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# “BIG BLACK BEASTS”: RACE AND MASCULINITIES IN GAY PORNOGRAPHY

by

DESMOND FRANCIS GOSS

Under the Direction of Wendy Simonds, PhD

## ABSTRACT

Although there is a good foundation of feminist research at the intersection of performative labor, pornography, and sexuality, there are few (if any) published studies that examine race in porn content intended for gay men’s consumption. What’s more, existing research samples solely from corporatized porn, which is expressly produced, scripted, and directed. Bound by the conventions of the market, however, corporate pornography must abide by a consumer demand that reflects white machinations of black sexuality rather than the self-proclaimed sexual identity of African American men. Instead, I employ an exploratory content analysis of pornographic videos categorized as “ebony” on a popular user-submitted porn database. I am interested in 1) the character of pornographic representations of queer black masculinity and 2) how these representations vary between corporate and non-corporate producers. I find that representations of black men in gay porn rely on stereotypes of black masculinity to arouse consumers, especially those which characterize black men as “missing links” or focus excessively on their “dark phalluses.” Moreover, these depictions consistently separate gay black and white men’s sexuality into bifurcated discursive spaces, thereby essentializing sexual aspects of racial identity. Lastly, though such depictions are less prevalent in user-submitted videos, overall, both user-submitted and corporate content reify stereotypes about black masculinity.

INDEX WORDS: Pornography, Race, Gay, Queer, Sexuality, Masculinity

“BIG BLACK BEASTS”: RACE AND MASCULINITIES IN GAY PORNOGRAPHY

by

DESMOND FRANCIS GOSS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2017

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“BIG BLACK BEASTS”: RACE AND MASCULINITIES IN GAY PORNOGRAPHY

by

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DEDICATION

For every poor, queer, black kid in the South just trying to survive.

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## 1 UNPACKING PORN: RACE, SEX, AND MASCULINITY

While riding public transportation in uptown Atlanta, I noticed an unusual advertisement displayed in a bus stop kiosk. The poster was facing oncoming traffic and large enough to be read from a good distance away. Most of the advertisement was covered with the chest of a muscular white man, but in the center of the photo was a shirtless, dark-skinned black boy with thin dreadlocks. The advertisement also featured words scripted horizontally in large type across the boy's bare chest, reading: "Small body. Huge game." I stared at the poster intently – I felt uncomfortable with the image yet not completely able to comprehend why. Later, when I returned to photograph the image, I began to understand: my discomfort resulted from the brazen sexual exploitation of a black youth. Interestingly, advertisers and city officials had managed to post this advertisement without arousing the alarm of local community members, many of whom had recently expressed outrage over a state-run childhood obesity campaign they perceived as anti-child in the same area (Teegardin 2011). Although no genitalia are displayed in the image, the photo is clearly suggestive of assumed black male sexual power – so immense it defies the physiological condition of petiteness.

In 2007, an art exhibit entitled "Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now" opened in London, celebrating the artistic representation of sexuality throughout human history. Folding under pressure from the community, the Barbican Gallery prohibited visitors under 18 from viewing the show (Chittenden 2009). Of particular concern were several controversial photographs by New York post-pop photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, which presented nude and erotic images of black men – nearly two decades earlier, a showing of Mapplethorpe's exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio led to large anti-pornography protests, an executive resignation, and an obscenity trial (Dobush 2015). Although other art –

including photographs – in the Barbican exhibition featured homoerotic and sadomasochistic portrayals of nude subjects, the racial character of Mapplethorpe’s series of photographs added insult to the already sexually explicit, and thus problematic, presentation (Chittenden 2009). In a way, the inclusion of non-white bodies pushed Mapplethorpe’s photos out of the sunny realm of nude art and into the dark underworld of pornography. Such situations illustrate the malleability of definitions of pornography, as they are undoubtedly delineated with intersecting social parameters like age and race. Clearly, though so often dismissed, pornography provides representations of the eroticized body which can offer “valuable resources for questioning how historical, social and political conditions function to shape cultural attitudes and identities” (Chittenden 2009:157).

How did this photographic art become toxically pornographic so easily, while sexually suggestive material featuring a child goes largely unnoticed at a bus stop? Obviously, pornography is not simply a reflexive consequence of psycho-sexuality – it is also political, contextual, moral, communicative, and evocative. In a word, it is “social.” Although, there is a good foundation of feminist research from this perspective – especially at the intersection of labor and sexuality in the porn industry – there is very little (if any) published research that examines the content of pornography intended for gay men’s consumption that features black participants. And apparently, race is important, as Collins (1993) posits in her analysis of straight porn, “when people of color are [featured], the title usually conveyed this information to consumers. This presumably means that skin color is very salient to consumers” (277). Moreover, all of these projects focus on industry porn, which is usually produced, scripted, and directed. Industry porn is bound by the conventions of the market and must therefore abide by

consumer demand, which may reflect white machinations of black sexuality rather than the self-proclaimed sexual identity of African American men themselves.

Consequently, this research focuses on the representations of African American men in user-submitted gay pornography, particularly when juxtaposed with corporatized porn. I conduct a content analysis of “ebony” videos submitted on a popular user-submitted porn database. More specifically, I examine video and website content, as well as user comments, to understand the processes through which pornography both reinforces and eschews stereotypes about black masculinity, even when positioned as a non-corporate (or “amateur”) enterprise made by or for people of non-heteronormative sexual orientations. Moreover, in the following chapters, I unpack how these processes are significant to understanding the dialectics of social agency and social structure at the intersection of race, sexuality, queerness, and masculinity. In chapter one, I provide an overview of literature that explicates the lived experiences of queer people of color at the intersection of white supremacist and anti-gay cultural ideologies and institutions. Chapter two is a genealogical exploration of pornography in the United States. In the following chapter, I delineate theoretical perspectives on identity, power, and performativity, which I later utilize to frame my findings. Chapter four is a review of my data collection and analysis processes. In chapters five through seven, I present the results of the content analysis, focusing on the recurrent themes of “missing links,” “dark phalluses,” and “separate spaces.” And, lastly, chapter eight includes conclusions and implications of my findings for the field of sociology and the future of black queer socio-politics.

## 2 CHAPTER 1: THE INSOLUBILITY OF BLACK AND QUEER

Few have expounded on power and agency in porn. In fact, the implication of pro-porn feminism is that anti-porn factions inadvertently subscribe to an essentialist gender ideology

when presuming that all sex on public display (or, for some, any sex at all) is always at the behest of men's desire, in service to men's arousal. However, as queer and feminist pornographers interject, sex is a micro-sociological space where gender norms can be retooled, reordered, and revolutionized. In such a space, absent force or coercion, social actors may resist institutional captivity by drawing on the power to self-regulate sexual behavior – in other words, we can and often do exhibit sexual agency. Though pro-sex work feminists have not had to as fervently defend porn performers, women's labor in pornography conjures the same third-wave affirmations of sexual expression, where women's sexual agency is unbridled regardless of men's gaze (Martin 2007). Nevertheless, some feminists have challenged the reality of women's sexuality altogether, instead regarding it as a social fiction created for, and thus inseparable from, the male gaze:

A woman is a being who identifies and is identified as one whose sexuality exists for someone else, who is socially male. Women's sexuality is the capacity to arouse desire in that someone. If what is sexual about a woman is what the male point of view requires for excitement, have male requirements so usurped its terms as to have become them?

Considering women's sexuality in this way forces confrontation with whether there is any such thing (MacKinnon 1982:515).

Here, women's agency in pornography is impossible because women's sexuality itself is a tautological impossibility – it cannot exist without its binary partner, objectifying misogyny. However, this ideology defies the basic tenet of intersectionality – that identities are multiplicative and therefore inequalities are multifaceted (Crenshaw 1991). So, then, what happens to the agency of men at once paradoxically marked by gendered privilege, racial subjugation, and sexual deviance?

Agency and power are two sides of the same coin. Agency, sexual or otherwise, is the deployment of power against an external, opposing force – thus, agency is power’s kinesthetic state. Psychologically, agency can also be conceptualized as a kind of resource embedded in identity, expressed through the possession of self-esteem, purpose, self-control, and self-efficacy (Côté 1996). But sociologically, agency must be understood in the restrictive context of the social structure from which it emerges, is exercised, and extinguished. For instance, Bierra (2014) argues that agency is not only “authored” by the agentic social actor but also by on-looking social actors. Bierra exemplifies their argument with the now-famous comparison between Associated and American Free Press images of Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath, one of which describes a white couple as “finding” groceries, the other describes a black man as “looting.” There is a third actor, however, more fundamentally existential and omnipresent than the others: culture. In Wendy Griswold’s framework of the “cultural diamond,” understanding social processes means uncovering the relationships between the social world, cultural objects, receivers, and creators (Griswold 2012). Therefore, to understand the functionality of agency in black men’s performances in gay porn, we must understand how these actors – gay porn, gay black men, the viewer, and the broader structure in which both are embedded – intercept, reconstruct, and internalize the messages of each other. And when the dust settles, we may have a clearer picture of how power flows between them.

## 2.1 INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION

To understand queer people of color as they relate to power (i.e., operationalize or surrender agency) is to understand how power constructs and is constructed by interpersonal interaction, institutional interaction, identity, and space, in the socio-politics of race, masculinity, and sexuality. For example, when queer people of color engage in social interaction, they do so

in bodies which are racialized in contrast to an opposing white referent. The comparative process of racialized sexuality is not a new phenomenon and it surely precedes the increased visibility and coherence of LGBT communities. Through time, assumptions about race-based distinctions in physical power continually reinforce the social power of artificial difference. Historically, such power has been a crucial tool in the postcolonial project of nation-building and the neoliberal capitalist project of transnational labor exploitation – both of which serve to maintain hegemonic whiteness. Whether the comparison is to “sneaky” Japanese men in WWI or brutish black men during the Jim Crow era and onward, comparisons to idyllic white masculinity create a platform that justifies colonial subjugation of colored bodies.

In gay communities, people of color are often the fetishized subjects of white gay sexual fantasy. Consider the “effeminate Asian man” (Euguchi 2001; Han 2007) or the “butch black man” (Barnes and Battle 2010), both overused and under-examined archetypes of race-informed stereotypic sexual characterization. Just as Asian masculinities and black masculinities are hyper-feminized and hyper-masculinized in American culture, respectively, these prejudices also pervade gay male consciousness, fostering a psycho-sexual attitude about queer Asian and black men that is both fetishizing and stigmatizing. Outside a social milieu which epitomizes supposed Asian sexual submissiveness (such as “rice queendom”), gay Asian American men are frequently desexualized. Moreover, when they do become the sexual targets of white men, their bodies are frequently viewed as insufficient for anything other than sexual conquest (Chen 1999). Similarly, a conceptualization of black male sexuality as savage and untrammled evokes cultural understandings of African Americans as a sort of primitive humanoid subspecies (Collins 2005). Such generalizations of black psychology catalyzes gay culture’s sexual ideation of “big black cock” (or BBC) and other references to the supposed beastliness of black gay male sexuality

(Malebranche and Bowleg 2013). These ideas do not remain statically fixed to gay media (such as gay porn). Instead, like those about gay Asian sexuality, they are critical to the maintenance of power that instructs the interactional processes between gay white men and gay men of color.

## 2.2 IDENTITY

Western conceptualizations of homosexual identity frequently ideate queerness and non-white ethnicity as a dualism, as if either identity concept inherently negates the other. Such ruminations can be readily understood in the processes of racial exclusionism in LGBT communities, such as bouncers turning away would-be patrons of color at entrances to gay bars, soliciting additional forms of identification, or instilling dress codes that preclude fashion associate with black culture (Han 2007; Saunders 2015). In fact, beyond sexual fetishism, queer people of color are frequently excluded from intimate physical and social settings where LGBT communal identity is created, maintained and redefined, including activist groups (Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009), LGBT neighborhoods (Manalansan 2005; Nero 2005), and traditional intimate relationships (Chen 1999).

Moreover, queer people of color can internalize this separation as a socially prescribed bifurcation, resulting in a heterogeneous identity where one's queer self and one's self of color remain problematically distinct. In a 2010 study, Hunter explores identity maintenance among black gay men, highlighting the fluidity of racial and sexual character, and the importance of interacting with individuals, communities, and larger social structure in the configuration of self. Through an analysis of respondent narratives, Hunter identifies three ideal types which best describe the frames through which queer individuals of color – specifically, gay black men – may come to conceptualized their social group identifications. In the “interlocking model,” for example, individuals fuse their “blackness” and “gayness” in an effort to avoid the pitfalls of an



identity construct that separates or prioritizes identifications, and thus repudiate the oppression experienced by racial and sexual minority statuses that are deemed unrelated, hierarchal, or oppositional. Here, gay black men participate in an exercise in agency, reclaiming socio-political power that is deconstructed by gay and straight communities when race is conceptualized as a divergence from queerness – as one of Hunter’s participants explained, “it’s empowering to understand the sameness in both (Hunter 2010:86).”

However, most respondents in Hunter’s study did not subscribe to the interlocking model and instead, fell into models that echoed the separation of race and queerness. For instance, in the “up-down model”, individuals privilege one identity over the other, such that they see themselves as “black then gay” or (less often) “gay then black.” Hunter suggests that the propensity for black LGBT individuals to identify as “black first” may stem from the pervasive and candid nature of homo-negativity in African American communities, and the tendency for individuals to understand their psychology as situated in their most stigmatized identification (Hunter 2010). In contrast to individuals who use the interlocking model to describe their racial and sexual selves, respondents who use the up-down model seek to recognize a social space between race and sexual orientation. Moreover, in the “public-private model,” respondents tie their definitions of racial and sexual identity to the cultural spheres of public space (e.g., the stigmatization of black skin) versus private space (e.g., intimate behaviors with a same-sex partner in the bedroom) (Hunter 2010). Although separations that constitute the up-down and public-private models appear unconnected to socio-political power, as feminism decrees, “the personal is political.” Indeed, strategies of concealment reflect cultural conceptions of what is appropriate behavior and for whom.

### 2.3 INSTITUTIONAL INTERACTION

Queer people of color must navigate institutional power in bodies demarcated by both racial and sexual difference. Doing so can prove difficult or impossible when institutional arrangements are couched in hegemonic heterosexuality and hegemonic whiteness, as all American institutions are. Green (2007), for example, explores the lives of gay black men, particularly their interactions with community institutions like church, family, and LGBT-oriented business establishments. As in Hunter's (2010) study (see above), most of Green's respondents discussed "the unique problem[s] of negotiating dual incommensurable minority identities" (2007). Green continues:

That is, these men found that the very intergenerational familial systems that fostered a healthy racial self-concept at the same time excluded their emerging homosexual attractions. In these instances, the duality of opposing minority statuses was often irreconcilable, producing new sets of structured choices and survival strategies. (2007:758)

In these instances, bifurcated identities were incapable of acting as wells of social empowerment – the racial empowerment of familial support in black families and black churches conflicted with the sexual empowerment of living "out and proud" as a gay man. In contrast, as these same men encountered LGBT-institutions in metropolitan areas, they faced race-based prejudices, discrimination, and invisibility (Green 2007). Clearly, racial discourse in LGBT-communities frequently acts to prohibit queer people of color from reaping the beneficial emotional and political possibilities of LGBT togetherness. Thus, even as they attempted to reconcile their gay and black identities by fleeing the homo-negativity of their ethnic communities for the supposed sexual and racial progressivity of metropolitan life, their agency

was checked by the distinctive power systems that structure the interactions between social institutions and people who exist within multiple dimensions of subjection.

## 2.4 SPACE

Community empowerment has been a mainstay of LGBT culture since the onset of gay liberation, as metropolitan areas like Atlanta, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco began to see the emergence of LGBT enclaves, not only as safe spaces but also as places for political organizing. However, queer people of color frequently were (and continue to be) excluded from these spaces through a process Nero (2005) describes as “gay territorial economy” (see also Green 2007). To start, neighborhoods where gay (predominately white men) sought to establish communities were often formerly ethnic enclaves and working class neighborhoods, made ripe for gentrification by race and class-based property devaluations and divestment from government-business cooperatives interested in urban real estate development (Nero 2005; Logan and Molotch 1987). Interest-convergence allowed for white gay and straight communities to align prerogatives in an effort to boost economic development and heighten the fiscal benefits of a rising tax-base. Meanwhile, political economy practices, such as restrictive zoning, fortified the physical and cultural boundaries between gay white communities and communities of color (Nero 2005).

In many regards, the exclusion of queer people of color from LGBT spaces is not just an unfortunate consequence of latent prejudices or overflow from racism that percolates linked social phenomena, but a socio-political objective of white LGBT communities. Neoliberal spatial politics perpetrate a forced exodus, as the integrated processes of crime-prevention, “homeland security” efforts, and panoptic surveillance make spaces reserved for queer people of color more visible, more deserving of scrutiny, and more amenable to gentrification (Manlansan 2005).

Similarly, queer people of color and their associated spaces are often commoditized and fetishized by gay media. For example, gay travel discourses frequently allude to sexual tourism in communities and nations of color (Manalansan 2005) and gay porn productions featuring black men are often set in ghettos and warehouses with a backdrop of graffiti, prodding white consumers to enter these dangerous spaces at their own risk. Hence, a homonormative discourse that promotes gentrification as a means of securing neoliberal rights like domestic privacy and unrestrained consumerist consumption does so at the expense of safe spaces of queer communities of color.

### 3 CHAPTER 2: PORN, PAST AND PRESENT

Defining what constitutes pornography has been one of the problems in social science studies on pornographic material. In “A Review of Internet Pornography Research,” Short et al. conduct a meta-analysis of research on internet pornography over the past 10 years (2012). Unfortunately, the great diversity of methods made cross-sectional comparisons difficult and the authors suggest that the included scholars do not agree upon a single definition of pornography. However, Short et al. suggest that these individualized approaches to pornography can be configured into a broad standard that defines porn as “any [...] products designed to increase sexual arousal of users,” “material containing explicit sexual descriptions,” and “materials that either show clear pictures of, or talk/write about sexuality using sexual vocabulary,” which could include “magazines, videos, the Internet, and explicit novels” (2012:14). Using this definition, I conclude that the internet source and its collection of sexually-explicit, user-submitted material utilized to garner data for this project is categorically pornographic.

No matter how we define it, often wrapped in religion, tradition, humor, protest, and ontology, pornography seems to be an ever-present feature of human behavior. Throughout

history, erotic depictions have been common in cultures separated by large swaths of time and space, continuously adapting to emergent forms of communicative media. Indeed, the earliest known (probably) erotic images were carved onto walls of our earliest anthropoid ancestors, the oldest of which is a crudely drawn vulva in France, predicted to be nearly 36,000 years old, a relic of the Cro-Magnon era (White 2012). Later, every major civilization would find a way to display representations of human sexuality or closely associated phenomena. The Erotic Papyrus scroll of Egypt (circa 1150 BCE) features scenes of men and women engaged in various sex acts (O'Connor 2001). The Moche of Peru inscribed sex scenes onto pottery of (mostly) anal sex, masturbation, featuring both same and other-sex coupling (Wołoszyn, and Piwowar 2015). Other more well-known ancient erotic artifacts such as Greek ceramics, Roman paintings, Medieval European miniatures, Indian manuscripts (i.e., the *Kama Sutra*), and Japanese wood prints demonstrate the myriad of ways sexuality has been illustrated through human existence. In fact, some have argued that erotic imagery was and continues to be a fundamental driver of technological advance, helping to spur both early investment in and later popularity of cinematic, photographic, and internet technology, even the original printing press (Strusiewicz 2010; Johnson 1996).

The 15<sup>th</sup> century invention of the printing press undoubtedly led to a wider dispersal of erotic images accompanied by a burgeoning discourse about sexual vulgarity. As these images spread, they garnered more attention from reigning Catholic authorities. In the early 1500s, Pope Adrian VI bemoaned that “there have been many abominations these many years, abuses in spiritual things, excessive decrees, and everything perverted” and threatened to destroy the Sistine Chapel because of its thematic sexuality and Pagan references (Eko 2016:114). Not long after, Italian erotic sketch artist Giulio Romano was imprisoned and his artwork burned by

Adrian's successor, Pope Clement VII (Eko 2015). In Europe, this culture of opposition later found its most fertile ground in the ethics of the Britain's Victorian Era, as the behavioral impetus of communal morality (driven largely by developing class divisions) replaced earlier papal dicta in the regulation of sexuality. Because Victorian ethics were more focused on the social control and management of sexuality – particularly among the lower classes – than its institutional censorship, viewing erotic material was both culturally unacceptable yet very common (Eko 2011; Foucault 1978). Nevertheless, in 1857, Britain passed the Obscene Publications Act, the first law ever to prohibit pornography (Manchester 1988).

The development of photographic and cinematic technologies in the early 1900s provided new methods for the creation and dissemination of pornography. Because early cameras were arduous, fickle, and expensive, emergent sexology had succeeded in solidifying the psychic link between gender roles and sexual anatomy, and obscenity laws forbade the production or possession of art meant for arousal, single prints of nude women – such as the notorious “French postcards” – dominate this period of porn (Klich 2001). In fact, these photos (daguerreotypes, to be exact) were so popular that French poet Charles Baudelaire focused his critique of photography on the reproduction of erotic imagery: “It was not long before thousands of pairs of greedy eyes were glued to the peepholes of the stereoscope, as though they were skylights of the infinite” (Baudelaire 1964:667). Sexological thought also contributed to the development of hetero and homosexuality, not only as behaviors, but sexual identities. The period surrounding WWII saw a surge of gay erotica, as obscenity laws in the United States – which prohibited exposed penises – gave way to a preponderance of super soft-core porn like “physique magazines” and postcards featuring men in “posing straps” (or thongs) (Johnson 2010). The advent of motion pictures introduced the modern form of erotic imagery, complete with genital

close-ups and characteristically rudimentary narratives, and popularized the “hard-core” element of intercourse (Slade 2006). These “stag films” were often screened in brothels, frat houses, and private homes – the oldest surviving version of which, “El Satorio,” follows an imp chasing several nymphs through a woods as kidnapping and rape ensues (Slade 2006; *El Satorio*).

### 3.1 GENDER AND RACE IN PORNOGRAPHY

Surviving the conservatism of the 1950s (and finding new a new venue with the “pin up” phenomenon), pornography flourished during the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s and found its quintessential decade in the 1970s, the “Golden Age of Porn” (Lehman 2012). In 1973, the Supreme Court nullified federal law that criminalized the possession, production, and distribution of pornography. As a result, porn came out of the closet and into the mainstream, stylized after and budgeted like Hollywood movies (Eko 2011). At the same time, a fierce anti-pornography feminist ethic became a major component of the contemporaneous second wave of the women’s liberation movement (Long 2012). Dissatisfied with the unchecked misogyny of the so-called sexual revolution, a large swath of the movement radicalized, led by earlier work in consciousness-raising and safe-space creation in response to physical and sexual masculine violence, such as “Take Back the Night” campaigns and rape crisis centers (Long 2012). In a statement issued by the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966, Betty Friedan declared that NOW will “protest, and endeavor to change, the false image of women now prevalent in mass media.” By the later part of the following decade, anti-porn sentiment had become firmly enmeshed with women’s lib – the first national anti-pornography conference was held in 1978 and Andrea Dworkin’s influential *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* published the following year. Though earlier camps derided porn as a catalyst for the sexual objectification and victimization of women (“pornography is the theory, and rape the practice” [Morgan

1980:128]), Dworkin infamously posited that the existence of pornography was in itself sexist violence, as “its nature, its magnitude, its use, its meaning” were contrived by “male power” (Dworkin 1983:24).

The video home system (or VHS), along with Richard Nixon’s anti-porn crusade, effectively ended the Golden Age of Porn. It was followed by the modern formulation characterized by low budgets, clichéd narratives, and notoriously mediocre acting, as it returned to the dark recesses of our cultural closet (Lehman 2012). Meanwhile, pornography was becoming a divisive issue in the feminist movement – so divisive, in fact, that the era is often characterized as the “feminist sex wars” (Abrams 1995). On either side, new voices, like Catherine MacKinnon and Camille Paglia, reinvigorated their campaign with radical, often controversial, vigor – anti-porn Mackinnon influenced critique of heterosexuality as inherently sexist with her pronouncement that “man fucks woman; subject verb object” while pro-porn Paglia has been widely criticized for her view that rape is an evolutionary trait in men akin to a “hunting reflex” (Mackinnon 1983; Segura 2015).

The anti-porn camp, influenced by “lesbian feminist” thought, remained steadfast to its claim that the objectification and marginalization of women in pornography (to say nothing of the common and overt themes of physical and sexual violence) were inherently anti-feminist (Long 2012). However, voices of dissent grew louder, under the banner of “sex positivity,” arguing against the impulse to interpret women’s sexuality in any context as ostensibly passive and thereby (like sex work, birth control, and homosexuality) the purview of paternalistic oversight, rightist socio-politics, and state regulation and censorship (Rubin 1984; Abrams 1995; Long 2012). Though attrition has likely precluded a victor, pro-pornography feminists are arguably most welcome in the phenomenological subjectivity of the third and current wave of



women's liberation. In a way, the war itself is emblematic of the third wave, where objective directives are abandoned while differences are celebrated as the hallmark of the plurality of women's experiences.

Queer studies has not (yet) experienced the same internal conflict surrounding porn, in part because of its same affinity with the notions of fluidity and intersectionality of individual experience that characterizes the more porn-positive third wave of feminism. Moreover, pornography in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the few cultural spaces that allowed for progressive exploration of (particularly gay men's) non-normative sexuality in a stigma-less environment, in a time when even non-erotic representations of queerness were fundamentally indecent (Escoffier 2009). The photos of men in posing straps, physique mags, and pulp fiction of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were not just a part of gay culture; "they virtually *were* gay culture" (Hooven 2002:74). And these cultural artifacts had a lasting effect, as the present state of gay men's sexual culture mirrors the same masculinist imaginary that glorify fitness and youth (and whiteness). As Morgan recounts in "Pages of Whiteness: Race, Physique Magazines, and the Emergence of Gay Public Culture": "current dynamics of racial segregation in the world of queer politics are rooted in the historical conditions in which that movement first emerged... The roots of gay political activism and community building were thus nourished by the same soil in which racial segregation flourished" (1996:282-283).

The internet has made pornography more popular and accessible than any previous technological advance. Today, internet porn is huge business – with tens of millions of porn-related searches a day, hundreds of millions of webpages dedicated to erotic images and videos, and a global yearly profit in the billions (Dines 2010:47). The era of internet porn has also ushered in a new diversity of voices, perspectives, activities, and bodies, such as those

encapsulated by “feminist” and “queer porn.” Current feminist porn has its roots in the early work of entrepreneurs like Candida Royalle, who founded Femme Productions in 1984, one of the first porn producers to operate on the then radical notion that “women...have a right to [their] own pleasure” (Comella 2013:82). But distributor doubts about marketing and demand stunted the growth of Royalle’s enterprise, limiting product to just a few feminist-minded sex shops (Comella 2013). Though still a niche market, contemporary feminist (and queer) porn utilizes the open access of the web to bypass nervous distributors while supplying content that:

uses sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homo-normativity... seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex, and expand the language of sex as an erotic activity, an expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics...[and] creates alternative images and develops its own aesthetics and iconography to expand established sexual norms and discourses. (Taormino et al. 2013:10)

Despite the seemingly revolutionary quality of feminist and queer porn, anti-porn feminists remain largely unmoved, as Long notes (quoting Dworkin): “pornography without inequality [is] impossible to make [because] pornography by definition is ‘based on sexualized inequality or women’... [Feminist porn’s] reliance on the representation and performance of inequality, then, appears to sit uncomfortably with the attempt to frame the content as ‘feminist’” (Long 2012:90).

Pornography continues to be a polarizing topic in feminist communities (Miller-Young 2006). Today, arguments tend to split along conflict theory and structural-functionalist lines: does pornography reify sexual objectification of women's bodies and reproduce the structural barriers to women's access to high-status labor? Or is pornography emblematic of third-wave feminist claims to sexual control and an avenue to financial stability, particularly for women of lower socio-economic status? However, in light of the slow and inadequate response of the porn industry to feminist critiques, it's no surprise that voices from the former camp have (arguably) dominated the debate. In *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, American Studies professor Gail Dines examines how pornographic images are "part of a wider system of sexist representations that legitimize and normalize the economic, political and legal oppression of women" (Dines 2012:512) Moreover, like gender, race is also a part of the cultural debate about porn, as pornographic material often reproduces both the racial and gendered character of social relations in mainstream culture. In an intersectional study of pornographic images on the internet, film theorist Daniel Bernardi (2007) describes the complex nexus of race and gender in pornography:

[A] young woman is shown spreading her legs for the camera. Although we see her breasts and pubic hair, her face is not featured because it is not necessary to the image's racial discourse. The Chihuahua dog breed that appears in the Taco Bell advertisements, the Web site's title, "Dark Pussy," and an explicit dialogue bubble—"yo quiero teen action?"—signify Latina...Positioning young Latinas as spicy fast food willing to fuck anything, the Web site and image illustrate the intertextuality of racism in online pornography. (117)

Indeed, an analysis of porn offers an opportunity to dissect what Bernardi proclaims is the utilization of “women and people of color in the...articulation of whiteness” (2007:117). For example, the phenomenon of “hip hop porn” offers a profound example of how porn operates at the node of race, gender, sexuality and capitalism. Hip hop pornography combines the sexually explicit and erotic character of pornography with rap artists, rap lyrics and beats, scenes depicting ghettoized urban neighborhoods, “pimps,” “hoes,” and other aspects of “thug life” (Miller-Young 2008). Depictions of black sexuality may appear to represent the social psychological manifestations of African American culture but much like hip hop, the character of pornography is shaped by the economic drivers of free-market capitalism, as well as the institutionalization of white supremacy and male hegemony. Therefore, hip hop pornography regularly features black women at the dispense of men’s sexual desire, as black men capitalize on the eroticized black female body. Moreover, this racialized display serves white ideals of black masculinity and femininity, as hip hop porn references the apparently captivating power of an imagined black sexual unorthodoxy (Miller-Young 2008).

We can reasonably assume that Western discourse on sexuality has always had a pornographic orientation toward black women’s bodies. Consider the tragedy of Saartjie Baartman. In the early 1800s, apartheid, poverty, and coercion prompted Baartman to leave her home in the Dutch Cape Colony (present-day South Africa) for Liverpool then Paris. There, she was enslaved and encaged by a professional animal trainer who displayed her for eager white European onlookers who were mesmerized by the size and height of her buttocks (Nash 2008; Collins 1993). Many were curious about a human they presumed to be so radically different from themselves that she must be part of an entirely different species – some even considered Baartman to be a living relic of the elusive “missing link,” part of some lesser hominid

community (Qureshi 2004). Even in death, Baartman remained on view: her body was dissected, preserved, and displayed in a Parisian museum (Qureshi 2004). In the years since, long after the power of scientific racism has diminished, Baartman's story has become a black feminist legend, used to critique the racial ignorance of (white) feminism by exemplifying the unique sexual discourses surrounding women of color and to show the historic linkages between essentialist understandings of gender, sexuality, and race (Nash 2008). Similarly, too, Collins reminds us that contemporary pornography emerged during the same time and in the same place of Baartman's exhibition, so that "the treatment of Black women's bodies in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States may be the foundation upon which contemporary pornography as the representation of women's objectification, domination, and control is based" (1993:98).

Since the 1980's many research studies have demonstrated the persistence of racial stereotypes in pornography, "hip hop" or otherwise (Bernardi 2007). For example, for Asian women, these stereotypes are often predicated on the presumption of subservience and dullness (Hamamoto 1998). In a telling example, one corporate-sponsored pornographic video (presented as a preview to a DVD) depicts an Asian women acting as a prime time reporter, reading the day's news in a business suit, behind a large desk, and seemingly uncaring or unaware of the twenty or so men who, one by one, approach the desk to ejaculate on her face. The faces of the men are not displayed. She does not show signs of enjoyment or detestation – she is there to collect what they give her – a receptacle for their ejected masculinity. This representation is a modification of the *bukkake* sex party phenomenon in Japanese culture (Moore 2010). During these functions, many different men ejaculate on one woman's face (Moore 2010). However, the addition of a career-centered backstory to her character in this industrialized representation of *bukkake* adds another level of gendered process to the phenomenon: men's sexual power trumps

feminist liberation. Pornographic images reiterate stereotypes of other racial groups as well, depicting “Latin women as sexually voracious yet utterly submissive; and black women as dangerous and contemptible sexual animals” (Mayall and Russell 1993:275).

Black men in straight porn also seem confined to stereotypes endemic to broader cultures of race and gender. A study by Cowan and Campbell (1994) found that the race and gender of participants in straight porn affected how pornographic actors interacted with each other. For example, while white men were more aggressive with black women, black men were more aggressive with white women (Cowan and Campbell 1994). The ways in which women submitted to their male partners also differentiated by race. For instance, black women were more likely to fellate on their knees while both black and white men were more likely to ejaculate on white women’s faces. Moreover, black men displayed less intimacy with both black and white partners than white men and were more often “prodigiously endowed” with large penises such that their representations were less human than “sex machine” (Cowan and Campbell 1994:335). Clearly, though black men inherit male privilege in pornography, white supremacy relegates black men’s sexuality to white fantasy. As Mayall and Russell (1993:289) note, “by and large, African-American men who consume pornography have a choice of buying magazines in which only whites are portrayed, or in which white men use African-American women or African-American men use white women.”

Given the pervasiveness of feminist scholars’ discussion of power distributions depicted in pornographic material as well as in the porn industry itself, it is not surprising that much of the research into racial stereotypes in pornography focuses on women of color in heterosexual contexts, in porn produced by corporate enterprises. However, such a focus may not be representative of race and gender practices in pornographic imagery more generally in three

important ways. First, a focus on women of color prohibits an analysis of how men of color fare in porn. Second, a focus on other-sex coupling in pornography (or “straight porn”) ignores or understates the complicated and interesting interplay of gender and race processes that take place in sexually explicit imagery featuring same-sex (or “gay”) porn. Lastly, a focus on corporate produced pornography cannot fully account for personal agency, which – in the absence of economic reward for stereotypic sex play – may allow for more transgression against prejudicial representations of race, race relations, gender, and sexuality. In other words, how is power distributed to the separate (albeit overlapping) identities of gender, race and sexuality in pornography that features the erotic performances of black gay men, when those men have the power to represent themselves as they see fit?

### 3.2 NONNORMATIVE BODIES: FETISHISM AND EMPOWERMENT

Black men are largely absent from gay erotica from the first half of the 1900s. For example, posing strap photos of black men have yet to be unearthed and may not exist at all. Physique magazines did not feature black men on their covers until the early 1960s and only four were featured from 1955 to 1960 (Johnson 2010; Morgan 1996). When men of color were presented, they were enmeshed in fantasy that recalled oft-replicated stereotypes or painful history of racial violence. For instance, black men in physique mags were often posed with chains, on shipping crates, or otherwise posed with props reminiscent of American slavery (Morgan 1996); the earliest known appearance of a black main character in gay pulp fiction was 1971, toward the end of its popularity, in a publication titled *Mixed Nuts*; and the earliest porn film to feature a black main character is titled *Mr. Footlong's Encounter*, where “Mr. Footlong” exacts revenge on his cheating white lover by “topping” his romantic competition. Clearly, (white) gay culture was more concerned with derailing censorship than challenging racism in

queer communities, the United States, and its own publications. Though many have bewailed the recent assimilationist shift right of queer politics, the alignment of 20<sup>th</sup> century gay porn culture with libertarianism (i.e., a free market without government intervention) instead of institutional deconstruction of racist social, economic, and political structures, marginalized queers of color from the very beginning (Johnson 2010; Morgan 1996).

Analyses of race in contemporary gay pornography appear to be relatively absent from academic discussion on the matter (Rowden 2011). Nevertheless, there are many references to the racialized character of gay porn in popular culture. For instance, in the March 2001 issue of the *Washington Blade*, a reader known as “Panting in Anticipation” writes to advice columnist Woody Miller:

I’m writing in hopes you can give me some recommendations to meet my *particular fetish* [emphasis added]. I am a black male who happens to be a bottom, who likes white tops. Unfortunately, I’m having a hard time finding quality films showcasing these match-ups. In porn it’s always the extra large [sic] black man servicing a white bottom. And even these are basically mechanical, there is no lovemaking or chemistry between the actors. Can you recommend a few quality movies where the white guys top the black guys? (3)

Even after consulting with a “porn reviewer extraordinaire,” Miller is unable to provide any adequate suggestions, remarking that fulfilling the reader’s “particular fetish” is a “tall order.” The only suggestions Miller can offer are two select scenes from two different gay porn videos, one of which is ironically titled *Black Drills/White Holes* (Miller 2001:3).

Another non-academic earlier example involves tension between two organizations, the awareness-raising group “Gays of Ottawa” and *The Body Politic* magazine, for its publishing of



an advertisement for a porn magazine titled *WASP (White Asses Super Pricks)* (Bearchell and Patterson 1984). Though this title could be read as a retributive fetishization of white men's bodies, the caption – “Unethnic. Unorthodox.” – suggests that the racial processes presented here are actually an effort to construct an illusory problem of minority over-representation, to which the creators respond with whitewashing. Shortly after, *The Body Politic* published a rebuttal in which the author compared racial “preference” in gay pornography to his own affinity for mustaches: “...my preference excludes many (most?) asian [sic] and native men, since facial hair is less common among them...So, is my preference for moustaches a covert or indirect racial bias?” (Popert 1983).

The few studies that examine the presentation of non-normative (i.e., non-white, non-thin, and non-young) bodies in gay porn often attempt to understand the dialectical discourse of fetishism and empowerment as it pertains to these men's involvement in corporatized pornography. Mercer (2013) investigates this phenomenon among older men, noting that the popular sub-genre of “Daddy porn” has offered older gay men a place of dignity in the limited pantheon of body types for gay men's sexual consumption. Though Mercer is initially skeptical as to whether this emergence is a progressive instance of sexual liberation or a “reassertion of patriarchal masculinity and a problematic eroticization of abusive power dynamics,” (2013:313) Mercer ultimately sides with the former: “in the figure of the sexualized older gay male we see the indication of a progressive and necessary turn for an aging population, challenging the hegemony of youthful athleticism and celebrating what we all become” (2013:325). Highberg (2011) takes on a similar project, examining the role of fat men in gay porn. Like Mercer, Highberg argues against the anti-feminist pornography monolith constructed by Dworkin and company (Held 2013). Instead, Highberg understands that for some non-normative communities, fetish

pornography offers a space, sexual and otherwise, where individuals who do not or cannot model homonormative identity orientations can find community and validation (2011).

Other scholars have sought to examine the ways in which pornography allows for postcolonial communities to reconstruct new sexualities without the fetishizing gaze of white supremacy. For example, increasingly, both Arab and Mexican men have been participating in producing gay pornography that challenges European assumptions of primality and savagery, decenters white sexual desire as guiding principle, and denounces the exploitation of bodies of color as a space for figurative sex tourism, opting instead to represent the sexuality of gay men of color as significant in their own right (Cervulle and Rees-Roberts 2008; Subero 2010). Such developments are promising for the emancipation of gay black men's sexuality in pornography. But do African American gay men, like fat or older men, have the privilege of choosing where their images fall on the spectrum of pornography, somewhere between stereotypic fetishization at one end and sexual empowerment at the other (Highberg 2011; Mercer 2013)? If straight porn featuring participants of color is any indication, this privilege may be unavailable to black men in gay porn.

Understanding the social processes and structures that shape the sexual performance of black men in gay pornography is an important project for contemporary sociology in several ways. Postmodern thought construes social life as more decentered and deconstructed than ever before, where each individual's self may be a conglomeration of multiple, overlapping, and even contradictory identities (Conley 2013a). Hence, in this research, I observe porn featuring individuals whose sexual performance is largely the consequence of a unique and under-examined discourse involving race, masculinity, and sexual orientation, all at once. This more inclusive lens is crucial for understanding another important aspect of sociological

postmodernism: agency. In essence, we are more aware than ever that we can execute resistance to hegemonic mechanisms of social control through the deployment of agency (Chappell 2008; Modesti 2008). Here, I am interested in how black gay men utilize or disregard agency to re/de/construct their own sexuality, particularly in the age of user-created digital media. Such an understanding could have implications in other contexts where the sociology of sex seeks to consider the increasing cross-over between sexuality and technology.

What implications could black gay men's sexual performativity in gay porn mean for African American gay men outside of pornography? In a 2012 study of black gay men in Toronto, participants were asked to describe the character of their sexual encounters as a function of race (Husbands et al. 2013). Overall, participants reported more anal insertiveness with white, Latino, and Asian men than with other black men. Even participants who identified as "versatile" (performing as both top and bottom in different contexts) admitted to always being the penetrative partner when engaged in anal sex with non-black partners. Moreover, some participants preferred to engage in normative relationships (versus purely sexual relationships) with white men, as their experiences in such relationships with other black men demonstrated that black masculinity can be powerfully – sometimes dangerously – oppressive (Husbands 2013). Similarly, a public health study of gay men's "safe-sex" practices found a statistically significant correlation between racial discrimination experienced by black and Latino gay men and the lack of condom use when engaged in sex acts with partners of unknown HIV/AIDS status (Smith 2012). Though linking pornographic representation and lived experience is a controversial and under-critiqued ideological exercise, there are numerous studies that suggest a substantial connection. In other words, racial stereotypes in gay pornography can have real effects in the lives of men of color.

#### 4 CHAPTER 3: IDENTITY, POWER, AND PERFORMATIVITY

The paradigmatic frames of this research – queer, black feminist, and critical race theories – are each distinct, though overlapping, offspring of the critical tradition. Critical theory is primarily concerned with community orientations that are systematically shut out of overarching societal discourses or whose inclusion is an (often unwanted) afterthought (Buechler 2014). However, critical theory does not restrict itself to the boundaries of identity socio-politics. Instead, critical paradigms seek to not only understand the power mechanisms that imbue social oppression but to also figuratively deconstruct and literally dismantle these processes on a macro-sociological scale (Buechler 2014). This ideology is readily apparent in the origins narrative of critical theory in the Frankfurt School of sociological thought. Although theorists in the Frankfurt tradition borrow much of their understanding of the social world from Marxist conflict theory, critical theorists condemned Marx for his inability or unwillingness to disband social inequality from his axiomatic centrality of capitalistic class stratification (Buechler 2014). To Frankfurt academics and the critical theorists who followed, domination involves a complex structure of power and privilege that guides *all* social processes, not limited to only class structures. Moreover, critical theory argues that restricting sociology to a mere understanding of this process of domination is insufficient – an unfortunate consequence of the discipline’s ongoing attempt at legitimization by quietly claiming that social systems can be objectively quantified like the systems observed in the so-called “hard sciences” (Buechler 2014). Critical theory, in contrast, suggests that “although we cannot change the laws of physics or chemistry, we can change the laws of society” (Buechler 2014:35).

In the introduction to *Black Queer Studies*, Johnson and Henderson discuss the lack of discursive dialogue between two specific critical premises: critical race and queer theories. The

purpose, therefore, of their book is to negotiate this interaction, to “interanimate” the “liberatory and interrogatory discourses” of “black studies and queer studies” (Johnson and Henderson 2005:1). In this chapter – and throughout this project – I seek to do the same with two significant modifications. First, I unite queer, critical race, and black feminist theories in an explanatory triumvirate that provides me the tools to deconstruct racialized expressions of masculinity. Secondly, I compare how these expressions frame sexuality. In doing so, I approach an empirical and theoretical understanding of the sociocultural phenomenon delineated as “blaQueerness” (Wilson N.d.) and the associated lived experiences of those who live, work, play, and fuck at the often treacherous intersection of blackness, queerness, and cis-masculinity, where social actors often struggle to unify identities that broader Western culture has historically deemed incompatible.

Scholars of varied social locations have discussed such troubled intersections with language and concepts rooted in their own experiences. For example, Du Bois’s “double consciousness,” Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness,” and the concept of blaQueerness all share a pivotal goal: to articulate and theorize on the social psychology produced from and by navigating space as two identities, ultimately two different people, attempting to become one (Du Bois 2008; Anzaldúa 1999; Wilson n.d). Du Bois laments such becoming, since one of his incompatible identities (American citizenship) expressly and currently subjugates the other (blackness) (Du Bois 2008). Though the oppressive forces of whiteness and imperialism are similarly significant for Anzaldúa, their effects are manifestations of residual political tensions between native and Mexican-situated identities, brought to life in a sociocultural “borderland” – a place that necessitates “a tolerance for indifference, a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 1999:101). A paradigm of blaQueerness consolidates these notions by challenging both historical

anti-black, anti-femme, and anti-queer aggressions and their resulting psychic and cultural consequences that marginalize through “indifference” and “ambiguity.” Indeed, the phrase itself is a linguistic play symbolizing a conceptual bridge between two concepts that have been bifurcated by a chimerical “border,” a bridge between paralleled consciousnesses (Wilson n.d.).

“Quare theory” is Johnson’s (2011) academic counterpart to the cultural phenomenon of blaQueerness and a challenge to the colorlessness of “queer,” which Anzaldúa argues is “a false unifying umbrella...[that] homogenizes, erases our differences” (Anzaldúa 1991:250). Although clearly influenced by feminist theory and gay and lesbian studies, queer theory grew from a critique that neither paradigm fully addresses the fluidity and reflexivity of sexuality. As such, queer theory has concerned itself with any and all forms of sexuality, particularly those that are non-normative, and insisting that sexual behaviors, ideologies, and categories are socially constructed, saturated with symbolism, and endemically resistant to the institutional powers that imbue deviance into sexualities outside of mundane heterosexuality (Jagose 1996). If queer theory is in its infancy, then quare theory represents a significant point of maturation. Though quare incorporates queer, it also addresses the failures of queer theory by mirroring the conversion of lived experience into academic epistemology employed by black feminist thought (Johnson 2001). Moreover, quare theory overcorrects for the analytical poverty of non-white frames of reference by centering the perspectives of people of color and theorizing inequalities beyond sexual orientation (Johnson 2001). To the quare actor, theory, or study, race is not an addition or afterthought to sexuality analysis, but rather the two are inseparable.

In another regard, quare theory is a perspective that queers the intersection of identities. Intersectional theory first took root in critical legal studies, where Kimberlé Crenshaw provided a simple but powerful analogy for the experience of multiple oppressions: “Discrimination, like

traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another...Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination” (1991:1244). Here, Crenshaw lays out the structural framework of intersectionality that problematizes paradigms that view sexism or racism from a singular perspective. Instead, intersectional theory seeks to understand these forms of oppression as co-constitutive. As such, black women’s experiences exceed descriptions that construct their identities through oppositional ideations constituted by juxtapositions with the experiences of black men *or* white women. In other words, the marginalizing experiences of black women are not simply the sum of racism and sexism – they inhabit a character that is decidedly black women-centered.

Like queer theory, intersectionality seeks to challenge the essentialist notions of identity that sequestered the analytic and implicational potential of its theoretical predecessors. Intersectional theory elucidates conceptualizations of identity as historically-situated phenomena, couched in institutional mechanisms that work to maintain and reproduce the cultural hegemony of elite strata (Grzanka 2014). Thus, intersectionality is critical to understanding the complexities of identity socio-politics. As such, intersectional research tends to focus on the critical examination of structural forces and institutional processes that sustain multiple dimensions of marginalization (Grzanka 2014). The work of Roderick Ferguson in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004) invokes this focus in the context of sociological research concerned with queers of color. Ferguson argues that the discipline of sociology has institutionalized racialized heteronormativity such that social phenomena that deviate from this typology are excluded from sociological discourse. Like queer theory, a “queer of color critique,” therefore, seeks to examine how gender, race, and sexuality diversify one another,

particularly in the context of identity formation as an effect of socio-historical discourse (Ferguson 2004).

How do queerness and blackness interact with masculinity? Connell describes masculinity as an organizing social practice – a discursive cultural ideology – that structures social relations through the continuous gendered projects of male performance (2008). Although patriarchal power is central to masculinity, sexual performance (what Connell calls “cathexis”) is also crucial for masculine practice. And the two are intimately connected: access to hegemonic masculinity requires proper expression of cathexis to benefit fully from patriarchal power. Of course, proper expression is limited to white heterosexual cismen – therefore, queer men of color are relegated to a lesser status as “complicit,” “marginalized,” or “subordinate” masculine actors (Connell 2005). For example, Johnson demonstrates subordination when noting that “when black Americans have employed the rhetoric of black authenticity, the outcome has often been a political agenda that has excluded more voices than it has included” (2003:3). Importantly, the instability of these states compels masculine actors to develop strategies for coping such as repudiating hegemonic ideals, compensating for lack of access to hegemony, deflecting attention from hegemony-blocking characteristics, or denying the existence of such qualities outright (Chen 1999) – each of which comes with unintended side-effects. Though performing traditional black masculinity is associated with confidence, self-esteem, and social acceptance, it may also lead to psychological anguish, depression, and risk-taking behaviors for black men, regardless of sexual identity (Fields et al. 2015).

In addition, youthful white bodies are the status quo for cultural ideals and images of Western sexual attractiveness. Expounding on his experiences as both a queer theory scholar and former porn star, Tortorici connects queer conceptions of sexuality with his own real-world



experiences in the porn industry (2008). Tortorici critically examines the character of racial preferences in porn commodities, which typically promote young white bodies as the most salient physical manifestation of sexuality, while derogating bodies of color into the realm of fetishism. Obviously, the current rhetoric of “sexual preference” does not as easily permit the innocuous declaration of racial preference for sexual partners as before the modern state of racial integration. However, there still exists language that allows for such preferences to endure without the explicitly racist ideologies they once signified. Hence, as Tortorici notes, a gay porn production company may issue a casting call looking for “Surfer/Jock/Student” types instead of a call for “young white actors.” On the website used for this research (discussed below), the suggestion of white corporeal supremacy is similarly maintained through categorical searches. Although there are website buttons that allow for searches for Latino actors (“Latino”), black actors (“Ebony”), Japanese actors (“Yaoi”), older actors (“Daddies”) or “Interracial” actors, there is no such grouping of “white porn,” as pornography featuring young white bodies is the standard.

In *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins discusses the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality, and how this intersection is shaped by the heteronormative white ideal (Collins 2005). Collins (2005) qualifies this interaction as a collection of ideology and social behaviors that (mis)represent black sexuality. To Collins, sexuality is a “specific constellation of social practices [imbued with conceptions of race and gender] that demonstrate how oppressions converge” (Collins 2005:11). “Black sexual politics” is a useful conceptual frame for analyzing the race-gender character of gay porn featuring African-American men, as media representations and cultural discourse are also the interrogative focus of racist socio-politics for Collins’ project. On the whole, Collins describes the representation of black sexuality in American culture as wild

and unrestrainable, animalistic and primitive, especially when compared to the socially-valued image of white sexuality as the natural standard and moral authority on human sexuality.

Furthermore, according to Collins, constructing this racial difference through constant comparison to the ideal is crucial to maintaining white cultural supremacy (Collins 2005). Gay pornography provides a social vehicle for this process of continual appraisal, as the standardization of white men's bodies is repeatedly contrasted to black men's fetishized sexuality.

Collins also introduces the concept of controlling images as media machinations that draw on sociohistorical prejudices to frame stereotypic representations of black women, such as the "mammy," "hoochie," or "welfare queen" (Collins 1990). Considering the impact of these examples on the shape of American discourses about childrearing, the structure of work, poverty, government assistance, and entertainment industries, to name a few, it is clear that controlling images are virtual displays of hegemonic power. In this sense, controlling images do not necessarily reflect race relations as they are but as they are desired to be by institutions involved in securing power supremacy for the social elite. In Collins's examples, white supremacy and male hegemony frame the image of black womanhood as apposition to the depiction of moral citizenship supposedly illustrated through whiteness and maleness (Collins 1990).

This concept can be extended to media associated with queer black men. First, and most notably, images of queer people of color are disproportionately absent from mainstream media representation, particularly in film and television. Although depictions of white LGBT characters are more readily available on cable television, shows that depict the lives of queer black men are essentially confined to one LGBT-oriented network. Even within this network, there is a preponderance of black femme comedic side-characters, which recalls the critique of America's

voyeuristic and paradoxical fixation with black entertainment (hooks 1992). Moreover, this invisibility repudiates queer people of color, much like black bodies in broader American media, as to “perpetuate white supremacy and with it a phallogentric spectatorship where the [queers] to be looked at and desired are ‘white’” (hooks 1992:118).

Second, when images are present, they tend to reify white imaginings of queer people of color and thus, to reinforce the power artifices that structure and emanate from them. For example, although the Logo TV’s *Noah’s Arc* is the first American television show with a cast of all queer characters of color, at times the characters retreat into typical (controlling) images of gay black men. This phenomenon is made evident through an examination of scenarios that involve intimate coupling. Though character performances range from the femme-leaning, drag-performing Alex, to the butch-leaning, body-building Ricky, all of the love interests of any of the four main characters are portrayed as butch. In fact, through dialogue, costuming, and mise-en-scène, it is the most violent, virile, muscular, and “straight-acting” men, who we (the audience) are made to believe are most deserving of our sexual desire. These representations, though not singularly effective, are certainly not trivial; cultural images become symbolically violent when they provide the impetus for marginalization and oppression of certain communities. These structures are internalized as psychological *habitus*, making the power stratification that permeates social fields appear invisible, immutable, and inherent (Bourdieu 1984). Moreover, through socialization, such *habitus* can become so powerful that the communities marginalized through this internalization willingly participate in and reproduce their own oppression (Bourdieu 1984).

Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of sexuality and power is also a useful theoretical frame for the analysis of race and gender in pornographic images. To Foucault, “pleasure and

power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another” (Foucault 1978:48). Thus, although the pornographic portrayal of black men’s sexuality as a powerful force may appear to articulate an associated social or political power outside the context of sexuality, it is important to understand this caricaturing as partly a provision for white gay men’s sexual pleasure. Therefore, the relationship between white and black men’s sexuality exemplifies what Foucault describes as “bio-power” – representing the varied ways in which the social control of bodies catalyzes the suppressive domination of populations (1978). Through this frame, the presentation of black men’s sexual virulence in pornography can be understood as a corollary of white eroticism that minimizes the potential “danger” – both literal and figurative – that gay black communities pose to white men’s hegemonic orientation to gay culture. Such portrayals may serve to continue the project of “white-washing” queer communities and social history (see Hunter 2010; Green 2007; Manlansan 2007).

The sexualized presentations of race, gender, and sexuality are all dramaturgical performances – they are ways in which we present our psychic identities to the world and to ourselves. In such performances, we substantiate their social, cultural, and political power in structuring our psychologies, communities, and institutions (Butler 2004; Johnson 2003). They are generally encapsulated by the routine world of the everyday, but are occasionally thrust into the extraordinary, where they become exaggerated versions of themselves, somehow perverted, and showcased for a once passive audience now captivated by the display. In these instances, queer people of color have routinely found a vehicle for subversion, through oft-irreverent and interrogative play with gender, racial, and sexual stereotypes. Muñoz (1999) labels such transgressions “dis-identifications,” which neither accept stereotypes as truth (identify) nor abandon them outright (counter-identify). Muñoz argues that these performances are the recycled

and recoded progeny of stereotype, whose meanings are made so distinct from their origins, that they no longer occupy the same cultural space as identification or counter-identification (1999). Johnson illustrates dis-identification in a critical analysis of blaQueer patois, specifically the language of hetero-patriarchal domesticity. Thus, when queer black men refer to drag spaces as “houses” or respected mentors as “mothers,” they are broadening the heterosexual discourse to make room for “black gay subjectivity” (Johnson 2003).

Power is multi-faceted and multi-directional, both oppressive and endowing – or as Foucault wrote: “The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces” (1977:74). In other words, social actors experience power from multiple sources at any given point in their lives – and in these experiences, individuals may find themselves simultaneously reaping benefits from social power while sustaining repressive attacks from other agents. Furthermore, as apparatuses of white supremacy are firmly institutionalized in Western society, physical racial violence gives way to administrative oppression. As a consequence, the power to subjugate and regulate is legitimized. Of course, agency is also involved in shaping the role of power in the lives of queer black men and the bargaining of masculinity privilege is an oft-utilized method for its deployment. Conceptions of masculine power are colored by race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and body-typicality, such that masculine power is differentially distributed across masculine subgroups, where cisgender, white, body-typical, class-privileged men are the categorical reference. Queer black men have the opportunity to counteract oppressive power systems by performing and embodying stereotypic ideology about black masculinity, but at what cost?

## 5 CHAPTER 4: PROCEDURES AND ANALYSES

*What the field needs now is less politicking and theory and more sampling and history. The basic deficiency of porn studies is its paucity of genre surveys whose authority is rooted in a broad, up-to-date sampling of pornographic texts and a rigorous knowledge of the determinants that have produced them. (Andrews 2007:52)*

### 5.1 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Four methodological frames guide data collection and analysis for this study: interpretivism, positionality, black feminist epistemology, and intersectionality. I use an interpretive qualitative approach. My goal is to provide a description of observed social processes so “thick,” and an understanding so “deep,” that its value eludes any unreasonable uncertainty (see Geertz 1973; Weber 1968). This process is also aided by a method of triangulation that involve incorporating quantitative data, various sources and types of information, and multiple theoretical framework (Denzin 1978; Patton 1999). Moreover, I use general descriptive statistics to catalyze a more robust analysis than otherwise possible (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson 2004). Nonetheless, I largely employ interpretative qualitative techniques to avoid the positivistic pitfalls of quantitative research, which many feminist scholars, queer scholars, and scholars of color have characterized as generally incongruous with a deep and dynamic exploration of the social lives of marginalized communities (Carroll 2008; Williams 2000). Indeed, their critique is especially important here, as much of the data in this research is associated with people who live at the intersection of multiple stigmatized identities. Hence, rather than proselytize about this study’s findings as infallible, I recognize and characterize them as suggestive themes that, though powerfully explanatory, are necessarily

incomplete and exclusionary. Moreover, I deploy precautionary research tactics to lessen the impact of such eventualities.

Positionality requires that a researcher appreciate the influence of their own lived experiences in shaping the configuration of research designs and interpretations (Collins 1990; Huisman 2008). Because inference, assumption, and bias are fundamental aspects of any scientific endeavor, the importance of acknowledging, interrogating, and reporting how they influence research is fundamental. Thus, as Malterud (2001:484) asserts “preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them.” As a queer person of color, I understand that my identity exerts influence in and over the architecture of this study, but I propose that familiarity can also enrich the indispensable contextualization that provides substance and weight to research findings. My experiential familiarity with the cultures and media of queer black communities are just as significant to my investigative rigor as my professional training; both enable me to simultaneously contextualize black queer existence with structural processes and individual experience.

Similarly, black feminist epistemology is a reaction against the systematic disengagement with sources of information associated with black women’s thoughts and experiences. To that end, it advocates for the exploration of any similarly situated form of subverted cultural knowledge (Collins 2009). Black feminist epistemological positions include: a recognition that notions considered factual are highly influenced by the history of research restricted to middle-class white men; a refutation of presumed equality between researcher and participants (because educational privilege grants researchers undue authority); an appreciation that all experiences are relevant and deserving of sociological analysis; and a call to researchers to conduct scholarship with a justice orientation that centers on community liberation whenever possible (Collins 2009).

As I engage in scholarship, these positions are always at the forefront of my consciousness, framing any and all of my decisions regarding reviewed literature, data collection, modes of analysis, and discussions of findings.

In *Black Reflexive Sociology*, sociologist John Stanfield posits that “an outgrowth of homogeneous descriptions of people of color in social sciences...is the assumption that people of color have no differential identities” (2011:55). Stanfield further suggests that if “the social sciences are going to be of any relevance in the next century, their human creators and maintainers must democratize how they structure, interpret, and distribute their work” (2011:61). Originally discussed as an underutilized tenet of postmodern jurisprudence, intersectional methodology aids this transition by moving researchers to consider how belonging to multiple social communities, each uniquely positioned around access to power, shapes lived experience (Crenshaw 1991). Additionally, intersectional methodology mandates deliberation on the social environmental conditions that attach separate cultural meanings to different psychological states, thereby creating a legion of seemingly heterogeneous identities. Nevertheless, gender and race have historically dominated in intersectional research; identity categories such as sexuality have received far less attention (Brown 2012). In this study, I do my part to remedy this deficiency by deconstructing understandings of social processes and ideologies as confined to an isolated racial, sexual, *or* gendered identity, and reconstructing them with a diversified, theory-driven perspective that seeks to unpack and compare identity categories while amplifying previously unheard “voices” and discerning power disparities (Griffin and Museus 2011).

## 5.2 DATA COLLECTION

Most of the data for this study were collected from Xtube.com. “Tube” websites are internet social media interfaces which allow users to upload and share their own videos, many of



which are self-created. Headquartered in Canada and established in 2005, one year after YouTube, Xtube provides a platform for viewers and users, as well as corporate sponsors, to see and share sexually explicit videos for free (Halpert 2008). Though common today, Xtube ushered in the “porn 2.0” internet movement as the first website dedicated to user-generated pornography (Marshall 2009). Moreover, Xtube remains one of the few of such sites to offer message board, blogs, instant messaging, and location-based hook-up assistance, alongside sexually explicit images and videos (Halpert 2008). In 2013, the website ranked as one of the 300 most viewed websites in the United States (US) – with over a quarter of site visitors located there – and as one of the top 700 for all countries combined (*Alexa*). With the continued proliferation of analogous websites, Xtube’s rank has dropped to 728 for the US and 1074 globally (*Alexa* 2016). Nevertheless, in addition to unregistered visitors, the site currently boasts a registered user membership at 10 million “and still growing” (*Xtube* 2016).

Though declining in popularity, the site is best suited for the purposes of this research for several reasons. First, because of its age, Xtube permits a reach back through time that other similar sites do not. Second, many other sites do not allow users to comment on content, which is an integral part of this research. Third, similar websites tend to treat gay porn as secondary rather than parallel. For example, a footnote on Xvideos.com, the most popular pornographic tube site (DreamStar 2014), states that “about 1200 to 2000 adult videos are uploaded each day (note that gay and shemale videos are filtered from this page, but shown in their respective categories)” (*Xvideos* N.d.). In contrast, Xtube allows users to select the sexual orientation of their desired content (i.e., gay, straight, or bisexual) before gathering videos that they may then sort by other categorizations. Moreover, sites like Xvideos and xHamster.com – the second most popular porn tube site (DreamStar 2014) – do not allow for cross-categorization. Therefore, though I can

select for “black” or “gay” porn on these websites, I cannot select for both. Lastly, because of its age and social networking features, Xtube has an established sense of community, characterized by a kind of brand loyalty that fosters a sense of belonging extending well beyond that of a simple compendium of porn. This is evident in the sheer number and quality of video comments. For example, at times I sifted through hundreds of comments on Xtube, some rather lengthy and nuanced, while the most-viewed video cross-categorized as “gay” and “black” on Pornhub.com – the third most popular porn tube site (DreamStar 2014) – has only two comments.

While much of Xtube’s content is created and submitted by users, some of the videos available are uploaded by both small enterprises (with little to no internet presence other than pay-per-view videos on Xtube) and large corporate franchises (with multiple brands, websites, and products) in the video and internet pornography industry. These businesses typically submit short clips of pornographic DVDs or web videos as advertisements. Regardless, whether the user is a corporate avatar or a porn enthusiast, all registered members are allowed to create a profile page where they can display “General Info” (such as gender, “turn-ons,” and “turn-offs”), personal demographics (such as formal education level, ethnicity, marital status, and sexual orientation), genital preferences (such as penis size and presence of absence of pubic hair), career description (such as job title and income level), hobbies (such as favorite book and movie), physical characteristics (such as weight and “disabilities”), and sexual interests (such as types of fantasies and fetishes). Users may also connect with other users, post comments on profile pages or on videos, and collect their favorite material. Aside from erotic videos and images, Xtube content also includes user-created blogs, user-created live webcam broadcasts, and an automated dating service. Site visitors may use search terms to find specific videos or let Xtube provide suggestions based on their selected preferences. Videos on the website are listed by icons that

feature stills of the video, the video length, the video title, the username of the submitter, and a short caption. Both registered and unregistered viewers may reorder this list by cross-referencing general video descriptions (amount of views, ratings ranks, most comments, etc.) with fetish preferences that are listed alphabetically in a sidebar which includes categories like “muscle worship,” “twinks,” “BDSM,” and “Fursuits.”

Five of these categories make explicit reference to communities of color: “Asian,” “Ebony,” “Interracial,” “Latino,” and “Yaoi/Bara” (comics that typically feature intergenerational Japanese gay sex partners). Though all of these categories deserve analysis, the purpose of this research is to unpack racial processes associated specifically with blackness in gay porn, while attending to any significant differences between non-corporate and corporate-produced content. Unlike non-corporate videos, corporate clips usually include descriptions suggesting an invested corporate enterprise, feature brand logos or labels, express concern for self-promotion, and always include links to for-sale products (such as website subscriptions or DVDs) in the user profile or the video itself. I selected “most viewed” videos to approach a measure of popularity rather than representativeness. As such, I quota sampled the 20 most-viewed non-corporate gay videos categorized as ebony, the 20 most-viewed corporate gay videos categorized as ebony, and the 20 most-viewed gay videos (without the ebony classification). Lastly, since the hierarchy of most-viewed videos changes frequently, I immediately downloaded videos once they were identified.

I created a tabular coding sheet to record descriptive data such as case number, submission type (i.e., corporate, non-corporate, or most-viewed non-ebony), video title, video hyperlink, run time, date posted, number of viewer votes and associated rating, tags, categories, top comments, poster or company name, and whether the video featured or was produced by its

poster (see Appendix A). I also used this sheet to record observations about videos including comments that allude to race; user names and profiles that allude to race; summary of video plots; stated or perceived race of participants and commenters; sounds (such as background music and dialogue); props (including wardrobe); sex acts cross-categorized by stated or perceived race and position; use of safer sex practices (such as condom use, infection screening, or use of lubrication); and analytic memos of any variety. Although video imagery, captions, tags, titles, and especially comments, make up the vast majority of data in this study, I also snowball-sampled related content when applicable. Such data include third party advertisements for websites, sex toys, supplements, and DVDs, as well as images and text from other websites and DVDs that explicitly concern black queer sexuality. Later, I utilize these secondary data as support for primary findings from Xtube content whenever possible.

### 5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Though the analysis I conduct in this study is not substantively quantitative, here I offer several descriptive statistics of the sampled data to contextualize my qualitative findings. First, no ebony video included only white participants and no non-ebony video included only black participants. Similarly, most non-corporate producers of ebony content are black while most non-corporate producers of non-ebony content are white. However, the racial identities of some users and participants are either unstated or non-inferable (therefore, in the following discussions, I present racial identity only if it has been self-proclaimed or reasonably deduced). Furthermore, an analysis of submission year, number of views, and viewer ratings, indicates that videos in the sample are highly popular and fairly current. The modal year of submission is 2010, with the earliest submission in 2005 and the latest in 2014. The average number of views per video is 3,313,828; the least watched video has 129,138 views and the most watched has 15,101,989

views. The average rating (from zero to 100) is 88, with the lowest rating at 36 and the highest at 99. Lastly, the average run-time is six minutes; the shortest video is one minute and the longest video is 31 minutes.

In contrast, qualitative content analysis is an unobtrusive method of data analysis that involves the “interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” in any form of recorded communicative information (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1278). As a tool for analyzing discourse, it deconstructs manifest content to uncover deeper latent meanings embedded in social and cultural environments (Tonkiss 2004). Such a process involves unpacking both the intent of producers of encoded communicative knowledge as well as the decoded interpretations of its consumers, while classifying subjects, rationalizations, and deviations in context. The outcome is an “interpretive repertoire,” a model of communicated information that systematizes textual and contextual meanings into a deployable explanatory discourse (Tonkiss 2004). However, although qualitative content analysis is a more potent tool for creating descriptive categories of interpreted meanings, it does not necessarily require cross-examination of data, and therefore lacks the power to formulate explanatory theories emblematic of grounded methods (Cho and Lee 2014).

Grounded theory argues that because sociocultural meanings are constantly refined and reified by social interaction, research methods should be “grounded in the natural context in which the inquiry takes place” (Priest et al. 2002:31). Furthermore, through a process of “constant comparisons” between significant incidents of the phenomenon under study, researchers can be fairly certain that emergent categories retain relative significance, no matter their relative temporality – and these relationships are key, as they constitute a bridge between apparently dissimilar categories that, when expounded, become theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Borrowing from grounded theory (see Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006), I utilize a constant comparative method of theory construction that builds codes from incidences (initial-open coding), categories from codes (focused-axial coding), and lastly theory from categories (theoretical coding), through an iterative and holistic process of refining raw data (Seale 2004). For this research, incidences are parcels of text or image data that contain thematic significance, while codes constitute the themes themselves. These codes are then concentrated and grouped around categorical axes. Lastly, categories are polished and meaningfully threaded together to support a core theoretical position, more sophisticated than its components, and indicative of some underlying structure in the data (see Appendix B).

I used NVivo 10 qualitative software to perform coding and aid analysis by organizing codes and categories, as well as visualizing output. I inputted incidence records standardized by the coding sheet into NVivo then systematically perused and compartmentalized this data to identify and label manifest and latent incidences of the phenomenon under study, including associated qualities and features, as “nodes” in the software (Charmaz 2006). I focused on the descriptive characteristics of videos and their participants, the sexual behaviors performed by participants and the context in which these behaviors are enacted. However, I began this process of initial-open coding without a true hypothesis – but with an interest in the processes of race (specifically, black-other relations), masculinity, sexuality, and agency in gay men’s sexual culture, embedded in pornographic video imagery and its associated captions, tags (i.e., keywords for searching), titles, scripts, and utterances of participants. During focused-axial coding, initial codes were thoroughly refined, as those most frequent or conceptually significant earned analytic precedence. I then compared and contrasted these substantive codes by dimensions such as “condition, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences” to

create the following categories classified by similarity (Strauss and Corbin 1990): *Dark Phalluses: Preoccupation and Dismemberment; Missing Links: Primitiveness and Primality; and Separate Spaces: Bifurcation and Essentialism.*

During each stage of coding, I created numerous analytical memos that note theoretical and conceptual connections between all modes and levels of data. Memos are abstract, informal ideations about data that emerge from and further encourage disentangling embedded meanings that are later sorted, harmonized, and diagrammed to assist in the conception of a final explanatory postulate by providing a logic pathway from raw data to families of codes. I disposed of memos that were ultimately unsupported or superficial while venerating those with conceptual gravity. In the theoretical coding stage, I employ these memos to investigate, interrogate, and finally weave together the associations and interactions between categories (and their properties) to instigate an overarching theoretical concept of explanatory power. Though the ongoing creation of memos is an indispensable aspect of grounded methods, other components can become confused and cumbersome to the point of impracticality, recreating the same positivism that grounded theory initially revolted against, by turning intricate social processes into static social physics (Kelle 2005; Robrecht 1995; Mjøset 2005; ge 2011). Therefore, I restricted my utilization of grounded methods to those features and magnitudes best suited to my methodological orientations, research goals, and data characteristics.

In sum, the narrative I reassemble from the data should be understood as a sexual script. Sexual script theory was developed as a sociological response to the essentialism that historically dominates sexuality discourse and thereby proclaims sexual orientations, identities, behaviors, and attitudes as wholly biologically determined (Wiederman 2015). In contrast, sexual script theorists interpret these dimensions of human activity and their associated meanings as socially

constructed, meaning that human actors performing sexually follow a “script” which prescribes connotation, orders and categorizes sexual activity, frames incoming sensory information, restricts actions and reaction to within cultural boundaries, and integrates “nonsexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience” (Gagnon & Simon 1973:17). Moreover, sexual scripts exact influence at the cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic levels (Wiederman 2015). Cultural scripts entail broad, abstract social messages about sexuality; interpersonal scripts use those messages to frame social interactions, and intrapsychic scripts guide the internalization of external cultural and interpersonal experience into a unique sexual identity (Wiederman 2015).

Gagnon and Simon suggested that in “postparadigmatic societies,” cultural scripts are less impactful in the absence of the widespread shared meanings that characterize “paradigmatic societies,” therefore postparadigmatic actors must more readily rely on interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts to make sense of sex (Wiederman 2015). This distinction has interesting applications for analysis of the modern conceptions of sexuality purported through internet pornography. For example, several studies have noted the overlap between sexual scripts in pornography and partnered sexual activity in real life (see Stulhofer, Busko, and Landripet 2007), though none address racial differences. Furthermore, though researchers have noted the gendered and life course nature of sexual scripts, again none have addressed racial differences (see Wiederman 2005; 2015). How then might we characterize racialized sexual scripts in the postparadigmatic phenomenon of user-submitted internet pornography? In the following chapters, I discuss the character of pornographic representations of queer black masculinity. I find that representations of black men in gay porn rely on stereotypical sexual scripts of black masculinity to arouse consumers, especially those which characterize black men as “missing links” or focus excessively on their “dark phalluses.” Moreover, these depictions consistently



separate gay black and white men's sexuality into bifurcated discursive spaces, thereby essentializing sexual aspects of racial identity. And though such depictions are less prevalent in user-submitted videos, both user-submitted and corporate content reify stereotypes about black masculinity.

## 6 CHAPTER 5: DARK PHALLUSES (PREOCCUPATION AND DISMEMBERMENT)

The preoccupation with black men's penises is a long-established concept and behavior with origins in the European colonialism of African communities. Though likely tied to the use of heredity to mark innate differences, the ideology also provided an impetus for the demonization of black men's sexuality, particularly as they connote a danger to white women. In *Black Skin, White Masks* postcolonial philosopher Frantz Fanon discusses the ideological transformation of black penis to "dark phallus," from mundane anatomy to white supremacist symbol of black sexuality. Fanon begins with a comparison of black and Jewish oppression, arguing that while Jews represent an intellectual danger to whites, blacks represent a biological one, "for the Negro is *only* biological" [emphasis added] (Fanon 1952:127). Therefore, utilities for the social control of black men focus on the corporeal, especially the sexual. Moreover, because of the cultural assertion that black men are void of intellect, their sexual behaviors are not limited by human morality and therefore reflect the supposed incivility and brutality of nature. Or, in Fanon's words, "whoever says *rape* says *Negro*" [emphasis in original] (Fanon 1952:127).

In this form, the preoccupation with black men's penises constitutes a sexual threat where black men's "gender, race, and/or sexuality...elicit negative stereotypes" that catalyze racially motivated acts of symbolic, institutional, and physical oppression (also known as "sexual racism") (Morton 2007:226). Indeed, the power of the sexual threat black men represent is so

great that it can move agents of white supremacy to commit lethal acts of violence. For example, in 1955, a 14-year-old black teenager named Emmett Till was kidnapped, mutilated, and shot to death for (allegedly) flirting with a white woman (Latson 2015). And seventy years later, before murdering nine black worshippers at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church in South Carolina in 2015, white shooter Dylan Roof proclaimed, “I have to do it. *You rape our women* and you’re taking over our country. And you have to go” [emphasis added] (Gray 2015). Such instances, and the thousands like them from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade through today, illustrate that, in Fanon’s configuration, “the Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions” (Fanon 1952:136).

The internalization of black sexual threat can also have consequences that shape not only broader cultural ideations about black sexuality, but also community and individual psychology. Kovel’s *sexual threat of the black male hypothesis* suggests that the preoccupation with black men’s penises evolves through a psychoanalytic process akin to Freudian Oedipal development (Kovel 1971). First, blackness is associated with negative experiences, primarily through the restrictive and censored relationship between young children and their own feces, ushered by the child’s authority figures. Next, black men come to represent “the bad father who possesses the black mammy...and he has the genital power which forever excites the child’s envy; he is also the bad child who lusts after the pure and utterly forbidden white mother (made sexless in reality)” (Kovel 1971:71). White men then revolt against their “bad fathers” by symbolic castration, as black men begin to identify with the role assigned to them by their oppressors (Kovel 1971). Side-stepping the obvious problematics of psychological determinism, essentialism, and pseudoscience, there are several sociological reclamations available in this perspective: the hyper-marginalization of black women; the learned phenomenon of “black

equals bad”); the importance of black phallic danger to the patriarchal paternalism of white women; and the prophetic self-fulfillment of stereotype.

In his films, *Black Is...Black Ain't* and *Tongues Untied*, filmmaker Marlon Riggs offers a critical black-queer analysis of these co-constitutive ideologies. In the former, Riggs helps to unpack the phallogentrism foundational to the Black Power movement:

When we translate the history of black oppression sexually, especially through the writings of George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver, [etc.] it's all sexualized into emasculation and castration. So, the reclamation of the black race gets translated into “it's a dick thing.” That's why I'm fond of saying “if the ‘black thing’ is really a ‘dick thing’ in disguise, we're in serious trouble because it is like a kind of worship of the phallus.

(Riggs 1994)

In *Tongues Untied*, Riggs recalls the excitement of southern black queer migrants upon first arriving in gay communities in urban cities, expecting an atmosphere more accepting than their native homes, but finding a new kind of non-acceptance:

I avoided the question “Why?” Pretended not to notice the absence of black images in this new gay life – in bookstores, poster shops, film festivals, even my own fantasies. Tried not to notice the few images of blacks that were most popular. Searching, I found something I didn't expect, something decades of determined assimilation could not blind me to: in this great gay mecca, I was an invisible man. Still, I had no shadow, no substance, no place, no history. No reflection. I was alien, unseen, and seen unwanted.

Here, as in *Hephzibah*, I was a nigga. Still. (Riggs 1989)

Beside narration, Riggs displays images from various outlets of gay men's culture: a photograph of a bondage-and-discipline scene where a white man in leather bends over a nude black man in chains, pushing his head down, with a caption that reads "SLAVES FOR SALE"; a drawing of a naked, erect white man whipping a black man, also naked and erect, and roped to tree branch; and a caricature of a muscular black man, drenched in sweat, with a speech bubble full of intentional misspellings and sexual promise for white men ("Yuh knows I save it all up jis' fer yew!") (Riggs 1989). Both the *Black Is* and *Tongues* example represent the continuing importance of sexual threat. In the first, the preoccupation with black men's penises is internalized as a means to reclaim masculinity privileges lost to black oppression. In the latter, the threat itself becomes fetishized. In this new imaginary, white gay men replace white women, still keenly aware of the supposed brutality of black men's sexuality, only now in want of it.

#### 6.1 PREOCCUPATION: BIG BLACK COCKS AND THE THINGS THEY DO

It is difficult to recall a social context other than sports and penile endowments where black men are referred to as "gods," and it is no consequence that physicality, particularly size, is central to earning such proclamations in either phenomenon. Overall, ebony videos were considerably more focused on penises than non-ebony videos. Videos featuring black participants gave more camera time to penises than faces, while the opposite was true in videos with only white participants. Moreover, there were twice as many references to penis size in video descriptions and viewer comments in ebony videos than in non-ebony. Clearly, there is a unique quality to black men's penises that is so central to gay men's sexual desire that its significance eclipses that of other possible points of eroticism on black men's bodies. In fact, some type of reference to "BBC" (big black cock) was made in the comments of almost every video featuring black participants (note: all following transcriptions unaltered):

“WOW that is a BUGE [a portmanteau of black and huge] cock”

“I LOVE that LONG long beautiful black cock”

“i luv your monster dark cock”

Indeed, size is a perhaps the most important desirable quality of black penis – there were 234 references to large penis size in the data<sup>1</sup>, a quantity only surpassed by references to race. Moreover, sexual attitudes about penis size among gay men are clearly structured by race as there were twice as many references in ebony versus non-ebony videos. The content of viewer comments also points to the importance of race in the fantasy of black penis, not only in sheer volume of mentions but also through a boundary-building categorization that culminates in the designation of “nigga cock”:

“that is NOT a nigga-dick, i don't even know why theres so much hype ovr it anyways, thats avg for me! Trust ive seen nigga dicks...”<sup>2</sup>

“holy fuck! a true nigga cock! freakin stud would rip my hole to shreds!”

“Wow just love your nigga dick inside my tight ass and fill me with your sweet honey baby:)”

Penis size defines black men in gay porn, to the point that girth somehow implicates the trueness of the blackness of the man to which it is attached, such that a “true nigga cock” should “rip [a] hole to shreds.” Or as another commenter notes: “thats what a black dicks sposed to be like.”

In a 1903 article from the ninth volume of *Medicine*, Dr. William Lee Howard positions penis size as evidence for the impossibility of racial integration, positing that “when education

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<sup>1</sup> “Data” refers to all sources of information related to videos.

<sup>2</sup> Quotes are cited without alteration whenever possible; I forgo the use of *[sic]* to avoid a disruption in flow.

will reduce the large size of the Negro's penis as well as bring about the sensitiveness of the terminal fibers which exist in the Caucasian, then will it also be able to prevent the African's birthright to sexual madness and excess" (Howard 1903). Certainly, gay porn's fixation on black penis size takes cues from broader culture at least as much as the reverse is true, and its injurious effects on black men can be quite significant. In "Last Taboo: Why American Pop Culture Just Can't Deal with Black Masculinity" (Morris 2016), Pulitzer Prize-winning film critic Wesley Morris examines American preoccupation with black men's penises through a pop culture frame, while reminiscing about his own experiences as a black man who has sex with men. Focusing on film and television, Morris confronts the double standard that currently ushers in the growing acceptance of exposed white penises in movies and cable television while continuing to censor the black phallus to the point it is "imagined more than it is seen" (2016:50).

The implication of such phantasmagoria, according to Morris, speaks to wider racial problematics: "The under-representation of the black penis bespeaks a larger discomfort with depicting black male sexuality with the same range of seriousness, cheek and romance that's afforded white sexuality" (2016:71). Part of this lack, Morris asserts, results from the acceptance of and subsequent discomfort with the stereotype of "big black dick." Therein lies an unsettling paradox of patriarchal white supremacist ideology about black men's sexuality: although the stereotype of monstrously large penises works to support conceptions of black men as animals with unrestrainable sexuality, by contrast it also establishes white men's sexuality as less masculine and therefore inferior. However, white men have learned to reposition these presumed aspects of their sexuality as a product of civility and morality lacking in black men. In my data, this process is reflected in the racially dichotomized characterization of sexual organs such as

comparisons of “sweet white ass” and “beautiful black cock” or “giant black monsters” and “white wands.”

Many same and other-gender loving black men have noted how the stereotype has adversely affected their self-esteem and intimate relations. For instance, Morris recalls an incident upon bringing a white man back to his apartment for sex:

But then he stood there for a moment and gave my crotch a long, perplexed look, like Geraldo Rivera did when, after months of buildup, he opened what turned out to be Al Capone’s empty vault. He replaced his clothes and, before exiting, explained himself: “That’s not what I expected.” (2016:52)

In a similar article, “Average Size...for a Black Man: Myths about Racism, and the Patriarchy,” black community psychologist Bill Johnson discusses the looming specter of penis size in his relationships with white women, where his partner’s friends would inquire, “Is his dick big?” or “Is it true what they say about Black men?” (2016). Unlike Morris, Johnson does not explicitly reject the stereotype as a means of psychological self-care, instead he attempts to measure-up to the expectation but to no avail: “For my genitalia, I want BIG! [But] I’m stuck with what I got” (2016). Moreover, statistical research also suggests that race-based misconceptions about penis size influences the sexual identity of men of color. For example, Grov et al. use multinomial logistic regression to demonstrate that although most men who have sex with men consider themselves of average size, many black, Latino, and Asian American gay men hold “perceptions of penis size that [are] consistent with racial stereotypes” which “influence intrapsychic sexual scripts about how [they] perceive themselves (2015:231).

In addition to what a penis looks like, what it does is also important. In many cultures, ejaculation is tied to ideologies of masculinity and manhood. In Western sexology, for example,

first ejaculation among men (or “semenarche”) is typically regarded as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood for cis-men, where “adult” is defined by a capacity for human reproduction (Janssen 2007). For example, in one study, a meta-analysis of semenarche, the researcher proclaims that “for a male to make the transition to manhood, he needs to experience this highly sexual event” (Frankel 2002:1). Among the Azande communities of central Africa, seminal fluid is understood as trivial before puberty, but as “a boy blossoms into manhood” his semen comes to “contain the souls of children” (Janssen 2007:124). And some Sambian communities in New Guinea believe seminal fluid so full of masculine energy that young boys are expected to consume that of older boys to become stronger warriors (Herdt 1981).

To initiate arousal, viewers require action from black men in gay porn, and the more intense, the better. Therefore, ejaculation (and penetration) are paramount to stimulating viewers’ arousal by living-up to expectations about black men’s sexuality. For example, “shooting sperm” is clearly a much-desired demonstration of the power of black penis. There were 25% more references to ejaculation in ebony videos than non-ebony videos. And video commenters seemed keenly aware of the significance of ejaculation to the sexual allure of dark phallus:

“Wow what a black boy [,] spit good two”

“I’ll lick up every drop of that sweet black seed”

“yeah drop that fucking huge black meatstick in my ass and fuck me rough and then cum all in my ass ! MMMM”

“The sight of that hot white cum shooting outta your jet black dick made me shoot my load.”

“I crave blackdick cum!”



“2 BEAUTIFUL HUGE BLACK DICKS, DOIN WHAT THEY DO BEST, SHOOTIN CUM.”

The intensity of ejaculation is often an integral aspect of sexual allure for men who have sex with men (MSM). Moreover, for black MSM, this intensity is an extension of the masculine power with which we imbue black men’s penises. Klein (2011) provides a frame of reference in their study on felching (sucking or eating semen out of someone’s anus) among MSM:

African American men were far less likely than their non-Black counterparts to seek felching partners online. One possible explanation of this may pertain to the fact that the African American men in this sample were significantly more likely than other men to self-identify as sexual tops [...] and, as noted, it was the sexual bottoms, not the tops, who were most likely to want to find partners for felching. Another possible explanation is that this race-based difference is attributable, at least in part, to cultural differences in how men of different races define masculinity for themselves. Accepting another man’s semen (or actively seeking this semen, as would be the case in sex involving felching) may be construed as being less masculine than giving one’s semen to another man. (381)

Narratives surrounding anal sex in the data also suggest that gay white men’s sexual fantasies concerning black men are predicated on black men’s penises inside of others? – rarely is the dark phallus understood as desirable in its own regard, for its own sake. In non-ebony videos, there is frequent discussion among commenters about skillful technique, beauty beyond sex, and love:

“I want to be your student.”

“Fuck man I love watching you suck cock!”

“You are a real artist.”

“this is a real professional suck off guy.”

“What a spectacular looking man – those eyes – and how u manage cocks too!”

“I have a total crush on Alden [a young white semi-professional porn star] :) After I get off (usually around the part when he does) I love watching the ending, when he smiles I'm all ‘Awwww! He's so cute and innocent.’”

Black participants in ebony videos, by comparison, are rarely characterized by these same humanizing qualities. As such, there are 24 times as many references to beauty in non-ebony videos than ebony videos. Moreover, though there were many references to technique, most were reserved for the skill of white men. When such discussions were about black men, they are almost always couched in the penetrative actions of black penis:

“blk guy can fuck!”

“That black guy knows how to get into some ass! I love the way he cum!”

Moreover, although the data suggest a preference for videos that portray anal sex rather than masturbation across the sample, that preference is stronger in ebony videos, with a 2:1 ratio in non-ebony videos compared to a 3:1 ratio in ebony videos. In one video, for example, two black men engage in anal sex in a hotel room. They are squarely framed in view of a camera and often address their viewers directly, indicating the explicit performativity of their sex. The top wears a bandana covering his face, a nod to the assumed impenetrable masculinity of “down low” black men. Towards the end of the video, the bottom asks “How big this dick is? Tell me.” The top responds, “between nine and ten.” Here, the pair signify the importance of size in the

eroticization of anal penetration, using comments about the top's penis size to lure viewership, playing to the expectation of "big black dick" in action.

## 6.2 DISMEMBERMENT: ORGANS, TOOLS, AND MONSTERS

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon performs a critical reading of a passage from *Martinique* by French journalist and author Michel Cournot, in which Cournot (1949) writes:

The black man's sword is a sword. When he has thrust it into your wife, she has really felt something. It is a revelation. In the chasm that it has left, your little toy is lost... Four Negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral. They would be unable to leave the building until their erections had subsided; and in such close quarters that would not be a simple matter. (13)

Fanon responds: "When one reads this passage a dozen times and lets oneself go—that is, when one abandons oneself to the movement of its images—one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis" [emphasis in original]. Cournot's narrative is emblematic of the continuing cultural reconditioning of black men's penises into dark phalluses, characterized as enormous creatures of appetite, destructive machinery, or organic material bereft of a meaningful bodily attachment. Here, as Fanon notes, white women are the conduit through which the threat of the dark phallus is realized and, as such, the humanity of black men is subsumed by the beastliness of their penises. However, in gay men's sexual culture, where the dark phallus is an overt desire in sexual fantasy, black men are not overcome by penile power, but rather, detached from it. I label this process "dismemberment," not to deemphasize the historic and present-day terror exacted on black bodies by racist people and institutions, but to couch this phenomenon in the same cultural ideologies that produce such physical violence.

There were twice as references to dismembered penises in ebony videos than non-ebony videos. This process generally involves positioning the dark phallus into one of three archetypes: dissociated organ, wielded tool, or sentient “monster.” When black penises become dissociated organs, consumers conceptualize and discuss them in ways that render the persona and remaining organic material of its owner invisible, even useless. For example, in one video, two black men engage in anal sex on a bed in a dark room. Though camera angles change throughout, the act of anal penetration is always center-frame. Neither participant’s face is perceptible, though identifying tattoos are visible. This setup, it seems, is likely less about protecting anonymity than presenting black penis without the unwanted interference of black persona. In fact, non-ebony videos always included at least one participant’s face while several ebony videos were faceless. In addition to cinematography, viewers participated in the dissociated dismemberment by either utilizing relative (e.g., “that”) rather than possessive (e.g., “his”) pronouns or referring to black men’s penises as “meat” in their comments:

“where’s my black man at? little latin boy craving for black meat!”

“I’d want to be the one in the middle but I’d also need a nice big slab of chocolate meat between my lips!”

“where can i find another vid with that dark meat?”

“IM LOOKING FOR A BLACK COCK TO FUCK ME REAL GOOD, ANY TAKERS?”

“wow. i luv the dick! [and] the owner! Lol”

“wanna see that cock shoot his load!”

Black men’s penises were also often characterized as wielded tools. For example, one website that posts videos as advertisements on Xtube, aptly titled RawRods.com, solely features

black men engaged in same-sex sex acts. Some black users also participate in this phenomenon by referencing the tool analogy in their usernames (e.g., “choclatedipstick”). However, this phenomenon was most prominent in viewer comments. At times, these references are simplistic and explicit (for example, “awesome!!!! what a huge tool!” and “!!!! that's a perfect black top - hot tool”). Otherwise, these characterizations made reference to specific objects of utility, especially “poles”:

“wish I could suck a black pole like that one”

“Once that pole from the HOT and RIPPED black guy got buried in my ass, I'd cum instantly! MORE!!”

“Not sure which HOT stud is u, butt LUV 2 be the cock-addICted, white btm-daddy worshipping urs & ur HOT, IG Thug-buddies' hard fuk-poles & swallowing ur loads!!!!”

“Bet that feel like a machine when it pump the sperm out”

“White twink getting reamed and creamed by massive black pipes - heaven!”

“Wow what a beautiful black guy and man a nice attachment”

“Watchin dat white cum shootin frum that blacktower all over dat buteeful skin. Hot!”

Not only do such references sequester black men’s anatomy from the rest of their humanity, they also recall the history of white America’s exploitation of black productivity. Interestingly, a few tool references were also infused with undertones of violence:

“I worship the selfish...instincts that drive a superior Man to wield his penis as a [weapon] to conquer and exploit willing victims”

“FOUND!!! WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION!”

“You could club a baby seal with that thing.”

In these instances, sexual desirability emanates from the convergence of misconceptions about black men's bodies and black men's psychologies.

The sentient monster archetype was more than twice as prevalent as the other two combined. Here, the dark phallus is not only separated from its host, but in contrast to the lifelessness of dissociated organs and wielded tools, sentient monsters are directly or indirectly imbued with personality and animus. For instance, circuitous animus usually made reference to humanoid creatures, especially gods and monsters, as a metaphor for the intimidating posture of large beings:

“that is God”

“Slap my face with that big monster meat...”

“please bring that monster to San Diego! not sure if it would fit, but would LOVE to try!”

“I admire your big...dick! ...you have a monster out there!”

“would love to shuv my tounge in there and gag on that monster cock of yours”

“I can't believe his ass wasn't gaped out when you finished cause you have one monster of a dick.”

Size is not the only metaphor of significance here. For example, the website [Monsterporn.com](http://Monsterporn.com) is entirely devoted to illustrations that feature men and humanoid monsters engaged in same-sex sex acts. Most of the men are slim, hairless, and white in high contrast to the monsters that are much thicker, hairier, and darker, with larger penises than their human partners. Some of the monsters are familiar – werewolves, demons, vampires, giants, aliens, angels, etc. – while others appear to have been created for the site. They all, however, are menacing, and the violence implied by the social history of monsters, especially in contrast to the innocent (white) victim, raises question about the presentation of consent in these fantasies. Of course, this is part of the

lure – to be taken by the big, dark, hairy, monster, to lose the power of consent and to revel in that loss, is the fantasy. One black video poster, like many others, even alludes to this concept to in their video tags: “black cock big huge monster.” Commenters, too, often referenced monster imagery to explicitly indicate that black men’s penises have lives and minds of their own:

“u took ur time with that monster and got a big reward...”

“its ALIVE, its ALIVE”

Moreover, such references were often tied up with notions of gender:

“I have so much respect for a guy who has the courage to show his face. Mind you, when you are that attractive, with such a monster cock, you'd be proud to do so. Thank goodness your bush is not shaved, you're still a real man!”

and race:

“Damn I really want to hang out with you guys... you're like so friendly with [that] gentle giant black monster and a hard white large wand”

“I luv your monster dark cock my ass pussy and mouth ache for your bbc”

“what a huge monster beautiful blk dick YUM!!! I'd try my best to [suck] it deep in my throat...”

“I've taken some big dicks down my throat, but I might gag on that monster. The sight of that hot white cum shooting outta your jet black dick made me shoot my load.”

“those jamaican guys got big monster dicks...where'd they come from? it must be the island food or water...”

“he met his God and it is your DICK! amazing -- yours is about 5 times as big as his little asian cock, too!”

Commenter's discuss white men's penises much less than black men's, and when they do, they praise unique attributes (“Love when guys know how to enjoy each other's foreskin!”) or intangible qualities that defy specification (“I couldn't say exactly why, but THAT is a dick to die for”). This distinctive impulse to focus on and dismember black men's penises is useful for maintaining a segregated sexual desire for black men without the racial problematics that should otherwise accompany such fetishization. Considering the history of social and political disenfranchisement of gay communities in the U.S., we can assume that there is potential for gay white men to be more empathetic toward the plight of black gay men than folks who are both straight and white. Thus, misrepresentative depictions and conceptions of minority groups in American culture and media are a potential site for fortifying resistant alliances. However, such connections are stifled by the ongoing significance of race to the disjuncture of American communities, including queer ones. In the “real world,” these disconnections operate through mechanisms of separation like marriage, private schooling, home-buying, and church patronage. In gay porn, the preoccupation with and dismemberment of black men's penises similarly attenuates racially conscious, sociocultural integration. Essentially, these processes confine sexual interest and appreciation for black masculinity to these trivial contrivances regarding black men's bodies, while white masculinity enjoys a much broader dominium of relevance in gay porn.

In the field of disability studies, researchers have been reluctant to approach topics typically associated with psychology for fear of reigniting the oppressive gaze of medicalized pathology, responsible for the atrocities that befell people with disabilities during society's era of



institutionalization (Liddiard 2014). However, some have argued that doing so inhibits important inquiries about the psychological impact of disablism (Liddiard 2014). A similar phenomenon underpins the ongoing disengagement of sexuality studies with the origins of sexual attraction, particularly of the queer variety. Two of the oldest known organizations in the U.S. founded by and composed mostly of white lesbian women and gay men – the Daughters of Bilitus and the Mattachine Society, respectively – assembled while the obtrusive gaze of psychology was focused on cataloguing “disorders” and their genealogies (Rizzo 2006). In addition, the continual push of gay, lesbian, and trans politics away from biological essentialism generally marks conversations about the origins of psychosexuality as off-limits (Leachman 2016). Nevertheless, sexual desire is a social construction like any other, emanating from a complex system of integrated social processes, obscured by a widespread epistemological focus on biology (particularly hormones, brain structures, and chromosomes) and Freudianism.

Although assumptions of naturalness conceal the social production of cultural ideologies, unpacking the symbolism presented by such artifacts renders this process visible. What’s more, this new transparency allows us to examine how sociocultural mechanisms of inequality structure the making and maintenance of cultural artifacts such as sexual desire. For example, in a preface to *Coming Apart*, Alice Walker (2006) writes:

“Many Black men see pornography as progressive because the white woman, formerly taboo, is, via pornography, made available to them. Not simply available, but in a position of vulnerability to all men. This availability and vulnerability diminishes the importance and power of color among men and permits a bonding with white men *as men*, which Black men, striving to be equal, not content with being different, apparently desire.” (3)

In this study, I argue a position similar to Walker's: that the fetishized desire for black masculinity by gay white men is about more than sexual longing. It allows gay white men to unite with heterosexual whites under the umbrella of black denigration. Moreover, because this relationship is couched in the unquestionable inherency of sexual desire, the presumed bond between gay brethren remains largely intact.

## 7 CHAPTER 6: MISSING LINKS (PRIMITIVENESS AND PRIMALITY)

Baartman's tragedy is but one of many attempts by Europeans and white Americans to demarcate blackness as subhuman by declaring people of African descent to be a "missing link" between modern humans and "lesser" primates (Westra 2004). In fact, this discourse, which positioned black people as evolutionary relics, was integral to the "scientific racism" of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that created illusory anatomical differences to establish white superiority as a cornerstone of contemporary science (Conley 2013b). Phrenological theory, for instance, posited that skull shapes associated with Anglo ancestry were indicative of civil demeanor and heightened intelligence (Conley 2013b). At the same time, the field of physiognomy similarly tied phenotypic qualities (particularly skin color) to intellect and moral character (Conley 2013b). Later, social Darwinists deployed new concepts like heredity and evolution to bolster the position that Anglo-Europeans topped the social ladder because they were most fit for species survival (Conley 2013b). Though modern discussions of racial distinction are typically framed by ideals of cultural difference, they remain rooted in scientific racism, as such differences are presumed to be and experienced as immutable (Conley 2013b).

Moreover, scientific racism had a direct line to the sociocultural character of race relations at that time. After the United States' Civil War, many Southern scientists relied on this discourse to convince the American North that antebellum segregation was both necessary and

“natural” (Rich 2012). One such scientist was R.L. Gardner, a naturalist and primate collector who recorded his observations about race while traveling in Gabon and then paralleled race relations there to those in the U.S. Interestingly, Garner suggested that western imperialism ultimately denigrated white superiority through cultural and sexual miscegenation as well as ensuing divisions between whites about how to best handle conquered peoples (Rich 2012). Furthermore, because “the negro race will remain for ages if not forever, a social dead-weight that will necessarily handicap the white man,” Garner’s solution to racial animus at home was to deport all black Americans to Africa (Rich 2012:88). In Garner’s estimation, black people were less worthy of benevolent humanity than the Gabonese animals he studied and protected because they possessed a different kind of intelligence, one characterized by the fear and violence that results from an innate inability to process cognitive abstraction: “The negro is essentially a materialist and his mind only deals with material things...Spirit apart from matter is as unthinkable to the negro mind as the immensity of space” (Rich 2012:97). Because of this inherent quality, Garner and other racists argued that integrating black Americans was a waste of white America’s time and resources (Rich 2012).

Garner’s position was unique for his era in that it was firmly oppositional to the suggestion that paternalism toward “less civilized” human communities was “the white man’s burden”; or as Garner posits, “It is rather an unpleasant duty to have to be the ‘Father’ of a lot of savages whose social horizon is but little above that of the gorilla or chimpanzee and such is my task among these wooly cannibals” (cited in Rich 2012:98). Although, today this “burden” may be confined to religious missionary work (Ferguson 2016) and Western militarism (Kramer and Michalowski 2005), the understanding that white and black worlds are incompatible remains a prominent feature of contemporary race relations despite diversity culture’s sanctions on the

public expression of such sentiment. For example, though the number of white Americans who approve of interracial marriage has quadrupled since the 1950s, only 1.8% of new marriages in 2013 were multiracial (Wang 2012). What's more, these data suggest a sexual component to modern anti-blackness implied by resistance to genetic entanglement of black and white heredity, most evident in the attitudes and behaviors associated with anti-miscegenation. In fact, in the face of black progress, references to "missing links" deeply insult and dehumanize black Americans, such as when executive director of Clay County Development Corporation Pamela Taylor referred to former First Lady Michelle Obama as an "ape in heels" (Phillips and Bever 2016) or the many memes catalogued in the retrospective "Primate in Chief: A Guide to Racist Obama Monkey Photoshops" (Sauer 2011).

In the present as in the past, from lynchings to police murders, conceptualizing black people as "more simian than human" legitimizes white violence toward black communities (Sauer 2011). Black hyper-masculinity is central to this conceptualization, even in regards to black women, as the aforementioned "ape" comment suggests. It is the masculinist qualities of readiness for violence, stifled intellect, and social-emotional deficiency which make black people so dangerously different. Unlike the nostalgic cultural celebration of these characteristics in white men – the proliferation of "man caves," for example – the U.S. citizenry deride these same characteristics in black men and women. In addition, Collins' theory of controlling images (such as the "mammy" and "angry black man") describes how hyper-masculinity is deployed by white supremacy to subjugate black communities (Collins 2004; Wingfield 2007). This same process is echoed in pornography, where black men's supposed violent hyper-masculinity is fetishized. On "Interracialled," a site dedicated to porn featuring black men with white women, a gif features one such pair engaged in vaginal-penile intercourse, the woman wincing as the man grabs her by

the throat, under a text that reads “the black man’s orgasm is more important than you are.” Another image on the same website is captioned: “Your little girl...Passed out again at a frat party. The brothers really like her...It is an all black fraternity.”

Considering that very few producers of pornography cater to women, these images are likely created for and consumed by men – and captions like “Reblog if you want to see your wife get filled from this cock” or “Admit it – there’s nothing better than seeing a BBC stretch your wife’s pussy,” suggest that the primary audience is specifically *white* men. But why would white men masturbate to images of black men having sex with or raping their wives and daughters? The answer rests at the intersection of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, where straight white men can not only subordinate white women and marginalize black women but also identify with and primitivize black men, all at once – for instance, another image with a fully-clothed black man and a nude white woman features the caption “Natural Selection.” Psychosexual pleasure is more than simply associated with these representations, as it also derives from them. And despite the widespread (and problematic) assumption that white gay men are less capable of such anti-black racism because of a shared status as prosecuted minorities, this same racist fetishization permeates gay men’s sexual culture. In gay pornography featuring both black and white participants, white men often fill the role of subordinated bottom, while in either scenario black men remain dominating tops.

## 7.1 PRIMITIVENESS: SUBORDINATION AND DIMINUTION

In *Black Masks, White Skin* (1952), Fanon pithily illustrates the racist undertones that justified the brutality of white colonialism in African communities as well as the ongoing terrorism of its gaze toward the diaspora: “the Negroes are animals” (127). Furthermore, in Fanon’s calculation, sexuality is a pivotal facet of white supremacy: “The white man is

convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him” (1952:131). In gay men’s pornography, black men are construed as less human than their counterparts, and this image then serves as a source of erotic attraction. In fact, there are almost twice as many indicators for primitivity in the ebony video category than non-ebony. The predominant means through which gay sexual culture primitivizes black men in pornography include relegating men of color to subordinating associations of natural rawness, unrefined putrescence, and anachronistic animality. In addition, some video producers and commenters primitivize black men through diminution, which positions adult men of color as dependent wards of white men.

In gay men’s pornography, black men are “real” men. For example, one white Xtube user – whose video collection includes titles such as “Latin Jerkoff 2” and “huge black dick cuming loads” – summarizes this conceptive “real man” in his profile under “Turn Ons”:

“A bitch instinctively surrenders to a real Man, who exercises His natural right to relentlessly fuck the cunt or cunts of His choice. [The fact that] the bitch suffers is just a tribute to the regal glory of His almighty phallus. When the power of His loins can no longer be contained, He triumphantly spurts His sacred essence in or on the reamed bitch, and His victory is complete.”

This user, like so many others, characterizes masculine realness as a coercive, phallogentric, brutal, and competitive sexual authoritarianism, whose tendency for unbridled barbarism is a “natural right.” In contrast to discussion of such savagery in non-ebony gay porn, this attitude reflects more than just a sadist taking pleasure in inflicting pain. In addition, the user’s statement above illustrates a central ideological tenet of black men’s presence in gay pornography: the sexual embodiment and performativity of men of color serve at the pleasure of white desire.

Therefore, masculine realness for black men in gay porn is not configured in the traditional sense, where a masculine actor engages in cognitive-behavioral maneuvers to consciously eschew femininity. Such maneuvering requires an analytical intellect supposedly lacking in black men. Instead, an association with “raw” and “natural” material epitomizes the “realness” of black men in gay porn, who are supposedly unaltered by the feminizing forces of civilized humanity, which produce qualities such as intelligence and emotional aptitude.

For example, in spite of the idealized image of the attractive gay man as essentially hairless except for his head and face (Pyle and Klein 2011), hairiness is an eroticized physical attribute prominent in both ebony and non-ebony video categories. However, when producers and consumers allude to hairiness in non-ebony videos, they typically do not reference race overtly:

“It’s great to see someone so relaxed and enjoying himself. I LOVE a muscular guy with a hairy chest, together they just shout \‘MAN!!\’”

“why would gay men not like hairy guys? dude body hair like the greatest thing in the universe!”

“I love his hairy balls. He’s a hunk all around”

“magnificent load of creamy goodness! And love the natural bush on both as well.”

“Now that I loved...a [boy] with a mans cock...and no shaved [boys]!!”

For white and black men alike, hairiness indicates “natural” masculinity – it “shouts ‘man,’” demarcates “hunkiness,” and adulterates youth. And, interestingly, the tone of the only instance in which whiteness and hirsuteness are associated is oppositional -- “Stay Tan Buff and hairless...you are so fuckin’ hot...perfect white guy.” However, consumers and producers discursively link hairiness and blackness in pornography featuring black performers. For

example, user “WHT4BLKNC” lists among their “Turn Ons” “mainly black guys (especially OLDER black men. You can’t be too old for me....no age ceiling at all) Hairy chests...” Other white users similarly connect blackness and hairiness in their lists:

“Naked men from all over, particularly, Japanese, Asian in General plus black african! hairy pits, hairy chests, hairy groins...”

“Hairy Cocks, all Black Cock (no matter what size!)”

“muscles, big dicks, big balls honey *aggressive Blacks, Latins*, darker Europeans German/Scandinavian types are very hot too. Tuff guys, *facial hair, armpits*, smooth *sweaty* men, light-med *hairy* tops, thick, solid *bears*, football player types, role playing, fisting, leather, lycra, speedos, wrestling, kissing, cuddling, affection, *macho-fuckers* [emphasis added].”

For black men, hairiness discursively bridges the fetishization of black masculinity with the eroticization of primitivity, such as this white user’s comment on an ebony video: “Thank goodness your bush is not shaved, you’re still a real man!” Here, the user employs the presence of pubic hair to define “real man,” where conceptions of primitivity and primality frame “realness.”

Several clips in the ebony video category are produced by RAWRODS, a company that creates and distributes gay pornography featuring “bareback Black men hardcore fucking.” The company’s advertising not only reifies that association of black men with natural rawness but also attempts to capitalize on it: “Brothas doin it like we do it, nottin but RAW dick up in dis joint!” One RAWRODS clip that features three young black men includes a superscript text reading “after school the freaks come out.” In another, titled “Chino in the Raw,” three young black men engage in various sexual activities with one another, and a text reads, “Aight, yo, the



thugs are back with some serious gangsta lovin...No bullshit – just straight up gangstas doing it raw.” Rawness is a discursive mechanism which permits black men to participate in gay sex without sabotaging the allure of black masculine aggression. Instead, rawness redefines gay sex as both a natural phenomenon and a perilous adventure: “No bitches allowed...this da real shit nigga.” Clearly, though white consumers participate (one white user has a photo album titled “STUFFED: Me getting plowed by big, raw black dick. Mmmmmm!”), black men also self-associate with natural rawness:

“My raw dark meat inside bare, unprotected white flesh.”

“god he's so milky white. love to get my raw meat inside him”

Here, black men reap a sexual premium by contrasting their rawness (“dark meat”) with white men’s refinement (“milky” “unprotected white flesh”). Importantly, buying into such conceptualizations of black masculinity is one of the few and limited ways in which black men can maintain self-value in gay men’s pornography.

In gay men’s sexual culture, “raw” also refers to the act of anal sex without the use of condoms, also known as “barebacking.” Moreover, this rhetoric is resistant toward an image of gay men as vectors of disease, transforming the idea of condom-less gay sex from careless hedonism to a source of sexual empowerment and queer resistance. However, distinctions in usage of the term suggest that racial and gendered ideologies are important to its connotations and apprehension. For example, when consumers or producers characterize sexual behavior as “raw” in non-ebony videos, they are typically referring to activity that includes at least one performer of color. If not, such videos almost always include a performer who is explicitly characterized by inexperience with gay sex:

“Oh yeah one other thing...and the mere fact that you fucked him RAW...this punk is NOT st8.....all the best. watch how he takes cock up his cunt like a [bitch]”

“I love watching these guys raw fuck n tear up a nice young sweet HOT virgin hole! They both deserve it and so do the bois!”

“Serious Raw Aggressive Anal Penetration, Laughing, and Kissing. You name it and these three videos have it. Hanging out with our FRAT BOY was a blast.”

In positioning inexperience with gay sex as desirable, these three comments reveal the close ties between rawness, aggression, and topping. In the first, barebacking feminizes a gay sex “virgin,” discrediting their claim to heterosexual masculinity. In the second, the aggression of “raw fucking” enhances the pleasure derived from observing sex with a virginal bottom “boi.” Similarly, the last comment positions seriousness, rawness, and aggression as collusive and parallel elements useful for the sexual exploitation of a “frat boy,” the prototypical gay sex virgin. What’s more, even when rawness is used to describe white men’s activities in gay porn, it maintains an (inverted) relationship with the fiction of natural black hyper-masculinity: “Seeding a white guy’s raw pink guts [with] my sweaty dark meat.”

In addition to discussions of rawness, the black primitivity discourse in gay men’s pornography also manifests through inferred or overt references to nature. For example, a short video titled “Nature Boi” features a fit black man masturbating. There is nothing other than his skin color and the leopard print rug underneath his chair that connotes “nature.” Another video, “From Africa to Asia,” features a black man and a man of Asian descent engaged in anal sex. Despite the video’s title, American products in the background and the accents and English proficiency of the participants suggest that the video is filmed in a western location. In this instance, the producers and consumers of this porn invest energy to establish the non-white

ethnicities of the performers as more “natural” than whiteness and then secure the erotic dividend:

“now that’s a fuck video real natural two hot men showing how sex should be great cum shots nice loads ‘lucky ASIAN [boy]’”

“That was so super, super hot. I would love to be that luck Asian to have that big African dick deep inside my super horny hole.”

“5 stars!!! I want some of that big African dick tearing my man cunt in half too.”

In these examples, while “Asian” describes a psychosocial identity, “African” is merely an adjective to characterize a type of “dick.” Other references place black men in an ecological fantasyland. For instance, one user comments that he is “looking for black guys with a real big black cock to fuck my horny white ass deep hard and longtime also like to be fuck by more than one black guys I like to be fuck in the open nature outdoor.” Similarly, the profile avatar of another user – “a white man looking for a black man” – is a photo of two young, fit, dark-skinned black men wrestling nude, in what appears to be the African savanna, backdropped by Mount Kilimanjaro. And, again, discussions of nature surrounding primitivity reinforce the discursive connections between black masculinity, topping, and aggression: “damn I luv an aggressive black top that knows how to fuck some good ass!! Especially luv watching a black top totally butt ass naked when he workin! So natural n sexy!”

In “The Sociology of Smell,” Synnott (1991) delineates the significance of olfaction to meaning-making in the social world: our judgment of odors as good or bad positions smell as a prominent component on the construction of the moral self. Synnot distinguishes between three categories of odor: manufactured, symbolic, and natural (1991). However, there is significant overlap between them, as “[odor] is a *natural sign* of the self as both a physical and a moral

being. The [odor] is a symbol of the self' (1991:444). Moreover, the symbolism of smells is a conduit for notions of ethnicity. For example, in Kang's study of North American nail salons, the "pampering body labor" of physical and emotional care of Korean manicurist transforms a routine hygienic procedure into a rewarding physical and emotional experience for wealthier white clients, couched in attentiveness and respect (2010). In these spaces, both customers and owners constantly police the gender and ethnic identity of Korean manicurists based on a gendered model minority stereotype of Asian women as subservient, hard-working, natural caretakers (Kang 2010). One major aspect of this policing is smell, as owners and customers expect manicurists to forgo consumption of Korean foods while in the workplace to dispel perceptions of ethnic otherness (Kang 2010). Similarly, Synnott mentions Hitler's claim that Jewish Europeans smell of "moral mildew" as well as the persistent claim by American and European whites that "Negroes" have an "extremely disagreeable" odor, underscoring how "foul smells [are] not just unpleasant, they [symbolize] an inner rotteness" (1991: 448).

In gay men's pornography, noxious odor remains associated with black men. However, rather than reviled, stink is a direct line to the unrefined putrescence that contributes to the fetishized primitivity of black masculine sexuality. For example, one of the most viewed ebony videos is a clip from a porn flic titled "Sweatin' Black" which centers around a theme of black men engaged in same-sex sex after or during sport activity (the video is subtitled "Vivid Man Raw 5: A Sports Jam"). In a review of the film on TLA film productions, gay porn reviewer Keeneye Reeves comments "Sure, [the director's] flicks are all 'homeboy in the hood/papi chulo' but man he finds hot pieces and man does he know how to get them to perform" (Reeves N.d.). Here, producers use sweatiness to convey an image of primitive black masculinity, emphasized by the reviewer's distillation of black and Latino men to "pieces" void of agency

and made to “perform.” In addition, consumers of gay porn similarly eroticize the body odor of black men:

“amazing piece of black meat, i would hope it smells bad too”

“Wow what a black [...] spit good two, love to sniff his balls an ass bet he smell real musky an sweaty”

“love to lick [the black performer’s] hole bet it taste good an smell real strong”

Like noxious smells, in the popular imagination of North America uncircumcised penises also connote unsanitariness, as we associate the presence of foreskin with smegma (a mix of dead cells and oils with a chunky consistency and foul odor) and a higher risk of infections, especially those that are sexually-transmitted (Taylor 2016). Despite the simple methods of prevention for these conditions – washing and condom use, respectively – as well as low incidence rates, North Americans maintain a view of uncircumcised penises as simultaneously “natural” and “dirty,” “gross,” or “unhealthy,” which likely disenchant some would-be partners from sex activity with partners who are “uncut” (Taylor 2016). Nevertheless, material specifically featuring performers of any race with uncut penises comprises a fair share of gay fetish pornography. For black men, however, producers and consumers of gay porn explicitly link to racial notions as, like smell, the attraction of uncircumcised penises on men of color stems from the sexual allure of primitivity. For instance, one white user’s “Turn Ons” include “masculine men, jockstraps, wife beaters, muscles, uncut dicks on mexicans and blacks, [bareback] porn.” Another’s consists of “Black men...Masculine men...Thugs...Uncut Dicks...Hung black dicks.” At times, gay men lament the use of circumcision on black men specifically. In the comments of a video titled “THICK NIGGA, BIG THICK LONG FAT

DICK!!!,” one user posits that “Donkeys are always uncut” and “sadly that one was incomplete” then asks us to “[Imagine] that piece of meat as it should have been!”

Even outside the context of circumcision, sexually transmitted infection invokes an image of uncleanness, illustrated by a rhetoric among men who have sex with men that declares persons living with HIV or AIDS “dirty” and those with unknown HIV status “clean.” In fact, this ideology is so entrenched that some gay men subconsciously correlate the cleanliness of the room in which they’ve had sex with their susceptibility to sexually transmitted disease (Merteeks et al. 2013). Moreover, the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender uniquely shapes the character of HIV/AIDS stigmatization among queer men of color (Brooks et al. 2005). Nevertheless, gay pornography frequently replaces the pathological disease orientation of condom-less sex with the sexual allure of barebacking, where the associated “dirtiness” becomes subject of desire: “I thoroughly enjoy watching Men fuck [boys] without condoms. It’s juicy and nasty.” Of course, the perceived race of participants differentiates this subjectivity as the resistant sexual politic of barebacking is largely reserved for white men. For one, comments on non-ebony videos contain fewer words of caution about unprotected sex. In fact, other than a video featuring two men cheating on their partners (“you guys are fucking [liars] and cheaters...not to mention you're fucking without a condom then taking that back to your boyfriend... you are a fucking idiot [...] you're the reason why HIV is such a problem”), most were supportive:

“This has all of the best- A \*\*\*\*\*friend BB fuck, considerate/passionate top, bottom cums first, then top gets off inside. Please GOD give us more!  
love the bare back!”

On the other hand, in ebony videos featuring barebacking mixed-race partners, black men participate in contrasting black putrescence and white purity:

“Seeding a white guy’s raw pink guts w/ my sweaty dark meat.”

“My raw dark meat inside bare, unprotected white flesh.”

Some commenters even resigned to the idea of black gay men as vectors:

“all them nasty ass hoes got HIV that’s off top!”

“If you're really thugs, at least you had the sense to wear condoms, and I didn't see all the tats, which is usually typical of the thug’s mentality, thugs, questionable, more macho, then you should be yes.”

Relatedly, pro-safer sex comments on ebony porn were more stern than those on non-ebony videos (“condoms much?”). Where concerned commenters gently prodded white performers for their lack of condom use (“Yes I admit i cummed! This is really hot. But dont you think this is also [...] dangerous to get all sorts of STDs?”), they assumed black performers were ignorant about the importance of condom use and responded patronizingly:

“HOT VID... but safe sex should be practiced... 1 in 4 african american males between ages 18-29 are infected with HIV and either don’t know it or know and won’t say anything...besides old dude lied...he said the condom was keeping his dick from staying hard...when he took it off...his [penis] was still limp.. i just think he wasn’t that all into it...”

“These two young college [boys] need a little more education on STD's before they become a statistic. Doing sex raw is a risk in itself to catch an STD especially HIV even

if you don't come inside somebody's rectum. They r just plain stupid and ignorant. Hope that doesn't bite in the butt one day. If u keep playing with fire, u will get [burned] one day.”

Curiously, though comments on ebony videos featured more stringent warnings about barebacking, they also featured more explicit support. Thus, white consumers simultaneously express concern for higher incidence of infection among black men who have sex with men and are aroused by the naturalism and primitivity implied by the congruence of black masculinity and barebacking, as most references to condom-less sex that included mention of race were positive:

“One of the hottest 3ways on here. Love that black top! His, muscular body and fat curved cock still bareback fucking the versatile guy long after he blows his load, fuck yeah!!! Ah, to be the middle man in that cream sandwich.”

“I want to be the guy in the middle - man, he's fucking that \*\*\*\*\*, then gets the huge, hung, black man to fuck his ass hard. The three of them get into sync and fuck like three lucky, fucky rabbits. way to go guys!!! what bareback fucking dudes is all about.

Thanks!”

“Bareback fuckin and fisting! I have a weakness for men of color but really enjoy the company of any masculine, confident man, small group or couple. Love big huge balls, fat cocks and uncut cocks with lots of loose skin but I dont discriminate...”

The project of primitivizing black men also includes ideating black men as evolutionary anachronisms, less human than their white counterparts. At times, this discourse frames white masculinity similarly. For example, in porn featuring fat, hairy men (or “bears”), both performers and commenters evoke this rhetoric as affirmation of sexual desirability:



“You are so fucking sexy. Love your handsome furry face, furry chest and gorgeous hairy ass! WOOOOF!”

“Yeah, he's got hot little ass, alright, but FUCK, he is one fortunate [daddy] to have you! OiNK”

“bottom str8 cub is big and juicy!”

One particular motif here is the figurative use of the term “feed” to represent the intake of ejaculate through the mouth or anus, largely reserved for bottoms in non-ebony porn:

“You know I would love to feed you my MONSTER and my BIG LOADS.”

“Open up. Let me feed you.”

“O, I just love feeding time! I'm soooo hungry right now!”

When videos include black partners, “feeding” takes on a distinctly racial character, that either reifies racial ideology of black masculine monstrosity (“I'd FEED on that big black fucker”) or diminishes black masculinity to a subordinate status (“YEAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH Daddy feed his cute Black Boyyy mouth”). Moreover, many references to animality in videos featuring black men position black masculinity as an evolutionary mishap:

“I guess if you're gonna be a mutant, that's a pretty good way to be mutated.”

“What a magnificent specimen of the MALE.”

“Oh my goodness this is completely hot!!!! The black guy must be from another world.

He's absolutely gorgeous!!!!!! Keep em cumming...!”

Others link contemporary black masculine sexuality with “less-civilized” ancestral African communities. In doing so, these references sidestep the conventionality of modern black identity in the West, a quality that threatens to dismantle the fantasy of black primitivity:

“TURN ONS: smooth juicy well endowed men make my mouth watering again and again, especially attracted to dark colored men because they turn me on most of all, mandingos, Caribbean”

“gorgeous face with a mandingo cock!”

At times, these references include comparisons of black men and masculinity with non-human animals and animal behavior, especially those creatures and habits which symbolize patriarchal power and aggression in Western culture:

“Man, you don't need to play by yourself.....I would suck dat big ass dick and [...] ride you like Wild Bill rode his [horse] across the Pecos”

“thats fuckin hot! that black dude is a stallion!”

“absolutely no doubt how the ALPHA MALE is here”

“Sir, YOU are AWESOME!!! Love how you use white boi ass pussy for your alpha male needs! The way you penetrate, use and seed his hole! DAMN!!! Thankfully I had the honor of being introduced to the superior black dick my freshman year of [high] school.”

“HORSE.”

“Big\_black\_man\_beast”

To contrast, in the rare instance in which a video features an Asian performer, he is domesticated, infantilized, and thus feminized by an animal reference: “thaz a HELLA HOTTTT lil brown Asian PuppyBoy butt!!! Thankz for feelin him up and shootin your warm ball milk on his PRETTY LIL ASIAN BOY BUTT PUSSY!!!”

Importantly, though the generous allocation of power and prowess to black masculinity is unrealistic, gay men’s pornography simultaneously diminishes black masculinity to juvenility. In

fact, North American media consistently present blackness as both more and less of what it is – as both so abstract that such depictions are bereft of applicability and so concrete that nuance is indecipherable (McAlister 2012). Moreover, Fanon (1952) understood such apparently disparate contradictions as actually synergistic phenomena: “Since his ideal is an infinite virility, is there not a phenomenon of diminution in relation to the Negro, who is viewed as a penis symbol?” (123). Though Fanon’s position is clearly demonstrated in many of the discussions above, black men are also explicitly diminished in gay men’s pornography. In one video categorized as ebony, an older white couple invites a younger black man to participate in a threesome. During this encounter, the invitee wears a mask covering his eyes, probably to hide his identity as an underage participant or give such an illusion. The entire video consists of one of the men face-fucking their guest – and though the younger black man is shown masturbating, he does not communicate any signs of pleasure. The video is titled “Daddy Ken feeds a morning cum load to the morning blowjob boy” and, indeed, the younger black man is referred to as “boy” throughout the encounter (“That’s a good boy,” “Open up, boy,” etc.). And commenters are keenly aware of and take pleasure in the racialized diminishment presented here:

“YEAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH Daddy feed his cute Black Boyyy mouth your WHITE DADDY BALL SAC!!! And make him \*\*\*\*\* your Daddy ball milk!”

“I’d love to worship your white cock”

In another video titled “Str8? Jbone shows off his little black weenie,” two white men film a black man masturbating while watching pornography. The two men prod Jbone with simplistic questions to firmly establish his heterosexuality (“How many girls are you seeing now?”). Over the video’s duration, the men make several requests that Jbone initially denies but later accepts under pressure. Given the use of editorial cuts, it is likely that producers understood

this pattern of refusal-then-acceptance as a significant contribution toward the video's allure. A critical review of this video renders white supremacy (in conjunction with class privilege) visible in gay men's pornography: Jbone (characterized in the caption as a "wannabe rapper") is financially and emotionally coerced by two white men to engage in same-sex sexual activity for the viewing pleasure of other gay white men. At least a few black men recognize this discourse and enact resistance by rejecting Jbone's behavior as anomalous to "ordinary" gay black men:

"sounds to me like a White man who is doing the filming...its obvious the Black guy is feeling a buzz...wonder how much Mr. cameraman paid him.....?"

"he def paid dat crackhead lol"

Here, black commenters reconfigure Jbone's display of Sambo-like conformity as not in keeping with black masculinity – instead, it is construed as the result of monetary incentive and drug-induced coercion.

These images and rhetorics primitivize black sexuality in gay men's pornography for the fetishistic pleasure of (mostly) white men. Black men are associated with natural rawness, unrefined putrescence, anachronistic animality, or diminished to the point of subservient prematurity. Toni Morrison's concept of *African Americanism* is a useful tool for unpacking the racial processes at play in this cultural media fantasy; she proposes that North American media have created a fictive black persona that encompasses "the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning" about the cultures and psychologies of the black diaspora (1993:6). In this collection of symbols, white America can actively resist racial justice without having to claim responsibility for doing so because we interpret this process as fantasy. The instances I discuss in this chapter "queer" *African Americanism* by investigating the intersection of gay men's cultural ideologies and

phantasmagoric black American identity. The fantastical primitivization of black men in gay pornography is a prominent motif at this location. These images permit white men to “get off” on the subordination of black masculinity. Moreover, they allow for the integration of blackness into the gay erotic without the formative challenges to white supremacy that such integration might otherwise entail.

## 7.2 PRIMALITY: MONSTROSITY, VIOLENCE, AND POWER

On one hand, primitivity entails an ideology that positions black masculinity as a prehistoric state of identity situated within its modern surroundings. On the other, primality emphasizes the continuing display of malicious attitudes associated with primeval savagery. This is the difference between an ape in a cage at the zoo and an ape on the loose in your neighborhood. Both are spectacle for sure, but the latter stimulates a tension not present in the former. It is this sexual tension – this implication of danger – that drives the erotic allure of presumed black masculine primality in gay men’s pornography. This trope is well-rehearsed in Western culture. In *Welcome to the Jungle*, Mercer (1994) critiques Robert Mapplethorpe’s infamous “X Portfolio” series for encouraging white viewers to observe black men as “abstract, beautiful things” shrouded in the “primal fantasy of the big black penis” (174). The trope even extends to politics, as in Maine Governor Paul LePage’s assertion that “guys with the name D-Money, Smoothie, Shifty” travel from urban areas to “impregnate a young, white girl,” deployed to present black men as scapegoats for Maine’s “heroin epidemic” (Reilly 2016). And there is a long history of this discursive device in gay porn featuring men of color. For example, in a critical film analysis of queer men’s pornography produced in Mexico, Subero (2010) suggests that the “socio-sexual imaginary” envisions Latino men as possessing “an extreme form of primal sexuality” (119). Subero later extends this position to all men of color:

“This type of representation of masculinity has also been utilized in gay pornography, more specifically Anglo-European pornography in which coloured men are troped as hypersexual individuals who are sexually insatiable and whose image and role, not only within the sexual exchange but also as an embodiment of a sexuality, denote the idea of a raw *primal* sexuality” [emphasis added].

For black men in gay porn, the portrayal of primality entails presenting black masculinity as violent and powerful and is intended to arouse the viewer by offering an image of black masculinity as “sensuous but dangerous” (Subero 2010:120).

Xtube’s gay ebony category is saturated with references to “monsters” – in fact, there are 8 times as many references compared to videos in the non-ebony categories surveyed. Furthermore, this theme extends to the broader culture of gay men’s erotic media. Discussed in the previous chapter, one website even offers viewers the opportunity to “see monsters fuck innocent humans.” The symbolism of such a tagline is of great importance given the network of racial and sexual ideologies that feed the sex cultures of gay men: black men are to “monsters” as white men are to “innocent humans.” Clearly, an aspect of this cultural construct is associated with the presumption of black physicality, without which a \$27.94 per month subscription to the website “Big Black Boyfriends” would seem nonsensical. However, much of the symbolic primality is represented in the thread of violence that permeates comments about and representations of blackness in gay men’s pornography. There are more than twice as many references to violence in the ebony versus non-ebony video categories. Conventionally, the hardness of black masculinity prohibits inclusion in normative cultural erotics. In gay men’s porn, however, this hardness has a high premium – as a consequence, “thug sex” is the pinnacle of gay black erotica:

“hot thugs.... this white ass would love to be thug fucked lots”

“i wuld love 2 get fucked like that thugs turn me da fuck on. if u a thug and u can fuck like that or better hit me up and lets make that [shit] happen”

“want to get thug fucked...anyone near Chicago?”

“newark, nj here, thug fuck me too”

“I want to get thug-fucked. Who is near Washington DC. message me.”

So high is this premium, in fact, that the parameters of thug sex are heavily policed, especially by black consumers:

“WANNABE PORN THUG!”

“All these dudes is CAKE ASS NIGGAS... Soft as fuck... Gay clubbing ass [boys]”

“and aint nothing dl or thug about any of them”

“If you're really thugs, at least you had the sense to wear condoms, and I didn't see all the tats, which is usually typical of the thugs mentality, thugs, questionable, more macho, then you should be yes.”

“SO STUPID ARGUING ABOUT WHAT A THUG IS WHEN U NEED TO JUSS SHUT UP AND FUK ONE”

“BORING [so-called] thug just going through the motion. He must be getting paid”

“Thugs?? GIRL, BYE!!! Real thugs don't moan like that during sex.”

Ironically, the valorization of “thug life” is often associated with virulent queer antagonism. In *Black Sexual Politics*, Collins (2005) confronts the motif as a *controlling image*: “The thug is inherently physical and, unlike the athlete, his physicality is neither admired nor can it be easily exploited for White gain. [He] may be crafty, but the essence of his identity lies in the

inherent violence associated with his physicality (158).” Collins also suggests that the relationship between essential (or “authentic”) hyper-masculine blackness and the caution it warrants delegitimizes racial integration – in other words, “who wants to live next door to a thug or sit next to one in school?” (159). Despite the reticence most Americans show toward such proximity to thugs, there are certainly throngs of gay men who would like to fuck one. This incredible penchant for thug sex greatly overshadows feminine allure in gay black eroticism, especially in comparison to its white counterpart. It seems even queerness does not upend the unrealistic expectation of implacable toughness in black men. For instance, in one ebony video featuring a black top and a white bottom, the hard-fucking top asks incessantly if the bottom is “ok.” At first, it seems as though the top is simply concerned about the bottom’s well-being. However, rather than exercising moderation, the top deploys roughness right up to the point of intolerance. The black top, who also produced the video, captions it “black man fucks white boy bareback.” In this instance, his awareness of the expectations for performances featuring black tops and white bottoms is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of black “man” and white “boy.”

Several of the profiles of white users I reviewed name violence as a desired quality in sexual encounters with black men:

“TURN ONS: Black men, Big Black Cocks, Uncut Black cocks, Creampies from black men, Being used like a slut by black men, Gang bangs, group sex, and so much more!”

“Blacks, Latinos and Arabs especially wanted. Love verbal [abuse] in a foreign language...CRAVE DARK COMPLEXION BLACK TOPS!!”

“TURN ONS: Straight, Short, Black, Latino, ARAB, Verbal, Ethnic guys and blue collar White guys...AGGRESSIVE STRAIGHT MEN...Being used like a



WHORE/SLUT...Multiple, anonymous, Black and Latinos dicking me down...i  
desperately want to have that humongous black cock slammed up my juicy cunt!”

In some comments in response to videos featuring mixed-race couples, viewers express their desire to be abused by black men:

“A gorgeous big black cock like yours needs a good white mans hole to use and abuse”  
“fuck bro I WANT U TO TAKE THAT HUGE BLACK COCK GRAB THE BACK MY  
HEAD AND SHOVE IT IN MY MOUTH MAKE MY FAKE STR8 ACTING PUNK  
WHITE BOY ASS YOUR LIL BITCH FAG BOY ... FUCKING TIE ME UP SPREAD  
MY LEGS UP OVER UR SHOULDERS AND SHOVE THAT DICK IN MY VIRGIN  
TIGHT WHITE BOY ASS SLAM ME HARD MAKE ME SCREAM MOAN CRY  
LIKE A LIL FAGGOT BOY”

In others, viewers express admiration for the violence represented in black men maiming white men (and women) during sex:

“I want to see you hammering that white [boy’s] ass so hard he fucking yelps!!”  
“Way to [kill] that mancunt!! I’m calling nexties!! Way to get it bro!!”  
“omg! You tore that little white ass up! Fucking hot, dude!”  
“Dont know if hes gay or what but I would love to see that destroy my white slut wifes  
asshole”

Similarly, a few white viewers explicitly state a desire to see or experience rape perpetrated by black men:

“WILL U PLEASE RAPE ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“That is pure RAPE. Love it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“even when he say dont. make him \*\*\*\*\* all over that would be hot see that asshole blow up with stuff coming out from u hitting it reall hard. handcuff him so he cant stpp u.

BLOW THAT ASS HOLE OUT MY DUDE. MAKE HIM TURN REAL RED.”

In the discourse of black violence in gay men’s pornography, the boundary between consensual aggression and rape is blurred by the presumption that black masculine primality does not – perhaps, cannot – make this important distinction. More overt forms of such “race play” (such as staged slave auctions and use of racial slurs) remain a controversial though still practiced activity in BDSM culture (Cruz 2015). However, in these instances, consenting participants of color generally initiate and control the process. In the world of pornography, such fantasies of non-consent and deployment of racial denigration proliferate with little to no resistance. Moreover, in contrast to the implied need for consent and black control in race play that subjugates black identity, essentialist assumptions of black masculine primality makes such validations seemingly unnecessary for the portrayal of black men’s violence. Because BDSM is commonly understood as a more fetishistic phenomenon than ebony porn, such portrayals appear ordinary because they are contextualized by sexual normativity. In gay men’s pornography, abuse, maiming, and even rape at the hands of black men is often either nonincidental or desired – as one viewer comments, on a video featuring a white bottom “taking as much of it as he can” from a black top, adding, “where there is misery there is enjoyment.”

Racist portrayals of black men in in gay porn are also normalized through the association of monstrosity and violence with power, which commands fascination and admiration from black and white users alike:

“YOU ARE MAGNIFICENT sexy beautiful I loved the way you looked into the camera and licked your lips such a calm INTENSITY. Im YOURS MAN!

“i'd be there at your command Sir!”

“it is clear that white people we have no choice but to surrender to the superiority of blacks”

In one video, three men engage in “train”-style anal sex – a black top penetrates a white bottom who is simultaneously penetrating a third participant. The two white men, one of whom is also engaged in topping, are innocuously described by commenters as “hot,” “sexy,” and “steady.” But the adjectives used to characterize the black top are shaded by connotations of power: a “mega” stud “rapid-fire pounding,” “thrusting hard,” and “piling back in.” Of course, power play is a widespread and longstanding theme in queer sexual cultures. The implied femininity of gay masculinity (as well as the “clone” backlash to such implications) disrupts the normative conventions of patriarchy and casts the subject as a potent site for queering sexual performativity. Race and class, nevertheless, complicate this phenomenon, as the masculinities of men of color and working-class men are fetishized as “more primal”:

“TURN ONS:Drunks, crack heads, hustlers, thugs [...] ghetto blacks, Mexicans, rednecks, blue collar types, guys who expect to be worshipped and PUERTO RICANS. I prefer men who are straight and men who do NOT like [faggots] like me...I WANT TO BE A SUCK BITCH FOR YOUNG STRAIGHT MEN IN TRAILER PARKS who make me buy them [booze] and pot by jacking me up and then feeding me cum”

And the greater the physical power differential, the greater the appeal: “love seeing [a black performer] push your seed in that asian hole and then have him suck you.” Such scenes create the

illusion of black subjectivity – while maintaining the objectification of Asian masculinity – by casting black masculinity as primordially powerful. However, this subjectivity is artificial: both black and Asian men are objects of white men’s fantasy. Moreover, this manifestation of black power is not realistically resistant because it is wholly situated in the sexual, expressing ignorance or disdain for black aptitude and humanity: “I prefer dominant blackguys who know what they want and get it done *without too many words* [emphasis added].”

Though the conception of black peoples as primitive and primal is certainly not a novel phenomenon, it is nonetheless paradigmatic of the contemporary nostalgia for the supposedly bygone days of white men’s unencumbered sovereignty. Kimmel (2013) attributes this sentiment to white men who feel entitled to an “American Dream” that is denied to them by the federal government and instead distributed to undeserving ethnic and racial minorities, women, and LGBT communities. This “aggrieved entitlement” creates an “us versus them” mentality that essentializes white superiority and black deficiency (Kimmel 2013). This ideology, however, extends beyond the overtly political into everyday sociocultural attitudes and behaviors. In *The Caveman Mystique*, McCaughey (2008) discusses the relationship between the backlash to feminist socio-politics, a growing interest in caveman symbology in pop culture, and an understanding of human sexuality as exclusively predicated on human evolution. Like Kimmel (2013), McCaughey (2008) poses white men’s aggrievement as response to rising multiculturalism, demonstrated in cultural trends (for example, the “outrage media” characteristic of Rush Limbaugh in the former and the proliferation of “man caves” in the latter). But *Caveman Mystique* introduces the importance of sexuality discourse to white men’s lamentation of apparently declining supremacy, as modern men attempt to recapitulate lost power by invoking the sexual primality of prehistoric masculinity (McCaughy 2008). The

industry of sex tourism, for example, is catalyzed by North American and European men's aggrievement, as white men in the West travel to Latin American, South Asian, and Eastern European countries to pay for sex and companionship (Davidson 2001). Sex tourists choose these locations intentionally – to these men, the ethnicity and class of the sex workers who live there signals an exotic otherness “more in tune with nature” (Davidson 2001) and “untainted by European morality” (Bishop and Robinson 1998).

And what of black men's self-reproduction and appreciation of black masculine primitivity and primality? Perhaps gay black men have internalized the narrative, but they may also reproduce it as a form of “erotic capital” – the deployable resource of sexual attractiveness – which has the potential to draw admiration, celebrity, and income. In the original formulation of the concept, Hakim (2010) argues that women can and should utilize erotic capital as a means of self-empowerment. In contrast to the top-down flow of power implied by internalization, I queer the term here to highlight the agency some men may exercise in reifying racist stereotypes for gay men's pornographic consumption or in any other context. But I do so with caution: Green's critique of erotic capital (2008) reveals the importance of intersectionality in sexuality theorizing, as the success with which erotic capital can be used to establish power is significantly varied by race, class, disability, age, and other identity categories. Muñoz (1999) warns that, though recycled stereotypes are a “powerful and seductive site of self-creation,” such “disidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects” (5).

There are, of course, elements of fetishized primitivity and primality in non-ebony videos, but the structure and degree of such presentations are clearly delineated by the race of both performers and audience, intended and actual. In non-ebony porn, for example,

primitiveness is largely reserved for bottoms. At times, however, the reference is extended to working-class performers, as gay white men's sexual fantasy approximates proletarian white masculinity to black masculinity when black men are absent, exemplified in non-ebony videos with comments such as "smells like a blue collar MAN!" and tags like "STR8-Construction-guy." In comparison, the praise for skill that white commenters offer white performers in non-ebony porn is essentially nonexistent in ebony videos – where white men are commended for their technical talents ("fucken hell what hand/ass/cock coordination") and penchant for romance ("If these two guys aren't true lovers in real life, they certainly ought to be"), black men are admired for their biological attributes, over which they have little or no influence ("Nothin like a beautiful black dick"). In other words, while white sexual prowess is tied to intellectual and emotional ability, black sexual prowess is an inborn trait. Like the appeal of sex tourism and the cavemen mystique, gay white men's fascination with black masculine primitivity and primality rings with nostalgia for a forlorn period "when men were men" – raw, natural, dirty, monstrous, violent, and powerful.

## 8 CHAPTER 7: SEPARATE SPACES (BIFURCATION AND ESSENTIALISM)

Black men were straight, Gay boys were white and I was in the way. (dodd 2015)

Overt and implicit exclusion of black men from cultural and physical spaces concerned with "community" is a longstanding tradition in gay men's cultural history. Moreover, the ebb and flow of black exclusion has mirrored philosophical changes in LGBT socio-politics in the United States. For example, the homophile movement in the U.S. and western Europe – one of the earliest instances of public mobilization for gay rights – was troubled by the specter of racial and class segregation from its onset:

First, the idealized public square in the United States, the place where one has full rights and fully belongs, has always granted unequal access to member of nonwhite groups. For African Americans and other people of color, there was no neutral public in which race was not a factor. Second, the homosexual citizen presumed that gay men were subject to harassment and discrimination solely because of their sexuality. This was a fraught assumption for people of color, who could never presume that race was not at work in their treatment... [The socio-politics of the homophile movement was a] limited representative of gay experience and therefore a constraint. (Self 2012:84)

The era of militantism and rioting that followed the homophile period, including uprisings from Compton's Cafeteria to Stonewall Inn<sup>3</sup>, was led and sustained by many poor queer and trans people of color, though contemporary narratives of gay histories often reduce or eliminate their contributions and visibility. Later, the radical queer politic that formed as a necessary response to the AIDS epidemic, demonstrated by groups like ACT UP, widened the net of queer community to include people of color (BLK: National Black Lesbian & Gay Newsmagazine 1991).

However, as LGBT politics has most recently shifted from radical to assimilationist, focusing almost exclusively on the right to same-sex marriage, the voices and experiences of gay black men and other queer and trans people of color have been disenfranchised once again (BSSM Collective 2008).

Thus, separate physical and cultural spaces for gay white and black men are as significant now as they have ever been. Establishments still use prohibitive mechanisms such as "double ID-ing" and entry refusal to deny gay and trans people of color access to gay bars (Street 2017). At

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<sup>3</sup> In August of 1966, San Francisco police raided Compton's Cafeteria, a late-night restaurant and hangout for trans folk. In 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar popular among marginalized queer and trans folk. Both incidences resulted in patrons fighting back against police brutality.

times, such mechanisms are implicit, such as dress code policies barring “hoodies...sagging pants...bandanas [and] oversized chains” (Saunders 2015) or racist décor: “there was an American flag on [a half-built] wall and above that there was what looked like a dead Mexican in a sombrero” (Street 2017). LGBT communities have traditionally understood Pride festivals, like gay bars, as “safe spaces.” However, queer and trans people of color are increasingly using these events as sites to protest white silence on racial injustices such as deportation of Latinx immigrants, police murders of unarmed African Americans, and the increasing corporatization of Pride festivities (Michelson 2017). Similarly, many have critiqued and challenged the inclusion of police officers and affiliated organizations in Pride events as the “Black Lives Matter” campaign continues (Link 2017). Meanwhile, many gay white men have expressed outrage over such space-making, as reactions to the addition of black and brown stripes to the rainbow Pride flag demonstrate (Abad-Santos 2017).

In addition, racial schisms have similarly impacted the current state of socio-politics in gay communities. In the U.S. and western Europe, vocal contingencies of gay white men are supporting far-right candidates and policies, despite the malicious repercussions of such politics on people of color, including gay and lesbian racial and ethnic minorities (Holden 2016; Segalov 2017). Ultra-conservative pundit Milo Yiannopoulos was even featured in a “puff piece” cover story in *Out* magazine, and “Twinks For Trump” garnered over 3000 followers on Twitter (Ford 2016). When the groundbreaking film *Moonlight* was released in 2016 – the first major film to explore the complexities of black queer masculinity – many gay white men took to social media to make racist jokes or diminish the film’s significance by sexually objectifying the actors. Film reviewer Eric Snider, for example, tweeted “I can’t choose. LA LA LAND speaks to the gay white man inside of me; MOONLIGHT speaks to the gay black men that have been inside of



me.” These instances were so common, in fact, that many black queers spoke-out on social media, such as this critic who commented: “So, you want to frame that picture of Mahershala but you didn’t care when Philando Castile was murdered in front of his family? You want to sleep with Trevante but you stayed silent when your friend said ‘all lives matter?’” (Witt 2017). Moreover, many have critiqued the relative ignorance of liberal white gays as queer and trans people of color continue to experience physical and symbolic violence:

“When Black Trans/Non-Conforming folk are being murdered weekly and many gay organization/publications are staying silent, I remember how our bodies are outside and unseen. I’ve grown tired of the gay community. I’m tired [of] being surrounded by cis-white gay folk looking to me for spectacle and sass. I’m tired of them appropriating Paris is Burning. I’m tired of their misogynoir. I’m tired of their theft of Black Trans folks scholarship and research.” (dodd 2015.)

Gay men’s culture of sex is not exempt from these social and political upheavals and interactions on dating and hookup apps and websites are a particularly contested space. In their profiles, white gay men routinely reiterate some version of the dictum “no fats, no femmes, no Asians, no blacks”; some even use racist monikers in place of these more obvious terms: “no spice,” “no rice,” and “no curry” (Allen 2005). In response, some gay men of color have resigned themselves to the idea of segregated spaces, framing their resignation as a tactic of resisting gay white men’s fetishizing gaze:

“The gay world prioritizes White Frat boys with blond hair and chiseled abs. You don’t fit into that all. Instead most of them see you as a fetish or potential flavor of the month. When they want to indulge their “Kink” more often than not you are the kink. But hey if

you are one of those Negroes that enjoys being fetishized by white gay men then more power to you, nobody is stopping you. But be honest with yourself and stop placing this onus on racist white men.” (Woods 2017.)

Other responses from men of color have similarly absolved white men of responsibility by assimilating into this culture of colonized desire. In *True Confessions of a Potato Queen*, Asian Australian author Alexander Montgomery argues that white men are optimal gay partners because they are “the superior race today” (Gremore 2017). Nevertheless, some men of color are challenging the racism in gay sexual spaces and culture, asserting their right to be included in gay sexual communities without racist fetishization. These men are demanding that gay white men reevaluate their positioning in white supremacist society, while unpacking their own internalized anti-blackness: “How could I ask that strangers find my black body beautiful when I saw black bodies as alien, foreign to my desires?” (Harris 2016).

Clearly, race relations continue to carry salience in gay men’s cultures and communities. In any of its varied forms and context, racial contestation in gay spaces had invigorated a philosophical inquiry which sociologists and LGBT activists alike have largely dismissed: what is the rightful place of “sexual preference” in white supremacist heteropatriarchy? The congruence of race, gender, and sexuality further complicates this question in user-formatted social media platforms like Grindr or Xtube. After the decline of queer radicalism in gay politics, the neoliberal discourse of individual rights defined much of the LGBT political agenda into the twenty-first century. As gay white men challenged the government’s intrusion into the privacy of their bedrooms, this same discourse simultaneously lessened the cultural potency of such bigotry by situating it “behind closed doors.” However, these “preferences” are no longer private, as public social media platforms that facilitate sex have served them up for analysis and critique. In

this study, I find that separation best characterizes racial ideology in gay men's pornography. The performances, comments, and profiles of black and white men are starkly bifurcated by race, particularly in terms of sexual desirability and conceptions of love and beauty. These bifurcations dichotomize black and white gay identities by emphasizing or deemphasizing racial visibility to solidify a perspective of irreconcilable difference. Moreover, this dichotomization essentializes blackness and whiteness by correlating the inherency of race with longstanding gender archetypes regarding sexual behavior.

### 8.1 BIFURCATED PERFORMANCES: FOCI OF DESIRE AND RACIAL VISIBILITY

In my sample, there are about twice as many comments from black users in the ebony category than the non-ebony category. Similarly, there are about twice as many comments from white users in the non-ebony versus ebony category. Though tracking such trends with user comments is methodologically problematic, this drastic difference may suggest that race plays as much of a role in the attractiveness of pornographic images on the internet as in romantic partnership "in real life." Furthermore, it also contests the common perspective that monoracial partnering is but a mere consequence of physical proximity. It seems, in any case, that black gay men seek other black men and white men seek other white men more than the opposite is true. Importantly, this phenomenon likely extends beyond attraction for analogous physical characteristics, as racial identity configures the performances (and performance evaluations) of men in gay pornography. As such, distinct foci on psychosocial and physical attributes racially bifurcates the performances and evaluations I analyzed for this research.

Producers and consumers were much more attentive to technique and occupation in non-ebony versus ebony videos. Though there are 26 references to technique in non-ebony porn, there are none in the ebony category. As previously discussed, in these instances, commenters

are keen to express their admiration for the skillfulness with which gay white men execute their sexuality (“This should be a required, looping video at every gay bathhouse video lounge in the world. New to cock sucking? This man is your teacher”). In the comments on a video featuring a white man performing oral sex on another, rather than fawn over the size of the penis as they do in ebony videos centered on oral sex (“I had an ex with a long black dick like this that I rode and sucked uncut”), viewers express respect and appreciation for the giver’s ability. Similarly, there are seven times as many references to occupation in non-ebony pornography. Here, producers afford white performers character development in which their occupations become a pertinent part of the presented fantasy. They are “blue collar,” “construction workers,” “firemen,” and “broke uni[versity] boys.” The only proximal example in the ebony category is a pornographic parody of “MTV Cribs.” Unsurprisingly, this characterization differs from that above in its emphatic pronouncement of racial identity through connotative rhetoric and symbols; the video’s caption reads “A whole new thug series, THUG MANSION!...Breion's Crib is off da chain!” And unlike related instances in non-ebony videos, there is no mention of the participant’s fictitious career.

The focus on particular physical attributes also shifts between ebony and non-ebony categories. In gay porn featuring black performers, producers and consumers overwhelmingly center their sexual gaze on penis size and musculature, which are rarely referenced in videos from the non-ebony category. In contrast, one major focal distinction between categories is the quantity and quality of reference to the desirability of hairiness. In fact, there are approximately seven times as many references to hair in the non-ebony category. In ebony porn, references to hair were either negative evaluations (“Those nasty ass rolls of hair! such a turn off”) or posited

only to demonstrate the “naturalness” of black masculinity. In non-ebony porn, however, all mentions of hair are decidedly positive, even celebratory:

“Nothing Better Than Pounding A Hot White Hairy Dude!!!!!”

“Those eyes, those lips, that scruff... fuck!!!”

Although producers and consumers understand hairiness as a marker of “real” masculinity in both categories of video, the dullness and dearth of explicit references to hairiness in ebony porn suggest that it is especially important for indicating masculinity for gay white men. In other words, “natural” masculinity is automatically elicited in pornography featuring black men by virtue of a viewer’s preexisting sociocultural paradigm of black identity.

Like hair, age is another physical attribute that is disproportionately emphasized in non-ebony porn – indeed, the category contains 12 times as many references than its ebony counterpart. In videos with white performers, youth is a quality that carries a high premium, evidenced by the comparatively large quantity of non-ebony videos which advertise their inclusion of hairless, skinny youth (or “twinks”) (Willoughby et al. 2008). Of the three videos with “twink” tags in the ebony category, two feature interracial sexual activity. Curiously, the only other ebony video with any sort of reference to twinks portrays a black twink topping. And this configuration is so jarring to viewers that many take to the comments to defend or disparage it:

“this is one of my favouret favouret when u think of who was going to get fuck wow the table was turned love it”

“clearly we can see he's not a top cause he can't fuck he dont have no stroke in his back”

“[He] is bottomy but he sure turned that hot Haitian boy out good”

“she [kills] me tryin t act toppy...i hate em.”

“[He] has a good size dick and bottoms also fuck- leave the dude alone and enjoy the flick”

“Get a real top to pound that [boy’s] cakes!”

The willingness of the video’s corporate producers to portray a twink top, the ensuing debate among commenters, and the popularity of the video, all suggest that “twink” is almost never relevant in the exclusive presence of black masculinity. Instead, it is a focus of desirability activated by whiteness alone. As such, while “twink” often symbolizes a sexual identity for white men, it generally remains a sexual novelty in ebony pornography. Like twinks, older gay men, or “Daddies,” occupy another sexual archetype in gay pornography related to age, whose prevalence is also tied to race. While non-ebony videos frequently reference Daddies, they are virtually absent in the ebony category. Again, the single video which alludes to “Daddies” in the ebony category features an interracial hookup, where a white “Daddy” continually degrades his “little black boy.” By contrast, the amount of search tags, caption references, and comment mentions about Daddies in non-ebony videos suggests that they are far more revered in this category, especially when contextualized by “Daddy-son” relationships, as in this commenter’s critical fan fiction:

“would like some build up - the showing of the huge cock - the attempt to get it in the tiggth hole. tears running down the face of the [son] from the [pain] as it enters -- Daddy will not take \"NO\" for an answer from his [son]. The hard determined face of Dad as he pile drives his [son] and the final ejaculation of both [son] and Dad.”

It seems that the abstraction of whiteness allows for more variation in pornographic norms. In pornography, sexual scripts about hair and age provide discourses through which gay white men can pray at the altar of youth, revere the wisdom and confidence that accompanies aging, and play – albeit, controversially – with the normative dynamics of heteropatriarchal family. In ebony porn, however, the significance of youth is implicit in its overemphasis on black virility. Relatedly, without the platform provided by “bear” culture, older black men are generally denied a space in the zeitgeist of gay men’s sexuality. Moreover, given the history of misrepresenting and dismantling black families in North America, the sort of “Daddy-son” play represented above may be off-limits to some black performers as well as less palatable to many viewers. No matter the context, race undoubtedly influences the production and consumption of pornography and vice versa. Even when black men are included in the assembly of gay pornographic motifs, the surrounding discourses generally diverge significantly between ebony and non-ebony performances.

For example, there are striking racial distinctions in how producers and consumers conceptualize love and beauty. Overall, discussions on the topic are much less common in ebony porn; there are 12 times as many references to “love and beauty” in the non-ebony category. Comments about beauty in ebony porn are either explicitly tied to race (“Man i have only ever been attracted to black guys and you sure would be a great partner, You are very handsome and have beautiful kissable lips”) or co-constitutive with stereotypes about black masculinity, such as its embodiment of sexual power (“YOU ARE MAGNIFICENT sexy beautiful I loved the way you looked into the camera and licked your lips such a calm INTENSITY”) or its association with large penis size (“honestly out of all the blk dicks this is the very first small one ever...but he’s cute”). Moreover, references to love are altogether absent from this category. In contrast,

non-ebony videos are replete with mentions of beauty beyond the typical adoration of muscular physique:

“Lovely [boys], both of them! Beautiful, charming, and oh so sexy.”

“He's so damn cute and that smile!”

“I don't often say guys are pretty but the one on the left really is.”

“they r both cute but \*\*\*\*\* on left is just adorable!”

“I love watching the ending, when he smiles I'm all \“Awwww! He's so cute and innocent.\””

Unlike the incessant praise for penis length and girth in ebony porn, commenters praise a wider variety of body parts when videos feature white participants:

“can't decide what's sweeter his ass or his lips”

“I love his feet”

“Georgeous eyes.”

The non-ebony category also includes much acclaim for gentle emotional expressiveness:

“Your handsome, fuckin ripped and hung.....More to the point your comfortable in your own skin.”

“it's because you giggle that makes this soo hawt!!!”

“his video shows that you have a sense of humor and that makes you **THAT MUCH MORE SEXY.**”

“Two sleek bods making love. It's great & full of peace & energy.”

Neither producers nor consumers address qualities like comfort, humor, or peace in ebony pornography, as they are contrary to the unidimensional portrayal of aggressive black



masculinity. In other words, though there are limitations, white men can more readily explore femininity without significantly sacrificing sexual attractiveness. Similarly, commenters were often keen to interpret performances in non-ebony videos in the context of romantic love:

“love the spontaneity, and your connection to each other”

“Such passion. It's absolutely inspiring to see you enjoying each other like that”

“This is the best vid, that I've seen on this site -- you guys really do love each other, that much is obvious by the way you look into each others eyes & the kissing is tender & passionate.”

“the guy in the blue tshirt getting the hand job is totally in love with the other guy you can tell by the way he keeps looking at him all doey eyed, really sweet and hot!”

“HOT!!! n is that thunder n rain we hear in the background? I love making love on the rainy thundery nights too...”

In ebony porn, there are no deliberations on inspiration, tenderness, or intimacy, no descriptions of black performers as “adorable,” and no euphemisms for sex like “making love.” The only connections worthy of praise are between black men and their “nice attachments.” What’s more, the intangibility with which some imbue depictions of beauty and love in non-ebony porn (e.g., “you come across as genuinely sexy...from the inside out”) suggests that white masculinity is sexually desirable even apart from physical qualities in gay men’s pornography.

Though many of these qualities are customary for normative relationships, gay men’s sexual culture typically reserves them for white men. Pornography created for gay men contextualizes performances by white participants with concepts of beauty and love that also exist independently of the sexual voyeurism of erotic imagery. Participants of color, on the other hand, are excluded from these humanizing discourses. Importantly, these rhetorics of bifurcation

rely on a system that either emphasizes or deemphasizes white and non-white identities depending on how such racial visibility factors into the sexual culture of gay white masculinity. For instance, one non-ebony video features a white man performing oral sex on several different men in succession. In the comments, many viewers are enamored with the performer's eye color ("so blue!"). In this case, regardless of intention, there is an unseen but clear relation between the celebration of blue eye color and the celebration of whiteness, especially when considering the paucity of similar comments on ebony videos. However, the most obvious way in which gay men's pornography bifurcates black and white masculinity is by making black men's genitals hyper-visible. Here, penis sizes do not simply vary across communities but are instead an essential trait of one's racial identity. For example, a viewer expressing his disappointment in a black performer's endowment sarcastically suggests that "he is definitely half black and half Chinese."

Racial in/visibility therefore demonstrates how bifurcated performances dichotomize black and white identity in gay sexual culture – and there are almost four times as many references to race in ebony versus non-ebony videos. This dichotomizing of blackness and whiteness is a mechanism through which identities become essentialized. For instance, the constant rhetorical contrast between "black men" and "white boys" exemplifies how the bifurcation of racial performances in gay pornography dichotomizes black and white masculinity by gerrymandering the value of femininity. Furthermore, for white men, racial invisibility in gay men's sexual culture allows them to publicly express racist attitudes without admonishment, which is likely unheard-of in other nonprivate venues. For example, many white viewers seem comfortable using "nigga" or "nigger" in their comments, as long as the words act as complimentary adjectives for black men's penises. Similarly, several commenters express their

distaste for black men with the same wanton regard for the social problematics of anti-blackness (“I don’t like black guys at all”). On the contrary, there are no mentions of race in tags, titles, or captions for videos that include only white men. Moreover, comments on such videos, as well as the profiles of white users, only discuss whiteness in relation to racial fetish, particularly when they wish to bottom for black tops:

“hi. I'm a white bottomslut for blacks.”

“Happily I am young white, slave to a black dominant Master”

“I looking for black guys with a real big black cock to fuck my horny white ass deep hard”

Username like “WHITEASS4BLACKS,” “HORNYWHITEASS,” and “lyt4dark” illustrate that whiteness is only salient in gay men’s sexual culture when in high contrast with black masculinity. In a video titled “White Guy Fucks Black Guy Hard,” commenters engage in an enthusiastic discussion about the “true” racial identity of its participants:

“so ignorant. they are brazilian.”

“dude isnt white”

“THAT GUYS NOT WHITE. THEYRE BOTH BRAZILEROS. MORONS”

The ensuing debate demonstrates the importance of racial visibility for nonwhite participants to the culture of desire for white men, as the uninterrupted perception of these performers as people of color is crucial to the allure of such fantasy.

## 8.2 SEX, GENDER, AND ESSENTIALIZED IDENTITIES

Evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and other disciplines concerned with the innate predispositions of “human nature” have long argued that socialization cannot account for every

human attitude and behavior (McCaughey 2008). Instead, they suggest that our psychologies must also include concepts that are inherent to the human genome. Nevertheless, present-day sociology remains largely supportive of the social constructionist view that all human reality is a sociocultural product to some degree. Moreover, many sociologists have used the genealogy of modern concepts to exemplify how seemingly elemental behaviors and attitudes are in fact the consequences of institutional apparatuses. For example, in *Queering the Color Line*, Somerville (2000) illustrates how the historical development of racial and sexual identities are mirrored phenomena:

“It was not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either “homosexual” or “heterosexual” emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between “black” and “white” bodies...The simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined.” (3)

Somerville’s research illustrates how dichotomization aids essentialism by placing social variables in opposition. By defining one in contrast to the other, varied social psychologies are transformed into embodied identities. Framed this way, definitional ambiguity is irrelevant to the normative development and maintenance of identity – as whatever something *is*, it is certainly not *that*. In gay men’s sexual culture, “white and black,” “man and woman,” and “gay and straight,” continue to define one another through the deployment of gendered and racialized archetypes of sexuality. Recurrent causal associations with gendered sex acts in gay men’s pornography concretizes racial identities and vice versa. In this context, “black” and “white” are

so saturated with meaning that viewers and producers utilize them to personify physiological aspects that even sociobiologists would likely consider nonessential to racial identity:

“mmmmm I love black cum”

“I’ll lick up every drop of that sweet black seed”

“that is hot...love to have my white lips around that cock”

The type of sex acts performed and appreciated in gay men’s pornography is highly dependent upon the race of the participants. For example, videos featuring black participants were less likely to depict performers engaged in “rim jobs” (or anilingus) and masturbation and more likely to show participants involved in anal sex. Since gay pornography disproportionately infuses hyper-masculine attributes into images of black men, it is unsurprising that consumers appear more interested in black men when they are topping other men. In fact, topping is so intrinsic to black masculinity in gay men’s pornography that a lack of anal penetration during black men’s sexual performances is grounds for dismissal: “Ya’ll need to quit playing with them dicks over there and go ahead and stick something up in somebody!” No matter the sex acts performed or race of the performer, white commenters assign blanket sexual characteristics to participants of color based on preexisting ideas about the sexual behaviors of individuals from these communities:

“the [Bla-tinos] so rico suave”

“I love the black guy. I love black guys period.”

“I knew the spanish had some good things to offer! Damn!”

“I live in Brazil where you find horny guys all over willing to fuck a hole!”

These sweeping characterizations are so prevalent and persuasive that viewers outside of the U.S. and Europe become convinced that the sexual performances depicted and discussed are an essential aspect of the sexuality of these communities of color:

“[black] americans are gud fuckers huh?”

“black guys don’t have a face expression when cum”

“YO, NIGGAHS NEVAH HAS DE SES WIFOUT HOLLIN, ‘SHIT, AH SHIT, SHIT. SHIT.’”

Comments like these maintain and disperse sexual scripts that declare certain attitudes and behaviors inherent in the sexuality of black men and other men of color. Even when users fail to delineate the essence of black men’s sexuality, belief in its existence is legitimized by its supposed impact: “your ruined for life letting that black dude fuck you gross!” On the other hand, in the non-ebony category, there are twice as many depictions of partners engaged in anilingus than in the ebony videos. In addition, although ebony porn features many more references to penises overall, there are 50 percent more depictions of ejaculation in non-ebony porn. Thus, the essence of white sexuality in gay pornography could be described as “omni-significance.” In fact, gay pornography permits white men such a wide range of sexual expression that whiteness appears largely essence-less.

Nowhere is the essentializing force of gay men’s sexual culture more apparent than in discourses surrounding topping and bottoming. Race, gender, and sexuality define and redefine one another within these discourses. In other words, who tops and who bottoms, who’s “femme” and who’s “masc,” as well as how these roles are successfully fulfilled or disrupted, demonstrates the impact of rooted and racialized sexual scripts. For instance, in gay men’s pornography, bottoming is something done *for* others, while topping is something done *to* others.

Relatedly, there is very little deviation from the norm of black tops and white bottoms, “black dicks” and “white butts”:

“That's what I like. Black cock in sexy white asshole”

“I wanna bring my white fuck-bottom ass to the party”

“I'd [die] with that thing inside of my lil white ass.”

This distinction has important implications for racial performativity in porn for gay men, as only white men have permission to occupy either position without incurring social penalties. It seems that in gay pornography, black men can “lay the pipe” or “give up the ass,” but they cannot do both:

“I'm all bottom, and I love my tops to be all tops, I'm the kind of bottom, that if I saw you turn this tops ass into a cunt in front of me, I as a bottom, would never give him any fuckin [access] to my cunt. He'd be a bitch in my eyes forever.”

Moreover, because masculinity carries the highest premium, producers and consumers almost always give high marks for topping by members of any racial community. Thus, even white men are penalized for being too effeminate: “I LIKE THE FIRST ONE TOMMY HE IS SO MANLY AND THE THIRD ONE JAY I THINK HE IS A GAY THE WAY HE WANKS AND CUMS ITS SO AWKWARD.”

Regardless of race, femme sexuality is “awkward” when not in use by a masculine top. Furthermore, examples like the one above illustrate how femme-antagonism works to shore the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity, even as queerness detaches these gendered concepts from “anatomical” sex. But femme-antagonism is not a race-neutral phenomenon; whether a bottom’s performance is well-received depends largely on their racial identity. For

example, viewers consistently praise white bottoms for their masculine physique and virility, best demonstrated by how well they “take it”:

“Mmm love beefy bottoms... I'd pound the fuck outta that guy”

“Love tall bottoms!”

“always good to see a nice rock hard cock on a bottom”

“Dude!!You took this ebony god like a real man!!Congrats on the fucking hot video!”

In contrast, almost all comments about the performances of black bottoms were critical, with many expressing disappointment in the performer’s feminine qualities:

“bottom is waaaay toooooo feminine for me to be turned on. Oh well.”

“he can take some dick, but he bitch too much, lol...”

“Crack a window is right...I can smell that queeny ass from here.”

“sounding like a bitch is not sexy”

Though femininity may be frowned-upon in non-ebony porn, it is expressly condemned in sex between black men. Producers of corporate videos often proclaim “no bitches allowed,” or some variation thereof, in the marketing materials for ebony videos. In doing so, they participate in the ongoing attempts to “de-gay” sex between black men. Such rhetorical barriers prevent disruption of the fantasy which depicts black masculinity as incapable of feminized attitudes and behaviors. In addition, the intense policing of black men in “thug sex” videos illustrates the lack of space for femininity in ebony porn (“What REAL thug gets fucked in the azz”). In any context, in any position, black men who have sex with men must embody the supposed hardness of black masculinity if they are to maintain sexual desirability.



Discussion of virginity and heterosexuality also reveal how definitions of race, gender, and sexuality are co-constitutive. The novelty of “deflowering” is a common theme in both straight and gay pornography. However, in addition to amateur participation and virginity, gay men’s erotica similarly exploits heterosexual masculinity to shore the fantasy of conquering an unadulterated body, akin to planting a flag on the moon. What’s more, racial dichotomization in the utilization of these tropes essentializes blackness and whiteness through deploying gendered archetypes that structure how these qualities are performed and appraised. Curiously, gay men’s pornography in the non-ebony category includes much discussion of straightness. While there are 110 references to straightness in non-ebony pornography, there are only seven in the ebony category. Conversations about straightness in non-ebony porn center around proclamations of heterosexuality and the ensuing debates which police the boundaries of straightness in gay performances:

“Come on, man. Just find a guy....a hot, normal, masculine (read: NON-QUEEN) guy, and fuck 'im.”

“he's straight? is he married? if he was that would be even more fucking hot”

“Yeah straight man wouldn't be kissing and rubbing his hands all over the top guy, def some gay or bi happening here”

“Are these sissies straight? My gramma is a [...] butch bloke then!”

“If he's anywhere near straight, then I'm Liza Minelli.”

On the other hand, the few discussions of straightness in ebony videos focus on the racialized and interrelated concepts of “thug porn” and “down low” sexual encounters: “If you like the DL Thugs and the straight [boys] you will love this site.” Unlike those in non-ebony porn, references to heterosexuality in ebony videos act simply act as markers of blackness rather than full-blown

fetish. Straightness, therefore, is a quality implied by black masculinity. And this implication has an unfortunate corollary consequence of excluding black sexuality from normative gay erotic. In this way, gay pornography participates in the sidelining of queer black men in gay culture.

Similarly, virginity is a highly-valued commodity in non-ebony porn, often used by producers to market products: “he is a TRUE Ass Virgin, in this video he sucks cock for the first time, he MAN KISSES for the first time (NO LIE).” Here, viewers again express appreciation for and debate the boundaries of virginity in comments:

“hunter sure handles that virgin hole well!!love it:)”

“i like splitting virgins in half with my dick....drives me nuts”

“I love watching these guys raw fuck n tear up a nice young sweet HOT virgin hole!”

“That wasn't His first Time!!! he knew exactly what he was doing.”

“No virgin takes That into his ass”

On the contrary, like straightness, virginity is less of a topic in ebony pornography; when discussed, it is situated in discourses that are expressly racialized:

“Would love that thick black cock deep inside my virgin ass!!”

“black guys turn me on the most...still waiting for my first black guy to fuck me..hit me up if interested”

“I like the look, idea & feel of being inside a pure white guy.”

Whereas blackness implies heterosexuality, whiteness implies virginity, especially when videos feature black performers. Moreover, this rhetoric is indicative of how race, gender, and sexuality define and dichotomize one another in gay men’s pornography. For example, unlike the allure of virginity in straight porn, prior sexual activities are irrelevant in pornography for gay men, if all

prior sexual partners are women. In fact, “turning” a straight man – or, synonymously, a “gay virgin” – is within itself a highly-valued theme (“FUCKING STRAIGHT BOY: A Virgin Cherry-pop video”). However, the state of being “turned” is only desirable so long as it is temporary: we want to see a “straight” guy made to moan like “bitch,” but only if he is to return to his wife and kids afterwards. Certainly, this attitude entails an element of resistance, for if gay sex is so “terrible,” then why are “straight” men so keen to risk everything in order to participate? However, these scenarios also sideline femininity and queerness in gay porn by centering the normative masculinity implied by heterosexuality. Additionally, though *temporarily* turning a straight guy is a demonstration of masculine power, *permanently* turning one is unsettling because it challenges the bottom’s proclamation of straightness as well as the masculinity of the top. But in ebony videos, femininity and queerness are not merely sidelined, but rather discarded altogether. The absence of deliberation about straightness and virginity in ebony porn suggests that the fetishization of black masculinity in gay pornography rests on the essentialist assumption that black men *cannot* be turned.

The use of concepts and language borrowed from heterosexual culture also aids the concretization of racial, gendered, and sexual identities in gay men’s pornography. This process primarily involves rhetorical and conceptual femininization by reconfiguring the mouths and anuses of bottoms into “pussies,” “cunts,” and even wombs:

“Lookin at dat Dikk make ma pussi twitch!”

“damn, dude want to give you all the ass pussy I got”

“please come to san francisco, and lemme use my pussymouth on your BBC”

“Damn thats a big ol black dick.. kind that get the booty wet”

“Way to [kill] that mancunt!!”

“vers took his manhood and gave his cock to the sub, vers got pregnant too”

Consumers also recondition pejoratives usually reserved for women, particularly “bitch,” into adjectives which describe the attitudes and behaviors associated with bottoming:

“feelin very bitch when lookin at this video!”

“ALWAYS WANTED TO GET BITCHED OUT BY TWO GUYS WITH BIG DICKS”

“Nothing like being a bottom bitch, taking a nice big dick, and moaning like a [indecipherable].”

“you would make me one happy bitch [boy]!”

Relatedly, some viewers utilize “bitch,” as well as “slut” and “whore,” to characterize the condition of having little self-worth outside of being used by a dominant partner:

“I'd probably smack the little bitch around and spit in his worthless face.”

“He used him like a two-bit little slut. Awesome.”

“STUDS after all need a slut they can do NASTY [things] with/to”

Some commenters reject the association of bottoming with womanhood, but only insofar as they wish to retain a masculine image that diminishes the misogynistic subjugation inherent to that relationship:

“i dont take pleasure in degrading myself and being somebodys bitch, i have more self respect than that.”

“Sorry, but it's your asshole, not your [boy] pussy or your man cunt, it's your asshole, I'm not trying to piss anyone off, but if I want a cunt or a pussy, I'll see a woman.”

“that lil woman on the btm though, wtf?! he ruined the scene with his need to be in the spotlight so much it makes me wanna be a gay basher”

Race is an important delineator of such references, and there are two times as many in ebony versus non-ebony pornography. For instance, many position Asian men as the ultimate possessor of femininity in gay men’s sexual culture:

“thaz some TITE ASIAN BOYYY ASS PUSSY!!! He musta liked tastin his pussy juice on your BIG BROWN COCK”

“there needs to be more BLACK / ASIAN [porn] done!! Id like to see more lady[boys] getting black dick”

“jack off that BIGGGGG BLACK DICK in his smooth Asian [boy] ass pussy!”

However, the majority of these comments position black men as masculine actors in contrast to feminine white men:

“I want that dic up my tight white manpussy”

“i will be your whiete whore”

“I want some of that big African dick tearing my man cunt in half too.”

“please come to san francisco, and lemme use my pussymouth on your BBC.”

“Fuck yes. White [boy] pussy be so tight; makes me nut fast if it's good and they passionate [as fuck] too”

This language genders gay sex acts by borrowing discursive concepts from heterosexual culture. In both straight and gay men’s pornography, masculinity is a feminizing force, as the act of topping transforms the bottom without regard for their previous gender expression and identification. Importantly, this rhetoric prohibits sexual activity between masculine actors.

No matter the gender expression or genital arrangement of a bottom, they are always the

feminine partner: “Simply, a cunt is whichever orifice a Man chooses to fuck. The Man defines it as cunt with his hard penis through the act of penetration.” Using the language of normative heterosexuality allows gay men to cast their roles in the image of what man-to-man sexual relationships should look like in heteropatriarchal culture. Moreover, these roles have important implications for how performers are racialized, as gay white men are cast as damsels and black men as monsters. In essence, gay pornography operates as a tool of racialized homonormativity, consigning black men to heterosexual masculinity and thereby precluding men of color from full citizenship in normative gay community.

By and large, what sex looks like in a porn marketed for gay men depends on the races of its participants. If it features solely white men, consumers are more likely to see characterizing displays of love and beauty, as well as performances that *disidentify* with heteronormative taboo about hairiness, age, an incest. Moreover, any display or performance included here is detached from notions of race altogether. However, if it includes black men only, viewers are likely to encounter only one theme, one characterizing quality, repeated across almost every video of its kind: the gay sex monolith of the masculine black top. These bifurcated portrayals are so entrenched that their representations of the sexualities of gay black and white men are dichotomized, constantly defining themselves in relation to the other. As a result, while white men benefit from the versatility provided by racial invisibility, the sexual attitudes and behaviors of black men are understood and presented as essential qualities of black masculinity. The workings of race in gay men’s porn offer insight into how race works in gay culture more broadly. For example, in these overlapping spheres, the experiences and representations of black men illustrate how intersectional standpoints limit the power derived from masculinity privilege. Though gay porn casts black men in the role of

masculine top, the agency assumed endemic to such a role reveals itself as fallacy, as it is only in this space that black men who have sex with men are assigned sexual desirability. Black sexuality, it seems, is only worthy – perhaps even palatable – in gay pornography when featured for the desire of white men.

In the real-world, this overemphasis on black masculinity can have devastating consequences for gay black men. In May of 2015, a court convicted Bayna Lekheim El-Amin, a queer African American man, of assaulting two gay white men, Jonathan Snipes and an unnamed other (Jacobs 2016; Dunham 2016). Though video of the incident shows Snipes assaulting El-Amin *before* El-Amin's retaliation, the *New York Daily News* describes him a “much larger” “hulking brute” who “bashed” two “gay men” (Jacobs 2016). Such descriptors, like El-Amin's conviction, reflect the continuing dichotomization of aggressive black men (who only top) and normal white men (who do anything). The exclusion of black men from gay culture is paralleled by the exclusion of gay men from black culture, and both have a significant history in the U.S. When gay civil rights leader Bayard Rustin criticized the violence of the Black Power movement, other leaders cast him as a betrayer of black justice (Singer and Kates 2003). The association of nonviolence with femininity heightened the visibility of Rustin's queerness (a “white invention”) which permitted many to present Rustin as a pawn of white supremacy. In an iconic image of Rustin participating in a protest march, an African American man in Black Panther garb holds a sign behind him reading “fag” (Singer and Kates 2003). Rustin continued his project of peaceful democratic equality, even as a pariah in many factions of social movements during the 1960s, to become one of the most significant figures in anti-war and civil rights history. However, other incidences have indicated just how dangerous black queerness can be, even beyond the threat of

physical and symbolic violence from others. The 2016 suicide of a gay black student who “found it hard to be gay and black,” as well as many other similar incidences, illustrate how the separation of spaces for gay black and white men can have serious, even deadly consequences (Channon 2016).

## 9 CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURITY

Despite the panoply of cultural messages to the contrary, sex is a social interaction steeped in identity politics. Many feminist activists and scholars involved in second wave feminism affirmed this proclamation by critically analyzing the institutional and cultural mechanisms through which heterosexuality supports patriarchal systems. For some with this perspective, pornography provided significant contributions to antifeminist oppression because it portrayed women as no more than sexual objects which serve at the pleasure of men. However, much of this analysis lacked intersectionality, and therefore many of its ideological conclusions rest on the falsehood that all masculinities are created equal. Nevertheless, the political impact of sex, as both ideology and incident, intensifies when situated at the intersection of more than one marginalized identity. Thus, the sex of queer men of color is a cultural site saturated with sociopolitical meaning.

Controlling images of black masculinity, for example, buttress the eroticism of gay men’s pornography (Collins 2015). “Big black cock” is likely the most prevalent racial theme in erotica created for gay men. In this context, producers and consumers expend an exorbitant amount of energy maintaining a preoccupation with black men’s penises and discursively severing them from black men’s bodies. Rather than penises, here they become monsters, tools, or merely detached organs – inanimate objects, “dark phalluses,” operating solely as narrative device in the sexual fantasy of gay white culture. In doing so, the fetishization of



black men continues unimpeded by the potential problematics inherent to a racist sexual gaze in an era that sanctifies diversity culture, even if hollowly. Another widespread discursive phenomenon in gay men's porn is the conceptualization of black men as "missing links." This rhetoric delineates black masculinity as both primitive and primal. In this frame, gay sexual culture imagines black men to be more natural, unrefined, and animalic than their white counterparts.

At times, producers and commenters primitivize black men by diminishing them to the point that they become white men's dependent wards. Here, too, gay men's pornography eroticizes the violence, monstrosity, and power implied such racialized depictions of hyper-masculinity. What's more, representations of black and white masculinities vary greatly in gay porn, allocating their associated sexualities to separate discursive spaces. While blackness maintains a hyper-visibility in gay men's pornography, the incessant bifurcation of sexual tropes like love and beauty dichotomizes black and white identity. Lastly, the constant definitional mirroring of race, gender, and sexuality, concretizes these tropes and thusly transforms cultural motif into essentialized aspects of racialized identities. Therefore, by helping solidify a sociocultural image of black men as "missing links," by reducing black masculinity down to a "dark phallus," and by aggravating the segregation of black and white men, gay men's pornography participates in the ongoing exclusion of black men from equal and just citizenship by reifying existing stereotypes about black masculinity and extending them into queer contexts. On the whole, pornography for gay men demonstrates the cultural insolubility of "black" and "queer" as well as the limits of performative power in the sociopolitics of identity.

## 9.1 THE PORNOGRAPHIC IS POLITICAL

In theory, user-submitted pornography offers black participants more agency to perform sexuality without explicit intrusion from capitalist marketing, which may more readily bend to pressures of racist, sexist, and queer-antagonistic public demand. Indeed, some such aspects of user-submitted videos in this sample were quantitatively distinct from that of corporate producers. For example, corporate producers were more than twice as likely to reproduce gendered archetypes about gay men's sexuality, with a focus on straightness and youth. In fact, the most-watched video of the sample centered entirely on two white, straight "uni boys" who were paid to masturbate on camera. Furthermore, corporatized pornography more frequently borrowed language from heterosexual romantic culture to characterize same-sex sex acts between men, rhetorically transforming anuses into "boy-pussies" and bottoms into "slutty bitches." What's more, there are double the amount of references to race in both the viewer comments and marketing materials (tags, captions, titles, etc.) in corporate versus non-corporate videos. The abundance of comments about race in corporate porn may demonstrate a "signaling effect" (Edin 2000) in which the focus on race by producers highlights the discursive role of blackness for viewers, thereby stimulating a hyper-awareness of black identity. Comparing only corporate and non-corporate ebony porn presents similar distinctions: non-corporate producers deemphasize straightness and other rhetorical devices indicative of a homonormative discourse that replicates heterosexual relations. Moreover, non-corporate videos are less defined by stereotypes of black masculinity. Black men in user-submitted porn are more likely to engage in masturbation and oral sex, while corporate ebony videos are more like to depict anal penetration and focus on penis size. Overall, non-corporate pornography included less discussion of race from both producers and consumers.

However, comparing indicators reveals far more similarities than differences between corporate and non-corporate pornography. Many of the quantitative discrepancies are small, and the qualitative values of problematic rhetoric remain steady across categories. Thus, though user-submission clearly offers black performers the agency to deconstruct and challenge racist sexual imagery, it does not automatically translate into such resistance. It is likely that the movement of user-submissions through a corporatized filter at least partially diminishes such agency. The racialization already framing website featuring corporatized porn may mark even non-corporate videos featuring black participants as open to black fetishization, as viewers discursively classify any video with black performers as “ebony porn.” Moreover, the lack of significant distinction between corporate and non-corporate pornography may illustrate the limits of agency in a neoliberal context. Individual agency – whereby someone acts on their own behalf – cannot adequately contest the juggernaut of racism in gay men’s sexual culture (Wiebe, Durepos, and Mills 2010). In addition, such resistance may be altogether illusory, as socialization pushes individual actors to participate in their own subjugation by internalizing oppressive cultural ideologies.

In other words, because agency cannot be detached from the social structure in which it is embedded, antithetic sociocultural values often pervade mechanisms of resistance. However, this does not necessarily disarm the politics of black performativity in gay men’s pornography. In his theorizing on agency, Bourdieu posits that relative location in institutional environments (or “fields”) partially determines a social actor’s positionality and vice versa (Bourdieu 1993). Thus, micro-level agency and macro social structure are actually co-constitutive phenomena, each helping define the other. A perspective that forefronts the fields shared by individuals and institutions alike permits the framing of racialized

performances by black men in gay porn as both agentic and impotent, both resistant and oppressive. Like Bourdieuan social philosophy, third-wave feminists also wrestle with these contradictions, as many suggest that the exploitation of men's gaze in women's sex work is indeed a feminist endeavor, despite its reification of women's objectification (Martin 2007). Similarly, rather than understanding the replication of racist tropes in user-submitted videos as purely internalized racism, perhaps we can partially appreciate this process as a demonstration of black performers flipping-the-script. In this context, black producers reappropriate the stereotypes pervasive in corporatized porn as a means of *disidentification*. In doing so, black performers shift resources and energies away from corporate endeavors and instead funnel them toward the communities from which such capital is unjustly reaped.

White gay men, on the other hand, seem especially keen on de-racing their sexual desires, even when racism clearly pervades them. In *Unlimited Intimacy*, a much-celebrated homage to barebacking in gay men's communities, Tim Dean (2009) posits that condom-less sex is a "colorblind" enterprise that equalizes black and white men in both action and rhetoric. Dean suggests that such "unregulated sex" defies sociocultural boundaries of race, class, and age by jumbling social identities, "contaminating one thing with another" (20). Dean further issues barebacking as a model for egalitarianism and integration in American society:

"All the evidence suggests that participants in bareback subculture are as racially diverse as one would expect in a multiracial society such as the United States. Subcultural membership does not depend on race, class, age, serostatus, or even sexuality but simply on one's willingness to embrace risk, to give and to take semen. In this respect, bareback subculture is unusually democratic." (40)

In his analysis of the porn film *Niggas' Revenge*, Dean positions the appropriation of anti-black stereotypes to “intensify eroticism via images of dominance and submission” in porn as at least unproblematic, if not a tactic of black resistance (2009:41). Discussions of race in *Unlimited Intimacy*, however, are emblematic of the ongoing detaching of expressly racist attitudes from gay white men’s sexual gaze. In a racist society, however, there is no “colorblind” activity or ideology, no way to de-race social phenomena in any context.

In any regard, a thorough analysis of gay men’s pornography illustrates the political gravity of sexual desire, regardless of cultural attitude that positions sex as a democratizing force because of its supposed disregard for racial inequality. In fact, such attitudes understand the derivation of sexual pleasure from bodies outside one’s racial community to be indicative of the success of integration; or, as Alice Walker (2006) suggests, “interracial sex is presumed to constitute evidence that racial or sexual discrimination is not a problem.” If sociologists and activists interested in the intersection of race and queerness are to ever deconstruct such politics of desire, we must begin with this fundamental postulate: sexual preference is not, in any circumstance, an apolitical phenomenon. Of course, this may mean re-introducing troubling conversations about the sociocultural origins of sexuality – conversations which social institutions and cultural ideologies have historically employed in order to pathologize queerness and marginalize queer people. However, building future analyses on this truism also means re-problematizing institutional fetishization of queer sexuality, and finally holding whiteness accountable for its supportive role. For too long, white queers and queer academics have unproblematized the “my preference, my business” explanation of sexual desirability. But such an individualized and neoliberal discourse only

upholds the “right” of gay white men to proclaim “no fats, no femmes, no blacks, no Asians” without recourse.

Moreover, this sort of exclusion can have negative implications for the physical and mental health of gay black men, as well as the well-being of queer black communities. Public health research, for example, has already linked racism and risk-taking among men of color. Such research has even demonstrated a causal relationship between black and Latino gay men’s lack of condom use and the psychological impact of their experiences of racist victimization (Smith 2012). What’s more, some studies have analyzed the particular impact of gay pornography in the lives of black men specifically. In the absence of comprehensive sex education, accessible queer community spaces, representations in mainstream media, as well as willing and informed parents, pornography becomes an important socializer for some young, gay black men (Hussen et al. 2012). In their analysis of “sexually explicit media” on a hook-up site, White et al. (2015) find that corporate producers of gay pornography are more likely to depict black participants engaged in condom-less sex than white participants. In fact, several studies have indicated a relationship between “pornography viewing, intrapsychic sexual scripts and actual sexual experiences” (Hussen et al. 2012:872); and without other avenues of queer enculturation, pornographic depictions of sexuality may carry more weight among black men who have sex with men. Furthermore, because discrimination encourages disproportionately high levels of depression and anxiety among gay black men (Graham et al. 2009), racial marginalization in gay men’s sexual media likely exacerbates mental health issues among members of these communities.

## 9.2 FUTURITY

Future research should attempt to address the methodological limitations of this study. First, the data used here is not representative and should therefore not be generalized to make causal explanations of social attitudes and behaviors. However, procuring a representative sample of internet pornography is likely, at this time, an impossible feat. With the necessary time and resources, future projects may instead wish to cast a wider net to collect a more varied representation of content. Second, despite all attempts to avoid doing so, this study likely reproduces a cultural ideology that conceptualizes gay black men as a monolithic community. For ease of analysis and discussion, it was most efficient at times to discuss gay black men en masse. Regardless, queer African American men live at the intersections of many standpoints including but not limited to race and queerness, which influence their lives and mentalities. Third, I utilize Xtube as a source of data because, unlike other similar sites, it archives videos, allows users comments, centers gay men's pornography, and fosters a unique sense of community among consumers. Nevertheless, Xtube's declining popularity should prompt future research endeavors to analyze websites at the forefront of user-submitted pornography to give a timelier account of how race works in gay men's porn presently.

Moreover, problematizing white gaze in gay pornography has serious and interesting implications for social organizing concerned with the experiences of queer people of color. First, we must begin to appreciate that racism in gay men's pornography is a symbolically violent phenomenon in which "all of [our] culture's racist myths become just another turn-on" (Leidholdt 1981). Many feminists have asserted that misogynistic violence in heterosexual pornography contributes to, or even causes, men to rape women (Long 2012).

Though overly simplistic, these critiques have illuminated the relationship between oppressive media portrayals and the physical experiences of subjugated communities. Therefore, the discussions of desire politics presented here should be couched in the larger discourse of sexual oppression experienced by people of color, people with disabilities, fat people, and femmes in gay men's cultural spaces and ideologies. Though seemingly detached, each is an aspect of the impression left by white supremacist heteropatriarchy on the social psychology of LGBT communities. Groups of marginalized queers are already involved in making space for these individuals; however, broader change in macro-level cultures and institutions may be impossible without able-bodied, "masc" white men acknowledging and deconstructing the seeds of oppression within themselves.



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APPENDICES

## 9.3 Appendix A. Coding Sheet

Case #:	Notes/Indicators
Date:	
Submission Type	
Title/Link	
Poster/Company (Race; Feat. /Prod.?)	
Captions	
Run Time	
# of Views	
Date Posted	
(Votes) Rating	
Tags	
Categories	
Top Comments (Name/Race)	
Other Comments/replies (Name/Race)	
Notable Users	
Summary	
Race of Participants	
Location Description	
Sounds	
Props& Wardrobe	
Sex Acts: Position: Race	
Safer Sex Practices	
Analytic Memos	



## 9.4 Appendix B. Data Analysis

