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Dude-Sex: White Masculinities and 'Authentic' Heterosexuality Among Dudes Who Have Sex With Dudes

'Closeted' men of color have increasingly become the focus of public health research and media exposés, with these accounts pointing to the likelihood that straight 'men who have sex with men' (MSMs)¹ may explain rising rates of HIV infection among heterosexual women of color (Boykin, 2005; Denizet-Lewis, 2003). People of color – and particularly Black men on the 'down low' (DL) and Latino MSMs – are newly central figures in discussions regarding internalized homophobia, sexual repression, HIV/AIDS, the betrayal of unsuspecting wives and girlfriends, and the failure to come out of the closet (Boykin, 2005; Hill Collins, 2004; King, 2004; Denizet-Lewis, 2003; Mukherjea and Vidal-Ortiz, 2006). To make sense of the factors that would prevent men of color from being 'honest' about their 'real' lives and desires, analyses of MSMs have drawn heavily on theories of the closet and its racialized underpinnings (Boykin, 2005; Hill Collins, 2004; King, 2004). Black men on the DL, in particular, have

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been described as 'a new subculture of gay men' for whom 'masculinity that is so intertwined with hyper-heterosexuality renders an openly gay identity impossible' (Hill Collins, 2004: 207). Similarly, Latino MSMs have been implicitly characterized as closeted gay or bisexual men for whom cultural barriers, rigid ideas about gender, and strong ties to family and religion prevent public identification as gay or bisexual (Diaz, 1997).

Critics of these discourses have argued that the lack of discussion about white men on the DL has reinforced stereotypes about Black male sexuality as dangerous and predatory, as well as provided 'evidence' that African Americans are more homophobic than other racial groups (Boykin, 2005). Others have shown that the down low has the all too familiar ingredients of moral panic: 'concealed non-normative sexualities, a subaltern genre of expressive culture (Hip-Hop), a pandemic caused by a sexually transmitted agent, *innocent victims* (heterosexual women), and a population often accused of misbehavior (men of color)' (González, 2007: 27, emphasis in original). In sum, dominant narratives about the DL reveal a new set of fears about uncontrollable male bodies of color, or the volatile intersections of masculinity, race, and sexuality.

In addition to the racial components of down low rhetoric, the characterization of straight-identified MSMs as closeted also exemplifies the persistent tendency to view sex *acts* as meaningful and objective indicators of a true sexual selfhood and to gloss over larger questions about the gendered and racialized construction of heterosexual and homosexual categories (Foucault, 1978; Katz, 1996; Sedgwick, 1992). According to the logic of the closet, same-sex sexual practices among heterosexuals signify sexual repression, or a failure to be honest about who one *is*, and the sexual community or culture in which one belongs. The recent insistence that MSMs are actually closeted gay men constrained by racially-specific or culturally-internal forms of homophobia has helped to solidify a narrow and essentialist conceptualization of homophobia. At the individual level, 'internalized homophobia' is believed to arise from the unwillingness of MSMs to recognize and/or celebrate their essential nature, or 'who they really are'. At the cultural level, and akin to 'culture of poverty' arguments used to pathologize African Americans, mainstream down low and MSM discourses imply that homophobia stems from essential, ethno-racial cultures of sexual repression.

As I will argue, however, a more productive reading of homophobia views the disavowal of gay identity and culture as one of the constitutive elements of heterosexual subjectivity – or a primary means of expressing heterosexual selfhood in a sexually binary world. While down low discourse implies that same-sex sexuality reveals a homosexual selfhood and that homophobia is an expression of culture, this article explores the theoretical insights that emerge from a reversal of this logic, or from

viewing gay and straight as cultural spheres, and homophobia as a subjectifying practice (or a struggle to construct heterosexual selfhood).

Based on examination of an online community in which white 'str8'-identified men assert that sex with other white men *bolsters* their heterosexual masculinity, I highlight the heterosexual and racialized meanings that white MSMs attach to their same-sex behaviors. I argue that while some men who have sex with men prefer to do so within gay/queer cultural worlds, others (such as the 'straight dudes' described here²) indicate a greater sense of belonging or cultural 'fit' with heterosexual identity and heteroerotic culture. For the latter group, homophobia, or the need to strongly disidentify with gay men and gay culture, is less a symptom of the *repression* of a 'true self', but rather an attempt to *express* a 'true self' – or one's strong sense of identification with heteropatriarchal white masculinity – in the context of having sex with men.

More specifically, this study points to the role of whiteness – including white archetypes and images – in the process of establishing heterosexual 'realness', or believable straight culture. In contrast with the media's recent efforts to locate tensions between sexual identity and practice within African American and Latino cultures, my findings suggest that whiteness is also a commonly used resource for bridging the gap between heterosexual identification and same-sex desire. Previous research has pointed to various institutional contexts in which straight-identified men have sex with men, such as 'tearooms', prisons, and the military (Humphreys, 1978; Kaplan, 2003; Schifter, 1999). These studies have demonstrated how men leverage hyper-masculinity, socioeconomic success, and the 'need' for quick and easy sex to preserve heterosexual identity and moral 'righteousness' (to use Humphrey's term). Building upon this research, the present study considers how *race* (including racial identification) and *racialized culture* (including racialized images, clothing, language and 'style') are also used to bolster claims to heterosexuality and to reframe sex between men as a hetero-masculine and 'not-gay' act. Similar to the assertion of feminist theorists that gender is always an intersectional accomplishment – or a construction that takes forms in and through race, class, and sexuality (Bettie, 2002; Hill Collins, 2004; Hull et al., 1982) – I show that the appearance of 'authentic' heterosexuality is also accomplished in interaction with race, socioeconomic class, and gender. While recent research has begun to critically explore these intersections for men of color (González, 2007), this article marks the often-invisible significance of race and culture for white dudes who have sex with dudes.

Race, culture, and the social construction of heterosexuality

While other research has examined the historical relationship between racial ideologies and the invention of homosexuality (Ferguson, 2004; Somerville, 2000), limited attention has been given to the role of race in the routine and daily accomplishment of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In this article, I argue that the ongoing construction of authentic or believable male heterosexuality is reliant upon racial codes that signify 'normal' straight male bonding, 'average' heterosexual masculinity, and lack of interest in gay culture. Whiteness – and more specifically the use of white masculine archetypes for example frat boys, surfers, skaters, jocks, and white 'thugs' – can play a central role in the production of an authentic and desirable heterosexual culture distinct from gay male culture.

In this article I do not make claims about the 'actual' sexual and racial identities of men who place advertisements for sex online, instead I am interested in the sexualized and racialized *cultures* these advertisements draw upon and reproduce. Indeed, a growing body of queer scholarship has pointed to the significance of *culture* in the construction and regulation of the heterosexual/homosexual binary. Following Foucault's assertion that 'homosexuality threatens people as a "way of life", rather than a way of having sex', Halberstam (2005) has argued that 'queer subjects' might be redefined as those who 'live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned', including, 'ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed' (2005: 10). Halberstam expands the boundaries of queerness to include subjects often not thought of as queer, and in a distinct but similarly motivated move, other queer scholars have 'disidentified' with mainstream or 'homonormative' lesbian and gay politics and its focus on monogamy, domesticity, and prosperity (Duggan, 2003; Muñoz, 1999). Queer, in each of these approaches, is less about sexual practices than about a 'way of life' that defies the rules of normative, respectable adult citizenship. Transcending long-held debates about whether to privilege sexual identification or sexual practice in the study of sexuality, this conceptualization of queerness is de-linked from both. Instead, because queer sexual culture or 'way of life' is what most violates social norms, *culture* becomes the material of queer resistance.

This article offers support for the argument that the lines between queerness and normativity are marked less by sexual practices and identities than by cultural practices and interpretive frames. In contrast with recent work

that has expanded queer subjectivity or disavowed 'normal' gays and lesbians, I take a different empirical approach by demonstrating how whiteness and masculinity interact to offer *heterosexual culture* to white men who have sex with men. At the end of this article, I return to the question of culture and to my own queer disidentification with the hetero-erotic culture produced by str8 dudes online.

Method: Studying dude-sex

The 'Casual Encounters' section of Craigslist-Los Angeles (craigslist.org) is an online community bulletin board in which predominantly white 'str8 dudes' solicit sex with other white str8 dudes.³ Exemplifying the arguments about culture described earlier, sex acts themselves are not meaningful indicators of sexual identification for str8 dudes on Craigslist. Instead, ads placed by str8 dudes suggest that it is willingness to identify with or consume 'perverted' queer culture that makes others queer, and conversely, it is str8 dudes' mastery of 'normal' heterosexual culture that makes them straight. This study builds upon an earlier pilot project, where I examined how beer, straight pornography, references to violent sex with women, 'dude speak' and other symbols of hyper-masculinity were used to construct and authenticate heterosexuality on Craigslist (Ward, 2007). In that project, the ads constructed a str8 dude erotic culture that was decidedly *not* gay, often homophobic, and distinct from the erotic culture of the 'Men Seeking Men' section of Craigslist (which included ads posted by men on the 'DL' and 'straight-acting' gay men seeking 'same'). In contrast with the earlier pilot project, my focus here is on the role of race in the construction of heterosexuality among white, str8-identified men who seek sex with other str8 men.

As stated earlier, studies of sexuality have frequently invoked the notion of a 'real' sexual self, one that can be identified by interviewing research subjects about their 'actual' sexual practices, desires, and identifications. The notion of 'the real' has become particularly salient for researchers of online blogs and chat rooms – sites in which people may *represent* themselves in one way (man, woman, gay, straight, Black, white), but *actually be* another. From the perspective that there is a distinct dichotomy between the representational and the real, it is important to note that the study at hand reveals how 'str8 dudes' represent themselves in their Craigslist ads, but does not reveal how they identify, what they actually do, or how they think about what they do 'in real life' (or 'IRL', the abbreviation used in cyberspace).⁴ (This is significant, as I will show, in terms of racial identification, not just sexual identity.) Reflecting the method of cultural analysis more broadly, this study demonstrates how a heterosexual *culture* is constructed online without making any claims

about the 'true' heterosexuality of the men who post ads on Craigslist. However, if genders and sexualities are *always* performed and accomplished within particular cultural contexts (Butler, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1987), we might view the identities claimed online as equally 'revealing' or 'reliable' sources of knowledge about the gendered and racialized construction of sexualities. This article points to the gendered and racialized strategies that are used to construct 'authentic' heterosexuality in cyberspace; yet given that 'cyberspace . . . implicates the real outside the machine', these strategies are likely to inform (and be informed by) other realms as well (Rodriguez, 2003: 119).

As I will argue, the production of heterosexual culture on Craigslist is accomplished not only through what is arguably a 'homophobic' and hyper-masculine rejection of queer culture; it is also dependent upon racial archetypes and images that invoke 'real' heterosexual white masculinity. For this study, I collected and analyzed all ads placed on Craigslist Los Angeles by 'str8' self-identified men during May through July of 2006.⁵ Of the resulting 125 'Casual Encounters' ads collected and analyzed, 71 per cent made reference to race – either the racial identification of the person placing the ad or a specific racial preference for a sex partner. Among the ads that made reference to race, 86 per cent were placed by men who either identified themselves as white, or included a photo of themselves in which they appeared to be white (though I recognize that the latter is a flawed indicator of racial identity and that race itself is socially and historically constructed).⁶ In order to capture all ads placed by straight-identified men seeking men, I searched for ads containing either the terms 'DL' or 'str8', the latter of which was more commonly used on Craigslist. In 'Casual Encounters', self-identified white men placed approximately 85 per cent of the ads, regardless of whether the term 'str8' or 'DL' was used.

As I will describe later, the sociopolitical landscape of Southern California is clearly significant to the construction of white heteromascularity on Craigslist Los Angeles, as many ads reference Southern California masculine archetypes (e.g. surfers, skaters, sun-tanned frat boys and others). I selected Southern California as the site of my analysis because of my own location in Los Angeles and my familiarity with the local neighborhoods, regional slang, and other references that appear in 'Casual Encounters' ads. While my focus on Los Angeles limits the generalizability of the study, it also allows for consideration of the ways in which racial, gendered, and sexual authenticity are locally and regionally constructed. Future research may benefit from a comparative approach.

Regular dudes, Casual encounters

Before describing how whiteness was deployed in Casual Encounters, I begin with a general description of str8 dudes' heteroerotic culture. In contrast with the logic that gay and straight are at opposite ends of a behavioral and biologically-determined binary, the str8 dudes who post on Craigslist construct 'gay' as a chosen identity that is not particularly linked to who is having sex, or what sexual acts are involved. Instead, being gay is about *how* sex is done – the language that is used, the type of 'porn' films that are watched, the beverages consumed, and the motivation that drives the sex itself. The following ads, representative of dozens of others, illustrate how str8 dudes lay claim to 'straightness' while soliciting sex with other men:

Straight Dude Drunk and Horny . . . Any str8 bud wanna jack? – 27. Here's the deal. Went out drinking and clubbing, thought I'd hook up with a chick, but didn't pan out. I'm buzzed, horny, checking out porn. Is there any other straight dude out there who would be into jacking while watching porn? . . . I'd rather hook up with a chick, but none of the CL [Craigslist] chicks ever work out.

What happened to the cool bi/str8 dude circle jerks? – 33. What happened to a group of masc[uline] dudes just sitting around stroking, watching a game, drinking some brews, jerking, showing off, swapping college stories, maybe playing a drinking game and see what comes up?

Str8 guy wants to try BJ tonight – 27. Ok, I'll make this short. I'm up late tonight. I have a girlfriend. But I'm at home by myself now. I watch porn and I like when the women suck on big cocks. I've been thinking about it, and I think I'd like to suck one. I'm not attracted to guys so I'd rather not look at you much. Just suck your cock. I have a Polaroid and would like to take a pic with cum on my face. But this is really only for tonight cuz I'm horny! . . . I am Caucasian and prefer Caucasian.

\$300 Bucks Cash If You're STR8 & Goodlooking!! – 27. Hey, are you str8, good-looking and broke? Are you Under 30 and hella cool? Like watching porn and talking bout pussy? You're in luck. 300 bucks every time we hangout. Be under 30. Honestly STR8. I'm mostly str8, great looking chill bro.

Str8 jackoff in briefs outside male bonding edging stroke – 34. I am a tall blond built packin' jockman with a big bulge in my jockeys. Dig hanging in just our briefs man to man in the hot sun workin' my bulge freely . . . If you are into jackin' and being free to be a man, let's hang. If you have a pool or a yard to layout and jack freely smoke some 420 [marijuana] and just be men, hit me up. No gay sex, I am looking for legit male bonding, masturbating in the hot sun only.

Unlike in similar websites for gay men, women are a central part of str8 dudes' erotic discourse. As these ads illustrate, str8 dudes often describe

sex between dudes as a less desirable, but 'easy', alternative to sex with women, or suggest that dude-sex is a means of getting the kind of sex that all straight men want from women, but can only get from men – uncomplicated, emotionless, and guaranteed. Str8 dudes get drunk, watch heterosexual porn, talk about 'pussy', and maintain a clear emotional boundary between each other that draws upon the model of adolescent friendship, or the presumably 'harmless', 'proto-sexual' circle jerk. References to being 'chill bros' and 'male bonding' help to reframe dude-sex as a kind of sex that bolsters, rather than threatens, the heterosexual masculinity of the participants. Only those who are 'man enough' and 'chill enough' will want dude-sex or be able to handle it.

In some cases, misogyny and references to violence against women are used to reinforce the link between dude-sex and heterosexual male bonding:

Whackin Off to Porn: STR8 porn. Gang bang. STR8, bi-curious masculine white guy lookin' for a masculine guy. Get into stroking bone with a bud, talkin' bout pussy and bangin' the bitch.

Any Straight/Bi Guys Want to Help Me Fuck My Blow-up Doll???: Come on guys . . . we can't always pick up the chick we want to bone right??? So let's get together and fuck the hell out of my hot blow-up doll. Her mouth, her pussy, and her ass all feel GREAT. Just be cool, uninhibited, horny, and ready to fuck this bitch. It's all good here . . . lates.

Such ads suggest that dude-sex is a sexual and often violent expression of heterosexual masculinity and heterosexual culture, distinct from gay male culture in which misogyny typically manifests as the invisibility, rather than the objectification, of women (Ward, 2000). Marilyn Frye (1983), in her analysis of drag queens, argues 'What gay male affectation of femininity seems to be is a serious sport in which men may exercise their power and control over the feminine, much as in other sports . . . But the mastery of the feminine is not feminine. It is masculine'. I draw on Frye's analysis to suggest that while dude-sex makes use of and 'masters' homosexual or non-normative sex practices, this deployment of non-normative sexuality in the service of 'str8' culture is perhaps not best understood as 'queer'.

White dudes, race, and class

Str8 dudes draw on the imagery of male bonding and the symbols of straight male culture, including references to sports, beer, fraternity membership, smoking pot and being 'chill', 'buds', or 'bros'. Yet 'dude

speak' and 'dude style' is not simply masculine and heterosexual, it is also racialized. Recent studies of Black and Latino men on the down low have emphasized the importance of shared urban culture, and particularly hip hop, to the construction of down-low masculinity and sexuality (González, 2007). González explains that *culture* (and not public or politicized identity) is what is at stake for Latinos on the down low: 'gay is not an option; Hip Hop is' (2007). Here I argue that *racial cultures* are also a central player in how white str8 dudes make sense of their str8 sexuality. In some cases, white dudes appropriate the symbols of Black and Latino down-low masculinity; in other cases, they foreground symbols of white masculinity (surfers, frat guys, jocks and so on) or synthesize the former with the latter.

Appropriating hip hop masculinity: White bros and thugs on the DL

White str8 dudes – like a growing number of young white men in general – bolster their masculinity through the appropriation of terms and gestures used by Black and Latino men, especially within rap lyrics and culture. Writers critical of the mainstreaming and white ownership of rap have pointed to the ways in which its consumption by white youth has bled into other forms of racial and cultural appropriation (Kitwana, 2005). Young white men, in particular, have turned to rap for a new model of masculinity, male rivalry/violence, and heterosexual male bonding – resulting in white males giving each other 'daps', wearing hip hop clothing, and 'affectionately' referring to one another using the term 'nigga' (Kitwana, 2005). While the appropriation of Black culture is rarely this explicit on Craigslist, str8 dudes nonetheless construct a masculine and heterosexual culture through a complex synthesis of white masculinity (e.g. surfer dudes) and masculinities of color (e.g. bros, thugs, and the DL). Str8 dudes commonly use phrases identified by African American studies scholars as 'Black slang', such as 'sup?', 'hit me up', and 'thugged out' (Smitherman, 2000), such as in the following ads:

23 y/o white dude party in Hollywood – Hey guys, I'm partyin right now at home and have plenty of stuff to share . . . I'm lookin to meet a cool str8 thugged out white dude around my age, who would wanna come over, kick back, watch a lil porn, smoke a lil, and stroke off together. I might even be down to deepthroat some cock so if you love getting awesome head you should definitely hit me back! I'm lookin for someone chill & masculine so hit me up if this sounds like you . . . LATE

Str8 curious on the DL. Lookin' to chill – 23. Sup? Just looking to chill with another str8/ bi dude, into young or older bros type . . . to mess around, not into perverted shit. Also not into fatty, femm guys. If you're a guy, please be in shape. I'm sort of skinny, curious here and haven't really acted on it. Just regular sane dude. Discretion a must. Aiite, late.

In an effort to convey that the sexual encounter will be casual, meaningless, and embedded in heterosexual male culture, white str8 dudes rely upon 'urban' slang derived from Black culture to represent heterosexuality. However, as with many forms of cultural appropriation, the slang used by str8 dudes is fast becoming associated with whites, and white masculinity in particular. For instance, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, 'bro', a term commonly used by str8 dudes, is a slang term for 'brother' with etymological roots in African American vernacular English. However, its popular and contemporary usage by young white men in California has transformed its local and contextual meaning. Bloggers on urbandictionary.com, for example, define 'bros' as: 'white frat guys', 'stupid white trash guys', and 'usually white young males, found commonly in places like San Bernardino County in California, as well as Orange County'.

It may be most accurate to describe the racialized heterosexuality of str8 dudes as a kind of Eminem-inspired white working-class 'thuggery', constructed through an in-your-face reclamation of 'white trash' and homophobic, or anti-gay, sexuality. While some ads express desire for 'average' working-class men (e.g. 'carpenters, carpet layers, plumbers, construction workers, mechanics, truckers, cable guys, delivery guys, overall just a hard working guy as I am. NO GAYS sorry'), others eroticize aggressive 'white trash' masculinity, such as in the following ad (with original photo, cropped to protect anonymity):

Str8 fuck a guy in his briefs, masc(uline) man to man fuck, hiv neg only. Hey fucks. I need to fuckin lay the pipe in some tight manhole today. I am hiv neg fuck with rubbers only. I want to have a hot packin guy in some tighty whities bent over and on all fours takin my dick like a champ. No fems or tweeking pnp ['party and play'] dudes. I hate that shit. Only 420 and a hot packin butt. Hit me up with your pix and your contact info.



Ads such as this amplify the appearance of heterosexuality through a synthesis of working-class culture, whiteness, and what is arguably the subtle appropriation of Black masculinity through hip hop slang ('hit me up') and 'thug' masculinity. Other ads produced similar images of 'rough' white masculinity through reference to skinheads and other archetypes of white male rebellion historically rooted in white racist, sexist and homophobic violence – 'lookin for str8, bi, surfr, sk8r, punk, military, truckers, skinhead, rough trade . . . I'll give you the best head ever, buddy'.

Though being on the DL has been sensationalized in the media as a rejection of white gay culture specific to Black men living 'otherwise

heterosexual lives' (Denizet-Lewis, 2003), a few white str8 dudes on Craigslist claimed DL identity as their own (though 'str8' was used far more commonly):

STR8 DUDES . . . White boy lookin for a NO CHAT suck . . . u lemme suck u . . .
– 29. Hot dude on ur dick . . . u fuck my throat and bust it . . . we never talk. Come over, kick back, pull ur cock out and get a kick ass wet deepthroat BJ. Love to deepthroat a hot str8 dude on the DL . . . bust ur nut and split. I'm a very goodlooking in shape white dude . . . totally on the DL . . . just wanna suck a hot str8 dude off, take ur nut . . . that's all. My place is kewl.

SECRET SERVICE HEAD – 28. Sup? Looking for bi/ str8 bud who is just looking to crack a nut . . . Just walk in kick back watch a porn and get blown . . . Cum and go . . . That's all I am looking for . . . Be white, under 30, masculine and discreet. This is on the DL . . . Have a girlfriend . . . but new to town.

Black gay writer and activist Keith Boykin has argued that there is a racist stigma and double standard associated with the 'down low'. Referring to the white characters in the hit film *Brokeback Mountain*, Boykin contends,

the reason why we don't say they're on the down low is simple – they're white. When white men engage in this behavior, we just call it what it is and move on. But when black men do it, then we have to pathologize it into something evil called the 'down low'. (Boykin, blog on keithboykin.com, May, 2006)

Indeed, the stereotypical image of the DL is that of partnered, heterosexual, masculine Black men having quick and deceitful sexual relations unconnected to mainstream gay culture. As such, the DL is a useful shorthand available to white str8 dudes wishing to affirm their own heterosexuality, as well as to invoke the perhaps fetishized imagery of deceitful, immoral, or 'evil' sex (to use Boykin's term).

Surfers, skaters, and frat guys: Archetypes of white heterosexual masculinity

Archetypes of youthful, white, heterosexual masculinity are also popular among str8 dudes on Craigslist, who commonly include a list of desired 'male types' in their ads. Many str8 dudes express an explicit preference for other white dudes, and this preference is strengthened by naming specific forms of hegemonic masculinity, such as jocks, skaters, surfers and frat dudes (Connell, 2005):

Any HOT White jocks lookin to get sucked off??? – 23. Hey guys, I'm just a chill good looking dude heading down to the area for a BBQ and I'm looking for any other HOT Str8 or bi white dudes looking to get sucked off. Just sit back and relax and get drained. I'm especially into sucking off hot jocks, skaters, surfers, and frat dudes. If you're hot and if you're into a hot no strings blow job, then hit me up.

Seeking a MASCULINE JACK OFF BUD to STR8 PORN – 29. Hot masculine white dude here . . . looking for another hot white dude to come by my place, and work out a hot load side by side. Straight Porn only. Prefer str8, surfer, etc. Not usually into gay dudes.

In such ads, the heterosexual culture of dude-sex is established by drawing upon available typologies of white heterosexual masculinity. Others make reference to specific white ethnicities, such as one ad seeking ‘blondes, Italian(s), Jewish types, fat dick heads, hairy, white and/or Latin dudes . . . suit and tie types’.⁷ Just as the appropriation of Black and white working-class masculinities helps construct an authentic ‘heteroerotic’ culture, so too does the image of a normative middle-class or professional whiteness (i.e. dudes who go to college, participate in sports, wear suit and ties, and so on). In both cases, race and socioeconomic class play a central role in making heterosexuality legible in the context of men’s sexual seduction of other men.

In addition to naming racialized archetypes, some ads include long and detailed accounts of the exact clothing, dialogue, sex acts, and erotic mood required to maintain the heteroeroticism of dude-sex. For instance, the following ad was placed by a ‘str8 guy’ who ‘lives a very str8 life’ seeking someone to enact a ‘role play’ in exchange for \$400. The ad included a much longer script from which I have excerpted only a small segment:

. . . You come to the hotel in loose shorts with no underwear on, a tank top and flip flops, and when you get there we just kick back and maybe have a few beers and shoot the shit to get to know each other a little bit and feel more comfortable, then we start talking about our girlfriends and girls that we have fucked before or the best blow jobs we have had, etc., the whole time acting like we are just good friends that are horny. I am kind of dumb and don’t have a lot of experience with chicks and you want to teach me and help me learn more. You then tell me that you are getting really horny thinking about all the hot sex you have had and ask me if I have any porn we can watch. I put one on and as we watch the porn, you are constantly grabbing your dick and playing with it as it gets harder and harder . . . Then you sit down right next to me and you say, ‘dude, you gotta hear this story about this one chick that I made suck my dick until I blew my load in her’, then you tell me the story about it. While you are telling me the story you act it out with me . . .

While whiteness is not explicitly named in the role-play, the script mirrors the white surfer/frat dude fetishism common in the ‘Casual Encounters’ section of Craigslist-Los Angeles. As stated in a web article on ‘frat fashion’ (published by the New York hipster website *blacktable.com* in 2005): ‘From out of the shower or off the lacrosse field and right into happy hour, flip-flops take [frat guys] every place they want to go. Flip-flops suggest sand and SoCal-cool [southern-California-cool] . . . !’ Thus, some of the ad’s references – such as the ‘costume’ of flip

flops, shorts and a tank top – possibly hint at white surfer/frat masculinity, exemplifying the ways in which erotic fantasies may be implicitly or unintentionally racialized. Yet the glorification of surfers and frat dudes also illustrates the way in which the racialized construction of heterosexual and homosexual cultures are locally or regionally specific. Many of the references to white masculinity on Craigslist-Los Angeles – surfers, bros, dudes – appear to be rooted in southern California lifestyles, or at least the imagination of them.

Less str8, more DL: Desiring black men?

In addition to self-identifying with the DL, a small number of white str8 dudes expressed desire for ‘no strings’ sex with ‘hung’ Black men on the DL. These ads, in contrast with the ads in which white dudes used Black slang and style to seduce one another, produced a distinct cultural effect. While many ‘white on white’ ads implied sameness, reciprocity or egalitarianism (let’s stroke together, watch porn together, ‘work out a hot load side by side’ and so on), ‘white seeking Black’ ads typically emphasized difference, hierarchy, and service. The majority of such ads were placed by white men looking to perform ‘blow jobs’ for big, muscular Black men. Many of the ads in ‘Casual Encounters’ mention the importance of being ‘hung’, but ads seeking Black men placed particular emphasis on the relationship between race and body size (e.g., ‘big BLACK cock’, ‘nice big meaty Black guys’):

Discreet White Deep Throat 4 DL Black – Size Matters – 44. Discreet 44 yr old white guy lookin’ to service hot Black guys on the DL. I’m hairy, good shape. I’m lookin’ for very hung Black guys who love to kick back, watch porn and get their cocks serviced. I really like to deep throat big BLACK cock. If you are interested, hit me back with your stats and a pic if you have one . . . I really love very tall skinny men, hung huge.

Looking to suck off big black men, on the DL – White guy here looking to suck off big muscular black guys. I like them big, over 250lbs and muscular. No strings attached. Hoping to meet some men on the DL. Got my own place, it’s private and discreet, no strings, no hassles, etc. Just want to suck off some nice big meaty black guys.

Ads placed by white guys seeking Black men on the DL were less likely to focus on authenticating heterosexuality through reference to women, straight porn, and friendship (male bonding, ‘being buddies’) and more likely to focus on ‘the DL’ as pre-formulated code for impersonal sex across racial difference.

White submission and Black dominance was also a central theme in these ads. In the following ad, an image is included that reverses the

master/slave relationship (a dominant Black male, and a shackled white male) and has likely been taken from BDSM-themed gay porn:

Muscled Guy Looking for Str8 or Bi to Service on the Down Low – Meet me at the construction site. I will be there waiting for you [in the?] dark, service you and leave anonymous . . . Send pic must be hot like me.



Source: Craigslist

While race is not mentioned in the text of this ad, the figure of the dominant Black male (and the submissive white male body) is used to represent the queerer – or less normal and natural – white fantasy of the down low. This and similar ads suggest that in the Black–white encounter, Black men are always dominant; they receive sexual service, but they don't provide it. Friendship, equity, and 'normal and natural male bonding' are represented as either undesirable or impossible across racial lines. In some ads, class differences also pervade the encounter. In the foregoing ad, the 'construction site' – in contrast to the reference to white 'suit and tie types' – invokes manual labor and the type of job more likely to be held by men of color. The DL requires anonymity, discretion, and meeting in 'dark' places like the construction site. In the Craigslist representation of the Black-white encounter, cross-racial sex is not an organic expression of 'male bonding' or 'just being men'. Instead, the presence of (or desire for) race and class difference produces a darker, less natural and less straight encounter.

Because of its association with men of color and the closet (or hidden homosexuality), the term 'DL' was less likely to be associated with authentic white heterosexuality in 'Casual Encounters' ('str8' was preferred by white dudes) and was more likely to be used by men of color in the 'Men Seeking Men' section of Craigslist. In fact, though beyond the scope of this study (which focuses on white men), I noticed during data collection that ads placed by men of color appeared more frequently in the 'Men Seeking Men' section than in the 'Casual Encounters' section. I can only speculate about why men of color would not have chosen to post ads in 'Casual Encounters', but it seems likely that they were deterred by the predominance of white dudes seeking other white dudes. Conversely, it makes sense that white dudes uninterested in gay identification would be drawn to 'Casual Encounters', given that its moniker makes no reference to gender identity (or identity at all), while 'Men Seeking Men' makes gender identity primary.

While reference to the symbols of Black masculinity and style helped in the production of authentic heterosexuality, reference to actual sexual contact with Black men generally did not. Instead, cross-racial sex was permeated with difference and inequality, becoming itself somewhat queer. This finding mirrors the findings of the study more broadly – for straight-identified white men seeking men, maintaining a heteroerotic culture was largely reliant upon specifically white forms of heterosexual masculinity (including those that appropriate some elements of Black culture).

Discussion: Disavowing str8 dudes

Str8 dudes who seek sex with men draw upon a wide variety of conceptual resources to assert a heterosexual male identity, including the use of racialized archetypes and images intended to signify authentic heterosexuality. While other research has highlighted the ways in which racial binaries were used to construct the heterosexual/homosexual binary in the late 19th century (Somerville, 2000), the ads placed on 'Casual Encounters' suggest that race continues to play a central role in the daily accomplishment of heterosexual 'realness', particularly when authenticity is likely to be called into question. This deployment of race to signify heterosexuality included both cross-racial identifications and the preservation of white racial boundaries. In some cases, white str8 dudes appropriated the symbols/language of Black heterosexual masculinity to construct a culture of male bonding that is arguably recognizable as the antithesis of gay male culture. In other cases, white str8 dudes invoked the 'DL' as a means of eroticizing deceitful and 'evil' sex or expressing desire for closeted Black men looking to be 'serviced'.

However, most commonly, white str8 dudes drew on archetypes of white heterosexual masculinity to provide evidence of being an average, normal dude. The majority of white str8 men who posted in 'Casual Encounters' expressed a preference for men like themselves, or men who fit the paradigmatic image of the straight middle-class white male (i.e. frat dudes, suit and tie types, surfers, skaters and so on). While being gay has often been stereotyped as a 'white thing' (Muñoz, 1999), the figure of the '*straight* white man' symbolizes both financial and cultural power as well as the average man, the 'everyman', the 'regular dude'. Given the ways in which systems of white racial dominance construct whiteness as natural, invisible, and non-racialized (Frankenberg, 2001; Lipsitz, 1998), sex between white men is likely to be experienced as deracialized and 'natural', possessing none of the 'difference' or racial fetishism expressed in cross-racial sexual encounters. Thus, for white str8 dudes, whiteness played a key role in producing evidence of normal/average male heterosexuality. This may be because desire for the ostensibly deracialized (but white) 'everyman' is less threatening than the desire for men of color, who are coded as both hypermasculine and hypersexual within US popular culture (Hill Collins, 2004).

However, despite the ways in which the emphasis on whiteness may be experienced as the absence of racial fetish, the erotic culture of 'Casual Encounters' was rife with white fetishism. In addition to simply declaring oneself a white str8 dude, detailed descriptions of white male bodies, white male lifestyles ('looking for surfers, [and other] LA-types'), and white male bonding helped to create and maintain the heteroerotic culture of dude-sex. Surfers, for example, were a particularly desired type, not because of the importance of surfing skills or the desire to actually surf together, but more likely because of the white, hetero-masculine script associated with southern California surf lifestyle – flip flops, chillin', just being bros and talking about chicks. In sum, racial markers are not used only to identify one's physical 'type', they also provide an entire cultural universe from which to draw heterosexual costumes, scripts, and countless other codes for heterosexual masculinity.

At a broader level, this and other studies indicate that racial categories are always already sexualized and that sexuality categories are always already raced (González, 2007; Muñoz-Laboy, 2004; Somerville, 2000). Though I have focused on the intersections of whiteness and heterosexuality, my aim is not to position whiteness simply as one of several possible and equivalent examples of the racialization of heterosexuality. Instead, the ads on Craigslist suggest that in a culture constituted by both a racial and sexual binary (white/other and heterosexual/other), whiteness and heterosexually become 'natural' bedfellows. Both whiteness and heterosexuality simultaneously signify

the 'really, really normal, nothing out of the ordinary' subject. For the str8 dudes on Craigslist, it appears that the most average and normal of male heterosexualities is white heterosexuality, even when it engages in same-sex practices and appropriates Black culture. In the context of white male bonding, Black bodies disrupt the staging of normalcy and occupy a distinctly queerer space 'down low'.⁸ Building on sociological analyses of hegemonic and marginalized masculinities (Connell, 2005), future research might also reveal the range and hierarchy of heterosexualities by conceptualizing white heterosexuality as 'hegemonic' and heterosexualities of color as 'marginalized'.

In addition to highlighting the racialization of heterosexuality and heteroerotic culture, the ads placed by str8 dudes also confirm the importance of giving as much consideration to sexual *culture* as has been given to sexual practice. When queer feminist colleagues and I first read an ad placed by a str8 dude in 'Casual Encounters' – 'nothing gay here at all, just two guys, watching hot porn, stroking until the point of no return' – we marveled at the suggestion that the ad was anything but gay. Later, I marveled that my colleagues and I had been so invested in owning (as queer) a cultural space that is so decidedly intent on identifying with heterosexuality. In Casual Encounters, sex practices are not useful guides for delineating the boundaries of queer and non-queer, or establishing political alliances with queer stakeholders. While the white str8 dudes who post ads in Casual Encounters express their desire for sex with other men, their desire takes form within the context of heterosexual identification and heterosexual erotic culture (in other words, the use of heterosexual pornography, the disavowal of gay culture, misogynistic discussions of women and their bodies, insistence on 'normal' heterosexual male bonding as the organizing principle of the sexual encounter).

To de-queer the sex described on Craigslist is to give up the epistemological pleasure of self-righteous knowing, owning, outing and naming. In the face of homophobia and heterosexism, honing one's 'gaydar' and revealing that '*we are everywhere*' have been among few queer luxuries. Yet as others have argued (Halberstam, 2005; Duggan, 2003), political solidarity built primarily around sex acts misrecognizes what is most threatening, and subversive, about queerness. Queer *culture* – including a collective rejection of the rules associated with normal, adult, reproductive sexuality and (nonconsensual) heterosexual power relations – may better help scholars and activists determine the meaning of queer. On the one hand, str8 dudes exemplify sexual rule-breaking and the defiance of respectable sex behavior. On the other hand, their reliance on misogyny and homophobia to interpret and organize their sexual practices suggests a greater degree of cultural alignment with heterosexual traditions of same-sex sexuality, in which male sexual bonding is interconnected with

violence against women and gay men. This complexity reveals the permeability of the categories 'straight' and 'queer', which signify not only the divide between normal and abnormal sexual practices but also the divide between normal and abnormal interpretive frames for understanding these practices. Str8 dudes have abnormal sex, but they invest in ideologies of racial and sexual normalcy. Thus, str8 dudes' 'erotic culture of normalcy' also suggests the need to rethink the ways in which repression and 'internalized homophobia' are mapped onto all straight-identified same-sex behaviors. Rather than a symptom of repression, passivity, or lack of self-awareness, str8 dudes' rejection of queerness may be more accurately understood as agentic acts of identification with heterosexual culture.

This article has pointed to the value of viewing queer and straight as cultural spheres that people choose to inhabit in large part because they experience a cultural and political fit. Such an approach highlights the *intersections* of queer and straight cultures, identities, and practices, and suggests that some intersections may be formed by queer sexual practices and straight cultural and political investments. Redefining queer and non-queer as cultural affiliations also implies that queer 'rights' serve to protect not everyone who engages in same-sex sexuality, but all those who cannot or will not invest in hegemonic str8 culture – gender freaks, kids in gay-straight alliances, and all people who are or are willing to be part of this thing we call 'queer'.

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Notes

1. MSM is a term first adopted by epidemiologists to classify men who have sex with men, regardless of whether they identify as gay, bisexual or, heterosexual.
2. 'Dude' is a vernacular term used by young white men in the USA to refer to one another. It was originally popularized by young, primarily white, surfers and skaters (or skateboarders) in California, but has since achieved popularity throughout the USA. 'Jock' is a slang term used to refer to young male athletes, and 'frat' is an abbreviation for a college fraternity.
3. There is disagreement on the web regarding the meaning of the term 'str8'. In some online communities, 'str8' functions simply as internet slang for 'straight', and it has also been used as an abbreviation for 'straight' in rap

- lyrics. However, others, such as contributors to 'urbandictionary.com', argue that 'str8' is used almost exclusively by gay and bisexual men 'in the closet'.
4. See González (2007) for a discussion of the distinction between 'cyberdata' and real time observations in 'cyberethnography'.
 5. This study received approval from the University of California Internal Review Board for the use of human subjects. Though Craigslist is a public site, I have made every effort to protect the anonymity of the men whose personal ads I have used. Any specific identifying information (e.g. name of a small and specific neighborhood, physical descriptions, contact information) has been removed from the ads.
 6. I note here that the association between light skin and whiteness is not specific to the research context, but is an aspect of racial hegemony that arguably exists independent of data selection methods and over-determines the analysis of visual images.
 7. Some white dudes on Craigslist named 'Latin' men as a desired type. It is unclear whether these ads positioned 'Latin' – like Jewish and Italian – as a form of white ethnicity or a category of racial otherness. I note that within the racial discourses of the state, such as in the US census, Latinos are conceptualized as racially white. Reflecting broader racial politics, it is possible that including Latinos in the category of 'white dudes' on Craigslist is a racial strategy used by whites to expand and solidify the category of whiteness.
 8. Thank you to Rachel Luft for clarifying this point.

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