



Sexual Migration, Cross-Cultural Sexual Encounters, and Sexual Health

Héctor Carrillo

Abstract: Sexual migration, a concept developed recently in the sexuality studies literature, is defined as international relocation that is motivated, directly or indirectly, by the sexuality of those who migrate. I argue that to conceptualize sexual migration fully, we need to consider a number of dimensions associated with this kind of transnational movement, including sexual immigrants' transportation of practices across international borders, their lives in their places of origin, their exposure to local and foreign sexual ideologies prior to migrating, their agency in adapting and appropriating ideologies and practices prevalent in both home and host countries, and the transformations in sexual identities and behaviors that they experience after migration. I present two case studies that illustrate these points, analyze the conceptual relationship between sexual migration and sex tourism, and discuss the effects of sexual migration on immigrants' sexual health.

Key words: international migration; globalization; gay identities; sex tourism; HIV/AIDS

I have so many relatives there [in Hermosillo, Mexico], so many childhood friends. I could not lead my gay life the way I wanted, the way I lead it now. So, leaving and going to Tijuana was a [great] opportunity.

In my current job [in Tijuana], I have to lead a heterosexual life, a life in which they ask me: "When will you get married? Where is your wife?" All that is tiring in the long run. One cannot tell them directly [about one's homosexuality] because telling can affect you and you may lose all you have. I feel that here [in San Diego] there is not so much problem with that.

-interview with Javier in San Diego

These quotations are from an interview with Javier, a 33-year-old-man who lives and works in Tijuana.¹ Sometime after his arrival in the U.S.-Mexico

border region, Javier began to participate in gay life in San Diego. Gay friends from Tijuana introduced him to San Diego's gay bars and dance clubs, sex clubs, cruising areas, and porn theaters, and even brought him to a gay nudist beach in La Jolla. "I felt like I was on an adventure, like a kid playing, playing to discover and to be curious," said Javier.

At the time of this interview, Javier was thinking about moving permanently to the U.S. Tijuana had provided him distance from the environment where he grew up, and where he felt that adopting an open gay life was difficult because of the close presence of his family and childhood friends. In Tijuana he had been more open about his same sex attraction, and he had also discovered gay life in San Diego. However, he still felt limited. He thought it impossible for him to disclose his homosexuality at work, where he continued

1. This interview was conducted in 2000 as part of a pilot study that consisted of 20 interviews with Mexican gay male immigrants in San Diego, CA and in Guadalajara, Mexico. The Guadalajara interviews included men who

were planning to move to the U.S. in the near future. This pilot study informed a larger ethnographic study that I describe in more detail elsewhere in the article.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Héctor Carrillo, Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California, San Francisco, 74 New Montgomery St., Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94105. E-mail: hcarrillo@psg.ucsf.edu

to pretend that he was heterosexual. Based on what he had seen and experienced in San Diego, Javier imagined that moving to the U.S. would allow him finally to fully integrate his homosexuality into all aspects of his life.

This article is about the type of migratory phenomenon that Javier's story illustrates, which has been labeled "sexual migration" (Cantú, 1999; Parker, 1997). This term refers to international migration that is motivated, fully or partially, by the sexuality of those who migrate, including motivations connected to sexual desires and pleasures, the pursuit of romantic relations with foreign partners, the exploration of new self-definitions of sexual identity, the need to distance oneself from experiences of discrimination or oppression caused by sexual difference, or the search for greater sexual equality and rights.

I will argue that studying sexual migration requires a conceptual framework that differs somewhat from that of more general studies of migration and sexuality. A more common approach in the current literature on this topic is to attend to changes in immigrants' sexuality that result from international relocation (e.g., Espiritu, 2003; González-López, 2003; Haour-Knipe & Rector, 1996; Herdt 1997a, 1997b). I suggest that also paying attention to the role that sexuality itself plays as a force propelling transnational movement may yield interesting new insight about the constitution of contemporary global sexualities, as well as about forms of migration that are not caused primarily by economic or familial factors. With this goal in mind, I propose to study sexual migration from a synthetic theoretical perspective that brings together work on globalization, transnational movement, cultural hybridity, and sex tourism, as well as immigration and sexuality. This synthesis implies an interdisciplinary approach that draws on diverse fields, including sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. Insofar as these concerns also have important implications for health and sexual health, then the fields of public health and public policy are also participants in this conversation.

From this multidisciplinary perspective, studying sexual migration requires a very strong focus on the sexual and social situation of the immigrants prior to relocation, along the migration path, and after arrival

and settlement, as well during periods when the immigrants return to their home countries.² In cases such as Javier's, we would need to ask what prevented him in Mexico from leading a gay life of the sort that he wanted, and whether he is likely to find in the U.S. the gay life that he desires and imagines. Although at first glance the question seems simple, answering it requires consideration of a complex set of factors (individual, social, cultural, and political), including analysis of the options available to Javier in Mexico (which likely depended on his class position, education, and specific social network and family history), his sexual history, his prior contact with homosexuals and with gay communities, the strategies that he used to manage his sexuality before and after relocation, his prior exposure to images and ideas about gay life in U.S. cities, his imaginings of how his (sexual) life would be in this country, and his points of entry and history of incorporation into U.S. life and U.S. gay life. Additionally, we would need to consider how Javier has changed sexually as a result of his relocation, especially as he has begun to enact a sexual life in the U.S. and possibly has engaged in cross-cultural social and sexual encounters with those born in the host country and with other immigrants.

To exemplify how these different factors have been considered in studies of sexual migration, I discuss two cases: the situation of Mexican sexual migrants in California, and the appropriation by Filipino gay migrants of a quintessential Filipino religious pageant. For the first case, in addition to the existing literature I rely on my previous research in Guadalajara, Mexico and my current work on sexual migration in California. In Mexico, I conducted ethnographic research on sexuality and HIV prevention between 1993 and 1995. This work has been published in book format (Carrillo, 2002), and was based on participant observation in a variety of social settings and 64 interviews with adults (homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual) between the ages of 18 and 53. This research demonstrated that Mexico is undergoing complex, and sometimes rapid, processes of cultural change in regards to gender and

2. For an interesting discussion of the need to analyze different stages in the migration process, see Chavez (1998).

sexuality related issues, including changes in attitudes about male homosexuality, and about male and female roles in heterosexual couples. This finding questions common stereotypes about Mexican sexualities and gender relations, which in the U.S. are often perceived as being informed solely by a traditional (meaning pre-modern) Mexican sex/gender system. As we will see below, considering the situation of sexual immigrant groups prior to their relocation may facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the immigrants' process of incorporation in their host countries.

In addition to this work in Mexico, my analysis of the first case is informed by the literature on Mexican immigrant women and gay men in California (Cantú, 1999; González-López, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994) and my current research, which focuses on the lived experiences of Mexican gay and bisexual male immigrants living in San Diego. This four-year ethnographic study consists of participant observation in venues where Mexican gay immigrants socialize, and interviews (initial interview and follow-up 12 months later) with 150 gay or bisexual men. The sample includes Mexican immigrants, U.S.-born Latinos (for comparison purposes), and sexual and romantic partners of Mexican immigrant men. The study is still in the data collection phase.

For the second case, I review and discuss some aspects of Martin Manalansan's (2000, 2003) insightful and important work on Filipino gay male migration to the U.S.³ I then analyze differences in the conceptualization of sexual migration and sex tourism, and argue that work on sexual migration could benefit from the attention that the literature on sex tourism gives to the dynamics of cross-cultural sexual interactions. I argue as well that defining who is a sex tourist and who is a sexual migrant requires some rethinking, because current definitions tend to reflect assumptions about the people who move, namely whether they come from rich or poor countries.

In the article's final section I discuss the practical

consequences of sexual migration for sexual health. I explore the relationship between migration and sexual health as represented in the public health literature. I argue that, despite empirical evidence that the sexual health of Latino and other immigrants is often better upon arrival than that of long-term immigrants or U.S.-born populations, the current work on this topic often does not explain fully the factors that may be influencing sexual risks in this population. Limitations of the current literature on the topic may be related to reliance on assumptions about the immigrants' sexual situations prior to migration as well as widespread use of cultural stereotypes (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004).

Conceptualizing and Studying Sexual Migration

During the past decade, a handful of scholars have conducted studies that focus on the topic of international sexual migration of women and homosexual men to the United States (Cantú, 1999; Carballo-Diéguez, 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Manalansan, 2000, 2003). Conceptually, their work is inscribed in a larger field of transnational studies of sexuality and studies of the connection between sexuality and globalization.⁴ Indeed, to understand sexual migration fully it is helpful to consider a number of concepts used in the field of transnational studies that help characterize the effects of accelerated, yet uneven, global dissemination of practices and ideas, as well as how such ideas and practices circulate. This list of interrelated concepts is varied, as indicated by Povinelli and Chauncey (1999a, p. 441):

Homogenization, diversification, hybridization; the local, the global, and the glocal; locality, localization, and translocality; globalization and transnationalism; flows, linkages, scapes, and circuits: we are witness to a proliferation of conceptual conjunctions and neologisms that describe, or more simply that demarcate, the

3. There are important historical differences between Filipinos and Mexicans in relation to immigration to the United States. However, I find that considering both groups here enriches the more general discussion of changes that result from sexual migration as part of larger processes of sexual globalization.

4. For example, see Altman (2001), articles in the special issue "Thinking Sexuality Transnationally" of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Povinelli & Chauncey, 1999b), and chapters in Patton and Sánchez-Eppler (2000), and in Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan (2002).

dense, variegated traffic in cultural representations, people, and capital that increasingly characterizes the social life of people around the world.

Emphasizing the global importance of these traffics, Puar (2002, p. 125), citing work by Kaplan (1996), argues that “the experiences of location, displacement, mobility, and travel are crucial to the constitution of the modern subject.” In relation to sexuality, these perspectives suggest that transnational forms of movement, including migration, may be one of the primary forces informing the constitution of modern sexualities around the world—this in addition to discursive dissemination sustained by communication technologies and the mass media, and the local adoption, adaptation, and transformation of globalizing cultural expressions.⁵

In analyzing the experience of Filipino gay migrants in New York City, Manalansan (2000, 2003) combines notions of “transmigration” (which he borrows from work by Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992) and “global ethnoscapes” (based on work by Appadurai, 1991, 1993). Manalansan (2000) states:

No longer prone to “permanent rupture” from the homeland or total subservience to the hegemonic practices of the adopted nations, these “transmigrants” are living lives that span and transgress borders and specific localities with new means of transportation and communication in what is now called a “global ethnoscapes.” (p. 184)

The core idea here is that, because contemporary migrants often maintain strong cultural and physical ties with their homeland, there is a two-way traffic of ideas and practices related to sexuality between the migrants’ host countries and their homelands—a traffic that contributes to complicated processes of cultural change in both locations. Note the emphasis on transgression and agency, on the transmigrants’ ability

to reshape their lives in ways that create new spaces for them to fit in their host countries. Instead of merely assimilating or adopting roles that are expected of them in host countries, the transmigrants subvert hegemonic expectations. As we will see below, this premise is linked to notions of the racialization of migrants from poor countries, meaning here the immigrants’ acquisition of a racial or ethnic minority status upon arrival in host countries that have a predominantly white majority of European origin.

Sánchez-Eppler and Patton (2000, p. 2) emphasize that movement and translocation have entered “the picture as theoretically significant factors in the discussion of sexuality.” These authors make reference to essentialism/constructionism and global/local debates, and argue that “[n]ow, identity is viewed as strategic, rather than essential, contingent on, reproduced, decaying, co-opted, in relation to material and discursive factors that, especially in the context of sexualities, are always a complex lamination of local onto global onto local.” Sánchez-Eppler and Patton then state: “Sexuality is intimately and immediately felt, but publicly and internationally described and mediated. Sexuality is not only not essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; sexuality is on the move” (p. 2). The emphasis here is not only on bodies moving, but also on discourses moving independently or with them. “When a practitioner of ‘homosexual acts,’ or a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces—nation, region, metropole, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease—intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place” (p. 3). Furthermore, these authors emphasize that the results of movement are far from uniform, and advise us to go beyond “the recognition that sexual identities are constructed,” and instead to focus on “how to make sense of the always poignant and sometimes hilarious labors of reinvention and renegotiation in new places, or in reimagined old ones” (p. 3).

Much like Manalansan (2000, 2003), in making this last point Sánchez-Eppler and Patton call attention to migrants’ agency, and to the role that migrants play in shaping and reshaping sexualities in home and host countries. This is nicely captured in the following

5. Wonders and Michalowski (2001, p.546) make a particularly interesting point about the relationship between global forces and local sexualities. These authors privilege large, world cities as “strategic sites of globalization” and, based on work by Sassen (2000), suggest that local forms of sexuality are what concretize global sexual processes—what give body and shape to diffuse, intangible forces of globalization.

quotation:

Bodies do not rest stably in a place until a discourse overtakes, agitates, and names their desires. Rather bodies pack and carry tropes and logics from their homelands; they seek out an 'imagined community' of intrinsic queerness, which they read about between the lines of international media and policy. But traveling the paths of international policy, global media, academic disciplines, and nationalistic ideologies, discourses themselves may travel even faster. Dislocated bodies may re-find their native discourses when they get "there," as if they have "discovered" that the Other elsewhere is "naturally" the same. (p. 10)

This argument further strengthens the sense that the actual movement of bodies is only one of the forces operating within complex processes of globalization and "glocalization" of sexualities.⁶ It suggests that cultural ideologies and representations may play a prominent role in reshaping sexualities around the globe—and thus that they cannot be ignored in studying sexual migration—and that the flow of discourses about sexuality may precede the flow of people who travel or relocate for sexuality-related reasons.

Furthermore, thinking about these two types of flows—of bodies and of discourses—is a good starting point to consider the complex processes that run parallel to people moving for sexual reasons. As Chavez (1998) suggests in his study of undocumented Mexican immigrants in San Diego, to fully understand migration (and by extension sexual migration), we need to analyze carefully the separation from the homeland, transition, and incorporation into a host country. We need to also account for the kind of liminality that characterizes the migratory process. Such emphasis invites inquiry about the motivations that the migrants had to leave their countries, how they imagined life (and sexual life) in their destination, what informed

6. The term "glocalization" is a play on the words globalization and locality, which scholars use to emphasize local processes of adaptation of ideas, norms, and values about sexuality that now circulate globally. For discussion on globalization and locality in relation to sexuality see Altman (2001), Boellstorff (1999), and Wonders and Michalowski (2001).

such imaginings, their paths and means of transition, and what happens to them (generally and sexually) once they arrive. These issues are central to the examples of sexual migration to the U.S. that follow.

Sexual Transmigration and Agency: Filipino Gay Men in New York

Working with Filipino gay-identified men living in New York City, Manalansan (2000, 2003) analyzes these men's 1994 appropriation of the Santacruzán, a Catholic pageant of Spanish origin that is celebrated every May in the Philippines. In its original version, the Santacruzán "is a street procession that usually begins and ends in a church....The procession is essentially a symbolic reenactment of the finding of Christ's cross by Queen Helena or Reyna Elena, the mother of Emperor Constantine of the Holy Roman Empire" (Manalansan, 2000, p. 186). Manalansan describes the religious pageant as consisting of women dressed as the different *sagalas* (muses) who accompany Queen Helena in her quest to find the cross. In the procession, each *sagala* dresses up as the character that she represents, and is accompanied by male escorts carrying an arch of flowers.

In the New York Filipino 1994 gay version described by Manalansan, the procession became a fashion show, and the *sagalas* were reinterpreted to represent simultaneously traditional Filipino-constructed characters and new characters reflecting a contemporary, global and Filipino-American gay sensitivity. Manalansan argues that this enactment helped reaffirm a sense of a distinct U.S.-based Filipino gay identity; was intended to contest, dismantle, and reassemble "symbols from the two countries" (2000, p. 191) (secular/religious, American gay/mainstream); created space for the formulation of a political statement about immigration and race; and created a sense of cultural nostalgia among the Filipino men participating. In this sense, the appropriation and reinterpretation of the Santacruzán by gay Filipino immigrants is a clear expression of group agency as enacted by a gay immigrant group, which is in fact one of the few, if not the only such expression that has been analyzed thoroughly.

In my current research in San Diego I have

identified what I believe might be a somewhat comparable example: the enactment of a yearly Miss Mexico beauty pageant in the North County region where men dressed as women represent the Mexican states of origin of each male participant. The night that my colleague Jorge Fontdevila and I attended, much as in the original beauty pageant that it emulated, the participants were evaluated by a panel of judges on body and beauty, creativity, and talent (and in this case, I believe also on their ability to pass convincingly as women). The event included several contests in which the participants wore swimming suits, regional costumes, and night gowns, and responded to questions that gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their intellectual abilities. Interspersed between these several contests, female impersonators and a male *ranchero* singer performed Mexican or Latin pop songs.

Perhaps most interestingly, the whole event was conducted in Spanish (reflecting an assumption that everyone there understood or had a cultural connection to Mexico), and a considerable proportion of the audience appeared to be composed of sympathetic Mexican non-gay people, including migrant workers, older people, Mexican families with children, and groups of heterosexual young men and women. The audience cheered enthusiastically when their favorite contestant was named, and there was some degree of competition among people in the audience who came from the different states represented.

Observing this event, I wondered whether this kind of sympathy and group solidarity across sexual orientation lines is possible only because of the shared experience of migration. However, I thought also about the popularity that female impersonation shows have among heterosexual people in cities like Guadalajara, which might cause us to question whether this kind of cultural expression is exclusive to the Mexican diaspora. In the case of the gay Santacruzian, Manalansan (2000) argues that the distance from the homeland allowed these men to openly enact roles, such as cross-dressing, that would be difficult for some to perform in the Philippines. One participant “had a dressmaker in the Philippines make a *maria clara*, a traditional Filipino costume, and borrowed his family’s antique cross for the Santacruzian procession in

Manhattan. These were flown to New York a month before the event” (p. 198). He suggests that this was possible due to the facility of modern communications, and because being away allowed this participant to do what would be unimaginable for him to do in the Philippines. The participant is quoted as saying that his performing in a dress back home would have labeled him a *bakla*, a label applied to effeminate men, and would have been shameful to his prominent family. In this sense, it may be possible that distance from home may enable certain individuals to adopt practices that, although prevalent in their home countries, they could not perform there without provoking unbearable stigma due to the proximity to their immediate social and familial networks.

In any case, this international delivery, along with the migrants’ possibility of travel between the U.S. and the Philippines, suggests the potential for transformations that the migrants may prompt both in their home and host countries. Manalansan (2000, 2003) indicates that by enacting new forms of Filipino gay identity outside of the Philippines, transmigrants do indeed create cultural forms that return to the archipelago as new options. One could easily imagine the New York Filipino gay version of the Santacruzian returning to Manila, now interpreted as a contemporary Filipino gay diasporic event arriving from the U.S. and symbolizing Filipino contributions to modernity and globalization. Furthermore, in the host country the practice would appear to give distinct presence to Filipino gay men in mainstream gay life, reaffirm a sense of diasporic Filipino gay identities, and perhaps even provide messages aimed at confronting the racialization of Filipino (and Asian) gay men, thus promoting a greater acceptance of Filipinos in U.S. gay communities (particularly since the event appeared to be marketed to a wider gay audience and included some references to negative aspects of the objectification of Filipino gay men within mainstream gay communities). In this sense, the appropriation of this traditional Filipino religious ritual ultimately may aid the position of Filipino transmigrants participating in the U.S. gay world.

Whether these kinds of cultural appropriations can be seen as happening in isolation from other forms of local and global cultural change is a question that I

believe Manalansan (2000, 2003) leaves mostly unanswered. The author provides hints that the Santacruzian has undergone considerable secularization and—because of the ritual’s emphasis on female deities and the potential for camp that such emphasis provides—some level of “queerification” in the Philippines as well, where men sometimes portray female deities in local Santacruzians. Indeed, a quick Internet search using the keyword Santacruzian reveals that the practice has been secularized to the point of allowing for the creation of a commercially available “Filipino Santacruzian Barbie.”⁷ The author, however, does not discuss the implications of this more general secularization of the ritual in creating the cultural space for the New York gay Santacruzian to happen—something which I believe adds to the story and suggests the importance of placing the cultural practices and appropriations associated with sexual migration in the larger contexts of cultural and social change (local and global) in both home and host countries.

More generally, the cases presented here raise some questions about the meaning of immigrants’ sexual agency, as well as how agency is defined in relation to values and practices that sexual immigrants perceive as characterizing home and host cultures. In this regard, there are contradictory cases that suggest different possible directions that group agency may take. For example, in Espiritu’s (2003, p. 264) interesting analysis of Filipino immigrant groups in San Diego, she found that Filipinas tend to construct white women as “sexually immoral,” and that they use this negative stereotype to promote a sense of sexual virtue among Filipinas. This case illustrates a form of group agency that is used to control Filipinas’ sexuality, and that is sustained by a widespread collective discourse within the immigrant group about the meaning of “true,” “traditional” Filipino sexual culture. By contrast, some Mexican women in González-López’s (2003) study in Los Angeles, after meeting U.S. men became prejudiced against Mexican men, and came to question strongly the ways in which Mexican men treat them. In this case, immigrant group agency would appear to be constructed around examination of

negative aspects of traditional sex/gender cultures in the home country. These examples suggest that, in analyzing cultural expressions of group agency such as the gay Santacruzian or the gay Miss Mexico, we ought to pay attention to the kinds of questioning of, or support for, ideas that immigrants associate with sexual cultures in home and host countries.

Sex Tourism

The term sex tourism has been used primarily to refer to patterns of travel of citizens (mostly men) from rich countries to poor countries who seek, among other forms of pleasure, sexual contact with local men and women (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). For good reasons, the literature on this topic has tended to focus on sex between tourists and locals that often involves considerable differences in power between sexual partners, exchanges of money and material goods for sex, and sometimes extreme forms of exploitation, particularly of women and children (Altman, 2001; Larvie, 1997; Nagel, 2003; Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). There are many well-known examples, and one that is often invoked because of its blatancy is that of men from multiple destinations who go to Thailand to have sex with local male and female prostitutes, including children (Altman, 2001; Nagel, 2003).

Some work on this topic, however, recognizes that sex tourism is quite varied in its forms. For instance, Nagel (2003) describes a type of sex tourism that involves women from rich countries who travel on vacation to places where they seek local men for sex. She cites cases in Hawaii, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Gambia, and Nepal. These women construct the local men as exotic, hyper-masculine, highly sexed, and available. Historically, Nagel argues, these forms of sex tourism by women appear veiled under the rubric of *romance tourism*. This is because the sexual encounters often are not viewed by participants as an economic transaction, or as a one-night stand. Instead they happen with the pretense that they constitute dating and that they could lead to longer-term cross-cultural romance.

The pretense of dating seems to be important as well for some male travelers. Wonders and Michalowski (2001) contrast the consumption of

7. See Santa Cruzan Filipina Barbie (2004).

female sex work by male tourists in Amsterdam and Havana, and note that in Amsterdam male tourists tend to pay for discreet sexual encounters that are defined strictly as business transactions, while in Havana they may pretend more readily that they are dating the woman in question.⁸ In Havana, these authors argue, this pretense is possible because of a combination of lower pay rates (which allow the men to spend more time with a particular woman), less commercialization of sex work, local expectations of social interaction that favor greater involvement, and some awareness on the part of sex workers that their approach makes them attractive to sex tourists—to the kind who dislike business-like sexual transactions.⁹

Cantú (2002) analyzes the flow of gay American sex tourists to Mexico. He emphasizes two images of Mexico that are actively promoted, sometimes simultaneously, in gay guide books and travel brochures. One is the image of Mexican gay beach resorts as being just like those found in other global gay settings, where the tourists can relax about being themselves. He calls this the “just like home” (p. 148) image. The other has to do with what Cantú conceptualizes as a more “colonial desire” (p. 149), which is most eloquently described in a quotation taken from Eduardo David’s travel guide, *Gay Mexico*: “The adventurous visitor may want to go farther afield in search of the men for whom Mexico is particularly famed: the butch hombres who would never walk into a place known to be gay, but who are ready to spring to attention when they catch a man’s eye. These are men who *must be pursued* [italics added]” (p. 149).

While these images are meant to represent the view of Mexico by U.S. gay tourists, Cantú (2002)

recognizes that the same kind of fantasies may be prevalent among gay Mexican male tourists who travel to the U.S.—that these men are sex tourists in their own right when they travel to see for themselves gay urban centers in U.S. cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. I believe that this consideration is important to balance the picture, even when, due to economic differences between the two countries, the flow of tourism is certainly greater from the U.S. to Mexico than the other way around. Considering the flow of tourists in both directions adds significantly to our understanding of the complicated ways in which international travel contributes to sexual globalization. Cantú also discusses in this article the effects of Mexican sexual migration to the U.S., which is the main focus of his dissertation research.

One aspect of this phenomenon that Cantú (2002) does not analyze, and which adds another important variable to the sex tourism/sexual migration equation, is the internal flow of Mexican urban gay sex tourists to Mexico’s beach resorts—Mexican men who travel to these resorts seeking to meet Americans and other foreigners for sex and romance. When I conducted research about sexuality in Guadalajara (Carrillo, 2002), there was a flow during winter and spring of homosexual men who went to Puerto Vallarta for weekends. For example, during the *Semana Santa* (Easter), the gay dance clubs in Guadalajara were sparsely populated in part because so many men had left to go to Puerto Vallarta. These times coincided with those when more foreigners visited Puerto Vallarta.

In one case, Enrique, who was a middle-class 20-year-old participant in my study, went from Guadalajara to Puerto Vallarta for a long weekend in the spring of 1994. He was accompanied by gay friends, but not by his 40-year-old boyfriend. Having had recent relationship difficulties with his Mexican boyfriend, Enrique expressly sought to meet foreigners for sexual and romantic exploration. He returned ecstatic about his weekend affair with a young French Canadian, with hopes for potential future romance with this gay tourist, but knowing realistically that the odds of that happening were slim. In the following days, he became reintegrated into his Guadalajara routines, including spending time with his boyfriend, to whom he did not reveal that this affair had happened. The

8. Wonders and Michalowski (2001) point out that sex tourism in both cities is propelled by global forces that make possible a large flow of international sex tourists and also, in the case of Amsterdam, an international flow of female migrants who become incorporated into sex work. Some among the latter may be characterized as sexual migrants, particularly if they had previous knowledge of, and a motivation to participate in, sex work.

9. Wonders and Michalowski (2001, p. 563) quote experienced American sex tourists living in Costa Rica, who complain that in that country the commercialization of sex work has “ruined” Costa Rican sex workers.” These men anticipate the same may happen in Cuba as sex work becomes more organized as labor and commercialized.

twist in this story is that the weekend that Enrique spent in Puerto Vallarta there were so many Guadalajarans in the gay clubs there that two friends of his boyfriend saw him making out with the French Canadian at a gay bar. The news of Enrique's affair reached his boyfriend even before Enrique returned to Guadalajara. Enrique's Mexican boyfriend waited a few days before mentioning anything, in order to give Enrique space to disclose his affair, and when Enrique did not he decided to end their relationship of two years.¹⁰

The dynamics of sex tourism are complex in that they may involve men and women, homosexuals and heterosexuals, paid and unpaid sex, as well as flows of tourists from rich to poor countries, from poor to rich countries, from rich to rich countries, and from poor to poor countries. Furthermore, sex tourism and sexual migration are hard to separate, because what eventually becomes sexual migration often begins as sex tourism—for example, those men in my current study who came to the U.S. for a visit and decided to stay after gaining entry into gay cultures here, or who came to visit an American boyfriend and then never left.

Through its analysis of cross-cultural sexual encounters, the literature on sex tourism contributes to our conceptual understanding of sexual migration, as well as of the kinds of racialization that occur in such relations. This is an area in which the field of sexual migration remains somewhat underdeveloped. I would suggest that there is a need to further understand how sexual desires, objectification, racialization, inequality, and exploitation play out in the context of cross-cultural sexual encounters between sexual migrants and their sexual partners, particularly in their host countries. The dynamics of cross-cultural sexual encounters also have important implications for sexual health.

Additional evidence that these issues need to be emphasized more in the study of sexual migration is found in some of the questionable premises that appear to inform current conceptualizations of sexual migration. For instance, issues of sexual pleasure,

10. More on Enrique's case can be found in Carrillo (1999, 2002).

leisure, and adventure rarely are considered in studies of sexual migration, but they are strongly emphasized in studies of sex tourism. More generally, migration is sometimes perceived as applying only to people's movement from poor to rich countries, and tourism only to movement from rich to poor countries. When American citizens travel for pleasure they are called tourists, and if they decide to stay more permanently in a foreign country they become expatriates, but they are rarely called migrants. Middle-class and rich people from poor countries who visit the U.S. are called tourists, but if they decide to stay beyond the terms of their tourist visa they become migrants or immigrants, but not expatriates. If they are poor and came initially to visit family (and perhaps also to sight-see), and then decide to stay longer, they also become migrants (and perhaps also acquire the label of undocumented migrants), but they rarely are regarded as tourists.¹¹ However, as the examples that I have presented might suggest, the boundaries between tourism and migration (and, by extension, sex tourism and sexual migration) are often tenuous, and the two phenomena may overlap significantly.

Implications for Sexual Health

Overall, the links between sexual migration and sexual health remain largely unexplored. Most of the work on migration and health (and by extension on sexual migration and health) assumes, correctly, that these two issues may be negatively related—for example, that migration may create special vulnerabilities in terms of the transmission and acquisition of sexually transmitted disease. The logic is that because migrants are uprooted, their patterns of sexual behavior and ideology are destabilized by contact with new sexual cultures (Herdt, 1997b).

The material that I present in this article, however, suggests that the relationship between sexuality, migration, and health may be more complicated, particularly in the case of sexual migration *per se*. If sexual migrants indeed “play with the world” (to

11. Wonders and Michalowski (2001) note some of these disparities in labeling but do not question them. Instead they seem to accept the notion that sex tourists travel from rich countries and immigrants move from poor countries.

borrow Manalansan's phrase, 2000, p. 191) in multifaceted ways, contribute to changing sexuality in their home and host countries, and are simultaneously recipients of new sexual norms, values, and ideas and also actors shaping and reshaping them, then we cannot just speak of vulnerability in relation to sexual migration and health.

In my experience in the applied field of HIV prevention in the U.S., I have observed that practitioners tend to operate with the assumption that migrants from Latin America have greater vulnerabilities for HIV transmission than the locals. This assumption may derive from an understanding that migrants often leave poorer countries such as Mexico seeking to improve their personal situation and the corollary beliefs that recent immigrants must be poorly educated about HIV/AIDS, experience social isolation and poverty upon arrival, have low self-esteem, seek adventurous sexual behaviors in this "more-sexually-liberal" country, and generally find themselves more vulnerable to HIV infection than U.S.-born people. In the published research, however, there is no consensus about whether recent Latino immigrants have more HIV risk or about which cultural factors correlate with lower or higher HIV risk in this population.

Most problematically, public health studies on this topic tend to make assertions about sexual cultures without adequate empirical investigation. On the one hand, a number of studies (Flaskerud, Uman, Lara, Romero, & Taka, 1996; Ford & Norris, 1993; Newcomb et al., 1998; Peragallo, 1996) have found lower levels of HIV risk among immigrants and less acculturated groups, which tend to include recent immigrants. These studies tend to conclude that the explanation for these findings is that recent immigrants are more sexually conservative or sexually modest, and thus that traditional sexual cultures are somewhat protective. In this case, acculturation to mainstream U.S. values is perceived as detrimental to sexual health because of the social and sexual permissiveness that it generates. On the other hand, when researchers have found higher levels of HIV risk in recent immigrants or less acculturated Latinos(as) (Flores-Ortiz, 1994; Marín & Flores, 1994), they tend to blame machismo and traditional Latino sexual cultures, and then emphasize

that more acculturated Latinos(as) might have lower risk because they have acquired more self-determination, self-assertiveness, and individuality (all characteristics that are imagined as being more prevalent in mainstream U.S. cultures).¹² Because most of this research was designed to measure cognitive and behavioral factors related to sexual health, and not to study sexual cultures, these assertions are often made mostly on the basis of the authors' own perceptions of Latino sexual culture and gender norms, and not of empirical data collected with study participants. Moreover, a majority of these articles do not acknowledge limitations of the construct of acculturation that have been pointed out by anthropological critics (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004).

If indeed it is true that recent immigrants from Latin America have lower levels of HIV risk than U.S.-born populations, then this finding would be consistent with a phenomenon that has been labeled a *health paradox* in studies of Latino health in the U.S., and of Latino mental health in particular (Escobar, 1998; Rumbaut, 1997; Scribner, 1996). This term refers to a common finding that the health status of recent Latino immigrants is better than that of U.S.-born populations, and their health risks lower. This outcome runs contrary to what researchers expect, and hence the use of the term health paradox. I wonder, however, whether this idea of a paradox is justified, or whether it merely reflects the fact that we have not approached the study of the effects of migration on health, and on sexual health, with enough depth. Indeed, part of the problem is that studies of immigrant health rarely pay attention to the immigrants' conditions in their home countries—to the cultural systems that prevail there and to the immigrants' previous exposure to practices and ideas arriving from the United States and other places (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2001).

12. To be sure, some studies (Marks, Cantero, & Simoni, 1998; Marín & Flores, 1994; Marín, Tschann, Gómez, & Kegeles, 1993; Mikawa et al., 1992) do recognize that there are mixed effects of acculturation or dismiss the role of acculturation in creating significant changes in sexual culture (Magaña & Carrier, 1991).

Conclusion

The cases that I have discussed in this article suggest that studying sexual migration is important to elucidate more fully the constitution of contemporary sexualities in an increasingly globalized world. I believe that a deep understanding of the forces propelling international sexual migration, the lived experiences of (and strategies used by) sexual immigrants, and the effects that sexual immigrants have as individuals and groups in their home and host countries may add considerably to current theoretical understandings of sexual globalization. A focus on sexual migration may clarify what changes occur when sexualities “are on the move” (to borrow Sanchez-Eppler and Patton’s phrase, 2000, p. 2), not only in the form of discourse and through the adoption of similar cultural expressions in dissimilar places, but also when bodies carry with them ideologies, practices, desires, longings, and imaginings about ways of enacting sexuality differently in faraway locations.

In more practical terms, understanding sexual migration may provide important avenues for the formulation of policy and educational strategies to promote sexual health within specific subgroups of ethnic minority populations. To date we do not know enough about how immigrants’ sexual behavior changes as a result of relocation, nor do we know if there are differences between sexual immigrants and other types of immigrants. Indeed, consideration of the former group has been mostly absent in academic work about migration and HIV (for example, see articles in Haour-Knipe & Rector, 1996; and most of the articles in Herdt, 1997a). Furthermore, we know close to nothing about what happens to immigrants’ sexualities and sexual behavior over time, in their back and forth movement between home and host countries, or when the definition of home shifts to include the host country as well.

Finally, I would emphasize that responding to these theoretical and practical questions requires a multidisciplinary approach: an effort to establish a conversation, currently uncommon, involving scholars in the social sciences, the humanities, and public policy and public health. Simultaneous consideration of the analytical frameworks provided by cultural studies,

anthropological/ethnographic approaches, and more practical health/policy orientations may be very productive, and may lead to exciting new ways of conceptualizing global sexualities and global sexual health.♦

Acknowledgments

Funding for my pilot interviews with Mexican gay immigrants was provided by the Collaborative HIV-Prevention Research in Minority Communities Program, at UCSF’s Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. This program is funded by the National Institutes of Health. My current research with this population is funded by grant # R01 HD042919 from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health. My research in Guadalajara, Mexico was supported by dissertation fellowships from the Inter-American Foundation, the UC MEXUS program, and the Organization of American States. For providing helpful editing comments and suggestions, I am grateful to Steven Epstein, Gilbert Herdt, Terry Stein, colleagues participating in the conference “Critical Issues in American Sexuality” of the National Sexuality Resource Center (August, 2003), and an outside peer reviewer selected by the journal.

References

- Altman, D. (2001). *Global sex*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1991). Global ethnoscaples: Notes and queries for a transnational anthropology. In R. Fox (Ed.), *Recapturing anthropology* (pp. 191-210). Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1993). Patriotism and its futures. *Public Culture*, 5(3), 411-29.
- Boellstorff, T. (1999). The perfect path: Gay men, marriage, Indonesia. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5(4), 475-510.
- Cantú, L. (1999). *Border crossings: Mexican men and the sexuality of migration*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine.
- Cantú, L. (2002). De ambiente: Queer tourism and the shifting boundaries of Mexican male sexualities.

- GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8(1-2), 139-166.
- Carballo-Diéguez, A. (1998). The challenge of staying HIV-negative for Latin American immigrants. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, 8, 61-82.
- Carrillo, H. (1999). Cultural change, hybridity, and male homosexuality in Mexico. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 1(3), 223-38.
- Carrillo, H. (2002). *The night is young: Sexuality in Mexico in the time of AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cerruti, M., & Massey, D.S. (2001). On the auspices of female migration from Mexico to the United States. *Demography*, 38(2), 187-200.
- Chavez, L.R. (1998). *Shadowed lives: Undocumented immigrants in American society* (2nd ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Cruz-Malavé, A., & Manalansan, F., IV. (Eds.). (2002). *Queer globalizations: Citizenship and the afterlife of colonialism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Durand, J., Kandel, W., Parrado, E., & Massey, D. (1996). International migration and development in Mexican communities. *Demography*, 22(2), 249-264.
- Engardio, P.J. (1999, April 14). You can't be gay, you're Latino: A gay Latino identity struggles to emerge somewhere between the macho Mission and Caucasian Castro. *SF Weekly*. Retrieved July 16, 2004, from <http://www.sfweekly.com/issues/1999-04-14/feature.html>
- Escobar, J.I. (1998). Immigration and mental health: Why are the immigrants better off? *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55(9), 781-782.
- Espiritu, Y.L. (2003). "We don't sleep around like white girls do": Family, culture, and gender in Filipina American lives. In P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (Ed.), *Gender and U.S. migration: Contemporary trends* (pp. 263-284). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Flaskerud, J.H., Uman, G., Lara, R., Romero, L., & Taka, K. (1996). Sexual practices, attitudes, and knowledge related to HIV transmission in low income Los Angeles Hispanic women. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 33(4), 343-353.
- Flores-Ortiz, Y.G. (1994). The role of cultural and gender values in alcohol use patterns among Chicana/Latina high school and university students: Implications for AIDS prevention. *International Journal of the Addictions*, 29(9), 1149-1171.
- Ford, K., & Norris, A.E. (1993). Urban Hispanic adolescents and young adults: Relationship of acculturation to sexual behavior. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 30(4), 316-323.
- González-López, G. (2003). De madres a hijas: Gendered lessons on virginity across generations of Mexican immigrant women. In P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (Ed.), *Gender and U.S. migration: Contemporary trends* (pp. 217-240). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Haour-Knipe, M., & Rector, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Crossing borders: Migration, ethnicity, and AIDS*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Herd, G. (Ed.). (1997a). *Sexual cultures and migration in the era of AIDS*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Herd, G. (1997b). Sexual cultures and population movement: Implications for AIDS/STDs. In G. Herd (Ed.), *Sexual cultures and migration in the era of AIDS*, (pp. 3-22). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered transitions: Mexican experiences of immigration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hunt, L.M., Schneider, S., & Comer, B. (2004). Should "acculturation" be a variable in health research? A critical review of research on US Hispanics. *Social Science & Medicine*, 59, 973-986.
- Kaplan, C. (1996). *Questions of travel*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Larvie, P. (1997). Homophobia and the ethnoscape of sex work in Rio de Janeiro. In G. Herd (Ed.), *Sexual cultures and migration in the era of AIDS* (pp. 143-164). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Lindstrom, D.P. (1996). Economic opportunity in Mexico and return migration from the United States. *Demography*, 33(3), 357-374.
- Magaña, J.R., & Carrier, J.M. (1991). Mexican and Mexican American male sexual behavior and

- spread of AIDS in California. *Journal of Sex Research*, 28(3), 425-441.
- Manalansan, M.F., IV. (2000). Diasporic deviants/divas: How Filipino gay transmigrants "play with the world." In C. Patton & B. Sánchez-Eppler (Eds.), *Queer diasporas* (pp. 183-203). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Manalansan, M.F., IV. (2003). *Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Marín, B., Tschann, J.M., Gómez, C.A., & Kegeles, S.M. (1993). Acculturation and gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors: Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic white unmarried adults. *American Journal of Public Health*, 83(12), 1759-1761.
- Marín, B., & Flores, E. (1994). Acculturation, sexual behavior, and alcohol use among Latinas. *International Journal of the Addictions*, 29(9), 1101-1114.
- Marks, G., Cantero, P.J., & Simoni, J.M. (1998). Is acculturation associated with sexual risk behaviors? An investigation of HIV-positive Latino men and women. *AIDS Care*, 10(3), 283-295.
- Massey, D.S. (1999). A validation of the ethnosurvey: The case of Mexico-U.S. migration. *International Migration Review*, 34(3), 766-793.
- Massey, D.S., & Espinosa, K.E. (1997). What's driving Mexico-U.S. migration? A theoretical, empirical, and policy analysis. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(4), 939-999.
- Mikawa, J.K., Morones, P.A., Gomez, A., Case, H.L., Olsen, D., & Gonzalez-Huss M.J. (1992). Cultural practices of Hispanics: Implications for the prevention of AIDS. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4), 421-433.
- Nagel, J. (2003). *Race, ethnicity, and sexuality: Intimate intersections, forbidden frontiers*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Newcomb, M.D., Wyatt, G.E., Romero, G.J., Tucker, M.B., Wayment, H.A., Carmona J.V., Solis, B., & Mitchell-Kernan, C. (1998). Acculturation, sexual risk taking, and HIV health promotion among Latinas. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45(4), 454-467.
- Parker, R. (1997). Migration, sexual subcultures, and HIV/AIDS in Brazil. In G. Herdt (Ed.), *Sexual cultures and migration in the era of AIDS* (pp. 55-69). Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Patton, C., & Sánchez-Eppler, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Queer diasporas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Peragallo, N. (1996). Latino women and AIDS risk. *Public Health Nursing*, 13(3), 217-222.
- Povinelli, E.A., & Chauncey, G. (1999a). Thinking sexuality transnationally: An introduction. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5(4), 439-450.
- Povinelli, E.A., & Chauncey, G. (Eds.). (1999b). Thinking sexuality transnationally. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 5(4).
- Puar, J.K. (2002). Circuits of queer mobility: Tourism, travel, and globalization. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8(1-2), 101-137.
- Rumbaut, R.G. (1997). Assimilation and its discontents: Between rhetoric and reality. *International Migration Review*, 31(4), 923-960.
- Sánchez-Eppler, B., & Patton, C. (2000). Introduction: With a passport to Eden. In C. Patton & B. Sánchez-Eppler (Eds.), *Queer diasporas* (pp. 1-14). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Santacruzana Filipina Barbie. (2004). Retrieved July 16, 2004, from Manika Web site: <http://www.manika.com/sc.htm>
- Sassen, S. (2000). *Cities in a world economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Schiller, N.G., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration. In N. G. Schiller, L. Basch, & C. Blanc-Szanton (Eds.), *Towards a transnational perspective on migration* (pp. ix-xiv). New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Scribner, R. (1996). Editorial: Paradox as paradigm—The health outcomes of Mexican Americans. *American Journal of Public Health*, 86(3), 303-305.
- Wonders, N.A., & Michalowski, R. (2001). Bodies, borders, and sex tourism in a globalized world: A tale of two cities—Amsterdam and Havana. *Social Problems*, 48(4), 545-571.