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# The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity

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# The Girl Hunt: Urban Nightlife and the Performance of Masculinity as Collective Activity

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*The purpose of this article is to document the collective nature of gender performance and sexual pursuit, activities typically associated with individual rather than group behavior. Drawing on narrative accounts, I analyze how young heterosexual male students employ the power of collective rituals of homosociality to perform sexual competence and masculine identity by “girl hunting” in the context of urban nightlife. These rituals are designed to reinforce dominant sexual myths and expectations of masculine behavior, boost confidence in one’s performance of masculinity and heterosexual power, and assist in the performance of masculinity in the presence of women. This analysis illustrates how contemporary courtship rituals operate as collective strategies of impression management that men perform not only for women but for other men. In doing so, interaction rituals associated with the girl hunt reproduce structures of inequality within as well as across the socially constructed gender divide between women and men.*

From Chicago’s jazz cabarets to New York’s gay discos to Las Vegas’s strip clubs, sexualized environments have historically defined downtown zones of urban nightlife (Bernstein 2001; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Chauncey 1994; Kenney 1993; Owen 2003). Hot nightclubs and cool lounges enforce sexualized norms of dress and body adornment and invite flirtation, innuendo, and physical contact among patrons engaged in rituals of courtship. Nightspots also rely on the attractiveness of service staff and the promise of eroticized interaction to recruit customers (Allison 1994; Lloyd 2005; Spradley and Mann 1975), while sexual relations among staff are frequently the norm (Giuffre and Williams 1994). Moreover, young urbanites identify downtown clusters of nightclubs as *direct sexual marketplaces*, or markets for singles seeking casual encounters with potential sex partners (Laumann et al. 2004).

For these reasons, scenes of urban nightlife serve as particularly fitting sites for observing how men and women enact gender as a routine accomplishment in everyday

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life (West and Zimmerman 1987). In this article I examine girl hunting—a practice whereby adolescent heterosexual men aggressively seek out female sexual partners in nightclubs, bars, and other public arenas of commercialized entertainment. Recent sociological studies of sexual behavior analyze courtship patterns in relatively normative terms, concentrating on the logistics of sex partnering and mate selection in cities (Laumann et al. 2004). In contrast, in this article I wish to emphasize the more performative nature of contemporary flirtation rituals by examining how male-initiated games of heterosexual pursuit function as strategies of impression management in which young men sexually objectify women to heighten their own performance of masculinity. While we typically see public sexual behavior as an interaction between *individuals*, I illustrate how these rituals operate as collective and homosocial *group* activities conducted in the company of men.

### THE PERFORMANCE OF MASCULINITY AS COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY

According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, masculinity represents a range of dramaturgical performances individuals exhibit through face-to-face interaction (Goffman 1959, 1977; West and Zimmerman 1987). Like femininity, masculinity is not innate but an accomplishment of human behavior that appears natural because gendered individuals adhere to an institutionalized set of myths they learn through everyday interactions and encounters, and thus accept as social reality (Goffman 1977; West and Zimmerman 1987). Throughout their formative years and beyond, young men are encouraged by their parents, teachers, coaches, and peers to adopt a socially constructed vision of manhood, a set of cultural beliefs that prescribe what men ought to be like: physically strong, powerful, independent, self-confident, efficacious, dominant, active, persistent, responsible, dependable, aggressive, courageous, and sexually potent (Donaldson 1993; Messner 2002; Mishkind et al. 1986). In the fantasies of many boys and men alike, a relentless competitive spirit, distant emotional detachment, and an insatiable heterosexual desire, all commonly (but not exclusively) displayed by the sexual objectification of women (Bird 1996), characterize idealized masculinity.

Essentialist visions of masculinity obscure how both women and men resist, challenge, and renegotiate the meanings surrounding masculinity and femininity in their everyday lives (Chapkis 1986; Connell 1987, 1992, 1993, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Donaldson 1993; Hollander 2002). The inevitable disconnect between dominant expectations of normative masculinity, on the one hand, and actualized efforts at what West and Zimmerman (1987) refer to as “doing gender” as a dramaturgical performance, on the other, presents a challenging problem for men, particularly because “the number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small” (Connell 1995:79). It is an especially acute dilemma for young men of college age (18–25) who, as “emerging adults” (Arnett 1994, 2000), display many of the physical traits of early adulthood along with the emotional immaturity, diminutive body image, and sexual insecurities of late adolescence (Mishkind et al. 1986).

The competitive ritual of *girl hunting* epitomizes this dilemma, as heterosexual adolescent males aggressively seek out female sexual partners in dance clubs, cocktail lounges, and other public arenas of commercialized entertainment in the city at night. While courtship rituals are by no means confined to nightlife settings—as evidenced by the relatively large numbers of romantic couples who meet through work and school (Michael et al. 1995:72)—in American culture, bars and nightclubs are widely considered more normative environments for actively pursuing anonymous sexual partners in a strategic manner (Laumann et al. 2004). In contrast to occupational and educational domains in which masculine power can be signaled by professional success and intellectual superiority, sexual prowess is a primary signifier of masculinity in the context of urban nightlife.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the importance placed on competitive “scoring” (Messner 2002) among men in the highly gendered universe of cocktail lounges and singles bars should not be underestimated.

However, a wealth of data suggests that, contrary to representations of urban nightlife in popular culture, such as Candace Bushnell’s novel *Sex and the City* ([1996] 2001) and its HBO television spin-off, rumors of the proverbial one-night stand have been greatly exaggerated (Williams 2005). According to the National Health and Social Life Survey, relatively few men (16.7 percent) and even fewer women (5.5 percent) report engaging in sexual activity with a member of the opposite sex within two days of meeting them (Laumann et al. 1994:239).<sup>2</sup> About 90 percent of women aged eighteen to forty-four report that they find having sex with a stranger unappealing (Laumann et al. 1994:163–65). Findings from the Chicago Health and Social Life Survey demonstrate that, across a variety of city neighborhood types, typically less than one-fifth of heterosexual adults aged eighteen to fifty-nine report having met their most recent sexual partner in a bar, nightclub, or dance club (Mahay and Laumann 2004:74).<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the efficacy of girl hunting is constrained by women’s ability to resist unwanted sexual advances in public, as well as to initiate their own searches for desirable sex partners. Whereas the ideological basis of girl hunting stresses vulnerability, weakness, and submissiveness as conventional markers of femininity, young women commonly challenge these stereotypes by articulating their own physical strength, emotional self-reliance, and quick wit during face-to-face encounters with men (Duneier and Molotch 1999; Hollander 2002; Paules 1991; Snow et al. 1991).

For all these reasons, girl hunting would not seem to serve as an especially efficacious strategy for locating sexual partners, particularly when compared with other methods (such as meeting through mutual friends, colleagues, classmates, or other trusted third parties; common participation in an educational or recreational activity; or shared membership in a civic or religious organization). In fact, the statistical rareness of the one-night stand may help explain why successful lotharios are granted such glorified status and prestige among their peers in the first place (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:851). But if this is the case, then why do adolescent men persist in hassling women in public through aggressive sexual advances and pickup attempts (Duneier and Molotch 1999; Snow et al. 1991; Whyte 1988), particularly when their chances of meeting sex partners in this manner are so slim?

I argue that framing the question in this manner misrepresents the actual sociological behavior represented by the girl hunt, particularly since adolescent males do not necessarily engage in girl hunting to generate sexual relationships, even on a drunken short-term basis. Instead, three counterintuitive attributes characterize the girl hunt. First, the girl hunt is as much *ritualistic and performative* as it is utilitarian—it is a social drama through which young men perform their interpretations of manhood. Second, as demonstrated by prior studies (Martin and Hummer 1989; Polk 1994; Sanday 1990; Thorne and Luria 1986), girl hunting is not always a purely heterosexual pursuit but can also take the form of an inherently *homosocial* activity. Here, one's male peers are the intended audience for competitive games of sexual reputation and peer status, public displays of situational dominance and rule transgression, and in-group rituals of solidarity and loyalty. Finally, the emotional effort and logistical deftness required by rituals of sexual pursuit (and by extension the public performance of masculinity itself) encourage some young men to seek out safety in numbers by participating in the girl hunt as a kind of *collective* activity, in which they enjoy the social and psychological resources generated by group cohesion and dramaturgical teamwork (Goffman 1959). Although tales of sexual adventure traditionally feature a single male hero, such as Casanova, the performance of heterosexual conquest more often resembles the exploits of the dashing Christian de Neuville and his better-spoken coconspirator Cyrano de Bergerac (Rostand 1897). By aligning themselves with similarly oriented accomplices, many young men convince themselves of the importance and efficacy of the girl hunt (despite its poor track record), summon the courage to pursue their female targets (however clumsily), and assist one another in “mobilizing masculinity” (Martin 2001) through a collective performance of gender and heterosexuality.

In this article, I focus on the ritual of girl hunting to analyze how heterosexual young men perform masculinity as a collective activity in the context of urban nightlife. Drawing on their self-reported narrative accounts, I document how these young men employ a set of collective “hunting” strategies designed to (1) reinforce what I call “the myth of the pickup” and other dominant expectations of masculine behavior; (2) boost confidence in one's performance of masculinity and heterosexual power; and (3) assist in the performance of masculinity in the presence of women. I am not suggesting that the presentation of a masculine self and its attendant peer status serves as the *only* desired or stated purpose or outcome of the girl hunt, as this activity is also clearly motivated by physical and romantic pleasure seeking (Collins 2004). It is also not my intention to suggest that all young men follow the protocols of girl hunting as collective activity in their sexual pursuits. Rather, in this article I wish to illustrate how groups of young heterosexual men employ the power of collective rituals of homosociality to perform heterosexual competence and masculine identity in the public context of urban nightlife, and to show how these rituals reproduce structures of inequality *within* as well as *across* the socially constructed gender divide between women and men.

## METHODS AND DATA

I draw on firsthand narrative accounts provided by 243 heterosexual male college students attending the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League research university situated in Philadelphia. These data represent part of a larger study involving approximately 600 college students (both men and women). The study was conducted at Penn among all students enrolled in one of two semester terms of a sociology course on media and popular culture taught by me during the 2003–4 academic year.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were directed to explore Philadelphia's downtown nightlife by attending at least one nightlife entertainment venue (i.e., restaurant, café, dance club, sports bar, cocktail lounge) located in Philadelphia's Center City district for the duration of a few evening hours' time. They were encouraged to select familiar sites where they would feel both comfortable and safe and were permitted to choose whether to conduct their outing alone or with one or more friends, relatives, intimates, or acquaintances of either gender.

Upon the conclusion of their evening, students were instructed to document their experiences in detailed narrative accounts. Although some of the materials I assigned during the course address the elaborated performance of masculinity in public (i.e., Bissinger 1990; Geertz 1973; Grazian 2003; Grindstaff 2002), students were not necessarily expected to address these themes or issues in their accounts. After submitting their typed narrative accounts electronically to a team of research assistants (who in turn read them to ensure that each adhered to proper standards of protocol), the respondents' names were removed from their submissions to protect their anonymity. These accounts were then forwarded to me; I assigned them individual case numbers and systematically coded and analyzed them separately on the basis of gender.<sup>5</sup> An initial read-through of accounts submitted by my male respondents revealed recurring commonalities, including a pronounced goal of seeking out young women as potential sexual and romantic partners, and an ambitiously strategic orientation toward this end. Subsequent coding of these accounts highlighted the importance of collective behavior (including the ritualistic consumption of alcohol), a codependent reliance on one's peer group, and the deployment of team-oriented strategies deemed necessary for approaching women in public.<sup>6</sup>

The original sample of 243 heterosexual male students consists of 21.4 percent ( $n = 52$ ) freshman, 36.6 percent ( $n = 89$ ) sophomores, 21.8 percent ( $n = 53$ ) juniors, and 20.2 percent ( $n = 49$ ) seniors. Participants ranged from 18 to 24 years of age, with a mean age of 19.9 years. Reflecting the privileged social status of Ivy League university students, the racial and ethnic makeup of the sample is as follows: 78.2 percent ( $n = 190$ ) white, 11.5 percent ( $n = 28$ ) Asian, 4.5 percent ( $n = 11$ ) non-Hispanic black, 2.9 percent ( $n = 7$ ) Hispanic, and 2.9 percent ( $n = 7$ ) mixed race/other.<sup>7</sup> Recent available statistics (*U.S. News and World Report* 2005) estimate the proportion of minority students at the University of Pennsylvania at 17 percent Asian, 6 percent black, and 5 percent Hispanic. In terms of residence prior to college, nearly three-quarters (70 percent) of the sample lived in suburban areas, while about one-quarter hailed from urban

environments (26.3 percent) and the rest from rural areas (3.7 percent). Likewise, nearly three-quarters of the sample (70.4 percent) resided in the northeastern United States, with the rest closely divided among the Midwest (5.3 percent), South (9.1 percent), West (10.7 percent), and eight countries outside the United States (3.7 percent).<sup>8</sup>

### Studying College Men

Because young people are likely to self-consciously experiment with styles of public behavior (Arnett 1994, 2000), observing undergraduates can help researchers understand how young heterosexual men socially construct masculinity through gendered interaction rituals in the context of everyday life. But just as there is not one single mode of masculinity but many *masculinities* available to young men, respondents exhibited a variety of socially recognizable masculine roles in their accounts, including the doting boyfriend, dutiful son, responsible escort, and perfect gentleman. In the interests of exploring the girl hunt as *one among many types* of social orientation toward the city at night, the findings discussed here represent only the accounts of those heterosexual young men whose accounts revealed commonalities relevant to the girl hunt, as outlined above.

These accounts represent about one-fifth of those submitted by my 243 heterosexual male respondents. While this subgroup comprises a substantial portion of the sample, the findings it suggests by no means represents the behaviors of *all* my students, and this should not be surprising. As Connell (1995), Messner (2002), and others argue, the dominance of hegemonic masculinity is often sustained by the aggressive actions of a minority within a context of normative complicity by a more or less “silent majority” of men who nevertheless benefit from the subordination and sexual objectification of women. Insofar as the ritual of the girl hunt symbolizes a celebrated form of hegemonic masculinity, it is therefore imperative that we examine how it is practiced in the context of everyday life, even if its proponents and their activities represent only one of many possibilities within the constellation of masculine performances and sexual identities available to men. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:850) observe, hegemonic masculinities are “to a significant degree constituted in men’s interaction with women.” Accordingly, examining how girl hunting is accomplished can help clarify how group interactions link gender ideologies to everyday social behavior.

To ensure informants’ anonymity and confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms to all persons. However, I have identified all respondents by their reported age, school year, and racial and ethnic background.

### THE GIRL HUNT AND THE MYTH OF THE PICKUP

As I argue above, it is statistically uncommon for men to successfully attract and “pick up” female sexual partners in bars and nightclubs. However, as suggested by a wide selection of mass media—from erotic films to hardcore pornography—heterosexual

young men nevertheless sustain fantasies of successfully negotiating chance sexual encounters with anonymous strangers in urban public spaces (Bech 1998), especially dance clubs, music venues, singles bars, cocktail lounges, and other nightlife settings. According to Aaron, a twenty-one-year-old mixed-race junior:

I am currently in a very awkward, sticky, complicated and bizarre relationship with a young lady here at Penn, where things are pretty open right now, hopefully to be sorted out during the summer when we both have more time. So my mentality right now is to go to the club with my best bud and seek out the ladies for a night of great music, adventure and female company off of the grounds of campus.

Young men reproduce these normative expectations of masculine sexual prowess—what I call *the myth of the pickup*—collectively through homosocial group interaction. According to Brian, a nineteen-year-old Cuban sophomore:

Whether I would get any girl's phone number or not, the main purpose for going out was to try to get with hot girls. That was our goal every night we went out to frat parties on campus, and we all knew it, even though we seldom mention that aspect of going out. *It was implicitly known that tonight, and every night out, was a girl hunt.* Tonight, we were taking that goal to Philadelphia's nightlife. In the meanwhile, we would have fun drinking, dancing, and joking around. (emphasis added)

For Brian and his friends, the “girl hunt” articulates a shared orientation toward public interaction in which the group collectively negotiates the city at night. The heterosexual desire among men for a plurality of women (*hot girls*, as it were) operates at the individual and group level. As in game hunting, young men frequently evaluate their erotic prestige in terms of their raw number of sexual conquests, like so many notches on a belt. Whereas traditional norms of feminine desire privilege the search for a singular and specified romantic interest (Prince Charming, Mr. Right, or his less attractive cousin, Mr. Right Now), heterosexual male fantasies idealize the pleasures of an endless abundance and variety of anonymous yet willing female sex partners (Kimmel and Plante 2005).

Despite convincing evidence to the contrary (Laumann et al. 2004), these sexual fantasies seem deceptively realizable in the context of urban nightlife. To many urban denizens, the city and its never-ending flow of anonymous visitors suggests a sexualized marketplace governed by transactional relations and expectations of personal noncommitment (Bech 1998), particularly in downtown entertainment zones where nightclubs, bars, and cocktail lounges are concentrated. The density of urban nightlife districts and their tightly packed venues only intensifies the pervasive yet improbable male fantasy of successfully attracting an imaginary surplus of amorous single women.

Adolescent men strengthen their belief in this fantasy of the sexual availability of women in the city—the myth of the pickup—through collective reinforcement in their conversations in the hours leading up to the girl hunt. While hyping their sexual prowess to the group, male peers collectively legitimize the myth of the pickup

and increase its power as a model for normative masculine behavior. According to Dipak, an eighteen-year-old Indian freshman:

I finished up laboratory work at 5:00 pm and walked to my dormitory, eagerly waiting to “hit up a club” that night. . . . I went to eat with my three closest friends at [a campus dining hall]. We acted like high school freshmen about to go to our first mixer. We kept hyping up the night and saying we were going to meet and dance with many girls. Two of my friends even bet with each other over who can procure the most phone numbers from girls that night. Essentially, the main topic of discussion during dinner was the night yet to come.

Competitive sex talk is common in male homosocial environments (Bird 1996) and often acts as a catalyst for sexual pursuit among groups of adolescent and young adult males. For example, in his ethnographic work on Philadelphia’s black inner-city neighborhoods, Anderson (1999) documents how sex codes among youth evolve in a context of peer pressure in which young black males “run their game” by women as a means of pursuing in-group status. Moreover, this type of one-upmanship heightens existing heterosexual fantasies and the myth of the pickup while creating a largely unrealistic set of sexual and gender expectations for young men seeking in-group status among their peers. In doing so, competitive sexual boasting may have the effect of momentarily energizing group participants. However, in the long run it is eventually likely to deflate the confidence of those who inevitably continue to fall short of such exaggerated expectations and who consequently experience the shame of a spoiled masculine identity (Goffman 1963).

### PREPARING FOR THE GIRL HUNT THROUGH COLLECTIVE RITUAL

Armed with their inflated expectations of the nightlife of the city and its opportunities for sexual conquest, young men at Penn prepare for the girl hunt by crafting a specifically gendered and class-conscious nocturnal self (Grazian 2003)—a presentation of masculinity that relies on prevailing fashion cues and upper-class taste emulation. According to Edward, a twenty-year-old white sophomore, these decisions are made strategically:

I hadn’t hooked up with a girl in a couple weeks and I needed to break my slump (the next girl you hook up with is commonly referred to as a “slump-bust” in my social circle). So I was willing to dress in whatever manner would facilitate in hooking up.

Among young college men, especially those living in communal residential settings (i.e., campus dormitories and fraternities), these preparations for public interaction serve as *collective rituals of confidence building*—shared activities that generate group solidarity and cohesion while elevating the personal resolve and self-assuredness of individual participants mobilizing for the girl hunt. Frank, a nineteen-year-old white sophomore, describes the first of these rituals:

As I began observing both myself and my friends tonight, I noticed that there is a distinct pre-going-out ritual that takes place. I began the night by blasting my collection of rap music as loud as possible, as I tried to overcome the similar sounds resonating from my roommate's room. Martin seemed to play his music in order to build his confidence. It appears that the entire ritual is simply there to build up one's confidence, to make one more adept at picking up the opposite sex.

Frank explains this preparatory ritual in terms of its collective nature, as friends recount tall tales that celebrate character traits commonly associated with traditional conceptions of masculinity, such as boldness and aggression. Against a soundtrack of rap music—a genre known for its misogynistic lyrics and male-specific themes, including heterosexual boasting, emotional detachment, and masculine superiority (McLeod 1999)—these shared ritual moments of homosociality are a means of generating group resolve and bolstering the self-confidence of each participant. Again, according to Frank:

Everyone erupted into stories explaining their “high-roller status.” Martin recounted how he spent nine hundred dollars in Miami one weekend, while Lance brought up his cousins who spent twenty-five hundred dollars with ease one night at a Las Vegas bachelor party. Again, all of these stories acted as a confidence booster for the night ahead.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this constant competitive jockeying and one-upmanship so common in male-dominated settings (Martin 2001) often extends to the sexual objectification of women. While getting dressed among friends in preparation for a trip to a local strip club, Gregory, a twenty-year-old white sophomore, reports on the banter: “We should all dress rich and stuff, so we can get us some hookers!” Like aggressive locker-room boasting, young male peers bond over competitive sex talk by laughing about real and make-believe sexual exploits and misadventures (Bird 1996). This joking strengthens male group intimacy and collective heterosexual identity and normalizes gender differences by reinforcing dominant myths about the social roles of men and women (Lyman 1987).

After engaging in private talk among roommates and close friends, young men (as well as women) commonly participate in a more public collective ritual known among American college students as “pregaming.” As Harry, an eighteen-year-old white freshman, explains,

Pregaming consists of drinking with your “boys” so that you don't have to purchase as many drinks while you are out to feel the desired buzz. On top of being cost efficient, the actual event of pregaming can get any group ready and excited to go out.

The ritualistic use of alcohol is normative on college campuses, particularly for men (Martin and Hummer 1989), and students largely describe pregaming as an economical and efficient way to get drunk before going out into the city. This is especially the case for underage students who may be denied access to downtown nightspots. However, it also seems clear that pregaming is a bonding ritual that fosters social cohesion and builds confidence among young men in anticipation of the

challenges that accompany the girl hunt. According to Joey, an eighteen-year-old white freshman:

My thoughts turn to this girl, Jessica. . . . I was thinking about whether or not we might hook up tonight. . . . As I turn to face the door to 301, I feel the handle, and it is shaking from the music and dancing going on in the room. I open the door and see all my best friends just dancing together. . . . I quickly rush into the center of the circle and start doing my “J-walk,” which I have perfected over the years. My friends love it and begin to chant, “Go Joey—it’s your birthday.” I’m feeling connected with my friends and just know that we’re about to have a great night. . . . Girls keep coming in and out of the door, but no one really pays close attention to them. Just as the “pregame” was getting to its ultimate height, each boy had his arms around each other jumping in unison, to a great hip-hop song by Biggie Smalls. One of the girls went over to the stereo and turned the power off. We yelled at her to turn it back on, but the mood was already lost and we decided it was time to head out.

In this example, Joey’s confidence is boosted by the camaraderie he experiences in a male-bonding ritual in which women—supposedly the agreed-upon *raison d’être* for the evening—are ignored or, when they make their presence known, scolded. As these young men dance arm-in-arm with one another, they generate the collective effervescence and sense of social connectedness necessary to plunge into the nightlife of the city. As such, pregame fulfills the same function as the last-minute huddle (with all hands in the middle) does for an athletic team (Messner 2002).<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps ironic that Joey’s ritual of “having fun with my boys” prepares him for the girl hunt (or more specifically in his case, an opportunity to “hook up” with Jessica) even as it requires those boys to exclude their female classmates. At the same time, this men-only dance serves the same function as the girl hunt: it allows its participants to expressively perform hegemonic masculinity through an aggressive display of collective identification. In this sense the pregame resembles other campus rituals of male socialization and boundary maintenance, particularly those associated with fraternity life and violence against women (Boswell and Spade 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 1990).

During similar collective rituals leading up to the girl hunt, young men boost each other’s confidence in their abilities of sexual persuasion by watching films about male heterosexual exploits in urban nightlife, such as Doug Liman’s *Swingers* (1996), which chronicles the storied escapades of two best friends, Mike and Trent. According to Kevin, an eighteen-year-old white freshman:

I knew that [my friend] Darryl needed to calm down if he wanted any chance of a second date. At about 8:15 pm, I sat him down and showed him (in my opinion, the movie that every man should see at least once—I’ve seen it six times)—*Swingers*. . . . Darryl immediately related to Mike’s character, the self-conscious but funny gentleman who is still on the rebound from a long-term relationship. At the same time, he took Trent’s words for scripture (as I planned): “There’s nothing wrong with showing the beautiful babies that you’re money and that you want to party.” His mind was clearly eased at the thought of his being considered “money.” Instead of being too concerned with not screwing up and seeming “weird or desperate,” Darryl now felt like he was in control. The three of us each went to our own rooms to get ready.

This collective attention to popular cultural texts helps peer groups generate common cultural references, private jokes, and speech norms as well as build in-group cohesion (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Fine 1977; Swidler 2001).<sup>10</sup> In this case, globally distributed mass-media texts (i.e., films, music recordings and videos, television programs, computer games, comic books) supply audiences with a familiar set of shared discursive strategies and symbolic resources that influence daily social behavior pertaining to gender and sexual expression at a more localized level (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Swidler 2001). Similar to the immersion in rap music, the incorporation of collective film viewing into the pregame ritual promotes male group solidarity. But in addition to generating a sense of collective energy, it provides a set of cultural frames useful for making sense of the girl hunt, just as Sanday (1990:129) documents how fraternity brothers habitually watch pornographic films together in their preparations for late-night parties. Of course, *Swingers* represents much tamer fare: yet like pornography, the film encourages the development of a hypermasculine identity while supplying young men with scripts for upcoming social interactions with women, reducing women to infantile objects of sexual desire (“beautiful babies”), generating collective excitement for the girl hunt, and giving young men the self-confidence necessary for competing in such a contest.<sup>11</sup>

### GIRL HUNTING AND THE COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE OF MASCULINITY

Finally, once the locus of action moves to a more public venue such as a bar or nightclub, the much-anticipated “girl hunt” itself proceeds as a strategic display of masculinity best performed with a suitable game partner. According to Christopher, a twenty-two-year-old white senior, he and his cousin Darren “go out together a lot. We enjoy each other’s company and we seem to work well together when trying to meet women.” Reporting on his evening at a local dance club, Lawrence, a twenty-one-year-old white junior, illustrates how the girl hunt itself operates as collective activity:

We walk around the bar area as we finish [our drinks]. After we are done, we walk down to the regular part of the club. We make the rounds around the dance floor checking out the girls. . . . We walk up to the glassed dance room and go in, but leave shortly because it is really hot and there weren’t many prospects.

Lawrence and his friends display their elaborated performance of masculinity by making their rounds together as a pack in search of a suitable feminine target. Perhaps it is not surprising that the collective nature of their pursuit should also continue *after* such a prize has been located:

This is where the night gets really interesting. We walk back down to the main dance floor and stand on the outside looking at what’s going on and I see a really good-looking girl behind us standing on the other side of the wall with three friends. After pointing her out to my friends, I decide that I’m going to make the big move and talk to her. So I turn around and ask her to dance. She accepts and walks over. My friends are loving this, so they go off to the side and watch. . . .

After dancing for a little while she brings me over to her friends and introduces me. They tell me that they are all freshman at [a local college], and we go through the whole small talk thing again. I bring her over to my two boys who are still getting a kick out of the whole situation. . . . My boys tell me about some of the girls they have seen and talked to, and they inform me that they recognized some girls from Penn walking around the club.

Why do Lawrence and his dance partner both introduce each other to their friends? Lawrence seems to gain almost as much pleasure from his *friends'* excitement as from his own exploits, just as they are "loving" the vicarious thrill of watching their comrade succeed in commanding the young woman's attention, as if their own masculinity is validated by his success.

In this instance, arousal is not merely individual but represents a collectively shared experience as well (Thorne and Luria 1986:181). For these young men the performance of masculinity does not necessarily require successfully meeting a potential sex partner as long as one enthusiastically participates in the ritual *motions* of the girl hunt in the company of men. When Lawrence brings over his new female friend, he does so to celebrate his victory with his buddies, and in return, they appear gratified by their *own* small victory by association. (And while Lawrence celebrates with them, perhaps he alleviates some of the pressure of actually conversing with her.)

Along these lines, the collective quality of the girl hunt makes each male participant accountable to the group as well as to himself. In this manner, young single men will goad each other on to persist in the hunt, deriding those who turn away potential pickups. Michael, a nineteen-year-old white junior, reports on his evening out at McFadden's, an Irish-themed sports bar and nightclub:

My friend Buddy beckoned to me from the dance floor. Not knowing what he wanted, I snaked my way through the crowd to join him. As I approached him, a girl several years my senior smiled at me. She looked like she wanted to start a conversation, but waited for me to initiate. Not particularly interested in her and with my friend waiting, I awkwardly moved past with what I am sure was a weird smile on my face. *Buddy had seen this entire exchange and said he was disappointed in me for not trying to hit on her.* (emphasis added)

Through their homosocial encounters, young men make one another accountable for their interactions with women, and their vigilance increases the chances that over time these men will eventually comply with the set of practices that sustain the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, *even in instances when such men disagree with those expectations* (Connell 1995; Demetriou 2001).

As Christopher remarked above on his relationship with his cousin, the collective aspects of the girl hunt also highlight the efficacy of conspiring with peers to meet women: "We go out together a lot. We enjoy each other's company and we seem to work well together when trying to meet women." In the language of the confidence game, men eagerly serve as each other's shills (Goffman 1959; Grazian 2004;

Maurer 1940) and sometimes get roped into the role unwittingly with varying degrees of success. Michael continues in his report by describing Buddy's exploits:

Buddy, a twenty-five-year-old University of Pennsylvania alumnus, is the kind of guy who is not afraid to flirt with as many girls as possible. Tonight he was putting his charm to good use, dancing with any girl who would give him the time of day. I realized he had called me over for the purpose of finding a girl for me. Turning to the girl nearest him on dance floor he said to her, "This is my friend Michael. He's a little shy." Waiting for him to introduce me to her, I realized after a moment that he didn't know these girls either. His introduction was actually one of the cheesiest pickup lines I had ever heard used that wasn't the punch line to a joke. I introduced myself to the girl whose name I found out was Rebecca, a twenty-four-year-old professional from South Philly. I talked to her for a few minutes and admitted my true age to her; surprisingly, she didn't blow me off too quickly, but her interest was definitely in Buddy rather than me at that point. Deciding to leave the two of them to get better acquainted, I excused myself to the bar to get a second beer.

In this instance, Michael politely disengages from the interaction without challenging the ideological basis of the girl hunt itself. Rather, his passive performance amounts to what Connell (1995) refers to as "complicit masculinity," insofar as Michael is able to support his friend's interaction and thus benefit from the "patriarchal dividend" (acceptance within a male homosocial group and the status associated with such membership) gained from the promotion of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity as represented by the girl hunt (also see Demetriou 2001).

Among young people, the role of the passive accomplice is commonly referred to in contemporary parlance as a *wingman*. Popularized by the 1986 film *Top Gun*, the term literally refers to the backup fighter pilots who protect the head of a military flying formation by positioning themselves outside and behind (or on the wing of) the lead aircraft to engage enemy fire when necessary. In recent years, the term has been appropriated to refer to an accomplice who assists a designated leading man in meeting eligible single women, often at costs to his own ability to do the same. In male-oriented popular culture, the wingman has become institutionalized in men's magazines ("*Maxim's Wingman Training Manual*" 2003), literature documenting young men's real-and-imagined sex lives (i.e., Max 2006; Strauss 2005), and how-to manuals with such dubiously promising titles as *The Guide to Picking Up Girls*. This last text provides a vulgar description of the colloquialism:

Everyone knows what a wingman must do. Your wingman must take the extra girl for you if there are two girls and you want to talk to one of them. The wingman must lay rap on your girl's friend as long as you rap with your girl. It does not matter that the girl's friend may be very ugly. The wingman must do his job at any cost. He must be able to pull his own weight and back you up. Otherwise, your girl may get pulled away by her friend whom your wingman has failed to entertain. (Fischbarg 2002:36)

In public rituals of courtship, the wingman serves multiple purposes: he provides validation of a leading man's trustworthiness, eases the interaction between a single male friend and a larger group of women, serves as a source of distraction for the friend or friends of a more desirable target of affection, can be called on to confirm the wild (and frequently misleading) claims of his partner, and, perhaps most important, helps motivate his friends by building up their confidence. Indeed, men describe the role of the wingman in terms of loyalty, personal responsibility, and dependability, traits commonly associated with masculinity (Martin and Hummer 1989; Mishkind et al. 1986). According to Nicholas, an eighteen-year-old white freshman:

As we were beginning to mobilize ourselves and move towards the dance floor, James noticed Rachel, a girl he knew from Penn who he often told me about as a potential girlfriend. Considering James was seemingly into this girl, Dan and I decided to be good wingmen and entertain Rachel's friend, Sarah.

Hegemonic masculinity is not only expressed by competitiveness but camaraderie as well, and many young men will take their role as a wingman quite seriously and at a personal cost to their relationships with female friends. According to Peter, a twenty-year-old white sophomore:

"It sounds like a fun evening," I said to Kyle, "but I promised Elizabeth I would go to her date party." I don't like to break commitments. On the other hand, I didn't want to leave Kyle to fend for himself at this club. . . . Kyle is the type of person who likes to pick girls up at clubs. If I were to come see him, I would want to meet other people as well. Having Elizabeth around would not only prevent me from meeting (or even just talking to) other girls, but it would also force Kyle into a situation of having no "wing man."

In the end, Peter takes Elizabeth to a nightclub where, although he *himself* will not be able to meet available women, he will at least be able to assist Kyle in meeting them:

Behind Kyle, a very attractive girl smiles at me. Yes! Oh, wait. Damn it, Elizabeth's here. . . . "Hey, Kyle," I whisper to him. "That girl behind you just smiled at you. Go talk to her." Perhaps Kyle will have some luck with her. He turns around, takes her by the hand, and begins dancing with her. She looks over at me and smiles again, and I smile back. I don't think Elizabeth noticed. I would have rather been in Kyle's position, but I was happy for him, and I was dancing with Elizabeth, so I was satisfied for the moment.

By the end of the night, as he and Kyle chat in a taxi on the way back to campus, Peter learns that he was instrumental in securing his friend's success in an additional way:

"So what ever happened with you and that girl?" I ask. "I hooked up with her. Apparently she's a senior." I ask if she knew he was a freshman. "Oh, yeah. She asked how old you were, though. I said you were a junior. I had to make one of us look older."

Peter's willingness to serve as a wingman demonstrates his complicity in sustaining the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which therefore allows him to benefit from the

resulting “patriarchal dividends”—acceptance as a member of his male homosocial friendship network and its attendant prestige—even when he himself does not personally seek out the sexual rewards of the girl hunt.

In addition, the peer group provides a readily available audience that can provide emotional comfort to all group members, as well as bear witness to any individual successes that might occur. As demonstrated by the preceding examples, young men deeply value the erotic prestige they receive from their conspiratorial peers upon succeeding in the girl hunt. According to Zach, a twenty-year-old white sophomore:

About ten minutes later, probably around 2:15 am, we split up into cabs again, with the guys in one and the girls in another. . . . This time in the cab, all the guys want to talk about is me hooking up on the dance floor. It turns out that they saw the whole thing. I am not embarrassed; in fact I am proud of myself.

As an audience, the group can collectively validate the experience of any of its members and can also internalize an individual’s success as a shared victory. Since, in a certain sense, a successful sexual interaction must be recognized by one’s peers to gain status as an in-group “social fact,” the group can transform a private moment into a celebrated public event—thereby making it “count” for the male participant and his cohorts.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, as argued above and elsewhere (Laumann et al. 1994) and demonstrated by the sample analyzed here, turning a heterosexual public encounter with a stranger into an immediately consummated sexual episode is a statistical rarity, especially when compared with the overwhelming degree of time, money, effort, and emotion that young men invest in such an enterprise. But if we focus on the *primary* goal of the girl hunt—the performance of normative masculinity—then it becomes clear that the collectivity of the endeavor allows peer group members to successfully enact traditional gender roles even when they ultimately fail at the sexual pursuit itself. Again, the performance of masculinity does not necessarily require *success* at picking up women, just so long as one participates in the endeavor enthusiastically in the company of men.

For instance, Sam, a twenty-two-year-old black senior, observes how one such peer group takes pleasure in one of their member’s public rejection at the hands of an unimpressed woman:

By this time it was around 1:30 am, and the party was almost over. . . . I saw a lot of the guys had their cell phones out while they were talking to the women. I figured the guys were trying to get phone numbers from the girls. So as I walked past one of the guys, I heard him ask a girl for her number. But she just laughed and walked away. That was real funny especially since his friends saw what happened and proceeded to laugh as well.

As young men discover, contrary to popular myths about femininity, it is increasingly uncommon for women to act passively during sexually charged confrontations, even those that may be physically precarious. In such situations, women often resist and challenge the advances of strange men in public through polite refusal or

the expression of humor, moral outrage, outright rejection, or physical retaliation (Berk 1977; Hollander 2002; Snow et al. 1991).

Nevertheless, one participant's botched attempt at an ill-conceived pickup can solidify the male group's bonds as much as a successful one. According to Brian, the aforementioned nineteen-year-old Cuban sophomore:

We had been in the club for a little more than half an hour, when the four of us were standing at the perimeter of the main crowd in the dancing room. It was then when Marvin finished his second Corona and by his body gestures, he let it be known that he was drunk enough and was pumped up to start dancing. He started dancing behind a girl who was dancing in a circle with a few other girls. Then the girl turned around and said "Excuse me!" Henry and I saw what happened. We laughed so hard and made so much fun of him for the rest of the night. I do not think any of us has ever been turned away so directly and harshly as that time.

In this instance, Marvin's abruptly concluded encounter with an unwilling female participant turns into a humorous episode for the rest of his peer group, leaving his performance of masculinity bruised yet intact. Indeed, in his gracelessness Marvin displays an enthusiastic male heterosexuality as emphasized by his drunken attempts to court an unsuspecting target before a complicit audience of his male peers. And as witnesses to his awkward sexual advance, Brian and Henry take pleasure in the incident, as it not only raises *their* relative standing within the group in comparison with Marvin but can also serve as a narrative focus for future "signifying" episodes (or ceremonial exchanges of insults) and other rituals of solidarity characteristic of joking relationships among male adolescents (Lyman 1987:155). Meanwhile, these young men can bask in their collective failure to attract a woman without ever actually challenging the basis of the girl hunt itself: the performance of adolescent masculinity.

In the end, young men may enjoy this performance of masculinity—the hunt itself—even more than the potential romantic or sexual rewards they hope to gain by its successful execution. In his reflections on a missed opportunity to procure the phone number of a law student, Christopher, the aforementioned twenty-two-year-old senior, admits as much: "There's something about the chase that I really like. Maybe I subconsciously neglected to get her number. I am tempted to think that I like the idea of being on the look out for her better than the idea of calling her to go out for coffee." While Christopher's excuse may certainly function as a compensatory face-saving strategy employed in the aftermath of another lonely night (Berk 1977), it might also indicate a possible acceptance of the limits of the girl hunt despite its potential opportunities for male bonding and the public display of adolescent masculinity.

## DISCUSSION

A consistent thread in symbolic interactionism concerns how structures of inequality are constituted and reproduced through recurrent patterns of ordinary social interaction. According to Collins (1981:987–88), the very foundations of the macrosocial world and its institutions can be reduced to the agglomeration of everyday face-to-face

encounters conducted among humans over time. As he argues, "Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a 'state,' an 'economy,' a 'culture,' a 'social class.' There are only collections of individual people acting in particular kinds of microsituations." Schwalbe et al. (2000) emphasize how the repetition of "generic processes" such as oppressive othering, identity work, boundary maintenance, and emotion management all contribute to the reproduction of inequality through their frequent deployment in varied social contexts.

Taken in this way, the "girl hunt" is shorthand for a composite of multiple types of collectively initiated interaction rituals capable of reproducing social inequality on the basis of gender. Group-based efforts at "mobilizing masculinity" (Martin 2001) during the pregame, and "girl watching" (Quinn 2002) in the context of nightclub interaction, operate as processes that fabricate gender difference and male superiority while transforming women into targets of the collective male gaze and objects of sexual desire. By engaging in the "mutually supportive facework" provided by wingmen, would-be suitors reproduce myths of male dominance by cooperatively creating nocturnal selves that "foster impressions of competence and trustworthiness" through strategies of impression management, deception, and guile (Schwalbe et al. 2000:424). Of course, these generic processes occur not merely in a vacuum but within a social setting in which the regularity of sexist banter and asymmetric courtship rituals encourage the replication of such behaviors, along with the continually renewed ideologies of feminine subordination they promote.

But at the same time, it is equally noteworthy that the girl hunt promotes social inequality and subordinate behavior *among men*. Among participants in the girl hunt, the most dominant men enjoy a disproportionate degree of social prestige relative to their competitors, as is the case in other sexual contests (Wright 1995). Competitive sex talk among adolescent peers in the hours leading up to the girl hunt create an unrealistic set of sexual expectations for impressionable young men, particularly those who already suffer from anxiety over their body image and sexual development (Mishkind et al. 1986). Meanwhile, the repetition of collective rituals of masculine identification successfully conditions young men to suppress empathy for females targeted by the girl hunt, just as the training regimes of military and police units serve to diminish feelings of inhibition and fear among cadets (Schwalbe et al. 2000:437). As illustrated in the last section, male peers often rely on the cultural scripts associated with girl hunting to hassle one another to perform masculinity by behaving in ways that seem to counter their actual sexual desires. In the end, the interaction rituals associated with the girl hunt reproduce structures of inequality *within* as well as *across* the socially constructed gender divide between women and men.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I used the ritual of girl hunting to analyze how young men employ the power of collective rituals of homosociality to perform heterosexual competence and masculine identity in public. Drawing on self-reported narrative accounts,

I documented collective strategies young men employ when girl hunting, suggesting that these strategies reinforce dominant myths about masculine behavior, boost confidence in one's performance of masculinity and heterosexual power, and assist in the performance of masculinity in the presence of women. While the presentation of a heteronormative masculine self and its attendant peer status does not necessarily serve as the only desired or stated purpose of the girl hunt, my goal in this article was to isolate and therefore emphasize the *ritualistic*, *performative*, and *homosocial* features of girl hunting as a *collective* strategy of impression management and mobilizing masculinity.

In emphasizing the collective aspects of girl hunting and the performance of masculinity in urban nightlife, this study follows a consistent thread within sociology that recognizes how rituals of dating and mating occur within specific interpersonal networks in which shared and collective meanings of sexuality are institutionally inscribed in social space (Anderson 1999; Laumann et al. 2004; Liebow 1967; Swidler 2001; Waller 1937). More specifically, this exploration of how men collectively perform gender and heterosexuality builds on more recent symbolic interactionist approaches to homosocial group dynamics, including the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity through homosocial behavior (Bird 1996), the mobilization of masculinities in public (Martin 2001), and the practice of "girl watching" as a collective form of sexual harassment (Quinn 2002). Likewise, this analysis of girl hunting illustrates the efficacy of homosocial rituals of solidarity not only as tools for mobilizing masculinities among men in the moment but as engines of confidence building for subsequent public encounters.

While girl hunting employs collective group dynamics found in a variety of settings, the social context in which college students participate clearly shapes the collective character of their everyday behaviors, including the performance of adolescent masculinity and the pursuit of casual sex. While by no means "total institutions" (Becker 2003; Goffman 1961), modern American colleges and universities encourage collective behavior through the segregation of persons on the basis of age (as well as other social attributes such as race and class), officially recognized student groups (including fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams), shared residential housing, and the spatial concentration of campus life. As young adults undergoing the slow transition from adolescence to adulthood, college men may be more likely than their elder counterparts to desire the protection of their peers during risky encounters with strangers in public. Meanwhile, as men grow older and gain additional markers of status (i.e., occupational prestige), they may no longer require the pregaming rituals of confidence building once considered necessary preparation for the girl hunt. At the very least, they may replace collegiate forms of "pregaming" with more adult-oriented rituals, such as happy hour cocktails shared with colleagues after work.

The nightlife setting itself also appears to invite a more collective orientation to masculine performance and sexual pursuit than other contexts. Unlike professional settings where formal guidelines and official workplace norms (at least theoretically)

censure sexually suggestive talk and behavior (Dellinger and Williams 2002; Quinn 2002), nightlife settings encourage aggressive sexual interaction among participants. As a result, such an environment may prove too intimidating for individuals unprotected by a surrounding peer group. Moreover, nightclubs and singles bars feature open floor plans where populous clusters of anonymous strangers can congregate and mingle, whereas coffeehouses, bookstores, sidewalks, and other public areas conducive to public interaction are less accommodating of large groups of people. In such settings, perhaps we would expect to see men participating in the girl hunt in smaller formations of two and three (the exception being the male “girl-watchers” who line downtown sidewalks during the lunch hour; see Whyte 1988). Future research on girl hunting in alternative public contexts (and among a wider variety of populations) will undoubtedly yield interesting findings about the collective nature of masculine performance and heterosexual pursuit.

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## NOTES

1. Other such signifiers include physical dominance and assertiveness relative to other men, skill at competitive bar games, and a high tolerance for alcohol.
2. The gender discrepancy here may reflect reporting biases, with men overreporting and women underreporting their sexual behavior (Laumann et al. 1994:239n12). For a critique of the National Health and Social Life Survey and the reliability of sex research more generally, see Lewontin 1995.
3. According to the Chicago Health and Social Life Survey, the exception to this statistic is the Mexican community area called “Westside,” in which 23 percent of women (but only 19 percent of men) reported having met their most recent partner at a bar, dance club, or nightclub (Mahay and Laumann 2004:81).
4. For inclusion in the sample generated for this article, male students either voluntarily self-identified as heterosexual or else were coded as such from their written narrative accounts (i.e., referenced a female sex partner or generalized heterosexual desire). While it is certainly possible that those coded as heterosexual may *also* engage in homosexual or bisexual practices, this did not preclude them from inclusion in the sample, given the nature of the research question. (In my original pool of 267 eligible male subjects, 4 self-identified as gay and 34 opted not to disclose their sexual orientation; of the latter, 14 were eventually coded as heterosexual, while 20 remained nondescript enough to be removed from the sample.) The lack of data on the experiences of homosexual students is a clear limitation of this study; on the varied performances of gay men in the context of urban nightlife, see Brekhus 2003, Chauncey 1994, and Rupp and Taylor 2003.

5. All names were removed to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. However, students were asked to supply basic demographic information (including gender, age, year of school, residence, racial and ethnic origin, and sexual orientation [optional]) to be used as a reference during coding and analysis, which was conducted with the help of NVivo, a qualitative data software package.
6. Of course, since these reports account for only one evening's worth of behavior and experience, I cannot validate whether they accurately characterize the lifestyles of my individual respondents, although peer-led focus groups later conducted among a smaller sample of thirty male respondents uncovered similar findings.
7. Nearly 40 percent of the Asian students in the sample are of Indian descent. While my data analysis did uncover very small differences in consumption patterns among my sample on the basis of race and ethnicity, I could not detect notable differences relevant to the arguments presented in this article. Nevertheless, for the edification of the reader I identify the ethnoraacial background of all participants cited in the rest of the article.
8. Students residing in Philadelphia prior to attending the University of Pennsylvania comprise 8.2 percent of the entire sample, while 22.2 percent hail from within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Of those students from outside the Northeast, a disproportionate number resided in the populous states of California and Florida prior to college. The numbers are rounded off.
9. In this context, the male ritual of jumping in unison to loud music bears a close resemblance to the "circle dance" initiated by fraternity brothers immediately prior to an alleged incident of gang rape, as described in Sanday 1990.
10. Perhaps for this reason, Kevin's narrative account consistently draws on the slang employed by the film's lead characters: "Darryl, our newly decreed 'money' friend, shifts around, playing it cool, scanning the room for his tie." "Darryl was definitely in 'money' mode, because she sat close to him (after only a little to drink—so she must have seen something in him)."
11. In the last several years, my classroom surveys of undergraduate students and their favorite motion pictures reveal that male respondents consistently cite films that draw on similar themes to those in *Swingers*, including the party-hearty campus hijinks of college life (*National Lampoon's Animal House*, *Old School*); male vanity and the meaning of manhood (*American Psycho*, *Fight Club*); the camaraderie of violent men in secret societies and criminal gangs (*The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *Scarface*, *The Usual Suspects*); and the relentless pursuit of women (*There's Something About Mary*).
12. There are additional benefits to working as a collective as well. If the success of any single member can confer status on all other members, then traveling in a large group increases the odds that at least *someone* in the group will have a successful romantic encounter, provided the group does not *impede* the success of any single member by introducing competition to the setting or prove distracting to the proceedings.

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