally in their local area. However, even among those who stated that the general climate was neutral or positive, they didn't all want to be out themselves. There were particular risks for these DL and discreet men, especially since a good portion were in committed relationships with women. Colin noted that his North Carolina community was "maybe 50/50 trending liberal," but that did not alter his decision to be discreet.

There was a general consensus that participants' girlfriends or wives would not be accepting of their past or current same-sex encounters. Amir has not fooled around with other men since he has been in a serious relationship with the woman who is now his wife of over 10 years. When asked if she would be okay with him being orally bi or heteroflexible, he replied, "I don't think so. Not if she knew I'd done things behind her back. I can see the smallest possibility

that she'd be interested but not enough for me to speak with her about it" (Amir 2021). It was a risk that Amir was not willing to take and there would be little to gain in sharing information about his past encounters with his wife.

Luke, on the other hand, still plays with men even though he has a girlfriend. He said "she probably wouldn't like it" owing to their Muslim faith, so he is not open about it (Luke 2021). Luke works in the finance sector, and hooking up with men is something he does to let off steam "after a stressful day" (Luke 2021).

Mr. Ser Vay, who is now divorced, did not think his ex-wife would have approved of his same-sex experiences either. He notes that "She had her suspicions. But she never knew. She never did with certainty. And I don't think she would have believed it. If she, if somebody, had confronted her about it, I don't think she would have believed them" (Ser Vay 2021). Having grown up in Northwest Georgia while currently residing in small town Alabama, Mr. Ser Vay has never had the opportunity to think about not being discreet. Since his community is very conservative, it is not an appealing option. He explains, "Right here, it's, it's, the world is still, you know. I mean. Alabama is very different" (Ser Vay 2021). And by different, he means that anyone outside the norm risks being ostracized for their choices and behavior. He is not willing to take that risk and he feels it would substantially disrupt his life if he were to tell his peers.

Recently, Bill H.B 322 was passed and signed into law in the State of Alabama (Turrentine 1). Not only did it ban transgender students from using restrooms of their choice at school, but it also "include[s] language similar to Florida's 'Don't Say Gay Or Trans' bill, which would ban any acknowledgement of sexual orientation or gender identity in classrooms from kindergarten through fifth grade" as Human Rights Campaign Press Secretary Delphine Luneau

reports (1). Even though this bill may not affect Mr. Ser Vay directly, it illustrates the unwelcoming nature of the current Alabama political climate.

On the issue of family support, there was much variation in answers. Kyle who is originally from the Northeast explained, “I would not say my household was conservative. My mom was actually head of the local Democratic Party and later was an elected official. However, my mom has always been sort of against LGBT pride and whatnot, mostly because she associates pride with *PDA (public display of affection)*, which she hates no matter who is doing it” (Kyle 2021). So even though his mother was somewhat liberal given her elected position, it did not necessarily translate to unwavering support for LGBTQ+ rights. She expected queer people to adhere to the heteronormative framework of looking, sounding, and acting straight. This is true for a lot of heterosexual Americans according to a 2010 study led by sociologists Long Doan, Loehr, and Miller (1178), “heterosexuals are equally as supportive of legal benefits of same-sex couples as they are for heterosexual couples, but are much less supportive of public displays of same-sex couples than they are for heterosexuals” (American Sociological Association Press Release 2014 1). And even though heterosexuals are more likely to support PDA among same-sex couples in 2022, there are still plenty who will remain opposed. This may result in a perception that PDA among hetero couples are normative, while PDA with same-sex couples are deemed abnormal. DL and discreet MSM are often going to want to remain a part of the traditional narrative; they will not engage in same-sex PDA under any circumstances, which is why a lot of play happens only behind closed doors.

When asked if he had any LGBTQ+ members in his family, Amir said he had a cousin who was gay (Amir 2021). He explained that “myself and other cousins have discussed it but it’s never come up with my folks or anyone else. We look at it as something we always knew. I

didn't know what gay was when I noticed he was different but I knew he wasn't like me" (Amir 2021). Margaret Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter "found that Black youths were more uncomfortable with others knowing about their homosexuality and had disclosed to fewer numbers of other individuals than had their White peers" (225). And even when family members realized that a loved one wasn't hetero, as exemplified by Amir's cousin, it wasn't something that was talked about openly with elders. It's also important to note that Amir, a heteroflexible DL man, saw himself as different than his gay cousin. This could likely be because he presented more masculine and heteronormative than his cousin, who may present as more flamboyant.

4.15 Down Low Top looking for good wet booty

Atlanta | guys for guys

Down low top looking for good wet booty →

I'm 28 6'2 200 STD free. Tryna make a masculine lowkey bottom cream on my dick. Must be in shape, disease free, younger than 40. Im not out at all so discretion is important. Prefer you be not out too. Let's not make this complicated. Send pics, stats, and location in first message

Details: 27 years old, in Buckhead Atlanta.
Looking for 18 - 40 yrs old.
Posted 5 days ago.




Figure 19: Doublelist Ad #2

In the above classified ad, a DL top is looking for a "good *wet* booty" aka a bottom. He shares his stats (6'2 200) to indicate that he is physically fit. He is also seeking a man who "must

be in shape”. Leone, Sedory, and Gary note how there’s “societal pressure on men to appear more muscular and lean” (Allensworth-Davies et al. 54). There is this “muscularity craze” that has affected men from all backgrounds, straight, bi, or gay (Allensworth-Davies et al. 54). This is also illustrative of the idea of heteronormative ideals and wanting a man to have similar physical attributes as oneself.

As in the Doublelist ad in the “Masc 4 Masc” chapter, we can see this poster is also seeking someone who is masculine. It is often the case that MSM want someone who not only has the physical attributes, but also acts masculine like themselves. This “masculinity language [in the ad] and the connection between muscularity and masculinity are also evident in the way that men describe their bodies and the bodies they desire” (Miller, “Textually Presenting 311). When the poster says “*lowkey* bottom” he means someone who is chill/straight acting. It could also mean someone who is easy going. This ideal sexual partner wouldn’t be thought of as engaging in such same-sex activity. Lowkey could also be a synonym for men who are on the DL. Even though he does want someone masculine presenting, this partner should be submissive to him in the bedroom. This may be why he requires someone “younger than 40”. As a 27 year old man, he wants to be in charge, the dom. It is easier to have control over someone who is around the same age or younger. Interestingly, he also doesn’t provide a minimum age requirement like the other ad.

The poster also uses code phrases such as “wet booty” and “cream on my dick” to attract other MSM. When he says wet booty, he means that he is seeking someone who is ready to play. It is also like saying “wet pussy,” but in this regard a man’s ass is his “bussy”. The “wet booty” is what he’s after: it’s the end game. When he wants his prospective partner to “cream on my

dick” it means he wants to make them cum or reach an orgasm while he is fucking them. It is, therefore, his job to make this happen once he meets with said hookup.

One of the most important parts of the ads is that this MSM is on the DL himself, and he is seeking someone who is in the same position as him. He clearly states that “I’m not out at all so discretion is important” and “Prefer you be not out too”. Even though there are straight DL MSM, this may not be the case for this poster. When he uses the term “out” he is also signaling that he likely identifies as non-straight: he could be bi, pan, heteroflexible, or gay. He may not be in a position to come out yet, so being on the DL is where he feels most at ease. And like some other MSM, he “may feel unsafe disclosing [his] same-sex sexual behavior” as his specific circumstances are unknown as Robert J. Zeglin puts into light (345-346).

When he states “let’s not make this complicated,” he is also looking for NSA sex. When he says “send pics, stats, and location in first message” he doesn’t plan on conversing much with MSM who reply to the ad. As in the other ad, he wants the hookup to happen in the moment and not hours later. And it also sounds like he’s looking for nothing more than a one-time encounter.

This poster also claims he is “STD free” as he is seeking someone “disease free”. Thus, we know that the poster is “taking some precaution to screen potential partners, even though we know nothing of specific precautions assumed once a meeting takes place” as Sheana S. Bull and Mary McFarlane note (549). The poster never states whether he prefers safe-sex or *bareback* sex, nor is PrEP mentioned (see 2.11 for a discussion). But this may be merely an illusion of protection. Statements must usually be taken on faith as most MSM will not have access to one’s medical records to determine if their partner is being truthful. Also, when he saying he is “STD free,” the acceptance of this is built on stereotypes. There is often a myth that STD free means “clean” which then “refer[s] to STI infections as ‘dirty’” according to Dionne Gesink, Salway,

Kimura, and J. Connell (661). If MSM asked directly about “STI testing [this then] can be perceived as less stigmatizing and more empowering” than simply asking if they are STD free (Gesnik et al. 661).

Ultimately DL and discreet MSM want just one thing: to have private and secretive sex. Whatever happens between two consenting men doesn't need to become public knowledge. There are reasons to remain confidential; the stakes are high for some of these MSM, whether they are married or come from a religious upbringing. And the terminology used here, “DL” and “discreet”, are almost interchangeable according to the majority of the participants in my study. Kyle would agree with this notion, “I don't say there is much of a difference between DL and discreet” (Kyle 2021). Luke also would concur with Kyle by stating, “I would say in my opinion they're the same” (Luke 2021). One shouldn't attempt to label any of these men because being on the DL and discreet are just behaviors. And there isn't just one way to behave; MSM have their own ways of exploring their pleasures. Even though these behaviors may be intertwined with their sexuality, for some men, these are distinct concepts. These behaviors may help form queer identities or they may uphold hetero ones.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

People that fall outside the heteronormative ideal are often “othered” in Western society. From a young age, many boys are told they must present as masculine, hetero, and domineering. To go against this societal norm is to risk losing rank within the heteropatriarchy. This risk is significant as rank can be linked to power and authority.

Even with a bisexual wife, Colin felt a degree of “shame and embarrassment” surrounding his attraction to men (Colin 2021). There is a stigma for MSM regardless of one’s self-identification. Colin explained that, “If I sleep with 100 women, I’m a stud or a pimp, but with one guy, I’m gay” (Colin 2021). Experimenting with men was seen as both *gay* and *feminine*. Colin goes on to say that “a man is not less masculine for having sex with another man” (Colin 2021). However, the vast majority of the men I interviewed believed that society would claim otherwise. They chose to remain discreet or DL for a plethora of reasons: for some it had to do with their relationship or material status, others lived in conservative Southern towns, while some MSM simply felt they had no need to tell others about their same-sex encounters.

Americans seem to have a need to categorize and label folks for any sexual activity that falls outside the norm. Not every man who receives a brojob is queer. Some may just be experimenting, while others seek them out on apps like Grindr or websites like Doublelist. Receiving a brojob is a type of behavior, but it is not an identity. In my case, my participation in the activity is part of my bi identity, but this is not true of everyone. Sexuality is fluid, and there is no need for people to confine themselves in rigid boxes labeled as “straight”, “bi”, or “gay”.

Sexual behaviors are influenced by intersecting factors that can include race, age, religion, identity, and particular cultures. They are often intertwined with one another, and I could not look at a participant's age without looking at his race or religious background. For Mr. Ser Vay, in his small conservative Georgian town growing up "there was no such thing as sexuality. You were not really a sexual person until you were married" (Mr. Ser Vay 2021). One could not simply look at Mr. Ser Vay's behavior without looking at the external forces at play. His upbringing was multifaceted even though it may not seem that way at first glance.

It is important to research hegemonic masculinity, perhaps removing it from the category as "natural" or "normal". As both Connell and Messerschmidt explain, "hegemony could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (832). I specifically looked at this masculine domain through a Southern lens. Hegemonic masculinity becomes the default. Kyle even stated that labeling himself as queer wasn't "meant for guys like me" (Kyle 2021). He was viewed as "straight-passing," thus this gave him the ability to remain near the top of the heteropatriarchy without being questioned (Kyle 2021).

When I began my case study, I was able to assimilate within bro culture through my work even though I do not consider myself a bro or a dude. I use this to my advantage, such as when I code-switch while navigating Grindr and Reddit. I also had to learn to navigate the hookup world as a researcher rather than a casual sex seeker. There are rigid boundaries when doing this work and I had to be professional at all times. This case study was not a quick, straight-forward practice. I learned to become patient. I could go weeks without getting any participants for my survey, while there was one day where multiple people would fill it out. Once I got interviewees at hand, I had to make sure each of them felt comfortable and at ease. They were able to tell their stories, while I listened attentively without judgment. The stories that I've collected are largely

hidden and ignored. Discreet and DL men usually do not have the opportunity to share their lived experiences. I was able to collect and reveal eight personal narratives, material that is not only stigmatized, but material that also complicates questions on masculinity, sexual behavior, and identity.

The present case study is just a glimpse into the world of brojobs. I am left wanting to do more similar studies. While researching the literature on brojobs, I found only one chapter: “Brojobs, Bro Culture, and Hegemonic Masculinity: A Call to Reconceptualize How Educators Address Homophobia” by Joseph Jones, which was a mere three pages long. There is a huge gap in the published literature and I want to help fill it. Jane Ward and Tony Silva have both coined “Dude-Sex” and “Bud-Sex” and have been very influential in my studies. There aren’t many scholars who focus on straight identified MSM, so I would like to become part of the “crew” so to speak.

I will be starting my Ph.D. in Gender Studies at *Indiana University, Bloomington* this fall. Besides my work on brojobs, I would also like to do more research on bisexual men, bi erasure and bi identity and representation. I am curious about bisexual encounters as well. Sex is something that is often considered off limits for discussion, but I think it’s something that needs to be more central in our discourse. I want to explore the taboo of gay sex further, especially in the context of stigmas among sexually fluid MSM.

I would like to explore hookup applications in more depth. I think I may be able to research Grindr without doing a study on the app itself. Even though there is a lot of literature about Craigslist, I have yet to find any scholarly articles discussing Doublelist. I would like to explore Doublelist as a hookup site in more detail and see how MSM are using the app.

I would also like to continue my autoethnographic work. My lived experiences are central to my work. I would like to see how my positionality could fit into other studies. Typically, researcher and subject are rigidly separated, but I want to continue to combine my fieldwork with self-reflection. It was not easy writing about some of my past experiences, especially the Tex anecdote. However, it was necessary to share my own lived experience, because I wanted my stories to be read, heard, and listened to as well.

As a native Georgian, I also enjoyed talking to other MSM from the Southeast. I want to explore Metro Atlanta even further, particularly with regard to ITP and OTP and differences between urban and suburban hookup culture. Because I had to broaden my case study geographically, I did not have a chance to delve into this. Additionally, there are generational differences I would like to explore among MSM. Luke was the only Gen Z I interviewed, so I would like to hear more from MSM in this demographic. Although I'm a late Millennial (1994) myself, there are some major differences between the two groups. I also want to hear more from Latino and Asian DL and discreet men because their narratives are often overlooked. I was able to interview only one Asian man in my case study, and I did not have a chance to interview any Latino men.

This thesis research was just the beginning and the foundation of my work, and I still have much to do. There are more studies to be done. There are more stories to be told and more MSM to talk to. Thank you for reading this thesis. Thank you for listening to my story and thank you for listening to the personal accounts of my participants: Amir, Colin, Hank, Joey, Kyle, Luke, Mr. Ser Vyay, and TJ.

Glossary

- **69** – when two MSM suck each other’s penis at the same time. This is a type of oral sex.
- **autoethnography** – can be defined as cultural analysis through personal narrative according to Boylorn et al (17). A researcher’s own lived experience becomes a focal point of their work.
- **bareback** – sex without a condom.
- **bear** – a large robust man who is often hairy. Usually presents very masculine and tends to be older (mid-30s +)
- **bi erasure** – when bisexuality gets put into question or is overlooked and disregarded or isn’t viewed as a valid identity.
- **binary** – refers to a perception of something as having two and only two distinct states with none in between, eg. white or black, gay or straight.
- **binary terror** – Rebecca Schneider describes this as “the terror that accompanies the dissolution of a binary habit of sense-making and self-fashioning is directly proportionate to the social safety insured in the maintenance of such apparatus of sense” (13).
- **bisexual** – attracted (emotionally or physically) to more than one gender. Typically men and women, but can include trans and nonbinary folks.
- **BIPOC** – acronym for Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- **Black Church** – Several Christian denominations with churches that have predominantly African American congregations.
- **Black Mecca** – a place that is a safe haven for Black people. In a city such as Atlanta, for example, Black people have been able to succeed at a rate that’s much higher than other U.S. cities and so it can be referred to as a “Black Mecca” (Hankins and Holloway 236-237).
- **bro** – usually a man’s man. Someone you can comfortably watch a football game with or have a beer with.
- **bro code** – a set of rules both spoken and unspoken that bros are expected to follow. Bros must put their bros first at all times, for example.
- **bro culture** – this can be defined as a “subculture that exists within educational and corporate settings” according to Joseph R. Jones (102). Examples of this include: white college fraternities, the military, and country clubs

- **brojob** – can be defined as oral sex between men, especially when at least one participant does not identify as gay. This is often between two bros, but can also be between total strangers.
- **bottom** – someone who gets penetrated. Tends to be the more submissive one in the sexual act.
- **bud-sex** – a term coined by Tony Silva. It involves “specific type of male-male sex that reinforce[s] rural masculinity and heterosexuality” (Silva, “Bud-Sex” 51).
- **bust a nut** – to have an orgasm (male). MSM use this term a lot on various hookup platforms as this is usually an ideal outcome.
- **car play** – foreplay and sex that occurs in a vehicle. This is super common when neither of two MSM can host.
- **case study** – Political science professor John Gerring, defines it as a method that is “(a) qualitative, small; (b) that the research is ethnographic, clinical, participant-observation, or otherwise ‘in the field’; (c) that the research is characterized by process-tracing; (d) that the research investigates the properties of a single case or (e) that the research investigates a single phenomenon” (342).
- **cisgender** – someone who identifies with the sex they were born with.
- **compulsorily monosexuality** – April S. Callis states this is when “U.S. society mandates that every person be attracted to just one sex and denies that a person can be attracted to both” So MSM are often forced to pick a “side” instead of being able to dabble and try new sexual experiences (Callis 218).
- **Craigslist Personals (Casual Encounters Section)** – it was a subsection of the Craigslist website where MSM could post ads seeking NSA hookups. They could also reply to one another. It was the primary hookup website before Grindr came along.
- **cruising** – when a MSM goes to a public place such as a park or restroom to try to find another MSM to hook up with. This doesn’t occur as much as did long ago and is more common among older men.
- **cut** – short for circumcised. According to Hodges and Waldeck, “the circumcised penis became the social norm” in the USA (Earp and Darby 65). MSM will ask each other if they are cut prior to meeting up as it is expected and regulated.
- **daddy** – an older man who is typically very dominant, and often has money they are willing to spend on a younger sexual partner.
- **deviant** – going against social norms. This often happens in secret and is not considered acceptable behavior by society at large. Giving a brojob is an example of this.

- **discreet** – a situation in which MSM are not completely open about their same-sex experiences. This usually require some degree of anonymity, but can vary.
- **Disidentification** – According to José Esteban Muñoz, this occurs when “neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11). For example a man may routinely have sex with other men, but he may still identify as straight since it is societal norm.
- **Doublelist** – A website, similar to Craigslist. Once Craigslist closed the personals part of the website in 2018, Doublelist became an alternative. MSM could now post ads here where they could reply to one another.
- **dry spell** – to have no sex or sexual encounters for a period of time. On hookup apps, MSM may advertise that they have a dry spell, so someone could help them out.
- **dominant** – having complete control and authority over someone else. Tops are often described this way.
- **down low (DL)** – MSM who are typically married or have a girlfriend, while hooking up with men in secret. These men typically present as both hetero and hypermasculine.
- **dude-sex** – a term coined by Jane Ward. It involves “getting the kind of sex that all straight men want from women, but can only get from men—uncomplicated, emotionless, and guarantee” (Ward, “Dude-Sex” 421).
- **essentialist** – viewpoint that people have fixed qualities that cannot be changed by choice. For instance, saying that “one is born gay” means it was predetermined at birth.
- **fetish** – usually a specific type of activity that one is attracted to. If one has a “foot fetish,” it means they have a fascination with feet.
- **fruity** – code for queer or gay acting. Old fashioned in nature, but some queer people have reclaimed the word.
- **fun** – this is usually code to hookup. This term is used frequently on hookup apps to signal one’s interest in another potential partner.
- **friend with benefits (FWB)** – a person who is viewed primarily as a friend, but with whom one has sexual encounters. It is more than NSA hookups because there usually is some type of bond here.
- **Global North** – this “encompasses the rich and powerful regions such as North America, Europe, and Australia” (Braff and Nelson 1). When I mention the Global North, I am specifically talking about North America and more so the USA.
- **Grindr** – The most mainstream and popular mobile app MSM use to find other MSM. Usually used to find NSA hookups through GPS. One can message anyone on the app up to certain distance (unless they buy Grindr Xtra or Unlimited which has more features).

- **Gynecomastia** – enlargement of male breasts which is often the “characteristic of the female” according to physician William A. Schonfeld (380).
- **head** – refers to the act of either giving or receiving oral sex. It is a synonym for blowjob.
- **Height Weight Proportional (HWP)** – this means the ratio of one’s height to weight is fairly typical and not a high or low extreme. It is considered a sign of physical fitness. MSM will usually ask this on hookup apps, so they know they’re meeting someone they deem fit.
- **(hetero)sexual** – men who are physically and emotionally attracted to women. There are some MSM who identify as hetero despite their same-sex encounters.
- **hegemonic domain** – this “appears to be a key domain, is about ideology, culture, consciousness and knowledge” according to sociologist Minoo Alinia (2336). MSM want to stay on top of this domain, so they can continue to assert power over others.
- **hegemonic masculine** – traits such as “emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women” according to Steven L. Arxer (390-391). This can occur in sport teams or fraternities.
- **hegemonic masculinity** – “embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men,” according to sociologists R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (832). White hetero men assert their dominance and power over marginalized groups of people (including women and BIPOC).
- **heteroexceptionalism:** Jane Ward describes this as a situation in which “some people who identify as heterosexual, same-sex encounters or desires will result in no social stigma or punishment because their typical daily behaviors are not associated with these acts” “Born This Way” 97). So for a white cis MSM who is married to a woman, if he has a same-sex interaction, it doesn’t change his place or status in society.
- **heteroflexibility** – Sociologist Laurie Essig defines it as “a person has or intends to have a primarily heterosexual lifestyle’ but ‘remains open to sexual encounters and even relationships with persons of the same sex’” (Carrillo and Hoffman 92). These same-sex encounters may happen just a few times or in some cases, more frequently.
- **heteropatriarchy** – can be described as the “social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent” according to (Avrin et al. 13). White cis-men are typically at the top of the heteropatriarchy, while queer BIPOC people are at the bottom.
- **heteronormativity** – Marcus Herz & Thomas Johansson define it as “a body of lifestyle norms as well as how people tend to reproduce distinct and complementary genders (man and woman)” (1011). White MSM can use heteronormativity to conform and stay within social constraints.

- **hookup** – a general sexual encounter. This can include foreplay, oral or anal sex.
- **host** – the person who can have someone over to their residence, hotel, etc. for sex.
- **hung** – a way to describe a large penis.
- **hypermasculine** – overtly masculine; macho. Has to “act like a man” at all times.
- **Inside the Perimeter (ITP)** – Inside Atlanta City Limits (as well as Interstate 285). This divides the city from the suburbs.
- **internalized homophobia** – when one has a “negative social attitudes toward the self” according to Meyer & Dean (Frost and Meyer 1). Usually it’s when one is ashamed of one’s sexuality.
- **intersectionality**- Jennifer C. Nash describes it as “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality, has emerged as the primary theoretical tool designed to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity” (2). When looking at MSM, it is important to consider how all these elements intertwine. One may be white and discreet for instance, but may come from a religious or working class background. One cannot just look at these elements alone.
- **Kinsey Scale** – a scale that rates sexual orientation from 0 (exclusively heterosexual), 3 (equally heterosexual and homosexual) to 6 (exclusively homosexual). It embodied the idea that sexuality was fluid and not binary.
- **masc 4 masc** – When a masculine man is seeking another masculine man to have “fun” with. This includes how they look and act.
- **masc energy** – when one comes across as masculine and hetero presenting. If one is wearing a basketball jersey, they are presenting as masc.
- **mobile** – able to drive to a hookup. This is especially important if one cannot. Usually it means one owns one’s own vehicle.
- **masculine persona** – one that presents masculine personality traits at all times.
- **MSM** – acronym for men who have sex with men. This helps identify men who may not identify with being LGBTQ+. It is more inclusive of all identities.
- **native anthropology** – people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group. So a queer person who was once a subject can now study their own community.
- **NSA** – acronym for No-Strings-Attached. This typically is a type of hookup. It is casual and means one does not want anything serious; no emotions or obligations involved.

- **Outside the Perimeter (OTP)** – Outside Atlanta City Limits (as well as Interstate 285). This can be considered the suburbs rather than the city.
- **pansexual** – attracted to one’s personality regardless of their gender identity. Usually connection is of great importance.
- **PDA (public displays of affection)** – Acts of affectionate physical contact in public. This can include holding hands, hugging, or kissing.
- **PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)** – an HIV prevention drug. It helps “reduce the risk of acquiring HIV” according to Remy and Enriquez (2). It is often targeted to MSM due to the “higher risk”.
- **private sphere** – one’s actions not seen by the public eye. For example, if one goes to a MSM’s house to hookup, this is behind closed doors and not public knowledge and so is part of the private sphere.
- **public sphere** – one’s actions seen by the public eye. If one tweets, this is in the public sphere as everyone can read this tweet. Their behavior is also public knowledge.
- **Reddit** – a website/app that allows users discuss a variety of topics. Specifically for MSM, they can use certain subreddits such as “/r/atlantar4r” where they can find hookups or they can also use it as a way to view porn or just converse with other MSM.
- **rushing** – A specific process for recruiting members to college fraternities in which prospective members attend various events in order to know more about that specific frat. If a frat is interested in them, they will offer them a “bid” which they can accept or deny.
- **sexually fluid** - refers to how one’s sexuality can fluctuate. It can also refer to heteroflexible, bisexual, and pansexual people.
- **Scruff** – an app like Grindr (there is a chat feature based on GPS) used to find hookups among MSM, but it is geared towards Bears and hairier men.
- **Snapchat** – is a mobile application and social media platform where one can send text messages and pictures. The pictures usually disappear after an allotted amount of time. MSM will use this to exchange nudes prior to meeting up.
- **shower play** – foreplay in the shower that could lead to oral/anal sex.
- **stigma** – harmful stereotype pertaining to some people.
- **straight acting** – refers to one who tries to “act” straight and more hetero. This encompasses their behavior and presentation. For example, using slang like “bro” to refer to a friend.
- **submissive** – the passive person in a hookup, giving control to the partner. Usually the bottom.

- **Squirt** – this is a website/app that allows MSM to find places/spots to cruise outdoors. Users can also rate how safe certain cruising grounds are based on their experience there.
- **tech bro** – a bro who works in the tech industry; hypermasculine in nature.
- **tribes** – On Grindr, users can classify themselves into groups such as “discreet, geek, daddy, poz, etc” as Yasin Koc situates (28).
- **twink** – a smooth (hairless) and lean teen/twenty-something. Presents more boyish in nature.
- **queer** – an umbrella term for people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. For some people, but it can mean an act of defiance. Being queer is political.
- **queer friendly** – a space that is welcoming and is inclusive to all LGBTQ+ members
- **queer masculinities** – Robert Heasley defines this as the “masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine” (310). Thus, anything outside the norm, is typically labeled queer and not normative behavior.
- **queerness** – the state of being queer. Usually one has certain qualities or quirks that embodies the queer identity.
- **wet** – As a vagina usually gets excited, it typically lubricates itself. When MSM say this though they are talking about an ass. It is usually used as an analogy to a vagina. When a MSM is having sex with someone, he can make an ass moist or “wet”
- **WSW** – acronym for women who have sex with women. This helps identify women who may not identify with being LGBTQ+. It is more inclusive of all identities.
- **Yik Yak** – social media platform where people can discuss a variety of topics. Although not super common, some MSM would use it for hookups or brojobs.

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Appendix A: Qualtrics Survey

Brojob Survey

Q1

Welcome to the research study!

Reminder: You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

- I consent, begin the study. I also agree to the use of direct quotations from this survey. (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate. (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Block 1

Q2 Do you consider yourself a discreet or on the downlow cis-man (biologically male from birth)?

- Yes, continue survey (1)
- No, exit survey (2)
-

Q3 Through which platform did you hear about this survey/case study?

- Grindr (1)
- Doublelist (2)
- Reddit (4)
- A different platform (3) _____
-

Q4 How old are you?

Q5 How do you define your race/ethnicity?

- Caucasian (1)
- African American (2)
- Latinx (3)
- Asian (4)
- Bi-racial/Multiracial (5)
- Self-Identify (6) _____

Q6 Where in Metro Atlanta are you from?

- Inside the Perimeter (Atlanta City Limits) (1)
- Outside the Perimeter (typically suburbia) (3)
- Rural/Small Town (4)
- Not Listed (5) _____
- Prefer not to say (6)

Q7 What religion were you raised?

- Roman Catholic (1)
 - Methodist (2)
 - Southern Baptist (3)
 - Episcopalian (4)
 - Lutheran (5)
 - Unitarian Universalist (6)
 - Judaism (7)
 - Presbyterian (8)
 - Islam (9)
 - Non-Denominational Christian (10)
 - Quaker (12)
 - Bahá'í (13)
 - Eastern Orthodox (14)
 - Greek Orthodox (16)
 - Santería (24)
 - Buddhism (17)
 - Hinduism (18)
 - Sikhism (19)
 - Pagan (20)
 - Religion not listed above (22)
-
- Not raised any religion (25)

Q8 Are you still part of this religious community?

- Yes (1)
- No (3)
- On and off (4) _____
- N/A (5)

Q9 Do you have a girlfriend or wife?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- It's complicated (3) _____

Q10 What sexuality orientation do you identify with?

- Straight (1)
- Bisexual (2)
- Pansexual (3)
- Heteroflexible (4)
- Self-Identify (6) _____

Q11 How old were you when you had your first brojob or same-sex experience?

Q12 Can you tell me about your first encounter with another man?

Q13 Are you familiar with the term "brojob"?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Heard it once or twice before (3)

Q14 Have you ever gone further than a brojob?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Somewhat (3) _____

Q15 Besides Grindr and/or Doublelist, what other apps/websites do you use to hook up with other men?

Q18 Would you be interested in participating in the interview portion of this case study? If yes, what pseudonym (fake name) would you like to go by? And what would be a good way to contact you for this interview? Your contact information does not need to be identifiable as you choose what information you'd like to provide. I will keep your contact information private as I just need it to contact you. This can completely be a throwaway account as it does not need to include your real name. I can contact you via Discord, E-mail, Grindr, Skype, or Zoom. The interview can be done either by text, audio, or video chat. The method you choose is completely up to you and what you feel most comfortable with.

- Yes, I will interview. I would also like to pick my own pseudonym. (please provide pseudonym and contact information below) (1)

- Yes, I will interview. You can pick my pseudonym for me. (please provide contact information below) (2) _____
- I will need to think about being interviewed as I am unsure. If you decide you would like to interview, you can email me at catatz@mun.ca or contact me via Discord (Corey #6018)/or Skype (corey.tatz) (3)
- No I am not interested in being interviewed at this time. (4)

End of Block: Block 1

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Personal Background

- How old are you? What generation would you consider yourself?
- How do you define your gender? Has your gender identity changed over time? What pronouns do you go by?
- How do you define your race/ethnicity?
- Do you affiliate yourself with any religion? If not currently, what were you raised as a child?
- What part of Atlanta are you from? Are you from inside or outside the city limits? Are you originally from here? Do you consider yourself from “The South”?
- Do you have a girlfriend or wife? Can you tell me a little about your previous relationships – to what degree have you been romantically involved with others? In what ways have you been sexually involved with others? Are you divorced? Do you have any kids?
- How old were you when you first had a brojob or same-sex experience?
- What sexual orientation do you identify with? At what age, did you consider yourself this orientation? Has it changed over time?
- Do you have any siblings or family members in the LGBTQ+ community?
- What does the term “down low” mean to you? Do you use the term for yourself? How about the term discreet?

Sexual Encounters

- Can you tell me about your first encounter with another man? Are you familiar with the term “brojob”? How would you define it? Do you prefer to receive or give a “brojob”?
- Can you please tell me about your first brojob experience? Did you know the person?
- How often do you partake in brojob activities? When was the last time you gave/received a brojob?
- Have you ever gone further than a brojob (ex: anal)?
- Besides Grindr, what other apps or websites do you use to hook up with other men?
- What kind of men are you attracted to? Will you hookup with men who are of different races than you? Do you prefer men who are younger, older, or the same age?
- What are your limits in terms sexual activity with other men? Giving/receiving brojobs? Is kissing or touching acceptable? Watching pornography (and gay or straight?)? Voyeurism? Intercourse?
- Do you stick to phone/internet apps, or have you ever engaged in public cruising?
- The Kinsey Scale can be defined as “assigning people to three categories—heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual—the team used a seven-point scale. It ranges from 0 to 6 with an additional category of ‘X’” (Kinsey Institute, Indiana University). So, Zero would exclusively heterosexual, 3 would be equally heterosexual and homosexual, and 6 would be exclusively homosexual (Kinsey Institute, Indiana University). On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being exclusively straight, 10 being exclusively gay, where if anywhere would you fit?

Appendix C: Recruitment Ad

Academic Researcher seeking Participants for research on Brojobs



MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR, CANADA

GENDER STUDIES

Hello, my name is Corey Tatz. I am a graduate student studying Gender Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland which is located in Canada. I am currently in the midst of performing a case study entitled, "The Ins and Outs of Brojobs across Metro Atlanta". This study will examine the role brojobs have in online hookup culture as well as the concept of the "down low". This case study will focus specifically on what risks "bros" who seek brojobs might be taking.

I am seeking discreet/on the down low MSM (men who have sex with men) who have received a brojob in the past. These men should self-identify as either sexually fluid, straight, bisexual, or pansexual. Please be between the ages of 18-50. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Color) men are more than welcome to participate.



Those interested, will complete a simple nineteen question survey and for those willing, may then participate in a follow-up interview. To begin the survey, click here: https://mun.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3jwbFmDmlsLhevQ

Once you have completed the Qualtrics survey, I will contact you if you indicated that you would participate in the interview portion. Please email me at catatz@mun.ca if you have any questions. You may also contact me via Discord (Corey#6018) and Skype (corey.tatz) as well. I look forward to speaking with you. Note: this case study will protect the anonymity of all participants and you will never be required to give your real name.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.