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## Generational Changes in the Meanings of Sex, Sexual Identity and Stigma among Latino Young and Adult Men

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### Abstract

In this paper we examine the sexual identities of Latino men who have sex with men and women, in which an analysis was made of 150 sexual histories of Latino men aged 18–60. This study asks how is the bisexual identity and experience of stigma different for Latino men along the generational spectrum, and how do these differences relate to kinship support and gender ideology? In the process of analysis, two main clusters of characteristics were identified to reflect this population: young men aged 18–25, whose open bisexual identity correlated positively with kinship/peer support and flexible gender and sexual roles; and men aged 26–60, who refused or were reluctant to identify as bisexual despite the fact that they were sexually active with both men and women. This group as a whole had less kinship and peer support, were more likely to identify with traditional gender roles and were less sexually versatile. Finally, a third group reflected Latino men across the generational divide who were less concerned with same-sex stigma, but who nevertheless felt the bisexual label to be confining, illegitimate, or otherwise negative.

### Keywords

Bisexuality; Stigma; Sexual Behaviour; Sexual Identity; Masculinity

### Introduction

Ethnic minority men who have sex with both men and women (behaviourally bisexual men) have been identified in the USA as one of the most vulnerable groups for contracting HIV. In many communities nationwide men who have sex with men and women (MSMW) have higher incidences of HIV than men who have sex exclusively with men, or exclusively with women (Brooks et al. 2003). Behaviourally bisexual men have, at times, been relegated to the sidelines of public health research, where they have been examined as an epidemiological bridge population, and where categories of men who have sex with men (MSM) have proved inadequate to capture the often complex nature of their sexual and romantic involvements (Muñoz-Laboy, 2004; 2005). HIV risk among behaviourally bisexual

men can be seen as a result of their social vulnerability, as determined by a confluence of structural violence factors, such as poverty, economic exploitation, racism, gender power, and sexual oppression (Parker 2001; Parker et al. 2000; Farmer 1992, 1996, 2001). Indeed, a remarkable half of all Latinos in the USA live below the poverty line (Espinosa 2008). As a minority group that is racially, ethnically, economically, and sexually marginalised, behaviourally bisexual Latino men can be seen as belonging to multiple socio-cultural groups, facing multiple and simultaneous forms of oppression, and occupying a position in society that is consistently understudied (Pastrana 2006; Fukuyama and Ferguson 2000).

For minority ethnic behaviourally bisexual men, a powerful factor contributing to social vulnerability and isolation is the presence of stigma. Goffman defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting,” and that reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (1963, 3). Several studies have demonstrated how stigma increases individuals’ vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Parker and Aggleton 2003; Varas-Días et al. 2005). Yet because bisexuality has historically suffered erasure (MacDowall 2009; Angelides 2001), we have limited understanding of how stigma operates in the social context of bisexual men, and how this might be changing over time. Few studies have examined generational differences in bisexual expressions and identity among minority ethnic groups in the USA. The goal of this analysis is to map the sexual identities of behaviourally bisexual Latino men across two age groups in order to examine how sexual self-identification relates to a broader social context. It should be noted at the outset that this analysis does not directly address HIV risk. While studies focused on socially vulnerable populations are imperative in themselves, broader examinations of the socio-cultural meanings surrounding sexuality are critical to furthering the study of HIV risk (Abrahmson and Herdt 1990; Parker and Carballo 1990). This is particularly true among populations that are sexually marginalised and prone to high levels of stigmatisation and social isolation.

This analysis borrows the anthropologist Gilbert Herdt’s definition of sexual culture as the “classification of sexual beliefs and behaviours, the range and extent of people’s desires and the subjectivities that express them in action, and their ideologies of sexual nature and gender difference, reproduction, and pleasure” (Herdt 1999, 9). With this construct in mind, our study team sought to locate bisexual identity, gender ideologies (defined here as the socio-cultural construction of “masculine” and “feminine”), and kinship/community support systems, on a generational axis. Our study team asked, how is the bisexual identity and experience of stigma different for Latino men along the generational spectrum? The study of sexuality has in recent years shifted its focus from a study of individual behaviour to a framework that incorporates the role of the social context in the organisation of sexual and sexual risk behaviour (Parker 2009; Adimora and Schoenbach 2005; Parker and Aggleton 2003). This paper aims to contribute to this important research trend, which has framed a spate of recent studies (McKay et al. 2012; Bland et al. 2012; Quevedo-Gómez 2012; Dodge et al. 2012; among many others).

The study team proceeded with questions regarding sexual identity among behaviourally bisexual Latino men with the knowledge that Latino men may face additional challenges to the self-acceptance and disclosure of a non-heterosexual identity compared to their white counterparts. While Latino men have a higher likelihood of engaging in bisexual activity

than whites, (Sandfort and Dodge 2008) they are less likely to disclose this behaviour (Sea, Reisen, Dias 2003). The association between masculinity—defined here as the socially dominant gender construction whose components include physical strength, aggression, control and competition (Connel 1995; Day 2001)—with heterosexuality may be particularly strong within Latino cultures, where institutional and cultural factors, including machismo, reinforce the superiority of heterosexuality in patterning social relations (Martines et al. 2011). In previous studies by the authors, it was found that maintaining a masculine identity played a crucial role in ways that behaviourally bisexual men organised their sexual lives, and that the pressure to conform to masculine ideologies was a source of stress (Muñoz-Laboy and Dodge 2005). In addition, high levels of familism (defined by emotional connectedness and familial support and honour) among Latino men promotes compartmentalisation between family life and same-sex activity rather than disclosure (Muñoz-Laboy, 2008). More generally, it is believed that non-white LGBT populations are less likely than whites to choose a sexual label as a primary identity, as Anglo-American sexual orientation categories may be culturally specific and ill-fitting (Muñoz-Laboy, 2004; Phellas 2005).

## Methods

### Sampling and recruitment

A mixed-methods study was conducted consisting of 150 in-depth interviews on men's sexual histories and self-administered questionnaires. While this was a mixed-methods study, the present analysis was focused exclusively on qualitative interviews. We used a qualitative quota sampling per geographical zone of the city. We sampled in 4 zones of predominantly Latino neighbourhoods of New York City, (New York) Newark, and Jersey City (New Jersey). These were selected based on US census data. To assure a diversified sample our parameters in each zone were based on venue quota sampling: 25% from Latino venues that were not gay/bisexually oriented nor AIDS-related venues (e.g., religious organisations, 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 the team to interview behaviourally bisexual men who identified as bisexual, as well as those who did not. The selection criteria for participation were: being 18–60 years and bisexually active (having had sex with a least one man and one woman) within the last 6 months (the literature has pointed to 6 months as a time-frame to establish behavioural sexual orientation stability [Stokes, McKirnan & Bursette, 1993]).

### Data collection procedures

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 (bilingual in Spanish) for the purpose of this analysis. One-time in-depth interviews were conducted over the course of 1–1.5 hours. They included opened-ended questions used for this analysis. The main prompts for this analysis were “How do you describe your sexuality to yourself?” and “How do you describe your sexuality to others?” Exploring this topic in-depth, questions were asked about the types of partners, descriptions of scenes or locations, and the influence of kinship and social networks and gender ideology on identity and behaviour.

### Data analysis

The present analysis focuses on the qualitative interview portion of the mixed-methods study, in which two data analysts chose a subset of narratives representative of illustrative cases. Interview transcripts were de-identified and entered into Atlas.ti, a software package specifically designed to handle textual data and its analysis. A codebook in Atlas.ti was constructed by two independent coders, including coding families that were theoretically chosen for this analysis (including, Race/Ethnicity, Family, Religion/Spirituality, Masculinity, Sexual Practices, Sexual Identity, 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; the remaining 85% was then coded using the same codebook.

All names of participants in the study have been changed. This study was approved by Columbia University Institutional Review Board (CUMC IRB AA0494) and Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB #20641). To protect the confidentiality and privacy of study participants and research materials, a federal certificate of confidentiality (CC-HD-09-84) was obtained. This study was funded by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (1R01 HD056948 01A2).

### Terms

The term Latino is used here to refer to an individual of Latin American ancestry. Specifically, this is an individual whose birthplace, or that of his parents or grandparents, was in any territory of Latin America. Traditionally, the term bisexual has been used to refer to individuals who are either sexually or emotionally attracted to, or sexually intimate with, members of both sexes (Kinsey & Pomeroy 1948; Maguen 1998). This is the definition employed here, although it should be noted that in order for men to take part in the study they needed to have had sexual contact with a man and a woman in the past 6 months, excluding those who were emotionally attracted to both sexes but not sexually active. References here to “versatile,” as well as to “top” and “bottom,” are all common in popular language, and will be used to describe insertive/receptive sex roles, and the variation of the two, between men (Carballo-Diegues et al. 2004; Silverstein et al. 2004).

### Participants

Among participants in our sample, 53.1% had an annual income below US \$14,999; 30.4% earned between \$15,000 and \$49,999; and the remaining 16.5% earned above \$50,000 per year. Five percent of the sample had an elementary school education, 15% had a middle school education, 11% had some high school education, 20% graduated high school, 6.5%

had a GED, 25% had some college education, 15% had a college degree, and 2.5% had a Master's degree or above.

Finally, the average age of study participants was 32.9 (SD = 11.8) years of age. The study team originally planned to construct age parameters and split the participants into two categories based on this mean: the first group age 18–32, the next age 33–60. However, during the process of analysis it was discovered that the youngest participants, aged 18–25, expressed a distinct set of themes. These characteristics were in marked contrast to the rest of the group. Therefore it was decided to split the data accordingly, along different age parameters to reflect this phenomenon: age 18–25, and age 26–60.

## Study Findings

### Men aged 18–25 years

The group of young men aged 18–25 overwhelmingly identified as bisexual. While non-white groups disclose their identities on some level at roughly the same age as whites, Latino youth do not disclose to as many as their white counterparts (Savin-Williams 2003; Rosario et al. 2004; Grov et al. 2006). It has been suggested that cultural factors, such as the dramatically expanded visibility and acceptance of same-sex oriented people in the media and entertainment, contribute to the increase in sexual orientation disclosure among the young (Grov et al. 2006; Savin-Williams 2003). Kinship or community support was the critical component to identifying as bisexual within this group. Young men had close family members that they had entirely or partially disclosed a bisexual identity to, and/or were engaged in same-sex active peer networks.

Young men in this cluster had at least somewhat positive experiences of disclosing their identities to family members. Felix (Ecuadorian, age 19)<sup>1</sup> had good relationships with his parents, although his father had been partially estranged since he came out as bisexual. Here he described his experience coming out this mother:

I said, “Mom, I gotta say something.” She was, like, “What happened?” “I gotta say something. I gotta tell you something”... She said things, like, “I still love you,” and everything. My little sister was there. It was cool – normal conversation (RK014/27).

Antonio (Dominican, age 24) reported a large network of bisexual friends. At home he was in the closet to his very “macho” father, but he described his mother as his “best friend”:

I tell my mother everything, what I do with guys, what I do with female. If I had a threesome, if I didn't have a threesome... I show my mom everything, everything. Me and my mom has a open relationship, I could say whatever (R007/12).

Alex (Puerto Rican/Dominican/Jamaican, age 19) reported two brothers who were “ok” with his open bisexuality and a father that remained silent. Alex's mother, however, pressured him about his orientation. In the absence of a fully supportive family, Alex reported an extensive network of gay and bisexual friends. Of his friends from high school, college, and

<sup>1</sup>Denotes participants self-reported ages and ethnicities

the neighbourhood he grew up in, he claimed that “Maybe 20 are gay. And then 30 are bisexual.”

Diego (Dominican, age 19) reported having disclosed his sexual identity to “almost” everyone in his life. He enjoyed a supportive network of gay, bisexual, and straight friends, and described himself as “pretty confident” regarding his orientation. He believed his mother knew, although they didn’t discuss it directly. When his younger brother found out about his bisexuality through a friend, he reacted mildly:

He was fine. He was like, “I don’t care.” We still love each other. We have a good time regardless. (P041/11)

The attitudes of the majority of these young men reflected a flexible gender ideology, even those who had experienced more traditional roles in their family home. Antonio (Dominican, age 24) had a particularly traditional father who opposed him partaking in anything that he considered “feminine,” including cooking, which Antonio loved to do. Here he described his father’s comments and his response:

...like oh that’s for faggots, you shouldn’t do that. You know like you know I don’t take the word offensive but you know he’s old school so I don’t really pay no mind to him (R007/12).

Rafael (Puerto Rican, age 19) had no qualms about cooking and cleaning, despite the fact that he did feel these traits to be feminine. He explained some of his views about manhood and expressed a desire for gender equity:

To be a man, you have to take on a lot of responsibility. Like I don’t feel like you have to make all the money, but you should make a good amount of money, or contribute well... But if the women’s gonna take care with the money, the man should be doing the cooking, the cleaning, and like – I feel like it should be equal (RK015/24).

Young men in this cluster did not attach strict gender definitions to terms and behaviours. Carlos (Puerto Rican, age 20) used the term “slut” to describe both a female friend and his own father, who cheated on his mother repeatedly. When Felix (Ecuadorian, age 19) was asked if there were positives to being a man, he responded “I want to say strength, but women also have strength too. I don’t know.”

Similarly, young men of this grouping practiced a high degree of versatility in sexual practices, and attached little or no stigma to the receptive sex role. This study works from an understanding of penetrative and receptive sexual positions as having significant variations in organisation and value along ethnic lines and within varying social contexts (Carrillo 2002; Parker 1991, 1999). At the same time, because the literature has long pointed to a traditional Latino cultural division of sexual interactions into “active” and “passive” roles (Taylor 1986 Carrier 1995; De Moya and Garcia 1996; Fox, 1996; Liguori et al. 1996) a delineation that is gendered as “male” (masculine, active, penetrative, dominating) and “female,” (feminine, passive, receptive, submissive), this analysis will proceed with a notion of this particular gender ideology as dominant in heteronormative Latino social contexts. Again, this is not to suggest that this traditional classification is hegemonic, as new

ideologies likely coexist alongside the old in an increasingly global context (Asencio and Acosta 2009; Carrillo 2004; Gonsales-Lopes 2004; Quevedo-Gómez 2012). In this configuration, the receptive or “female” position in sex between men is the more transgressive and stigmatised role, and it is therefore a significant finding among the young men in this study that the high degree of versatility practiced was expressed openly and without stigma.

Felix (Dominican/Puerto Rican, age 19) identified himself as a “Versatile,” explaining:

In some of the relationships I’ve been in, I was the bottom in the relationship. Then there was other ones that I’ve only been top (RK014/32).

Raul (Puerto Rican/Indian/Black, age 18) practised roles depending upon the partner:

That means that like if I’m in a relationship with a masculine guy like Juan, I would have to be at the bottom. But if I was in a – with a feminine boy like the kid I was just with, Armando, I would be considered masculine. And I don’t have a problem being the top because he likes bottom. Most boys who I find are my bottom, and more masculine guys are tops (K002/43)

These findings reinforce studies that show versatile Latino men as choosing sexual roles on the basis of perceived levels of masculinity in the partner, wherein “masculinity” conforms to common stereotypes such as size (overall body and penis) and aggression (Carballo-Diégues et al. 2004). Young men in our study decided roles according to perceived gender traits as well as mood and relationship status, with roles treated as a largely value-neutral matter of preference.

### Men aged 26–60 years

Men in this age grouping were characterised by their unwillingness to label their sexual identity. In addition to the various constraints presented by Latino culture, it has been suggested among gay men that lifetime of internalised stigma leads them to remain more closeted than younger generations coming of age in a more tolerant social environment (Schope 2002). Among the men in our study, most men did not identify as bisexual despite the fact that they were sexually active with men, women, and/or transgender women. In general, these men had less kinship and community support, reported a stronger identification with traditional gender roles, and practised less sexual versatility. Some men began sexual relations with men and/or transgender women after the dissolution of a long-term heterosexual relationship or marriage. Many explained their behaviour in a way that emphasized their continued masculinity and need for privacy.

Ramon (Puerto Rican/Black/Italian, age 56) did not identify as bisexual. He kept his same-sex behaviour hidden from friends, family, and his long-time live-in girlfriend. He regarded his same-sex activities as a private matter, one to be kept separate from the rest of his life. Speaking about the openly gay and bisexual men in his workplace, he noted:

I don’t try to disrespect them, that’s what you want to do, it’s fine. I do what I want to do. Whenever I’m behind closed doors, that’s me... that’s private, when it comes down to sexuality, that’s a private thing (R027/45).

At the time of the interview, Rigo (Latino, age 30) was in a three-way relationship with a man and a woman, though he did not consider himself bisexual. He expressed concern that his behaviour was “private,” explaining “...I’m a very quiet person. What happens, happens in my room” (R069/45). David (Dominican, age 37) began having sex with men at age 30, after engaging in a number of long-term heterosexual relationships and fathering two children. He considered his sexual identity “experimental,” and also, “none of your business.” (R026/22, 26).

Many men in this cluster lacked a solid base of kinship support, with family members or peer groups either nonexistent or unsupportive. For Jorge, (Dominican/Puerto Rican, age 31) maintaining a public heterosexual identity was often difficult. After engaging in a secret live-in relationship with a transgender woman, rumours circulated among his friends. When confronted, Jorge repeatedly denied involvement with his transgender ex-girlfriend, out of fear of losing his friendships and social position within a gang:

I’m very scared, ‘cause in the gang that I’m in, it’s not acceptable, and I been there for a lot of years already, and I wouldn’t want to lose my friends, and that’s basically why I’m so scared, and I’m scared like to this day. (RK013/62)

Men in this cluster had a stronger identification with traditional gender roles than the men in the younger grouping. They often described an inner conflict between their beliefs surrounding gender and their sexual behaviour, and were more likely to cite religious belief in their explanations. Alonso (Puerto Rican, age 45) expressed traditional gender values and considered himself heterosexual, although he began having sexual relations with men and transgender women after his marriage of 25 years ended. At the time of the interview Alonso was having sexual relations with a biological woman, a transgender woman, and a man. He disliked the use of labels, complaining that it “has gotten out of hand” and that all the sexual identities were “creating an immoral impact on people.”

The men in this cluster also explained their behaviour in a way that stressed their continued masculinity. For example, Alonso offered a definition of his orientation:

male sexual, that means you perform well and you can do it with anything and everything (R025/24–25).

Emilio (Dominican/Egyptian, age 37) was raised with strict gender roles in the home. He experienced internal conflict between his behaviour and a fear of immorality, noting that “at times, I feel like I’m sinning.” Emilio did not identify as bisexual, preferring to describe himself as “sexual. I’m just a sexual person.” He discussed his relationship with masculinity, explaining that he agreed with the messages he had received over his life about manhood:

I fall in line with it, yeah. I feel manly. It’s not like I’m hanging out with my gay friends or whoever, and it’s like, “Oh, I turned into this –“ It doesn’t happen. I’m still me. And whatever woman I hang out with, they’ll never look at me like, “Are you that way?” (R065/21)

Ramon (Puerto Rican/Black/Italian, age 56) was also raised with traditional gender roles in the home. His past experience had included long term relationships with women and men. At the time of the interview, he was in a long-term relationship with a woman, but had



casual sexual relationships with both men and women outside of the relationship. When asked to describe his sexual identity, Ramon insisted:

I'm a man, no doubt about it, I'm a rigorous man, I work hard. If I like something, okay, that turns me on, or gives me pleasure, I'll run with it. These titles or these labels you choose what you want to be. I'm a man; a man is a man is a man (R027/44).

Compared to the younger cluster, men in this grouping were not as sexually versatile. Some made direct connections between their belief systems and their preference for sexual roles. For example, although Ramon reportedly no longer believed in organised religion, values from his religious upbringing persisted. Here Ramon talks about his dislike of being penetrated:

You know, that part of me that grew up as a kid in a religious – we're not supposed to do that... That comes up sometimes, and I recognise it. I say, "No, this is not for me." (R027/57)

Of the older cluster, David (Dominican, age 37) was one of the few participants who admitted to acting strictly as a "bottom" during sex with men. Yet he quickly clarified that playing this role did not make him submissive in any way:

Yeah. But I ain't no soft mother fucker. So I mean, not to say like that. I just let him know, like, "Yo, this is being dumb. But remember at the end of the day, I'll punch you in your nose" (R026/26).

In contrast to the younger group's fluidity, David's need to re-assert his masculinity after playing the perceived submissive role vividly illustrates the gender role rigidity and same-sex stigma that characterised this age group.

### **Problematic Classifications**

Although the willingness to categorise one's sexual orientation was sharply divided along generational lines, not all young men interviewed embraced the bisexual label. A subset of younger men who identified as bisexual did so in spite of the fact that, for various reasons, they felt it wasn't a positive or accurate representation of their identity. Likewise, among the older cluster, not all men interviewed had problems with a bisexual identity that could be immediately related to beliefs about gender or a fear of stigma. These men were not concealing their same-sex behaviour, but nevertheless found labels restrictive and rife with negative stereotypes and memories.

Raul, (Puerto Rican/Indian/Black, age 18) who was reportedly non-religious and played a versatile role in sexual relations with other men, didn't like the idea of applying a static term like "bisexual" to his ever-changing experience of sexuality. He also disliked the stereotypes associated with certain labels:

something tells me that I don't wanna be considered neither bi or straight or anything because the one thing... It's always sex, sex, sex, sex, sex. And I don't wanna be part of that. (RK007/29).

Jesus, (Colombian/Dominican, age 40) expressed a similar concern for stereotypes. Jesus insisted that his sexuality was uninhibited. He said that if someone asks him, he says that he is bisexual, but that he prefers not to discuss it:

Some people say we're greedy, or bisexuality we're confused...Bisexuality's just you have a feeling for both sexes. That's all...Doesn't mean you're greedy. Greedy if I got three women or three men. Then that's greedy...You know, when I look in the mirror, all I see is me... So me comes above – before anything (R072/31, 42).

Angel (Puerto Rican, age 32) also found a sexual label unnecessary. Angel was open to his family about being bisexual, and reported being “very comfortable with his sexuality,” but having to label himself was too confining, and brought back negative memories:

It brings me back to the whole in the beginning of my life trying to figure out what I am you know, gay, bisexual, this and that, and the whole putting yourself in a box has been stressful and in a way causes trauma (R084/21).

These men's discontent with sexual labelling highlights the negative perceptions bisexual individuals often face in both heteronormative and gay environments, whether they are behaviourally bisexual or identified (Angelides 2001; McLean 2008; Rust 2002; Welsler-Lang 2008). Their reflections indicate that for some men, a bisexual identity is problematic for reasons not necessarily related to being open about one's bisexuality.

## Discussion

The data reported on here was collected from a cross-sectional, mixed-methods study. As a result, the way in which identity and the management of sexual experiences may change over time cannot be accurately analysed. However, most studies of bisexuality among minority ethnic groups are based on small samples. This study included a moderate sample size of Latino bisexual men from urban environments in the New York City area.

For younger men in this study, sexual identity was largely inseparable from sexual activity, a label willingly adopted early in life and positively related to kinship support of family and/or peer groups. Younger men in our study engaged in flexible gender and sex roles, even if they were raised in traditional gendered environments. They reported joining peer groups of LGBT youth with relative ease, and without a great deal of perceived social stigma. It is likely that this community provided the support necessary to buffer the negative feedback of one or more parent, although many young men had at least one parent's (or sibling's) support, whether tacit or otherwise. This cluster was also characterised by sexual versatility, as most of the young men practiced fluid sexual roles depending upon the partner and the experience. These findings are in line with studies that show young people increasingly disclosing their sexual identities, and they underline the importance of social networks in doing so (Savin-Williams 2003; Rosario et al. 2004; Grov et al. 2006). This group represents a significant contrast to the older cluster in our study, and reveals a remarkable resilience against discriminating cultural and social forces, both of the larger culture and those specific to Latinos.

Older men in this study did not label themselves according to their sexual behaviour. Some began sexual relations with men and transgender women later in life, after their late 20s, following the dissolution of one or more heterosexual relationships. For these men, who had more traditional understandings of gender than their younger counterparts, it was crucial to underline that their masculinity was unaltered by same-sex activity. Often this same-sex activity was considered private, and kept from families, communities, and spouses. Older men were more likely to experience internal conflict over their sexual behaviour than their younger counterparts, and in some cases this was explicitly tied to religious and gender beliefs. It is probable that internalised stigma and related negative emotions lead them to be less sexually versatile, and to view the receptive role as particularly threatening to masculinity. This group can be situated within a literature that find Latino men less likely than whites to disclose a non-heterosexual identity, and as experiencing particular institutional, cultural, and ideological barriers to disclosure. Moreover, the two age groups can be situated within findings that point to a coexistence of plural gender ideologies, wherein values, roles, and practices are being reconfigured in an environment of migrations and local-global contact, and the “old” exists alongside the “new” (Asencio and Acosta 2009; Carrillo 2004; Gonsales-Lopes 2004).

Finally, a subset of men across the age spectrum complained that a bisexual identity was restrictive, inaccurate, or carried negative connotations. Among older participants, this problem with a bisexual identity was distinct from the objections of their cohorts, who sought to distance themselves from publicly acknowledged same-sex behaviour, and instead revolved around a lack of flexibility and negative stereotypes associated with the bisexual label. In the younger cluster, men still identified as bisexual, but had a similar concern for negative stereotypes and the limiting or inflexible nature of labels. Interestingly, both groups hinted at sexual identity being unnecessary to their sense of self, or to the persistence of more relevant identities (like manhood) that superseded an identity based upon sexual orientation. These reports are in line with recent studies in which LGBT subjects described labels as restrictive and limiting (Willis 2012; Hillier et al. 2010) and may call into question the continued usefulness of sexual classifications for articulating sexual roles and involvements (Sedgwick 1990), a point which may be particularly salient for non-white LGBT populations.

Peer networks emerged as a key component to bisexual identity. For young men, they offered a level of insulation from the discriminative attitudes of family members and the larger culture. Older men, refusing a bisexual identity and therefore lacking a LGBT community, managed stigma through the compartmentalisation of their behaviour. This allowed for a continued alliance to traditional gender ideologies and religious-based moral values, but also resulted in internal conflict, negative emotions, and a heightened experience of stigmatisation. This study did not incorporate migration factors (among our population, 34.6% were native-born, and of those foreign-born, 50% had lived in the USA since infancy). Considering the documented relationship between migration experiences and social isolation, (Muñoz-Laboy, Hirsch, Quispe-Lasaro 2009; Parrado and Flippen 2010) future studies would be wise to examine migration in relation to behaviourally bisexual men’s health concerns, including the lack of social networks (Martines et al., 2011).

## Conclusion: Aging out of bisexual versatility, or a historical shift?

One way to interpret the preceding data would be to organise the two age clusters linearly on a timeline. Employing this framework, the younger cluster would be illustrative of the flexibility, peer networking, experimental behaviour, and irreverence for established norms commonly associated with youth. The older cluster could then be seen as merely an older version of the young—one for which the conservatism of age had increased a concern over social stigma and realigned an identification with the gender ideology learned in childhood. Yet this would be an incorrect conclusion for several reasons, not the least of which is the dramatic expansion of LGBT awareness, visibility, and activism in the past decades. The younger cluster in our study came of age in a drastically different social context, one which afforded them the option to interact with LGBT individuals, peer groups, and communities. Societal visibility of the LGBT population and greater numbers of youth disclosing their sexual orientation to families at earlier ages indicate that the younger cluster in our study are representative of emerging trends in the USA, and suggest that new frameworks be developed to examine these shifting dynamics among young, behaviourally bisexual minority ethnic men.

The practice of non-stigmatised sexual versatility may suggest a historical shift among very young behaviourally bisexual Latino men. Studies over the past several years have noted an increase in role flexibility among men in Latin American countries, pointing to a growing interconnectedness with developed nations like the USA as a contributing factor (Carballo-Diégues et al. 2004; Carrillo 1999). Prevailing articulations of gender and sexual behaviour continue to be dominated by binaries—e.g., masculine and feminine, gay and straight—which relegate diverse behaviour to discrete categories and conceal and problematise the existence of bisexuality. These binaries, which can be traced to specific historical junctions, reflect a value-laden gender hierarchy in which heterosexual masculinity is superior to both the “homosexual” and femininity.

In contrast, the fluid gender ideology of some young Latino men, and the extension of these beliefs to the most intimate level of same-sex activity, may indicate a historical change. By practicing non-stigmatised sexual versatility, young Latino men would seem to be participating in a reorganisation and levelling off of unequal gender attributes. At the same time, and while it is tempting to document an erosion of the insertive male as the socially valued sexual role, it is also important to consider other possibilities. For instance, might traditional gender power dynamics have simply been “re-packaged” among the those who are younger, in a way that current methods leave undetected? It may be prudent to approach future studies with this potential in mind, as well as to design measurements around the identification of such possible reconfigurations.

It is vital to continue to frame discussions of Latino men’s bisexualities within a larger context of structural violence and their persistent economic, social, political and sexual marginalisation. Because of the relationship between stigma, social vulnerability, and HIV risk, locating areas of heightened stigmatisation and social isolation, as within the older cluster in our study, is crucial for the future design of both HIV risk and mental health interventions.

Bisexuality has long been a contested site—complicating theories of sexuality, suffering erasure within sexual identity movements, and pushed to the sidelines of public health research. This population reports experiences and identities that can confound historically and culturally-specific classifications of identity and behaviour, and pushes us to reconsider conceptual frameworks. It is the authors' belief that research into the constellation of elements that make up the experience of bisexually-active Latino men is imperative, both for identifying determinants of HIV risk and to inform non-disease-focused theoretical frameworks of bisexuality.

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