

Getting Off and Getting Intimate

How Normative Institutional Arrangements Structure Black and White Fraternity Men's Approaches Toward Women

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Social scientists implicate high-status men as sexually objectifying women. Yet, few have investigated these men's perceptions and accounts of their own experiences. Racial variation in gender relations in college has also received little scholarly attention. Analyzing 30 in-depth, individual interviews and surveys and two focus group interviews from Black and White men at a large university, we find racial differences in approaches toward women. More specifically, Black men exhibit more romantic approaches, whereas White men exhibit more sexual approaches. However, these differences are not solely related to race. Instead, "normative institutional arrangements" (e.g., community size and living arrangements) structure these approaches. We discuss the broader theoretical mechanisms regarding masculine performances, gender attitudes and behaviors, and race. In doing so, this study highlights the importance of "normative institutional arrangements" for understanding how the performances of masculinities are legitimized across racial- and status-group categories of men.

Keywords: *hegemonic masculinity; sexuality; gender inequality; race; status; normative institutional arrangements; college; fraternity*

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Despite the proliferation of research on collegiate gender and sexual relations (Martin and Hummer 1989; Boswell and Spade 1996; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006), we know little about one of the key groups within this institutional arrangement—fraternity men. Meanwhile, we know even less about differences and similarities in Black and White high-status men's relations with women (Brandes 2007; Peralta 2007; Flood 2008). Because fraternity men typically are situated on top of the peer culture hierarchy, a comprehensive understanding of the organization of collegiate social life must take into account how these specific enclaves of men understand and perceive gender relations and sexuality, and whether these understandings and perceptions vary by race.

Scholars have offered three competing explanations regarding racial differences in men's approaches toward women: (a) Black and White men objectify women similarly; (b) Black men objectify women more than White men; (c) White men objectify women more than Black men. The first possibility contends that most men, irregardless of status or race, sexually objectify women in the same manner. Thus, Black and White men's performances in masculinities are expected to be similar. In patriarchal societies, men control sexual and romantic environments by promoting sexually aggressive behavior among men (Clark and Hatfield 1989; Hatfield et al. 1998; Flood 2008). Through the emphasis of the importance of sexual prowess, cultural mandates concerning gender encourage men to "sexually objectify" women and appear "sexual." However, such mandates encourage women to stress relationship viability and appear "romantic" (Hatfield et al. 1998). Hence, men are often authorized to express themselves sexually, while women who act this way are shunned. This possibility suggests that gender trumps race and status concerning men's interactions with women.

A second possibility is that Black men exhibit more sexually objectifying approaches toward women than do White men. This explanation is most in line with scholarship on Black men's relations with women. More specifically, cultural motifs like the "cool pose" (Majors and Billson 1992) portray Black men as culprits of sexual violence (Majors and Billson 1992; Anderson 1999). However, this perspective, which is echoed with public discourses and much scholarly research, gives the impression that all Black men are part of the same cultural spaces, thereby neglecting the fact that Black men may be part of different sociocultural¹ spaces that yield distinctly different structural consequences for their treatment of women. It should also be noted that the stereotypical nature of Black men as the *Mandingo*—overly aggressive, sexually promiscuous, physically superior yet intellectually inferior—has long been purported in mainstream discourses (Hunter and Davis 1992; Collins 2004). Race scholars assert this is a problematized, dramatized, and monolithic perception of Black men that is often exacerbated in the media (Staples 1982; Hoberman 1997).

Finally, the third possibility asserts that White men are more sexually objectify than Black men. By virtue of their presumed greater status and esteem, White

men are more likely to control social environments and accept, and even normalize, sexual objectifications of women (Connell 1987; Kimmel and Messner 1989; Kimmel 2006). This perspective echoes the sentiments of women who claim sexual harassment in high-status institutions such as law, academia, and corporate America where White men are typically the controllers of social environments (Kanter 1977). In contrast to the aforementioned “cool pose,” some extant literature finds that Black men’s gender attitudes, compared to their White counterparts, are more supportive of gender equality because of a shared oppression and subordination with women (Millham and Smith 1986; Konrad and Harris 2002).

In this article, we assess these three predictions by analyzing 30 in-depth, individual interviews and surveys and two focus group interviews with Black and White high-status fraternity men. We find evidence that White men are more sexually objectifying than their Black counterparts, in support of the third prediction. However, we also find that the reasons behind this pattern go beyond the explanations typically asserted by this prediction and the first two predictions. Collectively, the three explanations noted above neglect the extent to which cultural and social norms are embedded within and shaped by the structure of institutions, and in turn, how structure shapes men’s approaches toward women and the performances of masculinities. Accordingly, we contend that “normative institutional arrangements” are one of the key factors that underlie racial differences regarding how men interact with women romantically and sexually on college campuses.

Normative Institutional Arrangements in Higher Education

Normative institutional arrangements are boundaries that shape social interactions and establish control over social environments (Gerson and Peiss 1985; Hays 1994; Britton 2003), and one structural mechanism that should be of importance to scholars interested in intersectionality research. Normative institutional arrangements identify social contexts (e.g., social environments in fraternity houses), whereby certain behaviors are more or less acceptable and certain structures hold individuals more or less accountable for their treatment of others. Such arrangements represent taken-for-granted assumptions that are external and exist outside of individuals, “social, durable, and layered” (Hays 1994), and constraining and enabling. Normative institutional arrangements focus on the accepted arrangement of relationships within social institutions. In this article, normative institutional arrangements draw attention to the ways in which performances of masculinities are legitimized across different sociocultural categories of men, and the role structure plays in men’s approaches toward women. Here, we showcase the implications of the intersecting forces of race and status by examining two normative institutional arrangements that are common themes in Black and White men’s understandings and perceptions of gender and sexual relations: (a) small Black student and Greek

communities; (b) living arrangements including a lack of on-campus fraternity houses.

The Black student community at most Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) is small and insular. There is also a limited amount of social interaction between Black and White fraternities and between Black and White students overall (Allen 1992; Massey et al. 2003). Similar to patterns at the societal level, interracial dating is infrequent (Joyner and Kao 2005). As a result, even high-status Black fraternity men are mostly invisible in White social arenas.

In contrast, the relatively small number of Black students and limited interactions with Whites indicate that Black fraternity men are much more visible in the Black community. In fact, this group of Black men aligns with the ideals of what DuBois (1903, 1939) conceptualized as the "Talented Tenth." Such members of the Black elite are expected to sacrifice personal interests and endeavors to provide leadership and guidance to the Black community (Battle and Wright II 2002). However, being part of the Talented Tenth signifies the monitoring of this group's behavior, particularly actions that are inconsistent with a greater good for the Black community. This monitoring by others on Black fraternity men is intensified in a structural setting with a small community size, and in turn, increases the likelihood that their treatment of women will be publicized and scrutinized by members of their own social community and the broader college and off-campus communities. Although White fraternity men may also be visible, the sheer number of White students leads to them being held less accountable, and consequently, able to perform masculinity in a manner that Black fraternity men cannot.

Not only is the Black community relatively small but Black Greeks have very different on-campus living arrangements than White Greeks. There is a historical legacy of racial discrimination, both within and external to the university, that has traditionally precluded Black fraternities and sororities from gaining equal access to economic resources such as Greek houses and large alumni endowments (Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998). To date, most Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) do not have fraternity or sorority houses on university property (Harper, Byars, and Jelke 2005). If they do, these houses normally are not the same size or stature of those of their White counterparts. To the extent that the structure of living arrangements facilitates a certain treatment of women, racial differences in access to housing on-campus may have implications in potential racial differences in approaches toward women.

In sum, the claims by masculinities, sexualities, and race scholars suggest that culture provides a portal whereby men view women as physical objects. However, research in this area suffers from three important shortcomings. First, the structural mechanisms by which normative institutional arrangements promote women's subordination have been underemphasized. Most recently, scholars have called for a resurgence of such research and have pointed to the exploration of contextual and structural factors to uncover these mechanisms (Reskin 2003; Epstein 2007).

Second, the perspectives of high-status men remain absent in the literature. Hence, this study seeks to understand how elite men decipher their worlds and how privileged statuses influence the processes underlying gender dynamics. Third, research largely has not explored the potential for racial differences in men's gender relations. Consequently, gender and sexuality research has portrayed men as homogenous proponents of gender inequality, irregardless of race and/or social context.

Our work offers an opportunity to address these gaps in the literature by reporting on interviews with Black and White high-status men. Some high-status Black men (e.g., Black fraternity men) may have attitudes and beliefs that are similar to their White male counterparts. However, due in part to a hyper level of visibility and accountability, Black men may be unable to perform hegemonic masculinity similar to their White male counterparts.² Actually, because of a relative lack of accountability and visibility afforded to high-status White fraternity men in this structural setting,³ it is White men's performances of masculinities that may be closer to that of the "cool pose." Therefore, we hypothesize that Black men will exhibit less sexually objectifying approaches toward women than their White counterparts.

Accordingly, we pose two essential questions (a) Regarding high-status fraternity men's relations with women, are there racial differences in romantic versus sexually objectifying approaches? (b) How do "normative institutional arrangements" structure men's approaches toward women? Because there has been limited empirical research on elite men, we privilege their accounts and voices to gain an insider's perspective into the intersections of masculinities, status, sexuality, and race.

Setting and Method

We conducted 30 in-depth individual interviews and surveys, along with two focus group interviews, from 15 Black and 15 White fraternity men at a PWI that we call Greek University (GU). Enrolling approximately 30,000 undergraduates, GU is ideal for this study because of its strong academic reputation, vibrant social life, and party scene. GU's emphasis on Greek life facilitates the examination of gender relations among high-status men. About 20% of GU undergraduates are members of Greek letter organizations, which is larger than similar universities.⁴ For members, the Greek system normally offers a home away from home, friendships, and social and philanthropic activities. There are approximately 25 White fraternities with memberships around 100, some with on-campus and some with off-campus status, and five Black fraternities with memberships around 10 and all hold off-campus status.⁵ Although approximately 25% of White students are members of Greek organizations, less than 10% of Black students are members of Greek organizations.⁶ Black and White fraternities are operated by two different governing bodies, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)⁷ and the Interfraternity Council (IFC),

respectively. Although none of these fraternities appear to explicitly discriminate on the basis of race, there is virtually no overlap in race among members of these organizations.

Data Collection

To select our sample, we used a reputational approach (Boswell and Spade 1996) to identify high-status fraternities. Relying on rankings of fraternities by members of sororities and fraternities, students in sociology classes, informants in Greek Affairs, and the Assistant Dean of Students that rank fraternities based on popularity, academic and philanthropic events, and athletic prowess, three White fraternities consistently ranked high on all lists. We include all three in our study. Because only five historically Black fraternities are recognized by the NPHC, membership in any of these fraternities normally conveys a certain high-status, particularly at GU because the Black population is only about 4% (1,524). We interviewed members from four of the five Black fraternities. We attempted to interview all five and were gained entry to four. The sampling strategy enables us to check for commonalities and differences within and between race. Participants were recruited by emailing the fraternity presidents to see if the investigators could attend a chapter meeting to make an announcement about the study, invite members to participate, and leave detailed study flyers.

As a Black and White team of male researchers, we note that gender may elicit certain responses with participants de-emphasizing romanticism. We also conducted interviews with the authors matched with participants by race to elicit candid responses about the other racial group. Based on the data presented throughout this article, we are confident that we limited methodological biases. For example, one White respondent states, "Blacks will fuck anything." Another says, "Yeah, my friends at home are Black. They like to put it in girls' asses." Based on our experiences interacting with these respondents, we believe they would not have made these comments if they were being interviewed by a Black interviewer. See the quotation on page 17 for a Black quotation about Whites. These quotations show that respondents did not hesitate to make derogatory statements about the other group.

All the men in our study report being family-oriented and having lofty career goals. Most participants are active on campus and have higher GPAs than non-Greeks. However, a substantial class difference exists between Blacks and Whites. The Black men's self-reported family household income is lower middle class, whereas the White men's self-reported family household income is upper-middle class. Many of the Black fraternity men have scholarships, student loans, and/or jobs to pay for tuition and housing costs, whereas most of the White fraternity men have scholarships and/or their parents pay a substantial portion of their tuition and living expenses. All respondents self-identify as heterosexual (see Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Sample by Race

Variable	Range	Variable Description	White = 15	Black = 15	Total = 30
Age	18-24	Years	20.11	21.27	20.69
Classification	1-4	1 = Freshman, 2 = Sophomore, 3 = Junior, 4 = Senior	2.22	3.73	2.98
G.P.A	0-4	Cumulative Grade Point Average	3.31	2.92	3.12
Living Situation	0-1	0 = Lives off-campus, 1 = Lives in a Fraternity House	0.87	0.00	0.45
Years in Fraternity	1-5	Years respondent has been a fraternity member	1.94	2.00	1.97
Religiosity	1-4	1 = Not at all, 2 = Slightly, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very	2.00	3.07	2.54
Family's Social Class	1-6	1 = Poor, 2 = Working, 3 = Lower-middle, 4 = Middle, 5 = Upper-middle, 6 = Upper	4.56	3.87	4.22
Relationship Status	0-1	0 = Single or dating, 1 = Committed relationship	0.33	0.67	0.50

Interview Procedure

Most of the data presented come from the individual interviews. In-depth interviews are useful for developing a broad understanding of students' experiences in various aspects of college life and for exploring the meanings students attach to these experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Similar to Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney (2006), we used an 8-page, semistructured interview guide to ask participants about many topics including the Greek system, race relations, partying, hooking-up, dating, sexual attitudes and experiences, and their goals for the future. With interviews averaging 2 hours, we aimed to obtain a holistic perspective of these men's collegiate lives. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to ensure personal and organizational anonymity. Following the interviews, we recorded ethnographic field notes to capture aspects of the interview interactions that might not be evident in the transcripts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). At the end of each interview, we asked respondents to complete a paper-and-pencil survey. Data from this survey on sociodemographics, family background, sexual attitudes and experiences, and relationship history provide contextual information about each respondent.

The focus groups were conducted after the individual interviews were completed to support the individual interviews. Most focus group respondents were part of the 30 individual interviews. The focus groups were used to triangulate the data and focused on themes that evolved from the individual interviews. They also allowed

us to interrogate emerging propositions. Because shared discourses are documented to occur in peer groups, the unique environment generated in focus groups was well suited to this project (Morgan 1997; Hollander 2004). Although focus groups have been criticized for their lack of ability to elicit truthful views about gender and sexuality from young men, the interviewers had preexisting knowledge of the men and could question specific accounts and perspectives.

Analytical Strategy

We use deductive and inductive reasoning as analytic approaches to “double fit” the data with emergent theory and literature (Ragin 1994). We initially allowed analytical categories to emerge as we searched for similarities and differences in how Black and White fraternity men interact with women. Guided by these themes and patterns, we then used deductive reasoning to look for evidence and theories to make sense of the data. We used ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package, to connect memos, notes, and transcriptions. After establishing patterns in the coding, we searched the interviews thoroughly again looking for examples that both confirmed and contradicted emerging patterns. Our emerging propositions were then refined or eliminated to explain these negative cases (Rizzo, Corsaro, and Bates 1992).

Racializing Gender Relations on Campus

The interviews suggest that Black fraternity men exhibit more romantic approaches than White fraternity men. Although both groups sexually objectify women, Black men emphasize romanticism more than their White counterparts. They indicate that women are physical objects of enjoyment but should also be respected. White fraternity men make few romantic references and primarily view women as sexual objects.

The following quotations exemplify sexually objectifying approaches. This participant suggests that romance is unnecessary in the quest for gratification.

Pretty much you do not need to do all that wine and dine them and all that. You can skip all that and just bring them back to the house and do what’s important to you. (White)

In two different parts of the interview, a participant explains which factors affect how far he will go with a woman.

- R: If they [women] were decent or just okay, I’ll just mess around with them . . . Get head.
- I: When she gives you head, do you go down on her?

- R: Honestly, I don't like that . . . I do it every once in a while. Honestly depends how hot the girl is. If I'm drunk and into the girl, I probably would. But other girls, I just make out with them for a little bit.
- R: We were talking for about a week and we started messing around. She starts giving me head, and when I took her shirt off, I put my hand on her stomach and this girl had abs. I think that's the most disgusting thing. Like, girls with abs, its like . . . too masculine. So that like turned me off and I couldn't get off and I never called her again. (White)

Nine of the 15 White participants report engaging in sexual behavior that they do not prefer including performing oral sex because of a woman's desirable physical characteristics. They also rarely describe "hot girls" in terms of social competence and popularity. Reports from Black men also contain sexually objectifying approaches. While describing what he desires in a woman, a participant compares women to cars as he explains why his standards for sexual encounters are lower than for relationships.

- I: Are your standards lower for a hookup than a committed relationship?
- R: I use this analogy. Some people say it's corny, but whatever. When you have the title of a car, you want it to be nice, but you'll jump in your friend's car. You'll ride, you'll ride anything because it's not your title. But if I'm going to have the title to you, you've got to be nice because you represent me! But now I'll ride in a pinto, but I just won't buy one. (Black)

Although both groups exhibit sexually objectifying approaches, romantic approaches in quality and content are far more prevalent among Black men. They respond when asked to "describe ways you or your friends respect women on campus."

I definitely think my fraternity brothers do a lot of stuff that make them [women] feel appreciated like getting them flowers; whether write them a poem, whether it's just tell them they look beautiful. (Black)

I think you have to treat women with respect. I think because of how society is I think a lot of males have been misshapen to be like the world leader; the dominant figure in the relationship. They wear the pants in the relationship. I feel like I would treat a woman the way that I would want to be treated. (Black)

Conversely, many White men describe a very different notion of respecting women.

We respect women. We won't take advantage of them if they're wasted. If she's puking in our bathroom, one of the pledges will get her a ride home. (White)

One way that I respect women? A lot of ways. I'll never ask if she needs a ride home after we hookup. I'll let her bring it up or let her spend the night. You respect a girl more if you let her stay. (White)

Black and White differences are also evident in responses to "what do you consider a serious relationship?" White men understand a serious relationship primarily in

terms of physical monogamy, whereas Black men define serious relationships in terms of socioemotional exchanges.

- R: If you're in a serious relationship, you shouldn't be making out . . . that's wrong.
 I: So serious relationships are when you don't cheat on a girl.
 R: No. You shouldn't be making out in front of people. If you have a girlfriend you can't be like all over girls at parties. (White)

Serious relationship is pretty much a basic understanding that two people are together. You have somebody to talk to; somebody who is going to be there on the other end of the phone call. When you leave that message they're calling back. Maybe at night you got somebody to cuddle with. Somebody that could possibly cook for you. Somebody that might be taking you out, picking you up. Somebody that is worrying about what you're doing. (Black)

Twelve of the 15 Black fraternity men explain that having someone to "share" and do "special" things with is the best thing about being in a serious relationship.

I'd say you get the companionship, the love. You've got somebody there in daytime hours, not just in nighttime hours. The nine to five hours they're going to be there to go out with you. They might send you out with some stuff, take you out to eat, go see a movie, and like it's that constant companionship. (Black)

Comparatively, only 7 of the 15 White fraternity men mention that this is a benefit of a committed relationship. Instead, 12 of them explain that having a "regular hookup" is the best thing about being in a relationship.

Lots of sex. You can have it everyday without having to go out and get it. It's a lot easier, but you do have to put up with shit occasionally. (White)

The best thing is you don't have to use a condom. It feels better and you can go right to it. And you got someone to call that you know what they want and knows what you like. (White)

In contrast, only 3 of the 15 Black men mention sexual convenience as a benefit of being in a committed relationship.

Perhaps most revealing are the responses to "describe a romantic evening." Black men volunteer specific details without hesitation and reveal intimate knowledge of their partners, thoughtful planning, and intricate execution.

I try to do romantic things on occasion, not just on occasions. On her birthday I surprised her. I told her we were going out to dinner. There is a whole day of events. I left a dozen roses in front of her door. I have a key to her apartment just because she likes to have that kind of security just in case I need to go over there and do something for her. When she came home I had prepared a dinner for her. I cooked her

favorite dinner which was spaghetti and she was really surprised. It was a candlelight dinner, lights were off, food all served, salad, and spaghetti. She really liked that and I gave her some more gifts, but the last thing I got her was a ring that she loves. (Black)

Of course, “romantic” does not necessarily imply equitable gender relations. “Romantic” can also have negative connotations for gender relations (e.g., women need to be taken care of, pampered, put on a pedestal). Comparatively, most White men’s narratives imply less thought and planning. Only three of them could describe a romantic evening, two of which were descriptions encompassing “dinner and a movie,” preferably an “expensive establishment.”

I clean up, shave, put on a nice shirt with a nice pair of pants, you come out of the car, you wait for her, open the door for her. Nice expensive restaurant; something with a good reputation. Maybe somewhere someone’s parents would take them, because that lets them know you’re dropping some cheddar, you know, your dropping some money. Have some easy conversation, then come back have a few more drinks, and then, you know. {laughs}. (White)

Another White participant says, “Well, on her birthday I got her an ipod. She loved it. I took her out to dinner, an expensive dinner.”

Finally, the language used by White fraternity men to describe women in gender interactions suggests sexually objectifying approaches, whereas the language exhibited most frequently by Black fraternity men implies more romantic approaches. White men commonly refer to women as “chicks,” “girls,” and other belittling terms. Conversely, Black men generally use more “respectful” terms like “women,” “ladies,” and “females” or refer to individuals by name.⁸ As seen in many quotations throughout the article, the examples below illustrate the role of language regarding gender relations.

I know this one time I was real drunk, a little too flirtatious with a female who was actually a friend of mine. I did—I was not trying to hook up with her. Actually, she was trying to hook up with me. And when the alcohol mixed with the flirtatious lady, mixing with me not driving having to be at her house that night. I did regret it when I woke up the next morning {laughs}. (Black)

When the booze settles in you can make mistakes and you’ll screw up with a “frat rat” or something. (White)

Collectively, Black excerpts normally acknowledge women’s agency, whereas the White accounts typically display the use of the passive voice, whereby a woman is always acted on and never acting. Black men emphasize more romanticism in their accounts regarding experiences with and attitudes about women. However, these differences are not solely related to race.

Normative Institutional Arrangements Structure Approaches Toward Women

We find that differences in men's approaches toward women are structured by normative institutional arrangements centering on community size and living arrangements. Participant accounts suggest that the size of their respective racial communities on campus and the presence or absence of a fraternity house underlie racial differences in romantic versus sexually objectifying approaches toward women.

Greek and Racially Based Communities

Fraternity men are concerned about their individual and group reputations when making gender relation choices. Thus, they aim to steer clear of certain social scenes to preserve their status as elite men. In the following accounts, participants indicate that to maintain their reputations they normally will not "hookup" with low-status women. We asked, "Are there any women you wouldn't hook up with?"

Fat girls. I stay away from them. Sluts too. They're disgusting. I don't need to hookup with that, that's not *our* [his fraternity] style. (White)

Everyone has the one, two, or three girls that they're like what the hell was I doing? But you don't want to have too many. I mean its good to hookup, but you don't want to do it with a girl that's easy. If it's a girl that every guy wants and you bring her back its like, "Wow! You hooked up with that girl? That's impressive!" It feels good. If you hookup with an ugly girl, you're friends will give you shit for it. (White)

Yes. They're not attractive. [laughs] That might sound mean, but that's what they are. Not attractive girls. I don't think there's no woman here that's higher than what we think we can reach. And then lower, yes there is a group of people that you should just not touch. I hear a lot of guys in other fraternities say, "Man I wish I could get a girl like that." Instead, we just get the girl like that. (Black)

White fraternity men indicate that the "word" gets around easily within the Greek community regarding gender interactions. They normally engage in a variety of unspoken rules to preserve their reputations. The following White participant describes the "card" rule.

R: You got one card to play. You can hookup with two girls in the same house [sorority organization] and you might be alright. As long as you don't piss off the first one. If you do, you're done. You won't have a chance with any other girls in that house. But you can't play the card unless some time has passed.

I: How much time do you need?

R: It can't be the same weekend for sure. Probably after a week or so you should be okay. (White)

The Greek community seems to hold White fraternity men accountable to sorority women. As the quotation above alludes, it is only for reasons of saving face that will allow them access to other women in the same sorority. Another White participant describes how cheating could result in a bad reputation if he got caught.

- I: What would happen if you got caught cheating?
 R: The way I could see it [cheating] affecting something is if it's a sorority girl you fuck over.
 I: You can't screw with a sorority sister?
 R: You could, but you could get the name, you're an asshole, you're a player, or something like that. I mean it might. It could spread around the [her sorority] house. Then you're Blacklisted. (White)

Although repercussions exist with sorority women, there are an abundance of non-Greek women with no reputational constraints. The large number and high percentage of White students give White fraternity men an ample pool of women not connected to the Greek community. When relating with non-Greek women or GDIs,⁹ White fraternity men do not have to worry about "the word" getting around. Moreover, White fraternity men can disassociate from the fraternity, blend into the crowd, and interact as they please.

- R: GDIs come here and it's like sensory overload. They are like in awe. If you're in awe, it's like so easy. {laughs} You can say anything to a GDI. Adam makes girls cry.
 I: He wouldn't do that to a sorority girl?
 R: You make a sorority girl cry she's going to tell all her friends. "I was at XYZ [fraternity] and this guy made me cry and he's such an asshole." If you say it to a GDI, she's going home and you're probably never going to see her again and she's not going to tell all of XYZ [sorority] that you said this and you're not going to have a whole sorority that hates you. (White)

Black fraternity men face a different organizational structure. These men feel that they cannot "do things like other guys."

Because there's only seven [Black Greek] organizations on campus, we have a huge impact on the Black race here. Where there's like 750 different [White] organizations, their impact is not as severe. It's not as deep, especially cause they have more people than our race. (Black)

It's kind a like being on the basketball team or being on a football team. You know what I'm saying? Its kinda like "Eta" [his fraternity name] puts you on the next level. Like you're Black Greek but you are like the . . . you are supposed to be representing the Black Greek. It's kinda hard to get that out, but when we do something we are suppose to be setting the bar for everybody else. It's like a known thing that we suppose to be setting a bar. You know what I mean? (Black)

Black fraternity men, and many Black students, cannot overcome the reputational constraints of the small Black population. Black men report being very conscious of their behavior when interacting with women. Although White fraternity men can generally be anonymous and “get off” safely, Black fraternity men perceive themselves to be constantly visible and therefore continuously held accountable for their treatment of women.

The Fraternity House

The organizational structure of “the house” facilitates sex, discourages intimacy, and is used as a resource, which affords White fraternity men control of sexual environments. For instance, these men report that women normally engage in relationships to be associated with a particular fraternity and to have access to fraternity functions and/or alcohol.

I know I’m Jack “B” [“B” represents his fraternity’s name], and there’s probably a Jack “C,” but I don’t care. I know she just wants to come to our parties and know someone there. (White)

College-aged women younger than 21 years old seem to rely on fraternities for basic ingredients of the mainstream version of the college experience—big parties and alcohol. In fact, an interview with a White participant was interrupted twice because of orders for alcohol placed by an ex-girlfriend and another woman from the dorm.

“The house” also facilitates a convenient means of engaging sexual behavior. A participant discusses the difference between living in “the house” and living off-campus.

You meet a lot more girls in the house. The frat [house] is easier, a lot easier too in that sense cause coming back from the bars, it’s not necessarily like “let’s go back to my place.” Instead it’s like, “Let’s go back to the frat [house] and have a couple more drinks.” It’s like you don’t sound like you’re trying to hook up with them. “Let’s go back to my house and just . . . get it on” . . . [laughs] . . . It’s easier. (White)

“The house” also constrains men’s gender relations. Although the fraternity houses at GU are impressive mansion-like structures, they are chaotic, nonprivate spaces that promote nonromantic activities. Most White fraternities require a “live-in” period. In the first year, members sleep in cold dorms, which are rooms composed of dozens of bunk beds.

It’s like fifty of us sleep together. But you put your beds together and have all these sheets and stuff. It’s like a bungalow. But sometimes you can hear other people having sex. (White)

If members earn enough “house points” for representing the fraternity well through activities like philanthropy or sports, they then typically live with three roommates in a tiny bunk-style room.

White fraternity men indicate that they could never “get away” with having romantic time. A White participant says, “There’s so many people running around that house, someone’s bound to see or hear something.” The public nature of fraternity living arrangements is also confirmed in our field notes. While entering a fraternity room to do an interview, the interviewee and interviewer interrupted a roommate who was masturbating. The interviewer reported surprise that the masturbator seemed only slightly uncomfortable with the interruption. This suggests that interruptions like these are commonplace.

Although privacy would intuitively be linked to more sexually objectifying approaches, in the context of Greek social life, a lack of privacy facilitates these approaches by preventing intimacy. While having other people as witnesses should reduce the degree of exploitation, Greek social life is a normative institutional arrangement structured by hegemonic masculinity with sexual prowess as one of its essential ideals. Thus, men who engage in public displays of sexual objectification are applauded. A participant describes one evening in the cold dorm.

Lunch on Fridays are the best. It’s like all the stories from Thursday night. It’s pretty funny. It’s a good time. For instance, Tom came into the cold dorm and he was with his girlfriend and they were really drunk. And he’s like, “We’re having sex.” I was like, “You should have heard him. He punished her.”¹⁰ (White)

Romantic displays, because they are not in concert with hegemonic ideals, are sanctioned. For example, participants indicate that men who make romantic displays like saying “I love you” or opting for alone time with a woman over “hanging with the guys” will quickly be referred to as “pussy-whipped.”

You don’t want to be known as pussy-whipped. Guys that are pussy-whipped are wimps. They just let their girl tell them what to do. You can’t count on them. They’ll tell you one thing, but if the girl says something different, they’re doing what she says. (White)

Another White participant characterizes how public displays of romanticism are considered to be uncool by the general Greek community.

I don’t know how romantic it gets. Am I like going to set up a table in my frat room and light a candle? It’d be cool, if I had the balls to do it. (White)

When asked directly “why don’t you and your friends have romantic evenings,” a White participant explains.

Frat houses aren't the place for that [romantic behavior]. Have you looked around? The place is filthy and you have no privacy. None. I shower with five guys; people always coming in and out. You're never alone. I used to feel weird about it [sex], but now I don't. Like I used to try to be quiet, but I'm having sex less than four feet from where my roommate, whose having sex with his girlfriend. You're going to hear something. So you don't worry about it. (White)

Conversely, Black fraternity men's off-campus status offers private space for romantic relations. Most members are scattered across two- to four-person apartments and rental houses. Interviews conducted in bedrooms at Black residencies were devoid of interruptions, whereas interviews with Whites had three to four interruptions, on average. Field notes document that Black men's rooms are frequently decorated with expressions of personal achievement and style, whereas White men's rooms are often decorated with mainstream posters and sexually objectifying appeals. Consider the following field notes.

We conducted the interview in E3's room. He had mafia posters around his room from the movies *Godfather* and *Scarface*. He also had a Dr. Seuss book and a pimp poster in his room as well. E3 is a martial arts champion and has several of his large trophies in his room and around the house. (Black)

The room was filthy. It felt dirty like it hadn't been disinfected in a while. There were many posters and artifacts on the walls of beer or liquor companies and one wall decoration was of some Dr. Dre records. The coffee table had three Playboy magazines laid out in a fan-like shape and the windows had two suction cup Playboy Bunnies hanging off of them. (White)

A Black participant comments on his interactions with the decoration styles of White men.

I go through some of these [White] male's rooms and that's all they got—they got posters. I mean I just can't have no posters of naked women just *all* around my room. Like when you walk in you see nothing but nude! (Black)

In sum, normative institutional arrangements—the presence or absence of a fraternity “house” and the size of the Greek and racially based community in the larger student population—afford Blacks and Whites different opportunity structures for romantic and sexual relations. The small, highly visible and insular Black communities normally force Black fraternity men to be conscious about their positions as leaders and role models, thus affecting their experiences with and treatment of women. This consciousness often leads Black fraternity men to conveying more romantic approaches toward women. Because of the size of the White student population, White fraternity men often find relief from reputational constraints. “The house” facilitates White fraternity men's relations with women by putting them

in control of sexual environments. At the same time, however, the “public” nature of fraternity houses constrains gender relations by providing only nonprivate and unromantic spaces, thereby promoting more sexually objectifying approaches.

Culture Mediating Normative Institutional Arrangements

Although we have emphasized the importance of structure in approaches toward women, some may assert that maturation or relationship status may be factors. Black fraternity men are one year older and further along in college. Because of different recruitment practices between Black and White fraternities, most Blacks do not become members until their sophomore or junior years, whereas Whites primarily “rush” during their freshman year. Hence, the number of years Blacks and Whites have been fraternity members is roughly the same. So this 1 year age difference should not be overstressed. More importantly, we compared the responses of older White fraternity men with those of their younger counterparts. We find their approaches toward women to be similar. Because Black men tend to be in more committed relationships, it could be argued that higher relationship rates result in more romantic approaches. Our data do not offer much support for this argument. White men in committed relationships still report more sexually objectifying approaches than Black men. Comparatively, Black men who are not in committed relationships report similar romantic approaches to Black men in committed relationships.

Religiosity, however, seems to play a factor in approaches toward women, albeit mediating normative institutional arrangements. A White participant explains why he is still a virgin. He says, “Well, because I’m a Christian. I’m waiting to share that with my wife. It’s a faith thing.” While explaining how he manages to be a virgin, he explains that “they [women] just have to understand. I don’t do that [intercourse]. It’s been tough because girls say ‘are you serious?’” He continues to explain his frustrations with the Greek community’s emphasis on sexuality.

I’m sure you’re not going to find too many twenty-two year old virgins around. It’s kind of funny too, because it is almost frowned upon around here. It’s almost like you’re the Black sheep of the crew, because it’s socially acceptable to have sex and stuff like that. You see me, nobody ever believes it. But it’s almost like a stigma that you’re kind of labeled with people that know. Always when people find out it’s a surprise to them. (White)

Another participant explains why he does not hookup as often as his fraternity brothers.

Not as much as some of the guys in this house. I’m not that way. It’s a conscious decision. I need to really like the girl and feel comfortable. My parents have been together forever. You don’t just do that kind of stuff with just anybody. (White)

Although the two negative cases highlighted above demonstrate the significance of cultural values, they also stress the importance of normative institutional arrangements for approaches toward women. These men feel uncomfortable and are frequently ridiculed and scrutinized by their fraternity brothers and women for not adhering to the hegemonic ideals reinforced by the normative institutional arrangements of Greek social life. Moreover, they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

As an added point of emphasis, focus group and ethnographic field note exerts high-light participants own awareness of the importance of normative institutional arrangements. When Black men were asked in a focus group if things would be different if GU was not a PWI, and instead a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), they unanimously responded, “Yes.” If Black men had a house, they think their behavior would be similar to their White counterparts. They perceive “the house” as a place to socialize in large groups that is free from police contact and potentially hostile strangers. If they were the “majority,” they perceive being free from the incessant scrutiny of the general campus community. Black men explain how “nice it would be” to not have to represent “every Black man on the planet.” An ethnographic field note is fitting here.

While attending Etas step practice, the members began discussing their Spring Break plans. They planned to go “road tripping” to Panama City Beach. I asked why Panama City? They replied that it was cheap and a place where they could go and meet new women who do not go to GU. I asked why this was so important. They replied because the new women cannot come back to school and tell everyone else what they did and who they were with. One member replied, “We can just wild out!” (Black)

When White men were asked in a focus group to imagine life without “the house,” they replied, “It would be like being a GDI.” They further explained that “the house” is “like a face” which enables them to “meet girls.” White men also mirror issues of safety indicated by Black men. For instance, they are concerned that if they lose “the house,” they would have to go to bars, small house-parties, or third-party vendors and would then have to worry about drinking and driving, public intoxication, and police breaking up parties. In other words, White fraternity men perceive that losing “the house” would make them “just like everybody else.”

Discussion and Conclusion

We have explored whether there are racial differences in men’s approaches toward women. By characterizing elite Black and White fraternity men’s understandings of their sexual and romantic relationships, this research fills three critical empirical gaps. First, we explore the perspectives and insights of a group that is often implicated in mainstream discourses in romantic and sexual relations on college

campuses—high-status fraternity men. Second, we explicitly compare Black and White men. Third, we examine how the normative institutional arrangements of institutions shape the performances of masculinities.

Our findings suggest that both Black and White fraternity men sexually objectify women; however, Black fraternity men exhibit more romantic approaches in their perceptions of their relations with women. Black college social scenes, particularly Black Greek scenes, are often more gender egalitarian. Although the small size of the Black community and the organizational structure of the Black Greek system generally force Black men to be more conscious about their treatment of women, the organizational structure of the White Greek community facilitates sexually objectifying approaches toward women. White fraternity men also have a larger pool of non-Greek women to engage; therefore, they are held less accountable for their relations with women because of a hyper level of anonymity. Although the presence of a fraternity house enables White fraternity men to be in control of sexual environments, it also constrains gender relations by offering nonprivate and nonintimate spaces.

Unlike the lower class men in studies by Majors and Billson (1992) and Anderson (1999), Black men in this study are more affiliated with DuBois (1903, 1939) Talented Tenth and double-consciousness concepts.¹¹ For Black men who identify as or with this elite group, the racialization of high-status institutions holds them more accountable for their treatment of women and constrains their approaches. As a result, some may assert these Black men's attitudes and values about the treatment of women are different from other Black men and their White fraternity male counterparts. Although there is support for this perspective, particularly because Black fraternity men stress more holistic qualities of women and tend to perceive more aspects of romanticism to be masculine, we argue the influential effects normative institutional arrangements have on shaping racial and status differences in men's gender scripts surfaces in the behavior or at the performance level of these men. To save face and status, Black fraternity men have to be more concerned about how their interactions with women are perceived by others. This leads to a unique set of reputational boundaries and constraints for Black fraternity men not exhibited by White fraternity men.

Our emphasis on normative institutional arrangements does not deny the presence of other factors that may be implicated in racial differences. For example, Black men in this study report being more religious than White men. Therefore, we would still expect for them to have cultural values that buffer sexually objectifying approaches. Less religious Black men, however, still exhibit more romantic approaches than the White men in the sample. Thus, we contend these patterns are an artifact of the racialized level of accountability and visibility within the normative institutional arrangements of campus social life. Our research confirms that when normative institutional arrangements are in concert with mainstream hegemonic ideals, sexual objectifications are more likely to occur.

Our findings offer an interesting parallel to Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney's (2006) ethnographic examination of women who reside on a women's floor in a "party dorm." They find that female college students, especially those in their first year and under the legal drinking age, rely on fraternities for parties and alcohol, and consequently, relinquish power and control of social and sexual environments to these men. They conclude that individual, organizational, and institutional practices (e.g., prohibiting alcohol in dormitories) contribute to higher levels of sexual assault.

Our research further argues that structural settings shape how actors perceive others (e.g., as sexual, romantic, and/or holistic others) and reflect the racial and gender dynamics of college campuses including racial segregation and skewed gender ratios. Along these lines, hegemonic masculinity is about much more than gender beliefs and masculine performances. Hegemonic masculinity is also about normative accountability structures and the preservation of normative personal, social, and institutional resources. Privileges across gender, race, and status divides afford White fraternity men less accountability when performing a hegemonic masculine self during interactions with women. As shown here, under certain institutional arrangements, racial disadvantage, as with Black fraternity men, can decrease gender inequality and reduce a traditional hegemonic style of engagement toward women. However, race and/or class advantage, as with White fraternity men, and disadvantage, as with the Black men in Majors and Billson's (1992) and Anderson's (1999) studies, can increase gender inequality and propel a hegemonic presentation of self such as the "cool pose."

Now that we have a greater understanding of the importance of not just being a racial/ethnic minority but also being a numerical minority or majority and how these normative institutional arrangements structure the gender relations of high-status men on campus, future research should investigate how common these patterns are among individuals across a range of institutional settings. Specifically, our research has implications for masculinities and its relationships with White men at small colleges, or where they are the minority group, and men of other racial/ethnic groups in institutional settings where they are the majority group. Although these propositions cannot be sufficiently answered in this study, it does provide a blueprint for how scholars should approach research in this area.

Particularly useful in extrapolating the findings presented here is DeLamater's (1987) recreational-centered approach,¹² whereby approaches toward others are facilitated by contextual and structural factors. Applied here, the recreational approach assumes that actors can exhibit both romantic and sexually objectifying approaches based on the dynamics of the structural setting. Men and women do not fit into monolithic groups. Although the literature has traditionally established a gender dichotomy whereby men exhibit sexual prowess and women cling to romantic ideals, we find men exhibit both sexually objectifying and romantic approaches. By integrating the recreational approach into the discourse on romantic and sexual

relations, scholars will be better equipped to extrapolate the interconnections between masculinities, sexualities, gender inequality, and race.

Taken together, our findings suggest that efforts to increase gender equality on college campuses should center on increasing the perceived accountability of men by offering social spaces that enable communicative and intimate gender relations. For example, Boswell and Spade (1996) find that fraternity houses and commercial bars that are low-risk for sexual assault encourage men and women to get acquainted. Although the data implicate the presence of a fraternity house in unequal gender relations, they do not necessarily suggest that the elimination of fraternity houses is required to accomplish gender equality. Many sorority houses do not seem to have these problems because they have strict guidelines regarding gender ratios, parties, alcohol, and overnight guests (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006). Thus, the normative institutional arrangements that afford men—in this context White fraternity men—a lack of accountability to exploit hegemonic prowess must be restructured to alter the level of accountability that encourages gender inequality. Our study concludes with an optimistic suggestion: by promoting normative institutional arrangements that facilitate accountability structures and romantic and equitable approaches, improvements toward gender equality are possible.

Notes

1. Allport (1954) uses “sociocultural” to refer to the intersection between class (status) and caste (race).

2. Previous research has suggested that Black men’s performances of masculinities are constrained by their marginalized status within the racial paradigm (Connell 1987, 1995; Kimmel 1987, 2006; Kimmel and Messner 1989; Hearn 2004). We advance this thesis by focusing on the intersections of race and status within a specific institutional structure (e.g., fraternity house).

3. Edwards (2008) states, “White structural advantage is Whites’ disproportionate control or influence over nearly every social institution in this country. This affords Whites the ability to structure social life so that it privileges them. White normativity is the normalization of Whites’ cultural practices . . . their dominant social location over other racial groups as accepted as just how things are. White normativity also privileges Whites because they, unlike nonwhites, do not need to justify their way of being.”

4. The statistics concerning GU come from Student Activities and Greek Affairs.

5. On-campus status means the fraternity has a fraternity house on university property, whereas off-campus status means the fraternity does not.

6. Since the founding of Phi Beta Kappa (now an honor society), Greek organizations have been an integral part of colleges and universities for more than 200 years (Brown, Parks, and Phillips 2005). Fraternities are national organizations composed of college students that are men, usually designated by Greek letters. Most fraternities were founded on principles such as scholarship, community service, sound learning, and leadership and are distinguished by highly symbolic and secretive rituals. Greek fraternities and sororities are normally high-status organizations on collegiate campuses. Members of Greek fraternities and sororities are often members of student government and honor societies, are frequently some of the most recognizable student leaders on campus, and have higher grades and graduation rates than other students (Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998).

7. Some of the most influential and celebrated African American leaders—Martin Luther King, W.E.B. DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, and Maya Angelou—became members of nationally recognized African American fraternities and sororities. Having such a distinguished lineage of past members often makes members of African American fraternities and sororities feel that they must uphold an esteemed legacy (Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998).

8. Throughout the duration of the project, women were categorized as many sexually objectifying and derogatory terms by Black and White fraternity men including “bitch,” “hoe” (whore), “skank,” “freak,” and “tramp.” Most of these names are given to fraternity groupies or women who are perceived to be sexually promiscuous.

9. “GDI” is an acronym for “God Damn Independent,” which is a derogatory term used to describe non-Greeks.

10. In this context, the statement “punish her” implies that “Tom” was making his girlfriend moan and that the bed was rocking because of sexual movements.

11. The comparison between this study and the ones by Majors and Billson (1992) and Anderson (1999) should not be overstated. Although the men in all three studies are Black men, they are embedded within different normative institutional arrangements. As asserted in the literature review, minority men exhibit intragroup differences in the performances of masculinities and should be evaluated outside the tradition monolithic box they are often placed within.

12. Although DeLamater (1987) at times interchanges the sexual objectifying approach (which he calls body-centered) with the recreational-centered approach, we choose to distinguish these two approaches. As we have discussed throughout the article, normative institutional arrangements propel more or less sexual objectification and romanticism. The recreational approach allows the researcher the ability to assess complex decisions actors make based on structural settings.

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