Published in final edited form as:

Cult Health Sex. 2013 May ; 15(5): 555–569. doi:10.1080/13691058.2013.774050.

The eroticism of Internet cruising as a self-contained behaviour: a multivariate analysis of men seeking men demographics and getting off online

Brandon Andrew Robinson^{a,*} and David A. Moskowitz^b

^aDepartment of Sociology, University of Texas, Austin, USA

^bDepartment of Epidemiology and Community Health, New York Medical College, Valhalla, USA

Abstract

Most studies on men seeking men and who use the Internet for sexual purposes have focused on the epidemiological outcomes of Internet cruising. Other research has only focused on online sexual behaviours such as cybersex. The present study examines men who find the acts of Internet cruising and emailing to be erotic as self-contained behaviours. We surveyed 499 men who used craigslist.org for sexually-oriented purposes, and ran an ordinary least squares multiple regression model to determine the demographic characteristics of men seeking men who found Internet cruising erotic. Our results showed that younger compared to older men seeking men found the acts erotic. Likewise, men seeking men from mid-sized cities and large cities compared to men from smaller cities found Internet cruising and emailing to be erotic. Most notably, bisexual- and heterosexual-identifying men seeking men compared to gay-identifying men found these acts to be more erotic. Our results suggested that self-contained Internet cruising might provide dual functions. For some men (e.g., heterosexual-identifying men), the behaviour provides a sexual outlet in which fantasy and experimentation may be explored without risking stigmatization. For other men (e.g., those from large cities), the behaviour may be an alternative to offset sexual risk while still being able to 'get off'.

Keywords

Internet cruising; men seeking men; craigslist; computer-mediated eroticism; sexual identity

The Internet has become a crucial medium for many people to explore their sexuality, especially for men seeking other men for sexual purposes. The ubiquity of the Internet has engendered novel discourses around sexuality, creating a space for new sexual identities to be developed online (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Fernandez-Davila and Lorca 2011; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Ross 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000). In this 'erotic oasis', men seeking men are able to investigate sexual health information, negotiate their sexuality and sexual behaviours, cruise for offline sexual encounters and even engage in virtual sex with other men (Adam, Murphy, and de Wit 2011; Bolding et al. 2007; Bolding et al. 2004; Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Daneback et al. 2012; Davis et al. 2006; Delph 1981; Fernandez-Davila and Lorca 2011; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Grov, Parsons, and Bimbi 2007; Ross 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000; Sanders 2008; Tewksbury 2010; Wilson et al. 2009). The Internet's accessibility, affordability and anonymity has allowed men seeking men to experiment with sexual identities and behaviours, including

those identities and behaviours that are often deemed aberrant by the larger society (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008; Davis et al. 2006; Fisher and Barak 2000; Garofalo et al. 2007; Lever et al. 2008; Ross 2005; Tikkanen and Ross 2000).

This anonymity of the Internet facilitates a sense of privacy around one's same-sex sexual desires, affording one to achieve sexual contact with other men without having to reveal one's own personal identity (Braine et al. 2011; Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Maratea 2011; Ross 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000; Tikkanen and Ross 2003). People can search for sexually-similar others and possibly acculturate into these sexual subcultures (Maratea 2011; Ross et al. 2007; Tewksbury 2003). As Peterson (2000) and Tikkanen and Ross (2000) identified, the Internet was useful for men during their coming out process, and Ross (2005) argued that lurking online can allow individuals ' . . . to watch the interactions, learn some of the language, and gain an understanding of what being gay is about . . . the internet [sic] is equivalent to a one-way window into a gay bar'. (348). Gay men's use of male-for-male chat rooms has provided them opportunities to gain sexual autonomy through their exploration of sexual practices and their participation in chatting with other similar men online about potentially erotic acts (Sanders 2008). Accordingly, the Internet has helped youth develop their sexual identity (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Fernandez-Davila and Lorca 2011; Mustanski, Lyons, and Garcia 2011) and has granted those more geographically isolated men the ability to explore their sexuality (Horvath, Bowen, and Williams 2006; Tikkanen and Ross 2000; Williams, Bowen, and Horvath 2005). The Internet provides a space for these men to play with some of their sexual desires without having to frequent physical locations in which fears of identification and stigmatisation would occur or even abound (i.e., gay bars or bathhouses) or which may be difficult to access because of age limits or geographic confinements (Bolding et al. 2007; Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Lever et al. 2008; Ross 2005; Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). The Internet has helped those young, those geographically isolated and other marginalised populations of men develop a sense of their sexual identities and desires, providing a forum where sexual fantasies can be explored without physical interaction and high risk (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Peterson 2000; Ross 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000; Tikkanen and Ross 2003).

The majority of the literature on these men seeking men and their use of the Internet for sexual purposes has studied the epidemiological outcomes of Internet cruising (Bolding et al. 2005; Fernandez-Davila and Lorca 2011; Liao, Millett, and Marks 2006; Mustanski, Lyons, and Garcia 2011). For instance, the use of Internet-based technologies (e.g., webcams) has been associated with sexual compulsivity (Dew and Chaney 2004). Men who seek sex with other men and meet them online have tended to have more sexual partners (Grov, Parsons, and Bimbi 2007) than men who meet other men in traditional, in-person locations (e.g., bars, physical gay-spaces). Likewise, younger men who identify as gay are more likely to seek partners online than older gay men (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005). Some studies have shown that these men have also been more likely to engage in unprotected sex and other risky sexual behaviours than other men-seeking-men populations (e.g., 'barebackers' versus 'non-barebackers') (Garofalo et al. 2007; Klein 2009, 2010; Tewksbury 2003). However, other studies have found that these men were no more likely to practise unprotected sex with men they met online compared to men they met offline (Bolding et al. 2005; Horvath, Bowen, and Williams 2006). Nonetheless, in a study of condom non-use among men who have sex with men, it was observed that men who have sex with men who met online reported a higher mutual agreement not to use condoms compared to men who met offline (Ostergren, Rosser, and Horvath 2011). Likewise, Moskowitz and Seal (2010) found that men who have sex with men who posted large numbers of personal advertisements and were able to hook up because of their posts were

more likely to accrue STDs than those who posted fewer advertisements. Within most of these studies, the Internet is construed as a medium used by men who are seeking to engage in risky sexual behaviours and, therefore, it is a medium that may be facilitating the rising HIV rates among men who have sex with men (Blackwell 2010).

The role of sexual identity in actualising some of the above behaviours is also important to these epidemiological studies. As Leobon and Frigault (2008) note, a great diversity of sexual behaviours and identities exist online and men seeking men do not all inhabit a homogenous cyberspace. Men who self-identify as bisexual (or heterosexual) have had different needs and wants and have espoused sexual health positions differently to men who identify as gay (Cheeseman, Goodlin-Fahncke, and Tewksbury 2012; Kennedy and Doll 2000; Klein 2009). Bisexual men have tended to engage in lower levels of sexual risk, have not looked for offline sexual partners as much as gay men and have used Internet chat rooms more than other men-seeking-men populations (Bolding et al. 2004; Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008; Klein 2009; Tikkanen and Ross 2003). Lever and colleagues (2008) found that bisexual men were more likely than heterosexuals and homosexuals to use the Internet to find discreet affairs without having to leave the house or jeopardise appearances. Furthermore, Ward (2008) showed how 'str8'-identified men used craigslist.org to seek sexual encounters with other 'str8' men and to negotiate their sexual interests without comprising their heterosexual identity. Although these studies have pointed to sexual identity as important in one's online behaviours, bisexual and heterosexual men have been largely omitted from the literature targeting gay men and HIV, generating little knowledge about their needs and Internet use for sexually-related purposes (Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008).

Not surprisingly, with most of the research focusing on the behavioural outcomes of the Internet, few studies actually examined the online behaviours and desires themselves. In one study on men seeking men and Internet sex chat rooms, Ross and colleagues (2000) showed that Swedish men who used the Internet for sex chat rooms and for acquiring sexual information were likely to be young, from small towns, have lower formal education and have bisexual sexual experiences (see also Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). In a later Swedish study, Daneback and colleagues (2008) revealed that bisexual-identified individuals more '... than gay men/lesbians or heterosexuals indicated that they used the Internet to engage in sexual activities they would not engage in offline' (123). Moskowitz and Seal (2010) found that men who placed a high number of advertisements online but who rarely actualised a face-to-face same-sex sexual encounter were more likely to practise safe-sex than those who did actualise encounters. Their research suggested that placing advertisements and emailing (i.e., online/Internet cruising as a self-contained behaviour) might even be sufficient erotic acts for some people. Lastly, Adam and colleagues (2011) exposed that engaging in online fantasising and erotic chatting, especially around unprotected anal intercourse, often led to men engaging in those behaviours offline as well. This finding is in congruence with Fisher and Barak's (2000) earlier hypothesis that an 'erotophilic' would incorporate sex-positive acquisitions from looking at online sex shops into their offline sexual behaviours. These studies challenge people to see online eroticism as a real behaviour and that this eroticism has consequences for offline sexual behaviours as well.

To date, hardly any research has been done to follow up on these speculations. Daneback and colleagues (2012) recently discovered that some men were sexually aroused through searching sexual health information online, but no studies have examined or accounted for the use of personal advertisements and emailing as self-contained forms of eroticism for men seeking men. It is imperative to study this new context of the eroticism of Internet cruising in order to comprehend novel forms of sexual behaviour and their implications for

sexual identity development and sexual health outcomes (Adam, Murphy, and de Wit 2011; Tikkanen and Ross 2003). From a public health perspective, engaging in cybersex and other sexual self-pleasures (e.g., masturbation, finding sexual health information arousing) has been categorised as completely (physiologically) safe, if kept strictly online (Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000). That is, men cannot get HIV/STDs from emailing, reading profiles and advertisements or from swapping nude pictures. Therefore, as researchers seek HIV/STD resilient strategies to potentially suggest to riskier groups of men, it is important to research what types of men engage in this safer act of self-contained Internet cruising for erotic purposes and who may be *intentionally not* seeking sexual encounters requiring face-to-face contact. This study will seek to uncover which men seeking men find Internet cruising and emailing erotic in order to contribute to a better understanding of the Internet's role in the lives of these particular groups of men.

Hypotheses

Given that little research on Internet cruising as an erotic and self-contained act has been conducted, more study is needed to explore which factors impact men seeking men who use the Internet for erotic online purposes. Situated within, and suggested by, the previous literature, this study proposes:

H1: Younger men seeking men will find Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic compared to older men seeking men.

H2: Less educated men seeking men will find Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic compared to more educated men seeking men.

H3: Men seeking men from smaller cities will find Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic compared to men seeking men from more urban areas.

H4: Bisexual and heterosexual self-identifying men seeking men will find Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic compared to homosexual self-identifying men seeking men.

Methods

Procedures

We used a cross-sectional design with a sample of men seeking men on craigslist.org. A 15-minute survey was emailed to men who posted sexual advertisements under the 'men seeking men' section on craigslist.org. Specifically, men who posted advertisements under this section on craigslist.org were sent a block message asking them to help the researchers understand the sexual behaviour and health of men who cruise for sex online. They were also provided a link to follow if interested in completing the survey. The data were collected from January to March of 2008. As with most studies that offer no compensation for participants' time, our study had a relatively low response rate (around 5%) compared with the number of total solicitations emailed (>10,000 emails). Yet it is impossible to know how many individuals literally received the email, opened it and made a conscious decision to ignore it. A more meaningful statistic may be that about 72% of those who started the survey (or 531 men) completed the survey in its entirety. The solicitation was sent to men posting in all cities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. The topics covered included demographics, physical appearance, social identity, the participants' attitudes, current relationship status, numbers of sexual partners, sexual behaviours, condom and drug use, sexual health and craigslist.org use (see Klein et al. 2010 for more information).

Measures

The key dependent variable was the erotic cyber-communication scale (ECCS). This variable was an eight-item scale that asked men to rate their craigslist.org use in relation to different erotic acts of emailing and Internet cruising. The actual items, along with the seven-point agreement scale, may be found in Table 1. All statements combined to create a scale (the ECCS) with good reliability, $\alpha = 0.78$. Scores were summed and re-coded creating a measured range of 1 to 46. The closer to 46, the more erotic Internet cruising and emailing was considered to be by the participant. Because this was a scale we conceptualised and operationalised, we ran a confirmatory factor analysis with Varimax rotation to uphold the appropriateness of keeping the scale as one coherent factor. The analysis admittedly produced two factors with Eigenvalues above one and which accounted for 58% of the variance. The factors, their components and each item's loading may be viewed in Table 1. The cutoff loading for inclusion in a factor was .50 (Pedhazur and Schmelkin 1991). Ultimately, it was due to this last criterion that we decided to keep the scale whole. Two of the eight (25%) items loaded equally well into either factor (specifically, items 3 and 7). Moreover, in returning to the language of the actual items and trying to figure out what, conceptually, these factors could be, no evident answer emerged. They all seemed to be accessing similar areas regarding emailing, posting advertisements, Internet cruising and perceived eroticism. The high degree of statistical and conceptual overlap between factors coupled with the good reliability between all the items encouraged us to keep the scale whole.

For the city size independent variable, we recoded and created dummy variables. Men were asked, 'What is the size of the town or city in which you live?' and were given six exclusive options. Cities were classified by size according to their population. Relying upon Seasons's (2003) and Simard and Simard's (2005) classifications of mid-size cities as being between 50,000 and 500,000 inhabitants, we recoded our variable accordingly. Therefore, for small city, we combined less than 10,000 and 10,000 to 50,000 people. For mid-size city, we combined 50,001 to 100,000 people with 100,001 to 500,000. For large city, we combined 500,001 to 1 million and over one million. We used 'small city' as the reference category (as suggested by previous literature) and put 'mid-size city' and 'large city' into the model.

For the sexuality independent variable, we also created dummy variables. Men were asked, 'Which of the below statements best describes your sexuality?' They could pick: 'I'm straight', 'I'm bisexual', 'I'm gay' or 'I don't consider myself gay, bisexual or straight'. We excluded the 6% who chose the 'I don't consider myself . . .', which reduced the sample size from the original 531 to 499. We used gay as the referent category and entered bisexual and heterosexual into the model.

Men were asked for their age, creating a continuous independent variable with a mean of 40.76 years old and a standard deviation of 12.06 years.

Men were asked to select their level of education from six different choices. They could only choose one of the following options: finished some high school, graduated high school, finished some college, graduated from college, finished some graduate school, received a graduate degree. We left this as an ordinal independent variable.

The last independent/control variable was success rate of hookup. This variable asked, 'In the past three months, what per cent of time were you successful at having a sexual encounter by using online advertisements?' The respondents could choose from never to 100% of the time, on a 10% increment scale. We left this as an interval variable.

Statistical analysis

STATA 11 for Macintosh was used to analyse the data. Descriptive characteristics of the variables were examined within the software in order to investigate the distributions and forms of the data. From there, ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple linear regression was implemented to assess how sexuality, city size, age and education predicted those who found Internet cruising and emailing to be an erotic act. Success rate of hookups was also in the model as a control because previous literature with this data set suggested that this variable could theoretically have a negative relationship with finding Internet cruising and emailing as erotic (Moskowitz and Seal 2010). The beta coefficients (β) presented in the results section are the standardised beta coefficients. Likewise, the delta coefficients (δ) are the standardised beta coefficients for the dummy variables. To correct for heteroskedasticity, which was found during the examination of the OLS model, HC3 robust standard errors were used (see Long and Ervin 2000; Wooldridge 2009).

Results

Sample

As described in Table 2, the sample showed a fairly normal distribution for education, age and ECCS. Most men in the sample were between 30 and 50 years old and most had graduated from or had some college education. For city size, the sample of men was least likely to live in small cities (27.66%) and most likely to live in a mid-size city (38.08%). Those living in large cities fell in between (34.27%). The majority of the sample also identified as homosexual (66.33%), but a sizeable number identified as bisexual (29.66%). A small minority identified as heterosexual (4.01%). The men reported a low success rate of hook up from placing advertisements on craigslist.org. They only were successful in about 3 out of 10 attempts.

As displayed in Table 3, the OLS multiple regression analysis with robust standard errors showed a significant association between the independent variables and the dependent variable, $F(7, 491) = 13.74$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.13$, $p < .001$. The model was significant in predicting the men's eroticism associated with Internet cruising and emailing, explaining about 13.48% of the variance. As the whole model was significant, the individual independent variables within the OLS model and their associations with the dependent variable were explored to accurately assess the hypotheses:

H1: Within the OLS model, age was significant, $t = -6.38$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -0.28$. Older men seeking men found Internet cruising and emailing to be less erotic compared to younger men seeking men.

H2: Education was not found to be significant and, as such, we could not rule out the null hypothesis.

H3: Within the OLS model, mid-size city, with small city as the reference category, was significant, $t = 2.78$, $p < .01$, $\delta = 0.14$. Residing in a mid-size city when compared to a smaller city was positively associated with finding Internet cruising and emailing more erotic. This meant that our hypothesis was incorrect.

Similarly, within the OLS model, large city, with small city as the reference category, was significant, $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$, $\delta = 0.16$. Residing in a large city when compared to a smaller city was positively associated with finding Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic. Again, this disproved our hypothesis.

H4: Within the OLS model, bisexual, with homosexual as the reference category, was significant, $t = 5.23$, $p < .001$, $\delta = 0.22$. Being bisexual compared to being homosexual was positively associated with finding Internet cruising and e-mailing to be more erotic.

Similarly, within the OLS model, heterosexual, with homosexual as the reference category, was significant, $t = 2.64$, $p < .01$, $\delta = 0.10$. Being heterosexual compared to being homosexual was positively associated with finding Internet cruising and emailing more erotic.

Finally, it should be noted that the main control variable of success rate for hookups was significant within the OLS model, $t = -2.66$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -0.11$. Successfully hooking up from Internet cruising was negatively associated with actually finding Internet cruising and emailing to be erotic. Incidentally, this finding may speak towards the validity of ECCS. For if the scale were not accurately measuring men's erotic attitudes towards cruising and email (i.e., that the behaviours are enough to 'get off'), one would expect no convergence with actualised offline sexual encounters. To some degree, this is not the case.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the characteristics of men seeking men who find Internet cruising and emailing to be self-contained erotic acts. Consistent with the initial hypothesis, younger men tended to find Internet cruising and emailing to be more erotic compared to older men. Research has shown that youths use the Internet to 'come out' or acculturate into the gay culture (Bolding et al. 2007; Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Ross 2005; Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). Younger men additionally could be using Internet cruising to explore their same-sex desires (i.e., as an informal sex-education tool that builds their cognitive sexual orientation). If fantasy is influential over psychosexual development for young individuals (Rosario et al. 1996), then the exploration of same-sex fantasies via the Internet may be a relatively risk-free, available way to experiment with identity and develop erotic scripts. Alternatively, structural obstacles exist for younger men, which make using the Internet the only way to 'get off'. Legal age-limits prevent younger men from entering gay bars and bathhouses. Offline sexual encounters usually require some form of transportation and space, which may be impossible to acquire. In the end, the confluence of all of these social, cognitive, and structural factors may overwhelm the desire to leave the computer screen and make masturbating alongside Internet cruising behaviours sufficient.

Our second hypothesis, which focused on education, could not be confirmed. This study assessed eroticism as a self-contained behaviour, where previous studies (e.g., Ross, Tikkanen, and Mansson 2000; Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003) examined other types of online behaviours. It may be that education tends to affect specific online behaviours, such as chatroom use or sexual information acquisition, but not necessarily perceptions of eroticism surrounding the use of Internet communication features. We still believe that future studies should continue to explore the role education plays, if any, in the lives of men seeking men and their Internet cruising behaviours.

Past studies have shown that those men seeking men who lived outside of urban areas were more likely to engage in cybersex or Internet sex chat rooms because of the paucity of available local gay public spaces, literal spatial isolation and/or lack of knowledge of other non-heterosexual men (Horvath, Bowen, and Williams 2006; Tikkanen and Ross 2000; Williams, Bowen, and Horvath 2005). As a corollary, we expected erotic feelings towards Internet cruising to develop as a means to replace the erotic stimuli traditionally offered by actual partner encounters. This was not the case. Rather, it seemed more likely that for men living in rural areas, cruising remained an intermediate behaviour that facilitated offline encounters. In speculation, Internet cruising may not be viewed as erotic itself because successful cruising for rural men is actually quite difficult. The behavioural condition (i.e., cruising) is not reinforced with a positive sexual outcome (i.e., engaging with a live partner). As a result, the eroticism association is not learned nor felt. In contrast, men living in more

populated areas, but who still cruise online for sex, have easy access to social (e.g., cultural acceptance) and structural (e.g., transportation) facilitators of offline sexual encounters. Simply, it is *easier* to have sex. More positive outcome efficacy attitudes develop towards computer-mediated sexual communication and the eroticism felt towards the online behaviours are really expectancies. Granted, this social learning/Pavlovian response is merely a thesis. Future cognitive psychological studies will have to explore the relationship between Internet use, social learning, expectations and erotic attitudes.

Perhaps most intriguing, and consistent with the earlier literature and hypotheses, sexual identity did greatly impact finding the self-contained act of Internet cruising as erotic. We posited bisexual- and heterosexual-identified men seeking men would find Internet cruising to be more erotic than gay-identified men seeking men – and for similar reasons as younger men seeking men (i.e., to explore their same-sex desires, to acculturate into gay culture, to come out and to fantasise: Brown, Maycock, and Burns 2005; Lever et al. 2008; Peterson 2000; Ross 2005; Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). Bisexual and heterosexual men seeking men may see gay public places as more related to a gay identity (Ross 2005; Tikkanen and Ross 2000) and, therefore, they turn to the Internet to cruise and find eroticism. Also, Rosario and colleagues (2006) showed that sexual identity development could change over time, where a bisexual identity may just be a transition to a gay or lesbian identity. In seeking to explore and experiment instead of enacting their desires offline, bisexual and heterosexual men seeking men might find Internet cruising and emailing to be an erotic tool for sexual self-expression, satisfaction and possible identity development.

As an alternative explanation, the anonymity and accessibility of the Internet allows these men to find pleasure in cruising for other men without having to reveal their own identity, without actualising ‘gay’ (i.e., physical sex with another man) behaviour and also without upsetting their potential partners or having sex outside of their relationship (Tikkanen and Ross 2000, 2003). As Peterson (2000) discovered in his research on bisexual and gay heterosexually married men online, the Internet served as a tool for these men to feel good about themselves through making connections with other men. These men, without ever meeting the other online men, could experience high levels intimacy through just their online interactions, and it was not rare for these men to fall in love with other men online (Peterson 2000). These bisexual and heterosexual men may also not want to enact their behaviours offline as offline intimacy (especially penetration) may be seen as ‘too gay’, and, hence, compromise their sexual identity (Ross 2005; Ward 2008). Gay men also use the Internet more than bisexual men for seeking partners (Daneback, Ross, and Mansson 2008), which could leave bisexual men as less experienced in having sex with other men – especially men met online. In being inexperienced, seeking to avoid having sex outside of their relationship with a woman, and/or not wanting to compromise one's sexual identity, bisexual and heterosexual men seeking men may only have the Internet as an outlet for their non-heterosexual feelings, which could increase their arousal with online cruising compared to gay men, who are more comfortable enacting these behaviours offline. In line with Brown and colleagues (2005), Lever and colleagues (2008) and Ross (2005), online eroticism as a self-contained behaviour may serve as a bridge between fantasy and offline action for these bisexual and heterosexual men who may fear developing a stigmatising identity (see also Fisher and Barak 2000). These men may feel embarrassed for not knowing information about sexuality and, hence, they use the Internet to explore these issues with other men, getting aroused in the process (Daneback et al. 2012). Therefore, further studies should investigate why bisexual and heterosexual men seeking men find Internet cruising more erotic compared to homosexual men seeking men online.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. The data were limited to men seeking men who were posting only on craigslist.org; and, therefore, it may not be generalisable to men who use other sites to also Internet cruise. Likewise, all the men in this sample had at least posted an advertisement on craigslist.org, so it may not be capturing those men who just 'lurk' or do not actively post, but who may still be cruising for erotic purposes. Again, the response rate was low, which may have produced a sampling bias. Having a large sample size mitigated this potential. Finally, with respect to the literal data, there was a heteroskedasticity problem, which was corrected by robust standard errors.

In turning to limitations of the measures, there may be issues surrounding how the data were assessed. The question on the men's success rate might have been too vague or open to interpretation. Yet more importantly, the men's self-selected sexual orientation also might have been underdeveloped in measurement as an independent variable. Obviously, there is some dissonance between self-identifying as heterosexual and the parameters of being included in this study (i.e., having posted an advertisement looking for same-sex sexual partners). It is important to note that although the respondent's self-identity online may not be congruent with their sexual orientation and behaviours offline, we do not believe that online and offline identities are mutually exclusive or that one is more authentic than the other. As Ward (2008) argues, online identities are equally reliable sources of knowledge as offline identities within our pursuit to understand the construction of sexualities within society. With that in mind, the identity that the men selected in the questionnaire was arguably the identity that they subsumed in cyberspace when cruising and discussing erotic behaviours with other men online. This merely supports the notion that all fields of study should continue to explore the heterogeneity of the male-for-male population and not construct them as a homogenous group in future studies.

Lastly, the dependent variable, while reliable, may have some unknown, untested issues surrounding its validity. Arguably, the statistically significant convergence described at the end of the results explained too little of the variance to truly indicate validity. In addition, we did not include items on other sorts of Internet-mediated communication tools, that might be used for erotic purposes (e.g., webcams). We did not delve into the motives for why certain men find online cruising as erotic or which behaviours these men actually enact (e.g., Skype masturbation sessions). Future researchers who might want to include a similar measurement in a survey should definitely investigate its accuracy at measuring eroticism surrounding Internet cruising/computer-mediated communication, the motives theorised within this paper, as well as the specific behaviours of the men who find cruising online as erotic.

Conclusion

The above findings have significant implications for understanding why men seeking men turn to the Internet and find pleasure in online cruising. Engaging in Internet cruising and emailing itself does not pose any public health risks for these men. Therefore, the separation of this behaviour from actually hooking up through the Internet needs to be reexamined within public health research and literature. If bisexual men are engaging in lower-risk sexual practices (Klein 2009), this study then furthers speculation about the types of behaviours that bisexual and heterosexual men seeking men engage in online compared to homosexual men. New understandings about sexual identity, sexual learning and intrapersonal education, behaviour and the Internet's role in men seeking men need to be re-conceptualised if the field of sex research wants to adequately address rising HIV and other STI risks within men-seeking-men communities.

Accordingly, the findings of this study push the field to rethink sexualities in general. Internet cruising and emailing seem to play a legitimate role in the sexual lives of younger men seeking men, men who identify as bi- or heterosexual and men who live in large cities. The role that these erotic practices play in these men's lives needs special attention. Do these practices provide sexual empowerment and exploration for these men? Do these practices help mitigate engaging in risky sexual behaviours? How does exploring one's desires online without actualising them offline affect one's concept of his sexual-self? Alternatively, is this perceived eroticism merely a Pavlovian response to the condition-reinforcement paradigm? These questions and many more need to be investigated further by both quantitative and qualitative undertakings. As Peterson (2000) and Ross (2005) note, new forms of intimacy freed from reproduction and other heteronormative demands can be facilitated by the Internet. By adding Internet cruising and emailing as erotic acts to these discussions, researchers can explore other forms of how people are enacting sexual desires, externalising fantasies online and transfiguring sexuality in this digital age.

Acknowledgments

Data collection for this article was supported, in part, by centre Grant P30-MH52776 from the National Institute of Mental Health (PI: J. A. Kelly) and by NRSA postdoctoral training grant T32-MH19985 (PI: S. D. Pinkerton).

References

- Adam PCG, Murphy DA, de Wit JBF. When Do Online Sexual Fantasies Become Reality? The Contribution of Erotic Chatting via the Internet to Sexual Risk-Taking in Gay and other Men Who Have Sex with Men. *Health Education Research*. 2011; 26(3):506–515. [PubMed: 21242323]
- Blackwell C. The Relationship among Population Size, Requests for Bareback Sex, and HIV Serostatus in Men Who Have Sex with Men using the Internet to Meet Sexual Partners. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*. 2010; 20(3):349–360.
- Bolding G, Davis M, Hart G, Sherr L, Elford J. Gay Men Who Look for Sex on the Internet: Is there More HIV/STI Risk with Online Partners? *AIDS*. 2005; 19:961–968. [PubMed: 15905678]
- Bolding G, Davis M, Hart G, Sherr L, Elford J. Where Young MSM Meet Their First Sexual Partner: The Role of the Internet. *AIDS and Behavior*. 2007; 11(4):522–526. [PubMed: 17347876]
- Bolding G, Davis M, Sherr L, Hart G, Elford J. Use of Gay Internet Sites and Views about Online Health Promotion among Men Who Have Sex with Men. *AIDS Care*. 2004; 16(8):993–1001. [PubMed: 15511731]
- Braine N, van Sluytman L, Acker C, Friedman S, Des Jarlais DC. Sexual Contexts and the Process of Risk Reduction. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2011; 13(7):797–814.
- Brown G, Maycock B, Burns S. Your Picture is Your Bait: Use and Meaning of Cyberspace among Gay Men. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2005; 42(1):63–73. [PubMed: 15795806]
- Cheeseman K, Goodlin-Fahncke W, Tewksbury R. 'Looking for a Married Hookup': An Examination of Personal Ads Posted by Men Seeking Sex with Married Men. *The Journal of Men's Studies*. 2012; 20(2):144–157.
- Daneback K, Ross M, Månsson S. Bisexuality and Sexually Related Activities on the Internet. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2008; 8(1–2):115–129.
- Daneback K, Månsson S, Ross M, Markham CM. The Internet as a Source of Information about Sexuality. *Sex Education*. 2012; 12(5):583–598.
- Davis M, Hart G, Bolding G, Sherr L, Elford J. Sex and the Internet: Gay Men, Risk Reduction and Serostatus. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2006; 8(2):161–174.
- Delph E. Preventing Public Sex in Library Settings. *Library & Archival Security*. 1981; 3(2):17–26.
- Dew BJ, Chaney MP. Sexual Addiction and the Internet: Implications for Gay Men. *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling*. 2004; 24(2):101–114.
- Fernandez-Davila P, Lorca KZ. Trust and Sexual Interaction: The Significance of the Internet on the Sex Life and Sexual Risk Behaviors of Gay and Bisexual Men in Spain. *International Journal of Sexual Health*. 2011; 23(2):120–138.

- Fisher WA, Barak A. Online Sex Shops: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Ideological Perspectives on Internet Sexuality. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 2000; 3:575–589.
- Gauthier D, Forsyth C. Bareback Sex, Bug Chasers, and the Gift of Death. *Deviant Behavior*. 1999; 20(1):85–100.
- Garofalo R, Herrick A, Mustanski BS, Donenberg GA. Tip of the Iceberg: Young Men who Have Sex with Men, the Internet, and HIV Risk. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2007; 97(6):1113–1117. [PubMed: 17463378]
- Grov C, Parsons JT, Bimbi DS. Sexual Risk Behavior and Venues for Meeting Sex Partners: An Intercept Survey of Gay and Bisexual Men in LA and NYC. *AIDS and Behavior*. 2007; 11(6): 915–926. [PubMed: 17206536]
- Horvath KJ, Bowen AM, Williams ML. Virtual and physical venues as contexts for HIV risk among rural men who have sex with men. *Health Psychology*. 2006; 25(2):237–242. [PubMed: 16569116]
- Kennedy M, Doll LS. Male Bisexuality and HIV Risk. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2000; 1(2–3):109–135.
- Klein H. Differences in HIV Risk Practices Sought by Self-Identified Gay and Bisexual Men who use Internet Websites to Identify Potential Sexual Partners. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2009; 9(2):125–140.
- Klein H. Men who Specifically Seek Unprotected Sex Partners via the Internet: Whose Profiles are the Most Searched for by other Site Users? *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*. 2010; 22(4): 413–431.
- Klein H, Lambing TP, Moskowitz DA, Washington TA, Gilbert L. Recommendations for Performing Internet-Based Research on Sensitive Subject Matter with ‘Hidden’ or Difficult-to-Reach Populations. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*. 2010; 22(4):371–398.
- Leoban A, Frigault L. Frequent and Systematic Unprotected anal Intercourse Among Men Using the Internet to Meet Other Men for Sexual Purposes in France: results from the “Gay Net Barometer 2006” Survey. *AIDS Care*. 2008; 20(4):478–484. [PubMed: 18449826]
- Lever J, Grov C, Royce T, Gillespie B. Searching for Love in all the ‘Write’ Places: Exploring Internet Personals Use by Sexual Orientation, Gender, and Age. *International Journal of Sexual Health*. 2008; 20(4):233–246. [PubMed: 20502618]
- Liau A, Millett G, Marks G. Meta-Analytic Examination of Online Sex-Seeking and Sexual Risk Behavior among men Who Have Sex with Men. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. 2006; 33(9):576–584. [PubMed: 16540884]
- Long JS, Ervin L. Using Heteroscedasticity-Consistent Standard Errors in Linear Regression Model. *The American Statistician*. 2000; 54:217–224.
- Maratea RJ. Screwing the Pooch: Legitimizing Accounts in a Zoophilia On-Line Community. *Deviant Behavior*. 2011; 32(10):918–943.
- Moskowitz DA, Seal DW. ‘GWM Looking for Sex—SERIOUS ONLY’: The Interplay of Sexual Ad Placement Frequency and Success on the Sexual Health of ‘Men Seeking Men’ on Craigslist. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*. 2010; 22(4):399–412.
- Mustanski B, Lyons T, Garcia SC. Internet use and Sexual Health of Young Men Who Have Sex with Men: A Mixed-Methods Study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 2011; 40(2):289–300. [PubMed: 20182787]
- Ostergren JE, Rosser BRS, Horvath KJ. Reasons for non-use of Condoms among Men Who Have Sex with Men: A Comparison of Receptive and Insertive Role in Sex and Online and Offline Meeting Venue. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2011; 13(2):123–140.
- Pedhazur, Elazar J.; Schmelkin, Liora P. *Measurement, Design and Analysis: An Integrated Approach*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Hillsdale, NJ: 1991.
- Peterson LW. The Married Man On-Line. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2000; 1(2–3):191–209.
- Rosario M, Meyer-Bahlburg HFL, Hunter J, Exner TM, Gwadz M, Smith AM. The Psychosexual Development of Urban Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths. *Journal of Sex Research*. 1996; 33(2): 113–126.
- Rosario M, Schrimshaw EW, Hunter J, Braun L. Sexual Identity Development among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: Consistency and Change over Time. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2006; 43(1): 46–58. [PubMed: 16817067]

- Ross MW. Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2005; 42(4):342–352. [PubMed: 19827239]
- Ross MW, Rosser BRS, McCurdy S, Feldman J. The Advantages and Limitations of Seeking Sex Online: A Comparison of Reasons Given for Online and Offline Sexual Liaisons by Men Who Have Sex with Men. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2007; 44:59–71. [PubMed: 17599265]
- Ross MW, Tikkanen R, Mansson S. Differences between Internet Samples and Conventional Samples of Men Who Have Sex with Men: Implications for Research and HIV Interventions. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2000; 51(5):749–758. [PubMed: 10975234]
- Sanders TC. M4M Chat Rooms: Individual Socialization and Sexual Autonomy. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2008; 10(3):263–276.
- Seasons M. Indicators and Core Area Planning: Applications in Canada's Mid-Sized Cities. *Planning Practice and Research*. 2003; 18(1):63–80.
- Simard M, Simard C. Toward a Culturalist City: A Planning Agenda for Peripheral Mid-Size Cities. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*. 2005; 14:38–56.
- Tewksbury R. Bareback Sex and the Quest for HIV: Assessing the Relationship in Internet Personal Advertisements of Men Who Have Sex with Men. *Deviant Behavior*. 2003; 24(5):467–482.
- Tewksbury R. Men's Success in Online Cruising for Male Sexual Partners. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*. 2010; 13
- Tikkanen R, Ross MW. Looking for Sexual Compatibility: Experiences among Swedish Men in Visiting Internet Gay Chat Rooms. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 2000; 3(4):605–616.
- Tikkanen R, Ross MW. Technological Tearoom Trade: Characteristics of Swedish Men Visiting Gay Internet Chat Rooms. *AIDS Education and Prevention*. 2003; 15(2):122–132. [PubMed: 12739789]
- Ward J. Dude-Sex: White Masculinities and 'Authentic' Heterosexuality Among Dudes Who Have Sex With Dudes. *Sexualities*. 2008; 11(4):414–434.
- Williams ML, Bowen AM, Horvath KJ. The Social/Sexual Environment of Gay Men Residing in a Rural Frontier State: Implications for the Development of HIV Prevention Programs. *Journal of Rural Health*. 2005; 21(1):48–55. [PubMed: 15667009]
- Wilson PA, Valera P, Ventuneac A, Balan L, Rowe M, Carballo-Diéguez A. Race-Based Sexual Stereotyping and Sexual Partnering among Men Who use the Internet to Identify other Men for Bareback Sex. *Journal of Sex Research*. 2009; 46(5):399–413. [PubMed: 19337934]
- Wooldridge, JM. *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach*. 4th ed.. Souther-Western Cengage Learning; Mason, Ohio: 2009.

Table 1

Confirmatory factor analysis of the eight items comprising the erotic cyber-communication scale.

	Factor 1	Factor 2
1. I find the process of posting an ad and waiting for responses, in it of itself, an extremely erotic component of Internet cruising for men.	0.06	0.89 [*]
2. The emails I receive from other men looking for sex are an extremely erotic component of Internet cruising.	0.07	0.89 [*]
3. Just posting an advertisement for men and getting emails from men is enough to get me off.	0.55 [*]	0.57 [*]
4. I often post ads looking for men even though it's highly unlikely that I'll follow through with the hookup.	0.78 [*]	0.07
5. I can't understand why men post ads if they're interested in only emailing back and forth with other men.	0.71 [*]	0.14
6. If I don't end up hooking up with a man from posting an ad, it was a waste of my time.	0.59 [*]	0.09
7. Exchanging pics/looking at other men's pics is enough to get me off.	0.55 [*]	0.51 [*]
8. I have never played games or toyed with other men posting ads.	0.59 [*]	0.06

Note: The precise text and order of each item used in the survey is represented. Items 5, 6, and 8 were reverse coded. The current study used a seven-point system of agreement: (1) Disagree strongly, (2) Disagree moderately, (3) Disagree a little, (4) Neither agree nor disagree, (5) Agree a little, (6) Agree moderately, and (7) Agree strongly. Items that have asterisks Items 3 and 7 meet the criteria for inclusion in both of the factors.

* meet the criteria for inclusion in their respective factor.

Table 2

Description of the sample.

		<i>N</i>	%
City size			
	Small city (< 50 K)	138	27.66
	Mid-size city (51,000–500,000)	190	38.08
	Large city (500,000 +)	171	34.27
Sexual orientation			
	Homosexual	331	66.33
	Bisexual	148	29.66
	Heterosexual	20	4.01
Education			
	Some high school	8	1.6
	Finished high school	50	10.02
	Some undergraduate	162	32.46
	Finished undergraduate	141	28.26
	Some graduate	38	7.62
	Finished graduate	100	20.04
	M	SD	Range
Age	40.76	12.06	18 to 79
Success rate for hookups	29.9	26.61	0 to 100
Erotic Cyber-Communication	19.19	9.55	1 to 46
Scale			

Note: *N* = 499.

Table 3

OLS regression predicting erotic emailing and Internet cruising.

	Model ^a	SE ^b
Sexual orientation		
(Ref = Homosexual)		
Bisexual	0.22 **	0.88
Heterosexual	0.10 *	1.92
City size		
(Ref = Small City)		
Mid-size city	0.14 *	0.96
Large city	0.16 *	1.04
Age	-0.28 **	0.34
Education	0.07	0.31
Success Rate for Hookups	-0.11 *	0.15
Constant	31.06	31.06
<i>N</i>	499	499
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.1348	0.1348

Note

*
 $p < 0.01$ **
 $p < 0.001$.^a
numbers reflect the standardized betas^b
robust standard errors used in model.