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# The Two Different Worlds of Black and White Fraternity Men: Visibility and Accountability as Mechanisms of Privilege

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## Abstract

There has been limited empirical research on how individuals “do privilege.” As a result, our understandings are incomplete about how high-status groups continue reaping the benefits of privilege. Using data from fifty-two men in three white and four black fraternities at a predominately white institution, this paper demonstrates that visibility and accountability function as mechanisms of privilege. Because of a large community size, central fraternity house, and influential alumni, white fraternity men are afforded a hyper level of invisibility and unaccountability. Because of the small black community and the obligation black fraternity men perceive having to be the ideal black student, they reap a hyper level of visibility and accountability based on expectations from and interactions with a host of others (e.g., university officials, white students, black community, women). By showing how high-status whites epitomize an ideal white racial identity and preserve inter- and intraracial boundaries, we advance theoretical discussions on hegemonic whiteness.

## Keywords

race, hegemonic whiteness, privilege, identity, fraternity

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Popular media portrayals of Greek life paint uniquely different pictures of white and black fraternity men. On one hand, *Animal House* (1978) and *Old School* (2003) show stereotypical portrayals of mostly privileged white fraternity men “sowing their royal oats” by partying, hooking up with women, and drinking excessively. *School Daze* (1988) and *Stomp the Yard* (2007), on the other hand, portray black fraternity men as mostly career-oriented, concerned about racial uplift, burdened by the plight of African Americans, and unable to so freely embrace the college experience like white fraternity men (see Hughey 2011). In 2005 while conducting an ethnographic study with fifty-two men in three white and four black fraternities at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest, we noticed these men appeared to be living out the portrayals of their groups in the films and seemed to have very different experiences as fraternity members. As a black and white team of male researchers, we were positioned to examine an important question: why do the institutional arrangements that privilege white fraternity men constrain black fraternity men?

The racial inequality literature does an excellent job documenting disadvantage. However, the mechanisms that allow individuals to “do privilege” have been given less attention. As a result, our understandings are incomplete about how groups, such as white fraternity men, maintain reaping the benefits of high status. For this particular setting, we demonstrate that visibility (via community size) and accountability (via perceived obligation to the racial group) operate as mechanisms that allow white fraternity men to do privilege in ways their black counterparts cannot. While white fraternity men benefit from a hyper level of behavioral invisibility and unaccountability, black fraternity men experience a hyper level of behavioral visibility and accountability and are constrained by the same institutional arrangements that give these white men power. Reclaiming a Du Boisian approach to examine the “wages of whiteness” (Bobo 2000; Du Bois 1935 [1969]; Roediger 1999), we argue that white fraternity men are afforded a “psychological wage,” while black fraternity men are penalized by a “psychological tax” (Rinder 1954). By highlighting how white fraternity men gain purchase on an ideal white racial identity, we show how high-status whites form and sustain not just their interracial privilege but their intraracial distinctions with other whites as well.

Building on a growing body of work on racialization and identity processes (Gallagher 2003; Gayles 2006; Perry 2001, 2002; Schwalbe 2008), privilege (Kanter 1977; McIntosh 1990; Rothenberg 2002; Royster 2003), race–class–gender (Harvey-Wingfield 2009, 2010), and Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) (Brown, Parks, and Phillips 2005; Hughey 2007, 2008; Kimbrough 2003; Kimbrough and Hutcheson 1998; McClure 2006;

Parks 2008; Ray 2011; Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz 2006). Our findings extend research on the mechanisms that sustain privilege and the saliency of racialized identities. In this regard, our study corroborates and adds to discussions on hegemonic whiteness by testing and validating Hughey's (2010, 1292) theory "that meaningful racial identity for whites is produced vis-à-vis the reproduction of, and appeal to, racist, essentialist, and reactionary inter- and intra-racial distinctions." In doing so, we answer a call put forth by Lewis (2004, 639) asking for "careful research on the structural and organizational practices that privilege whites" to "highlight the specific institutional arrangements that benefit some more than others." We begin the literature review by racializing the benefits of privilege. We then draw attention to research that speaks to how visibility and accountability operate as mechanisms of privilege to structure black and white fraternity men's identities and sense of self.

## **Background**

### *Racializing the Benefits of Privilege*

Privilege means having the ability to be exclusive (Syrett 2009), access resources inaccessible to others, create social and economic capital more efficiently than others (Bourdieu 1984), control social environments and others in those environments (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Boswell and Spade 1996; Sanday [1990] 2007), avoid forcible interactions with undesirable others (Ray and Rosow 2010), maintain privacy (Armstrong 2002), reduce monitoring and policing (Russell-Brown 2008), and choose when to be visible and invisible (Ellison 1952; Franklin 1993). White privilege provides whites "with the ability to move through the world relatively unencumbered" (Lewis 2004, 637) and experience many of the benefits listed above. Whites also have interactions with others who view them for their individual accomplishments and faults and not those of the entire white race (McIntosh 1990). As a result, whites can view themselves solely as individuals, choose when to activate their group affiliation, and experience a collective group invisibility by escaping the costs associated with racial group stereotypes.

The benefits described above are heightened for white men. They can make mistakes unattributed to their gender and be heralded for taking risks (McIntosh 1990). They can usually find sponsors willing to use social capital to enhance their life opportunities, unlike their lower-class black counterparts (Smith 2007). White men are also rewarded better than black men in administrative positions (Turner and Myers 2000), women-dominated professions

(Harvey-Wingfield 2009, 2010; Kanter 1977), and normal job-seeking routes to upward mobility (Pager 2007; Royster 2003). Even for groups where it may be assumed that blacks reap more benefits, we see this is not the case. In an examination of the benefits of social capital for student-athletes at top NCAA Division-I universities, Clopton (2011) found that white athletes have significantly more social networks, social capital, and trust in the university.

So unlike whites, blacks are not afforded the normative benefits of whiteness. Instead, they experience costs associated with living in a racialized society. Racialized social system theory contends that race alters normative institutional arrangements to the point that the entire institution becomes racialized (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). This leads to a divergence in various outcomes where the higher-status racial group receives greater “economic remuneration, is granted higher social estimation, often has the license to draw physical as well as social boundaries, and receives a ‘psychological wage’” (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 469-70). Being a college student should allow blacks to overcome some of these disadvantages and actually receive some of the benefits of privilege. However, research on race, class, and education imply otherwise and suggest that visibility and accountability operate as mechanisms that inhibit blacks’ ability to have similar experiences as whites.

### *Visibility as a Mechanism of Privilege*

Students supposedly enter college by their hard work and perseverance in high school. However, decisions about who is worthy to pursue a college degree are tracked long before then, and they normally fall along racial and class lines (Massey et al. 2003). The inequality embedded within the U.S. public school system (Kozol 2005; Lewis and Pattison 2010) translates into the underrepresentation of students of color in college. At predominately white institutions (PWIs), we see a small community size of blacks. As of 2004, forty-six of the fifty flagship state schools had less than 12 percent black enrollment (JBHE). This small community size leads to a heightened level of visibility for black students because they become “racially marked” (Lewis 2004, 631) the minute they step on campus. Gallagher (1995) found that roughly 20 percent of the whites in his sample believed their university was 70 percent nonwhite, when in fact it was 70 percent white.

Unlike black students at PWIs, white students are able to blend into the crowd and take full advantage of the social aspects of the college experience. They are also able to capitalize on an assortment of benefits associated with white privilege “through positioning those marked as ‘white’ as essentially

different from and superior to those marked as ‘non-white’” (Hughey 2010, 1292). For example, black students are burdened by the expectation to know “everything black” as one of the sole representatives of their marked race in class discussions and peer group settings. Feagin and Sikes (1995) found that black students were often confused by white students as being another black student, continuously asked if they were athletes, frequently solicited by professors to explain why blacks engage in certain behaviors, and given lower scores on assignments when writing about black culture or issues. They argue that “white critics are oblivious and fail to see white-run institutions as a serious problem for black students” (Feagin and Sikes 1995, 97).

The existence of black students is also continuously questioned and stereotyped by a host of others (e.g., white students, professors, administrators). Instead of thinking blacks earned their privileged status, whites assume blacks are intellectually inferior and the beneficiaries of Affirmative Action handouts (Feagin and Sikes 1995; Katznelson 2006). Additionally, university officials excessively monitor the few spaces on campus (e.g., dorms, cultural centers, popular eating locations) where blacks feel comfortable (Cole et al. 2009). These dynamics lead to black students reporting higher levels of social isolation and having less rewarding college experiences (Allen 1992).

Stereotypes about gang involvement (Hughey 2008), criminality (Muhammad 2010), and hypersexuality (Ray and Rosow 2010) hamper black fraternity men in particular. In turn, they may suffer from stereotype threat by not wanting to fulfill group stereotypes about black men (Steele 1997). Similar to the black Baptist women Higginbotham (1993) examined, black fraternity men may aim to combat racist depictions of black men and negative behaviors they witness among black men regarding their interactions with women (Ray 2011) and perceived lack of care for racial uplift and personal well-being. Higginbotham (1993) argued that the pursuit for respectability comes with the price of black conformity to the norms and values of the dominant society. For black fraternity men, this conformity may lead to an increased level of accountability based on their interactions with university officials, white students, and black community members.

### *Accountability as a Mechanism of Privilege*

Du Bois (1903b) asserted that high-status blacks are constrained by their responsibilities to the black race as part of the Talented Tenth. The Talented Tenth are the top 10 percent of African Americans who are well educated, politically engaged, and in a position of influence to assist with ameliorating racial inequality. BGLO members have historically fit this description

(Brown, Parks, and Phillips 2005; Parks 2008). Black fraternity men are viewed as representatives of their families, home cities, and the entire black Greek and student communities. As a result, their behavior affects their individual outcomes and the opportunities of the entire black student community. Feagin and Sikes (1995) asserted that perceptions of “representing blackness” is embraced by whites and blacks alike who believe the black/white education and wealth gaps are the responsibilities of middle-class blacks to uplift their lower class brethren. Therefore, the consequences of being part of the Talented Tenth for black fraternity men may elicit stressful and unsatisfying interactions with university officials, white students, and the black community.

On most campuses, black fraternities do not have Greek houses. Scholars cite the historical consequences of discrimination, finances, and membership numbers as the main reasons for this pattern (Brown, Parks, and Phillips 2005). As a result, black fraternity men normally have to rely upon university venues for programming and social events. This leads to them coming in contact with administrators, being held accountable to university officials, and surveilled more than white fraternity men. However, university officials and whites are not the only ones surveilling black fraternities. Since the black student community at PWIs is small and insular, there is a greater likelihood that black fraternity men’s actions will be publicized by other blacks on and off campus. White fraternity men normally have Greek houses for programming and are exempt from being burdened with their behavior directly affecting other students or the local white community. They can also choose when to self-segregate in order to maintain a level of privacy unattainable by other students living on campus. In turn, the fraternity house becomes an institutional arrangement of legitimacy that exemplifies “dominant ideals” (Hughey 2010, 1292) by validating white fraternal routines and marginalizing the practices of others, even other white students.

These structural differences may affect fraternity men’s sense of self. While white fraternity men normally have the benefit to operate under a single vision of self-consciousness, black fraternity men’s identities may be strained by their insider/outsider status in predominately white environments. Du Bois (1903a) asserted these dynamics lead to groups such as black fraternity men experiencing double-consciousness. Extending the concept of double-consciousness, Rawls (2000) asserts that a teamwork self mediates the struggle of blacks as they aim to juggle their dual status in white-dominated spaces. Individuals who experience the teamwork self are more committed to the community or group than to their individual self. This creates two

conflicting sets of obligations for African Americans: (1) the public self as a member of the black race and (2) the private self as an individual. Hence, black fraternity men may come to find that “personhood and group membership are the essence of selfhood” (Rawls 2000, 259).

Taken together, the ultimate outcome of visibility and accountability for black fraternity men may be a continuously activated psychological tax for interacting in predominately white settings. A set of expectations from and interactions with a host of others alter black men’s fraternal experiences. White fraternity men, on the other hand, can limit the influence of these alternative expectations by choosing whether to internalize them or not. As a result, they garner a psychological wage and experience an assortment of benefits associated with an ideal white racial identity, which allows them to maintain inter- and intraracial boundaries based on their racial and status privilege. We examine these possibilities with the study described below in the methods section.

## **The Fraternity Project**

The Fraternity Project is a nine month ethnographic study consisting of interviews, surveys, and observations with fifty-two black and white fraternity men collected from spring 2005 through fall 2005. The Kinsey Institute and the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity provided funding for the project. Twenty-eight men are from four black fraternities and twenty-four men are from three white fraternities. We conducted two focus group interviews (one black, one white) consisting of six white men and eight black men who were also part of the fifty-two men from the study. We collected data with men about their perceptions, attitudes, interactions, and behaviors on topics including race and status relations, romantic and sexual relations, sexual attitudes, sexual experiences, partying, hooking up, relationships, sexual coercion, sexual assault, and family and Greek background.

## **Study Site**

A PWI with thirty thousand undergraduates and roughly ten thousand graduate students served as the study site. This university is similar to most large state schools in the United States, so we call it State University (SU). *U.S. News and World Report* characterizes SU as “selective” in its undergraduate admissions, with many graduate and professional programs ranked in the top tier. In addition to its academic reputation, *Annual Princeton Review* ranked

SU as one of the top party schools during the time of the study. This combination means that SU is an ideal site because of its strong academic reputation, vibrant social life, and party scene. SU is also a “college town.” Because local businesses are more likely to cater to students in college towns, the saliency of the fraternity role may be more pronounced than in other settings.

In regards to the Greek system, two separate councils, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and the Interfraternity Council (IFC), preside over black and white fraternities. There is virtually no racial overlap among members of black and white Greek organizations. Approximately 20 percent of the white students are Greek, while 10 percent of the black students are Greek. IFC consists of about twenty-five white fraternities with approximately one hundred members per fraternity, which totals more than 2,500 members. Black fraternities are substantially smaller. NPHC includes five black fraternities each with about ten members, which totals to only about fifty fraternity members. All of the white fraternities had a fraternity house on campus property at the time of the study, while none of the black fraternities had a house. These data come from Greek Affairs and Student Affairs at SU and are comparable to similar universities.

### *Sample Selection*

We used purposive sampling to select the fraternities for this study. We selected fraternities that students and administrators considered to be the top on campus. Similar to Boswell and Spade (1996), we used a “reputational approach” to identify “high-status” fraternities. Members of sororities and fraternities, students in sociology classes, informants in Greek Affairs, and the Assistant Dean of Students ranked fraternities based on popularity, academic and philanthropic events, and athletic prowess. All lists consistently ranked three white fraternities in the top five. We included these three fraternities in the study.

As mentioned previously, only five historically black fraternities exist on campus. Membership in any of these organizations generally conveys a certain high-status, particularly at SU since the black population is only about 4 percent. Members from four black fraternities were included in the study. Participants were recruited by emailing the presidents of the targeted fraternities to see if we could make an announcement at chapter meetings, invite members to participate, and leave flyers about the study. In addition to contacting fraternity presidents, we utilized snowball sampling and contact referrals.

## *Methods*

As mentioned earlier, the Fraternity Project has four types of data including observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. The ethnographic observations were ongoing during the spring 2005 and fall 2005 semesters. We wanted to capture fraternity men interacting during the school year and then when they returned in the fall to see if any differences surfaced in their attitudes and behaviors related to the topics mentioned earlier. Using Corsaro's (1985) approach of recording field notes, personal notes, methodological notes, and theoretical notes, we had a strict blueprint to collect data while in the field. Fraternity men were observed in a multitude of settings including fraternity houses, rented houses, apartments, dorms, organization meetings, social, educational, community service, and philanthropic events, athletic competitions, step shows, classrooms, and parties. We aimed to collect data that painted a holistic picture of these men's Greek-related lives. We frequently spent days with one respondent at a time to see how he interacted in different settings. This particular research strategy became extremely useful for ascertaining the mechanisms that hold men more or less accountable for their treatment of others. We primarily observed how fraternity men interact with each other, other Greeks, non-Greek students, women, sorority women, and authority figures (e.g., administrators, police officers, professors, staff members).

In addition to the observations, we conducted thirty in-depth interviews and twenty-two informal interviews. We conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen white and fifteen black fraternity men. The in-depth interviews lasted on average two and a half hours. Similar to Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney's (2006) study of collegiate women, we used an eight-page, semi-structured interview guide to ask fraternity men about the topics mentioned above. We digitally recorded and transcribed the in-depth interviews using pseudonyms to ensure personal and organizational anonymity. In-depth interviews are especially useful for developing a broad understanding of students' experiences in various aspects of college life and for exploring the meanings students attach to those experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Collecting field notes during interviews are also important for capturing aspects of interview interactions (e.g., facial gestures, attire, time of day, social environment) that might not be evident in the transcripts (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). We recorded these data as well.

We collected the twenty-two informal interviews during field observations. Certain respondents did not want to participate in the formal interview

process, because of either hesitancy related to anonymity or time constraints. Once we established rapport with an organization, members were normally more than willing to talk to us, especially when a member who had completed an in-depth interview discussed his experience. During informal interviews, we used our cell phones, hands, or notepads to record data.

At the end of each interview, respondents completed a paper-and-pencil survey. The survey included questions on sociodemographics, family background, sexual attitudes, relationship history, and sexual experiences. Data from this survey provide contextual information about each respondent. With these surveys, we were able to further validate the information provided by each participant during the interviews. The thirty men who participated in the in-depth interviews and six additional respondents completed the survey.

We conducted focus groups after the individual interviews were completed to clarify themes that surfaced during the individual interviews. We used focus groups to triangulate the data by focusing on themes that evolved from the individual interviews. Because collective discourses occur in peer groups, the unique environment generated in focus groups was well suited to this project (Hollander 2004; Morgan 1997). Although focus groups have been criticized for their lack of ability to elicit truthful views about race and status interactions among young men, we believe our strategy to conduct two group interviews (one with a black fraternity and one with a white fraternity) limits this methodological concern because the men in each group knew each other, were of the same racial group, and felt more comfortable being candid with their responses.

### *Characteristics of the Men in the Study*

All of the men report being family-oriented and having lofty career goals. Most participants are active on campus and have higher GPAs than non-Greeks. GPA is one of the few differences between our sample and the general trends in the literature on Greek organizations (Wilder and McKeegan 1999). A substantial class difference exists between the black and white samples. Black men self-identified as lower-middle class, while white men self-identified as upper-middle class. Many of the black fraternity men have scholarships, student loans, and/or jobs to pay for tuition and housing costs, while most of the white fraternity men have scholarships and/or parents to pay their tuition and living expenses.

We aimed to sample men who had been in their organizations the same amount of time (one to two years). Most white fraternity men were initiated

as freshmen, whereas most black fraternity men were initiated as sophomores or juniors. Because of these different recruitment styles, black fraternity men reported being one year older and one year further along in college than white fraternity men. Therefore, we conducted interviews with older white men and younger black men. These interviews elicited similar results to the total sample. All respondents self-identify as heterosexual.

### *The Researchers*

A black and white male research team served as Principal Investigators and collected and analyzed the data. Literature on conducting interviews documents there is a different type of truthfulness when respondents and interviewers are matched by race (Schaeffer 1980). We followed this protocol and the data revealed this strategy was useful. Black and white men made comments about the other race that we are sure would not have been made if participants were being interviewed by an opposite-race interviewer. We also continuously reflected on our interviewing styles and found that both groups of men were consistent in how they talked about race, gender, and status relations and their role as fraternity men.

Similar to matching interviewers and interviewees by race, some research has found modest effects for the importance of age matching (Moum 1998). Colleagues told both of us that we “looked young enough” to act as participant-observers at undergraduate events. We shaved regularly and chose not to wear sports coats during observational periods. Although we were concerned that our age may manipulate the normal social interactions that occur in Greek-related settings, we were frequently confused for undergraduates or members of the fraternity being studied.

Although we developed a rapport with these men, gaining entry was an issue. The black researcher is a member of a black fraternity. While this commonality would seem to allow for easy entry, it potentially led to more difficulty because participants suspected that important information may be given to members of the researcher’s fraternity. The black researcher solved this issue by conducting many of the initial interviews at his office. For his undergraduate degree, the white researcher attended a small liberal arts college that did not have Greek organizations. Nevertheless, he quickly learned the importance of the “vouching” networking that occurs to validate someone as credible in the Greek community. We both used male and female students to vouch for us with participants. Pizza was also purchased for some of the interviews. As a whole, we had to “hang out” with these men for trust to

develop. This process was beneficial because some important data were collected during this initial entry period.

### *Analytic Strategy*

We used inductive and deductive reasoning as analytic approaches to “double fit” these data with emergent theory and literature. Ragin (2000) states that “double-fitting” is a technique that uses empirical evidence to improve theoretical concepts, while simultaneously using the theoretical concepts to refine the empirical findings. Ragin (2000) asserts this process allows for more mutual clarification between theoretical concepts and empirical themes.

For each interview and field note excerpt, we categorized respondents based on race and organizational affiliation and coded words relating to race, role meaning, privilege, consciousness, identity maintenance, and inter- and intragroup relations. We searched for certain key words (e.g., money, brotherhood, status, race, black, white, meaning, means, benefit, privilege, constraint, conscious, consciousness, brotherhood, identity, respect, select, hard work, house, exclusive), and synonyms to these words, in the transcribed interviews and field notes. We were primarily concerned with how participants experienced the benefits and costs of privilege. We used Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package to connect field notes and interview transcriptions. After establishing patterns in the coding, we searched the data again looking for examples that confirmed and contradicted emerging patterns. The propositions were refined or eliminated to explain negative cases (Rizzo, Corsaro, and Bates 1992).

The theme of visibility surfaced primarily during observations, so much of the data about visibility come from field notes. Accountability surfaced primarily during in-depth interviews. We rely on five questions from the in-depth interviews to demonstrate how accountability operates as a mechanism of privilege: (1) What is it like to be a fraternity member? (2) Whose opinion of your fraternity matters the most? (3) Can you name at least three white fraternities? (4) Can you name at least three black fraternities? (5) What do people think about your fraternity? We begin with white fraternity men and discuss how they experience a hyper level of invisibility, followed by accounts concerning black fraternity men’s experiences with hyper visibility. We then detail how invisibility and visibility lead to a lack of accountability for white fraternity men and a hyper level of accountability for black fraternity men.

## **Visibility and Accountability: Mechanisms of Privilege**

### *Hyper Level of Invisibility*

Because of the large white community at SU, most white fraternity men can interact in social scenes without others knowing about their organizational affiliation. At will, they can disassociate from the fraternity, blend into the crowd, and remove the saliency attached to the fraternity role. These privileges are afforded to individuals “marked as ‘white’” (Hughey 2010, 2). White fraternity men are somewhat conscious of their interactions when in Greek-related settings, but they generally perceive little interactional constraints outside of the Greek context. Moreover, once white fraternity men remove themselves from the confines of the organizational structure of Greek life requirements for the fraternity role become invisible, and in many ways, inconsequential. Paul, who is a twenty-year-old sophomore majoring in biology, stated the following about the norms regarding paraphernalia. Paul says: “So okay there are rules, like when you’re pledging you know now that you’re a brother you have to behave this way if you’re wearing letters or anything? You’re not supposed to be like fucking shit up on campus.”

Paul’s comment suggests that if white fraternity men want to be disruptive, they simply have to not wear fraternity shirts and the fraternity is no longer liable for their actions. In turn, all of the blame is placed on the individual. When white fraternity men choose to wear their letters in certain social settings, or tell others about their membership, their status may increase. If they are in a setting where fraternity status is problematic (like at a twenty-one and older club with “townies”), they can choose not to wear their letters. Accordingly, they are treated like others in the setting. What is key here is that white men have a choice of fraternal visibility and can in some ways be invisible in predominately white settings by blending into the crowd. When a person is invisible they do not have to follow the rules and norms attached to a specific role. The invisibility that ensues when white fraternity men take off their Greek letters is a benefit not transferable to black fraternity men because of the small size of the black community at PWIs and the saliency of the fraternity role for black men. We will address this more in the next section.

Another benefit of a large community size for white fraternity men is that they can afford for many African Americans and certain others to be invisible. This invisibility hinges on the ability to avoid forcible interactions. Forcible interactions are interactions where individuals must come in contact with others they would not if these interactions were under their control.

Because of the privileges white fraternity men are given to control and supervise social boundaries, they can interact with whom they please, thus excluding (e.g., minorities, homosexuals, lower-status whites) or including (e.g., desirable women) certain groups. Anyone who wants to affiliate with white fraternities must abide by and conform to the rigid social boundaries that are in place. Even if individuals do not agree with certain racial, gender, and social boundaries, silence often signifies acceptance. We witnessed several times where a group of individuals would come to a fraternity house for a party and some were not allowed in. Fraternity men act as doormen and gatekeepers to keep individuals out that the fraternity deems unworthy of entering. Although these rigid social boundaries may partly be a matter of personal choice, the organizational structure of Greek and collegiate life inhibits much interaction across racial and status divides. As a result, the racial segregation frequently witnessed in college social scenes is similar to the segregation in most neighborhoods (Massey and Denton 1993) and public schools (Kozol 2006; Lewis and Pattison 2010).

Interview and observational data also revealed the importance of a fraternity house and the proximity of the house for eluding visibility. The houses of the three white fraternities in our study are away from other fraternity houses, on a main street that most students pass daily, and geographically close to local bars and restaurants. Therefore, proximity allows these three fraternities to preserve social and spatial boundaries in ways other organizations cannot. In this case, the white fraternity men considered here exemplify an ideal white racial identity and are able to maintain intraracial boundaries with whites who do not have credentials or exhibit performances that align with hegemonic whiteness. Comments from two participants are fitting here.

Joseph, who is a twenty-one-year-old senior majoring in political science and former president of his fraternity, made the following statement about the white fraternities in our study:

I think there's a culture among 3rd Street chapter houses, people who live there. It's just . . . I think it's a different scene. I think that the frats on 3rd Street almost have their own common bond, you know. So the sororities will hang out with fraternities that are on 3rd Street and vice-versa. They are all row close with each other. That's a subculture. Proximity has a lot to do with it and I think that they also are familiar with the chapters that have a very strong tradition. I think they all have that common bond going for them.

The subculture and common bond that Joseph mentioned speaks to the privilege to be exclusive and sustain boundaries that others cannot. Because of these benefits of privilege, white fraternity men are less conscious about their behavior than others. Syrett (2009) reaches similar conclusions in his historical review of high-status white fraternities.

Rex, who is a twenty-two-year-old junior double majoring in biology and psychology, described how living in a fraternity house is enabling for fraternity men as it pertains to romantic and sexual relations:

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.

Ray and Rosow's (2010) finding about the importance of living arrangements for structuring romantic and sexual approaches toward women is supported by Rex's statement. Although the fraternity role also allows black men to socially engage women, fraternity houses give white men control over social and gender environments not afforded to black fraternity men.

### *Hyper Level of Visibility*

Many field note excerpts discussed the frequency by which students (primarily black students) knew black fraternity men. Students recognized black fraternity men in an array of settings, including the library, the university center, university events, classrooms, and parties on and off campus. In fact, students frequently recognized black fraternity men even when they did not have on their fraternity letters. Black men were also commonly addressed by name by people unknown to them. Although the black student population at SU is only 4 percent, black students frequently interacted together in predominately black settings. Conversely, white fraternity men primarily interacted at fraternity houses with a closed network of people. These findings support Rawls's (2000) teamwork self. While conventional wisdom may lead one to conclude that being a member of the ingroup in a large community would invoke more interactions that elicit feelings of constraint (like white fraternity men), our findings show that a small and insular outgroup within a larger community (like black fraternity men) actually trigger a hyper level of visibility. Brian, who is a twenty year old senior majoring in education and

NPHC President, addressed how community size increases the visibility of black fraternity members. He stated: "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."

Because of the need to maintain a certain presentation of self in order to be recognized and regarded in high social esteem by the campus community, black fraternity men feel they must speak to most black students on campus. Ted, who is a twenty-one-year-old senior majoring in business and president of his fraternity, stated: "Like as blacks, you know some people feel like it's our duty as black people to say hi to other black people." Wolly, who is a twenty-three-year-old senior majoring in business, made a similar comment and spoke to the psychological tax these black men perceive they must pay. He stated: "It's like dang! Am I that good I gotta come hug you and shake your hand? I shake everybody hand man. I mess around and have a phone booth disease on my hand!"

When black fraternity men do not speak to others, they are perceived as "stuck-up." Consequently, black fraternity men believe the status of the entire fraternity is lowered. Ted stated: "When we are together as Etas [fraternity name] people say 'the Etas are stuck up.' So then those people play that off Eta. 'He's stuck up. He didn't say hi.' But a lot of people expect you to say hi. People you don't even know!" Here, we see a parallel between the men in our study and the cheerleaders and popular girls from middle school that Eder (1985) studied over two decades ago. Eder (1985) examined interpersonal relations among adolescent middle school girls. She found that girls undergo a "cycle of popularity" where they start being really popular and can only stay popular if they engage in certain deference and demeanor rituals with other students. Black fraternity men enter a similar cycle of popularity with black students, especially black women. Ted added:

I think certain females feel like they deserve more than the "hi what's up? How you doing?" They want the hug. They feel like we had a conversation or encounter where they feel like they deserve more. Like if I sat down and talked with her yesterday and I see her tomorrow she deserves that hug. With some people, I mean that's legit. If I sat here and have a conversation with you about my grandma dying, then the next day me and you might be a little bit closer. But I think some people just take that and run with it.

Our field notes confirmed Ted's comment as we observed black fraternity men receiving more unsolicited attention from black women than non-Greek black men. In fact, we observed women interacting with black fraternity men more than black athletes. Ray (2011) notes that black fraternity men are believed to be more supportive of gender equality than other black men so black women may feel more comfortable socially interacting with them. While many may assume that all blacks feel obligated to speak to other blacks in white-dominated environments, this obligation may not be as pervasive among the current generation of black young adults. We observed black students frequently walking by one another without speaking. Black students normally spoke to one another when they knew each other. Although certain groups of students (like black fraternity men) may perceive an obligation to speak to other blacks, it definitely was not as pervasive as some may conjecture.

### *Hyper Level of Unaccountability*

Most white men report that fraternity membership is fun and a normal part of the college experience. They also state that no one's opinion of their fraternity really matters. A few white participants say that "sorority girls'" opinions matter the most. However, white fraternity men are only concerned about sorority women's opinions in order to continue reaping the benefits of easy sexual relations. Below Lane and Rex make comments about how relationship issues and cheating can affect future interactions between white fraternity men and sorority women who already know one another. Lane, who is a twenty-two-year-old senior majoring in marketing, remarked:

Lane: You got one card to play. You can hook up 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.

Interviewer: How much time do you need?

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

Lane seems to have no qualms about hooking up with multiple women who live in the same sorority house. His main objective is not making them upset so that it disrupts the benefit of easy access to women. Besides, most people would probably agree that "a week or so" is not a lot of leeway time

to hook up with multiple women who live in the same sorority house. Rex makes a similar statement about how cheating can affect a member of his fraternity.

Interviewer: What would happen if you got caught cheating?

Rex: The way I could see it [cheating] affecting something is if it's a sorority girl you fuck over.

Interviewer: You can't screw with a sorority sister?

Rex: 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.

Interestingly, Rex never mentions women who are not members of sororities. He only perceives the repercussions of cheating will be severe if members of the woman's sorority find out. Clearly, Lane's and Rex's comments show that if white fraternity men are conscious of their behavior when interacting with sorority women it is in a restricted manner.

White fraternity men are also limitedly concerned about university administration because they are protected by influential fraternity alumni who give donations to the university. White fraternity men often discussed the affluence of their members, members' parents, and alumni. During field observations, one participant stated: "There are kids in our house worth 400 million dollars. A guy his name is David and he just inherited [a dieting company] from his mom." Another said, "We have kids whose dads are presidents of [daytime television networks]." Members state that alumni can often rectify issues with university administration.

"Gamma" is considered the most affluent white fraternity at SU. They ask for parent's income on the membership application, start recruiting prospective members from high school, and have rush only once a year (compared to twice a year like most Greek organizations). Because Gammas select members based on socioeconomic characteristics and are able to recruit freshmen earlier than other fraternities, they often secure the preferred men from the incoming freshman class to continue their exclusive lineage of high-status men. Although university policy prohibits freshmen from living in Greek houses, the Gammas pride themselves on being the only fraternity to "get a pass" to allow its freshman members to move into their house. A participant from another fraternity discussed how the Gammas' recruiting practices preserve intergenerational security:

They recruit lots of high school kids in a very stereotypical way. A stereotypical question for them is, "What does your dad do and how much money does he make?" Most guys don't rush in the summer; they rush in the fall, so we get them.

White fraternity men also show little concern about what other white fraternities think of them. Although white fraternities are viewed as competition for athletic competitions and awards (which makes sense considering white fraternities are in the same Greek council), members do not alter their normal routines and practices while planning for other organizations. Additionally, white fraternity men show no concern at all about black fraternities. In fact, only three of the fifteen white fraternity men who participated in in-depth interviews could name one black fraternity. On the other hand, all fifteen of the black fraternity men who participated in in-depth interviews could name at least three white fraternities, with many of them naming the white fraternities in our study. This finding highlights the two different worlds between white and black fraternity men and speaks to Higginbotham's (1993) point about the awareness blacks have about white social life. It also draws attention to the ability of privileged whites to make staples of the black community (like BGLOs) invisible and irrelevant. So, these high-status white fraternities not only preserve interracial boundaries with blacks, they also manufacture intraracial and status boundaries between themselves and other white fraternities, non-Greek white men, and lower status women. As a result, because of the privileges of alumni networks and property, they benefit from a hyper level of unaccountability that is unattainable to most students.

### *Hyper Level of Accountability*

As the finding above suggests, black fraternity men are conscious of white fraternities and aware of their normal routines. During the focus group interview, black fraternity men were quite upset that white fraternity men were unaware that SU had BGLOs. Black fraternity men asserted they won several awards over the past few years at the annual Greek awards ceremony over white Greeks so white fraternity men at least should be aware of them in that regard. While this may be true, white and black fraternities simply interact in two different arenas that lead to little interaction among them. Hughey (2007) makes similar assertions in his article on nonblack members of BGLOs.

Unlike white fraternity men, black fraternity men view the fraternity role to be much more serious than simply having fun and partaking in the college

experience of parties, alcohol, and sex. They view the fraternity role to represent “the ideal black Greek” to the black community and “the ideal black student” to the white community and the administration. Ted’s comment below captured this theme:

It’s kinda like being on the basketball team or being on a football team. You know what I’m saying? It’s kinda like Eta puts you on the next level. Like you’re a black Greek but you are like the—you are suppose to be representing *the black Greek*. You know what I’m saying? And so, 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.

The data further show, in a very direct manner, that black fraternity men perceive they are held accountable by a host of others. More than one hundred years after Du Bois’s (1903a) prophetic words, Julio echoes his theoretical position concerning double-consciousness. Julio is a twenty-one-year-old senior and president of his fraternity. He is very conscious of the perceptions and expectations of others. Julio stated: “They are not looking at us as individuals, or an individual organization, but as blacks as a whole.” When asked who “they” are, Julio replied, “Everyone! The eyes are always watching.” He is referring to the fact that everywhere members of his fraternity go, they perceive that someone is surveilling them to report back about their behavior and how they govern themselves. Our field note excerpts noted the frequency by which someone would tell black fraternity men that someone had seen them somewhere or heard something about them. While white fraternity men may not know about BGLOs, the black student body considered black fraternity men “campus superstars.” Ted’s quotation above captures this. Other participants make references to consciousness as well—“I am conscious. . . . We are conscious.” To make this hyper level of accountability even clearer, when asked whose opinion of his fraternity matters the most, Julio said: “The Dean of the School.” Other black fraternity men stated: “The black community’s opinion matters the most.”

Black fraternity men even have a heightened level of accountability to black sorority women. Since black fraternities and sororities are both part of the NPHC, women can hold organizational positions such as president or vice president and govern over black fraternities. As a result, black fraternity men must engage in deference and demeanor rituals with black sorority women in a manner that white fraternity men do not have to with white sorority women. White fraternity men are not organizationally connected to sorority women

so they are privy from organizational deference and demeanor rituals that are politically charged.

Here we see a parallel between our study and Stompler and Padavic (1997), who assert that historical instances related to racism place black men and women on a more equitable level than it may be for white men and women. As previous research notes (Skocpol, Liazos, and Ganz 2006), one of the reasons the NPHC includes fraternities and sororities is to combat the discrimination that black students collectively endure. So not only are black men and women potentially on a more equitable level as it relates to gender relations than their white counterparts, they are also organizationally tied to one another in a way that provides more leverage for black women to obtain equity.

Finally, one of the best examples that highlight the hyper level of accountability black fraternity men experience occurred during field observations at a party after a step show being sponsored by NPHC. When events such as parties or step shows occur on campus, the sponsoring organization(s) must hire security. Security guards are normally off-duty police officers who are paid roughly eighty dollars per hour for their services. Greek Affairs recommends having one security guard for every one hundred expected guests. SU also has a rule that everyone who attends the party must sign in and present a student ID, either from SU or another university. Following university rules, NPHC members did not allow a group of individuals in the party because they did not have student IDs. Several minutes later, this group got into a fight outside of the party and was escorted off of university property by the hired security guards. An hour after the fight, a shooting occurred several blocks away from the university. The university officials supervising the party decided to stop the party. BGLO members were outraged because they followed all of the rules and felt as though they were penalized for something that did not concern them or students at SU. After this incident, administrators restricted BGLOs from reserving the main ballroom at the university center for one year. Rather than focusing on who won the step show that drew more than two thousand (mostly black) students to the university, the campus paper the following Monday mentioned the NPHC party and focused on the off-campus shootout that did not involve university students.

As seen here, the burden of fraternity status weighs heavily on black fraternity men in ways it does not for white fraternity men. Because black fraternity men are concerned about how their interactions affect the status and reputation of all black students, they are conscious of their status positions within the black Greek and student communities and broader white community. Black fraternity men perceive an obligation to represent black Greeks in

predominately black settings and black students in predominately white settings. This obligation leads to a hyper level of accountability not experienced by white fraternity men.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This article examined why the institutional arrangements that privilege white fraternity men constrain black fraternity men. We presented evidence that white fraternity men are afforded a hyper level of invisibility and unaccountability, while black fraternity men reap a hyper level of visibility within the small black Greek and student communities and in the larger community of whites. Consequently, other students hold them accountable for their status and race positions on campus. In turn, they worry about perceptions from a host of others (e.g., administrators, whites, broader black community) regarding their fraternity's reputation as well as the reputation of the entire black student community. Because of a large community size, central fraternity house, and influential alumni, university members hold white fraternity men accountable in very limited ways so they continue acquiring the benefits of the choice of fraternal visibility, casual sexual encounters, and exclusivity.

Supporting Du Bois's (1903b) Talented Tenth theory, black fraternity men believe they have an obligation to be the leaders and voices for the black collegiate community. The fraternity role is a struggle for black men as it functions as both a personal and communal identity. As Rawls's (2000) teamwork concept highlights, individuals who identify as black and high-status normally exhibit collective group values and norms where their self-concept is more concerned with the "we" than the "I." Since white fraternities average one hundred members and the size of the student and local communities they interact with are large, white men exhibit more individual values. In turn, they are more concerned with the "I" than the "we." As a result, white fraternity men are afforded a psychological wage, while black fraternity men are penalized by a psychological tax.

Our findings further indicate that the organizational structure of collegiate life establishes rigid spatial boundaries that perpetuate rigid social and racial boundaries. While these spatial boundaries seem permeable, they maintain impermeable social and symbolic boundaries regarding "do's" and "don'ts" for intergroup and intragroup relations. These boundaries surface in the size of the organization, the size of the community that the organization primarily caters to on and off campus, the presence or absence of a fraternity house, and the geographic location of the house. These boundaries allow white fraternity men to avoid certain role constraints, maintain social esteem and

exclusivity, and be privileged to govern themselves socially, spatially, organizationally, and structurally in ways black fraternity men cannot. For white men, the benefits of this role include a hyper level of invisibility and unaccountability, exclusiveness, intergenerational security, and the privilege to govern and control social environments.

In this regard, white fraternity men not only benefit from interracial privilege but also intraracial privilege. White fraternity men use their high status to gain purchase on racial, social class, and status distinctions between themselves and blacks, other white fraternity men, non-Greek white men, and women. Invisibility and unaccountability allow them to keep acquiring the benefits of privilege inaccessible to others; even other whites in the same setting who (on the surface) seem to be similarly situated in the status and structural hierarchies. Consequently, mechanisms of privilege are continuously emphasized in everyday, mundane ways through an interactional process that further validates an ideal white racial identity. An ideal white racial identity not only includes whiteness as a normative marker allowing for subjugated visibility but also includes hegemony and social class privilege as constructs that further solidify power and control, which manifest in symbolic and material ways. On many college campuses, high-status white fraternity men are able to accomplish this ideal. By identifying specific mechanisms of privilege, and benefits and costs associated with these mechanisms, we extend theoretical discussions by Hughey (2010) and Lewis (2004) on hegemonic whiteness.

Our findings also align with Bonilla-Silva's (1997) racialized social system theory, which contends that the higher status racial group receives greater social and economic esteem and a license to draw social and physical boundaries. These racial and status differences are due in part to the institutional mechanisms in place. Institutional rules are established to keep the experiences of students equitable. However, the "de facto" consequences of these rules are that white fraternity men can do privilege in ways black fraternity men and other students cannot. In turn, they capitalize on institutional oversights that allow them to circumvent rules, implement exclusivity, and determine who can and cannot participate. If white fraternity men have an event, they decide who is worthy of entry. Blacks cannot self-select. If they have an event on campus, all students must be given the same rights to enter. In some ways, both groups of men are responding to the institutional conditions they have been afforded, but these conditions affect them in very different ways.

Although white fraternities without a Greek house may seem similar to black fraternities, our findings suggest this is not the case. Removing fraternity houses from white men will not lead them to experience the level of

visibility black men do. Likewise, although Greek houses for white fraternities serve as protection from problematic interactions with administrators and individuals they do not want to associate with, Greek houses will not give black fraternities the same benefits. Black fraternity men will continue to encounter an increased level of policing as their houses will simply be added to the list of places to be surveilled. While a Greek house may assist black fraternities with some scheduling issues by giving them a central place to organize and hold social events, the hyper level of accountability they experience and the obligation to the black community the fraternity role creates for these men will not be eliminated.

Taken together, invisibility and unaccountability are not synonymous with black fraternal affiliation like they are for white fraternal affiliation. Black fraternities continue to be at a social and structural disadvantage and reap costs associated with their privileged role. Because of the benefits of hegemonic whiteness, the fraternity role for white men is normalized, taken-for-granted, and idealized. In turn, white fraternity men are supplied an assortment of benefits and entitlements that black fraternity men and other students cannot obtain.

The implications of these findings for higher education are quite interesting. Although perceptions of racial obligation may be more stressful and unsatisfying for black fraternity men, a heightened level of visibility and accountability is beneficial for how high-status men interact with women and lower status men. This creates an interesting quandary where the combination of visibility and accountability leads to more gender and status equity, while maintaining racial inequality related to the benefits and costs of privilege. If higher education officials really want students to have similar experiences, white fraternity men should be mandated to follow the same rules and regulations as other student groups, while there should be a reduction in the level of surveillance that black fraternities experience.

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## Bios

**Rashawn Ray** is currently a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Research Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley/UCSF and an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park. His work addresses three key areas: the determinants and consequences of subjective social class identification, men's treatment of women, and how racial stratification structures social life. Ray is the editor of *Race and Ethnic Relations in the 21st Century: History, Theory, Institutions, and Policy*. He is currently working on a project examining racial differences in perceptions of barriers and incentives to physical activity. Ray has been awarded funding from the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Sociological Association Minority Fellowship Program, the Society for the Study of Social Problems, and the Ford Foundation.

**Jason A. Rosow** research interests are situated at the nexus of sociology of culture, social psychology, and self and identity. He has spent time in the field conducting interviews and observations with Wilson Palacios on his study of the "club/party" culture of Southwest Florida. He obtained his MA in sociology at Indiana University in 2005 and he is currently working in the private sector.