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Partner Selection among Latino Immigrant Men Who Have Sex with Men

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Abstract This qualitative study explored partner selection in a sample of immigrant Latino men who have sex with men (MSM). In-depth interviews were conducted with men living in the greater New York metropolitan area who had been born in Brazil ($n = 10$), Colombia ($n = 14$), or the Dominican Republic ($n = 9$). One focus group was conducted with MSM from each of the three countries (9 Brazilian, 11 Colombian, and 5 Dominican participants). A grounded theory approach revealed three main themes relating to partner selection. The first concerned stereotypes of how Latino and Anglo-American men tend to behave in their sexual encounters and relationships. The participants perceived Latinos to be more affectionate and passionate, whereas they saw Anglo-American men as more independent and practical. These cultural discrepancies sometimes resulted in a preference for Latino partners. A second theme concerned stereotypes of the national groups, including expectations that Brazilians would be sexy and sensual and that Dominicans would have large penises. As found in other research on MSM of color, ethnic and national stereotypes were associated with experiences of sexual objectification. The third theme addressed the importance of masculine characteristics in sexual attraction and partner selection. Negative feelings towards effeminate men who did not conform to normative male physical or behavioral presentation reflect a stigma found inside and outside of the gay community. These findings suggest that gender and ethnic stereotypes play an important role in shaping partner choice and have implications for sexual risk and relationship formation.

Keywords Latino · MSM · Sexual partner · Stereotypes · Masculinity

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Introduction

Research on the selection of sexual partners has frequently focused on factors influencing the choice of long-term mates by heterosexual men and women, whereas the process of partner selection among men who have sex with men (MSM) has received much less attention. The literature has shown that individuals often seek mates who are similar to themselves in intelligence, values, personality attributes, and physical characteristics (Buss, 1985). In addition, certain traits in potential partners, including intelligence, sense of humor, honesty, kindness, good looks, facial attractiveness, and dependability, have been reported as important by men and women—both gay and straight (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Gómez, Mason, & Alvarado, 2005; Lippa, 2007). Age of partners has also been reported as relevant, with a preference for younger aged partners professed by gay and straight men (Silverthorne & Quinsey, 2000).

This qualitative study examined partner selection in a sample of immigrant Latino men who have sex with men. Little has been reported about partner selection among MSM, and even less is known about the process among Latino immigrant MSM. This group is at high risk for HIV (CDC, 2008) and, therefore, it is important to gain further understanding of their sexual partnering.

Theoretical approaches to the issue of partner selection have often taken an evolutionary perspective, emphasizing the survival value of strategies of mate selection (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001), including when explaining differences in preferred traits for partners in long-term relationships and short-term sexual encounters (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Although MSM grow up within a dominant heterosexual culture that emphasizes the link between sex and reproduction, it has been argued that among MSM the type of relationship desired is more relevant than evolutionary factors in determining the importance of various traits (Gobrogge et al., 2007). In a study of internet personal advertisements, gay men sought short-term sexual encounters more frequently than straight men, but both gay and straight men reported a wider acceptable age range for short-term than long-term partners. In studying MSM, it is important to examine partner selection for short-term sexual encounters, as well as longer term relationships.

The process of partner selection can also be shaped by issues stemming from ethnicity and culture (Díaz & Ayala, 1999; Gómez et al., 2005). In qualitative interviews with participants in the Seropositive Urban Men's Study, race and ethnicity were often cited when describing an ideal partner, with some men preferring partners of their own ethnicity and others preferring those with different backgrounds (Gómez et al., 2005). Racial, ethnic, and national stereotypes influenced not only participants' preferences for certain partners, but also potential partners' perceptions of participants. Many men of color have reported experiences of sexual stereotyping and objectification (Gómez et al., 2005); for example, African American men have described being approached solely because of the stereotyped view that they have large penises (Teunis, 2007).

Partner selection among MSM also can be influenced by gender expectations. Gómez et al. (2005) noted that the majority of their participants valued masculine and devalued feminine appearance in their partners, but that this pattern was especially evident among the Latino and African American men. For these men, masculine appearance and comportment were typically viewed as essential in a partner.

The preference for physically masculine partners may be shaped by a gay cultural context, as well as more general Western patriarchal values that accord greater status to men. The development in the gay community of an ideal of a physically masculine man has been described as a reaction against earlier conceptions of gay men as effeminate (Connell, 2005), as well as a response to AIDS and its accompanying loss of body mass strength (Halkitis, 2001). Furthermore, it has been argued that the stigma associated with gender-nonconformity in the larger society is internalized by gay men and results in a preference for masculine partners and an antipathy toward effeminate men (Taywaditep, 2001).

The desire for partners who behave in a masculine manner can also be viewed within a Latino cultural context. Appropriate masculine behavior in Latino cultures has sometimes been described with the construct of machismo. Although there has been disagreement about the definition and current applicability of the term, machismo was historically depicted as hypermasculinity (Gutmann, 1996; Mirandé, 1997). Characteristics seen as male (e.g., activity, strength, dominance, sexual prowess, aggression) were prescribed, and those seen as female (e.g., passivity, weakness, and vulnerability) were proscribed for men (Mirandé, 1997).

The enactment of masculinities in Latino cultures, however, has been shown to be more complex and varied than this definition implies (Gutmann, 1996; Mirandé, 1997). Two recent studies of machismo provided evidence of multiple dimensions of Latino masculinity, including emotional expressiveness and affiliation (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). Furthermore, differences in gender stereotypes for expressing emotions (e.g., love, sadness, embarrassment) have been shown to be smaller for Latinos in the U.S. than for European Americans, thus suggesting greater cultural acceptance for emotional expression among Latino than among Anglo men (Durik et al., 2006). However, among Latino MSM, as among other groups of MSM, other aspects of femininity, such as mannerism and appearance, are devalued (Sandfort, Melendez, & Díaz, 2007; Taywaditep, 2001).

This qualitative study investigated partner selection—the process of choosing and being chosen—among Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican MSM in the New York area. Although representation of these three groups in the U.S. has substantially increased in recent decades, they have received little research attention (Logan, 2001; Luiz, 2005). It has been argued that more research should address heterogeneity among Latinos (Torres et al., 2002), and the inclusion of Latino immigrants from three countries enabled us to examine both commonalities and discrepancies in the experience of Latino MSM. In this article, we explored three broad issues that arose repeatedly in the conversation of the men in this study. First, we explored how stereotypes of Latino and Anglo-American men impacted their sexual encounters and relationships. Second, we examined how ethnic and national stereotypes influenced partner selection. Third, we investigated how conceptions of masculinity shaped partner choice.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The research for this article was conducted in the greater New York City area (Manhattan, Queens, Newark) among immigrant Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican MSM. Participants were recruited between autumn 2004 and spring 2005 as part of a larger research project on contextual influences of sexual risk behavior among immigrant Latino MSM (see Zea, Reisen, Poppen, & Bianchi, in press). Data reported in this paper came from focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted in the qualitative phase of the research project. Recruitment methods included snowball sampling, advertisements in gay publications and on internet websites, flyers, and referrals from health and prevention programs serving the Latino gay community.

Three focus groups were conducted, one for participants from each of the three countries of origin, in the participants' native language (i.e., Spanish or Portuguese). There were two facilitators in each focus group, at least one of whom was a native speaker and at least one of whom was a gay man (sometimes the same person). Focus group guides were used to structure the conversation in a manner that ensured relevant issues were covered, but facilitated spontaneous discussion and inclusion of unanticipated topics. Topics covered included immigrant gay community, sexual partners and activities, sexual identity, drug and alcohol use, and HIV and STI risk. Individuals of the three national groups were asked about ways in which their nationality affected their sex lives within the gay community in New York City. Focus groups lasted approximately 2 h. Participants were reimbursed $50 for their time and given $5 to cover the cost of transportation.

Eligibility criteria included having been born in Brazil, Colombia, or the Dominican Republic, being 18 years of age or older, and having had sex with a man in the last three months. Individuals who met eligibility requirements could participate in either the focus groups or in-depth interviews, but not both. The number of participants in each of the focus groups was as follows: 9 in the Brazilian group, 11 in the Colombian group, and 5 in the Dominican group. The ages of focus group participants ranged from 20 to 57 years, with a mean of 37 years. The average length of time in the USA was approximately 10 years, with a range of 4 months to 24 years. About 60% of the participants in focus groups reported that they were in a relationship with a primary male partner.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in the language of preference of the participant. Interviewers were native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese, but also fluent speakers of English. Interview guides were developed to loosely structure the conversations and to address a variety of topics, including migration, sexual behavior, sexual partners, condom use, and drugs and alcohol. Questions were sufficiently open-ended to allow unanticipated topics and themes to emerge and be discussed. Interviews lasted approximately 90 min, and participants received $65 in reimbursement for time and transportation costs. Questions that addressed the topics for this paper most directly were: "Do you think that your race, ethnicity or national origin impacts your sexual life?" and "Tell me a little about whom you are sexually attracted to. Do you have any preferences in terms of ethnicity, style, age, gender roles, etc.?"

Participants in the in-depth interviews met the same inclusion criteria as focus group participants. Fourteen Colombian, 12 Dominican, and 10 Brazilian men participated in the in-depth interviews, but three Dominican participants were later eliminated because they revealed in the interviews that they were not immigrants, but rather had been born in the U.S. The remaining 33 interviewees comprised the final sample. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants from the in-depth interviews, who are listed there and in the text below with pseudonyms. We do not use any name for the focus group participants.

The average age of those interviewed was 35 years, with a range from 18 to 58. The median length of time in the U.S. for interview participants was 10 years, with a range from one to 26 years. About 40% of the participants reported having a primary partner at the time of the interview. The Dominican participants differed from the Colombian and Brazilian participants in that they were slightly younger and less educated. Even though the majority of the sample had some college education, many of our participants were economically disadvantaged because of their immigrant status.

All focus groups and interviews were tape-recorded and data were transcribed for analysis using Atlas.ti 5.0. Interviews were coded in the original languages by a team of four researchers, three of whom were native speakers of Portuguese or Spanish. There were at least two coders for each interview, one of whom was a native speaker of the language of the interview. The coding of the first four interviews was done simultaneously by three coders in order to establish criteria for coding. Thereafter, the majority of interviews were coded by two coders and discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion and consensus as suggested by methodology guidelines provided by Frieze (2008). The analysis of the data was guided by the principles of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992), such that themes and relationships were identified and then modified, accepted, or rejected as additional information and insight emerged over the course of the analysis. Categories were developed within each theme and continuous coding and use of memos were applied to allow for ongoing revision of categories. The final scheme of themes and categories was reviewed and checked against the coded data.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants for in-depth interviews ($N = 33$)

Name[a]	Age	Years in U.S.	Education	Relationship status	HIV status
Brazilians					
Antônio	43	19	Some college	Widower	Positive
Jorge	52	10	College	Single	Positive
Francisco	52	23	Some college	Partnered	Positive
João	34	5	College	Single	Positive
Gilberto	36	7	College	Single	Positive
Joaquim	39	19	College	Partnered	Unknown
Guiomar	25	5	Some college	Partnered	Unknown
Bruno	28	1	Some college	Partnered	Unknown
Edson	28	2	College	Girlfriend	Negative
Oswaldo	31	8	High school	Single	Negative
Colombians					
Rodolfo	50	16	High school	Partnered	Unknown
Edgar	45	24	Some college	Single	Unknown
Luis	58	24	Graduate school	Single	Positive
Gabriel	48	3	College	Single	Negative
Eduardo	35	9	College	Partnered	Negative
Esteban	34	10	College	Single	Negative
Rubén	35	15	Some college	Partnered	Negative
Gonzalo	42	3	Graduate school	Partnered	Positive
Mario	38	7	Some college	Single	Negative
Carlos	23	15	High school	Partnered	Negative
Jairo	28	10	College	Partnered	Negative
Luciano	34	9	High school	Single	Negative
Mauricio	29	16	College	Single	Negative
Álvaro	33	2	Graduate school	Single	Negative
Dominicans					
Fabio	45	20	High school	Single	Unknown
Guillermo	25	14	High school	Single	Unknown
Leopoldo	18	18	Some high school	Single	Negative
Samuel	42	12	Some college	Single	Positive
Pedro	33	4	Some college	Partnered	Unknown
Pablo	23	6	Some college	Single	Negative
Rafael	31	26	Graduate school	Single	Unknown
Miguel	28	28	High school	Single	Negative
Felix	32	16	Some college	Partnered	Negative

[a] All names in this table are fictitious

Results

Three themes concerning partner selection emerged in the interviews and focus groups: (1) stereotypes of Latino and Anglo-American men; (2) stereotypes of the specific immigrant groups; and (3) masculinity in sexual preferences and roles. The topics covered within each of these themes are presented in Table 2, as is the number of respondents from each group who contributed to each category. Because some topics emerged spontaneously within interviews and focus groups, not all topics were discussed by all respondents.

Stereotypes of Latino and Anglo-American Men

The participants reported a consistent difference in how Latino and Anglo-American men approached sexual encounters and romantic relationships. Sex was described as being something more "cerebral" and practical for Anglo-Americans, but more emotional and passionate for Latinos. The perception that Anglo-American men are less affectionate and more pragmatic than Latinos sometimes resulted in feelings of emptiness or lack of intimacy experienced by participants during sex. A Brazilian man (Jorge) described

Table 2 Number of interviews and focus groups contributing to major themes and categories by ethnic group

Major themes and categories	Brazilian	Dominican	Colombian
Stereotypes of Latino and Anglo-American men			
Latinos—more passionate and lack control over sexual situations	1 IDI[a]	–	2 IDI
Anglo-Americans—more cold, practical, independent in relationships	3 IDI, FG[b]	–	2 IDI, FG
Idealized image of the "gringo" boyfriend	1 IDI, FG	FG	FG
Stereotypes of the specific immigrant groups			
Sexual objectification of Brazilian and Dominican men	7 IDI, FG	4 IDI	–
Positive consequences on sexual stereotypes	1 IDI	1 IDI, FG	FG
Negative consequences on sexual stereotypes	3 IDI, FG	1 IDI, FG	1 IDI
Masculinity in sexual preferences and roles			
Preference for masculine men and/or devaluation of effeminacy	3 IDI, FG	3 IDI, FG	7 IDI
Sexual roles influenced by masculinity/femininity of partners	2 IDI	–	5 IDI

[a] In-depth interviews (IDI), $N = 33$

[b] Focus group (FG), Brazilian ($N = 9$), Dominican ($N = 5$), Colombian ($N = 11$)

sexual relations in the U.S. as devoid of feelings and mechanical:

> [In the U.S.] you are like a robot, a sex machine… you have sex, you get up, you are done, you leave, you clean yourself, and you don't even know who you had sex with. With me, it is different, it is not like that. Feelings must be involved, one must feel something to be able to have sex with another person, which the majority here don't do.

In addition, the men in this study expressed the belief that Latinos are passionate, more spontaneous, and less likely to plan or prepare for a sexual encounter—qualities that could potentially lead to greater HIV risk. For example, this situation was described by a Colombian participant (Edgar):

> I think it is like one's nature, no? That is, I don't know if [Latinos] are hotter or more passionate, or what it is. But it's like one loses control over taking care of oneself. On the other hand, not an American. An American… it has happened to me that we go to bed and the first thing he does is open the night table and put the condom on me for when the moment comes. Not the Latino. In fact, one says to him, "Do you have a condom?" "No, I don't have a condom." "Well then, there is no condom, let's go."

A lack of feeling of closeness was an especially salient theme that emerged throughout discussions relating to Anglo-American partners, especially when participants were seeking an enduring relationship. Some of the participants (e.g., Gabriel) believed that "it is very difficult to find a [stable] partner in the U.S." As João, a Brazilian man put it, "Here, it is very hard to have relationships, I have tried several times…people only want to have sex." The difficulty in finding stable relationships in the U.S. was partially attributed to cultural differences in norms concerning affiliation, relationships, and emotional attachment. A participant in the Colombian focus group made the following observation:

> When you first start seeing someone, you are in love, and you want to be with that person all the time, you want to make plans with that person, you want to share good things with that person. In contrast to an American, who makes plan on his own, [a Colombian] makes plans with his family and his partner. Therefore, there are these cultural clashes…

The dissatisfaction with relationships in the U.S. differed starkly from participants' expectations upon coming to the U.S. Many initially anticipated dating or forming long-term relationships with Anglo-American men. The desire of Latino MSM to explore something new—to date Anglo-Americans rather than other Latinos—was discussed in both the Brazilian and Dominican focus groups. One participant explained: "I believe that each one of us when you first set foot in this country that the last thing you thought was that you would have a relationship with another Brazilian gay man, [but] with a Gringo, yes. Am I lying?"

Not only were Anglo-American men new, appealing, and different, they represented a social status unavailable to many newly arrived immigrant Latinos. A Colombian focus group participant described an idealized image of the "blue-eyed and white" Anglo-American man, a partner preference arising from white men's dominant status within the U.S. Moreover, Latino men who became romantically involved with American men were often able to experience some of the privilege associated with their partner's social status. A Brazilian man (Bruno) described the experiences of some immigrant MSM with Anglo-American partners in this manner:

> I think that the Brazilians who become involved with Americans do fine for a while and they live a fantasy life that is not theirs, because many Americans have a good

> social position…And the Brazilians who arrive here and get involved with them get taken in by these conditions—of living well, of having a car available, and in the majority of times of having easy money through the boyfriend….It is not like they [the Brazilians] get closer [to Americans] out of self-interest, but rather the person offers them these things and they let themselves be swayed by it.

Some participants described how their initial desire to have a relationship with Anglo-Americans dissipated over time. They found themselves gravitating back towards other Latino partners. As a Dominican focus group participant noted, he felt "better off with my own race [ethnic group] because I know it better and get along well with my own race." A participant in the Colombian focus groups explained it in this way:

> So, you try to have a relationship with an American, in general it is one of the first relationships you have, and even if you speak English very well, with you being Latino, there will always be a time when, when you get frustrated. You don't understand, for example, what your partner is trying to say, you don't understand what he is feeling, what he is experiencing…and these are things that keep repeating themselves, keep repeating …and then you say, "Oh well, there is a cultural difference here, and I prefer to be with a person who has customs similar to mine". Even if this other [Latino] person is jealous or possessive, they are not as individualistic as the Americans are….and we are not as cold as the Americans are. We are used to having a person who is more attached by the bone to us. And that is why I think I prefer a Latino or Colombian.

Stereotypes of the Immigrant Groups

In addition to talking about their own preferences for Latino and Anglo-American partners, participants discussed how perceived characteristics of men from their national groups affected potential partners' reactions to them. Brazilians and Dominicans had strong beliefs about their group's sexual reputations, whereas Colombians did not.

There was a widely shared opinion among Brazilian participants that Brazil's image as an exotic and sexually charged country was responsible for an image of Brazilians as highly sensual and sexual by nature. According to the participants, Brazilian MSM were regarded as very desirable in the U.S. because of the expectation that they were good lovers, who were "thinking of, talking about, and looking for sex" all the time. A Brazilian man (Gilberto) described other MSM's reaction after finding out his nationality in this way:

> When you say that you are Brazilian, man, it sounds like it is something out of this world. It seems that they are winning the lottery…there is a certain frenzy, it is like a shot of energy.

In a similar vein, many potential sexual partners' attraction to Dominicans was attributed to the reputation that Dominicans have large penises. Dominican participants also reported that others frequently assumed they were sexually virile and always ready for sex. They noted that with non-Dominican partners, they were often expected to be the active and insertive partner. A Dominican participant (Felix) described the reputation of Dominican gay men in the U.S. in this way: "I think that being Dominican gives me the stamp of being hot and it's expected that… I be more "macho," more active, and that I enjoy penetrating, that I have a big penis."

In contrast to the Brazilian and Dominican participants, Colombians did not report any particular sexual stereotypes or reputation that would set them apart from other Latinos. Some Colombians described themselves as being passionate and affectionate in their sexual interactions, similar to other Latinos. In addition, some Colombian participants emphasized their manner of speaking and level of education as features that made them attractive to Anglo-American men.

The data indicated both positive and negative ramifications of the sexual stereotypes of Latino men. Although the reputations of Latinos in general or Brazilians and Dominicans in particular made attracting casual partners easier, many participants felt that these generalizations contributed to sexual objectification. For example, Alvaro, a Colombian, expressed such feelings when he stated that "[Americans think] 'Ah Latinos, to have sex with a Latino must be very good.' But, they really are not interested in anything else. And I am tired of that."

Similarly, a Brazilian, Oswaldo, noted his experience of sexual objectification due to his nationality being equated with sex in the following way:

> Many people attack me [sexually] because I am Brazilian. As soon as you mention that you are Brazilian, they want sex. Do you understand? This is very offensive, you know? You probably have heard about this [before]. You mention being Brazilian and everybody [says], "Wow! My gosh, Brazilian! Hmmm, Good lay!" This happens a lot… being Brazilian means that one is great for sex.

Pedro, a Dominican participant, described the process of becoming disillusioned with the objectifying treatment he experienced:

> That was a label that they put on me, "The sexy one," sexy everywhere I turned, and in the beginning it seemed to be quite flattering, but after a while I realized

> that it was, or at least to my mind it seemed to be, something quite offensive to tell you that you are sexy, because what they mean was that you are good to fuck with, nothing else.

Participants also described ways in which sexual objectification sometimes resulted in pressure to perform sexually or to conform to expectations. A Brazilian focus group participant noted: "One has to prove that one is good [in bed] since one is Brazilian, one must show the national product…it's like people are saying to you, 'Come on, you Brazilian, prove that you are a Brazilian for real!" Francisco noted that objectification led potential sexual partners to assume that as a Brazilian, he would be willing to engage in a wide range of sexual behaviors: "I don't like [this reputation] because sometimes it is taken to the level of vulgarity or that anything can happen and I believe in individuality; not all Brazilians will have that sensuality or that sexuality."

Stereotypes may be particularly difficult for those men who fail to conform to the expectations placed on their group, which can even lead to distancing one's self from the group. João explained: "Since my sexual situation is not very active right now, I avoid saying that I am Brazilian because I want to avoid causing a certain disappointment….I tend to say that I am Latino or South American."

Masculinity in Sexual Preferences and Roles

Beliefs about masculinity and femininity were widely discussed by participants in relation to partner selection. Masculine characteristics were viewed as important criteria for sexual attraction and several participants indicated that they would never become interested in a man who was effeminate. A Brazilian participant (Oswaldo) described his preference for sexual partners in this way:

> I like men who are very masculine. If the person is effeminate, then it is a real turn off. The person can be homosexual, as long as he is not flamboyant….[if he is] I am not attracted, but when he is a man, a real man then I am attracted.

Similarly, a Dominican focus group participant remarked, "I go to bed with guys who are masculine. Be it to fuck or be fucked, but an effeminate man, no."

The acceptability of certain female characteristics varied for different participants. Rubén, a Colombian, reported that his partner had a small body size, like a woman, but was not feminine. This physical characteristic made Rubén feel more masculine and in control, as if he were the "Papi." Other participants noted that ways of dressing or grooming traditionally associated with women (e.g., tweezing one's eyebrows, wearing cologne) were "too gay" and a deterrent to pursuing a relationship.

The definition of what constitutes masculinity was broader, however, than might be commonly found in Anglo-American culture in that it included a greater acceptance of emotionality. The Latino men in this study did not associate emotional expressiveness with femininity. As one Colombian focus group participant explained, "We want to feel not feminine, but rather possessive and passionate." Thus, this type of emotional behavior was not viewed as incompatible with male gender expectations.

The stigma associated with gender non-conformity in both the larger society and gay sub-culture provided an additional motive for the choice of masculine partners. Bruno noted his distaste for partners who display feminine traits:

> If I wanted a woman I would grab a real one. So, I like a person who carries himself as a man, who talks in a normal way, who dresses like a man, and that he be a person that when we are seen together on the street people would not say, "Here comes two faggots."

One participant, Luciano, described being conflicted about his feminine tendencies and attempting to conform to a masculine ideal. He described himself as being effeminate his entire life and talked about his internal struggles to become more masculine in this manner:

> I was very effeminate while growing up and I suffered a lot with that…so I want to be masculine. That is what I want and that is what I like in other men, so I also want to be masculine. So, I started to study the things that I did, how I saw myself, the things that I did unconsciously that were feminine-like, that were considered feminine by society, and I started, little by little [changing] and I am still working at it.

Partner selection for MSM could also involve the issue of sexual role, and sometimes in the Latino cultural context, insertive partners are considered masculine and receptive partners are considered feminine. As one Colombian participant (Jairo) put it, "We associate being the bottom as taking the role of the woman, of being passive…of one who is willing to receive the man and letting the man penetrate." A preference for masculine-seeming receptive partners was also reported, however, which is consistent with the general preference for masculine partners. A Colombian participant (Gabriel) noted that he enjoyed having partners who were receptive, but "act straight, in other words like men."

Most men in this study reported being versatile in their role for anal intercourse (i.e., taking insertive and receptive roles), but concerns about gender implications of sexual roles influenced their behavior. For example, Alvaro remarked that he preferred to be the top and was only willing to be the receptive partner when, "the person [is] very virile, someone who awakens my desire to be 'bottom'….very, very masculine." Another participant, Bruno, reported taking the insertive role

at the beginning of the sexual encounter, and thereby establishing his masculinity: "I don't have a problem in being bottom or top….because it is an exchange. But, in the beginning I get pleasure from being the top like a man."

Discussion

Cultural expectations and stereotypes influenced the process of partner selection among the Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican immigrant MSM in ways that were relevant for both short- and long-term relationships. Common perceptions of Anglo-American men as cold, practical, and independent contrasted with self-perceptions of Latino men as passionate, emotionally expressive, loyal, and desirous of close relationships. Although one would expect such perceived differences to be salient in ongoing relationships, it was also an issue in brief encounters.

The more collectivist orientation of Latino participants was evident in their desire for greater emotional contact with partners, even in short-term sexual encounters, where they sometimes perceived their Anglo-American partners as behaving in an impersonal manner. In addition, the Latino men's expectation that being in love involved having an intense relationship, spending time together and with family, and sharing all aspects of one's life conflicted with the more independent approach sometimes taken by their Anglo-American partners, which at times resulted in Latino men feeling lonely and dissatisfied in longer term relationships. It is interesting to note that there was a tendency in some men toward decreased desire for Anglo-American partners with increased exposure and time in the U.S. due to these cultural conflicts. Although the discrepancy in emotional style from that perceived as typical of Anglo-American men was a reported theme, it was not universally experienced by the Latino men in this study.

The cultural expectations and stereotypes described had potential implications for HIV risk. Sexual scripts for Latino men included passion and spontaneity—characteristics that many described with pride. These characteristics, however, were thought to contribute to Latinos' lack of preparation for and loss of control during sexual encounters, which ultimately hindered consistent condom use. Previous research has noted that loss of sexual control was a common reason given by Latino gay men to explain failure to engage in safe sex (Díaz & Ayala, 1999). Some Latino men in the current study interpreted the preparation, planning, and self-control that their Anglo-American partners brought to sexual encounters as antithetical to passion. It is important that HIV prevention efforts for Latinos frame safer sex techniques as compatible with caring, passion, and emotional intimacy.

Despite the cultural differences, many Latino immigrant MSM reported being drawn to Anglo-American partners, particularly in the early period after arriving in the U.S. Anglo-American partners tended to have higher social status and greater financial resources, and often provided their Latino partners with access to privilege and money. Power imbalances between partners, particularly when one partner is receiving material goods or support from the other, can diminish the dependent partner's agency in sexual situations and therefore may increase his HIV risk (Díaz & Ayala, 1999). Although this may have been the case for the low-income participants in the current study, more affluent Latino immigrants would not be expected to experience this type of power differential in their relationships with Anglo-American men.

Sexual stereotyping of racial, ethnic, and national groups was an evident influence in the process of choosing and being chosen as a sexual partner. Such stereotyping involves generalizations about potential partners based on characteristics attributed to their groups. Although there may be some actual differences among groups, the process of stereotyping fails to differentiate among individuals within groups. Stereotypes of Latino men as passionate lovers, of Brazilians as highly sensual and sexual, and of Dominicans as having large penises were repeatedly reported. Although such images could be interpreted as describing positive attributes in a lover, they contributed to sexual objectification and dehumanization. Some participants in this study felt that potential partners reduced them to their national stereotypes, failed to see them as whole people, and valued them only for their assumed sexual characteristics. Although the Colombians in this study perceived their own educational achievements as attractive to potential partners, they and the Brazilian or Dominican men made little mention of other personality characteristics.

The findings of this study were consistent with other research showing objectification as a common experience among gay men of color (Drummond, 2005; Gómez et al., 2005; Teunis, 2007). Sexual stereotyping and objectification may be especially common in partner selection for anonymous or brief sexual encounters. White men's dominant status, racist views of men of color, and perceptions of the foreign as exotic or sexually exciting all contribute to sexual objectification of men of color within the gay community (Teunis, 2007). Research on sexual objectification has highlighted the negative impact on women's mental health and well-being resulting from objectification (e.g., Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; McKinley, 1999). Recently, studies have begun to document similar effects of sexual objectification among gay men (Martins, Tiggeman, & Kirkbride, 2007).

The Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican men in this study expressed a preference for masculine sexual partners almost exclusively, a finding that is consistent with previous research in multi-ethnic samples (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Gómez et al., 2005). Moreover, they believed

that their own masculine appearance and behavior were important in their success in attracting partners themselves. This partiality for masculinity may reflect an implicit—and largely unconscious—endorsement of patriarchal views, which value characteristics and behaviors ascribed to men (e.g., activity, strength, aggression) over those ascribed to women (e.g., passivity, weakness, vulnerability). For Latino men, gender-conforming masculine behavior also includes emotional expression, nurturance, and family orientation (Arciniega et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2002); therefore, the greater desire for warmer partner relationships than sometimes encountered with Anglo-American men, as discussed above, is not inconsistent with enactment of masculinity.

In Latino cultures, sexual roles during anal intercourse have sometimes been associated with gender, such that insertive (active) partners are viewed as masculine and receptive (passive) partners are viewed as feminine. We found some support for this perception in our study, as the relative masculinity of partners sometimes determined sexual role, with more masculine partners tending to take the insertive role. Preference for a specific sexual role was rarely mentioned however, as an influence in partner choice; it was clearly secondary to masculine characteristics in steering partner selection.

In addition to the expressed preference for masculinity, we also found an antipathy toward effeminate men as potential partners. Attitudes stigmatizing effeminate men are evident in the larger culture, as well as in gay and Latino cultures (Connell, 2005; Mirandé, 1997; Taywaditep, 2001). This distancing from or rejection of men who are not masculine may reflect internalized homonegativity or self-hatred among the MSM themselves: for some participants, masculinity was associated with heterosexuality and valued, whereas femininity was associated with homosexuality and shunned. A number of authors have pointed out the internalized homonegativity and shame inherent in such a belief system, which is not limited to Latino men (Bergling, 2001; Taywaditep, 2001).

Because gay men have traditionally been stereotyped as displaying effeminate characteristics, distancing themselves from effeminacy and men who appear effeminate may serve to protect some MSM from the stigma associated with homosexuality. They can preserve their own self-esteem by linking sexual-orientation prejudice to gender atypicality, and not to homosexual behavior per se. In addition, because MSM continue to be targets of prejudice and discrimination based on the stigma associated with homosexuality (Herek, 2007), some MSM avoid being seen with effeminate men. In this way, they can lessen the probability of being identified as gay in public, thereby shielding themselves from being a target of homophobic behavior.

Unfortunately, the implications of these attitudes for the well-being of effeminate men can be grave. Gender nonconforming gay men tend to report more anti-gay discrimination than gender-conforming men and experience poorer mental health outcomes (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007; Taywaditep, 2001). Potential rejection not only by the larger society, but also by the gay community, can lead to negative self-concept and low self-esteem among effeminate men. Moreover, the lack of attraction to effeminate men among many MSM may result in the disempowerment of such men in their sexual relationships. Effeminate men's compromised power position relative to their partners could diminish their ability to negotiate condom use and insist on safer sex practices. This situation, in combination with an expectation that effeminate men would take the receptive role in anal intercourse, could result in their increased vulnerability to HIV.

Limitations of this study included an approach that allowed some themes to emerge naturally and, therefore, all participants did not address all issues. Consequently, a direct comparison of the experiences of the Brazilian, Colombian, and Dominican men on all topics was not possible. The men in this study discussed numerous cultural characteristics and stereotypes that they believed were relevant to their choosing or being chosen as a sexual partner. Although such stereotypes clearly affected the experience of our participants and their partners, we recognize that such stereotypes do not accurately describe entire ethnic or national groups. Moreover, the questions that opened the topic in the in-depth interviews first addressed sexual attraction and then queried preferences for partners based on ethnicity, style, age, and gender roles. Such questions could have influenced respondents to focus their attention on short-term sexual encounters, in which partner characteristics such as appearance would be more salient than qualities such as intelligence or honesty. Because short-term encounters are common among MSM, however, it is important to explore partner selection in this context as well.

Further research is needed to investigate the prevalence of the perceptions and experiences reported here and the extent to which these gender- and culture-related factors influence sexual behavior and sexual risk. In addition, future research could explore mechanisms by which sexual stereotyping might contribute to self- and other-objectification, as well as the consequences of objectification among MSM and their relationships with sexual partners. It is also important to further understand the difficulties that MSM encounter in trying to conform to gendered expectations of themselves and the strategies used to deal with these difficulties especially for men how are perceived as effeminate and stigmatized. Gaining greater insight into the context of Latino gay men's

sexual encounters and relationships within the U.S. is crucial in order to design effective HIV/AIDS prevention programs and meet the mental health needs of this population.

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