

I THINK YOU'RE THE SMARTEST RACE I'VE EVER MET: RACIALISED ECONOMIES OF QUEER MALE DESIRE

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Abstract

This paper explores how queer white men become both the desiring subjects and desirable objects of the queer male gaze. By analysing the personal experiences of queer Asian men, this paper argues that queer white men claim possession of desire as capital through racialised economies of queer male desire. These economies privilege queer white men by racialising queer Asian men and other non-white queer men, and ascribes them desirability according to the queer white male gaze. By racialising non-white queer men, queer white men's whiteness is unracialised, and so, conceals their possession of desire as a white possession. I argue that it is only by exploring how queer white men claim possession of desire as capital within these racialised economies of queer male desire, that we can consider how they dominate the queer male gaze.

Introduction

The title of this paper is a pick-up line used on me by a queer white man. The fact that this pick-up line was used on me, a queer Asian Australian man, somewhat belies the presumption that we desire our partners based upon a variety of factors such as charm, height, hair-colour, class, and education, whilst excluding our desires for race and whiteness as one of these factors. Given that the body is always raced, how then can we exclude our desires for race and

whiteness in our choice of partners? Of course we apportion varying degrees of importance to these factors according to our individual preferences; however this does not mean that we can exclude race and whiteness as elementary as any other of these factors in our embodied desires for our partners. If admitting that we desire someone because they are racialised as black or white for instance, makes us feel uncomfortable, then we ought to seek to understand why this is so. In this paper I seek to understand why queer white men are desirable for queer Asian men. By analysing the personal experiences of queer Asian men, I explore how queer white men are privileged as both the desiring subjects and desirable objects of the queer male gaze. I will unpack queer white male privileges and the systems through which they come to dominate the queer male gaze by developing a concept of desire as capital. Just as any other form of capital with value, I will show that queer white men claim possession of their desirability within racialised economies of queer male desire, in which non-white queer men are racialised and queer white men are unracialised. I will illustrate how queer white men benefit from these economies as unracialised white subjects, so that the invisibility of their whiteness conceals their possession of desire as a white possession.

Speaking Back to Whiteness

My story behind writing this paper is one which, I believe, is worth elaborating for

the purposes of my argument. I started writing this paper as a way of speaking back to the queer white men who are racist towards me. This attempt at speaking back to whiteness is only possible with the support of critical whiteness theorists like Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll, whose work I greatly admire for the empowerment it provides me in recognising that these experiences of racism are not a problem which I have caused, but rather a reflection of the possessive investments in whiteness made by queer white men. In this paper, I am not attempting to speak on behalf of all queer Asian men. What I am doing in this paper is speaking back to whiteness by speaking with other queer Asian men, so the potential queer white male reader of this paper is entering into our conversation. In speaking about my experiences of racism, I do not intend to suggest that I do not benefit from Asian Australian privileges; rather, my intention is to think through these experiences of racism as an attempt to engage with the effects of a white/Asian binary, which I experience all the time in the Australian queer scene. The effects of this binary are also evident in the American and Canadian contexts, demonstrated by my use of queer Asian American and queer Asian Canadian male authors, who discuss similar experiences of queer white male dominance in America and Canada respectively (Fung 1991; Leong 2002; Manalansan IV 1996; Mangaoang 1996; Wat 1996; Roy 1998; Sanitioso 1999)

Before I began engaging with critical race and whiteness theory, I had always considered queer white men's racism directed towards me as due to my actions, which had caused them to be offended. However, when I researched this paper and began reading about other queer Asian men's experiences of being racialised in the queer scene, I instantly recognised the same

experiences in my own life. This paper is my preliminary attempt at theorising the reasons behind the uniformity of these queer Asian men's experiences of queer white male racism. What is common in all of these experiences is the acknowledgement that we as queer Asian men are undesirable in the eyes of most queer white men. What continues to haunt me, even after writing this paper, is that these narratives also illustrate our acknowledgement that we are undesirable to each other (see Leong 2002). In this paper, I seek to understand why queer white men are desirable and how whiteness benefits them in a system that maintains their desirability. This paper then, focuses explicitly on queer white men. By conceiving of desire as capital, I will propose that desire circulates within racialised economies of queer male desire. Through these economies, whiteness claims possession of the standards by which we measure queer male desirability, and so, we as queer Asian men are always racialised as non-white queer men who both desire queer white men and are undesirable for queer white men. I begin my argument with a theoretically important detour into a survey of critical race and whiteness theory, by considering how whiteness operates more broadly as possession and is itself inalienable property inherited only by white people.

Overview of Critical Race & Whiteness Theory: Whiteness as Capital

Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies has consistently drawn attention to the power of whiteness in claiming possession of Indigenous peoples' lands. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2005) incisively points out that the celebrated values of Australian national identity serve the white project of denying Indigenous sovereignty to claim Australia

as a white possession. Values such as egalitarianism, mate-ship, and a 'fair' go are embedded in the narratives of convicts, diggers and British settlers. These values mask the heterogeneity of Australia as a British possession consisting of Anglo-Saxons, Anglo-Celts, Scottish and Welsh. This masking of the heterogeneity within British whiteness denies the conflicts between these ethnic groups so that Australia's national values of egalitarianism, for instance, can be celebrated as a white possession. Thus, it is by celebrating these values, and masking these conflicts, that Australia can be claimed as a white possession. When the land is constructed as the oppressor, evident in Australia's historical mythology of survival against the harsh landscape, white possession is valorised and Indigenous dispossession is erased. The celebration of white Australian national values, therefore, simultaneously claims possession of Indigenous peoples' lands by denying Indigenous dispossession. As Moreton-Robinson (2005: 21) argues "[p]roperty rights are derived from the Crown which in the form of the nation-state holds possession. Possession and nationhood are thus constituted symbiotically".

This suggests that, since white values are celebrated and privileged within regimes of white Australian nationalism, values are themselves part of the property claimed by white Australians. Following Bourdieu, Ghassan Hage (1998) argues that white control over Australia's national spaces is part of the cultural capital inherited by white people. In his influential book *White Nation*, Hage illustrates how white people control Australia's national spaces through a fantasy of white supremacy. It is through this fantasy that white Australians inherit the cultural capital of whiteness and so have the power to control Australia's national

spaces, evident, for example, in the dominance of white Australian icons celebrated in the stadium space of the Sydney Olympics Opening Night Ceremony (Hage 1998). Thus the possession of whiteness operates within a system; a fantasy of white supremacy that endows upon those deemed to be white Australians the privileges through which Australia is claimed as a white possession. Inheriting whiteness, therefore, means inheriting a system of privileges, and so whiteness itself has a capital value.

This value accorded to the possession of whiteness also follows from Cheryl Harris' (1993) persuasive argument that whiteness, as the inheritance of epidermically inscribed white skin, and other visible attributes of whiteness, has itself become valuable and inalienable property. In the United States, white Americans controlled Black African Slaves as property, and claimed the lands of Native Americans as their own. Through this history of exploitation of the racialised Other, whiteness came to be defined as "the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings" (Harris 1993: 1721). In a system where the legal definition of property rights was alienable, white privileges were considered inalienable, something only white people inherited. As Harris (1993: 1734) argues, "the inalienability of whiteness should not preclude the consideration of whiteness as property. Paradoxically, its inalienability may be more indicative of its perceived enhanced value, rather than its disqualification as property". A history of exploitation through which white people claimed the property of racialised non-white Others had the effect that the inheritance of white skin meant not only the inheritance of white privileges, but also the possession of the valuable and inalienable property of whiteness. Thus, whiteness itself has come to attain a

capital value, an anomalous class of property inherited only by white people.

This brief outline of specific aspects of the field of critical race and whiteness studies has highlighted how whiteness claims possession of the property of Indigenous peoples (Moreton-Robinson 2005), inherits white power in the form of cultural capital (Hage 1998), and is itself conceptualised as an inalienable property (Harris 1993). The questions that I pose are: what configurations of privileges do queer white men inherit, and how do these privileges make queer white men desirable for the queer male gaze? What forms of unearned white privilege do queer white men inherit from this broader system of whiteness? My intention is to not suggest that queer Asian men are duped into desiring queer white men, and so maintain queer white male racism unintentionally; rather I focus on how the circulation of desire largely works irrespective of the intentions of agents, by considering how desire circulates as capital claimed by queer white men. Following Hage's (1998) argument that white people inherit whiteness as cultural capital, I consider how desire for queer white men is itself a form of capital, and I explore how queer white men claim possession of desire as capital within racialised economies of queer male desire. Desire for queer white men then, is not simply inherited as a white possession, rather it is inherited in a system – a racialised economy through which non-white queer men are racialised and queer white men are unracialised. This economy constructs desire for queer white men as a form of capital. As Damien Riggs (2006) writes: "white (queer) identities are neither solely social nor individual in nature – they are in and of themselves social artefacts that are simultaneously produced through social contexts, whilst being productive of social contexts, in

that their ongoing reiteration serves to further enshrine the normative status of whiteness". By focusing on the construction and circulation of desire in producing the desirability of queer white men, I will show how racialised economies of desire work to privilege queer white men as both desiring subjects and desirable objects of the queer male gaze. I begin my analysis of queer white male desire by problematising one of my experiences of being desired by a queer white man.

Desiring a Smart Race

It was at first year university parties that I met most of my former queer white male partners. At one of these parties, another first year student – a queer white man – approached me and we started speaking about what high school we attended, what courses we were studying at university, and what pub crawls we had already joined. Whilst the topic of our conversation remained on university life generally, it suddenly took a sharp turn towards 'my race'. This change in topics occurred when this queer white man said to me, "I think you're the smartest race I've ever met". When he commented on my intelligence as a product of my race, I was confused. Although confronted by this comment, I was unsure about my emotions and how to respond. Was his comment a compliment, or an insult?

It is at university that I first began to celebrate the fact that I am queer. After officially 'coming out' to my friends in high school, I anticipated that university would be a time when I would meet many queer friends and queer lovers. However, after being involved in the queer scene for a few years, I began to notice that all of my queer white friends had a greater turnover of partners than I had. I noticed that all of them had met

their partners from each other's networks of queer friends. This exclusion from my queer white friends' networks made me ask myself: 'Am I ugly, or boring?' Towards the end of my undergraduate degree, I made a conscious decision to focus on my study and to realise the racial construction of Asian as a 'smart race'. Since I was excluded from my white friends' queer networks, I decided to further pursue a queer agenda through queer activism. I was elected male sexuality officer and was actively involved in student politics. However, whilst campaigning for queer rights, I realised that the rights I was fighting for were those of queer white men. It was in my final Honours year of study when I realised that, unlike my queer white friends, I was not white, I was Asian.

After being quietly excluded from my queer white friends' networks, to be desired by a queer white man at the party was my ultimate revenge. It was a statement of my desirability. It was confirmation that my friends were wrong. I was desirable because a queer white man desired me. Kent Chuang (1999: 35) describes the same experience when he asks, "[i]n my desperate search for approval from Anglo men, had I become so selfish, helpless and angry that I would turn against my own kind?" In my recounting of these painful personal experiences, we witness a circulation of desire within racialised economies of the queer male gaze. What interests me about this experience is how this queer white man desired me as a member of a 'smart Asian race'. Just as whiteness claims Australia as a white possession by denying Indigenous sovereignties (Moreton-Robinson 2004; Moreton-Robinson 2005), this queer white man claimed possession of the right to be the arbiter of my race's intelligence through which he considered me desirable.

In desiring me as a member of a 'smart Asian race', this queer white man made me turn towards my experience of racialisation. This highlights how effectively whiteness deflects attention away from its own privileges towards the racialised other. Frantz Fanon (1967: 112) describes the pain of this experience of being racialised as "an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood". Like Fanon (1967: 116), I am silenced by the racially subjectifying compliment, in which "I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am of the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance". Tony Ayres (1997a) describes this experience incisively when he recalls how he "eventually realised that when most Caucasian men in the gay scene look at Asian men, they don't see a tall or short man, attractive or unattractive man. They don't see a Chinese, a Filipino, or a Cambodian, they see a category, which absolutely describes us but which defines nothing". Like Ayres, I became racialised as a member of the category of a smart Asian race for the gaze of the queer white man who desired me. These examples challenge conventional representations of queer male desire as a capital that circulates within and between queer male bodies, implying that all queer men have access to desire and so can become desirable. Although it could be argued that I desired this queer white man for his whiteness and he desired me for my Asianness, and therefore desire circulated between our bodies in an equivalent exchange, it will be shown that queer white men are rendered more desirable than queer Asian men because whiteness claims possession of the standards by which we measure all racialised non-white queer men's desirability.

Queer White Men as Desiring Subjects and Desirable Objects of the Queer Male Gaze

Let us continue exploring how queer white men become desiring subjects and desirable objects for the queer male gaze. The queer white man who desired me at the party was the desiring subject of my queer Asianness, and also the desirable object of my queer Asian male gaze. However, unlike his overt racialisation of me as a member of a category of smart Asians, my experience of being racialised silenced me from overtly racialising him. One queer Asian man describes this experience of being racialised when he says, “[e]very time I look at a man I’m interested in, I have to think first, ‘Does he like Asians?’ not ‘Does he like me?’” (Ayres 2000b: 162). In contrast, as queer white men inherit the desirability of whiteness, when they see other queer white men, they do not need to ask ‘Will this man like whites?’ Queer male desire thus circulates in a system of racialised economies of desire through which non-white queer men are racialised and queer white men are unracialised. As this queer Asian man’s question demonstrates, queer white men benefit from their invisible whiteness through the presumption that whiteness is desirable for all queer men. It follows then that although non-white queer men can gain certain forms of desire as aesthetic capital such as a muscular body or fancy clothing, unlike queer white men, they do not inherit the unracialised subject position of desirable whiteness. This invisibility of whiteness has the effect that racialised non-white queer men turn inwards towards their experience of racialisation in a search for confirmation that they are desirable.

Chuang (1999: 31) recalls how he “searched desperately for evidence that an Asian could be a sexually

desirable object, but neither Calvin Klein advertisements, ‘Days of Our Lives’, nor stories of Rose Hancock on the 6 o’clock news showed [him] that it was possible”. Richard Fung (1991) also searches for evidence that Asian men are desirable, only to be confronted with the dominance of images of white men in gay pornography. This over-representation of queer white men in queer media is the result of what Ayres (2000b: 161) describes as a “culture where Tom of Finland is the pinnacle of what is considered desirable”. This search by queer Asian men for confirmation of their desirability highlights how whiteness draws attention towards what it perceives as the lack of the non-white racialised other. Instead of focusing on the dominance of images of whiteness as a privilege claimed by queer white men, these queer Asian men focus on how they lack desirability as racialised non-white queer men. Our desire for queer white men, however, is not simply the result of the dominance of the images of white men in the media. Instead, this dominance highlights a broader system of whiteness which claims “prepossession” (Moreton-Robinson 2005) of the standards by which we measure male beauty for queer white men. In other words, queer white men are made more desirable than non-white queer men because there are already systems in place, in the queer media for instance, which prepossess the capital of desire for queer white men. This prepossession of the standards of queer male beauty is not taken-for-granted, but needs to be constantly re-claimed as a white possession.

In a Letter to the Editor of the gay magazine *Campaign*, we witness how this prepossession of queer white men’s desirability was re-claimed as a white possession when it was challenged with the image of an Asian man on the

cover. In a response to this image of the first Asian male model on the cover in the magazine's 20 year history, the white author of the letter, David Phillips wrote: "[t]here are only a few white men interested in the small Asian dick. You can show me a small dick and a big black one and it is more important to go off with the big black one than the small Asian one" (Leong 2002: 84). Ayres (2000b: 160) describes this categorisation of racialised non-white queer men's desirability according to penis size, as a racial hierarchy in which "Asians were behind Black and Latino men in the scale of things" and "[o]f course, white men were at the top". Although Phillips' mentions 'white men', his whiteness becomes invisible at the point at which he racialises the penises of non-white queer men. Phillips' as a white man, therefore, is not racialised according to this hierarchy. What will be more evident throughout this paper, is that the white man's penis becomes the invisible standard by which we measure racialised non-white queer men's penises, and hence, their non-white queer male desirability. There are several effects of this invisibility of whiteness: First, given that the white man's penis is absent on this hierarchy, it is presumed to be desirable. Secondly, racialised non-white queer Asian and black men are ascribed desirability by the queer white male gaze. Thus, the very absence of queer white men on this hierarchy presumes that the white man's penis is desirable, and so claims possession of desire as capital for queer white men, through which they can then occupy the positions of desiring subject of the racialised penis, and the desirable object of the queer male gaze. This presumption of queer white men's desirability, then, installs Phillips' and other queer white men, as the desiring subjects of the big black penis, and the desirable objects of the queer male

gaze, in which their white penis is *a priori* desirable.

Queer Asian Men as Subjects and Objects of Desire

Queer white men's possession of desire as capital is also illustrated in one of my personal experiences in which my former best friend, a queer white man, was overtly racist towards me. In one conversation we had together, we discussed the American television series *Queer as Folk*. In one episode of the series, one of the characters, Emmett, dates a queer Japanese man (the only representation of an Asian man in the entire series), who never says a single English word in the episode, but is seen smiling and holding hands with Emmett. Despite the fact that we were not explicitly discussing the fact that this man was Asian, my friend felt entirely comfortable in telling me that he found the Asian man in the episode "repulsive" and that he would never find Asian men attractive – "they're just disgusting" he reminded me. What offends me about this conversation was the fact that I didn't challenge this overt racism, but instead agreed with my friend, as he knew that I only desired and had only ever dated queer white men. In being the addressee of his racism towards Asian men, I experienced the self-epistemic violence of being racialised as non-white. It was simply my racialised queer Asian male presence and that of the Japanese character on *Queer as Folk* that was sufficient to deprive my ex-friend of his desirability as a queer white man. In order to re-claim this standard as a white possession, both my ex-friend and Phillips project their insecurities surrounding their queer white male desirability onto queer Asian men, who are racialised as queer Asian men and so lack desirability for the queer male gaze. This projection is achieved by

racialising non-white others, in this case queer Asian men, as having small dicks and therefore, "just disgusting" for the queer white male gaze.

There are also some similarities and differences between my former friend's racialisation of me as an undesirable queer Asian man and the queer white man at the party who desired me as a member of a smart Asian race. In both cases, these two queer white men are the desiring subjects of the queer male gaze, illustrated by the fact that as unracialised queer white men, they have the power to racialise me as either 'disgusting' or desirable for the queer male gaze. Secondly, in racialising me, these two queer white men focus upon my race, which has the effect that their white privileges and possession of desire as capital is obscured. This concealment of queer white men's possession of desire is evidenced in both scenarios in which I was silenced by the experience of being racialised. As my desire for the queer white man at the party was premised on my exclusion from my queer white friends' networks, I accepted this experience of being racialised as a member of a smart Asian race, without challenging his whiteness. Similarly, as my former friend knew that I had only ever dated and desired queer white men, his knowledge of this fact, gained through our friendship, silenced me from challenging his overt racism directed towards queer Asian men. The difference in both scenarios is that one queer white man desired me, whilst the other found me 'repulsive'. The dominant similarity is that both queer white men are installed as the desirable objects of the queer male gaze, achieved by silencing me from challenging their white possession of desire as capital.

Similar to Phillips and my former friend, queer white men's reclamation of desire

as capital is also evident in the terms used to describe, and thereby racialise, queer white men's desire for queer Asian men. Chuang (1999: 41) defines these terms in his 'Aussie Glossary for the Linguistically Challenged' in which 'rice queen' is defined as a "Caucasian man who is predominantly sexually interested in Asian men" and a 'potato queen' is an "Asian man who is predominantly interested in Caucasian men. Chuang (1999: 32) recalls how he, "heard stories about an infamous Sydney gay bar where rice queens hang out, [which] used to be nicknamed 'Asian Take Way'. These terms serve to belittle queer white men who desire queer Asian men, and so reclaim queer white men's desirability and spaces of desire as a white possession. Peter Jackson (2000: 183-184) argues that the "rice queen [occupies] a stigmatised and marginal position, [and is] stereotyped as a sexually unattractive man who is unable to find a Caucasian partner. The rice queen is mocked as a man whom 'only Asians find attractive'". In contrast to the terms 'rice queens' and 'potato queens', there are no terms used to describe queer white men who desire each other. Although there are fetishised descriptions of queer male desire like S&M, Bear, or Leather, these are not racialised descriptions like rice queens and potato queens. Queer white male desire, therefore, is the standard by which we measure racialised non-white queer male desire. As Jackson (2000) highlights, 'potato queens' and 'rice queens' are terms of deprecation used by queer white men against other queer white men who desire queer Asian men. By belittling 'rice queens', whiteness re-possesses queer white men's desirability by expelling, as an undesirable white other, the queer white men who desire queer Asian men. As they desire queer Asian men, rice queens reject the imposition of queer white men as the desirable

objects of the queer male gaze. Rice queens, therefore, stray from the norm of white desiring queer men, and so are denigrated as undesirable by queer white men.

However, even queer Asian men who desire queer white men – potato queens – see rice queens as undesirable. Chuang (1999: 32) describes the majority of rice queens he dated as undesirable old white men: "I believed that I was trapped in a circle of old men and leeches in their forties, fifties and sometimes older, unfit or fat, unattractive bordering on repulsive. 'The only reason they want us is because they can't get a white boy,' one Asian friend told me. Another queer Asian man describes how he 'went to a party and it was full of middle-age Caucasian men and young Asian boys'" (Ayles 1997a). From these experiences of queer Asian men, we can identify how the requirement that all queer men desire queer white men operates by excluding the undesirables – older queer white men (often rice queens) and queer Asian men. Desire as capital functions as a white possession and is reclaimed as a white possession by preventing non-white desiring rice queens and white desiring queer Asian men from claiming that they are desirable for the queer male gaze. Queer white men claim possession of desire as capital by positioning rice queens and potato queens as undesirable within racialised economies of queer male desire because they either refuse to desire queer white men, like rice queens, or they are racialised as undesirable queer Asian men. Rice queens and potato queens are therefore rendered undesirable for either refusing the installation of queer white men as the objects of the queer male gaze, or by being racialised as queer Asian men.

However, although rice queens are excluded along with queer Asian men from claiming queer male desirability, this does not mean that they stop racialising queer Asian men. Many queer Asian men describe how rice queens expect them to perform the role of submissive Asian. This is illustrated in one experience described by a queer Asian American man who writes: "[w]hen a friend of mine finally convinced a drunken white man who had been forcing himself on him that he did not like playing the submissive role, the white man became disgusted and said, 'You have completely turned Americanized. Go back to Asia and learn how to be an Asian.' This white man and others like him, sober or inebriated, have no way of relating to my Asian brothers except from atop" (Leong 1996: 73). Even though rice queens are belittled by queer white men as undesirable, they continue to exercise their queer white male privilege by racialising and effeminising queer Asian men. Ayles (2000b: 161) writes that "[b]ecause the majority of gay Asian men in Australia are slimmer and smaller than their Caucasian counterparts, they are also stereotyped as feminine or 'boyish'...The same racial stereotype that makes Asian women desirable makes Asian men marginal" . By racialising queer Asian men, these rice queens demonstrate their inalienable (Harris 1993) queer white male privileges. In other words, despite the fact that rice queens are excluded from claiming desire as capital because they do not desire queer white men, their inalienable whiteness guarantees them the power to racialise queer Asian men. In racialising their queer Asian male partners, by demanding that they 'learn how to be a submissive Asian', these rice queens feminise queer Asian men, and so maintain racialised economies of queer male desire in which queer Asian men are undesirable.

Feminising and Castrating Queer Asian Men

In Fung's (1991) famous article *Looking for my penis: The eroticized Asian in gay video porn*, he uses the visible lack of Asian penises in queer media to claim that queer Asian men are feminised for the queer white male gaze. Repeating the same racialised hierarchy that Ayres discusses, Fung (1991: 148) writes: "[s]o, whereas Fanon tells us, 'the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis,' the Asian man is defined by a striking absence down there. And if Asian men have no sexuality, how can we have homosexuality?" Ayres (1999c: 94) echoes Fung's claim when he writes: "[i]n gay media photos of Caucasian men the focus of attention is often the man's erect penis, the most aggressive symbol of masculinity. In contrast, the focus in photos of Asian men is the curve of the body, a typically feminine emphasis. This representation shows the Asian male as passive and subservient". How does this feminisation of queer Asian men demonstrate queer white men's possession of desire as capital? In answering this question, we might recall Phillips, the white author of a Letter to the Editor of *Campaign* discussed earlier, in which he declared that queer Asian men are undesirable because they lack big penises (see Leong 2002). In his letter, we witnessed how queer white men's penises become invisible in their absence on the racialised hierarchy of penis size. Fung and Ayres' description of how queer Asian men are feminised, thereby making them undesirable within racialised economies of queer male desire, illustrates how desire as capital is claimed as a white possession by queer white men. This possession of desire by queer white men occurs by making queer Asian men undesirable, an argument made by Jackson (2000: 183) when he writes:

"[t]he dominant de-eroticisation of Asian men within White gay cultures occurs by an effeminisation of Asian men's bodies and the privileging of a model of masculinity based on the idealised attributes of a Caucasian male". In contrast to black men who possess more desire as capital than queer Asian men because of their supposedly big penises, queer Asian men lack desire due to their supposedly small penises. Feminising queer Asian men literally dispossesses them of even more desire as capital by removing their penises altogether, and so literally makes them 'women', a process in which "Asian and anus are conflated" (Fung 1991: 153). By apportioning desire according to penis size within these racialised economies of queer male desire, queer white men, like Phillips, make their whiteness invisible. In other words, queer white men claim possession of desire as capital through their very absence within racialised economies of queer male desire. It is only through this absence, the invisibility of their whiteness, that queer white men can conceal their possession of desire as a white possession. This racialised hierarchy installs queer white men as both the subjects of the queer male gaze and the objects of queer male desire. It follows, then, that the racialisation of queer Asian men as having small undesirable penises and feminised bodies serves the project of making whiteness invisible, and therefore *a priori* desirable.

The feminisation of Asian men is not an isolated representation in racialised queer male economies of desire, but is part of a dominant trope, evident in the West's fantasies of Asia. David Eng's (2001) book *Racial Castration* uses psychoanalytic theory to analyse David Henry Hwang's film *M. Butterfly* (Cronenberg 1993). This film problematises the West's feminisation of Asia in Puccini's original opera *Madame*

Butterfly and replaces the Japanese woman Cio Cio San, with a Chinese transvestite, Song Liling. In the beginning of Hwang's film, Song says: "I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man...The West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine, weak, delicate and poor" (emphasis added). Song 'tricks' the Frenchman - Rene Gallimard – into believing that she is a 'woman', as she is really a spy working for the Chinese government. Eng (2001: 150) argues that the logic of fetishism as defined by Freud, functions through a compensatory logic that facilitates a normative heterosexual relationship. The black penis threatens the unity of the white male ego by positioning white men as less masculine than black men, thus threatening the structural stability between him and the white woman. In *M. Butterfly* the opposite occurs, in which Gallimard denies the existence of the Asian man's penis, he castrates the Asian man so that he can sustain the fantasy of his white heterosexuality (Eng 2001: 151). In one scene when Song's penis is finally revealed to Gallimard he says to her: "tonight I've finally learned to tell fantasy from reality, and knowing the difference, I choose fantasy" (Eng & Hom 1998: 337). Gallimard's fantasy of his 'superior' white heterosexual masculinity can only exist by castrating Song, thereby feminising her through the Orientalist fantasy of feminine Asia which is ultimately achieved by having 'heterosexual' sex with her through her anus. Thus, feminising queer Asian men literally castrates them within racialised economies of queer male desire. Without penises, queer Asian men lose the capital of queer male desire in a process which racialises non-white queer men and masks queer white men's desirability as a white possession. The invisibility of whiteness then, makes the desirability of whiteness taken-for-

granted and so guarantees the possession of desire as capital for queer white men. As feminising queer Asian men means castrating them, without penises, queer Asian men literally become undesirable for the queer male gaze.

Given the historical dominance of the West's fantasies of feminised Asia, parodied in Hwang's film, it is not surprising that queer white men subscribe to the same fantasies and so find queer Asian men undesirable. However, as Hage (1998) argues, white Australian fantasies do not just exist, but rather they require practices that sustain and perpetuate the inheritance of white power for white people. As queer Asian men then, we ought not to seek reasons as to why we are undesirable, but rather we need to explore how queer white men become desirable by perpetuating these fantasies of feminised and undesirable queer Asian men. This is a sentiment echoed by Fung (1991: 157) when he writes: "[i]t is not the representation of the fantasy that offends, or even the fantasy itself, rather it is the uniformity with which these narratives reappear and the uncomfortable relationship they have to real social conditions".

To understand the dominance of these fantasies in which queer Asian men are made undesirable for the queer male gaze, we need to examine how whiteness operates as possession. However, given that it is the invisibility of whiteness which claims possession of desire as capital for queer white men, this project of researching queer white men's possession of desire is difficult. These challenges are expressed by Ayres (1999c: 92) when he says: "[b]ut you cannot point a finger and say, 'This man is racist because he doesn't sleep with me.' I don't think people consciously choose their desires. But, the very fact of

this separation of desire into racial categories indicates a kind of institutionalized racism". In this quote, Ayres astutely points out the difficulty of challenging the possession of desire by queer white men and how non-white queer men are racialised by queer white men. I would caution, however, that we ought to resist the temptation to identify queer white men as racist merely on the basis that they refuse to desire queer Asian men. This is not to say that queer Asian men are misguided when they claim to experience queer white male racism - indeed, this paper is my attempt at speaking back at queer white male racism. Instead, my argument is that rather than focusing on our experiences of queer white male racism, we ought to shift our attention towards queer white men by asking the question: 'What do queer white men gain from refusing to desire queer Asian men?' Furthermore, we need to ask: 'What do queer white men gain from desiring us as racialised non-white queer Asian men?' Following Fanon (1967), we ought not to focus on constructions of the black man, but rather we need to explore how the white man constructs his whiteness through his constructions of the black man.

Conclusions

This paper has been my preliminary attempt at seeking to understand how queer white men become desirable through their racialised constructions of queer Asian men as undesirable. Borrowing from Hage (1998), who used Bourdieu to argue that white power is inherited by white people as cultural capital, and Moreton-Robinson's (2003; 2004; 2005) work on whiteness as possession, I have shown how queer white men claim possession of desire as capital in order to install queer white men as desiring subjects and desirable

objects of the queer male gaze. However, desire can only be claimed as a white possession in a process that makes whiteness the invisible standard by which we measure the desirability of racialised non-white queer men. The invisibility of queer white men's whiteness has the effect that racialised non-white queer men, like the queer Asian male voices in this paper, turn inwards towards their experience of racialisation and undesirability. This experience of being racialised as queer Asian men is an epistemic violence, which highlights how effectively whiteness deflects attention away from its own privileges towards the racialised non-white Other, who is encouraged to experience a lack, in this case, a lack of desirability for the queer male gaze. As queer white men's desirability must be obscured as a white possession, desire is made to appear to circulate within racialised economies of queer male desire, through which it can then be assumed that all queer men can become desirable, thereby concealing the very queer white male privileges that install queer white men as desirable in the first place.

In conclusion, we ought to return to the queer white man who desired me as a member of a 'smart Asian race'. Not only does his categorisation of me as an intelligent race serve to racialise me, his comment also secured his desirability as an unracialised queer white male subject. As my desire for him was itself premised on my exclusion from my queer white friends' networks, I was silenced by his 'compliment' - a racialising and exclusionary white practice, which had the effect that I was encouraged to appreciate the fact that I was desirable as a queer Asian man, because a queer white man desired me. He claimed his desirability as a queer white man therefore, by desiring me not as another queer man, but as a

racialised queer Asian man, who is 'predominantly interested in Caucasian men'.

The final queer white man whom I would like to speak back to is my ex-friend. In speaking back to him, I follow the advice of our queer Asian sister who said: "'[d]on't worry, once a bitch called me an ugly chink'... It's our duty to assimilate our beautiful selves into the Australian culture. Think of the younger generation. We are pioneers for our young up and coming Asian sisters. Just go for it" (Chuang 1999: 33).

Following the advice from this queer Asian man, by being present in the queer scene, queer Asian men may stand up against whiteness. When we speak about queer white male desire, we refuse the silencing of whiteness that encourages us to experience a lack of desirability. So, when faced with a call to experience the epistemic violence of being racialised by queer white men, we as queer Asian men might stand together and say in unison to these queer white men, "I think you're the most desirable race I've ever met".

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