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"The Gay Facebook": Friendship, Desirability, and HIV

in the Lives of the Gay Internet Generation

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“The Gay Facebook”: Friendship, Desirability, and HIV in the Lives of the Gay Internet Generation

by

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Dedication

To feminism, which gives me hope for a better tomorrow…

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Abstract

"The Gay Facebook": Friendship, Desirability, and HIV in the Lives of the Gay Internet Generation

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Why are men seeking other men online? And how does the Internet influence these men and their sexuality? These are the two underlying questions driving this thesis. To answer these general questions, I conducted a qualitative study, which used in-depth individual interviews with 15 men who have sex with other men who self-identified as gay, queer, or homosexual. Through employing a theoretical framework that is inspired in queer theory, I uncovered three main topics in these men's lives that are intimately shaped by their use of the Internet: friendship, racial and bodily desire, and HIV. First, I show the creative ways gay men are using the Internet, and specifically a sexualized space, in order to build relations with other gay men, despite the larger obstacles a heteronormative society puts in these men's way to forge these friendships. In using their gay identity to try to establish relationalities with other gay identified men, the informants in this study challenge the impersonable traits associated with modernity, while seeking to build new alliances that could potentially radically disrupt heteronormative society. Secondly, I highlight how the social exclusionary practices toward people of color and

non-normal bodies on Adam4Adam.com reifies whiteness and masculinity, which in turn, reifies heteronormativity. Here, I unmask how the structure of Adam4Adam.com, especially its filtering system, normalizes these discriminatory practices in users' lives. Thirdly, I examine the role and meaning of HIV and sexual health in the lives of my informants. I incorporate the term "doing sexual responsibility" to show how my gay informants manage their anxiety-ridden lives when navigating their sexuality and sexual health. I also show how the gay men in this study engage in online foreplay as a pleasurable way to manage this anxiety and how trust and hegemonic masculinity are unintended consequences of this danger discourse on sexuality. As these men's narratives and this thesis illustrate, society is still structured through heteronormative standards, but the Internet provides a new space for gay men to navigate their marginalized status in society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I type Adam4Adam.com into my web browser. A website loads. An orange background greets me with a banner that reads, "Join FREE. Find your ADAM today!" Below this banner and log-in screen, I see information about downloading the mobile and smart phone versions of this website as well as an advertisement for a gay pornographic website. In small print – at the bottom of the page - there is also Adam4Adam.com's "Terms and Conditions," partly stating that I must be "…at least 18 years of age…". I am, so I click "Join FREE."

Here, I encounter these "Membership Terms and Conditions" in more details. I briefly peruse this page, and I put a check mark next to having read and agreed to the terms. I also put a check mark certifying that I am at least 18 years old. I click continue.

After entering my preferred username, password, and e-mail address, I must choose my home location. I select "USA – Texas – Austin Metro – Austin – Other in: Austin." I have been alerted that my area has been changed. I click "Continue Here."

I now must enter my physical description. "All fields in this page are REQUIRED," I am told. Before I can even access and see the men on this website, I must disclose my age, height, weight, waist size, body type, hair color, body hair, ethnicity, and what I am looking for (see Appendix A). This interface tells me that these physical descriptions matter. These characteristics define the desirable traits people want to know about me; therefore, I must disclose them to even enter the space. I can also only choose from a drop-down menu, constraining my choices of whom I can be in this space. I answer them hesitantly, but honestly. I click continue.

Next I must make a profile headline to attract users who are looking over my profile. On this page, I am encouraged to "say more about" myself that I could not express in the drop-

menus on the previous page (see Appendix B). However, I only have 550 characters to talk about what I like, what I look like, and what I am looking for. How can I say all of these things in 550 characters? My eyes glance over to the right of this page, where I am told that my profile is supposed to be about me, and that illegal activities (including hate and racism) are prohibited on this website. I skim these key rules over, then write about being a researcher in under 550 characters. I click continue.

On this last page, I can now disclose "OPTIONAL Information." I am told, "If you are looking for Friendship and/or Relationship we recommend answering Part 1 and if you are looking for Sex we highly recommend answering Part 2. Answering these questions will help members find you with our advanced search tool" (see Appendix C). The website interface tells me that if I am looking for friendship and/or a relationship, then men will want to know (in addition to the required descriptions I have already filled out) my profession/occupation, my scene, if I am "out" or not, if I drink, smoke, do drugs, and my zodiac sign. I can also write about my hobbies in under 100 characters. However, if I am looking for sex, then members will want to know my sexual role, dick size, if I am circumcised or not, if I practice safe sex only or anything goes, my HIV status, and where I prefer to meet. After deciding whether I want to fill out these optional items (I don't!), which will help other users find me with Adam4Adam.com's "advanced search tool," I can finally hit the button that says "Create Account."

Upon creating an account, I can now upload face pictures of myself (or body or private parts), and I can finally begin to browse the other men who are on this website. While browsing, I am surrounded by porn advertisements. I see that I can look up parties in my area, and I can look at the sex workers online in Austin as well. I, though, click "Members Online." I am confronted by profiles with faces. Other profiles are of bodies and/or genitals. Some profiles say

"no photo" while others say "private photo only." I begin to click through the profiles in the Austin area, striving to get a feel for the type of men online in this space. I immerse myself into Adam4Adam.com.

In this digital age, the Internet has become a crucial site for people to explore, construct, and experience different modes of their sexual lives. For gay and lesbian individuals, the Internet is the prime space to meet similar others for dating and sexual purposes (Grov et al. 2012; Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). These Internet spaces can serve as sites of pedagogy (Kellner 1995), where people can log on and not only learn about various types of sexualities but also search for sexual interests that suit their desires. During my initial immersion online, however, I wondered *why* did I have to answer all of these questions before I could even enter Adam4Adam.com? And why *these* specific questions? What is Adam4Adam.com's interface and profile construction teaching users about sexuality for men seeking other men on this website?

The Internet is a social construct - a product of culture and power. Ideas embedded online about sexuality are often reflections of larger, offline hegemonic discourses (Nakamura 2001). In many online spaces, identities, desires, and other aspects of sexuality have become built into website designs, where individuals construct profiles based on the infrastructure that the website permits (e.g., I *must* answer certain demographic characteristics, and I can *only* choose from the categories in the drop-down menus) (Nakamura 2001; Gosine 2007). Within this formulation then, these website designs, as reflections of larger hegemonic structures, could be reifying offline social issues in specific ways for the people inhabiting these spaces, warranting a need to understand how these spaces are shaped and how they shape the people who are within them.

These brief issues along with my initial immersion into Adam4Adam.com led to my over-arching research questions: *Why are men seeking other men online? And how does the Internet influence these men and their sexuality?*

To answer these general questions, I conducted a qualitative study, which used in-depth individual interviews with 15 men who have sex with other men who self-identified as gay, queer, or homosexual. I conducted these interviews during the fall semester of 2012 in the city of Austin, Texas, after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from The University of Texas at Austin. This thesis will present in the subsequent chapters the major findings of this research study. In chapter two, I examine the reasons why gay men are going online and visit sexualized websites to find friendship with other gay men. I explore the meaning and role of friendship in gay men's lives and why the Internet is the space for gay men in their twenties to build these relations today. In the third chapter, I turn to exploring how the interface of Adam4Adam.com shapes racial and bodily desires for gay men inhabiting this space. I show how the "advanced search" feature of this website allows users to racially cleanse this space and how bodies become quantified in this space, abjecting non-normative gay embodiments. In the fourth and final analytical chapter, I analyze the role of HIV in the lives of my gay informants and how they utilize Adam4Adam.com to deal with these issues and concerns associated to HIV and AIDS. I uncover how Adam4Adam.com provides an interface for gay men to screen other men about these sexual health issues, while also providing a pleasurable way to discuss these anxiety-ridden issues before meeting for sexual encounters. In my conclusion, I summarize the contributions of this study, discuss its limitations, and reflect about future research directions.

In the subsequent sections of this Introduction I lay the foundation for my thesis by supplying (1) the relevance of this study, (2) the theoretical frameworks for my analysis of these issues, and (3) the methodology of this study.

Relevance of the Study

The ubiquity of the Internet has engendered new discourses around sexuality, and it has opened up a realm for new sexual identities to be enacted online (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000). In being accessible, affordable, and anonymous (the three A's), the Internet allows for sexually marginalized individuals to experiment with sexual identities and behaviors, including those identities and behaviors that are often deemed abnormal in the larger society (Garofalo et al. 2007; Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008). This anonymity creates a sense of privacy around one's same-sex sexual desires, and it helps one achieve sexual contact with other similar individuals without having to reveal one's own personal identity (Tikkanen and Ross 2003; Maratea 2011). Within this contextualized interplay, users can engage with cyberspace in ways that supplant their offline desires that may not actually be afforded to them "in real life" because of the stigmas attached to most non-normative sexual ways of being (Doring 2009; Usher and Morrison 2010). For this matter, media outlets, including the Internet, serve as localities for sexually marginalized populations to build community and to construct a sense of a sexual self outside of the larger heteronormative society (Fejes and Petrich 1993). In providing an accessible and anonymous place for people who are sexually marginalized to meet others, the Internet can help in reducing same-sex stigmas and actualize a sense of normalcy around one's sexuality and sexual behaviors (Grov 2004; Grov et al. 2007).

The Internet is now the top place where gay and lesbian individuals meet their romantic partners (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). In 2008 and 2009, over 60% of gay and lesbian

individuals, regardless of age, met online, and it is the most common place for the gay and lesbian population to meet compared to any other space in the past (ibid.). Likewise, for all men who engage in some form of same-sex behavior but who may not necessarily adopt a gay identity, it has been suggested that between 40 and 52% of men seeking men for sex meet online (Liau, Millet, and Marks 2006; Grov et al. 2012). It is undeniable that the Internet is serving as a prime space for people who have been sexually marginalized in our society, and men seeking men in general; therefore, the need for researchers to understand this space and its influence on these men's lives is crucial.

Some previous studies have begun to unmask this digital impact on people's lives. For instance, gay men can investigate sexual health information, negotiate their sexuality and sexual behaviors, engage in virtual sex, and cruise for offline sexual encounters with other individuals (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Grov et al. 2007). From a public health perspective, engaging in cybersex and other sexual self-pleasures (e.g., auto-stimulation) is physiologically safe online (Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000); however, for many men seeking men, the Internet has become a new context to cruise not just for sexual pleasures, but also, for these offline sexual encounters as well (Tikkanen and Ross 2003).

Other studies have pointed to some of the positive aspects of the Internet on stigmatized sexualities, mainly for identity development. Like most media, the Internet is a space where individuals are forging their identities (Kellner 1995). Users actively choose which sites to visit in order to carve out their sense of self and space online (Wakeford 2000; Doring 2009). In the spaces people choose to log-on to, people can examine how others construct their identities, and with this anonymity that the Internet affords, individuals can play with the construction of their own identity based on how they see themselves or how they want to be seen within a certain

online space (Wakeford 2000; Alexander and Losh 2010). Accordingly then, the discourses circulated through this new media are lending to how people are conceiving of and constructing their identity categories (Gray 2009).

This space that the Internet has created for people to construct their identities is helpful for gay men. Peterson (2000) and Tikkanen and Ross (2000) found the Internet to be useful for men during their coming out process, and Mustanski and colleagues (2011) argue that the Internet has helped youth develop their sexual identity. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth can often find support online, where the Internet has served as a buffer for these youth to protect against the negative health outcomes of homophobia in the offline world (Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012). Also, the Internet allows men seeking men, who may not be "out" about their sex lives, to not have to go to gay bars or other gay venues in order to explore their sexuality (Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). It is easier to know who is gay online, making it easier to talk to other men (Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012). Likewise, the Internet has allowed geographically isolated men to explore their sexuality (Tikkanen and Ross 2000); people can search for sexual similar others and possibly acculturate into sexual subcultures (Ross et al. 2007; Maratea 2011). Whether geographically isolated, in the process of coming out, or just exploring one's sexual desires and curiosities, the Internet provides a space between fantasy and physical interaction, which can help people develop a sense of their sex lives (Peterson 2000; Tikkanen and Ross 2003). With the evolving sexual norms of personal advertisements and their explicit sexual content (Tewksbury 2003, 2006), it is imperative to study this new context of Internet cruising in order to comprehend novel forms of sexual behavior and desires and their implications for sexual identity development and sexual health outcomes (Tikkanen and Ross 2003).

It is within this over-arching literature on the Internet, sexuality, and gay men's experiences online that I seek to situate this particular study. Because the Internet now serves as the prime place for gay men and lesbian women are meeting each other, I seek to explore *why* this is the case and *what* does this fact tell one about gay men of a particular generation in society today. Likewise, for men meeting on a website that is explicitly sexual in nature, how does this space influence men's perceptions of their sexuality? I explore the meaning-making of Adam4Adam.com in the lives of my informants who use the space in order to highlight why this space is important for gay men and how it shapes their ideas around gay identity, desire, and HIV in order to qualitatively add to this previous literature.

Theoretical Frameworks and Previous Literatures

Toward a Critical Queer Examination of Gay Men's Lives and the Internet

I employ a theoretical framework that is inspired in queer theory, queer of color critique, as well as empirical research on gay men's lives in the social sciences to explore the issues that emerged during my interviews. Queer theory situates sexuality as being a product of power, and within this system of power, certain identities and practices are given more legitimacy than other sexualities (Jagose 1996; Sullivan 2003). For this matter, I take sexuality to be something that is constructed, where sexual meanings, identities, and categories are socially situated within a given historical point of time and negotiated inter-subjectively (Epstein 1994). Sexual identity, then, is the complex developmental outcome of the individual interacting with society, and consequently, self-identifying with the sexual label that society has constructed as appropriate for someone who has particular sexual desires and engages in particular sexual behaviors. Within this schema, sexual desire is one's erotic wants and fantasies – how one thinks about one's sex life (Laumann et al. 1994) – where in many societies today, one's gender desires (i.e., a desire

for a man and/or a woman and/or a person with another gender identity/presentation) often plays a main role in the construction of one's sexual identity. Likewise, sexual behaviors are what people do sexually (i.e., their sexual practices) that can range from masturbation and oral sex to anal and vaginal sex (ibid.). Sexual behaviors can also encompass different practices of "safe" sex, such as using a condom or not, or any other practices that encompass things people can do when interacting sexually with one's self or with others. The social meanings attached to these desires and behaviors then often get internalized – integrating these attitudes and meanings into one's own sense of self and leading to individual's adopting an accordance sexual identity. Again though, these identities, desires, and behaviors are embedded in systems of social meaning and shaped by social institutions, and they should not be seen as essential or natural (Epstein 1994).

One main undertaking in unmasking the social meaning of sexual identities and relations was Adrienne Rich's (1980) concept of "compulsory heterosexuality." This concept is often credited as a foundational idea within queer theory for it describes heterosexuality, in Western societies, as an institution that tries to make obligatory heterosexual relations, constructing non-heterosexual relations, such as lesbian relations, as abnormal (Rich 1980). Building off of this concept, Gayle Rubin, in her influential 1984 essay titled "Thinking Sex," introduced the idea of the charmed circle. According to Rubin, sexuality gets politically mapped and valued along binary lines of being "good" or "bad" in these concentric circles that are further divided in sections. In most Western societies, sex is often seen as dangerous and constructed within a negativity discourse (Rubin 1993 [1984]). However, certain sexuality, primarily marital, reproductive heterosexuality, is hierarchically ranked as the most socially respectable, conferring upon individuals who enact and embody this form of sexuality many rewards, including legal,

social, physical, material, and institutional benefits (ibid.). This creates an erotic stigma against those who do not measure up to this mode of sexual enactment and embodiment, relegating non-heterosexual individuals and their practices to a lower realm of social approvability (ibid.).

Less than a decade after Rubin used the charmed circle to illustrate different forms of sexual exclusion and inclusion, Eve Sedgwick (1990) elucidated how the homosexual/heterosexual binary permeates every part of social life, serving to constantly reify heterosexuality as normal and natural. Similarly, Michael Warner (1991) coined the term "heteronormativity" in order to show how the privileging of heterosexuality permeates society, granting social and political privileges to those who are heterosexual and relegating those who are not to a marginal status position. Heteronormativity is a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices in society that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality (Warner 1991, 1993; Valocchi 2005). This sexual binary also relies upon the gender binary of man and woman, where under heteronormativity, the gender roles of masculine men and feminine women are naturalized (Valocchi 2005). Although many people may experience these binary sexual and gender categories as fixed and natural, queer theory argues that experiences of a fixed self-identity only point to ideological power and how this power is internalized (ibid.). In turn, queer theory seeks to expose and trouble these binaries in order to reveal the instability of these hegemonic formations, and queer theory believes that in studying lived experiences, which are more complex than hegemonic ideologies, is one way to expose the incoherency of the larger social order (ibid.). Therefore, in studying identity and marginal lived experiences, I seek not to reify these categories as natural, but rather to expose the larger mechanisms in society that are producing these identities in individual lives (Epstein 1994).

Building off this concept of heteronormativity, Lisa Duggan (2002) introduced "homonormativity" to describe the political strategies used within sexually marginalized communities that reinforce heteronormative institutions and mores. Sexually marginalized individuals can claim sexual citizenship through asserting that gay and lesbian individuals are just like their heterosexual counterparts, except for their same-sex object choice (Duggan 2003). Basically, one can view homonormativity as women and men in same-sex relationships trying to seek rights and legitimacy within society, and for them to gain these rights, they must assimilate and reify the proper ways of being and practicing sexualities (i.e., as illustrated in Rubin's charmed circle). Gay men and lesbian women who can or do assimilate into heteronormative structures (e.g., monogamy, marriage, having children) and conform to the congruent gender roles receive more rights and privileges than those who do not – or cannot – assimilate (Warner 1999). This creates a division within these communities, where people get divided along the lines of being the "good" gays and the "bad" gays (Warner 1999; Duggan 2003). Although homonormativity may allow certain sexually marginalized individuals to get rid of certain stigmas within society, ultimately, this strategy reifies the dominant heteronormative structures of society, which still marginalize all non-heterosexual individuals, to varying degrees, no matter how many rights one may gain.

Heteronormativity (and by extension, homonormativity) must also be understood as part of racialized social formations as well. In her article "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," Cathy Cohen (1997) argues that heteronormativity is not just based upon regulating LGBT-identified individuals but also is legitimated through abjecting other non-normative sexualities, bodies, and lived experiences (e.g., inter-racial relationships, the welfare queen). Heteronormativity cannot be understood as being legitimated just through the

heterosexual/homosexual binary but also through white supremacist ideologies as well (Cohen 1997; Ferguson 2004). Echoing the authors who contributed to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Roderick Ferguson (2004) calls for scholars to implement a queer of color critical analysis in order to show how social formations are in and through the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and class. For Ferguson, capitalism allowed for diverse sexualities and social formations to spring up; however, scholars assumed that these "perversities" were inherently a negative part of industrialization because they deviated from the white, heteropatriarchal norm. Therefore, one must understand how heteronormativity works in conjunction with not just gender, but also racial and classed formations in order to understand and challenge how these norms operate within society. A transformational politics of a heteronormative society does not view heteronormativity as a singular, isolated set of power relations, but seeks to expose how these structures of power all work together to marginalize particular status groups in society. Therefore, this thesis is informed by a queer theoretical framework to critically explore the experiences of gay men of the Internet generation within larger ideologies and structures of power relations, which shape friendship, race and the body, and HIV/AIDS – issues I now turn.

Friendship in Gay Men's Lives

With the proliferation of the discourses on sexuality, procreative sexuality became the norm that the state and the social sciences attempted to document and enforce (Foucault 1978), and as Whitney Davis (2010: 262) notes, "…*the state itself* claimed to produce [and to protect] the care and love that an individual man might once have extended interpersonally to another man…Friendship as such, then, increasingly became an obsolete reality…" (emphasis in the original). With the death of friendship, people began to wonder what men were doing with each other in homosocial spheres (Foucault 1989). Likewise, through the discourse on sexuality and

procreation, any sexual relations between people of the opposite sex were seen as a romantic relationship and not as a friendship (Nardi 1999). Homosexuality was then brought into discourse to prohibit affectionate, romantic, and eroticized relations for these men in monosexual spaces and to promote procreative (i.e., heterosexual) sexuality as the sexual norm of society (Davis 2010).

However, as Peter Nardi (1999) states in the beginning of his book *Gay Men's Friendships*: "…gay people have a different way of doing friendship, for so the story goes" (1). Modernity has led to the rise of "plastic sexuality," where sexuality is freed from its reproductive demands, and therefore, people can engage in everyday social experiments in building a diverse set of relationships (Giddens 1992). Gay men have adopted the identity of homosexuality, which was first used to pathologize them (Foucault 1978), where this homosexual discourse cannot be fully used to divide affectionate and romantic relations for gay men anymore. For example, in his mixed methods study on gay men (including 161 questionnaires and 30 interviews), Nardi (1999) found that for gay men, sex is often a component to building these relationships. Likewise, Judith Stacey (2004; 2005) discovered, in her 50 family life history interviews with self-identified gay men, that anonymous sexual encounters can even lead to conventional (i.e., monogamous) relationships. Nardi (1999) calls on society to question the heterosexual assumption that separates sex from ideas around friendship in order to view new relational possibilities that are present within current society. Nonetheless, this discourse of procreation that separated sex (and hence, romance and kinship) from friendship is still often the dominant discourse, where now, in an age of "plastic sexuality," friendship is still divided from the sexual, making these relations that gay men form still seen as non-normative (Giddens 1992; Nardi 1999).

Nonetheless, to search for a sexual partner, often in a public place, has begun to be transformed by the Internet. This act, known as cruising, has been a linchpin of gay culture, often because it served as a restorative process, where gay men could find others who shared their similar desires and cast off sexual repressions that a heteronormative society had placed on them (Lynch 2002). Sociologist Laud Humphreys (1970) in his groundbreaking, controversial book *Tearoom Trade* showed how discrimination against men who desired to have sex with other men led many of these men to clandestinely cruise for sex in public restrooms. Although several decades later and with great advancements in LGBT rights, Reece and Dodge (2004) still discovered in their study of cruising on college campuses that cruising helped many young gay men develop their sexual identity and establish a social network with other like-minded individuals. Judith Stacey (2004) reveals similar results in her study on how cruising allows gay men to form families, and she argues that gay male cruising culture yields social and familial consequences. However, technology is changing interpersonal relations, and it is reshaping people's lives (Shapiro 2010). Therefore, "…the Internet has offered a new 'stage' to those outlined by Humphreys 35 years ago" (Ashford 2006: 288), leading me to explore how the Internet has shaped cruising and men's relations with other men.

In the first analytical chapter of this thesis, my informants' voices question this divide between sex and friendship through showing how friendship building is unfolding for gay men on a sexual website. Here, I uncover the ambivalence between making friends within a sexualized space. I also explore how the "political economy of sexuality" is shaping young gay men's lives today and their search for friendship. Padilla (2007) defines the political economy of sexuality as the study of how macro-level political-economic transformations shape the meaning of sexuality for individual sexual actors. Likewise, Cantú (2009) shows how a queer materialist

perspective is crucial in understanding how capitalism works to marginalize those individuals whose sexual practices and identities fall outside of the realm of "proper" sexuality under heteronormativity. As one will see, this political economy of sexuality helps explain why young gay men are going online to build friendships instead of going to other offline venues. Lastly, I will also show how cruising for friendship can challenge heteronormative society while also subscribing to some of its normative discourses.

Race and the Body in Gay Men's Lives

I use the term race and other social categories (e.g., gender, sexuality) in this thesis to be understood as social constructions[1]. Race is formed by social, economic and political forces, which assigns racial meaning to particular bodies (Omi and Winant 1994). For example, Omi and Winant show that when European colonizers came into contact with people of a different phenotype than themselves, these colonizers, through extermination, the institution of slavery, and other coercive tactics, set out to establish themselves as different than and superior to indigenous and African people. One main way this difference was established was through biological racism, where different racial groups were seen to have distinct, innate characteristics, with white people possessing the superior characteristics (ibid.). Although disproven, this biological view of race still influences the knowledge and construction around race today, and it works to mask the historical construction of race (see McKittrick 2010). Nonetheless, race is socio-historical, and it varies over time and across cultures. Race is only given its meaning through the process of racialization, where previously unclassified relationships and groups are given racial meaning (Omi and Winant 1994). A system of racial meaning has become a central axis within all social relations and institutions, and therefore, analyzing how race is structured and structures society is crucial to uncovering power and inequality.

In chapter three, I offer up a queer of color analysis to suggest that the structure of Adam4Adam.com and the practices that gay users engage in lead to the re-marginalization of all non-heterosexual individuals, though in qualitatively different ways. Sociologist Roderick Ferguson (2004) defines a queer of color critique as an interrogation of "…social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class…" (149). These categories are not discrete social formations, but rather they are bound up with one another in and through the production of culture (Ferguson 2004). For example, heteronormativity gained its legitimacy as the hegemonic norm in society not only through abjecting LGBT people but also through abjecting people of color as possessing "abnormal" sexualities as well (ibid.). The ideological construction of the black matriarch, the welfare queen, and the black buck legitimizes white, monogamous, heterosexuality as the norm. Today, racial meaning often operates through neoliberal discourses, which rely upon the idea that racism supposedly does not exist anymore because people of color theoretically have legal equality; therefore, within the realm of the erotic, acts like "personal preference" are seen as life choices devoid of any discriminatory beliefs (Holland 2012). In chapter three, I specifically show how these neoliberal and homophilous discourses - the tendency for people to form relationships with similar others based upon similar statuses and/or values (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954) - lead to the objectification of race and its comparison to other hobbies such as hiking or cooking. Exploring how racial meaning shapes desire for young gay men within this online arena will reveal how power is operating on dating websites.

In this same chapter, I also explore issues around the body. I take the body to be the physical attributes of an individual that allows one to relate to other individuals and to the world (Kregan 2006). The meaning of this physical experience of existence (i.e., the body) is symbolically and materially constructed and assigned particular meanings within particular

spaces, which can vary over time (Kregan 2006; Puwar 2008). Meanings assigned to bodies are constructed through power, where certain bodies are privileged and others are subjugated.

As research has shown, these physical bodies, especially around muscularity and masculinity, have been central to the personal and cultural identities of gay men (for an overview, see Wood 2004). Men, in general, and gay men, specifically, are inundated with muscular images through advertisements, fitness magazines, pornography, and many other media outlets (Duggan and McCreary 2004). Consuming these images and seeing muscularity as part of one's manhood has led to muscle dysmorphia (Leit, Gray, and Pope 2002) and body dissatisfaction and social physique anxiety among many men (Duggan and McCreary 2004). However, compared to heterosexual men, gay men tend to diet more, be more afraid of becoming fat, and are more dissatisfied with their bodies and degree of muscularity (Kaminski et al. 2005). Gay men also hold more distorted cognitions about the importance of having an ideal physique compared to heterosexual men, where gay men are more at risk of developing eating disorders (ibid.). In fact, being affiliated with a gay community increased one's body dissatisfaction because "…the intersection of gender and sexual orientation compounds body dissatisfaction among gay men, since it reinforces their tendency to objectify both themselves and each other, and to judge their bodies by diverging and conflicting standards" (Wood 2004: 47). Therefore, the design of Adam4Adam.com, as well as the bodies in people's profiles and the pornography advertisements on the website, are not only placing muscularity, and by proxy masculinity, as the top tier of desirability, but it could also be lending to this exacerbation of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among gay men.

To explore these issues of the body in chapter three, I turn to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell (2005 [1995]), hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of

gender practices within a certain context and historical period "…which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy…" (77). Masculinity is shaped through how men relate to one another as well as how men relate to women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). For example, gay men have a subordinated masculinity in relation to heterosexual men, and men of color have a marginalized masculinity in relation to white men (Connell 2005 [1995]). For Connell, physical bodies are intricately linked to the meaning of gender, and therefore, bodies are inescapable from the construction of masculinity and femininity.

Under hegemonic masculinity then, a hierarchy of gay masculinities manifest itself, where gay men often strive to mitigate forms of oppression – where one of these forms takes place through the physical body (Phua 2007; Slevin and Linneman 2010). Gay men who desire to be muscular, masculine, and "straight-acting" try to adhere to heterosexual displays of masculinity in order to assuage their subordinate position (Phua and Kaufman 2003; Phua 2007). This desire for heterosexual displays of masculinity relegates large bodies, older bodies, non-white bodies, and feminine bodies to lower realms within this gay masculine hierarchy (Taywaditep 2002; Phua 2007; Slevin and Linneman 2010). For example, "…the stereotypes that typify gay Asian American men as non-manly compromise their location in the racial and sexuality hierarchies within a hegemonic masculinity frame" (Phua 2007: 916). This hierarchy of gay masculinities re-stabilizes hegemonic masculinity, which in turn marginalizes all gay men. Gay men, in wanting to mitigate being oppressed, reify their own oppression (Slevin and Linneman 2010). Through exploring issues of the body under hegemonic masculinity, in conjunction with race, I seek to unmask the operations of desire in these gay men's lives.

HIV/AIDS in Gay Men's Lives

Most of the literature on men seeking men and online cruising focuses on the epidemiological outcomes of these behaviors (Mustanski, Lyons, and Garcia 2011). Men who seek sex with other men and meet online tend to have more sexual partners than men who seek sex with other men in other arenas, and these more adventurous sex-seeking men use the Internet as a tool to find these numerous sexual partners (Mustanski 2007). With the accessibility of online personal advertisements, men can find others for sex, and these men are more likely to engage in unprotected and other risky sexual behaviors (Garofalo et al. 2007; Klein 2009, 2010). Within most of these studies then, the Internet is constructed as a cause for the still high prevalent HIV rates among men who have sex with men (Blackwell 2010). The majority of these studies found that younger men who identify as gay are more likely to seek partners online and engage in these riskier behaviors than other men seeking men populations (Klein 2010). These studies that examine the way the Internet has impacted HIV for men seeking men have come to dominate the majority of the literature and discourse on the Internet and its impact on men seeking men's sexualities. Although this literature definitely sparked my interest in this topic, as one will see, I do not necessarily take up in my own study this debate on whether these men engage in "riskier" behaviors or not. Instead, I seek to qualitatively add to these studies to uncover the meaning of HIV and risk in the men's lives as they navigate their sexual lives and relations on the Internet.

In qualitatively exploring how discourses around HIV/AIDS shapes gay men's behavior, in chapter four, I use the concept of *doing sexual responsibility*. This concept is rooted in West and Zimmerman's (1987) conception of "doing gender," where they argue that one "does gender" on an interactional level that reifies institutional arrangements of men as dominant and

women as subordinate. Gender is the activity or accomplishment (something people *do*) of managing one's behaviors within everyday life, in which, one's sex category would not be held suspect. Gender then is constituted through interaction; where when people "do" gender, it appears to be "natural" through bolstering sex and sex categories. Gender becomes a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" that is constituted through and embedded within social interaction (West & Zimmerman 1987: 126).

One of the key points of this theory is how people are held accountable by how they "do gender." West and Zimmerman (1987: 136) state, "The notion of accountability also encompasses those actions undertaken so that they are specifically unremarkable and thus not worthy of more than a passing remark, because they are seen to be in accord with culturally approved standards." Within this interactional level, one will always be held accountable because people are always trying to know the gender of the other person, whom one is interacting with. If one "does gender" appropriately, this person will make gender and sex and their unequal institutional arrangement appear "natural." This accountability and gender assessment needs to be explored in order to seek social change and reveal that gender is something people *do* and not something that people *are*. For example, "...household labor is designated as 'women's work,' but that for a woman to engage in it and a man not to engage in it is to draw on and exhibit the 'essential nature' of each" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 144). That is, women are not "naturally" propelled to do household labor, but rather, their womanhood is measured through doing this type of work. In doing this labor, women are seen to have the "essential" characteristics of domestic work and men are not. By challenging this conflation of household labor with womanhood, all individuals within a household can begin contributing equally to this type of

labor, lessening the subordination of women that is produced through this division of labor and its re-signification of the gender binary.

For the purpose of my analysis, doing sexual responsibility refers to how men on Adam4Adam.com should know and state their HIV status and safe sex practices on their profile, as well as screen other people's profiles. Doing sexual responsibility should be understood as being shaped by larger cultural discourses around sexual health, though this doing sexual responsibility happens on the interactional level. As Simon and Gagnon (1984) explained, cultural scenarios provide the collective instructions for a sexual conduct. These instructions are then mediated through the interpersonal conduct of everyday life, and one's intrapsychic desires and fantasies shape how one erotically experiences sex (Simon and Gagnon 1984; Laumann and Gagnon 1995). Also, West and Zimmerman (1987) noted that "doing gender" is always contextualized within a given setting. Therefore, this doing sexual responsibility should be understood within the interactional space of online male-for-male dating and hookup sites, and it will most likely differ in other contexts and among interactions of people embracing different gender identities and expressions. Nonetheless, I take doing sexual responsibility as the achievement of managing one's presentation of one's cyber-self within Adam4Adam.com that reifies larger public health arrangements and discourses about HIV and safe sex.

Throughout the rest of this thesis, the queer theoretical paradigm will be generally applied, along with these other literatures and concepts, in order to tie together the findings of this project. In chapter two, I will show how a heteronormative society has hyper-sexualized the lives of gay men while removing important dimensions of their human interactions and everyday lives. This process may create ambivalence in the lives of my informants who use a sexual website in order to build meaningful relationships —that are not sexual— with other gay men. I

will explore how their search for "something more" on Adam4Adam.com challenges these heteronormative discourses promoting stereotypes of gay men as being hyper-sexual and how gay men building friendships with one another can be a radical challenge to the dominant heteronormative social order. From there, in chapter three, I specifically apply a queer of color critical analysis in order to explore how specific racial and bodily desires that my informants explore on Adam4Adam.com creates a hierarchy of desirability among gay men. However, this hierarchy relies upon dominant heteronormative understandings of sexuality; therefore, I highlight how specific racial and bodily desires actually marginalize all sexually marginalized individuals, just to varying degrees. In the last analytical chapter, I carry this previous argument over to explore the stigmatization of people with HIV. In a heteronormative society that constructs gay sexuality as dangerous and links it automatically to HIV, I uncover how gay men navigate their anxieties about sexual behaviors on Adam4Adam.com. These anxieties lead to gay men abjecting HIV positive individuals and other "promiscuous" gay men. However, by pointing to how gay men find pleasure through online flirting and how these heteronormative discourses often fail in intimate, interpersonal sexual interactions, I show how these larger discourses and structures can be challenged, so that gay men can find more pleasurable ways to explore their sexuality that does not rely upon abjecting other gay men. Throughout these subsequent chapters then, I intend to show how heteronormativity influences how my informants experience and navigate their sex lives on Adam4Adam.com, but also how heteronormativity fails and can be challenged through my informants creative practices on this website. I seek to answer Epstein's (1994) call to study sexually marginalized individuals (in this study, gay men) in order to expose larger issues of power, meaning, and organization in society and to show that no part of social life is fully comprehensible without studying sexual meanings.

Methodology

The Research Project

For this project[2], I implemented complementary qualitative methodological approaches on the website Adam4Adam.com - one of the most popular online gay personal websites in the United States (Dawley 2007). Upon IRB approval, I had to first create an Adam4Adam.com account to even access the website. I made a username like "UTReseacher" (my profile was often blocked and deleted [an issue addressed below] so my profile username would change slightly each time). From there, I filled out the demographic characteristics that the website required for me to select in order to make an account, but I left the other fields blank. I also did not put a picture of myself in my profile. The text within my account also briefly detailed the purpose of my profile and the study (see Appendix D for an example of a profile I used to recruit participants).

Following this account creation, I visited Adam4Adam.com around one to two hours every day. On the first four days on Adam4Adam.com (July 31st to August 3rd of 2012), I gathered 100 profiles in order to get a better understanding of this space and the people inhabiting it. I logged on day one in the afternoon, day two in the morning, day three in the late evening, and day four in the evening. As Klein and colleagues (2010) suggest, different men are online at different times, so in order to get a better capture of the space, a researcher needs to explore a website during different periods of the day.

As soon as I logged on to Adam4Adam.com, I would set my parameters to the Austin metro area only. From there, I would take a screen capture of the first 25 profiles online at that moment. These screen captures were saved in a locked file on my computer, and all identifying information within the profiles was edited out (see, for example, Appendix M). These 25 profiles

represented the latest 25 men to log on to the website during the same time that I was logging on. With these profile images on my computer, I would examine first the demographic characteristics that the men filled out about themselves. From there, I would also peruse what the men wrote about themselves in their profiles, paying particular attention to how they described their personal lives and hobbies as well as their sexual desires and interests.

I followed a grounded theory approach to analyze these texts and used coding (see Charmaz 2006), where my codes were reflective of the data as close as possible, while also examining the action that was emerging within this cyberspace. Through perusing profiles and interacting with the interface of the website, I become a "participant-experiencer," where I strove to experience the website in the same way that other users may also experience it (Garcia et al. 2009). As this participant-experiencer, I spent hours and days clicking on numerous profiles, trying to get a feel of how a person logging on to this website would use the interface, while browsing all of the various profiles of the men on this website in Austin. By being a participant-experiencer, I was better informed to draft my interview guide and to engage in a more nuanced interview process with the men I interviewed as I was more aware about the particularities of Adam4Adam.com.

After doing this preliminary analysis of the profiles that I collected, I also conducted in-person, in-depth interviews with 15 men in the Austin area who used Adam4Adam.com for sexual purposes. All of these men were between the ages of 22 to 28 with a mean age of 24.8. Three men identified as white, 3 identified as white Hispanic[3], 3 identified as Latino or Hispanic, 2 identified as Black, 1 identified as Black and Latino, 1 identified as Turkish and Greek, 1 identified as Asian, and 1 identified as White and Indian. They also had a range of educational backgrounds and occupations (see Appendix F for a full table of the informants' demographics).

For purposes of confidentiality, all informants' names have been changed, and I delineated each informant by how he described his own sexual and racial identities.

To recruit these men, I sent a block message to users on the website who were between the ages of 21 to 30, that is, men who were born between 1982 and 1991. Those born in and after 1982 are known as the Millenial or Internet generation (Rawlins, Indvik, and Johnson 2008). I selected this age range because I wanted participants who grew up with the Internet as a ubiquitous part of their everyday lives – people in this Internet generation. I also selected people over 21 because I wanted to know why people were going online instead of going to other gay spaces, such as gay bars, which typically have age restrictions, where someone must be 21 or over to enter these spaces. The block message briefly detailed the study, and it provided users a link to the study's website where they could obtain further details about the research project. The block message read as follow:

> My name is Brandon Robinson, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. I am conducting a research project on the role of Adam4Adam.com in the lives of men who use the website and its impact on sexuality. Specifically, I am exploring how this site shapes one's sexuality, sexual desires, and sexual behaviors.
>
> I am looking for men in the Austin area who use this site for sexual hookups. I am seeking to meet in-person with you in order to interview you for this research project. The interview will last around an hour, and it will be completely confidential. If you are interested in participating in the study or want to know more about the project, please e-mail me at barobinson@utexas.edu or visit the study's website at www.sexualityandtheinternet.wordpress.com.

Making an official project website is often essential for Internet-based research, especially when recruiting hard-to-reach populations on sensitive subject matters (Klein et al. 2010). This website provided the opportunity for individuals to find out more about the study, at a time convenient for them, and it gave a link to my official profile on the University of Texas at Austin website, establishing me as a legitimate researcher (ibid.). I identified all of the study informants through this particular method.

I personally conducted the interviews between August and December of 2012. The interviews took place during daytime on the University of Texas at Austin campus. I interviewed my participants either in my office or in a reserved room at the library while making sure we had privacy. There was no compensation for participating in this study; all informants freely volunteered their time to be interviewed. The interviews lasted around 1 hour, and they were semi-structured, where topics could be explored openly and led by my informant's experiences and points of view (Esterberg 2001). I structured the questions with less threatening questions near the beginning and more sensitive questions near the end; this structuring of questions helped my informants feel more comfortable with me as an interviewer and be prepared to be forthcoming with their answers to personal questions once they established a relationship of trust with me (ibid.).

I designed an interview guide in order to examine different themes and explore potential answers to my research questions. The major themes covered during the interview were: profiles on Adam4Adam.com, using the Internet to find sex, and sexual health and behaviors (see Appendix E for the full interview guide). I gathered demographic data at the end of the interview when my informants may have felt more comfortable to disclose this information to me. Asking this information at the beginning of the interview may have set the wrong tone and told my

informants that I just want quick facts and not detailed, narrative accounts (Weiss 1994). My informants were also explicitly told from the beginning that they could skip any question(s), hopefully establishing a more mutual relationship with my informants and giving them some control over the interview process (González-López 2011). After each interview, I immediately wrote a quick journal entry, detailing the participant's demeanor and personality during the interview and my interactions with the informant (Taylor and Bogdan 1998; Esterberg 2001). These brief journal entries also helped shape how I engaged with and understood my informant's experiences and the data.

I recorded the interviews, and later, I personally transcribed each interview. I then coded these transcriptions also following a grounded theory approach. This method allows my informants to speak for themselves, where I strove to not impose my own theoretical framework, but rather, created new insights based upon my participants' accounts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Charmaz 2006). I coded by first attaching labels to segments of the data, describing what each segment is about (Charmaz 2006). From there, I would write memos, which were my preliminary analytical notes about the action occurring within the coding of my data. I sought to uncover the tacit meanings within my informants' accounts of their experiences in order to find the intent of *how* and *why* my informants do certain things (ibid.). I continued this process while conducting my interviews in order to theoretically sample my subsequent interviews, trying to get more data related to these emerging categories. I continued interviewing until I reached theoretical saturation with my sample size, where my interviews yielded no new theoretical insights (Weiss 1994; Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

Qualitative Research and the Internet Generation: Lessons and Challenges

As I conducted my interviews it became evident: face-to-face interaction helps the researcher to establish rapport with the participant, which often affords for a more meaningful and in-depth interview to take place (Weiss 1994). With in-person interviews, I was able to identify emerging issues significant to my informants' experiences with Adam4Adam.com that I followed up on with further probing questions to further explore men's experiences around these themes. Accordingly, in-person interviews provide a setting for me to notice physical cues of my informants, which was useful data as well. In all these regards, doing in-person, in-depth interviews was a strong methodological approach in achieving these aims.

Qualitative approaches are at the center of sexualities research because these methodologies search for interpretative meanings within the lives, experiences, and practices of people who are sexually marginalized, and these approaches often do not take sexualities to be an essential condition (Gamson 2000). Qualitative methodologies take as their epistemology that all knowledge is socially situated (ibid.). One talks to individuals on a personal level, where the research participants share their own perspectives and experiences (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Since everyday life has become mediated by and through the Internet (Murthy 2008; Beneito-Montagut 2011), especially for the Millennial or Internet generations, qualitatively studying the Internet is crucial to understanding the sex lives of sexually marginalized individuals, gay men in particular.

As a complex and multi-faceted structure, the Internet has proven to be a difficult space for researchers to study (Sade-Beck 2004). Researchers who want to explore cyberspace may not want to limit their investigation to just the online realm, as the Internet is not an isolated space, existing in its own vacuum (Garcia et al. 2009; Beneito-Montagut 2011). In fact, researchers

studying the Internet may want to implement a variety of methods – both online and offline – as "Researchers who use online data-gathering methods exclusively are in danger of focusing on findings arising from the sites themselves, thus missing additional themes that are expressed otherwise; their research will not be as rich as studies based on integrated methodologies" (Sade-Beck 2004: 50). These integrated methodologies not only get at the diffuse nature of the Internet in people's lives, but it also troubles the dichotomy that some scholars have constructed in their separation of the "virtual" from the "real" world as if the two are not constitutive and always influencing one another (Garcia et al. 2009; Beneito-Montagut 2011).

Qualitative researchers studying the Internet often have to develop skills to analyze visual and textual data as the Internet turns the act of writing into speech, where the text of users serves to constitute the online space (Sade-Beck 2004; Garcia et al. 2009). As cultural meanings are encoded within language, discourse analysis is used to examine how power is functioning within these texts of this space (Kellner 1995). Discourse analysis enables one to understand the constructive content of texts and their relation to the meaning-making within a space and within the larger social order (Gill 2007). For these reasons, I explored the discourses and images being used within the website's design and infrastructure and within people's profiles in order to uncover the meaning-making that is constituting and constituted within this specific space. I then conducted in-depth interviews in order to not limit my analysis to the online realm, but rather, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how the Internet impacts the lives on- and offline of the people who inhabit this space.

One challenge I encountered with this method was that I was repeatedly flagged for spamming on this website, and I often had my accounts blocked. As Klein and colleagues (2010) suggested, I had other profiles already on hand to continue recruiting individuals when previous

accounts were blocked. Eventually though, the website barred my IP address, and I had to rely on colleagues to make accounts for me. Recruiting hard-to-reach populations who are using a website for purposes other than being recruited for research (i.e., dating and sex) could partly explain why this study took 4 months to recruit just 15 participants (see Klein et al. 2010 for more information on this issue).

Despite the difficulty of actually interviewing in-person 15 participants, I was still surprised that many men had an initial interest in being a part of this research topic. During recruitment, I received over 100 e-mails from different men, who had some initial interest in being interviewed. As I thought that recruitment for this project was going to be quite hard, I was, at first, taken aback by all the men's interest in being part of this study. For various reasons (e.g., not within the age range of this particular study), I could not interview all of these men. Nonetheless, this outpouring of interest pointed to the fact that these men felt that this study was important and wanted people to know how Adam4Adam.com affected their lives and the lives of other gay men.

Another challenge is locating gay men to interview can be difficult because some people do not specifically identify with these identity categories, or they may be resistant towards scientific research for fear of being portrayed as deviants (Gamson 2000). For example, although I sought to interview all types of men who used Adam4Adam.com, regardless of how they identified themselves with regard to their sexual identity, all of my informants self-identified as gay, queer, or homosexual. As Robinson and Moskowitz (2013) recently found when surveying men seeking men on Craigslist.org, gay men compared to bisexual- and heterosexual-identified men seeking men were more likely to meet offline the men they cruised for online. As having an offline sexual encounter through Adam4Adam.com was a criteria for being in this study, this

stipulation may account for why all of the men who self-selected into this study mostly identified as gay, with one identifying as queer and one identifying as homosexual.

Likewise, bisexual- and heterosexual-identified men seeking men may have feared more than gay-identified men of having their sex lives exposed. Providing phone or online interviews may have lessened this fear; however, I chose to conduct in-person interviews for the reasons stated above, possibly affecting which individuals chose to self-select into my study. However, I did try to be mindful of this ethical dilemma by only getting verbal, and not written consent (González-López 2011), from my informants in order to have no paper trail of their identities in case they were not "out" about their sexual behaviors and/or identities. Nonetheless, only self-identified gay, queer, and homosexual men ended up participating in this study. Although I do not take sexual identity to be an essential category, many of my informants experienced their sexual identity as deeply part of their identity and as shaping their practices (as I will discuss in the following chapters). Therefore, I do find that only self-identified gay, homosexual, and queer individuals chose to participate in this study to be significant, as this self-identity most likely shaped the experiences of my informants, and hence, the findings of this study.

On this issue of self-selection, it must also be noted that the men who participated in this study had to, on some level, be comfortable and willing to engage in these conversations with me. In fact, some individuals who initially contacted me to be interviewed decided not to participate because they did not want to talk in-depth about their sex lives. Therefore, this study captures a picture of a select group of men who were willing and forthcoming enough to disclose what many would deem as quite personal topics and issues.

Despite these challenges, my identity as a queer person, who has familiarity through research and personal experience of gay dating and hookup websites, assisted me in establishing

a good rapport with my informants. Often, people participating in studies want to know that the researcher understands one's life and their concerns, and for gay research participants, they often want to know the sexual identity of the researcher (Klein et al. 2010). In fact, over half of my informants asked me before we met in person if I was gay before they agreed to participate in this study. I do not know if my informants would have participated if I did not identify as gay or if I did not disclose this information; however, I felt that disclosing my sexual identity, when asked, helped me to build trust with my informants, making them feel comfortable to participate in this research study.

On other issues of positionality, my race, as a white person, my gender presentation, as feminine, and my age, as mid-twenties, definitely influenced my interviews as well. Many of my informants felt quite comfortable disclosing to me their desire for white men and their non-desire for people of color (as examined in Chapter 3). I do not know if this candid disclosure about racialized desires would have been the same had I been a person of color. Likewise, there were no explicit demeaning comments made to me about feminine gay men (something other research on gay desire has often explored [see, for example, Clarkson 2006]). Informants may have steered clear of discussing gender presentation and desire since I occupy this marginalized gender presentation position. Also, I was born in 1987, making me part of this Internet generation as well. Being of similar age as my participants most likely made them feel more comfortable interacting with me as they could have presumed that I could relate to understanding the ubiquity of the Internet in their lives. With no doubt, my positionality interacted with and influenced my experiences with my participants, their answers to my questions, and my interpretation of the data. I was aware of these consequences and implications of the above while

conducting, transcribing, and analyzing the interviews, as well as when I examined and wrote about each one of the findings I present in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

[1] In line with Collins (2004), I do not put race or other social categories in quotation marks, as I take that all are socially constructed, and none are necessarily more constructed than others.
[2] This project was approved by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board on July 30, 2012.
[3] I use the term white Hispanic only when referring to the 3 informants who directly stated this description as their racial identity. The use of the term white Hispanic is often traced to the U.S. census, which creates racial and ethnic categories (Allen 1999). As Theodore Allen (1999) shows, the U.S. census created the categories "Hispanic" and "non-Hispanic" as an ethnic categorization separate from the race one could choose to identify with on the census. Latinos have often contested this ethnic labeling, and many have self-identified as a racial group (Almaguer 2003). This identifying of white Hispanic among my informants may point to the residual effects of this census classification that classified all Latinos as an ethnic population (i.e., as Hispanics) who could have a variation of phenotypes. Likewise, this identification with "whiteness" among 3 of my Latino informants also points to the diversity, discrimination and tensions based on skin color within communities of color. Skin color still operates as a marker of access, treatment, and privilege, even among Latino populations (Vidal-Ortiz 2004); therefore, this identification as a white Hispanic may be a way to differentiate one's self from dark-skinned Latinos or other people of color, in hopes of securing some rights in a racist society.

Chapter 2: "Beyond Sex": Cruising for Friendship on the "Gay Facebook"

"I wouldn't be where I am today if I wasn't on Adam4Adam that one day and that muscle guy hadn't emailed me and said, 'Hey, let's go to lunch.' And had I declined, where would I be? I'd probably still be miserable and a hundred pounds overweight. He really inspired me to just go on, and it was strictly platonic. I mean…we did nothing sexual," asserted Gabriel, a 25-year old self-identified white Latino college student. Gabriel and many of my informants validate research with gay men: gay men explore and develop important aspects of their lives by establishing social networks with other like-mind individuals (Reece and Dodge 2004). Gabriel explained,

> So I've met friends on Adam4Adam, and, I think, you can meet some amazing people […] It doesn't always have to be sexual. It doesn't always have to be sexually oriented. I mean on its surface, it is what it [the website] exists for […] I mean, the whole idea between NSA hookups - no strings attached hookups - is you meet; you hookup; and whether or not it goes well, you don't talk again. But sometimes if it does go well, you do want to talk again. You do want to hang out. You do want to hookup again. So yea, it's really to me, Adam4Adam has really inspired me to keep going, and to just be who you want to be, and be who you are, and don't be afraid of who you like, don't be afraid of what you like to do.

Riley, a 24-year old white college student, echoes Gabriel's words, "I can think of two people that I can honestly say changed my life in some way, and I met them…I would not have met them but for this technology. So, I'm grateful for it." Besides the voices of men like Gabriel and Riley, 86 of the 100 profiles I analyzed for this project listed that they were looking for friendship on Adam4Adam.com. Friendship and cruising have served as central organizing

principles in gay men's lives. Through cruising and friendship, gay men can develop their sexual identity and community while finding support and solace from a hostile heteronormative social world (Nardi 1999).

In this chapter, I seek to explore how the Internet has re-shaped cruising for a younger generation of gay men and why this practice is still essential to gay male culture despite the growing advancements of LGBT rights in the United States. Although a variety of men with different sexual preferences, as well as women, have engaged in acts of cruising (see, for instance, Humphreys 1970; Hammers 2009), cruising has both historically and recently still served as a unique aspect of gay culture. Through cruising, gay men can find others who share their desires and cast off sexual repressions that a heteronormative society has placed on them (Chauncey 1994; Lynch 2002). The narratives of the men I interviewed illustrate that cruising still serves as a restorative process that has changed their lives; however, the Internet has begun to transform cruising as a sexualized social ritual – these men are now also cruising for "strictly platonic" friendships. However, why are younger gay men turning to the Internet as a site to meet other men like themselves? And what are the struggles of gay men who are looking for friends and love online in a time where public acceptance of gay people is growing?

To answer these questions, I first expose the tensions that the gay men I interviewed feel when trying to seek friendships on a sexual, hookup website. This first section examines how gay men's everyday use of Adam4Adam.com challenges the larger heteronormative discourse that separates sex from friendship (see Foucault 1989; Nardi 1999). Secondly, I illustrate why young gay men now cruise online instead of cruising in other more public arenas such as gay bars. Here, I show how the political economy of sexuality (Padilla 2007) is re-shaping gay men's intimate lives, where the Internet affords a space for these men to find connection with other gay

men while maintaining their busy life schedules. Thirdly, I turn to Foucault's ideas around friendship and pleasure to suggest that younger gay men are forming gay male bonds that disrupt the heteronormative social order. In their search for "something more," the gay men in this study are challenging the hyper-sexual stereotypes of gay men, trying to find other meaningful connections that are often denied to them because of the social structure that privileges heterosexual love over gay intimacy, sex, and friendship.

Ultimately, I show the creative ways gay men are using the Internet, and specifically a sexualized space, in order to build relations with other gay men, despite the larger obstacles a heteronormative society puts in these men's way to build these connections. Through revealing how these men navigate these contradictory spaces in a search for "something more," I elucidate new, digital strategies a young, generation of gay men are engaging in to find others today that have the potential to challenge and change the larger heteronormative social order.

Section 1. "The Gay Facebook"

A. "Sort of trashy": Adam4Adam.com as a Sexualized Space

"To me, Adam4Adam is a dirty site," claimed Tito, a 23-year old self-identified white Hispanic information technologist. Tito and many of the men I interviewed viewed Adam4Adam.com as a highly sexualized space, and some of them talked about this sexual aspect of the website in negative terms. Cisco, a 24-year old Latino artist, described his first impression of the site when he searched for it online. He stated, "I Googled it myself, and I was like reading the reviews from other people. I was like, 'Oh, so people just come here to fuck. Ok, this is fun.'" Accordingly, when I asked Tanner, a 25-year old white public relations worker, how he discovered Adam4Adam.com, he replied:

> I found out about Adam4Adam just from people joking about it. Like, I remember there was one joke where somebody was like - I don't remember the punch line; I'm terrible telling jokes - but it was essentially like, "You find out your brother is on Adam4Adam, and you've just been chatting with him." It was kind of gross that whole, I don't know, incest fear we all have. And I was like well what is this Adam4Adam? And of course, where I went to school, it was sort of trashy. That's how people viewed it.

These informants' statements show that Adam4Adam.com can be viewed as a sexualized online space. Tanner and his friends found the website to be "trashy" because the website is free, allowing almost "all" gay men access to the website, including many people of color (an issue taken up in more detail in Chapter 3). This notion of trashy along with Adam4Adam.com being free is bound up with many class connotations. Ideas around trash often stem from the stereotype of "white trash" – lower-income white people who are seen as lazy, as not engaging in morally appropriate behavior compared to their middle-class white counterparts, and as being in too close contact with black and Latino people (Morris 2005). In this sense, trashy is seen as debased, wrong, and immoral, where ideas around lower class people get conflated with bad forms of behavior, including sexual behavior (Krause 1996). As a free website, Adam4Adam.com is different than most gay dating and hookup websites that often require a paid subscription fee. Gay men with a variety of different sexual and personal interests can utilize Adam4Adam.com to explore and enact their identities and sexual preferences, including searching for impersonal sex. The fact that men from all class backgrounds may be on this free website compared to other paid gay dating sites leads Tanner and his friends to see the website as "trashy" – a potential fear of inter-class contact. For many of the gay men in this study, the impersonal sex gets conflated with this class view of being debased, even though these men still use the website. Here, the sexual

nature of Adam4Adam.com gets class-based stigmatized, where users "jok[e] about it" and view the website as "kind of gross," as stated by Tanner.

Darryl, a 24-year old African American underwriter, who uses many different dating and hookup websites even told me, "Yea, now all of those profiles except for the Adam one - they're not ho sites. I only use Adam for - well that's what I created this Adam for - to hookup. The other sites are for potential dating." Darryl, who dated a man from Adam4Adam.com, sees the website as a "ho" site, especially compared to all of the other websites which "are for potential dating." This fact is not surprising as Koby, a 27-year old Asian massage therapist, described Adam4Adam.com similarly:

> If you are looking for sex, yea, I mean it's all there. And it's no strings attached. You just have to be careful with who you are sleeping with. You know, making sure you're getting all of the information that you need to keep yourself safe. But if you are looking for something other than sex, I think, it's harder just because it's easy…it's easy to have the sex component there and to search for sex.

The sexualized nature of Adam4Adam.com gets linked to notions of the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Gay men on Adam4Adam.com who view the website as a degraded space feel that they must protect themselves from contracting an STI if they are engaging in "no strings attached" sexual encounters. The de-linking of sex from friendship within a heteronormative society (Nardi 1999) makes it hard for Koby and other informants to find something "other than sex" on this website. The sexualized nature of the website foregrounds the "sex component," while other components of the website, such as social networking, get pushed to the background, making it more difficult for gay men to engage in these other non-sexual activities through Adam4Adam.com.

In fact, Tanner, the only informant in this study who did not use Adam4Adam.com to find friends but instead only used the website to find sexual encounters with other men, stated: "I mean you wouldn't log on to Adam4Adam if you weren't looking for something sexual. I mean there are those people, 'I'm just here for friends.' And I'm like, 'Sure you are, sure. That's why you have a picture of your penis hanging out and whatever.' You're not fooling me. I don't think you're fooling anybody." For Tanner, Adam4Adam.com cannot be a space to develop friendships; Adam4Adam is always about "looking for something sexual." Sex and friendship is divided; a gay man who exposes his genitals online sends a signal: he is not "just here for friends." This divide between sex and friendship in society affects all relationships; however, under heteronormativity, this divide affects male-male relationships in a specific way: a gay person who is actually seeking to build non-sexual relations with other gay men should present himself in a non-sexualized way – not with any sexual body parts.

Darryl though, who called Adam4Adam.com a "ho" site and uses the website to "hookup," ponders his own profile: His main profile picture is "a picture of my ass. And I'm pretty sure it says something about I want to be in a relationship, which is kind of contradictory in itself." In making their profiles within gay dating and hookup spaces, gay men know that the purpose of the profile is to sell one's self to the community of browsers (Mowlabocus 2010). People of color often exploit their own sexual stereotypes in order to become desirable sex partners online (Wilson et al. 2009). As a black man, Darryl may find that by relying upon assumptions about what others users may want in a black man – seeing black men present their bodies and not their faces - Darryl may be able to make contact with more gay men on Adam4Adam.com[1]. In fact, because of the sexual stereotypes of black men, Darryl's use of bodily pictures in order to seek a relationship on Adam4Adam.com may not be that

contradictory. Through using his body to attract other gay men on the website, Darryl may be able to actually make more connections with other users – a point that may be confirmed through Darryl actually dating someone he met on Adam4Adam.com at a previous point in his life.

Hugo, a 25-year old self-identified white Hispanic graduate student, explicates this ambivalent idea even further. When I asked Hugo why he uses Adam4Adam.com, he stated:

> Just to meet people, I guess. Like, I don't know, cause it's sort of like a double standard or whatever. Like when you see someone on there, I'm clearly not here for a hookup - only friends. And it's like…I'm like "Ok, whatever." But sometimes it's like "Yea, I do just want to meet someone to hang out with." So it's kind of weird for me to be kind of judgmental when I see a profile like that, but then part of me is like it'd be cool to meet someone to just like meet people. So, I don't know. It's kind of contradictory, but that's how it goes.

As Nardi (1999) argues, sex and friendship are separated within the larger heteronormative discourse of society. This fact is true for my gay informants. These men felt "contradictory" emotions about using a sexual site with the purpose of meeting other gay men with whom they can spend time and potentially become friends. Hugo perceives himself as "kind of judgmental" when he sees people looking for friendship on Adam4Adam.com, though a part of him "is like it'd be cool to meet someone to just like meet people." Everyday language, within a heteronormative society, does not allow for a sexual component to be within the conception of friendship (Nardi 1999), and this fact is made clear by how Darryl and Hugo did not know how to truly explain the contradiction of their own views and actions. As Adam4Adam.com is a website built around (male) sexuality, the website inherently has a sex component to the space. This sexual component makes it difficult for gay men to see the website as a space that can be

utilized to social network with other gay men. These men view Adam4Adam.com as "sort of trashy," yet they have "contradictory" feelings as 14 of my 15 informants have or want to find more meaningful relationships through the website.

A final telling example of this ambivalent tension in gay men's use of Adam4Adam.com comes from Acar, a 26-year old Turkish immigrant graduate student. Acar states, "People like that [professors, professionals], I make friends with. And they all are like surprising, and they all are on this website. Well it's considered, well this website is kind of like – it's kind of like sleazy. But all those people – professors, professionals – people are on there." This surprise that Acar experienced in making friends may have stemmed from a class mindset that often divides professionals from notions of sleaziness. As discussed earlier around Tanner's assertion of the Adam4Adam.com being trashy, sleazy is synonymous with trashy, where hard-working individuals are seen as civilized and as not engaging in wanton acts that are associated with lower-class individuals (Krause 1996). As gay men have been striving for acceptance, one realm of achieving this acceptance is through adopting notions of professionalism and embracing class mobility. This professional class performance seeks to distance itself from sleazy sexual content, as this sexual content is seen as lewd and as antithetical to achieving assimilation through class mobility (Sender 2003). Therefore, Acar's surprise may have arisen because he sees most people on Adam4Adam.com as not sexually morally appropriate, and hence, not as middle-class professionals, even though these men are also on the website.

In addition to this surprise stemming from ideas around class, this surprise also came from how the rise of homosexuality was in congruence with the demise of male friendship and with the state control over procreative sexuality (Foucault 1989), as discussed in the Introduction. Michel Foucault (1989) in a 1981 interview felt that homosexuality was inherently

about friendship as it was predicated on men wanting to engage in *relations* with other men. In line with Nardi (1999), Foucault talks about how historically, in many societies, sex and sexuality were and are linked to friendship. In this age of "plastic sexuality," friendship is still divided from the sexual (Giddens 1992; Nardi 1999). However, the contradiction that my informants experience between this sex and friendship split can expose the "crisis tendencies" of the social order. As Connell (1992) explicated, when people experience contradictory ways of living within the social order, one can see that the social order is in crisis, for it does not allow space to fully capture the experiences of those people living within this order. These contradictions and the crises that they can create can disrupt the hegemonic social order, while opening up creative possibilities of re-forming social relations (Connell 1992). Many of the gay men in this study seem to struggle to see how friendship and sex could work together, where their ambivalent feelings are predicated on larger heteronormative discourses around friendship. Nonetheless, as the next section shows, the ambivalent feelings around this sex and friendship dichotomy are eventually discarded as not working for these gay men. These men find the creative possibilities of searching for friendship in a sexualized space, through the practices of personally desexualizing the website.

B. "It didn't just have to be sexual": Desexualizing a Cruising Site

"I know the website is there – it's a hookup site. It's for guys to meet up. But what's really interesting is that I've met people on there that actually became like my really good friends," said Leonardo, a 24 year-old Latino college student. Although Leonardo and many of my informants perceived Adam4Adam.com as a sexualized space, they talked similarly about using the website in order to build relationships and friendships. Leonardo also explained, "and we never had any sort of sexual relation because there was a conversation initially, but it kind of

just fizzled out. It was sort of like one of those things where we didn't feel a connection, but there was such a potential for a friendship that I just acted on it, you know?" Similarly, a man in one of the profiles in my analysis stated (see Appendix G): " I know that most are on here to get a quick nut and dip out, thats not what im looking for. […] Looking for that one guy that can be my friend and my lover through the good, bad, and the ugly."

The men I interviewed as well as the online profiles I analyzed expose the ways Adam4Adam.com has allowed for a change in how some young gay men cruise. Cruising was often about finding sexual encounters (that could possibly turn into friendships), but through the Internet, some gay men are just cruising to find a potentially meaningful relationship and not just one-time and temporary sexual adventures.

Some informants did make friends through cruising for sex. For example, Riley told me about one of his friends he met on Adam4Adam.com:

> There was this one guy […] We became platonic friends, so it's funny to think about how it started. His name was Tony, and we met on Adam4Adam. It was when I first joined it around that time. […] So we would hookup, off and on, maybe once or twice a month for more than a year. […] And we ran into each other again after Chris and I had broken up. And I was online, and I said, "Ok, let's re-connect and hookup." But it had been so long that the chemistry had changed. And I had always really enjoyed talking to him post-coitus, and so we'd spend like forty-five minutes to an hour chatting, making talk, and what I realized was that this person could be my friend. And it didn't just have to be sexual, and more than that, I wasn't really interested in the sex with him anymore. I was really only interested in a friendship. […] So then he became, over the course of about a

year, a really good friend. And we spent a lot of time together. And he recently moved, but now when I think about it, I really miss him so much.

Having sex through cruising can often lead to friendships where the sex is not a component anymore (Reece and Dodge 2004; Stacey 2004). Like gay men in the past (see Nardi 1999), Riley's experience shows the complexity of how gay men form intimate bonds and relationships. Through a sexual encounter, Riley built intimacy and later a deep friendship with Tony. Although the chemistry had changed between Riley and Tony, Riley still saw a value in their relationship outside of just having sex. In moving beyond seeing his relationship with another gay man as sexual, Riley still pursued other meaningful types of emotional and friendship bonds with Tony. There is a split between sex and friendship in Riley's account; however, this account reveals how gay men may challenge the hyper-sexual stereotypes placed upon them. Riley is able to form other types of bonds with other gay men, even when the sexual component is not prevalent anymore.

However, most of my informants talked about cruising for friendship that did not necessarily even have a sexual background to begin with. Gabriel frustratingly told me:

> There are all these cute guys, and you are trying to just say hi, and they won't even say hi back. It's like how do you know…like I'm not always…like one of my slogans is "I'm not always about what everyone's about" because I'm not. You can say hi, and we can be friends. We can hang out. Or you can say hi and think what you want. You know, I'm not going to… it doesn't mean I want to have sex with you. It doesn't mean I want to hookup with you. It means, "Hey, let's talk."

Ashford (2006) found in his study on cottaging (the British term for cruising) that "…the Cyber Cottage can also act as a meeting forum, creating an opportunity for discussion and to

arrange sexual meetings. This contrasts with the traditional ephemeral, anonymous and silent somatic encounters that have come to characterise cottaging experiences" (285). The same holds true on Adam4Adam.com, but men are not just using Adam4Adam.com to arrange sexual meetings or "to hookup." The gay men in this study say that they are looking to make friends and to find people to hangout with. These statements show that the Internet is shifting cruising away from always being just sexual, where online cruising can now function as a place to meet and be friends with other gay men, as in the case of men like Gabriel, who says that he enthusiastically waits for men to simply "say hi" back.

Accordingly, Hugo told me about how Adam4Adam.com was useful for him aside from sex:

> I had a job interview at this company, and this guy in his profile he said he is into IT. So I just randomly asked him, "So like what do you do in IT?" And he gave me some like really vague answer. And I was like cool. I just got this interview at this IT company. And he goes, "That's actually where I work." So I met up with him and just like got information on the company and stuff. And we didn't...it wasn't a hookup or anything, but yea, so I met him on Saturday from Adam4Adam.

Hugo's quote clearly illustrates how he utilized Adam4Adam.com to cruise where work and professional related connections may also take place — not just sex. Through Adam4Adam.com, Hugo enhanced his professional network with other men and gained information and connections. This fortuitous connection reveals that, at least, a certain group of gay men in Austin are on Adam4Adam.com and this website is highly popular and influential in these particular gay men's lives (indeed, in a later section of this chapter, my informants claim that the same gay men at the gay bars are on this website). The fact that this website is used by a group of

gay men also explains Tanner's earlier "incest fear" that he might see gay men on this website who he already knows or with whom he has already had sexual encounters with. However, if gay men in other mainstream offline gay social spaces are using the website, then the website may not always be viewed as just being about sex.

Likewise, Acar's words were revealing with regard to the strategy and intentionality involved in these online exchanges. He explained,

> For me the interest of being on Adam4Adam, you know, you look at it like "Oh, ok." Then you start talking, and the more you get sure what you want from him. And there are some people that are really good, and you just don't want to waste it through hooking up. You just, "I'm not going to have sex with this guy. This guy could be useful to me as a friend."

For Acar, he met people on Adam4Adam.com that he saw could be "useful" as a friend, and therefore, he was "not going to have sex with this guy." Again, this de-linking of sex and friendship is part of a heteronormative discourse; however, it shows how cruising for some young gay men has changed - my informants are not necessarily always cruising just to have sex. Acar finds not having sex with only certain individuals as having any worth. There are some people who are not "really good," and these individuals get linked to the sexual – to have ephemeral sexual encounters with these particular people. However, people who Acar sees as "useful" get more highly valued and become de-linked from the sexual nature of the initial encounter, where they become just friends. Acar is meeting these "useful" friends in a sexual space – the encounter itself started off sexual. However, by relying back upon the divide of sex and friendship (where sex is devalued within that divide), the people that Acar sees as "really good" are the only ones who get de-sexualized and can be seen as more than a sexual person –

can be a potential friend. Here, a charmed circle (Rubin 1984) within gay communities gets constructed. People who are "useful" enter the center of the circle, while other men get pushed to the sexualized peripheries. The divide between sex and friendship structures who is seen as good and can be a friend, and who is seen as not good, and hence, Acar does not want to form a more relational bond with these particular individuals.

Gay male cultures have often had ambiguity and fluidity among sex, love, and friendship (Stacey 2005), and therefore it may not be surprising that the men I interviewed are using a sex space to build friendships and other connections including but not limited to work and professional matters. Gay men have often formed their ties through inventive modes, where in the past cruising for ephemeral sexual encounters have lead to friendship, community building, and/or monogamous relationships (Nardi 1999; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). Adam4Adam.com and the Internet have allowed gay men to utilize a cruising site to become similarly inventive in cyberspace as they establish friendships with other gay men. The unique aspect though is that Adam4Adam.com is a sexualized space, yet the interactions can be devoid of sexual content or intentions.

Mikel, a 27-year old black events supervisor, also told me how he used Adam4Adam.com to make friends because he did not have many gay friends.

> I just like people. I think at this point in my life I find it interesting that I have two gay friends. One of them is my ex of four years and the other one is silly, as this son refers to me as his mother. [Mikel laughs] I had a lot to do with his coming out, so I'm like his gay mother. But those are like the only, of all the people I know and I've lived with - and I've lived with a ton of people - I only have two gay friends, and I'm like that's kind of weird. So it is important to me to try and make friends.

Like my other informants, Mikel uses Adam4Adam.com to explore potential friendship relationships with other gay men. Having other gay friends can lead to positive psychosocial adjustment for gay men (Vincke and Heeringen 2004; Doty et al. 2010). Friendship has always played a crucial role in gay men's lives, and it allows gay men to link their personal lives to a larger gay social community (Nardi 1999). For black gay men, these dynamics may become more compounded because of the racism in gay communities that often ostracizes black gay men (Bérubé 2001) along with the homophobia of the black communities (Moore 2011). Adam4Adam.com allows for Mikel to connect to a variety of different men, where this space may allow Mikel to meet other gay people of color and/or non-racist gay individuals.

As Mikel and my other informants stressed a desire to find more gay friends, Adam4Adam.com may be serving as a space that can help gay men forge these relationships and possibly build a better attitude about one's own sexuality as well. Cruising then, through the Internet, has transformed the act to be not just about looking for sex, but also about looking for friendship and other connections. This de-linking of cruising from sex helps to move gay people outside of stereotypes and prejudices that heteronormativity has promoted to hyper-sexualize and dehumanize them. The gay men in this study seek to de-sexualize a sexual space by using their sexual identity to build friendships and other connections with men on Adam4Adam.com. One main way this de-sexualization of the hyper-sexual gay subject happens is through the discourse of comparing Adam4Adam.com to Facebook.com.

C. "Adam4Adam is like gay Facebook": Adam4Adam.com in Everyday Life

"It's like Facebook. To me actually, Adam4Adam is like gay Facebook. That's what it is to me," said Acar in our interview. Leonardo stated, "It's like checking the gay Facebook. That's what I call it - gay Facebook. That's what it is." And Cisco said, "Honestly, it's my own version

of Facebook." Acar, Leonardo, Cisco and many of my informants see Adam4Adam.com just like the largest social networking site Facebook.com but for gay people. Comparing Adam4Adam.com to Facebook.com allows these men to normalize Adam4Adam.com as not just a sex site but as a place to make connections – to social network. These men's voices are revealing, giving the fact that Facebook.com is the most popular social networking site for young people with over 85% of college students using this site (Junco 2011) and Adam4Adam.com is one of the most popular online gay personal websites in the United States (Dawley 2007).

Earlier in our interview, Acar stated, "So, my profile was more like explaining who I am, explaining what I like, explaining what I dislike, rather than what I hate, and what I expect. It's more like an introduction." Later, when I asked him what his main profile picture was on Adam4Adam.com, Acar made the comparison again, "Like again, it's like Facebook. So it's more like my Facebook profile picture and my Adam4Adam profile picture is the same." For Acar and my other informants, Adam4Adam.com was a way for these men to introduce themselves. It was a social network site catered to gay men, where they can explain "what I like, explaining what I dislike." Acar even uses the same profile picture on Facebook.com and Adam4Adam.com. In making the link between these two websites, Adam4Adam.com becomes a space for men to provide "an introduction" of one's self to meet other men for networking.

Likewise, a couple of informants talked about how being on Adam4Adam.com has become part of an everyday practice or routine of computer use, the same way they do with any other social networking site. As Hugo talked about his use of Adam4Adam.com, he said:

> I was just on because, I mean, I have this habit of procrastinating or like needing distractions. So I get on. Honestly, it's normally on in the background. I just like sign on, and I'll watch TV or something. Or pull up another tab on my computer, and you know,

do something else like check Facebook or check my e-mail. But lots of times it's not like my primary activity on the computer; it's just in the background.

In line with Hugo, Riley made the same comparison, "Like I said before, it [going on Adam4Adam] just becomes habitual. It's like what do. You open it up along with your Facebook while you are sipping coffee." For these informants, they do not actively get on Adam4Adam.com to cruise for sexual encounters. Instead, they get on Adam4Adam.com just out of habit along with getting on Facebook.com. These men see Adam4Adam.com as other social networking sites that people habitually log on to every day. Many men did not even state logging onto to Adam4Adam.com specifically to just cruise for a sexual encounter at that particular moment. Adam4Adam.com is more viewed as a gay social networking website that is just "normally on in the background."

In their qualitative study of same-sex intimacies with 96 British individuals in same-sex relationships, Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) termed the coin "life experiments" to describe the everyday life decisions that gay and lesbian individuals choose to live their lives that challenge the larger heteronormative social structures. As a marginalized population, these same-sex couples must self-invent viable ways to live in order to find new possibilities for shaping personal ways of life against heteronormativity (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). For example, during the HIV/AIDS crisis, sexually marginalized populations created inventive and intimate community networks in order to care for one another during the epidemic. These life experiments highlight the agency of sexually marginalized individuals who are trying to construct ways to live in a hostile world that privileges heterosexuality (ibid.).

With the rise of the Internet, gay men may now engage in other forms of everyday life experiments in order to make meaning and survive daily in a heteronormative society.

Adam4Adam.com becomes a space where gay men engage in these everyday life experiments. While these men are working or just watching television, they can be connected to this cyber-gay community. The gay men in this study integrate Adam4Adam.com into their everyday lives, where they can find connections and talk to other gay men while they are simultaneously living and working within the larger heteronormative society. This quotidian use of this website challenges the social order, where gay men never have to truly feel alone or isolated from other gay individuals – they can even just leave Adam4Adam.com on in the background. The new life experiments that technology has opened up for gay men has allowed new spaces to be inhabited (literally 24/7 if one chooses – websites do not close down like offline venues typically do during certain times of the day), where gay men can always feel some connection to other gay individuals or a cyber-gay community.

A few informants even explicitly stated that their main purpose for being on Adam4Adam.com was to social network. Gabriel saw the main benefit of Adam4Adam.com was "socializing" and "being able to just discover who you are and what you like." When I asked Koby what he was looking for on Adam4Adam, he replied, "Just to meet people, make new connections. That is pretty much – networking." Iago, a 26 year-old self-identified Hispanic who works in business, said this about his primary use of Adam4Adam.com:

Interviewer: What would you say is your primary purpose for using Adam4Adam?

Iago: Just social network, that's it.

Interviewer: So you use it mainly to find friends? To meet?

Iago: Yea, just to conversate and to chat and meet new people, that's it.

Interview: So your primary purpose isn't sex?

Iago: No, that's more of if it happens it happens. That's not what I'm looking for though.

This discourse of Adam4Adam.com being the "gay Facebook" is evident in these informants' lives. Gabriel sees the socializing aspect of Adam4Adam.com as its main benefit, and Koby "pretty much" just uses the website to "make new connections" and network. Iago drives this point home where he states that he is not even "looking for" sex on Adam4Adam.com. A sexual hookup through the website is tangential to Iago trying to "social network" and "meet new people." These men's use of Adam4Adam.com challenges the hyper-sexual stereotype of gay men. These gay men are looking to build relations with other men that are not always predicated upon sex.

This discourse of comparing Adam4Adam.com to Facebook.com or simply just calling it the "gay Facebook" shows how Adam4Adam.com functions as a place to social network with other gays and not just cruise for sex. Facebook.com is embedded into college-age student's lives, where the website almost becomes an invisible background in how these students communicate with one another (Barkhuus and Tashiro 2010). Facebook.com serves as the "glue" that holds many people's friendship networks together (ibid.). People can communicate with their friends throughout the day, see social gatherings taking place in their communities, and they can efficiently integrate the website into their busy, nomadic lives (Barkhuus and Tashiro 2010; Cheung, Chiu, and Lee 2011). High technology acquisition rates and availability of computers and technology make it easy for young people to maintain online social friendships that then bolster their offline connections to other social networks and gatherings (Barkhuus and Tashiro 2010).

Although often perceived as just a sexual cruising website for men seeking other men online, Adam4Adam.com is being used as a social network website for the self-identified gay men in this study, and not primarily or in accordance with seeking sexual encounters.

Adam4Adam.com is also an invisible background in how young gay men are communicating with one another. Like Facebook.com, gay men use Adam4Adam.com to stay in contact with other gay men throughout the day, and they can integrate the use of the website into their busy everyday lives (a topic explored more in-depth in the next section). The gay men in this study have grown up with technology, giving them high technology acquisition rates to navigate integrating Adam4Adam.com into their daily lives smoothly. Unlike Facebook.com, Adam4Adam.com allows gay men to specifically connect with other gay men, generating a space for a marginalized population to seek the similar benefits of Facebook.com but for a specific purpose.

Friendship is a social process (Nardi 1999) and the gay men in this study are utilizing the Internet in new ways to explore this friendship process. Adam4Adam.com allows these gay men to not just cruise for sex but to cruise to build friendships that may become lasting and meaningful. The social organization of cruising has changed from just recreational sex that may lead to relationships (Nardi 1999; Stacey 2004), and now online cruising can serve the function of just finding other gay friends. Accessibility in being able to easily connect with other inividuals is one feature that defines friendship (Nardi 1999), and with the Internet, the accessibility to forge new bonds is readily available. Adam4Adam.com serves as a place for gay men to meet other (gay) male friends, a process that offers a space to gay men as they build supportive friendships with one another and mutually assist in creating positive identities in a traditionally homophobic society. As Rumens (2010) stated, in a heteronormative society, "…the influence of sexuality in providing common ground among gay men for organizing gay male friendships may not have lost any of its salience" (1542). Gay men still seek other gay friends, showing that sexuality is a prominent part of a gay man's identity despite the legal advancements

of LGBT rights in U.S. society. But why do men use this website to social network instead of other avenues? This question I now turn to by looking at why my informants like Adam4Adam.com.

Section 2. "To Have a Smorgasbord Right There": Positive Aspects of Adam4Adam.com

The Internet provides a crucial space for LGBT people to develop their sexual identities, find sexual information not provided to them in the offline world, and socialize with other LGBT individuals (Hillier and Harrison 2007). In Hillier and colleagues' (2012) focus group studies with 33 LGB youth and 26 non-LGB youth in the United States, over half of LGBT met someone offline who they initially met on the Internet for support, community, friendship, and/or sex. The Internet is a positive and normal way for LGBT people to meet others compared to heterosexuals who saw the Internet as a dangerous space to meet people offline (Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012). A longitudinal quantitative study of over 4,000 English-speaking adults showed that over 60% of gay and lesbian individuals met online in 2008 and 2009, where meeting online for gays and lesbians is more common than any other meeting places for gay or straight people in the past (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). One main reason is because they have fewer options to finding other gay men in the offline world, and they can escape the stigma and marginalization that the hostile physical world creates for gay individuals (Brown 2001; Lever et al. 2008). Although the gay bar scene often acted as a space for safety, community building, and political organizing for older generations of gay men (Chauncey 1994; Bérubé 2003), the potential to meet a wider array of individuals online outside of the world that continues to be hostile toward gay men was one main reason my informants preferred Adam4Adam.com. The other two main reasons cited by my informants were money along with being busy and their dissatisfaction of the gay bar scene.

A. "I Want to Save Myself the Gas and the Time": Finances and Busy Lives

"Well, there is the convenience, right? You don't have to get in your car, and you don't have to buy a drink. You can make yourself a drink at home - so there is that benefit," succinctly stated Leonardo. Leonardo and other men said that one of the main reasons they preferred Adam4Adam.com instead of offline gay spaces and venues was because Adam4Adam.com is free and convenient. The accessibility and affordability of the Internet has often been noted as a main factor driving men seeking men to these online spaces (Ross 2005); however, the reasons *why* gay men value this "convenience" of not having "to get in your car" and "have to buy a drink" have been left unexplored.

Like Leonardo, Darryl also saw the value of going on Adam4Adam.com instead of going to the gay club: "These same people that are on Adam4Adam are up in the clubs. So if I want to save myself the gas and the time to actually go to a club to hookup, I can just go on Adam4Adam." Raj, a 22-year old self-identified half white and half Indian college student, similarly elaborates on the convenience aspect of Adam4Adam.com compared to going to a gay bar:

> Because if you go to a bar like one or two or three hours, you have that set time. But on Adam4Adam, someone can message me while I'm away or while I'm in class or something. And then I can come back to it and see it later. It's something I don't have to be like constantly attentive to.

Mikel also told of a similar use of Adam4Adam.com to socialize with other gay men: "Being insanely busy and working in a particularly macho environment, I don't get a chance to meet many gay men or possible dating prospects. So that's my main benefit from Adam4Adam is actually meeting friends - meeting new people." Adam4Adam.com provides the benefit of

allowing Mikel to meet friends, which his busy life does not really allow for this extra time to meet friends elsewhere.

Like Raj and Mikel, Gabriel said, "Usually I don't do anything during the week. I'm just so busy. I mean, I work eight hours a day, then I go to the gym, then it's just crazy, and then I have school on top of that." Gabriel has to balance school like Raj and working like Mikel that Gabriel only has leisure time to "go to the gym" during his "busy" week. Building off of Hochschild's (1997) concept of how when work invades family life, and hence, "family life gets Taylorized," Gloria González-López (2005) shows how the work demands of an industrialized, capitalistic society lead to the *Taylorization of sex* for Mexican immigrants. Sex becomes something that these immigrants must schedule into their busy lives of working and surviving in the United States (González-López 2005). Similarly, the *Taylorization of gay life* is unfolding in the lives of this generation of gay men in this study, though for very different class purposes compared to the Mexican immigrants in González-López's study. To save time and money (which time is also money in a capitalistic society), gay men can use the free service of Adam4Adam.com from the convenience of their home, work, classroom, or in any other setting. These men do not Taylorize their lives in order to survive, but rather, their busy schedules are shaping how these gay men form intimate bonds, where they cannot put aside time to meet other gay men in offline venues. Because of the class structure in which they occupy, which involves going to school, working full-time, and taking care of their bodies, these gay men are searching for intimacy and connection with other gay men through the convenience of the Internet.

Lastly, Riley talks about being on the website while working: "You don't have to do anything other than open it [Adam4Adam.com] up. Like on the weekends, I'll be working on legitimate stuff for work, and it will just sit there in the background window." Riley can put

Adam4Adam.com on in the background allowing for him to network with other gay men while he is at work. This shows the ways in which the Internet has resulted in multi-tasking behaviors for some gay men – men who may have the class privilege to Taylorize their lives to do many things at once - which in the case of Riley may offer the opportunity to create some form of virtual intimacy with the communities he belongs to, a sense of connection that he can actually experience even while working. Friendship building is often shaped by the accessibility and availability of friends (Nardi 1999), and the Internet may offer that in a symbolic and virtual way for gay men like Riley. As the gay informants in this study have busy lives and want to save money, Adam4Adam.com provides a free and convenient alternative for gay men to meet other gay men while in class, working, or doing other things.

A political economy of sexuality is unfolding in these gay men's lives (see Padilla 2007; Cantú 2009). Gay men, including the men in this study, are already isolated from other gay men, and the busy demands of the capitalist economy is furthering isolating gay men from others by not allowing them to have the time to meet other gay men in offline venues. In order to counter these feelings of loneliness that are exacerbated by the political economy, gay men are "Taylorizing" their sex lives by using the Internet, and specifically Adam4Adam.com, to develop bonds with other gay men while still working, going to school, or taking care of themselves (e.g., going to the gym). Adam4Adam.com provides a space for these gay men who are marginalized by the heteronormative political economy to fit their intimate and social needs into their demanding, alienating busy schedules.

B. "They Just Stand Around with Their Group": Dislike of Gay Bars

Besides time and money, a few informants expressed why they disliked the gay bar scene and preferred Adam4Adam.com over going to these offline venues. As Riley expressed his

frustration, "Ugh, the gay bars - people just go there in groups. They just stand around with their group, and they just stare at each other. They remain strangers. […] I go out probably two or three times a month, but that's tops. Whereas, I'll get online four or five days a week." Riley only goes to a gay bar a couple times a month, where he gets online almost every day of the week. Riley finds it easier to meet other gay men online because these gay men are not already in their friend groups when inhabiting Adam4Adam.com, making it easier to not remain strangers. Riley finds it less anxiety-ridden to know if other men are interested in him by seeing if they clicked on his profile online, where he feels intimidated walking up to a gay man who is standing around with his friends. The gay bar scene is not seen as a place for some gay men to go to meet other gay men; rather, some gay men are perceived as going to the bar with their already established social networks, and therefore, are believe to not want to engage with other people in the space. For Riley, the gay bar scene is an environment where it is difficult for him to approach other men because he cannot gauge if these men have an interest in him.

Colin, a 22-year old white college student, told me about his annoyance with the bar scene:

> So with online, I'm more in control of myself. I'm usually sober. This way we can know - we can actually have a conversation. Because if you are at the club, you have loud music, and I can't hear. It's hard for me to have a conversation with guys at the club. So I feel like meeting guys online is an easier and better means for me to meet guys.

Colin, like Riley, sees Adam4Adam.com as a space that facilitates social encounters and potential conversations with other gay men. Colin is not alone in his struggle with loud music and other situations that give life to the gay bar context. In their study on the gay scene, Ridge, Minichiello, and Plummer (1997) also found that gay men were frustrated with "loud music" in

gay public spaces because it made it hard for these gay men to build friendships and communities. As Riley's and Colin's statements reveal, Adam4Adam.com provides a more comfortable and conducive space for these men to social network and to search for gay friends. In contrast to a time before the Internet, when gay men might have found the gay bar and club scene as the ideal space to find a community and gay support (Chauncey 1994; Bérubé 2003), for some gay men today, the Internet is allowing them to establish more meaningful connections in the quiet and rather isolated context of home, work, or whatever space a young gay man may connect with these communities via the Internet.

Mikel's quote summarizes both of these view points:

> I prefer to engage in a more in-depth conversation - not "nice shoes, take off your pants." And I find that bars and clubs are usually, it's usually too loud. You can barely hear yourself think. I mean, you go in there with your friends. They're in there with their friends. And you know you are competing for attention, and it's just too much of for me, personally. There is too much going on in the bars to actually meet someone that I'm willing to talk to. Basically, I just see bars as just a big hookup scene, and I guess, I want something more. Not necessarily a relationship because I don't have time for one, just an actual conversation, to actually meet someone.

As Mikel's description of gay bars and clubs shows, he is also looking for less distracting and more focused one-on-one conversation that these offline venues do not environmentally allow. Like Colin, Mikel sees these spaces as loud, and like Riley, he has identified some of the exclusionary practices of friendship that take place in these spaces. Hillier and Harrison (2007) found that for making friends, online spaces were a more conducive space than the bar scene. People can get to know other people for a long period of time over the Internet, which can

construct safer interactions than the rush of first meeting someone at a bar (Hillier and Harrison 2007). Offline verbal exchanges can often be seen as shallow, where the deliberateness of actually taking the time to write correspondence to another human being online may actually construct deeper friendship bonds and connections (Briggle 2008). As Mikel stated, he felt that the Internet did provide this space for a more in-depth conversation than the shallow offline interactions of asking another person to undress. Gay men can talk to other gay men for long periods of time online, where it is quiet, and they are more likely to be sober, creating a safer, more trusting atmosphere to meet other gay individuals who are not already out with their friends, standing in groups.

C. "Cast a Wider Net": More Selection of Gay Men

The main benefit discussed by my informants of why they enjoyed Adam4Adam.com as the prime place to meet people was because it allowed for an array of men to meet. As Tito stated, he could "use the site to see more men than at the bars." Accordingly, Koby told me, "Well, you definitely get a wider population, I think. Going to the clubs you kind of see the same familiar faces every weekend, but with the Internet, you can cast a wider net." Being able to see a larger population of men on Adam4Adam.com was seen as a benefit because it allowed my informants to "cast a wider net" in finding different people than what physical spaces like a bar or club could allow.

Hugo explicates the above points very well:

> I guess just the way it's set up, being on the Internet, you have more selection or whatever. Whereas at the club, I don't know, like in the club you aren't going to see as many people for like a handful of reasons. But on Adam4Adam it's like the way you can

just look for people. You know, it's not infinite, but I feel like you have more options when you look for people online than you do in a physical space.

Like Tito and Riley, Hugo believes that Adam4Adam may offer more possibilities of meeting more men when compared to the actual gay scene, which is perceived as more limited. The dating market and friendship possibilities are expanded online vis-à-vis the gay bar scene. The Internet opens up a space for men to meet one another who may not have been able to ever meet because they did not occupy the same physical spaces. In the past, the availability of seeking new friends has often been limited by one's social structure and physical environment (Nardi 1999). In contrast, the Internet provides a breakdown of this physical space, where a variety of different types of people occupy this online arena, allowing for the expansion of people's social networks. Likewise, it can also allow people to meet particular kinds of other people (a topic explored more in-depth in Chapter 3), and to find people "on the go." As Riley describes it:

> I just think that you can expand your pool of people that you get to meet. I think the more people that you meet, for me, if I can meet more of them, I see that as a good thing, because then you just don't have to hang out at some "divey" gay bar. Do you know what I mean? These people are out there. They are on the go. They are doing shit. They are getting stuff done. They aren't just trolling around at a bar.

Adam4Adam.com not only allows Riley to expand his "pool of people" that he can meet, but also it allows him to meet other people like himself who are "getting stuff done." Riley is someone who lives a busy life, and he is searching for someone who is busy like himself – someone who is perhaps more likely to be found online. Adam4Adam.com becomes constructed as a website where busy people go, where offline spaces are seen as leisure spaces for people

who are not working hard (though some offline spaces may require money in order to frequent them). Interestingly, people who frequent offline spaces such as gay bars (a space that often served as a communal place to build gay communities and identity in the past) become devalued within this reasoning. Younger generations of gay men may already have a sense of a gay identity, where they do not need to frequent offline arenas to build this identity. Instead, they can be gay, work hard, and find other gay men who are doing the same through the Internet. These younger gay men still seek connections with other gay men, but they do not see the gay bar scene as a space to seek these connections or to develop a gay identity anymore. Rather, people who frequent offline venues are seen as trolls who are not being productive members of society, and hence, are not desirable to Riley.

The final two telling quotes on expanding one's social circle through Adam4Adam.com are also linked to knowing exactly the sexuality of the people within this online space. Not only is the pool of potential partners expanded by the Internet, but it is also easier to talk to potential partners because one may assume that the other men within these online spaces are gay (Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012). For Tanner, "The accessibility is really easy. It's nice to have a smorgasbord right there. Pick somebody. There is none of that "Is he gay or not?" I mean even when you go to the club, there are always those straight people, who damn it, they're here, and they throw off your Gaydar. It's just terrible." Likewise, Colin gives an even more vivid detail about meeting more people whom one knows is already gay. He enjoys Adam4Adam.com for it allowing to:

> Just having a connection with other guys. I mean, 'cause you can go to the gay clubs, but when you're out and about in the rest of your life, you have no idea who is gay because we automatically assume that everyone is heterosexual. And it's not like I have a great

> Gaydar. I have a shitty one, but I can never truly trust if that person is gay or straight. And I'm too much fearful of going up and having a conversation and asking the question, "Hey, are you interested in me? Are you gay? What's your sexuality like?" That's something I feel is not a social norm for me, even though I want that to be. I want it to be where it doesn't matter what sexuality you are; it will be okay to approach someone. And if they are not interested, oh well. But here in the South - in Texas (Austin is a little better) - but if you go outside of Austin where I live, it's much riskier. I'm always fearful of being beaten up, of being attacked. I carry a pocket knife around with me because I never know who is going to do anything.

Both Tanner and Colin see Adam4Adam.com as a prime place to meet men, whom they can know are gay. Colin recognizes that he can go to physical gay bars, but as Tanner noted, even in these designated gay spaces, straight people are present, who "throw off your Gaydar." On Adam4Adam.com, one has "a smorgasbord" of men to easily pick to connect with, and although not all men on Adam4Adam.com would identify as gay, offline spaces represent a higher "risk" in exploring if someone was gay or a straight man. The fear of trying to connect with men in offline spaces has led Colin to even "carry a pocket knife" because of his fear of being the target of homophobic violence – at least, in Colin's opinion, in the South.

Gay men have fewer options in making other gay friends and finding potential partners in the offline world compared to heterosexual men (Hillier, Mitchell, and Ybarra 2012; Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012). Gay Internet spaces provide a space away from offline homophobic prejudice, where the social cost and stigma are still high for gay men trying to approach other men without knowing their sexual identity (Brown 2001; Ashford 2006). For my informants, Adam4Adam.com is free, can fit into their busy lives, and it provides them an

expansion of men to talk to and meet outside of the noisy bar scene. As Internet personals are more attractive to individuals who have fewer alternatives to meet friends and partners in the physical world (Lever et al. 2008), the gay men in this study, by using the Internet to make friends, speak to the idea that sexual stigma against homosexuality is still largely prevalent in society. This stigma has led these gay men to creatively turn online cruising into a space to build connections and to maybe find "something more."

Section 3. "What You Make It": Cruising for "Something More" on Adam4Adam.com

"Hookups aren't bad but something more than that would be nice too. Maybe not a relationship, but at least friends who relate to each other in ways besides sex," read the text of a profile I analyze in this thesis (see Appendix H). Like him, many men are looking for "something more" that is "besides sex" when they visit Adam4Adam.com. Although cruising has often been a relationality that is predicated on avoiding relationships (Bersani 2002), the men in this study are utilizing a cruising site and a gay identity in order to find "maybe more." The profile of the user I referred to earlier stated in its headline, "looking for friends, maybe more." Echoing this sentiment, in this particular era of digital cruising, the self-identified gay men in this study are seeking "something more" – something ineffable. In this section, I will use Foucault's ideas on sexuality and friendship to examine the ways in which these men are seeking new forms of relationalities. As these connections do not exist yet, they cannot be specifically named. These formless relationships are this "something more." I will also theorize the ways in which these new personal engagements may open up new and creative possibilities to think about friendship and sexuality within this digital era.

"I never expect anything more than just a physical exchange, but I hope for more than that," stated Riley as a way to summarize what he struggled to explain. Earlier, Riley described

his experience of cruising on Adam4Adam, as often just "a physical exchange." However, he is also "looking for something more than that."

> Oh because, I think that if it was just - if it was just in those moments where I was just excruciatingly horny and needed to find someone to have sex with, then I wouldn't just look at it as often. And so, I think I'm probably looking for something more than that, but it's like this paradox because you're in all likelihood not going to find them in that circumstance - somebody that you can build a more meaningful relationship with. But it becomes habitual, I think, to look at it, and then also there is always like that chance that there is that super interesting person on there that you wouldn't have met otherwise.

For Riley, establishing a "meaningful relationship" or finding "that super interesting person" who may be difficult to meet offline may become easier online. In their research conducted in Great Britain, Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) revealed that many gay men in their study felt that they could not find the emotional connection they were hoping to find through casual sexual encounters. These men responded by continuing to engage in casual sexual encounters in hopes of still finding someone, or they gave up these encounters and searched for alternative avenues to meet other gay men (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). Riley sees the "paradox" of trying to find "something more," but he feels that "in all likelihood," he is "not going to find them in that circumstance." However, he takes the first option outlined by Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, and he still explores looking for "something more" through cruising.

Acar, when talking about what is he looking for when he logs onto Adam4Adam.com, stated:

> Yes, well, it's always difficult to distinguish because I look for sex, and I look for something more simultaneously. And it just literally depends on…like again, my current

boyfriend was a trick. He was supposed to be a hookup, and we had sex for the first time, and then we wanted to see each other again, and everything is so good so far.

For Acar, he utilizes online cruising sites to "look for sex" and to "look for something more simultaneously." These two things are "difficult to distinguish" for Acar. He is using a sexual hookup website, which is often seen to be about ephemeral relationships, to find longer lasting bonds with other men. For Acar specifically, one current bond was with "a trick," who is now his boyfriend. They had a sexual encounter through Adam4Adam.com, and then they "wanted to see each other again."

The men I interviewed in Austin echo Foucault's (1989) reflections about the formation of gay identities, relationships, and pleasure. Foucault talks about how identities can be useful if they are used to create new friendships – new ways for people to give each other pleasure. He does not believe that one *is* gay, but one can *become* gay. One can use this identity to create a gay life and new forms of relationality. Through *becoming* gay, Foucault (1989: 308) wonders "What relations...can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?" Sexuality could then be used to "arrive at a multiplicity of relationships" (ibid.: 308) – one being in and through friendship. Here, gay identity and cruising are used as a game to build relationships and other friendships. Foucault (1989) describes how sex and sexuality can be used as a creative life force to establish new forms of relationalities through one's desires. One can become susceptible to more than the pleasures of just the "hookup" itself, where men may establish more intimate bonds with just "a trick."

Koby also talked about remaining open and susceptible to the idea of forming relationships and other bonds on Adam4Adam.com. After telling me about wanting to find

friends on the site, I asked Koby, "Are you possibly looking for a long-term relationship through Adam4Adam?" He replied,

> It's not like my number one goal, but if it happens to come to fruition through a casual encounter, and we hit it off really well, and we start hanging out a lot, and it turns into a long-term relationship – sure. But it's not like I'm going hunting for my husband or anything like that. I'm just going for friends and meeting new people.

Although Koby mainly goes on Adam4Adam.com to meet potential friends and connect with others, he is also open to the possibility that other pleasures could "come to fruition through a casual encounter," including a lasting relationship. Like Acar, Koby sees other types of pleasures and relationships that can arrive through sexual encounters. These men are not just looking for sex, as they realize other forms of relationality are possible outside of just hooking up. Scholars have argued that modernity has led to the impersonability of social relationships (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004); however, gay men are trying to re-discover intimacy and bonding through cruising online (also often linked to impersonability). Finally, Foucault (1989) even believes that forming friendships through *becoming* gay can challenge and explode the current relationalities in society. Friendship, through a homosexual mode of life, is more disruptive to society than homosexual sex acts. This mode of life brings "…affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship…" that can lead to "…the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force" (Foucault 1989: 309). Society fears this love between men because it can supersede laws, rules, and habits.

Riley also uses Adam4Adam.com to meet new people. He said:

> Sometimes I wonder, "What do I really expect to find on Grindr [a geosocial gay networking mobile application] or Adam4Adam? And what am I really looking for?"

> […] I think I just always want to be open to meeting somebody new. And the people that I've known in my life that I've always wanted to emulate and be like are people that are constantly curious and always meeting new people. And this just seems like a really easy way to do that.

For Riley, Adam4Adam.com provides an "easy way" to meet new people. This cruising website provides a pathway for Riley who perceives that people who are "constantly curious" engage in an active social life that involves encounters with those yet to be known. As stated in his opening quote, Riley "hope[s] for more" than just a "physical exchange." The pleasure of cruising on Adam4Adam.com is not always even about sex for him. Pleasure is delinked from sex, where it is located in "looking for something more" – in meeting new people.

The road Riley and other gay men are following to discover new ways of giving other men new pleasures – to friendship – is formless and must be invented. Within the discourse on sexuality, sex became conflated with pleasure. For Foucault (1989) though, one can become susceptible to new forms of pleasure that could invent "…a manner of being that is still improbable" (310). These new pleasures may move beyond sex, where a desexualization of pleasure can allow bodies to find new pleasures (and possibly later, desire) in odd things (for Foucault: drugs, friendship, and sadomasochism) (Foucault 1989; Davis 2010). As Foucault (1989: 212) eloquently states, "…we should be striving, rather, toward a desexualization, to a general economy of pleasure that would not be sexually normed." One place to locate these new pleasures is through a homosexual mode of life – of using gay identity as a game to build friendships. Adam4Adam.com clearly provides a place to find pleasure in sex, but it also provides an "easy way" to find other pleasures in meeting people. These friendships must be forged and invented, as cruising for friendship is a new way of life for gay men. Nonetheless,

this effort can lead to "something more" – new pleasures that are desexualized and found within camaraderie.

Leonardo stated, "Like I said, it goes beyond sex because I think even if your interest is only to have sex with that person, I don't think it is realistic, at least for me, to meet someone just for sex. Like there has to be something, some sort of connection, even if it's the tiniest one. There has to be." Adam4Adam.com "goes beyond sex" for Leonardo. Even, at times, when Leonardo is using the website for sexual purposes, he does not perceive it as "realistic" to meet someone with the exclusive purpose of having sex and always needs some kind of "connection" with all of the people that he meets through Adam4Adam.com. My informants could not give a name to this "connection" or "something more." As friendship is a formless relationship that must be invented for gay men and the "poverty" of language does not allow for the description of this alternative forms of intimacy (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001), this ineffability of the new relationalities is not surprising. As human beings who have been traditionally perceived as hyper-sexualized in hetero-patriarchal societies, there is often not ways to view gay friendship outside of a sexualized understanding of gay men. However, the men in this study are seeking new ways to open up new relationalities through using Adam4Adam.com to find creative connections of humanity with other gay men.

As Gabriel notes though, Adam4Adam.com can, of course, be used to just find ephemeral sexual encounters. Gabriel asserted, "It's really like what you make it. You know, I've met some amazing people. I've met some douche people - some douche fags. I've met some great people. I mean it's what you make of it." For Gabriel, Adam4Adam.com is actually a personal experience — "what you make of it." The website can be utilized for a variety of purposes, and for some gay men, they use Adam4Adam.com as a space to express a homosexual mode of life and to

build new friendships. Later in the interview, when Gabriel was talking about the opening story of this chapter, where a man he met on Adam4Adam.com inspired him to lose weight, he stressed again the importance of the website being what a person makes it. He said, "Because I think, it's what you make it. It's not necessarily I'm only there to find sex. I'm only on there to do this. Now yea, absolutely, I do that sometimes when I'm really horny. Yea, I want someone really quick. This is easy. But I think you can also find really cool people that will inspire you and help you out and stuff like that."

As illustrated, Gabriel may use Adam4Adam for a potential sexual encounter. His engagements online, however, are more sophisticated. He is trying to find a homosexual mode of life, where he can make connections with other gay men that go beyond the sexual components and that inspire each other to become better human beings. Seeing Adam4Adam.com as just a sexual space is easy within a heteronormative society that hyper-sexualizes gay men; however, gay men are using this space to subvert these discourses by trying to search for meaningful relationships and connections, which can challenge the social order.

Lastly, Hugo also fell in line with Gabriel in his expression of how Adam4Adam.com could be used. Repeating himself, he explained how he uses the website,

> I don't know…I think it's…I don't know why…I don't know because, I think, hm…I think part of it is I wish - maybe not wish - I guess, Adam4Adam is like how I use it. […] There is the possibility of meeting someone for like non-sexual intentions, and I think, I don't put in like the sexual information because I want to keep that possibility open.

For Hugo, as illustrated, the pleasure on Adam4Adam.com is completely desexualized. The way he uses the site is to meet people for non-sexual intentions.

For the gay men in this study, Adam4Adam.com is a way to build new forms of relationalities outside of just hooking up. Cruising, which is often seen as anonymous, ephemeral sex, has changed for certain gay men. Gay men can now use online cruising as a way to *become* gay – to express a homosexual mode of life. In *Unlimited Intimacy*, Tim Dean (2009) postulated that online cruising would diminish sexual encounters and experiences with strangers. He fears that online cruising does not allow contact and instead it treats …"a stranger as a blow-up doll or a mail-order bride" (Dean 2009: 194). However, as the above narratives show, some gay men are looking for contact – for connection – with the strangers that they meet on Adam4Adam.com. My informants' desire for "something more" could potentially be subversive to the social order. They are seeking pleasures "beyond sex," through seeking connections, friendship, and "something more" with the individuals they cruise for on Adam4Adam.com. My informants use their identity of gay men to *become* gay – to find other men to have relations with. Sexual encounters like cruising, for Foucault (1989), did not pose the same threat to the social order as building friendships do. Therefore, this "something more" that my informants are looking for on Adam4Adam.com is a revolutionary act. My informants may in fact have the potentiality to shake up the social order.

Conclusion

This digital era has brought new life experiments for gay men to creatively explore in order to build relations with other gay individuals. The gay men in this study have integrated Adam4Adam.com into their everyday life in order to build connections with other gay men. Cruising for sex has historically allowed gay men to find similar others and to explore their sexual desires (Lynch 2002; Reece and Dodge 2004). Likewise, friendship has also served as a space for gay men to forge their identities and to build supportive communities (Nardi 1999;

Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001) and alternative families (Stacey 2004). Now, these two realms - cruising and friendship - have merged together where gay men can cruise online for friendship and other meaningful connections. The relational possibilities of the merging of these two arenas are yet to be seen, but clearly, gay men are using their identity and this online cruising space for forging different alliances in the 21st century.

One challenge these gay men face is the heteronormative discourse that separates sex from friendship. This discourse, originally predicated on sex being only about procreation, establishes that sex should only be enacted within a romantic relationship, and never between or among friends (Foucault 1989; Nardi 1999) Many informants found it contradictory to be social networking within a sexualized space that is "trashy" and a "ho site." However, they also challenged this discourse through discursively calling Adam4Adam.com the "gay Facebook." This term allowed my informants to see the website as a place to social network – just for gay men. Through utilizing this discourse, the gay men in this study could normalize their everyday practices of finding friendships and other connections within a sexual space, challenging the larger heteronormative social order.

Likewise, this search for "something more" on Adam4Adam.com definitely has the potential to challenge and disrupt the social order as well. If this "something more" comes to fruition, different relationalities between gay men may open up desexualized pleasure and allow for other explorations of desire. These friendships that can be forged through online cruising should be recognized as a homosexual mode of a life – a space where men can *become* gay (Foucault 1989). The ineffable "something more" that gay men are trying to find through online cruising points to where the social order fails to allow spaces for gay men to have desexualized relationalities and pleasures. However, in trying to move "beyond sex," Adam4Adam.com

allows gay men to challenge their hyper-sexual stereotypes and to use their gay identity to not always seek sex but also these desexualized pleasures like friendship. In their search for "something more," gay men's experimental living in this digital era can lead to social and cultural change that seeks to humanize and desexualize gay men in society.

Adam4Adam.com may be the prime space to engage in this new experimental living because of the benefits it provides for gay men. In having to Taylorize their intimate lives, gay men can integrate connecting with other gay men through Adam4Adam.com into their busy lives and schedules. Likewise, Adam4Adam.com provides a quiet space where men can connect with other men outside of the noisy, cliquey gay scene. Gay men can also "cast a wider net," and can make connections with other gay men who they may not have ever encountered in the offline world. However, this expansion of the potential pool of people to meet is still limited online, especially if informants use Adam4Adam.com's filter system to only meet particular men. How do filter systems limit the relational possibilities and the forging of alliances for gay men? How does the structure of Adam4Adam.com shape my informants' own desire? And how is this website a microcosm of larger racial and gender structures of society? It is to these questions of exploring the limitations of meeting a diverse set of men on Adam4Adam.com that I now turn to.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

[1] As explored in more detail in Chapter 2, of the profiles analyzed in this study, white and Latino men were almost twice as likely to use a face picture as their main profile picture compared to black men. Black men typically used body pictures as their main profile pictures on the website.

Chapter 3: "The Beauty of Online Dating": Filtering Races & Quantifying Bodies

"Racially, it's generally white. Body type is usually athletic or muscular. Age range is between 25 and 35…And that's it - that I can think of," exclaimed Koby, a 27-year old Asian gay man, when describing his sexual preferences on Adam4Adam.com to me. Later, when Koby and I were discussing how people could select to see these individual preferences on Adam4Adam.com and other dating websites, he stated, "It's the beauty of online dating right? You can put in the parameters of what you want, and then, there you go." Koby's statement is telling: the search for gay male connections online is bound up with larger offline societal powers of inequality. With the advent of access to the Internet, many scholars believed online spaces would allow for a utopian democratic world without any social inequalities (see Chow-White 2006). Individuals online could be free from the constraints of the social structures of difference, where social categories like race and gender would be equalized or irrelevant. However, the Internet is a product of power and culture, and therefore, social identities are evident within cyberspace (Nakamura 2001, 2008). Race and other social categories become employed online through both texts and images, commodifying identities for consumption and divorcing them from politics and oppression.

In this chapter, I set out to uncover some of the forms of inequalities that exist on Adam4Adam.com in the lives of the gay men who use this website. Here, I focus on race and the body – as these two characteristics were the most salient in the interviews with my informants. Racism has been well documented within gay communities (Bérubé 2001; Han 2006; Caluya 2008) as well as body discrimination (Drummond 2005; Varangis et al. 2012). Nonetheless, how is the structure of Adam4Adam.com assuaging or exacerbating these forms of discrimination? And what forms do racism and body discrimination take on in cyberspace?

To tackle these questions, I offer up a three-fold thesis for this chapter: First, by analyzing the structure of Adam4Adam.com, I posit that the filtering system on this website allows users to cleanse particular racial bodies from their viewing practices. Russell Robinson (2008) postulated that dating websites' search features could be re-shaping people's racial desires. In this study then, I empirically show how this website essentializes and collapses race into a simple drop-down menu category. This marking of one's race normalizes users' everyday practices of filtering out bodies of color, reproducing the very same practices of racism that people experience as part of everyday life, offline.

Secondly, I utilize Patricia Hill Collins concept of the "new racism" and Sharon Holland's ideas around the everyday practices of racism within one's erotic life to show how these social exclusionary practices toward people of color are seen as not being discriminatory. In her book *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins (2004) defines the new racism as historical ideologies about black sexualities being re-invented into new ideological forms in order to justify discrimination and social exclusion of people of color. This new racism is transnational, based upon patterns of corporate organization that created a global economy, and it disseminated through mass media (Collins 2004). Here, I will show how the Internet, as a form of mass media (that is also globalized), creates a space to further manipulate ideas around people of color. One main way these discourses and ideologies work is through neoliberal discourses around "personal preference" that normalize racial discrimination in cyberspace.

Lastly, I turn to gay bodies in cyberspace. Relying upon Foucault's (1978) argument about the power and proliferation of discourses through science and feminist critiques of science in using quantifiable measures to establish "objectivity," I use the term *the quantifiable-body discourse* to illuminate how the body is numerically measured in order to "objectively" compare

bodies. This discourse requires all gay men to discipline their bodies to be the "ideal," desirable gay man. Men who are perceived as "fat" or physically unfit are seen as being sexually undesirable and thus rejected.

Ultimately, through utilizing a critical queer of color analysis (Ferguson 2004), I will highlight how the social exclusionary practices toward people of color and non-normative bodies on Adam4Adam.com materializes whiteness and masculinity as the norm, which in turn reifies heteronormativity. In this sense, these discriminatory practices may allow certain gay men to mitigate their subordinate position in society; however, they are giving into structures that further subjugate sexually marginalized people in the end.

Section 1. "I usually just filter it down": Cleansing Cyberspace

"Like since there is the filter thing that like lets you go by age, I usually just filter it down to like 18. I think I go up to 30, and then mainly just people that I think are attractive," explained Raj, a gay college student who is white and Indian. Tanner, a white gay man who works in public relations, stated, "I would always set my filters to I think 20 to 32. I would look for white, Latino, or Middle Eastern men. And I don't remember if there were further fields. Oh, I wanted somebody who was nearby but not next-door; so I would set my search to the region that I was in." In his study of around 500 Los Angeles profiles on Adam4Adam.com and through interacting with other users with multiple profiles, Russell Robinson (2008) theorizes that race-based searching for online sexual partners may be impacting users' reification of white desirability. In this section, I will first examine the structure of Adam4Adam.com's search engine. By showing how the gay men in this study are actually using this "quick search" feature, I will empirically build off of Robinson's (2008) predictions about how these search engines may be affecting users' notions of desirability. As Chun (2006) explicated, operating systems (and

here, I further this to include website infrastructures) constrain how users can present themselves, and therefore, what users think is a proper and desirable person. Revealing the structure of this website gives insight into how gay men are conceptualizing desirability in this digital era.

When a user makes his profile on Adam4Adam.com, he is required to fill out certain demographics in order to even inhabit the space, as discussed in the Introduction (see Appendix A). Salient characteristics such as ethnicity[1], body size, age, height, and weight are required to be filled out from a drop-down menu, tacitly telling users that these demographics matter the most within this space if one wants to present their desirable self. Accordingly, the website also places a further value judgment on certain demographics based upon its "quick search" feature (see Appendix I). Through turning on this feature, users can select to see only men within a certain age range and of a particular race or races, along with location and having a picture. Height, weight, and body type are important as a user must disclose them to have a profile, but clearly, age and race are constructed as the two most important factors of desirability as these are the only two demographics that the space allows for one to filter[2].

The design and interface of cyberspace already limits how a user can construct one's self – a user who is being created by and through their use of the space (Chun 2006). Adam4Adam.com is structuring intimate desires through marking certain characteristics as more desirable within this space based upon the required fields a user must fill out. Koby, Raj, and Tanner did not discuss hair color or one's attire as important to desirability; rather, they discussed the very same demographics that the website highlights the most – race and age. As Nakamura (2008) explained, racial identity is part of a user's self-representational online practices, especially in sites like Adam4Adam.com, where marking one's race is required to even

inhabit the space. Race, along with age, becomes a social category and a filter that a user has access to by choosing from a simple drop-down menu. Race is further utilized through selecting only to see a certain race or races and people of a certain age on the website. The complexities of race and age are erased through these filtering processes, as this search function just reduces these categories to a simple term that one can just click away.

Tito, a 23-year old self-identified white Hispanic who works in information technology, filters "from 18 to 39," and he selects to see "all races except black." Tito felt that this filter system on Adam4Adam.com set it apart from other gay dating applications like Grindr (which does not have a filter system) because it "allows you to just see your interests." Not only does race and age become visibly marked as the prime demographics of desirability with this space, but also to be able to filter out or to not see certain races and ages when inhabiting Adam4Adam.com is viewed as a positive feature of this dating site.

However, as Raj points out, "I've found people from all races attractive. I don't necessarily find like all black men attractive, but I've found some attractive at least. So you should be at least open to the possibility of that happening." Black men get named and marked as a group that is often not desirable for Raj; in stating that he finds *some* black men attractive, Raj marks this desire for black men outside of his normative desires. However, he feels that people should be open to the possibility of finding certain people within a race as desirable, even if people do not find that race, in general, to be attractive. People can choose to only search for white bodies within dating and hookup cyberspaces, never having to view a non-white body online (Robinson 2008). These spaces shape and regulate the intimate and sexual subjectivities of the users who inhabit these online spaces (Raj 2011). Robinson (2008) argues that if white users were forced to see bodies of color in these spaces, they may find some of them desirable –

something that Raj recognized as well. However, with this new cybernetic racial exclusion, Robinson (2008) ponders how whiteness can be left as the stable norm. As structures affect one's desires, website's designs are impacting users' racial preferences – and age as well (Robinson 2008; Wilson et al. 2009).

For Holland (2012), race has no meaning outside of racist practices, as today, race was and is given its meaning through discriminatory, differentiating, and often violent acts (e.g., slavery, lynching). Therefore, the structure of Adam4Adam.com is furthering racism (and ageism) through giving race (and age) a salient meaning on its site. Racialization becomes a digital process (Nakamura 2008), where a person is read not by their skin tone (and the phenotype associated with it), but literally is read by the naming of race through the drop-down menu choice that appears in a user's profile. This meaning is then furthered by the users who inhabit the space, who also assign essentialized meanings to the category of race by choosing to only see "white, Latino, or Middle Eastern men," "all races except black," or "it's generally white." One does not even have to look at a person's pictures; he can just look at the racial or age descriptor on one's profile or just search for a particular race and age range through the "quick search" feature.

In their content analysis of over 700 profiles of men seeking men on the website Manhunt.net, Callander and colleagues (2012) argued that the very nature of seeking a date or hookup invokes wanting to know descriptions about the desired other. Race and age must be made readily available for users to know since race and age are assigned meaning through these quotidian practices of managing intimate spaces and lives. Race and age are named in order for erotic play to be organized according to the larger hegemonic structures of society. These discriminatory practices are heightened even more when users not only use these filter systems

but also view them as "the beauty of online dating," as stated by Koby. This marking of race and age as important to organizing erotic life is bound up within quotidian practices of the normalization of naming these demographics in a profile and the pedestrian nature of these "quick search" features on most dating sites. These discriminatory practices are constructed as positively essential to online gay dating where one can use a "quick search" to cleanse out people of color and people of certain ages that one does not want to see or find desirable. The term "quick search" though is just the first euphemism for these quotidian discriminatory practices of gay online dating; I now turn to racial desires being seen as a normalized form of discrimination.

Section 2. "Not like discriminating in a bad way": Race & Sexual Stratification

Within these neoliberal times of personal choice, racism is often masked through acts of mild prejudices, such as "preferring" to date or have sex with a particular race (Holland 2012). Neoliberalism is the term used to describe the pro-business activism beginning in the 1970s, where attacks on progressive laws and redistributive social movements were superseded by an upwardly redistribution of resources where everyone "equally" had a chance to obtain these resources through individual hard-work and responsibility (Duggan 2003). These neoliberal discourses rely upon these economic beliefs to further liberalism discourses that everyone is equal under the law, making discrimination like racism appear to not exist (Holland 2012). As discrimination is erased through these discourses, people's personal life choices, like preferring to date or have sex with a particular race, is not seen as prejudice, but just one's personal preference. However, since racism makes race as a category actually have meaning, racism is not removed from these intimate practices (Fung 1991; Holland 2012). Actually, systematic practices of racism and racialization produce these quotidian effects of desiring a particular race (Guzmán 2006; Holland 2012). These effects set limits to human desire as people of certain

racial groups are not even considered as a possibility for an intimate engagement for both people of color and white individuals (Holland 2012).

In this section, I explore how race becomes constructed as a personal preference for the gay men in this study. Using the Internet is now an everyday practice for these gay men; therefore, through using Holland's (2012) work on "everyday racism" and intimacy and desire, I suggest that this discourse of personal preference is a new, nuanced expression of this quotidian racism. This everyday racism is disseminated through the mass media of the Internet, and it marks a form of new racism (see Collins 2004). The larger societal structures of racism and its ideologies get masked and distorted within this "personal preference" discourse, making it difficult for people to see how one's desires are shaped by society and the structure of Adam4Adam.com. I also turn to the literature on homophily – on how and why people often build relationships with similar others (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001) - to show how the desire for white gay men gets normalized as the superior racial preference for both people of color and white individuals within this space. Through illuminating how the structure of Adam4Adam.com works in tandem with these neoliberal and homophilous discourses on racial desire, I show how macro-structures of racialization and micro-interactions of "personal choice" influence one another to further an erotic new racism in this digital age.

A. "People have their turn-ons and turn-offs": Race as a Personal Preference

"I can say that I have never had sex with Asian people and black people. It doesn't mean anything. Its just like, you know, people have their turn-ons and turn-offs," stated Acar, a 26-year old Turkish-Greek graduate student. Koby held a similar view, when he told me:

I am open to all races, though I have a more - I don't want to say discriminate - but I do discriminate, I guess, against blacks. But not like discriminating in a bad way, it's just like, I don't have, I'm not attracted to black men. However, I have been attracted to like half-black and then all the other races are fine. I generally don't go towards Asians either.

Both Acar and Koby found Asian and black men to be undesirable. As previous research has shown, black and Asian men typically are abjected to the lowest realms of erotic racial preferences - black individuals for being seen as hypersexual and Asian men for being seen as asexual (Wilson et al. 2009; Paul, Ayala, and Choi 2010). Acar and Koby do not see these racial desires as discrimination - "it doesn't mean anything." However, race plays a central role in whom these men are choosing to interact with and meet on Adam4Adam.com. In not wanting to "go towards" black or Asian men, race becomes marked as significant in these men's lives. When race is marked, racism is present (Holland 2012).

In fact, race is marked very specifically. Koby's comment about being attracted to "half-black" shows how there is a racial gradient hierarchy, where black bodies represent the lowest rung on this hierarchy. However, if one can mix blackness with another race, then these individuals can gain some erotic capital to become more desirable. Similar to Robnett and Feliciano's (2011) findings on heterosexual Internet dating profiles on Yahoo Personals, social distancing through Internet dating is not just directed from white people toward black individuals, but it operates between and among people of color as well. This erotic rejection of one's own race often stems from internalized racism, where a racial minority accepts the larger negative messages about one's race being inferior, and hence, identifies himself with whiteness and/or perceives whiteness as superior (Jones 2000).

For example, Darryl, a 24-year old African American underwriter, also used the word "discriminate" when stating, "I guess, hooking up-wise, I don't discriminate racially. I've only hooked up with one black person though…I would date a black person before I would hookup with a black person. I don't know why, I just, something tells me to just stay away from skinny gay black boys that like to get fucked." In Darryl's description of black individuals whom he meets on Adam4Adam.com for just a hookup, there is no space for individuality. Black bodies are not seen as being heterogenous; they are all lumped into being non-desirable. Under racialized heteronormative discourses, black people are always sexually homogenized as being undesirable, where the heterogeneity of black people is erased (Ferguson 2004). However, if Darryl wants to date a particular black person, then he would take the time to get to know "the type of person that they are" as Darryl told me he does with potential dates. Here, where the relationship is not predicated on sex, space is opened up for black men to be seen as individual subjects with their own personalities. However, in general, black bodies get collapsed into something to "just stay away from."

As part of online desirable narratives, race is commodified in order to attract others within gay hookup spaces (Mowlabocus 2010; Paul, Ayala, and Choi 2010). Through this commodification, sexual racism like race-specific sexual objectification and race-based sexual stereotyping occurs. Wilson and colleagues (2009), in their qualitative study with over 100 gay men who use the Internet to look for bareback sex, define race-based sexual stereotyping "…as inferred beliefs and expectations about the attributes a sexual experience will take on based on the race of the partner involved in the experience" (400). These race-based sexual stereotypes erase the heterogeneity among racial populations, where people of color often are pressured to conform to these stereotypes in order to be sexually viable on- and offline (Robinson 2008;

Wilson et al. 2009). One's personal preferences begin to become revealed. One may not be attracted to particular people of color because they are constructed through the lens of race-based sexual stereotypes. Race-based sexual stereotypes erase people of color's individual traits that should be more important in whom one wants to date or have sex with (e.g., hobbies, sexual interests). Men of color's humanity and personal life are reduced to being a race and a category. Through the everyday practice of using the search feature on this site – a search feature that is premised upon social inclusion and exclusion – users can erase and cleanse people of color through a simple click on the screen. This everyday practice of racial categorization and exclusion in online spaces is one of the ways in which the new racism operates within this digital media age.

A brief, but telling, conversation unfolded between Tanner and me when we met. Before moving to Austin, Tanner went to college in New York City. His description of Adam4Adam and the people who use Adam4Adam in New York City reveals how racial stereotypes can often operate in the gay imagination of desire:

> Tanner: You had to cross the river to often times visit the people on Adam4Adam. Manhunt [a paid subscription gay dating and hookup website] was more for the people in the city [Manhattan]. Manhunt was more lower-island - SoHo, Tribeca, the Villages, Chelsea. And Adam4Adam was really above 150th street; so like way up there or over in Brooklyn or even Queens. So it was just Manhunt was where you went for people in Manhattan who are white and not into weird kinky things - if that makes sense.
>
> Interviewer: And then Adam4adam was seen as...?
>
> Tanner: If you want to get fisted, you went on Adam4Adam, or if you had a Latino flair or something.

Interviewer: There are more people of color on there?

Tanner: Yea.

People of color's erotic potentialities are constrained through ideologies, which seek to maintain white hegemony (Collins 2004; Holland 2012). Race-based sexual stereotypes rely upon historical ideologies about bodies of color, especially around sexual roles and behaviors (Robinson 2008). Through being fetishized and objectified within these spaces, black bodies are seen as being aggressive and having big penises; Asians are seen as sexually submissive and having small penises; and Latinos are seen as sensual and having uncut penises (Wilson et al. 2009; Paul, Ayala, and Choi 2010). These stereotypes rely upon larger notions of black bodies being violent, Asian bodies as asexual, and Latin bodies as exotic. As Senthorun Raj (2011) argues, "…the body becomes bound within a discursive space that defines my erotic potential in fragmented terms like 'slave' or 'btm' [bottom]" (5).

In Tanner's description of the different people who occupy different websites, one can understand how "personal preference" is shaped by and through race-based sexual stereotypes. In NYC, Tanner preferred to pay for a subscription on Manhunt.net, so Tanner could connect with white people who were "not into weird kinky things." Bodies of color, or white people who desire people of color (those who have "a Latino flair"), get conflated with hyper-sexuality and kink (e.g., fisting). Whiteness gets associated with "proper" sexuality, where people of color and their admirers get relegated to being dirty, immoral, and perverse (Owens 2004). To avoid having to see or connect with people of color, one could pay to inhabit a website (e.g., Manhunt.net), where more "normal" white men could be found - the men who live in the appropriate parts of Manhattan.

Darryl and Cisco talked about their experiences of black men messaging them on Adam4Adam.com. “The guys that pretty much hit me up are black - which is interesting. I don’t know why I just said it was interesting. To me, it’s interesting because [Darryl whispers] I don’t really hookup with black people.” Cisco, a 24-year old Latino artist, gave a detailed account of his thoughts on black men trying to talk to him on the website:

> Every so often it’s the African Americans who hit me up, only because apparently I’m the Latino that they like. And I’m like, “I don’t care; I really don’t care. But you seem like a nice guy, I’ll keep talking to you.” And I keep mentioning that “I will not have fucking sex with you, just so you know.” And they keep hinting and hinting, and I’m like “No dude, I’m not going to have sex with you.”

One can see how even when black people try to connect with other people on Adam4Adam.com, these black men are not seen as individuals, but they are only seen through the lens of their stereotype. Darryl, who is black, finds it “interesting” that black people contact him, as he is not interested in having sex with them, so it “never goes anywhere” because he is interested in white and Latino men. Darryl even has to “initiate the first contact” with a white or Latino person whom he wants to hookup with. Nonetheless, Darryl does not like being contacted by black men, though they may only be contacting him because it is hard for black men, including Darryl himself, to make contact with non-black people on the website (Robinson 2008). Likewise, in Cisco’s narrative, who identifies as Latino, black people again get conflated with hyper-sexuality. Although Cisco, as well as all of the other men in this study except for Tanner, are looking for friendship on Adam4Adam.com (see Chapter 2), Cisco describes his interactions with black individuals on the website in just sexual terms. These black individuals get

constructed as constantly pestering him about having sex, where Cisco has to constantly remind black men that he will talk to them but not have sex with them.

Through these narratives, one can begin to see how "personal preferences" are actually structured by larger systems of stratification. Building off of Martin and George's (2006) theory of sexual stratification, Green (2008) theorizes that sexual sites – spaces of sexual sociality – are part of a larger sexual field – a stratified matrix of relations that is often a part of other macro-stratified social systems. Within these sexual fields, there are tiers of desirability, where one is classed within this ranking based upon one's erotic capital – the quality and quantity of eroticism that one possesses that elicits an erotic response in another. Although sexual fields are often based upon larger stratified social structures, the individual sexual sites have their own sexual schemas that erotic players must learn to play and navigate (Green 2008, 2011). In online sexual sites, the sexual field can often be defined through the content of online profiles, which give a sense of the erotic capital of the website (Green 2011). Socio-sexual categories like masculine and feminine and/or black and white are often embedded within the sexual stratification of sexual fields and erotic capital.

Within the sexual field of Adam4Adam.com, my informants who navigated within this sexual site saw black and Asian individuals as the least desirable. The larger sexual field of desirability that ideologically constructs people of color as hyper-sexual or asexual (Davis 2003; Smith 2005; Chong-suk 2006) demotes people of color to a lower ranking on the tier of desirability — online and offline. Nonetheless, this sexual stratification gets glossed over through neoliberal ideas of "personal preference." This new racism of "personal preference" gains its insidiousness through the mass media of the Internet and people's everyday practices online. The structure of Adam4Adam.com and its filtering system normalizes the everyday use

of just finding particular racial bodies as desirable. The cleansing out of non-desirable bodies from one's online viewing and chatting practices furthers this normalizing practice of not having to interact with people of color. Racialized structures of desire and sexual stratification become completely part of my informants' use of Adam4Adam.com, as these issues are completely embedded within the infrastructure of the website.

B. "I'm so Aryan with my sexual preferences": Desiring Whiteness

"But it worried me that I was so into white-bread. Basically, I love white boys and blondes in particular. I'm so Aryan with my sexual preferences; it freaks me out a little bit," states Riley as he describes his taste for white men to me. Riley, who is a white gay man, continues this talk by mentioning how he did have sex with many men of color: "So I really wanted to test that and just make myself get out of my comfort zone. And I basically did that while I was in college. And so I had sex with lots of different types of people and different types of men, and found that I was most comfortable where I started - with white boys." Riley's reflections on his erotic racial preference reveal two key things when it comes to race and sexuality: consumption and comfort.

In her piece "Eating the Other," bell hooks (1992) shows how white culture, which is often perceived as boring or without culture, often commodifies and consumes people of color in order to "spice" up whiteness. In having sexual encounters with people of color, white individuals hope to be changed by the encounter, where they do not feel so "white-bread" anymore (hooks 1992). White people's taste and palates become appeased through consuming people of color; in being commodified, race is stripped from its political and historical meanings and all intragroup difference is erased (hooks 1992; Owens 2004). Riley's comments quite literally reveal this eating of the other. People of color become just something to consume to

"test" one's preferences. Riley hoped to be transformed by stepping out of his "comfort zone." Ultimately though, people of color could only provide a temporary spice, exploration, and adventure to Riley's sex life; he ended up where he started, a comfortable place – with white boys.

This ending up where Riley started engenders notions around homophily, dating, friendship, and attraction. The social structures of society constrain and shape how people build relationships with whom, and people are often limited to only meeting others within one's own environments (e.g., workplace, neighborhood) (Nardi 1999). In their review of the literature on homophily, McPherson and colleagues (2001) found that residential proximity is the number one predictor of homophily. Being around similar others actually shapes one's attraction to these similar others.

Although there may be a breakdown of environmental constraints in online spaces, offline effects of homophily can still affect online choices with whom to contact and connect (Skopek, Schulz, and Blossfeld 2011). This finding is revealed in this study as well. The gay white men I interviewed, despite having access to meeting a variety of people on Adam4Adam.com, preferred to meet other white men. Previous research on homophily and gay friendships and connections show a similar pattern of gay white men forming more intimate relationships with other gay white men (Nardi 1999; Galupo 2009). This homophily is exacerbated online, where people can search for others who share homogamous traits through these online filtering systems. However, previous research has shown that same-sex couples are more likely to be in inter-racial relationships compared to heterosexual counterparts (Schwartz and Graf 2009; Gates 2012). Earlier literature, though, suggested that this inter-racial coupling may be because gay individuals make up a small population in society, and therefore, they do not

have as many people to choose to date as heterosexual individuals, leaving gay people to date outside their race (Kurdek 2003). This thin dating market may be driving same-sex inter-racial coupling, where the Internet has allowed for the expansion of this market, in turn, allowing for gay individuals to be more selective in their dating criteria. One of these new selection processes includes excluding people of color. With this breakdown of environmental constraints through online arenas and "casting a wider net," one can see that other socio-political factors are at work in constraining and constructing who befriends whom and what connections are made both online and offline.

Of the 100 advertisements I analyzed for this research endeavor, 0% stated they were seeking explicitly a non-white race unless it was coupled with also seeking white men (see Appendices K & L). On the contrary, a white preference was often mentioned within people's profiles as the desired race that one was seeking, regardless of the race of the user (see Appendices K-O). As profile in Appendix M explicates: he is a "chill, masc[uline] dude" who does not want someone "over 48" and wants another "tall and muscular" man, and he "usually only hookup[s] with white guys." The text of this person's profile then goes on to talk more about himself and his hobbies right after defining himself through the people whom he desires.

This act can be seen in other users' profiles as well. One user is a "Fun, honest, stable, and normal masculine guy…into tall, lean, fit white and Hispanic guys, in their late twenties to thirties…" (Appendix K); he also enjoys traveling, cooking, and other activities. One's "preference" for another race (Appendices K & M) gets cited alongside other preferences like hiking and movies. A racial preference becomes named and labeled along side of activity preferences, where one should share a similar interest and race.

Several examples besides the above ones include:

Mostly into white guys 21-40-sorry just a preference. (Appendix N)

Into WHITE guys. Sorry just my preference. Like guys…close to my age. Not into fats or fems! Like real men! (Appendix O)

INTO ALL KINDS OF MEN BUT MOSTLY LATINOS AND WHITES 18 TO 40 (Appendix L)

There are no stereotypes associated with these white men; rather, they represent the norm of beauty by which bodies of color are judged (Wilson et al. 2009). These users do not desire a particular whiteness (e.g., a white top) but just whiteness itself. They must be young and masculine,[3] but there are no stereotypes associated with white sexuality. One defines one's self as white (and/or as seeking whiteness), marking whiteness as the most desired racial category within this space. Balsam and colleagues (2011) found that people of color experienced explicit statements of "no [non-white] person" (micro-assaults) as micro-aggressions that could be linked to higher depression and stress for LGBT people of color. The naming of "mostly into white guys" may not only further the white norm of desirability, but can also lead to further stress and depression for people of color inhabiting Adam4Adam.com.

This desiring of whiteness also becomes normalized through also referring to it as "just a preference" like any other hobby or sporting activity. Just as marking non-white races as undesirable is normalized through quotidian racist practices of personal choice, so too is whiteness marked as desirable within a similar neoliberal logic. This neoliberal logic of desire works in tandem with ideas around homophily. Owens (2004) found in her study on race, sexual attractiveness, and Internet personals that when a user did not explicitly desire a particular race, then he or she would mention one's hobbies as a way to find similar others. On Adam4Adam.com, the story is different. Having things in common includes being of the same

race. Here, homophilous discourses of sharing similar interest (e.g., cooking, hiking) are also part of being of the same race. This discourse around having similar activity and racial preferences masks the larger sexual stratification structures that shapes one's desires, as it works to normalize whiteness, linking it to attributes like cooking, which potentially adds to one's erotic capital within this space. The website layout allows for whiteness to be placed at the top in the racialized sexual field of Adam4adam.com. This racialized sexual field is then given life through users everyday interactions and practices on the website while they are searching for love, sex, friendship, a relationship, or something more.

This naming and marking of whiteness was also discussed explicitly by some of my other informants. Tito, who lived in Miami before moving to Austin, stated that he now finds white men as the "most interesting" because they are "a novelty here" as he claims no white men existed where Tito lived in Florida. Likewise, Cisco tersely stated, "Honestly, my attraction is mainly white men, so I usually click on white [men's profiles]." Darryl also said, "Yea, so I prefer to date any race. Hooking up, pretty much white or Hispanic - Latinos."

In a large study on heterosexual dating online, white people, when compared to people of color, are often far more likely to date within their own race (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). In fact, race is one of the main selection criteria white users look for on dating websites – more important than education or religious preferences (Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie 2009). Latinos are the most included out-group by white online daters – a fact held true by the profiles analyzed and the comments of the informants in this study. Likewise, as stated earlier, social distancing and the exclusion of black and Asian people from people's dating and sexual preferences happen by people of color as well (Robnett and Feliciano 2011). Both Tito and Cisco, as Latinos, and Darryl, as a black man, desire white men mostly. Their desire to date or

have sex with white people assigns whiteness as being at the top tier of desirability within the sexual field of this website.

This desire for whiteness is not seen within a larger structure that values whiteness as the hegemonic beauty standard, but rather, it is again "just a preference." Quotidian racist practices work to not only mark what is undesirable (i.e., non-white men), but it also marks what is desirable (i.e., white men). It masks its racist mechanics though by framing it within neoliberal and homophilous discourses around "choice," "preference," and/or "my comfort zone." The Internet gives a space for this new racism to be expressed without any social repercussions because it is seen as just a normal part of online dating. This new racism though and its value of whiteness is bound up with heteronormativity, which seeks to not only relegate LGBT people but also people of color's sexualities (Ferguson 2004). To value whiteness is to reify certain aspects of the heteronormative society that relies upon white sexuality being the proper norm. In this sense, the racialized discourses and exclusionary practices on Adam4Adam.com are reifying a structure – white, patriarchal, heteronormativity – that ultimately subjugates everyone who is on this website, though to varying degrees. The racialized sexual stratification that is being furthered through these discourses, as well as the structure of the website, need to be challenged in order for people of color to be seen as individuals and potential partners on dating and hookup websites. Seeing people of color as individuals will not only challenge white supremacy but also its complementary power structure heteronormativity. I now turn to another form of social exclusion on Adam4Adam.com that also needs to be challenged – the gay body.

Section 3. "Who doesn't like a nice body?": The Ideal (Gay) Body

The male body is objectified and commodified in societies, though there are culturally specific ideas about what constitutes the ideal form of male beauty (Swami and Tovée 2008;

Glasser, Robnett, Feliciano 2009). Within mainstream gay communities, the hegemonic norm of beauty has often been documented as being young[4] and muscular (Kaufman and Phua 2003; Lodge and Umberson 2013). For instance, in a quantitative study comparing 134 gay men with 119 heterosexual men, Tiggeman and colleagues (2007) found that gay men idealized thinner and more muscular bodies than straight men and that gay men experience lower self-esteem about their bodies compared to their heterosexual male counterparts. Similar to heterosexual women, gay men must navigate this "body fascism" of society that constantly reminds these men that their desirability is bound up with the shape of their body (Adam 2000). Gay men are about as dissatisfied with their weight as heterosexual women (Levesque and Vichesky 2006).

In this section, I explore how the body is constructed and desired on Adam4Adam.com. I show how the website quantifies bodies for users to quickly compare one's body to another. I then reveal how this quantification of bodies leads to the discrimination of people with larger bodies on Adam4Adam.com. I suggest that dating and hookup websites such as Adam4Adam.com are perpetuating the larger norms around bodies and beauty; however, these norms take on unique forms in cyberspace that must be explored in their complexities.

A. "Height-weight proportionality": Quantifying the Body

"As long as you are fit, I don't think it matters," explains Cisco as he is telling me what type of men he is attracted to. He continues, "At least height and weight proportionate, that is actually a lot better than 'Oh, you are extremely ripped. Yea, but can you hug yourself?' And also the fat people, 'Oh, can you touch your toes?' I know you are nice and all, but I don't think I want to lift up flab if I ever get to that point." Notions of "height and weight proportionate" and other numerical ways of measuring the body were mentioned by many of the gay informants in this study. Again, to even make a profile on Adam4Adam.com, one must disclose one's age,

height, and waist size (all numerical options chosen from a drop-down menu), and one must also numerically enter one's weight. This requirement of disclosing these numbers before one can inhabit the space can alert to a user that these quantifiable characteristics are important components of assessing desirability on Adam4Adam.com (Campbell 2004). Quantifying the body allows one to assess where one fits on the tiers of desirability within the sexual field of this website. Erotic capital can become aligned with specific numbers – one must be height and weight proportionate.

As Tanner also explains, "I was looking for people who were I guess with a BMI between 21 and 28 - like the normal, average person range. Of course I liked men who were a little bit taller. I'm a tall person, so it's a bit strange with somebody who is five-foot four. […] So yea, just people of average composition." A user's "stats" – a term derived from the professional sports realm to describe an athlete's statistical record of performance – becomes a way for people in cyberspace to relay information about their physical bodies (Campbell 2004: 121). For example, Tanner can look at a person's height, weight, and waist size (as noted in every person's profile). From there, Tanner can make sure these numbers align, and then he can quickly assess if this user falls within an "average composition."

I use the term *the quantifiable-body discourse* to capture this numerical body assessment phenomenon that happens in many societies today. Discourses are "…powerful, taken-for-granted assumptions that shape how people think, talk, and act" (Elliot 2012: 13). Discourses reflect dominant interests, and these discourses are often crafted by "experts" in scientific, medical, political and other socially influential professions. One way discourses gain their legitimacy today is through the science of statistics and quantification. For example, in studying and quantifying people's sexual desires and practices, a science of sexuality was engendered

where populations could be regulated for heterosexual reproduction (Foucault 1978). This quantification of sexual acts proliferated discourses on sexualities that sought to construct the norm as heterosexual monogamy while showing those deviating to be abnormal.

In fact, statistics and quantification measures were specifically and historically established to construct certain bodies as inferior (i.e., black bodies) – "significantly different" - and to legitimize white superiority (Hughes 1995). More contemporarily, *The Bell Curve* used the "objective" measure of IQ to basically argue also for white superiority; these authors relied upon the statistical center of the bell curve to establish sameness and normalcy, where standard deviations from the center are used to explain and justify difference (Grey 1999). In this way, power and domination have been implemented within this "scientific" way of measuring bodies as it has historically been about establishing societal norms and "objectively" legitimating the inferiority of other populations (Hughes 1995). This process happens through first naming what is different, which is often based upon larger hegemonic powers within society. According to Hughes (1995: 402), "Quantification creates the scientific illusion that subjectivity and politics have been transcended. Numbers, in and of themselves, proclaim objectivity."

This reach of quantifiable measures to establish some "objective" truth throughout many societies today extends to almost any concept, even something as apparently complicated as happiness[5]. Through relying upon science and "objective" quantifiable measures, discourses gain legitimacy in telling people how they should act, think, and be.

Therefore, *the quantifiable-body discourse* is when people rely on numbers, which are often couched in scientific reasoning of compositing "the normal, average person range," to assess people's size and desirability. In fact, "body weight and height are used in combination as simple and reliable measurements for evaluating nutritional and overall health status and

screening for overweight" (Kuczmarski and Flegal 2000: 1074). Although there are debates about whether the body mass index (BMI) – weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared – is the best way to assess someone's health and "overweight"[6] status (Burkhauser and Cawley 2008), I posit that these general scientific discourses about the body still manifest themselves in how the gay men in this study assess their bodies and others' bodies. The prevalence of my informants mentioning height-weight proportionality shows just one way of how this quantifiable-body discourse gets bound up in these gay men's every day assessment of desirable bodies.

These quantifiable measures actually make it easy for users in cyberspace to compare one's measures to another user's measures (Campbell 2004). As Raj told me, "I'm attracted to like the standard attractive, like you know, 32-waist or whatever. But I'll also send it [an online message] to people who are like 33- or 34-waist. I mean, I realize that since I'm not in the best shape, people who are in really good shape are not going to be interested in me, so there is no point in sending them a message." Tanner can easily compare his height with another user, and Raj can compare his waist-line with another user. These "stats" disembody the body into discrete objects, where one does not see if one shares similar interests with another person, but just quickly compares their quantified bodies to see if they may be compatible.

Likewise, Mikel, a black gay events supervisor, talks about how these numerical ways of describing the body can be initially more important than one's pictures:

> Sometimes I don't look at the images first. One of the first things I look at is height and weight. I'm fine with someone being short and skinny, or you know, tall and a little heavier. But yea, if you are five-four and 200 pounds, I'm probably not going to be

attracted to you. So that's pretty much what I look for first is that height-weight proportionality.

Disclosing one's "stats" emerged in the online arena before pictures became a popular part of online dating websites (Campbell 2004). Even though pictures are a common feature of dating and hookup websites today, these numerical descriptors are still important as they allow users to "objectively" assess if one's body meets the scientific, average standard. These "stats" make the body a static entity with just a fixed set of values (ibid.). This quantified way of viewing another profile allows users to make snap judgments about another user. My informants can compare themselves to another person, and then decide whether or not to continue looking at this person's profile and/or engage in conversation with him. This numerical way of assessing the body erases individuality and allows for other bodies that fall outside of the "average" bodily numbers to be seen as non-desirable. Through this quantifiable-body discourse, the "average" body gets "objectively" normalized as being desired, erasing how this discourse discriminates against bodies that fall outside of its reach. In masking itself in "science," bodily desire of height-weight proportionality is left unproblematized.

B. "Very lean and muscular": Qualifying the Body

"I tend to type or I tend to text people who are in good shape," explained Acar. Koby enjoys men with "athletic builds, muscular – lean muscular." When later describing one of the two men he has developed a relationship with through Adam4Adam.com, Koby mentioned, "He also had pictures of his body, which is very lean and muscular, which is what I am into. So I said hello, and just complimented him on his body, and that's it. And we just started talking from there." Aside from desiring lean and muscular bodies, Leonardo told me, "I tend to like smaller guys. […] I'm a pretty tall guy, and I'm pretty big, so I like someone smaller and thinner than

me." Lastly, Gabriel had two different types of body types that he was attracted to: "I typically like the little smaller guys - the twink guys. […] Then on the flip side, I go for the other extreme, which is the muscular guys."

As these above quotes reveal, within the quantifiable-body discourse, there were actual specific body physiques that my informants looked for in other men on Adam4Adam.com. In previous studies, muscular and athletic body types are often seen as the most attractive (Lanzieri and Hildebrandt 2011; Varangis et al. 2012). This fact holds true in the sexual field of Adam4Adam.com, where lean, muscular, in-shape, thin bodies represent the top tiers of desirability within the embodiment of erotic capital within the quantifiable-body discourse in cyberspace. Acar and Koby mainly talk to people who possess these types of bodily physiques. Koby may never have met his good friend from Adam4Adam.com had his friend not had the body that Koby desired. It was only through having this body that Koby contacted this gay man, and Koby even started the conversation through complimenting this other man on his body.

Accordingly, Swami and Tovée (2008) have suggested that the desire for muscularity among gay men may be linked to how gay men can use their bodies to display masculinity. Under the quantifiable-body discourse, gay masculinities rely on a body that has to be disciplined, controlled, and desired. This desire for these particular bodies and disciplining of one's own body can, again, be a reflection of the bodily sexual stratification of the larger society that gets built into the infrastructure of the website. For example, in building a profile, one must select a body type to inhabit the space. These body type drop-down menu choices are: slim, average, swimmer's, athletic, muscular, bodybuilder, and large. Through these selections, tiers of desirability are formed around the athletic body (though said in various different ways), while erasing the desirability of fatness – "large" stands out as not really being synonymous with the

other choices. This drop-down menu alone tells a user that the sexual field of Adam4Adam.com privileges athletic bodies as desirable within this space.

Nevertheless, for my informants to use the exact words of "athletic" and "muscular" are not surprising given that these body types constitute the top tiers of desirability and erotic capital on the website and often within the larger society. Men who occupy Adam4Adam.com can quickly assess and discriminate against particular bodies that are marginalized within the quantifiable-body discourse. From there, they desire the athletic and muscular bodies that are attributed high erotic capital within this space. These men also discipline their own bodies to fit the mold of this discourse as well, as muscular, masculine bodies help one construct a gay identity. However, who gets rendered as abject from this quantifiable-body discourse and these limited qualitative descriptors that are found on Adam4Adam.com?

C. "Rather be extremely overweight or sick with HIV?": Abject Bodies

"I'm pretty stereotypical. Who doesn't like a nice body? I'm not super body conscious or body critical, but I prefer people to have a reasonable level of fitness. I try to be decent to look at when I'm naked, and I just think that especially at my age, it's what you have to do if you want to get laid," began Riley as he was describing to me the type of physical bodies that he found to be desirable. In a telling turn of reflexivity, Riley continued:

> We [gay men] are so hard on each other, and there's a lot of pressure to look a certain way. I mean, I was talking to my friends, and I posed the question to a group of my friends: "In the gay community - as it is now, where we live - would you rather be extremely overweight or really sick with HIV? Like what do you think would get you treated worse by whom we're around - by our people?" And almost everyone at the table acknowledged that they would rather have HIV than be extremely overweight in the gay

community. And I totally agreed with them. So anyways, I've gone off on a tangent from the original question. But yea, I look for fit guys, and I try to at least be reasonably fit too.

Riley (and his friends) see being "overweight" as more stigmatizing than being "really sick" with HIV. In this acknowledgment, both being "overweight" and being HIV positive are recognized as stigmatized and marginalized positions among gay men. However, a gay man who is "overweight" is situated as having less erotic capital than one who is HIV positive. This being "overweight" is juxtaposed against being "fit" or having "a nice body" as described in the above sections. Likewise, as Whitesel (2007: 93) states, "Following the personal ad lingo, a failure to be 'height-weight proportionate' goes beyond the bounds of how a gay body 'ought to *look*.' Gay men marginalise other gay men who fail to conform to strict bodily standards and use these boundaries in the making of inequality." The quantifiable-body discourse goes beyond how one should look – it is clearly abjecting those that fall outside of this "average" norm – particularly gay individuals with larger bodies. Riley thinks that gay men are hard on one another because of these hegemonic gay beauty standards, but most of these men, including Riley, still try to be "fit" and expect the same in their dating and sexual partners.

In accordance, Hugo told me, "I'm not into, you know, like chubs [a large gay man]. I'm not a chubby chaser [gay men who desire larger individuals] or anything, so I don't click on those profiles." Likewise, Mikel jokingly, yet truthfully, told me, "Overweight Hispanic guys - I'm also not attracted to them. Not the Hispanic thing, it's the overweight. Like I'm fine with whatever race you are, but dude seriously hit a gym. Put down the taco. Sorry, that was slightly racist. [He laughs] I might have to use that one in my [comedy] show. I like that." For Hugo, desiring "overweight" people gets placed into its own fetishized category (i.e., "chubby chaser")

– marking them as different – as not normal. For Mikel, being "overweight" again gets marked with another marginalized position in the tier of desirability – being "Hispanic." Mikel is quick to point out though, that like HIV for Riley, being "overweight" is more of a problem than being a person of color. "Overweight" becomes one of the main rungs on the tiers of desirability, where an "overweight" individual's erotic capital may only be worth anything if within specific gay fetish communities, (for example, the bear communities [see Hennen 2008]).

Stripping "overweight" individuals from most, if not all, gay erotic capital is normalized through the quantifiable-body discourse and the binary construction of fit versus "overweight" bodies. The quantifiable-body discourse, based on scientific assumptions, can support people's desires for "fit" and "athletic" bodies because these bodies can be seen as the "average" healthy norm of embodiment. Those who fall outside of the "average" BMI bodies can quickly be over-looked by ignoring profiles that are not height-weight proportionate. This discourse though has a more noxious effect than just ignoring height-weight disproportionate profiles. It leads to the discrimination of "overweight" individuals within gay communities. Being "overweight" is seen as being worse than having HIV, and possibly, as having less erotic capital compared to "fit" gay men. This hierarchy of gay masculinities reifies the larger social norms that oppress all gay men though, as larger notions of hegemonic masculinity are upheld.

Conclusion

Structures of inequality and sexual stratification limit erotic desire. Adam4Adam.com, which has a similar interface as most dating and hookup websites, these inequalities take on new forms. The theories of the Internet being a utopia devoid of any social inequalities has been documented and challenged (see Nakamura 2001; Chow-White 2006; Nakamura 2008). However, this study empirically shows how the structure of Adam4Adam.com can exacerbate

sexual stratification within the lives of the men who use this website. Robinson (2008) theorized that website filtering systems may limit who sees and contacts whom. My informants' narratives expand on this perspective by showing how these "quick search" features often lead to the cleansing of black and Asian men for the gay men in this study who use this aspect of Adam4Adam.com. In not even having to see bodies of color on the website, I suggest that sexual stratification is exacerbated, where whiteness gains even more erotic value through stripping black and Asian men of erotic capital in not even having to look at them or interact with them online. While being online, a gay man browsing Adam4Adam.com can simply click to erase and make men of color invisible – the very same men who might not be desirable offline either.

This macro-level of sexual stratification gets rationalized on the micro-interactional level through neoliberal discourses around "personal preference" and notions of homophily. One's erotic taste for white (and to a lesser extent Latino) men is not seen as discrimination, but is seen through the discourse of one's personal individual choice. This "personal preference" is a form of new racism, where the Internet allows for a space to openly disclose these discriminatory remarks but not see them as racist. However, this choice is not independent of the larger structures that commodify non-white sexuality as abnormal (Robinson 2008; Wilson et al. 2009). Historically, people of color, and especially black men, have been de-humanized and seen as hyper-sexual (Collins 2004). This sexual construction of people of color (mainly, black, Latinos and Asians) is juxtaposed against white sexuality, which becomes the sexual hegemony (or sexual supremacy): White gay men occupy the norm of desirability and has the most erotic capital on the website.

Lastly, inspired by Foucault's (1978) conception of science and discourse and feminist critiques of numbers and objectivity (for example, Hughes 1995), I suggested the concept *the*

quantifiable-body discourse in order to show bodies get measured and compared in cyberspace in order to discipline bodies to be lean and fit. Likewise, bodies in cyberspace not only get quantified and disciplined and but also this quantification process marginalizes "different" bodies that are outside the norm.

However, although Riley saw being "overweight" as more stigmatizing than being HIV positive, HIV still is a powerful construct that is shaping the lives of the gay men who use Adam4Adam.com. In the following analytical chapter I explore the role of HIV in regards to sexual stratification and desirability on Adam4Adam.com. How are larger discourses around HIV and the structure of Adam4Adam.com shaping users perceptions of this disease? How are gay men utilizing the website to discuss this issue as well as other sexual discussions? And how do these discussions play out during actual intimate encounters? To these questions, I now turn.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

[1] Adam4Adam.com labels racial categories as ethnicity.

[2] It must be noted that the Adam4Adam.com mobile application has a different search feature (see Appendix J). Here, age and ethnicity are still demographics that can be filtered, along with other non-required demographic information such as HIV status, looking for, practice, sexual role, scene, and dick size. Although this research project set out to examine the website Adam4Adam.com, many users also mentioned having the mobile application on their phone. Therefore, the two must be understood as influencing one another (Gudelunas 2012). However, of the demographics that all users are required to fill out, race and age are still the only two that can be filtered.

[3] Discourses around masculinity and femininity can be found in the profiles collected; however, gender presentation was basically never explicitly mentioned during the interview process except in connection to sexual practices and HIV (a topic explored in Chapter 3). This fact may stem from the interviewees possibly reading me as effeminate, and therefore, my informants chose not to broach the topic. However, masculinity has also been documented as a hegemonic form of desirability in gay (online) communities (see for example, Clarkson 2006; Lanzieri and Hildebrandt 2011).

[4] As all of my informants are "young" by societal standards, between ages 22 and 28, they are mostly privileged to not have to consider how age may affect their experiences with hegemonic gay beauty norms. With age absent as a form of experiencing body discrimination for my gay informants, the issue of weight became the salient idea of how my informants discussed gay bodies.

[5] In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed (2010) shows how a science of happiness was constructed, where happiness was assumed to be something good, and therefore, scientist must study happiness in order to teach individuals how to maximize this good. Again, happiness gets quantified – a "hedonimeter" – in order to construct a measurement that is supposedly objective (Ahmed 2010). This science of happiness and its discourse then tells people how they should feel - disciplining bodies, in that, people should always be working towards this objective happiness that is somewhere "out there."

[6] I put "overweight" in quotes throughout this thesis to denote that it is a term often used by my informants and the medical establishment, but I do not think there is some "objective," "normal" weight out there for one to actually be "over."

Chapter 4: "A Potential Threat": HIV, Internet Foreplay, & Trust

"Before I have sex with anyone - and I think I can speak for so many gay men, some of my friends - I always think of the consequences," began Leonardo, a 24-year old Latino college student, as he was describing his psychological state of meeting people for sex on Adam4Adam.com. He continued, "I would say HIV is like at the top of my head every single time I meet someone. It's like something I think about. I actually have like an anxiety about it. Maybe a couple years I will be able to let go of, but yea, it was something that was always on my mind when I thought about having sex with someone."

Young gay men, like all of my informants, have grown up within the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These men did not experience a gay world and identity before this disease. In his seminal book *Dry Bones Breathe* on gay male culture and post-AIDS identities, Eric Rofes (1998) shows that gay men, born after the HIV/AIDS epidemic, their sexual identities and practices are intimately linked to discourses around risk, condoms, and "safer" sex. Leonardo is not alone then when he expresses his anxiety about HIV when talking about his sexual practices with men. Rather, Leonardo's fear about contracting HIV represents what most young gay men feel about having sex with other men and what many of my informants experienced when logging onto Adam4Adam.com.

In this chapter, I seek to examine how the Internet has transformed and shaped ideas around HIV, sexual health, and risk. Most studies on sexual health, men who have sex with men, and the Internet have come from a quantitative, epidemiological background (for a meta-analytical overview see, Liau, Millet, and Marks 2006). These studies often debate whether men who have sex with men and who meet online are more prone to engage in sexual risk taking than those men who meet in offline venues (Bolding et al. 2005; Ostergren, Rosser, and Horvath

2011). Although these studies are important and have been formative in the field of men seeking men online and their sexual health, I seek to understand the meaning of sexual health and how this meaning affects the behaviors in the lives of the self-identified gay men in this study. How do discourses around HIV and the design of Adam4Adam.com shape the sexual relations and sociality of gay men who engage with other men through this website? And how do these men negotiate their sexual desires and health within this larger context of managing risk around contracting HIV?

To address these questions, I first examine the role of the danger discourse around HIV in how it is presented on Adam4Adam.com, in how it shapes the ways in which people present themselves on this website, and in how it affects how individuals relate to one another. "Danger discourse" refers to how particular sexual activities have dire consequences (Elliot 2012). Inspired by West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender," this first section introduces the concept of *doing sexual responsibility* to illuminate how managing risk is part of the neoliberal concept of personal responsibility (Adam 2005; Halperin 2007). In drawing upon case studies of published work (including his own published work) about internet-mediated partnering, sexual health, and bio-technologies, Mark Davis (2009) shows how this responsibility creates the errant and the model gay citizens. In this first section then, I propose that this doing sexual responsibility, which is based upon larger discourses of sexual health, leads to gay men surveiling HIV positive individuals and those who do not do sexual responsibility appropriately.

Secondly, I show how my informants use "online flirting" to pleasurably navigate these fears around HIV. Here, I show how my informants creatively utilize Adam4Adam.com to discuss one's desires that they hope to enact in one's actual sexual encounters. Although these discussions often rely upon the larger cultural scripts of the danger discourse around sexuality, I

suggest that these gay men are finding new ways to add pleasure within these discussions that are often fraught with anxieties. This addition of pleasure into these sexual negotiations can point to a way to interpersonally discuss sexuality outside of these larger discourses that always construct gay sexuality as dangerous.

Thirdly, I turn to the role of hegemonic masculinity and trust to explore the reasons why my informants did not use condoms with particular individuals, even when ideally they subscribed to the larger HIV discourses around having "protected" sex. Here, I turn to Gramsci's (1971) concept of "contradictory consciousness" to show how when one's practice does not match the dominant discourse on how can should behave chasms - or "crisis tendencies" (Connell 2005 [1995]) - in the social order can arise. Through exposing the fissures within this danger discourse and doing sexual responsibility, I seek to open up new productive possibilities in re-thinking discourses around HIV, sexual health, sexual desire, and pleasure for gay men today.

And lastly, I suggest that this doing sexual responsibility is predicated upon heteronormativity and disciplining gay bodies and intimacies. Discourses on HIV/AIDS have often linked this disease to gay men as a way to stigmatize their identity and practices (Altman 1998). Within this formulation of linking HIV to homosexual men, sexual responsibility becomes a way for gay men to move away from this stigmatizing discourse (Keogh 2008). However, this sexual responsibility is still predicated upon larger heteronormativie discourses of monogamy and the unthreatening, uninfected gay male body (Crimp 1987). In this sense, I contend that this doing sexual responsibility by gay men on Adam4Adam.com reifies larger heteronormative discourses that seek to marginalize and discipline all gay lives.

Section 1. "I always look at HIV status": Marking & Stigmatizing HIV

With the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the mainstream discourse around the virus linked the disease to one's own personal failings and used the disease as proof that homosexuality was unnatural (Rofes 1998; Gould 2009). A moral panic was birthed into discourse, where HIV/AIDS was used to further homophobia and stigma against LGBT individuals and other people who were seen as expendable in society (e.g., drugs users and sex workers) (Crimp 1987; Gould 2009). Although the height of the crisis is over,[1] these discourses around HIV/AIDS, irresponsibility, and their link to non-normative sexualities still linger. For example, HIV positive individuals and promiscuous gay men are often used as scapegoats within gay communities as examples of irresponsible citizens, who are making it harder for other LGBT individuals to gain their rights in society (Crimp 1987; Courtenay-Quirk 2006). In fact, large sectors of the gay communities exposed to professionally informed ideas about HIV/AIDS have internalized public health discourses, which advocates personal prevention methods around minimizing one's sexual risk taking for the larger good of society (Halperin 2007; Keogh 2008). In this section, I explore how these discourses around HIV are playing out in the lives of the gay men who use Adam4Adam.com for sexual purposes. I uncover how my users screen for HIV statutes in other users on the website and how the website infrastructure aids in this screening process. Likewise, I also examine the beliefs around people who do not disclose their status and what this non-disclosure means under a sexual health paradigm that tells each person one should know his status, and subsequently, tell one's partners. Lastly, I show what these discourses and practices mean for the stigmatization and marginalization of HIV positive individuals within their gay communities.

A. "I check people if they are HIV positive": Screening Profiles

"I met a guy, and we dated for about 3 months. And since he didn't tell me that he got HIV, I assumed that he doesn't have [HIV], and he assumed that since he didn't tell [me that he had HIV], [then] I knew that he has [the virus]. So he thinks that we didn't talk about this, so I know it, and I thought that we didn't talk about it, then it's no problem about him," explains Acar, a 26-year old Turkish immigrant graduate student, as he is telling me about his past boyfriend who he found out was HIV positive. Acar continued:

> At the end of the 3rd month, I saw his description, and I checked it online. And this was for AIDS, and I was like, "Wow." He said he is undetectable. He has been using these drugs for some years, and he is safe. But I got my status checked after that. That's sad. I think I'm a little bit mean here, but I just ended the relationship. But it's kind of like that red line for me. I'm sorry about that, but like, I just cannot go on.

Barry Adam (2005), in his qualitative study of interviewing over 100 men who recently had unprotected sex (half of whom had sero-converted – had become HIV positive), shows that within these neoliberal times, sexual health gets constructed through the rhetoric and practices of individual responsibility (see also, Davis 2009). However, this responsibility often falls upon HIV positive people, who are assumed to be the one who is to disclose their positive status (Davis 2002; Adam 2005). This logic often backfires. HIV negative men often assume the positive person will disclose, where HIV positive men will assume that HIV negative men will disclose or not engage in non-condom use unless they are also positive (Adam 2005; Halperin 2007). As the beginning of Acar's narrative shows, Acar (being HIV negative) assumed that his boyfriend (being HIV positive) should have disclosed his sero-positive status. What is unique with cyberspace, though, is that Acar eventually discovered his partner's status while checking

things about his boyfriend online. Acar felt his partner had lied to him (even though Acar never disclosed his own HIV status), and because Acar's partner did not live up to the neoliberal, individual responsibility of disclosing one's sero-positive status, Acar ended the relationship. This individual way of viewing HIV responsibility obscures the larger cultural and structural issues surrounding being HIV positive, and it leaves the blame and responsibility for managing HIV back on (HIV positive) gay men (Crimp 1987; Kaplan 1990).

Subsequently, I asked Acar, "And did he mention his HIV status in his profile?" He replied, "No, and I checked it after all. And there is no information about that. And I was like, 'I'm so stupid.' I mean I check people if they are HIV positive. I'm like, 'Oh, this guy is positive.' But like my eyes are looking for the word positive. Its like the general, how do you say this, screening. If there is no positive, I'm like ok. That's how I used to be." This screening process is bolstered by the coding properties of gay dating and hookup websites, which build into their interfaces public health categorizations of understanding HIV (Davis 2009). For example, Adam4Adam.com offers a drop-down menu for its users to select if one is HIV positive, negative, or "don't know" (see Appendix P). A user can also choose to not select any of these options and leave the field blank. Likewise, for sexual practices, users can only choose "anything goes" or "safe sex only" (see Appendix Q), creating a binary that either one only practices "safe sex" or one is open to anything. With these drop-down menus as part of a user's profile though, HIV and sexual practices become salient parts of how men present themselves on this website.

As an HIV negative person, Acar finds that it is his individual responsibility to screen people's profiles for one's status. Screening for HIV is fairly common on gay dating and hookup websites, where perusing profiles for one's status is seen as a passive, non-confrontational way to examine and avoid HIV positive individuals (Mustanski, Lyons, and Garcia 2011; Grov et al.

2013). This screening, as well, could be seen as a form of sero-sorting harm reduction. Harm reduction is a pragmatic stance that realizes many people will engage in risky behaviors, and therefore, it explores how people can lessen the negative consequences for engaging in these behaviors (Collins et al. 2012). Sero-sorting - seeking sexual partners of the same HIV status – is seen as a way to minimize the risk of contracting HIV (Race 2010). If Acar saw "no positive" when quickly screening online profiles, then he would pursue contacting the person. Acar felt "stupid" for not implementing this screening procedure with the HIV positive man that he dated, revealing how this notion of individual duty to protect one's self against HIV can have psychological consequences when one does not fully implement these strategies.

Likewise, many of my informants felt that listing one's HIV status and sexual practices in one's profile was a "clear" way to convey to other men what type of people they were looking for on Adam4Adam.com. As Riley, a 24-year old white college student, stated, "We [Riley and someone he met on Adam4Adam.com] didn't really talk about sexual roles or expectations. I think mostly because we had complete profiles. He was HIV negative. He said he practiced safe sex. And I was like well those are two check marks for me - like good. And I'm attracted to him. There is now nothing standing in the way of me wanting to hookup with this person basically." Tanner, a 25-year old white public relations worker, also told me, "It [using a condom] wasn't like it is an optional thing. I made it fairly clear in my profile that without wasn't an option. So, I guess, I just had the understanding that one would be warned." Hugo, a 25-year old self-identified white Hispanic graduate student, even expressed frustration when someone he was going to have sex with apparently did not read his profile: "He was trying to have unprotected sex with me. And it was after the fact - it totally didn't happen - but after I went home, I was like, 'Did you not see my profile? It says safe sex only and whatever.'" Lastly, Raj, a 22-year old

self-identified half white and half Indian college student, explained to me, "If it doesn't say like the safe sex only thing, then I'll ask. But if it says safe sex only, I just assume that they'll use safe sex stuff."

Websites, like Adam4Adam.com that provide the interface to list one's HIV status and condom use, allow for the avoidance of conversations around these issues (St. De Lore et al. 2012). As the above four narratives show, listing these items tells other users about one's self, where one can be "warned" that one only practices "safe sex." My informants believe that other users will read their profiles and engage with them accordingly. In their interviews with 28 men-seeking-men from Craigslist.org who found the Internet to be their favorite place to meet sexual partners, Christian Grov and colleagues (2013) discovered that the Internet can make it easier for people who want to use condoms to find other similar people. In this regard, many scholars have advocated for websites to require users to put one's HIV status, last testing date, and condom usage into one's profile (Levine and Klauser 2005; Lore et al. 2012; Grov et al. 2013).[2] In his participant-observation in gay social settings (including two popular online cruising websites) and interviews with 31 gay men in Sydney, Australia, Kane Race (2010) theorizes that these designs on websites may make HIV negative and HIV positive men navigate around one another in order to avoid HIV transmission, and this navigation can alter the conceptions of sociality and belonging within these spaces. Those who belong become those who are HIV negative and list that they practice "safe sex" – two things that are "good." HIV-positive individuals and those who do not practice "safe sex" often become ignored on these websites (Grov et al. 2013), as illustrated by my interview with Koby:

Koby: I say something like I want to meet like just HIV negative people, who are STD free – just for the expectation that I do hookup, that's kind of like the route that I would go.

Interviewer: So you would never hookup with an HIV positive person?

Koby: Probably not.

Interviewer: Why would you not want to do that?

Koby: For my safety reasons, and then just because I don't know too much about it - about safe sex and how to have sex with an HIV positive person. But by any means, I know I have friends who are HIV positive. I just keep it at a friendship level.

Koby, a 27-year old Asian massage therapist, only wants to meet HIV negative people. Koby acknowledges that part of his wariness is because of his own lack of education around HIV. This statement reveals the larger structural issue of most people not receiving professionally informed knowledge about this virus. In not receiving this education, many people just rely on more readily-available discourses about HIV positive people being dangerous, a topic I explore in more in-depth below. Likewise, Koby tries to make this ignorance not seem as discriminatory by claiming that he has HIV positive friends; however, he does not want to meet HIV positive people on Adam4Adam.com because it might develop into a hookup. Nonetheless, Koby, like the other gay men trying to navigate sexual health on Adam4Adam.com, can rely on the website's interface to possibly sero-sort and quickly find HIV negative individuals who are looking to use condoms during sexual encounters.

In this chapter, I use the concept of *doing sexual responsibility* to show how men on Adam4Adam.com can "appropriately" enact their sexuality and how they hold accountable how other people enact their sexuality as well. The concept of doing sexual responsibility is inspired

by "doing gender," an influential paradigm in gender studies, as I explain in the theory section of the Introduction. By doing sexual responsibility, gay men, through their interactions on Adam4Adam.com, appear to naturalize the public health paradigm that promotes what the "proper" gay citizen should *do* and *be* (Keogh 2008). Accordingly, all men's profiles on this site are held accountable based upon how people are doing sexual responsibility. Similar to "doing gender," this accountability makes doing sexual responsibility unavoidable for gay men, reinforcing the moral imperative that one must know one's status and practice safe sex for the good of the larger society.

In line with Race (2010), I posit that Adam4Adam.com's interface, like most gay dating and hookup online interfaces, are altering the sociality of gay men who inhabit these websites. Kane Race argues that these websites "…both enable and routinize specific practices of self-presentation and sexual selectivity…" (10), which echoes what my informants told me about how they present themselves as doing sexual responsibility and screen and hold accountable how other's present themselves as well. This sociality then is altered through people doing sexual responsibility on the website. By listing one's status as HIV negative and by listing "safe sex" only, my informants felt that users with the same status and "safe sex" practices should contact them. They also do sexual responsibility by screening other people's profiles to make sure they are also HIV negative and wanting to use a condom. They often do not contact people who are positive or who engage in non-condom use. In this sense, being HIV negative and doing sexual responsibility help make men more desirable on Adam4Adam.com, increasing one's erotic capital online. Likewise, HIV-positive people should always disclose their sero-positive status, marking them as different – with less erotic capital - and as someone that most of my informants

would not contact. One change to alleviate this problem was websites allowing the ability to leave the HIV prompt unanswered (Race 2010) – the topic I now explore.

B. "That just means that they are lying": Signaling Danger

"Some people just don't list their status. I initially think, 'How clever do you think you are? Like we just won't address it, and then no one will wonder?'" asked Riley, when discussing with me people who do not put their HIV status in their profiles. He went on to say:

> I just feel like particularly for Adam4Adam, and much more so than the mobile apps, is they give you the opportunity to say a lot about you in a basic sense. Do you know what I mean? You get the basics out of the way. And so if people don't take advantage of that then it just tells me that they have something to hide or they have something they don't want to talk about right away.

In her book *Not My Kid*, Sinikka Elliot (2012) argues that the danger discourse around sexuality and adolescence constructs the sexual as risky and makes pleasure and desire seem almost unimaginable. As part of this discourse, fears about contracting "…lifelong and life-threatening sexually transmitted infections…" is often seen as inevitable when a teenager is sexually active (Elliot 2012: 39). Here, I further Elliot's concept of the danger discourse in order to highlight how gay sexuality is often constructed similarly to adolescent sexuality and is always inherently tied to notions of risk and fear. Within the danger discourse around sexuality, sexual activity is seen to have physical and psychological consequences, where fear shapes people's sex talks. Davis (2009), explains, for instance that this discourse is fear driven and focuses on the failures of people's enactment of their sexuality and never one's needs. Sexual pleasure is never a goal of this "danger discourse," but rather self-regulation, shame, and stigma are the driving forces in how gay men conceptualize their sexuality (Davis 2009). Specifically,

for male same-sex behavior, fear of contracting HIV becomes constitutive of the "dangers" of sexuality (Crimp 1987); gay psyche becomes held hostage, where gay men are in a state of fear and crisis when it comes to understanding their sexual behaviors (Rofes 1998).

As Riley's above quote indicates, HIV status disclosure is a normative part of a user's profile construction on Adam4Adam.com. Within this sexual space shaped by the "danger discourse," Riley fears become manifested in his skepticism of people who do not list their status. Within Elliot's conception of this discourse, the binary of adult sexuality is "safe, responsible, and mature," and teenage sexuality is "unsafe, irresponsible, and immature" (Elliot 2012: 63). Although all same-sex sexuality is often seen as immature, selfish, and irresponsible (Lewin 2009; Moore 2011), I suggest that disclosing an HIV negative status on Adam4Adam.com helps to mark some gay men on this website as doing sexual responsibility appropriately. An HIV negative disclosure status may compensate for some of the stigma associated with same-sex erotic exchanges. On Adam4Adam.com, beliefs about the sexuality of the users is manifested in what people should do – in how these men should present themselves on Adam4Adam.com. For Riley, people on Adam4Adam.com should list their status in order to do sexual responsibility because uses should "address" HIV, since they are inhabiting this sexual space.

During my interview with Cisco, a 24-year old Latino artist, the option of not listing one's HIV status arose. As illustrated in our interview:

> Cisco: If they don't have their status posted that just means that they are lying and that they are hiding something that's more serious than what they are showing to everyone else. […]
>
> Interviewer: So people who don't list their HIV status, you think they're...

Cisco: They aren't saying more than what they should be saying. It's the whole honesty thing, and I view it as also you have to be respectful of everyone around you. It would be best to reveal yourself than hide yourself so much that you can fuck up somebody else's life because you chose not to reveal it.

Within the "danger discourse," having sex in a responsible way is constructed as the only legitimate form of agentic desire (Elliot 2012). Similar to Dixon-Mueller's (2007) claim that it is one's personal and social responsibility to know one's HIV status, Cisco feels as well that it is "respectful of everyone around you" to be honest about having HIV or not. The neoliberal responsibilities of men seeking sex with other men in these times of sexual self-regulation and self-surveillance is to always know one's HIV status and to "reveal yourself" on one's profile. My informants used the profile interface to examine and hold accountable who is sexually desirable. If a user did not post one's status, these profiles were viewed unfavorably for not doing sexual responsibility accurately. Gay men, who came of age after the mid-1990s - when the HIV/AIDS crisis was deemed over - have been exposed to post-HIV/AIDS discourses that shape the ways in which sexual negotiations take place. These discourses put the onus of sexual responsibility on the individual, where gay men should be "honest" about their HIV status and constantly surveil their own sexual practices and others. HIV is seen as dangerous – as something that can ruin someone's life – and so to not be forthcoming about one's sexual health and practices is seen as trying to harm others.

A final telling quote comes from Xavier, a 24-year old black Latino housekeeper, who said that the first thing he looks for in a person's profile is "definitely HIV status, and then I read their profiles to scan for clues on what type of person they are." One's status on Adam4Adam.com defines a user first before the rest of his subject-hood – from being seen as a

full subjective, autonomous human being not just an HIV status. Later in the interview, Xavier stated:

> Adam4Adam actually gives you the ability to list your stats [a person's demographic characteristics], but not everyone lists everything, which goes back to the whole misrepresentation. […] Sometimes I wish they actually put like make it mandatory [to list] your HIV status, 'cause like a lot of people do not do that. […] Me, I always look at HIV status. If that person does not have an HIV status in their profile, whether directly or indirectly, I'm probably not going to talk to them, or may even outright block them – just for safety - for safety.

As stated earlier, Levine and Klauser (2005) and St. De Lore and colleagues (2012) believed that listing HIV status on these websites would be beneficial for public health. Xavier, as well, wishes that these features were "mandatory." As sexuality is perilous and risky within the "danger discourse," men on Adam4Adam.com can "other" the men who do not list their status and masks this "othering" process through notions of risk and safety. Within sociology, "othering" is the process of marking a certain group of people as different, where this difference is predicated upon as seeing this group as morally inferior to one's own group (Schwalbe et al. 2000; Lister 2004). The group that is seen as morally inferior is constructed as an object – the "other" – who is marked by their "undesirable" trait, erasing the complexity and capabilities of this person's full self (Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin 2010). The danger discourse as implemented on Adam4Adam.com allows for the "othering" of the men who are not doing sexual responsibility appropriately by knowing and disclosing their HIV status. This "othering" holds these men accountable, as my informants will not talk to them or may block them, and it allows these users to do sexual responsibility better than these "other" men – to mark themselves as

morally superior. People become divided based upon a biological characteristic of having a virus or not (Davis 2009); the Center for Disease Control's classification of a "risk group" literally creates an us-versus-them dichotomy (Crimp 1987). My informants do sexual responsibility by knowing, being, and listing that they are HIV negative, telling other users that they are low risk and responsible sexual subjects, "othering" those who do not perform accordingly (Davis 2009). This "othering" process denies the other users' as being full sexual subjects – as possessing autonomy to express one's full complex sexual wants and desires – because they are just marked and seen as doing sexual responsibility inaccurately.

The danger discourse around sexuality is present on this website. My informants see HIV as a threatening disease that they must guard themselves against. Potential sexual activity becomes laden with burdens and personal responsibilities, where one can be a responsible sexual subject or one can be an irresponsible user. As same-sex sexuality is bound up with larger discourses on being irresponsible and immature (Lewin 2009; Moore 2011), men on Adam4Adam.com can do sexual responsibility within the danger discourse in order to try to gain some legitimacy as being "proper" sexual subjects. This doing sexual responsibility relies upon "othering" those men who do not know and/or disclose their HIV status. The men I interviewed construct a danger discourse around the non-disclosing of one's HIV status. These men are held accountable for not doing sexual responsibility correctly, and my informants fear that these men are a risk and are unsafe.

C. "This puts the whole kibosh on the whole sex thing": Desirability & HIV

"There is sometimes when somebody says they're positive, and that is what pushes you over the line to no longer be interested in them. Like it just happens because I mean, I'll just be brutal about it, like they don't have enough going on otherwise to make up for it. They just don't

seem that awesome," as Riley frankly tells me about the HIV positive people he has talked to on Adam4Adam.com. He goes on:

> It's so superficial, and it's entirely asinine of me to feel this way, but it can be a determining factor. So yea, if they don't have it listed, I ask. I'm not going to pretend that I succeed in using a condom every time. I don't. I wish that I did. I'd have a lot less anxiety in my life, but I, at least, want to try and limit the people that I'm with to people who at least try and be safe - as suppose to people who just don't care anymore.

Within the danger discourse on sexuality, HIV positive people – no matter how "awesome" they may be – lose their status of recognition on Adam4Adam.com. HIV positive individuals are seen as "unsafe" and as "people who just don't care anymore." Despite the fact that Riley does not implement condom use every time in his own encounters (a topic I explore in more depth in the last section of this chapter), HIV positive people bare the brunt of being seen as reckless and irresponsible. Being marked with a sero-positive status is to be marked as never able to do sexual responsibility correctly. HIV positive individuals become the scapegoats of being the "bad" gays, who are often seen as promiscuous and dirty (Rofes 1998; Grov et al. 2013).

As Ellen Lewin (2009) points out in her book *Gay Fatherhood*, from the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, gay men became stigmatized not just for their sexual identities, but also for being possible carriers of the disease. Within this double marginalization, gay men are seen as engaging in "scandalous and exhibitionistic behavior" (Lewin 2009: 21). To distance themselves from this marginalization, many gay men responded with a new interest in "monogamy, domesticity, and arguably safer pleasure" (ibid.: 22). For Lewin's study, one way for gay men to stake a claim for citizenship in this post-AIDS society is through fatherhood. Although in her study, Lewin is examining gay fatherhood as a way to socially distance one's self from these gay

stereotypes, she points to larger discourses around gay identity and practices that are operating in my informant's lives as they navigate their relations on Adam4Adam.com. I suggest that for the generation of gay men, who are in their twenties, claiming an HIV status as negative as they engage in cybernetic sexual explorations is a way to do sexual responsibility and thus embrace behaviors and attitudes that may distance them from the irresponsible and unsafe behaviors traditionally associated with being gay. This doing sexual responsibility constructs the "proper" male-for-male sexual subject as not pre-occupied with careless consumption, but rather he is responsible and safe. This claim to and doing of sexual responsibility challenges notions of same-sex sexual behaviors as immature and irresponsible and allows for a certain "upward moral mobility" (ibid.: 129) for the men seeking responsible sex with HIV negative men. This "upward moral mobility," as clearly seen below in Iago's account of his ex-roommate being promiscuous and Iago being the moral sexual subject for doing sexual responsibility, relies upon a constant surveillance of other people's HIV status as well – even people who claim to be HIV negative on the website.

When I asked Leonardo, "So you think it's kind of an unknown rule on there to put if you practice safe sex only or not and if you are HIV positive or negative or not?" He replied:

> Yea, and then like, you know, you have to use your own judgment. You know, not everyone on there is honest. [Interviewer: Yes] But I do like the fact that you can see that information and that it is there for you. You don't have to go through the process of asking someone…Well I do [ask someone] even if they say they're HIV negative, even if they say that they practice safe sex. Only I still ask before I do anything with anyone.

The anxiety around HIV that Leonardo expressed in the opening quote and that Riley expressed is present whether one lists one's HIV status or not. This anxiety is part of the danger

discourse that conflates sex between men with risk and HIV. However, this anxiety also helps to understand how this rejection of HIV positive people is not necessarily attitudinal prejudice (Race 2010). Gay men must navigate a heteronormative world that already deems them as marginalized. Therefore, to protect one's health and from gaining another stigmatized identity through contracting HIV, gay men are wary of being associated and definitely coming into sexual contact with HIV positive people. These new online sexual interfaces materialize these concerns and anxieties in new ways (Race 2010). To lessen one's anxiety, one can surveil other profiles, ask people their status, and do sexual responsibility that allows them to achieve some legitimacy as sexual subjects.

As Koby explains, "I usually tell them I'm only into safe sex. I ask for their HIV status and when was the last time they got tested. I ask them if they have proof - if they could show it to me." Xavier also said that "sometimes I want, I have to ask like their testing results. Like that's the whole misrepresentation thing too, they say that they are negative, but it usually takes me a little bit more convincing for me to believe that person is negative." As shown in the previous section, my informants feel it is imperative for men on Adam4Adam.com to disclose their status. This disclosure marks who could potentially be a subject of desire for the men inhabiting this website. However, disclosing one's status is not enough. These men must also show further "proof" of being negative or do "a little bit more convincing."

Clearly, the danger discourse of risk and fear goes beyond just viewing a person's profile. As gay life is homogenously constructed in society as "frivolous and morally ambiguous" (Lewin 2009: 135), men attempt to move away from this stigmatized identity through protecting themselves against men who may be HIV positive. Instead of being completely careless and sexually adventurous, the gay men in my study foreground safe sex and HIV-surveillance as a

way to distance themselves from the stigmatization of HIV. Stigma and fear drive the policing of these HIV individuals (Hoppe 2013), creating a "seronormativity" (Race 2010), where HIV negative men have more erotic capital[3] than HIV positive individuals, stratifying sero-positive men to a lower level of desirability for not doing sexual responsibility.

Mikel, a 27-year old black events supervisor, talked about trying to get HIV information out of the men he meets up with: "I've actually been able to coax out of a couple guys that although they didn't list or they put negative as their HIV status, they are indeed HIV positive. So that part of the whole conversation thing, because once you like me, you are less likely to try and kill me." When I probed him further about how he was able to elicit this information, he stated:

> One guy actually told me online that he was positive. And I was like, "Uh ok, well." He said, "You are nice. I'd still like to be friends." And I was like, "Yea, sure. We can definitely be friends, but you do realize that this puts the whole kibosh on the whole sex thing." [Mikel laughs] […] And then the other guy, […] it was actually pretty much like 10 seconds in the door that he told me. And I was like, "Ok, well thanks for sharing. Uh once again, yea - no, not going to happen." […] I don't like you enough to die. So thanks for telling me, but yea. I do get tested regularly, so I don't really trust any body.

HIV "as a scourge laying waste to human life" (Gonzalez 2010: 82) literally for Mikel is "enough to die." The fear around HIV explicitly gets linked to murder and death, where an HIV positive person is constructed as trying to "kill" someone. Mikel holds these men accountable for not doing sexual responsibility through his refusal to have sex with them and to not see these men as desirable anymore. Likewise, to reassert that he is doing sexual responsibility accurately, Mikel ends his story by reasserting that he gets "tested regularly." As identity is a process and a

continuing lived project (Lewin 2009; Moore 2011), the men on Adam4Adam.com construct their sexual identity through first disclosing one's HIV status and then continually surveilling other people's status even if these other men claim to be negative. To gain "respectability," the gay men in this study not only construct those who do not list their status as irresponsible, but they still try to elicit HIV information out of the men they meet for sexual encounters. My informants claim that they always practice "safe sex" and get tested regularly; yet, these men still find knowing another person's status as the "proper" way to be a sexually active man seeking other men.

Tanner, a 25-year old white public relations worker, said he "did a bathroom snoop" at a man's house once. When I asked him "What was in the medicine cabinet?" He replied,

> Tanner: It was a treatment for HIV. And they weren't upfront with me about it. Even though it was my expectation that a condom would be used, if that's not something that they would be upfront about or not just not be upfront about but lie about, that was a deal breaker for me.
>
> Interviewer: So they didn't list their HIV status in their profile?
>
> Tanner: They did, but they lied about it.
>
> Interviewer: They listed it as negative?
>
> Tanner: Yea.

Like Mikel, finding out that this man was HIV positive "was a deal breaker for" Tanner; those who are HIV positive have no erotic capital. Tanner stated that the deal break came because the man lied about his status; however, Tanner still felt the need to do "a bathroom snoop" before having sex with the man. Tanner "does sexual responsibility" by claiming "that a condom would be used" anyways (again, which could protect someone from contracting HIV),

but using protection was clearly not enough for Tanner. The "other" man becomes constructed as irresponsible for not being "upfront" about his status – something HIV positive people should always do. Tanner gains "upward moral mobility" through being the responsible sexual (honest) subject while concurrently HIV positive men are cast as irresponsible, liars, and as not desirable. By doing sexual responsibility, Tanner, like most of my informants, become good gay men, where HIV positive men are relegated to being errant sexual citizens.

Iago, a 26-year old Hispanic businessman, drove home these points about the "proper" sexual subject and knowing one' status:

> Iago: I will bring up the question of what their status is. If they don't know it, then it's just, "Ok, but there is nothing that is ever going to happen between us." I'm a very – it's very important to me for you to know your status – that's just me.
>
> Interviewer: How do you know if they actually are telling you the truth?
>
> Iago: You don't know. That's why you use a condom.
>
> Interviewer: So you ask, so you can put it out there that's its important, and then you still use a condom?
>
> Iago: Except for the regular one [sexual partner] that I have [sex with], I know what "they're" like. I had a roommate who used Adam[4Adam] and he still does. Well, he is not my roommate; he is an ex-roommate. And he's very promiscuous – very, very promiscuous. And I just know not to take it so lightly because I know he is very promiscuous. He never gets tested, and he's putting others at risk. I don't say anything because it's not my business. In a way, like I just prefer not to even - I just turn the other way. It's sad, but you can't force a person to take a HIV test.

Iago's above quotes speaks to the binary construction of the "good," upwardly moral sexual citizen and the abjection of the "promiscuous" irresponsible gay man. The "abject" is someone that disturbs the social, that literally repulses another, and is not seen as a subject (Kristeva 1982). Butler (1993) argues that the abject is socially unrecognizable and unacceptable; however, the abject must constantly be named in order to legitimize and make intelligible the "proper" norm in society. For example, the "fag" – as an abject position – is utilized discursively as a specter to constitute masculinity and to discipline bodies to perform masculinity appropriately or face falling into this abject, "fag" position (Pascoe 2007). Similarly, gay men who are HIV positive become the abject within gay communities. This abject position constitutes the "proper" gay sexual subject and discipline's gay men to do sexual responsibility appropriately. The "good" citizen must first know one's status, and Iago finds those who do not know their status as not desirable. Iago sees his ex-roommate who "never gets tested" as promiscuous and "putting others at risk." He finds men like his roommate ("what 'they're' like") as "sad" – as the repulsive abject. The "good" sexual subject in this time of HIV must not be promiscuous, get tested, use protection, and not put others at risk. To achieve "upward moral mobility" as a sexually active gay man seeking other men, these actions are the "proper" ways to "do sexual responsibility" on Adam4Adam.com. For gay men who are on Adam4Adam.com, assertive explorations about the HIV status of a man they meet online become the preface to a potential erotic encounter. Those who lie about one's status, hide it, or struggle to reveal the truth become the abject – those who are undesirable and repudiated.

Kiran Mirchandani (2012) sees authenticity (like identity) as something that is constantly being constructed and contested. She states, "the study of authenticity is a study of legitimacy because it both confers value onto that which is deemed authentic and legitimates the position of

those who have the right to do the deeming" (Mirchandani 2012: 4). To move away from the stigma of gay men as careless sex fiends who have HIV, my informants "do sexual responsibility" and authenticity through surveilling other men's HIV status and through holding these men accountable for not knowing their status and for being promiscuous, rendering them as not desirable. Men who are positive, do not list their status, or do not get tested are the irresponsible individuals on Adam4Adam.com. These men are not "authentic" sexual subjects. Their legitimacy as sexual subjects is denied through not being desirable and through being blocked by other users. The danger discourse makes the men on Adam4Adam.com not only fear those people who do not list their status, but even people who claim to be negative. Although all men are consuming sex on this website, authentic, respectable sexual subjects within these times of HIV must seek safe sex and not have sex with men who are irresponsible. However, as the end of Iago's quote foreshadows, this discourse of doing sexual responsibility and being the "authentic" sexual subject has its fissures in my informants' lives – an important topic explored in section three. Next, I turn to how users erotically assert their sexual agency in interpersonal communication with others on the Internet - an assertion serving to mediate harm reduction approaches to their sexual encounters.

Section 2. "It's sort of like online foreplay": Pleasure-Danger & Harm Reduction

"Nobody on Adam4Adam is willing to get any drama. […] It's kind of like a scheduling. How do you want to start? What do you enjoy a lot? What do you want to do after that? Do you want this? Do you like that? What don't you like?" These questions are a part of the conversation that Acar has with the men he meets on Adam4Adam.com before meeting with them for sexual encounters. He goes on to describe this scheduling, "And then you kind of like, literally it's kind

of like, a program of a theater. You are going to see that, and see that, and then this happens, and then that happens. And it ends at that."

The Internet and websites like Adam4Adam.com have transformed how men explore, negotiate, and imagine sex before meeting for their *actual* sexual encounters. Through talking to each other on the website, users can explicitly discuss how they want the sexual interaction to unfold before they engage in certain sexual behaviors during the encounter. This discussion of how one desires for the sexual encounter to happen – this "sexual scheduling" – though is based off of cultural sexual scripts, specifically scripts around doing sexual responsibility in this post-HIV/AIDS crisis era. As discussed in the theory section of the Introduction, sexual script refers to how the cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic ways of understanding sexuality and sexual behaviors all affect how one experiences a sexual encounter (Gagnon and Simon 2005 [1973]). Through scheduling on Adam4Adam.com, users rely upon cultural scenarios, often shaped by the danger discourse about sexuality, while expressing their desires in order to engage in interpersonal ways of scheduling how one's sexual encounter will take place. In this section, I examine how gay men design sexual schedules as they negotiate, imagine, and explore what they like and dislike about sex, and as they fantasize with other people while being online. I will show how the gay men I interviewed design these "sexual schedules" based on the sexual scripts that have shaped their personal lives.

For Acar, this sexual scheduling helps to avoid "any drama." When I asked Acar what he meant by drama, he elaborated:

> The drama is the unexpected thing. […] What happened once, somebody came, and I didn't know if he was on drugs or he was drunk – that's drama for me. Another time, I traveled to a guy's place, and I got in, and then he was like [in whisper tone] "Sshhh!"

> I'm like "What?" "My boyfriend is sleeping." I'm like "Fine, I'm going back." And another time, I thought I was going to bottom, and then he wanted to bottom, and I was like it's not that easy for me to just change. I was like [makes annoyed moan sound]. So drama to me is anything unexpected.

As Gagnon and Simon (2005 [1973]) explained, most human behavior is not spontaneous, and this typically includes sexual behavior (p. 13). Though sexual scheduling, Acar sees planning his sexual encounters as important in his avoidance of the unexpected – an unexpected that is constructed by the cultural sexual scripts of "risky" and "dangerous" encounters. Acar gave three different examples of what he saw as the unexpected, where his desires could not come to the forefront because these unexpected things took place, causing him to end the sexual encounter. Avoiding drama can also be perceived as a form of harm reduction, where Acar could be trying to minimize his risk of contracting HIV through not having sex with people on drugs, people in relationships, and in switching sexual positions. Sexual scripting and avoiding drama become strategies on Adam4Adam.com for men to practice negotiated safety, where gay male agency is used in forging one's sexual practices (Davis 2009).

This sexual scheduling to avoid drama has an erotic and pleasurable component to it. As Acar further explains, "First of all, it's not that formal like scheduling. It's more like you talk about it, and you like try to turn him on as well. At the same time, you let him know what you want. And he turns you on too, and at the same time, he lets you know what he wants." This sexual scheduling becomes an interpersonal way of flirting and seducing someone before the sexual encounter. Hugo, as well, saw these online sexual discussions as part of the sexual experience:

> Even if you are meeting someone just to hookup and their profile is filled out, I feel like I always still talk about it [sexual practices]. It's kind of like Internet foreplay or something like that. Even though I know you are interested in this, let's talk about it before we do it or something like that. Yea, I guess it's sort of like online foreplay in that aspect.

These online discussions become the preface to the *actual* sexual encounter. Through the interpersonal interactions, users engage in foreplay, trying to turn each other on, while delineating what each other enjoy sexually. For Hugo, online foreplay "serves two purposes. On the one hand, it is like you know foreplay, and it serves that. But at the same time, it's like you get to know what the person is into, so you know what you are getting into before you actually meet up and stuff."

I suggest that this "online foreplay" is also a form of harm reduction. It is an interpersonal dialogue that allows these gay men to mutually share their fantasies. Harm reduction is built around the larger cultural sexual scripts of the danger discourse and seeking to reduce risk or "drama". Within this context, harm reduction can be seen as a way to navigate the pleasure-danger paradoxes of sexuality. This pleasure-danger construction of sexuality posits that sexuality is a site of danger and repression but also a place to explore pleasure and agency (Vance 1984). As Gloria González-López (2005) notes in her study of Mexican immigrant sexualities, Mexican women can experience positive feelings and opportunities through enjoying their sexuality, while also encountering risks and dangers during this exploration — danger and pleasure usually go hand and hand. For gay men online, Internet foreplay introduces a pleasurable aspect into their lives while they are encountering the larger heteronormative discourses that construct their sexuality as dangerous and risky, especially in the context of HIV. Men can erotically turn one another on while trying to express their sexual desires and anxieties

that the danger discourse and the fear of contracting HIV may hold over them. Internet foreplay also highlights the relational aspect of sexual negotiations, challenging the neoliberal notions of personal responsibility, where now dialogue becomes the crucial way of dealing with these issues (Rofes 1998; Davis 2002). This online foreplay becomes a novel way to negotiate one's safety, foregrounding pleasure and relationality instead of constant anxiety and fear over one's individual duty to protect one's self.

Other informants talked about their use of Adam4Adam.com for the purpose of discussing sexual schedules. Colin, a 22-year old white college student, believed discussing sexual interests and roles beforehand was important "because you don't want to have a sword fight and end up being a bottom when you really don't want to because I am always a top." Mikel told me, "You might say it's one of my pick up lines. I usually tell guys that I use the highest quality of both condoms and lube. […] So yes, I do discuss safe sex practices. I tell them pretty much what they are getting into." Tanner said he has "a thorough vetting process" in order to make sure people are giving him "consistent information." Lastly, Colin told me there is a "code" to follow if you are to meet an online person offline. The code is as follows:

> I like to know what I'm getting myself into. I don't like any weird surprises. I require a face picture because I want to know who I'm looking for because I can't tell you just based off your body or your dick. […] If they don't tell me at least some sort of status or give me their stats, like their full stats, and say if they are HIV negative or disease and drug free, I won't meet them. If they seem a little bit off while I'm talking to them, I'll talk to them for a bit. If they seem off to me, I won't meet them. If they are into something really crazy stuff that I don't get into, I won't meet them. If our sexual

activities that we want to do don't match, then I won't meet them. So it's just like all these different little things.

All of these informants also use the Internet to mediate their sexual interactions and to schedule out their sexual encounters. To stating one's sexual position or condom use or to getting consistent information and avoiding people who "seem a little bit off," Adam4Adam.com's chat feature allows these users to express their sexual agency while guarding themselves against drama or "weird surprises." Through gay culture and sexual experimentation, many things which are considered "safe sex" today are part of gay men trying to navigate a sexual balance between risk and safety (Crimp 1987; Halperin 2007). This "online foreplay" and discussing various practices through the Internet can then be read as digital sexual experimentation that can be seen as a new way to practice "safe sex" and harm reduction. Horvath and colleagues (2010) documented how frank discussions before sex about HIV and sexual practices decreased the risk for sero-discordant unprotected anal intercourse (see also, Young and Rice 2011). This "online foreplay" becomes a pleasurable way for my informants to do sexual responsibility that does not necessarily foreground their fears and anxieties.

But why are these pleasurable discussions easier to have online? Online spaces may make it more conducive to ask these questions compared to offline realms like gay bars. The Internet provides a space for one-on-one interactions; more frank discussions may be able to occur because one is not in large group settings, where exposing personal information may be viewed more negatively (Horvath et al. 2010; St. De Lore et al. 2012). As Gabriel, a 25-year old white Latino college student, told me, "We've made it easier for social networks, and Adam4Adam, and Grindr – whatever - to talk about your practices and to put it in writing than we've made it to actually have a face-to-face conversation with another human being." This comfort of disclosing

things online versus face-to-face has had a dramatic effect. HIV disclosure to casual sexual partners has increased with the increase use of the Internet in mediating sexual encounters (Race 2010). Most gay men, including those who are HIV positive, found the Internet to be a safer space to disclose and discuss sexual health and practices than offline spaces (ibid.). For this matter, Adam4Adam.com and other gay websites may be a crucial space to (pleasurably) practice harm reduction and to assert one's sexual agency around sexual matters. This pleasurable way of doing sexual responsibility still relies on the larger "danger discourse," but it becomes a way to highlight other affects besides fear and anxiety when relationally negotiating sexual practices and behaviors. Now, I turn to exposing the fissures of the danger discourse by illuminating how it sometimes fails in my informants' lives - even those who subscribe to the discourse when navigating the sexual realm of Adam4Adam.com.

Section 3. "A condom gets in the way of true intimacy": Contradictions

In the past few years, trust – feeling confident that another person would not lie - has re-surfaced as a possible "risk" factor in sexual encounters of gay and bisexual men (Fernández-Dávila and Lorca 2011), although Díaz and Ayala (1999) documented this topic among Latino gay men over a decade earlier. Condom use often stops when gay men deem a relationship serious (Eisenberg et al. 2011; Mustanski, Lyons, and Garcia 2011), where some gay men are confident that they will not get HIV through having unprotected sex with someone they trust (Rofes 1998). In fact, "…the prevalence of UAI [unprotected anal intercourse] with casual partners, with whom men had 'often' had sex before, was close to the prevalence of UAI within regular relationships" (Zablotska et al. 2011: 610). Others argue that distrust often leads to continual condom use (Halperin 2007), suggesting that unprotected anal intercourse may not be that spontaneous, but rather based upon familiarity (Zablotska et al. 2011). As trust and condom

use were relevant issues for my informants, I discuss the meaning of them in this section. Specifically, I explore the contradictions of subscribing to larger discourses around the "good" gay, who uses condoms, and the break down of the danger discourse through trusting other men one has sexual encounters with.

A. "I had an army guy and a cowboy": Hegemonic Masculinity & Crisis Tendencies

"I list safe sex only, but oddly enough this past month, I had unprotected sex. And I've been beating myself over it because I preach condoms. I preach safe sex. But I just got caught up in the moment, and I just wanted to be wild and spontaneous," Colin anxiously told me. He went on, "And I ended up having unprotected sex with 2 different people who both like - we both listed safer sex on our profiles, and we were both HIV negative. But we ended up having unprotected sex." Colin, like many of my informants, believes in the discourse of "safe sex," he did not live up to this ideal in the past month. There was a doing sexual responsibility in accordance with larger discourses on the website and in most sexual practices; however, this doing sexual responsibility often broke down in certain moments, particularly moments around trust or when the other man embodied a form of ideal masculinity. Turning to these "crisis tendencies" - when people experience contradictory ways of living within the social order that point to the instability of that order - in "doing sexual responsibility," I seek to uncover the creative possibilities of re-forming social relations (Connell 2005 [1995]; Elliot 2012).

Although Colin engaged in the harm reduction approach of sero-sorting, Colin still experiences a level of anxiety about his actions – showing how the fear of the danger discourse viscerally and psychologically affects gay men if their behaviors fall outside of the idealized ways they should behave. When I probed Colin further about the men whom he had unprotected sex with, he gave a telling account:

> The first guy I met I mean we were just like wanting to talk and hangout for a bit and see where things led. And we had a really interesting connection. And he was an army guy at [deleted for confidentiality], and me, I was just like "He is an army guy." It was just like that alone. […] Yea, and then the next guy I did bareback sex [sex without a condom] with was actually a week later. And he was a cowboy. Like I had an army guy and a cowboy all in the same month. Let's call it an amazing month and move on.

One reason for not using condoms appears to be that the men who my informants were having sexual encounters with embodied a certain idealized form of masculinity, that is, what gender scholars identify as "hegemonic masculinity." Hegemonic masculinity is the historically hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, where cultural ideals of masculinity and institutional power are often aligned (Connell 2005 [1995]). Hegemonic masculinity exists in relationship to other expressions of manhood within a hierarchy of masculinities competing (Messner 1995), whereby gay men occupy a subordinated relational position to heterosexual men, and gay men are often constructed as being associated with femininity (Connell 2005 [1995]). Connell argues that for many gay men, to be gay is to desire not just men, but also, a particular form of embodied masculinity. However, idealized forms of masculinity are reified through this relational process; as Bersani (1987: 208) states, "…gay men run the risk of idealizing and feeling inferior to certain representations of masculinity on the basis of which they are in fact judged and condemned." As a process, gender is relational and thus many gay men often desire particular hegemonic forms of masculinity in other men. This desire though recast gay men as subordinate to heterosexual and "masculine" men as it re-stabilizes hegemonic masculinity and its relational forms within society.

In Colin's account, the doing sexual responsibility by listing safe sex in one's profile is undermined in the actual sexual encounter. In U.S. society, army men and cowboys are often constructed as iconic forms of masculine embodiment (Sonnekus 2009). In having sex with these masculine men, Colin did not use condoms. However, to desire these types of men more than other men (who Colin always uses condoms with) reifies these types of masculinity as more desirable embodiments. This reification of masculinity through desirability recasts gay men as subordinate, as they are not seen to be the embodiments of these types of idealized male forms.

Likewise, Darryl, a 24-year old African American underwriter, talked about a straight, married man who he barebacked[4] with:

> One dude, we hook up from time to time. He is straight, married with a kid. He loves barebacking. He's like an insatiable bottom. I don't know why…I don't know why he is married. Actually he is getting divorced but whatever. Anyways he is into girls. He wants to date girls. But he likes to get fucked by guys. Or actually, I'm the only guy that's ever fucked him.

Under hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality occupies the dominant position for men, and thus men like the one Darryl has been having sex with – a man, who Darryl says is straight, married with a kid, and dates women. Again, ideal notions of masculinity, whether through an army or cowboy embodiment, or a man being straight, influenced these men to not use condoms during sex. Darryl's desire for a man who is married to a woman (presumably a self-identified heterosexual) is stronger than his desire for other men as he does not use a condom with him. As Rosenbaum, Daunt, and Jiang (2013) discovered, self-identified heterosexual, married men who posted advertisements under the men seeking men section of Craigslist.org received more e-mails of interest than their gay counterparts. Heterosexual men are seen as ideal embodied forms

of masculine desirability that gay men want to have sexual encounters with. In having sex with these types of men, Colin and Darryl said that they altered their usual behavior, showing how these types of men hold a special (hegemonic) place in these gay men's desires.

Therefore, men who embody certain forms and relations of hegemonic masculinity create a contradictory consciousness for Colin and Darryl. A contradictory consciousness is when individuals have inherited dominant views about them as a social group in society, but they also have an implicit consciousness that unites individuals with others on a more micro-level (Gramsci 1971; Gutmann 1996). Colin and Darryl have inherited the dominant view of the danger discourse and doing sexual responsibility, but when encountering men who embody idealized forms of masculinity, they do not always implement this dominant practice. This desire for masculine embodiment and the contradictory consciousness which arises from not using condoms with these particular men points to a "crisis tendency" in doing sexual responsibility; that is, a fissure is exposed in this dominant way of how gay men are suppose to sexually relate to one another within the danger discourse on sexuality. Darryl and Colin do not "do sexual responsibility" with these types of men as they do with other men, for as Colin told me, "…the guys I found really hot and very attractive - both inside and out - I really just didn't care [about using a condom]. I just wanted it to be connected in a way I've never been connected with someone before." Colin felt that this embodiment of the cowboy and army men and how they "carried themselves" played into his desire to not use a condom and to be connected with these men who treated him "gentleman-ly." The danger discourse that often influences their sexual life holds to be inadequate within these particular sexual relations, where men carry a specific form of masculine embodiment. This "crisis tendency" within the social order that individual's contradictory consciousness often points toward is full of contradictions itself. It exposes both,

the fissure of the danger discourse, and the reification of relations of hegemonic masculinity that subordinate gay men. Basically, hegemonic masculinity subordinates gay men as a social group, so in effect, the ways in which these men desire these social prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity in their sexual, interpersonal exchanges with other men at the relationship level further marginalize them. The notion of trust, however, can create a different contradictory consciousness, where the "crisis tendency" this consciousness points toward does not necessarily lead to the re-subordination of gay men and their desires – the crux of this section that I now explore.

B. "I'm still having unprotected sex": Trust and Non-Condom Use

Interviewer: Is it important to you to always use condoms?

Iago: Yes. I do have a regular though where I don't use condoms with him. But I do get tested regularly. I actually just got tested [shows me his arm] a couple days ago. So I do get tested a lot.

Interviewer: So sexual health is important?

Iago: Yes, even though I know it's a contradiction because I'm still having unprotected sex. 'Cause god knows he is probably having sex with someone else that I don't know about, but it's still a risk. I don't prefer to do that, but it's just something that we've always done ever since we started our thing.

Interviewer: Why with him and no one else?

Iago: Because I'm very comfortable with him – very, very comfortable. At one point, it almost did turn into a relationship, but we both just decided not to.

In his book *Caribbean Pleasure Industry*, Mark Padilla (2007) details the lives of Dominican male sex workers within the global sex tourism industry. Padilla uncovers that these

male sex workers often discussed their lives and sexual practices within the larger discourse of HIV prevention and safe sex practices; however, these practices were not always implemented. He states, "they [the male sex workers] conceive of condom use as a social norm to which they must conform – at least in discourse, if not always in practice" (Padilla 2007: 194). These men often over-reported their condom use because they saw using a condom as an "idealized behavior," but when engaging in sexual encounters, these men did not always use condoms. One reason for not using condoms reported by these men was because they felt trust with their clients. Again, a contradictory consciousness arises where there is the idealized expectation of using a condom versus what gay men actually do in their sexual encounters. Trust, expression of masculinity in a partner, and enhanced intimacy and/or familiarity are at the core of this contradiction.

Recently, there has also been quantitative documentation of the role of trust in men not using condoms when having sex with other men. Zablotska and colleagues (2011) found that the cessation of condom use was correlated with an increase in the familiarity with a sexual partner or through having repeated sexual encounters with a person. Likewise, Rouwenhorst and colleagues (2012) discovered that when men trusted their sexual partners, they then believed the disclosure of one's HIV status more, and were then more likely to not use a condom during sex. Lastly, Prestage and colleagues (2012) confirmed these other two studies, and concluded: "…some gay men treat some partners differently to others based on how well they feel they know them and so it is unlikely they will respond to appeals to use condoms with all casual partners because these decisions may often be driven as much by the nature of their relationship with individual partners as they are by a principled commitment to 'safe sex.'" (pg. 667-668). Iago's account speaks to these points clearly. Although Iago, like most of my informants, are

committed to "safe sex," when on gets to know another, these larger ideas of seeing everyone as a "risk" start to give away. Through trust, these "idealized behaviors" do not always become actualized, where sexual health is still important, but so is trust, being comfortable, and intimacy.

Riley goes into great detail about why he sometimes does not use a condom. Here, I quote him at length, as this narrative adds a very nuanced understanding about *why* gay men often end up not using condoms with the men whom they trust:

> It is almost without fail that this happens with people that I have sex with repeatedly because you - I hate that this happens to me - but I just start to trust them. […] I've had sex with them dozens of times that you stop thinking of that person as a potential threat, and you think of them as a person - a person that you like if you're having sex with them that often. So it's just really hard to want to use a condom. And I think that condoms, when they're used with gay men, it's not for the purpose of preventing conception. It's almost a statement to how dysfunctional we are because if you're having sex with this person right, you're having intimacy. You know, I have yet to find a more intimate thing that you can do with somebody but have sex with them. And at the same time it can almost be contrary to that. It can be the least intimate thing that you do with somebody. It can be really physical. It can be totally selfish. But when you trust somebody, and it's somebody that you have a connection with and somebody that you have good sex with, putting a condom on is like making a statement like, "Oh, you're still a threat. There's something potentially wrong with you that's going to hurt me." […] But I just think like it gets in the way - a condom gets in the way of true intimacy.

Riley appears to see most men that he has sex with as "a potential threat" – as a person who may give him HIV. However, he does not use a condom with the people he trusts and who

he actually sees as a person – as someone who will not hurt him. This construction of strangers as a potential threat is much in line with Díaz and Ayala's (1999) findings that "…using condoms makes people feel that they are with a stranger, with someone who is potentially dangerous, with someone you can't trust, from whom you need to protect yourself" (285). For Riley, he wants to make sex intimate with these individuals. Golub and colleagues (2012) explain why intimacy also plays a larger role in not using condoms than seeking pleasure In fact, "HIV prevention messages themselves have contributed to the disassociation between condom use and interpersonal trust, telling gay men that they must use condoms specifically because they cannot trust their sexual partners' HIV-status disclosures or commitments to monogamy" (Golub et al. 2012: 630). Not using condoms when someone trusts another and wants to be intimate with him can then be read as an unintended consequence of the danger discourse around sexuality. Condoms are to protect against risk. One is not seen as a risk anymore, but as a human who inspires trust and intimacy, so condom use stops. Riley takes an "estimated risk," where he does what he wants to do instead of always doing what he should do (Eisenberg et al. 2011).[5]

Gabriel also spoke about trust and barebacking with particular individuals:

Gabriel: I think that I barebacked with them - I think that I trusted them. I didn't think they were unclean or unsafe. They told me they were negative. I'm negative. I mean, you know, so that's just – it's a trust issue. […] I think that with bareback stuff it's just a trust issue.

Interviewer: Were these people that you met exclusively to hookup with? Or had you already built rapports with them?

Gabriel: I think most of them have just been people that I've hooked up with – that's it. […] I've been lucky so far to not have, you know, caught anything or got anything. And I

pray the same for them because I'm clean so I hope that they were not lying to me, but I know that I'm completely honest with them.

Gabriel also felt to not use a condom with certain people was "just a trust issue." Like Riley, Gabriel saw these men differently – as men who inspire trust. Trust, in these men's accounts, allow them to see other men as not carriers of HIV but as subjects who they wanted to engage in more "intimate" sex with. As Padilla (2007: 189) argues, "…the gap between what sex workers say and what they actually do" reveals the complexities of sexuality and sexual behaviors. This gap, here, exposes that the larger discourses around doing sexual responsibility do not work even for those who often subscribe them. Through trust, men's fears are lessened, and they see other men as human subjects. Trust becomes one of the "crisis tendencies" within doing sexual responsibility and the danger discourse that exposes how these practices and discourses never fully align in people's lives.

Later, Gabriel told me, "I'm versatile, but as a bottom, I prefer safe sex. As a top, as long as I trust that person, I'm open to bareback sex. It's a risk that I take, but it's only because I've had bad experiences with condoms in the past." Here, Gabriel practices "strategic positioning" - adopting a sexual position during sexual intercourse that has a lesser transmission rate of HIV (Davis 2009). His account also points to the larger structural issue in a lack of education around condom use. In having bad experiences in condoms, he relies on other strategies to mitigate HIV transmission through being the sexual penetrator during unprotected anal intercourse.

When I tried to understand what made him trust people, Gabriel told me, "It is a choice that we make, both mutually as adults. We both make that choice. So, you're trusting me. I'm trusting you. And it goes beyond that, but I think, as far as that person making me trust them, it

might have been the conversation. It might have been their looks. It just really depends on that person."

Similarly, Darryl told me:

> I don't think I've used a condom once this year, and for me that is actually very rare, but then again, I'm usually not a top. I don't think I've bottomed this year but with my ex[-boyfriend]. And we didn't use a condom because we had that special arrangement going. All the other guys I've topped. I usually ask them if they're clean - like when is the last time you've been tested? Or have you been tested recently? Are you clean? And they'll say yes. And if they were to say no, then I wouldn't hook up with them.
>
> Interviewer: So you trust them when they tell you that they are clean?
>
> Darryl: It's the only thing I can do. I look at it as you have to ask first. If you don't ask…if they lie to you, they can lie to you. Anybody can bullshit you. I hold myself as a very honest person. I'm not going to bullshit. I'm not going to lie - that's bad karma waiting to come back on me. So I'm hoping that by me not lying, hopefully my karma will just keep going.

Davis (2009) found that reciprocity is key to online sexual interactions and negotiations for gay men. In fact, gay self-identity, forged online, is formed through this principle (Davis 2009). Gay men often rely upon the adage of "honesty is the best policy" and "do unto others" (Rier 2007), where honesty is highlighted throughout many of the accounts given in this chapter. Darryl also practices strategic positioning, where he only engages in unprotected sex when he takes the penetrator role during sex. And like the other informants, he only foregoes using a condom when being penetrated if it is with someone he trusts – his ex-boyfriend. Darryl highlights though that although he engages in the harm reduction of strategic positioning, he still

relies on trust with the men who is having sex with. This trust is based on ideas around this reciprocity; because he is honest, he feels others will be honest in return.

Although the men in this study do sexual responsibility on Adam4Adam.com and in their sexual practices, notions of trust and masculinity led to the break down of – the "crisis tendencies" of - these actions and discourses. The discourse of what gay men should *do* and *be* was clearly not always implemented in these own gay men's lives. These fissures expose that the larger discourse around the "authentic" sexual subject in male-for-male cyberspace does not capture the lived realities of these men within this digital era. These chasms show the need for new discourses around sexuality and HIV. Gay health and identity should not just be linked to HIV discourses (Rofes 1998; Halperin 2007), and a structural understanding of the HIV epidemic is needed (Kaplan 1990). The danger discourse as it is implemented now, creates anxiety and fear for gay men trying to navigate their sexual lives, while abjecting HIV positive individuals as irresponsible and non-desirable. Ideas around pleasure and relationality, which highlight the structural aspects of sexual health and HIV, could reduce some of this stress and anxiety as they are encountering other men for sexual purposes on Adam4Adam.com.

Conclusion

Discourses around HIV and its link to gay sexuality are prevalent in the lives of my gay informants on Adam4Adam.com. I have suggested that the danger discourse around sexuality, which posits gay sexual behaviors as risky and immoral and outside of heteronormative understandings of "proper" sexuality, shapes how my informants say that they interact with other men online (Elliot 2012). This discourse also relies upon notions of individual responsibility, making each person's responsible for one's own behaviors, and ignoring the structural components to HIV and sexuality (Adam 2005; Halperin 2007; Davis 2009). However, gay men

can *do sexual responsibility* through screening profiles for HIV status, disclosing their own status and sexual practices, and holding people accountable for not disclosing these items. This doing sexual responsibility helps particular gay men achieve some sexual legitimacy as sexual subjects, while abjecting HIV positive individuals (who get conflated with promiscuity) as dirty, perverse, and non-desirable. Nonetheless, this doing sexual responsibility upholds the larger heteronormative discourses that construct gay sexuality as dangerous, where some gay men may gain some upward moral mobility, but ultimately larger structures that marginalize them are being reified.

These practices, though, must be considered within the larger context of gay men trying to navigate their sexual health within a heteronormative society. The gay informants in this study pointed to having inadequate sex education, and this lack of information can be one reason while they were wary of getting to know HIV positive individuals. Likewise, gay men experience constant fear and anxiety around enacting their sexuality, where this discrimination might not be overt prejudice, but rather gay men just trying to do the best they can within the danger discourse that deems their sexual behaviors as wrong (Race 2010). In already being marginalized in society, gay men may fear further marginalization through contracting HIV, and therefore, to try to gain some legitimacy and recognition by society, these gay men do sexual responsibility in order to be seen as "proper" sexual subjects. One creative way these gay men do sexual responsibility is through online foreplay. Internet foreplay allows these men to add pleasure to their sexual interpersonal relationships, assuaging fears of risk and highlighting the relational component to sexual negotiations.

Nonetheless, this danger discourse around sexuality has unintended consequences. Through trusting certain men or desiring to be intimate with men who embodied certain forms of

masculinity, the gay men in this study often failed to implement sexual responsibility in all of their sexual encounters. This failure is not these men's own doing. Rather, it points to the fissures in this discourse, exposing how this discourse operates to marginalize everyone, especially HIV positive individuals. This discourse creates constant psychological anxieties for the gay men I interviewed. Therefore, new ways of discussing sexuality, HIV, sexual health, and the Internet need to be formed, especially ones that highlight pleasure, relationality, and an understanding of structural issues. In this way, gay men can find possibly better ways to express their sexual agency and to not have to live in a constant state of worry, fear, and anxiety. In the last chapter, I summarize the contributions of this work, discuss the limitations of this research project, and point to new directions in future research.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

[1] Rofes (1998) argues that the HIV/AIDS crisis is over and that gay men are forging post-AIDS identities.
[2] It should be noted that Grov and colleagues (2013) only advocate for condom usage to be in profiles. They are more skeptical about the listing of HIV status.
[3] See chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion and definition of sexual stratification and erotic capital.
[4] Barebacking is a gay slang term that generally refers to having sex without a condom. There is also a barebacking culture, where men who identify as barebackers intentionally have sex without a condom for a variety of reasons such as condom fatigue, as resistance to sexual health paradigms, and as the eroticizing of risk (Gauthier and Forsyth 1999). None of my informants told me that they identified as being a part of this culture; therefore, I believe their use of the term was the more general use of just describing non-condom use during sex.
[5] Padilla (2007) also shows that when male sex workers trust their clients, they associate being intimate with these clients with "the cessation of condom use" (194). Likewise, these sex workers often do not use condoms with their wives or girlfriends because they see sex with these women as more intimate than sex with their gay clients. In Padilla's study, sex workers construct a marketable fantasy through performing an "authentic" idea of a Dominican sex worker in the gay tourist's imagination. On Adam4Adam.com, the "authentic" sexual subject is often performed also through a marketable fantasy of listing one's HIV status and through stating that one practices safe sex only. However, this "authentic," marketable man is troubled when these men trust other men and want to be more "intimate" with them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research study began with two general research questions: *Why* are men seeking men going online to find each other? And *how* is the Internet shaping these men's sexuality? The findings of this study greatly brought to light these questions and provided rich understandings of how self-identified gay, homosexual, and queer men are navigating their sexuality via the Internet today.

In the first analytical chapter, I uncovered that these gay men are not just going online to find sexual encounters, but many are also looking to build friendships with other gay men. Friendship has served as a cornerstone social bond for gay men as friendship has allowed gay men to find similar others and build a collective positive identity in a society that marginalizes their sexuality (Nardi 1999; Reece and Dodge 2004). In a society that separates sex from friendship (Nardi 1999), many of my informants experienced ambivalence and difficulty in trying to find and build friendships through Adam4Adam.com - a website known to be about sexual hookups. However, through their everyday use of this space, the informants in this study have transformed online cruising to not always being sexual but also about just searching for other gay friends. This search for friendship and comparing Adam4Adam.com to Facebook.com challenges the larger heteronormative stereotypical notions of gay men always being hyper-sexual and shows how these gay men want and struggle to find other social connections. In using their gay identity to try to build relationalities with other gay identified men (see Foucault 1989), the informants in this study challenge the impersonability associated to modernity (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004), while seeking to build new alliances that could potentially radically disrupt heteronormative society.

In the same chapter, I also examined the ways in which these gay men use the Internet to build friendships for three main reasons. First, gay men can integrate Adam4Adam.com into their busy lives. The political economy is re-shaping these men's sexuality (see Padilla 2007), where these men can connect with other gay men while working, in class, or engaging in other everyday life responsibilities that the economy demands of them. Secondly, and similar to some of Ridge, Minichiello, and Plummer's (1997) findings, the gay informants in this study found the gay bar scene not being conducive to meeting and talking to other gay men, especially because other gay men are already there with their friends and the bar is loud. Thirdly, gay men can "cast a wider net" and meet a variety of different gay men safely online that is limited in the offline physical locations different people inhabit.

Chapter three elaborated on and complicated the above: I pointed to some of the limitations in casting this wider net in meeting new individuals: mainly, race and the gay body. Building off of Robinson's (2008) theorization about race-based searching in cyberspaces, I empirically show how these website search functions are being used to racially cleanse out particular bodies of color. Although these cleansing practices are part of a larger structure of sexual stratification and erotic capital (Green 2008, 2011), in cyberspace, these racist structures, as well as meeting similar others (i.e., homophily) are exacerbated and then further normalized through using neoliberal discourses of viewing racial desires as "just a preference." Interestingly, Owens's (2004) found in her study on race, sexual attractiveness, and Internet personals that when a user did not explicitly desire a particular race, then he or she would mention one's hobbies as a way to find similar others. Contrary to these findings, this study reveals that one's similar interest in hobbies gets collapsed with one's interest in same-race interactions. Homophilous discourses allow for race and hobbies to become conflated, where a preference for

"whites only" gets linked to a preference for someone who likes cooking, hiking, or other activities. The search function of Adam4Adam.com normalizes just looking for people with similar racial traits, making these exclusionary practices a quotidian part of being online.

This new racism takes the form of 'digital racism' and allows informants to not see these racialized desires as potentially discriminatory, masking the larger white, hetero-patriarchal discourses that are influencing people's intimate lives. Utilizing a queer of color critique, I suggest that these racial specific sexual desires re-construct larger heteronormative discourses about "proper" sexualities. Although discrimination based on racial characteristics organizes inequality within gay communities and selectively privileges some of their members, the racial exclusionary practices on Adam4Adam.com reify a larger structure – heteronormativity - that has traditionally marginalized those who are not heterosexual. The ways in which white supremacy and heteronormativity work in tandem need to be exposed in order for all people to have the same potential in finding friends and partners online.

Accordingly, people in cyberspace are often required to fill out their age, height, weight, and waist size in order to construct a profile on most gay and straight dating and hookup sites. These measurements can quickly alert a user to what is a desirable body on these websites, and it allows for other users to assess and compare one's body to another (Campbell 2004). Likewise, my informants used the notion of "height-weight proportionality" to easily compare their bodily "stats" to other users. These "stats" disembody the body, erasing the individual (Campbell 2004), and it allows users to "objectively" normalize their discrimination against "overweight" individuals on Adam4Adam.com – what I have termed *the quantifiable body-discourse*. This discourse reifies athletic bodies as possessing more erotic capital on this website. Again, this hierarchy of desirability allows certain gay individuals to achieve certain levels of acceptability,

while marginalizing other gay men because they do not have "normative" bodies. This non-desire for "overweight" bodies is not seen as discriminatory because the quantifiable-body discourse "objectively" tells users that these bodies fall outside of the "average" scientific body measurements. Micro-level interactions of discrimination get masked within larger macro-structures of sexual stratification and inequality. This division of gay men masks the larger heteronormative structures at play in deciding who is desirable, and it does not allow gay men to forge bonds with other gay men because of just one's body size or race. This discrimination reifies hegemonic masculinity – a practice that subordinates non-heterosexual men and gay masculinities. These discourses and divisions need to be challenged to end heteronormativity's grasp on gay men's desires, in order for all gay men to be seen as individual human beings and sexual subjects online and within the larger society.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the role and meaning of HIV and sexual health in the lives of my informants. Relying upon West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of doing gender, I incorporate the term *doing sexual responsibility* to show how gay informants screen, surveil, and hold accountable other gay men around issues of HIV in order to construct themselves as respectable, socially responsible individuals. Doing sexual responsibility allows gay men to assuage their own anxieties around HIV, often created through the "danger discourse" (Elliot 2012) on sexuality. However, these practices abject HIV positive individuals to being non-desirable and non-approachable on Adam4Adam.com. This form of stigma and rejection of HIV positive individuals reify the heteronormative discourses that conflate gay sexuality with HIV, and therefore, new ways of viewing HIV positive people and sexual practices need to be explored to not perpetuate these inequalities.

Nonetheless, the gay men in this study engage in online foreplay as a pleasurable way to manage this anxiety while navigating the sexual perils created by the "danger discourse." This Internet foreplay, often shaped by sexual scripts (Gagnon and Simon 2005 [1973]), challenges the "danger discourse" on sexuality by adding pleasure and need to the framing of harm reduction for users on this website. This online foreplay can be seen as a creative way to challenge heteronormative discourses on gay sexuality that always conflate sexuality with danger, erasing all forms of pleasure.

Lastly, although gay men ideally subscribe to the "danger discourse" and doing sexual responsibility, trust and masculinity can lead to chasms of these larger practices and discourses. The contradictory consciousness that arises during these moments points to one way that heteronormative discourses on gay sexuality do not fit into actual gay lives and gay men's practices. The notion of trust highlights the unintended consequences of this "danger discourse," where when people are not viewed as "risky" or "dangerous," gay men see them as humans and adjust their sexual practices accordingly. In exposing the fissures of this discourse as well as the pleasurable ways my informants navigate their sexual health and lives on Adam4Adam.com, I seek to point to ways to challenge these heteronormative sexual health discourses and paradigms. Novel ways of discussing sexual health and pleasure are needed in the lives of gay men that are outside of these heteronormative understandings of gay sexuality always being dangerous, where the potential threat of HIV is constantly lurking in the background.

Heteronormativity structures *why* gay men are going online to find one another and *how* these men are using these online spaces. Because of their marginalization within the larger society, some gay men are turning to the Internet to find one another. Racialized heteronormative discourses affect how gay men connect with other men in this space, as well as, discourses on

bodies and sexual health. Nonetheless, these spaces also provide creative ways for gay men to connect with other gay men in spite of larger structures historically marginalizing their lives. In searching for "something more," gay men can potentially build intimate bonds that a heteronormative society does not often allow for gay men to build. Likewise, in engaging in online foreplay, gay men find pleasurable ways to navigate the anxiety that the "danger discourse" on sexuality creates in their lives. These larger discourses need to continue to be challenged in order for gay men to build connections with a variety of other gay men, and although online spaces may be where heteronormativity is being reified, it is also be challenged simultaneously. By finding and focusing on the creative ways gay men are creating a space to live and breathe in a society that deems them aberrant, one can continue to unmask ways of undoing the white, hetero-patriarchal social order.

Limitations and Future Research

This research project focused on a select group of mostly self-identified gay men as well as one queer man and one homosexual man in the Austin area on Adam4Adam.com. Given this fact, some of the findings may not be generalizable to other social groups, in other geographic regions, and/or on other websites. However, I hope that many of the concepts and theoretical insights developed in this thesis can provide unique analytical tools to explore these issues in other contexts.

For instance, men who identify as bisexual (or heterosexual) have very different needs than men who identify as gay (Kennedy and Doll 2000; Klein 2009). Bisexual men tend to engage in lower levels of sexual risk, do not look for offline sexual partners as much as gay men, and use Internet chat rooms more than other men seeking men populations (Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008; Klein 2009). Bisexual men face ostracism from both heterosexual and

homosexual communities, possibly forcing them to go online for various reasons more so than their homosexual or heterosexual counterparts (Kennedy and Doll 2000). Likewise, bisexual men are often erased from literature targeting gay men and HIV, generating little knowledge about their needs and Internet use for sexually related purposes (Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008). For this matter, future research should explore how bisexual men are navigating these websites, if they are also looking for friendships with similar others, and how ideas around sexual health shape their online behaviors.

Similarly, scholars should explore how the Internet impacts the lives of older gay men and how they navigate these websites. Ageism has been documented as a form of discrimination within gay communities (Adam 2000; Kaufman and Phua 2003), and ageing leads to bodily changes that are often see as being not as desirable as youthful bodies (Slevin and Linneman 2010; Lodge and Umberson 2013). Therefore, issues around bodily discrimination that were explored in this study may become compounded with the ageing gay body, and therefore, future research on dating and hookup websites and gay men should investigate these issues for these older generations of gay men today. Also, because older gay men are from a different generation than the Internet generation explored in this study, scholars should see how these men utilize the Internet for dating and sexual purposes similarly or differently than this younger generation of gay men.

These findings may vary in other cities or in other geographic contexts like rural areas. Men in rural areas do not often have offline gay established places to meet (Horvath, Bowen, and Williams 2006); therefore, their reasons for being online and their needs may be different than the men in this study. Likewise, other urban areas with different racial demographics and different offline gay venue spaces may shape how gay men in those areas utilize the Internet and

interact with other men online. Future research should explore how other geographic contexts can expand upon the ideas uncovered in Austin, Texas.

Lastly, future research should explore how some of the larger issues raised in this thesis unfold on other dating and hookup sites for not only gay men but also heterosexual, lesbian, and any other type of social networking dating websites. For example, Lin and Lundquist (2013) recently found in their study of mate selection among heterosexual Internet daters that white daters with a college degree were more likely to contact and respond to white daters without a college degree than they were to black daters with a college degree. This study showed how education did not have a mediating effect among heterosexual Internet daters; instead, homophily and racial hierarchies still influenced dating markets. More future research should specifically explore if and how the users on these websites are filtering particular individuals from their viewing practices, and how race and ideas around the quantifiable body shape the sociality on these websites as well. Issues around sexual health should be explored too, as they can add to one's overall understanding of how sexual health is unfolding within this digital age, between and among various social groups. Other scholars should consider interviewing the people who created and operated Adam4Adam.com and other dating and hookup websites in order to see why they design the websites in specific ways and what their objectives are for making these websites.

Study's Contributions

In the realm of gay men and friendship, this study has shown how a new generation of younger gay men – men who were born between 1983 and 1990 and grew up with the Internet as a central aspect of their lives – are navigating finding connections in a society that separates sex from friendship (Foucault 1989; Nardi 1999). Cruising is not always sexual in nature anymore

(though happening in a sexualized space), where this study shows that gay men are often just cruising for friendship. Likewise, through a political economy of sexuality lens, one can see why a younger generation of gay men are not mainly meeting at offline gay venues like in the past (Chauncey 1994; Bérubé 2003), where now men can integrate the online world into their everyday, busy lives. For this matter, this study expands on ideas around gay men and friendship through showing that gay men are still strongly seeking friendship, so much so, that they integrate these social networking websites into their daily routines. This search for "something more" challenges the impersonability thesis about modernity (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004), where friendship is still central to gay men's lives – so central that the Internet allows gay men to search for connections with other gay men throughout their daily lives, not even having to go to physical, offline gay spaces anymore to forge these bonds.

This study also contributes to the literature on race and the body in gay men's lives. In combining Patricia Hill Collins (2004) ideas around the "new racism" with Sharon Holland's (2012) conception of the quotidian aspects of racism and the erotic, this study has shown how racism has become digital and normalized in online gay dating spaces. Being a pioneer study to empirically explore a website's filtering system, this thesis suggests that the structure of a U.S.-based website may make cleansing race bodies pedestrian and not seen as discrimination. Likewise, this study furthers ideas about gay bodies as they are quantified and digitized in cyberspace. Although body discrimination is not new to gay communities (see Wood 2004), this study shows how website's interfaces make it easy to compare bodies and to normalize discrimination against bodies that are not "height-weight proportionate." These new forms of racial and bodily discrimination are so ingrained in people's daily practices on these websites

that the larger macro-issues become effaced, reifying the hegemonic structures of inequality in society.

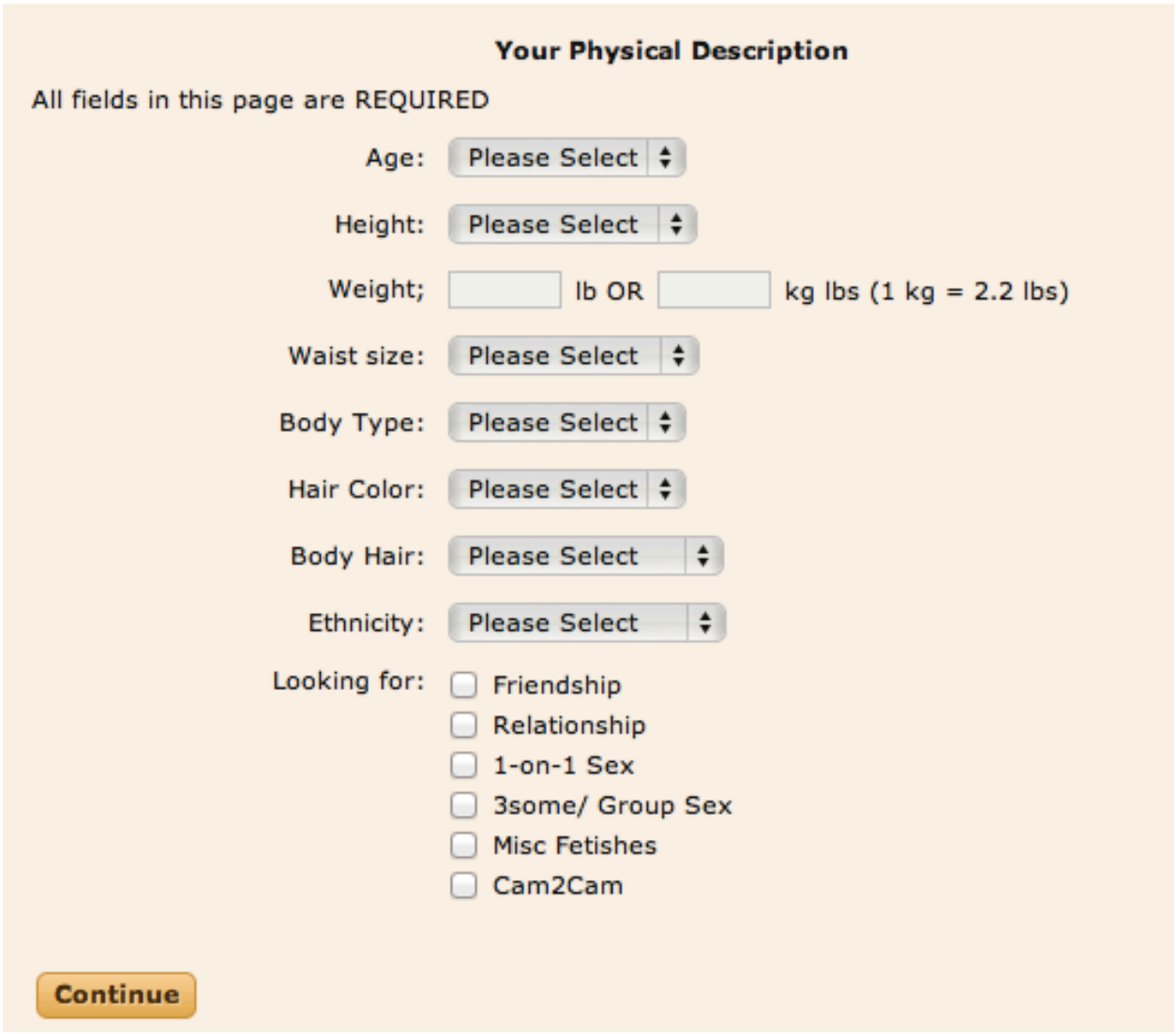
Likewise, the meaning of HIV and AIDS takes on unique forms in cyberspace as well. The danger discourse around sexuality, which posits gay sexual behaviors as risky and immoral, shapes how my informants interact with other men online (Elliot 2012). Gay men utilize website's interfaces to screen profiles for HIV status, disclose their own status and sexual practices, and hold people accountable for not disclosing these items. Accordingly, this study shows how gay men engage in online foreplay as a creative way to add pleasure to this anxiety-ridden navigation of the pleasure-danger construction of sexuality (Vance 1984). Likewise, this study contributes in understanding the unintended consequences of this discourse, as gay men experience a contradictory consciousness when they trust another sexual partner or when he embodies forms of hegemonic masculinity. This study points to ways of how these larger discourses on HIV are being implemented online by young gay men but also how they are finding creative ways to find some relief from this "danger discourse."

Through exploring the meaning of the Internet in the lives of gay men, I hope these men's voices expand our understandings of gay identity, desires, and behaviors in this increasingly digitalized age. With the recent advancements of certain LGBT rights in the United States, gay life is definitely changing in unprecedented and unexpected ways. However, as these men's narratives illustrate, society is still structured through heteronormative standards, where the Internet opens up a new space for gay men to navigate their marginalized status in society, trying to find human but also exclusively erotic connections with other gay men. Building these relations is still fraught with various forms of discrimination that need to be exposed, questioned, and disrupted so that all gay men can eventually find relief in a society that deems them less than

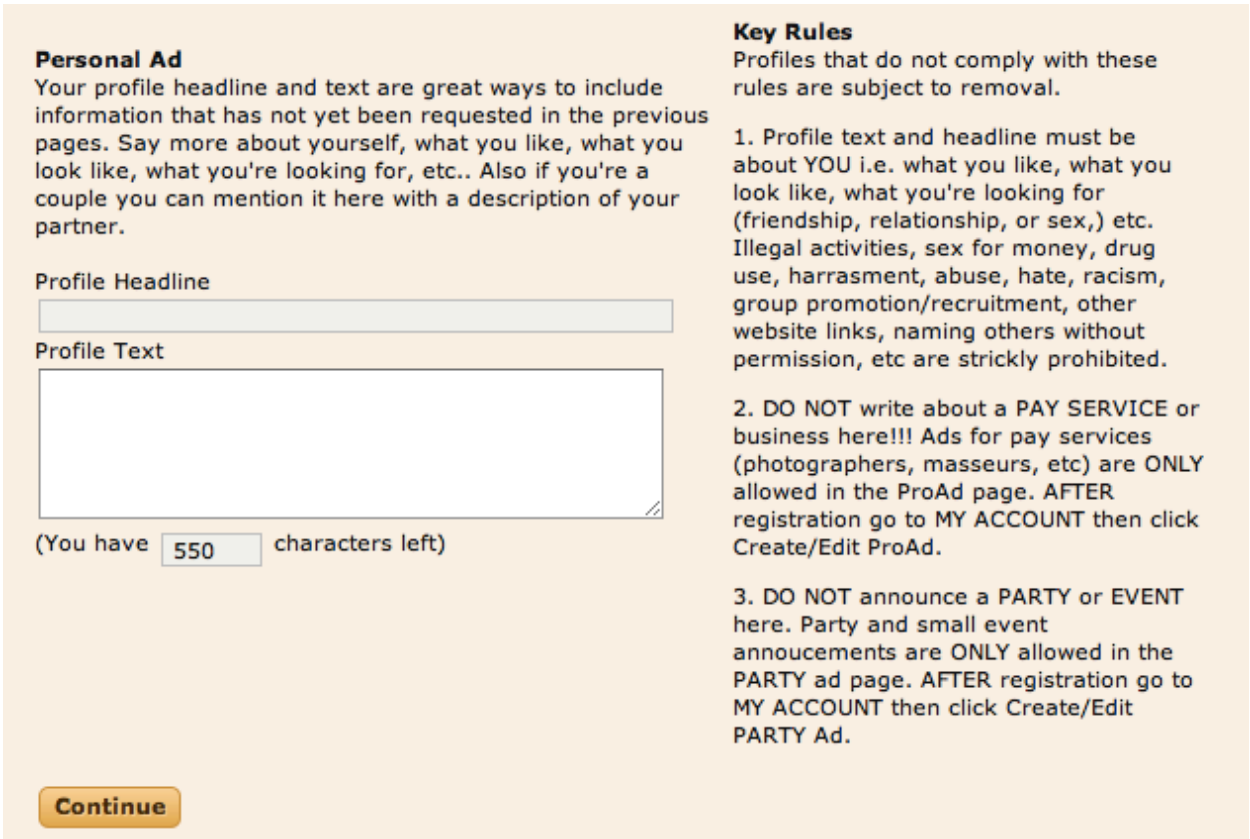
heterosexual individuals. These men's voices and my examinations of their stories have pointed to these issues and ways that they can be challenged, in hopes of opening up new ideas and practices in achieving more equality and humanity for gay men and other sexually marginalized people today.

Appendices

Appendix A – Required Demographics



Appendix B – Profile Description



Personal Ad
Your profile headline and text are great ways to include information that has not yet been requested in the previous pages. Say more about yourself, what you like, what you look like, what you're looking for, etc.. Also if you're a couple you can mention it here with a description of your partner.

Profile Headline

Profile Text

(You have 550 characters left)

Continue

Key Rules
Profiles that do not comply with these rules are subject to removal.

1. Profile text and headline must be about YOU i.e. what you like, what you look like, what you're looking for (friendship, relationship, or sex,) etc. Illegal activities, sex for money, drug use, harrasment, abuse, hate, racism, group promotion/recruitment, other website links, naming others without permission, etc are strickly prohibited.

2. DO NOT write about a PAY SERVICE or business here!!! Ads for pay services (photographers, masseurs, etc) are ONLY allowed in the ProAd page. AFTER registration go to MY ACCOUNT then click Create/Edit ProAd.

3. DO NOT announce a PARTY or EVENT here. Party and small event annoucements are ONLY allowed in the PARTY ad page. AFTER registration go to MY ACCOUNT then click Create/Edit PARTY Ad.

Appendix C – Optional Demographics

OPTIONAL Information
The following information is **OPTIONAL**. If you are looking for Friendship and/or Relationship we recommend answering Part 1 and if you are looking for Sex we highly recommend answering Part 2. Answering these questions will help members find you with our advanced search tool.

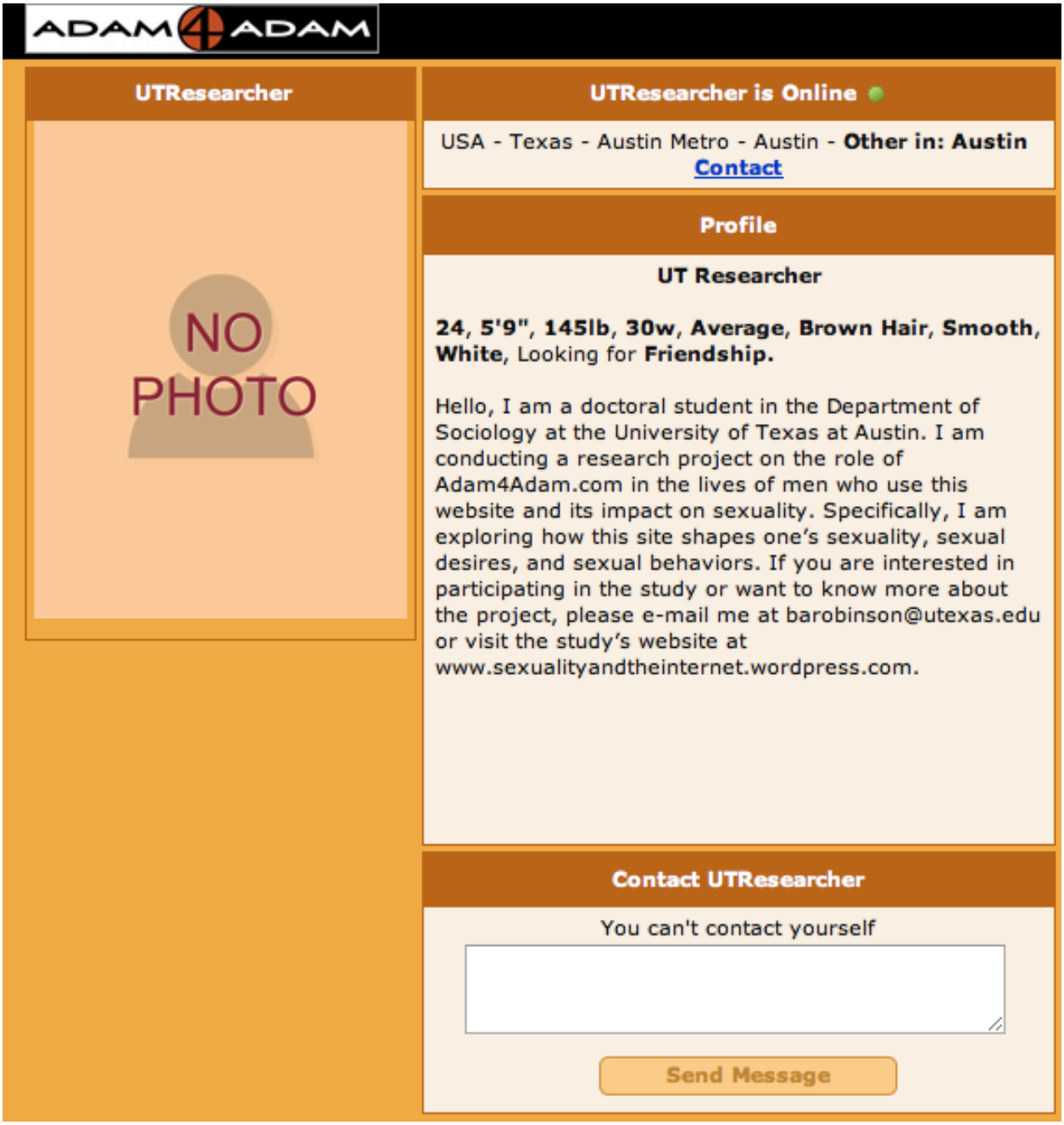
Part 1: Mostly of interest to members looking for Friendship/Relationship

Profession/Occupation	
Scene	Please Select
Out	Please Select
Smoke	Please Select
Drink	Please Select
Drugs	Please Select
Zodiac	Please Select
Talk about your hobbies, interests, where you like to go out, favorite things, etc.:	(Up to 100 Characters)

Part 2: Mostly of interest to members looking for Sex

Sexual Role	Please Select
Dick	Please Select
Dick Cut	Please Select
Practice	Please Select
HIV Status	Please Select
Meeting Place	Please Select

Appendix D – Recruitment Profile



Appendix E – Interview Guide

Initial Opening Questions

1. How comfortable do you feel by knowing that you are going to be talking with me about topics related to your use of the Internet to find other men for sexual purposes?
2. Can you tell me about the first time that you used the Internet to find an offline sexual encounter with another man?
3. Can you describe for me how you discovered the website Adam4Adam.com?
4. How long have you been using Adam4Adam.com?

Profiles on Adam4Adam.com

1. Can you describe for me your own profile on Adam4Adam.com?
    Tell me about what images you use of yourself.
    Tell me about what you write about yourself.
2. Can you tell me about the type of men that you are looking for on Adam4Adam.com?
    What profile images are you drawn to?
3. Do you find that the men that you meet have accurately represented themselves in their profiles?

Using the Internet to Find Sex

1. Can you describe for me the last time that you logged into Adam4Adam.com?
    What did you do on the website while you were logged in?
2. Can you tell me about the last offline sexual encounter that you had with someone that you met on Adam4Adam.com?
    What did you talk about with him on Adam4Adam.com before meeting him in-person?
3. What benefits do you see from using Adam4Adam.com instead of going to gay bar/clubs to find sexual hookups?
4. Do you think Adam4Adam.com has made it easier for you to find other men to have sexual encounters with?
    If so, how?

Sexual Behavior & Health

1. How do you talk about your sexual interests with men on Adam4Adam.com before meeting for the sexual encounter?
2. Can you tell me about how you discuss safe-sex practices on Adam4Adam.com before meeting for a sexual encounter?
3. Can you maybe tell me about a time where you were talking with someone on Adam4Adam.com and then decided not to meet him offline?
4. Can you describe for me what types of sex acts you normally engage in with the men you meet on Adam4Adam.com?

Personal Information

1. May I ask you your age?

2. How would you describe your race?
3. Educational background?
4. Do you mind telling me your occupation?
5. How would you describe your sexual identity?

Final Thoughts

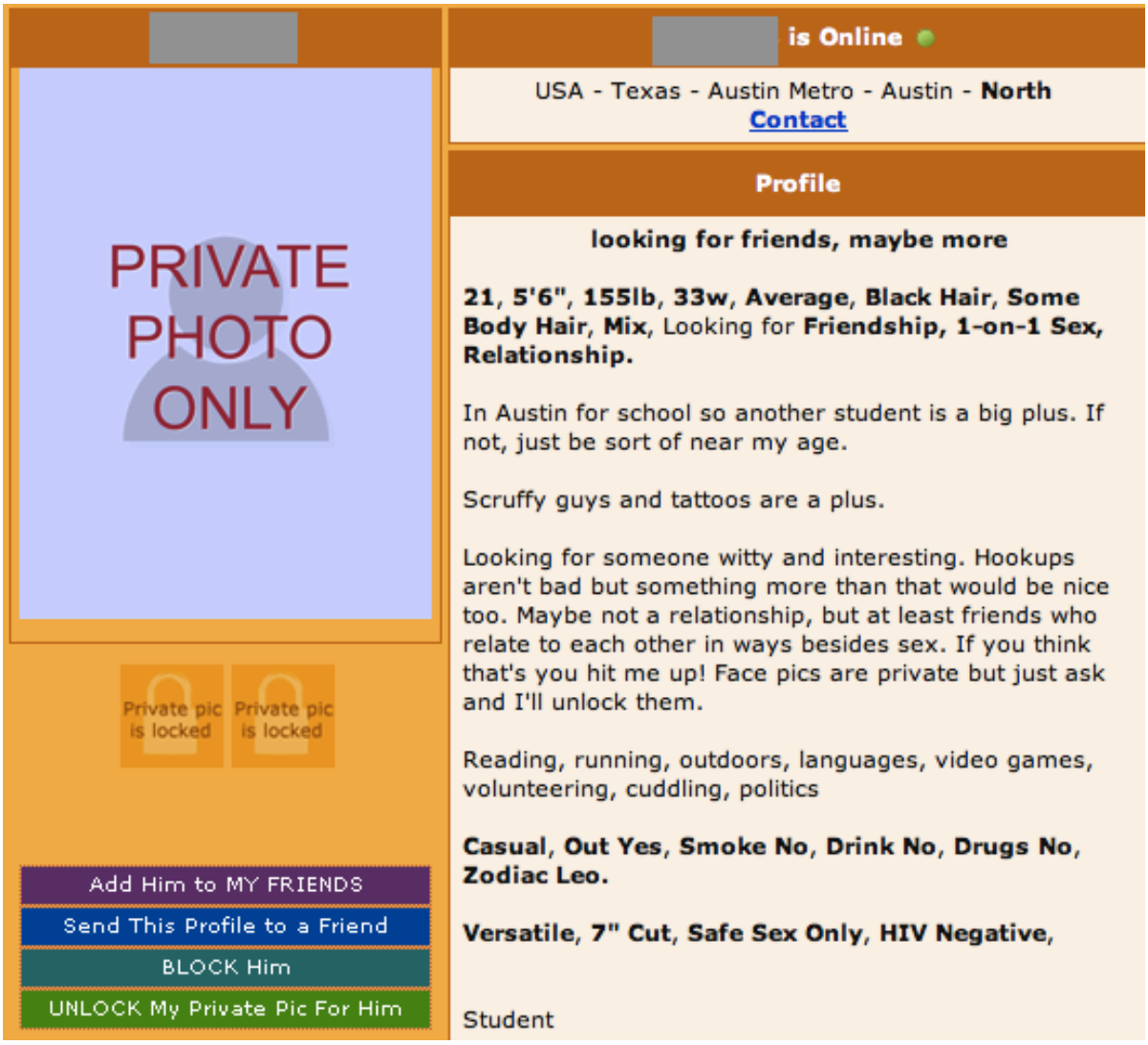
1. Is there a question that you found difficult to answer during this interview?
2. Is there a question I did not ask that you consider would have been interesting, controversial, or difficult for you to be asked?
3. Is there something we did not discuss about [describe project again] that in your opinion would be important for you to share with me?

Appendix F – Study Participants

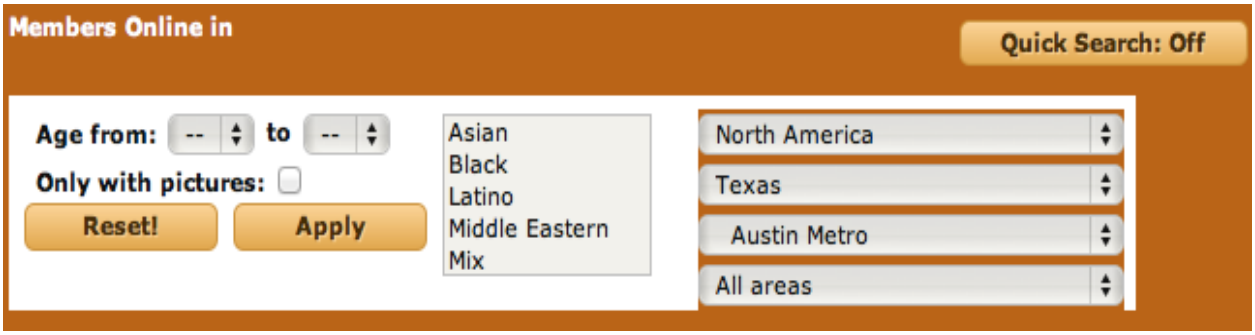
	Age	Sexual Identity	Race	Education	Occupation
Acar	26	Gay	Turkish & Greek	In Graduate School	Graduate Student
Cisco	24	Gay	Latino/Hispanic	Finished High School	Artist/Writer
Colin	22	Queer	White	In College	Student
Darryl	24	Gay	African American	Some College	Underwriter
Gabriel	25	Gay	White Latino	In College	Non-Profit
Hugo	25	Gay	White Hispanic	In Graduate School	Graduate Student
Iago	26	Gay	Hispanic	Finished High School	Business
Koby	27	Gay	Asian	Finished College	Massage Therapist
Leonardo	24	Gay	Latino/Hispanic	In College	Student
Mikel	27	Gay	Black	Finished College	Events Supervisor
Raj	22	Gay	White & Indian	In College	Work Study Student
Riley	28	Gay	White	Finished College	Non-Profit
Tanner	25	Gay	White	Finished College	Public Relations
Tito	23	Homosexual	White Hispanic	Finished High School	Information Technology
Xavier	24	Gay	Black & Latino	In College	Housekeeper

Appendix G – Profile: "Be My Friend"

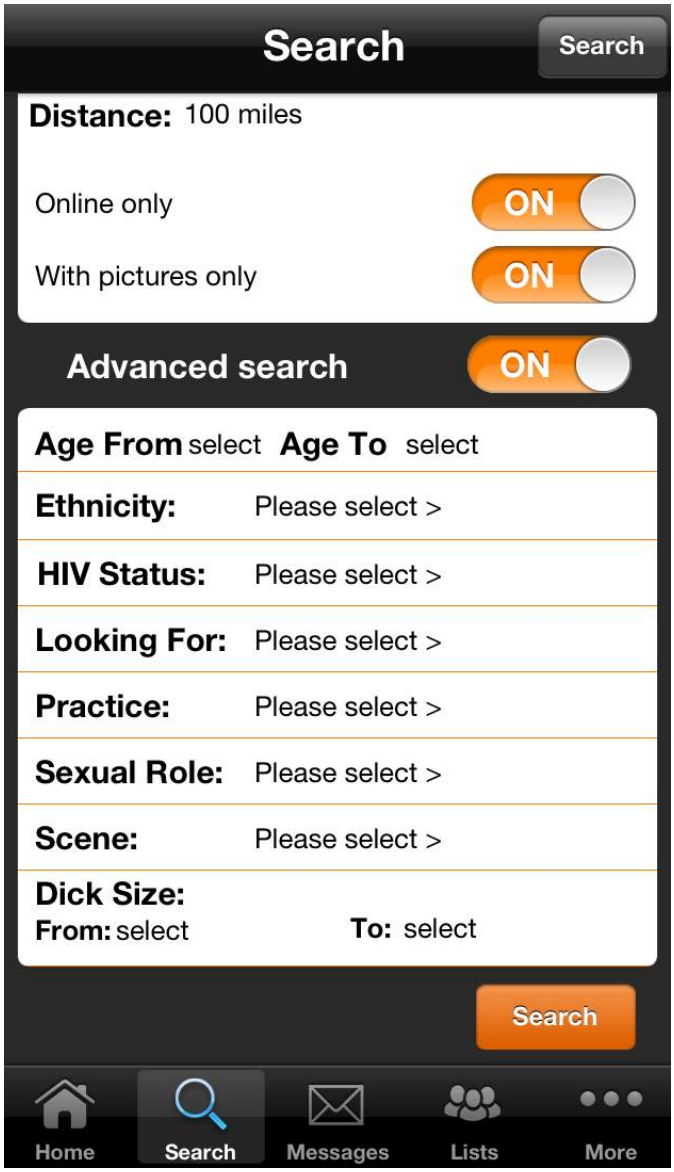
Appendix H – Profile: "Looking for Friends"



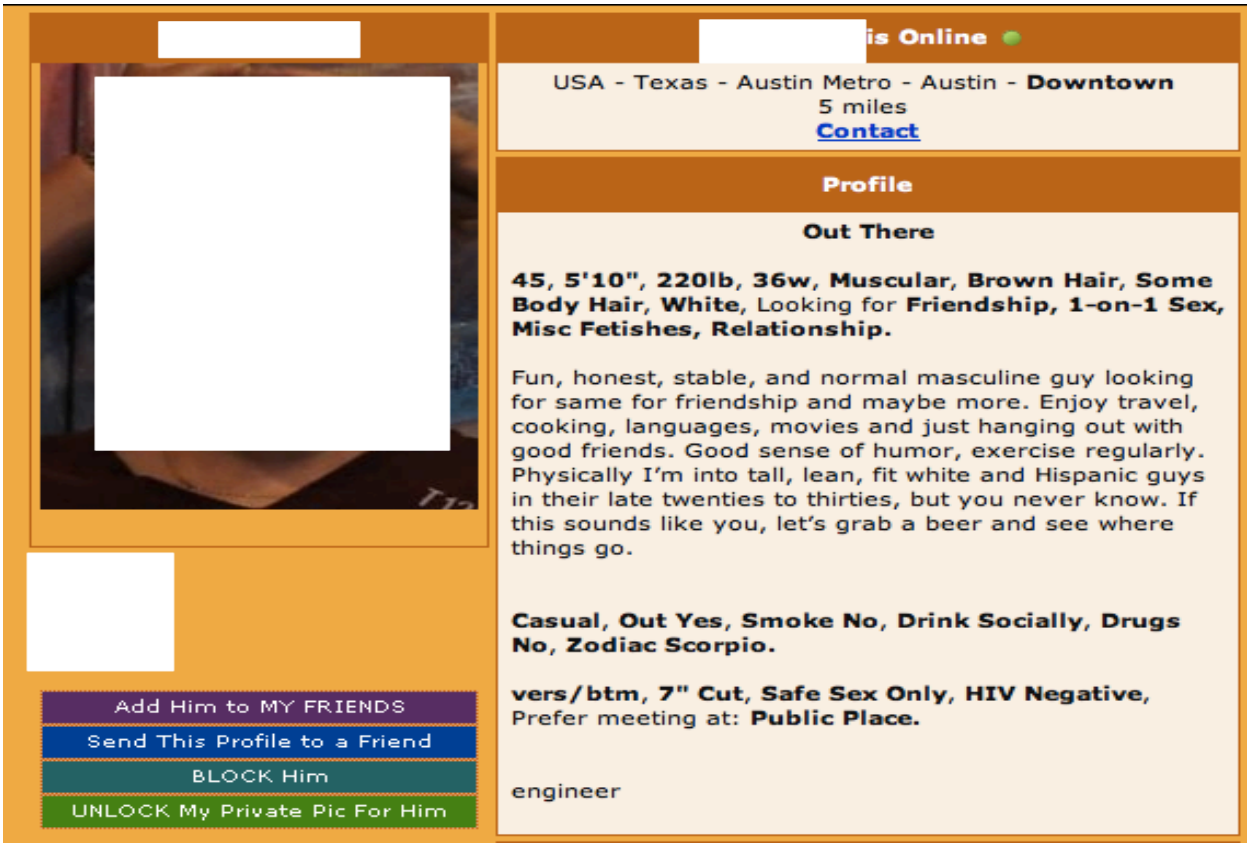
Appendix I – Quick Search



Appendix J – Mobile Quick Search



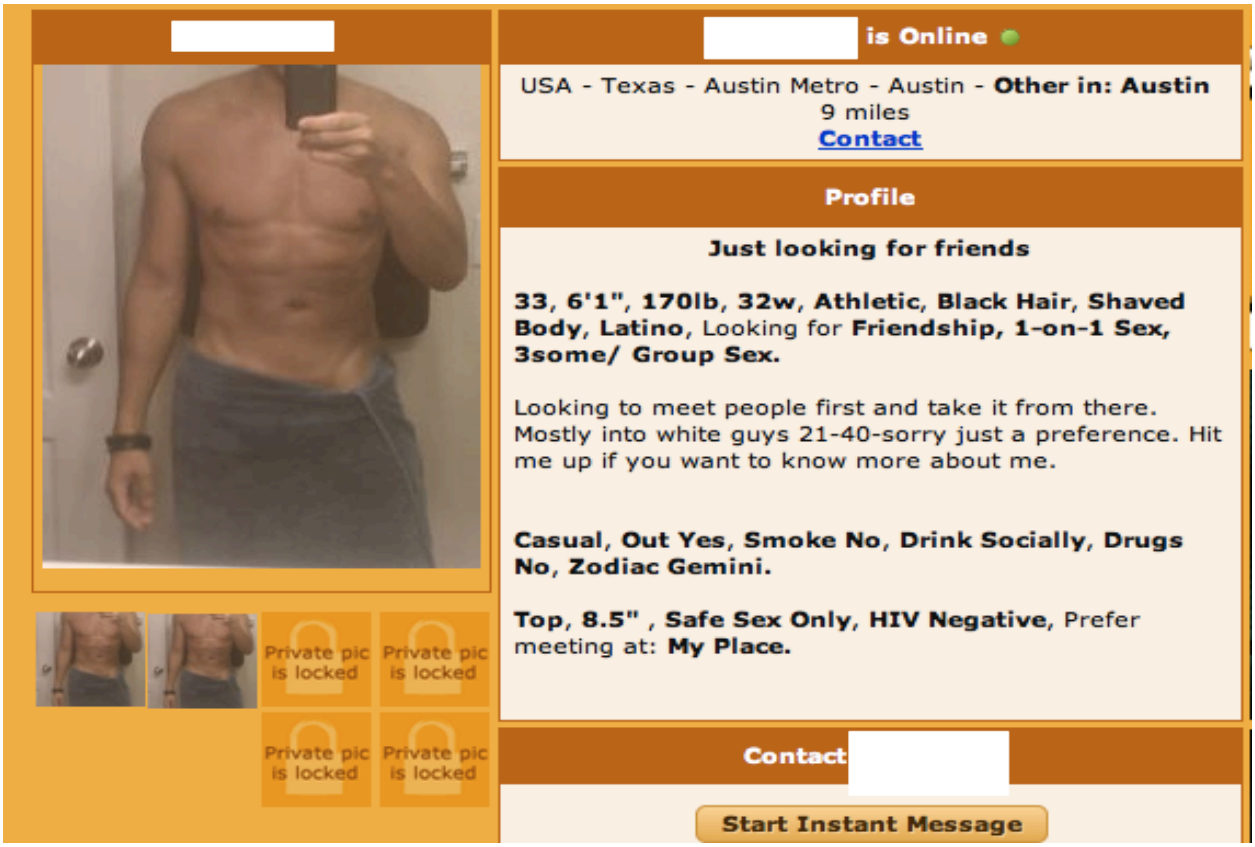
Appendix K – Profile: "Into...White and Hispanic"



Appendix L – Profile: "Mostly Latinos and Whites"

Appendix M – Profile: "Only Hookup with White Guys"

Appendix N – Profile: "Mostly into White Guys"



Appendix O – Profile: “Into WHITE Guys”

[redacted] is Online

USA - Texas - Austin Metro - Austin - **North**
9 miles
Contact

Profile

25, 5'11", 169lb, 31w, Average, Brown Hair, Some Body Hair, White, Looking for **Friendship, 1-on-1 Sex, Relationship.**

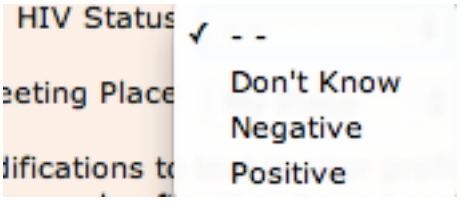
laid back up for anything. like making new friends and see wher it goes. just see whats up. If your going to message me please have a face pic. Into WHITE guys. Sorry just my preference. Like guys who are laid back completely vers and like oral fun close to my age. Not into fats or fems! Like real men! Don't message me without unlocking pix. I don't have any locked. Have more to send. I like men not boys. Please don't message me or send smiles if you do not comply.

i like to get out with friends and have a Damn good time haha

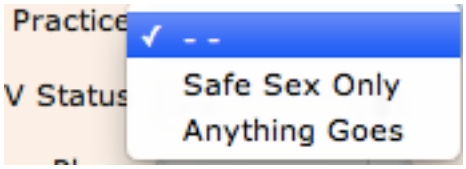
Casual, Out No, Smoke Yes, Drink Socially, Drugs No, Zodiac Aries.

Versatile, 7.5" Uncut, Safe Sex Only, Prefer meeting

Appendix P – HIV Status



Appendix Q – Sexual Practice



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