IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE ON SEXUAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AMONG ETHNORACIALIZED GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN IN TORONTO

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Research Team

Principal Investigator

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Co-investigators

- **Peter A. Newman**, Ph.D., Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, and Canada Research Chair in Health and Social Justice.
- **Trevor A. Hart**, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Ryerson University.
- **Clemon George**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Ontario Institute of Technology.
- **Ishwar Persad**, Centre for Addiction & Mental Health
- **Andre L. Ceranto**, AIDS Committee of Toronto.
- **Riz Quiaoit**, Community Member
Community Advisory Committee

- **Shazad Hai**, MSM Outreach Coordinator, Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention.
- **Daniel Le**, Gay Men’s Health Promoter, Asian Community AIDS Services
- **David Lewis-Peart**, MSM Outreach Coordinator, Black CAP.
- **Marco Posadas**, Bathhouse Counselor Initiative Coordinator, AIDS Committee of Toronto.
- **Tavinder Channa**, Community Member
- **Dexter Roberts**, Community Member
- **Siva Gunarathnam**, Gay Men’s Outreach Coordinator, AIDS Committee of Toronto
- **Anthony Chen**, Community Member
- **Gerardo Betancourt**, HIV Prevention Program Coordinator, Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples
- **Marco Gomez**, Policy consultant
Purpose: To examine the relationship between racialized identity, sexual orientation identity, and body image among ethnoracialized gay and bisexual men in Toronto, Canada.

Multi-phase, mixed-methods study: Phase 1: Focus groups & interviews (n=61); Phase 2: Survey (n=400)

Community Collaboration: Roles of Community Advisory Committee (CAC).

4 ethnoracial communities:
- East/Southeast Asian;
- Black/Caribbean/African;
- Hispanic/Latino/Brazilian;
- South Asian.
METHODS

☐ Eligibility:
1) 18 years old+ male
2) Identify as gay or bisexual or report having had had sex with another man in the past 12 months
3) Identify with at least one of the four ethnoracial communities.
4) English speaking

☐ Recruitment: Community agencies, online list-serves, word-of-mouth.

☐ Data Collection: 2-3 focus groups for each ethnoracial community & individual interviews (when preferred).
# Focus Group (n=58)

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<th>DEMOGRAPHICS</th>
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<th># OF ATTENDEES</th>
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<td>East &amp; Southeast Asian</td>
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### Individual Interview (n=3)

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<tr>
<td>Black/African/Caribbean</td>
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DATA ANALYSIS

• Used MAXQDA, a qualitative coding software.
• Used coding techniques from Grounded Theory, such as initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006).
• Coded by multiple people (including RAs, PI and CAC members), multiple times: Ongoing peer debriefing to ensure inter-rater reliability.
• Member checking with CAC members for feedback.
• Multiple reviewers conducted several stages of assessment to choose data that are most salient to each code.
Three main themes emerged across four ethnoracialized communities.

(1) Body Image Idealization in Gay/Bisexual Male Culture

(2) Negotiating a Racialized Body Image

(3) Negotiating Impact of Body Image on Relationship with Self and Others
“I guess with the assumption of... being automatically perceived as bottom... “the feminine person” is the bottom so are you assuming that because of my body that I wouldn’t want to have the option of being the top... if there’s only two options that I have to be this right away, without even knowing me, that I’m playing the role of ...a woman... Is that because of my body, I wonder. Because...you’re fragile and geisha-like or whatnot.”

[East & Southeast Asian, < 30]
“Sexually...if I am being fetishized I don’t really like that and I wouldn’t really have sex with someone if that’s what’s going on. Socially... we live in a White supremacist society, unfortunately. So, of course, there’s going to be...a lot of not necessarily discrimination all the time but you can just sense it.”

[South Asian, < 30]
3. Negotiating Impact of Body Image on Relationship with Self and Others

A: Strategizing & Managing Pressures to Conform to Body Ideal

“I’d skip meals. I’ve made myself vomit... so that I could look good for the evening... When I used to drink, I would not eat meals, because I was going to go out and party, because I wanted to look good. So to the detriment of my health, I will do that.”

[Latino/Hispanic/Brazilian, > 30]
A: Strategizing & Managing Pressures to Conform to Body Ideal

“I got invited to..Pride beach party...and I said no... I can...imagine the expectation of body, you know, what it’s going to be like to be in this space. And at this point...in my life, I don’t need to be in those spaces to be validated... I’ve...cocooned myself with a set of friends, community people, that don’t have those issues around body... I surround myself with my own that validates me, that I feel that I can...express myself in whatever way I feel and not be judged.

[Black/African/Caribbean, > 30]
B: Impact of Body Image on Health

“When I get picked up, I feel accepted....I say, “wait a minute, maybe I ain’t that bad looking.” So, my insecurities about my body has led me to have promiscuous sex; it’s as simple as that, just because I want to be accepted by somebody, and if you go and you get picked up you feel that much better about yourself.”

[East/Southeast Asian > 30]
B: Impact of Body Image on Health

“I’m HIV positive, I have Kaposi... people looked at your legs...the skinny body, they know you’re HIV positive, and they talk. At first I didn’t think it would get to you, but it does get to you... So, I had a major image problem. Even right now, although I’ve gained back some weight...if I don’t open my big mouth all the time people probably won’t guess that I’m positive... I look in the mirror and I still see this skinny little HIV positive person... It’s the way that I perceive myself, with very low self-esteem.”
C: Impact of Body Racialization on Relationship with Others

“If you’re in a relationship with a Caucasian person, going into a space that’s predominantly of colour, ...the reception...is...double-edged...You’re either looked at as traitors, or envied. ... ‘You’re in this community and isn’t there anybody else in this community that you could have found?’ The other way you’re a trophy... a catch...the perception is either you didn’t try hard enough to meet someone of your own race, [or] you don’t like your own race... A lot of perceptions are thrown at you.” [Black/African/Caribbean, > 30]
Body image issues for ethnoracialized gay/bi men are complicated by the influence of racism, racialized discourses, masculinity norms (and to a smaller extent, homophobia). These influence the health and well being of ethnoracialized gay/bi men.

Ethnoracialized gay/bi men are actively navigating ways to counter the effects of racism and these masculinity norms upon them as individuals and in their communities.
Mainstream LGBT communities need to continue to advance an anti-racist agenda and collaborate with ethnoracialized communities to advance an anti-homophobia agenda.

Effective multiple level (individual, community, structural) models for preventing and alleviating racialized body image issues are needed to advance the overall health and wellness for ethnoracialized GBM.
Thank You!

- The participants
- Members of Community Advisory Committee
- Members of Research Team
- Staff Team
  - Rory Crath
  - Rhonda Hackett
  - Sophia Woo
Questions? Comments?

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