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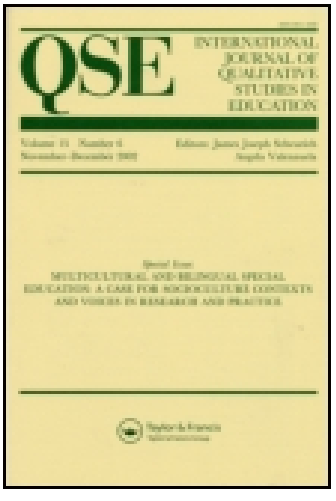

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Party animals or responsible men: social class, race, and masculinity on campus

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Studies of collegiate party and hookup culture tend to overlook variation along social class and racial/ethnic lines. Drawing on interview data at a "party school" in the Midwest, I examine the meanings and practices of drinking and casual sex for a group of class and race-diverse fraternity men. While more privileged men draw on ideas of age and gender to construct college as a time to let loose, indulge, and explore, men from disadvantaged backgrounds express greater ambivalence toward partying. For these men, partying presents both opportunities and dilemmas and taps into tensions inherent in being upwardly mobile college men. For some, symbolic abstention from extreme party behavior addresses some of these tensions and validates their place on campus. Men's talk of collegiate partying reveals the dynamic and relational construction of intersectional identities on campus.

Keywords: college; masculinity; social class; race

> *College*: A magical place where it is rumored that learning takes place, although to those who enter it is often described differently afterward, as a beautiful land in which beer flows in amber currents next to a golden pasture, where virgins lie naked with gentle smiles upon their calm, inviting faces; but more precisely, a Shangri-La rite of passage into adulthood which involves rampant consumption of alcoholic beverages, flagrant and promiscuous sexual behavior, and a general and fundamental disregard for any form of responsibility by its habitants. (Urban Dictionary)[1]

While tongue-in-cheek in its rhapsodic depiction of college, this definition for "college" – the most popular and highly rated of numerous on the open-source website for youth slang *Urban Dictionary* – captures widespread thinking that configures college as a time to let loose and have fun, especially regarding drinking and sex, and as a period of transitioning to adulthood. As scholarly attention has increasingly investigated the "experiential core" of college (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008), or the time between entrance and exit, studies have begun to take partying and related casual sexual behavior seriously (Bogle, 2008; England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2008; Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Freitas, 2010; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). *Partying,* here defined as alcohol-fueled group revelry and *hooking up,* sexualized, intimate contact outside of a committed relationship, have interlocked and

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become normative aspects of college peer culture in the United States, existing as both widely shared discourse and practice on many campuses, especially at so-called "party schools" where robust subcultures encourage students to drink more and study less (Ven, 2011; Weiss, 2013). The definition above, with its references to naked virgins, promiscuous behavior, and heavy drinking, underscores the need to understand collegiate party culture as a gendered phenomenon, one that potentially provides potent resources for the construction of masculine identities. And yet, because of inequalities related to race, ethnicity, and social class, men may be differently positioned to endorse masculinity projects characterized by adventurous drinking and heterosexual exploits.

To date, few investigations have explored collegiate party culture from an intersectional perspective, looking beyond gender to examine how structures of inequality work together to shape students' conceptualizations and experiences of partying. Collegiate party culture characterized by ritualized drinking and hooking up requires particular cultural orientations and skill sets as well as resources such as time and money. Drawing on interview data at a "party school" in the Midwest, I examine the meanings and practices of drinking and casual sex for a group of class and race-diverse fraternity men. While more privileged men draw on ideas of age and gender to construct college as a time to let loose, indulge, and explore, men from disadvantaged backgrounds express greater ambivalence toward partying. For these men, expectations related to collegiate drinking and sexual behavior present both opportunities and dilemmas and tap into tensions inherent in being upwardly mobile college men. Reconfiguring collegiate social expectations allows some disadvantaged men to construct masculine identities as mature and responsible. Others who seek integration into the dominant party subculture encounter social, cultural, and economic barriers. Men's talk of collegiate partying reveals the dynamic and relational construction of intersectional identities on campus.

Theoretical framework

Defined as the practices and processes that privilege men in relation to women, *hegemonic masculinity* is the exalted ideal of what it means to be a man in a given culture (Connell, 1995). Certain behaviors and processes will ensure men's dominant gender position while also privileging hegemonic forms of masculinity over subordinate ones; thus, inequalities among men and women are intricately bound up with inequalities among men (Connell, 1987, 1995). Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), providing a corrective to what they see as problems with the "multiple masculinities" perspective, argue that focus should be on similarities across groups of men. They define "manhood acts" as those behaviors that signify a masculine self, elicit deference, and resist exploitation. Even men who appear subordinate in relation to other groups of men may signify manhood and claim gender privilege. Men may discursively construct credible masculine selves in relation to dominant conventions of masculinity and in relation to other men (Dellinger, 2004; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Men's talk signifies masculine selves and does interactionist work of constituting social identities (Schrock & Schwalbe, 1996; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Structures of inequality such as social class and race/ethnicity shape men's signification of masculine selves, leading to variation in interactional expectations, settings and "audiences," and available resources and "props" (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). An interactionist framework encourages us to recognize how these interlocking systems

are mutually reinforcing social arrangements that create competing expectations and dilemmas for men (R. Collins, 2004; Wilkins, 2012a, 2012b).

My initial interests were broadly related to masculinity and heterosexuality, especially ideas that young men are naturally heterosexually driven. I sought to reconcile the centrality of heterosexual performance to the hegemonic ideal of masculinity with the apparent fact that few men accomplished this ideal, whether because they were unable or unwilling. As with many other aspects of hegemonic masculinity, dominant notions of "real manhood" may exist broadly as discourse but operate in lived experiences in more complicated ways (Chen, 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). My focus is therefore on how men *interpret* ideas of manhood and sexuality – how college men relate to and manipulate ideas of party culture and masculinity as they construct narratives about themselves and the social world around them.

Peers, partying, and social inequalities

Away from parents and densely clustered with other people similar in demographics, residential college students "identify, affiliate, and seek acceptance and approval" from peers (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), with whom they bond and produce rich peer cultures of shared meanings, routines, and artifacts. Based on a study of more than 25,000 students at over 200 institutions, Astin (1993) identified peers as "the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). Despite the obvious power of peer culture, education scholarship has been slow to investigate how intramural sorting processes affect student adjustment and success. This oversight is significant, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds fare less well on many measures than their more privileged peers. First-generation students, or those who do not have a parent with a bachelor's degree, are significantly less likely to re-enroll in college after the freshman year and have lower overall graduation rates (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). These students may struggle academically, with lower pre-college reading and math skills and less college preparatory work. They may also struggle socially. Research shows that first-generation students tend to be less integrated and involved in campus life. They participate less in extracurricular activities like clubs and organizations, are more likely to live at home, to maintain connections with friends outside of college, and to have off-campus jobs unrelated to studies (Kuh et al., 2005; Walpole, 2003).

While some of this limited *engagement* may be related to material constraints, it is also likely related to social and cultural issues that affect non-traditional and minority students. Racial minorities and students from lower social classes may feel pressure to disconnect from their families and cultural traditions in order to align themselves with the academy and peer cultures within, many aspects of which they may find unfamiliar and threatening (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Rendon, 1994). Students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds tend to have less familiarity with the cultural and organizational logic of colleges and universities, including how they operate administratively, the role of professors and their relationships with students, and the nature and purpose of student life (Bergerson, 2007). In a study of first-generation students from diverse cultural backgrounds, Rendon (1994) found that non-traditional students, especially racial minorities, often had "invalidating experiences" that reinforced their doubts about their academic abilities and undermined their sense of belonging in higher education. In their study of social class and

college women's romantic and sexual careers, Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) find that women from less privileged backgrounds hold class beliefs about age and sexuality that are in conflict with a college subculture that endorses delayed adulthood and casual sex. These young women, more inclined to marry and have children sooner than their more privileged peers, often found hookup culture "not only foreign but hostile" (p. 607). The dominant social scene on campus, with its focus on heavy drinking and casual sex, could appear "mystifying, uncomfortable, and alienating" to less privileged women (p. 607). Especially at so-called party schools, student social life focused on alcohol-fueled partying and casual sex may be so dominant that students who do not participate may feel like outsiders making alternative lifestyle choices (Sperber, 2001; Weiss, 2013). Abstaining students may be excluded from other aspects of college social life or may have difficulty acclimating to the college experience more broadly.

The intersection of social class, race, and gender structures men's opportunities to participate in collegiate party and hookup culture and the meanings they make of it. Class-privileged men may be more likely to adopt an "emerging adult" perspective that embraces delayed adulthood, self-development, and experimentation (Arnett, 2004; Furstenberg, Kennedy, McLoyd, & Settersten, 2004). Young people who are privileged by race and class also have more latitude in how others view their behavior, while less privileged youth face more scrutiny, surveillance, and less forgiving interpretations of their behavior (Ferguson, 2000). On one hand then, class and race-subordinate men, denied access to signifiers of masculinity such as political and economic power, may access heterosexual privilege to compensate (Anderson, 1999). On the other hand, their disadvantaged social positions may complicate their ability to claim masculine privilege through heterosexual performance. Wilkins (2012b), for example, finds that Black college men receive both stigma and status because of cultural ideas related to Black heterosexual masculinity. Black male college students may distance themselves from predatory types of masculine sexuality, either by emphasizing academics (Harper, 2004) or by emphasizing romance over sexual conquest (Ray & Rosow, 2009). While some college men may signify manhood through homosocial rituals of drinking (Capraro, 2000) and girl chasing (Grazian, 2008), structural inequalities may make accessing these forms of gender privilege easier for some men than others.

To expand the range of intersectional insight into experiences of partying and hooking up among college students, thereby addressing a critical gap in the published research, I draw on in-depth interviews with college men and mixed-gender group interviews conducted at State University, a large public university in the Midwest. I introduce the dominant party scene on the campus studied and discuss widely shared understandings of party culture among students. I then examine how race and class-privileged fraternity men construct masculine identities in relation to expectations to engage in ritualistic drinking, group revelry, and casual sex. Lastly, I examine how less privileged fraternity men relate to these same expectations.

Setting and research methods

State University is a major research institution and a flagship campus of the state system. While respected for its broad range of academic programs and research, State University also has a reputation as a "party school," consistently topping national lists of schools where students drink heavily and study little.

Approximately 35,000 students were enrolled at State University at the time of study, including roughly 28,000 undergraduates, of whom 88% were white, less than 5% African-American, and less than 2% Latino. Approximately 17% of students were active in sororities or fraternities. Located in a small Midwestern town with a distinct college orientation, State University predominantly enrolls students of traditional college age (between 18 and 24 years old) who live on campus or nearby in dense student neighborhoods. Businesses in an adjacent downtown area cater to students, including numerous bars and clubs. Weekend nights during the academic year are lively, with groups of students carousing loudly on sidewalks. The sociologist Karen Weiss (2013) explains that many students attend such schools precisely because they are interested in partying, and other students, in effects analogous to second-hand smoke, contend with the consequences of highly visible and dominant party subcultures.

Sample and recruitment

The data discussed in this article come primarily from 24 interviews I conducted with fraternity men at State University. These interviews were part of a larger project on college, manhood, and sexuality. All of the fraternity men were heterosexual-identified and between the ages of 18 and 22. Fourteen of these men were white and from four of the largest and most visible fraternities with houses on campus – what I refer to as "mainstream" fraternities. Another 10 men interviewed were members of "multicultural" organizations: six men from two Black fraternities and four from one Latino fraternity. The Black and Latino fraternities at State University were positioned alongside and in the shadows of the mainstream (predominantly white) Greek system. They did not own houses, and official fraternity business and socializing tended to occur in houses near campus that several members rented and lived in. Thus, while all respondents reported on here were fraternity men, they came from varied backgrounds and occupied different social locations on campus. Fraternities were obvious sites for recruitment given existing research on collegiate party subcultures, especially research on male group behavior, drinking, and problematic sexual behavior (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Sanday, 1990; Strombler, 1994). While a substantial body of research has investigated issues of gender and sexuality within fraternities, most studies focus only on predominantly white populations (for exceptions see Ray & Rosow, 2009).

The majority of the men indicated that they were "middle-class"; however, the white fraternity men appeared, on average, significantly more class privileged than the fraternity men of color. I asked questions about parents' occupations and educational attainment, families' financial stability, and home communities. I also asked questions about financial aid, student loans, and employment while in school. For the purposes of this paper, I classified 11 of the respondents as less privileged (three white, five Black, and three Latino). Almost all first-generation college students, these men received little to no family support for tuition, received substantial need-based aid through scholarships and loans, and typically held jobs to help cover living expenses. State University, for these men, was a path toward moving up from their original class positions. Thus, I frequently refer to these men as "upwardly mobile." Not all men were easy to classify. Nick, for example, an out-of-state student of Mexican heritage, came to State University by cobbling together scholarships and working for pay (especially during the summers). His parents – financially secure and

middle class in income – helped out as much as they could, but they perceived his decision to attend a far-away school as puzzling and worrisome, in large part because of uncertainty over costs. Ultimately, I categorized Nick as upwardly mobile.

When possible, I contacted fraternity men directly, inviting them to participate in the study via email. In some cases the "president" of the house forwarded my email to members. I explained that I was interviewing men about manhood, sexuality, and relationships with women. Personal recommendations from participants and snowball sampling led several men to participate. In order to achieve greater social class diversity in the larger sample, I also recruited men by giving a presentation to participants in the Endeavor Program, a government-funded campus organization that assisted first-generation and minority students.

Interview procedure

The interviews ranged from one to three hours (with an average of 1.75) and were conducted in private offices on the campus where participants were students. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed me to collect rich data on how the men felt about and made sense of their college experiences, and about the social and structural contexts in which they had them. I talked to the men about their pre-college life experiences, from their family backgrounds and childhoods to their high school friendships and early romantic and sexual experiences. They discussed their paths to college and their experiences since matriculating, both social and academic. I also asked about their goals for the future, such as whether they expected to get married and have children. While our discussion focused broadly on college social life, I also asked specific questions about the men's romantic and sexual relationships. I asked questions about their friends' sexual practices and attitudes in order to gain insight into their peer cultures. While interviewing did not allow me to observe men's actions firsthand, it did allow me to collect men's detailed accounts of, and reflections on, their intimate experiences and campus social life. The semi-structured, qualitative nature of the interviews encouraged men to serve as informed and reflexive participant observers on fraternity life and campus partying. I was interested in how the men used the interviews to make sense of their social worlds and experiences. I frequently asked the men to illustrate their accounts with specific examples and stories. When discussing men's friendships and socializing, for example, I asked questions such as "What kinds of things do you and your friends do for fun?" and, "Tell me about a really fun night you recently had." "Who was there and what happened?"

My identity as a somewhat older male in the semi-professional role of "grad student" likely affected how the men talked to me about college partying. I believe I was too young to strike the respondents as an adult authority figure, yet I was socially positioned (as an instructor and researcher) outside of the social worlds of undergraduates. Using this "betwixt and between" social status, I encouraged the men to "fill me in" on what I had heard about; State University's reputation as a party school preceded it, and through teaching undergraduate classes related to gender and sexuality, I had heard many stories of college social life. I explained that I had been an undergraduate just a few years prior, though at a significantly smaller school with nothing like State University's party scene. Most men seemed eager to fill me in, not just on their social worlds but the larger "lay of the land" at State University. Being a fellow male, I believe, also helped generate rapport that

facilitated easy and open discussions about sexual attitudes and experiences. While I asked some direct and personal questions, I also framed inquiries in terms of how others think, feel, and behave: "How does the average guy feel about that?" "What would your friends do in this situation?" "What kinds of things do your friends say about people like that?" I heard many detailed stories that, to an outside audience, would seem sexist and misogynistic. While these stories often offended my feminist sensibilities, they led me to believe that most respondents felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics. For example, some men openly talked about their disrespectful behavior toward promiscuous women, or how they strategized to "get some" but not "give" (sexual pleasure) in return.

I aimed to increase the comfort of all of my respondents by asserting my neutral, professional role as a researcher. It is possible, however, that as a white man, I more easily built trust and rapport with the white fraternity men. However, I believe being a sociologist inquiring about issues of race and ethnicity signaled to respondents of color that I was an anti-racist ally. In the case of both the Black and Latino fraternities, I received an endorsement from an organization elder who vouched for me and the project, likely putting others at greater ease about volunteering and participating in the interview. I also believe that several of the respondents of color found participation in the project, and my curiosity about their organizations, rewarding, given the relative invisibility of their organizations on the predominantly white campus.

Analysis of data

After each interview I took preliminary notes on my impression of the interview and the key ideas that had emerged. I created a narrative sketch of each respondent, including demographic information related to hometown, race/ethnicity, and social class; his lifestyle in college, including social and academic interests; and my impression of his appearance, personality, and demeanor during the interview. I transcribed and analyzed interviews using the software-based data analysis program AtlasTi. I identified and coded patterns across interviews and flagged negative cases that could clarify or alter emergent themes (Rizzo, Corsaro, & Bates, 1992).

I also supplement the in-depth interview data with 16 mixed-gender focus groups ($N = 87$; 24 men and 63 women) that I helped to conduct with State University students as part of a larger study on college student social life. I conducted eight of these focus groups by myself or with a co-investigator. The co-investigator conducted the remaining focus groups, either alone or with one other researcher. We aimed to speak with a diverse range of students in order to get a broad, though by no means complete, view of campus social life. Most of the focus groups comprised students in the same formal organization (a sorority or an evangelical Christian group, for example) while other focus groups were based on friendship groups. For formal organizations, we typically recruited participants by contacting leaders by email and asking if they could form a focus group of several members. For informal groups, we recruited participants through student contacts who then formed the focus groups.

Partying on campus

As a series of ritualized, scripted events (Schwalbe et al., 2000), the dominant party scene on campus encouraged participants to enthusiastically drink and socialize with

abandon, often in a sexually charged atmosphere. Weekend mornings often found lawns littered with cans and bottles, articles of clothing, and assorted furniture – signs of hard partying that served as a pointed contrast to the stately buildings on campus. Members of white Greek letter organizations, while a statistical minority on campus, were highly visible and formed the heart of this party scene at State University. Mainstream, predominantly white fraternities hosted the vast majority of the gatherings that comprised this scene, controlling timing, organization, and themes. Gatherings ranged from small, impromptu drinking groups to highly organized events involving hundreds of guests, staging and decoration, and hired bands.

A wide range of students recognized these fraternities as places to drink, meet people, and hook up. As a first-year woman explained in a focus group, "I just like meeting new people and there's so many more people there …" A recent fraternity party she had been to was "really hot and everyone was just dancing all over each other." Students in a focus group of evangelical Christian men and women described the campus as rife with alcohol and hookups, but when asked where specifically students could find casual sex, one man responded: "check out a fraternity party." The others agreed. Sorority women in focus groups also identified fraternities as the place to party. As one woman said: "First week we have girls in the house, we take them out almost every night to a fraternity and every night it's just centered around getting wasted." To which other women in the group agreed in unison: "Getting them wasted." While off-campus bars and clubs formed extensions of this party scene, strict policing of underage drinking at these venues encouraged underage students to flock to fraternity houses to have quintessential college party experiences.

Because the party scene was large and had an outsize influence over campus social life, all students were at least aware of its presence and most had to negotiate their place and identity on campus in relation to it. Even students who never participated could communicate the broad outlines – the areas and venues, the types of students who participated, and the general range of activities that occurred there. Despite being relatively exclusive and catering to a small slice of life at State University, the Greek-driven party scene was unavoidable.

Privilege and partying

The privileged fraternity men, engaging what I call the *collegiate party discourse*, speak of college as a time to party, let loose, and indulge in adventurous, hedonistic exploits. David says he enjoys fraternity parties because they are an "insane mess" and "like you wouldn't believe." Struggling to tease apart the different elements, he explains, "You're drinking with your buddies, you're drinking with these girls and getting them drinks, and there's sex all over the place, you know. It's just a mess." Out of all of the mainstream fraternity men, all but three said they chose State University at least in part because it is recognized as a party school. These men employ the party discourse to align themselves with an exalted image of the heterosexual playboy fraternity guy: he is fun and social, having the time of his life, and making friends and memories that would last a lifetime. Alcohol and sex are hallmarks of this discourse. Greg says he could have gone to a well-regarded engineering school closer to home but chose State University because he wanted "booze, boobs, and brothers." When I asked men to describe typical fun nights with their friends, they told stories of crowded parties and endless alcohol. Men get "wasted," "wrecked,"

"blasted," while parties are "wild," "out of control," and "ridiculous." Mark details the first days of partying after moving into his fraternity:

> It was like something out of a movie. These parties would be huge, they'd be hot and crowded and I mean, full of girls you didn't know, all pretty good looking, and it just seemed like, people were there to hook up, or at least you know be there for sexual attention and the sexual atmosphere.

Often their accounts, like this one, take on an almost rapturous tone, full of excitement and wonder, especially when on the topic of women and sex.

The party discourse highlights the importance of ritualized drinking and hooking up to men's social positions and identity among peers. Mark goes on to describe how he acquired a reputation for being wild and funny when drunk: "It was a lot of fun. Like with the guys, they loved me 'cause I was crazy when I was drunk, you know, I'd do anything." Men's stories are full of collective rituals of heterosexuality (Grazian, 2007): assessing women's physical attractiveness, flirting with women, and helping each other hook up. As Will says:

> Guys'll work together, yeah, you know, we'll work together. We'll make sure everybody's drinking, having a good time, gettin' a little something. You don't let your brothers go it alone. Man, that's why we're there, brothers, you know what I'm saying?

One man proudly reported that his fraternity brothers call him "porn star" because of his success at hooking up with women at parties. Another man says: "It's definitely a status thing. Like, among my friends at least, there's this thing where it gets kind of competitive, you know, who can hook up with the hottest girls. Who can get with 'em." The morning after large parties, men grill each other about sexual experiences. Peer status structures reward these men for partying and hooking up. Male friendships are privileged, and men are expected to signify manhood through homosocial (Bird, 1996) coordination of drinking and heterosexual performance.

This talk of fun, friends, and sex configures all (mainstream) fraternity men as fun-loving, hard-partying, and heterosexually competent, regardless of men's actual inclinations and experiences. Allen says he is partying less and studying more lately because of a demanding block of business school classes, but he proudly asserts that "guys are always hanging out" at his house and "there are always girls, too." Gil contends that girls are like "groupies" at his house, looking for attention and sex, yet he misses being in a relationship: "I try to talk to a girl, a girl always thinks that I'm trying to get with her or try to have sex with her." Because the discourse frames heavy ritualized group drinking as ubiquitous and unproblematic, men have to justify their abstention. Despite not participating in some party-related behaviors, whether by choice or ability, the *opportunity* for fun resides discursively in the background, providing ample resources for men to construct themselves as adventurous, fun-loving, and heterosexual men.

Several men reveal feeling personally strained by expectations to party and drink, yet going along anyway. In this sense, they begin to form a critique of the party discourse and associated meanings and practices. Chris says, "You drink when you wanna drink, you drink when your friends wanna drink, and it's not always pretty." Men have to be willing and able to separate academic selves from social selves in order to participate in collective activities, a separation that can cause strain, as Jacob explains: "My grades took a dip. I was just hanging out too much. It

was fun, but I made some mistakes, in hindsight." Men describe strong pressure from peers to "just party and just let go." Alex says, "I was so hung-over during that exam the next day, but it was my buddy's birthday, so we were hanging out [the night before]." While one still has to attend class with some regularity and complete necessary coursework, a great deal of time, the discourse tells us, should still be devoted to socializing. Academic work or other serious concerns are forbidden, consigned to other times and spaces. The atmosphere should be joking, lighthearted, and carefree. While the collegiate party discourse reflects widespread cultural logic that normalizes alcohol-fueled socializing and links sexual performance to masculinity, it also glosses over problems men encounter and obscures variation in their experiences.

Within the party discourse, college is a special time when one can enjoy adult freedoms (i.e. alcohol and sex) without adult responsibilities, especially those related to work and family that will come later in life. Kevin explains that he wants to "have fun" in college because he knows "down the road it's not going to be like this." By situating college between childhood and full adulthood, these men legitimate their participation in activities that might otherwise be seen as indulgent or foolish. Partying heavily, this thinking goes, is not so much about shirking responsibility as it is about having the quintessential college experience. Moreover, by asserting their belief that college is a time to let loose and have fun, men affirm their commitment to adult ideals of masculinity, work, and committed relationships. Letting loose only makes sense if, as Chris says, "You can't do this forever."

Upward mobility and partying

Less privileged fraternity men demonstrate far more ambivalence toward the party discourse. While they agreed that college was a time to have fun and discover oneself, they mostly took a dim view of ideas that heavy drinking and hooking up are normative for college students. Indeed, most of these men expressed strong disapproval of college students who seem more interested in partying than studying and advancement. Inverting many of the same meanings the more privileged men used to construct selves as youthful, adventurous, and masculine, these upwardly mobile men draw on ideas of maturity and social responsibility to depict college partying as foolish and self-indulgent. When asked if he ever participated in the drinking culture at State University by going to bars or large parties, Brandon replies, "Why would I want to do that to myself, when it just makes you sick and stupid and do things you might regret?" Sean says he is not against drinking outright but rejects ideas that getting wasted is somehow fun: "I'm not here to be stupid. I'm here to be smart, to learn." Drinking, at least in the bacchanalian form configured by the party discourse, makes little sense to men like Michael, who see their college attendance as a reward for self-discipline and hard work: "I'm here because I've worked hard to get here, and I'm going to succeed later because of what I do now. It's cause and effect and about making right decisions." Students who party too hard put themselves at risk of failing classes and having to leave the university, Ronald explains, "because they get caught up in all this." Several men conjecture about a link between drinking and peer pressure, implying, like Ronald, that heavy partying may be a sign of loss of control or a lack of self-knowledge. In contrast, Gabriel says that, "I like to party and hook up with girls. Don't most guys? But that's not why I'm here. And I know that about myself, and I'm going to stay true to my path." While many of the more

privileged fraternity men draw on the party discourse to normatively embed partying on the path toward self-actualization and adulthood, these men are more likely to contend that one who knows himself does not need to party heavily. Brandon clearly articulates this sentiment when he draws on ideas of age and masculinity to say, "I'm a man. I'm not going to endorse that kind of behavior – getting drunk, or high, chasing girls, not caring about how I affect the world."

A small subset of upwardly mobile men sought entrance in the dominant party scene through membership in mainstream fraternities, pushing aside their concerns about irresponsible behavior and material costs. Gil was able to parlay much of his former high school status into his new fraternity identity, as his new peers value him for his athletic skills and ability to party and hook up with women. Gil is, in his own estimation, attractive and has good "spit game," or the ability to chat women up flirtatiously at parties. Yet he has serious misgivings about his participation in a culture focused on drinking and hooking up with women. Partying and casual sex do not feel right to him; it feels as if he is not growing up and being responsible:

> I don't know, like, drinking, and I know it's socially acceptable and at the same time, I'm like, you know, I drink or you know like I guess I, I'm not real a … Guess I'm not really true to girls, I guess, not really in a relationship … that's kind of toward the bad arena like, alcohol and girls or whatnot.

Gil speaks with an animated ambivalence about drinking and casual sex, and his confusion is palpable as he talks about the pleasures of partying and fraternity brotherhood.

Beyond a responsibility they have to themselves, the upwardly mobile men often reference responsibility to others in their critical talk of college partying. Mauricio implies he cares about how he affects "the world." Rex says he is a "moderate, responsible drinker" because drinking too often, "makes people something they're not and causes a lot of problems, like alcoholism, bad parenting, problems in society." Three of the African-American men stated explicitly that African-American students have to carefully guard their collective reputations – to assert public identities as serious, academic, and committed – and partying too heavily could undercut these managed impressions.

Upwardly mobile men do not reject the link between masculinity and heterosexual performance. They, like nearly all of the fraternity men interviewed, feel that sex is very important to them, believe that their male friends gain status by having sex, and believe that college is an appropriate time and place for sexual experimentation and development. Preston, for example, normalizes casual sex but also delimits it when he says, "And you know, everyone has their needs, but you don't talk about it, you don't tell people, 'cause if you get a bad reputation that just more degrades us." Ronald feels the Black community on campus is too small to be divided by adversarial gender relations often caused by men's aggressive sexual pursuit of women: "We need to stick together 'cause nobody else going to look after us." He concedes that members of the Black Greek letter organizations party and hook up, but they do so "with responsibility and intelligence." Because of the low numbers of Black students on campus, and because of prevailing negative stereotypes of Black Americans, he feels Black fraternity men have to be especially careful and dignified in their self-presentations.

Sometimes upwardly mobile men also made reference to their parents when talking about collegiate party behavior. As he talked about his social experiences at State University, Nick, who identified as Mexican American and "Southern Californian," mentioned his parents several times, especially their financial struggles and their confusion over his wanting to go out of state. Had he joined a white fraternity, he would have to ask them for extra money, he explained, to cover dues and other expenses. His parents also lack an understanding of the social side of college life:

> I don't think my parents would get it – if I was in a white fraternity. They'd wonder what I was doing it for. Like if it's just about parties or whatever … And if my parents had any idea, like some of the stuff that goes on here [at State University], with these rich white kids, they be like, "Nicky you coming home. Now" … They wouldn't want me to get in any trouble, you know. Like getting addicted to drugs or getting, you know, a girl pregnant.

Nick belongs to a non-traditional Latino-focused fraternity that, as he explains, is both "social and educational." Membership in his fraternity helps him connect with others from a similar background: "We gotta help each other, you know. Because we may not feel like we belong here, but that's not the case. It's just that we got [to] make our own way."

Symbolic boundaries and collegiate partying

Upwardly mobile fraternity men associate mainstream (predominantly white) fraternities with hard partying, describing them as "wild," "drunken," and "crazy" places. Rex says:

> It seems that those guys are more interested in the social aspect of fraternities. There's the idea or the stereotype of wild parties and drugs and sex and I think that part of it's true. You can definitely find those things up there.

These men characterize both individuals and organizations as being party oriented, drawing symbolic boundaries between these others and themselves. Ernest says, "Everyone knows that [those] fraternities are the place to party. It's almost like, that's why they're there. It's so, I don't know, accepted like." He then switches to a discussion of individuals: "It's almost like that's why they've come to college." Repeatedly in his interview, Ronald drew distinctions between his own teetotaler lifestyle and the decadence he sees as characterizing mainstream Greek life – the luxury cars, designer clothes, and alcohol and drug use of these men and women. "I mean, you see the cars they drive. They never thought about money in their life. They spend more at the liquor store than I spend all year." He sees a tight connection between students' social class backgrounds and their party tendencies: "And here you have these students, whose main goal is to get drunk four nights a week, and they get to drive that? That's life, I guess." Michael contends that his fraternity is committed to the more philanthropic aspect of fraternities: "doing what we can to help, make some kind of contribution." Similarly, Gabriel says he thinks his Latino fraternity and the Black fraternities are "more grounded" and "more focused on the character of individuals but *also* about fun."

These party-related boundaries also extend to sexual behavior and men's approaches toward women. Ronald had proudly been open to joining any kind of

fraternity during his first year, thinking race did not matter. Eventually, however, he came to believe that the connections men made in mainstream fraternities seem based more on drinking and how you talk about women: "[The white fraternity men] be talking about 'bitches and hos,' and 'hittin' that.' And getting pussy and all that. And I'm like, for real?" Brandon says most mainstream fraternity men share three goals: "Get drunk. Get girls drunk. Get laid. That's it." Sean says he would advise first-year women to be "very careful" and to "watch themselves" because "parties can be dangerous and those guys got one thing on their mind." Michael says he learned in a college course that fraternities have a "culture of aggression" in which men "score points and challenge each other" for having sex, which seems to match his impression of the white but not Black fraternities at State University; the Black organizations on campus are "less about sex and parties," he believes.

These characterizations of white fraternities regarding partying and sex are thus not value neutral but part of a claim of moral superiority and, in turn, a claim to an honorable manhood. By associating recklessness, immaturity, and sexism with other fraternity men and with collegiate party culture more generally, these men reject the party discourse and assert their own definitions of masculinity. Mauricio says:

> You can be all messed up and wild and throw yourself into partying and sex and temptation, but I think that's not being true to your talent and your potential. It's throwing away an opportunity to make something of yourself, which is why I'm here personally.

Other men similarly question heavy partying while affirming self-denial and responsibility as key to making the most of college and successfully transitioning to adult manhood. As Nick says, "I think being a man is taking responsibility for yourself. Not always doing what's fun but putting yourself to … doing the hard work." Similarly, Rex says, "You can refuse to grow up and be a man, continue to drink, getting drunk and stoned and trying to always get girls." For Ronald, the white fraternities' culture of male bonding through objectifying women seems immature – "little boys' behaviors. Not men's," he says. In his mind, they party too much and prey on women aggressively: "What do these situations and [the fraternity men's] tolerance say to women who want to be associates of these men?" The men in his fraternity are different, he contends: "We won't put ourselves in [those kinds of] situations." Real men, this thinking says, are responsible, know when to buckle down rather than have fun, and are respectful and custodial toward women.

At times upwardly mobile men are careful to make distinctions between individual fraternity men and the larger organizations to which they belong. Nick, for example, says "I know a lot of people in those orgs, and they're the best, uhm, the best of what those organizations should be about, not what you always see, the obvious stuff." Preston says he thinks all mainstream fraternities get a bad rap because of a few "bad apples" and isolated problems with "drinking and drugs and problems with girls and stuff like that." He explains, "A lot of people look at those fraternities and wonder what they're doing, besides having parties. But that's not fair to the individuals … who are more than just that, the social side of things." Nick says, "You get these ideas about fraternities from the media, like 'Animal House' and all those movies, but I don't think it's like that." Ronald says he does not have a problem with exuberant partying but with fraternities who "talk a good talk" about philanthropy but do not live up to their promise. "If you want to party, just party," he says. "But don't pretend to be something else you're not." Rex refers to this

perceived hypocrisy when he says, "They're social organizations primarily, and you really see that after a while."

Discussion

The privileged fraternity men draw on the college party discourse as they talk of college as a time to let loose and have fun. Collegiate party culture provides these men with ample resources for constructing masculine identities, especially built around homosocial relationships, partying, and pursuing women. Talk of wild, drunken parties and hooking up with girls constitutes men as adventurous, youthful, and heterosexually competent. Widely shared understandings of what college is supposed to be like render partying a default, normative feature of college that needs little explanation, even when causing men strain and other negative effects. As Weiss (2013) argues, "getting wasted at college is a collaborative process that is shaped, regulated, managed, neutralized, and reinterpreted as a harmless, mostly pleasurable and rather normal activity" (p. xx). Party culture tells these men to party on and that "stuff happens" (Weiss, 2013). Hangovers and missed classes are par for the course, even evidence of having had a good time.

More privileged men tend to assume that life after college will be characterized by more demanding obligations: graduate studies or full-time work, committed more "adult" relationships, and families. These men share beliefs that the college experience is special and limited – a unique time period and setting that justifies indulging in youthful, irresponsible behavior. Thus, their talk of partying reflects a gendered and classed sense of entitlement to collegiate hedonism. Expectations that men party – engage in collective rituals around drinking and hooking up – serve as resources for masculine identity work, providing men with symbolic, social, and material means for signifying manhood in a collegiate context.

While small and not representative, the sample of class and race-subordinate men in this study suggest that investigations must take into account structural inequalities that shape students' conceptualizations and experiences of collegiate partying. The less privileged men in the study tend to speak of partying and self-focus in ambivalent ways – as luxuries they owe to personal and family sacrifice. Compared to their more privileged peers, these men hold a different set of assumptions about higher education and emerging adulthood. College is a path to a middle-class life involving a decent job and family, but this upward mobility is precarious and not guaranteed. Rather than speaking of college as a time *before* adulthood, the upwardly mobile men understand college as a time of assuming adult responsibilities and leaving childish things behind. They express beliefs that heavy drinking and girl chasing are better left to younger men or those not enrolled in college. Even Gil, who easily found status through partying and sex in his mainstream fraternity, expresses anxiety about drinking and hooking up with women. It is not the adult life he imagined he would have in college. Nonetheless, he is hopeful that membership in the mainstream Greek system will result in economic, cultural, and social capital in later life.

The upwardly mobile men draw on the college party discourse to construct symbolic boundaries and stake claims of moral authority (Lamont, 1992). They describe irresponsible partying and sexism as key elements of other fraternities and other men. To be clear, I am not assessing the veracity of these claims, but instead analyzing the way men create and use meanings to make sense of their social world and to draw boundaries between themselves and others. College social life – especially the

values and behaviors related to partying and hooking up – serves as the site and material for interactional processes of meaning making and masculine identity construction. The less privileged fraternity men, while normalizing partying to an extent, construct partying and related behaviors as choice. Using tropes of college partying as reckless, wild, and indiscriminate, they frame their own behavior in opposition – as strategic, responsible decision-making. They signify manhood by inverting gendered ideas embedded in the party discourse. In this case, symbolic abstention from many party behaviors allows the men to claim masculine identities as responsible and hardworking. While, to some men, the battered, party hard condition of a fraternity house could help claim authentic partier identity, many upwardly mobile men define themselves in opposition to this style of collegiate masculinity, weaving together widespread cultural images of "frat guy partiers" with local representations of these ideas (drunken revelers, littered lawns) to clearly say what and who *they are not.* This identity construction relies on opposition – to cultural images of what college is supposedly about and to other groups of men on campus. Triangulating with such comparisons, Brandon concludes: "I'm a man. I'm not going to endorse that kind of behavior."

By criticizing other men as irresponsible and as disrespectful toward women, these upwardly mobile men indirectly question race and class privilege while justifying their own place on campus, as individuals and organizations. Such claims of moral uprightness not only legitimate individual men's place on campus – by asserting men's worthiness and dignity as college students – but also the place of multicultural fraternities on campus. Some of the Black Greek organizations at State University have venerable histories and chapters across the country, but they could still appear small and under-resourced compared to even the downscale white fraternities on campus. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that members of these multicultural fraternities were galled by the ostensible privilege of the white fraternities in combination with the appearance of exuberant indulgence in the party lifestyle. The drawing of symbolic boundaries around issues related to partying and sex could perhaps nurse feelings of exclusion, injustice, or invisibility on campus. Through redefining the links between hard partying, casual sex, and masculinity, these men raise questions about the values and behaviors of other men, helping to justify their own place on campus and that of their organizations.

Conclusion

While the accounts of the men profiled above are not meant to be representative, they do show some of the ways social class and race shape students' experiences within the experiential core of college. As such, they show the importance of *intersectionality* (P.H. Collins, 1991) and *multiple identities* (Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011) in college men's lives. A college peer culture focused on partying and hooking up may meet the developmental needs of some emerging adults more than others. For more privileged students, delaying entry into the workforce, experimenting with drugs and alcohol, and avoiding committed, romantic relationships in favor of hookups may fit well with their class-influenced assumptions about higher education and emerging adulthood. Arnett (2004) for example, argues that emerging adulthood is a time of experimentation, self-development, and self-focus. For less privileged students, expectations to party and hook up may seem foreign and unappealing.

As scholars increasingly turn their attention to the experiences of students *within* college, they will likely uncover myriad ways the understudied social worlds of college sort and exclude students (for examples see Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Stuber, 2011). In addition to further examination of "intramural" sorting processes related to gender, race, and social class, future research could attempt to trace how student experiences are linked to social reproduction in life after college. Far from trivial "fun and games," college partying may be a key site where identities are constructed and group boundaries are drawn, perhaps leading to a consolidation of privilege that continues well beyond college.

Note

1. http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=college.

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