Just a preference : exploring concepts of race among gay men looking for sex or dates online

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Just a preference: Exploring concepts of race among gay men looking for sex or dates online

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thoughts, and experiences.

Publications and Presentations

The following is a list of publications and presentations derived from the data collected and

analyses conducted as part of this research. The analyses included in the thesis are more

developed and recent than those included in the publications listed here. An updated and

complete list of publications relevant to this project can be found online at

www.dentoncallander.com.

Publications

Callander, D., Holt, M., Newman, C. (2012). Just a preference: racialised language in the sex-seeking profiles of gay and bisexual men. *Culture, Health and Sexuality, 14*(9), 1049-1063.

Callander, D., Holt., M., Newman, C. (forthcoming). 'Not everyone's gonna like me': Accounting for race and racism in Australian sex and dating webservices for gay and bisexual men. In A. Harris and A. Mohummadally (Eds.), *Multicultural queer Australia: Then, now and the future.* Sydney, NSW: AGMC.

Presentations

Callander, D., Holt, M., Newman, C. (2013, August). Is online sexual racism *really* racism? Presentation at the *International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society Conference*, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Callander, D., Newman, C., & Holt, M. (2013, August). Preference or prejudice: Exploring and challenging race-based attraction among gay and bisexual men in Australia. Presentation [poster] at the *International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society Conference*, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Callander, D., Holt, M., & Newman, C. (2012, April). How gay and bisexual men approach and navigate concepts related to race when they go looking for sex or dates online. Presentation at the *British Psychological Society Annual Conference*, London, UK.

Callander, D., Newman, C., & Holt, M. (2011, September). Just a preference: Exploring 'online sexual racism' and its relationship to sexual-risk-taking among gay and bisexual men in Australia. Presentation at the *Australasian Society of HIV Medicine Annual Conference*, Canberra, Australia.

Callander, D. (2011, September). Just a preference: How gay and bisexual men conceptualise race in looking for sex or dates online. Presentation at the *English, Media and Performing Arts Annual Postgraduate Symposium*, Sydney, Australia.

Abstract

For many gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, the Internet is a central aspect of their sexual and romantic lives. Although often trumpeted as a convenient way to meet people, online sex and dating present unique challenges for those looking to connect. Among these is how racial concepts are used to define desire or disinterest, which in Australia is a contentious issue among men who look for sex or dates online. Although recent media attention has propelled what is sometimes called 'online sexual racism' into mainstream debates, very little is known about this concept, its potential impact or men's perceptions of it. This thesis addresses that gap by exploring concepts of race and racism on sex and dating webservices for same-sex attracted men. A mixed methods approach was adopted, which consisted of a content analysis of sex and dating profiles posted online, a national online survey of gay and bisexual men in Australia, and in-depth interviews with gay men who use sex and dating webservices. The findings across these methods suggest a diversity of attitudes exists towards race online, accompanied by individual and often situationally-dependent understandings and expressions of racism and online etiquette. The ways in which men talk about race and their online practices differ among racial groups and reflect broader Australian discourses of race. There seems to be, however, interest among some of the gay men who use these webservices to approach concepts of race (and racism) from a critical position. Nevertheless, widely differing opinions and experiences related to race remain, as does the need for further work to engage men and ask important questions about the role and impact of race among these online communities. Although many men are troubled or conflicted about ideas of race and racism as they intersect with their search for sex or romance, the overwhelming response to this as an issue was one of resignation. This thesis provides a first analysis of the complex tension between ideals of sexual liberty, the normalisation of racial prejudice, and the increasingly important online social spaces that are negotiated by gay and bisexual men.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Internet is a central aspect of the sex and dating lives of many gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. Changes in technology continue to offer new platforms from which men can connect and it is increasingly common for men to report meeting their first male partner through online channels. The enduring and apparently growing popularity of Internet sex and dating among gay men has fostered interest and, in some cases, even concern over the cultures of sex and dating online. One highly salient and contested aspect of these online cultures is discrimination among potential partners based on race. Appearing on public sex and dating profiles, comments such as, "No Indian guys," and, "White guys to the front of the line," raise questions about appropriate language and behaviour in this setting, as well as the impacts of the articulation of this type of race-based discrimination. It has also ignited a debate between those who call such practices 'sexual racism' and others who would defend them as 'just' a matter of personal preference. This thesis seeks to explore issues related to the articulation and negotiation of concepts relating to race and racism among online sex and dating communities of gay men in Australia.

To date, some illuminating research has been published on the subject of race, racism and gay men. Some has highlighted the dominance of Whiteness in online and offline cultures of sex and dating (McBride, 2005; Teunis, 2007), while others have introduced personal narratives detailing some of the challenges that men of non-White backgrounds (who in Australia are the minority racial groups) face while trying to connect sexually with other gay men (see C. Han, 2007). Most of the available research, however, has emerged from the particular discourses of race that drive the social, political and sexual landscapes of the USA, with a few notable exceptions. In Australia, where this project is situated, some research has highlighted the challenges that many men of minority racial groups face when attempting

to connect with others online (Raj, 2011; Riggs, 2012). However, while that research considers both the Australian context and an online environment, much of what is available is relatively limited in its scope. Missing in the research literature to date is a comprehensive overview of what race and racism mean to online gay sex and dating communities. Not only is the Internet a key dimension of contemporary sex and dating cultures for gay men today but also its structural characteristics might foster different types of behaviour that are only rarely seen elsewhere. Such potential is important in considering a concept such as race, which carries significant discursive weight in terms of the associated cultural and political tensions.

Recent articles in gay and mainstream news media suggest 'online sexual racism' is an issue of growing interest and concern for an increasing number of people (see Matheson, 2012; Law, 2012). As further demonstration of this social interest, several campaigns launched by community and advocacy organisations in Australia have targeted this issue. One such example is the website, 'Sexual Racism Sux' (http://www.sexualracismsux.com/; Mansfield & Quan, 2013), which provides testimonies, discussions and resources aimed at challenging racist practices and perceptions about race and sex both online and offline. Blogs, videos and even *Tumblr* pages have also been used as platforms for individuals to share diverse media representations that analyse or defend race and racism as a part of gay men's sexual experiences. Through social media sharing, notably, and in the comment sections of newspaper articles posted online, a debate over the boundaries of racism persists, which is complicated against a backdrop of sexual desire and individual proclivities.

Central to debates on this issue is whether or not it is fair or appropriate to conceptualise racialised partner discrimination online – that is, making distinctions among potential sexual or romantic partners based on perceived racial identity – as a form of racism. Traditional definitions of racism are not

universally agreed upon, but when applied to a sex and dating context, these issues become further complicated by the intersection of additional compelling discourses relating to 'sexual liberty' or the 'right to choose', i.e., the right to make clear distinctions, racial or otherwise, among sexual or romantic partners. Commentators in gay media have even come out publicly to analyse the notion of a 'sexual racist':

> I seem to know loads of sexual racists. People who won't have sex with Indians or blacks or even whites; I even know people from various races who will only have sex with one specific race that isn't their own. I need to ask though, is that so bad? I mean, I won't have sex with women because I'm gay, but does that make me sexist or a misogynist? (Matheson, 2012).

Strong voices on the other side of this debate have also spoken about the need to challenge racialised partner discrimination in sexual contexts:

> . . . sexual behaviour is no more justified a place for racial prejudice than any other area of life. We should stop making racist statements in essentially public forums like personal ad sites. If our sexual preferences have had an ethnic or racial bias, we should challenge ourselves to confront those limits and, if we can, exceed them (Mansfield & Quan, 2013).

There is no doubt that issues relating to sex and race are laden with strong opinions and it is interesting to see these different opinions being expressed and critiqued. However, very little documented and evidenced research is available regarding community attitudes towards these concepts, despite many pundits, writers and journalists weighing into the debates.

1.1 Thesis aims

This thesis is exploratory in nature and has four primary aims. The first is to describe the activities men are engaging in regarding race and racism in seeking sex and dates with other men online. Of specific interest here is how men use and make sense of their own or other people's perceived race in this context. Second, in recognition of the diverse and conflicting opinions on these issues, this thesis aims to describe and explore the various positions that gay men hold, some of which are expressed through sex and dating webservices themselves. As already suggested by the quotations above, this line of

inquiry is rich with potential for helping to illuminate the meanings of race and racism for communities of gay men (both online and offline). A third aim is to assess the potential impacts of online experiences related to race and racism while looking for sex or dates. This assessment includes impacts in both the online and offline worlds and considers earlier research that has suggested a possible link between experiences of racism and detrimental effects for individuals. The final aim is to provide recommendations for possible interventions, strategies, approaches and, of course, future research that can continue to address some of the issues raised by this project.

1.2 The thesis scope

This thesis addresses a specific form of racial prejudice (sexual and romantic) within a particular environment (online) and in a specific national setting (Australia). Further, it is exclusively interested in addressing these matters as they relate to gay men, which is how men with same-sex attraction will be described throughout this work. It is essential that the specificity of this project be recognised because it helps to identify the boundaries of this research. It might not be appropriate, for example, to assume that an inference drawn from this project could necessarily be applied to another population or in another country. As I will argue in more detail in the coming chapters, a concept such as race must be explored in relation to the national setting in which the relevant concepts are expressed. Of particular interest are the historical, social and political forces that are unique to every national and cultural setting. The same applies to focusing on gay men and the online environment. The interactions among these key concepts and their position within this research are best understood in relation to the focus of this project. While there is some potential to outline the broad conclusions in relation to any or all of the main themes of the research, it is essential to recognise that it might not always be appropriate to do so.

1.3 Thesis structure

This research is located at the intersection of several important areas of work pertaining to race, sex and the Internet. Chapter 2 reviews some of the most relevant literature on prejudice, race and racism, with a focus on how these concepts are deployed in Australia and among communities of gay men. It also reviews some of the available literature on 'sexual racism'. With the Internet forming a key component of this project, chapter 3 is devoted to research on Internet use and, in particular, to online community dynamics. Again, part of this chapter involves a focused review of research on gay men and the Internet, as well as the search for sex or dates online. This project is based on a three-stage, sequential, mixed methods approach, as detailed in the first part of chapter 4. The remainder of chapter 4 describes the methodology, methods, results and inferences to be drawn from the first stage of the research: a content analysis of sex and dating profiles posted online by gay men. Chapter 5 details the methods, results and inferences relative to the second stage: a national online survey of gay men in Australia. Finally, the third stage consisted of in-depth interviews with gay-identified men in Australia, which is explained in chapter 6. The final chapter of this thesis, chapter 7, is organised around a discussion of the overarching themes and insights generated across the three research stages and includes conclusions and recommendations regarding future directions.

1.4 Locating myself

Just as it is necessary to draw out the boundaries of this thesis, so it is important to recognise my own place within my research. I identify as a White gay man, who actively participates in the sex and dating communities of interest to this work. In some ways, this identity and my experiences have likely provided a type of 'insider knowledge' regarding the particular facets and dynamics of these cultures. At the same time, that insight might also have led me to take certain things for granted or biased me against recognising issues that can be revealed only when examined at a distance. I fully acknowledge

that my engagement with online sex and dating webservices– which was my first introduction to other

gay men over ten years ago – has both guided and driven the development of this research and the

particular methods employed here, along with my approach to interpreting the data and information

gathered. Further, as a White gay man, I understand that my experiences have likely been very different

from that of men of other racial identities, in particular those in Australia who identify with a minority

racial background. Although part of this project requires engagement with the stories and experiences

of men from minority racial groups, I make no claims of representation. Instead, in as critical a fashion as

possible, I endeavour to present my interpretation of what was shared. Nevertheless, during my years

of engaging with online cultures for gay men, I have developed a deep personal interest in seeing these

online communities thrive in a way that fosters more positive and inclusive connections between and

among men. This is a particular 'truth' that underpins this project and has been my motivating drive for

conducting this research.

Chapter 2

Prejudice and racism

This chapter and chapter 3 review the literature relevant to this project. Chapter 3 reviews research that relates to the Internet and this chapter summarises and discusses some key research theories and concepts that relate to prejudice and racism. While this material represents an enormous body of work, the chapter is intended to draw on research from the social sciences most relevant to the topic of this thesis – race, sex and the Internet. It also includes material that must be acknowledged to enable an understanding of the broader context of this research. The early part of this chapter reviews some of the prominent theories and hypotheses that have attempted to explain the origins of prejudices (and the stereotypes that support them), drawing on research from traditional psychology. Part of this review also involves seeking to establish some working definitions of the terms that underpin this research, namely *prejudice*, *stereotype, discrimination,* and *race*. I then discuss the specific form of prejudice in which that this research is interested – racism – in more detail, with reference to the social context and history of racial discourses in Australia. Finally, the last section explores the particular dynamics relating to race and racism among gay men, which are often organised around issues relating to sex and desire. This work moves the review towards an understanding of more critical perspectives on racism and sexuality, in advance of the following chapter, which reviews contemporary Internet research.

2.1 Defining prejudice

Gordon Allport (1979) wrote one of the definitive works on prejudice as a function of social behaviour. Part of his writing explored definitions of prejudice, which Allport described through the idea of 'ethnic prejudice'. He defined ethnic prejudice as:

. . . an antipathy based upon a faulty or inflexible generalisation. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group (p. 9).

Although now somewhat dated, this definition highlights many prominent features of prejudice that continue to inform contemporary research. Allport views prejudice as an internal (felt) or external (expressed) phenomenon and a presumption of group membership is seen to form the basis upon which prejudices are formed, which means that prejudices can be individually or collectively directed. Generalisations organise and mobilise prejudiced thinking. Prejudice is also characterised as a 'fault' in perception or cognition.

The main problem with Allport's definition is not what it does but what it fails to do. Primarily, it ignores the possibility that one can express prejudice in positive forms. Positive prejudice, by way of example, would be an expression such as, "All Asian people are smart" or "Black people are good at dancing." From the speaker's perspective, these generalisations are activated through a stereotype linked to particular racial groups and are positively constructed in a way that appears, on the surface, to be complimentary. To address this gap, J. Jones (1997) developed a more complete definition that captured the possibility of prejudice being expressed as either a positive or negative construct: "A positive or negative argument, judgement or feeling about a person that is generalized from attitudes or beliefs about the group to which that person belongs" (p 10). This definition also includes references to generalizations and group membership, while being explicit that prejudice can be framed either negatively or positively. As a definition of prejudice, however, it is also somewhat lacking in that it seems to underplay the troubling social implications. While capturing the positive/negative binary, the definition produced by Brown (2011) clarifies that all prejudice, even positive prejudice, is based on negative assumptions about the characteristics of a group: "Any attitude, emotion or behaviour towards members of a group, which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy towards that

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group" (p.7). Although it may seem paradoxical for positive prejudice to imply negativity, the reduction

of an individual to a singular category serves, even unintentionally, an agenda of subordination (Brown,

2011). As an example, consider this statement: 'women are special and should be treated like queens'.

On the surface such a statement is seemingly positive but it actually reproduces a role for women as

dependent on or subordinate to men (Glick & Flake, 1996). Because of this appreciation for the

negative implications of prejudice – whether expressed through positive or negative stereotyping – it is

Brown's conceptualisation of prejudice that predominantly informs this thesis.

In addition to laying the foundation for modern definitions of prejudice, Allport also produced the

language with which prejudice continues to be discussed today. The terms 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' are

two of the most important because, as the above definitions suggest, prejudice operates based on

presumed group membership. The most common group delimitations tend to be around age, gender

and race. An ingroup is simply a group of people who share a set of agreed-upon characteristics. If you

are a member of a sports team, for example, your fellow teammates form the relevant ingroup. By

contrast, outgroup membership is defined as applying to anyone who does not share these

characteristics and therefore cannot be presumed to be a member of the ingroup. Thus, anyone not a

member of your sports team is part of the relevant outgroup. Considering the permeability of these

boundaries, ingroup and outgroup memberships tend to overlap and, over time, shift.

2.2 Stereotypes and discrimination

Allport and Jones both reference generalisations in their definitions of prejudice, which are commonly

described as 'stereotypes'. Indeed, most understandings of prejudice construct it as an attitude or belief

based on ideas about an individual because of assumed group membership, which is what makes the

stereotype a central concept within broader frameworks on prejudice: "to stereotype someone is to

attribute to that person some characteristics, which are seen to be shared by all or most of his or her fellow group members" (Brown, 2011, p 68). Because of the important role of stereotypes in understanding prejudice, their formation and meaning have received much attention in the literature. Although some research has sought to understand whether stereotypes are 'accurate', research in the social sciences has typically focussed on what stereotypes reveal about the particular dynamics and relations between social groups (Brown, 2011; MacRae, Stangor, & Hewstone, 1996). The coming sections review in more detail these approaches to stereotype formation and maintenance as a way to understand prejudice.

Another important concept is discrimination, typically understood as a behaviour or practice based on prejudice. For example, believing that "all Asian people are smart" is an example of prejudice. However, if you own a business and because of such a prejudice you only hire those people racialised as 'Asian' then you are engaged in discrimination. Differential treatment, be it positive or negative, based on prejudicial attitudes is discrimination. I deliberately emphasise that point not only because it is a very important component of understanding the lived experience of prejudice but also because it forms a core part of Allport's conceptualisation of the internal (felt) and external (expressed) natures of prejudice.

2.3 Research on prejudice and stereotypes

Research on prejudice began to develop in earnest in the 20th century. Over time, there has been considerable change in the ways of investigating and conceptualising these concepts. A review of relevant research from the 1900s argued there was an arc in prejudice research that mirrored broader trends in psychological research (Duckitt, 1994). More recently, Dovidio (2001) condensed this review into three dominant approaches (which he called 'waves') that influenced research on prejudice and the

interpretation of findings. The first wave, informed by traditional Freudian notions of psychopathology, suggested that prejudices were a form of flawed thinking. This approach positioned prejudice as an individual problem. Later, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, during the emergence of cognitive psychology, researchers came to see stereotypes and the prejudices they supported as a natural and inevitable outcome of attempts to organise large amounts of complex (social and other) information. During that period, Allport published the first edition of his manifesto (1954), in which he argued for several directions that fit within a normalised and cognitive approach to understanding prejudice (the second chapter, for example, is entitled, "The Normality of Prejudgement"). The third wave of prejudice research, within which contemporary research is usually located, is characterised by an understanding of prejudice as multi-dimensional and influenced by diverse and divergent forces, including a thorough appreciation of social relations and dynamics.

Interest in prejudice has drawn on diverse disciplines, including psychology, criminology, sociology and economics, to name a few. The social sciences, where this research is located, offer countless theories, models and hypotheses on the subject that are not necessarily at odds with each other but tend to pursue different threads of interest. In a compendium on the subject, Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick and Esses (2010) gathered together accounts from experts representing different approaches within the discipline of psychology. The following section summarises past research on prejudice and cognition, affect, social systems and media as well as research from traditional schools of psychological related to neurology, evolution and development. While this thesis approaches these issues from a critical stance, these more conventional approaches not only shape the context of research on race but also how it is sometimes represented in the public domain.

2.3.1 Human brains, evolution, and development

Although there are clearly limits to what neuropsychology can reveal about social behaviours (with technology continuing to facilitate increasingly insightful pictures of our neural pathways), specialists have made substantial inroads in understanding the relationships believed to exist between prejudice and our brain functions. Research in this field suggests, for example, that the part of our brain that analyses facial structures is less active when we are looking at 'outgroup' members compared to those we perceive to be part of our 'ingroup' (Van Bavel, Packer, & Cunningham, 2008). Other research suggests that the part of the brain through which we experience pain-related empathy is less active when viewing evidence of pain in someone from a different racial group than it is when viewing those perceived to be of the same racial group (which the authors suggest may be related to the capacity for empathy among different racial groups) (Chiao & Mathur, 2010). It is important to note, however, that many researchers and commentators point to the risks of reducing social dynamics such as these to questions of brain activity, as doing so ignores the complex meanings, cultures, and contexts that influence social behaviour (see Tallis, 2013). Some of this research appears to operate under an unstated assumption that prejudice originates in the brain, which is why it can be 'seen' at the level of brain activity but often does not consider how human engagement in a social world could shape our neural processes.

Similar criticisms have been levelled against evolutionary psychology's attempts to explain prejudice as a function of human behaviour. However, in spite of the limitations of this field, it may offer some unexpected insights because evolutionary theories of psychology are not interested only in evolved genetics and behaviour but also in the ways that social and cultural systems evolve and change (Schaller, Conway, & Peavy, 2010). The latter approach is directly relevant to this project in relation to what evolutionary theories might reveal about stereotype development and change, which some have

suggested follow a 'natural selection-like' path influenced by the ways that specific ideas about social groups are shared through interpersonal communication (Schaller & Conway, 2001). Again, while this research is not positioned within an evolutionary model (and there are some important critiques of this approach), there is value in seeking to understand how other fields – particularly those with as much influence as evolutionary psychology – approach and explain the categorisation of human difference.

Similar to the evolutionary paradigm, a developmental approach to understanding prejudice is rooted largely in seeking to understand how and where this practice develops in human beings. In this case, particular emphasis is on how we learn prejudice and develop prejudiced thinking as we grow up. By studying prejudices among children, researchers using this approach speculate that we can understand the origins of prejudicial thoughts and behaviour and, importantly, learn how to influence young people to embrace less prejudiced attitudes. Typically, those working in this field argue that it is much easier to influence attitudes in the formative years of childhood and adolescence than later in adulthood (Killen, Richardson, & Kelly, 2010). Research has identified ways in which young people learn about stereotypes and prejudice. For example, an American study on interracial dating expectations observed the important role of parents in prejudice formation among adolescents (Edmonds & Killen, 2009). This influence, however, is moderated significantly by the additional influences of peers, school and intergroup experiences (Fiske & Russel, 2010; Killen, Kelly, Richardson, Crystal, & Ruck, 2010; Killen et al., 2010). Developmental psychology has also investigated the formation and application of stereotypes. Research in this field reveals that younger children are significantly less likely to apply stereotypes than children a few years older (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). Further, children are more likely to remember individual experiences that affirmed their existing stereotypic notions than those that do not (Liben & Bigler, 2002).

2.3.2 Cognition and affect

Although they are sometimes constructed as incongruent concepts, cognitive and affective (emotional) processes are currently viewed in traditional psychology as two sides of the same coin. Cognitive psychology, which was immensely influential in the mid-to-late part of the 20th century, provides the framework with which contemporary thinking about prejudices and stereotypes tends to be most commonly explained today. (For an overview, see Eysenck, 1990.) This approach views them as normal attempts to make sense of a large amount of complex information. Such a framework suggests that when we meet someone for the first time or greet an old friend, our brains begin the nearly instantaneous process of categorising and recalling associated stereotypes based on age, race and sex. These are the three most commonly referenced social categories because they can often be discerned (or so it is assumed) by looking at someone, which makes them the most readily available cues (Fiske & Russel, 2010). That is not to say, however, that these are 'natural' categories and as I explain later, it is important to reflect critically on how categories such as age, race and sex develop their social significance within particular historical or geopolitical settings.

Cognitive theories suggest that stereotypes are mental shortcuts used to make sense of our complex social worlds (Fiske & Russel, 2010). In tandem, both cognitive and emotional processes are seen to influence how readily we activate these shortcuts. However, the process of activation does not really explain where such shortcuts originate or how individuals learn to value some categories (flexible though they may be) over others. An understanding of cognitive processes can suggest which circumstances might more readily activate stereotype-based shortcuts. For example, it has been suggested that, when we are distracted or involved in a consuming task (referred to in this field as 'cognitive loading'), because of the finite depth of our mental capacities we are more likely to rely on social stereotypes than if our brains were at rest (Fiske & Russel, 2010). Further, cognitive theorists

suggest that under such circumstances, individuals may pay attention only to categories determined to

be most relevant to the situation (Quinn & Macrae, 2005) and/or the most readily accessible (Castelli,

Macrae, Zogmaister, & Arcuri, 2004). Similarly, our emotional or 'affective' states may influence the

activation of stereotypes, partly because affect can mimic cognitive loading (Smith & Mackie, 2010).

Other research has suggested that certain emotional states have identifiable effects related to

prejudice. As an example, during periods of happiness or anger, people may have an increased reliance

on stereotypes (Stroessner & Mackie, 1992).

Some research has directly contradicted the suggestion that cognitive loading leads to greater

stereotype activation. For example, some studies from the 1990s found that stereotypes were less likely

to be activated if an individual was mentally distracted by a task (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Spencer, Fein,

Wolfe, Fong, & Duinn, 1998). The discrepancy between these two studies and others cited earlier

illustrates part of a debate among psychologists during the 1990s and early 2000s about the automatic

activation of stereotypes. This point may seem small, but as Bargh (1999) notes, there are serious

implications to suggesting that stereotypes as the basis of prejudice and discrimination are beyond

individual control, which includes individual legal and social responsibility. While Bargh's (1999) review

concluded that stereotype activation might, in fact, be an 'automatic' cognitive process, the author also

suggested that attempts to address the stereotypes themselves, through, for example, elimination of

culturally shared ideas, were the best target for interventions. This type of conclusion highlights the

difference between individual and social understandings of concepts like prejudice and stereotypes.

Although some research has demonstrated the possibility for individual-focused interventions to alter

stereotype activation (see, for example, Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000; Sassenberg

& Moskowitz, 2005), Bargh (1999) suggests that truly significant approaches to change must consider

broad social and institutionalised forms of stereotypes and prejudice. This argument views prejudice as a social issue, as opposed to an individual one rooted in maladaptive thinking or behaviour.

2.3.3 Social dynamics

Much of the research reviewed thus far has focused on paradigms centred on the individual dimensions or components of prejudice. While prejudice can be expressed to and by individuals, the overarching theoretical framework for this study – social research on race, sexuality and the Internet – requires a more complex and socially informed approach to conceptualising prejudice. This way of thinking argues that our roles within society, which articulate our place within overarching social structures, also influence how people form prejudices and make use of stereotyped thinking. Not only do people understand certain social roles through associated traits, but they also can then come to ascribe those traits to individuals who occupy a particular position (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 2005). Further, those occupying a position can also begin to internalise the social concepts it imposes upon them (Diekman, Eagly, & Johnston, 2010). These roles, however, are not static and can change over time or in relation to context. Here, economics and politics are frequently implicated in how we come to understand the changing character of particular social roles. Consider, for example, how the gendered role of 'woman' was influenced by the impact of WWII. Participation in the workforce by women during that time has led some scholars to declare the war as a 'political' event that (among others) facilitated a change in how the roles of women in countries like the USA were and continue to be perceived (Goldin, 1991).

Social role expectations have also been implicated in the ways social groups come to be broadly defined (and vice versa). It has been suggested that individual traits inferred from role-related behaviour are sometimes generalised to understandings of an entire social group (Diekman et al., 2010). As an example, observations of a woman fulfilling the role of a nurse might lead to trait ascriptions of her as

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nurturing and caring, which might further lead to the transfer of those assumptions more generally to

women as a social group. This type of transfer is partly how social systems are seen to influence

stereotype formation. Further, perceived group status within a social structure influences how people

associate traits with social groups and roles, which is yet another aspect of stereotype formation

(Diekman et al., 2010). Part of this idea leads to, as Ridgeway (2006) explored, and as summarised by

Diekman and colleagues, the maintenance of group status distinctions:

> People enter interactions with social ordering schemas (i.e., beliefs about the status of groups)
> that tend to be socially shared and that influence their interactions. Behaviours influenced by
> such beliefs reproduce societal structure. Status beliefs perpetuate the traditional social
> structure by providing rationales for status distinctions between groups (p. 220).

Not only does perceived status based on group membership influence how people interact with each

other but those interactions also work to reinforce inequality. More significantly, social structures can,

therefore, be understood as the origin of beliefs about social groups and distinctions. Thus, the

dynamics of social systems are an important component of understanding how between-group

inequality endures.

This section highlighted the significance of understanding social roles in relation to prejudice and

discrimination. As discussed, this framework proposes that individuals are socially recognisable through

their group membership, which is characterised by particular social roles and the traits ascribed to an

individual because of that role. How people perceive membership leads them to appraise the social

place of individuals based on traits associated with social roles (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). When

individuals fail to meet stereotypical role expectations or seek out a role that is not in line with group

membership, conflict can arise (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

2.3.4 Theories of intergroup relations and competition

Social relationships lie at the heart of social psychologists' understanding of prejudice and stereotypes. While opportunities to facilitate interaction across different social groups have been shown to decrease prejudices (especially among children), intergroup competition is nonetheless a classic and persistent explanation for prejudice. The traditional social sciences, in particular, rely on that view to generate predictions regarding group interactions in different social settings. Group competition is believed to arise because we live in a world where resources (e.g., employment, food, shelter, cultural objects) are constructed as finite. If you reduce the complexity of social engagement to questions of dominance and survival, any particular group would therefore be assumed to want to ensure the most direct and continuing access to those resources (Esses, Jackson, & Bennet-AbuAyyash, 2010). This way of thinking about conflict and competition between groups is, however, a rather simplistic. Nevertheless, it resonates with contemporary thinking about social conflict, particularly about contentious political issues, such as national policies on immigration and refugees (Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, & Lalonde, 2007). Some theorists have suggested that a desire to maintain the status quo (such as the traditional image of Australia as predominantly White and English-speaking) would foster attempts to decrease the influence of particular outgroups (Esses, Jackson, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2008). Ghassan Hage (1998), an important social theorist on contemporary issues including multiculturalism and race relations, has discussed some of the ways Whiteness in Australia works to maintain dominance amid a culture of multiculturalism. Although Australia has adopted egalitarian ideals and continues to promote itself as a culturally diverse country, an endless stream of evidence nevertheless reveals that the privileging of Whiteness continues to play out in discriminatory ways (Hage, 1998). This privileging provides some of the important background to this thesis by considering how these types of inter-group dynamics continue to play out in present-day Australia and with particular attention to the relatively new social arena of sex and dating webservices.

Another important theory on intergroup dynamics is 'Social Dominance Theory', which suggests that intergroup relations work to maintain group-based social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 2011). Although this theory has been criticised for, among other things, insufficiently explaining the response of subordinate social groups to a social hierarchy or how the hierarchy is created in the first place (Turner & Reynolds, 2003), it has also received support for its amalgamation of the most useful features of various other models of intergroup relations (Sidanius, Pratto, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Social dominance theory purports that social hierarchies are created and individuals within groups and groups themselves are invested in maintaining these hierarchies (even if they occupy a subordinate position). Intergroup relations, however, are not static. They are ever-changing but serve the types of hierarchies described above, often rationalised and achieved through the perpetuation of myths and ideologies that support inequality. Prominent examples of these myths include nationalism and racism (Esses, Jackson, & Bennet-AbuAyyash, 2010).

Within the same family as social dominance theory is 'social identity theory', which views individuals as belonging to certain social groups and gaining emotional value and significance from that sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The ways in which group differences are perceived, as well as the notion of social mobility, have been used to predict intergroup behaviours. Typically, individuals are believed to disassociate with an identity if they believe there is the chance of moving to another associated with greater privilege. Competition arises when individuals view the boundaries between groups to be insurmountable, which can then take the form of ingroup favouritism. While 'social dominance theory' and 'social identity theory' are only two amid many others that seek to provide workable concepts and explanations for group and intergroup dynamics, I share them here to demonstrate two influential approaches to understanding group difference and conflict. Further, the

ideas they offer regarding how individuals negotiate difference and respond to prejudice have value in

considering the behaviour of gay men in an online sex and dating context.

2.3.5 Common threads

Although some of the studies reviewed here operate from conflicting epistemologies, we can recognise

some consistencies. One is that prejudices and stereotypes are influenced by diverse contextual factors

and are socially produced. This means that at different times and in different settings, prejudices and

stereotypes can manifest themselves (or not) in different ways. Another consistency is that individual

differences cannot be ignored. While broad conclusions could be drawn from this research, it is also

necessary to recognise the potential for the influence of individual variation. Many, if not all, of these

individual, psychological processes originate in the social real (i.e., the content and direction of

perceptual processes) and therefore should not be considered to be pre-determined. Rather, they must

be learnt or acquired before they can be applied. Finally, (presumed) group membership is the key to

how prejudice is understood. However, the categories by which membership is defined are not as clear-

cut as might be assumed; they have a history, have changed over time and are subject to ongoing

contestation. This is an important and contentious dimension of research on prejudice that is

illuminated by considering the various meanings and characteristics evoked by the umbrella concept of

'race'.

2.4 Prejudice and media

As discussed earlier in the section on evolutionary approaches, some researchers believe that

stereotypes (as a cultural phenomenon) 'evolve' through a process of cultural evolution that is largely

driven by interpersonal communication. Media, such as television, film and the Internet, represent the

most important ways in which social concepts are distributed and reproduced today. Because of their

broad reach, representations through media have a major impact on how individuals perceive particular

social groups, including, for example, Aboriginal Australians (Donovan & Leivers, 1993) and gay men

(Rössler & Brosius, 2001; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006). The importance of the ways that groups,

and in particular minority groups, are represented through media is highlighted by three theories about

how individuals make sense of what they view through a screen. First, television audiences develop

emotional responses to television characters in a very similar fashion to those they would develop

towards a real person ('parasocial interaction') (Kanazawa, 2002). Second, people are believed to

emulate the types of relationships they see on television, such as those depicted between an ingroup

and outgroup ('modelling theory') (Bandura & Bryant, 2002). Finally, people are believed to make sense

of what they view on television as first-hand observations, that is to say, as accurate portrayals of reality

(Mutz & Goldman, 2010). Our exposure, therefore, to consistently negative depictions of outgroups can

exacerbate intergroup conflict and reinforce and reproduce a discriminatory social order. By contrast, it

is argued, more positive (or less demonised) depictions of a minority group can help improve social

attitudes towards them.

Most of the research in this area has been focused on television, which remains a primary but mostly

passive medium for many people. However, the emerging force of 'social media' via the Internet has

dramatically altered the ways in which people across a broad range of social contexts engage with and

exchange information. Social media have been defined in many different ways since emerging as a

concept. They are now commonly defined as Internet-based technologies that facilitate the creation

and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media include social

networking services (e.g., *Facebook*), blogs, microblogs (e.g., *Twitter*), video/photo sharing websites

(e.g., *YouTube, Pinterest*), online forums, podcasts, and so on. The amount of content generated and

published today is staggering. For example, it is estimated that every minute, over ten hours of video

content is uploaded to *YouTube* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While much of this content undoubtedly

goes unnoticed, extensive research has explored the potential for wide reach by online posts if they

resonate with influential members of online communities (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto, & Gummadi,

2010; Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010).

The enduring dominance of more traditional forms of media alongside newly emerging social

manifestations raise an important question: what is the potential impact of the media landscape on the

practice and perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes? For a start, we can confidently expect the rate

at which content is disseminated to accelerate the ways in which social norms such as stereotypes are

reproduced and changed. Further, social media thrives through a reflexive exchange of content among

users, which can be taken up, changed and re-distributed in an altered form. Material that challenges

prejudices or stereotypes today has new and more effective platforms for reaching intended audiences,

with the potential to 'go viral' if it is well-received. At the same time, messages that reinforce prejudices

through negative representations also have the same platforms available. There are many new ways of

organising and spreading discriminatory concepts via 'new' media (see, for example, Goggin's [2006]

discussion on the role of SMS messaging during the Cronulla Race Riots in Australia). Although

concerted efforts to generate content that challenges or reinforces particular ideas are a part of the

social media landscape, of particular interest are the forms of accidental and uncritical reproductions of

things like stereotypes that are a part of how people share ideas through these platforms. This rapid

dissemination becomes important to unpacking how men describe their (racialised) desires through sex

and dating webservices, which I return to in later sections.

2.5 Racial prejudice, racism, and race

Racial prejudice is a specific form of prejudice. In keeping with how this chapter has defined prejudice so far, racial prejudice is viewed as a positive or negative evaluation of either an individual or a group of people based on stereotypes associated with membership to a presumed racial group. It is no secret that racial stereotypes are seen to offer some of the most contentious examples of inter-group difference and conflict. Although racism is racial prejudice, these terms should not be used interchangeably because of one notable difference. While racism has to involve either a positive or negative group-based evaluation to be classified as 'racism', it also requires a degree of social power to translate a prejudicial position into outcomes that will either disadvantage an outgroup or advantage an ingroup (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2010). This distinction is important because it suggests that, while anyone can articulate racial prejudice, racism can be exercised only by members of a dominant racial group. As highlighted in the earlier section on defining prejudice, both have negative outcomes. However, racism represents a systematic and, as it is commonly described, 'institutional' way of conceptualising, consolidating and enacting race-related prejudices.

The concepts of racial prejudice and racism are complicated by the categories upon which they are based. Race, as it is widely understood today, is arguably a biologically superficial category for defining group differences, yet it is invested with major social significance. As technology enables scientists to delve deeper into our basic building blocks, the field of genetics reveals that 'race' is not useful as a classification for explaining differences between individuals or groups (Kittles & Benn-Torres, 2010). Within medicine, although some attempts have been made to develop products such as race-targeted medications, researchers repeatedly emphasise that racial categories reveal very little about group differences and are themselves rather unclear categories (Hacking, 2005; Lock & Nguyen, 2011; Pollock, 2012). Despite these convincing arguments against use of race-based descriptors, however, they endure

and continue to hold significant social meaning for many people. This endurance can be attributed to

the history of race as a concept, the meaning of which can be traced to the period of European

colonialism. Not only was 'race' applied to humans as a way to describe the apparent physical

differences among newly discovered groups of people, but it also came to be used to assess social

characteristics, such as morality and intelligence (Bernasconi & Lott, 2000). This understanding of race

as a 'fundamental' biological category (despite evidence to the contrary) continues. For example, some

research has suggested that race is a 'natural' category that can explain differences in areas such as IQ,

temperament, and so on. Herrnstein and Murray (1994), for example, reignited the race and

intelligence debate in the 1990s by suggesting that observed IQ differences among racial groups may

have a genetic or hereditary explanation. This particular debate has a long and contentious history and

although more recent work continues to unravel the myth of race as a 'natural' category, this legacy of

meaning cannot be quickly undone.

Beliefs and ideas about race also become entangled with concepts of 'ethnicity', a term intended to

capture shared cultural values believed to be associated with living in or being influenced by the culture

of particular shared geographical regions (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997). I use this term sparingly in this

thesis for quite deliberate reasons. Although ethnicity is clearly an important concept and one that

many people feel very significantly assists in describing their own identity, the notion of 'race' is, in my

view, still a more dominant and influential concept in everyday usage, particularly in relation to how

people form prejudices on the basis of physical appearance. Consider, for example, the continuing (and

reductive) use of the label 'Asian' in Australian society. This concept cannot capture the multitude of

different cultural groups that are potentially associated with people who were born in or have a cultural

history with the multitude of countries making up the Asian continent. Yet it continues to be used in

everyday vernacular as a category of racial organisation, including by people who are themselves

labelled or classified as 'Asian'. Certainly, as noted later in this thesis, such reductionist racial categories

are far more common on sex and dating webservices for men than those relating to specific ethnicities

or cultural groups. While recognising that even a critically informed use of the notion of race can

unintentionally reinforce racial categories and how they are understood in science (Lock & Nguyen,

2011), because of my interest in the social meaning and impacts of racialised discourses, I cannot ignore

the relevance of those distinctions. 'Race', therefore, is used in this thesis to identify and unpack the

socially constructed categories of perceived physical differences as they are understood and defined by

study participants and webservice users.

Understandings of racism and racial prejudice underwent dramatic changes during the 20th century,

largely in the wake of major social events in Europe, the USA and elsewhere. Events such as the

Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement dramatically challenged dominant forms of racism in the first

few decades of the century, which were followed by a groundswell of social and political mobilisation

around the values of social inclusion and understanding. Unfortunately, while racist concepts

subsequently became socially and legally prohibited, many researchers have argued that there are still

more nuanced – but no less worrying – manifestations of racist thinking. This suggestion has given rise

to expressions such as 'symbolic racism' (Sears, 1988), 'aversive racism' (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), and

'new racism' (Barker, 1982). All these concepts are based upon the belief that, while traditional versions

of prejudice and racism were characterised by *blatant* expressions, these newer forms represent a more

subtle prejudice that forms a more integrated – and in some ways, 'invisible' – dimension of everyday

life (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). While blatant prejudice has been described as "hot, close and

direct", subtle prejudice, by contrast, is "cool, distant and indirect" (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p. 58).

Because of its covert nature, subtle forms of prejudice can exist within societies that actively value and

promote inclusivity and multiculturalism. This tension highlights the complex ways racial prejudice and

racism operate in democratic societies such as Australia, along with why it is challenging for legal and

social policy to identify effective ways of defining and addressing prejudice. If it is hard to see, it is hard

to confront.

Within the field of psychology, there has been great interest in finding ways to identify and separate

implicit and *explicit* prejudicial attitudes, especially those relating to race. Explicit attitudes are those of

which we are aware and can respond to in a measured and deliberate way (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler,

2000). By contrast, implicit attitudes are generally understood to be those of which we are unaware,

can be unintentionally acted upon, and which might not be recognised by an individual as reflecting his

or her beliefs (Wilson et al., 2000). Implicit attitudes are seen to develop from early life and emotional

experiences, as well as through shared cultural biases (Rudman, 2004). Recent advances in how such

attitudes are measured have ignited interest in this topic, although some researchers have criticised the

measurement of these hidden attitudes based on validity and replicability (LeBel & Paunonen, 2011).

Legal scholars also challenge the concept of implicit attitudes in regard to antidiscrimination law (see

Bagenstos, 2007; Mitchell & Tetlock, 2007). Much of this debate seems akin to arguments discussed

earlier regarding automaticity in stereotype activation and in general, we can draw similar conclusions.

Interestingly, however, much of the research on implicit attitudes and race focuses on attitudes as a

cause for prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour; it pays less attention to the initial formation of those

attitudes.

There is value in understanding how attitudes are maintained and expressed, as both have been

implicated in the prejudice and racism literature. A major contribution is the revelation that people can

hold explicit attitudes of diversity and inclusion but react to their implicit attitudes in a way that

suggests enduring or underlying forms of prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2010; Dovidio, Kawakami, &

Gaertner, 2002; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Thus, people may believe themselves to be highly egalitarian and accepting of multiculturalism but maintain deep-rooted and hidden racial prejudices that can inform their behaviour in less well-recognised and understood ways. This lack of recognition lies at the heart of the explanation of 'new' forms of subtle and covert racism.

2.5.1 Racism, discrimination and Whiteness in Australia

Although the broad theories that underpin prejudice remain consistent internationally, the particular constructs associated with race and racism are highly dependent on their social contexts, particularly those relating to nations and national histories. A brief review of this literature paints the broader picture of a research study relating to race in Australia. The history of race and racism is Australia is long and complex; several major events had profound impacts on the production and reproduction of race relations and racial discourses. Australia's history as a former British colony (in a similar fashion to other post-colonial societies) was characterised by the traumatic and violent dispossession of its Indigenous peoples and policies of assimilation and cultural education now regarded as misguided and harmful. Not only is this colonial legacy still evident in Australia's language and political systems but it is also reflected by the enduring myth of Australian 'Whiteness'. This national identity dictates a discourse that officially values multiculturalism and diversity but consistently reveals itself to be reproducing a social order that maintains Whiteness as holding primary cultural authority (Hage, 1998). Prominent examples of the subordination of people from minority racial (i.e., non-White) groups can be found among Indigenous peoples, revealing this troubling legacy of colonialism. Health is an area that clearly demonstrates the disproportionately poor outcomes for Aboriginal Australians, compared with the rest of the Australian population (Larson, Gillies, Howard, & Coffin, 2007). Rates of incarceration are another, with suggestions that they are up to ten times higher among Indigenous people than the general Australian population (Cunneen, 2009). While racism perpetuated against Indigenous

Australians is often manifested in subtle and hard-to-identify ways (Stratton, 2006), it is articulated in

blatant forms as well (Mellor, 2003; Pedersen & Walker, 1997). These experiences, along with the

chilling differences in outcomes of health, education and crime (as well as other social indicators)

suggest that the endurance of social systems in Australia is based upon the reproduction of a group-

based racial hierarchy.

Another pivotal policy in Australia's social history is the now infamous *White Australia Policy*, which

comprised a group of immigration laws, known officially as the *Immigration Restriction Act* (National

Archives of Australia, 1901). This was one of the most direct and commonly cited examples of a

dominant ingroup (i.e., White English-speaking Australians) working to maintain their social position

through the exclusion of outgroup members, which in the Australian context was based on a belief in

White superiority (Hage, 1998). Although this legislation was slowly replaced, starting in 1958 and

completely dismantled by 1973 (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009),

undeniable and enduring effects of such an actively discriminatory policy continue to be felt among, in

particular, those viewed as 'Asian' in Australia (Singh, 2000). These attitudes are revealed through

particularly discomforting moments in Australian cultural history, such as the rise of the anti-Asian 'One

Nation' political party in Queensland (Rapley, 1998), and the recent widely publicised attacks on Indian

students in Victoria (Wilsom, 2010).

In Australia, as with much of the 'Western' world, racism in Australia has increasingly taken the form of

anti-Muslim rhetoric (Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007). This shift demonstrates a shift in the

constructions of racism towards a panic about changing values that, in this instance, are rooted in

religious differences. Particular traits ascribed to a presumed Muslim role become generalised to a

whole group of people. That view is then enacted in the form of the 'new racism' discussed by Barker

(1982). Australian research findings that race and racism are discussed in 'us-vs.-them' terms highlight

how group membership remains the central organising force of prejudice at an individual and societal

level (McLeod & Yates, 2003). The description of asylum seekers who attempt to reach Australia by sea

as 'boat people' provides an additional hateful example of how these discourses attempt to dehumanize

people affected by conflict and trauma in their home countries (for a description of these attempts

played out in Australian Parliament, see Every & Augoustinos, 2007), while fostering a perverse sense of

nationalism through alarmist representations of cultural identity under threat (Hage, 1998).

The research and writing reviewed in this section summarise some of the complex political and social

history of race relations in a post-colonial country. Not only do they help provide context for this

project's research but they also serve as reminders of the importance of national discourses that drive

local constructions of race as well as manifestations of racism. The next section reviews literature

focused on how identity (in this case, the category 'gay') begins to intersect with these complex ideas.

2.5.2 Race and racism among gay men

During the 20th century, although not united by national identities, gay men (particularly in Western

countries such as the USA and Australia) became more socially connected (in some ways at least)

through a shared need to engage in social and political activism as a minority group in sexual politics and

citizenship rights (Altman, 2002). This need and the connections it facilitated made possible what

hitherto seemed an impossible idea: the notion of a 'gay identity'. This identity was and remains tied to

the shared activities of seeking political and social change, which some have argued demanded a

coherent expression of a singular and enduring myth that all gay and lesbian people are united (Teunis,

2007). The ideal of a shared community between gay and lesbian people, and among gay men in

particular, often becomes conflated with ideals of sexual liberty, the idea that consenting adults should

be free to choose their sexual partners and practices without interference (Weeks, 2003; Reynolds, 2002). Attempting to categorise a diverse group under one broad umbrella, however, raises significant challenges and although 'gay community' may have become a part of popular lexicon, some have argued in favour of the concept of 'gay communities' to reflect the different organisations of people who identify as gay (Epstein, 1999). Further, recent research has suggested continuing ambiguity among gay men about what constitutes community in this sense and about how membership to such a community is defined (Holt, 2011). Nevertheless, *community* continues to be employed as a common representation in contemporary depictions of gay life. It is important to note that questioning the meanings of this idea is not intended to dismiss the useful contributions that a sense of community can offer, particularly given the risks traditionally associated with rejection from family, friends and society based on difference in sexual and gender identity (C. Han, 2008b). It is useful and important, however, to consider in more depth questions about how to define key concepts such as community.

Cracks in the myth of a unified gay community become particularly visible when we consider issues of race. As Teunis has argued regarding a White-dominated culture like the USA: "White men can control and apparently feel in control over who is, or is not qualified to be part of 'their' gay community. They alone define its citizenship" (2007, p. 266). Indeed, research the gay community has consistently argued that an unspoken hierarchy of race relations operates among gay men, at least in countries like Australia and the USA. Such a hierarchy is maintained predominantly by the actions and privilege of White middle-class men (C. Han, 2008b; McBride, 2005; Teunis, 2007). This inequality raises some confronting questions about social inclusion and why it might appear that some groups that have come to represent the gay community might inadvertently or actively seek to maintain existing hierarchies and orders.

Of course, gay men are not insulated from broader social discourses, and, as discussed in the previous section, ideas of Whiteness and racial difference are powerful and pervasive forces across broader social systems in Australia. The challenge for the very notion of gay community, however, is that it is a cultural identity used to represent a group of racially diverse people. The gay community, however defined, needs to understand, recognise and address the diverse needs of those it represents. The idea of a unified 'family' of gay men appears, unfortunately, to be a misrepresentation that privileges 'White issues', such as those associated with same-sex marriage, for example (Teunis, 2007)(not to mention the gender exclusivity implied by the term). The same-sex marriage movement has been accused of privileging and advocating for a 'White issue', not because marriage is not important to gay men of colour, but because it seeks to further the increasingly popular notion of gay identity as mainstream and normative (Teunis, 2007). If Whiteness is viewed as a dominant feature of gay identity and gay community in the Western world, a 'mainstream' identity is therefore a White one as well. This mainstream approach then feeds into the reproduction of what has been labelled by some as 'homonormativity':

> This new homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recording of key terms in the history of gay politics: "equality" becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, "freedom" becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil societies (Duggan, 2012, pp. 65-66).

The presumed power of White male identity can therefore be seen to have contributed to the organisation of this community. While the privilege this identity brings may lend political clout and social power to an important struggle, it does little to recognise the diverse identities and priorities of people who identify as (or engage in practices associated with being) gay.

Homonormativity is also informed by broader discourses on gender. Race becomes directly implicated within these discourses because, as Dreher and Ho explain, "discourses of race and Whiteness are central to understanding the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity" (Dreher & Ho, 2009, p. 13). The

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reinforcing intersections between normative concepts of race and gender are reminders that, although 'gay' may operate as a minority identity, 'White' and 'male' certainly do not. As noted above, a homonormative agenda may seek further to entrench the social power associated with those identities within communities of diverse membership, which is further demonstrated through considering the privileging of particular performances of masculinity among gay men, particularly in relation to sex. The 'ideal' gay man has been described as a North American export that privileges hypermasculine behaviour as the most desirable form of masculinity (Baldwin, 1985). Some research suggests that this distinction further implants it as the purview solely of White men (Ward, 2008). In Australia, the conflation of idealised standards of beauty and Whiteness has also been implicated in the value assigned to particular body types and penis sizes (Caluya, 2006; C. Han, 2006; C. Han, 2007). This system of cultural values, which McBride (2005) notes is exemplified in the marketing of the American clothier *Abercrombie & Fitch*, racialises sexual appeal in a very specific way. White becomes the most desirable ideal, while all the other options of masculine embodiment become judged against it as a standard (A. Han, 2006).

The racialisation of sex and sexuality has become an important conceptual lens through which research and writing regarding gay men can glimpse new questions about race and racism. As C. Han (2007) points out, "Whiteness claims possession of the standards by which we measure all racialised non-white queer men's desirability" (2007, p. 5). A privileging of Whiteness legitimates – or perhaps even requires – the use of racialised stereotypes in characterising 'other' racial groups in relation to that social order. This 'othering' can then lead to the production and reproduction of particular 'sexual stereotypes', most commonly recognised in the hypermasculinity of men racialised as Black (see, for example, Persson & Newman, 2008) and the submissive femininity of those racialised as Asian (see, for example, C. Han, 2006). Sexual stereotypes can mean that non-White racialised men are expected to fulfil certain roles

and can become valued for their exotic status in White dominated cultures (Cervulle & Rees-Roberts, 2009; C. Han, 2006; Teunis, 2007). As discussed above, aspects of masculinity have become part of how some racial groups are understood by gay and bisexual men. Among Asian men in White-dominated cultures, for example, the gendered devaluation of the perceived feminine role that is attributed to Asian men can lead to subtle exclusions from the sexual economies of the gay men (Ayres, 1999; A. Han, 2006; C. Han, 2006). As Ayres (1999) put it:

> For the most part, though, my experience in the gay scene has been characterized by neither outrageous abuse nor outrageous attention. Instead it has involved a wearing, subtle, almost imperceptible feeling of exclusion (1999, p. 89).

Though Ayres describes a mostly subtle and evasive form of prejudice, it has been suggested elsewhere that blatant expressions of discrimination (as significant as expulsion from gay bars) have been perpetrated against gay men of colour in the USA and elsewhere (C. Han, 2007). Further, experiences of discrimination have been linked to how well non-White gay men can assimilate to Australia's White middle-class gay culture (Ridge, Hee, & Minichiello, 1999). Both subtle and explicit forms of discrimination towards gay-identified and other men who have sex with men reveal some of the many ways in which the ideal of a unified gay community fails to reflect upon and recognise the cultural fault lines within.

Earlier I discussed the role of media in defining stereotypes and reproducing prejudice. Much research has identified the glaring absence of non-White bodies in social texts and materials for gay men in White-dominated cultures like Australia and the USA, with the exception of some minor scattered references that could be read as a form of 'politically correct' tokenism (C. Han, 2008c; Roy, 2012; Teunis, 2007). Even a cursory review of one issue of the popular Sydney-based gay magazine, *SX* (Gay News Network, 2013)*,* revealed only four non-White faces amid pages and pages of photographs of models and 'street' subjects. One of those images is an advertisement for the specifically Asian-themed

dance party, *FantAsia*. By contrast, men of minority racial groups do appear in gay pornography but

mostly in terms of the exotic, which could be seen to play out for the benefit of a White audience

(Cervulle & Rees-Roberts, 2009; Subero, 2010). Representations through media of non-White bodies

appear to be lacking and may contribute to the exclusion and objectification these men experience.

Finally, issues relating to racism and racial prejudice in the gay community have also been implicated in

public health concerns. In the literature on gay men, there are primarily three ways that issues of sexual

health, specifically in relation to HIV transmission, intersect with concepts of race. The first of these is

largely observational and notes the vastly different rates of HIV infection among individuals of different

racial identities. In the USA, for example, surveillance data collected by the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) reveals that Black/African and Latino/Hispanic Americans men who have sex with

men are disproportionately affected by HIV infection when compared with other populations,

particularly their White peers (CDC, 2013). In Australia, the system of HIV surveillance does not

routinely collect race or ethnicity data, which therefore prevents exploration of HIV infection along

these lines. The second way that race and sexual health intersect for gay men is in relation to sexual

role expectations fostered by (racist) sexual stereotypes, which some have suggested may contribute to

the practice of unsafe sex among some minority groups, particularly Asian and Pacific Islander gay men

in the USA (C. Han, 2008a). A similar risk association has been proposed to operate among Latino and

Black men, also in the USA (Ayala, Bingham, Kim, Wheeler, & Millett, 2012). A recent qualitative study

sought to explore and make meaning of this complex set of associations (Ro, Ayala, Paul, & Choi, 2013).

This research, while not explicitly identifying a relationship between racism and sexual risk, suggests

serious implications of experiencing both explicit racism and also more subtle forms of social and

cultural exclusion, which include influences on the sexual and mental health of gay men. Finally, past

research has also considered how a concept known as 'sexual mixing' may relate to sexual risk and racial

identity. Sexual mixing is a way of understanding how much or how little contact an individual has with

sexual partners from outside their established social networks. Earlier mathematical research on

disease trends and prevalence at a population level suggests that mixing between groups, known as

disassortative mixing, contributes to a greater magnitude of HIV infection over the long-term while sex

within social groups, known as *assortative mixing*, generates a lower magnitude of infection (Gupta,

Anderson, & May, 1989). Not surprisingly, given the already mentioned disproportionate rates of HIV

along racial lines, hypotheses rooted in sexual mixing are numerous in the literature. Research from the

USA, for example, sought to test sexual mixing as an explanation for why the population of men

racialised as Asian maintained low levels of HIV in spite of high rates of unprotected anal intercourse,

the rationale being that if Asian identified men were mostly having sex with each other then HIV

population rates would remain at mostly stable (low) levels (Choi, Operario, Gregorich, & Han, 2003).

Although the research from Choi and colleagues found that Asian identified men had a large number of

non-Asian identified partners, the likelihood of having unprotected anal sex was much higher with other

Asian men than it was with men of a different ethnicity. Thus, the authors of that study concluded that

the prevalence of HIV among Asian men in the USA may remain low at least partly because of racialised

assortative mixing in the context of potentially high-risk sexual practices. Similarly, a study from the UK

found that men were three times more likely to have unprotected anal sex with men of the same racial

group, again pointing to assortative mixing in relation to sexual practice (Doerner, McKeown, Nelson,

Anderson, Low, & Elford, 2012). That research, however, also found that most racial minority men were

likely to have some incident of unprotected anal sex with men of a different racial identity and the

authors therefore concluded that sexual mixing was not a convincing explanation for the differing rates

of HIV infection among racial groups. Regarding public health and the issues of HIV and other STIs, it is

clear that race and racism have been implicated in the previous research literature but the mechanism

for the observed relationships is not particularly clear. The differing international results and inferences

suggest that caution needs to be exercised before translating these findings to the Australian context.

2.5.3 Sexual racism and sexual racial prejudice

This section focuses on the concepts of 'sexual racism' and 'sexual racial prejudice'. While the review

thus far has already addresses much of the relevant work in this area, these two key concepts deserve

more detailed attention. Given the definitions of racism provided earlier in this chapter, it may be

necessary to distinguish between 'sexual racism' and 'sexual racial prejudice'. Because racism is often

defined as an institutional prejudice demonstrated by a majority (dominant) group towards a minority

(subordinate) one, defined in this way sexual racism in Australia is primarily expressed by White

individuals against those of minority racial backgrounds. In one of the few works devoted to the subject,

Stember (1978) defined sexual racism as, "the sexual rejection of the racial minority, the conscious

attempt on the part of the majority to prevent interracial cohabitation" (1978, p. ix). Sexual racial

prejudice, however, is a term that more broadly encapsulates sexual exclusion based upon racial

stereotypes. This definition departs from a binary distinction between the 'oppressed' and the

'oppressor' and recognises instead that everyone is capable of enacting prejudice. However, 'sexual

racism', it must be noted, is the concept more commonly used in popular and research lexicons; 'sexual

racial prejudice' is not.

Although Stember (1978) provides one of the earliest definitions of sexual racism, his conceptualisation

of the issue was very much shaped by the period in which he wrote. More recently, Plummer (2008) has

described sexual racism in broader terms that recognises the shifting nature of prejudice today:

> The face of sexual racism has shifted from the blatant, often violent trappings of the past, to
> more subtle manifestations such as unconscious biases in attraction, racial fetishization, and
> reproductions of ethnosexual stereotypes in pornography (Plummer, 2008, p. 3).

Plummer raises important areas of interest through examples of 'subtle manifestations' of sexual

racism. First, the notion of unconscious biases relates to how implicit and explicit attitudes have been

distinguished in the conceptualisation of racial discrimination. Although an individual might not

recognise the influence of racial prejudices on his sexual interests, it is entirely possible that decisions

made in this regard could be influenced by implicit beliefs. Second, racial fetishization is a form of

positive prejudice that may appear to value the perceived racial characteristics – physical or cultural – of

another group but does so through reducing an individual to a singular identity and ignoring their

idiosyncratic differences in favour of broadly held cultural stereotypes. Plummer also notes,

importantly, not only the role of 'ethnosexual stereotypes' but also the way the media exacerbate

sexual racism. Following this recognition of how modern racism informs sexual racism, for the purposes

of this thesis 'sexual racism' is defined as: distinctions made on the basis of race within the sexual or

romantic arenas of life. While this definition ignores some of the important complexities and

distinctions between racism and racial prejudice (as discussed earlier), 'sexual racism' is commonly

understood as a shorthand definition of this particular issue.

Research on 'sexual racism' helps position these concepts in relation to traditional ways of thinking

about prejudice and racism. Such research also demonstrates that ideas about sex, prejudice and racism

influence the politics of inclusion within the 'gay community' of Australia. Further, there appear to be

some potentially serious health implications of the ways racial concepts are articulated and negotiated

in relation to gay men's sexual lives. However, research in this area has yet to address many important

issues, including gay men's perceptions and attitudes related to 'sexual racism'. It has also failed to

compare these perceptions and attitudes to broader notions of inclusivity and multiculturalism.

Additionally, as I discuss in chapter 3, no research has adequately examined the complicating layer of

online engagement. This omission is despite the Internet's dominance in the sexual and romantic lives

of many gay men in Australia and its potential to facilitate fresh insight into the largely private

intersections between racial prejudice and sexual cultures. Finally, although there has been some

suggestion of how experiences of racial prejudice in relation to sex or romance can affect well-being, far

more research is required to explore different pathways that do not lead exclusively to sexual health

and instead to consider potential implications of men's feelings about and engagement with online

communities.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter, through a review of the literature on prejudice and racism, introduces two highly complex

concepts that have dominated (and perhaps even 'plagued') social and psychological research over the

past century. Although the governments of many countries make bold statements about valuing

diversity, old hierarchies rooted in, among other things, a post-colonial privileging of Whiteness, remain

intact. That these hierarchies are replicated within the sexual and romantic lives of men who have sex

with men is hardly a surprise. The racialisation of sex among gay-identified men has fascinated many

and provided ample opportunities to identify and reflect on the enduring inequalities that operate in

both subtle and explicit ways in contemporary societies. Sexual stereotypes, attraction biases, and

media representations may simply represent modern ways of reproducing very old ideas about sex and

race. These are issues that I examine further in this thesis. In the next chapter, I continue to review

literature relevant to this project by exploring research that has examined the Internet and online

engagement.

Chapter 3

Gay men, dating and the Internet

The previous chapter reviewed some of the key areas of research that have investigated prejudice and racism with particular relevance to gay men and Australia. This chapter reviews research relevant to another dimension of 'online sexual racism' – the Internet. While 'sexual racism' is not unique to online settings, there is some evidence (and perhaps even more community belief) that it is very common online and expressed there in forms not typically observed in other settings. It is possible that something about the mediated environment of the Internet might facilitate a type of disinhibition that encourages a freer expression of this form of prejudice. As has been pointed out, however, the social complexity and intersections between identity and community means that there is no neat divide between the online and offline worlds. Thus, research conducted on Internet-based practices and cultures might therefore also provide a channel through which we can also better understand how these issues play out in diverse offline and online settings.

Researching race, racism and the Internet requires a detailed understanding of the contemporary features and experiences of online settings. Despite their relatively recent development, for many people these forums have already become an integrated part of everyday life. The Internet is now taken for granted as a pivotal player in social and sexual relations, at least in resource-rich countries. As online sex and dating services provide a forum that facilitates interactions among a diverse group of Internet users, this chapter also explores contemporary understandings of the more collective or 'community' dynamics of online encounters (as well as reviewing research on the individual experience of using the Internet). I then review the available research on gay men's use of the Internet, which I use to illustrate some of the more abstract ideas currently being debated regarding the Internet, identity formation and community engagement online. Much of the research on gay men's use of the Internet thus far has

focused on sex and dating, as well as the negotiation of issues related to race in online settings. Further, to explore how race becomes enmeshed in the fabric of sex and dating webservices for men, I have included a section that introduces and compares the core characteristics of some popular sex and dating webservices for men (*Manhunt, Squirt, Grindr,* and *Scruff*) and describes their basic functionality at this time. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the most glaring omissions in the existing literature and explains this project's relative position.

3.1 How we behave online

Although the Internet has become an increasingly integrated component of everyday life for many people, as it gained pre-eminence as a media form only in the 1990s it is still a, relatively, new avenue for social connection and engagement. The generally private activity of using a 'personal computer' or device such as a smartphone or tablet becomes contrasted with the immense range and reach of connections the Internet makes possible, which can inspire a "mixture of being alone and yet not feeling alone" (Turkle, 2005, p. 146). This quotation highlights two of the most important areas of research on use of the Internet reviewed in this section: online identities and online communities.

3.1.1 Online identities

Online expressions and articulations of identity are highly researched topics. The study of identity online is fascinating (and contentious) because if they choose to people are able to take on a number of identities for themselves online. Thus, online identity can be mutable and fluid (Turkle, 1995). Of course, identity offline is not necessarily a fixed state but various physical and geographical restrictions operate in the offline world that are generally less influential online. Consider, for example, how feasible it would be offline for a married middle-aged man living in Scotland to perform convincingly the role of a young lesbian woman living in Syria (see Addley, 2011). Ironically, the mutability of online

identities have led some researchers to suggest that this type of identity freedom may enable people to

express their 'true self' (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002): a psychological concept from the 1950s

and 1960s intended to capture a sense of an authentic expression of self, free of pretence and

performance (Winnicott, 1960). Further, an interest in the potential for revealing the 'true self' online

has been posited as one of the primary drawcards for Internet use among young people (Tosun &

Lajunen, 2009). While the idea of a 'true' or 'authentic' self remains contested, online environment

nevertheless foster the potential for different types of behaviour. Suler's (2004) influential research in

this area was critical of the notion of 'true' identities online ("the self does not exist separate from the

environment in which that self is expressed" [2004, p. 325]) but maintained that the online environment

has material effects on the experiences and behaviours of users, which he named the 'online

disinhibition effect'.

Suler was not the first researcher to examine the behavioural changes mobilised through an

engagement with computer-mediated communications. In 1995, Turkle's seminal work on the subject

proposed that it was a combination of physical separation (i.e., 'aphysicality') and anonymity that most

influenced what people would be willing to say or do online. Suler then built on this earlier work by

proposing a series of six factors that he believed contributed to the 'online disinhibition effect'. It is

important to note that these factors were seen to exert different levels of influence, to interact

unpredictably, and not to be universally applicable. The first factor Suler called 'dissociative anonymity',

which refers to the many different and easy ways to conceal or construct alternate identities online.

This concept is often used to explain how and why people employ different identities online from those

they present in 'real' life (Turkle, 1995). It is important to understand that this concept is not simply

about being anonymous, i.e., having *no* recognisable social identity. Rather, anonymity in this sense is

tied to the dissociative aspects of being online, that is, one can operate online in a quite separate and

distinct fashion from offline life. As discussed below, online and offline phenomena are now viewed as positions along a continuum, rather than a dichotomy or binary relationship between the 'real' and the 'virtual'.

Suler's second disinhibiting factor was 'invisibility', which he viewed as a two-way street. In most cases, you cannot see other people's embodiment or physical presence or be seen online. Invisibility is particularly relevant when engaging with text-based online environments, which strip away the many social clues and cues apparent during visual or face-to-face interactions. Third, the 'asynchronicity' (i.e., not in real time) of some online interactions can create delays in communication, which can remove the type of immediate feedback that can influence the kinds of social practices in which an individual is willing to engage. The absence of visual, audio and physical cues, which contributes to the sense of invisibility, also connects to the fourth factor: 'solipsistic introjection'. Suler suggested that without being able to hear or see another person, people may assign voices and/or traits to textual interactions. An example of this concept is reading an email from someone and hearing a particular tone of voice in your head, which may or may not be a reflection of how that person actually sounds.

Fifth, 'dissociative imagination' is the idea that the lives lived online do not have offline consequences and that a neat dividing line exists between the 'virtual' and 'real' worlds. Suler, citing observations from a criminal lawyer, describes dissociative imagination as people seeing, "their online life as a kind of game with rules and norms that don't apply to everyday living" (2004, p. 323). Finally, traditional lines of social authority and status are believed to be minimized online. Although, as argued with relevance to race in chapter 2, social hierarchies clearly do operate in the online world and power dynamics are as active as they are offline, they are articulated differently. Thus, the traditional role of cues associated with status and power in terms of determining who is able to speak on any particular topic may no

longer apply, or not to the same degree. The removal of such cues may encourage relationships with more of a peer-like quality because of a perception of diminished lines of authority. These six factors, which interact with each other, may help to explain why some types of social behaviour and practice online can seem more disinhibited than they would be offline.

The theory of the online disinhibition effect has recently gained attention regarding its potential explanation for the much-publicised phenomenon of 'cyberbullying' (see Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). It has also been invoked to help explain other social harms associated with the online environment, such as sexual harassment (Barak, 2005), the grooming of children for sexual abuse (Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech, & Collings, 2012) and the distribution of child pornography (Wortley & Smallbone, 2012). Online disinhibition, however, is not always viewed as a negative phenomenon. Later in this chapter, I explore its potential for positive outcomes in relation to identity formation and self-expression. However, these particularly troubling examples demonstrate how taboo practices can appear to be more easily accessed and facilitated via the Internet than in offline settings, which is at least partially explained by disinhibition theories. Similarly, such disinhibition may be useful in thinking about race and racism as a topic considered off limits elsewhere but, for the reasons described above, more easily accessed and articulated in an online space.

The marked growth in social networking webservices in recent years has produced a great deal of research exploring issues relating to identify formation and self-presentation online. As these services typically require users to construct their online profiles using pre-determined templates, the characteristics and functionality they prioritise may influence how individuals engage with these services. For example, the way users put together an online identity for themselves on a social networking site like *Facebook* has been shown to be quite different from how people will present

themselves in an anonymous online environment. Although 'identity' as it is understood here is

primarily projected through one's online profile, it may also be articulated through more implicit

interactions, such as publicly available posts (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). When online identity is

linked to an offline identity (i.e., using your 'real name'), people are more likely to project

representations of themselves that are commensurate with those performed in daily life, although these

representations may still demonstrate idealised or desired characteristics (Zhao et al., 2008). It has also

been argued that the careful construction of identity online may not be intended to facilitate

communication or the sharing of information but is, for some, a practice of self-promotion and 'brand

management' (Olivier, 2011) or, in extreme cases, a reflection of narcissistic characteristics or reduced

self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010). A fine line seems to be observed in this research between putting

forward a best or desired version of 'self' online and what might be read as more gratuitous or troubled

attempts to look good via the Internet.

While promoting yourself in positive ways has also been identified as a feature of the profiles of sex and

dating webservices, these can be seen as somewhat different environments from many other social

networking sites because there is the anticipation and, in many cases, expectation, of face-to-face

encounters resulting from initial online contact (Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006). Thus, the effects of

online disinhibition may be somewhat suppressed, given an expectation that online and offline identities

will one day be connected. That is not to say, however, that people do not engage in various forms of

creative representation (or even deception) in describing themselves online, which could be facilitated

by the above-described aspects of disinhibition. In fact, being 'deceived' is a commonly reported fear

among those who use sex and dating webservices (Brym & Lenton, 2001). In 2003, some 86% of survey

respondents in Canada reported a personal experience of being misled by another user of a dating

service in regards to physical appearance (Gibbs et al., 2006). What is most important about this body

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of research is what it reveals about how identities are constructed in *anticipation* of a sex or dating encounter and the lengths to which people can go in presenting positive images to potential suitors. And, apparently, it counts. Users of such services report that both the subtle and obvious cues that an individual's profile provides are crucial in assessing potential attractiveness (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). An ability to perceive such cues captures the distinction between the expressions of self one *gives* and the expressions of self one *gives off,* as sociologist Erving Goffman observed many decades ago (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's insights still appear to be valid in understanding self-presentation either online or offline and while Suler's (2004) 'online disinhibition effect' is likely at work in this online space as well, it may be somewhat suppressed.

In summary, the representation of identity and 'self' online is not necessarily inconsistent with those that feature offline. However, the research reviewed here points to some important distinctions between the two. Online forms of engagement might influence the types of things that people say or do online. Understanding the online disinhibition effect offers some sense of the specific factors that might drive those differences. While such an effect might facilitate an increase in negative behaviour online, it could also lead to new opportunities for performing the self, which could have positive outcomes in challenging social norms and preconceptions. However, the willingness to put yourself 'out there' online is mediated by how exposed (i.e., anonymous) or not one feels, which may also explain why profiles linked to offline identities tend to be more recognizable than those that are not. However, even when an online profile could be linked to a 'real' identity offline, it is not uncommon to find individuals engaged in deliberately positive forms of self-promotion or idealisation, particularly within the world of online sex and dating. The next section focuses on how these various issues relating to identity and the Internet operate in larger groups of people, including the notion of an 'online community'.

3.1.2 Online communities

While accessing the Internet at a computer or through a personal device is generally a solitary affair,

part of what makes being online so appealing is its ability to connect you to others. At any time,

countless other people inhabit the digital spaces available online. Traditional restraints on social

engagement, such as geography, cultural difference, and even language, matter less and less, which has

led many researchers to question what the advent of online life means for our understandings of

'community'. As discussed in chapter 2 regarding the concept of a 'gay community', significant

challenges stand in the way of arriving at a stable definition of 'community'. Communities are rarely

viewed or experienced as cohesive or easily described. People who are presumed to belong to

particular communities may, in fact, engage with them to varying degrees or not at all, and they are also

likely to feel connected to a number of different communities simultaneously (Wilson & Peterson,

2002). All of these complexities are compounded in an online environment where a single person has

the potential to take on multiple subject positions (Wilson & Peterson, 2002). Further, understandings

of online communities vary according to the disciplinary perspectives taken in research on this topic,

with sociologists and anthropologists defining community differently from, say, those more interested in

the technologies that facilitate group formation online (Preece, 2001). Indeed, as an example of the

latter perspective, online communities are sometimes defined by the brand or type of platform upon

which they have been built, such as descriptions of the *Facebook* community or a community of

bloggers. This thesis aims to consider a sociological understanding of 'community'. To that end, an

online community can be conceptualised as "a group of people who interact in a virtual environment . . .

[who] have a purpose, are supported by technology, and are guided by norms and policies" (Preece,

Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003, p. 1). As in the offline world, online communities tend to be

organised around a shared interest or intent (Wallace, 2001), but they can also, as discussed, describe

those who simply hold membership of a particular webservice (e.g., the *Facebook* community, the

Manhunt community). It is too simplistic, however, to view communities as operating either online or

offline. Online communities can and do reproduce aspects of offline ones and vice versa, which is why it

is more useful to think about community and identity extensions that spans the somewhat dated

dichotomy of the 'real' and the 'virtual' (Wilson & Peterson, 2002).

Nevertheless, online representations of communities do have some distinctive features in comparison to

offline ones because they are maintained through computer-mediated technologies. As discussed, this

technological dimension can contribute to the definition of online communities. It can also be useful in

developing a model to understand online communities, distinguishing two features of online

engagement: usability (humans interacting with technology) and sociability (humans interacting with

each other through the technology) (De Souza & Preece, 2004). The dimension of usability is governed

by software and hardware and, although a community can thrive when built on poorly constructed

platforms (Maloney-Krichmar, 2003), well-made software contributes to the success of an online

community, including through the facilitation of collective engagement. The dimension of sociability is

composed of the people, purposes and policies that shape an online community, all of which are

contributors to whether or not it will flourish. However, as Preece (2001) points out, the 'success' of an

online community can depend on who is asking the question. Online retailers, for example, will have

very different definitions of a successful online community than, say, the moderators of a health support

forum or a group of gamers who have created their own online environment. However, Preece's (2001)

definition of community 'success' suggests that ongoing interest and participation from members over

time is the broadest way to measure the success of an online community. Conversely, an 'unsuccessful'

online community is one that does not have many or any active members and therefore does not

produce or provide new content for its membership, or content that is distributed goes unnoticed.

Prominent examples of inactive communities can be found even in the very recent history of social

networking where an attempt at capturing a community market has so far failed (e.g., *Google+*), a

previously popular platform fell from favour (e.g., *MySpace*, *Friendster*) or the online organisation of a

particular community ceased to exist (e.g., *www.gaymer.org*).

The characteristics of community members have been proposed to offer a second marker for appraising

the success of online communities. The number of users, their demographics, diversity, experiences,

and roles form a part of how such success can be measured (De Souza & Preece, 2004). As a simple

example of how these markers might be relevant to success, consider the influence of a community's

size. Larger communities are less likely than smaller ones to stagnate and be able to support members

who are less active or who 'lurk' (an invisible form of community participation defined by observing but

not posting or otherwise contributing) (Nonnecke, Andrews, & Preece, 2006). Finally, the policies of an

online community are also seen to contribute to its success. As Williams put it: "most online

communities have developed a set of rules governing conduct in tandem with deterrence mechanisms

to dissuade any 'inappropriate' action'" (2000, p. 99). In this light, online communities can be seen to

represent new social formations, which are self-governing and typically organised around only one or

two shared interests or priorities. It is also common practice among large webservices to require that all

members agree to abide by a specific set of 'terms of access', violations of which can lead to

membership revocation. Within the boundaries of those terms, however, conduct is generally

moderated by community members themselves through techniques of social observation, commentary

and generating norms, which, if violated, can lead to interventions, such as shaming (Sternberg, 2012).

Although rarely defined as such, gay men looking for sex or dates online can also be conceptualised as a

type of online community. Based on the definition of an online community provided here, gay men can

be seen to interact with each other online through a shared technological framework, with a similar set

of purposes, and, generally, to adhere to an established set of norms for participating in those communities. Considering the notion of a 'community continuum', online sex and dating among men can be viewed as an extension of the offline world of sex and dating among men, albeit featuring a slightly different set of cultural practices and social norms. It is easy to imagine how individual styles of social engagement at offline sites for sex and dating (such as bars, parties or beats) might be reproduced in an online environment. And it is also likely that the forms of social moderation that characterise the online environment could have quite different implications for the things people say or do online in the pursuit of sex. I return to the question of whether gay men looking for sex or dates online form a kind of community below.

3.2 Race and racism in an online world

Chapter 2 reviewed aspects of an interdisciplinary research literature relating to prejudice, racism and race. In this chapter, I review research focussed on issues relating to race and racism online. Later in this chapter, I focus more specifically on the aspects of this literature that relate to the sex and dating context. In light of the research reviewed thus far, it seems reasonable to suggest that social representations of 'race' on the Internet would draw upon many of the same dynamics and tensions that exist in offline environments. Such similarities have been observed, for example, in the activities of racial supremacy groups, which have been shown to be making good use of online spaces to mobilise their political agenda (see Daniels, 2009; Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). Earlier I referred to particular aspects of the Internet, such as anonymity, which, some suggest, might facilitate socially unacceptable or even illegal behaviour. The online disinhibition effect may contribute to deviant behaviour because a feeling of disinhibition or freedom can make it easier or more likely for an individual to seek out an online community that promotes racial hatred. Such a relationship might also partly explain the plethora of racist jokes that can be found online, which not only represent extremist

views on racial and ethnic difference but also some of the more subtle ways that racist discourses can be

articulated (Weaver, 2011). It also highlights that the Internet, by its nature, archives and indexes

material. This archiving makes it possible for something like a racist joke, which might have been simply

ignored in other settings, to become a part of a collective and publicly available record. This feature is

one of the reasons that the Internet is such a fantastic social research tool, particularly when engaging

with sensitive topics that people may otherwise be unwilling to share too much about. What is posted

online often remains online for long periods and can be accessed repeatedly. Other examples of what

blatant racism online can be found in research about an online gaming community. Women identified

as African-American reported experiencing abuse and marginalisation from other game players, who

lashed out with flagrantly racist and sexist sentiments (Gray, 2012b). Another study of the same gaming

community suggested that the software and systems themselves fail to recognise the needs of minority

gamers and focus instead on addressing and engaging a young, White male audience (Gray, 2012a). A

systemic marginalisation of minority groups has also been observed in virtual communities of young

people, which tend to have significantly fewer choices of avatar bodies (visual representations of users

in online environments) that feature anything other than the default 'peach' skin colour (Kafai, Cook, &

Fields, 2010).

Tellingly (and unsurprisingly), the presence or perception of a moderator has been shown to influence

how people discuss issues relating to race online. For example, a study of chat room behaviours among

young people found that racial slurs were significantly more frequent when users believed the room to

be unmoderated (Tynes, Reynolds, & Greenfield, 2004). Research on the comment sections of online

news outlets found many examples of negative racial stereotypes (Harrison, Tayman, Janson, &

Connolly, 2010; Steinfeldt et al., 2010) and that people would use coded language to subtly share racist

meanings if such comments were moderated (Hughey & Daniels, 2013). Further, some people defend

their comments through claims of 'common sense' and 'political correctness' in (Hughey & Daniels, 2013). Interestingly, Hughey and Daniels also suggest that when moderators remove overtly racist comments, this corrective action can perpetuate the myth that we are living in a post-racial or colour-blind world. (Not to mention, as they suggest, that doing so also does a great disservice to discursive research that seeks to analyse these forms of social communication.)

It is likely that expressions of racialised and racist views online have implications for offline health and well-being. Considerable research has explored the implications of online experiences for offline well-being, particularly among young people, including one study that found participating on a social networking site could have both positive and negative effects on self-esteem and well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). More specifically related to race, another study argued that not only is racial discrimination (both direct and vicarious) commonly experienced by young people online but that it also has measurable effects on psychological well-being (Tynes, Giang, Williams, & Thompson, 2008). Further, reported experiences of racial cyber-harassment were shown to be associated with academic, substance use and mental health issues among young people (Sinclair, Bauman, Poteat, Koenig, & Russell, 2012). Collectively, this research suggests that online experiences, including those related to race and racism, can have very serious offline consequences and should therefore not be excused from social norms based on their 'virtual' expression.

Importantly, research has also suggested that there are many productive opportunities afforded by the Internet regarding racialised discourses and practices. For example, writing in 2000, Kang argued that the invisible and anonymous aspects of the Internet could, in fact, help to challenge or at least neutralise racial stereotypes and create more open-minded opportunities for people from different backgrounds to connect. In terms of challenging racial discrimination, one fascinating study from the

USA found that buying a car online made it possible to avoid an observed price differential for consumers of minority racial groups, who in offline settings were typically charged more than White consumers (Morton, Zettelmeyer, & Silva-Risso, 2003). In contrast to this focus on the value of de-racialising Internet users in order to avoid racial discrimination, American research found that narratives of ethnicity, culture and race were prominent in the construction of *Facebook* profiles among minority groups, which the authors linked to reclamation of pride in cultural identity (Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009). Further, a Canadian study found that crafting online profiles provided young Asian-identified people with opportunities to authenticate and ascribe meaning to the racial identity 'Asian' (Nguyen, 2011). Online communities that aim to engage and represent particular racial minority groups might also help individuals form new and supportive social connections and assist with the organisation of related social and political activism (Parker & Song, 2006).

3.3 Gay men online

In common with a large component of research on gay men and race, research on gay men and the Internet has tended to focus on issues relating to sex and sexual practice, and, more specifically, sexual health. Since the advent of publicly accessible Internet technologies, gay men have been used them to connect and interact with each other for many reasons, among them sex (Weinrich, 1997). This use of the Internet has particular resonance in settings where sex between men was and/or is illegal, or at least culturally proscribed, in that the Internet can facilitate social engagements in safer and more private ways. In the early days of online engagement, which were dominated by text-based live chat features, gay-themed chat rooms were among the most popular of all chat rooms (S. Jones, 1997). Considering how recent these practices are in the history of sex between men, it is remarkable to be able to demonstrate today that the Internet has become the most common channel through which gay and bisexual men meet their sexual partners in Australia (Hull, Mao, Comfort, et al., 2012; Hull, Mao, Kao, et

al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012). The Internet also fosters other types of interactions, however, such as meeting friends and boyfriends, and has been shown to make it possible to develop new relationships while increasing individual social capital, particularly among younger men (Rawstorne et al., 2009). In the UK and the Netherlands, it has also been reported that most gay men under the age of 30 now report meeting their first sexual partner through the Internet (Bolding, Davis, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2007; Franssens, Hospers, & Kok, 2010).

Although men use the Internet for a variety of purposes, given its popularity as a sex-seeking tool, much research has focused on the role this technology might play in enhancing or compromising the sexual health of Internet users. One common issue in this research with gay men centres on whether or not men who find sexual partners online engage in more unprotected anal sex than men who meet partners in offline settings. This idea has been promoted by research from the USA in particular that has explored the culture of 'barebacking' (i.e., intentional anal sex without condoms), observed from the late 1990s onwards, which some claim is partly facilitated by the Internet (Berg, 2008; Dowsett, Williams, Ventuneac, & Carballo-Diéguez, 2008; Grov, 2006; Halkitis & Parsons, 2003). Early research in this area also observed higher rates of recent STI infections and sex without condoms among men who found sexual partners online than through other venues (Elford, Bolding, & Sherr, 2001). A more recent meta-analysis of articles on this topic concluded that Internet use is associated with higher sexual risk behaviours among gay men (Liau, Millett, & Marks, 2006). Several studies have suggested that observed higher risk behaviour is linked to serosorting practices (i.e., seeking out sexual partners of the same HIV status) as a pathway to achieving safer 'unprotected' sex. Serosorting may decrease HIV-associated risk but it ignores other STIs and remains significantly riskier than having sex with a condom (Bolding, Davis, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2005; Davis, Hart, Bolding, Sherr, & Elford, 2006b; Race, 2010). The assumption is that discussing barebacking, which is a stigmatised practice in some contexts (Halkitis, Parsons, &

Wilton, 2003), may be easier and 'safer' in an online setting than offline. Further, some webservices ask

their users to disclose HIV status as a part of the standard setting-up process for user profiles. Although

HIV-positive disclosures online are rare, it has been suggested that men living with HIV use subtle cues

and clues (such as leaving the HIV status profile field blank) to indirectly suggest their status to others

(Davis, Hart, Bolding, Sherr, & Elford, 2006a; Race, 2010). Bolding and colleagues (2005), however,

found that men were no more or less likely to seek out men of discordant or unknown status online

than they would offline. Much research has also explored different ways of harnessing the Internet as a

tool for the dissemination of safer sexual messages and interventions for gay men (see Adams, Neville,

& Dickinson, 2012; Bolding, Davis, Sherr, Hart, & Elford, 2004; Klausner, Levine, & Kent, 2004).

Within the large body of literature related to sexual health and the Internet in relation to gay men,

research beyond sexual health on gay men and the Internet has tended to focus on issues relating to

identity. Most early research in this area was interested in the ways that identity was articulated and

negotiated through text-based chat communications. Chat rooms, a foundational aspect of not only

online gay culture but also online communication culture more broadly, have been compared in the

literature to gay bars. They are typically seen to provide safe and affirming places for both gay-

identified and closeted men to articulate individual identity, collective notions of identity, and a sense of

community based on sex, politics, desires, and common interests (Campbell, 2004; Ross, 2005). By

providing a publicly available yet private space that is unrestrained by geography, gay chat rooms were

seen to be early contributors to contemporary understandings of a global gay identity that, in many

ways, is believed to transcend national boundaries (Altman, 2002). Using this same logic and extending

arguments presented by Preece (2001), online communities may serve to homogenise gay culture and in

doing so discourage dissenting voices.

The Internet also appears to be an especially important resource for self and identity development among gay men and particularly young gay men. Early research identified three basic uses of the Internet among young gay men (and lesbian women) related to the process of identity formation and the much-discussed journey of 'coming out': to gather information; to explore new forms of self-expression; and to find acceptance through a like-minded community (Woodland, 1999). Australian research echoes these online uses and interests with an expanded list of six: identity; friendship; coming out; intimate relationships; sex; and community (Hillier & Harrison, 2007). As discussed, other research has suggested that self-expression and exploration may be reasons that young people are drawn to the Internet (Tosun & Lajunen, 2009). As an extension, young gay men are believed to be attracted to the Internet because it offers a sense of safety, as well as the potential for sexual exploration (McKenna, Green, & Smith, 2001). The Internet is also a source of sexual education – including on safer sex – for many young gay people (Hillier & Mitchell, 2008). Thus, exploration carried out online is seen to inform young gay men's beliefs and understandings about how sex and relationships, among other things, are 'done' in the gay community. Collectively, this research demonstrates the complex and reflexive ways in which social norms relating to sexuality and sexual practice can be shaped by online experiences.

3.4 "No Asians, please": Gay men, race and the Internet

Although issues of race and racism among the online sex and dating communities of gay men have only recently started to gain attention, there has been some fascinating and important research on this topic conducted to date. Much of this work is premised upon the belief that sexual racism among gay men appears to be more common online, or at least more explicitly *expressed* online than offline (Plummer, 2008; Smith, 2012). Further, the Internet, by default, creates an archive of posts and interactions, which can be trawled for evidence related to race and racism in this context. If that is true, the propensity for men to demonstrate racial prejudice online is likely to be a result of the online disinhibition effect.

However, it might also be that when men are asked to describe their desires online they feel it is socially permissible in such a space to embark upon such descriptions by – at least in part – drawing upon racialised language.

Much research in this area has focused on how racial concepts are managed within online advertisements and profiles placed by gay men looking for sex or dates. Riggs (2012), for example, reviewed 'anti-Asian sentiment' observed on the popular sex and dating website, *Gaydar.* Although he found that these sentiments were relatively rare among profiles posted by users in Australia, Riggs found many examples to develop descriptive categories of their racialised content. They included profiles that described having a personal preference for Asian-looking men, those that reproduced racial stereotypes of Asian men as feminine, those that described 'Asian' as a specific type of gay man, and those that apologised for potentially offence through the articulation of a racial preference. Although these categories reveal a particular discursive construction of Asian men within Australian gay online cultures, they also illuminate a particular way of thinking about how men racialise their expressions of desire. In the USA, some research has suggested that only members of the dominant racial group (White) and those with racial identities near Whiteness ('honorary White') have the 'erotic capital' to assert racialised expressions of desire in these online spaces (Smith, 2012). Such findings have been echoed in Australian writing on race relations, which has observed the power of Whiteness in authorising the right to articulate desire, with a presumed position of desirability on the part of the author/speaker (Raj, 2011). As explored in chapter 2, racial discourses exert significant influence within the politics of desire articulated in gay communities, such as a White-standard of desire against which other racialised bodies are measured in Australia, Europe and the USA (where most of the research on this topic is situated). Given that online communities and identities are known to reproduce many aspects of the offline world, it is not surprising to recognise traditional forms of power being ascribed to

particular racialised identities through the Internet. Racial hierarchies are therefore most likely to

operate among men who use online services to meet other men. Assumptions about attractiveness and

desirability are also likely to "match Eurocentric assumptions familiar from other contexts" among

Australian and European users (Payne, 2007, p. 3).

Writing in the USA, Smith (2012) has argued that individuals might also deliberately make use of their

own racialised identities as a form of erotic capital online. For example, compared with online ads

posted by White men living near the USA-Mexico border, Smith's research found that Latino and Black

men tended to highlight aspects of their race as a potential drawcard that relied on assumed

stereotypes (e.g., penis size, masculinity). Such tendencies were very different from how White men

were observed in articulating their own forms of what Smith called 'erotic race capital'. While the

minority race men sampled by that research sometimes made aspects of their racial identity explicit, ads

posted by White men were typically characterised by an assumed privilege to articulate their desire,

coupled with an invisibility regarding their own racialised characteristics. These differing styles of

engagement reveal much about the intersections between race and erotic capital online. Of course,

these specific discourses are only relevant to the context of a White-dominated society. It is to be

expected that different countries would demonstrate different social structures regarding race and

privilege.

3.4.1 Online webservices and profiles

Online sex and dating is no longer a new concept and, as discussed, gay men in particular have made

very good use of the Internet as a tool for forming connections since the Internet's early days. However,

providing a more detailed understanding of the platforms that are most popular for gay men to use

today is important for revealing the key aspects of the contemporary experiences of webservice users.

A major component of these experiences is the role of the sex and/or dating profile, which is not unlike other online profiles, such as those available through social networking webservices. (In online social networking, 'profile' and 'page' are often used synonymously to describe a space within a webservice that features content [mostly] controlled by the user.) As user profiles on sex and dating webservices are the primary mechanism through which individuals advertise themselves to others and also the channel through which communication and contact with other users are made possible, they can therefore be considered to act as discursive, albeit somewhat constrained, representations of an individual. It makes sense to assume that the webservices that host these virtual representations would therefore exert some influence on how people construct a particular narrative and impression of themselves online. Understanding the format provided by online services in constructing profiles is therefore a significant dimension of understanding how webservice users negotiate the parameters and opportunities to use that space.

3.4.2 Latest technologies

Many services seek to connect men with other men for sex or dates. From a technical standpoint, we can organise them into two broad, overlapping categories: browser-based websites accessed from personal computers and mobile applications accessed from mobile phones or tablet computers. Increasingly (and following a more general trend), services that were originally browser-based are working towards extending their reach to include mobile platforms as well. However, some mobile applications still work exclusively on smartphones and tablet computers, with the popularity of such software applications increasing over the five years parallel to the growth of new mobile technologies. These applications frequently use GPS functionality to connect people in geographical proximity to one another. Collectively, I have chosen to refer to all of these websites and mobile apps as 'webservices'.

At the time of writing, one of the most popular webservices for gay men is *Manhunt*: an international sex and dating webservice that boasts a large active user base around the world and over 140,000 users in Australia (as defined by profile access in the past year). Although this service

Figure 3.1 A standard profile on the website Manhunt
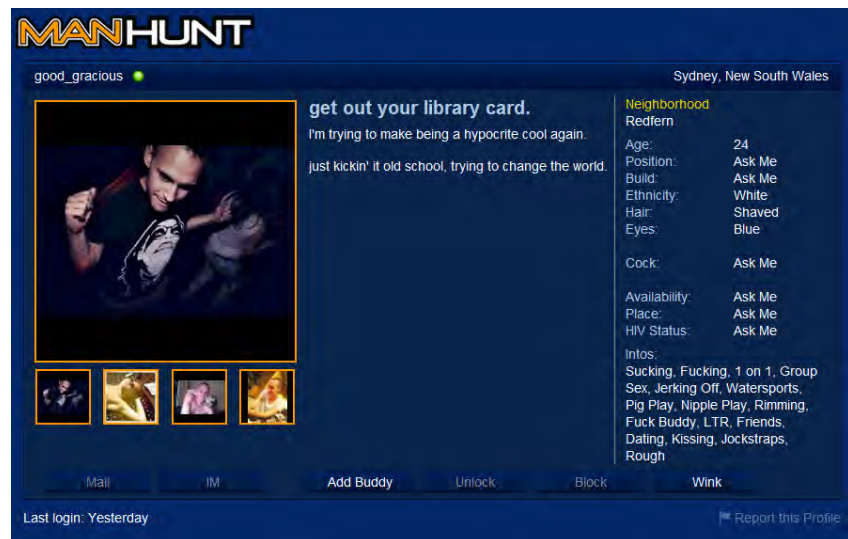
originated as a website, it has recently attempted expansion through the development of a GPS-enabled mobile application.

There is value in using this webservice to explain profile creation because, in many ways, *Manhunt* represents a 'typical' sex and dating webservice: it asks users to share certain types of information and presents this information in a format that is common across most services of this type. Figure 3.1 is a screenshot of my personal *Manhunt* profile. When first registering for the webservice, new members are asked to provide basic demographic information, such as age, weight, height, ethnicity and HIV status, which is then included as part of their standard profile. This information, as you can see in Figure 3.1, is displayed down the right-hand side of a user's profile. Second, men have the option to write a piece of free text for their profile; this content will be accessible to other users via the keyword search function. This text is positioned in the centre of the profile page. Finally, photos can be uploaded and, if desired, made private, which allows users to control who can view those photos. This functionality is similar to other social networking platforms that allow some degree of control over who can see what content. Members can browse the profiles of other users and are able to communicate through email-

like messages, instant messaging or through a centralised chat room service. As discussed, this format is a standard template available to the users of many sex and dating webservices regardless of their target population. Other examples of big players in the market for both gay and straight people include *Gaydar*, *Plenty of Fish*, and *Lava Life*. Like those webservices, *Manhunt* offers both a free and a paid access version: free users are limited by the number of profiles they can view daily and the number of messages they can send and receive. Mobile applications follow a very similar format but, by virtue of their more

Figure 3.2 A standard profile on the mobile app *Grindr*

limited hardware, must work with less screen space and are therefore often simplified by allowing less space for free text and fewer photos. Figure 3.2 is an example of what a profile on the mobile application *Grindr* might look like.
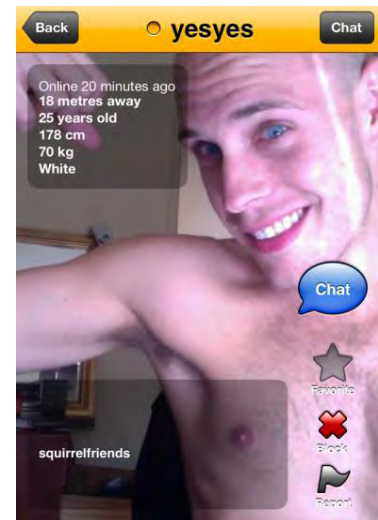
However, there are some key differences among webservices, particularly in relation to the information asked of members and the category descriptions offered as part of that. Table 3.1 compares four popular sex and dating webservices currently on the market for gay men: *Manhunt*, *Squirt*, *Grindr* and *Scruff*. All offer either free or paid subscription options. There is some variety in relation to demographic information but common across all four platforms are age, height and ethnicity. In relation to 'ethnicity', all four webservices offer what is typically characterised as a 'racial description', using three consistent labels: 'Asian', 'Black' and 'Middle Eastern'. The remaining labels, as you can see in Table 3.1, are similar in some ways but differed in specifics. The only label not translated across all services is 'Indian', which appears only on *Scruff* and *Manhunt*. Each service also provides the option for users to choose not to select a label for ethnicity. Not selecting any option on the mobile applications means that this information is simply not displayed. For the browser-based services, the field would

instead be automatically completed to read 'Ask me' (*Manhunt*) or 'Rather not say' (*Squirt*), which in some senses makes this choice appear more meaningful than if it were simply blank.

[Table 3.1](#) Comparing four popular sex and dating webservices for gay men

| | Browser-based | | Mobile application | |
	Manhunt	*Squirt*	*Grindr*	*Scruff*
Demographics	Age Height Body type Hair colour/type Eye colour Ethnicity Cock size Circumcised Sexual position HIV status	Age Height Weight Body type Body hair Ethnicity Cock size Circumcised Sexual position HIV status	Age Height Weight Ethnicity	Age Height Weight Body hair Ethnicity
Free-text space	650 characters	1500 characters	169 characters	
# of photos	> 10 (public and private galleries)	10 photos/15 videos	1	1 (+ private gallery)
Race-related labels	Asian Black Middle Eastern Latino Indian White Mixed South Asian Native American Other	Asian Black Middle Eastern Hispanic Caucasian Mixed race South Asian Aboriginal Other	Asian Black Middle Eastern Latino White Mixed South Asian Native American Other	Asian Black Middle Eastern Latino/Hispanic Indian White Multi-racial Pacific Islander Native American
Filter/search by ethnicity?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Slogan	"If he's out there, he's on here."	"Hot n' Horny hook-ups"	"The world's biggest mobile network of guys."	--

In relation to the issue discussed above about racial categories being labelled 'ethnicity' by these webservices, while it is conceivable that they are trying to encompass the subtle cultural differences that distinguish ethnic groups, they are instead probably reproducing the most commonly known labels

associated with the physical appearance of people from different parts of the world. This argument is

further supported by the labels themselves, which are in some cases so broad that they start to become

meaningless in their reduction of people from dozens of countries into one category (e.g., 'Asian').

Further, while many of these labels are fairly consistent across services, they seemed to reflect a

generally narrow, North American, view of how people might choose to describe their ethnic/racial

background. This point is demonstrated by the use of labels like 'Asian' and 'Native American'. If, as I

have argued, 'Asian' is too general a label, 'Native American' is surely too specific and certainly reflects

the North American focus of these particular services, even though all have international users. The

only service that did not include 'Native American' was the Canadian-based webservice, *Squirt*, which

instead offers 'Aboriginal'. Other labels, such as 'Latino' or 'Black' might have different meanings

depending on geographical location. However, Altman (2002) has argued that the globalization of gay

culture, at least partly as a function of these types of services, has made such labels internationally

recognisable to gay men. For example, while in Australia the label 'Black' could be used to refer to an

Indigenous person, among users of these services it would almost exclusively be understood to mean

someone of African or Caribbean background (Altman, 2002). This use of racialised labels might also

provide further evidence to support Preece's (2001) reflections on the homogenisation of culture via

Internet-based communities.

The requirement that users select from these race-based descriptive labels across services is evidence of

the important (and often unquestioned) role that racial concepts play in shaping participation in and

experiences of sex and dating webservices for men. By building race constructs into the very fabric of

the services through which men find partners, race and racial discrimination may be seen to be actively

'normalised' within these online cultures. Thus, racialised concepts become a part of how users

voluntarily articulate preferences for partners, which could explain why all the services, except *Grindr*,

enable searches or filtering of profiles based on race. This functionality means that it is possible to call

up only profiles of those men who have described their race as 'White', for example. What does this

type of labelling and searching suggest, then, about the implications of requiring all men who sign up to

this service to choose a racial category (or in their terms, 'ethnicity') to characterise and locate

themselves within these online communities of gay men? On one hand, we know that men prefer to

have access to a wide range of information about potential partners in order to make judgements about

whether or not they are interested in making contact. Race (2010) has discussed this desire for

information in relation to HIV status but I believe that is also potentially more broadly applicable. A

demand for information could influence the shape and form of these webservices. On the other hand,

the structure of these services undoubtedly plays a part in how men think about categories associated

with sex. The mere inclusion of race may reproduce the idea of it as a significant social category and

difference between men. In keeping with MacKenzie and Wajcman's (1999) foundational work on the

social shaping of technology, it is expected that social practices influence technological forms and that

technological forms also influence social practice. The reflexive relationship between online and offline

continues to be evident and is explored as part of the analysis of the data collected for this study.

3.5 Conclusions

To understand the articulation and negotiation of race and racism within online sex and dating contexts

for gay men, it is necessary to think through the complexities of the online environment itself. Past

research has highlighted that the Internet is not a distinct social setting but can instead be understood

as an extension of our offline lives. It is, however, also different in that it creates a technological buffer

or medium between individuals which appears to influence the ways that people behave online, some of

which can be interpreted as evidence of the online disinhibition effect. Features of online engagement,

such as anonymity and invisibility, can lead to socially inappropriate behaviour but can also foster

opportunities for self-expression and social connection. The latter may be particularly important for young or closeted gay men seeking to construct a new identity for themselves. Part of this online experience involves seeking out information and trying out different practices while also connecting with a community of like-minded people.

Online communities appear to be predominantly moderated by evolving systems of social norms that are largely dictated by the community members themselves but are also influenced by the formats and requirements of online webservices. The idea of self-governance is important in considering how the expression of racialised language is identified and responded to by fellow community members. When gay men turn to the Internet to connect with other men, the information they receive about permissible forms of social engagement in those settings might influence the views they develop and/or condone regarding gay identity, gay community and sex between men. Consider, then, the implications of accepting or normalising the types of anti-Asian or blatantly racist sentiments described in some of the literature reviewed in this chapter. Not only could this normalisation influence an individual's personal understanding of these issues but it might also serve to generate particular understandings of what it means to be gay and what it means to contribute to gay community in Australia, both online and offline.

3.6 The current research

Although there has been growing attention to the issue of sexual racism within gay men's online sex and dating communities in recent years, the research published to date is limited in several pivotal ways. Some work from the USA has reported on these issues in the context of the quite specific set of race relations that define that setting. Given the aforementioned importance of national context in unpacking racial discourses, it is somewhat challenging to translate that work to make it meaningful in Australia. Further, previous work has focused mostly on sexual racism in its broadest sense and, as I

have argued, the influential role of the Internet today provides further justification for understanding these issues in that specific context. While there have been several important and convincing introductions to these concepts published by Australian researchers, much work is still to be done to build on those largely theoretical approaches by providing empirical data on the attitudes and practices of gay men. Part of this work will require addressing the reflexive nature of online and offline discourses in shaping contemporary meanings of race and racism among Australia's 'gay community'. Finally, there have been few concrete suggestions for how issues relating to race and racism should ideally be addressed in these online communities.

For these reasons, the current project represents one of the first attempts to provide a comprehensive and empirically based contribution to the literature on online sexual racism among gay men in Australia. Part of this contribution involves thinking through the very concept of '(online) sexual racism' and also considering how men themselves make sense of these issues and the ways online communities respond to such practices. Finally, it is important to consider whether there are clear ways forward to propose in terms of recommendations for policy and practice. The next chapter introduces the methodological framework upon which this thesis is based and presents findings from the first stage of this mixed methods design.

Chapter 4

Stage 1: Content analysis of racialised language on a sex and dating webservice

Before describing the processes, results and inferences of stage 1 of the research, it is necessary to describe the overall framework of the research design. This chapter reviews my approach to mixed methods research and then outlines the specifics of content analysis, which forms the first stage of the project.

Overview of approach to mixed methods research

Race and racism as a part of online sex and dating for gay men exist at the intersection of several important and contentious domains: race, sex and the Internet. For the researcher, the challenge of how best to approach this phenomenon is daunting, to say the least. It was clear from the beginning that this topic would require a mixture of complementary research approaches that worked with strengths and compensated for weaknesses to allow me to draw a sufficiently broad and insightful set of conclusions. To that end, I developed three sequential stages of research, aligning and integrating three distinct methods:

Stage 1. Content analysis of racialised language on a sex and dating webservice;

Stage 2. An online survey of attitudes, perceptions and experiences related to racialised partner discrimination online; and

Stage 3. In-depth interviews with gay men in Australia who use sex and dating webservices.

A 'stage' in this sense represents not only a delimitation of time but also a way to describe the three focused sub-studies conducted within the broader framework of the research. Combined, these methods were designed to address a wide range of questions related to race and racism as a part of sex and dating online and to address emerging issues as the project progressed. This, as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) point out, is one of the strengths of mixed methods research – its ability to confirm

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and explore within one project. While this chapter focuses on the overarching methodological

framework as well as the methods specific to stage 1, the online survey is described in chapter 5 and the

participant interviews are detailed in chapter 6.

As I used a mixed method approach to inquiry, it is necessary not only to explain the specific stages of

research but also to describe the overarching framework that held these different methods together.

Over the past decade, different ways of defining mixed methods research have emerged. Teddlie and

Tashakkori (2006), for example, pioneered typologies that favour the number of methodological

approaches used, number of stages, stage of integration, and type of implementation (e.g., sequential).

Creswell (2002), on the other hand, has privileged the sequence of implementation and the weight

('dominance') assigned to each method. Greene (2007), whose work has had the greatest influence on

this project, highlights how different methods interact and the weight ('status') each is awarded during

analysis. For this project, several aspects of a mixed methods approach were pivotal in developing and

conducting the research.

First among the issues of a mixed methods design was how to reconcile, under the umbrella of a single

research project, the various paradigmatic and methodological traditions associated with each of the

stages listed above. Past work has identified several ways that mixed methods approaches navigate

complex and sometimes conflicting paradigmatic approaches, both theoretically and logistically. This

project is best represented by what Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) called a 'complementary strengths

stance'. While paradigms are not necessarily incompatible, this approach recognises that they can be

significantly different. Not only can this approach strengthen the project using methods with

"nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths" (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p.

17), but it can also allow for a rich blend of findings generated through diverse approaches. Although

complementary in design, part of this strategy involved the maintenance of each method's

methodological integrity, which is a key aspect of preserving their inherent strengths (Morse, 2003).

Others have warned of the risks associated with 'muddling methods' (Stern, 1994), which in mixed

methods research can potentially threaten validity, reliability and generalisability. For this reason, the

three stages of this project were conducted as distinct, separate and sequential approaches to the

broader investigation. That is not to say that they did not influence each other but the methods

themselves remained faithful to each field of inquiry from which they were drawn. This was true for

sampling techniques, measures, and ways of assessing data integrity. Each method generated very

different types of data and it would therefore not make sense to assess the quality of those datasets or

conduct analyses using the same techniques. Instead, the data from each stage were assessed for

quality using the conventions of that particular method. Further, separating the methods in this way

had the added benefit of creating a measured pace for the project while allowing the associated

research paradigms to be maintained and respected.

In spite of this distinction among the methods, it was important that there be opportunity and room for

the stages of this project to influence and direct each other. This type of mixing is a defining feature of

mixed method research. Specific to this project, I developed a sequential design to allow earlier stages

to influence the development of later ones. This type of integration is an example of *iterative integrated*

mixed methods design, in which the results of one stage are used to inform the development of others

(Greene, 2007), which included aspects of sample selection, analysis, and the development of measures

but was also reflected in the research objectives and questions posed at each stage. This approach was

not a mixing of methods directly but rather the use of findings and questions formed in other areas of

the project to inform *how* methods were employed elsewhere. For example, findings from the online

survey in stage 2 suggested that different understandings of racism were being employed by

participants. However, I could not identify the specifics of these differences. Compensating for this

limitation, the interviews conducted during stage 3 were able to investigate this concept in more detail.

In this example, a finding was used to direct a methodological approach within the framework of that

particular method, while leaving the methods from both stages intact. The following chapters highlight

other examples of this type of integration.

Another aspect of mixed methods research is each stage's 'status' (Greene, 2007) or 'dominance'

(Creswell, 2002), which can be described as the relative weight assigned to particular methods.

Although some mixed methods work uses categorisations like 'primary' and 'secondary', this project

sought to apply equal status to each stage of inquiry, which means that the findings achieved through

one stage were considered as equally important as the findings achieved through others, with no

particular privilege ascribed to either quantitative or qualitative approaches. Greene (2007) describes

this type of balance as an important aspect of an iterative integrated design, with greater possibilities in

mixed methods research produced in "spaces with equity of perspective and voice" (p. 126). There is

much to commend this position, which further recognises that every method has strengths and

weaknesses. Attention to the different strengths and weaknesses of each method discourages valuing

one over the other and provides cause to reject Morse's (2003) suggestion that good mixed methods

research must have one overarching epistemological position (e.g., inductive or deductive). Adhering to

one perspective would not only, by default, privilege one type of data over another but it could

downplay the important differences that exist among methodological paradigms: differences that might

reveal insights in themselves.

To summarise, this project was conceptualised as three distinct stages of different but complementary

methods from quantitative and qualitative research. Although inferences from each stage were used to

inform later stages of the research, I gave priority to methodological integrity to maintain the strengths

and offset the weaknesses associated with each approach. The sequential implementation of each

stage not only allowed for greater methodological integration but also dictated a measured pace for the

project. Finally, the equal status assigned to each method reflected my belief that strong mixed

methods research engages with equal perspectives and different voices to enable a richer

understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

4.1 Methods: Content analysis of racialised language on a sex and dating webservice

The first stage of this research comprised a content analysis of sex and dating profiles posted online by

gay and bisexual men in Australia. Research in this stage aimed to assess the ways in which men used

their profile text to discuss race and race-related concepts and to quantify how often race-related

language was used, the types of race-related language employed, and by which users. Through this

approach, I sought to develop a classification scheme for understanding the different ways in which race

was discussed by men who use sex and dating webservices, including the ways in which men from

different racial backgrounds articulated and negotiated race-related concepts in this context. An earlier

version of this analysis has been published in the peer reviewed literature (Callander, Holt, & Newman,

2012).

Drawing on the content of user profiles, the three aims of this stage of the research were as follows:

1. To develop descriptive categories related to men's use of racialised language online;

2. To conduct comparative analyses between racialised language use and self-reported race; and

3. To describe the frequency of and trends in racialised language use across webservice users.

Several specific hypotheses were developed through a review of research from the USA (Phua &

Kaufman, 2003). As discussed in chapter 2, national context forms a significant aspect of how race can

and should be understood. It was therefore not clear to what extent – if at all – observations from the

USA would translate to Australia. However, as has also been pointed out, some aspects of gay culture

transcend national boundaries; it could be that discourses of race observed overseas would be

reproduced in Australia as well. To address that point, this stage was intended to test the transferability

of earlier overseas research in this area, as well as the following three hypotheses:

- The profiles of White users would be less likely than those authored by men of other racial

  groups to reference race in any way on their profile;

- The profiles of men from minority racial groups would most likely reference race in relation to

  the self; and

- There would be differences in the ways that men from different racial groups engaged with

  racialised language.

4.1.1 Website

User profiles were sampled from *Manhunt*. Chapter 3 described some aspects of this webservice that

make it a 'typical' sex and dating webservice and which made it a rich and appealing source of data.

First, *Manhunt* users, like the users of other similar webservices, represent themselves through online

profiles that contain demographics, personal and physical characteristics, photos and a free text section.

Second, *Manhunt* offers paid and free options for membership, with free members limited by the

number of profiles and messages that they can view or send. Finally, *Manhunt* is somewhat unique

compared to some of the other services described so far (e.g., *Grindr, Scruff,* or *Squirt*) in that it allows

for a large section of user-generated text, which was a particularly appealing quality given this stage's

focus on language.

As part of a publicly accessible webservice, *Manhunt* user profiles exist within the online public domain, although a membership is required. The Terms of Access and Use for this webservice, which all users are required to agree to upon creating a profile, permit the use of profile content for "private, personal entertainment, education and commercial use" (Manhunt.net, 2010). The collection and use of profile content for this analysis were deemed to fall within those parameters. The design of this stage of the project was approved as 'low risk' by the University of New South Wales Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel. Further steps were taken, however, to protect users' identities, which included not saving profile usernames and not collecting any user photos.

It is worth noting here that *Manhunt* moderates the free text posted by its members. When a profile is created or updated, there is a delay between when content is submitted and when it appears online. This delay is presumably to allow moderators time to ensure that the text does not breach *Manhunt*'s Terms of Access and Use, which restricts activities like solicitation for paid sex work. These terms also include a somewhat vague prohibition of "racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable" content (Manhunt.net, 2010).

4.1.2 Samples

Using *Manhunt,* two distinct samples of online sex and dating profiles were collected during October and November 2010. Following the sampling strategies detailed below, demographic information (age, race, HIV status) and the free-text section were copied from each profile into a spreadsheet. User names were used to identify duplicate profiles and then cleaned from the dataset, which was encrypted and stored on a secure server. Profiles were removed from the dataset if they were not in English or if they were meant to represent more than one person, such as for a couple or a group of people.

Sample 1: Purposive

The first sample was purposively collected from those profiles that in some way referenced race or a race-related concept. To identify profiles containing racialised language, keyword searches were conducted using the webservice's built-in search function. This feature of the webservice also allows for searching among all standard profile variables (e.g., location, age, preferred sexual position). Using this functionality, 16 keyword searches were conducted of profiles from users in Australia containing any use of: *race; racial; racism; racist; Asian; White; Wog; Indian; Latino; Middle Eastern; Black; Aboriginal; Lebanese; Leb; ethnicity; ethnic*. Results of these searches are limited by the webservice to a maximum of 500 profiles, which are presented in a random order. The first 50 profiles were sampled from each list generated through these searches. Some searches returned less than 50 profiles and in those cases, all were sampled. In addition to the exclusion criteria described above, profiles were also excluded if their use of a keyword term was not related to race (e.g., the word 'white' to describe a colour rather than the race of a person).

Sample 2: Systematic

The second sample was collected systematically. A systematic sample was achieved by collecting every fifth profile of those webservice users who were logged onto the system at the time of data collection. Data collection took place at various times during the week and at different times during the day to help further randomise the selection of profiles, with 30 profiles collected per day until 300 profiles in total had been sampled. As with sample 1, usernames were collected only to check for duplicates and were removed from the final dataset.

4.1.3 Analysis

Analysis 1: Describing characteristics of race-related profile content

The first analysis used the profiles of sample 1 to develop descriptive categories of observed racialised language. To develop those categories, the collected profiles were read and reread multiple times to identify recurring themes, turns of phrase, and language choices. Codes were developed throughout this process with the aim of describing the different ways in which racial language was being employed. This version of content analysis has been referred to as 'thematic unitizing' and is considered a strong method of category (unit) development that allows for descriptive richness (Krippendorff, 2012). This stage of analysis also included several instances where inter-rater reliability (kappa) was calculated to assess agreement among several coders. Every attempt was made to provide rich descriptions of the categories accompanied by illustrative examples. Although category development focused on whole profiles sampled for their use of racialised language, pieces of racialised text were isolated and stored in a separate database. This procedure enabled coding using the constructed framework, which in turn allowed for the descriptive and comparative analyses described in the next section to be conducted.

Krippendorff (2012) highlighted the importance of content analysis categories that are both exhaustive (capturing all of the observable forms of language) and mutually exclusive (clearly distinctive in relation to each other). To achieve these standards, categories were frequently reviewed, revised and subjected to testing, with a particular focus on ensuring they were successful at capturing and making sense of the more unusual or ambiguous examples. This process went through several revisions of the categories and their definitions. The final categories were then organised into an overarching coding framework that sought to provide a complete picture of the use of racialised language in this sample.

Content analysis was selected as the analytic approach to making sense of these data because it facilitates three important descriptive outcomes. First, it enables the development of a coding framework to identify and interpret recurring features in the data, which is in itself a necessary and valuable introduction to a topic that is little understood in the Australian context. Second, it builds on that process through the construction of frequency markers, which are useful quantitative tools for answering basic questions about prevalence and scope. Finally, the combination of these two processes enabled group differences to be identified and explored through statistical tests, which I describe in more detail below. Thus, as in the first stage of this project, content analysis provided an effective way to begin exploring the empirical evidence of online sexual racism while also answering some important introductory questions about the broader topic.

Analysis 2: Systematic sample to determine prevalence of race-related profile content
The second analysis used the profile text collected for sample 2. Again, pieces of racialised text were isolated from the broader profile text to allow for coding. This analysis included an additional dichotomous yes/no variable to describe whether or not a profile text included some reference to race. Then the coding framework constructed in Analysis 1 was applied to the profiles collected in sample 2 that contained racialised language. This process provided a sample of coded profiles for which descriptive and comparative statistical analyses could be conducted.

4.1.4 Statistical analysis

As discussed, coding units of racialised language across both samples allowed for the application of statistical techniques. This form of quantitative content analysis allows comparisons of language use among profiles representing different groups of men. Frequency counts were employed to outline the prevalence of racialised language within the established descriptive categories. They were also used to

facilitate Chi-Squared tests, which explored potential differences in the ways that men from various racial backgrounds engaged with racialised language. Additionally, within both samples, binary sub-samples of White and non-White users were created to test specific hypotheses. For all analyses, SPSS Statistical Software Version 20 was used (IBM, 2011) with statistical significance set at $p<0.05$.

4.2 Results

Using purposively sampled profiles posted by gay and bisexual men on the webservice *Manhunt*, a coding framework was developed to describe language use associated with race. This section describes this framework and the various descriptive and comparative analyses make possible through its development. Please note that any quotations reproduced here are unedited, except where specified. Keyword searches on *Manhunt* retrieved 769 instances of racialised language within 704 unique profiles across Australia. Although I originally intended to construct several mutually exclusive categories to describe the ways racial language was observed in this context, the diversity of language they contained required a more complex approach. To capture this diversity, the final framework therefore aimed to capture and describe three aspects of racialised language. The first among these aspects is the *Subject* of racialised language, which could also be described as the 'who or what'. Second is the 'why' or *Purpose* of racialised language. Finally, the framework describes 'how' users engaged with racialised language, which I am describing as their *Position*. The following section expands on how each category was defined as part of the coding framework, details the coding units contained within each, and provides illustrative examples. An overview of this coding framework can be found in Figure 4.1. All quotations were taken directly from the sample used to generate this framework and remain unedited, unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 4.1 A framework for understanding racialised content as it appears on the sex and dating profiles of gay and bisexual men in Australia (Callander, Holt, & Newman, 2012)

Subject
- **Self** - describing race-related qualities of oneself
  - *"38, slim, white boy."*
- **Others** - describing race-related qualities of others
  - *"Only into Asian boys."*
- **Concept** - describing race-related meanings at a social or collective level
  - *"What's up with all the racism on here?"*

Purpose
- **Marketing** - selling one's self as a potential partner on basis of race
- **Discrimination** - distinguishing partners on basis of race
  - **Negative** - excluding potential partners: *"Not interested in over 25 or Asian."*
  - **Positive** - including potential partners: *"black guys, wog dudes to the front of the line."*
- **Commentary** - reflecting on the practice of sexual racism
  - *"Racist guys, please don't contact me."*

Position
- **Defensive** - justifying the use of race-related concepts
  - *"Not racism, just a preference."*
- **Normalised** - using race-related concepts in a manner that assumes no justification
  - *"Asians to the front of the line."*
- **Critical** - addressing or challenging the use of race-related concepts
  - *"If you think saying "no asian, no offence" is not racist then Fuck Off."*

4.2.1 Subject: the 'who or what' of racialised language

Racialised language observed in user profiles made reference to a presumed subject, which could include a person or group of people but was also sometimes directed at abstract ideas or concepts. These categories could be described as the *self*, *other*, or a *concept*. The subject was determined not by considering sentence structure but instead by focusing on who or what the race-related text was directed towards. Such a distinction is important, given that the subject of a section of text might differ from the subject of a unit of racialised language when considered within the overall structure of a sentence. Inter-rater reliability among the three coders (myself and my two supervisors) was high (K = 0.93).

Self

In some instances, users employed racialised language directly referencing the self, that is to say the author of the text. One profile described its author as a, "38, slim, white boy".   Another described himself as a "42 year old asian – Indian in origin".   In these examples, "white", "asian", and "Indian" are all used self-referentially.

Other

In other instances, racialised language was used to describe someone else or a group of other people. Lines such as, "have a soft spot for indian and asian guys, but all welcome," and, "I'm not into asian men," are examples of how racial descriptions were used in relation to other people.

Concept

Finally, some men's use of racialised language described *concepts* or ideas associated with race. For example, the following refers to the subject of 'racism' in the online sex-seeking community of gay men: "It annoys me that guys have racial preferences on here." While it could be argued that 'guys' is the subject of this sentence, as these categories are focused on race, the subject of interest here is a concept.

4.2.2 Purpose: the 'why' of racialised language

It was assumed that racialised language was employed by men on sex and dating webservices for a particular *purpose*. Three primary purposes that seemed to indicate men's apparent motivations in using race-related language were identified and these were labelled *marketing*, *discrimination* and *commentary*. Inter-rater reliability for this category of codes was high (K = 0.88).

Marketing

The first purpose identified here was the use of racialised language to describe or *market* oneself with reference to characteristics related to race, for example, "asian student here." This category is linked exclusively with the *self* as a subject. Some men wrote about a *concept* but did so in what appeared to be an effort at self-promotion ("Also all nationalities are welcome as i am not racist like most of the guys on [h]ere"). Instead of considering this to be an attempt to *market,* however, examples such as these were classified as *comments* for reasons expanded upon later.

Discrimination

For this purpose, the term *discrimination* was employed in the strictest sense of the word – to distinguish and separate - rather than being associated with any sort of value judgement. This category was then further broken down into two sub-categories, as men could discriminate *negatively* or *positively*. *Negative discrimination* refers to content that deliberately excludes a particular group or groups of potential partners on the basis of their race, as in, "Not really into white guys sorry." *Positive discrimination*, in contrast, expresses a racialised interest or preference for potential partners, as in, "Asians and Mixed race = SEXY!!" Deliberately including all racial groups, such as "Any race is cool", was also coded as positive discrimination.

Commentary

Finally, for this category, some men appeared to use racialised language in their profile as a way to provide *commentary* on race. Observed instances of user-driven commentary were almost always related to racism as a discursive practice, which was sometimes focused on sexual racism both in the gay community at large ("No racial barriers! Being a part of a community that wants equality and ending discrimination we should probably take a good look out ourselves,") and specific to this particular online space ("i'm an absolute hater of racist wankers on here"). While

some of this content could be seen as discriminatory in nature ("If you dislike someone simply because of their racial background we probably won't get along"), the engagement with the subject (of racism) positions examples like this one as social commentary, rather than an attempt to distinguish between or among potential partners.

4.2.3 Position: 'how' men used racialised language

The third and final aspect of this framework's description of racialised language is the *position* that men took toward the use of racialised language, which could also be described as their tone of expression in employing racial and race-related concepts. Three ways of interpreting men's positions were included within this category: *defensive*, *normalised,* or *critical*. Using these labels, agreement among coders was high (K = 0.80).

Defensive

Attempts to excuse, permit or justify the use of racialised language of any sort were categorised as *defensive* in tone*.* This tone could include actively supporting the use of race-related concepts in relation to sex and dating ("If not being sexually attracted to Asians makes me racist does only liking cock make me sexist?") and could also include making some defence for not only what was written but the sentiment behind it as well ("Sorry guys, not into Asian or Indian guys – just a preference").

Normalised

A *normalised* position was defined as the use of racialised language without any kind of commentary or question and in a way that offered no additional justification. Examples such as, "hairy wog bottom," and, "into white guys my own age or younger," demonstrate the use of racialised language without offering an opinion or position on that use.

Critical

Finally, the tone of racialised content could also be *critical*, constructing a position that was directly and explicitly in opposition to the use of racialised concepts online and occasionally also in relation to broader discourses of race and racism. For example, some profiles included statements such as, "Sexual racism sux!" and, "Racism isn't sexy." These demonstrate how a user's profile text could be used to adopt a position that aimed to reflect, challenge and debunk some of the practices associated with the use of racialised content.

4.2.4 Describing racialised language among gay, bisexual and other MSM online

Among the 704 unique profiles included in sample 1, ages ranged from 18 (the youngest age permitted to join the webservice) to 67 (M = 33.29, SD = 9.96). *Manhunt* has predefined options for HIV status (*Negative, Positive, Don't know* or *Ask me*) and race. Most users reported that they were HIV negative (82.8%), with a small minority indicating they were HIV positive (1.4%). The remaining users either did not complete the HIV status field or selected the 'ask me' option (16.4%). Using the available options, user profiles identified their authors as White (48.5%), Asian (10.5%), Middle Eastern (10.3%), mixed (10.1%), other (3.5%), Latino (3.3%), Black (2.3%), South Asian (1.4%), Indian (1.2%) and Native American (0.1%). The remaining users selected the 'Ask me' option for race or did not complete the question (8.7%). While the 'Ask me' responses were recognised as interesting, because of the difficulty of incorporating them into the proposed analysis, profiles with an 'Ask me' response to race were excluded from subsequent analyses.

One primary aim of this analysis was to describe the prevalence of, that is, how common it was to use, racialised language among men's sex and dating profiles. For both samples, men most commonly made use of racialised language to *discriminate positively* and adopted a *normalised* position around their use

of racialised language and concepts. Profiles collected for sample 1 most commonly referenced the race

of *others* while profiles in the systematic sample referenced race of the *self*. Table 4.1 shows this

breakdown between the two samples in more detail, noting that for the systematic sample, proportions

were calculated only among those profiles containing some reference to race.

Table 4.1 Racialised language use among purposive and systematic samples of sex and dating profiles

	Purposive sample		Systematic sample	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*
Any reference to race?				
Yes	769	100	57	19.0
No	--	--	243	81.0
Subject				
Self	248	35.2	31	50.0
Other	427	55.5	30	48.4
Concept	94	12.2	1	1.6
Purpose				
Marketing	346	32.0	31	50.0
Negative Discrimination	54	7.0	--	--
Positive Discrimination	353	45.9	30	48.4
Commentary	116	15.1	1	1.6
Position				
Defensive	59	7.7	3	4.8
Normalised	556	72.3	55	88.7
Critical	154	20.0	4	6.5

One of the key findings from these analyses is that approximately 20% of profiles contain some

reference to race. Although the two sampling techniques generated samples with different categorical

proportions, it is worth noting that the distribution of responses among the systematic sample broadly

mimics that of the purposive one. The value of the purposive sample is that it enables a more detailed

exploration of what is a seemingly more rare than expected phenomenon. While this breakdown is

useful in beginning to illustrate how racialised language is used on men's sex and dating profiles,

another objective of this analysis was to explore differences in language use among users identifying

with different racial backgrounds themselves. Using the constructed categories, Chi-squared tests were

applied to assess difference in language use among racial groups of both the purposively and strategically collected profile samples.

4.2.5 Analysis 1: Purposive sample of profiles

Table 4.2 provides an overview of this analysis, which is drawn from the purposive sample of profiles. The value of this sample as a part of these analyses is that it allows for consideration of racialised language that may be uncommon but does appear to exist online. As discussed, the majority of profiles across sample 1 discussed race in reference to *others* (55.5%). When we examine differences within and between racial groups, however, the *other* was the most common subject of profiles from White (76.7%) and Asian men (46.9%). The profiles of White users were significantly more likely than any other group to reference an *other* (χ^2(18, 702)=226.83, *p*<0.001). Compared to other racial groups, profiles of users who self-identified as Indian were the most likely to make use of racialised language in relation to the *self* (77.8%) and 'mixed' race profiles were the most likely to include a race-related *concept* (20.5%). Overall, non-White users most frequently discussed their own race, while White users most commonly discussed the race of others.

Positive discrimination was the purpose of racialised language most commonly identified in the purposively sampled profiles (46.9%). Profiles from White webservice users contained this purpose more often than profiles from any other racial group (64.8% of White profiles; χ^2(27, 702)=232.30, *p*<0.001). Using one's profile for *marketing* accounted for 30.9% of sample 1 profiles and was most commonly found in the profiles of Indian and Middle Eastern users (77.8% and 73.4% respectively). *Commentary* was found in 15.1% of the profiles analysed in sample 1 and was most common in the profiles of users who reported a 'mixed' or White racial background (21.8% and 17.4% respectively). Although it was more prevalent in the profiles of self-described White users when compared to other

racial groups (9.7% vs. 4.3%), *discriminating negatively* was, in general, the least utilised purpose (7.0%

of all texts in sample 1).

Finally, *normalised* positions dominated the use of racialised language in the profiles of sample 1,

identified in 72.1% of all the texts analysed. Normalised positions were most frequently observed in the

profiles of self-described Black and Middle Eastern webservice users (94.4% and 92.4% respectively;

χ^2(18, 702)=53.46, *p*<0.001). Adopting a *critical* position was found in 19.8% of all the texts sampled and

was more common in the profiles of men who self-identified as of 'mixed' ethnicity or Asian (29.5% and

23.5% respective), while White users' profiles were most likely to express a *defensive* stance (11.5%).

Compared to those of non-White users, the profiles of self-described White men were more likely to

adopt a critical or defensive stance (17.0% and 4.3% respectively among non-White users compared to

22.3% and 11.5% of White users). Profiles of both non-White and White men most commonly adopted

a normalised tone in relation to race (78.7% and 66.2% respectively).

Table 4.2 **Employment of racialised language across self-reported racial identities of sample 1 (purposively collected) profiles** (Callander, Holt, & Newman, 2012)

Racial group	Subject n (%)			Purpose n (%)				Tone n (%)		
	Self	Other	Concept	Marketing	Negative Discrimination	Positive Discrimination	Commentary	Defensive	Normalised	Critical
Asian	33 (40.7)	38 (46.9)	10 (12.3)	31 (38.3)	1 (1.2)	35 (43.2)	14 (17.3)	3 (3.7)	59 (72.8)	19 (23.5)
Black	11 (61.1)	7 (38.9)	--	12 (66.7)	1 (5.6)	5 (27.8)	--	1 (5.6)	17 (94.4)	--
Indian	7 (77.8)	2 (22.2)	--	7 (77.8)	--	2 (22.2)	--	--	8 (88.9)	1 (11.1)
Latino	18 (72.0)	6 (24.0)	1 (4.0)	18 (72.0)	1 (4.2)	4 (1.3)	2 (1.7)	--	23 (92.0)	2 (8.0)
Middle Eastern	57 (72.2)	22 (27.8)	--	57 (72.2)	6 (7.6)	15 (7.6)	1 (1.3)	5 (6.3)	73 (92.4)	1 (1.3)
Native American	1 (100)	--	--	1(100)	--	--	--	--	1 (100)	--
South Asian	6 (54.2)	3 (27.3)	2 (18.2)	6 (54.5)	--	2 (18.2)	3 (27.3)	--	6 (54.5)	5 (45.5)
White	34 (9.1)	286 (76.7)	53 (14.2)	34 (9.1)	36 (9.7)	238 (64.8)	65 (17.4)	43 (11.5)	247 (66.2)	83 (22.3)
Mixed	35 (44.9)	27 (34.6)	27 (20.5)	34 (43.6)	4 (5.1)	23 (29.5)	17 (21.8)	5 (6.4)	50 (64.1)	23 (29.5)
Other	17 (63.0)	6 (22.2)	4 (14.8)	17 (63.0)	1 (3.7)	5 (18.5)	4 (14.8)	--	22 (81.5)	5 (18.5)
	219 (31.2)	427 (56.6)	86 (12.3)	217 (30.9)	50 (7.1)	329 (46.9)	106 (15.1)	57 (8.1)	506 (72.1)	139 (19.8)
$\chi^2(p)$	226.83 (<0.001)			232.30 (<0.001)				53.46 (<0.001)		
Non-White	185 (56.2)	111 (33.7)	33 (10.0)	183 (55.6)	14 (4.3)	91 (27.7)	41 (12.5)	14 (4.3)	259 (78.7)	56 (17.0)
White	34 (9.1)	286 (76.7)	53 (14.2)	34 (9.1)	36 (9.7)	238 (64.8)	65 (17.4)	43 (11.5)	247 (66.2)	83 (22.3)
$\chi^2(p)$	183.87 (<0.001)			181.06 (<0.001)				17.60 (<0.001)		

Note: -- indicates a 0 cell count; **Note:** cells with counts < 5 have been suppressed in the overall analysis

4.2.6 Analysis 2: Race-related content in a systematic selection of user profiles

A total of 300 unique profiles was systematically sampled and analysed for use of racialised language (sample 2). Although this sample included few instances of racialised language, its key strength was in its representation of the 'real' sex and dating context online. Primarily, it enabled the calculation of prevalence indicators, which were mostly missing from the literature thus far. Website users in this sample were aged from 18 to 68 (M = 32.75, SD = 9.66) at the time of collection and most identified as HIV negative (83.4%). In this sample, profiles were collected from Asian (11.4%), Latino (0.7%), Middle Eastern (0.3%), South Asian (0.7%), mixed (6.5%) and White users (68.4%). The remaining users identified with another racial identity (2.9%), did not complete the question or selected the 'ask me' option (9.1%). Those selecting 'ask me' were removed from the analysis.

From the profiles collected, 62 examples of racialised text were coded, appearing within 57 (19%) of the 300 sampled profiles. Race-related content therefore appears in just under one in every five sex and dating profiles in a systematic sample of gay men's profiles on *Manhunt*. As with the first analysis, possible connections between racialised language use and self-described racial identities were explored. The texts collected from profiles of Asian men were more likely to contain any reference to race when compared to those of other racial groups (45.7% vs. 20.4%; χ^2(1, 279)=15.96, p<0.001). Given the relatively small numbers of profiles from men of minority racial backgrounds, language use for this analysis was primarily compared between White (n = 373) and non-White (n = 296) webservice users (see Table 4.2 for more detail). Confirming one of the original hypotheses, users of a minority racial identity were more likely than their White peers to mention race in their profile text (37.7% and 15.7% respectively; χ^2(1, 279)=15.03, p<0.001). When considering only those profiles containing some use of racialised language, men of minority

race were more likely to employ race in relation to *self*-description (73.1%), while White users

most commonly used race in reference to *others* (66.7%; χ^2(2, 59)=11.61, *p*=0.003). Only one

sampled profile made reference to a race-related *concept* as the subject of the text (3.8%). The

racialised content of the profiles of men from minority racial backgrounds was used most

frequently to *market* the self (73.1%), while White users mostly engaged in *positive discrimination*

towards potential partners (66.7%). None of the texts contained examples of *negative*

discrimination and only one contained a *commentary* on race. There did not appear to be a

significant difference between the White and non-White users in the type of *position* expressed;

the majority of texts adopted a *normalised* position (87.8%).

4.2.7 Summary

These results show that only a minority of *Manhunt* users (19%) made use of racialised language

within their profiles. However, when racialised language was used, men from different racial

backgrounds employed it in different ways. White and Asian men who used racialised language in

their profiles, tended to do so to describe other people and to denote what they did or did not

want from sexual partners. However, compared to users from other racial groups, White men

were less likely than other men to reference race in any way in their profile text, confirming the

hypothesis that the profiles of White users would reference race less frequently than other racial

groups. When they used racialised language in their profiles, men of minority racial groups (with

the exception of those racialised as Asian) tended to focus on describing themselves in terms of

race, confirming the hypothesis that men racialised as non-White would use racial concepts most

often self-referentially. The majority of men, regardless of their self-ascribed race, referred to

racialised concepts in a *normalised* way. Nonetheless, some used their profile text to critique,

challenge or defend the use and meanings of race and racism in the online sex and dating space.

Compared to men from other racial groups, White users were more likely to critique or defend the use of racialised language in their profiles.

4.3 Inferences drawn from stage 1 findings

This first stage of the project sought to explore how concepts related to race were articulated by gay men who use sex and dating webservices. The profile texts of webservice users were collected and analysed for their use of racialised language. A coding framework was developed from purposively sampled profiles and applied to a systematically sampled subset of profile texts. This section presents inferences from these findings.

4.3.1 The 'subject' of racialised language

Engaging in racialised descriptions of *others* dominated the majority of the purposively sampled profiles and was also found among a large number of the systematically sampled profiles. This finding should not come as a surprise on a webservice that explicitly instructs its members to tell other users, "all about [themselves] and what [they]'re looking for." Articulating these subjects was, however, not uniformly popular among men across the profiles of different self-described racial groups. In fact, although the *other* as a subject accounted for more than three-quarters of the purposively sampled profiles belonging to White users, this subject was not nearly as popular on the profiles of other racial groups. Of the nine racial options provided by *Manhunt*, only two groups of users (White and Asian) commonly mentioned the racial characteristics of other people. It is worth noting that profiles of Asian users described the racialised *self*, along with racialised *others* at very similar rates. For the remaining seven groups, a focus on race as a characteristic of the *self* dominated the analysed profiles. This focus on the self, along with a similar finding among the systematically sampled profiles, partially confirms the hypothesis that the profiles of men from

minority racial groups were more likely than others to include any reference to race but that those references were more likely to be self-referential.

The observed differences among the racialised *subjects* of these webservice profiles might reflect what others have described as the 'invisibility of Whiteness'. Frankenberg (1997) described this concept as rooted in dominance and assumed normalcy: "whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the making of others on which its transparency depends" (p. 6). If a White identity were the assumed dominant or default 'norm' in Australian culture, it might be seen to require no further qualification or explanation, which means that White gay men would feel no need to describe themselves as White or even think to do so in the first place. Further, research from the USA has demonstrated that an assumption of Whiteness continues to dominate how people think about who represents the 'typical' gay man (Teunis, 2007). Both of these presumptions could partly explain why White users were unlikely to self-describe in terms of race. Using Roland Barthes' (1972) terminology, White men become the 'ex-nominated' subject of sex and dating webservices for men. Against an unspoken expectation of Whiteness may stand a complementary expectation for members of other racial groups to disclose or discuss their own racial identity. This assertion is further underscored by demands from other users regarding racial or ethnic identification, as expressed on the profile of one White user that read, "I shouldn't have to ask for a picture, or your age, or your ethnicity. Have it available straight away or I'll just pass over your profile." While this text makes no specific reference to the racial identity of webservice users, it does send a clear message that race (described by this user as 'ethnicity') is something that must be easily and readily identifiable. It also demonstrates the value that some men place on racial identities as a strategy for 'sorting'

potential partners online, in this case, ranking it among age and physical appearance as an important component of this process.

An assumption of Whiteness does not, however, explain the observed popularity of *other*-based race descriptions on the profiles of Asian users. What is particularly interesting here is that this distinction among subjects was much less clear for Asian users than for non-Asian users. To illustrate this point, consider the difference in proportions between *self* and *other* descriptions. Approximately 41% of the profiles sampled from Asian-identified users referenced the *self*, while 47% referenced an *other*, which is a difference of 6% between these two subjects. By contrast, Indian men most commonly referenced the *self*, which accounted for 78% of the sampled profiles, while the second most commonly subject was an *other*, which accounted for only 22% of sampled profile. This difference suggests that some Asian men engage with racialised *others*, while others remain interested in descriptions of the self. Further, there is the possibility that some profiles used both types of language, acknowledging their minority racial status (which, as I discuss, appears to be an expected norm in this community), while also exerting a description of *others*. I expand on the potential reasons for this division in the next section.

Expressing *concepts* relating to race and racism was the least popular subject across both samples of profiles. This finding suggests that most men who use sex and dating webservices are focused on seeking and potentially meeting partners and not on engaging in social and political debates about who makes up the communities of men who use these webservices. Nevertheless, while the activities in which webservice users are engaged might not deliberately invite political or social discussion, a small proportion of users did choose to use their profile to engage in this way. There are a few possible interpretations of this finding. First, it could be that some webservice users are

attempting to attract partners by positioning themselves as attractive in relation to other users.

Publicly challenging racialised practices through one's profile could therefore be such an attempt, by decrying the practices of others to draw positive attention to one's own. Evidence for this interpretation was found in the text of some users, who seemed to be condemning other men while proposing their own inclusiveness: "I don't care what colour you r, I'm not racist – unlike everyone else on here." Second, it could also be that the work of activist groups in Australia is beginning to have some impact on the discourses of race online. The best example to demonstrate this possibility is the line, "Sexual racism sux", which appeared on several sampled profiles. This particular expression with the idiosyncratic spelling of 'sucks' seems to be taken directly from a social campaign and website of the same name, 'Sexual Racism Sux' (Mandsfield & Quan, 2013). As I discussed in chapter 1, this website represents community-level work aimed at questioning and challenging the practice of (negative) racialised partner discrimination and appears to have influenced some webservice users' conduct and language.

4.3.2 The 'purpose' of men's racialised language

The types of analysis undertaken in this stage did not allow for an extensive appreciation of why men wrote what they did. However, it was possible to conduct a surface-level analysis of potential motivations in the hopes of investigating what may drive race-related online practices. The coded purpose of racialised language employed in the sampled profiles was also markedly different according to the self-described racial groups of webservice users. Within both the purposively and systematically collected samples, to *discriminate positively* between partners based on race was the most commonly used purpose (e.g., "Interested in Latino men"). Within racial groups, however, this finding was relevant only for the profiles of White and Asian users. Other racial groups in the systematic sample most commonly employed racialised content in an attempt to

describe themselves or to self-market, a finding that is consistent with the predominance of a *self-*

subject among other racial groups. This relationship was observed among the systematic sample

as well.

What this difference might say about the broader intersections between race and sex among this

population is usefully explored through a discussion of desire and politics among gay men. Several

accounts, many of them first-hand, have addressed the politics of gay sex and desire in Australia

and overseas. While differences exist across national borders, there is a commonly shared belief

that attractiveness in Australia and other White-dominated cultures is dominated by an aesthetic

of Whiteness (A. Han, 2006; C. Han, 2007; Raj, 2011). The value placed on Whiteness means that

White gay men not only enjoy a certain privilege in being positioned as attractive by virtue of their

racialised identity, but also that they are able to shape – through, among other things, sex and

dating practices – what is seen as attractive in others. That influences the behaviour and practices

of men across racial identities. In this analysis, the influence that White gay men appeared to have

in dictating the physical requirements (including race) of potential sexual partners was evident in

their profiles, which most often specified the racial characteristics of potential partners. It appears

as though Asian men could also engage in the practice of specifying the racial characteristics of

potential partners, although to a lesser extent. As with the subject of racialised language

described above, the profiles of Asian users were the only group other than White men to engage

in *positive discrimination* (but to a significantly lesser degree). While the difference between

positive discrimination and the next most popular purpose (marketing) was only around 5%, the

same difference among the profiles of White users was closer to 60%. It could be that Asian men

are engaging in dual practices through their profiles by addressing their own race, as well as the

race of other people. It may also be useful to consider relative group sizes based on racial identity.

Asian men make up the second largest racial identity of the profiles included here and (as I touch

upon in the results of the next chapter) appear to be the second most populous group of men who

use sex and dating webservices. The size of this group may lend a certain type of power and

enable open discrimination among partners. If, as I have suggested, descriptions of racialised

others appear to be a normalised part of online sex and dating culture, men of racial minority

status might find themselves increasingly more comfortable with it as a part of online routine. In

contrast to profiles of White and Asian men, only a small number of profiles from other racialised

groups specified a desire for others based upon race, as most of the racialised content of their

profiles (when racialised content was used) was related to the *self*. The reasons for employing

racialised language are therefore poignant examples of how racial concepts can influence gay men

to engage with their own and other people's desires.

Very few profiles directly excluded potential partners based on race, which could be explained in a

few ways. Again, it might be the result of the impact of campaigns aimed at combating 'sexual

racism'. The material of the website 'Sexual Racism Sux' actively encourages men to describe

what they want instead of what they do not want. This type of intervention could explain why

negative discrimination was generally uncommon, while positive discrimination was the most

common purpose observed. However, this observation likely also connects to broader social

discourses that condemn (and even prohibit) the articulation of racist beliefs in favour of

tolerance, accompanied by a rise in more subtle expressions, as discussed in chapter 2. In fact,

some webservice users who declared disinterest in particular racial groups qualified their

disinterest by rejecting any potential critique: "I'm not a racist just not sexually attracted to

asians". Attempts by users to distance themselves from labels associated with racism highlight the

strategies individuals employ to reject the label of a 'bad racist' (Rapley, 2001; Riggs, 2004), which

also highlights some ambiguity among members of this community around what constitutes racism. Although occurring infrequently, the findings that White users were more likely than other racial groups to articulate negative discrimination may be a further demonstration of the privilege that White gay men enjoy in asserting their preferences, including those related to race.

Finally, those profiles that constructed commentary on race-related concepts represented a very small proportion of those sampled. When it was observed, however, it was most common on profiles from mixed-race or White users. It is difficult to interpret what the racial label 'mixed' might mean either to users themselves or in society more broadly. It could be that men who describe themselves as 'mixed' are more critical than others of the limited options *Manhunt* has made available to describe one's race. This type of critical approach would explain why men who selected this option were more likely to be men from other racial groups to offer commentary regarding the use of racialised language. It would be interesting to explore further what men mean by this label and how, if given the option, 'mixed' men would describe themselves in racial terms. The engagement in commentary by White users, however, can be further attributed to the influence of White identity in this space, which, in this case, is intended to influence the debates and critiques surrounding racial issues in online spaces. C. Han (2007) highlighted this struggle in the USA through his discussion of the role of gay community organisations and their approaches to tackling racial issues. His work suggests that within the gay community, leadership roles (even those related to fostering racial inclusion or addressing issues of race) tend to be dominated by White members, an idea echoed in other American research (Teunis, 2007). In Australia, this White dominance is not dissimilar to Hage's (1998) description of the socio-political debates around immigration and multiculturalism in Australian society, in which there is a presumed right for White subjects to dictate how issues are discussed. Although both of these examples reflect

issues of wider concern than those related to sex and dating online, it is interesting to see similar

social discourses manifested in the practices of gay and bisexual men online.

4.3.3 The way men 'positioned' their use of racialised concepts

One of the most striking aspects of the racialised language observed here was that, almost

universally, men adopted a normalised position regarding its use. Very few profiles sought to

defend or challenge the use of race-related concepts and most employed and accepted them

without question. This normalisation of particular language forms, as in society more broadly,

might suggest an uncritical approach to understanding race. The minority who did adopt a critical

position, however, were most commonly of 'mixed', Asian or White racial backgrounds and White

users were again more likely than their non-White peers to engage in critique. Conversely,

although speaking to the same point, very few men defended the use of racialised language.

Those who did were primarily White and sought to justify this practice as appropriate to an online

sex and dating context, while also distancing it from racism. That these defensive and critical

positions are primarily occupied by White users reproduces the dichotomy described earlier,

whereby White men are the most likely to defend the articulation of racially based sexual or

romantic preferences but are also likely to critique it. Men from racial minority groups, however,

appeared most commonly to adopt a neutral or normalised position.

These findings present examples of how many dimensions of online representation of race were

reproduced (and reinforced) by White users, which strengthen arguments by Hage (1998) about

multiculturalism, by Riggs & Augoustinos (2005) about racialised life in Australia, and by C. Han

(2007) about race in gay communities. While White subjects who position themselves on either

side of the debate might perceive themselves to be quite different from each other, they are, in

fact, relatively similar. Their Whiteness seems to invest them with the 'right to speak' on issues of

racism in this setting and an authority to manage, comment upon or intervene in the politics of

the online sex and dating world. While some men of minority racial groups did provide critiques of

sexual racism in their profiles, most appeared to accept it as a standard, unsurprising and maybe

even 'natural' component of the experience of engaging with sex and dating webservices for men.

4.4 Conclusions

This analysis provided a framework with which to begin to understand the diverse ways men make

use of language related to race in their engagement with sex and dating webservices. While other

research (see Phua & Kaufman, 2003; Riggs, 2012) has explored some aspects of these issues, this

analysis is the first attempt of which I am aware to provide a comprehensive overview of the

frequency and characteristics of racialised language found on a popular gay sex and dating

webservice used in Australia. Using the developed framework, I would like to highlight three

primary conclusions. First, the racialised identity of 'White' appears to be an invisible and

normalised default component of this webservice's culture among Australian users. Although the

profiles of many webservice users of minority racial backgrounds included some description of the

racialised self, this practice was uncommon among the profiles posted by White men. The relative

scarcity of this practice offers evidence of invisibility (through presumption) and normalisation

(through assumption). This finding suggests that in an online space this standard is not only

reproduced but is also reinforced.

Second, the White users of webservices like *Manhunt* appear more able than their peers of

minority racial groups to articulate racialised preferences in relation to potential partners. This

assertion is demonstrated by the racialised language on the profiles of self-identified White men,

which was primarily used to discriminate positively among other webservice users. Further

demonstrating this point is my finding that many minority race men were less likely than White

users to describe others through racialised language. Asian men were somewhat more likely to

discriminate positively based on race through their profiles, which may reflect their growing status

relative to group size. More research is necessary to understand the specific dynamics of this

relationship.

Finally, there appears to be a largely uncritical approach to race among the men using sex and

dating webservices. Most men adopted a normalised position in their use of racialised concepts.

It could be that sex and dating webservices themselves do not invite critical approaches to this

type of social issue. Some men might feel that it is not be the time or place or that doing so might

hurt their chances of connecting with other users. It could also be, more broadly, that people do

not often have the opportunity or take the time to challenge their own assumptions about social

systems. In light of these possibilities, it is interesting that some men were willing to defend or

critique the use of racial or racist concepts in this space. As I have suggested, such positions may

illuminate willingness among some men to generate discussion on these issues or, from a slightly

more cynical position, to use social positions like anti-racism as a means to self-promote and

connect with men on the basis of 'liberal' ideals.

There are likely to be many different ways that men use these services that were not captured by

this framework or through my interpretations. One finding that must be emphasised is the

diversity of ways in which men articulated and negotiated concepts related to race and racism

among the profiles sampled here, which also reveals the diversity of men participating in these

online communities. Although I have made inferences about the broader context of race and gay

men based on language in these profiles, it is risky to attempt to make too many assumptions

about experiences, perceptions or attitudes based on this analysis. In chapters 5 and 6, however,

this research will examine those dimensions in more detail.

Chapter 5

Stage 2: An online survey of attitudes, perceptions and experiences related to racialised partner discrimination online

The second stage of this project comprised a national online survey of gay men in Australia, which I review in this chapter. The profile analysis was valuable in providing an initial understanding of context; it allowed some inferences regarding practice and motivation. The aim of the survey was to build on those ideas through a more focused exploration of the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the gay men who use the services. Further, a survey not only enabled a more focused approach but also provided the opportunity for a large and diverse set of responses to be collected from men across Australia. Indeed, the ability to reach a large and geographically distributed sample is one of if not the greatest strengths of an online survey of this kind. It was also hoped that by reaching out to men through an online tool to discuss issues of online culture, the survey described in this chapter might facilitate a previously untapped level of critical reflection on the issues of race and racism in relation with sex and dating. Finally, recruiting and engaging with men within the domain in which this project is interested was deemed to be not only appropriate but also efficient and necessary.

5.1 Methods

As part of this stage, a dedicated website was established (www.justapreference.com), which was initially used as a landing page for the survey but was later maintained for the remainder of the project to post findings and provide information about this research. The survey itself was hosted through an online survey platform, NetQ (NetQuestionnaires Nederland, 2012), access to which was facilitated by the National Centre in HIV Social Research (now the Centre for Social Research

in Health) where my candidature was located. This stage's study design was approved by the

University of New South Wales Human Research Ethics Committee.

Across this stage, I developed six objectives and sought to test seven associated hypotheses.

Hypotheses were developed from the inferences constructed in stage 1 and from a review of the

available literature. The following matrix organises the objectives and, where relevant, the

associated hypotheses:

Objectives	Hypotheses
To assess the attitudes of gay men towards race as a discriminatory category online;	
To identify factors that may contribute to shaping those attitudes;	• Engaging in racialised partner discrimination will be associated with more positive attitudes to racialised partner discrimination • Experiencing negative racial discrimination online will be associated with more negative attitudes to racialised partner discrimination • Men who hold more positive views towards racial tolerance and multiculturalism will hold less positive attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination online
To describe the prevalence of partner discrimination on the basis of race;	
To explore and describe the concept of a racial hierarchy in this context;	• White men will be positioned as the most desired and privileged racial group • Men from 'Asian' backgrounds will be positioned as the least desired racial group
To test the relationships between men's experiences of being discriminated against on the basis of race online and their offline sexual risk taking; and	• Men who report experiencing negative racial partner discrimination online will report a higher degree of sexual risk taking than men who do not
To see if the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of racialised partner discrimination online differed between White men and those of other racial identities.	• Men from minority racial groups will be more likely to report experiencing negative racialised partner discrimination

5.1.1 Recruitment and participants

Stage 2 adopted an exclusively online recruitment strategy. A graphic designer developed several

visual advertisements and a project logo (Figure 5.1), which were displayed on the webservice

Manhunt through paid advertising during May 2011. The survey was also advertised through the

free 'Pages' feature on *Facebook* (facebook.com/justapreference), which was also used to facilitate participant feedback. Individuals were encouraged to share the survey and *Facebook* links with their networks to allow for snowball sampling, although this was not an actively pursued recruitment method.

Figure 5.1 Survey participant recruitment ads posted online
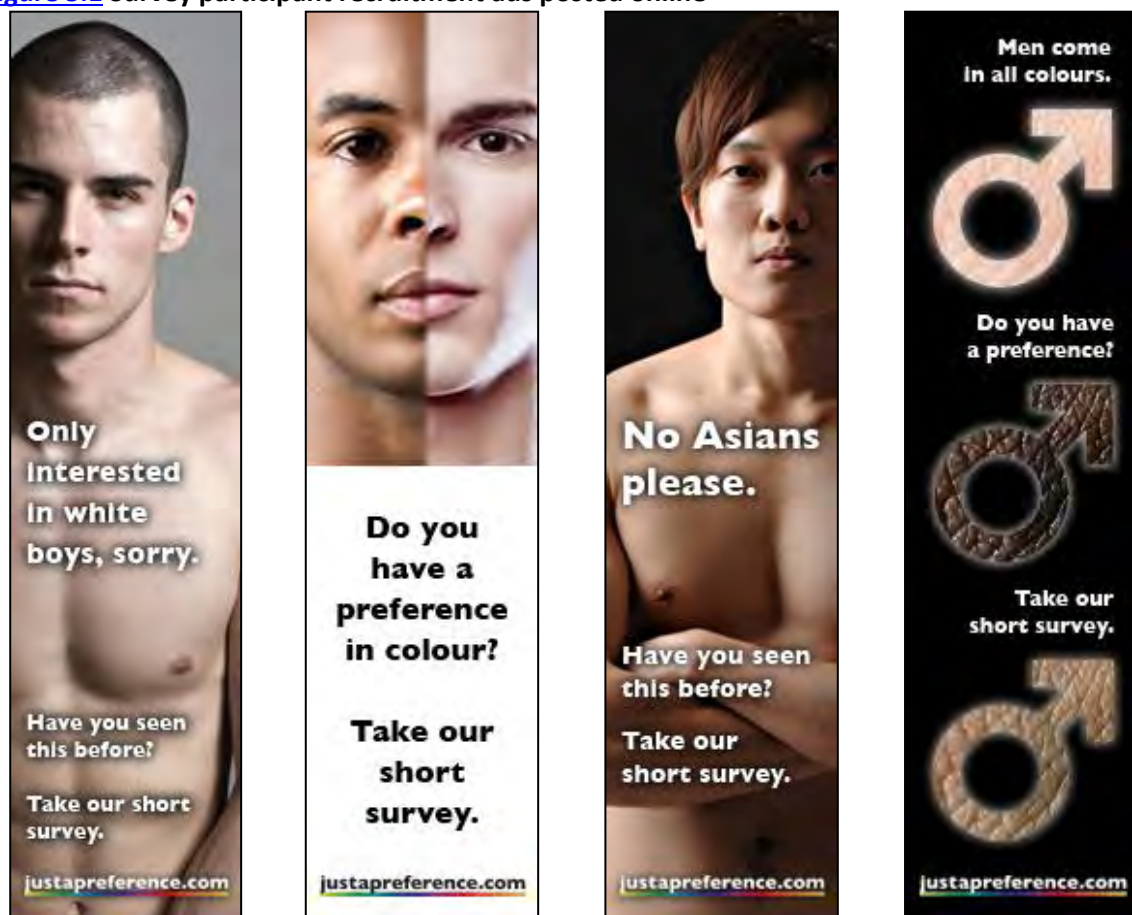
Participants were asked which recruitment method brought them to the survey to identify any potential recruitment biases. Participants were deemed eligible to participate if they lived in Australia, were over the age of 16 (the age of sexual consent in most Australian states and territories), identified as male and maintained a profile on a sex and dating webservice. Only participants who completed the final survey item had their responses included in the final data set

and those who did this were given the chance to win movie passes, which were drawn and awarded using email addresses not linked to individual responses.

5.1.2 Survey items and measures

Every attempt was made to include previously developed measures. However, given the specificity of the topic and the relatively new subject matter, there were few relevant existing measures or scales. The final survey instrument consisted of (excluding the pre-screen items) a total of 79 items in six sections, which appeared in the following order: 1) demographics; 2) online sex and dating-associated behaviours; 3) attraction to specific racial groups; 4) general racial tolerance and acceptance of multiculturalism; 5) sexual practices; and 6) attitudes towards online racialised partner discrimination. Participants did not necessarily answer every item, depending on their answers to previous questions and skips/routing through the survey. The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

Participant Demographics

The demographics section focused on standard demographic variables (e.g., age, postal code). However, it differed from other surveys in its attempt to categorise racial identity. A large number of options were provided to allow participants to describe more accurately their own racial or ethnic backgrounds in ways that made sense to them. An option was also provided to describe one's background in a free-text section. However, the instrument design recognised the tendency of racial categories to be oversimplified online; thus, participants were also asked to choose from the smaller range of racial classifications used by the webservice, *Manhunt*. Both of these sets of categorisations were used in describing the sample and in subsequent analyses.

Online sex and dating-associated behaviours

Participants were asked 15 questions related to their use of the Internet as a sex-seeking/dating tool. Questions included specifics about profile creation (e.g., *How much time did you initially spend in creating your online profile?*) and on sexual behaviour related to the Internet (e.g., *Is the Internet the most common way you go about finding sexual partners?*). Participants were also asked several dichotomous yes/no questions about the use of racial categories in describing or selecting potential partners online, in particular if they directly included men based on race. Considering the ways in which racial discrimination was articulated through the findings of stage 1, participants were asked both about their experiences of positive (inclusive) racial discrimination (*Does your profile indicate that you would like to be contacted by men of a particular ethnic/racial group?*) and negative (exclusive) racial discrimination (*Does your profile indicate that you would rather not be contacted by men of a particular ethnic/racial group?*). Participants were also asked, *Have you ever come across a profile that excluded someone on the basis of their race/ethnicity?* and, *Have you ever been excluded on the basis of race/ethnicity through the someone else's profile text?* to ascertain the perceived prevalence of racialised partner discrimination in the sample.

Racialised attraction

To explore the possible dimensions of a racial hierarchy within this online space, men were asked two specific questions. First, those men who indicated that their profile included or excluded groups of men on the basis of race were asked to disclose which racial groups were specified (e.g., *Which ethnic/racial group(s) do you indicate you are interested/not interested in being contacted by?*). Second, all participants were asked to consider how attracted they were to people of various racial backgrounds using a five-point scale from *very un-attracted* to *very attracted* (i.e., *For the following ethnic/racial groups please select how attractive you find men of this group. Focus on*

sexual and romantic attraction and not on friendship or other types of relationships). This scale

was not intended as an exercise in 'ranking' popularity among racial groups; rather, it attempted

to define the contours of racialised attraction by asking men to reflect on their own pre-conceived

assumptions about particular racialised identities.

General racial tolerance and acceptance of multiculturalism

Items for this section were adapted from the Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) (Ponterotto,

Burkard, Rieger, & Grieger, 1995). This measure, first developed for use in the USA, has previously

demonstrated validity with a range of populations in measuring respondents' attitudes towards

diversity (Ponterotto, Potere, & Johansen, 2002). The language employed by the original,

however, was developed for a heterosexual American audience and therefore it had to be

modified to fit an Australian context (e.g., replacing 'President' with 'Prime Minister'). Only the

first two subscales of the measure were used, as they referred directly to issues of race and racial

diversity. Items from the first subscale addressed general and social concepts related to diversity,

with participants asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly*

agree to statements such as: *In the past few years there has been too much attention directed*

towards multicultural or minority issues in education. Two items were removed from the original

list of eight for the adapted version of this subscale because they were judged to be too culturally

specific (e.g., *I think everyone should read Malcom X*). The second subscale was more specifically

related to personal or affective engagement with diversity and asked participants to respond to

eight statements such as: *My friendship network is very racially mixed*. In considering the validity

of this adapted version for an Australian same-sex social networking context, internal reliability

was calculated and mean scores were compared to previous sample data.

Sexual practices and risk-associated behaviours

To test the hypothesis that men who experienced exclusion on the basis of race while looking for sex or dates online would have higher rates of sexual behaviour deemed "risky" than those who had not experienced such exclusion, the survey asked questions about sexual practices. Participants were asked to report on recent sexual activities (e.g., anal sex, oral sex, rimming, etc). Items were also adapted from those used in the Australian Gay Community Periodic Surveys, (see, for example, Lee et al., 2012), which are annual, cross-sectional surveys of gay men across Australia that monitor a range of factors including sexual practices and drug use. The list of items from those surveys was expanded in an effort to collect more detail about specific sexual encounters. Participants were asked to describe their three most recent experiences of anal sex within the following domains:

- The use of condoms for anal sex (*never, always, some of the time, cannot remember*);

- Sexual position during anal sex (*top/insertive,; bottom/receptive,; both, cannot remember*); and

- Partner's HIV status (*negative, positive, I don't know/we never discussed*).

For each of these factors, participants were given the option to select *I don't remember* in an effort to avoid guessing. While each of these factors could contribute in some way to the potential of HIV transmission during anal sex, they do not contribute equally to that risk. For example, it is believed that some combinations of these behaviours, for example, not using a condom while being the receptive partner during anal sex, present a higher risk of infection that others, say, not using a condom while being the insertive partner during anal sex. Past research has attempted to quantify these risk contributors relative to each other, as described below.

Calculating sexual risk

Varghese, Maher, Peterman, Branson and Stekette (2002) attempted to quantify practices

associated with HIV transmission as risk *relative* to other practices. By assigning a value of 1 to

behaviours with the lowest associated risk of HIV transmission during anal sex, they calculated and

estimated the relative risk of other practices using epidemiological data, the biology of virus

transmission and community positivity rates of HIV among men who have sex with men. To

illustrate, consider how using a condom might influence risk of HIV transmission during anal sex.

Using a condom means that there is a much lower risk of HIV being transmitted during anal sex

than not using a condom. Compared to all other condom use practices (e. g., not using one, using

one some of the time), using a condom consistently during anal sex carries the lowest relative risk

of HIV transmission and would therefore be assigned a relative risk value of 1. Not using a

condom, however, presents a significantly greater risk of HIV transmission during anal sex, which

Varghese and colleagues calculated as 20 times higher than using one, and was therefore assigned

a relative risk value of 20. This quantification of behaviours allowed for risk calculations to be

conducted using the information collected from participants on their recent sexual experiences

involving anal sex with other men. Relative risk estimates were available for condom use, sexual

position and partner's HIV status. Using this information, the formula for calculating relative

sexual risk during anal sex was:

condom use **x** *sexual position* **x** *partner's HIV status*

Multiplying the relative risk values associated with each of those factors for the sexual encounters

reported by the participants generates a measure of the risk of HIV transmission during each

encounter. Of course, there are other factors involved with risk; however, quantifying these

measures allowed for a continuum of risk for use in subsequent analyses. Each potential risk score

was calculated and then scale-ranked from 1 (the lowest possible risk behaviour combination) to

18 (the highest). The lowest risk combination was using a condom during anal sex (1) while being

the insertive partner/top (13) with someone who was HIV negative (1). Conversely, the highest

was not using a condom during anal sex (20) while being the receptive partner/bottom (100) with

someone known to be HIV positive (430). Table 5.1 details each of these combinations, their

relative risk scores and then their place on the scale created as part of this project.

Table 5.1 **Possible relative risk scores of HIV transmission during anal sex**

	Sexual position	RR	Partner HIV status	RR	Condom use	RR	Total risk score
1	Top	13	Negative	1	Yes	1	13
2	Bottom	100	Negative	1	Yes	1	100
3	Top	13	Negative	1	Some	15	195
4	Top	13	Negative	1	No	20	260
5	Top	13	Unsure	43	Yes	1	559
6	Bottom	100	Negative	1	Some	15	1500
7	Bottom	100	Negative	1	No	20	2000
8	Bottom	100	Unsure	43	Yes	1	4300
9	Top	13	Positive	430	Yes	1	5590
10	Top	13	Unsure	43	Some	15	8385
11	Top	13	Unsure	43	No	20	11180
12	Bottom	100	Positive	430	Yes	1	43000
13	Bottom	100	Unsure	43	Some	15	64500
14	Top	13	Positive	430	Some	15	83850
15	Bottom	100	Unsure	43	No	20	86000
16	Top	13	Positive	430	No	20	111800
17	Bottom	100	Positive	430	Some	15	645000
18	Bottom	100	Positive	430	No	20	860000

The method of calculating the risk score described so far considers the HIV status of one's partner

as a factor associated with risk. While this is important, it also ignores the possibility that a

partner's HIV status might not be known or that inaccurate assumptions might have been made

about the partner's HIV status (see, for example, Zablotska et al., 2009). One way of correcting for

this potential for inaccuracy is to consider how well participants knew their sexual partners. This

knowledge was assessed along a five-point Likert scale and included the following options: *I didn't*

know him at all/it was the first time we'd met; We had met a few times before; I knew him well

enough but only considered him an acquaintance; I considered him a friend; He was a

partner/boyfriend or extremely close friend; cannot remember. This approach is an inexact way to

consider the likelihood that someone has accurate information about another's HIV status, and,

indeed, it is entirely feasible that close friends or boyfriends do not know each other's statuses

(for example, Australian research suggests that approximately one in five men in relationships

have a regular partner with an unknown HIV status (see Hull et al., 2012). However, as a rough

measure, this factor was used to adjust the associated risk of a partner's HIV status by

incorporating the degree of familiarity/uncertainty. As participants described closeness on a five-

point scale, the relative risk score associated with HIV status was adjusted between HIV negative

(1) and unknown (43). Thus, the adjustment was applied only to participants who reported HIV-

negative partners:

HIV status:	Negative				Unknown	Positive
Knew partner:	very well (1)	well (2)	a bit (3)	not well (4)	not at all (5)	
Status risk score:	1	11.5	22	32.5	43	430

This adjustment was then adopted into the formula for calculating sexual risk. Here, *n* represents

how well participants knew their partner along the scale, with 1 representing the closest

relationship and 5 the least close. The formula for calculating relative sexual risk adjusted for

partner closeness is as follows:

$$condom\ use \times sexual\ position \times [[(n-1) \times 10.5] + 1]$$

This way of calculating risk created additional potential behaviour combinations (up to a total of

36), which were placed along a continuum in the same way as with the first method. The two

methods of calculating sexual risk scores described here were each applied to information

participants provided about their recent sexual encounters. For participants who detailed two or

three recent encounters featuring anal sex, scores were averaged to create relative risk averages

of HIV transmission. Men who did not report any anal sex during their recent sexual encounters were excluded from the calculation of relative risk scores.

Attitudes (acceptability) towards online racialised partner discrimination

The final section of the questionnaire focussed on men's attitudes towards online racism and the use of racial categories to discriminate among potential sexual or romantic partners on the Internet. These attitudes were measured using eight newly developed items that were factor analysed to identify reliable scales. All eight items, listed below, were included in the final measure demonstrating high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.91).

1. It is OK to indicate a racial preference when looking for sex or dates online.

2. Indicating a racial preference in online profiles saves everybody time and energy.

3. Indicating a racial preference in a profile is a form of racism. (reverse scored)

4. People who indicate a racial preference in their profile are not trying to offend anyone.

5. As long as people are polite about it, I see no problem in indicating a racial preference in an online profile.

6. If I were attracted to a certain group of people, I would indicate this on my profile (or do already).

7. Racism is not really a problem on Internet sex and dating sites.

8. I am bothered when I read a profile that excludes people because of their race/ethnicity (reverse scored).

Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree* and summed to represent participants' attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination online from eight (an overall negative attitude) to 40 (overall positive). Scores on this scale were termed '*Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner Discrimination*'.

5.1.3 Statistical analysis

The analyses of the survey data focused on the expansion of the context descriptions provided in the first stage of this project. To that end, descriptive frequency counts were conducted across most of the variables collected. As stage 1 identified significant differences in the ways that men from different racial backgrounds experienced race online, comparative analyses (ANOVA and Chi-squared tests) were also conducted among the variables collected in the survey instrument to assess if similar relationships were present and to identify any new ones. Further, a dichotomous racialised variable was generated to compare responses from White men (as the dominant racial group) compared to those from participants of other racial backgrounds. However, all analyses were also conducted for individual racial groups (where possible) to help identify unique differences between and among groups that may have been missed through exclusive consideration of a White/non-White dichotomy.

Following these approaches, a multiple linear regression was conducted to assess factors that independently contributed to men's attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination. This model was constructed through consideration of factors identified as statistically significant at a bivariate level via Pearson correlations, Chi-squared or ANOVA tests. Statistical significance was again set at $p<0.05$ and SPSS (IBM, 2011) and STATA software (StataCorp, 2011) were used for all analyses.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 Sample

A total of 2902 people began completing the survey instrument. Of those, 164 were excluded because they did not meet the base eligibility requirements; 561 did not complete the final survey item and their responses were also removed. This left 2177 men, who comprised the sample for this stage of the project, reflecting a completion rate of 83.9%. The 725 individuals who did not complete the survey were slightly younger than those who did (M=29.5 vs. 32.0; $F(1, 2737)$=31.53, p<0.001), a factor previously identified as having an effect on survey completion rates among gay men (Jain & Ross, 2008).

Full demographic details are in Table 5.2. Most men were recruited to the survey via paid advertisements on the webservice *Manhunt* (89.2%). Others saw the *Facebook* page (4.6%), heard about it through a friend (4.9%) or found out about it in some other way (1.3%). The men who completed the survey ranged in age from 16 to 82 (M=32.03, SD=10.23). Most identified as gay (86.4%) or bisexual (13.0%) and only 13 participants described themselves as straight/heterosexual (0.5%). Educationally, most participants had an undergraduate or postgraduate university degree (63.6%). A majority of participants was not in a relationship at the time of the survey (76.9%) and reported that their HIV status was negative (90.4%). Compared to recent community samples of gay men living in Sydney and Melbourne, the sample described here had a much higher proportion of men not in relationships and slightly higher proportion of men who identified as HIV-negative (Hull, Mao, Comfort, et al., 2012; Hull, Mao, Kao, et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012).

Table 5.2 Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Factor	Responses	n	%	Factor	Responses	n	%
State of residence	ACT	51	2.3	Racial Background	Aboriginal	12	0.6
	NSW	784	36.0		Black/African	7	0.3
	NT	12	0.6		Central Asian	3	0.1
	QLD	352	16.2		East Asian	195	9.0
	SA	127	5.8		Indian/Bang/Pak	41	1.9
	TAS	26	1.2		Latino/Hispanic	38	1.7
	VIC	651	29.9		Middle Eastern	29	1.3
	WA	174	8.0		Mixed	109	5.0
					Pacific Islander	9	0.4
					Southeast Asian	162	7.4
					South European	67	3.1
					White	1458	67
					Other	47	2.2
Education	Some high school	126	5.8	*Manhunt* (sex and dating) racial descriptor	Asian	301	13.8
	Finished Year 12	394	18.1		Black	7	0.3
	Vocational/Trade	273	12.5		Latino	39	1.8
	University	984	45.2		Middle Eastern	31	1.4
	Postgraduate	400	18.4		Mixed	140	6.4
					Native American	3	0.1
					South Asian	41	1.9
					White	1474	67.7
					Other	41	1.9
					Leave blank	100	4.6
Sexuality	Gay/Homosexual/Queer	1882	86.4	HIV status	HIV-positive	99	4.5
	Straight/Heterosexual	11	0.5		HIV-negative	1969	90.4
	Bisexual	284	13.0		Don't know	109	5.0
Relationship status at time of the survey	Single	1677	77.0	Recruitment method	Ad on *Manhunt*	1942	89.2
	In a relationship	458	21.0		*Facebook*	101	4.6
	Other	42	1.9		Through a friend	107	4.9
					Received email	8	0.4
					Other	19	0.9

Most participants lived in one of Australia's three most populous states: New South Wales (36.0%), Victoria (29.9%) or Queensland (16.2%), which in 2011 was reflective of Australia's population distribution (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Regarding race, over half of participants described themselves as White/Caucasian (67.0%). The remaining participants self-identified as East Asian (9.0%), Southeast Asian (7.4%), mixed racial background (5.0%), Southern European/Mediterranean (3.1%), Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani (1.9%), Latino/Hispanic (1.7%), Middle Eastern (1.3%), Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (0.6%), Pacific Islander (0.4%), Black/African (0.3%) or Central Asian (0.1%). A small proportion of participants (2.2%) selected the

'other' option regarding race, for which popular responses included 'Anglo Indian', 'Jewish', and 'Australian'. Using the racial categories available on the webservice *Manhunt*, participants reported that they described themselves as White (67.7%), Asian (13.8%), mixed (6.4%), South Asian (1.9%), Latino (1.8%), Middle Eastern (1.4%), Black (0.3%) or Native American (0.1%). Some participants reported that they select the 'other' option for this field (1.9%) or left it blank (4.6%).

5.2.2 Online sex and dating associated behaviours

Participants were asked to report on several practices and behaviours related to using sex and dating webservices. Not surprisingly for a sample recruited online, the Internet was a significant dimension of participants' romantic and sexual lives. The majority of men reported that they generally visited online sex and dating services at least once per day (65.4%) and, for many, the Internet was the most common channel through which they organised sexual encounters (62.9%), although some (42.1%) said that they looked for partners equally online and offline. The majority also reported that they arranged sex through the Internet at least once a month (64.1%). Detailed responses for this section are in Table 5.3.

Men were also asked about their existing online sex and dating profiles. Those who maintained more than one profile were asked to focus on the one they used most frequently. Over half of the men (58.2%) reported that they had spent 10 to 15 minutes creating their profile and most had updated it at least once since that time (63.9%). A small number reported that they maintained more than one profile on the same service(s) (9.9%).

Table 5.3 Participant responses regard online sex and dating associated behaviours

Factor	Responses	*n*	%
Frequency online sex and dating webservices are accessed	<once per month	38	1.7
	Monthly	76	3.5
	Weekly	639	29.4
	Daily	1112	51.1
	>once per day	312	14.3
Frequency of online sex and dating webservices used to facilitate offline sexual encounters	Never	156	7.2
	1-2 times/year	624	28.7
	Monthly	917	42.1
	Weekly	446	20.5
	Daily	34	1.6
Most common way sexual partners are found	Online	1369	62.9
	Offline	326	15.0
	Half and half	341	15.7
	No current sex partners	141	6.5
Time spent creating profile	5 minutes	642	29.5
	10 minutes	794	36.5
	15 minutes	472	21.7
	>20 minutes	269	12.4
Positive racial discrimination on profile	No	1924	88.4
	Yes	253	11.6
Negative racial discrimination on profile	No	2041	93.8
	Yes	136	6.2
Has viewed a profile that discriminated others on the basis of race	No	89	4.1
	Yes	2088	95.9
Previous experience of being negatively discriminated against on the basis of race	No	916	42.1
	Yes	1261	57.9

A majority of participants (53.9%) reported that their profile referred to one or more desired features of potential partners, such as age or body type. A smaller proportion of men indicated that these preferences included race (15.0%), with 11.6% of the sample reporting positive partner discrimination on the basis of race ('inclusive') and 6.1% reporting negative partner discrimination ('exclusive'). Negative racial discrimination, although not common, was reported predominantly by participants of self-identified White racial backgrounds versus men of other backgrounds (7.1%, χ^2(12, 2177)=35.22, *p*<0.001). In spite of the relatively small numbers of men who reported that they discriminated negatively on the basis of race online, nearly all participants (95.9%) could recall reading a profile that had done so. Fewer respondents but still a majority could also recall being personally excluded on the basis of their own race via the profile text published by another

user (57.9%). Participants from minority racial groups (i.e., racial identities other than White) reported experiencing this significantly more often than participants from the majority racial group (i.e., White men) (81.6% vs. 46.2%, χ^2(1, 2177)=247.78, p<0.001). Among minority racial participants, it was most commonly reported by East and Southeast Asian men, 97.4% and 96.3% of whom had experienced discrimination in this way (χ^2(11, 719)=207.81, p<0.001).

5.2.3 Racialised attraction

Survey items on racialised attraction focused on two dimensions. First, men were asked to report which racial groups (if any) they included or excluded through their online profile. Second, men were asked to report on how sexually attracted they felt to men from eight different racial identities. For these items, men assessed their attraction to eight racial groups along a five-point Likert scale from 1- *very un-attracted* to 5- *very attracted*. A score of 3 (*neither attracted nor un-attracted*) reflects no particular interest or disinterest. The combination of these two approaches to assessing racialised desire formed the basis of an analysis of a racialised hierarchy. Table 5.4 describes frequencies, proportions, and mean values relevant to both of these survey areas.

Table 5.4 **Frequency of positive and negative discrimination against various racial groups through online sex and dating profile text and mean attraction scores**

	Positive disc.		Negative disc.		Net disc.*	Attraction	
Racial identity	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
White/Caucasian/Anglo	179	71.0	11	8.1	168	4.36	0.72
Mediterranean	119	47.2	15	11.0	104	4.19	0.81
Latino/Hispanic	117	46.4	21	15.4	96	4.04	0.84
Middle Eastern/Arabic	105	41.7	36	26.5	69	3.72	1.00
Black/African	64	25.4	45	33.1	19	3.31	1.12
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	29	11.5	60	44.1	-31	2.67	1.10
Asian	97	38.5	116	85.3	-19	3.00	1.24
Indian	32	12.7	94	69.1	-62	2.54	1.16
Other	3	1.2	--	--	--	--	--

*Net discrimination calculated as: (*n* positive discrimination) – (*n* negative discrimination)

In response to the first indicator, positive or negative discrimination was reported only for the sub-sample of participants who reported this practice. For the 11.6% of participants (*n*=253) who reported employing positive (inclusive) discrimination in their online profiles, 71% of those reported discriminating favourably towards White-identified men. As it is possible to indicate more than one racialised preference through their profile, those categories were not mutually exclusive. A total of 47.2% of this sub-sample reported discrimination in favour of Mediterranean men (e.g., Greek or Italian), which was the next largest proportion. The remaining groups whom participants said they positively discriminated in favour of were racialised as Latino/Hispanic (46.4%), Middle Eastern/Arabic (41.7%), Asian (38.5%), Black/African (25.4%), Indian (12.7%) and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander men (11.5%). Three participants selected the 'other' option (1.2%), explaining that they were most interested in 'mixed', 'ethnic' and "anyone other than White men".

By contrast, 6.2% (*n*=136) of participants reported employing negative discrimination in their online profiles. Among this minority of participants, the most commonly excluded group was men racialised as Asian (85.3%). In order, men also reported that their profiles excluded men racialised as Indian (69.1%), Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (44.1%), Black/African (33.1%), Middle Easter/Arabic (26.5%), Latino/Hispanic (15.4%), Mediterranean (11.0%) and White (8.1%). This order of exclusion is the inverse of the order of inclusion described above. Considering a 'net discrimination' indicator, that is, subtracting those reports of negative discrimination towards a particular group from reports of positive discrimination, provides an indication of the racial hierarchy that seemed to be operating in this setting. Positive and negative discrimination appeared to be two different ways of describing the same perceived racial hierarchy among gay and bisexual men who use webservices.

The second indicator asked all participants to assess their sexual attraction to the eight racial groups listed above. There are two related ways of analysing these data. The first is a simple calculation of mean scores across participant groups to assess general attraction. This analysis reveals that White men received the highest overall response scores from participants (M=4.36) and Indian men received the lowest (M=2.54). One group, Asian men, had a mean score exactly at the mid-point score of three (*neither attracted nor un-attracted*). The mean score values reproduce the racial hierarchy identified through the discrimination indicators. However, they tell only part of the story related to these scores. The second way of analysing these data is through consideration of score distributions across the five-point scale. None of the distributions of scores for each racialised group was even. Some, however, demonstrated significant right distribution skews (towards the *very attracted* end of the scale), while others were more normally distributed (around the midpoint) and some hinted at a predominantly left (*un-attracted*) skew, although to a lesser degree that those on the right. To demonstrate, consider the three graphs contained in Figure 5.2. The first graph, which details responses related to Indian participants, shows a slight left skew. The middle graph related to Asian men shows a more normally distributed curve, suggesting that men reported varied levels of attraction to those they racialised as Asian. Finally, the third graph shows a significant right skew with men more likely to report attraction to those racialised as White. Aside from affirming how I have thus far interpreted the racialised attraction apparent in the survey sample, this analysis strongly suggests differences between how men report attraction among racial groups. The issue here is not the normal distribution that is apparent towards men racialised as Asian (which you might expect given the variety in physical appearance and attractiveness in any 'racial' group) but instead the considerably skewed distribution in ratings of White men and to a lesser extent the other groups; you might expect the

attractiveness scores to be normally distributed for every racial group. This matter is explored

further in the discussion section of this chapter.

Figure 5.2 Graphic representations of attractiveness responses for men racialised as Indian, Asian and White

Attraction to Indian men   Attraction to Asian men   Attraction to White men
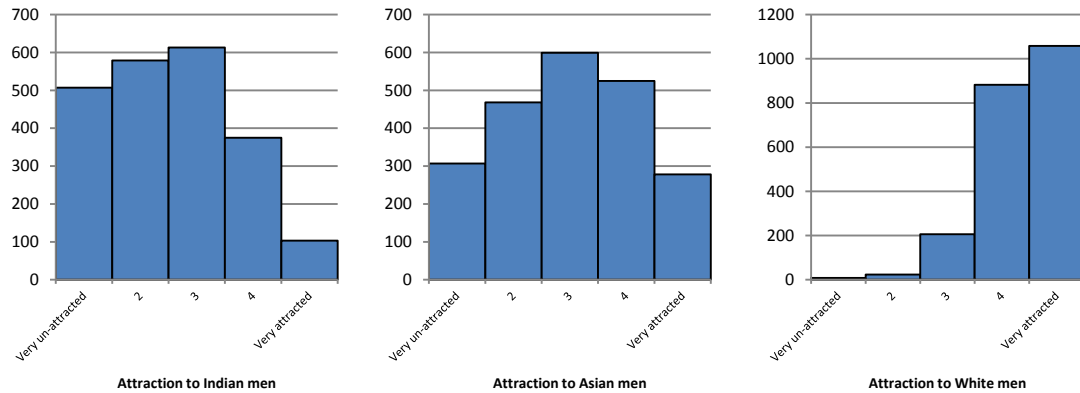
Finally, it is worth noting that the ways in which men responded to these items on sexual

attraction differed depending on their self-described racial identity. Men were generally more

likely to rate their own racial group as more attractive when compared with men from other

groups. For example, men grouped under the *Manhunt* category of 'Asian' gave higher average

attractiveness scores to Asian men (M=3.43) compared to non-Asian participants (M=2.93) (F(1,

2177)=43.46, p<0.001). This relationship was observed for all racial groups included in this part of

the survey, with the exception of Latino/Hispanic men, who were consistently ranked on the most

attractive end of the scale by most other participants and Black/African men, for whom

comparison proved challenging given the small number of participants from this racial group (n=7).

Compared to all other groups, Indian men gave higher average attractiveness ratings to all groups

of men, regardless of race (M=3.70, F(12, 2177)=2.21, p=0.009).

5.2.4 General racial tolerance and acceptance of multiculturalism

Attitudes towards general multiculturalism and racial/ethnic diversity were measured using the previously validated Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) (Ponterotto, Burkard, Rieger, & Grieger, 1995) adapted for use in an Australian context. Although this measure has in the past demonstrated high internal reliability, given the specificity of the gay/bisexual male population and the modified scale items, it was calculated for this sample and was sufficiently high (Cronbach's α= 0.81). The version used for the current study included 14 items with scores observed from 15 to 70, with an average of 49.73 (SD = 7.80). As noted, only the first two subscales of the QDI were used. The first assessed general attitudes towards diversity and contained seven items. The average score among participants on this sub-scale was 22.07 (SD=4.99). The second sub-scale also had seven items, assessed personal and affective involvement with diversity and had a mean score of 27.66 (SD=4.30).

Participants from minority racial groups had, on average, higher scores on the QDI, when compared to the majority (White) participants (51.91 vs. 48.66, F(1, 2177)=86.84, p<0.001). Among a sub-sample of the minority racial groups, participants from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background had the highest average scores (M=54.54), while East Asian participants had the lowest (M=50.80, F(1, 718)=2.70, p=0.002).

5.2.5 Attitudes towards (and acceptability of) online racialised partner discrimination

Attitudes toward racialised partner discrimination while looking for sex or dates online were measured using newly developed survey items. The scale score was calculated by summing responses across the eight items with observed and possible scores ranged from 8 to 40. The average of scores across the sample was 26.44 (SD=7.43). As this was a new scale, scores were

somewhat hard to interpret unless considered in the context of their distribution. Figure 5.3 is a

graphical representation of the distribution of scale scores, which does not have a normal

distribution and is positively skewed to the 'acceptable' end of the scale. A total score of 16 or

lower would indicate that a participant *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with all of the eight survey

items and suggest a largely negative attitude towards racialised partner discrimination online,

whereas a score of 32 or higher would suggest opposite predominantly positive attitude to

racialised partner discrimination online. Only 11.7% of participants were classified as having an

overwhelmingly negative score to online racialised partner discrimination (≤ 16), while a larger

proportion of men (26.9%) were classified with a strong positive score (≥ 32). The remaining

majority of participants (61.4%) were classified as having a neutral attitude to online racialised

partner discrimination.

Figure 5.3 Distribution of participant scores on *Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner Discrimination* scale.
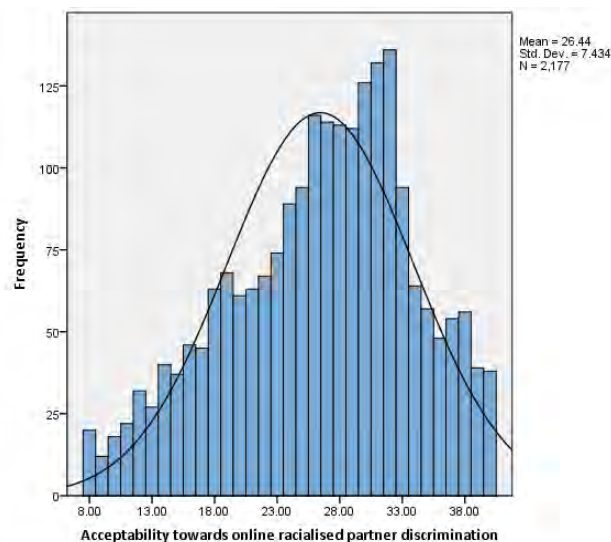
While the items included in this section do seem to form a potentially useful scale with high

internal consistency (Cronbach's α= 0.91), there is some benefit in considering individual items as

well. (Table 5.5 details participant responses to individual scale items.)

Significant differences in attitudes appeared between and among men from different racial groups. Summed scale scores were markedly different between White men and men of minority racial groups (*M*=27.47 and 23.94 respectively, $F(1, 2175)=153.75$, $p<0.001$), indicating that White men found online racialised partner discrimination more acceptable than other men. Across racial groups, the least positive attitudes to racialised partner discrimination online were among men from Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani backgrounds (*M*=21.10, $F(12, 2177)=19.50$, $p<0.001$).

Table 5.5 Participant attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination online

Item	Response	*n*	%
It is OK to indicate a racial preference when looking for sex or dates online	Disagree/Strongly disagree	493	22.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	298	13.7
	Agree/Strongly agree	1386	63.6
Indicating a racial preference in online profiles saves everybody time and energy	Disagree/Strongly disagree	374	17.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	263	12.1
	Agree/Strongly agree	1655	70.7
Indicating a racial preference in a profile is a form of racism*	Disagree/Strongly disagree	1067	49
	Neither agree nor disagree	317	14.6
	Agree/Strongly agree	793	36.4
People who indicate a racial preference in their profile are not trying to offend anyone	Disagree/Strongly disagree	345	15.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	545	25.0
	Agree/Strongly agree	1287	59.2
I am bothered when I read a profile that excludes people because of their race/ethnicity*	Disagree/Strongly disagree	990	45.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	249	11.4
	Agree/Strongly agree	838	43.0
As long as people are polite about it, I see no problem in indicating a racial preference in an online profile	Disagree/Strongly disagree	370	17.1
	Neither agree nor disagree	248	11.4
	Agree/Strongly agree	1558	71.6
If I were attracted to a certain group of people, I would indicate this on my profile (or already do)	Disagree/Strongly disagree	723	33.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	347	15.9
	Agree/Strongly agree	1107	50.9
Racism is not really a problem on Internet sex and dating sites	Disagree/Strongly disagree	1097	50.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	533	24.5
	Agree/Strongly agree	547	25.1

However, by considering racial identity as part of a hierarchy determined by desirability, the racial groups with which participants identified could instead be situated along a continuum from *least desirable* to *most*. Using that continuum, a Pearson's correlation revealed that a participants'

place in the hierarchy (as determined by their self-defined racial group) was related to their acceptability scores (r(2020)=0.29, p<0.001). For this analysis, men who self-described as 'mixed' or 'other' were, because of the ambiguity of those responses, removed.

Manipulating the variable of racial identity in this way meant that it could be used in assessing factors related to the acceptability scores (described above). Using ANOVA, Chi-squared and Pearson's correlation tests, several factors were identified as having potential relationships. Significant relationships are reported in Table 5.6. The following factors were identified as having potential relationships with participants' *Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner Discrimination* scores: 1) engaging in racialised partner discrimination online; 2) general racial tolerance; 3) state of residence; 4) profile contains any sort of preference regarding a partner; 5) highest level of education; 6) time spent creating one's sex/dating profile; 7) frequency of Internet-based sexual encounters; 8) frequency accessing sex/dating webservices; 9) self-reported sexuality; 10) previously being excluded on the basis of race; and 11) position of one's racial identity within the perceived hierarchy of attractiveness.

Table 5.6 Factors related to men's attitudes and perceptions of racialised partner discrimination online.

Variable		*n*	%	M	F (*p*)
				Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner Disc.	
Education	Some high school	126	5.8	29.45	21.36 (<0.001)
	Finished Yr 12	394	18.1	28.14	
	Vocation/Trade	273	12.5	27.87	
	University	984	45.2	25.67	
	Postgraduate	400	18.4	24.78	
Sexuality	Gay/Homo	1882	86.4	26.15	11.23 (<0.001)
	Straight/Hetero	284	13.0	28.23	
	Bisexual	11	0.5	30.36	
State of residence	ACT	51	2.3	28.59	7.50 (<0.001)
	NSW	784	36.0	25.51	
	NT	12	0.6	28.50	
	QSL	352	16.2	27.72	
	SA	127	5.8	28.50	
	TAS	26	1.2	30.04	
	VIC	651	29.9	25.85	
	WA	174	8.0	27.48	
Frequency accessing sex/dating webservices	< once per month	38	1.7	23.26	5.14 (<0.001)
	Monthly	76	3.5	25.23	
	Weekly	639	29.4	26.20	
	Daily	1112	51.1	26.38	
	> once per day	312	14.3	27.83	
Time spent creating one's profile	5 mins	642	29.5	27.06	8.57 (<0.001)
	Around 10 mins	794	36.5	26.91	
	Around 15 mins	472	21.7	25.83	
	More than 20 mins	269	12.4	24.70	
Frequency of Internet-based sexual encounters	Never	156	7.2	25.72	2.64 (0.032)
	Once /twice year	624	28.7	26.73	
	Monthly	917	42.1	26.23	
	Weekly	446	20.5	26.47	
	Daily	34	1.6	29.91	
Profile includes some type of preference	Yes	1173	53.9	27.61	64.27 (<0.001)
	No	1004	46.1	25.08	
Practiced racialised partner discrimination	Yes	326	15.0	31.14	164.75 (<0.001)
	No	1851	85.0	25.62	
Experienced racialised partner discrimination	Yes	1261	57.9	25.41	59.80 (<0.001)
	No	916	42.1	27.87	
		Range		M	r (*p*)
General racial tolerance (QDI)		15 – 70		49.7	-0.56 (<0.001)
Position of racial identity within the hierarchy of attractiveness		1 – 8		6.4	0.29 (<0.001)

These factors were subsequently included in a multiple linear regression analysis to identify

independent relationships with the dependent variable, *Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner*

Discrimination. This analysis, summarised in Table 5.7, found that the identified factors

contributed to 39.9% of the observed variance (R^2) in participants' attitudinal scores. Participants

whose associated racial identity placed them more favourably on the hierarchy of attractiveness

tended to have a more positive outlook toward racialised partner discrimination online. This

finding was also true of those participants who reported engaging in racialised partner

discrimination online. Conversely, men with higher levels of education, as well as men with a

higher acceptance of multiculturalism and diversity, tended to be less accepting of the practice.

Finally, profile creation was implicated in how acceptable men found online racialised partner

discrimination. While men who spent little time creating their profile tended to be less accepting

of this practice, those whose profile contained any type of partner preference, such as age, were

generally more accepting of it.

Table 5.7 Multiple linear regression of factors associated with men's attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination online.

	B	β	*p*	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Position of racial identity within attractiveness hierarchy	0.514	0.180	<0.001	0.414	0.614
Engaging in racialised partner discrimination online	3.212	0.157	<0.001	2.480	3.943
General racial tolerance (QDI)	-0.460	-0.480	<0.001	-0.493	-0.426
Profile contains any type of partner preference	1.413	0.095	<0.001	0.882	1.945
Education	-0.492	-0.077	<0.001	-0.716	-0.268
Time spent creating sex/dating profile	-0.414	-0.055	0.002	-0.672	-0.156

5.2.6 Sexual behaviour and associated risk

Finally, participants were asked to describe their recent sexual practices and up to three of their

most recent sexual encounters involving anal sex. Most participants reported having sex with

another man in the past year (98.8%) and reported at least one experience of anal sex in that time

(90.5%). Men commonly reported ten or more encounters involving anal sex in the past year

(57.6%) and a large number of men also reported engaging in oral sex (97.4%), mutual

masturbation (88.5%) and rimming (72.3%).

In describing up to three of their most recent encounters involving anal sex, participants frequently described themselves as the insertive/top partner (43.3%). The majority reported using a condom for the entirety of each episode of anal sex (59.2%) and most believed that their partner(s) were HIV-negative (65.0%). Men also described their partner(s) as someone they had met for the first time (35.3%), someone they considered an acquaintance (10.4%), someone they had met a few times before (24.5%), a friend (11.1%), or a partner, boyfriend or very close friend (20.4%).

As described in chapter 4, responses related to recent sexual experiences were used to calculate two sexual risk scores. The first of these considered condom use, HIV status and sexual role in determining the relative risk of HIV transmission. The average score for this measure (on a scale from 1 to 18) was 5.24 (SD=3.30) for the whole sample, suggesting low overall relative risk in the sample's practices during anal sex. The second risk score calculation adjusted the risks associated with a partner's HIV status by considering how well participants knew their partners. That risk score had a mean for this sample of 14.82 (SD=7.62) (on a scale from 1 to 36), suggesting greater relative risk once familiarity with/knowledge of partners was taken into account. When considering the sexual practices of men of unknown or negative HIV status, the mean scores drop to 4.96 (SD=2.93) and 14.33 (SD=7.25) respectively.

To test the hypothesis that men who had experienced racial discrimination online would be more likely to engage in HIV risk-associated sexual behaviours than those who had not, the two calculated risk scores were compared to men's responses regarding positive or negative racial discrimination online. No relationships were found using multiple ANOVAs, which were conducted

across the whole sample and within the identified racial sub-samples (all *p*-values=*ns*). This

analysis did not support my hypothesis that experiences of racialised partner discrimination in an

online context would be associated with sexual risk-taking offline.

5.2.7 Summary

The survey explored many different factors associated with men's online experiences relating to

race. Survey items were able to provide some sense of how men perceived racialised partner

discrimination online, while highlighting divergent opinions between men from White and non-

White racial backgrounds. It was not surprising to find that men who reported that they practiced

racialised partner discrimination themselves also tended to have more positive attitudes towards

it as a practice, nor was it surprising that men who supported racial tolerance and multiculturalism

tended to have less positive attitudes towards these practices. These findings confirmed my

hypotheses. Although I hypothesised that experiencing racialised partner discrimination would

lead to less positive attitudes towards it as a practice, this was true only for the sub sample of men

from minority racial groups. No such relationship was observed for participants of a White racial

identity.

Racial discrimination on sex and dating webservices was reported by only a minority of

participants but was most commonly reported by men identifying with a minority racial group, in

particular East and Southeast Asian men. White men were the least likely to report these

experiences but the most likely to report practicing racial discrimination, confirming my

hypothesis. White men were positioned by participants as the most 'desirable' racial group, a

finding that contributes to a greater understanding of how a particular racialised hierarchy

operates in this setting. These findings confirm the hypothesis that White men are considered the

most desirable participants of sex and dating webservices in Australia and, probably as a function

of this perception, are the least likely to experience negative racialised partner discrimination. The

data did not support my hypothesis that online experiences of racial discrimination would

contribute to sexual risk-taking during anal sex.

5.3 Inferences from stage 2 findings

The aims of the survey can be broadly condensed into four areas, which were largely meant to

address areas of interest not fully realised by the profile analysis in stage 1. The first area was to

describe a racialised hierarchy of desire. This was neither the primary aim nor an end in itself but

a way in which other observations of racialised behaviour could be, at least partially, explained.

The second was to explore prevalence associated with some of the diverse practices that have

been described regarding racialised partner discrimination online. Although the profile analysis

enabled this type of analysis to a degree, it focused on language and not necessarily on individual

or group experiences. Third, the survey sought to describe men's attitudes towards racialised

partner discrimination online. While the profile analysis provided some insights, the survey

responses added depth to my description of how men felt about this as an issue. Part of this

analysis involved examining the factors that could contribute to these attitudes, and which could

be used further to illuminate the concept itself. Finally, building on research that has attempted

to understand experiences of racism as related to sexual risk practices, the final broad aim of this

stage was to test a relationship between these two concepts. The next section addresses each of

these aims, as well as the specific ones described at the beginning of this chapter, using the data

and analysis taken from stage 2.

5.3.1 Racialised attraction and a racial hierarchy

Other research about gay men and online sex and dating communities has pointed to the existence of a racial hierarchy among gay men both online and offline. Attempting to quantify such a hierarchy is difficult, however, because of the potential risk of merely reproducing the inequalities that this research hopes to challenge. I want to be absolutely clear, therefore, that in discussing harsh-sounding concepts like 'attraction indicators' and 'racial hierarchies', this research hopes to capture how participants understand their own relationship between racial perceptions and sexual desires. Given this project's interest in exploring race, sex and the Internet, there is potentially great value in developing ways to understand the particular dynamics between and among racial groups as they are constructed by the men who use these services. Further, whether we would wish it or not, these hierarchies appear to be well established and commonly understood by participants in online sex and dating communities and are therefore important to describe and understand if we seek to challenge them.

The survey offered two avenues for assessing common understandings of desire associated with racial groups. Although I have argued against the simplicity of racial labels, the eight 'labels' included in this analysis might appear to be particularly reductionist. However, I used them because they are the categories employed in the demographic sections of sex and dating webservices used by Australian men. Men who reported either positive or negative racial discrimination through their online profiles were also asked to describe which groups they referenced. As discussed, responses to these items could be used to generate a net-discrimination indicator to compare the number of positive references with the number of negative. The second aspect of racialised desire was to ask participants directly how they understood their own

attraction to the eight specified racial identities. Combining these indicators paints a convincing picture of what an online racialised hierarchy looks like.

Defining a hierarchy in this way is one way to understand the racial dimensions of what Green (2008) referred to as 'erotic capital'. Feeling desirable increases one's ability to influence the discourses of desire that operate in this context and, more pressingly, to dictate the terms of engagement with other users. As race appears to contribute to this discourse, organising men within categories based on an associated place within such a hierarchy is a useful (albeit crude) way of generating an 'attractiveness' continuum. At one end of such a continuum are the racial identities commonly understood as 'desirable' and at the other are those who are positioned as less so, which suggests that racial identities are attributed with assumptions about attractiveness. Of course, individually, men may be perceived as more or less attractive, irrespective of their race. As both Green (2008) and Smith (2012) point out, a variety of factors can contribute to one's erotic capital, which among gay men can include aspects of masculinity, HIV status and body type (Smith, 2012).

Although the analyses thus far have drawn on dichotomised comparisons between majority/minority racial groups in Australia, the stratification of racial groups based on desire allows an approach with greater nuance that reveals the particular racial discourses that circulate in this setting. However, within this spectrum of groups, three broad organisational categories appear to be useful in illuminating group dynamics and behaviour. These categories are borrowed from earlier work from the USA on the Latin Americanization thesis, which suggested a tri-racial system of understanding race to replace the earlier Black/White dichotomy. In this way, racial groups were divided into three camps: White, honorary White, and collective Blacks (Bonilla-Silva,

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2004). This approach was adopted by Smith (2012) to describe discourses of race and erotic capital near the Mexico-USA border and added the previously mentioned ways by which mobility between these three groups could be achieved. Prominent among these, as I will explain, is masculinity and body type.

The first category, Whites, is defined by the erotic capital attached to a White identity. The survey items regarding racialised attraction firmly situate White men as the most desirable racial identity, a finding that echoes earlier research from the USA (Phua & Kaufman, 2003). Other Australian research has also suggested that Whiteness is the measure against which other groups are considered to be more or less desirable (see, for example, A. Han, 2006; Raj, 2011). The next collective racial group was labelled by Bonilla-Silva as 'honorary Whites', defined as a group 'secondary' to Whites that may have its own agency but exists as subordinate to the White majority. In reviewing the indicator of net discrimination, four groups (excluding White men) have positive values: Mediterranean, Latino/Hispanic, Middle Eastern/Arabic and Black/African men. Attraction scores for these groups were also all above a mid-point of 3 (*neither attracted nor un-attracted*). Therefore, within the context of gay men's sexual culture in Australia, it might be useful to describe these racial groups as 'honorary Whites'.

The language of Bonilla-Silva's original thesis labels the third and lowest-rated group as 'collective Blacks'. This name is somewhat misleading because it suggests dark skin colour and, but as described above, some men may have dark-coloured skin but be classified as honorary Whites. Key to understanding this model is to remember that these are not fixed categories and that different forms of erotic capital can influence how an individual might be classified. However, this analysis of racialised attraction does suggest some general conclusions about race relations within

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an Australian context. As discussed, understanding the history of race relations in any particular

setting is an essential step in contemporary dynamics, and in Australia, two racial groups have

traditionally experienced widespread marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of race:

those racialised as Asian and those racialised as Aboriginal. Returning to points made in chapter 2,

both groups experienced significant amounts of discrimination and prejudice with impacts that

can still be observed today. This legacy could partly explain how these groups come to be

positioned in the lowest tier of a tri-racial model, or what might be called 'collective Blacks'. A

similar historical narrative does not exist for people racialised as Indian. In an analysis of these

issues specific to his Indian identity, Raj (2011) focused on these issues through a White/non-

White dichotomy, which as I have argued does not fully explain the apparent power dynamics and

group organisation. As I have argued, this dichotomy is partly valid but does not fully explain the

types of group differences observed here. A possible explanation is that Indian men (by virtue of

their non-White skin) are ascribed less value than White men but, unlike some other racial groups,

cannot activate masculinity myths as a means for group mobilisation. Further research is

necessary to understand this group's particular place in the intersecting discourses of race and sex

among gay men in Australia.

There is a dearth of research on the role of masculinity in relation to racial identities. Asian men,

for example, are commonly stereotyped as feminine and submissive (C. Han, 2006), which is

another explanation for the relative devaluation apparently associated with their racial group. By

contrast, all of the racial groups that form the category of 'honorary Whites' have been associated

with strongly masculine identities. For example, some have written about depictions of 'Arab'

men in gay pornography: "Arab men are pictured as systematically active and virile, preferably

aggressive and decidedly well-hung" (Cervulle & Rees-Roberts, 2009, p. 198). This description

establishes a dominant and masculine stereotype for understanding men racialised as Middle

Eastern or Arabic. Similarly, Latino men have been depicted through pornography as

hypermasculine, highly sexual and macho (Subero, 2010). As the authors of both studies point

out, these representations operate on the basis of a postcolonial rendering of racial concepts that

perpetuates the notion of a White sexual consumer and the sexual commodification of particular

racial minorities. These concepts are particularly relevant to how we might understand the

category of 'honorary Whites', which is seen to exist in relation and subservient to the White

majority. Regarding Black and Mediterranean men, there is a long history of portraying Black men

as virile and aggressive (Scott, 1994) and Mediterranean men in Australia through the

"energetically assertive style and sexuality of the 'wog boy'" (Makeham, 2009, p. 215). It seems

feasible that the strong association of these racial identities with masculinity has enabled these

racialised categories to complicate the 'non-White' categorisation and inhabit a place as 'honorary

Whites' within the gay community. By contrast, for Aboriginal, Asian or Indian men, a lack of

associated stereotypes regarding masculinity may work to maintain their position as 'collective

Blacks'.

Clearly, representations of race and desire as either hierarchal or tri-racial are overly simplistic.

Nevertheless, they do appear to reflect some of the ways in which online and offline communities

of gay men organise their desires around social categories relating to race. Of course, mitigating

factors determine how attractive other people view an individual, which may counter or overrule

assumptions about attractiveness based on racial category. However, the focus of this section was

on broad generalisations and not unique experience. Further, as expanded on later in this

chapter, analysing race in this way enables a greater understanding of the how and why of other

practices associated with race and online sex and dating.

5.3.2 Prevalence and experience

Previously undocumented in the literature is how prevalent racial discrimination is within sex and dating webservices. One exception is a study from the USA, which reported that 27% of White men seeking men and 54% of Asian men used their online profile to state a preference for partners representing a particular race (Phua & Kaufman, 2003). Given the aforementioned differences between the Australian and North American contexts and particular nuances regarding racialised partner discrimination observed online, an approach of greater depth was required. Just over 6% of survey participants reported that they used race to discriminate negatively through their profile text. In spite of this relatively small proportion, nearly all of the men surveyed (95.9%) could recall viewing a profile that discriminated in this way. That a large proportion of participants could recall seeing something that is generally uncommon suggests that this is a highly salient practice. As part of the profile analysis, it was observed that men sometimes use very direct language to express forms of negative discrimination (e.g., "Asians and Indians to the back of the line"). This type of language could mean that when men do come across such profiles, the blunt language used makes it memorable. One reason that this form of racialised partner discrimination is so fascinating is that the online sex and dating world is one of the only contexts where such blatantly discriminatory language is considered largely acceptable. It is difficult to imagine another place in Australia where the expression 'No Asians' would or could be declared without expecting significant negative consequences. The salience of this practice could also be attributed to the growing number of articles on 'online sexual racism' that have appeared in both mainstream and gay print media. Not only is this evidence of growing social interest but it also reflects a general growing awareness, which, in turn, would make men likely to notice such practices when they are online.

Although a large number of men reported being personally excluded on the basis of their

perceived race, this experience was not uniform across the sample. Men from minority racial

groups were much more likely than their White-identified peers to report experiencing this

exclusion. The difference between these two groups was so great that, while fewer than one-half

of all White participants reported exclusion because of their race, over 80% of men from other

racial groups had had that experience. This experience was particularly prevalent among men of

Asian-identified backgrounds, such as those participants who identified as East or Southeast Asian,

with racialised exclusion reported by over 96% of participants from these groups. A similarly high

proportion of men who self-identified as Indian also reported these experiences. Here it is again

necessary to expand on the dichotomy of majority/minority racial groups and to consider why

some racial identities seemed to experience exclusion online significantly more often than others

did.

One explanation relates to the ways in which racialised attraction appears to be organised in a

hierarchy, which might govern some aspects of desire and attraction among gay men. One would

expect that men deemed 'desirable' would therefore experience sexual exclusion less often than

those deemed less desirable, who would experience it more often. This is not, however, an

explanation in itself. Instead, attraction and desire could be considered to be symptomatic of how

race works as an organisational tool for making distinctions online. To reiterate, other factors

such as socio-political history and group dynamics shape men's racialised desires. However,

carrying forward the discussion from the previous section, this racialisation of desire appears to be

largely connected to men's understandings of masculinity as shaped by sexual and cultural

stereotypes. East Asian and Southeast Asian men report exclusion most often because of

perceptions about their masculinity, which entrenches their position at the lower status levels of the tri-racialisation model. Whiteness is not necessarily associated with masculinity; instead, it is accompanied by all the advantages of a colonial history that consistently privileges White men as the most powerful group in Australia, including in relation to sex. This advantage explains their lack of experience with racialised exclusion online. Other groups report mixed experiences, which confirm the notion that they variously move up and down a model of gay tri-racialisation or do not fit into the model as proposed. Further, some men might not fit within prescribed categories of race or the model described above, which might challenge the way others perceived their racial identity online.

5.3.3 Attitudes towards (and acceptability of) online racialised partner discrimination

A third aim of the survey was to explore men's attitudes and perceptions of racialised partner discrimination as a practice online. The profile analysis did allow for some speculation about these concepts, as men occasionally used their profile space to respond to racialised partner discrimination as an idea. However, generally little is known about how men engage with this issue. Men's attitudes in this respect highlight some collective experiences of race and racial discrimination but also point to a divergence between White men and those in the minority racial groups. Not only were attitudes different between these sub-samples of men but so were the factors that appeared to contribute to shaping those attitudes.

Before exploring the overall attitudes assessed through the acceptability measure, we can consider individual items as a way to explore specific issues associated with these concepts. One prominent issue comes from quotations included in the profile analysis of stage 1, which revealed confusion among men over what constitutes racism in this context. While half of the men

surveyed agreed that racism is a problem on sex and dating webservices, a smaller proportion

thought that indicating a racial preference (e.g., positive discrimination) could be considered a

form of racism (37%) and only slightly more reported being 'bothered' when people use their

profiles to exclude publicly others on the basis of race (43%). Further, most men (64%) thought

that indicating a racial preference in one's profile was an acceptable practice. While these

responses point to differences in how these men understand racism, they also reveal that a

majority of men viewed the practice of racialised partner discrimination as acceptable and did not

consider it to be racist.

A feature of analysing the acceptability items as a measure was that it enabled a comparison

between how White men and men from minority racial groups approached racialised partner

discrimination as an issue. Confirming my hypothesis, men from minority groups were less

positive about racialised partner discrimination as a practice than were White men. Given the

prevalence and attraction indicators discussed thus far, that finding was hardly surprising. If

someone experiences a form of exclusion, it seems reasonable to suppose that person might hold

a poor opinion of the practice. This hypothesis is further supported by the finding from the

regression analysis: men whose racial category was ranked as less desirable by other men tended

to be less accepting of racialised partner discrimination as a practice.

Men with higher levels of education also demonstrated lower acceptance of racialised partner

discrimination than men with lower education levels did. This relationship was also observed

between how positively men felt about multiculturalism and diversity more broadly. Such a

relationship seems logical, as you would expect that people who believe in inclusion and

multiculturalism would be suspicious or critical of practices that could exacerbate or reinforce

racial inequalities. Further, the relationship to education could explained by past research that found higher levels of education and associating with other highly educated people tends to produce less racially discriminatory behaviour when compared to those with lower levels of education (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000).

Two other factors were identified as related to men's attitudes towards racialised partner discrimination online. First, indicating any type of non-racial preference, for example, body type or age, was found to predict higher scores on the acceptability measure. This finding suggests that men who specify preferences for partners in their profile might be more inclined to believe that it is acceptable to specify racial categories as well. Second, taking more time to write one's profile was associated with less positive attitudes towards these practices. Taking less time suggests less consideration, which past research has shown is an excellent condition for the activation of implicit attitudes associated with race (Dovidio et al., 2002). It could therefore be that men in a rush to post their profile might not fully consider the potential impacts of their profile content or be aware that it could be an explicit reflection of their attitudes. This hypothesis seems especially likely if men were distracted by the desire to find immediate sexual or romantic encounters.

This section described men's' attitudes towards one of the most contentious aspects of race in an online sex and dating setting. While some participants appear to view inclusion or exclusion based on race as a normalised and acceptable part of this online world, other men – particularly those have been constructed as less desirable, those who are better educated, and think more positively about multiculturalism and diversity – seem to be critical of these practices. While these are only some of the factors that influence men's attitudes, they allow speculation about the complex ways in which men form opinions on these issues.

5.3.4 Sexual behaviour and associated risk

Some earlier studies of race, gay men and sex suggest a link between experiences of racism and sexual risk taking. As discussed in chapter 2, this link has been explored among gay Asian men in Australia (C. Han, 2008a; Mao, Van de Ven, & McCormick, 2004) and Latino and Black men in the USA (Ayala et al., 2012; Ro et al., 2013). One of the primary aims of this survey was to explore this association and test the hypothesis that men who experienced racial discrimination online would also be more likely to engage in behaviour related to HIV transmission. No relationship could be established from the data collected from participants and it is therefore not possible to suggest any type of identifiable association.

There are several reasons why these data do not suggest a relationship between these factors. First, a weakness in the survey could be the way that sexual risk was assessed. As described in the survey methods, I developed a new way of collecting and calculating risk that borrowed from other related research, which was somewhat limited by a lack of thorough usability testing. Second, the research available on this issue to date has employed mostly qualitative methods, which may reflect the difficulties in attempting to reduce such complex behaviour to quantifiable elements. Finally, there is an inherent challenge in supposing that behaviour such as an online experience could be easily linked to one's sexual behaviour, which is undoubtedly influenced by diverse and complex forces. In spite of these limitations, this issue is an important area of inquiry. Future research should consider how it might be addressed more effectively.

Although the data collected allowed for consideration of differing trends in sexual role occupation (i.e., top and/or bottom) in relation to racial identity, I chose not to undertake this analysis. Past

research has explored these relationships at length, which as I discussed in chapter 2 is typically informed from an uncritical understanding of sexual stereotypes. One of the key points developed through this analysis, however, is that sexual risk and the behaviours that make sex more or less risky intersect in complex ways. *Why* sexual roles appear to be linked to social concepts of racialised identity and constructions of masculinity may be a more important question than describing *what* the patterns appear to be. Further exploration of these relationships is warranted, however, and I will return to questions about sexual roles, race and masculinity in the in the next chapter.

5.3.5 Conclusions

The findings presented here suggest that gay men seeking sex and dates online are engaging in a culture that is heavily influenced by discourses of race and racialised attraction. Members of racial groups that are attributed with particular stereotypes regarding masculinity and virility (which maintain a high degree of erotic capital among gay men in Australia) appear to inhabit a 'middle ground' of attraction among the men sampled here. As was expected, White men continue to dominate any measure of attractiveness far above their peers of minority racial backgrounds. What this might suggest about privilege and the expression of desire is hinted at by findings that White users are the most likely (of all groups) to demonstrate racialised partner discrimination, and also that they are the least likely to experience it. Less popular groups within this hierarchy are those who have faced persecution or vilification in Australian society more broadly, as well as those who cannot draw upon those cultural stereotypes to negotiate a more favourable position in the sexual order. Of course, I am speculating here about the behaviour of imagined others. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates how deeply implicated are the cultural assumptions about race within gay men's online sexual cultures.

While most participants acknowledged that racism was an issue on sex and dating webservices, few were prepared to suggest that racialised partner discrimination was an expression of racism. This finding reveals interesting dimensions of how webservice users themselves might define racism. Although most of the men held attitudes near the mid or above-mid range regarding the acceptability of the practice of racialised partner discrimination, some variation can be explained. Men who identified with a racial group deemed 'attractive' by other participants also tended to have more positive attitudes than others did towards racialised partner discrimination. Tellingly, members of more attractive groups were more likely than others to receive positive discrimination in their favour and less likely to be discriminated against negatively. Men who reported that they actively discriminated against others were also likely to think more positively about this practice than others did. Other factors, such as taking more time on profile creation, higher education levels and greater acceptance of multiculturalism, seemed to decrease positive attitudes towards this practice. Combined, those factors help us understand this complex set of issues and why people might choose to discriminate racially and/or how they explain their choice to do so.

The data did not show a relationship between sexual risk-taking and experiences of racism online. More research is required in the next stage to unpack relationships identified here and further explore associated complexities. The next and final stage of this project, discussed in chapter 6, explored these broadly identified ideas in more detail, through in-depth interviews with gay men who use sex and dating webservices.

Chapter 6

Stage 3: In-depth interviews with Australian gay men who use sex and dating webservices

Chapter 5 discussed the findings and inferences drawn from the online survey stage of this project.

The final stage of research involved several semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with

men who used the services investigated in this study. This chapter details the methods employed,

summarises the results and suggests inferences that could be drawn from the findings. An

abridged version of this analysis has been submitted to the editors of a forthcoming book,

Multicultural Queer Australia, to be published by the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council.

6.1 Interview methods

6.1.1 Participant recruitment

During the online survey, members of a sub-set of participants were given the opportunity to

share their email addresses if they wished to participate in a follow-up interview. Survey

participants were offered this option if, through their survey responses, they indicated that they

had been directly excluded based on their racial profile or had used either inclusive or exclusive

racial language in constructing an online sex and dating profile for themselves. This selection

process created a potential pool of interview participants (with associated email addresses)

comprised of 565 men. A subset of 177 men was randomly selected and sent follow-up email

messages regarding the interview component. Nine messages failed delivery because of incorrect

or non-existent addresses, with replies received from 29 men, 21 of who were interviewed

between August and October 2012. Three interviews were recorded by phone and the remaining

18 were conducted face-to-face in Melbourne and Sydney. Participants ranged in age from 21 to

48, with a median age of 27. Participants identified (according to their own descriptions) as White

(*n*=7), East Asian (*n*=2), Southeast Asian (*n*=4), Latino, Indian, Sri-Lankan and Black (*n*=1 each). One

participant was of mixed racial background and self-identified as a 'wog' (a term used to describe a

Mediterranean background in Australia).

6.1.2 Interview guide

Interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide, piloted with two gay-identified

men for feedback before recruitment. Pilot responses were also included in the interview data

set. The interview guide was designed to focus on thematic areas identified through stages 1 and

2 and those deemed to be important in addressing the research aims more broadly. The interview

guide provided direction to the content of interviews without rigidly directing them, so

opportunities to explore related or unexpected areas of inquiry were followed where relevant.

The guide was organised into four sections, which were introduced in no particular order. To help

initiate the discussion, two opening questions were developed:

1. What are some of the things you like about online sex and dating services like *Manhunt* or

   Grindr? and;

2. What are some of the things that you do not like about online sex and dating services like

   Manhunt or *Grindr*?

These open-ended questions were designed to introduce the topic of online sex and dating, while

also demonstrating to participants that there were no 'right' answers in relation to the potentially

controversial topic of online sexual racism. Follow-up questions were designed to prompt a

deeper exploration of the subject matter, following a funnelling and probing technique

(Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). Potential probing questions within each category were

included within the guide (see Appendix B). As noted, within the parameters of these guideline

topics and questions, each interview participant could respond in any way they wished and move

into other, related, topic areas as part of the exchange. I used a semi-structured technique with

open-ended questions and follow-up probes to create a 'conversational' style of interview with

the aim of developing rapport between interviewer and participant.

6.1.3 Interviews

With participants' permission, interviews were digitally recorded. Digital recordings were stored

in encrypted files and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were checked for accuracy against the

audio recordings and de-identified. Audio recordings were then deleted. Interviews were

preceded by a brief description of the project and a reminder of the confidentiality of participant

responses. At least 90 minutes were set aside for each interview; some were longer and a few

lasted only around 30 minutes. The average interview lasted for 45 minutes. At the close of the

interview, participants were given a copy of the Information and Consent form. Written consent

was obtained for in-person interviews, while verbal consent was recorded for telephone

interviews. All participants were given a copy of the information sheet for their records along with

$40 for their time and travel expenses.

6.1.4 Thematic analysis

Transcripts were prepared, checked for accuracy and cleaned of identifying details, such as names

of people or places. Every participant was allocated a pseudonym. Transcript data were analysed

using thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method I

used was as follows. Following transcription, the interviews were read in their entirety several

times, which allowed for the generation of preliminary analytic ideas and observations, and notes

were kept on recurring motifs. As I became more familiar with the transcripts, which was

facilitated by transcription and thorough repeated readings, I developed codes to describe and

categorise particular aspects of participant responses. These codes were grouped together under

potential themes and I wrote descriptions for each one. These descriptions were shared and

discussed them with my thesis supervisors, which allowed me to identify inconsistencies or

contentious issues. This process of code and theme development was repeated several times and

refined throughout the course of developing and writing the analysis. Names of the themes also

evolved during this process.

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out the importance of making explicit certain assumptions

associated with thematic analysis. Among these assumptions is the theoretical position adopted

for this stage of the project. I approached analysis of participant responses from a critical realist

standpoint, whereby I sought to understand the social context and individual meanings people

ascribe to the phenomena under investigation. In relation to the positioning and understanding of

how themes were constructed, rather than attempting to give a whole or complete description of

themes across the interviews, my analysis sought to describe one aspect in rich detail, which was

facilitated by a directed set of research questions and areas of interest developed in stages 1 and 2

of the project. While prior assumptions and research questions motivated the interviews

themselves and the analysis, I was also mindful of important emerging issues. This approach

borrowed on work from Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) and allowed for both inductive and

deductive code and theme development.

In chapter 4, I described this project's overall mixed methods approach and noted, importantly,

my desire for flexibility and integration across methods, theories and paradigms. This type of

flexibility is one of the great strengths of mixed methods work, although it can sometimes mean

that particular methods, such as those rooted in pre-existing theoretical frameworks, are less

accessible or less desirable when it comes to analysing data. A desire for mixing and flexibility is

one of the primary reasons that thematic analysis served as the strongest option for interpreting

the interview data collected during the final research stage. Thematic analysis does not assume

particular positions or perspectives and it was this flexibility that allowed for its integration with

the other stages of my research. Other qualitative methods used to analyse interview data, such

as discourse analysis or phenomenological analysis, would have been more challenging to align

with the combined inductive and deductive coding approaching employed throughout this

research process. As I sought to expand on insights constructed through stages 1 and 2 while also

exploring new and previously unidentified directions, it was clear that thematic analysis offered

the best opportunity to achieve these dual objectives.

6.2 Results and inferences from stage 3

The men who took part in interviews for this study revealed a diverse range of experiences and

perceptions related to the use of sex and dating webservices for gay men. While everyone

interviewed could be described as a 'regular' user, given that they logged onto a sex and dating

webservice at least once per week, their methods and motivations were varied. Individual

motivation also tended to vary depending on the circumstances:

> So I've used [sex and dating webservices] in lots of ways. I use them to link up; I've used
> them for friendship. I've used them to develop community in areas that I don't have
> connections already and I've used them for sex. I've used them for different relationships
> that were not necessarily vanilla or monogamous or more open to try and get some sort of
> safety element around broadening a relationship sexually – which I think they are really
> good for, or can be. (Aaron, 43, Anglo/Aboriginal)

The ways in which Aaron describes his use of sex and dating webservices provide a useful

overview of the commonalities across the interviews regarding sex and dating webservice use. It

is essential to consider the different reasons that men might go online to seek partners or socialise

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as we attempt to explore these communities and their social dynamics. In spite of this diversity, however, ideas and themes spanned interviews and combined to describe the particular culture and context of sex and dating webservices, which are directly and indirectly related to discourses of race and racism in this context. The following section discusses the four main themes identified through my interview analysis: enjoying *accessibility*, negotiating *abundance*, understanding *etiquette* and managing *race and racism*.

6.2.1 Enjoying *accessibility*: the joys and disappointments of instant gratification

Nearly all interview participants discussed the accessibility of online sex and dating. Some viewed this as a major drawcard for using sex and dating webservices, while others were critical of its influence on sex and dating among gay men more generally. All were convinced that, over time, it was becoming more convenient to logon and meet other men: "It is very convenient so if you ever want sex you just log on *Manhunt* or just use your cell phone to find someone so it's convenient" (Arc, 25, East Asian). For this participant, there is a perception that at any time there are men online with whom sex could be arranged. Partly, as Arc identifies, this accessibility can be attributed to mobile technologies. There is no doubt that mobile apps, like *Grindr* or *Scruff,* have dramatically changed the sex and dating web industry by localising the experience through GPS functionality. Not only does GPS technology generate a more convenient experience by localising contact but also it does so via a mobile platform, which means that men can access these services from, essentially, anywhere. Many participants identified smartphone technology as a central to their sense of the convenience of online sex and dating.

The accessibility of sex

To some degree, Arc also revealed his motivation for using sex and dating webservices: "if you ever want sex you just log on". While this point could suggest that Arc's primary *interest* in using sex and dating webservices is to arrange sexual encounters, it may be that Arc's understanding of the *purpose* of these webservices is to arrange sexual encounters. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive but they suggest two slightly different things – the intent of the individual user and the intent of the services themselves, which could be partly defined by the collective user culture. It appears that for this participant these two are interwoven: "The guys I've met through these services, we know that these services are for sex so the way we talk to each is quite similar. If we want to make friends, we'll use *Facebook* or something else" (Arc, 25, East Asian).

Arc clearly views sex and dating webservices as tools for sex seeking, which is an understanding shared by other participants. The implication that these services facilitate easy and convenient connections could be linked to an assumption that their primary function is for sex. This assumption appeared to differ among services, however, with some participants viewing different services as facilitating different types of encounters:

> So *Grindr* is instantaneous and it's local and it's . . . when you log on, if you want to have sex like now you will find other people in the same situations. If it's like, if you're on *Manhunt* people sort of, it's not as instantaneous – people are there for dates or something next week, which sometimes is good. (Axel, 26, White)

Again we return to comparisons between mobile and fixed technologies, which I have argued are important distinctions between newer services like *Grindr* and more traditional browser-based webservices, such as *Manhunt* (although recently such webservices have launched mobile apps of their own). Like Arc, Axel makes reference to the quick and easy ("instantaneous") aspects of mobile services: "if you want to have sex like now". This quotation not only speaks to the convenience and access facilitated by mobile technologies but is also a reminder of how the

services themselves can influence individual use and perceptions of online culture. For example,

Axel suggests that *Manhunt* culture is more dating or planning-oriented than other services, which

could reflect the fact that browser-based services typically offer more space for text (which may

characterise their users as 'serious' and/or 'considered'). However, this notion of the

instantaneous as a function of convenience and accessibility is a persistent concept in accounts of

these services and suggests that it may be becoming increasingly difficult to 'do' sex and dating

between men without becoming immersed in and contributing to a culture of instant gratification.

The notion of 'instant gratification' may therefore become a totalising logic to explain and justify

both the use of the technology and the forms of encounter it makes possible.

Accessibility was seen as a central driver of the types of encounters made possible by sex and

dating webservices. As I have suggested, many participants seemed to think of these services as

purely sex-oriented. Some even linked this orientation to the convenience with which men could

log on and articulated criticisms of this convenience as damaging to the broader cultures of sex

and dating among gay men:

> *Interviewer: So, on the flipside, you've kind of already hinted but what are some of the things you don't like about [sex and dating] services?*
>
> Mark: Yeah, what I don't like, yeah, it just makes it so easy and cheapens the whole process of, I don't know, what should be. . . you know, like if we step back 20 years ago we didn't have all this technology and you'd meet people the conventional way, like through work or actually go to a bar and talk to people. So I feel that it just cheapens the whole image and makes sex a commodity rather than something that yeah, it should be like that. (Mark, 23, mixed)

Mark's criticism of sex and dating webservices as 'cheapening' the sex and dating process suggests

certain expectations for the ways in which romantic connections are formed. This more critical

view of the value of accessibility was reminiscent of Giddens' (1992) arguments about romantic

love, which he distinguished from sexual desire and passion (*amour passion*). Although Giddens

dealt almost exclusively with notions of love between a man and a woman, his construction of

romantic love as a quest implies that it is hard won, elusive and therefore special. Mark's

perception of sex and dating online as 'cheap' may reflect a similar understanding of romance in

line with the quest motif while rejecting sex-based attraction, which has been characterised as

fleeting. Given the discussed accessibility and convenience of online sex and dating webservices,

an understanding among participants of finding partners as 'easy' and 'instantaneous' reaffirms

suggestions that it is not a particularly good place to find romance.

The superficiality of online connections has been fiercely contested in the research literature, with

some arguing that deep and meaningful connections can be formed with people online (see, for

example, Parks & Floyd, 1996) and others arguing that those connections are not as close or

reliable as those formed offline (see Cummings, Butler, & Kraut, 2002). As discussed, the

perception of sex and dating webservices as sex-focused was shared by many participants:

> I think a lot of people go on there with expectations and they will write in their profile that
> they're looking for love or a boyfriend or whatever. I think it needs to happen organically,
> you're not going to find the right one at all on a sex-searching app, which no matter how
> they market themselves is what they are as far as I'm concerned. (Axel, 26, White)

Here Axel seems to perceive online interactions as inorganic or unnatural while, again, positioning

online sex and dating webservices as primarily for finding sex. His reaction to this understanding

was to treat them as sex-seeking tools and leave his quest for romance to other avenues. Mark,

however, responded to a similar understanding of these webservices as inorganic by quitting

Grindr all together:

> Mark: I just deleted *Grindr* last week as well.
>
> *Interviewer: Why did you do that?*
>
> Mark: Too much. I just, everyone just wants to have sex and then, well, that's what I
> think. And I don't know. I've just had enough of all that stuff. And then I ask someone

out for a drink and they always say, "no, no, no." Or they say yes and then it leads to no. So yeah, it's kind of like a bit of a waste of time I felt. (Mark, 23, mixed)

This response to the convenience culture of online sex and dating is a reminder of the role that values and meanings play in shaping men's experiences of using online technology to meet other men. The value Mark placed on romantic love was not one he saw reflected in sex and dating services like *Grindr*. His response demonstrates a type of control that users can exert over their own access. By withdrawing, Mark was reinforcing his own ideas about sex and dating generally, as well as his ideas about sex and dating online. The disconnection Mark experienced challenges the premium placed on the convenience of these services and points to the diverse interests, values and expectations that men bring to their online encounters.

Acceptability as a drawcard

In spite of some scepticism around the online sex and dating market, most participants were pleased by the high levels of access afforded to them by sex and dating webservices. Being able to find partners from the comfort of home was commonly identified as a major drawcard for men, particularly in contrast to going to a bar, social event or sex venue:

> Well, they're, they're more available, you can use them at any time instead of waiting for the night to go to a bar of over to a sex club or sauna. And it's cheaper. (Carl, 39, Latino)

> I mean you can do it at any time of the day I s'pose, when it suits you and you've got free time. It doesn't tend to be geared to the weekend whereas when you tend to go out to bars and stuff like that it's very geared towards Friday/Saturday night. For me personally I think as I've got older the bar scene is becoming less attractive because it gets later and later and later. (Robert, 48, White)

These two participants identify positive aspects of accessibility that influence perceptions of online sex and dating services, some of which contrast with their experiences with other venues for meeting men. Reiterating points made earlier, a general sense of convenience is achieved by connecting with other men from anywhere and at any time. For Robert, this level of freedom has

increasing appeal as he ages. Bars and clubs could be constructed 'traditional' avenues for

meeting other men; other participants also expressed their disinterest in these venues. For

participants uninterested in such places, online sex and dating facilitates interactions with other

gay men that eliminate the necessity of visiting those traditional spaces.

The spaces for gay men that are created by online sex and dating webservices may be particularly

poignant drawcards for those men who do not identify as gay or who live in areas without an

identifiable population of gay men:

> I mean, I can't walk down the street and go – oh, that guy's hot, I wonder if he . . . You
> know, it's really sort of hit and miss . . . I mean, I'm from [suburb name] originally and
> down there there's hardly any gay guys at all. So in that respect you are able to identify
> people who are a part of your community a lot easier because they're all there, they're
> putting themselves out there. (Mike, 22, White)

That these webservices operate as spaces where men can privately and, if desired, anonymously

interact with other men is a likely attraction for some. Although there is ambivalence around the

meaning of 'community' among some gay men in Australia (Holt, 2011), Mike appears to be using

it as a casual moniker for other gay men. As mentioned, a geographic distance from residential

areas popular among gay men highlights the potential role online sex and dating webservices

might play for some, which is part of understanding access and the ways in which men make use

of that access in seeking to meet their diverse sexual or romantic expectations.

Returning to facilitators of convenience and access, there was an enduring perception evident in

the interview data that smartphones drive how and why men accessed sex and dating webservices

today. As discussed, the localisation of experience forms part of this access, which may also

contribute to why men use these services in the first place. The undercurrent of 'immediate' and

'instant' was evident in the various ways in which men articulated their views on access:

> I suppose because they are easily accessible, you know you can access it on your phone at any time. You can walk in and we've all got a smartphone, so that's easy. I guess it's fairly immediate. It's always like, 'let's do this now,' rather than, 'let's plan it for next week or next weekend.' So it's instant gratification. It's universal, I mean I can use the same profile anywhere – I travel a lot for work. (Corey, 38, White)

Corey seems to recognise here the importance of smartphones and, indeed, this recognition appears to exclude those men who do not have smartphones or who do not use them for sex and dating purposes. What is interesting here, however, is his description of his sex and dating profile as 'universal'. During the interview, we discussed Corey's use of sex and dating services overseas, which he viewed as efficient tools for connecting with men. His belief that an online identity maintains its meaning and value in different national contexts represents a dimension of the 'convenience' concept that reminds me of Altman's (2002) theories on the globalization of gay culture. Altman argued that online sex and dating are important channels through which gay culture can be disseminated internationally. As discussed earlier, this globalization is evident in the way that some racialised slang (e.g., 'Black'; 'Latino') come to have meanings for gay men outside of their original (typically North American) context. Although services like *Manhunt* and *Grindr* may have a particularly 'American' feel, they are still recognised and made use of around the world.

Barriers to accessibility

Most participants believed that sex and dating services were accessible to all. One participant, however, did discuss barriers to access that remained in place for some people:

> I was just recently in the country and there were a lot of young Aboriginal gay guys on these sites – *Manhunt*, they were all on and *Gaydar*. Their biggest problem is that they cannot afford full memberships so their accessing of those sites is completely different from everyone else's. In fact, that puts an oppressed people in a more oppressed position. And you know how that works out on those sites is that they are able to be viewed more than they can view. (Aaron, 43, Anglo/Aboriginal)

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This description evokes ideas about barriers to access and power that run parallel to the lines of socioeconomic status. As discussed in chapter 3, many sex and dating webservices offer either free or paid memberships, with free memberships generally restricted by the number of profiles and messages that can be viewed each day and, in some cases, a limit to the number of photographs that can be uploaded. This tiered approach seems to reflect forms of social marginalisation seen offline, in particular, allowing those with more money a higher level of access and challenging those without money to navigate a context that places restrictions on what they can or cannot see and do. While this may seem like a minor issue, it neatly dovetails with broader structures of social marginalisation and demonstrates the different forms of social inclusion and exclusion that men might experience in negotiating their social and sexual lives. It might also normalise the idea that poor or less privileged people can be more easily objectified than others, which is certainly not a unique concept. What is pivotal here is that, while basic access may be reasonably high (demonstrated by men in these rural communities accessing these webservices at least some of the time), this access is not equal and appears to reflect existing social strata.

Accessibility and race

This is an excellent point to begin to consider how concepts of race relate to those of accessibility. Through bringing together a large and diverse group of men to these online services, accessibility also creates a situation where men from diverse lifestyles interact in one shared space. Of course, interactions between and among diverse people can occur elsewhere on the Internet. However, in those corners of the web devoted to sex and dating among men, there is the added element of people actively searching for connections with each other. Thus, men who might not otherwise have the opportunity to communicate are doing so in the context of diverse cultural expectations, values and personal tastes. Particularly between men from very different cultural or racial

backgrounds, the chances of an offline meeting might be somewhat rare, given the different social

circles those men are likely to inhabit. Online, however, more traditional divisions of social space

are flattened out, increasing the chances that people from different social backgrounds might

interact with each other because of the common spaces they share. The very accessibility of

online sex and dating among this population may therefore be creating more racially diverse social

interactions and opportunities for the men accessing these services. However, while it might be

true that the Internet works to offset social (and physical) distance between people, there is, "no

reason to assume that it suspends the fundamental parameters of the social. Agents [i.e.,

individuals] still classify other agents by patterns of (non-)interaction and, in doing so, (re)create

social classes" (Schmitz, 2012, p. 198). An amalgamation of men from different social and cultural

backgrounds into a single online space could partly explain some participants' experiences of racial

discrimination: some men might be unprepared to navigate a racially diverse landscape. Of

course, I am not trying to excuse racially insensitive behaviour online, especially in a country like

Australia where multiculturalism is a large part of the national character. However, this idea does

present one potential explanation for some of the ways men engage with race when they go

looking for sex or dates online.

Summary

To summarise, many aspects of accessibility are important in expanding our understanding of

online sex and dating among men. Smartphone technology and the increasingly convenient

nature of these webservices are important in shaping how and why men use these services. While

perceived as 'easy' and 'immediate', these kinds of constructions of online sex and dating may also

be fuelling the notion that webservices for gay men are good only for finding sex. With this

perception, men seeking romance may be withdrawing from using these services and, in doing so,

critiquing the sorts of instant gratification that can be found online. Others, however, appreciate

how accessibility can mean more than simply convenience and recognise the potential for online

sex and dating to facilitate connections with other men in contexts where they might not be as

forthcoming. Finally, in relation to race, it becomes apparent that accessibility might have

fostered a greater diversity among the men interacting online but some men might not be fully

prepared for the types of social and sexual engagement that follow. As I discuss later, this lack of

preparation is reflected in my general impression that most men who demonstrate discriminatory

behaviour appear to do so out of ignorance rather than malice.

6.2.2 Negotiating *abundance*: popularity, freedom and a man's right to choose

> It's very like a supermarket, isn't it? There's lots of aisles and lots of choice. Lots of
> variety. Gosh, you could be shopping at that supermarket every day if you wanted to!
> (George, 47, White)

The number and diversity of the men participating in these online spaces characterise the second

theme identified through the interviews: abundance. This theme can be most usefully examined

via three questions:

1. What might be driving the abundance of men looking for sex or dates online?

2. How does that abundance influence men's online behaviour (which – as hinted at by

   George's simile – might be understood in relation to theories of consumer culture)?

3. How do men attempt to make sense of the many 'choices' available to them in

   navigating the large number of potential suitors online?

Factors driving abundance

It is hardly surprising that interview participants believed that a large number of gay men use

online sex and dating services, especially given that the prominence of online sex and dating

among gay men is well supported by national survey data (Rawstorne et al., 2009). However,

while all interview participants commented on the perceived abundance of men online, all were

located in urban centres of Australia. By comparison, rural or regional areas of the country would

likely have fewer active webservice users. Regardless, at least in some parts of the country, it is

the reality of many men's experience that a great many men use these services as a central

component of their search for sexual or romantic partners. But what factors foster this

abundance? There are several likely explanations. First, borrowing from the previous theme, the

accessibility of these webservices is a likely contributor to their popularity. Second, the marketing

strategies of the companies that operate these webservices tend to target popular gay media and

events to advertise their products to a specific audience of gay men. Finally, the Internet has been

a traditional meeting space for gay men, not unlike a gay bar (Campbell, 2004; Ross, 2005), with

the early text-based chat rooms with a gay theme among the most popular (S. Jones, 1997). As

members of a minority group that had to be careful of disclosing their sexual preferences in case

of homophobic persecution, gay men were early adopters of the Internet as a channel through

which they could more directly (and safely) connect with each other (Campbell, 2004).

Another potential contributing factor may be the increasing acceptability or normalisation of these

webservices. Although a large number of gay men may use online sex and dating services, does

that usage mean that all users consider their use to be an acceptable and normalised practice?

Some participants appeared to feel comfortable discussing their online experiences with their

friends – in particular, those also identified as gay – but were less willing when it came to other

groups of people:

> Yeah, I don't mind people knowing I use [*Grindr*] but it depends who knows. If it's another
> gay man, I don't care. I wouldn't want my parents to know really. Straight people, people I
> work with are mostly straight but they're pretty cool and they're all slutty. But yeah, there

are definitely people who get it and those who don't. But yeah, my friends not all of them use it, actually, but they know that I do and they think it is funny. (Axel, 26, White)

Immediately, the dominant construction of these webservices as sites for making sexual contact becomes apparent. Axel implies this sexual nature by suggesting that his 'slutty' friends are unsurprised by his use of *Grindr*. In contrast, people unfamiliar with the culture or those whom he perceives may not understand his use – such as his parents – are shielded from it. Those "who get it" could be defined by their casual approach to sex and dating online (i.e., "they think it is funny"), while "those who don't" might be characterised as more serious in either their relationships or understanding of these issues.

Other participants described 'in' and 'out' groups of people as being characterised by either casual or serious understandings of sex and dating webservices:

I mean, I was at [bar name] a few weeks ago and I was just with a few friends from [suburb name] and I was sitting there on *Grindr*. Just for shits and giggles because I was bored. And they were like, "Oh, you're on *Grindr*?" and they were fussing and guys who walked by would kind of look down on you. And it's funny looking at people's reactions because we all do it but if you do it out in public, we got to try and hide it. (Mike, 22, White)

Here we begin to touch upon some of the etiquette involved in using these services, which I expand on later in the next section of this chapter. Like Axel, Mike takes a casual approach and seems to be relatively comfortable with his friends knowing about his use of *Grindr,* while recognising that many or most gay men use these webservices as well. There is a tension inherent, however, in his attempts to define appropriate levels of use by pretending not to use them or at least pretending not to use them very often. This approach to self-restraint and pleasure is similar to other discussions in the field of public health, which prioritises moderation as a socially validated value (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). Conflicting acceptability of this kind may define this as a socially normalised behaviour but does so only so long as one demonstrates 'acceptable' forms of use.

The influence of abundance

Beyond factors fostering abundance, it is important to unpack related meanings and experiences.

Although many participants viewed the breadth of choice as enhancing their online experience,

there was acknowledgement by others that this did not automatically translate into a greater

number of positive encounters:

> At first I thought, "Oh – [*Grindr*] is heaven, gay heaven!" First time like you can meet
> anyone and I wasn't out back then too. And yeah, I thought it was like so nice to meet
> people and thought it would be really great to meet people. That was my first perception
> but now it's changed over time . . . I just feel it's not really reliable. I mean it's okay to
> meet people but, but you know, like you want to meet genuine people, like what you're
> looking for. So especially when I say 'genuine', I'm looking for like relationship-wise,
> friendship-wise. (Ragi, 23, Indian)

Ragi's early excitement at the prospect of meeting other gay men online was tempered by his

experience of navigating the virtual space and negotiating offline encounters. As with some other

participants, he questioned the possibility of making meaningful connections via sex and dating

webservices and appeared to place great stock in, yet again, their sexual nature. While it may be

reasonable to expect that a large number of suitors would lead to a larger number of positive

encounters, the clichéd reality is that quantity is no guarantee of quality. As other recent research

has pointed out, online dating might produce more suitors but in doing so, it also increases the

likelihood of engaging with unsatisfactory suitors (Best & Delmege, 2012). More men online could

also mean more opportunities for comparison. By this, I mean that the simple existence of a large

number of choices could invite men to compare and contrast between potential suitors in a way

that fewer choices could not. Returning to ideas rooted in consumerism, the quantity of choices

relates to what has been called the 'quality perception process' (Steenkamp, 1990), which

suggests that part of how consumers perceive the quality of products or brands is through their

ability to draw comparisons among similar products. Thus, the introduction or availability of

choices provides opportunities for comparisons between and among those choices, which could

influence how individuals understand the quality of individual items. While applying these brand-

related principles to online dating is clearly not as simple as, say, comparing washing detergents, it

is reasonable to suppose that if there were a greater number of men online, it would encourage

more critical comparisons between those men and, theoretically, an adjustment in the values that

users ascribe to each other. This would mean that webservice users living in areas of Australia

with high concentrations of gay men (i.e., more choice) are able (and even encouraged) to exhibit

greater 'discernment' than those users living among sparser concentrations of gay men (i.e., less

choice). Further, the mere existence of options makes it possible to make any type of choice in

the first place. Thus, while abundance may not always lead to a positive experience, there is

support for the notion that it could have an influence on how men perceive the quality of

potential partners.

Beyond influencing perception, abundance also constructs the men who use these services as

consumers. Of course, men could still be considered consumers in a far less populous marketplace

but the abundant nature of choice makes this analogy even more compelling. Such a relationship

not only means that men must develop and employ techniques for organising and navigating this

abundance, but in doing so they are also forced to take on the role of the free or 'sovereign'

consumer. This notion of the sovereign consumer, a central concept of consumerism, is relevant

here because it reflects the idea that the individual has both the right and ability to formulate their

own needs and desires free of social authorities (Slater, 1997). Although broader notions of

consumer freedom are not necessarily black and white, regarding online sex and dating there was

a consensus among participants that an individual had a right to define his own sexual or romantic

interests: "I think everyone has a right to have their own preference. I have the right to choose

who I do or do not want to sleep with" (Mike, 22, White).

Mike was in fact fiercely defensive of this right to make choices about sexual partners. He

returned several times to the notion of choice and freedom, reinforcing Slater's ideas of consumer

sovereignty and broader discourses regarding the right to choose. Other interview participants

also valued freedom of choice, along with the individual nature of personal (dis)interests. In the

face of so many options online, there was some frank discussion around these interests and the

ways in which they could (or should) be expressed:

> Well, you know, so I think everyone has their proclivities about what you, what you're,
> what you're looking for sexually or in a partner, or whatever. You need to be able to state
> those so that, you know, it's it's a, you know, we live in the middle of Sydney – it's a
> reasonably big pool of gay men. How do you, how do you narrow that down? How do you
> make sure that people are not, not contacting you but people are contacting you who,
> that you have more potential to be interested in? So if everything's just open slather and
> there's nothing, there's no, there's no way for you to I guess express your preferences
> then, you know, you could get I could get everything from teenage boys, which I have
> interest in, to old men, which I have no interest in. So I'd rather state up-front what I am
> looking for and, hopefully, that kind of narrows down the well, you know, the amount of
> communication and the amount of effort that you actually have to put in for looking for
> what you want. (Ron, 44, White)

Here Ron justifies his display of 'proclivities' as a response to the "big pool of gay men" online and

the danger (of wasted time) that could result from an open free-for-all. He not only expressed a

belief in stating preferences through his profile but also justified it through establishing it as a

need resulting from an abundance of choice. This expression of need resonates with notions of

consumer sovereignty and entitlement of choice, which is further reflected by Ron's revelation

that as a 44-year-old man, he has an interest in teenage boys.

Rose's (1998) discussion of the freedom of choice in contemporary, and particularly advanced,

liberal, social systems casts these ideas is a somewhat different light. He wrote:

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The forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely 'free to choose', but obliged to be free, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destiny. (1998, p. 17).

Considering the boundaries of choice, the freedom of a consumer can also be constructed as a requirement, with people expected to think about themselves as engaged in exercising choice. While Ron may defend his right to choose among men online, this understanding is contrasted by the limits of the systems (i.e., webservices and their cultures) in which these choices are made, which includes the descriptive categories and labels employed to define attraction. Beyond these systemic restrictions, broader limits regarding choice govern how one's 'proclivities' are formed in the first place. While Ron makes a case for his right to express partner preferences, he does not explore or question their foundation, which is key in justifying their place online, i.e., they are seen as 'natural' responses to the abundance of choice online.

Navigating abundance

There is an important question to be asked here, however, that challenges Ron's arguments for the public dissemination of personal interests. Why, instead of potentially offending someone by detailing interests or disinterests, do users not instead simply ignore messages from men in whom they have no interest? Of course, as Ron as argued, there are matters of efficiency and time management. Additionally, we might consider Bourdieu's (1984) work on taste and aesthetics, which described the ways in which discernment and taste are attached to power and social class. Bourdieu suggested that the manner in which one's tastes are presented is an important marker of social status. In this understanding, a user's choice to describe openly, via his profile, what he is looking for in a partner could be viewed as an expression of taste and, therefore, social position. This demonstration of discernment could communicate to other users a level of social standing,

suggesting either the entitlement to discriminate openly among men or, conversely, the

tactlessness of publicly excluding groups of people. Distinctions made in this way also create

distance between an individual and other 'lesser' groups. While all interview participants

articulated a favourable view of the free expression of preferences for partners, there was also a

suggestion that such expressions carried consequences. I expand on this aspect of etiquette in the

following section.

Several aspects of the apparent freedom of the online sex and dating consumer draw notions of

race into this discussion. Mike was quoted earlier as fiercely defending the right of an individual to

make choices about sexual or romantic partners:

> I think everyone has a right to have their own preference. I have the right to choose who I
> do or do not want to sleep with. And if I don't want to sleep with you because you're
> Asian, well you know what, it might be racist but you don't have the right to take that
> choice away from me. Call it what you want, maybe it's racism, I don't know. I think it's
> because I'm not attracted to them. But, you know, if it's racist by definition than that's
> fine but no one has the right to take away your ability and your prerogative to choose. You
> know what I mean? It's a freedom of choice. (Mike, 22, White)

In this expanded quotation from our interview, Mike goes on to question the label of 'racist', as it

challenges his sovereignty in exercising choice over sexual partners. While few people would

debate an individual's right to choose their sexual partners in broader terms, an additional

dimension is operating here that cannot be ignored: through the particular forms of consumption

being promoted, individuals are also engaged in producing and reproducing particular

understandings of social engagement, which includes social inequalities. It is also worth noting

that Mike implies the attraction he feels for different groups of men is natural or immutable (it just

'is'), rather than something acquired or learnt over time. The apparent 'naturalness' of his lack of

attraction is the justification for excluding men based on race.

Categorical distinctions, such as those that Mike expressed about race or that Ron expressed

based on age, reproduce a reliance on stereotypes. Most people would probably recognise the

challenges of employing stereotypes to make distinctions about broad groups of people, even

while defending an individual's right to make those distinctions. Yet, racialised stereotypes were

reported by many participants as tools for organising broad categories of information amid an

abundant field of choice:

> The thing about the [Lebanese] boys is that they're almost always not out and they're
> always, they're often quite muscled and straight acting, which I find really sexy. Because
> I'm not looking for a relationship then I don't care about what issues they have personally
> but the fact that they're not out and so straight acting . . . it's kind of a bit forbidden for
> them, especially if they're Muslim. It is forbidden. So I find that, and I guess for me it
> makes that more exciting because it is a bit more dangerous for them. (Axel, 26, White)

It is clear that Axel is making assumptions about men racialised as 'Lebanese' based upon

stereotypical characterisations of body type and culture. Of course, those descriptions are unlikely

to be true of all Lebanese men. For Axel, however, grouping these 'attractive' characteristics

under the heading of 'Lebanese' provides an opportunity to filter profiles that he sees as useful in

the pursuit of desirable men. Axel himself, however, appears to recognise the limits of these

stereotypes and applies qualifications with non-absolute language like, "almost always" and

"they're often".

A reliance on stereotypes can also be identified as a component of negotiating abundance

because, as suggested, narrowing down a wide range of choices requires a concerted attempt to

organise information. The challenge is that stereotypes of race as described by participants tend

to assign restrictive and often value-laden characteristics to different racial groups. For example,

Axel's conflates his perceptions of Lebanese men as masculine with an implication that he values

this as an attractive quality. While the use of these types of stereotypes was reported by many

participants, several also openly questioned the appropriateness of this approach, as Mark did:

I know I have preferences in terms of race and whether that's a good or bad thing I don't know. But I think yeah, a lot of people stereotype and obviously say that they prefer people only of one race when they don't really know and haven't really met someone of another race. So sometimes they're based on like false pretences 'cause saying that you don't like something but you haven't tried it is a bit, yeah . . .You know what I mean? (Mark, 23, mixed)

Mark appears to recognise the limitations inherent in making partner-seeking decisions based on racial stereotypes, and this type of reflexive commentary on assumptions was evident in many of the interviews. Nevertheless, Mark still reported using racial stereotypes to identify men with whom he might share similar cultural values. This disconnect between Mark's abstract ideas about stereotypes, race and his personal online practices suggests an important tension between these concepts. Many participants appeared to reject notions of racism or racist behaviour online but also to defend the validity of racialised attraction or the use of race-based discriminatory language as useful in the search for sexual or romantic partners.

As another technique to organise information and navigate abundance, many participants pointed to the built-in search and filter functions of sex and dating webservices. Some men saw these as useful tools for 'efficiently' selecting only those profiles that met their demographic requirements:

Charles: And, you know, you search according to, you know, what you're into, the kind of guys you're into, and people can search for, you know, the kind of guys that they're into as well. So it's like it can be a good match if, if you kind of do your searching right.

Interviewer: Just to clarify, when you say 'search', you mean through the built-in search functions of the websites?

Charles: Exactly, yeah. (Charles, 21, Southeast Asian)

Here Charles points to effective and efficient searching ("do your searching right") as a way to make a "good match". This method, however, requires a considered approach to searching and highlights a limitation of these functions. While characteristic-based searches might seem like a handy tool for navigating abundance, the factors used for searching are limited by the webservices

themselves. For example, the app *Grindr* allows filtering only based on age. The webservice

Manhunt, however, allows users to search based on a wide variety of factors, including some

demographic, geographic and interest-based descriptions. All services, however, make

distinctions about what can or cannot be searched for. To reiterate one of Rose's (1998) points,

these limitations can provide the obligation to make choices and distinctions but only within limits

not often recognised (e.g., you cannot search for characteristics like trustworthiness or sociability).

The technique of searching or filtering through the available choices is not unlike the techniques

we employ for online shopping. Factors such as price and brand can be used to limit what

products are or are not seen, which directly influences what one purchases, but one cannot filter

one's choices by all the characteristics that may be important in practice. There is always a gap

between what one is looking for and the extent to which technology facilitates that search.

The comparison to online shopping or, as George put it earlier, a 'supermarket', is relevant when

we consider the role of self-promotion or advertisement via sex and dating profiles. In the profile

analysis (see chapter 4), I discussed the language that participants used to *market* aspects of self-

racialisation. In considering this concept in relation to the interviews, it appears that what men

say and do in their profile has a significant impact on why and how people respond:

> *Interviewer: So, you have a certain expectation for what you want you go online – how do you communicate that expectation to others?*
>
> Axel: My profile. . . . I always think that if you put up a photo of yourself with a shirt on that's a pretty strong sign. Although, I don't have that myself. I used to but I found that I got less messages with the shirt off than on so now I just have my face, which was a bit insulting. Well, I'll show you my profile. I don't really remember what it says . . . I generally find the short and sweet ones are the ones who want sex and if they want more they'll say so specifically, so mine is really short and sweet. (Axel, 26, White)

There appear to be subtle (or not so subtle) cues that men are employing to send messages to

others. More risqué photos can suggest to others an interest in sex, as can a small amount of text.

Alternatively, using the acronym 'LTR' (*Long Term Relationship*) or using profile space to discuss non-sexual interests could signal an interest in dating or friendship. Other research has examined the ways in which men leave clues about their HIV status through online profiles as a way to connect with men of the same serostatus (Race, 2010). These findings remind us of the important role that profiles play in shaping men's online experiences and suggest direct and indirect ways to reveal interest and intent. These signposts are another way in which some users seek to select from the abundance of suitors online in an attempt to connect with like-minded men.

Summary

Abundance can be characterised by the large number of men engaging with these online services and the social and cultural diversity of those men. Although many factors are likely to contribute to abundance, the ways in which men think about this abundance and what those responses suggest about the dynamics of race and racial exclusion online are worthy of further examination. While men discussed a multitude of techniques to assist in managing the large number of prospective partners online, many seem unaware of (or unconcerned about) how their role as a consumer could reproduce certain systems of meaning. Many might not realise that their particular consumer choices are also, by definition, (public) endorsements of those systems. Men might feel there is little alternative but to promote themselves within a marketplace that at times is characterised and experienced as 'overstocked'. Undoubtedly, the abundance of men online has created a whole host of challenges for men who wish to engage in online sex and dating. Their responses to those challenges point to a multiplicity of ways that race might figure in men's online interactions.

6.2.3 Understanding *etiquette*: the strategic negotiation of online norms of conduct

Missing from the above discussion is a consideration of the forms of etiquette that characterise

and regulate participation in sex and dating online environments. In discussions with the men I

interviewed, a particular etiquette for engaging with these services quickly became apparent,

encapsulating not only their expectations of acceptable online conduct but also methods of

responding to behaviour that they deemed unacceptable. The men discussed a diversity of

specific norms and consequences for violating those norms. However, there was a shared

perception that such norms *did* exist, even if they were not universally agreed upon. As discussed

earlier, rules were sometimes imposed by the webservices themselves. *Manhunt* and *Grindr*, for

example, both moderate the profile text and photos posted by users. The very existence of 'block'

or 'ignore' functions suggests an assumption that misbehaviour could occur online. As Sternberg

(2012) explains, there is a long history of rule and norm generation and violation among online

communities and online sex and dating is clearly included in this way of thinking about self-

governance online.

Etiquette versus finding a partner

Online sex and dating is a special case, however, because of an apparent tension between what

men might understand as 'appropriate' online (or offline) conduct and their search for sexual or

romantic partners. In some cases, it appeared as though the desire to maintain appropriate

conduct was allowed to dictate online conduct only insofar as it did not impede success with

looking for partners. This was particularly evident in discussions of race and race-based

discriminatory language, for example:

> In terms of race, I do tend to, I do try to make my, my profile more positive rather than
> negative so rather than saying 'no Asians', I would say 'I have a preference for White lads

in European guise'. I do try and avoid saying things that I think are gonna put people down. (Robert, 48, White)

During our interview, Robert expressed a clear interest in men he perceived as 'White'. From his statement, we can infer that Robert did not want to offend others online but did want to communicate his sexual or romantic interests. His solution to resolving this conflict between social etiquette and personal desire was the management of his language, that is, focusing on *how* a desire is expressed, rather than being troubled by the specifics of that desire. Indeed, others identified expressions of desire (or expressions of discrimination) as tensions in how participants negotiated online etiquette:

> I have a standard response now that's ready to go at the click of a button around if you state in your profile that I think, you know, well, in my way it doesn't state at all explicitly but, if people state in their profile, "I'm not racist, but . . . . " or, "Sorry if you think that's racist," or, "I'm straight-acting and I don't like Asian not interested in Asian, Indians," blah, blah, blah, I just go, "That's just, that's appalling." So that, that affronts me. Some people are very definite about what they don't want. But it's along the lines of gender and age and race. And I'm not sure if there's a need for it but I look at them and all the time I read them and I go, "You're an arsehole for saying it." So it gets, it has a reaction. It gets a reaction from me. (George, 47, mixed)

George made some strong value statements about the use of racialised language online while reflecting on his aversion to profiles that exclude based on race (and other characteristics). George's aversion, however, comes not from a racialisation of desire or exclusion based on race but rather on how those exclusions are voiced or that they are expressed at all: "You're an arsehole for saying it." Many other participants expressed this important distinction: the crime was not in enacting racialised partner discrimination but in the particular forms in which that action was articulated.

Participants frequently discussed expressions of discrimination in terms of *inclusive* and *exclusive* language. In chapter 4, I explored the differences between these two types of language in the online sex and dating profiles of gay men. Many participants also recognised the differences and

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similarities between these two methods of communicating a similar idea. Some, like Robert, were very strongly in favour of using positive (inclusive) language, as it appeared to satisfy their needs for efficiency and clarity while seeking to avoid offending others. As with desire and etiquette, this tension between efficiency and decorum was also a prominent way that men described reaching a common ground between these two concepts. Other participants, however, were less convinced:

> You know, to be honest, if someone says, "I'm only into Asian and white guys," although that's, that's pretty horrible, in my mind, of course you're gonna, you know, when you weigh it up, if someone's saying, "No Asians," as opposed to, "I actually do like Asians but only Asians and such and such," then, you know, that is kind of more positive. For me as a person. But they should be on the same level. But I guess, when people say that they are interested in Asians, you know, I don't wanna say I forgive it but I, I'm like, "Oh, well that's cool." So yeah. I don't know. (Maurie, 24, Southeast Asian)

Maurie appears to position this as a choice between 'bad' and 'worse', which suggests that one must choose between being active or complicit in regards to the racialising of desire. Within the specifics of language, while some may characterise inclusive language as 'positive', it is nonetheless validating or accepting the notion that desire can and should be racialised. It also carries an implied exclusion of other groups: while writing 'Only into White guys' may have a more positive ring, it nevertheless implies a statement about the desirability of men who are not White.

Efficiency and etiquette

While contested among participants, expressions of discrimination did seem to represent a broader aspect of etiquette that was widely agreed upon, that of efficiency. Efficiency featured within each of the themes identified in the interviews and is an important dimension of etiquette because of the social norms it evokes for men using these webservices. Expressions of discrimination form a part of this expectation because they suggest that men using these services are meant to describe clearly what they do or do not want in the hopes of attracting only those who might be a good match. More generally, there was also the assumption that information

sharing was a key aspect of efficiency and, thus, of the etiquette of engaging with other men

online:

> I suppose you know you want to see, for me, you want to see the face, you want to see the body. You want to, those guys, for example, on *Manhunt* where everything is an 'ask me' then it's like, what's the point in having a profile? The point of having these boxes is so you can actually put some detail in them. (Corey, 38, White)

This quotation from Corey neatly describes the expectations he has about how information is

shared and displayed by other users. He viewed a person's failing to meet these expectations as a

violation of online conduct. Most participants reported negative reactions towards men or

profiles that were not forthcoming with basic information. Corey's rhetorical question – "what's

the point in having a profile?" – reveals his way of using these webservices but does not fully

consider how or why other people might be using them. Such an individual focus speaks to the

many different understandings of etiquette that might be held by the men who use these services.

While Corey might see the failure to provide demographic information as rude or pointless,

another user may feel that this approach is the best and most appropriate way to engage with

these services. Some participants speculated that men might purposefully leave some fields blank

in an attempt to avoid automatic exclusion or to remain more mysterious online. This strategy

was discussed in the interviews with specific reference to the field on 'race':

> Like I've had a number of guys who don't have their race on their profile either and that's when they say, 'do you mind Asian?' and then they show me their hidden picture or whatever and you've got an Asian face staring back at you. (Daniel, 27, White)

Profiles that do not disclose race would be in violation of Corey's definition of online etiquette.

However, there may be valid reasons for non-disclosure, as Daniel suggests. Invisibility, although

less obvious, appears to act as another strategy to enable men to participate online while keeping

them 'safe'. This inference reminds us of the social (and personal) implications of putting oneself

'out there', even in an online context. Daniel appears to reveal an assumption that Asian men will

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automatically expect a certain amount of rejection based on their race ("do you mind Asian?").

This expectation provides some stark evidence that some men, at least, are assuming some

webservice users will hold racist views, and doing what they can to protect themselves from

experiences of prejudice.

Etiquette online

The etiquette of online sex and dating is an evolving and dynamic cultural system that appears to

differ across webservices and their users. Commonalities can be found, however, in considering

the broader online context and the role it plays in shaping and dictating behaviour. In the same

way that the Internet may facilitate access to a large number of partners, it can also permit,

encourage or even disguise behaviour that might be considered rude or callous in other situations.

As an obvious example, many participants reported that their typical response to messages or

greetings from people in whom they had no interest was simply to ignore the messages. That

response is remarkably different from how we might expect most people to behave offline. Many

participants seemed to believe there were the marked differences between etiquette online and

offline, commonly attributed to the anonymity and sense of disengagement made possible by the

Internet:

> It's a sort of forum where, if you don't fit it, I'm quite able to be able to tell you don't and
> be quite explicit about it. And there's no, nobody's gonna come and knock on my door
> and say, "That's racist!" or, "That's vilification!" or any, you know, because you're hidden
> in a world, you know, a silent world where it's not policed. (George, 47, mixed)

While recognising the Internet as a public space ("It's a sort of forum"), George also sees it as

"hidden" and "silent". Other research has explored the public/private paradox of online

engagement (see Turkle, 1995, 2005). This finding fits with how Suler (2004) has explained the

'online disinhibition effect'. Through a combination of factors, including that Internet use is

generally a private and individual experience, people might express different opinions or thoughts

from those they would in other settings and that might be why George conceptualised online

behaviour as situated in a context of 'atypical' freedom from social and legal rules and regulations.

Unrealised in this assumption, however, is that posts and practices online almost always leave a

trail of records that remain a part of Internet archives. This crystallisation of online material

means that racist interactions can linger and continue to haunt those involved.

Of course, George's claim that online sex and dating is an 'unpoliced' world does not address the

multitude of ways in which people manipulate and moderate the behaviour and practices of

themselves and others. This form of self-governance is another major aspect of etiquette that

requires exploration: how do men respond to those who violate their assumptions about what is

appropriate? As we might suppose, the interviews revealed a diversity of responses on this issue.

Some broad styles of response can be summarised, however. The first was the most common; it

comprised simply ignoring the offending user:

> I've often found a profile on *Manhunt* I read and I really wanted to talk to him and then at
> the end it said, 'no Asians', so I won't talk to them. (Daniel, 27, White)

> If you are particularly racist or against a particular type, again, that's someone you tend to
> scroll past. At least in my case. (Corey, 38, White)

Both Daniel and Corey reported engaging in a sort of cultural 'policing' practice that involved

excluding individuals because of a perceived failure to meet (their) standards of etiquette. This

response could be interpreted not only as a form of ethical judgement; it also seems to reveal

particular strategies employed by some participants in constructing their own subject positions in

relation to the ethics of online engagement.

Interestingly, Corey is careful to qualify his reactions as the right thing "in [his] case", which suggests that he sees this response as a largely individual. Again, this is an example of the individual or situational approach to articulating the etiquette of online engagement. I call it situational because, in another instance, Corey also described a confrontational reaction he had to a profile that, again, violated his expectations of etiquette online:

> I guess the one that stands out to me and one that I actually challenged when I saw it when a guy messaged me, his particular quote was, "American guys to the front of the line; Asian guys to the back." And I challenged him about that and I've noticed that he's removed it. Obviously that was really racist and I wasn't impressed. (Corey, 38, White)

Supporting the strategy of ignoring an offending profile, this example demonstrates that some users more actively attempt to influence the behaviour of others online. This quotation provides an example of how social engagement, even in virtual spaces, is never truly un-moderated. Again, this type of response might have been about addressing the inappropriate behaviour of another but it could also have been about asserting a sense of the virtuous self through fulfilling a 'civic' responsibility to respond.

By contrast, other participants could recall being taken to task about their own use of racial discrimination online:

> People have said things like, "Well, what's wrong with Asians?" And, "Why don't you find, what's wrong with me?" type thing. Generally, if someone comes back with anything that's a bit sort of like, antagonistic, I just block it. (Robert, 48, White)

Robert's response to critiques of his discriminatory language was to disengage. For him, appropriate online etiquette should include not harassing or bothering others in their search for partners online. The ability users have to completely remove or 'block' others from their experience of the online space demonstrates one way that these webservices allow (and anticipate) potential conflicts and informal moderation between users (Sternberg, 2012). Even

this ability, however, does not negate the initial criticism. While Robert's choice to disengage was shared by other participants, others chose instead to adjust their online practices in light of criticisms they received.

Summary

Not surprisingly, participants described diverse expectations, perceptions, and responses regarding the etiquette of online sex and dating. These men seemed to have different experiences online and, at times, revealed very little potential for understanding each other's positions. For many men interviewed, their code of online ethics was important only insofar as it did not interfere with the more pressing goal of finding a sexual or romantic match. Some found that a potential conflict between their ethics and their desires could be resolved through careful management of language and expressions of desire or discrimination that sought to avoid offence. Those approaches did not always convince other participants; a kind of ambiguity remained regarding how to approach the articulation and negotiation of racialised desire online. Men demonstrated different techniques for challenging inappropriate conduct online, ranging from passive exclusion to direct confrontation. The impacts of such diverse approaches are not clear; however, many men apparently are interested in the social norms being produced and reproduced online and are sometimes willing to go so far as to police or comment on those norms. This description of the norms and etiquette of online services for meeting men provides useful insights for conceptualising the meanings of race in this context. While it appears that most men are not interested in causing offence or perpetuating racial prejudice, there is a consensus that this nevertheless seems to be occurring. Etiquette operates as a site both for understanding and for negotiating how racialised partner discrimination occurs, and perhaps, for contributing to its normalisation as an everyday, expected part of sex and dating webservices for men.

6.2.4 Managing race and racism: Safety, silence and subtle prejudice online

The three themes discussed so far contribute to understanding how gay and bisexual men who seek partners online conceptualised and negotiated race. However, while this finding is important to the broader contexts in which ideas about race and circulate, additional and more specific perspectives are also critically important to this inquiry.

Conceptualising race and racism

Most participants viewed race as having 'special' or particular meanings. They often took time during interviews to demonstrate how they had debated with themselves about whether to treat race treated differently from other ways of characterising partner preferences online:

> I think it's OK, I saw a lot of profiles that say 'no Asians or no Indians'. I think it's fine, I think it's 100% fine for me. Because I have something in my profile, 'no older than 35 please,' so it's the same. It's just a preference so it's fine. But if they say something bad to me then that's not cool. If they swear at me or do anything that hurts my feelings, that's not cool. (Arc, 25, East Asian)

Several participants contrasted the use of other, less 'controversial', descriptive categories (e.g., age, hair colour) with those related to race, which raises an important question central to this discussion: if it is wrong or inappropriate to exclude men because of their (perceived) race, is it also wrong to exclude them because of their hair colour, age or body type? The counter argument is that if it is permissible to discriminate among partners on one characteristic, is it not then also permissible to discriminate based on others? These arguments are important in understanding the articulation of desire in this context. While comparing race to age or hair colour might oversimplify these issues, it also presents an opportunity to consider how and why men frame race differently. Hair colour, for example, has not (typically) been a source of social marginalisation. In Australia today, it is fair to say that the idea of judging people based on hair

colour is not an important social problem. Age-based discriminations, however, are not as easily

justifiable because ageism is a social issue related to exclusion and misunderstanding. Much

research has found that older people in Australia face forms of social marginalisation, particularly

in the workforce (see, for example, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). Harrison's (2002)

exploration of issues related to ageing and ageism among gay men (and other sexually diverse

populations) in Australia found conflicting evidence that both supported and challenged the

stereotypes of young gay men as ageist and older gay men as lonely. From another perspective,

the idea of age and ageing could actually be seen as one of unification, a shared aspect of the

human experience that we all must navigate The perception of racial difference, on the other

hand, is fixed and remains fixed across one's life. While both age and race may be used by some to

highlight difference, race is unique in that that difference is reproduced permanently. While there

is little doubt that issues relating to age, as well as race, among gay men are complex, the

presence of one (i.e., age-based distinctions) does not excuse the presence of the other (i.e., race-

related distinctions).

The idea that race is a unique or special concept was a common thread woven through

participants' accounts. As discussed, several men compared race to other descriptive categories,

which suggests a commonly held belief that making distinctions among partners based on race

might be interpreted as being *outside* the parameters of racism. This was one strategy of

rationalisation evident in the interviews. Another was making particular or nuanced definitions of

racism, which were frequently characterised by the intent to cause malice:

> To me, racism is, you know . . . OK, like, if you're discriminating against someone, solely
> based on one characteristic about that person, then you can say that person is
> misogynistic or prejudicial or whatever . . . I'm not, like, promoting hate speech, I'm not
> discriminating against you, I'm not disallowing you to do anything or in any way restricting
> your rights or your freedoms. I'm not doing anything negative towards you as a person. I
> have an opinion, I have a belief or I have a preference, whatever, whatever it is. If my

preference is in any way negative towards you, how am I being racist? I think to me racism has to have an element of malice about it. You have to be like, there has to be a point to it. You can't say, "down with Jews, let's put them in a concentration camp." Of course that's being racist. But, you know, I'm not doing anything to these people, and this is why I don't understand it. It's like, racism or whatever . . . if I wasn't hiring you for a job because you're Asian then that is racist. If I bashed you in the street because you're Asian, of course that is being racist. But if I block you on *Grindr* or don't sleep with you . . . how is that racist? (Mike, 22, White)

This participant appears to focus his definition of racism on what could be called *blatant* forms of prejudice and discrimination. As discussed in chapter 2, differences between blatant and subtle forms of racism are important but can be somewhat difficult to distinguish in an online context. References to hate speech, physical violence, employment and concentration camps suggest that Mike views racist behaviour as highly discernible, easily identifiable and flagrantly intolerant. The issue, however, is that subtle forms of racism (which are far more common in Australia today) are, by definition, indirect and hard to identify (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

Research in psychology further complicates the issue by distinguishing between implicit and explicit attitudes (as discussed in chapter 2). Individuals hold implicit attitudes (commonly linked to subtle prejudicial or discriminatory behaviour) subconsciously and therefore do not recognise them as reflective of their beliefs (Dovidio et al., 2002). This research suggests important distinctions for individuals in describing and unpacking the behaviour and perceptions of others. It can also be helpful in developing meaningful definitions of racism and appropriate race-related behaviour. To summarise, it might be that men are saying or doing things that could be defined as racist without recognising them as such, which builds upon some participants' beliefs that ignorance (and not malice) drives racially insensitive behaviour online.

Unintentional racism is not a new idea. Valuable research and scholarship – particularly in the fields of counselling and education – has explored how people might, without explicitly or

consciously intending to, engage in a manner construed as racist. An important component of this

research has helped people to recognise and challenge unintentional racism in themselves

(Hyland, 2005; Moule, 2009). Research such as that by Hyland (2005) interpreted this concept as

one that assumes and validates a primary perspective of Whiteness. In common, participants did

indeed attribute racist behaviour as a function of ignorance or thoughtlessness, rather than

deliberate or intended racial prejudice:

> I think 80, 90 per cent of the time it's not racist behaviour, it's just ignorant behaviour. So I don't necessarily think these people are actually racist at heart. I just think their use of certain language is racist or has racist, racist sort of undertones. (Maurie, 24, Southeast Asian)

Again, we see a participant actively constructing a personal definition of racism here to make

sense of this phenomenon in an online sex and dating context. For Maurie, this process involves

an attempt to interpret the actions of others. By separating the act (i.e., using language with racist

undertones) from the notion of someone who is "racist at heart", Maurie constructs a conceptual

distinction between racist beliefs and racist practices. I find this to be an interesting distinction; I

certainly agree that many people will, at some point, do or say something inadvertently that could

be interpreted as 'racist', without consistently holding racist values or beliefs. Maurie also seems

to acknowledge that using concepts of 'racism' and 'racist' should not be done lightly, as that

action involves implications for both the accuser and the accused. Mike summarised this issue

rather neatly:

> Look, you don't want to be called a racist, nobody wants that. And I have been called a racist before and I was like, no I'm not a racist I'm just . . . I'm not going to fuck around. I'm not going to be like, "yeah, maybe," and lead someone on. I'm not like that, I'm not going to lead someone on to thinking that they have a chance when they don't. (Mike, 22, White)

The idea that "you don't want to be called a racist" was shared among participants; it explains to

some degree the distance men put between their online identities and this powerful label. I

observed this 'distancing' among many of the men interviewed. They described some form of

racialised desire and in the ways in which men talked about racism through the profile text

analysed in chapter 4. Other research has examined strategies that Australians use to reject the

label of 'racism' while engaging in racial discrimination publicly, such as criticizing 'political

correctness' while embracing ideals of 'speaking the truth' (Rapley, 1998). Participants commonly

used the notion that an individual was simply being 'honest' by describing race-based partner

discrimination to justify this practice. This approach was bolstered by the value men placed on

efficiency and clarity online and demonstrates how these two concepts (discussed earlier in

relation to etiquette and abundance) were used to rationalise discriminatory practices. It also

demonstrates how many men regarded race-based categories as 'natural' and clear ways of

marking distinction. Chapter 2 highlighted the view among some researchers that racial categories

are biologically superficial ways of marking difference (see Hacking, 2005; Lock & Nguyen, 2011;

Pollock, 2012) but among this sample, they appear to maintain their significance for marking

different types of people.

Racial experiences and finding partners online

Thus far, I have discussed the meanings that men ascribe to racism and the particular ways that

they define racism. Another relevant issue is the impacts or effects that experiences related to

race can have on individuals looking for sex or dates online. Participants described a wide range of

experiences related to race, ranging from benign to very aggressive. Their responses were also

varied. Before discussing specifics, however, it is essential to identify some of the broad influences

on how race is enacted and experienced online. The first is the way that the men identified and

negotiated the racial hierarchy that appears to operate among men online:

> It's pretty common to see profiles that say, "only looking for White, Middle Eastern,
> Europeans." So there is this two-tiered thing where the Western, anywhere west of

> Turkey is a plus and anywhere east of Turkey is a minus. You never see a profile that says, "looking for Indians." Even other Indians won't say that. (Corey, 26, White)

Corey's suggestion that men characterised as 'Western' enjoy greater popularity online than those who could be characterised as 'Eastern' is also supported by the survey findings: men racialised as White were most commonly described as desirable among Australian gay men. Many participants believed that White men enjoyed a certain privilege online while other groups, such as Indian and Asian men, faced particular challenges associated with their racial identity. Corey even hints here at the potential for internalising these generalisations about racial groups: "Even other Indians won't say that". This aspect of how racialised partner discrimination can operate online is both fascinating and troubling.

Internalised racism is the suggestion that an individual has accepted the belief that his or her own racial group is inferior to others (Pyke, 2010). This complex concept requires more examination than this thesis will allow. It has been discussed in literature on sexual racism among gay men (Smith, 2012) and I note it here because it was discussed by several participants: "

> So it's, it's just unspoken rule I suppose. Like this, this Asian guy that I, I've actually met two Asians and they despise Asians. Yeah. And they're living in Melbourne so I just find it sad. (Wei, 30, East Asian)

While it makes sense that the influence of racial discourses in Australia would also influence the minority groups they marginalise, the information I collected is too limited to permit the depth of examination that this complex issue demands. What is clear, however, is that racialised discourses and their expression play a significant role in shaping how men engage with sex and dating webservices. Also, there appear to be different implications for White and non-White men.

Another interesting aspect of Corey's discussion on race was his reduction of these extremely complex social dynamics to an Eastern/Western binary (i.e., "there is this two-tiered thing where

the Western, anywhere west of Turkey is a plus and anywhere east of Turkey is a minus"). Several

other participants used the same conceptual device and some men even began describing cultural

ideals relating to gay men, in the context of particular assumptions and stereotypes of Australian

nationalism:

> If someone was brought up in Australia obviously they are going to be much more
> Australian in their attitude. Even if they've been here for a long time but were born
> overseas. If they're straight off the plane in Sydney and they've come from a country
> that's not Western Europe or America they've got some ideas which are so different to
> ours, just who they're like and they way they dress. If I am going to be attracted to an
> Asian person it's like a Westernized Asian person, you know with a Western accent and a
> bit more savvy about Western culture. I work in a bar in the city with lots of travellers and
> the ones who are completely clueless about Western, Australian, just mannerisms and
> things I don't find that attractive. The ones who are switched on, I find that attractive.
> (Axel, 26, White)

As with the use of racialised stereotypes, it appeared in many cases as though participants were

making assumptions about what it means to be Australian. They appeared to do that uncritically,

failing to recognise the vastly different views that different individuals and groups might hold

regarding what it means to be Australian. This finding resonates with arguments by Hage (1998)

about the ways in which a nationalistic identity can be used to excuse or even encourage racialised

prejudice and discrimination. Such discourses are prominent characteristics of 'new' or 'modern'

forms of racism, as touched upon in chapter 2.

Indeed, several participants described a particularly 'Australian' view on certain racial identities:

> Corey: I actually explained this to a friend a couple weeks ago, there's something about
> the Australian psyche that sees Asians in particular, and particular in gay men, as almost
> not human. It's almost like they're sub-human.
>
> *Interviewer: Do you care to speculate on why this feels to you to be a part of the Australian
> psyche?*
>
> Corey: It's historical. There used to be the whole White Australia policy around only
> letting White people live here or immigrate here and Aboriginals aren't counted in the
> census and that sort of thing. (Corey, 38, White)

Corey drew a strong connection between a historical view on race in Australia and broader

attitudes and perceptions today. Historical and political events continue to influence the

production of contemporary social discourses of race and nationalism. For example, a large body

of research has questioned the influence of key and controversial events in Australian history,

such as the White Australia Policy and the rapid rise of the One Nation political party (discussed in

chapter 2). There is nothing to suggest that the world of online sex and dating would be immune

to the influence of such events, which is a reminder of the role that broad national discourses can

play in shaping how people engage – sometimes very personally – with concepts of race. The

online domain is, in effect, simply another space in which discourses of race and nationalism are

(re)produced. The question that rises, however, is what effects do those discourses have on the

men who experience or observe practices of racial discrimination in this context?

Several men provided evocative descriptions of their experiences of racialised discrimination

online and explained how this had shaped the ways in which they chose to engage with services

after that point:

> In a way, I, for me it tends to work better if someone messages me first. And I know that's
> a bit of a protective mechanism for me because I just don't like the, I just don't like the
> feeling of being rejected and almost always it's because of my ethnicity that, you know,
> it's just easier if someone, someone's kind of open to possibilities and it's just me first
> rather than me messaging someone who's not so open. (Charles, 21, Southeast Asian)

Styles of engagement, as discussed, are as diverse as the men who use these webservices and they

can serve different purposes. In this case, Charles waits to be contacted before he opens up to

other men online; that strategy removes the risk of rejection he faces in messaging someone first.

This strategy could be attributed to an assumption by Charles that he might be rejected based on

his perceived race or ethnicity. This form of protective strategy provides some evidence for the

conceptualisation of these online spaces as 'culturally unsafe', in that they do not maintain the

respect, dignity and identity of those who participate (Williams, 1999). It could be argued that the

men who make up these online communities have failed to create a space that is inclusive of the

diversity they attract.

Other participants, however, were far more active and aggressive in their responses to perceived

racial inequality and described highly confrontational interactions:

> Hing: I've been sort of attacked on *Grindr* once, which is pretty funny. Some, oh yeah, this
> is funny. I, I don't know, I was just like on it, messaging spree and I just totally messaged
> everyone than one guy responded. I think I said, 'Hi,' and one guy responded and said,
> saying, 'Fuck off Asian!' And I, and then I completely turned and then we had this sort of
> spin-out so I called him, what did I call him? I called him a fat mother-fucker, drop the
> Ewok 'cause he had some sort of goatee and then I was...yeah, then he kept saying, 'You
> dirty little Asian,' And all this sort of stuff.

> *Interviewer: So you sort of said it back, some of his own medicine?*

> Hing: I just sort of threw it back at him.

> *Interviewer: Did you feel at all upset by that interaction?*

> Hing: Yeah. I did, I did. (Hing, 24, East Asian)

This account is perhaps one of the most explicit examples of racist behaviour described by the

interview participants. Therefore, we shall examine several elements of his story. First, unlike

Charles' reaction, Hing's approach was directly confrontational. My research suggests that this

kind of highly charged conflict is not common on sex and dating webservices. However, clearly, at

times racist behaviour is so flagrant and insulting that it cannot be overlooked. The second

element is the response of the other man. Although I have suggested that men who engage in

racially discriminatory behaviour online often do so out of ignorance or thoughtlessness, some

men bring their racist attitudes quite deliberately into these virtual spaces. Hing's story is clearly

an example of the fact that this behaviour does occur. It is worth reiterating, however, that these

direct and confrontational forms of racism were quite rare relative to more covert and hard-to-

identify forms discussed above.

As further evidence, another participant described a similarly negative experience and his friend's

subsequent reaction to it:

> Arc: There was one guy though who really pissed me off, he said something really bad to me.
>
> *Interviewer:* What was that?
>
> Arc: Something like, something about my race. I'm from China so something really – I don't want to say it again – but something really, really nasty. It's just one guy so it's fine. *Interviewer: Let me just see if I understand, you were talking to this guy and he said something rude to you about your race?*
>
> Arc: Yes
>
> *Interviewer: And how did you respond? Did you message him back or what did you do?*
>
> Arc: I just ignored the message. I just ignored the message, yeah. *Interviewer: I'm curious about how you reacted to that type of interaction?*
>
> Arc: After that thing happened and during the next few weeks I didn't use Gaydar at all - it happened on a website called Gaydar – so I didn't use Gaydar at all up until the next few weeks. I really felt not good and I talked to my friends and he said 'forget it'. Eventually, I got through that but I really, really felt bad after the next few weeks.
>
> *Interviewer: So one of the ways you responded was avoiding those services for awhile?*
>
> Arc: Yes
>
> *Interviewer: But you have friends you could talk to about this sort of thing?*
>
> Arc: Yes
>
> *Interviewer: Had they had similar experiences?*
>
> Arc: I think they do, I think they do. But I think it's kind of personal so they didn't tell me what happened but I think they do have the same experiences.
>
> *Interviewer: So this isn't something you talk to your friends about a lot or in any detail?*

Arc: I talked to him about all the details and he just said don't let this make you sad, or something like that.

Interviewer: But he, your friend, didn't share his own personal experiences did he?

Arc: No, no. They said similar experiences and they chose to ignore this. They told me that I should do the same thing, just ignore those messages. (Arc, 25, East Asian)

Like Hing, Arc experienced a traumatic online attack as a result of assumptions made about his racial identity. He responded by avoiding the use of the sex and dating webservice altogether. He also discussed the experience with friends, demonstrating that he had access to social support. As past research reveals, social support networks are very important in countering negative experiences of racism (Lee & Ahn, 2011). Interestingly, the suggested response from his friend was to adopt a kind of stoicism in the face of these experiences, which is what he seems to have done. Like other participants, he also described a response that involved a modification of his own behaviour, rather than insisting on a change in others' behaviours. This approach to negotiating discriminatory experiences harkens back to findings from the profile analysis. They suggested that men from racial minority groups might be less likely than others to challenge or critique racial concepts online. While this response might help to protect potentially vulnerable men from the risk of further hurt, it might also contribute to a more general 'silencing' of the issue of racism on sex and dating webservices for men. Another effect could be the withdrawal of men from minority backgrounds from the services, therefore creating a kind of unwilling 'complicity' in the existing social order being maintained.

The distinctions that participants appeared to draw between blatant and subtle forms of racial discrimination are also important in making sense of individual experiences. For example, Hing and Arc both shared examples of blatantly racist behaviour from other webservice users. However, while focussing on these extreme examples is tempting, they do not appear to represent

most men's experiences online. Far more commonly, participants described a 'sense' or 'feeling' that they were being rejected, rather than having any concrete evidence:

> I don't know if that's a function of race but sometimes I can feel, I feel like there's an underlying sort of, I don't know, attitude that you can kind of tell when they're not interested in you based on race. (Maurie, 24, Southeast Asian)

This quotation from Maurie is an excellent example of how someone might experience a subtle form of racial discrimination online. Although men might be disinterested for a variety of reasons (completely unrelated to race), the lingering and unshakeable sense that rejection is race-based characterises how many participants spoke about their experiences online. While it might be difficult to label the subtle behaviour of others, Maurie's experience reveals the complexity of racialised discourses in Australia. Given the prominence of subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination, the real challenge facing gay online sex and dating communities seems to lie not in challenging specific incidences of blatantly racist behaviour but in finding ways to question and change attitudes that might be unintentionally guiding how men understand and engage with partner selection online and offline.

Summary

This section has explored many of the issues relating to race that were discussed in interviews with participants. While I have questioned the notion of race as a 'special' category, I am convinced that for many gay men it holds a very particular and distinctive place in their experiences of searching for sexual or romantic partners online. Participants were typically defensive, critical and indifferent to the use of race as an expression of discrimination. However, we cannot ignore the personal responses to the influence of its use on attitudes and practices. While the question of 'what constitutes racism?' might not be easily answered, much can be gained from attempting to understand how men articulate and negotiate the meanings of race and racism for themselves.

Through unpacking these constructions, we begin to sense how individual practice is rationalised

and ultimately consolidated as a broader set of social norms and expectations. Somewhat

independent of these definitions, however, are the ways in which experiences related to race can

profoundly influence those who experience them. While some reflected on the hurt they felt,

others described a quiet shift to more withdrawn online practices. These behavioural changes

many culminate in what seems like an unsolvable problem. Nevertheless, many participants

willingly challenged their own ideas, an approach which provides encouragement for possible

directions forward.

6.2.5 Conclusions

This chapter discussed four themes identified in the interviews with gay men. Many candidly

revealed the challenges of finding compatible partners online and the additional frustrations

associated with navigating a concept as socially charged as race. The context-relative themes of

accessibility, abundance and etiquette remind us of the size and complexity of many of these

online communities. They also help to provide a framework for understanding and exploring

issues of race and racism in these settings. Accessibility brings together a diversity of men into a

shared online space. That issue alone could explain some of the issues of racial discrimination and

insensitivity reported by participants. It may also explain the vast abundance of men who use

these sex and dating webservices. The context seems to demand and normalise a model of the

online dating consumer who is savvy, efficient and clear about his interests and disinterests

(including race). The idea that there is a 'normal' way to behave online forms the bedrock of the

expectations regarding etiquette that regulate both individual and collective online practice, even

though such etiquette appears to be a highly individualised concept. Finally, through focusing on

race and racism in these interviews, the fourth theme explores questions about how these

concepts are articulated and negotiated online and how they are shaped by broader social,

political and historical forces. These questions permit no easy answers; however, some gay men

appear to be willing to reflect critically and to challenge their own and others' assumptions that

racialised partner discrimination is appropriate or justified, whatever arguments might be offered

to justify it. The next chapter discusses the findings across the research stages with links to the

broader political, social and historical influences in Australia, along with suggestions for future

strategies and research.

Chapter 7

Discussion

This is the concluding chapter of this thesis. As I have shown, the articulation and negotiation of race and racism within online sex and dating communities for gay men are complex and contested issues. This research explored these concepts, providing new insights and identifying further issues for investigation. Through a mixed methods research approach comprising a content analysis of online profiles, a national online survey of attitudes and experiences and in-depth interviews with the men who use sex and dating webservices, this project represents the first comprehensive overview of the many dimensions of race as experienced by gay men in Australia who use online sex and dating communities. Although this thesis has explored race as a feature of sex and dating online, the insights described here focus primarily on the issue of 'sexual racism'. Importantly, this means not only the behaviour of individuals but also the collective meanings produced by the communities who use sex and dating webservices and the discourses that shape those meanings.

This chapter reviews four important findings from this research. First, although sexual racism online can – like other forms of prejudice – be expressed subtly or blatantly, it is more pervasive and, arguably, most potent in its subtle form. Second, the articulation of racial (and, in turn, racist) concepts is largely normalised in online sex and dating between men, which relates to and is reinforced by the subtle expression of this form of prejudice. Third, this research highlights that, for some participants at least, the practice of racialised partner discrimination appears to represent or even to have become indistinguishable from the expression of an ethic of sexual freedom. The fourth and final insight is that examining the use of a 'sexual freedom' argument as

a justification for articulating racialised forms of prejudice reveals a great deal about the politics of sex and race among gay men in Australia. This chapter also explores methodological implications of this research and considers future directions for research and intervention.

7.1 The subtlety of online sexual racism: Revelations of a pervasive issue

The analyses conducted for this study suggest that expressions and experiences of online 'sexual racism' are pervasively subtle in nature. The characterization of subtle prejudice as "cool, distant and indirect" (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, pp. 58) fits aptly with how many men experience but also express sexual racism online. Those who experience sexual racism commonly describe it as a feeling or a suspicion, while those who express sexual racism often report creative strategies to disguise their behaviour and avoid blatantly racist actions. Thus, often experiences of sexual racism cannot easily be substantiated with evidence because subtle prejudice is, by definition, covert and hard to identify. This inability to produce 'hard' evidence of racial prejudice may lead some men to believe that they are being oversensitive or imagining prejudice where none exists. In some of the earlier writing on this subject, Ayres summarised the issue succinctly: "What is so difficult about this form of exclusion is its elusiveness. I think, 'Maybe it's just me, maybe I'm being paranoid.' After all, everyone has to deal with rejection" (1999, p. 90). Online, if a man does not reply to your message, is it because he is 'turned off' by something written on your profile or is it because of assumptions he making about your racial identity? These doubts and ambiguities – not to mention the various methods that men use to solicit and reject each other's advances online – formed a consistent theme in this research, supporting the characterisation of sexual racism online as 'elusive'.

While ambiguity might mask the expression of sexual racism online, this research has collected sufficient data to support the thesis that men make racialised distinctions even if they are not being explicit about them. In a sense, this finding typifies the notion of subtle prejudice. Survey responses, for example, suggest that many men make distinctions based on race. Yet only a minority of the profiles sampled in stage 1 of this project contained explicit examples of racial discrimination. Covert forms of exclusion present significant challenges to men who look for sex or dates online and the communities they create. One such challenge was identified during the interviews, with men of minority racial backgrounds describing the types of protective strategies they employed in response to experiences of prejudice. Some strategies, such as quitting or taking a break from online sex and dating, represent a direct reaction to experiences of prejudice. Others, such as choosing to wait for messages from others rather than sending messages out, could be seen as quiet adjustments to behaviour in response to the subtle forms of exclusion I have described.

The interview analysis in the previous chapter touched upon the notion of cultural safety (or a lack thereof) as a way to understand these strategies. I return to this idea here to demonstrate the pervasiveness, influence and effect of subtle sexual racism. If we consider Williams' (1999) ideas regarding 'cultural safety', these online environments can be seen to be 'unsafe' for some men because they do not equally respect the identities of all of the men who make use of them. In response to this lack of safety, some men from minority backgrounds may alter their behaviour to guard themselves from the potential for discrimination or intolerance. Not only is this type of reaction markedly different from the experiences of the White men who took part in this study but it also reinforces the finding that some men from minority backgrounds experience stress

and/or discomfort while looking for partners online in anticipation of the *potential* for experiencing racial prejudice.

Subtle expressions of sexual racism are also related to how particular norms of engagement are produced, adopted and maintained by the men who comprise these communities. These norms are typically organised around a logic of White desire and the privilege that White men seem to have to define what is desirable in this setting. These norms can be maintained partly because the subtle expression of racism and discrimination hides evidence of this privilege in favour of the dominant myth that online, all men are equal. There is reflexivity in this relationship, however: not only do these subtle expressions reinforce the privilege of a White identity, but such privilege also drives the subtle expressions of prejudice online. Myths of equality and sameness seem to flourish online, largely because 'White' typically exists as an invisible racial identity, supported by the broader dominance of the Anglo-Caucasian identity in Australian society. As an example of how Whiteness is maintained as a privileged identity online, the profile analysis revealed that White webservice users rarely describe their own racial identity in their online profiles. Rather, they are more likely to specify their likes and dislikes regarding the racial identity of others instead of engaging in self-description. By contrast, for men from minority racial groups, the opposite is true. The dominance of Whiteness is expressed at both individual and group levels in these settings. In turn, this expression seems to dictate the terms of engagement, which further reinforces the existing racial power structure. These relationships are circular and reflexive.

This research has revealed a great deal about the connection between expressions of racism and the organisation of social norms. It also highlights the different challenges between confronting blatant and subtle expressions of prejudice. It is far simpler to ask men to remove racialised

language from their online profiles than it is to shift the broad attitudes that inform these practices. The pervasive subtlety of this form of prejudice is a reminder that this is not simply a problem of individuals violating social etiquette or small pockets of intolerance. Rather, it is an indication of the broad, low-level, everyday racism that permeates Australian society.

The subtle and often unremarkable nature of online sexual racism explored in this research suggests that some of the inequalities observed are being unintentionally reproduced. It was clear in the participant interviews that most men who engaged in racialised partner discrimination actively defended their right to do so and did not in any way see themselves as engaged in a form of prejudice. Often they defended their practices in the name of sexual liberty (a matter to which I return later in this chapter) and articulated personalised understandings of racism to fit with their particular practices, as explored in chapter 6. I return to this idea here because it illustrates the importance of a distinction between subtle and blatant prejudice, particularly given that some men seem to recognise racism only in its most blatant forms. Given the difficulty in identifying subtle prejudice (and because White men are significantly less likely to experience or be affected by it than non-White men are), it may be easier for these men to uncritically reproduce norms of inequality or engage in deliberate practices which they believe are acceptable but turn out to be harmful to others. While this speculation does not excuse expressions of racism, it reinforces Bargh's (1999) argument that efforts to address inequality and stereotyping need to address the social and the cultural processes in which discriminatory practices are formed and sustained, rather than simply addressing individual motivations or behaviours.

This section has focused largely on conceptualising sexual racism as a subtle form of prejudice. It is also possible to speculate about what this form of expression might reveal about the tenor of

online sex and dating communities. A relative absence of blatantly expressed sexual racism suggests that many gay men view such practices as unacceptable or at least recognise that other people may see them as such and modify their behaviour as a result. Although such a response addresses only blatant forms of prejudice, it is nevertheless a step towards shifting the attitudes of men who use online services. Further, decreased exposure to explicitly discriminatory language might have a positive impact on the online experiences of men from minority racial groups. Additionally, the evidence provided in this research of some men having no tolerance for the expression of blatant prejudice of this kind suggests that these communities might be willing to engage in a cultural policing of racist practices, or at least the forms that can readily identified. However, we need broader recognition of how diverse the online experiences of men can actually be in these environments if we are to challenge their enduring myths of sameness and equality.

7.2 Negotiating sexual racism as a normalised feature of sex and dating online

The normalisation of race and, in turn, racism online is the second key insight developed from this research. For the majority of men, racial concepts are a normalised feature of sex and dating online, which is influenced by and influences the subtlety of how racism is expressed. Subtlety and normalisation are closely related concepts that work together to perpetuate racialised discourses online. Not only does normalisation make it possible to ignore the role of race, it also makes it possible to accept and perpetuate the use of racialised concepts as integral to the practice of seeking partners online. Part of this normalisation is the acceptance of racial categories as an unproblematic and undeniable function of seeking sex and dating online, and, potentially, of articulating attraction more generally. This research has identified some of the creative strategies that men employ to negotiate the normalisation of these concepts online. It also explored how such strategies contribute to the maintenance of that position. The relationship of these

strategies to normalisation is not a linear one. In the next section, I explore some of the different

ways that men's online behaviours and attitudes interact reflexively with the enduring

normalisation of race and racism in online sex and dating communities.

Establishing and maintaining race and racism as features of online sex and dating relies on

contributions from the men who make up these communities. Across the research, I found ample

evidence for the diverse and creative ways that men's behaviours – inadvertent or otherwise –

maintain the significance of racial categories as a way of thinking about desire and desirability. It

is interesting to note that responses gathered through the survey and interviews stages suggest

that most men are not discomfited by the forms of racial discrimination that they witness or

experience online. While I am not suggesting that men do not experience frustration, guilt,

concern, anger or sadness in light of such experiences, responses to online sexual racism seem

best characterised, in this research at least, by a sense of resignation. Thus, while the practices

associated with racialised partner discrimination are not without their critics, the majority of

webservice users surveyed seemed to view their expression as an expected and accepted part of

how sex and dating works online and, in some cases, to even promote it as an effective tool for

making distinctions between or among potential partners. Not only does this provide evidence of

the pervasive normalisation of racialised concepts in this context, but it also reveals how these

forms of resignation, acceptance and expectation continue to strengthen its practice.

The normalisation of race as a feature of online sex and dating is also explicitly strengthened by

those who defend racialised partner discrimination. Each stage of the research provided evidence

that, although they are in the minority, some men who use these services explicitly value and

defend their right to articulate racialised preferences in pursuing sex and dating partners. In

chapter 1, for example, I quoted a Sydney-based commentator who, in an online editorial piece, criticised arguments against sexual racism (Matheson, 2012). The central theme of that article appears also to capture how some of the men who participated in this research thought about these issues, that is, by reference to cultural ideals of personal choice and sexual freedom. While I further explore this line of defence in the next section, I raise it here to demonstrate an important, albeit somewhat obvious, point: when men publicly defend the use of race-related sex and dating practices, either through their online profiles or other media, they contribute to the normalisation of those practices. This is undoubtedly a strategy through which race and, consequently, racism become further enmeshed in how gay men think about and articulate their desires online.

A second way to think about the normalisation observed in this research is by reflecting on how men manage concepts of race and racism in relation to their online experience. Most men seem to accept that race will feature in their search for partners online; this research has documented a range of creative strategies they use to locate and defend a place for themselves and others in relation to this racialised space. For some men, this negotiation means actively engaging in race-related practices. During the profile analysis, for example, when men talked about race, it was most commonly as a descriptive category applied either to themselves or to other people. During the survey, approximately one in ten men reported practising some form of racialised partner discrimination. From the interviews, it was apparent that men of diverse racial backgrounds were articulating racial concepts to define who they were and/or what they wanted. Using racial descriptors, particularly to articulate what men find to be desirable (or not), suggests an acceptance of race as a category with which people can (and should) be defined. In doing so, men demonstrated the normalisation of this practice for other users online and contributed to its ongoing reproduction and relevance.

Another strategy used to negotiate the normalisation of sexual racism online was the modification of one's own behaviour. As discussed in the previous section, examples of how men changed their own behaviour featured prominently in the interviews. Several participants described how they quit or took a break from using sex and dating webservices following an adverse experience or, tellingly, following prolonged exposure to the subtle forms of exclusion described in the previous section. Instead of challenging the practices of others, some men choose instead to adjust their own practices or to withdraw from the online world. While these responses can be interpreted as a legitimate response to the relative lack of 'safety' in these online environments, they also inadvertently contribute to the normalisation of racism online through silencing or removing voices that might expose or critique these practices. If men who witness or experience racism withdraw from online sex and dating communities, this reaction potentially affects the composition of those communities and further entrenches existing inequalities. This does not (necessarily) mean that those who experience sexual racism have a personal obligation to challenge the racist practices they witness or are subjected to. However, clearly these online communities maintain a particular, homogeneous, social order through the exclusion of critical voices, particularly those of men of minority racial backgrounds.

Nevertheless, while most participants seemed to accept the normalisation of race and racism online, some articulated explicit challenges. Some survey respondents reported strong negative attitudes towards the expression of race as a discriminatory category online. Analysis of profiles in stage 1 revealed several examples of men publicly challenging and condemning sexual racism. It is important to recognise these positions and the men who adopted them because, although they were a minority, they represented an important segment of men seeking partners online who

contributed a dissenting perspective to the normalisation of racial prejudice. Outside of this

research, several examples of online campaigns similarly critique discriminatory online practices. I

have discussed the website 'Sexual Racism Sux'; others, such as 'Douchebags of *Grindr*' and 'Stop

Racism and Homophobia on *Grindr*', name and shame profiles that include racial discrimination on

the webservice, *Grindr*. With visitors invited to post comments on such profiles, these websites

foster a sense of online community based on rejecting the idea of normalised racism online. This

approach is reminiscent of Sternberg's (2012) comments about the self-regulating nature of online

etiquette. This type of reactive strategy, however, really only targets blatant examples of racial

prejudice online. Following on the discussion earlier in this chapter, blatant prejudice forms only a

small part of the expression and experience of online sexual racism. While public shaming

potentially sends a message about the acceptability of such behaviour, it is also a reminder of the

greater challenges inherent in bringing about changes to the assumptions and stereotypes that

underpin racial prejudice. I have not, however, encountered a campaign, website, or profile text

that has recognised that racial categories are extremely arbitrary and unreliable tools for marking

or understanding differences among groups of people. Although some may critique racist

practices, they do not typically question underlying assumptions about racial difference and in

failing to do so, they further reinforce its normalisation. The questionable significance of these

categories remains a largely unresearched issue related to the expression of race and racism

online and is one that could help shift the value some men place on making and accepting racial

distinctions as a normative feature of online communities.

The normalisation of sexual racism online raises important questions regarding the implications of

sexual racism for men who look for partners online. Although some might challenge these

practices and confront those who knowingly or unknowingly reproduce prejudice, the majority of

men appear to be resigned to, to defend, or even to encourage the expression of race-related

concepts in the online sex and dating world. What messages does this send? Young gay men are

increasingly reliant on the Internet as an information source regarding sex, identity and

community. If they observe instances of blatant or subtle racial discrimination, there is a serious

risk that those practices could remain enculturated in those community settings. Further, men

who are exposed to messages that suggest their racial group is less attractive or desirable than

others may begin to internalise those ideas, harming their self-esteem, body image and senses of

self-worth. These are examples of how accepting or overlooking racialised partner discrimination

(and accompanying forms of racism) as a normal and even unavoidable component of online sex

and dating cultures can harm men who form a part of these communities.

7.3 Sexual racism and sexual liberty

One of the most common arguments employed in the defence of racialised partner discrimination

is that an individual has a right to make decisions about whom they want to pursue as a sexual or

romantic partner. As noted in chapter 1, this type of rationale has appeared in editorial

commentaries on the issue and was demonstrated through data and information from each stage

of the research. The profile analysis, for example, revealed several versions of this argument in

men's profiles. Significantly, the line 'just a preference', after which this project was named,

extends this underlying notion that choosing men based on racial categories is 'just' a matter of

personal taste. Although most would agree that we should have the right to decide whom we

share our time and bodies with, the libertarian line of reasoning (see Weeks, 2003) employed to

explain and defend racialised partner discrimination fails to recognise some important aspects and

implications of this argument. It also reveals some assumptions made by men regarding how

racism is defined and what constitutes racist practice. Not only does this insight expand upon the

distinction between subtle and blatant forms of prejudice but it also reveals some of the broader

politics of race and sex expressed throughout this thesis. The following section explores the

different ways that men define and defend a practice that some people see as racist.

In exploring this insight, it is first necessary to deconstruct the notion of sexual liberty or choice,

which is the idea that an individual has a right to make decisions about whom they are

romantically or sexually involved (as well as the ways they express themselves sexually). This idea

is highly contentious. For example, Weeks (2003) notes that for some people sexual liberty is "a

(perhaps *the*) key to social freedom" (p. 119) and that it is a concept with convoluted historical

and ideological links to capitalism, socialism and, of course, religion. This thesis research,

particularly the interviews, clearly revealed that sexual liberty represented an important and

deeply held ideal for many gay men. It was rarely questioned. Such attachment is explained (at

least partly) by the legacy of sexual repression. Many gay men are aware that this is still a time

when citizens are not permitted to love openly whomever they chose. The ideal of sexual liberty is

therefore strongly constituted in the parallel movement of gay liberation, which was itself a

reaction to the repressive regulation of homosexuality in social, medical, political and legal

spheres. In Australia, hostile medical and legal approaches to homosexuality were catalysts for

the gay rights movement during the 1970s and activism contributed to a shift in public opinion on

these issues, mirroring similar shifts elsewhere in the world (Reynolds, 2002). Because of this

history of regulation, activism and shifting social mores, the notion of sexual freedom has become

a powerful value and ideal for many gay men regarding their sexual and romantic lives and an

indicator of their place in broader communities and societies.

While I do not wish to downplay the significance of this hard-won ideal, as a defence of racialised

partner discrimination, sexual liberty and its links to a rhetoric of choice is limited on several

fronts. First, it does not address the impact that exercising one's sexual freedom can have on

other people. Every stage of this research revealed evidence that the way participants invoked

racial categories to define their sexual interests could be harmful to others. In the interviews, for

example, many men described distress and hurt felt at being rejected on the basis of their

perceived racial identity. They also highlighted the enduring sense of exclusion that then

permeated the online experiences of men who had been racially discriminated against. Previous

research has also suggested that experiencing racial prejudice, either online or in person, can

cause harm to individual well-being (Tynes et al., 2008; Sinclair et al., 2012). Further, we know

that being exposed to this type of cultural negativity can lead men to internalise the belief that

their racial group is less attractive or desirable than others (Ayres, 1999; Smith, 2012). These

examples of potential effects offer a compelling argument against the acceptance of racialised

partner discrimination. In addition, they also challenge a defence of this practice based on sexual

liberty. The irony is that the careless or carefree articulation of desire, which some may feel is

their right within a modern framework of sexual politics, may, in fact, contribute to reducing or

limiting the sexual freedom of others.

The second point that the sexual liberty argument fails to address is revealed through a

consideration of the online survey data. The ways in which men reported racialised forms of

attraction suggest deeply entrenched patterns that privilege some racial identities over others in

the Australian context. This finding was triangulated and confirmed across the three stages of this

project. It points to a complex but persistent series of patterns in the expression of desire among

men, including the influence of historical social forces. Is it an accident that historically regulated

and persecuted racial groups in Australia also tend to be those ranked by men as the least attractive? This relationship appears to be more than a coincidence. Not only does the evidence that this research provides of these persistent inequalities challenge the use of sexual freedom as a defence for racialised partner discrimination but it also reveals the inherent limits to the ideal of 'sexual freedom' in the first place. The reproduction of racial hierarchies – to which racialised partner discrimination contributes – may actually come to represent the *antithesis* of sexual freedom because it points to the imposition of broader social discourses on sexual and romantic arenas of life. If men are merely responding to social dictates that suggest some racial groups are better than others, can that really be described as freedom? The suggestion that racialised partner discrimination is 'just' an example of exercising choice, therefore, ignores that few aspects of our behaviour are actually 'free' of social inequities. Many people would acknowledge that, in Australia and elsewhere, racial inequality endures and spaces that may seem private, such as a bedroom or a bathhouse, are certainly not immune to its influence. Recognising such a connection is a pivotal theme of this research. This recognition also creates an opportunity for men who use online services to meet other men to reflect more critically on the ways in which they form and articulate their sexual and romantic desires.

In the USA, some have perceived challenges to the articulation of racism in sex and dating contexts as an affront to sexual freedom (Teunis, 2007). It appears that a similar struggle is playing out among gay and bisexual men in Australia. While this research does not intend to apply labels like 'racist' or 'racism' to condemn particular people or practices, identifying the ways in which this specific form of prejudice is expressed and the implications of these expressions can contribute important insights and reflections on how 'sexual freedom' is enacted. It can also examine how it could or should be, i.e., what are the potential and desirable alternatives to current practices? If

men were to reflect more critically on the formation and expression of their desires, they might realise the profound limits to the notion of sexual liberty, particularly in the ways that they express respect to others. Further, racialised forms of attraction impose particular ideas about desire that might deny men opportunities to form connections with others. Of course, some men actively challenge their own and other people's assumptions in this regard. Again, although this critical group remains in the minority, contributions to these communities through public forums could encourage others to rethink their own desires, or at least, their expressions of them. As discussed in the interview analysis in chapter 6, men reported that their opinions on these issues were evolving. Such a perspective might indicate a slow, uneven shift in attitudes. I hope that this research will contribute to contemporary understandings of and responses to these issues and inspire researchers to explore them further.

The tension that appears to exist between expressions of sexual racism and expressions of sexual liberty represents a quandary. How do individuals and communities understand and manage these conflicts between often deeply rooted ideas and ideals? Sexuality liberty is problematic only when it becomes a totalising discourse; when universal access to such freedom is assumed, it diminishes our ability to identify and reflect upon the power relationships that shape men's diverse experiences of looking for partners online. As discussed earlier in this chapter, compelling myths of sameness and equality serve only to reinforce the privilege and power of one group, while ignoring the real challenges and traumas experienced by others. Sexual freedom may indeed represent an important value for many gay men in Australia but it is a complex ideal that is not readily available to everyone. Future research on this subject should consider ways of negotiating and resolving the tension between the concepts of sexual racism and sexual liberty.

7.4 Methodological implications

This project employed three distinctive approaches to conducting research on this topic, which enabled three independent analyses. Together, these three lenses permitted a far deeper look and more useful focus than would have been possible using only one or two. However, several methodological limitations merit highlighting. First, although designed as a mixed methods approach, greater interplay between the stages would have enriched the lines of inquiry and the subsequent findings. While I attempted to refine this aspect of my method, additional time, and perhaps more comprehensive planning at the outset, would have deepened the relationships between the research stages. Second, I recruited participants across each research stage from a specific type of online community. The webservice *Manhunt* was used in each stage as the primary vehicle for recruitment. Thus, the samples could be biased by the type of men who chose to use that particular webservice. My focus on this webservice was a reflection of its popularity (*Manhunt* is one of [if not the most] popular webservices of its kind worldwide). However, considering other online cultures of sex and dating would have increased generalisability and strengthened the inferences drawn here. Finally, participants recruited during the interview stage were drawn almost exclusively from Australia's two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, which was a decision forced by funding limitations. An urban perspective on these issues, particularly as both cities have substantial and highly visible populations of gay men, is likely to be different from those provided by men living in regional, rural or less 'gay-friendly' places. However, in spite of these limitations (and in recognition of them) this research reflects a particular focus with identifiable boundaries.

7.5 Directions forward

A final step in describing this research is to suggest ways of moving forward. Inferences drawn from the three distinct stages confirm that issues of race and racism among gay men in online environments are complex and contentious, yet also seem to be viewed as acceptable and normalised characteristics of the sexual and romantic lives of gay men in Australia, both on and offline. Although some webservice users might have reservations regarding the threat that questions about desire and equality could pose to hard-won sexual liberties, it seems possible that a degree of reflection regarding the sexual or romantic dimensions of one's life can take place while one is also maintaining the right to determine one's partners. A simple reminder that desires change over time and are influenced by social forces could help men better recognise and reflect upon their assumptions about sex and relationships. Possibly, such reflection could foster new and fulfilling connections with men. This suggestion is not intended to be expressed as an empty or vague platitude but as a primary recommendation that can be made from this project. By asking instead of confronting, we could invite men to a conversation that seeks to identify and expand on the complexities of race relations in sex and dating contexts, rather than naming and shaming those engaging in practices of racialised partner discrimination. The non-threatening channels available on the multitude of platforms that men access for sex and dating offer ways of disseminating this message to men. When recruiting for the participant survey, for example, I was greatly impressed by how a few well-placed and designed advertisements recruited a large sample of diverse men who saw something of interest in this topic. A similarly directed campaign could potentially achieve a sizeable reach at relatively low cost. This idea is one possible way forward.

There are also ways to improve upon the designs of sex and dating webservices to better address or question the value placed on the assumed natural category of 'race'. In the review conducted

as part of chapter 3, ethnicity/race was among only a few demographic categories that appeared

consistently across platforms. Although one suggestion might be to remove this classification

entirely, such action may encourage the kind of in-text expressions of racial discrimination

observed during the profile analysis. Instead, developers of these platforms could remove the

drop-down menu identity categories that often share very little about a person's ethnicity and

seem instead to reproduce only normative ideas of race. These labels are frequently unclear,

reductionist and, in the case of many services, represent North American concepts of racial

difference. A simple free-text section that asked users to describe in one or two words their

ethnic or cultural identity could encourage a subtle and yet profound shift in how the men using

these services come to understand and use racial labels.

This research does not support censorship. As noted in chapter 4, many webservices, such as

Manhunt, moderate the text and photos that men post online. It might be tempting to suggest

that using this practice to remove racialised language could improve the tenor of these online

spaces. However, not only does this form of censorship only further encourage webservice users

to express racial concepts in subtle forms but it potentially also contributes to a representation of

these online communities as somehow 'post-racial'. As Hughey and Daniels (2013) point out, the

moderation of online racialised content does not challenge the fundamental attitudes that

generate it in the first place. Observed throughout this research, men appear to be engaged in

forms of self-governance regarding this behaviour. Thus, finding ways to encourage peer

reflection and commentary, rather than simply removing the content, could have more substantial

long-term benefits.

Finally, future research should continue to explore the effects on individual well-being of experiencing 'sexual racism' online and offline. The research presented here hints at the real potential for hurt and damage this form of subtle, enduring inequality can have on gay men. Future research should also consider the largely unanswered questions raised here about safer sexual behaviour among men who experience racism online or offline. I encourage future interest in this topic to consider how men understand and respond to the failings of race as a descriptive and discriminatory facture. Future research could also benefit from comparing and contrasting these concepts with relevance to other sexual communities, such as those of lesbian women or straight women and men. Given the Australian context of this project, research in a similar vein in other countries and transnationally would provide excellent opportunities to understand further not only these concepts but also the role of national and international discourses in shaping contemporary understandings of race and racial prejudice.

7.6 Concluding thoughts

This thesis sought to achieve four primary aims. The first was to describe the ways in which men behave online when it comes to race and racism in their search for partners. Throughout this thesis I have presented compelling and consistent evidence of the diverse practices in which men engage in relation to race and racism, and with this evidence I have made several inferences about their motivation and factors that may influence these practices and experiences. The second aim of this project was to describe how gay men perceive and make sense of the issue colloquially referred to as 'sexual racism', both on and offline. To that end, every stage of the research has explored both broad and specific attitudes and positions that range from outrage to indifference to resignation. As explored in this chapter, these diverse positions fuel a gripping and, at times, confronting public debate that speaks to both grand and personal ideas of sexuality and human

difference. Third, this thesis aimed to consider the impact of a specific form of racial prejudice as experienced in and perpetuated by the online environment. Again, in each chapter there is a substantial amount of evidence presented on the effects of sexual racism. Some of these, such as momentary experiences of frustration or shame, may be short-lived, while others, such as coming to believe that one's racial group is unattractive, are more likely to linger and to have a significant impact on concepts of self. Finally, this research sought to provide recommendations about ways forward in the areas of research, interventions and strategies, and it is hoped that there will be some practical outcomes of this research.

I have positioned this research at the intersection of many different fields of inquiry, methodologies and, occasionally, epistemologies. In an increasingly connected and entwined world, through such an approach we can explore the broad and complex range of concepts with which we engage while going about our social lives. For many gay men in Australia, online sex and dating appear to offer the primary avenue through which to connect with other men. However, as this project has revealed, these environments are full of complexities, challenges and potential dangers. By not only asking questions about *what* they find desirable in regard to race but also *why* they find it so and *how* they express those desires, men might be better prepared to navigate these online systems in ways that meet individual sexual and romantic needs as well as their commitment to the ideals of sexual freedom and social inclusion. Race and racism in these online communities occupy only a small piece of a bigger picture and if men can be open to greater inclusivity in their search for partners online – thinking through and beyond the notion of racialised partner discrimination as 'just a preference' – this research will have contributed towards the goal of achieving a stronger and more diverse Australia.

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Survey instrument

i. Pre-screen
Please select one of the following:
I agree to participate (continue to survey)
I do not agree to participate (end survey)

How old are you (in years)?

Please identify your gender:
- Male
- Female
- Other:

Do you currently live in Australia?
- Yes
- No

Do you currently have a profile on a dating/sex–seeking website for gay or bisexual men, such as Manhunt or Gaydar?
- Yes
- No

1. Demographics
How did you hear about this study?
- I saw an ad on Manhunt
- I saw an ad or a page on Facebook
- I heard about it through a friend
- I received an email or message about it
- Other

Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed.
- Some High school
- Finished Year 12
- Vocational Qualification/Trade Certificate
- University Degree/Diploma
- Postgraduate degree

Please enter your postcode:

In which state do you live?
- Australia Capital Territory
- New South Wales

- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria
- Western Australia

Please select which best describes your cultural/ethnic background.
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander
- Black/African
- Central Asian (e.g., Russian)
- East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese)
- Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani
- Latino/Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Mixed
- Pacific Islander
- Southeast Asian (e.g., Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese)
- Southern European/Mediterranean
- White/Caucasian/Anglo
- Other:

Sites like Manhunt or Gaydar often use broad categories of ethnicity in their profiles. If you were given the following options, which would you choose to describe yourself?
- Asian
- Black
- Indian
- Latino
- Middle Eastern
- Mixed
- Native American
- South Asian
- White
- Other
- I leave the ethnicity field blank

Please select from the following which best described your relationship status.
- Single
- In a relationship
- Other

How would you describe your sexuality?
- Gay/Homosexual/Queer
- Straight/Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Other

What is your HIV status?
- HIV positive
- HIV negative
- Don't know/I haven't had a test

2. Internet use

Please select which of the following services or websites you use or visit on a regular basis (at least several times per month).
- Dating/Hookup Websites (e.g., Manhunt, Gaydar, Squirt)
- Mobile Dating/Hookup Apps (e.g., Grindr, Maleforce)
- Social Networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)
- Gay–specific social networking sites (e.g., DList, Cockthevote)
- None of the above

How often do you visit sites like Manhunt or Gaydar?
- Less than once per month
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily
- Several times per day

How often do you meet men for sex arranged through websites like Manhunt and Gaydar?
- Never
- Once or twice a year
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

Is the Internet the most common way you find sexual partners?
- No
- Yes
- I use it as much as other ways (e.g., sauna/sex club, bars, etc.)
- I do not currently meet sex partners

The next questions in this section ask you to think about profiles you maintain on websites like Manhunt or Gaydar. Think about the profile you use most often while responding to each question.

When you first created your profile on a website like Manhunt or Gaydar, how much time did you spend filling in the information and writing the text for your profile?
- 5 minutes
- Around 10 minutes
- Around 15 minutes
- More than 20 minutes

When you were filling in your profile information, which statement most accurately reflects how you felt about it?

- I just filled in the compulsory bits and left everything else blank
- I filled in the compulsory bits and provided some basic extra information about myself or what I'm looking for
- I added a lot of extra information to reflect my personality or to specify what I am looking for

Have you updated your profile since you first created it?

- Yes, just once or twice
- Yes, many times
- No, never. It is the same since the first day I created it.

Do you have multiple profiles that exist on the same website?

- Yes
- No

Does your profile include information about the type of person you are looking for online? This might include things like specifying age, body type, hair color, etc.

- Yes
- No

Does your profile indicate that you would like to be contacted by men of a particular ethnic group? (e.g., "Interested in Middle Eastern men")

- Yes
- No

Which ethnic group(s) do you indicate you are interested in being contacted by? (select all that apply)
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander men
- Asian men
- Black/African men
- Indian men
- Latino/Hispanic men
- Mediterranean men (e.g, Greek, Italian)
- Middle Eastern/Arabic men
- White/Caucasian/Anglo men
- Other:

Does your profile indicate that you would rather not be contacted by men of particular ethnic groups? (e.g., ?Not interested in White
men?)

- Yes
- No

Which ethnic group(s) do you indicate you are not interested in being contacted by? (select all that apply)
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander men
- Asian men
- Black/African men
- Indian men

- Latino/Hispanic men
- Mediterranean men (e.g, Greek, Italian)
- Middle Eastern/Arabic men
- White/Caucasian/Anglo men
- Other:

Have you ever come across a profile that excluded you because of your race/ethnicity?
- Yes
- No

Have you ever come across a profile that excluded other men because of their race/ethnicity?
- Yes
- No

3. Racialised attraction

For the following ethnicities please select how attractive you find men of this group. Focus on sexual and romantic attraction and not on friendship or other types of relationships. Please try to be as honest as possible. Your responses are completely confidential.

1	2	3	4	5
Select this option if you would never consider having sex or dating men of this ethnicity/race	*Select this option if you think men of this ethnicity/race are not attractive compared to others*	*Select this option if you have no strong feelings in either direction*	*Select this option if you think men of this ethnicity/race are particularly attractive compared to others*	*Select this option if you think men of this ethnicity/race are very attractive and you actively seek them out as partners*
I think men of this group are **very** unattractive	I do not find men of this group to be attractive	I am neither attracted nor not attracted to men of this group	I find myself attracted to men of this group	I am **very** attracted to men of this group

- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander men
- Asian men
- Black/African men
- Indian men
- Latino/Hispanic men
- Middle Eastern men
- White/Caucasian men
- Mediterranean men (e.g., Greek, Italian)

4. Quick Discrimination Index (QDI, adapted)

Please read the following statements and indicate to what degree you agree with each one. Please try to be as honest as possible and do not spend too much time on any one question.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- I feel I could develop an intimate relationship with someone from a different ethnic group.
- My friendship network is very multicultural.

- I would feel O.K. about my best friend having a relationship with someone from a different ethnic group.
- In the past few years there has been too much attention directed toward multicultural or minority issues in education.
- Most of my close friends are from my own ethnic group.
- I think that it is important for children to attend schools that are ethnically diverse.
- In the past few years there has been too much attention directed toward multicultural or minority issues in business.
- Overall, I think minorities in Australia complain too much about ethnic discrimination.
- I think White people's racism toward ethnic minority groups still constitutes a major problem in Australia.
- I think the school system, from primary school through University, should encourage minority and immigrant children to learn and fully adopt traditional Australian values.
- If I were to adopt a child, I would be happy to adopt a child of any ethnic group.
- I think the school system, from primary school through University, should promote values representative of diverse cultures.
- It upsets (or angers) me that a non–White/Anglo person has never been the Prime Minister of Australia.
- I think it is better if people date within their own ethnic group.

5. Sexual practices

From the list below, please select which sexual acts in which you have engaged with another man **in the last year** (tick all that apply).
- Anal Sex
- Oral Sex
- Mutual Masturbation
- S&M
- Fisting
- Rimming
- Role Playing
- Other:
- None (only check if you have not had sex with another man in the past year)

Please estimate how many times over the past year you have had **anal** sex (i.e., fucking or getting fucked) with another man. Sometimes, like during group sex, you may have had more than one partner at a time. For this question, estimate the number of separate encounters as opposed to the number of partners.
- Never
- Once
- Twice
- 3–5 times
- 6–10 times
- 10–20 times
- More than 20 times

Thinking of the **most recent time** you had anal sex, which position did you take?

- Top/insertive partner (the one doing the fucking)
- Bottom/receptive partner (the one getting fucked)
- Both (you switched)
- Don't know/Can't remember

The last time I had anal sex, I used a condom:
- During the whole encounter
- Not at all
- Some of the time
- Don't know/Can't remember

How well did you know the guy?
- 1 (I did not know him at all/it was the first time we'd met)
- 2 (We had met a few times before)
- 3 (I knew him well enough but only considered him an acquaintance)
- 4 (I considered him a friend)
- 5 (He was a partner/boyfriend or extremely close friend)
- I cannot remember

What was his HIV status?
- HIV negative
- HIV positive
- I don't know/we didn't discuss

6. Acceptability of Online Racialised Partner Discrimination

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements. Try to answer as honestly as possible and do not spend too much time on any one question. "Online profiles" are those maintained on sites such as Manhunt or Gaydar.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- It is OK to indicate a racial preference when looking for sex or dates online.
- Indicating a racial preference in online profiles saves everybody time and energy.
- Indicating a racial preference in a profile is a form of racism.
- People who indicate a racial preference in their profile are not trying to offend anyone.
- I am bothered when I read a profile that excludes people because of their race/ethnicity.
- As long as people are polite about it, I see no problem in indicating a racial preference in an online profile.
- If I were attracted to a certain group of people, I would indicate this on my profile (or do already).
- Racism is not really a problem on Internet sex and dating sites.

Appendix B

Interview guide

VERBAL CONSENT PROTOCOL (when written consent form has <u>not</u> been signed - e.g., telephone interviews)
Interviewer: *Please label the recording. State the following*: This is a record of an interview conducted for the "Just a Preference" project. This recording is made on <DATE>.
Interviewer: *Indicate that the audio recorder is now on.*
Before we start, I need to record your consent to participate in the project entitled Just a Preference. This recording is made on <DATE>. Can you confirm that you have been informed about what is involved in the project, including any known or unexpected inconveniences or risks?
Can you confirm that you understand your participation in this project is strictly confidential?
Can you confirm that you freely choose to, to participate in this project?
Can you confirm that you understand that you can withdraw at any time?
And if you wish to make a complaint to the Ethics Committee of the University of New South Wales regarding this interview, the number is – and this number is also on the information statement – 02 9385 4234. So if you're happy with all of that then we can proceed.
Just to reiterate, any information that is obtained during this interview and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone unless required by law.

Opening questions

1. **What do you like about sex or dating websites/services like Manhunt or Grindr?**

2. **What do you not like about sex or dating websites/services like Manhunt or Grindr?**

Topics to be explored (not in any order):

Sociodemographics: e.g., age, race/ethnicity, education, employment and sexual orientation

Sexual practices: Examples of questions: What role does sex play in your life?; Can you tell me about the type of sex you generally have?; What does intimacy and connection with the other person mean anything to you in relation to sex?; How does sex contribute to your sense of who you are?; Do you ever consume alcohol or other drugs before or during sexual encounters? Why? How do you think drugs influence the experience?; How do you find sexual partners?; What are your views on bareback sex?

The Internet: Examples of questions: What role does the Internet play in your life? And in your sex life? Can you tell me about your first experiences of using websites like Manhunt or Grindr?; How do your friends think about or use sex and dating websites? Do you talk about your use of these websites with your friends? What do you say? How do they react?; What do you think other gay men think about or do in relation to these websites? Can you tell me about any positive experiences you've had in meeting someone from a site of this kind? What about negative experiences?; How do you respond when someone you are not interested in contacts you?; Can you recall a time when you felt rejected online by another guy? If so, how did this come about? How did you react? Why do you think he reacted the way that he did?; What would you consider inappropriate online behaviour? Why?

Race and sex: Examples of questions: Do you have any beliefs you can share about how your racial or ethnic background might influence your sex life?; What about the racial or ethnic background of your sexual partner/s? What are the different ways that website users talk about race and ethnicity on websites like Manhunt and Grindr? How do men describe their own and other people's race online?; Do you think that expressing a preference for the racial or ethnic characteristics of sexual partners should be considered racist?; Do you think that racism is an issue on sex and dating websites for men? If this is a problem, how could it be addressed?

Closing remarks

Before we finish, is there anything you'd like to add or expand on?

Thank you for your time. If you think of anything later that you would like to add or if any questions arise, please do not hesitate to be in touch or visit the study website.