

## Article

# LATINOS ON DA DOWN LOW: THE LIMITATIONS OF SEXUAL IDENTITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

**M. Alfredo González**

Queens College, CUNY, New York, NY

## Abstract

*Tying HIV prevention to sexual identity has been an effective public health strategy. However, HIV infection among young Latino/a and African Americans continues to mount. "On the down low," a youth term for secretive or undercover, has become a code for the furtive same-sex sexual practices of young men who reject Gay or bisexual identities. This phenomenon received the attention of African Americans but Latino communities have largely ignored it. Based on ethnographic observations in a Hip Hop club in New York City, and on postings in cyberspace, this paper documents the presence of Latino youth in "down low" networks. It asks whether the historical and political construction of ethno-racial identities in forms emerging sexual practices and identities, begging a review of established HIV prevention efforts.*

## Keywords

HIV prevention; *Down low*; Latinos; urban youth; identity; sexuality; Hip Hop

## Saturday night in *El Bronx*

That Saturday night of February 2001, Michael and I went to hang out to a South Bronx club not far from where I lived in upper Manhattan. We knew each other for almost 20 years and lately, we had to set up formal dates to catch up with each other. After being frisked for weapons and paying



admission, we entered a room packed with tough-looking Black and Latino young men. Michael looked at me with curiosity and asked, “you’ve been here before, Alfredo?” “Yeah; twice,” I responded. “And, are you sure this is a gay club?” “Of course,” I answered more interested in checking out the scene. Michael was puzzled by the total indifference that greeted us and the aloof-looking crowd pulsating to the rhythm of rap music. “Let me ask,” he said and went to one of the security guys by the door. Michael grew up in the Lower East Side and to me, he is the quintessential New Yorker: bold and assertive. He is the kind of guy that would not flinch at asking “is this a gay club” once he is already in it. “Alright, let’s check our coats,” he said as he returned persuaded.

Michael preferred the larger dance floor upstairs. The house music, the mirror balls, and the dancing styles made it more gay-identifiable. *Caushun*,<sup>1</sup> “The Gay Rapper,” was the star of that night’s show. I could not make out all the words in his rhyme, but three were clear: “I swallowed it.” Next to us stood a tall, masculine and handsome young Latino in oversized pants and a basketball tank top bouncing to the beat. Michael, the Latino chaser, turned to him and asked him, “Do you swallow it?” (Did I mention he was bold?) The guy turned to us with a big smile and replied: “No, I eat it.”

That night, I believed we had gone to a gay dance club that local young men attended because it played the music they liked, because it was located close to where they lived, or because they were as bored with the downtown scene as I was. Six months later I realized Michael’s doubts that night, had merit: two articles, one by Kai Wright in the *Village Voice*, and another by Malcolm Venable in *Vibe*, discussed African American and Latino men who had sex with men *on the down low* (i.e. on the sly, undercover), but did not identify as Gay (Venable, 2001; Wright, 2001; Denizet-Lewis, 2003). These journalistic accounts listed the South Bronx club as a meeting place for men *on the low* (Trebay, 2000), and reported that some of them may be having sex with women who ignored their homosexual practices (Venable, 2001). They were characterized as interested in rap music and marked masculine demeanor in their sex partners and themselves (Trebay, 2000; Venable, 2001; Wright, 2001).

The articles on the *down low* published in the popular press describe young men unfazed by the tension between their non-normative sexualities and their otherwise conventional Black and Latino working-class male identities. At the core of their secrecy, is their refusal to politicize their intimacy, that is, to adopt a public gay identity.<sup>2</sup> While the literature on same-sex practices among African Americans lists religion as a paramount deterrent of sexual expression, men on the *down low* do not cite choosing between *right* and *wrong* as a dilemma. Like the broad smile of our “handsome Latino” in the South Bronx club suggests, the young men quoted in these articles do not seem to experience guilt for rejecting Judeo-Christian strictures. Their quandary is not ethical but socio-cultural. They would not flout age-, race-, and class-sanctioned masculinities: gay is not an option; Hip-Hop is.

1 Pronounced as “caution.”

2 They give the impression to be fully aware of the mismatch between their sexualities and their public personas, and test the limits of the journalists’ naïveté with

In one of the first articles on the *down low*, Guy Trebay second-guessed these men's enjoyment of rap music, a genre widely depicted as homophobic and misogynistic (Trebay, 2000). Other articles in the popular press, relate the growing HIV infections among young *men-who-have-sex-with-men* (MSM), to the reluctance of men *on the low*, to identify as gay (Ballard, 2001; Suggs, 2001; Wright, 2001), and link their reportedly bisexual practices to the upsurge of HIV infections among women of color (Ballard, 2001; Edwards, 2001; Venable, 2001; Wright, 2001).<sup>3</sup> The *down low debate* has the necessary ingredients to sell: concealed non-normative sexualities, a subaltern genre of expressive culture (Hip-Hop), a pandemic caused by a sexually transmitted agent, *innocent victims* (heterosexual women), and a population often accused of misbehavior (men of color). Although in this discussion men of the *DL* never speak on their behalf, Kai Wright calls the initial flurry of articles "the great down low debate" (2001). In turn, in 2002 President Clinton's appointee and *Gay* commentator, Keith Boykin described what followed the initial reports as a "media frenzy" (<http://www.keithboykin.com/arch/000476.html>). The informational peak was not reached until 2003 with innumerable articles, books, TV shows, plays, and scholarly panels.

The initial reports focused on youth, linking life *on the down low* to Hip-Hop culture's *hypermasculine* stance (Trebay, 2000; Venable, 2001; Wright, 2001). The connection of the term *down low* with youth of color was consistent with linguistic assessments that place it emerging in the early 1990s among young African Americans (Green, 1998). Thus defined, the notion of the *down low*, although charged with moral and racial implications, is useful in public health terms because it delineates the sexual identity and behavior of a population, at a specific historical moment.

The sensationalist possibilities of expanding the rubric to all bisexual Black men who keep their men-loving activities to themselves, regardless of age or microcultural niche, proved too tempting, and soon the term *down low*, was applied liberally. In *Essence Magazine*, Tamala Edwards wrote that the *down low* was not just youthful sexual exploration, a common interpretation of bisexuality (Muñoz, 2004), but an established feature in the lives of some adult Black men (Edwards, 2001). Scotty R. Ballard, of *Jet Magazine*, argued that their refusal to identify as "gay" prevents these men from heeding prevention messages directed to the gay community. Health experts speculated that "some of those on the down low apparently learned the lifestyle in prison, then began dual lives after being released" wrote Ballard (2001), showing that for some people, the *down low* connotes crime and urban pathology.

Criticism also came from the *gay* community. In February 2000, Guy Trebay asked from the pages of the *Village Voice*, "Homo-thugz? Doesn't everybody know that [H]ip-[H]op hates faggots?" Men-loving men "dancing to music that in certain cases may advocate their demise," bewildered Mr. Trebay.

declarations of unlawful masculinity (Venable, 2001).

3 The CDC has reported in 2002 that HIV-related deaths remain a major cause of death among young and middle age minorities (CDC, 2002a). In 2000, 19% of new AIDS cases were reported among Latinos while they were 13% of the total national population (CDC, 2002b). The Young Men Study Phase I found that among MSM between 15 and 22 years of age in seven US cities, Latinos had an HIV prevalence of 6.9%. Preliminary results from Phase II (23–28 years old) indicate a prevalence of 14% for the same population (MMWR, 2001). Men who have sex with men continue to account for the largest group of HIV infections which indicates that new prevention strategies are needed as younger populations become sexually active (CDC, 2002c).

Although there are socially responsible rappers (Marable, 2002), Trebay voiced the widespread gay resentment against homophobic rap lyrics. The irony was that young men *on the low* seemed to have guilt-free sex lives, in great measure as result of the sex education the gay movement imparted. Yet, in refusing gay identity, they undermined the political hypothesis that “[Gays] are everywhere.”

In sum, in the *down low* debate, the rage caused by the alleged bisexuality of men of color, contrasted with the historical silence on white men’s bisexuality (Mukherjea and Vidal-Ortiz, 2002). In spite of the possibility of there being a continuum between “DL fashion” and strict sexual concealment (Gordon, 2002), press reports on *down low* sexualities were treated as monolithic and unquestionable truths. The lessons learned about non-judgmental tailoring of HIV prevention to specific lifeways and worldviews, were muffled by loud self-righteousness. Although most press descriptions of the *down low* included young Latino men, Latino/a HIV workers and communities have eluded the discussion.

This paper is an exploration of the *down low* as an emergent MSM sexual identity/culture that defies public health reliance on MSM political and sexual identities (i.e. gay identity) as models for the design of HIV prevention strategies. By analyzing the phenomenon of the *down low* mainly in terms of masculinity, and by discussing the relevant literature and examining texts from the Internet, this paper will attempt to show that gender and sexual identities are informed by race and class, and also by history and politics, yet not necessarily sexual politics. Additionally, this paper will portray the *down low* as a Latino issue.

First, I will define the term as it is used in the English dialect of African American youth, and in its extended use as a subject position in sexuality. I will then argue that socially located masculinities separate the *down low* from normalized gay identities. Then, with descriptions and texts from Internet sites, and with an analysis of the South Bronx club, I will discuss Latino men’s participation in this sexual culture, and the role of masculinity in the *down low*. I will conclude by examining the ethnographic record on Latin American male sexualities to illustrate a critique of static models of sexual systems, and in search of sexual traits congruent with *down low* sexualities.

The Internet data was extracted from bulletin boards of public websites with a declared interest in attracting men on the *down low*. This convenience sample, was obtained from sites in free electronic networks that welcome men on the DL explicitly. The objective of data collection was not to gather a random sample, but a diversity of voices and positions *vis-à-vis down low* sexualities. The goal of the observation was to collect messages posted by DL men, commentaries about life on the DL, sites’ self-descriptions, and styles of site management by their owners. Commercial sites and paid networks (like AOL, for example) were not included.

### **Down Low?**

For Jonathon Green, the term *down low* emerged during the 1990s among African Americans as an adjective meaning *covert* or *secretive*. The acronym *DL* means *keep secret* or *hidden* for teenagers in the United States, and for African Americans means *in a clandestine or sneaky manner*. Green relates the adjective *down low* to the noun *low down*, which means *privileged information*, or *intimate details* (Green, 1998). Richard Spears calls *down low* a noun meaning *information, explanation, events*, used as in “what the *down low*?” or “let me in on the *down low*.” Spears also relates *down low*, to the noun *low down*, *the facts*, and the synonym *the haps*, *things that are happening* (Spears, 2000). Geneva Smitherman defines *DL* as *something kept very quiet and secretive, and done on the sly*, and exemplifies it with verses from R. Kelly’s song “Down Low”: *nobody has to know/Lets just keep it on the down low* (Smitherman, 2000[1994]). Paul Baker’s *Fantabulosa: a Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang* published in London, defines *DL* as the initials of *down low*, and an adjective in African-American slang referring to *Black men who appear heterosexual in public, but have gay sex* (Baker, 2002). This designation, packed with cultural gloss-overs, places *down low* within the focus of this paper, sex between men. I will use it in a narrower fashion: sex between younger men that identify with Hip-Hop culture.

### **Latinos, Hip-Hop and Masculinity**

The history of the use of a common term for all populations of Latin American ancestry in the US (first *Hispanics*, and then *Latinos*), is rooted in federal efforts to homogenize and dilute the political connotations of Chicano and Puerto Rican identities during the 1960s (Oboler, 1995). The US Bureau of Census put in use the term *Hispanics*. This word imbued with ideas of traditional ways, family strength, and the standardizing power of the Spanish language. *Hispanics*, refers to the diverse set of Latin American communities sought after as a marketing niche (Dávila, 2002), and used as a proxy for low-income population (Rodríguez, 1998). Although the idea of the cultural uniformity of *Hispanics* or *Latinos* is problematic, both terms have been used strategically for political and organizational projects (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003). This ethnic “catch all” word should not be discarded as federal entities designing social policy and delivering services, stipulate their work in terms of limited population categories. In this paper, I will use the term *Latino* for its political and public health significance, but also to acknowledge how the US experience molds Latino lives and cultures. Fellowship with African American communities is part of that experience, and the development of Hip-Hop youth culture (rapping, breaking, DJing) as a social class and ethno-racial-specific artistic expression, is a product of it.

4 Credible connection to the culture and geography of the inner-city.

The birthplace of rap is, with certainty, New York City's South Bronx. In this racially mixed working class neighborhood, African American and Latino, or more specifically, Nuyorican youth gave birth to this expressive genre in the context of block and house parties (Lipsitz, 1994; Ards, 1999; Flores, 2000; Rivera, 2001, 2003). Latino rappers have been as political as their African American counterparts. When, in the 1990s, *English Only* initiatives and the attack on bilingual education emerged as a sign of anxiety about the growth of minority communities in the US, bilingual rap and Spanglish rhyming affirmed that Latin American cultures and language were already part of the US' subaltern cultures (Flores, 1994). The synchronic shift of rap from Afrocentricity toward *ghettocentricity* expanded the meaning of *realness*<sup>4</sup> (McLaren, 1995; Kelley, 1996), validating the presence of Latinos in rap and of rap among Latinos, for those unaware of their historical relationship.

During the same decade, the causal relationship between rap music's violent imagery and the dangerousness of youthful masculinities marked by race and class, became a truism. This, ignored that the commercial spotlight on *gangsta* rap concealed the diversity of rap as a musical form (Koza, 1994; Rose, 1994; McLaren, 1995; Dyson, 1996; Mahiri, 1997; Marable, 2002; Mahiri and Conner, 2003). Yet, the analysis of the roots and repercussion of *gangsta* rap lyrics would be incomplete without reference to the historical sexual stereotyping of African Americans and Latinos (Davis, 1983; Dyson, 1996).

Koza examined "specific negative themes" in major publications' discussion of rap lyrics, and suggests that they should be construed as strategies reinforcing the ideological *status quo*, perhaps as a reaction to rap's critique of the contradictions of urban life in contemporary US society and Black communities (Koza, 1994, 183–184; Dyson, 1996, 177; Martinez, 1997). Rap is a discourse critical of dominant discourses, and a seed for youth-specific counterhegemonic praxes (Fenster, 1995; Mahiri, 2000). Although the Hip-Hop movement's political and organizational potential is not yet completely realized, the role played by rappers representing the needs and grievances of subaltern communities and attempting to unite them in counterhegemonic consensus is not unlike Antonio Gramsci's notion of the *organic intellectual*<sup>5</sup> (Gramsci, 1989[1971], 6, 12; Abrams, 1995; McLaren, 1995; Ards, 1999; Kitwana, 2004). The notion of the *organic intellectual* is not the only idea of the Italian Marxist that is relevant to this discussion. I will also employ the conceptions of *hegemony* and *historical bloc* as applied by Connell and Demetriou to the notion of masculinity to shed light on the critical issue of the *down low*.

Robert W. Connell and his associates used the gramscian concept of *hegemony*, to coin the term *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1987, 1995; Gramsci, 1989[1971], 12; Carrigan *et al.*, 2001[1985]). This phrase means that "at any given time a form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted," and dominant racial and sexual identities characterize it (Connell, 1995, 77). The notion of *marginalized masculinities* covers the interplay of male

5 Specialists (philosophers, artists, scientists, technicians, etc.), with skills and knowledge that go beyond their own professions, who interpret, organize and outline a class' opinions, interests, production, and/or expansion, and who are intimately linked to, and formed along

gender with subaltern social classes and races, and *subordinated masculinities* refer to masculinities considered politically and culturally inferior or imperfect such as homosexual masculinities (Connell, 1995, 79–80). In this scheme, it is the effort of ethno-racial minorities to avoid the mark of *marginalized and subordinated masculinities* compounded, that produce *down low* sexual identities.

In response to Connell's use of gramscian taxonomies, Demetriou critiques the notion of *hegemonic masculinity* arguing that it remains "clearly demarcated" and never "infected" by non-hegemonic elements, which misses Gramsci's dialectical construction of the idea of *historical bloc*<sup>6</sup> (Demetriou, 2001, 346). Instead, Demetriou formulates another concept inspired in the work of Gramsci the *masculine bloc*.

In contrast to *hegemonic masculinity*, a *masculine bloc* is not necessarily composed of just the dominant races and sexual identities. Following Stuart Hall (1988, 170), Demetriou characterizes *masculine bloc* as a strategic alliance of diverse social forces, whose flexibility and dynamism hinges on that diversity. He illustrates his idea of *masculine bloc* referring to the gradual tactical incorporation and mainstreaming of images of gay masculinities into the marketplace during the last decades. Furthering capital accumulation is not the only purpose of co-opting gay masculinities, but also reproducing, legitimizing, and redeploying the image of a renewed, benign, and democratic capitalism that can embrace sexual diversity; a capitalism that thrives in meeting the *Other* (Demetriou, 2001, 350).<sup>7</sup>

While for Connell gay masculinities are by definition not *hegemonic*, for Demetriou, membership in the *masculine bloc* is not ascribed but produced through processes of co-optation, manipulation and negotiation. Forming these strategic alliances with the hegemonic historical bloc takes the edge of the disruptive power that gay masculinities and politics pose to normative gender and sexual systems. The political silences so produced, substitute praxis and tacitly validate the hegemonic consensus. Taking market participation as legal and socio-cultural conquests, do not concern or are not apparent to many. Yet, inside and outside gay communities and movements, some perceive the costs of this slippage.

For the children of the Civil Rights Movement – experienced in identifying loci of power – the integration of gay communities and masculinities into hegemonic concerns rings suspect. Young Black and Latino men may not be fully aware of their own accord with dominant ideologies and economics, yet they may notice the easy fit of commoditized gay identities along the forces they oppose. The aptitude to use the insights gained through membership in an oppressed group as a lens to inspect larger sociocultural landscapes – what W. E. B. Du Bois called *double consciousness* – is nurtured and developed in the historical and political realm where US subaltern classes and ethno-racial subjectivities operate.

the development of the class, which makes them *organic*.

6 Structures and superstructures form a "historical bloc." That is to say, the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures, is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production (Gramsci, 1989, 366).

7 Recent scholarship explores and documents the link between capitalist economics and the identities and communities born out of the gay rights movement. Alexandra Chasin looks at the inclusion of gay identities and lifestyles as marketing niches (2000), and Jeff Maskovsky studies the role of consumption in the building and maintenance of gay communities (2001, 2002).

*Dual* or *double consciousness* denotes the ability of some African Americans to perceive dimensions of the US social reality that remain “unseen, unexperienced, and denied by most of the nation’s citizenry” (Harrison, 1991, 90). The related capacity *to see out of more than one eye* (Cole, 1987; quoted in Harrison, 1991, 90), allows Black and white folks to recognize the socio-cultural features all US citizens share, but some Blacks can also see its contradictions by contrasting the cultural, ethical, and political sensibility gained through oppression:

This form of critical consciousness emerges from the tension between, on one hand, membership in a Western society, a Western dominated profession, a relatively privileged class or social category, and, on the other hand, belonging to or having an organic relationship with an oppressed social category or people ... these two tendencies, the conjunction of multiple subaltern statuses and bases of Otherness, combined with the apparent *irreconcilability* between them and the ideals and the normative expectations of “the free world” (i.e., “the free world” of capitalism, the American dream, or middle class privilege), may heighten and intensify counterhegemonic sensibilities, vision, and understanding (Harrison, 1991, 90, emphasis in the original; see also McClaurin, 2001).<sup>8</sup>

Not every African American person has or would inevitably acquire the faculty of *double consciousness*, nor is the skill limited to this group.

... all persons subjected to various oppressions do not necessarily or automatically develop this special ability to see the world critically, and members of dominant social groupings may sometimes cultivate radical relationships and commitments to the exploited peoples of the world (Harrison, 1991, 90).

The US Latino experience is a site of tension between *normative expectations* and *Otherness* and is therefore, fertile ground for critical examination of social paradoxes. Common urban and socio-economic niches grant Black and some Latino groups, comparable – although not identical – skills to produce counterhegemonic accounts of social complexities and contradictions.<sup>9</sup> Young urban Black and Latino men share youth culture (Hip-Hop) and their oppression which, combined with a measure of homophobia, may bring forth mistrust of the increasing close relationship between gay communities and dominant interests.

The growing inclusion of gay identities and masculinities into the hegemonic project, the emergence of gay markets as legitimate niches in mainstream economies, the taming and normalization of the once defiant gay movement, the consumerism of gay communities, all sharply revealed to the *second sightedness* of marginalized masculinities, may constitute a hard-to-breach gap for some Black and Latino men-loving young men, to adopt Gay social identities. Do

8 Faye Harrison (1991) and Irma McClaurin (2001) address *dual consciousness* while elaborating on the productive role of native anthropologists in transforming their *multiple visions* into a means to develop a decolonized anthropology and transform ethnographic practice into ethnographic praxis.

9 Among Latinos, this statement better describes the experiences of *Boricuas* and *Chicanos*, that is, the Latino communities with longest historical and political track record in the United States.

these barriers also extend to gender and their private lives, precluding the adoption of gay sexual identities?

The history of minority struggles in the US, makes ethno-racial politics significant in the formation of Black and Latino selves. Thus produced, their *marginalized masculinities* are peripheral to – but not outside of – the hegemonic consensus (Connell, 1995, 76). The distance that separates class- and race-marked masculinities from the dominant core is illustrated in the need to add the prefix “hyper” to “masculinity” when referring to Black and Latino young men in Hip-Hop. Class, ethnicity, and race oppression, and the associated emancipatory politics, may also inform these young men’s sexual identities like the history of race and gender oppression of Black women, informed their understanding of sexuality, fertility, and family (Collins, 1990, 43–66). It is not farfetched to consider that the struggle for social justice is a central building block of the identities of some Black and Latino male youth, and that its centrality prevents their identification with a community actively engaged in its mainstreaming, and associated with the white middle class ethos.

Critics of rap have characterized its lyrics as misogynous and homophobic. Defenders, argue that these portrayals refer to just one among many rap styles: *gansta* rap. In a society laden with gender and sexual bigotry, selecting for criticism one of many manifestations of bigotry – and a devalued manifestation at that – hints at other reasons. The underlying motive might not be as much intolerance of an art form as of the artists: dark skinned young men from historically oppressed groups whose containment hinges on accusations of sexual violence (Davis, 83). In various ways, the sexual and gender expressions of Black and Latino men, have been depicted as excessive, and proof of their dangerousness.

Since its inception, the self-exaltation of the rapper, or the writer in the case of graffiti, is a marking stylistic feature of Hip-Hop (Castleman, 1982). This is true of either male or female practitioners, but has caused most concern when male African American or Latino rappers heap praise upon themselves. Commentators describe the blend of this and other gender-marked features of male rappers’ urban declamations, as *hypermasculine*. The use of this adjective reveals the speaker (e)valuation of gender. Tagging rappers’ lyrics and demeanor as *excessively* or *exaggeratedly* masculine, betrays the endorsement of a well-calibrated and normative masculinity. Supporting one expression of masculinity in detriment of others, is a highly political move in light of gender’s socio-cultural constructedness, and its intrinsic connection with race and social class. There would be little debate over what kind of men are granted the center of the gender scale, but it is clearer whose masculinities are rendered dangerous. Verbal violence, and the threat or description of physical aggression, by assertive, disgruntled, urban young males of color, unsettles a Middle America invested in the *status quo*. The apprehension inherited from the three decades-long history of Hip-Hop, and the centuries-old obsession with the

dangerousness of darker masculinities, colors popular and official understandings of *down low* sexualities.

*Keepin' it real*, the grounding and foremost principle guiding rap artists' lives and cultural production, denotes steady commitment to inner-city social conditions, history, peoples, and moral and political values, even in the face of financial success (Basu, 1998). The transformation of Hip-Hop into a gendered expression of cultural capital, authenticates for Black [and Latino] youth, their ethno-racial identities and sense of community beyond sexuality (Gordon, 2002; Clay, 2003). Understanding the ethos of Hip-Hop as cultural capital within an economy of scarcity, explains their efforts to express same sex desire (often a negative value in the US), in ways that do not undermine the *realness* of Black and Latino identities. Investing non-normative sexuality in gay identity and community, threatens the cultural capital of ethno-racial identity (Clay, 2003), and implies confronting the racial and class bias of gay communities (Hemphill, 1991, xix, 1992, 40; Chung *et al.*, 1996; Mangaoang, 1996; Díaz, 1998, 124–126).

The restricted scope of this study, limits its findings. The insights obtained are few and do not represent a random sample. Yet, the internal coherence of the data on the *down low* is noteworthy. These men have an interest in the contemporary expressive cultures of Latino and Black youth, a preoccupation with symbols of masculinity, an apparently “guilt free” sexuality but also, a determination to observe pervading societal homophobia. This cultural logic should not be pathologized but understood as a representation of a historically specific socio-cultural position. This paper aims at such understanding and to erode the broad rush to conclusions that has characterized the discussion of this topic.

### **Sexual and Ethno-Racial Identities in Cyberspace**

The growing availability of computers and Internet communication has facilitated the development of virtual social interaction. Norms and rules to inhabit specific cyber environments and to address topics of common interest, organize these interactions. Anthropologists have studied them for more than a decade (Wilson and Peterson, 2002) and call them “cybercultures” (Escobar, 1996, 112). In doing “cyberethnography,” or the textual deconstruction of “cybertexts,” anthropologists should not treat “cyberdata” as interchangeable with real time observations, or base their analysis of offline cultural manifestations solely on the basis of Internet textual representations (Ito, 1997; Ortner, 1999). Even so, *cyberculture* remains a major focus of present-day anthropological inquiry, and the research strategy to study these real or imagined communities, such as *cybercommunities* centered on sexual interests (“netsex”) like *down low* systems, is *cyberethnography* (Marshall, 2003).

Popular press accounts of men *on the down low*, mention public websites nested in networks of electronic communication, as their virtual meeting places. In the anonymity of the Internet, a man *on the DL* can deflect cultural markers of gayness, and meet and arrange sexual encounters (“hook-up”) with other men away from gay venues (Venable, 2001; Denizet-Lewis, 2003).

Using keywords such as “down low” in a web search, anyone can locate websites where these men exchange messages and express their sexual agency. Often, website managers apply Hip-Hop’s alternative word spelling to the texts posted, so the homophones of keywords (*phine, thugz, boi, boiz*) can also produce results. The sites’ names may combine words that evoke sexuality, sex appeal, or physical features (*sexxi, nutting, ballers, hottest, big, bulky, lean*), or name the expected racial and/or ethnic identity of group members (*black, niggah*,<sup>10</sup> *nikka, latin, latino, blatino*<sup>11</sup>). To demarcate the groups’ geographical scope and improve their *hook-up* quotient, their sobriquets may include a region, city, or city neighborhood. The free Internet groups welcoming, or aimed to men *on the down low* that I found, declare this intent in a section written by the groups’ founders, usually called “group description” in their “home page” (the public façades of websites).

Latinos are an active part of this virtual sexual scene, and it is not odd to find evidence of this. A new and superficial reviewer will find them mentioned as desired group members. For example, the now defunct group “NYC Down Low Latinos,” included them in its name. Sites from large urban centers, typically name Latino and African American ethnicities side by side with references to *DL* sexualities. Clear stipulations about the group’s membership ethno-racial constitution are not rare, and it is also common that Internet sites for men of color are closed to European American men. Yet, on occasion, bans are not phrased in terms of social categories but in terms of preferred and unacceptable cultural expressions.

In the following *group description*, race and ethnicity are not the *conditio sine qua non* for membership. Yet, cultural predilections and aversions as stated, result in the withdrawal of the opening ethno-racial welcome mat. The detailed enumeration of “desired” and “intolerable” personal traits indicates the group managers’ cultural sophistication, and their awareness of the effects that enforcing these rules would have on the composition of the organization. Since the interactions of this group’s members would not be face-to-face, it is easy to create false identities in cyberspace. The only opportunity to effectively enforce these rules would be in occasional parties. It is obvious that the purpose of this strict behavioral code is not to regulate behavior and membership, but to inspire self-policing in the group’s members.

This group is dedicated to Philly and South Jersey niggas (black, latino, asian, even white if you down like that) 18–35 yrs. old who are trying to hook up with other niggas on the low. All members must list their ages and location in

10 The Internet source *Urban Dictionary* ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)), was used for words that have not made it yet into “slang dictionaries.” It uses contributors’ definitions, and site’s visitors can give “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” to signal their agreement. A contributor screennamed *THE TRUTH*, refers to the late rapper Tupac Shakur’s definition of *nigga*: “NIGGER – a Black man with a slavery chain around his neck. NIGGA – a Black man with a gold chain on his neck,” ([www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=thugged+out&cr=f](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=thugged+out&cr=f)).

11 *platanoluva*: “An abbreviation for ‘black & Latino’ used most commonly by young urban Gay men of color; 2. A person, place, or thing that is

Afro-Latino,” ([www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=blatino&r=f](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=blatino&r=f)).

12 *Carl Willis*: “Adj. Presenting the outward appearance of one’s identification with urban ghetto culture through affected attitudes, mannerisms, language, or dress,” ([www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nigga&r=f](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nigga&r=f)).

13 *reyflyinfury619*: “(verb) To hit on, flirt with, or seduce a female by using verbal or sometimes physical means of persuasion,” ([www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mack&r=f](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mack&r=f)).

14 *me*: “getting your game on, trying to get with a person,” ([www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=kick+it&r=f](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=kick+it&r=f)).

15 Consider the following announcements for “parties” in *Next – The Hippest Gay Guide to New York*:

- *Private, bi-monthly party for in-shape hot guys, 18–40. Protection and hydration provided.*
- *Private weekly Friday parties in Brooklyn for muscular or tight*

their profiles or you will be deleted. Spammers, Feminine niggas, and niggas who ain’t down with Hip-Hop, Football, Basketball, and Playstation 2 are NOT welcome here. But if you a tugged out<sup>12</sup> nigga who mack<sup>13</sup> bitches but still looking for niggas to kick it<sup>14</sup> with on the low, then this is your spot. Holla!

The first and the last sentences of the paragraph claim the group for sexualities “on the low.” The descriptive blurb adds that the “niggas” who can join may include “latino” and “even white if [they] are down like that.” The group’s ethnic and racial *open door policy* has restrictions.

Upper and lower age boundaries are instituted at the outset. Legal concerns compel commercial and non-for-profit Internet sex sites to prevent minors from joining by setting bottom age limits. The upper age restriction buttresses the youth of the group’s membership.

In gay publications, ads of gay sex parties that bar participants over certain age often require as well, a degree of physical appeal.<sup>15</sup> The absence of mention of preferred body types in this *group description*, suggests that fitness may not be the major aim of its age regulation. Instead, allusions to a musical form cultivated by Black and Latino youngsters, two kinds of team sports (involving physical contact), and a popular second generation video game console that hosts sports, fight, and war simulation programs, substitute the physical attractiveness requirement. In assembling an “interests list” as a tableau of traits desired in potential sex group members, its managers delineate a cultural gestalt of the *down low*. I turn now to an examination of this open window into these men’s sexual conception.

There are two components of note in this *group description*, that appear also in other Internet *down low*-related materials: avoidance of words that may refer directly to body parts or sexual acts, and the identification and allusion to “surrogate arenas” as means of describing complex gender or sexual subject positions. I call *surrogate arenas*, realms of sociocultural practice significantly marked by one or more social structures. Naming these *surrogate arenas*, or the association of their name with the social location of the person doing the naming, evoke specific subject positions with enough vigor to make superfluous their description. In consequence, *surrogate arenas* are means to refer to social locations by proxy, and thus demarcate an all encompassing cultural gestalt.

In this particular case, *surrogate arenas* tacitly stand for gender, race, ethnicity and social class. Group manager can expect that new members’ strict allegiance to the *surrogate arenas* they name, would produce not only a particular racial, age, and class profile, but most importantly, a cultural sketch: Hip-Hop and the broadest listing of its components.

Along with the *sui generis* spelling and punctuation of Hip-Hop writing, its “linguistic texture,” the capacity of the paragraph to evoke and delineate a location in United States’ culture, class structure, and gender system of these

leisure activities and interests amount to a demographic prescription for the group. We can find the embodiment of these socio-cultural coordinates in the option-deprived barrios and slums of the United States, where, cut off from the job markets that made “men” out of their fathers, men in the reserve army of labor lick their masculinities’ wounds, that is: they sharpen their manly mannerisms.

Since the group is a (cyber)space for sexual *hook ups*, what qualifies *Hip-Hop*, *Football*, *Basketball*, and *Playstation 2* to be requirements for membership is not their esthetic value or their recreational promise. Instead, these leisure activities and forms of expressive culture, have gendered symbolic contents enriched by social class, race, age, and ethnic connotations. Making them membership qualifications is a simple way to screen for multiple variables. Another practical advantage of this procedure is that the combination of these interests conveys a more precise identity profile than the intersection of individual conceptions of gender, class, race, age, and ethnicity. A common identity outline may be an effective means of threading together the elusive sense of community in cyberspace.

### **Freddy's Challenge**

I did not come across many personal messages by *DL* Latinos addressing what being *on the down low* means for them. Although Latinos may be reticent to engage in group discussions, they are members of Internet groups for men in the *down low* that welcome their ethnicity, as well as of those that ignore it. Latinos may identify explicitly in their posted messages, may include references to their ethnicity in their screen names,<sup>16</sup> or may use Spanish words in either messages or screen names.<sup>17</sup> The *down low* sexualities of Latinos have to be inferred from the inclusion of those two words, or the acronym *DL* in their screen names. References to the *down low* have become fashionable, so these markers are not enough proof of a man’s sexuality. There are few postings in which the writer admits to be *on the low*, and even less of these messages seem posted by Latinos. Yet, some allow us into the way of thinking of these men.

The following message was posted on November 2002, by an Internet user whose screen name included the word *boricua*. The posting was delivered in a *linguistic texture* associated with Hip-Hop writing. In it, the writer referred to his ethnicity, collapsing race and skin color, and including his place of residence and physical characteristics, and expressing interest in meeting other marijuana-smoking men *on the low*.

*what up... i'm a wite skin puerto rican from the Bronx... i'm on the low... looking for a kat that is on the loww too... lookin for those thugged out kats ... if your friends and family know how you get doen [sic] then you aint on the low... all my blunt heads holla... me: 6ft brown hair-eyes 173lbs*

*[fit] Black and latin men under 35 only. Sorry, but if you don't work out, don't bother; Private membership club/ monthly parties for well-built, well-groomed, handsome, professional men 18-45. Call for complete details (Next 2005, 64).*

16 Latino, Latin, lat, ltn, Blatino (Black Latino), Rican, Puerto Rock, Chicano, cholo, etc.

17 Papi, chulo, caliente, vato, etc.

This posting stands out because the writer did not limit himself to his interest in meeting a man *on the low*. Instead, he went on to provide his definition of it, so that those who opened their sexuality to friends or family would not approach him.

The message was included in a reply by another Latino, a man of African descent who lived in Brooklyn. He used as screen name the same name in his e-mail address and his public profile,<sup>18</sup> an uncommon practice even among openly *Gay* men. I will call him *Freddy Santana*. *Freddy* was not responding to arrange a *hook up* with *wite skin puerto rican from the bronx*, but to mention his experience of sexual openness, and to question with disdain, the wisdom of being *on the down low*:

*shit i get more respect from everybody who knows [how] I get down cuz of da way I act and that i can hold my own, ain't scared to let a nigga know what times it is and still hang with da hoods from ENY<sup>19</sup> to Da Bronx. most peeps get intimidated by da way I look, so I guess I don't have to be scared of what peeps think. if dat's U, more power to U. can't live like dat. if U can't get/learn UR respect from being who U are and holdin it down, what kind of respect can U get?*

Occasionally, men in the Internet question those on the *down low* in this way. Like in this case, most often, the questioning is ignored and that ends the exchange. *Wite skin's* posting, and *Freddy's* remark, were peculiar in the presentation of their sexualities and their selves.

One man preferred to conceal his sexual interest in men, and the other bragged about his openness. *Wite skin*, was “looking for a kat ... on the low too,” and clarified what he meant by defining of what he did not: “... if your friends and family know how you get doen [sic] then you aint on the low...” To that, *Freddy* opposed his rugged sexual frankness: “ain't scared to let a nigga know what times it is.” To establish firmly for *wite skin*, or any reader, the superiority of his sexual philosophy, he ended with a rhetorical question: “if U can't get/earn UR respect from being who U are and holdin it down, what kind of respect can U get?”

These men's clashing views on the disclosure of their non-normative sexualities were couched in analogous masculinities. *Wite skin puerto rican* did not ask from his sex partners what he did not offer, so he searched for a “kat that is on the loww” [sic], like him. Consequently, his explicit preference for a “thugged out kat” suggests he perceived himself to be *thugged out*. The use of the word *thug* in rap music refers more to attitude than to criminal activity. It is a quest for masculinity in images of lawlessness, usually called *hypermasculinity*.<sup>20</sup>

*Freddy\_Santana's* claim to masculinity was more eloquent. He voluntarily told anyone “what times it is” (i.e.: his sexual preference), because “most peeps get intimidated by da way I look.” *Freddy* was not *thugged out*. He was a *thug*,

18 If his e-mail were, let's say *Freddy\_Santana@electronicnetwork.com*, his screen name would be *Freddy\_Santana*.

19 East New York is a Brooklyn area with a reputation of being tough and dangerous like the Bronx.

20 The extensive allusions to the *thug* in Hip-Hop, suggest it is an ideal type. The

and this allowed him the privilege of disclosure. On the other hand, *wite skin* use of the compound *thugged out*, an adjectivized past participle indicating a finished action to which the subject – the *kat* he was looking for – has submitted himself to, emphasizes demeanor rather than essence: he was not searching for *thugs*, but for *those thugged out kats*. This might be over reading into limited data, but it is not trivial hairsplitting to point how these observations go to the urban ethos' source of legitimacy: realness.

*Freddy* questions the merits of the *down low* as a sexual strategy, but hardly disguised beneath, he is challenging *wite skin*'s ghetto citizenship. And it is he who better attains the politics-laden goal of tracing his ethos to the inner-city environment. The linguistic style of both messages denotes urban youth culture. *Freddy* and *wite skin* place themselves within New York City's Black and Latino working-class neighborhoods, but only *Freddy* construes his milieu as an emblem of masculinity. He links his life in the inner-city, and the respect he gets from "da hoods," to his fierceness: "I guess I don't have to be scared of what peeps think." He makes a strong case against *the closet* without using that phrase, or calling himself *Gay*. The respect he gets from the *niggas* who know how he *gets do[w]n*, evokes Philippe Bourgois informants' (1996), rather than gay liberation's. *Niggas* respect him because if they do not, they have to fight him, and apparently, *Freddy* cuts a daunting figure.

*Wite skin* initiated the exchange, so his message lacks the benefit of the rebuttal that *Freddy*'s had. His message was addressed to the membership of their *netsex cybercommunity* at large, so he presents his masculinity within a sexual frame. *Wite skin*'s search for a *kat on the loww* [sic] *too*, conveyed that he had sex with men but he was not *Gay*. He ensures the privacy of his sexual life so his more public gender, should not be considered a gay masculinity. To express how serious he was about gender he announced the standard of *down lowness* his potential suitors should observe: "if your friends and family know how you get doen [sic] then you aint on the low." *Wite skin* does not open himself to a physical challenge. Instead, he shuts his masculinity behind the seal of secrecy.

There is not enough material in these two messages to make major assertions about how Latinos in New York City achieve their sexual identities. *Freddy* and *wite skin* seem to have enough material to actualize their sexual desire within the terms of the cultural milieu of their birth and rearing. Although for this achievement, they may not have had to ride the subway downtown, over the past three decades, Lesbian and Gay lives have become increasingly present and demystified in the USA's popular culture and *Freddy* and *wite skin* men may have received clues from this presence. There may be also emerging alternatives in sexual identity politics for certain populations. Even though the data in this article cannot fully support either statement, it is better suited to underscore the significance of race- and class-informed gender in the approach to same-sex sexuality of certain groups of working-class Black and Latino young men like *Freddy* and *wite skin*.

*thug* is a cultural hero, not because allegedly he breaks laws, but because he represents opposition to *the man*'s laws, the oppressive *status quo*.

### Sexin' the Boogie Down

My motivation in inviting Michael to visit a South Bronx club was to spend time with an old friend near home, outside New York City's gay neighborhoods. In my prior visits to that club, I did not give much thought to its characteristics. I thought the club was different because the neighborhood was different. I was accustomed for example, to being frisked for weapons upon entering a night club, so I did not consider the ritual peculiar. It assured me that I would not encounter lethal violence inside, but a body search on someone not used to it, could imply lethal violence. The procedure was a deterrent measure hinting at the surrounding neighborhood and the club's patrons, which was unusual at the gay clubs downtown.

The decoration of the locale did not mark it as a gay or men-loving men's space. Since it was rented for private gatherings on weeknights, it did not bear features that could relate it to any specific group or community. That night, the patrons provided the character the club lacked. The young age, and the ethnic and racial make up of the crowd packing the first floor, was in step with the rap music it danced to. The great number of men spoke of their sexual interests, but their attitude puzzled Michael. They were serious, apparently unconcerned about other men. Their eyes converged on a spot right ahead but past the room's walls.

The manner these young men inhabited a sexuality-marked space, was unlike that of patrons at other gay clubs Michael and I had visited: not many smiled; very few talked; and most strikingly, there were no signs of flirting, cruising, or other sexual innuendo. Had the crowd been gay, at least a few of the men would have greeted our arrival with their eyes. (Even a cursory look would have sufficed to place us in the *interesting* or *uninteresting* categories of the mental catalogue of a handful of men.) A gathering of young *Gay* men in a gay recreational space on a Saturday night, like a similar group of heterosexual men and women in a comparable space and night of the week, would not be without some sexual intrigue. The presence of a few women, and the lack of exhibitions of competitive masculinity, like at a cockfight, conveyed a subtler homosocial message. The attitude of the men at this South Bronx club announced resoundingly "straight," but the men to women ratio, the dancing, and the fact that it was Saturday night, communicated, "not straight."

Although most of the information the press disseminated about the *down low* could not be corroborated without meeting the men the journalists interviewed, successive visits to the South Bronx club as a participant observer, confirmed Venable's (2001) assertions about its distinctive ambiance. Even though only a survey of sexual identity and behavior could establish the clientele's thoughts about their sexuality, and with whom they shared their intimacy, that club was visibly different from a gay dance venue.

Other substantial differences were the music and the self-presentation of the patrons: playing non-stop rap music is not a strategy to get a Gay crowd dancing. Even in the upstairs dance floor, rap tunes were heard more often than in a gay nightclub. The dress and hair styles of the customers followed a youth-of-color esthetic sense. More conventionally trendy young Gay men sport a subdued version of this style. The music of the Bronx club, and the attire of its patrons, evoked a point of reference outside mainstream gay communities.

Another distinctive feature of the gathering was the aloofness of its collective ethos. However minimal, the possibility of meeting new friends is one motivation to attend a nightclub, and this cannot happen without some form of self-expression. Emotional display, genuine or otherwise, is a major communication “currency of exchange” in leisure social settings. At the South Bronx club, young men projected indifference. Of course, this may say more about my inability to identify emotional expressions than about their apathy toward contact.

Although the decoration of the larger dance floor upstairs was dull, it brought to mind an average gay discotheque. The combination of four features delivered its gay-identifiable quality. Its mirror balls evoked the 1970s *disco* music that agonized longest at gay dance clubs. The DJ played *house* music, which succeeded *disco*, retaining its *ecstasy-through-dance* principle. The dancing was more playful, creative and personal. The swaggering of the patrons was slightly less studied than in the Hip-Hop room, and this allowed me to recognize some flirting.

*Caushun*, The Gay Rapper, was a slim Black man in his twenties with a lilt in his voice that set him apart from standard rappers. The club’s clients responded to his act, with full attention and swaying bodies. The refrain of his rap – *I swallowed it* – was the extroverted utterance of their sexual silences. No one’s sensibility seemed hurt by the lyrics. The attitude of the handsome Latino to our right, whom I shall call *Pepe*, typified the response of the crowd: his body followed the rhythm; his hands deep in his pants’ pockets accentuated his masculine demeanor; and his eyes on the stage revealed his interest in the performance. *Pepe* only looked away from *Caushun* to answer Michael’s provocative question. “Do you swallow it?” Parting his lips in a dazzling smile and narrowing his eyes mischievously, *Pepe* raised the stakes. “No, I eat it,” he answered displaying amused comfort.

Our interaction ended there, so it is impossible to assess if *Pepe* “ate it” *on the down low* or with the knowledge of those close to him. I know though, that on that night, most if not all HIV prevention messages directed to his age and ethnic group, were not coded with the gender and cultural values he and the other men at the club displayed. Had he gone that night to a club in a gay ghetto, *Pepe* would have been bombarded with unsafe sex warnings, and free condoms would have found their way to the back pocket of his enormous jeans. To do that, *Pepe* may have had to relinquish his preferences in music, peers, and

the way of being a man. Most importantly, to contemplate going downtown he would have had to think himself Gay, if he did not. No other population has been asked to travel any physical, cultural, and psychological distances to encounter HIV prevention efforts.

Since that night, *Caushun's* rhyming skills and willingness to address his sexual life in his lyrics have gained him national and international prominence. The warm reception he got from the public that night, suggests there may be various ways to be on the *down low*, and not a uniform response of self-hating and deceptive men. The publicity of the "*down low* debate," has begun to inspire HIV education campaigns targeting *Pepe* and his peers. However, they do not yet counterweight the media's myopic criminalization of *down low* sexualities.

### **Latinos and the Logic of the *Down Low***

Reports of men who have sex with men without publicly acknowledging gay identity have hit a sensitive chord in US society. Finding out that they had a way to refer to their sexuality (*down low*) simplified its discussion, but it suggested this was a self-conscious community with some degree of organization. The possibility that these men were having sex with women triggered a wave of AIDS panic. It reawakened the stigma once attached to "risk groups" long after HIV transmission was reconceptualized in terms of risk behaviors. Men who hide their same-sex or bisexual sexualities predate the first reports of the AIDS epidemic, so what is the basis of this newfound concern?

There are two new elements in this controversy. Since the Stonewall riots LGBT communities have become more visible, and the idea that same-sex sexualities should be understood in terms of LGBT identities has become a truism. The legal and political achievements of the LGBT movement have provided a degree of normalcy to the lives of people who otherwise might have lived as pariahs, but also made it easier to identify "sexual danger" as the number of closeted men and women decreased. Almost synchronically, in blighted US urban neighborhoods, Black and Latino youngsters introduced a complex political and esthetic movement: Hip-Hop. A branch of this cultural vanguard, rap music, became dangerous as its verses reflected the oppression of their communities, sprinkled with misogynous and homophobic statements. The mythical mantle of the dark-skinned, lower class, sociopath – once on the back of Black Power soldiers – was bestowed onto male rappers, now regarded as most likely to overthrow the government, or at least, give the establishment some headaches.

Since Black and Latino young men are at the center of the *down low* controversy it is easy to compound the historical sexual danger they represent with the cultural danger Hip-Hop evokes. Their refusal to publicize their stigmatized sexual practices by adopting a stigmatized sexual identity defeats

the power of heterosexuality to prevent HIV causing resentment and anger. Although the first journalistic reports about the *down low* included young Latinos (Trebay, 2000; Venable, 2001), they quickly faded from the discussion in favor of a focus on African Americans. Like the ostrich, the Latino community working on HIV prevention sticks its head in the ground mumbling *eso es cosa de negros*.<sup>21</sup> Is it really? Are we not *negros* also? If we accept that certain Latino groups, namely Chicanos and Nuyoricans, share a great deal and live in close contact with African Americans, are there any specifically Latino cultural features that provide fertile ground for the development of down low sexualities?

I will proceed now to examine how immigration and the background of Latin American sex/gender systems may resonate with the logic of the *down low*.

21 “That’s a Black thing.”

### The Sexual Predicament of the Immigrant

Latinos in the US are marked by their linguistic and migratory experiences but also by their exposure to the dominant European American, as well as other cultural groups (Díaz, 1998, 129–136). The comradeship of African American communities and leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, other struggles for equality, as well as local and regional politics, influenced the creation of a single Latino identity and the development of its political protagonism. Blacks and Latinos occupy comparable subaltern positions from which their voices and opinions cross-fertilize. Hip-Hop is an example of a joint endeavor in popular culture. The discussion of *down low* sexual practices should not omit this close connection.

Determining factors of this proximity are the geographical location and the length of time people of different Latin American nationalities have spent in the US. Some Latino groups have closer historical, racial, and geographical links to African Americans than others. Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York City are an instance of that social and political closeness (Rivera, 2003).

The study of Latino sexualities in the US has to take into account their rank in the racial and socioeconomic hierarchies (Díaz, 1998, 113–127). Like other immigrants before them, most Latin Americans in the US originate from the working and peasant classes of their countries of origin. With the exception of the first wave of Cubans immigrants, whose financial assets in the US were established before they fled the revolution, the limited cultural capital of Latin American migrants (Bourdieu, 1977), and the needs of the US labor market, predetermine their insertion in the poorer end of the working-class.

The phenotype of most US Latinos reflects the African and indigenous ancestry of Latin America’s lower classes. The racial characteristics and class origin of Latino populations impinge on their location within the US’ social structure, and racial system. Their condition as “workers,” is the connective tissue between their social position in the US and their ancestry and prior class

situation. Latinos' class position also marks their insertion into the US' gay communities and social imaginaries, which they enter not as "comrades," or potential "lovers," but in a range of subaltern roles encoded by national, ethno-racial, and class markers. Just as race does, social class molds sexual experience (Healy, 1996; Gluckman and Reed, 1997; Raffo, 1997; González, 2001). A sensible appraisal of Latino *DL* sexualities should not neglect to look into the roles of class, and the major characteristics of the Latin American sexual/gender system in the development of sexual identities.

### The Sex/Gender Baggage

Ethnographic works on Latin American sexual systems abound, but the same is not true about US Latino male sexualities (Parker and Cáceres, 1999). In light of this constraint, I will use the existing material on Latin America, in lieu of background for the examination of Latino males' sexual identity and practices. In doing so, I should note the limitations to this type of data extrapolation. The problematic use of one term, Latinos, to refer to the extensive diversity of Latin American peoples in the US, should be reiterated. In an ethnographic alchemy of sorts, I will use the body of ethnographic knowledge emerging from Latin American cultural diversity to fill in, however precariously, the ethnographic gaps on US Latino sexualities in general. The perils of this strategy should be pointed out.

The ethnographic literature on sexuality and gender in Latin America concurs in asserting that their socialization on these matters starts early in life, and that men have to follow a strict path in expressing their masculinities (Parker, 1991, 59–64; Lancaster, 1992, 41–44; Carrier, 1995, 3–4; Melhuus and Stølen, 1996). During this process, men must exhibit traits that go from bravery to sexual prowess (Parker, 1991, 43–49; Lancaster, 1992, 273–274; Carrier, 1995, 3–21; Gutmann, 1996, 235–236). Failure to fulfill gender scripts, generates doubts about sexual preference (Parker, 1991, 45; Lancaster, 1992, 274). Men are defined not only in contrast to women, but above all, in opposition to subordinated masculinities such as the *maricón* or *faggot* (Connell, 1995, 78).

Héctor Carrillo and Alfredo Mirandé affirm that social class is a factor in how far, and in which way men may stray from the norm in asserting and adopting the masculinity styles. However, for Latin American men in general, avoiding the stigma of homosexuality is a compelling motivation to fulfill gender prescriptions (Mirandé, 1997; Carrillo, 2002; see also Cáceres, 1998; Fuller, 1998). Acquiring gender traits and skills (to talk and walk "like a man," to be courageous, and to bond with *real men*), before becoming sexually active, ensures a young man's peers he is no *maricón*, and improves his chances of becoming a *real man* later on (Parker, 1991, 45; Carrier, 1995, 6–7; Gutmann, 1996, 16–19; Fuller, 1998, 60). Once he obtains the credentials of manhood,

his sexuality is expected to follow suit, becoming a real man in his equals' eyes.<sup>22</sup>

This gendering process is not infallible. In my experience, the usual privacy of sexual acts limits peers' ability to assess them. In describing their sexual performance, young men can embellish, correct, or fabricate their accounts (see also Cáceres, 1998, 160). Sexual preference is elicited from verbal declarations or from failure or refusal to follow masculine scripts. Thus, masculine Latino homosexuals can trick the sexual/gender system, avoid stigma, and *pass*.

In light of these depictions of the constrains and possibility for cultural resistance within the Latin American sex/gender system, it is not implausible that a young Latino on the *DL*, like *wite skin*, may be motivated to keep his sexuality under wraps, and trick a sex/gender system that destines him to be stigmatized. He may realize that the *faggot*, *cochón*, *maricón*, and even the *Gay man*, are defined/identified through their public presentation. Latino/as in the United States, in observing the gay community's hypermasculine culture (the cowboy, the construction worker, the leather-man, etc.), have gathered sufficient proof that gender and sexuality need not overlap. Their anxiety about non-normative sexualities may have decreased through the work of the LGBT movement, yet they may feel that "Gay" has race, class, and gender implications distant from Latino social, political, and cultural locations (D'Emilio, 1983; Weeks, 1986; Maskovsky, 2002; González, 2004).

22 He could lose his standing later in life if he is unable to emerge triumphantly from other tests that life will put to him such as being able to support his family, keeping his female companion from sleeping with other men, etc. (Parker, 1991, 47-49; Valdés and Olavarria, 1998, 33-34).

## Global Identities

Since the turn of the 1990s, the gay rights movement has expanded in developing countries. To a great extent, the guiding paradigm has been the LGBT movement of the United States (Altman, 2001, 87). "Gay" has become synonymous with "homosexual," and "homosexual sex" and "gay sex," are used interchangeably. This is problematic when referring to the same-sex sexual activity of non-gay-identified men. Additionally, across the planet the word "gay" refers also to a cultural and political universe. It is teleological to assume that all same-sex-loving people will eventually come to realize they are "Gay." Consequently, it is overly simplistic to infer that their failure to adopt a "gay" identity implies internalized homophobia.

Subsuming the wide array of same-sex sexual desire and experiences under one label is a biased taxonomic strategy (Dowsett, 1996; Offort and Cantrell, 1999). McLelland (2000) argues that Japanese homosexuals' reticence to give up hopes of forming a heterosexual family is not "failing to develop a 'gay identity.'" Citing Lunsing's assertion that for the Japanese, sexuality is not the most important aspect of personhood (1997, 284), McLelland argues that their refusal to forgo a heterosexual union may be based in the significance of the child-rearing family in Japanese culture (McLelland, 2000).

23 For instance, Aponte-Parés (2001) documents the geographical and political distance of *Queer* Latinos in New York City from mainstream Latino and gay communities.

24 In a study of a largely white cohort of MSM that compared those living in four “gay ghettos” to others living elsewhere, Mills *et al.* (2001) found that the “ghetto”-based men were more likely to embrace a gay or queer identity and to be involved in the gay community. The other men were less likely to have a gay identity but had not abdicated community involvement and were active in the “non-gay” community. The latter could be compared to men on the *DL* that may find compelling reasons to preserve their full membership in their communities of birth by keeping their sex lives on the *down low*.

The United States’ “mainstream” gay community and movement are greatly informed by white middle class style and socio-cultural priorities. One marked disparity between Latino/as and the white middle class in the US is the different weight and expectations placed on the “individual” *vis-à-vis* “family” and/or “community” (Carrier, 1995, 3–10). For many Latino/as “to come out of the closet” implies making hard choices that prioritize the individual over the communal self. It should not be surprising that some may decide to keep their sexuality on the *down low*, propping up their masculinity on Hip-Hop culture, and retaining full membership in their ethnic group (Díaz, 1998, 89–111).<sup>23</sup> Rejecting gay identity does not mean, for Latinos, relinquishing a political life, as their community of birth provides them a platform and agenda from which to propel themselves as political subjects in equality struggles.<sup>24</sup>

### The *Down Low* as Wake Up Call

Public health efforts should not attempt to herd Latino/as toward a gay or *queer* identity, but should learn instead about their worldviews and design preventive strategies that resonate with them. This effort should include a careful consideration of the socio-economic, geographic, historical, political, and cultural contexts of sexuality (González, 2001; Muñoz, 2001). Ethnographic research is a most appropriate tool for this task (Lindenbaum, 1992, 324–326). This effort should be sensitive to social class, race, gender, and to the imprints left on Latino cultures by their coexistence with other ethno-racial, class, gender and sexual groups. Likewise, the terms “gay” or “MSM” should be enriching analytic tools, and not generic categories muddling with ethnocentric assumptions the specificity of the sexual lives and identities discussed (Meyer, 2001, 856).

Recent reports of the Centers for Disease Control indicate that minorities remain at high risk for contracting HIV. Latino/as remain overrepresented among those with HIV, and MSMs continue to comprise a considerable portion of the HIV epidemic (Wolitski *et al.*, 2001). The number of young men infected sexually, suggests that we need new strategies to engage in a prevention dialogue those now at the onset of their sexual lives. In the 1980s, the Latino community reacted with hesitation to the HIV epidemic. Sexual taboos and disagreements about appropriate strategies to contend with drug use, slowed the progression of the community’s response from denial, to debate, to action against the ravages of AIDS. By the 1990s, Latino/as developed wide-ranging and sophisticated strategies to contend with the unique profile of the epidemic in their communities, including, among others, the challenge of serving undocumented immigrants and overcoming linguistic barriers.

The emergence of *down low* sexualities is a new development in HIV prevention. The magnitude of the phenomenon, its possible relationship to unsafe sexual practices, and its role in the increasing rates of HIV infection

among Latinas and Black women, remain to be assessed. Whether young men on the *down low* represent a concrete social phenomenon, or are just a fad, their actual or imagined readiness to dispense with gay identity reflects a new sexual sensibility in this population. The cultural connotations of a group marked by race, ethnicity, class, and expressive culture make the *down low* both, a problem, and the means to solve it. Confronting the challenge of providing HIV-related services to this young population opens opportunities for public health to learn from the process. Helping young men *on the low* prevent HIV transmission is both a duty and a gateway into the sexualities of the 21st century.

Cultural features and social location increase the probability that Latino/as are part of this trend. To think Latino/as are protected by their cultural distance from their neighbors is not only wrongheaded, but could have dire consequences. As in politics, we should recognize our allies and join them in struggling for the health of our youth. Yet, five years after the eruption of the *down low debate* in the headlines of the press, the silence of Latino/as, implies this is somebody else's problem.

The experience of gender, ethnic, sexual, and class identities will never be static. New strengths and vulnerabilities will emerge and vanish at every step. The task of updating our understanding of HIV infection risk, and the ideological scaffolding that supports it, will never be finish.

## Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was written for the conference "Latino Sexualities in the United States: Exploring an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda for the 21st Century" organized by the Center for Gender, Sexuality & Health of the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University. I would like to thank Miguel Muñoz-Laboy for inviting me to make a contribution to this event. Alex Carballo-Diéguez guided me to the work of Héctor Carrillo. Angelica Bocour, Arlene Dávila, Shirley Lindenbaum; and Sabiyha Prince read, commented and encouraged me on earlier drafts of this paper. I would like to acknowledge the support of Suzanne Oboler and Karen Benita Reyes, as well as the comments of the anonymous reviewers of Latino Studies. Their observations have improved this text. I claim ownership of the weaknesses that remain in it.

## About the author

M. Alfredo González is an urban and medical anthropologist, and long-time HIV activist living in New York City. He has done research on poverty, sexuality, mental health and HIV infection in the Dominican Republic, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and New York City, and teaches at Queens College, CUNY.



## References

- Abrams, Nathan. 1995. Antonio's B-Boys: Rap, Rappers, and Gramsci's Intellectuals. *Popular Music and Society* 19(Winter): 1–19.
- Altman, Dennis. 2001. *Global Sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aponte-Parés, Luis. 2001. Outside/In: Crossing Queer and Latino Boundaries. In *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arleen Dávila, 263–286. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ards, Angela. 1999. Rhyme and Resist: Organizing the Hip-Hop Generation. *The Nation* 269(4, July 26–August 2): 11–14.
- Baker, Paul. 2002. *Fantabulosa: A Dictionary of Polari and Gay Slang*. New York: Continuum.
- Ballard, Scotty. 2001. Why AIDS is Rising among Black Women. *Jet*, July 23.
- Basu, Dipa. 1998. What Is Real about “Keeping It Real”? *Postcolonial Studies* 1(3): 371–387.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. In *Power and Ideology in Education*, eds. Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey, 487–511. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bourgeois, Philippe. 1996. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cáceres, Carlos. 1998. Jóvenes Varones en Lima: Dilemas y Estrategias de Salud Sexual. In *Masculinidades y Equidad de Género en América Latina*, eds. Teresa Valdés and José Olavarría, 158–174. Santiago de Chile, Chile: FLACSO-Chile.
- Carrier, Joseph. 1995. *De los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell and John Lee. 2001[1985]. Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity. In *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, eds. Rachel Adams and David Savran, 99–118. Malden, MA/Oxford, UK: Blackwell (First published in *Theory and Society* 14 (5): 551–603).
- Carrillo, Héctor. 2002. *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in México in the Time of AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Castleman, Craig. 1982. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- CDC. 2002a. Young People at Risk: HIV/AIDS among America's Youth. *Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention*, March 11.
- CDC. 2002b. HIV/AIDS among Hispanics in the United States. *Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention*, March 11.
- CDC. 2002c. Need for Sustained HIV Prevention among Men who Have Sex with Men. *Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention*, March 11.
- Chasin, Alexandra. 2000. *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market*. New York: St. Martin Press.
- Chung, Cristy, Aly Kim, Zoon Nguyen, Trinity Ordone and Arlene Stein. 1996. In Our Own Way: a Roundtable Discussion. In *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russel Leong, 91–99. New York and London: Routledge.
- Clay, Andreana. 2003. Keepin' It Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity. *American Behavioral Scientist* 46(10, June): 1346–1358.

- Cole, Tohnetta B. 1987. About People: Spelman's "Sister" President. *Essence*, November: pp. 34, 125.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Harper Collins.
- Connell, Robert. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, Robert. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dávila, Arlene M. 2002. *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Davis, Angela. 1983. *Women, Race, and Class*. New York: Vintage Books.
- De Genova, Nicholas and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas. 2003. Latino Racial Formations in the United States: An Introduction. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(2): 2–16.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. 2001. Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique. *Theory and Society* 30: 337–361.
- Denizet-Lewis, Benoit. 2003. Double Lives on the Down Low. *New York Times Magazine*, August 3.
- D'Emilio, John. 1983. Capitalism and Gay Identity. In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, 100–113. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Díaz, Rafael M. 1998. *Latino Gay Men and HIV: Culture Sexuality, and Risk Behavior*. New York: Routledge.
- Dowsett, Gary. 1996. *Practicing Desire: Homosexual Sex in the Era of AIDS*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. 1996. *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Edwards, Tamala. 2001. Men Who Sleep with Men (AIDS Risk to African American Women). *Essence*, October, p. 76
- Escobar, Arturo. 1996. Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberculture. In *Cyberfutures: Culture and Politics on the Information Superhighway*, eds. Ziauddin Sardar and Jerome R. Ravetz, 111–137. New York: New York University Press.
- Fenster, Mark. 1995. Understanding and Incorporating Rap: The Articulation of Alternative Popular Music Practices within Cultural Practices and Institutions. *Howard Journal of Communication* 5: 223–244.
- Flores, Juan. 1994. Puerto Rican and Proud Boyee!: Rap Roots and Amnesia. In *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music, Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, 89–98. New York and London: Routledge.
- Flores, Juan. 2000. *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fuller, Norma. 1998. La Constitución Social de la Identidad de Género entre Varones Urbanos de Perú. In *Masculinidades y Equidad de Género en América Latina*, eds. Teresa Valdés y José Olavaría, 56–68. Santiago de Chile, Chile: FLACSO-Chile.
- Gluckman, Amy and Betsy Reed, eds. 1997. *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community and Lesbian and Gay Life*. New York: Routledge.
- González, M. Alfredo. 2001. USA Poverty, Globalization and "Men Who Have Sex with Men." Paper presented at the American Ethnological Society Annual Meetings, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, May 3–6.

- González, M. Alfredo.** 2004. Sexuality and Love in the Lives of Homeless Men in New York City. Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Center and University Center, CUNY.
- Gordon Jr., William.** 2002. The Real “Down Low”: Hip Hop Culture Producing Queer Identities. Paper presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, New Orleans, November 22–24.
- Gramsci, Antonio.** 1989[1971]. The Intellectuals in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York: International Publishers, pp. 5–23.
- Green, Jonathon.** 1998. *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang*. London: Cassell.
- Gutmann, Mathew.** 1996. *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hall, Stuart.** 1988. Gramsci and Us. In *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, ed. Stuart Hall, 170. London: Verso.
- Harrison, Faye.** 1991. Ethnography as Politics. In *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, ed. Harrison F., 88–110. Arlington, Virginia: American Anthropological Association.
- Healy, Murray.** 1996. *Gay Skins: Class, Masculinity and Queer Appropriation*. London: Cassell.
- Hemphill, Essex, ed.** 1991. *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*. Boston: Alyson.
- Hemphill, Essex.** 1992. *Ceremonies*. New York: Plume.
- Ito, Mizuko.** 1997. Virtually Embodied: The Reality of Fantasy in a Multi-User Dungeon. In *Internet Culture*, ed. David Porter, 87–109. New York: Routledge.
- Kelley, Robin D.G.** 1996. Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles. In *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins, 117–158. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kitwana, Bakari.** 2004. The State of the Hip-Hop Generation: How Hip-Hop’s Cultural Movement is Evolving into Political Power. *Diogenes* 51(3): 115–120.
- Koza, Julia Eklund.** 1994. Rap Music: The Cultural Politics of Official Representation. *Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 16(1): 181–190.
- Lancaster, Roger.** 1992. *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press.
- Lindenbaum, Shirley.** 1992. Knowledge and Action in the Shadow of AIDS. In *The Time of AIDS: Social Analysis, Theory, and Method*, eds. Gilbert Herdt and Shirley Lindenbaum, 319–334. Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- Lipsitz, George.** 1994. *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place*. New York: Verso.
- Lunsing, Wim.** 1997. “Gay Boom” in Japan: Changing Views of Homosexuality? *Thamyris* 4: 267–293.
- Mahiri, Jabari.** 1997. Street Scripts: African American Youth Writing about Crime and Violence. *Social Justice* 24(4): 56–76.
- Mahiri, Jabari.** 2000. Pop Culture Pedagogy and the End(s) of School. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 44(4): 56–76.
- Mahiri, Jabari and Erin Conner.** 2003. Black Youth Violence Has a Bad Rap. *Journal of Social Issues* 59(1): 121–140.

- Marable, Manning.** 2002. The Politics of Hip Hop – Part Two of Two. *The Free Press*, February 4. <http://www.freepress.org/columns/display/4/2002/489>.
- Mukherjea, Ananya and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz.** 2002. Figuring Race Masculinity and Perversion: Interrogating the Elision of White Bisexuality to Black “Down Low” as Identifiable HIV Risk Factors. Paper presented at the Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meetings, Sexuality on the Edge section, Chicago.
- Mangaoang, Gill.** 1996. From the 1970s to the 1990s: Perspectives of a Gay Filipino American Activist. In *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russel Leong, 101–111. New York: Routledge.
- Marshall, Jonathan.** 2003. The Sexual Life of Cyber-Savants. *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 14(2): 229–248.
- Martinez, Theresa A.** 1997. Popular Culture as Oppositional Culture: Rap as Resistance. *Sociological Perspectives* 40: 265–286.
- Maskovsky, Jeff.** 2001. Sexual Minorities and the New Urban Poverty. In *Cultural Diversity in the United States*, eds. Ida Susser and Thomas C. Patterson, 322–340. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
- Maskovsky, Jeff.** 2002. Do We All “Reek of the Commodity”? Consumption and the Erasure of Poverty in Lesbian and Gay Studies. In *Out in Theory: the Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology*, eds. Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap, 264–286. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- McClaurin, Irma.** 2001. Theorizing a Black Feminist Self in Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach. In *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*, ed. Irma McClaurin, 49–76. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- McLaren, Peter.** 1995. Gangsta Pedagogy and Ghettoethnicity: The Hip Hop Nation as Counterpublic Sphere. *Socialist Review* 25(2): 9–55.
- McLelland, Mark.** 2000. Is there a Japanese “Gay Identity”. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2(4): 459–472.
- Melhuus, Marit and Kristi A. Stølen,** eds. 1996. *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagery*. London: Verso.
- Meyer, Ilan.** 2001. Why Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Public Health. *American Journal of Public Health* 91(6): 856–859.
- Mills, Thomas C., Ron Stall, Lance Pollack, Jay P. Paul, Diane Binson, Jesse Canchola and Joseph A. Catania.** 2001. Health-Related Characteristics of Men who Have Sex with Men: a Comparison of those Living in “Gay Ghettos” with those Living Elsewhere. *American Journal of Public Health* 91(6): 980–983.
- Mirandé, Alfredo.** 1997. *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.** 2001. HIV Incidence among Young Men who Have Sex with Men – Seven U.S. Cities, 1994–2000, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 50(21): 440–444.
- Muñoz, Miguel.** 2001. The Organization of Sexuality of Bisexually Active Latino Men in New York City. Ph.D. dissertation, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.
- Muñoz, Miguel.** 2004. Beyond “MSM”: Sexual Desire among Bisexually-Active Latino Men in New York City. *Sexuality* 7(1): 55–80.
- Next Magazine.** 2005. Parties. New York, 64.
- Oboler, Suzanne.** 1995. *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Offort, B. and L. Cantrell. 1999. Unfixed in a Fixated World: Identity, Sexuality, Race and Culture. *Journal of Homosexuality* 36: 207–220.
- Ortner, Sherry B. 1999. Generation X: Anthropology in a Media-Saturated World. In *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies, Changing Agendas*, ed. George E. Marcus, 55–87. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Parker, Richard. 1991. *Bodies, Pleasures and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Parker, Richard and Carlos Cáceres. 1999. Alternative Sexualities and Changing Sexual Cultures among Latino American Men. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 1(3): 201–206.
- Raffo, Susan, ed. 1997. *Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbians Write about Class*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Rivera, Raquel Z. 2001. Hip-Hop, Puerto Ricans, and Ethnoracial Identities in New York. In *Mambo Montage: the Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila, 235–261. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rivera, Raquel Z. 2003. *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rodríguez, América. 1998. Racialization, Language, and Class in the Construction and Sale of the Hispanic Audience. In *Reflexiones 1997: New Directions in Mexican American Studies*, ed. Neil Foley, 29–52. Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies Books, University of Texas at Austin.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover. University of New England Press.
- Smitherman, Geneva. 2000[1994]. *Black Talk; Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*, Revised Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Spears, Richard. 2000. *NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions*, Third Edition, Chicago: NTC Publishing Group.
- Suggs, Donald. 2001. The Gospel According to St. Rufus. *Poz Magazine* May: Vol. 70, 28–31.
- Trebay, Guy. 2000. A Gay Hip-Hop Scene Rises in the Bronx: Homo Thugz Blow Up the Spot. *Village Voice*, February 8.
- Valdés, Teresa and José Olavarría. 1998. Ser Hombre en Santiago de Chile: A Pesar de Todo, un Mismo Modelo. In *Masculinidad y Equidad de Género en América Latina*, eds. Teresa Valdés and José Olavarría, 12–35. FLACSO-Chile: Santiago de Chile.
- Venable, Malcolm. 2001. A Question of Identity. *Vibe Magazine*. July: 98–106.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. 1986. *Sexuality*. London: Tavistock.
- Wilson, Samuel M. and Leighton C. Peterson. 2002. The Anthropology of Online Communities. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 449–467.
- Wolitski, Richard J., Ronald O. Valdiserri, Paul H. Denning and William C. Levine. 2001. Are We Headed for a Resurgence of the HIV Epidemic Among Men who Have Sex with Men? *American Journal of Public Health* 91(6, June): 883–888.
- Wright, Kai. 2001. The Great Down Low Debate: A New Black Sexual Identity May Be an Incubator for AIDS. *Village Voice*, June 12.