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Sex Markets and Sexual Opportunity Structures of Behaviorally Bisexual Latino Men in the Urban Metropolis of New York City

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Abstract

Sex markets (the spatially and culturally bounded arenas) that shape bisexual behavior among Latino men have been utilized as a deterministic concept without a sufficient focus on the ability of individuals to make autonomous decisions within such arenas. We nuance the theory of sex markets using the concept of *sexual opportunity structures* to investigate the ways in which behaviorally bisexual Latino men in the urban metropolis of New York City navigate sexual geographies, cultural meaning systems, sexual scripts, and social institutions to configure their bisexual behaviors. Drawing on 60 in-depth interviews with bisexual Latino men in New York city, we first describe and analyze venues that constitute sexual geographies that facilitate and impede sexual interaction. These also allow for a degree of autonomy in decision-making, as men travel throughout the urban sexual landscape and sometimes even manage to reject norms, such as those imposed by Christian religion. We explore some of the cultural meaning systems and social institutions that regulate sex markets and influence individual decision-making. Secrecy and discretion—regulated by the family, masculinity, migration, and religion—only partially shaped sexual behavior and relationships. These factors create a flux in “equilibrium” in bisexual sex markets in which sociocultural-economic structures constantly interplay with human agency. This article contributes to the literature in identifying dynamic spaces for sexual health interventions that draw on individual agency and empowerment.

Keywords

bisexuality; Latino men; sex market; sexual opportunity structure; sexual orientation

INTRODUCTION

In spite of recent interest in the study of Latino bisexuality in the United States, there have been few empirical studies that examine how bisexual men organize their sexual lives (e.g., Carballo-Diéguez, Miner, Dolezal, Rosser, & Jacoby, 2006; Martinez et al., 2011; Schrimshaw, Rosario, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Scharf-Matlick, 2006). There is some literature on bisexual sexual desire and how it is interpreted in the lives of men who have sex with men and women, finding that casual sex is a predominant behavior and that it is likely that sexual desire for men and women persists throughout the sexual subjects’ lifetimes (Muñoz-

Laboy, 2004). Although sexual desire often translates into sexual practices, the socioculturally dependent contexts in which sex occurs and how sexual decisions are made have been largely unexplored in bisexual Latino men.

Studies on HIV and AIDS have documented that bisexual Latino men who actively have sex with women are likely to have unprotected sex with male partners (Muñoz-Laboy, Castellanos, & Westacott, 2005). Some ethnographic and quantitative studies documented that bisexually active Latino and African-American men are at heightened risk for contracting HIV (Brooks, Rotheram-Borus, Bing, Ayala & Henry, 2003; Muñoz-Laboy & Dodge, 2005, 2007). In the HIV literature, sexual negotiation often refers to “discussions of likes, dislikes, and degree of safety in sexual behavior that partners expect” (Carballo-Diéguez, Miner, Dolezal, Rosser, & Jacoby, 2006, p. 473; see also Kippax, Noble, Prestage, Crawford, & Campbell, 1997; Semple, Patterson, & Grant, 2000), not focusing on negotiated contexts.

Sexual health interventions based on individual empowerment and human agency could benefit from a better understanding of the complex ways bisexual men navigate their social-cultural-economic contexts to find sexual partners and to form potential relationships. Some HIV participatory intervention approaches that draw on empowerment and human agency have been criticized for not taking into account these contexts:

Within this field, opportunities open up for people, first, to disentangle the complex web of everyday life...second, to deconstruct norms and conventions; third, to reflect on the performativity of everyday life; and finally, to rehearse performances for alternative realities. In short, the discourses and practices circulating within and constituting the “other spaces” of participation are the same ones that constitute and facilitate the performance of empowered agency. This power...does generate material sites in which knowledges, skills, and performances capable of outflanking existing constellations of gendered power can come into being. (Kesby, 2005, pp. 2055–2056)

Culturally reliable theories are paramount in urban centers, like New York, where Latino men who have sex with men are among the most vulnerable populations for HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (CDC, 2012). To inform interventions based on “empowerment” and human agency, we offer alternative frameworks that emerge from our data, which may provide insights into how best to address the vulnerabilities of specific vulnerable populations, in this case behaviorally bisexual Latino men.

Navigating Sex Markets Through Sexual Opportunity Structures

Our theoretical framework attempts to place human agency in two theories that address contexts that shape sexual behavior. First, the concept of the sex market offers us a partial theoretical framework for understanding the social organization of sexuality among behaviorally bisexual men in New York City. According to Laumann, Ellingson, Mahay, Paik, and Youm (2004):

Opposed to the black-box, economic notion of autonomous markets, the notion of the sex market places the explanatory focus on the local social and cultural

structures that limit or channel sexual behavior. In other words, we emphasize the way in which actors' social embeddedness in personal networks, meaning systems and sexual scripts, local organizations and urban spaces leads to different patterns of sexual partnering, sexual behaviors, and sexual-relationship outcomes. Thus, the sex market is the spatially and culturally bounded arena in which searches for sex partners and a variety of exchanges or transactions are conducted." (p. 8)

This concept is instrumental for a closer analysis of the physical context, cultural norms, and socioinstitutional factors through which men organize their sexual relationships and behaviors. Sex markets "legitimate search practices and a range of sanctioned transactions" (Laumann et al., 2004, p. 9).

Ideologies, social networks, physical space, and institutional spheres provide the rules that shape supply and demand in sex markets to a certain extent. In the social networks of bisexually active men, there are several stakeholders (e.g., parents, close friends, and coworkers). Social networks can shape sexual relational venues, in addition to the physical space where men meet potential sexual partners (e.g., bars, dance clubs, sporting events, etc.). This sexual geography is organized by socioinstitutional spheres (e.g., religion) that have regulatory mechanisms to dictate what "correct" sexual behavior among men and women is. What is dictated as correct is not always practiced, however. We interpret this theory of sex markets as being constraining.

Second, in a similar way, the concept of "extramarital opportunity structures," might be construed as constraining (Hirsch et al. 2010):

We emphasize the ways that meso- and macro-level factors enable men's participation in extramarital relations. In doing so, we draw attention away from the choices made by individuals and stress instead the factors that shape and constrain the options from which they may choose. In contrast to a narrowly economic notion of opportunity structure, we use the term to encompass the social, symbolic, and moral aspects of how society's structures shape behavior. (p. 6)

We find it useful to think in terms of "sexual opportunity structures" and explicitly insert individual choices back into the social equation. In other words, we are refocusing on the interaction between the micro-level (individual) and meso-level (interpersonal) in our formulation of the opportunity structure. This interpretation might have more theoretical traction when applied to sexual behavior, particular among behaviorally bisexual Latino men, because our focus is not on politics or broader historical (macro-level) dimensions.

What we term "sexual opportunity structures" involve the interplay of socio-cultural-economic configurations and human agency. The ability to act autonomously within a sexual opportunity structure depends on the degree of openness of the system to either change it or circumvent it strategically. We expect that sex markets and opportunity structures are *navigated* by men who have sex with both men and women, showing an essential degree of agency that is enacted by individuals who engage in bisexual behavior.

We expect that the concept of sexual opportunity structures might be helpful in understanding sexual decision-making among bisexually-active men, as well as the spaces,

contexts, and scripts that shape sexual practices and relationships. We anticipate that these men are also active participants and “agents” in the construction of their own sexualities, sexual behaviors, and relationships. Because bisexuality is not a generally accepted form of sexual expression, they might have to negotiate, adapt or reject the norms regarding sexuality and relationships in their social spaces. Within this context, bisexual Latino men sometimes adapt, and might reject, existing norms to navigate heterosexual-straight environments as well as homosexual-gay environments.

In this article, we seek to examine how sex markets and sexual opportunity structures are structured and navigated in New York City. We organized our analysis according to the (1) physical/virtual contexts and sexual geographies and (2) cultural meaning systems and socio-institutional factors that bisexual Latino men navigate in sex markets. Social networks, family, community norms, masculinity, and sex trade, among other factors, affect navigation through sex markets. The original sex market and extramarital opportunity structure theories do not consider agency to a significant extent, but instead focus on the multiple layers of factors that *determine* sexual behavior. Adding nuance to theory is a particularly important contribution to the existing literature on how bisexual Latino men navigate urban metropolises, such as New York City.

METHOD

Participants

To examine the bisexual Latino sex markets, we conducted a qualitative study including in-depth interviews with 60 behaviorally bisexual Latino men from August 2009 through September 2011 in New York City. This project was approved by the Columbia Medical Center Institutional Review Board (CUMC IRB Protocol # AAAE0494).

The selection criteria for participation were: being 18–60 years and bisexually active within the last 6 months (having had sex with a least one man and one woman, including oral sex). Men did not have to self-identify as bisexual to participate in the study. To assure a diversified sample to analyze the applicability of the theory sex markets, our sampling parameters were based on venue quota sampling: 25% from Latino venues that were not gay/bisexually-oriented nor AIDS-related venues (e.g., religious organizations, sports teams, workers’ programs); 25% came from venues that we consider “sexual venues” for men cruising for sex with other men, including public sex spaces such as parks, piers, and Internet sites; 25% of the men were recruited through bisexually-oriented venues, which included gay night clubs, sex clubs and bars, as well as bisexual groups, online networks and chat rooms; and, 25% were recruited from clinical sites, such as STI clinics and community health clinics. This form of recruitment allowed for us to interview men who identified as bisexual, as well as those who did not.

The process of recruitment consisted of four steps. First, a recruitment card was designed by our team with simple instructions to contact us via phone or electronic mail, or via the website on the card. Second, the card was given to all people present in recruitment sites, with permission from the establishments or agencies, with mini-posters and cards left for potential participants. The initial recruitment invited men to participate on a study on male

sexuality. Third, a version of the card was posted on two types of Internet sites: those geared towards Latino men cruising for sex with other men, as well as those oriented towards self-identifying bisexual Latino men. Fourth, interested participants had the option of calling via phone, emailing the study recruiter, or visiting the recruitment Internet page of the study. If the person screened met the selection criteria and met the sampling parameters, then he was asked to schedule a time and date for the face-to-face interview.

The average age of our sample was 33 years of age (SD, 11 years). Sixty-two percent ($n = 37$) were foreign-born, including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Peruvians, and Colombians. The remaining 38% ($n = 23$) were U.S.-born Latino men. Out of 60 participants, 27 (45%) self-identified as “bisexual,” 13 (22%) preferred no sexuality-related label, 7 (11%) self-identified as heterosexual, 2 (3%) self-identified as gay (although they had sex with women, i.e., bisexually active), and 12 (19%) had other unique labels for self-identification (e.g., “sexual,” “man,” “experimental,” “wild,” “try-sexual” (self-defined as “try safe sex”), “just me,” “fluent,” among others). Of the men in the sample, 27 (45%) classified themselves as “tops” (insertive sexual partners in anal sex with men), 15 (25%) as versatile (both insertive and receptive), and 11 (18%) as bottoms (receptive). The remaining 7 men (12%) only practiced oral sex with men.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish (or both) by an interviewer fully bilingual in English and Spanish. The data used for this analysis was transcribed directly into Spanish (by a bilingual Spanish transcriber from a certified agency) and translated into English by the first author (native bilingual in Spanish) for the purpose of this analysis. We used oral consent scripts in the language of their preference due to the sensitive nature of the research topics of this study. Permission for using oral instead of written consent was approved by the CUMC IRB. After informed consent procedures, participants were formally interviewed in a place of their selection.

One-time in-depth interviews were conducted over the course of 1–1.5 hours. The interview guide relied on open-ended questions that explored the domains of gender relations and sexual partnering. The main prompt was, “Where do you tend to meet potential sexual partners and lovers that are men or women?” Exploring this question in-depth, we asked about the types of partners, descriptions of scenes or locations, the ways in which these encounters were coordinated, and the effects of cultural factors and socioinstitutional factors (e.g., family and religion) on meeting men and women for sex. The data used in this analysis were taken from a study focused primarily on HIV vulnerabilities and gender. In our analysis, we focus on a subset of issues related to sex markets because we sought to better understand and generate new theories that might shape future research and interventions on the vulnerabilities related to bisexual sex in the urban metropolis of New York City.

Data Analysis

We used a modified version of grounded theory to analyze our data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This analytic approach begins with a theoretical standpoint and uses the data to generate, modify, or reject parts of theories. Our modified analytical approach focuses on

micro- and meso-level factors, as mentioned in the conceptual framework. Interview transcripts were de-identified and entered into Atlas.ti, a software package specifically designed to handle textual data and its analysis. We constructed a codebook in Atlas.ti, including coding families that were theoretically chosen (i.e., Background, Neighborhood, Race/Ethnicity, Immigration, Family, Religion/Spirituality, Work, Health Risks, HIV/AIDS, Masculinity, Sexual Practices, Sexual Desire, Sexual Identity, Sex Market, Sexual Relationships) and 300 sub-codes. Atlas.ti allowed us to code textual data by emerging topics to conduct qualitative data analysis.

Two independent coders coded 15% of the interviews with 80% congruency in coding, showing adequate reliability for qualitative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). We held weekly meetings to discuss coding practices and to refine our technique until agreement was reached. For the purpose of this article, codes used for the analysis mainly belonged to the code family “Sex Market,” including sub-codes: description of place/type of location, participants, sexual and emotional dynamics in these spaces, sexual norms and rules, the experiences before and after encounters, organized events for meeting potential relationships and sexual partners, transactional sex markets, and navigation of sexual lives among different public and private spheres—which we derived with the theory of sex markets in mind. To contextualize each quote and analysis we drew on the other code families (such as Background, Neighborhood, and Work, as appropriate). Pseudonyms were used in this paper to protect the identity of our study participants.

RESULTS

Physical and Virtual Contexts

Forty-five percent of the men ($n = 27$) interviewed met potential male sex partners at gay bars and clubs; 15% ($n = 9$) reported meeting potential female partners at heterosexual bars; 5% ($n = 3$) reported being able to meet male partners in heterosexual bars. Twenty-five percent ($n = 15$) met partners in public areas, such as trains, parks or streets, and 38% ($n = 22$) met partners on the Internet. The Internet could be further divided according to the type of website. Websites that were geared towards casual sexual encounters (e.g., “one night stands” or “booty calls”) were used by 33% of our sample (20 men) and 8% (5 men) used websites to meet men for dating and relationships. This shows those recruited through our theoretical sampling technique met men in a variety of physical and virtual spaces, which sometimes overlapped, especially revealing that men often met sexual partners in both bars/clubs and on the Internet.

Most self-identified working class men tended to prefer to use the Internet because it was a cheaper venue than a club where social standing was shown by who could purchase the most bottles of alcohol (which sometimes came with sparklers to show that a VIP table was “popping another bottle”) to attract both potential partners in straight clubs, and buying expensive cocktails was more frequently a barrier in gay bars/clubs. Self-identified middle-class men tended to live in neighborhoods with more gay bars, whereas working class men travelled, often long distances from their neighborhoods (usually in the outer borrows of Manhattan) to gay as well as straight clubs/bars when they had the money for the cover charge and to buy drinks.

Moreover, we identified recurring codes that described common spaces for sexual socialization in our sample. These were used to construct archetypal spaces, which exemplify contexts and their respective norms/codes, social environment, and activities that transpired as described in Table 1.

The spaces chosen for sexual socialization involved a combination of individual choices as well as factors such as how expensive it was, whether the man was searching for casual sex, friendship, or potential dating. These environments regulated relationships with men and women, and the ways in which men search for partners differed depending on whether they are looking for men or women. Some actively identified as homosexuals when they were in gay bars, whereas they identified as heterosexual when they were in public spaces, such as the streets. The social environment, ranging from the home to heterosexual bars to cruising websites, was associated with the types of persons met, activities that took place, ways to find partners, and particular incentives for visiting each market described. Several interactions emerged between environment and the reason for meeting a partner. For example, a high-end heterosexual nightclub was more promising for meeting girlfriends and having dates, whereas local heterosexual bars and bisexual websites were more geared for cruising. Most men tended to search for homoerotic experiences, such as masturbation, through webcams. Thus, we begin to see how sexual socialization allows for autonomy with certain sociocultural-economic limits.

Sexual Geographies and the Urban Space

The sexual geographies that our sample of men visited (and were visited from) for sexual encounters were not limited to their neighborhoods. Juan (37-year-old, Colombian, self-identified as “sexual” not “bi-sexual,” works in the pornography industry and escorting, with some high school, travels from the Bronx where he lives to the Greenwich Village to gay clubs) said that he would rather go to gay clubs because it was more a more “peaceful” space because “there is going to be a fight” in heterosexual clubs and, in gay clubs, he can “still have fun, dance and drink and party it up... and gay people are friendlier.” Alfredo (24-year-old Puerto Rican, self-identified bisexual man, unemployed, with some college, lives in upper Manhattan) explained: “I have some guys come from Westchester, from Long Island, for New Rochelle, it is weird. I get calls from everywhere.” In fact, some preferred to go outside of the areas where their communities know them. Alfredo preferred not to meet people in gay bars or clubs; instead, he preferred dinner, social gatherings, and poker games. He expressed: “It is not good to meet guys out at the club...because...everybody knows everybody there.” Alfredo has usually met women on the streets and preferred to meet women at coffee shops. Jairo (34-year-old Mexican man, who prefers no sexual labels, works as cook, with middle-school education, lives in Brooklyn, and meets men and women in Manhattan) described the same type of norms and rules that he navigates in sexual geographies to meet men and differentiates them from ways of meeting women. He said: “Here men are, to some degree more straightforward [than women], because they [make contact] first with their gaze. Women no, because [with women] I have a conversation and all of that; it is very different.” As they navigated the urban space, most men had a certain degree of choice depending on what type sexual socialization, interaction, and gender of partner they were seeking.

This was also exemplified by the experience of Diego (33-year-old Dominican man, self-identified bisexual, working as a sales person in a Chinese food store, with some high school, lives in upper Manhattan), who navigated sexual geographies by acting discreetly when he enters gay venues: “I make believe I’m going on the train, and real quick, I just go inside of there. Or either I go to the next bar, have a couple of drinks, go smoke a cigarette, and sneak inside.” Chico (56-year-old Puerto Rican man, who prefers no sexual labels, works as a health educator, with some high school, lives in East Harlem) who met men for sex on the Internet, at restaurants, and at work explained the types of body language and signals. Chico says “whoever throws the first wink gets the first word...so someone comes in the office to do something, and you sort of like him; and he sort of [looks at you] eye to eye...” This type of subtle discretion was practiced by most of our sample.

Migration and Sexual Opportunity

For 10 (17%) of our participants, it was easier to express their sexual desires in the United States than in their country of origin. This response emerged organically and was prompted by a general question about their immigration experiences. Francisco (31-year-old Dominican man, self-identified bisexual, working in a managerial position at a restaurant, with some college, travels from Queens where he lives to Manhattan to gay clubs) expressed that when he came to this country he “lost himself in the Village...never having seen this, a bar, men hugging... because this is not common in [his] country.” Another man, Eduardo (25-year-old Mexican man, self-identified bisexual, working as a bar back, with some high school, travels from Queens where he lives to Manhattan to gay bars), said that in Mexico he had to “hide [his bisexuality] from his family” because “even though Latino continue to bring their culture, there are not the same taboos, it is more open here [in New York], they respect gay people more...It is not as badly looked upon as in our countries.” Thus, some men might choose to migrate to the New York City to gain a greater degree of autonomy.

The stigmatizing factor in their countries of origin is more related to their ability to find sexual partners within more oppressive sexual geographies. Héctor (32-year-old Argentinian man, who prefers no sexual labels, works in construction, goes to gay and heterosexual bars near his neighborhood in Brooklyn) commented the same about his life in Argentina, where “he had sex a couple of times [with men], but it is more open here. Here there are bars; there it is a bit open, but when I came here...it was very different.” According to Héctor, the laws in Argentina now protect gays (or homosexuals) as a vulnerable population, but “the law is in the books; but in reality, the culture still does not accept it.” Hence, the openness of cultural systems might be as important as laws in delimiting sexual agency.

Transactional Markets

On another level, the literal exchange of money, goods, or services for sex was another common element of the “transactions” in the urban metropolitan New York sexual geography. Fourteen percent of the sample had practiced escorting or had exchanged sex for money or other items at some point their lives. In terms of economic standing, gauged by education, there were no clear differences between men who worked as escorts as opposed to those who held occupations in the formal economy. These activities took place mostly on the Internet.

According to Julian (28-year-old Colombian man, self-identified as heterosexual, works as an escort and personal trainer, with some college education, who lives in Harlem and works throughout Manhattan), some men were also introduced into this type of work by friendship and social networks of gay and bisexual men who were in the industry already through “word of mouth.” Julian started having sex for money with a friend who said: “Listen, we are going to go in this place. We are going to have sex and you are going to get paid.” The man had sexual intercourse with three people (men and women), but Julian complains that “when you first come in the business, the boss makes all the money, and they are not giving your share until you learn the rules.” Especially where sex is exchanged for money, some men, as in the case of Julian, express masculinity-based ideologies that guide their sexual acts with “customers,” such as being a strict “top” (insertive partner). Some escorts made pornographic films and webcam performances with both men and women, with men as the main audience.

Juan had a similar experience when entered the pornography market because of the influence of his social networks:

They were nude pictures, gay magazines. And they kind of trick you in the beginning. “Oh don’t worry. No one here will see them. They will be somewhere in California and Hawaii.” So you are like, “Oh yeah, cool. I can make some quick cash. How much? \$300, \$400, all right, do ahead” An hour of taking shots, and whenever I was broke, he would be like “Yeah come through. I could use some more pictures of you.”

Julian also commented that these customers sometimes called for massages with the intention of having sex. The transaction was not merely for sex, as Pablo (33-year-old Puerto Rican/ Dominican man, self-identified as bisexual, works for a health-related non-governmental organization, was an escort in the past, has a GED, lives in small room in the Bronx) explained: “Sometimes it was lonely people that just wanted to hang out, somebody to talk to. And I would charge them for that.” Thus, in escorting or other types of transactional markets men providing services sometimes did not know the actual intention of the client.

Negotiating Secrets, Discretion, and Opportunities

In this section, we show how bisexual Latino men navigated the scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) or the cultural codes related to secrecy and discretion set by social institutions (e.g., family and religion) when finding casual or steady partners. Cultural and socio-institutional factors are also crucial to understanding the structuring effect of sex markets described by Laumann et al. (2004), but we stress the term *navigation* because these norms were open to some degree of autonomous engagement.

Family and religion—The family was a meso-level “institution” that as was mentioned by many of our participants as important for organizing norms of silence about sexual expression, but it was one that could be navigated around. Chico stated that, in relationships with women, “no one knows about [his practices with men], behind closed doors, it should stay there... If it goes into my home, my family, that is a different story... You are breaking

boundaries.” The spatial “boundaries” drawn to protect familial norms in sex markets could be one explanation for keeping sex with men on the “down low,” which was a common finding in our sample. Alfredo said this bluntly, explaining that some male sexual partners, “Yeah, they are married...they are on the down low like...Yep, Married with kids.” The “down low” was a common way to circumvent boundaries.

Most of the bisexual Latino men interviewed navigated norms by keeping discrete identities and performances that might affect their families in complex ways. While working in the pornography industry, Juan explained that he was “over exposed,” and he was “battling with friends and family because a lot of people used to run into [his] magazine.” Some unemployed men entered the sex trade because of the need to provide for their families. The family played a role in the sexual rules that men follow to keep their relationships with men and women separate. Ernesto (19-year-old Puerto Rican/Dominican man, prefers not to have sexual labels, is currently unemployed, attends beauty school, travels from the Bronx to Manhattan and uses the Internet to find sex partners) explained, “My Dominican family, they don’t really see bisexual, they are just, like, “Oh, he’s gay.” The family was a common factor in the contextually dependent decisions that bisexual men made, but surprisingly we found that most of the sample circumvented the boundaries set by the family.

In addition to the family, religion played a role for a few men in the process of negotiating disclosure. Pablo said, “it was not open to speak of sexuality in school, in the home even less, and religion had a lot of influence on that.” Talking about religion as a “hypocritical” cultural institution that regulates people’s sex lives, Pablo stated:

I’m like, “you know just be comfortable with yourself;” but it’s just that so many old fashioned people out there make it hard for people...Christians in churches may be like, “I’m Catholic, you know the devil is in you.” But behind closed doors...

We expected for religion to be a more rigid structure in sex markets, but most of the men we interviewed circumvented religious boundaries. Jaime (29-year-old Peruvian man, who prefers no sexual labels, works in a department store, lives in upper Manhattan and travels to Midtown to gay clubs) describes a certain degree of transgression from religious cultural norms:

God, I’m so sorry for saying it, but I don’t care what religion says about [having sex with men] because I make my own decisions. I’m human. We’re all human. We all have to live our lives somehow, somehow. Yeah, they may mention it in the Bible, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that that’s going to stop me from doing what I got to do, or it’s not going to stop me from having sex.

The greater tendency was to “suspend” religious beliefs when *choosing* sexual partners. In several other cases, Christian religion was rejected as a normative system because of its constraints.

Relationships, affection, and discretion—Looking further into the interpersonal (meso-level) aspect of sexual opportunity structures, we found that for many of our participants, a common set of norms were involved in the negotiation between having sex and forging affectionate relationships. In some cases, we this noted that this negotiation took

different forms with men as opposed to women. This theme captures the meanings of commitment that some men used in describing the process of investing in the sexual/ amorous relationship. There were differences in the way Diego “feels” towards men and women: “with girls, I care more about their feelings, and guys, it is just, like they are guys.” José (28-year-old Colombian man, self-identified heterosexual, works in construction, with some high school education, who lives in Queen and meets men on the Internet) claimed that it was usually “the sex act because there was no love, just the sex act.” According to Diego, “because after you get attached to a person and then you break up, it really hurts. You feel uncomfortable, and that person is not there, and I don’t want to go through that right now.” Some participants sought “one night stands” with men and felt that they could forge feelings of love more easily with women, while others reported being unable to maintain a monogamous relationship.

Even though Carlos was able to love both men and women, he still held his relationships with men a secret, whereas he could be public about his affection for women. Carlos recounted an experience when he came to love another man, having “a mutual understanding, a respect, mutual respect” but “no one sees...no one has to know...It is a private matter.” The division between private and public spaces was again associated with the gender of the sexual partner.

Secrecy mediated the ability to form and maintain relationships. Discussing a four-year relationship he had with a man, another Juan claimed, “It was something I was hiding because I didn’t want my neighborhood [to know]. For some of our participants, not categorizing themselves as bisexual (or heterosexual or gay) was a cultural strategy used to approach both male and female sexual partners. Alejandro (a 21-year-old Honduran man, prefers no sexual label, works as a personal trainer, with a high school education, lives in Harlem) stated:

This has kind of been one of the hardest questions for me anywhere I go, because this is New York City, Harlem the land of both straight and gay. So when I walk through these places, I walk through these places as a man. I don’t walk through these places as a straight man; I don’t walk as a gay man; I don’t walk as a bisexual man. I walk myself as a man. So nobody comes in and asks me any roundabout question, at least not yet.

When probed further about what it meant to walk through these places as a man, Alejandro pointed to the high value that social spaces, such as his gym circle, place on masculinity and manhood. Alejandro highlighted the importance of having a “masculine” sexual partner in public not to be categorized as a non-heterosexual.

Yeah, so I like those like me because I don’t want people to know my business. So I do not, I would not want to walk down the street they say if I am walking with like somebody that I am having sex with, and they [are] very, very feminine, they like this, and people looking: that draws attention. I don’t like that. I really don’t. I think that’s a turn off.

Thus, there was a connection between secrecy/discretion and masculine performance for some of our participants.

The formation of sexual and amorous relationship was a challenge for a few of the men we interviewed due to this perceived inability to maintain a faithful relationship. Pedro expresses having greater honesty with men, because they will understand (albeit with jealousy) bisexuality and infidelity to a greater extent than women. Alejandro's narrative corroborated this argument:

It depends. Bringing it from a bisexual standpoint, I think men in general...are much more jealous in a way... [But] they can be forgiving because they know that [infidelity] can happen.

When asked if he ever loved a woman, Jefferson (37-year-old Puerto Rican man, self-identified as "experimental," unemployed, with a GED, lives in Harlem and meets men in public areas) exemplified a man with an internal struggle with fidelity and love, "As a person that can make me better, I did [love her]. [But] I was not in love with [her] because I cheated every time I had the opportunity." Thus, the ability to form and maintain a faithful, affectionate relationship was difficult for some of the men in our sample.

DISCUSSION

Our results showed that sexual behavior was affected by physical spaces and sexual geography, as well as by cultural norms and socioinstitutional factors that organize sexual behavior in sex markets among Latino bisexual men in our sample. Family, religion, and masculinity influence the need for negotiation, and sexual acts are influenced by the norms and rules of each environment where sex is being negotiated. Men weigh their options in terms of pleasure, love, stability, and monetary exchange (e.g., escorting) within bisexual sex markets. Behavior management was situation-specific and sex was made available depending on the degree of openness of sexual opportunity structures.

Men's strategies in choosing to navigate cultural meaning systems within sex markets are laden with secrecy and discretion, as well as by their self-awareness of attracting partners through a highly valued masculine image. This discretion becomes a factor that weighs heavily in conceptualizing a bisexual sex market where men have a variety of sexual or relational intentions. The utility function of a man looking for sex might be determined by his desire to have casual one-night stands without commitment in order to maximize pleasure; the man might also have the drive to become a father and establish a longer-term relationship. There were more barriers to loving or expressing love towards another man, such as the risk to not being seen as a "man" in society. The sexualities of many bisexual Latino men in our study were shaped by their sexual opportunity structures, and most men were also able to engage these structures to have a degree of agency. This includes the ability to choose sexual partners, but it also allows for creative ways to navigate emotions and sexual interchange.

For these men, this leads to the growing importance of the Internet—a sex market where intentions are often exchanged and desires can be separated to some degree from behaviors through the exchange of video and images. Factors related to secrecy/discretion highlight the growing significance of the Internet for finding sexual partners and navigating sex markets. Virtual networks formed through the Internet create spaces for sex markets where men can

negotiate secrecy and homoerotic behavior. Various dimensions of sexuality and behavior can be organized in cyberspace. These include making logistical arrangements for meeting, exchanges of money or other goods (e.g., through escorting), and exchanges of sexually explicit images. These supply side factors shape the ways men navigate through sexual geographies and their relative codes. It is paramount to note that secrecy was a strategy that was both binding and liberating for some of these men.

This article also sheds some light on how the family, for example, is a structuring factor that can be navigated within sex markets. Some men negotiate disclosure to preserve familial and social bonds, while finding new venues for sexual activity in the United States (Martinez et al., 2011). This analysis uncovers the complexities of bisexual negotiations and navigations as they occur in several contexts that often overlap. For example, these analyses suggest that it might be more difficult to coordinate sexual encounters with men in public spaces or private homes, where there is regulation from the family and the community (i.e. more restrictive sexual opportunity structures).

Furthermore, forming new bonds through friendship and work social networks is common in the process of acculturation (Rivera et al., 2008). Some analysis show that sexual culture in the United States is more restrictive for bisexual men because of identity-based dichotomies (i.e., gay versus heterosexual) as opposed to more fluid sexual systems in Latin America (Almaguer, 1993). However, our data show that some foreign born men in our sample (17%) actually believed that there were more opportunities to lead active bisexual lives in the United States because of the new friendship networks formed that offer extra-familial bonds and because of the urban sexual geographies of cities such as New York.

The limitations of this study include the inability to generalize the findings to the population level due to the sample size. This limitation might be true of larger samples as well, considering that theoretical sampling techniques are useful when reaching a largely “hidden population.” This was a convenience sample, which has inherent biases, such as possible self-selection: Men who were more interested in sexuality might have been more prone to participate in the study. This might have affected our results by increasing our chance of recruiting male escorts, for example. However, this bias can work on our behalf with the ultimate goal of identifying the most vulnerable sub-groups.

Because bisexual men do not necessarily identify with gay culture or entirely with heterosexual culture, we sampled from a variety of venues, including those where men were not predominantly Latinos (e.g., clinics). Although there are limitations in venue sampling, as well, due to the ways men identify themselves being contextually dependent, our results show that more than half of our sample was not self-identified as bisexual, showing some variation in sexual identities that emerged in the in-depth interview setting. That only 45% identified as bisexual indicates the difficulty of doing research on a category of men when so few who are behaviorally bisexual actually identify with this label. The venues in which bisexual men participate in sex markets overlap, but we also sampled in spaces that were not solely homosexually oriented.

This qualitative analysis adds complexity to the idea of a sex market among bisexual Latino men, an important theoretical contribution to sex research and intervention science. This analysis and process of theory formation allow for the identification dynamic spaces for sexual health interventions focused on an idea of empowerment that draws on contextualized human agency. Unlike Laumann et al. (2004), who described sex markets as essentially “rational” venues where sexuality is determined, we stress the idea of navigation within sexual opportunity structures. Men demand sexual partners in particular places because they want to minimize social risk, but all of these men (as they are behaviorally bisexual) were navigating and circumventing oppressive norms through personal agency.

By exploring the interaction between micro- and meso-level factors that might affect vulnerability, interventions might involve individual men or couples, as our analysis has implications for understanding spaces for both casual sexual interaction as well as the processes involved in forming relationships. The diversity of self-identities and secrecy we found might hinder the coalescence of a group-identity, which is sometimes necessary for community formation and mutual support. By pointing to commonly-experienced cultural and social institutions that might be otherwise understood as static and by showing how these are actively circumvented, we might be able to advocate for community-formation based on transgressive bisexual experience among Latino men. Our research reveals key patterns to explore in other urban settings, especially among Latinos in the Northeast of the United States where vulnerability for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, is highest in urban centers.

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Table 1

Examples of sex markets and activities that take place

Place	Location relative to residence of participant	Types of patrons/ people in space	Activities in space	Ways to find partners	Reasons for visiting place for bisexual Latinos
Home in outer borough	Participant prefers to meet potential sex partners in his residence	Lower middle class neighborhood, youth in the streets, participant lives in a rented room	Having dinner, playing cards, watching movies, drinking, talking	On-line and through friendship networks	Inexpensive space to hang out with women and men for casual encounters or dating
Heterosexual nightclub (Lower East Side, Manhattan)	Participant commutes from upper Manhattan (approximately 45 minutes)	Middle to upper-middle class club with a high cost of entrance; men and women, mostly metrosexuals	Drinking, eating, socializing, dancing house music and hip hop, cruising, exchange of contacts, kissing among men and women	Cruise, buy cocktails, exchange phone numbers, date	Finding females that are young, potential partners to marry and have children, dates
Gay Bar (Midtown, Manhattan)	Participant lives in Midtown just blocks away from the place	Middle class bar, cocktails are approximately \$10, mostly male environment,	Drinking, cruising, socializing, exchange of contacts, sex in restrooms, kissing, men display their bodies with tight clothing	Cruise, buy cocktails, exchange phone numbers, date	Meeting gay and bisexual men, safe space for same-sex sexual expression, potential dates or casual partners
Park in neighborhood	Public space located in the community of the participant in the Bronx	Low and middle class, availability of men and women	Sitting, leisure, cruising, sex work, biking, smoking cigarettes, playing dominos, walking dogs	Using codes, such as the gaze, talking to strangers, asking for a cigarette	Socialization with potential friends, casual sex partners, leisure
Latino Heterosexual club in neighborhood	Participant lives blocks away from the establishment in Washington Heights	Low and middle class, Latino men and women with a heterosexual role, some metrosexuals	Dancing to Latin music, drinking, exchange of contacts, kissing, sex work, women are hypersexualized in dress	Cruise, buy cocktails and bottles of liquor, exchange phone numbers, casual sex, date	Supply of people who share general aspects of Latino culture such as dancing and speaking Spanish, casual sex partners
DateBi.com	Participant belongs to a virtual network of potential partners	Bisexual, gay men, and heterosexual women of mixed social classes	Messages, winks, likes/dislikes, casual sex, long term relationships, short term relationships, friend networking, those who pay membership have control over initiating conversation	Sell personality and body through description and pictures, maintain a wholesome persona	Supply of potential partners for short and long term relationships
Macho to Macho Website	Person belongs to a virtual network of casual sex partners	Bisexual and gay men of mixed social classes	Cruising, casual sex, pornographic picture pictures, web cam communication for mutual virtual masturbation, sex work, membership fee makes it possible to have web cam sex and message	Display naked bodies, penises, muscles, solicit sex	Supply of partners for casual sex, visual stimulation, fantasy and sexual desire