Yellow Fever and Sticky Rice: A Mixed Method Investigation of Queer Asian Heterophily in Chicago

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Abstract

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While there has been some large-scale quantitative research on patterns of romantic and sexual partnering within the field of Sociology, this research has not focused extensively on queer populations. On the other hand, quantitative network investigations outside of Sociology have looked at queer romantic and sexual networks, but have not extensively studied queer Asians. This undergraduate thesis explores quantitative differences in the partnering practices of Asian and non-Asian queer men in Chicago using a large, novel dataset of romantic and sexual networks. Quantitative findings indicate, among other findings, that queer Asian men are significantly less likely to have homophilous partnerships, where their partners share their racial identity. While this quantitative analysis is able to show broad trends among queer Asians in Chicago, it is unable to add insight into what these trends look like on the ground and the meanings queer Asians attach to their partnerships. Thus, I also conducted 17 qualitative semi-structured interviews, and qualitative analysis was put into conversation with quantitative findings. I analyzed the interviews from the perspective of a Sexual Fields Theory (Green 2008, 2014). Participants saw themselves embedded within queer Chicago communities that valued traits associated with white masculinity, and were aware of that social structure when they were looking for partners.
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Introduction

Experiences in queer communities have often been different for queer people of color (QPOC) than for white\(^1\) queer people. These experiences can be harmful, and as a result many QPOC have complicated relationships to and within queer communities. A tantalizing headline for a 2016 *Chicago Reader* article read, “Queer man of color rips into the 'white-painted gay community.'” In the article, a queer Asian man voices frustration with what he views as a racist injustice within queer communities and queer partnerships:

Gay men, mostly whites and Asians, reject me because of my race, and no one admits to their sexual racism. I understand that sexual attraction is subconscious for many people. But it is unfair for a gay Asian like myself to be constantly marginalized and rejected. (Savage 2016)

A quick search on Google based on the phrase “are sexual preferences racist?” yields hundreds of thinkpieces and blogs ruminating on this question. Although sexual attraction is conceptualized as “subconscious” in popular discourse, scholars have started to explore what it might mean to look at romance and sex as socially embedded, inseparable from larger social forces in society (Green 2014). For QPOC, this rejection is part and parcel of navigating intersecting axes of marginalization (Crenshaw 1991). Although QPOC may find solidarity with other people who share those queer identities, that queer solidarity does not preclude marginalization through racism within these spaces. Moreover, white queer people retain the privilege of whiteness in queer communities. White norms of beauty and attractiveness pervade those spaces, just as they do elsewhere in society, which may cause QPOC to feel badly about

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\(^1\) Throughout this thesis, I choose to follow the style conventions of Black writers (namely, journalists such as Touré and Lori Tharps and poets such as Audre Lorde) in choosing not to capitalize white as a racial term, yet capitalizing groups of color such as Black and Asian. Building upon their arguments, I believe this stylistic choice brings attention to the ways that difference is ascribed to non-white bodies, and how white privilege becomes normalized in queer communities.
themselves and to feel excluded. This “sexual racism” is larger than just the rejection of queer Asian men by queer white men, and its effects are certainly not exclusive to Asian people of color.

Despite these online discussions, queer communities are only beginning to address “sexual racism,” in addition to preferences for sexual and romantic partners along other axes of difference. In the 21st century of queer online dating, it has become somewhat commonplace to list exactly what you are looking for in potential partners. Common taglines found on online dating profiles of white gay men include “no Asians,” “no Blacks,” “no femmes,” “no fatties”—suggesting that queer white men may not be aware of the impact those statements may have on QPOC and others in the community or, more pessimistically, are indifferent to those harms (Savage 2016). As public discourse in the United States about diversity and inclusivity turns a critical lens to whiteness and white privilege, this question of racialized “preferences” for partners gains new meaning and begins to be interrogated in ways it has not been before.

Additionally, these ideas suggest that racialized preferences have different valences depending on where they come from; however, these discussions still primarily center on white queer people. While the public discourse within queer communities has focused on how queer whites have excluded and rejected QPOC, discussions have focused less on what those racialized “preferences” might look like for QPOC and the implications of those “preferences” on how QPOC relate to queer communities and other QPOC. Moreover, discussions have not necessarily explored where racialized “preferences” amongst QPOC may come from, whether that is from an internalization of white and Eurocentric standards of beauty, finding solidarity with other QPOC, or something else entirely. As the queer Asian interlocutor in the *Chicago Reader* article notes, he also feels rejection from other queer Asians and includes his own racial group in his
condemnation of sexual racism. Relatedly, a Black gay author writes in a piece titled *An Open Letter to Gay, White Men: No, You’re Not Allowed to Have a Racial Preference*: “As gay men of color we get more than enough discrimination from the rest of the world. We don’t need the friendly fire from you” (Trott 2017). In some ways, a queer Asian man talking about rejection from other queer Asians is a sort of “friendly fire” on multiple axes, but it seems unclear whether this “friendly fire” is commonplace amongst queer Asians.

These discussions in queer communities that I was reading about (and even participating in, myself) led me to this topic of research. Thus, my main research questions are: do queer Asian men have racialized preferences for romantic and/or sexual partnerships, and if so, what are those preferences and where do they come from (e.g. do they tend to partner with other Asian people and why?); what are the meanings that queer Asian men attach to these preferences and to their own racial identity in their partnerships; lastly, how do queer Asian men choose to find their partners and how do they understand and manage their desirability as partners in these spaces?

Looking at sexual desire and queer communities sociologically may reveal insights into how larger social forces structure even the most intimate parts of people’s lives. Focusing on queer Asian people in this research not only contributes to knowledge about queer Asians, but hopefully says something about how spaces structure social interactions and how people of color navigate intersecting marginalized identities. Moreover, this focus on the embeddedness of romantic and sexual engagement within social spaces informs even larger inquiries on partnerships in general (queer or otherwise) and how partnerships form along axes of difference. Lastly, I hope to contribute to the existing development and refinement of a theoretical framework of partnering practices to reshape the broader study of dating and sex.
To answer my research questions, I conducted a mixed method study of queer men in Chicago. Using the methodology of sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al. 2006), I first conducted a quantitative secondary analysis of queer romantic/sexual networks to look at statistical patterns of racialized partnering. I then conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with queer Asian men to elicit how these larger statistical patterns played out in their lived-experiences and also to generate rich qualitative explanations for why these quantitative patterns may occur. My quantitative hypothesis was that queer Asians would be much more likely to form partnerships with non-Asians, and I expected to find in my qualitative interviews that their racialized partnering practices were related to larger constructions and stereotypes of queer Asian masculinity.
Literature Review

In the past few years, sociologists have become increasingly interested in studying dating patterns: Who do people prefer to engage with romantically and sexually? What characteristics do they look for in their romantic and sexual partners? And how do people look for their partners? In this review of the literature, I use the terms partner and partnerships to describe a particular sphere of relations between people. I conceptualize partnering to broadly encompass romantic and sexual engagement such as dating, romantic relationships, and sex.

Dating and Networks

This area of sociological study—what I term the dating literature—started to emerge in the mid to late 2000s. The dating literature is largely quantitative in nature, using user data mined from online dating websites and applications to analyze patterns in social engagement between users (Bruch et al. 2016; Hitsch et al. 2010). One key study in this literature is that of Feliciano, Robnett, and Komaie (Feliciano et al. 2009). These scholars looked at patterns of stated racial preferences on white, heterosexual user profiles of a popular dating website in the United States, and they found that racialized “preferences” for partners differed along lines of gender and race. Their most striking result is in the case of what they call “Asian exclusion”: white men were significantly more inclusive of Asian women in their preferences for partners, whereas white women were almost 12 times more likely to exclude Asian men as partners. The authors explained these differences by pointing out the different ways in which gender is racialized for men and women, and that negative stereotypes of Asian men as lacking masculinity may explain why they are excluded by straight white women.

This pattern of gendered and racialized differences within Asian partnering is also explored in other studies in the dating literature. Another study of heterosexual user data from a
popular United States dating website found that overall amongst male users, Asian men received
the fewest unsolicited messages from women (Lin and Lundquist 2013). In contrast, overall
amongst female users, Asian women received the most messages. Interestingly, although there
was a gendered difference between heterosexual Asian users in the total number of messages
they received, Asian users were still most likely to send initial messages to other Asians. This
sociological characteristic is called homophily, or the tendency for people within a social
network to be similar to each other in some characteristic (McPherson et al. 2001). A popular
adage to describe this characteristic is “birds of a feather flock together.” So, in terms of racial
homophily, heterosexual Asian men and women were still most likely to message each other
than to message users who do not share their racial identities, despite the fact that Asian women
seemed to be contacted much more frequently than Asian men.

However, the dating literature as it stands does not substantially look at the
romantic/sexual experiences of people of color, and is almost exclusively focused on
heterosexual populations. Queer partnerships have therefore remained largely unexplored in
these studies. Although the use of queer as a sexual identity is increasingly being adopted by
non-heterosexual people (Morandini et al. 2017), I use queer in its sociological signification (à la
queer theory) to describe a range of identities, practices, and expressions outside of those norms
posited by heterosexuality (Jagose 1996).

That being said, there is one study in the dating literature which looks at queer
partnerships, although the study has large theoretical and methodological limitations. Using
online dating website data, similar to the previously mentioned study, the authors compare
heterosexual and queer patterns of social engagement (Lundquist and Lin 2015). However, this
study has somewhat problematic assumptions in its comparisons and research design. For
example, the analytic sample comes from a single dating website where heterosexual users outnumber queer users by more than 10 to 1. This substantial unevenness in sample size has implications for their statistical conclusions. Relatedly, previous research has shown that heterosexual and queer populations seldom use the same dating websites and virtual spaces in the same way (Gudelunas 2012), and that the virtual spaces largely used by queer people are not the same as those used by heterosexuals. Therefore, it may not make sense to compare heterosexual and queer users from a single website.

Thus, knowledge remains incomplete on where queer people fit into the patterns found in dating literature, namely regarding racialized preferences and partnering practices. Relatedly, the dating literature has not yet adequately investigated the partnering patterns for people of color, and by extension, queer people of color remain understudied in this literature as well. Moreover, studies in the dating literature, due to their primarily quantitative methods of data mining online websites, are only able to capture a narrow definition of partnering practices. These studies can investigate certain patterns of communication and stated preferences, but are unable to capture nuances in these communication patterns, nor practices that occur outside of the online space. For example, these studies may be able to see patterns on what groups of people tend to message others and what groups tend to respond, but more qualitative analyses of the content or tone of those messages and how those aspects may affect whether someone replies are largely absent. Moreover, these studies are also unable to see whether people who engage in the online spaces actually meet in person for a date or to have sex. The existing dating literature cannot answer my research questions on the partnering preferences and practices of queer Asian men.

However, the field of network research has gained traction as both a methodology and content of study in this area (McLean 2017). In many social scientific disciplines, the collection
and analysis of network data has allowed for novel insights into social life. At their most basic construction, networks are abstracted representations of relations (often called structural relations) between people, places, and other units of the social world (Knoke and Yang 2008; McLean 2017). These representations are made of nodes, which are the units themselves, and ties, which are the structural relations between nodes. Ties can represent many different types of social relations within social science research such as familial relations, friendship, and romantic/sexual partnership.

While the sociological dating literature has not yet extensively explored queer populations, quantitative network studies of queer people have been conducted since the early 2000s and have been mostly concentrated in the discipline of public health (Mustanski et al. 2015). Within the public health network literature, populations are typically defined in terms of behavior. The analytic category which most often includes (although is not exclusive to) queer men is men who have sex with men (MSM). Public health network investigations of MSM have tended to focus on HIV transmission “risk” behaviors, such as how potential sex behaviors might transmit HIV to others within a connected network, and substance use behaviors, such as how having substance using members in a network might affect sexual behaviors (Birkett et al. 2015; Janulis et al. 2015; Mustanski et al. 2015; Phillips et al. 2016). Investigations have looked at homophily (and its opposite, heterophily) as it pertains to structuring sexual networks. Network studies of MSM have shown that substance use homophily (Holloway 2015), such as having others in one’s sexual network with similar substance use behaviors, and HIV status homophily (Amirkhanian 2014), such as having sex with others who share an HIV status, take part in shaping the networks of MSM. Although networks have been useful in painting a new picture of HIV spread in MSM, and in giving new insight into how to reduce health disparities, network
analysis for queer populations has not been substantially deployed to study the social and romantic lives of queer men apart from HIV risk.

Research of social networks has shown that racial homophily, or the tendency for people in a network to share a racial identity, plays a large role in shaping social networks in the United States (McPherson et al. 2001); research specific to MSM also supports this claim. Investigations of racial homophily within sex networks of MSM show that levels of racial homophily are generally high (Mustanski et al. 2015; Phillips et al. 2016), meaning that MSM tend to have sex partners who share their racial identity.

However, investigations on racial homophily have tended not to include all racial groups of MSM. While some studies have compared differences in levels of homophily between different racial groups of MSM (Mimiaga et al. 2009; Tieu et al. 2010), network literature on Asian MSM is sparse, and investigations have found inconsistent results as to whether Asian MSM tend to have sex partners who are also Asian (Raymond and McFarland 2009). Thus, the network literature cannot fully answer my research questions on the partnering practices of queer Asian men. This gap in the literature is likely related to constructions of public health risk groups. The vast majority (79.1%) of projects on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the past 20 years primarily focused on HIV (Coulter et al. 2014); as Asian MSM comprise a relatively small proportion of HIV diagnoses in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017), they tend not to be well represented in funded research. Thus, the lack of published literature on the sex networks of Asian MSM is probably due to constructions of HIV risk within public health discourses which center around the lower prevalence of HIV within Asian MSM populations, relative to other groups of MSM.
Additionally, both the public health literature and the sociological dating literature share a common limitation in that investigations have been overwhelmingly quantitative in nature. Although large-scale quantitative studies, such as those of online dating application profiles (Hitsch et al. 2010) and of young MSM (YMSM) networks (Mustanski et al. 2015; Phillips et al. 2016), can provide empirical support of behavioral patterns as they appear in the aggregate, quantitative studies are generally limited in their ability to provide explanations for these patterns. Thus, there is also a gap in both the dating and public health network literatures on the social contexts and settings (Edwards 2010) in which homophily arises in the sexual networks of queer men, as well as the subjective and cultural meanings (Fuhse and Mützel 2011; Grov et al. 2015) of homophily for queer men. Studies in these literatures are limited in their ability to explain the where, when, and how of homophily within sexual networks (McLean 2017), and why these patterns of homophily (or potentially the lack thereof) appear. Additionally, because of these quantitative methods, it has been necessary for investigations to narrowly operationalize partnerships and focus only on certain aspects of that sphere of practices (e.g., looking only at sex partners, or looking only at communication patterns), as opposed to addressing multiple practices that might constitute partnership.

To summarize, while both the sociological dating literature and the public health network literature have begun to provide insight into what dating and romantic preferences might look like, both literatures remain sparse in certain ways: the dating literature has not extensively studied queer people, whereas the network literature has not extensively studied queer Asian people. Additionally, these literatures are both highly quantitative in their approaches, and thus do not offer in-depth, rich explanations for the patterns that are observed in their data. Thus, these literatures are unable to answer my research questions on the dating preferences of queer
Asian men, where those preferences might come from and the meanings queer Asian men attach to those preferences, and how queer Asian men find partners.

Theory

I hope to fill the gaps in these literatures by studying in depth the partnering practices of queer Asian men, focusing on how they find and choose their partners. I draw on the insights of qualitative investigations on queer Asian men, their relation to queer spaces, and how their racialized identity affects their experiences in those spaces. Additionally, I draw upon Sexual Fields theory, which conceptualizes partnering practices as embedded within Bourdieusian fields (Green 2008).

Queer Asian Masculinity

The qualitative literature on queer Asian men has explored the many ways in which queer Asian bodies are constructed. In queer spaces, queer Asian men are often seen as feminine and/or emasculated (Poon and Ho 2008), and this is related to broader constructions of Asian-American masculinities, which depict Asian men as less masculine or hypomasculine to white male ideal (Chou 2012). These constructions of Asian-American men derive from historical anxieties of xenophobia in the United States. As the influx of Asian male immigrants who arrived in the States before World War II took on domestic work such as laundering and housekeeping, white Americans othered these men for taking on “women’s work” and created stereotypes of the feminized Asian-American man (Espiritu 2008). This constructed lack of masculinity has also been shown to affect how queer Asian men think of their bodies, such as their penis size (Grov et al. 2015). Moreover, queer Asian men are constructed as desexualized or asexual (Fung 1996), meaning that they lack sexual desire or sexual drive. This is further related to queer Asian men being seen as hypomasculine. Thus, both this emasculation and desexualization seem to paint
queer Asian men as less desirable sexual partners within queer Asian spaces. This
dispreference/aversion for Asian partners within queer spaces is also seen within the profiles of
queer dating mobile applications; a popular tag line on these profiles is “no fats, no femmes, no Asians” (Han 2008).

However, in a seemingly contradictory fashion, queer Asian men are also fetishized by
queer men of other racial groups (Han 2006). In a form of sexual exoticization and orientalism,
queer Asian men are viewed as enticing and attractive simply because of their perceived
foreignness and otherness. Although seemingly at odds with constructions of queer Asian bodies
as desexualized and unattractive, this orientalism and exoticization is rooted in the same
discourses that construct queer Asian men as feminine and emasculated. Binary constructions of
East versus West describe the West as masculine and the East as feminine (Chou 2012). As a
slippage occurs between constructions of Asian women and queer Asian men (related to the
ways that queer men in general are seen to embody femininity), at times queer Asian men are
seen to embody stereotypes of (straight) Asian women. Thus, the particular ways in which queer
Asian men are racialized, gendered, and sexualized paint them simultaneously as undesirable
masculine subjects or as hypersexual, fetishized feminine subjects (Han 2006).

In qualitative investigations of queer Asian partnerships (mostly in disciplines outside of
Sociology), it seems that queer Asian men do not tend to partner with other Asians, suggesting
that their partner networks would have low levels of homophily (Han 2006; Han et al. 2014).
This construction of queer Asian bodies as feminine is particularly significant when considering
partnerships between queer Asian men and men of other racial groups. In fact, partnerships
between queer Asian men and queer white men are so visible within queer spaces that
colloquialisms exist for these partnerships: queer white men who tend to partner with Asian men
are referred to as “rice queens,” and Asian men who tend to partner with white men are referred to as “potato queens” (Ro et al. 2013). Additionally, this racialized, heterophilous partnership also has a gendered component because queer white men retain access to normative masculinity, whereas queer Asian men are constructed as feminine subjects (Han 2006). These particular racialized, sexualized, and gendered relations between white men and Asian men seem to be unique amongst other cross-racial partnerships between queer men. This connects to the network literature of queer men as well—it may be that queer Asian men may overwhelmingly partner with white men in specific social contexts and settings, which would explain why the trend of high racial homophily which is found in other racial groups of queer men is not found in the networks of queer Asian men/Asian men who have sex with men.

**Sexual Fields**

Partnerships and interactions between actors are embedded within social contexts and spaces. One particularly useful qualitative framework for conceptualizing the embeddedness of these interactions is the Sexual Fields framework developed by Adam Isaiah Green (Green 2014; Green 2008), which draws upon the work of Bourdieu and his theory of fields (Bourdieu 1977). Green defines a Bourdieusian field as a socially structured arena with embedded agents, institutionalized practices, and some form of overarching and regulating logic. Thus, a sexual field can be specific to a certain site (a certain bar or a certain club) but it can also describe a typology or characterization of sites. Furthermore, the three main components of sexual fields are: structures of desire, erotic capital, and habitus. Structures of desire are broadly defined as hegemonic systems of judgment. In a sexual field, structures of desire are not simply the sum of individual valuations of desire (e.g. three people in the space find that person attractive) but rather, conceptualize the collective effects of the aggregation of individual desires (e.g. many
people think this person is attractive, which in and of itself makes them more attractive) (Green 2014). Erotic capital then, is a resource that people in a sexual field have access to (i.e. the more erotic capital one has, the more attractive they are within that structure of desire), and some have more access to erotic capital than others. Erotic capital is distributed unevenly in a field, and this distribution is based on properties such as actors’ fronts (e.g. facial features, clothing and style, bodily size) and comportments (e.g. how do you move around in a space, how are you behaving) (Green 2008). As actors become socialized within various sexual fields, they may employ practices that give them access to more (or less) erotic capital. This latter point about becoming socialized within a sexual field is defined by habitus, which are the ways in which people perceive and react to fields. More specifically, habitus refers to the ways that social structures (such as structures of desire, but also what Bourdieu calls “objective statistical relations” such as income inequality) become crystallized in individual social practices as dispositions (Bourdieu 1977). Habitus dictates what practices are deemed reasonable and unreasonable for actors based on field structures, and thus these practices also tend to reproduce those very structures (hence, Bourdieu’s well-known description of habitus as a structured structuring structure).

Thus, Sexual Fields provides a strong theoretical framework to interpret the partnering practices of queer Asian men and queer Asian masculinity. Queer Asian men are positioned in a particular way in relation to structures of desire. In queer and mostly white-dominated spaces, particular racialized and gendered constructions of queer Asian men may confer varying amounts of erotic capital to those subjects. Queer Asian men may thus employ certain practices (e.g. behaving in a certain way, emphasizing/de-emphasizing aspects of themselves) in order to invoke certain racialized and gendered constructions, manipulating their own positions within structures of desire and consequently their erotic capital.
Quantitative Hypothesis and Qualitative Expectations

My quantitative hypothesis, based on insights from the literature on queer Asian masculinity, is that queer Asian men will be particularly heterophilous in their partnerships and their romantic/sexual preferences, meaning that they will choose to partner primarily with non-Asian men. Thus, I expect to see statistical differences between the romantic and sexual networks of queer Asians and non-Asians. Furthermore, this tendency towards heterophily may or may not align with the subjective meanings that queer Asian men attach to their partnerships.

In my qualitative findings, I also expect queer Asian men to primarily partner with non-Asian people, particularly white men. When thinking about their past and current partners, a majority of those sexual and romantic partners will be white or non-Asian. However, these partnership patterns may or may not align with the qualities queer Asian men say they are attracted to or looking for in their partners. I may hear see some queer Asian men explicitly state that they are interested in men of a particular non-Asian racial identity (e.g., stating they are only interested in white men), or conversely that they are specifically uninterested in partnering with other Asian men. In those cases, those men are explicit about their preferences and deliberately look for partners who match those racialized preferences; therefore, the meanings they attach to their partnering practices are aligned with their heterophilous practices. However, I may also see that some queer Asian men are not as explicit about or as conscious of their tendency towards heterophily. They may not explicitely state a racialized preference for partners or instead recount a post-racial narrative that the racial identity of their partners has no significant bearing on their partnering practices. Despite this, I still expect to see that those men have heterophilous partnering practices. In that case, the meanings they attach would not be aligned with their practices.
My further qualitative expectations, drawn from the application of the Sexual Fields framework, are that queer Asian men will see themselves as undesirable within the queer spaces they occupy to find partners, and non-Asians (and white men in particular) will be seen as generally more desirable. In the language of the Sexual Fields framework, participants would be describing differences in erotic capital between themselves and their white partners. These disparities in erotic capital may explain the heterophilous preferences found in queer Asian men. Furthermore, queer Asian men will employ a range of practices to leverage their erotic capital in order to attain higher status partners.

Within a majority of queer sexual fields, white queer men, especially masculine white queer men, possess significant erotic capital due to their position within normative masculinity. In contrast, I expected queer Asian men to generally be without access to that normative (white) masculinity and would not possess significant erotic capital. As queer Asian men become socialized within queer sexual fields, their preferences may be influenced by these constructed hierarchies of erotic capital and attractiveness, a process that Green refers to as field effects (Green 2014); in other words, Asian men may not be interested in partnering with other Asian men because people in queer spaces do not find Asians attractive. Moreover, there are certain practices that I anticipate to find queer Asian men employing in order to position themselves within structures of desire to gain erotic capital. For example, some queer Asian men may choose to emphasize a hypersexualized and exoticized/fetishized queer masculinity, in order to attract high status partners. Others, in contrast, may choose to distance themselves from an othered Asian identity and to emphasize other aspects such as how they can perform a normative masculinity (e.g. performing whiteness) or invoke a post-racial ideal of queer communities.
Additionally, this management of erotic capital may be occurring in both physical and virtual spaces simultaneously, as virtual spaces may be conceptualized as sexual fields of their own. If certain physical spaces exist where structures of desire position queer Asian men as desirable (e.g. a bar where queer Asian men tend to frequent), queer Asian men may go there to meet partners. Furthermore, certain online presentation practices (e.g. which pictures to post, what to include/exclude in a dating profile description) may also be strategic in nature. Some queer Asian men may, for example, choose to have their race/ethnicity displayed on their online profiles. Related to my qualitative expectations about the alignment of subjective meanings, I also expect to find queer Asians who invoke a post-racial narrative and state that they do not think about their racial identity when assessing their desirability in queer spaces. However, queer Asians should still manage how they present their racial identity, even if they did not state that they do so. Relating these expectations to my quantitative hypothesis, it may be that the structures of desire within queer spaces facilitate heterophilous partnerships (over homophilous partnerships) for queer Asian men because of how erotic capital is distributed with respect to racialized masculinities.
Methodology, Research Design, and Data

To explore answers to my research questions, I need to test the validity of my hypotheses and intuitions. With unlimited time and financial resources, the ideal research design would be one that collects complete network data of every queer man in Chicago (i.e., every queer man in Chicago would report complete and accurate information on their social, drug, and sexual networks, and would recruit their queer network members into the study), followed by qualitative interviews of all queer Asian men in Chicago, and lastly, ethnographies of the spaces where queer Asian men in Chicago are found to frequent. I would need information on who queer Asian men partner with (and accurate demographic data on those partners), as well as detailed information of exactly how queer Asian men met all of those partners, and queer men’s experiences within the spaces they frequented to find those partners.

However, this is not a feasible approach, as many people are not interested in a multiple hour interview, and I do not have the time nor ability to recruit and interview every queer person in Chicago within a school year. Thus, this project occurred in two stages by a mixed methodology called sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al. 2006). In this approach, quantitative network data are analyzed in the first stage, and in the second stage, qualitative interview data explore participant responses and explanations to inform and deepen statistical interpretations. For my project, the quantitative analysis empirically tested the validity of my hypothesis regarding heterophily in the partners of queer Asian men. However, as stated in my review of quantitative literatures, the quantitative analysis was largely limited in providing explanations for heterophilous partnerships, nor can it show how larger patterns of homophily or heterophily relate to experiences on the ground. My qualitative analysis was able to elicit how queer Asian men conceptualized their erotic capital, contributing to the Sexual Fields framework.
Moreover, the qualitative analysis was able to provide rich, in-depth explanations for the quantitative patterns found in partner networks. Additionally, the dialogue between the quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to integrate my findings and generate answers to my research questions.

**Quantitative Investigation**

Quantitative data for this project have been collected within the RADAR study, a large, longitudinal cohort study of YMSM in Chicago conducted by researchers within the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority Health and Wellbeing, or ISGMH (ISGMH). This multi-level study has collected individual-, dyadic-, network-, geospatial-, and biological-level data on over 1,000 participants, with follow-up data collected every six months thereafter. Social, sexual, and drug use network data were collected using an innovative touchscreen software named netCanvas-R (Hogan et al. 2016). Network data collection procedures were based on the participant-aided sociogram approach, in which individuals (egos) name their network members (alters), provide demographic information on these alters, and identify any connections between alters—these smaller networks of participants connected to their partners are called egocentric networks (Hogan et al. 2007).

**Ego-Level Attributes**

Participant or ego-level data were primarily collected through a self-administered REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) survey. In the survey, participants are asked various social and behavioral questions on a range of topics such as demographics, sexual behaviors, and substance use. The variables used from this survey were age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, education level, employment status, sexual orientation, and self-reported HIV status. For the survey question on race and ethnicity, participants were asked two separate
questions: first, participants were asked whether they identified as Hispanic/Latino; second, participants were able to choose as many options as applied from the following list of racial identities: “American Indian or Alaska Native;” “Asian;” “Black or African American;” “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander;” “White;” and “Other.” To note, participants who identified as Hispanic/Latino could thus also identify as any racial category. Additionally, participants who selected the “Other” category were able to specify their racial identity as a write-in answer. In the quantitative analysis, one dichotomous racial variable of Asian vs. non-Asian was coded from these responses: if a participant selected Asian as one of their choices in the question about racial identities, they were coded as Asian. If a participant did not select Asian in that question, they were coded as non-Asian. Thus, participants who were coded as Asian in the analytic sample include both non-Hispanic/Latino and Hispanic/Latino Asians, as well as monoracial and multi-racial Asians. This approach is informed by the critical literature on Asian identity formation, as this coding recognizes Asian identity as multifaceted and able to overlap with any ethnic identity as well as other racial identities (Anderson and Lee 2005).

**Alter-Level Attributes**

Romantic/sexual partner- or alter-level data were collected through the network interview using netCanvas-R. Participants were asked to name their social, sexual, and drug use partners to populate their networks. They were also asked to provide information on the alters in their networks, such as the type of relationship (e.g., friend, romantic partner), gender, age, etc. Additionally, in an approach to creating participant-aided sociograms, participants were asked to report on sex and substance use links between alters (i.e., alter-alter ties) (Hogan et al. 2007). Contrasting with ego-level data, alter-level data are reported from the ego/participant perspective, and thus may not match how alters describe themselves (that being said, studies of
alter-level variables have shown high levels of corroboration (Phillips et al. 2017), meaning that egos can be fairly accurate in their reporting. The alter-level variables used were age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, education level, employment status, sexual orientation, perceived HIV status, and location met. The location where alters were met included broad categorizations (e.g., “Online/Mobile Application,” “Bar/Club,” “Work”) as well as the specific location (e.g., “Grindr,” “Hydrate”). Participants were asked about their alters’ racial and ethnic identities similar to the two-step method employed in the ego-level survey: first, participants were asked whether an alter was Hispanic/Latino, then were asked choose the alter’s race from the same list of racial categories listed above. However, in contrast to the way the ego racial identity was obtained, participants had to choose a single racial category (mixed or multi-racial was not an option). Thus, a fewer number of alters may have been identified as mixed or multi-racial, although some participants did write those categories in for Other.

Using the combination of ego and alter race/ethnicity responses, a dichotomous variable for racial/ethnic homophily was created. At first, a tie between and ego and alter was coded as homophilous if the ego and the alter shared a racial identity. However, as there were other intricacies within homophily that I wanted to explore, any common ethnic ties (e.g. both ego and alter were Hispanic/Latinx) was also coded as homophilous. Using concrete examples, a tie between a mixed Asian and Black ego and a monoracial Asian alter was coded as racially/ethnically homophilous. A tie between that same ego and a monoracial Black alter was also coded as racially/ethnically homophilous. Lastly, a tie between a Hispanic/Latinx Asian ego and another Hispanic/Latinx alter (regardless of racial identity) was also coded as racially/ethnically homophilous.
Quantitative Data Description

Although RADAR is a longitudinal study, I only used data from participants’ most recent visit as of August 14th, 2017. Of 787 participants who had a visit on or before this date, 691 (87.8%) who reported at least one sexual/romantic partnership in their network were included in the analytic sample, for a total of 1,949 sexual/romantic partners.

Since the main dependent variable of the statistical models is racial and/or ethnic homophily, 6 (0.1%) egos who wrote in unclear or vague racial identities (such as “Unique” or “Brown”) as well as those egos’ alters were excluded from the analytic sample, due to an inability to assess homophily. Additionally, since the research questions were about queer Asian men, 36 (5.2%) of egos who identified as women and those egos’ alters were removed from the sample. Thus, the final analytic sample contained 649 (93.9%) egos connected to 1,842 (94.5%) alters.

Ego Demographics

Descriptive statistics of the 649 participants, or egos, are shown in Table 1. In the RADAR sample used for analysis, the mean age was 22.6 years. The majority of the sample identified as cisgender male (96.9%) and as gay (72.9%). There were roughly equal numbers of Black (42.4%) and white (40.2%) egos. Roughly equal numbers identified as Asian (5.1%) and Native/Indigenous (5.4%), the latter of which included Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian categories. Lastly, 12.6% identified as Mixed or Multi-racial. Additionally, 31.7% of the egos identified as their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latinx. Thus, while the proportion of Asians in the ego sample was close to the proportion of Asians in Chicago as a whole (6.1% according to the most recent American Community Survey), Black egos, Hispanic/Latino egos, and Mixed egos were overrepresented (United States Census Bureau 2016).
**Alter Demographics**

Descriptive statistics of the egos’ romantic and sexual partners, called alters, are also included in Table 1. In the sample of 1,842 alters, the mean age was 25.1 years. The vast majority (91.3%) of alters were identified as cisgender males, and a high proportion (74.5%) were identified as gay. Nearly half (47.1%) of alters were identified as white; 27.2% were identified as Black, 2.5% as Asian, and 2.9% as Mixed race. In terms of ethnic identity, 25.1% of alters were identified as Hispanic or Latino. Thus, white alters were greatly overrepresented compared to the proportion of white egos, and non-white alters were underrepresented ($X^2 = 112.3, p < 0.001$). Additionally, non-Hispanic/Latino alters were overrepresented in alters compared to their proportion in egos ($X^2 = 10.5, p = 0.001$).

**Statistical Analysis**

Data cleaning and coding were conducted in R, a statistical computing environment (R Core Team 2014), and Microsoft Excel. Preliminary univariate and bivariate analyses were also conducted in R, the latter using the generalized linear models package for logistic regression (Knoke and Yang 2008).

In this quantitative analysis, I aimed to investigate whether there were differences in the likelihoods of forming racially homophilous ties between Asians and non-Asians, even after controlling for various other contextual factors (such as age homophily and location where partners were met). A logistic regression can be used to estimate the probability of a binary outcome occurring (i.e., homophily vs. heterophily). However, the quantitative analysis of egocentric networks requires specific statistical methods to account for the network structure. Because alter characteristics are collected from ego perspectives, we must assume that probabilities based on alter-level characteristics are statistically dependent on the egos that
named those characteristics, and thus a partitioned variance structure must be used (Merlo et al. 2006). Differences within an ego’s alters constitute within-level variation, and differences between egos are treated as between-level variation. Multilevel modeling (MLM), is typically used to account for this nested variance structure (R Core Team 2014; Venables and Ripley 2013).

Following other studies, the MLM used in this study consists of two equations, or levels, using separate within- and between-unit theoretical models (Lee and Bryk 1989). The within-unit model represents the likelihood of a racially/ethnically homophilous tie for an ego $j$, $P_j$, as a function of a connected alter $i$’s characteristics $X_{ijk}$, and random error $e_{ij}$:

$$Logit(P_j) = \beta_{j0} + \beta_{j1}X_{ij1} + \beta_{j2}X_{ij2} + \cdots + \beta_{jk}X_{ijk} + e_{ij}$$

In this within-unit model, $\beta_{jk}$ regression coefficients are structural relations occurring amongst all the alters connected to ego $j$ that affect how likely ego $j$ is to form a racially homophilous partnership. In other words, this within-level model investigates whether certain alter, or level 1, characteristics (e.g., whether a partner is serious or close in age with the participant) can affect the likelihood that that a partnership is racially/ethnically homophilous (e.g., partners closer in age are more likely to share a racial identity with the participant). Moreover, an important aspect of MLM is that it allows for these within-level structural relations to vary between different egos. Thus, for a specific ego, partners close in age may tend to be racially/ethnically homophilous, whereas for other egos, a reverse effect may be seen.

Therefore, we construct a between-unit model that investigates how these structural relations, $\beta_{jk}$, vary as a function of ego-level, or level 2 variables, $W_{pj}$, and a random error term $U_{jk}$.

$$\beta_{jk} = \gamma_{0k} + \gamma_{1k}W_{1j} + \gamma_{2k}W_{2j} + \cdots + \gamma_{pk}W_{pj} + U_{jk}$$
Similar to the previous model, the $\gamma_{pk}$ coefficients represent the effects of ego-level variables on the structural relations within an ego $j$. The main ego-level variable used in the MLMs in this study is whether an ego is Asian or non-Asian. In other words, this between-unit model allows for the estimation of any differences in the effects of alter-level characteristics on the likelihood of racial homophily between Asian and non-Asian egos. (e.g., the likelihood of similar aged partners to be homophilous is estimated between Asian egos and non-Asian egos, for each individual ego separately).

MLM using random intercepts, random slopes, and accounting for between variation at the ego and within variation at the alter level were conducted using Mplus, a statistical package that allows for these complex and multilevel regressions (Snijders 2011).

*Qualitative Investigation*

In order to supplement my quantitative analysis of homophily and to help explain quantitative results through rich accounts of what quantitative patterns look like on the ground, I conducted one-time, semi-structured interviews with a non-random sample of queer Asian men in the Chicago metropolitan area. I obtained approval from the Northwestern University IRB for the collection of this original data (STU00206367). Because queer men are considered a hidden sample, or one in which the sampling frame is not well studied or well known, methods such as snowball sampling have been used and modified to recruit more queer men into studies (Heckathorn 2002). This sampling methodology, especially for a sample of queer men of color, was helpful to find participants.

Chicago itself is a particularly useful geography for studying queer people. Sociologists have started to investigate the social dynamics of Boystown, a Chicago “gayborhood” on the North Side of the city and one of the largest queer urban spaces in the United States (Orne 2017).
While queer Asian men have been studied in the social contexts of many American cities such as New York (Grov et al. 2015; Tan et al. 2013) and San Francisco and other Californian cities (Han et al. 2014; Raymond and McFarland 2009; Ro et al. 2013), they have not been extensively studied in the geosocial context of Chicago. Previous studies on queer Asians likely focused on those other areas because of their relatively large Asian populations. According to the 2010 census, about half of all Asians in the United States live in just the three states of New York, California, and Hawaii, and all three states have Asian populations which exceed the national average of 4.2% (Barnes 2010). In contrast, most states in the Midwest had Asian populations at or below that national average. Thus, Chicago’s geosocial context may actually be more similar to the context that is faced by the half of US Asians who do not live in California, New York, or Hawaii, and a sample drawn from Chicago may speak to those experiences in a way that other studies have not.

I recruited participants using different mobile applications (such as Grindr) and social media websites (like public Facebook groups). Queer men are increasingly meeting their sex partners online and through mobile applications (Miles 2017; Rosser et al. 2011), so I expected that queer Asian men would be easily reached using these recruitment methods. I contacted potential participants who reach out to me from these advertisements to make sure that they match the eligibility criteria: that they identify as a man; as gay, bisexual, queer, or other non-heterosexual identity; and as Asian and/or Asian-American; that they are English-speaking; and that they are at least 18 years old. At first, participant identification as a man was wholly based on gender identity; however, after being contacted by interested participants who were gender nonconforming or nonbinary but assigned male at birth, I expanded the inclusion criteria to both cisgender or transgender men and nonbinary people assigned male at birth.
I wanted participants to feel as comfortable as possible discussing these topics, especially
given that people of color generally face more stigmatization due to queerness and are less likely
to be out (Grov et al. 2006). As such, I allowed participants to choose either a private or public
interview space. I offered private interview space at the Institute for Sexual and Gender Minority
Health and Wellbeing (ISGMH) office in Streeterville, where I am a research assistant.
Additionally, Northwestern and ISGMH have a partnership with the Center on Halsted, a
community center located in the Boystown area of Lakeview, and I was also able to offer private
interview space at the Center. If neither of those options seemed convenient for the participant, I
also offered to meet them at a public space of their choosing, such as a coffeeshop or café. Nine
interviews took place at the Center on Halsted, which seemed to be the most comfortable choice
for many of my participants. Five respondents chose to meet at ISGMH, which seemed to be
more convenient for my participants who worked in the nearby areas of the Loop, River North,
or in Streeterville. Lastly, three participants asked to meet at coffeeshops in Evanston, and in the
Andersonville and Lakeview/Boystown areas of Chicago. I obtained verbal consent from the
participants. The interview was audio recorded for transcription purposes. Although originally
expected to last around 60 minutes, almost all of the interviews were between 90 and 120
minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were compensated $20 in cash for the
interview.

Additionally, at the conclusion of the interview, I asked participants if they wished to
make any voluntary referrals for others who match the eligibility criteria, thus facilitating the
snowball sampling process (although referrals were not required). About an equal number of
participants were recruited through this snowball sampling process as through online and mobile
Most participants chose not to refer anyone; of the ones that did, they referred at the most successfully recruited participants. Of the participants recruited online and through mobile applications, the majority were recruited through an online flyer posted in a Chicago-based queer Facebook community group, and a small number were recruited through Grindr, a geosocial partnering application for queer men.

The topics covered in the one-time interview included the participants’ romantic and sexual partners, how and where the participant finds their partners, and how the participant interacts with others in spaces in Chicago. The questions in the interview schedule (Appendix) were heavily informed by components of the Sexual Fields framework and were meant to elicit whether queer Asian men in Chicago are homophilous, the subjective meanings participants attach to their racial identity and to homophily/heterophily in their partner networks, and also how their racial identity affects how they interact with other queer people in Chicago. For example, one of my questions asked participants whether their partners tend to share their racial identity, and how participants think about their racial identity when meeting partners. Other questions also asked whether participants meet their partners at physical venues (such as bars or clubs) and whether they meet partners online or through mobile applications, and how those two modes of meeting people might interact. In sum, I was looking for information on who respondents partner with and how they are meeting their sexual and romantic partners.

Additionally, to get insights into my research question about racial identity in various spaces, I asked participants to tell me a narrative of a recent time that they went out to look for partners. I probed participants to give as much detail in this narrative about this experience: how

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2 I also attempted to achieve sample variation of partnering practices during snowballing. For example, I would ask participants, “Do you have anyone to refer that is different from you in who they’re attracted to or who their partners are?” However, as shown in my qualitative findings, many of the respondents had somewhat similar racialized partnering practices, despite this snowballing methodology.
they chose where to go, who they were with, what they were wearing, how they chose to move in the space, etc. This detailed storytelling allowed me to get insights as to how participants view their own positionality within queer spaces in Chicago, and the meanings that participants attached to all the choices that they make when they are looking for sex partners. Additionally, there were questions which asked explicitly about participants’ experiences in Boystown. Thus, these prompts were meant to elicit participants’ understandings of the structures of desire and their sense of erotic capital within the spaces that they frequent. In other words, I was looking for participants to tell me about how they might manage their erotic capital in order to make themselves more desirable to their potential partners. I also asked similar questions about participants’ use of virtual spaces, such as the information that they choose to display on their dating profiles and how they choose to present themselves online.

These interviews were semi-structured. The interview script has approximate wordings of the questions because I did not want to unduly affect the answers of the participants or lead them to think of their experiences in a certain way. Often, while going through the interview script, participants would volunteer different and surprising aspects of their narratives that, at first glance, were unrelated to the questions posed, but which were nonetheless important for understanding their story. For example, some participants who were not from the Midwest made comparisons to their sexual and romantic lives before and after moving to Chicago, and others discussed the type of music that they liked and how certain bars never played it. I left the interview open-ended and flexible enough that if the participant wanted to talk about a specific aspect or theme of their experience, I was able to probe and find out more about why that theme might be salient. I found themes that I was not expecting within the few interviews, and adjusted later interviews to encapsulate some of those early themes. For example, several participants
spoke of their attraction to certain types of porn actors as distinct from their attractions to people they were seeking as partners, although I had not asked specifically about pornography engagement. I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews. These interviews were transcribed and participants (and the people that they discussed during their interviews) were given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Analysis of interview transcripts began using an iterative process of open coding, whereby analytic categories arise from the qualitative data itself and reflect the events and experiences of the participants (Emerson et al. 2011). I used a qualitative coding software called ATLAS.ti that was available on the NUWorkspace (Muhr and Friese 2004). The codes generated in the analysis process were organized and conceptualized with respect to the Sexual Fields framework (e.g. codes about levels and distributions of erotic capital, or codes about field effects).

Qualitative Data Description

A more detailed view of my qualitative sample is shown in Table 2. Of the 17 participants interviewed, 11 were in their 20s, three were in their 30s, two were in their 40s, and one was in his 60s.

All of the participants identified as Asian and/or Asian-American and identified with a variety of different ethnicities from East, Southeast, and South Asia. Because Asia as an analytic unit encompasses a massive geographic area and a great number of racial and ethnic groups (Han 2006; Okamoto and Mora 2014), the qualitative findings in this thesis focus more on the commonalities of Asian-American romantic and sexual experiences rather than on differences by Asian ethnicity or region. Six participants identified with more than one ethnicity, and of those six participants, two participants identified as mixed race (i.e., identifying with both an Asian
and a non-Asian ethnic identity). Thus, when listing the number of participants identified with each ethnicity, the groups are not all mutually exclusive. About half of the participants identified with an East Asian ethnicity: four participants identified a Chinese background, four participants identified a Korean background, two participants identified a Taiwanese background, and one participant identified a Japanese background. More than a third of the sample identified with a Southeast Asian identity: three identified a Filipino background, three identified a Vietnamese background, one identified Thai background, and one identified a Lao background. Lastly, one participant identified an Indian background. Of the two mixed race participants, both identified an East Asian (Chinese) identity, and one identified with a South Asian (Indian) identity.

In terms of immigrant identity, seven did not identify as an immigrant nor discuss family immigration histories as important to their narratives. Four participants either identified as first-generation immigrants, or discussed their parents being the first in their family to immigrate to the United States (there was some discrepancy in this category—some participants would say they were “technically” first-generation, although they themselves did not identify as immigrants). Lastly, six participants identified immigrating to the United States in their lifetime, with some immigrating as children, and others having migrated as recently as two years.

All of the sample identified as gay or queer, and sometimes used both identities interchangeably. Fourteen of the participants were cisgender men, meaning they identified with the sex that they were assigned at birth. Thus, three of the participants were trans and/or gender-nonconforming. One of those participants was assigned female at birth and identified as a transgender man. Two of those participants were assigned male at birth, but identified with a gender-nonconforming identity. Thus, while the sample were not all people who identified as men, all respondents were aware that my research focused on topics of queer Asian masculinity.
and that the majority of respondents were queer cisgender men. Additionally, in all stages of recruitment I used language referring to “queer Asian men.”

All of the sample lived in the city of Chicago. All but three of the sample lived on the North Side of the city. Of those three, one participant lived in the Northwest Side, one participant lived in the Southwest Side, and one participant lived in the South Side.

Lastly, the sample was generally highly educated. This may be related to the fact that it was primarily composed of East and Southeast Asian-Americans, groups which have generally high levels of educational attainment in the United States (Poon et al. 2016). All of the participants had at least some experience with college-level education. Five of the participants had completed graduate school. Nine of the participants had completed college, and three of the participants had completed some college. Thus, the sample I was able to generate seems reasonably suitable to answer my research questions. There was observable variation on axes such as age, ethnicity and regional Asian background, and immigrant status.

Data Integration

Lastly, I triangulated my quantitative and qualitative findings to answer my research questions about queer Asians, sex networks, and spaces. The qualitative themes provided rich explanations to the statistical patterns (e.g., whether Asians are more homophilous/heterophilous than non-Asians) found in the quantitative analysis, as well as contextual information on cases where those statistical patterns may not apply. Additionally, the qualitative data provided answers to the question of homophily as well, and so those patterns were compared between quantitative and qualitative. I also discuss theoretical implications and future directions for the use of Sexual Fields in mixed method research.
**Quantitative Findings**

I conducted a secondary quantitative analysis of the sexual network data from the RADAR study. These results were able to provide a statistically rigorous description of the levels of racial/ethnic homophily amongst the queer Asians in the sample and allow numerical comparisons between racial/ethnic homophily between Asian people and non-Asian people in Chicago.

**Homophily Model**

First, a chi-squared test was shown to be significant comparing levels of racial/ethnic homophily between Asian egos and non-Asian egos in the sample ($\chi^2 = 23.3, p < 0.001$). This suggested that there were potentially significant differences between the romantic/sexual partner networks between Asians and non-Asians with regards to homophily. As discussed in the methods section, the homophily variable was coded to encompass both racial and ethnic similarity. Thus, homophily among Asian egos was not confined to capture only ties between two Asian-identifying people, but rather any kind of racial/ethnic homophily among egos who identified as Asian. To put this more concretely with an example, both white and Asian alters of a mixed white and Asian ego would be counted as racially/ethnically homophilous ties, and these ties would be counted among Asian egos since the ego is mixed Asian.

Next, an unconditional, random intercepts, multilevel logistical model (in other words, a null model) was run on the clustered network data, using homophily as a dichotomous outcome. Essentially, this model calculated a type of clustered general level of homophily amongst the sample. This null model was shown to have significant residual level 2, between-level variation ($\sigma^2 = 3.876, p < 0.001$), meaning that there was enough variation between the egos to warrant using a multilevel model (as opposed to a more typical logistic regression). Moreover, the
residual variance allowed for the inclusion of level 1, or within-level, covariates such as whether a partner was a serious partner.

Thus, in the final model, the level 1 covariates included were whether a partner was considered a serious partner, whether a partner was met online or in-person, and a measure of age homophily (the absolute difference between the ego and alter ages). The level 2 independent variable was a dichotomous racial variable of whether an ego was Asian or non-Asian. The results of this quantitative model are shown in Table 3. The only level 1 covariate that was significantly associated with homophily was whether an alter was a serious partner or not, with serious partners being significantly more likely to be racially homophilous (odds ratio [OR] =1.57, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [1.04, 2.35]). Whether an alter was met online or in person nor whether an alter was close in age were not significantly associated with racial/ethnic homophily. In terms of level 2, or between-level, effects, egos who identified with an Asian racial identity were significantly less likely to form racially/ethnically homophilous partnerships compared to non-Asians (OR = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.31], even after controlling for those level 1 covariates such as whether a partner was a serious partner.³

Discussion and Limitations

Overall, I found that there were high levels of racial/ethnic homophily in the romantic and sexual networks of the RADAR participants. This aligns with the previous quantitative literature on homophily that looked at both queer and heterosexual populations (Bruch et al. 2016; Lin and Lundquist 2013; Mustanski et al. 2015). However, these studies had not substantially compared queer Asian people to queer people of other racial/ethnic identities. In

³ Additionally, I conducted a supplementary analysis including a level 2 measure of socioeconomic status (operationalized as whether an ego had a college degree or not), which is available upon request. Although having a college degree was significantly associated with heterophilia, the estimates and significance of all other variables were left virtually unchanged after the addition of this level 2 control.
contrast to past studies which had either excluded Asian populations or focused on heterosexual samples, these results were able to describe patterns of homophily in the partnerships of queer Asians using a rigorous statistical method.

Namely, I was able to show using a multilevel model that queer Asian people in Chicago were significantly less likely to form racially homophilous partnerships. This finding supported the intuitions from the qualitative literature on Asian partnerships in that those partnerships tended to be heterophilous. Furthermore, this finding is able to add nuance to past studies which have focused on homophily in other types of networks (not just romantic or sexual) as well. A literature review of network literature conducted by McPherson et al. suggested that race and ethnicity were generally the main organizing principle in the United States and other racially diverse countries (2001). While the authors briefly mentioned that this homophily may not be seen in the networks of smaller racial/ethnic groups, they did not fully explore this variation in racial/ethnic homophily. Thus, I was able to show that for a small racial group in Chicago (queer Asians), homophily was actually quite uncommon in romantic/sexual networks, and thus trends of homophily can vary quite a bit between different axes of identity. While McPherson et al. also briefly discuss the prevalence of heterophilous romantic partnerships between heterosexual white and Black people, they did not talk about Asian-Americans at all.

Moreover, this trend of heterophily in Asian networks persisted even after controlling for various contextual factors. Interestingly, whether a partner was met online or in person and whether a partner was close in age did not significantly affect homophily. Through the qualitative literature on Sexual Fields theory, I had expected that the type of space in which a partnership was facilitated would have had an effect on formation of homophilous ties (Green 2014). However, it may be that sexual fields are tied to more specific spaces than the broad
categorizations of online vs. in-person (e.g., specific bars or apps). However, I was unable to conduct a more precise analysis of these spaces due to both a lack of statistical power and underrepresentation of Asians in the sample.

These results are only part of the larger picture. While I was able to show through quantitative analysis that there were statistical differences in homophily between Asians and non-Asians, these data cannot fully explore how those homophilous (or heterophilous) partnerships occur, and the subjective meanings that queer Asians attach to their sexual and romantic partnerships. Moreover, because a more specific spatial analysis was not possible due to low cell counts, a nuanced analysis of how social spaces affect homophily could not be done. Thus, in the qualitative section, I explore these ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions of racial/ethnic heterophily in queer Asian partnerships.
Qualitative Findings

To restate, my mixed methods design follows a sequential explanatory design, where qualitative analysis is used to inform explanations of the quantitative results (Ivankova et al. 2006). The results of these 17 interviews were able to provide rich details on the partnering patterns observed in the quantitative data. Additionally, they help deepen understandings of the meanings that queer Asians attach to homophily and heterophily within their sexual and romantic partnerships.

Mirroring the quantitative results, respondents’ partnerships were generally heterophilous, and especially prevalent were partnerships between the queer Asian respondents and white men. However, in these qualitative data, I was able to explore a large tension between the participants’ sense of their own erotic capital, and the erotic capital that was conferred upon them by various sexual fields. As mentioned in the theory section, the metaphor of erotic capital conveys a sense of one’s ability to attain sexual and romantic partners in a given sexual field (Green 2008). Because the respondents’ white partners were generally considered to have higher levels of erotic capital, the fact that partnerships occurred between white and Asian men suggested that some queer Asians also possessed forms of erotic capital. However, by and large the respondents’ felt that they had very little or no erotic capital. In other words, despite the fact that they were able to attain these higher status white partners, participants still felt very undesirable within queer spaces in Chicago. I introduce a term called degraded erotic capital to describe the type of racialized erotic capital conferred onto the queer Asian respondents, as this contradiction has not been fully addressed by the Sexual Fields framework outlined by Green. Moreover, this sense of degraded erotic capital led to various management strategies and
practices by the participants; however, degraded erotic capital and the resulting strategies and practices led to high emotional tolls for the queer Asian respondents.

*White Heterophily: Opposites Attract*

Following the pattern found in the quantitative data, the participants in the qualitative sample overwhelmingly tended to have romantic and sexual partners that were non-Asian. In particular, many participants tended to have partners that were specifically white, and many were cognizant of this trend.

For some participants, their partners were overwhelmingly white. David⁴, 26, Vietnamese, said, “probably 90% of my partners were white.” For others, they may have had mostly white partners, but also partnered with non-Asian people of color. Daniel, 24, Korean, said: “They’ve typically been – well, they’ve been pretty mixed. It’s definitely like 60% white, 20% Latino, and then the other 20 is kind of like a mixed bag.” Some participants were currently in long-term relationships with white partners. Tom, 28, Vietnamese and Lao, was married to a man he met in college:

He's 33 years old, about the same height as me, similar build...He's white, he has a beard, medium length, well, short, medium-length hair. Brown hair, glasses...We met at school. I was 19 and it was like my second year of college and it was his second try.

Tom and his husband had an open marriage and identified as polyamorous, and so both of them had partners outside of their relationship. Tom made a distinction between his husband and his boyfriend, a different long-term partner:

[My boyfriend], he's 25 now. He just turned 25. He is a little bit taller than me. Also white, glasses, has a beard. Pretty short, curly brown hair on top. It's kind of starting to recede a little bit. Kind of a husky build. He has like a tiny belly, but it's I guess in a larger, somewhat muscular frame.

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⁴ I replace first names in this thesis with pseudonyms to protect respondents’ identities.
Although both of Tom’s romantic partners were white, the racial identities of his shorter-term sexual engagements (“hookups”) tended to be more varied. John, 33, Taiwanese, had a similar experience in an open (“monogam-ish”) relationship with a white man: “My description of him, normally, is Harry Potter's dad. He's tall, he's about 6'2”, white, kind of runner's build, tall and lean. Nerdy, for sure.” Although when describing his partners, John said: “they fully run the gamut, actually, in terms of physical appearance, race, ethnicity ... body type. It's kind of all over.” Thus, there was an overall pattern in the current and past partners of participants, in that those partners tended to be primarily white and for some, possess a particular image or type of white appearance. For those who had longer-term romantic partners and were in open relationships, their separate partners tended to have a wider range of racial identities and other types of characteristics.

Some participants explained their pattern of heterophily with white men in terms of racialized attraction. For example, Joseph, 30, Filipino, described being very attracted to a certain type of white man: “It was like the blonde white guy with the blue, pretty eyes… masculine, muscular, whatever.” However, while this pattern of having white partners was quite pronounced in the sample, many participants did not explain the pattern in terms of racial identity or racialized attraction. Participants often discussed their attractions or “types” in terms of certain physical traits rather than racial identities. David, who said he mostly partnered with white men, discussed his type as “having facial hair.” Mark, 27, Korean and Japanese, described his type as being “very tall, like six foot.” Similarly, Derek, 26, Chinese, talked about being attracted to two different kinds of body types:

I like the furthest ends of the spectrum. Sometimes I kind of like the small frame guys, like smaller frame, shorter. I find that kind of attractive, but then at the same time
extremely tall guys, really broad shoulders, really muscular, broad shoulders, hairy…That choice of middle doesn't capture me as much I would say.

Derek was somewhat different from other participants in that he had two distinct types; many tended to describe their attraction with regards to one type of feature or trait. However, participants discussed feeling the most attracted to men who had these physical traits of being tall, having facial hair and body hair, and being muscular. Additionally, there were a subset of participants who were still very attracted to hairy and muscular men, but also with other kinds of traits. Daniel, said: “The ideal type, I’m thinking like a little bit more mature, like bigger, heavier size. Just that mature, kind of older person.” So for Daniel, older age and a larger body size were attractive, in addition to traits like having body hair and being tall. Tom also had a preference for larger and older men: “Typically have some kind of belly. Maybe a little bit of muscle as well, so like muscle and fat are kind of mixed together, and maybe older. Possibly.”

Thus, these traits that many participants reported feeling attracted to—muscles, tallness, etc.—are typical in constructions of normative, white masculinity (Chou 2012). Although many did not conceptualize their attractions in a racialized way, at times, they would construct those traits that they found attractive as absent from Asian people. In other words, some participants would describe how Asians, in particular, were not generally able to possess traits such as tallness and having body hair. Jae, 23, Korean, when discussing masculinity, said: “A lot of Asian men are not capable of expressing those things, simply due to genetics and biology.” John similarly described how he chose to groom his own facial hair, said: “I like to keep a beard or mustache, because I know most Asians can’t do it.” Mark talked about liking tall people because, “that’s something that I don’t have.” Thus, at the same time that participants did not associate the traits that they found attractive with whiteness, they did relate those traits to their own bodies,
and often discussed how Asians were lacking in these traits of masculinity. This process involved many assumptions on both what traits Asians and white people were seen to possess, which other groups of queer people of color also seem to do (Carrillo 2017).

In addition to an attraction to those physical traits, participants discussed being attracted to certain personality types or comportments. In particular, many participants described being attracted to men who performed a certain type of masculinity. David, who was in a long-term relationship with a white man, said:

[My boyfriend] is very straight acting, very clean cut, professional, one of those guys where if you first meet, you probably wouldn't think he's gay… I guess I'm attracted to that, that's been an ongoing trend.

David grew up in a northern suburb of Chicago. When David was in high school before he met his current boyfriend, he used to meet often anonymous sex partners online, and most of them were older, white men. When discussing these partners, David said, “Some of them, like physically maybe weren't attractive, but I think just the idea of them being a straight, or married masculine guy, that was what turned me on the most.” Thus, David’s language of “straight-acting” or “straight” and “masculine” are both related to normative, hegemonic constructions of masculinity—namely, straight, white men. Aaron, 40, Filipino, also talked about being very attracted to a “straight” performance of masculinity:

I would just always go for the masculine looking ones, I guess the ones that you call passing or undetectable, unless they say that they're gay, you're like, "Oh you're gay?" Those are the type of guys that I would go for.

When asked about why he found those men attractive, Aaron explained the attraction in relation to his own performance of masculinity:

Going back to that idea that opposites attract, I consider myself ... You know how, gay, consider that as a spectrum, from the most masculine to the most feminine. I consider myself as more on the feminine side of things. It was hard for me to admit this back in the
day because being masculine and stuff like that is considered higher up in the gay community, that image. I used to have a hard time admitting that, but now that I'm older, I don't give a fuck anymore. This is me. To find genuine people that will like me, I have to be me and be honest about me.

Similar to Derek’s explanation of the type of guy that he’s attracted to, Aaron constructed a spectrum of gender presentations from masculine to feminine, and placed himself at the feminine side. Thus, Aaron explained his attraction to masculine men using the narrative of “opposites attract,” thus constructing his queer Asian masculinity (or femininity, in this case) as opposite to white masculinity. David also made the same construction when talking about his boyfriend, where he described him and his boyfriend as opposites and himself as a feminine person. Moreover, Aaron related his attraction to masculinity to his own femininity, depicting a hierarchy of attraction in the gay community. These descriptions also relate to larger stereotypes and constructions of queer Asian men, which describe queer Asians as hyperfeminine and emasculated (Chou 2012; Han 2006).

However, this attraction to masculinity was not only found in participants who felt that they were particularly feminine. Only 3 participants described themselves as very feminine, and many described themselves as masculine and described being attracted to masculine men as partners. John, who himself was quite muscular and masculine-presenting, described being attracted to masculinity (and not necessarily just white men): “My Instagram is full of like really hot, buff, people of all races and ethnicities, but like, you know, your hegemonic masculine, gym-bunny types.” Instagram is a social media platform where users can post pictures and follows other users to see their pictures; John was describing the other users that he followed and what pictures his news feed was typically populated with. When asked what “hegemonic masculine” meant to him, he replied that it meant people who were “buff,” and had a “big
personality.” Peter, 46, Chinese and Cambodian, made a distinction between masculinity in his friends and his partners:

Oh honey, I can care less if you're a flaming queen…If you have a good set of brains on your shoulders and a good personality you can be my friend. I really don’t discriminate. But if you're talking about attraction-wise? Yes. I tend to go more for masculine guys.

Peter was also very muscular, and was involved in many sports leagues in Chicago. Thus, it seemed that regardless of how one presented in terms of masculinity (e.g. hypermasculine), many participants found themselves attracted to this hegemonic display of masculinity.

“Sticky Rice,” or Lack Thereof

Related to this prevalence of Asian-white cross racial partnerships, participants described that there was a specific norm against homophily for queer Asians. For example, Joseph had this to say about other queer Asians:

I don't think any Asian guy has ever approached me. I think talking to other Asian guys, it was like, "Oh, what's your type?” And it was always the white type. And then I always get approached by old, white guys and some Black guys. I’ve never met Asians that were only into other Asians. I think that's like the only race that's like that, though.

Joseph described not ever being approached romantically or sexually by another Asian guy. Thus according to Joseph, homophily was not a norm among queer Asians as it might have been among other racial groups. This actually aligned well with the quantitative findings that Asians had significantly lower levels of homophily compared to non-Asians, suggesting that the norm of homophily isn’t as uniform as the network literature paints it to be. Additionally, norms of homophily (or rather heterophily, in this case) may also be mediated by space and place. David described visiting San Francisco and seeing queer Asians there:

I know, now I know a lot of gay Asian men, but they all have white partners, or really into white men. That's kind of normal, especially in Lakeview. Like I visited San Francisco with my boyfriend before, and a lot of Asian people there. And I met a lot of
Asian/Asian couples who we call sticky rice couples. I thought it was really refreshing to see.

David’s distinction between what’s normal in Lakeview and what’s normal in San Francisco suggested that there was something about the social structure in Chicago where homophily did not arise as a norm among queer Asians, leading to a lack of “sticky rice” couples. In part, this may be due to the large differences in the population of Asians in San Francisco where 35.4% of the city are monoracial Asians, as compared to the 6.1% in Chicago (United States Census Bureau 2016). However, those differences in population proportion could also be related to the ways that the queer Asian stereotypes outlined earlier in this section show up, especially if queer Asians in Chicago are often surrounded by white or non-Asian people. As David said, the optics of sticky rice couples was refreshing, but there seemed to be a tension between finding homophilous partnerships positive and actually being in homophilous partnerships. As mentioned before, David was in a long-term partnership with a masculine white man. However, he discussed a potential partner he had in the past:

Yeah. I just totally forgot about it. He was Filipino. He was cute, but I think we both realized we were both bottoms, or both twinky, skinny Asian guys, and was better off as just friends, but I had a good time.

“Bottom” refers not only to the act of taking the receptive sexual position in penetrative sex, but also to the identity associated with primarily or exclusively taking that position. Relatedly, though not synonymously, “twink” is a gay archetype describing skinny, often boyish and younger, and less dominant or submissive queer men. For David, it seemed impossible or nonsensical for him to partner with another Asian twink or Asian bottom, with the implication of romantic/sexual incompatibility. Relating this back to Joseph’s words about Asians never being into other Asians, that norm of heterophily might be constituted by this constructed impossibility of romantic/sexual partnership between two non-masculine people, as queer Asians are often
doubly excluded from normative constructions of masculinity by both racial and sexual stereotypes. Thus, this conflation of Asian with bottom/twink/femininity may explain why queer Asians in Chicago do not tend to see homophilous types of partnerships as even a viable option. To organize and contextualize why participants may have found homophilous partnerships so out of place, and why there seemed to be a norm surrounding white heterophily for the queer Asian respondents, we must turn to the Sexual Fields framework and the concept of erotic capital.

*(Degraded) Erotic Capital*

Aaron, Joseph, and David’s stories provide insight into how the queer Asian respondents made sense of their erotic capital. Erotic capital in sexual fields, as defined by Green, is a type of symbolic capital which describes one’s desirability as a partner. It can take on a variety of forms including physical traits, affective presentations, and eroticized sociocultural styles (Green 2008, 29). Thus, when discussing the types of people they were attracted to, participants were essentially denoting the different forms that erotic capital can take in the various places that they go to meet partners. However, this pattern of cross-racial, heterophilous partnerships between the queer Asian participants and their masculine, white partners implied that the queer Asians had some form of erotic capital as well—although the currency of that capital may be different from the capital conferred onto white men (what Green describes as a racialized currency of erotic capital), these participants seemed to have been able to attain higher status white partners. Despite the erotic capital conferred upon them by the structures of sexual fields, there was a tension among participants in accepting that erotic capital and recognizing themselves as being desired. Many participants made a distinction between being desired for who they “actually” were, versus being “fetishized” and conferred this racialized currency of erotic capital. Thus, I use the term of degraded erotic capital to describe this tension among the respondents.
“Straight-washed and white-washed”: The Hegemony of White Masculinity

When listing various traits in their partners that they found attractive, many named certain physical traits, like body hair and facial hair, and affective presentations like masculine comportments as traits that they and everyone around them found attractive. Although there was obviously variability among the participants in the kinds of traits that they found attractive, a common theme throughout was that they tended to find traits that were associated with white masculinity attractive (or at the very least, felt that they were being told to find those traits attractive). Additionally, an emphasis on a queerness that was invisible or undetectable invoked a normalization of heterosexuality, and thus these attractive traits may be more specifically associated with straight, white masculinity.

I use the term mainstream gay ethos to describe spaces/fields where structures of desire confer significant erotic capital to hegemonically masculine white men, and where social relations revolve around white masculinity. In contrast, I use the term queer subculture to describe the disruption of that mainstream gay ethos, especially with feminine-presenting respondents who saw themselves as resisting it. Jae, for example, fell into the latter camp, and I was able to gain insight into who was seen as possessing erotic capital through those who saw themselves as resisting hegemonic structures. Jae described why he rarely went to Boystown:

I think the reason why I haven’t been to a lot of the Boystown bars is because I already know that it skews towards white guys, or older white guys. So, it’s like why even bother going, when I know that I wouldn’t fit in there? For Boystown bars, it doesn’t feel… it’s not quite as strong of an immediate reaction, but a lot of it has to do with how I dress. Sometimes I feel like how I dress is the first thing that sets me apart, and then add that to the fact that I’m Asian, and then you’re completely eliminated from the equation. Not like completely, but for most people there… No one’s gonna look at me twice, now. I see that more at bars that are more for—not cruising, but talking to people and eyeing each other up. I hate Sidetrack because that’s the only vibe that I get there, is that people are just standing around looking at each other, trying to see who they wanna fuck.
Jae described a sense of feeling passed over or invisible and related it to the way that he dressed and presented himself, as well as his racial identity. Using the Sexual Fields framework, Jae’s physical and behavioral traits were not aligned with the field’s structures of desire in a way that conferred him erotic capital; in fact, he may have been so unaligned with those structures that he was rendered unintelligible as a potential partner. In other words, Jae’s gender presentation (that was not hegemonically masculine) intersected with his racial presentation as Asian to render him invisible as a romantic or sexual partner to the patrons of Boystown spaces, excluded from their pool of potential partners. Sanjit, 26, Mixed, held a similar view of certain spaces in Boystown.

He made a comparison between certain kinds of bars in the area:

> You know, so like, and I don't know, I feel a lot of times like especially in these very white-washed, very, I'm going to say it's straight-washed, quote unquote gay spaces, now I feel like people tend to try to conform to a very certain presentation of masculinity. Whereas, at Progress I'll see people voguing and the fem queens with their crazy acid washed light braids. And I'm like, "Yes, this is what people should be doing." Like being themselves. That was the whole point of our revolution. And then I walk across the street and they're all trying to act straight. So I'm just like, "I don't want to be with them."

Thus compared to what Sanjit called “white-washed and straight-washed” spaces (which according to him included bars like Sidetrack and Roscoe’s), spaces in Boystown like Progress existed where there were people who were not aligned with the mainstream gay ethos, indulging in non-white (specifically queer Black and brown) cultural forms like voguing (DeFrantz 2016). Additionally, by invoking the history of queer revolution, Sanjit positioned himself quite explicitly against what he saw as a co-optation of that revolution into a performance of heterosexuality. Interestingly, the concepts of “straight-acting,” or of “hegemonic masculinity” discussed in the previous sections were traits that many of the respondents found attractive.

Similar to Jae, because Sanjit felt he did not embody those ideals in the slightest, he felt passed over:
Me: Who are the people who would be found attractive at these spots?
Sanjit: Sidetrack and Roscoe’s, that’s basically your straight looking white man. Probably pretty buff or your daddy type… But definitely if I am in Roscoe’s I feel like I am much more on the defensive. I walk in knowing that you know, I'm not considered attractive in that space. I know that for some people I'm invading their space because they assume that Boystown is only for white people. So I feel like my ideas about race are much more aggressively enforced for myself. I feel like I have to be more defensive and more stand your ground against certain people in this space.

Although he still felt passed over as a potential romantic or sexual partner, Sanjit did not feel invisible in the same way that Jae did. This could have been in part because of Sanjit’s mixed race background; as someone who was both South Asian and Black, Sanjit was much darker skinned than Jae who was East Asian. Moreover, Sanjit was cognizant of the ways that his mixed identity was something others fixated on, often in a negative way:

A lot of people tend to say, I'm just not Asian period because of, again, how I look. You know, I don't ‘look’ Asian. I ‘look’ Black. That's always a fun, educational moment. But I look black to Asian folks then I look, like, ‘not Black; to Black folks. I'm just like, ‘Okay, I give up.’

Thus, Sanjit often felt hypervisible, and subsequently undesirable, because of his queer and mixed/multi-racial presentation.

Conversely, Joseph’s experience was different from Jae’s and Sanjit’s. I would place Joseph as much more aligned with the mainstream gay ethos, and this was evident in the different meanings Joseph attached to Boystown spaces and the Boystown community more broadly. When describing how he chose to dress himself, Joseph said:

I mean I'm a very generic dresser, so I don't have, like, these elaborate outfits. It's mostly just jeans and then shirt that I think looks really nice or like really good on me. So, because my shirt's a little tighter, I want them to be tighter, because it looks weird with baggy stuff. But, generally, anything that will make my ass look better, but I have a really flat ass, so it's very difficult. But yeah, there are some jeans that actually help, but just anything that's kind of tight around my quads.
In contrast to the meanings Jae attached presentation which was mostly related to presenting less masculine and resisting Midwestern mainstream gay aesthetics, Joseph conceptualized his appearance in a way that suggested a strategic management of erotic capital. Joseph’s choices to highlight certain parts of his body with tighter clothes. This suggested that Joseph did not feel invisible or passed over in more mainstream Boystown spaces, but in fact felt that others would find him desirable based on his appearance. This was confirmed in how Joseph described his experiences at Sidetrack:

Me: Do you feel pretty attractive at Sidetrack? Do you feel like people are into you?
Joseph: A little bit, yeah. I mean, again, like I do notice stares every now and then. I do try to avoid most of them. But, yeah.
Me: Who are the people that are typically at Sidetrack? What’s the crowd like?
Joseph: It’s a wide range. And it depends on the night you’re going. I mean, a lot of the guys that do approach me are the older, white guys that I probably would not be attracted to, because they’re a lot older. But, there’s a wide range of people that are young. I don’t know. Everyone, I think.

In fact, Joseph described getting attention from older, white men, although that romantic or sexual interest was unwanted. Despite this, Joseph discussed frequently going to Sidetrack, and described it as one of his favorite bars. Additionally, Joseph did not see Sidetrack as an exclusively white space, but instead a place where “a wide range of people” were present and welcomed. This was a divergence from Jae and Sanjit, who both said that they rarely spent time in Boystown spaces, who felt like outsiders because of their racial identities, and who more often chose to frequent physical spaces outside of that neighborhood. Echoing Jae’s sentiment, Joseph also made a distinction between mainstream Boystown spaces and places like Berlin. Joseph gave his characterization of Berlin:

It's kind of where the weird crowd goes, is what I've been told. I have a friend that does drag there. [The people at Berlin] are not like the typical ‘masc for masc’ kind of gays, I guess. I guess they're a little bit weird. I was trying to figure out what he meant by it, and,
in my head, ‘this is where all the goths and emo people go’, is how I'm envisioning what he means by that. It's something that I didn't really notice until he said something, but it’s definitely true.

“Masc for masc”, short for “masculine for masculine” has become somewhat of a colloquialism within queer communities. The phrase’s origin lies in queer men’s online dating profiles, where queer men would write some variation of “masculine man looking for other masculine men,” often juxtaposed with “whites only” or some kind of racialized preference. In this sense, Joseph constructed Berlin as a place where masculinity was not the typical currency of erotic capital, and where people were subverting the hegemony of “masc for masc” structures of desire by acting “weird.” Joseph also related the people at Berlin to other kinds of subcultures like “goths and emos.”

Thus, differences in Joseph, Sanjit, and Jae’s experiences of popular Boystown spaces were illustrative of those spaces’ structures of desire and the ways that certain bodies and gendered presentations are conferred erotic capital. As outlined in the previous sections, many of the participants felt that they were at a disadvantage when looking for romantic and sexual partners because of their racial identity—almost all of the participants discussed how white people were generally found more attractive, suggesting that whiteness generally translates to erotic capital in various sexual fields. However, Joseph was someone who, compared to Jae and Sanjit, had a more masculine presentation and found that in some cases (such as at Sidetrack) he did possess higher erotic capital. While Joseph had darker skin and “looked” Southeast Asian, his broader, fit body type and his athleticism (he came to our interview after a recreational volleyball league) gave him access a masculine currency of erotic capital. In contrast, Sanjit and Jae’s appearances were leaner/thinner and more transgressive of norms of masculinity (e.g., Jae’s nails were painted when he came to see me). However, Joseph’s story hinted at the larger tension
found in the queer Asian respondents: between the erotic capital conferred by sexual fields and participants’ own sense of their desirability.

“Yellow Fever” and Degraded Erotic Capital

Since white masculinity is awarded with high erotic capital, what then of queer Asian masculinity? Even though Joseph’s physical attributes aligned him somewhat with hegemonic structures of desire, Jae and Sanjit were not unsuccessful in finding romantic/sexual partners, even partners who were white and thus, higher status. This suggests that they all had some form of erotic capital. But incongruently, Jae and Sanjit (and other respondents) did not feel desired by others in the queer community.

This apparent contradiction may relate to the ways that other men of color are conferred erotic capital, such as the queer Black men in Green’s initial study of sexual fields. Green describes a racialized currency of erotic capital, focusing his analysis on a queer business district of New York City. He looks at the ways that certain Black gay men were able to emphasize and de-emphasize racial difference in order to bolster their erotic capital (Green 2008, 35). Some types of Black men played upon “Mandingo” tropes to attract white men, thus gaining access to this racialized currency of erotic capital through the emphasis of racial difference. Others who did not have access to those kinds of performances of Black masculinity (e.g. those who were shorter or less muscular) tended to de-emphasize racial difference in order to attract white partners.

My findings suggest that my queer Asian respondents navigated racialized tropes in a similar manner. As respondents tried to grapple with why their partnerships tended to be with white men, they were often aware of the racialized way in which their queer Asian bodies were eroticized. Analogous to constructions of queer Black bodies, a common racialized trope for
queer Asians could be the hyperfeminized, submissive, bottom stereotype that many participants discussed. Following the narratives of Green’s interlocutors, some of my respondents also played up racial difference in order to gain access to that racialized currency of erotic capital. Although participants were aware that these images of queer Asians were attractive to certain partners (suggesting a form of racialized erotic capital), these encounters did not tend to be fulfilling and often left them with a sense of shame and a lack of agency. I would assume that some of the Black men that Green interviewed would have felt a similar way when invoking analogous stereotypes for Black masculinity based on racism, slavery, and colonialism.

An effective way to make sense of how queer Black men, queer Asian men, and potentially other men of color attract higher status white partners is through a resource that I call degraded erotic capital. In Green’s somewhat economical presentation of the Sexual Fields framework, he interprets the effects of racialized erotic capital for queer Black men:

Schematic constructions of the uncivilized, dangerous, ‘thuggish’ black man—correlated with a status deficit in alternative fields (for instance, in an economic, legal, or political field)—provide a status increase in the form of erotic capital in the downtown sexual field. (Green 2008, 38 [emphasis in original.])

I hope to refine this interpretation by showing how in my participants, the analogous racialized tropes of queer Asian masculinity did not necessarily result in a status increase within sexual fields, despite the conferment of erotic capital. My respondents made a large distinction between this racialized eroticization and an imagined, unracialized desirability, suggesting that status increases do not occur uniformly among those who are conferred erotic capital. To make sense of these uneven social effects, I have introduced the term degraded erotic capital to the Sexual Fields framework. The concept of degraded erotic capital allows us to make a theoretical distinction between the experience of racialized eroticization by people of color (i.e., the erotic capital derived from the way people of color are constructed to deviate from whiteness (Fung
and the experience of erotic capital by those who are made desirable through hegemonic structures of desire, such as the masculine white men described in the earlier section. In the metaphor of symbolic capital, degraded takes on a double meaning: degraded erotic capital describes both an inferiority of the capital itself, meaning that the racialized currency of erotic capital is symbolically worth less than the erotic capital conferred to white men, and it also describes the degradation in status and agency of the queer Asian respondents when conferred this type of erotic capital.

The experience of degraded erotic capital was common as my respondents pursued romantic and sexual partnerships. David, whom I’ve mentioned had a history of meeting white partners through the internet for anonymous sex, talked about “playing” queer Asian stereotypes:

David: Probably. I would just say things like, "I'm very submissive, very, do whatever you want to me," let them know that they're going to be the dominant one, and I'm just very used. I guess, yeah, I played the whole stereotype of Asian are submissives. They're bottoms.
Me: But did you enjoy yourself during these sexual encounters?
David: I did, because it was just like a fantasy, or kind of role playing, like, "Oh, I'm going to be the very submissive bottom guy, and you're the dominant, masculine top." It's like a porno, you know?

David was one participant who discussed feeling comfortable in playing up these racialized images. He found that this racialized currency of erotic capital made him desirable to a particular group of older, white men that he found attractive. Moreover, he derived sexual pleasure from this role playing; in particular, David’s comment about how “it’s like a porno” echoes past media studies research on these particular racialized and eroticized images of queer Asian men (Nguyen 2014).

However, many participants did not share David’s experience in deriving pleasure from this particular performance of racial difference. In fact, many referred to feeling like someone’s “fetish” when they felt that they had to present themselves in a submissive, hyperfeminine, and
orientalized fashion. Participants made a distinction between feeling desirable and feeling fetishized. Thakoon, 25, Thai, was in a long-term relationship with another Asian man. However, he had also discussed how he was attracted to certain traits that were associated with non-Asian or white masculinity (e.g. body and facial hair, tall height, being muscular) and talked about his past non-Asian partners. His story was an illustrative example of this distinction between feeling fetishized and feeling desired:

I did think about hooking up with men who I may have felt were only interested in Asian men, which I wouldn't say I've thought about very much. I did have several White people and several Black people say things to me that may suggest that they'd only have interest in Asian men. I feel like a racial preference just wasn't something I thought about before. I don't know. Or maybe I was just also letting it go because I feel like I did that a lot growing up, the Asian jokes, the stereotypes, whatever, that growing up with mostly white people, I was just like, "Oh, yeah." Just let it fly by. Whatever. But I do remember the ones that were and some of them could be a little fetishizing about being with the perfect Asian bottom or whatever. Thinking back on it, I feel little gross, like, "Oh, I wish I hadn't done that and had sex with them."

Thakoon did not identify as an immigrant and grew up in a nearby suburb of Chicago. He described how there were not very many other Asian people in his community growing up. He related a lack of agency in pushing back against the stereotypes in his community to his sexual encounters with men who fetishized him. However, it is clear from Thakoon’s words that upon further reflection he felt “gross” and regretted those encounters with fetishizing men; that what he thought was an authentic desire at the time, he later chalked up to a fetishizing, and ultimately racist stereotype that he did not feel he had the agency to challenge. This tension between Thakoon’s ability to attain sexual and romantic partners and both his lack of agency and feelings of inauthentic desirability are not able to be addressed without the concept of degraded erotic capital. Though Green discusses the resentment of fetishization among his Black interlocutors, he nevertheless sees that fetishization as a form of undifferentiated erotic capital for his participants. But if this racialized currency of erotic capital relates to other forms of symbolic
capital as described in field theory, it should also connote a sense of agency and higher status (Bourdieu 1977), and thus it must be qualified with the idea of degraded capital.

Other respondents described similar stereotyping when being approached by non-Asian (and particularly white) men for dating or sex. Daniel discussed different ways that white men racialized and eroticized his body in a fetishistic way:

The Asian thing is kind of something I’m more weary of. This one time, I was doing this flirty, sexting kind of thing with this guy. I was like, ‘What do you wanna do?’ And he said, ‘I wanna chew on your eggroll.’ I was like, ‘Excuse me?!’ It’s weird because I just immediately assume that any white guy has that fetishizing kind of thing. So I almost come in like, “What if it’s this?” So that’s kind of in the back of my mind. Because for me, I guess it’s sad that I don’t assume that they’re looking because they’re interested in me, but that it’s a fetish kind of thing.

In Daniel’s story, the guy that he was talking to invoked both orientalizing and fetishizing stereotypes about Daniel’s body—in constructing Daniel’s penis as an egg roll, this man othered a part of Daniel’s body that is already rather scrutinized in queer Asian male stereotypes, while also eroticizing it by suggesting some version of oral sex. (As an aside, Daniel was Korean, and Korean egg rolls are not particularly phallic. It’s likely this other person was thinking of Chinese style egg rolls, thus invoking a racist, monolithic view of Asian cultures as well). Moreover, more explicitly than Thakoon, Daniel constructed a dichotomy between a guy being interested in him, and a guy making a fetish of Asians. While Daniel’s interlocutor may have genuinely been interested in him, Daniel’s experience of that sexual interest was quite degrading (and perhaps rightfully so), and thus Daniel did not consider that a genuine sexual interest. Furthermore, queer Asians seemed to expend a lot of time into trying to discern whether a potential partner was interested in them or fetishizing them. As Jae put it:

I’ve gotten pretty good, I think, at distinguishing if you are more fetishizing or have some kind of Yellow Fever or are actually into me, but there’s still some little things that only white people can get away that I got really tired of.
Thus, it may be that the Sexual Fields framework needs to be refined to be able to describe these negative feelings of racial difference, fetishizing, and lack of agency. As Daniel and Jae’s stories show, they were not on similar footing as the people who were fetishizing them; while those men felt that saying such things were acceptable or even attractive, Daniel and Jae did not have the same opinion though did not generally feel able to speak their discomfort.

We could therefore say that Daniel and Jae had an experience of degraded erotic capital, where although there were others who wanted to partner with them, their capital resulting from fetishism was inferior in nature. Moreover, degraded can refer to both the inferiority of their capital, but also to their degraded experience of that capital—while (white) others may have been able to feel attractive or desirable at being conferred erotic capital, the queer Asian respondents experienced feeling unattractive, undesirable, and even invisible as a result of their racialization.

“No Asians”: Degraded Erotic Capital Online

Although fundamentally different from physical spaces, similar social structures were at play within the online spaces that queer Asian respondents frequented to meet their sexual and romantic partners. While the Sexual Fields framework has been applied to the study of various types of physical queer spaces, it has not yet been thoroughly used to study online spaces (Green 2014). This is important in our current moment, as more and more people use mobile applications to meet their romantic and sexual partners. I show that the Sexual Fields framework can be applied to the analysis of online social relations, and argue that the mechanisms of different websites and mobile applications allow for different kinds of social norms between different online spaces. Furthermore, I show that queer Asians are conferred a similar kind of degraded erotic capital in various online spaces as well, although this process is somewhat more
explicit online. A discussion of strategies that respondents used surrounding mobile applications (or “apps”) and online space comes later.

Green discusses the sign-equipment of sexual fields, such as the décor of a physical space and the front of its patrons (Green 2008). This sign equipment communicates aspects about the field’s structures and what kinds of traits confer erotic capital to actors in the field. In online spaces, this sign-equipment could be conceptualized to include the interfaces of the apps, the kinds of information that users put on their online profiles, and the pictures that they upload. Almost all of the participants discussed using Grindr, a popular geosocial mobile dating application used primarily by queer men. Another popular online space frequently used by participants was Tinder, another geosocial dating application. The appearance of sign-equipment such as “whites only” or “no Asians” on Grindr profiles conveyed to the participants a sense of their erotic capital in that space, which was distinct from their sense of erotic capital on another online space like Tinder.

One notable example of the way that this sign-equipment affected participants’ sense of erotic capital was in Ben’s, 32, Vietnamese, experience on Scruff. Scruff is a mobile application that initially was started by the gay “bear” community, a subculture where hairy, bigger (in some combination of muscle and body fat), often white men are given high erotic capital. Scruff’s main interface consists of an array of profiles of people who are geographically near, similar to Grindr. However, Scruff also has a “global” page where users can see which profiles on Scruff have been engaged with the most for the past hour, regardless of their geographic location. Ben described checking this global leaderboard of Scruff profiles:

The global most viewed, right. I always thought about this, which is very funny you asked the question, because you scroll through it and they look exactly the same. It’s a white, muscular, scruffy man. Right? It’s a very typical look that they look exactly the same. I think one time I saw there was one Asian guy on top of the global. I literally
messaged him and I'm like, I'm so happy finally there's an Asian man on the top of the list. He just laughed. I do pay attention to that, I like how they all look the same.

This global page gave insight as to how erotic capital was distributed on Scruff (which many participants described as similar to Grindr in these social interactions); perhaps unsurprisingly, white men who were able to match a certain archetype for the bear subculture were the most desirable. Ben was used to never seeing other people who looked like him on this global page, evidenced by the fact that he described feeling happy that there was “finally” an Asian man on the top. But this was a relatively small concession, as the overwhelming and common presence of that page only being occupied by white men showed that attractive Asians are the exception, rather than the norm. Sanjit also discussed the racialized social interactions on different mobile applications:

Grindr had the issue of people being like, "I like my guys only," or "I like whites and Latino's only." And I'm like, "So, by Latinos you mean like the ones who look white, 'cause there's a whole, there's about two continents worth of people who identify as Latino." People are more explicit with their discrimination. Tinder was less like that. I think people on Grindr are like more like, "Aha, I want to bone, but this color of bone only." Whereas like, Tinder is more like, "Oh, we can see each other and get coffee or we can bone."

Sanjit described the ways that voicing racialized preferences for partners was normalized and ubiquitous on Grindr, but less so on Tinder. Additionally, he challenged those preferences by invoking the diversity of appearances within one of those categories. Joseph, 30, talked about seeing similar racialized preferences in Grindr profiles:

I used to see the “no fats, no fems, no Asians” thing. I think they've been shamed out of Grindr. I'm sure they still exist, but it was clearly out there, and a lot of people were like, "whites only." That was the thing. And then there's the stuff I just noticed.

Similar to Sanjit, taglines like “whites only” or “no Asians” on Grindr profiles were memorable to Joseph. None of the participants recalled ever seeing people list preferences for Asians on
Grindr. Contrasting with respondents’ social interactions in person, these racialized partner preferences were never as explicit as they were online. While participants may have had physical interactions where they felt fetishized or degraded because of their racial identity, none reported hearing phrases like “whites only” spoken to them in person. Thus in a sense, the tiers of desirability in online spaces reflect those found in person in a more crystallized way.

However, there was one app that some participants discussed as a space where Asians were more desirable. Minsoo, 25, Korean, talked about an app called Jack’d:

Me: Do you feel like you used Grindr and Jack’d in the same way, or not quite?
Minsoo: Different. Because Koreans use Jack’d mostly, so I’m kind of expecting that FOB-people would use Jack’d. And there are more Asians, so. I think, Koreans and Chinese use it in their country more. So they’re just kind of like using it here, too, but there’s not too many white people on Jack’d. Because I feel like on Jack’d, the most popular guys are like ripped Asians, probably. That’s just my speculation, though.

Jack’d is another queer male-oriented geosocial mobile networking application whose interface is very similar to Grindr’s. For Minsoo, Jack’d was racialized in a distinct way from Grindr, such that “ripped Asians” were actually conferred higher erotic capital. Additionally, as a Korean immigrant, Minsoo was also referring to particular kinds of Asian men that use Jack’d. Fresh off the boat or FOB is an often pejorative and othering term used to describe recent immigrants to a country. Minsoo’s description of Jack’d also points to another aspect of sign-equipment in online spaces, namely the images (or collection of images) in online profiles. The larger presence of Asian people on Jack’d signaled Jack’d as a space where Asians would be conferred erotic capital. Moreover, the desirability of Asians on Jack’d seemed to be related to the fact that white men did not typically use the app. For example, David called Jack’d “the less popular Grindr,” and others typically described it as a racialized app space for queer Asians and queer Black
people. Despite the fact that Asians seemed to have higher erotic capital on Jack’d, many of the participants did not seem to use it and preferred apps like Grindr.

Even for respondents who described playing up these racial stereotypes, they still described feeling differences in their own desirability and others’. David talked about a time when he used Grindr very frequently:

**David:** I felt like all of my friends had Grindr, was very much the same way, very pretentious about who they were going to message back or talk to, try to make their profile look as good as possible. I don't know. It's just how I felt. I got more hits on Jack'd than I did Grindr.

**Me:** Were your friends other Asian guys?

**David:** Mostly white.

**Me:** And do you feel like their experience using Grindr is different than yours?

**David:** Oh, definitely. I for sure knew they got more messages. Like, when we were together I could hear the app go off. Yeah. And I'd go on, like nothing.

As evidenced by David, the experience of being present in online spaces layered with physical social interactions as well. David was made aware of his degraded erotic capital in certain online spaces not only through the sign-equipment of users’ profiles, but also through a meta-virtual process of seeing (and hearing) how his white friends were more desirable when looking for partners online. Other participants also discussed similar interactions with non-Asian or white friends, where participants felt their experiences on these online spaces were vastly different than those of their friends. Whether it was conceptualizing how to diminish instances of racism, discrimination, or exoticization online while also looking for partners, or whether it was managing the interplay between virtual and physical social dynamics, queer Asian participants deployed strategies to manage their erotic capital.

*Managing Degraded Erotic Capital: Unequal Partnerships*

As a result of their sense of degraded erotic capital, respondents employed certain strategies of navigating their partnerships. Because many of the respondents’ partnerships were
with white men, these partnerships often felt unequal. We can explain these unequal partnerships through the metaphor of degraded erotic capital. Queer Asian respondents described racialized power dynamics due to the differences in erotic capital between them and their romantic and sexual partners, and thus had to manage their lowered status within their partnerships.

“Asian guys should never top”: Navigating Sexual Stereotypes

As described in the section on heterophily, participants tended to construct their partners’ traits in opposition to queer Asian masculinity. They described instances where they felt queer Asian men could not possess these traits like body hair or facial hair, or instances where they felt queer Asian men were less desirable than men of other racial and ethnic identities. These constructions of queer Asian men as emasculated or feminine echo those found in the literature (Chou 2012; Han 2006). Moreover, this femininity was often linked to sexual positioning: specifically taking the receptive or bottom role during anal or oral sex (as opposed to the insertive, top role). While the queer Asian respondents were shown to engage with stereotypes of both Asians and white men, differences in power between the Asian and white men (in the form of erotic capital) led to less agency for the queer Asian respondents (Carrillo 2017). Jae, for example, when talking about the kinds of stereotypes that he encountered, said that “Asian men have always been characterized as weaker, smaller, always the bottom, always more submissive.” Moreover, Aaron was also aware of other ways that his body was devalued because of his Asian identity. He discussed the sexual stereotypes that white partners would put on him:

They would describe the shit that they want to do to me. I was just like, ‘What makes you think I want to do that?’ Some of the stuff that they want to do to me is pretty ... I guess some people are into that, but for me, I consider it pretty demeaning. I'm just like, ‘No. I'm not into that.’ They said that they want to dress me up in panties or dresses. They want me to wear a skirt while they're fucking me. They're talking about lifting me and throwing me on the bed and fucking me and shoving their dick in my mouth, and stuff like that.
Aaron resented that his white partners assumed the different sexual acts that he would be comfortable engaging in. Although Aaron was someone who described himself as very feminine, his self-identification of that femininity felt different and empowering in a way that the presumptions of his white partners that he would enjoy wearing panties or dresses or taking a more submissive role in a sexual encounter did not. Aaron’s story about how a partner assumed that he would be comfortable engaging in sexual acts where he was dominated is also illustrative of the way that queer Asian men are constructed by non-Asian, namely white men, and the sexual stereotypes thrust upon them. However, it was often difficult for the respondents to grapple with these stereotypes because many did take the receptive role during sex, a role that is associated with femininity and submission. Although Aaron did not appreciate the ways that his partners have assumed different submissive sexual acts that he would want to do, he (along with many of the other respondents) described himself as a bottom, or someone who prefers to take the receptive role.

Derek echoed these stereotypes and said that “Asian men typically tend to be submissive bottoms because they are a little bit more on the feminine side.” Although Derek had described a belief that he had about Asian men, he also expressed frustration at the fact that others always expected him to bottom:

For me it's a rather complicated case. So far most of my sexual encounters are bottoming but I do have the yearn to do what top does and then so, it gets to the point, am I really a bottom or top? Honestly I love asses more than dicks. But physically my body, I don't know if it can or not. I don't know if it's stress or depression preventing me from doing top stuff or I just know. I haven't found a perfect partner to experiment with, while almost every person that I met with wants me to bottom. So I'm like okay. Why not?...Funny thing is, the white guy I was dating, he actually told me that Asian guys should never top.

Derek had expressed earlier in the interview that he recently had trouble maintaining an erection and climaxing, and believed that it may be due to his mental health. However, he also described
how most of his partners wanted or expected him to bottom. For people who already possessed low erotic capital, participants often just went along with what their partners wanted (such as taking a receptive role) in order to have sex.; thus, those decisions of who will top or bottom during sex were often made by participants’ partners. While Derek sometimes wished he could take a different role, he did often take on the receptive role, and this was very common amongst the queer Asians I talked to. Despite expressing discomfort at this stereotype or feeling like it was limiting, many participants often took on the receptive role in encounters with their sexual and romantic partners. Thus, there were often tensions in that loss of agency within romantic and sexual encounters for queer Asians. In particular, this tendency to take the receptive role (which was often seen by the participants as more submissive) may be part of a large tension in the queer Asian erotic habitus. Although they did not necessarily explain it as such, these constructions of queer Asian masculinity may weigh in on the possible roles that queer Asians see themselves taking on during sex.

“Fuck off, racists”: Online Presentations and Interactions

The tiers of desirability present in online spaces are embedded in larger social systems; queer Asians often experienced a sense of lower or degraded erotic capital on these apps and websites like they did in physical spaces, albeit through different patterns of interaction and social norms. Using online spaces was somewhat of a double-edged sword: one the one hand, respondents showed an awareness that others were often more overt with their racism and rejection online; however on the other hand, because of various mobile application interfaces and mechanisms, participants often felt that they had more agency in their self-presentation through online channels than in person. Consequently, many described strategies of managing their degraded erotic capital online, using different aspects of these online spaces to their advantage.
In terms of how the participants found their romantic and sexual partners, almost all of the participants used one or more online spaces in order to meet people. These spaces ranged from more conventional dating websites such as OKCupid, where users can put together an extensive online profile, to more popular geosocial, mobile networking applications. To give a brief overview of these application interfaces, apps are geosocial in the sense that many use mobile location services (like GPS, wi-fi, or cellular services) to pinpoint a user’s location; then, depending on the mechanisms of each app’s interface, users are shown a number of other people who are using the app and are within some specified radius of distance. The number of people who are shown to a user can also depend on the user’s tier of service. For example, Grindr, one of the most popular of these networking apps, gives free users access to view more than 50 profiles and advertises more than 6 times that for premium users. Participants tended to use more than one of these networking apps. The most common ones that they used were Grindr and Tinder, and a smaller number of participants also used Jack’d and Scruff (both with similar interfaces to Grindr). For example, participants often made comparisons between the types of partnerships that are facilitated on each app. Comparing Grindr and Tinder, Jae said:

I think it’s that difference in expectation on Grindr of I’m not really looking for someone to really bond with, whereas I feel like on Tinder, even just the fact that you can have more than one picture gives me a better sense of who you are as a person. Sometimes on Grindr I’ll see one picture and be like this person looks like somebody that I can like chill with, and then as soon as they send me more pictures I’m like you look kinda sketchy, or maybe that was just one really good picture.

For Jae, Grindr was not a place where you looked for deeper connections or “bonds” with people, but rather just a place where you looked for sex partners or hookups. Minsoo said, “Because Grindr was mostly for hookups, I did not get to like, talk a lot. I mostly talked about sex positions.” Thakoon, who had met his boyfriend on Tinder, said something very similar: “I do feel that Grindr was very hookup-y. I had always felt that Tinder was where I saw myself
finding someone who would be more longterm.” Many participants agreed with Jae, that due the fact that users can only upload a single picture to a Grindr profile, they felt less of an emotional connection with people they interacted with on Grindr and also felt that they knew those people less well.

Participants were cognizant of the variant online cultures found on different apps and websites, and often tailored their profiles accordingly in order to avoid negative interactions with other (often white) queer men. For example, Jae, who had used different apps and social media platforms to meet people, compared his Grindr profile to his Tinder profile:

I think Grindr was the only place that I would occasionally put something that’s like ‘fuck off racists’, basically, because I would see a lot of racism… How can this go so unchecked that, other than actually reporting those profiles, I would feel compelled to put something like that…So, if I put anything it would just be like ‘if you’re expecting me to be some Asian fetish, I will call that out immediately.’ But I never really did that on Tinder because I would assume the worst about people on Grindr, but I would assume a little bit better or have a little higher standard on Tinder.

Jae was reacting to a pattern of interactions he had experienced on Grindr, where white men would talk to him as their “Asian fetish,” thus giving him a sense of his degraded erotic capital. Thus, Jae strategically chose to put a disclaimer on his Grindr profile that that was not something he was interested in (although as he mentioned later in the interview, it was not particularly effective in deterring those kinds of men). For Jae, that pattern of interaction where men would message him in a fetishistic way was not as common on Tinder. Despite these patterns of interaction, many of the participants frequently used apps like Grindr and Scruff, instead of apps (like Jack’d, discussed above) where they might have been higher up on that space’s tiers of desirability. This could be because the participants had to negotiate strategies between attaining partners they found attractive (often queer white men with high amounts of erotic capital) and
frequenting spaces where they themselves would be found desirable. As David and Ben suggest, those two spaces are not often commensurate.

Contrary to what I had expected, another common strategy for the participants was to make their Asian-ness very visible in their online profiles and interactions. David said:

Yeah, I always put it out there that I’m Asian. Like if I do talk to someone, and I tell them Asian, and they’re not interested any more, I just want to avoid that, so I’d rather just let it out in the open. I’m a skinny Asian guy, you know?

Many participants spoke similarly of being “open” or not trying to “deceive” anyone about their racial identity, knowing that many Grindr users do not choose to have Asian partners.

Presumably, David made a distinction between being rejected by another person on Grindr after talking to them, or just being ignored or an interaction never occurring. In this way, the Asian Grindr users were able to somewhat shield themselves from those rejections, since those who would reject them never end up interacting with them. Other participants who used advertisement based online spaces, where users put up a posting to meet partners (such as Craigslist), employed a similar strategy. Aaron, for example, discussed the content of the Craigslist ads he would post:

I'm very direct. I would post a ... I wouldn't post my face pic on there, but if it's a clear match, I would agree to exchange or trade face pics, but like I said, I'm very upfront with my intention and its foresight. I would post a front shot and a back shot, no clothes. I write my self-description. I write that I'm Asian, that I'm this height, that I'm this weight, that I'm smooth, and this is the type of action or scene that I'm looking for. I'm not into long, winding, long dragging sex. I'm just looking for something 15 minutes or less, 30 minutes max. Yeah, this is fucking America. I have shit to do. I have laundry to do. I have to go to work. I have to feed my cat. We can't be doing this for three hours. This is what I'm looking for.

Similar to the language that David used, Aaron liked to be “upfront” with his intentions and clear with the description of his body, both in the written part of the advertisement as well as on the visual part of his pictures. Although some of the reasons that Aaron was so forthright in his
Craigslist postings were a way to avoid racism and rejection, Aaron seemed to find agency in being able to list out exactly what he was looking for in his partners. As an immigrant from the Philippines, Aaron invoked these feelings of agency by saying things like “this is fucking America” and that he had other things to do besides have sex for three hours. Also contrary to what I had expected, the participants tended to go online to look for partners when they were away from queer physical spaces where they could look for partners in person, rather than use them concurrently. For the most part, the participants tended to go on the apps for brief periods to “kill time” or if they were “bored” while at home, at work, or commuting, whereas I had expected participants to also be checking the apps while they were at bars or clubs. However, this may have been an efficient strategy in the sense that participants were using their down time to search for potential romantic or sexual partners. Additionally, some participants were able to skillfully use the hybrid virtual and geospatial nature of mobile dating applications to their advantage.

One participant, Joseph, described a strategy for staying somewhat connected while he was out in Boystown (the main “gayborhood” in Chicago’s North Side):

But, I think, typically, I check when I go out. And I also live in Logan Square, which is not a big gay hub, so sometimes when I'm out in an Uber, and I'm going towards Lakeview or whatever. I turn it on and then close it just to put my location there to see who would message me. Or if I'm going anywhere that I know, like here [Boystown] or Uptown or whatever. I open it, and I don't really look to see who's on it. I just open it and the close it just to put the bait out there. To see if I get any messages.

While apps can be partly conceptualized as virtual spaces in their own right, geospatial networking apps like Grindr are also uniquely tethered to physical areas and neighborhoods. It is clear from Joseph’s strategy of refreshing his location on the app that he attempted to bolster his erotic capital using the hybridity of networking apps to his advantage. This is because on Grindr,
users are shown a set number of people based on their location, and users can contact any of the
people that they’re shown. However, if the user (or any of the people in their feed) moves out of
that geographic radius, then their feed updates and a new set of profiles are shown. As is the case
on many of these geosocial apps, it is sometimes impossible to chat with people that move out of
that radius—unless a user and that person have already started a private chat while they were
visible in each other’s feed. Thus, Joseph employed a complex strategy of refreshing his app’s
location, putting his phone away to try to meet partners at a bar or club, and then later checking
the app to see if there are people who have messaged him. Moreover, the fact that he lived
somewhat farther away from the gay areas on North Side (Logan Square is on the Northwest
Side, across the Chicago river) meant that he could refresh his app while in Boystown and then
have his app’s feed stay there while he was physically out of that radius, so that he would show
in users’ feeds in that locale and potentially receive messages.

“Slow Jams for Homos”: Attending Boystown Bars and Events

One reason that many of the participants primarily used websites and mobile applications
to meet their partners may be related to a larger trend of people, especially young people,
interacting socially online (Chan 2017; Perrin 2015). However, the use of online spaces may also
be related to participants’ experiences of degraded erotic capital in physical queer spaces, since
as shown in the previous section, there were ways participants could manage online interactions
that were unique to online spaces. That being said, participants still frequented queer physical
spaces and had strategies for managing their erotic capital within bars and clubs, although these
strategies differed somewhat depending on respondents’ gender presentations. Respondents who
saw themselves as more undesirable because of their feminine presentation sought out specific
cultural and queer events where they felt more included.
The queer Asians discussed Boystown and Andersonville, Chicago’s two main gay entertainment and socializing business districts. This was how Jae thought about his appearance when going out in Boystown:

I don’t really change how I dress depending on where I’m going. If I were just meeting a friend at a bar I didn’t really care about like Roscoe’s or Sidetrack or something like that, I would still look the way I want to look at any bar, even if everyone else looks like a Midwestern dad. I would still wanna be cute. In the past year or two, I’ve been presenting a little more feminine when I go out, there’s this one pink jacket that really makes me stand out in the crowd. At Berlin not so much because everyone’s wearing pink at Berlin, but anywhere else, Also just painting my nails sometimes… But I think just in terms of how I dress when I’m going out, it conveys the kind of person that—not necessarily the kind of person I am, but the kind of person that I want to be seen with or that I want to talk to. But I do think the way that I dress does indicate my general taste in things, like more alternative music, I guess.

From Jae’s comparisons between himself and other queer people he saw in Boystown, it was clear that he saw his feminine and alternative presentation in these spaces as disruptive to the mainstream gay ethos (e.g., looking like a “Midwestern dad”). He also suggested that there were different spaces in which this ethos becomes crystallized, such as in Roscoe’s and Sidetrack (two very popular Boystown bars/clubs). However, those were bars that he “didn’t really care about.” Thus, in terms of his strategies, Jae was aware of certain spaces where his aesthetics were not found attractive, and thus he focused his efforts in other kinds of queer spaces. Jae did mention that there were certain Boystown spaces (such as Berlin, a club) where queer people were more transgressive or alternative in their presentation. However, Berlin did not fit into his overall characterization of Boystown.

Whether or not they were “mainstream or masculine gays,” many of the participants were generally heterophilous in their partnership practices and were ambivalent about those practices, and many experienced a degraded currency of erotic capital when looking for romantic and sexual partners, either online or in person. These differences between physical and virtual self-
presentations and how they relate to desirability have not been fully explored using the Sexual Fields framework. A fundamental difference between physical and online/virtual sexual fields could be the way that physical presentation of one’s body or one’s comportment is a more significant within those structures of desire than within online spaces. Jae and Sanjit’s subversion of hegemonically masculine gender presentation may have left them unintelligible within Sidetrack/Roscoe’s structures of desire, thus resulting in a feeling of being passed over or left out of the equation for others in the space looking for partners. In contrast, Joseph’s ability to access to perform a hegemonically masculine gender presentation conferred him erotic capital (although degraded) and thus he felt more desirable in that space. Because of the way that online presentation is irreducible to physical presentations of the self, even more masculine presenting participants like Joseph or Peter reported similar stereotypes of submissiveness and passivity being put upon them online; thus, there may be something different in the way that masculinity is physically embodied and read versus the way that masculinity is projected online that allows certain kinds of queer Asians (e.g., certain masculine presentations, certain racial presentations related to skin color) to occupy more physical space in Boystown. The privileges and status associated with embodied masculinity may then result in a different experience of racial marginalization for masculine queer Asians than those who are less masculine. For participants who were less masculine and mainstream in their presentation, Boystown was not generally a viable option to look for partners. Although these participants mentioned certain places that did feel more open to them like Berlin and Progress, they generally characterized Boystown as a place that was less open to them. Instead, participants like Jae and Sanjit found inclusivity in recurring events or themed parties that would happen in different parts of Chicago, not necessarily in Boystown. Thus, a common strategy for them was to seek out those special events
to socialize and to meet romantic and sexual partners. Jae discussed specifically seeking these kinds of events out:

So recently, I’ve been trying to go to—not to specific bars, but to more specific events. Slo-Mo is one that is explicitly on the website for queer people of color. All organized by queer women or queer femmes, most of them are of color and their mission statement is that this is a party for queer people of color and their friends. I think Slo-Mo stands for slow jams for homos or something like that. It’s really nice too because it’s a much more inclusive space, it’s a much more gender-inclusive space too, and something that I’ve noticed is that the more gender-inclusive spaces also tend to be more POC-inclusive. So, I’ve been to other bars that aren’t necessarily gay or queer bars but they are much more feminine or more targeted at women, and they’re just more diverse racially too.

Jae brought up Slo-Mo, an event that is specifically organized around gender and racial inclusivity. For Jae, this was much preferable than going to mainstream bars in Boystown that he saw as dominated by and geared towards white queer men. It was notable to Jae that the event organizers were women or feminine people and people of color; perhaps because of that reflection of some of his identities, Jae was able to feel that Slo-Mo would be more inclusive to him as a space that in many ways specifically challenged the mainstream gay male ethos of Boystown. Similarly, Sanjit discussed attending events run by queer South Asians:

Like I felt the safest in those spaces 'cause I was like everyone is a color. Everyone is a different color. Everyone's presenting differently. That felt the safest for me. Yeah, and I feel sad that our people don't, like people who are very clear and very of color and very non binary don't have a permanent safe space. You know, it's always like this constantly moving thing, it's temporary. Who knows? I don't know.

For Sanjit, it was also important that the people at these events reflected his identities, that there were many people of color, and that there were many different kinds of people of color and presentations of self. He felt safest in a space where perhaps the structures of desire in a space were not so crystallized as to have a uniform look of the clientele (e.g. the “whitewashed and straightwashed” Boystown bars like Roscoe’s and Sidetrack). However, there was also a tension for Sanjit in attending these kinds of events because of their transitory nature. For Sanjit, it was
significant that these events were a temporary suspension of those crystallized structures of
desire, and that in some ways it still doesn’t feel like a fulfilling act of subversion or resistance.
Jae also brought up how at some of these kinds of events, he would still see the “regular crowd”
(i.e., mainstream white gay men) of the bar, reminding him of this transitory nature.

In sum, these structures of desire which conferred queer Asians a low or degraded sense
of erotic capital often resulted in an ambivalent and complicated view of Boystown by the
participants. Although in a sense, Boystown was supposed to be a place where any queer person
could find community with other queer people, participants often felt that those spaces were not
necessarily for Asians or for people who were less masculine in their presentation. Thus, a
common strategy was to search for alternative types of queer spaces, such as queer events, where
those respondents felt “safer” and more generally included. However, as Sanjit’s words suggest,
there was often an emotional toll to employing these strategies that often felt like a stopgap, an
unfulfilling way of navigating an unequal playing field.

*Emotional Costs: “The last white man I’ll ever date”*

This brings us to my last empirical section, which focuses on the emotional costs of
degraded erotic capital, and the respondents’ associated strategies. There were multiple tensions
within the ways that participants explained their attractions, their partnerships, and how they felt
their racial identities factored into their experiences; engaging in these unequal partnerships with
white men however, often brought participants conflicting feelings of success while they felt
inferior. For one, although fewer participants named a specific attraction to white men, many
participants expressed a frustration both at the amount of white men that they had engaged with
romantically or sexually and at their experiences of rejection from white men. Relatedly,
although participants tended to pursue partnerships with typically white (or non-Asian),
masculine partners, participants tended to dislike the stereotypes that they felt those partners were placing on them. As a result, many participants were ambivalent about the number of their past partners who were white, or even their current partners.

Joseph, for example, was someone who explicitly stated an attraction to white men. He discussed how he had gotten out of a long-term relationship with a white man in the past year, and talked about a shift he had in thinking about his attractions:

It's so bad, but I make this joke, ‘I just had a lot of white meat and I want to branch out.’ I mean, that's what I tell my friends, and I just don't know. I think it was that. I didn't study sociology, but it's the whole we always put this gold stamp on white people. And so we live in this society where white comes first, so they're the ideal things in our mind, and once I had that and I experienced it, I was like, ‘Oh, now I've done the thing that society's told me to do, so now I can open my eyes.’

Joseph grew tired of the experiences that he had partnering with white men. In particular, his realization of the ways that racialized hierarchies of desire and white beauty norms were affecting who he found attractive made him want to resist those social forces. However, Joseph’s story also reveals a tension—those same forces that affected his attraction to white men were also the same forces that made him undesirable to them. When discussing his experiences with trying to meet partners, he talked about trying to talk to white men that were only into other white men:

It's one of those things like, ‘I think he's cute, but he's only into white guys.’ Or I would go out and just be envious of the white standard is better. So people don't really look at me the same as they would if I was white... ‘Oh well, I don't have as many opportunities in terms of people finding me attractive.’ So, nowadays I'm not really too depressed about it. I don't know if I'm just numb to it. I think I've just met more people that are more accepting of Asian people, so it's kind of uplifting me. And in terms of like we're going in a better direction. But it's still something that I think about.

Although Joseph discussed feeling like there had been a shift in how he viewed his attraction to white people, that shift did not necessarily feel empowering. He was unsure whether he had just
become numb to those feelings of rejection, or whether he had truly moved past it. Regardless, the undesirability that he faced due to his racial identity still weighed in his mind, and he felt that that was an unfair generalization of queer Asians that many white men were making.

These tensions were also apparent in Aaron’s story. Aaron discussed how his opinions on his facial features had changed, and how that was related to his attraction to white men:

> What do I like about my face? I like my full lips. I like my big eyes. Yeah, so that. I used to be insecure about my lips and also my nose. Pretty much insecure about everything. Again, growing up and coming from the Philippines, they have that colonial mentality that if you're not Caucasian or European looking, you're not really that attractive. I feel like there's beauty everywhere in every culture and I happen to be blessed with that. I realized that you don't have to be Caucasian in order to be considered good looking.

Aaron named a “colonial mentality,” referencing both his background from post-colonial Philippines as well as the ways that his cultural experience of colonialism affected what he found attractive. Similar to Joseph, at the same time as he found white men attractive as partners because of features that he associated with whiteness and European background, it also resulted in a negative valuation of his own features and of his own desirability as a partner. These negative feelings were enough for Aaron to want to change how he viewed his attractions. Thus, these men grew tired of being attracted to and pursuing white men that focus on whiteness made them feel lesser and unattractive. Despite this, both participants talked about current or recent sex partners that were white. So while the meanings that they attached to their white partnerships may have changed, they continued to engage in them. Similarly, Jae described a white man who he had started to see casually:

> This is kind of like a running joke that I’ve described him as, but he has like the weight of his entire race on his shoulders because he’s like the last white guy that I’ll ever date. I don’t know, right before I met him, I was like I’m done trying to date white guys.
It seemed difficult for participants to stop engaging romantically or sexually with white partners, in that their “last white guys” were not usually their last. This was not necessarily surprising, given that many participants also invoked the narrative that they could not really control who they were attracted to, and that sometimes it was just about sex. However, it was only with white partners that participants described wanting to change or shift their attractions; participants did not invoke these tensions when discussing partnerships with people of other racial identities. Even David, who was in a long-term, monogamous partnership with a white man, said:

David: Even though I am attracted to more than just white guys, when it came down to it, I would just mostly hook up with white guys. I don't know why. I think I was just scared of hanging out with a Black person, or Hispanic person, just 'cause I wasn't really familiar with it. I always told myself if I wasn't dating my boyfriend right now I think I would be with an Asian person, especially 'cause I've been traveling a lot the past couple of years to Asia, and I've just been falling in love with Asian men. And then, with my boyfriend I'm like, "If you weren't here, I probably wouldn't be dating a white guy."

Me: Uh-huh. And you said that to him?
David: No. He'd be like, "Fine, leave."

Despite having had a history of partnering with white men and having a current white partner, David was one of the few participants who explicitly said that he was attracted to other Asian men. While David reported being very happy in his current relationship with a white man, it raised the question of why that attraction was not something he saw himself being able to act upon. David’s fear of voicing these attractions to Asian men to his partner did not include a fear of him choosing to leave his boyfriend to pursue an Asian man, but rather his boyfriend telling him to leave. In other words, David could not even conceptualize leaving his partner, perhaps due to this inequality of erotic capital. Although there are many factors which affect whether
someone stays with or breaks up with a partner, it was of note that participants often felt that they did not have the agency to stop partnering with white men.

Moreover, tensions in feelings of agency and sexual stereotyping often weighed heavily in respondents’ minds. Feeling constrained to only taking the bottom position, for example, was often discussed by the respondents. For example, Peter, a masculine-presenting Asian man in an open marriage with a white man, had a strong reaction when discussing this Asian bottom stereotype:

Like I told you, automatically they assume all Asians are bottom. So there's many a time, I can go and fuck the shit out of you. You don't know me. Do you know what? In my relationship, I'm a bottom. But in other relationships I'm versatile you know that. But do you know that? Who are you to say all Asians tend to be … All Asians are bottom. You don’t know that. So don’t assume.

Peter was adamant in rejecting these stereotypes put on him by others in the queer community. He resisted the narrative that Asians are unable to take the insertive role in sex by reasserting his own sexual abilities. However, as much as Peter said that he was versatile (meaning that he enjoys taking either the insertive or receptive role), he was strictly the bottom in the relationship with his white husband. Peter explained it was because his husband “hates to bottom.” It would be reductive to assert that Peter did not top his husband only because of a racialized power dynamic—there are many actions that we do for the ones we love just because they do not like it, such as taking out the trash. However, this tension between Peter’s rejection of racialized bottoming stereotypes and the sexual role he often took with his husband raises the question of how Peter came to understand that he liked bottoming. He did not ever interrogate why his white husband would only be a top, though he challenged the stereotype that Asians could only be bottoms. Thus, Peter’s story suggests that some of these wider constructions regarding sexual positioning may be at play in the queer Asian habitus. Other participants who were in long term
relationships with white men also expressed a similar tension between awareness of these stereotypes, which brought about negative feelings, and the fact that they tended to take the receptive role in sex with their long-term partners. Joseph, who had been with his white boyfriend for 4 years, said:

There's always the Asian equals bottom thing. That fact comes up a lot. I figured that would come up in our conversation at some point. But I think that's a pretty prevalent stereotype. And then my partner also gets that from the other end. Like, "Oh, you're dating an Asian guy, you must be the top." Since his previous relationship was with a Black guy, he always got that he must have been the bottom.

Since Joseph was in an open relationship, he described often bottoming for his boyfriend, but being a top with his other sex partners. However, Joseph also brought up the fact that these racialized stereotypes applied to other racial groups as well, specifically in the context of inter-racial partnerships. Joseph’s white boyfriend was assumed to take the insertive position in their relationship, but conversely, his boyfriend was assumed to take the receptive role in a relationship with a Black man. This suggests a hierarchy of topping/bottoming that places Black men as primarily insertive partners, Asian men as primarily receptive partners, with white men somewhere in the middle. As many of the participants associated topping/taking the insertive role with masculinity, this sex position hierarchy aligns well with racialized constructions of masculinity. In these constructions, white men are considered to possess a normative masculinity from which men of color deviate: Asian men are considered hypomasculine, and Black (and sometimes Latino men) are considered hypermasculine (Chou 2012). Thus, their possession of erotic capital and the processes in the queer Asian habitus structured the experiences that these queer Asian people had in their sexual and romantic partnerships.

As discussed throughout these sections on degraded erotic capital, participants were often subjected to harmful and insulting messages of racism when looking for partners online. These
experiences of casual racism from others in the queer communities often had a high emotional
toll on the respondents. Many of the participants often left these messages unaddressed or dealt
with them in a more passive fashion, such as blocking another online user from sending further
messages. This process had its own emotional toll, as discussed by Jae:

If I just saw on their profile no Blacks, no femmes, no Asians, I would just immediately
report the profile, so any time…. Like I wouldn’t go through every single one, but every
time I tap somebody’s profile I would just immediately block and report them. I wouldn’t
even message them calling them out. In terms of actually receiving messages like that, it
is very much picking my own battles. It sounds awful, but sometimes just based on how
old they are and how they look, it’s not worth the effort trying to educate you because it
kind of seems like it would just be pointless. And I think, when I was a little younger, no
that I’m like ancient now, I have a little more gumption to be like that’s fucked up, don’t
say that. But now, it’s just the exhaustion of having that accumulation of experiences it’s
just like nope, just report it and block.

Thus, even as respondents like Jae chose not to engage with people who excluded Asians
or other people of color through the sign-equipment of their profiles, there was still an emotional
cost in having to process those kinds of statement and sentiments. As Jae described it, the
“accumulation” of those kinds of experiences weighed quite heavily on his shoulders. However,
some participants also discussed trying to engage with Grindr users who had messages like
“whites only” or “no Asians” in their profile. Peter, for example, discussed calling these people
out:

I would say, “have you been with all Asians? Some Asians will rock your world. I may
not be the right one. But do not ever say all Asians are horrible sex partners or whatever.
You don’t know that.” Many times, especially on Grindr, don’t get me started with that.
Yes, some people call me bitchy. Yes, I’m very outspoken. But I need to. Like I said, I
am actually … You’re talking about the next generation, for Asians to come out, and still
experience this… We went from nobody recognized us and now it’s beginning somebody
actually recognizes us. So I like to speak up, yes.

As most of my interview sample were in their mid to late twenties and early thirties, Peter
was somewhat older than the others at 46. He described seeing many changes in his time in the
queer communities of Chicago, and in particular his experiences were that queer Asians were
increasingly “recognized” as part of the Chicago queer community. For Peter, interacting with others in this way was less about meeting them as sex partners, but rather in convincing them to remove those messages from their profiles. The meanings that Peter attached to his interactions with racists or people who rejected Asians or other people of color were often about helping younger queer people of color. Thus, Peter was somewhat ambivalent about directly addressing these people. On the one hand, he felt that he was helping out that younger generation by trying to induce change in online cultures of racism, but on the other hand, it showed that there was still much more to be done. In sum, there were often heavy emotional costs in the experience of degraded erotic capital and engaging in unequal partnerships (or even just interactions) with white men, even though white men were considered higher status partners.
Data Integration Discussion

Through this mixed method investigation of sequential explanatory design, my goal was to conduct a quantitative analysis, then use qualitative data to deepen and further my explanations of the patterns I found in the quantitative data. In my quantitative analysis, my main finding was that queer Asian men were significantly heterophilous compared to non-Asian queer men. Through my qualitative investigation, I was able to deepen understandings of why queer Asians were particularly heterophilous compared to queer non-Asians in Chicago, and the subjective meanings that queer Asians attach to their heterophilous partnerships. Comparing findings in the quantitative and the qualitative data, queer Asians in both samples had highly heterophilous romantic/sexual networks, thus corroborating the mixed method findings. While network analysis can abstract certain aspects of social relations while highlighting others—e.g., heterophilous ties become conceptually equivalent in networks, thus highlighting differences between racial groups while smoothing out differences within racial groups—I was able to use qualitative data to bring out some of those differences within queer Asians and show nuanced subjective meanings attached to heterophily and racialized partnership.

Moreover, the qualitative data allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of quantitative findings. Interestingly, although serious partnerships were significantly associated with racial/ethnic homophily in the quantitative findings, only one of the nine qualitative respondents in serious/long-term partnerships was in a racially/ethnically homophilous partnership. This suggests that the statistical effects of a serious partnership on racial/ethnic homophily need to be teased out by racial/ethnic group (e.g., it may be possible that serious partnerships tend to be
homophilous for queer Black men but not for queer Asians). Further, respondents didn’t generally discuss age homophily in relation to racial/ethnic homophily, other than the fact that most participants tried to choose partners who were somewhat close in age to themselves. Lastly, I was also able to add nuance to the non-significant association in the quantitative analysis between the place/space a partner was met and racial/ethnic homophily. Through my discussion of the different sign-equipments on different online spaces and certain qualitative respondents’ experience of Boystown spaces, I was able to show that space and place may have a great influence both in the strategies that queer Asians employ to find partners and in the ways that queer Asians think about their racial identity. It may be that in the RADAR data, the operationalization of the space in which a partner was met was not granular enough to capture these differing relations that were elicited by my qualitative respondents, thus making that variable non-significant in the homophily model.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data added substantial nuance to my investigation of the network theory of homophily. Homophily is often conceptualized by network theorists as a guiding, organizing principle of social life. Network scholars who study populations with different racial identities have stated that racial and ethnic identities are one of the most prevalent homophilic forces that guide network formation (McPherson et al. 2001). While the majority of network studies are quantitative in nature and can show general trends, these investigations are often missing in rich explanations and theories as to how people conceptualize homophily, and what variability might exist surrounding homophilous trends. Thus, these explanations of homophily tend to overlook differences in context and geography.

5 In the homophily model, there was not significant variation by ego race in the effect of serious partnerships on homophily to justify this type of random slopes analysis. However, the qualitative data suggest that this non-significance may be due to a limitation of the RADAR sample (because of the low cell counts of Asian egos, and an even smaller number of Asian egos with serious partners) rather than a reflection of social trends.
I was able to show that, despite a general trend of heterophily for partnership formation among queer Asians in Chicago, there were different ways that participants engaged with and conceptualize this heterophily that they experienced. Some did not seem to think much of it, suggesting that in some circles, heterophily may actually be more normalized. Others had quite conflicted and ambivalent feelings towards this pattern of heterophily, although they continued to engage in heterophilous partnerships with white people. A smaller number engaged in homophilous partnerships, though they sometimes felt that they were unusual for doing so. These nuances, and in particular the differences in the meanings participants attached to their partnerships, would not have been captured with strict quantitative data due to a focus on more easily observable outcomes. For example, while RADAR data were able to show which Asians in the sample were heterophilous, they could not tell the various subjective meanings those participants attached to their networks.

Additionally, the integration of these two types of data also allowed me to inform the Sexual Fields framework, which is primarily a qualitative framework. The quantitative description of heterophily for queer Asians allowed me to focus my conceptualizations of erotic capital. In particular, knowing that this was a common statistical trend allowed me to ask participants questions that focused on the meanings that they attached to heterophily, thus deepening understandings of how heterophily relates to differentials in erotic capital due to race and racial presentation. Moreover, I was able to look at the different ways that this statistical trend shows up in the lives of queer Asians along different axes of identity such as immigrant identification, masculine or feminine presentation, or cisgender or transgender identity. While there were so many differences between participant experiences along these axes of identity, integrating the quantitative data allowed me to both highlight these qualitative differences while...
focusing on ways that these experiences are related and might aggregate to form a statistical
trend.

I am not aware of a study thus far that has put the Sexual Fields framework in
conversation with quantitative analysis, and thus this provides opportunities to conceptualize
how some of these qualitative concepts like erotic capital might be quantified (and the ways in
which that quantification may capture different aspects of erotic capital while obscuring or
rendering invisible others). For example, while the quantitative analysis of erotic capital using
distinct and presumably stable racial groups obscures differences in racialized presentations, it
allows for a broad, big picture trend of what partnerships look like between high status, high
capital partners and lower status, low capital partners (e.g. the statistical prevalence of
Asian/non-Asian partnerships) and dovetails well with the qualitative meanings a wide variety of
the interview participants attached to their partnerships with non-Asians, typically white people
(that they experienced the negative effects of this status differential). Another instance could be
the quantitative coding of partnership type, such as the coding of serious vs. casual partnerships
used in this study. Although this would also obscure qualitative differences between different
sets of partnerships, this analysis (e.g. serious partners were more likely to be homophilous)
similarly allows for a big picture view of how partnership type might relate to erotic capital and
heterophily. Although many of the interview participants were in serious partnerships with white
men, they also discussed how more casual “hookups” with white men allowed them to ignore
certain aspects of these differences in erotic capital, thus dovetailing nicely with the quantitative
finding on homophily. A strict quantitative analysis may not be sufficient for a full field
theoretical analysis, but many of these field concepts can be extended to quantitative models if in
a somewhat limited way.
**Limitations**

The main limitation of this qualitative sample was that variation along certain axes of difference was not able to be explored, due to the small sample size. As mentioned previously, while there were many East and Southeast Asian voices represented in this qualitative sample, there was only one South Asian participant (who was also mixed) and no Central/West Asian participants. However, South and Central Asian-American experiences may be sufficiently distinct from East and Southeast Asian-Americans to warrant a different discussion. Although I had tried to target recruitment of people from South Asian communities, it eventually proved very difficult for me to retain those potential participants, and I wonder if it had something to do with the different ways that South Asians relate to (or do not relate to) Asian-American identity (Okamoto and Mora 2014). Similarly, I only had one participant who identified as a transgender man, and two who had a gender non-conforming identity. Thus, I was unable to discuss more specifically how experiences of gender variance relate to erotic capital among my queer Asian respondents (although based on the hegemony of white masculinity all the respondents discussed, the implication is that this would result in lowered or degraded erotic capital, compounded with transphobia and cissexism). Moreover, the sample comprised of people mostly in their 20s and 30s, and only two participants who were above age 40. Thus, many of their experiences were rooted in the fact that they became adults (and for many, started to explore their queer identity) in the aughts and 2010s. Thus, the experiences of queer Asians who are older, such as those who became adults in the 80s and 90s may be different in the sense that attitudes towards queerness and queer identity have shifted since then. Future studies which explore erotic capital and Sexual Fields should attempt to seek out these variations in Asian-American backgrounds, gender identities, and age/generation.
Future Directions

Future studies could try to look at a larger sample of qualitative interviews that allows for more exploration of variability. Moreover, it may be interesting to conduct a similar study where participants complete both a quantitative network survey, and a (potentially randomized) subsample of those participants are selected to participate in a qualitative interview. This would allow for a tighter integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, as, for example, participants with different types of networks (e.g. highly homophilous vs. highly heterophilous) could be asked more focused questions about their attractions and the way that they look for partners in the qualitative interview, thus eliciting a more in-depth picture of their partnering practices.

Moreover, adding ethnographic techniques would dovetail nicely with these analyses, allowing for a view into how participants’ own sense of erotic capital and structures of desire may play out in these various spaces. Additionally, a technique of virtual or digital ethnography would be helpful to capture social dynamics of online spaces like Grindr as well, especially as online spaces seemed to be quite popular among the queer Asian participants. Lastly, it may be fruitful to investigate more thoroughly how the concept of degraded erotic capital might apply to racialized groups other than Asians. Although I drew some connections between my respondents and the Black gay men in Green’s initial Sexual Fields study, conducting qualitative interviews of a sample encompassing multiple racial groups would allow for a more in-depth investigation of how different histories and constructions of racialization may play out in the conferment of (degraded) erotic capital, and whether different groups of queer people of color follow similar or divergent experiences of racialized eroticization.
Table 1. Quantitative sample demographics from RADAR.

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<th>Egos (n = 649)</th>
<th>Alters (n=1,842)</th>
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Table 3. Multilevel racial/ethnic homophily model estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within-level Variables</th>
<th>Coefficient (log odds)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% CI, Odds Ratio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alter met online vs. in person (reference)</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>[0.61, 1.14]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serious partner vs. casual (reference)</td>
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<td><strong>1.57</strong></td>
<td>[<strong>1.04, 2.35</strong>]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age homophily</td>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>[0.95, 1.01]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Between-level Variables                       |                        |            |                   |
| Asian ego vs. non-Asian (reference)           | **-2.31**              | **0.10**   | [**0.03, 0.31**]  |

Note: Bolded estimates are significant at 95% confidence.
References


ISGMH. "Radar " [http://isgmh.northwestern.edu/about/impact/radar/](http://isgmh.northwestern.edu/about/impact/radar/).


Appendix. Interview Schedule.

Note: Because this is a semi-structured interview, the exact wording of questions will vary between participants. Some questions may be omitted if the participant answers them in previous questions, or if time does not allow. If certain themes emerge in participant responses, I may choose to probe on them. Probes and clarifications are included in the interview script below.

Introduction

In this interview, I’ll be asking you about the people that you partner with, and how you go about finding your partners.

By partners, I mean the people that you have engaged with sexually and/or romantically. How you define what that engagement is mostly up to you, but it can include people you’ve had sex with, people you’ve gone on dates with, people that you consider a serious partner, people that you consider a casual partner, and so on.

This first set of questions will ask about what your partners are like. As a reminder, I am not looking for any particular responses, and you may choose not to answer any of the questions that I ask you during the interview.

Characteristics of Sex Partners

1. Do you have a current serious partner or partners?
   a. Clarification: could be considered someone that you call a boyfriend or girlfriend, someone that you’ve engaged with romantically/sexually for a longer period of time
   b. Probe: What are they like?
   c. Clarification: physical or personality traits, age, racial identity, etc
d. **Probe:** How did you meet?

e. **Clarification:** Location, venue, mobile application, etc

2. **Who are you attracted to? What’s your type?**
   a. **Clarification:** certain groups of people, certain physical or personality traits, certain social identities (e.g. racial)
   b. **Probe:** If you don’t have a type, why do you think you don’t?

3. **Where do you think your types and preferences for partners come from? In other words, why do you think you have these types of preferences?**
   a. **Clarification:** These can be past experiences with people, things that others have told you, things that you feel about yourself, etc
   b. **Probe:** Have they changed at all over the course of your life? How?
   c. **Probe:** Would your preferences be different if you lived somewhere else? Why or why not?

4. **Describe to me someone that you were/are very attracted to.**
   a. **Probe:** What do you like about them? What about them is attractive to you?
   b. **Probe:** Were/are they a partner of yours? If so, what was/is it like having them as a partner?

5. **Have you had any partners that do not typically match your type/preferences?**
   a. **Clarification:** could be someone that you didn’t expect to partner with, someone that you weren’t/aren’t particularly attracted to
   b. **Probe:** Tell me about some of them. What are they like? How did you meet?
   c. **Probe:** How did it feel to partner with them?
   d. **Probe:** Why do you think you chose to partner with them?

6. **Would you say that your partners tend to share your racial identity?**
   a. **Probe:** Why or why not?
   b. **Probe:** How does the racial identity of your partners relate to the types/preferences of people that you’re attracted to?

**Partner Search Practices**

Let’s shift gears a little bit and talk about how you find your partners.

7. **How do you typically find your partners?**
   a. **Clarification:** bars/clubs, online or mobile applications, through social circles, etc
   b. **Probe:** What does this process look like? Do you tend to initiate these interactions?

8. **If you use websites or mobile applications to find partners, which ones do you use?**
   a. **Probe:** What do you think you use the most?

**Note:** I will likely ask about multiple virtual spaces if the participant lists more than one. I may choose to probe on specific spaces depending on participant responses.

9. **Tell me about <virtual space>.**
97
16. Who were the people that were there? What are they like?
   a. **Clarification**: physical or personality characteristics, social identities (LGBTQ, race/ethnicity, gender, etc)

17. How did people interact with you in the space? How did you talk with people?
   a. **Clarification**: do you talk with a lot of people, do people initiate conversations with you, do people respond to your initiations, did people find you attractive, did people ignore you
   b. **Probe**: Who did you interact with? What were they like?
   c. **Probe**: Why do you interact in this way?
   d. **Probe**: Who do you choose not to interact with? What are they like?

18. What would you say are characteristics of people who others typically find attractive at <physical space>?
   a. **Clarification**: types/traits of people that are popular at <physical space>, types/traits of people that are typically attractive/desirable at <physical space>
   b. **Probe**: Where do you think you fit into what people find attractive at <physical space>?

19. How do you think about your racial identity when you’re at <physical space>?
   a. **Probe**: If it affects your experience in the space, why do you think so? If not, why not?
   b. **Probe**: How do you talk about your racial identity at <physical space>, if at all?
   c. **Probe**: How do others talk about their racial identities at <physical space>, if at all?
   d. **Probe**: If people don’t explicitly talk about racial identity at <physical space>, are there other ways it might come up?
   e. **Clarification**: coded language, euphemisms, slang

20. Do you ever go on <virtual space> while you’re at <physical space>?
   a. **Probe**: How and when do you do that? What does that look like?
   b. **Probe**: Why do you choose to do that?
   c. **Probe**: How does your use of <virtual space> while you’re at <physical space> compare to your use of <virtual space> at other places?
   d. **Clarification**: do you go on it with a different purpose in mind, do you go on it discreetly vs. openly, etc

21. How do the partners that you meet on <virtual space> compare to those met at <physical space>?
   a. **Clarification**: types/traits of people, identities, etc
   b. **Probe**: What do you think about this comparison or difference? If there isn’t a difference between those partners, why isn’t there?
   c. **Probe**: How do the partners that you meet on <virtual space> and <physical space> compare to your type/preferences for partners?

22. What are some less typical ways you look for, or have found partners?
   a. **Clarification**: e.g., certain physical spaces or virtual spaces you rarely occupy, meeting someone by chance
   b. **Probe**: Why do you think these are less typical ways for you?
Racial Identity and Chicago

We’re almost at the end of the interview. I’m going to ask you some general questions about how you reflect on your racial identity as a Chicago resident, and also get some demographic information from you.

23. How important is your racial identity to you, in general?
   a. *Probe:* How often and when do you reflect on your racial identity?
   b. *Probe:* In what ways do you reflect on your racial identity?

24. What spaces in Chicago are the most welcoming to people who share your racial identity?
   a. *Clarification:* could be specific places, neighborhoods, areas, etc
   b. *Probe:* Do you frequent these spaces?
   c. *Probe:* Why are those places welcoming?
   d. *Probe:* Are those places also welcoming to people with LGBTQ identities? Why or why not?

25. Where do queer people usually go in Chicago?
   a. *Clarification:* Can be spaces, venues, neighborhoods, areas, etc
   b. *Probe:* How do those spaces that are welcoming to Asians compare to typical spaces where queer people go in Chicago?
   c. *Probe:* If they’re similar, why? If not, why not?
   d. *Probe:* What is it like to go to these typical spaces?

26. What are spaces, if any, where queer Asian men typically go?
   a. *Probe:* Do you frequent these spaces? Why or why not?
   b. *Probe:* Why do you think queer Asian men go to these spaces?

Demographics and Snowball Recruitment

1. What is your:
   a. Age
   b. Race and ethnicity
      i. *Clarification:* e.g., I am Asian and Filipino
   c. Do you identify as an immigrant?
   d. What Chicago area you live in
      i. *Clarification:* e.g. Uptown, Edgewater, Boystown
   e. Highest education you’ve completed?
      i. *Clarification:* high school, college, graduate school, etc

2. Do you have any questions for me?
3. Do you know anyone who identifies as a man, identifies as gay, bisexual, queer, or other non-heterosexual identity, identifies as Asian and/or Asian-American, speaks English, and is at least 18 years old?
   a. Is this person/people similar to you in terms of their partnering preferences?
   b. Would you be comfortable giving me a way to contact them to see if they would want to participate in this research?
   c. Would you mind giving out these cards with my study information to people who would fit the criteria?