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Beyond bad behaving brothers: Productive performances of masculinities among college fraternity men

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Beyond bad behaving brothers: productive performances of masculinities among college fraternity men

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Research on fraternity men focuses almost exclusively on problematic behaviors such as homophobia and sexism, alcohol abuse, violence against women, sexual promiscuity, and the overrepresentation of members among campus judicial offenders. Consequently, little is known about those who perform masculinities in healthy and productive ways. Presented in this article are findings from a qualitative study of productive masculinities and behaviors among 50 undergraduate fraternity men from 44 chapters across the US and Canada. Findings offer insights into participants' steadfast commitments to the fraternity's espoused values; their acceptance and appreciation of members from a range of diverse backgrounds; strategies they employed to address bad behaviors (including sexism, racism, and homophobia) among chapter brothers; and the conditions that enabled them to behave in ways that contradict stereotypes concerning men in collegiate fraternities.

Keywords: college men; gender; masculinity; fraternity

"They are drunken, promiscuous, academically disengaged lovers of pornography, sports, and video games who rape women, physically assault each other, vandalize buildings on campus, and dangerously risk their lives pledging sexist, racially exclusive, homophobic fraternities" (Harper & Harris, 2010, p. 10). This view of male undergraduates is reflective of what is generally reported about them in the higher education and social science literature. While it is true that a fraction of young men engage in some of the most alarming acts imaginable, not all are as destructive as news stories and social science research suggest. Higher education and student affairs scholars (e.g. Davis & Laker, 2004; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harper, Harris, & Mmeje, 2005; Harris, 2008, 2010; Harris & Edwards, 2010; Harris & Harper, 2008) have recently argued that an increase in gender-specific services and educational interventions crafted specially for college men will lead to decreases in their self-mistreatment and a range of destructive acts associated with misguided masculinities.

With the exception of cheating and academic dishonesty, Dannells (1997) found that the majority of college students who are sanctioned in campus judicial processes for property destruction, vandalism, public drunkenness, and other violations are

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men. Hence, Kimmel (2008), as well as Harper and Harris (2010), argue that at times college men behave stupidly and without good judgment. But what about those who are actively engaged on campus, make good grades, achieve healthy masculine identities, act responsibly and with honor, and respect women and themselves? Who are they and what can they teach us? Unfortunately, little is known about undergraduate men who act in these ways and embody such positive attributes. Some researchers (e.g. Harper, 2008; Harper, Byars, & Jelke, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2006; Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002; Kimbrough, 1995, 2003; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Pike, 2000; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995) have documented a range of educational advantages and positive outcomes associated with membership in a collegiate Greek-letter organization – higher levels of leadership and engagement in educationally purposeful experiences, racial identity development gains, stronger sense of belonging, higher grade point averages, and select cognitive development gains, to name a few. There have been few examinations of behaviors and navigational strategies that lead to the production of these outcomes among individual members.

In his 2008 book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, sociologist and leading men's studies scholar Michael Kimmel documents powerful insights gained through interviews with over 400 young men (many of whom were college students or recent graduates). The book offers rich details about who these men are, how they struggle to negotiate manhood with themselves and their peers, and why so many seem to wander aimlessly through their teenage years and into adulthood. Unfortunately, no study has been published in the education literature that explores how some men productively navigate *Guyland* or unmasks the sociocultural undercurrents of good behaviors. Hence, this study explores the experiences of undergraduate fraternity members who challenge stereotypically masculine norms through their commitment to academic excellence, involvement in campus leadership and service, responsible alcohol consumption, engagement in respectful anti-sexist friendships with women, and the consistent denouncing of homophobia and racism within their male peer groups.

Masculinities and college fraternities

The body of scholarship that considers gender-related issues in college fraternities focuses mostly on homophobia (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005; DeSantis & Coleman, 2008; Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Rhoads, 1995; Trump & Wallace, 2006), binge drinking and alcohol abuse (Borsari & Carey, 1999; Cashin, Presley, & Meilman, 1998; Caudill et al., 2006; Kuh & Arnold, 1993; Park, Sher, Wood, & Krull, 2009), hazing (Jones, 2004; Kimbrough, 1997; Nuwer, 1999; Sutton, Letzring, Terrell, & Poats, 2000), and sexual violence against women (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Boeringer, 1996; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Menning, 2009; Sanday, 2007). This research is disproportionately focused on predominantly white fraternity chapters at residential colleges and universities.

Rhoads's ethnographic study of a fraternity at a large research university revealed that male fraternity cultures produced and reinforced negative beliefs, attitudes, and behavior towards women and gay male students. Specifically, he observed that women were dehumanized and viewed primarily as objects for fulfilling sexual desires and targets for sexual manipulation. "Women were frequently characterized in ways that depicted them as something less than human beings – as objects worthy

of disdain. They were discussed as 'tools' or 'whores' and were frequently seen as targets for sexual manipulation" (p. 314). Similar to the views the members held of women, Rhoads found that gay men too were seen as inferior. These homophobic views stemmed primarily from the hyper-masculine culture that characterized the fraternity's environment. Thus, the members oppressed gay men as a way to defend their own masculinities, Rhoads argued.

Researchers (e.g. Chang & DeAngelo, 2002; De Los Reyes & Rich, 2003; Edwards, 2009; Schmitz & Forbes, 1994) have found evidence of racial discrimination in member recruitment practices with predominantly white fraternities and sororities on college campuses – these trends are longstanding and have been documented in social science and education literature since the 1950s (Gist, 1955; Horowitz, 1952; Lee, 1955). The almost exclusively white composition of these groups oftentimes permits the use of racial epithets (e.g. nigger), racist jokes, and the blatant exclusion of people of color from fraternity parties and other social events.

Inquiries that help expand insights into gender, masculinity, and culture in college fraternities beyond the aforementioned issues are needed. One notable exception to the monolithic published accounts of fraternity men is Anderson's (2008) two-year ethnographic study. Anderson did participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of a fraternity that espoused an ethic that embraced racial diversity, disdained homophobia, and required its members to treat women with respect. Members were observed consistently enacting these virtues. For example, Anderson noted that during the two years in which he observed the organization, "no use of the word *fag* or the phrase *that's so gay* was detected among members," nor did he observe them engaging in racist or misogynistic discourse (p. 610).

Anderson (2008) also found that members fostered a culture in which they were able to sustain valued, non-sexual relationships with women, and a space in which there was authentic "emotional intimacy among brothers" (p. 616). What is perhaps most surprising among Anderson's findings was that the chapter he observed was not relegated to a low social status among fraternities on campus, as is often the case when chapters do not embrace a stereotypically masculine collective group identity (Hesp & Brooks, 2009; Yeung, Stombler, & Wharton, 2006). Conversely, this fraternity was among the most popular and well-respected chapters on campus. It is also worth noting, however, that drinking (binge drinking in some cases) was prevalent among the group, which is consistent with most published accounts of fraternity culture. Anderson's (2008) findings challenge scholars to "rethink categorizing fraternal life as monolithically socio-negative toward women and gay men" (p. 617) and beckon for more empirical research that explores heterogeneity within and among fraternities. Anderson's focus was mostly on the fraternity, not its members.

Defining productive masculinities

Kimmel and Messner (2007) posited that masculinity is a performed social identity that is governed by socially prescribed notions of what it means to be a man. As such, men who perform masculinities in accordance with culturally defined expectations are rewarded, whereas those who violate these expectations are vulnerable to ridicule, alienation, violence, and other consequences. Kimmel and Messner also argued that no one form of masculinity exists, but rather there are multiple masculinities (some of which are prioritized and situated as dominant over others).

For example, men who are white, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, and middle or upper class can enact male privilege more easily than can men of color, gay or bisexual, physically disabled, religious minority, and low-income men. Finally, Kimmel and Messner declared that because masculinity is a performed social identity, the ways in which men express themselves as men will change as they "grow and mature" throughout their lives and as contexts shift.

Over the past decade, a body of knowledge on the social construction of masculinities among college men has emerged in the higher education literature (e.g. Davis, 2002; Davis & Laker, 2004; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2008, 2010; Kellom, 2004; Kimmel, 2008; Laker & Davis, 2011). These scholars have focused primarily on the roles of college environments in reinforcing hegemonic conceptualizations of masculinities and the influence on men's gender identity development and corresponding outcomes. Collectively, these studies examine contextual influences to provide insights into how environmental and interpersonal factors interact and shape gender identity development and performance among college men. For example, Harris's (2010) conceptual model described how men's gender socialization prior to college, participation in exclusively male peer groups, academic interests, and gendered campus norms interacted and influenced the meanings college men ascribed to masculinities. Similarly, Edwards and Jones' (2009) grounded theory of college men's gender identity development highlighted societal expectations of what it means to be a man, factors that complicate college men's identities as a result of these expectations, and critical influences in helping men transcend them. These models and perspectives provided a foundation for examining how men develop and sustain healthy, well-rounded, and productive masculinities in college contexts known to sustain and privilege hegemonic masculinities.

Given the aforementioned gaps in the published scholarship on fraternity men, we chose to study undergraduate members who were leaders in their chapters and other student organizations; consciously acted in ways that sought to disrupt sexism, racism, and homophobia; confronted chapter brothers who behaved in ways that were inconsistent with their fraternity's espoused values; and cultivated substantive, non-romantic friendships with women on campus. Collectively, these behaviors and attitudes characterize what we describe as *productive masculinities*. We call them "productive" because they have been linked, both theoretically and empirically, to a host of desirable psychosocial (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010; Harris & Lester, 2009), health (Courtenay, 2011), and student engagement (Harper, 2004, 2012) outcomes for college men. Moreover, these attitudes and behaviors also contribute to a safe and affirming campus community for all students and, if made known, can reshape campus social norms in positive ways for men. Berkowitz (2011) posited:

> Most men want to "do the right thing" and make healthy choices but may suppress this desire in order to fit in with what they think is true for other men. Men drink more alcohol (than they would otherwise), have more sex, blame sexual assault victims, talk and act in sexist and homophobic ways, and watch with silence when men degrade women verbally and physically because they think that these other men support these behaviors more than they really do, and also because they want to be accepted by these men. (p. 167)

The concept of productive masculinities we propose is aligned with Anderson's (2008) concept of "inclusive masculinity," which "is predicated on social inclusion of those traditionally marginalized by contemporary notions of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 617). Accordingly, men who subscribe to the notion of inclusive masculinity reject hegemonic and orthodox conceptualizations and are, "less concerned or entirely unconcerned whether others perceive them to be gay, straight, masculine, or feminine" (p. 606).

Our goal in the study was to expand the published research on fraternity men, by exploring factors that compel some to behave in ways that are inconsistent with gendered norms previously observed within college fraternities. The primary research question was: How do fraternity men enact productive masculinities? Two additional research questions were also explored: (1) How do fraternity men who openly challenge stereotypically masculine campus norms resist pressure and negotiate support among their peers; and (2) what sources of support are necessary for fraternity men to openly challenge hegemonic masculine norms and perform productive masculinities?

Methods and data sources

We approached this study from a constructivist epistemological perspective. A key assumption of constructivist epistemology is that an objective reality or "truth" does not exist, but rather what we come to know as reality is the outcome of our experiences that take place within social contexts and the meanings we ascribe to these experiences (Broido & Manning, 2002). Constructivist research is well suited for exploring issues of "power, representation, identity, and social justice" (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 437), as is the case in this study. Aligned with our constructivist epistemological perspective, we relied upon a qualitative methodology and employed the tenets of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and focus group methods to collect and analyze the data. Prior to detailing the systematic processes by which we selected participants, collected, and analyzed the data, we discuss the background and context of the study.

Background and context

During the spring of 2011, leaders from the headquarters of Alpha Beta Fraternity (a pseudonym) approached us during a national student affairs conference about partnering on a project to better understand masculinities among their undergraduate members. Alpha Beta (AB) is a North-American Interfraternity Conference[1] (NIC) member organization; on most campuses, its undergraduate chapters are part of the Interfraternity Council[2] (IFC). Several years prior to approaching us, AB launched a national educational program to challenge stereotypical masculine behaviors and encourage its members to be more responsible in their alcohol consumption, treatment of women, and interactions with each other as men. The program was implemented using a train-the-trainer model, thus there was wide variation in the extent to which it had been implemented at the chapter level. Some AB chapters had fully embraced and implemented the program whereas others only did so superficially, if at all. We agreed to partner with AB on the condition that we would have full control of the research design and ownership of the data. The fraternity did not compensate us for this study.

Sampling and participants

To identify participants for the study, we asked AB to send a web-based questionnaire (that we developed for a previous study of productive masculinities) to every active undergraduate member of the fraternity. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information that would allow us to identify the type of men we sought for participation in this study. The questionnaire was not used beyond this purpose. A link to it was sent to approximately 8000 AB undergraduate members who were asked to complete a series of "concern scales" by rating their levels of concern (on Likert scales from 1 to 10) when brothers in their chapters behaved in ways that are inconsistent with the espoused principles and values of the fraternity, as well as when chapter members said or did something racist, sexist, and homophobic. The questionnaire also included a series of "response scales" that instructed AB members to indicate the number of times "during this past school year that you challenged chapter brothers who: (1) behaved in ways that were inconsistent with the espoused principles and values of the fraternity, (2) made racist remarks, (3) made sexist remarks, and (4) made homophobic remarks." Responses to the questionnaires came directly to us and were not accessible by the fraternity's staff.

A total of 614 AB undergraduate members completed the screening questionnaire. From this group, we identified students with the highest mean concern and response scale scores. Again, since the questionnaire data came to us directly, AB's leadership was not involved in the identification and selection of participants. We shared a list of the 70 highest-scoring respondents with our contact person at the fraternity's headquarters and asked him to invite these students to participate in a series of face-to-face focus group interviews. Participation was limited to the first 50 students to respond.

Mean scores on the concern and response scales for the 50 men we ultimately interviewed were 9.3 and 7.9, respectively. They represented 44 AB chapters at colleges and universities across the US and Canada. Forty-one of the 44 chapters had alumni advisors. Thirty-seven participants were white, nine were Asian American, two were Latino, one was black, and one was multiracial. While the racial/ethnic composition of the study's sample was not diverse, it is representative of AB's membership and most IFC fraternities. All but seven participants identified as heterosexual; three were gay, one identified as bisexual, and three declined to disclose their sexual orientations. Twenty participants were seniors, 18 were juniors, and 12 were sophomores. Since we administered the screening questionnaire during the summer and held the focus groups during the fall, first-year students were not involved in this study. Participants' ages were in the range of 18–25 years old; the mean age was 21.

Data collection

The 50 participants were selected from AB chapters across the country (two attended Canadian universities). The participants were flown at the fraternity's expense to a hotel in Indianapolis, Indiana, for a two-day leadership retreat. They were informed that at some point during the retreat, researchers who wanted to learn more about their beliefs about masculinity would invite them to participate in a focus group. We gave each student an IRB-approved informed consent form, which detailed his rights as a human subject. We informed students, both in writing and in

person, that they could withdraw from the study at any time and without consequences. Moreover, because data were collected via focus groups, students could opt out of answering any questions that caused them anxiety or discomfort.

When the undergraduate fraternity members were not being interviewed, they participated in workshops on leadership, strategic planning, and chapter management that staff members from AB's headquarters facilitated. Although AB staff members were on site, they were not in the room during the focus groups; only the students and the interviewers were present. The headquarters staff agreed to not engage in any conversations with students, either directly or inadvertently, about the focus groups.

We conducted a total of seven focus groups, each of which lasted an average of 95 minutes. We chose focus groups as the strategy for data collection for several methodologically appropriate reasons. First, this interview method enabled participants to build on reflections offered by other AB members and access experiences and insights that may not have been otherwise recalled (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups also allowed us to assess the extent to which experiences and perspectives on masculinities were or were not shared among other participants. Finally, focus groups were an effective strategy to collect a relatively large amount of data from information-rich cases (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Based on the aforementioned conceptual framework that guided the design and execution of this study, we prepared a focus group protocol comprising 10 questions and pre-planned probes. Although questions were planned in advance, we employed a semi-structured interview approach during the focus groups to establish a conversational tone and rapport among participants. The focus groups concentrated on participants' conceptualizations and performances of masculinities, day-to-day pressures and challenges that made it difficult to transcend stereotypical masculine norms, and sources of support that have been meaningful in helping them overcome performance pressures and challenges. Examples of some of the questions we asked were: "Tell me about a significant high school experience that played a role in shaping how you thought about manhood?," "How have your thoughts on manhood changed since you've been enrolled in college?," "What has been your strategy for negotiating respect and support from the chapter brothers whom you have challenged for saying sexist, racist, or homophobic things?," and "I would imagine that being a person who speaks out is really tough. From where have you gotten support to be the person who challenges others in your fraternity?" Each focus group interview was audio-recorded and fully transcribed for data analysis.

Data analysis

Consistent with the study's purpose, epistemology, conceptual framework, and research questions, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) guided data analysis for this study. While theory generation was not a purpose in this study, grounded theory was an appropriate methodology given its focus on examining processes – or how phenomena occur and the conditions that influence them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since our focus in this study was to understand how participants developed and performed productive masculinities in a context that notoriously rewards hegemonic masculinity, a grounded theory approach seemed appropriate. Grounded theory data analysis is a fluid process in which the researcher systematically codes data and constantly compares them until saturation is reached (Charmaz,

2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We analyzed the data via initial, focused, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006).

The initial coding phase began with a critical, line-by-line reading of the transcripts. Throughout this process, we assigned keywords and phrases to capture significant concepts and incidents emerging from the data. To the extent possible, we used *in vivo* descriptors to "preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). This process resulted in 98 initial codes and 1135 code applications. Toward the latter stages of initial coding, concepts and incidents began to cluster into categories based on their shared properties. We conceptualized these clusters as emerging thematic categories. It was at this point where we shifted from initial to focused coding (although we continued to use initial coding until each transcript had been coded completely). During this phase, we sorted through larger segments of data that were contained in each emerging category, paying close attention to the most significant and recurring codes. Our goal during focused coding was to reduce the data to a set of conceptually rich categories that explained how participants developed and productively performed their masculinities in fraternal contexts.

Finally, we used theoretical coding to explore relationships and interactions between the emerging categories. Specifically, we sought to determine which of the categories captured conditions (or contextual factors) that both constrained and enabled participants to perform masculinities productively, as well as the consequences or outcomes of doing so. We viewed each category as "emerging" until it had been constantly compared across the data and saturation was evident. Finally, throughout the process of data analysis, we drafted research memos to capture our analytical thoughts, assumptions, and tentative conclusions. We organized and kept track of the data using *Saturate*, a web-based application that allows researchers to work collaboratively in analyzing qualitative data.

Trustworthiness and methods of verification

Several steps were taken to enhance the rigor of this study and verify the accuracy of our interpretations. We constructed a peer-debriefing team comprising professionals who have worked extensively with IFC fraternities, as well as scholars who have studied these groups and their members. This team of five colleagues provided feedback on our focus group protocol and study design and commented on drafts of our analyses. As a form of member checking, we sent a full draft of the findings section of this article to a subset of the men who participated in our study and invited their questions, critiques, and reactions.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that transferability is one way to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Hence, we are making clear that ours was a study of men in a particular type of group, specifically a predominantly white social fraternity that holds membership in the NIC, its undergraduate chapters almost always belong to the campus IFC, and it maintains residential fraternity houses at many colleges and universities. Every student we interviewed attended a four-year institution; most were residential. Hence, our findings transfer most logically to men's social fraternities that are demographically and structurally similar – but not to sororities, National Pan-Hellenic Council[3] (NPHC) chapters, predominantly

Latino or Asian fraternities, or academic/honors fraternities and not to students at community colleges or predominantly commuter institutions.

Researchers' positionality

For nearly a decade, we have both been engaged in the study of college men and masculinities, which has led to significant contributions to the published literature on gender issues and performativity in higher education. Harris's work has focused primarily on gender identity development for college men, has been constructivist in theoretical orientation, and is grounded by pro-feminist men's studies perspectives, notably Michael Kimmel, Michael Messner, and R.W. Connell. Primarily, Harper's work on college men and masculinities has relied on anti-deficit frameworks to study black male student success. He began his professional career in fraternity and sorority affairs at Indiana University, where he advised several fraternity chapters. Harris also has a professional background in student affairs that includes work with undergraduate men. We both were initiated into NPHC fraternities during our undergraduate years. Separately and together, we have published scholarly articles and book chapters on Greek-letter organizations.

We both came to this study with a personal and professional understanding that there are men in fraternities who behave in ways that contradict the dominant narrative about them in the popular press and social science journals – they were our fraternity brothers and friends, as well as our former students. Thus, our approach to this research is a byproduct of our own frustration with continuously hearing and reading one-sided accounts of fraternity men behaving badly. Notwithstanding, we acknowledge here, as we have done elsewhere, that some undergraduate fraternity members engage in the destructive behaviors for which they are stereotypically known (binge drinking, sexual violence, racism, and homophobia). Without minimizing the seriousness of these problems, we endeavored to locate and learn from members who were upstanding members of their chapters.

Limitations

Despite employing rigorous research and analytic methods, four limitations are worth noting. We first acknowledge that focus group effect may have come into play as some students may not have been comfortable sharing experiences and perspectives that diverged from what appeared to be salient for the group. We attempted to minimize this by explicitly inviting contributions to the discussion that were inconsistent with any sense of prevailing consensus. Second, there may have been some among AB's nearly 8000 undergraduate members who satisfied our criteria but did not complete the screening questionnaire.

Third, the response scales on our questionnaire presumed there were sexist, racist, and homophobic encounters in the chapters and that undergraduate men had the capacity to recognize these acts. Consequently, in chapters where these dynamics were not present, students would not have had opportunities to respond to racist, sexist, or homophobic statements and behaviors, which would have resulted in low scores on the response scales. Finally, although not necessarily a limitation of the study, we acknowledge the racial differences between the participants (mostly white male undergraduate students) and us (two black male

professors). Thus, some may not have been comfortable sharing certain aspects of their experiences because of perceived racial barriers. For example, some participants may have been reluctant to acknowledge instances in which they did not challenge racism within their chapters because we were black men. Notwithstanding the possibility, we perceived participants to be open, authentic, and candid in their conversations with us.

Findings

Four thematic categories emerged from our data analysis. These categories captured participants' experiences as fraternity men who performed masculinities in responsible and productive ways, and contextual factors that both facilitated and constrained their doing so. Each category is presented below and supported with verbatim quotes and reflections from the 50 fraternity members we interviewed.

Being and bringing out the best in men

Men in this study not only deemed it important to be good men themselves, but also assumed responsibility to help their fraternity brothers be the best men they could be. There were three factors that facilitated the participants' achievement of these two goals. First, they were relentlessly committed to and driven by a core set of values that served as guidelines for how they should behave and treat others. During the focus groups, the men referenced personal, familial, and religious values they had internalized that made it difficult for them to be passive observers of behaviors that were disrespectful or irresponsible. They also declared that AB's espoused values and the lessons that were instilled in them during their pledge period, such as "being men of character" and "serving others," also heavily influenced their commitment to being good men and performing masculinities in responsible ways. As one participant noted: "Our fraternity espouses very respectable virtues and we try to make our chapter resemble the virtues that the fraternity as a whole represents." Similarly, in response to a question about why he was so firmly committed to the values of the fraternity, another participant discussed the alignment between his personal values and those of the fraternity:

> Well, I think good values are something that I kind of grew up learning and I also just 100% bought into everything that my fraternity taught me during pledgeship, and so I think it's a combination of those two things, self-control and actually believing in the stuff that we were preached during pledgeship.

In addition to being steadfast in upholding their personal and fraternal values, participants were also motivated by a genuine care and concern for their brothers and a desire to see them grow and mature as men. Thus, the participants not only were diligent in ensuring that they themselves modeled what it meant to be a good man, but also saw it as their responsibility to support their brothers in being good men. This factor was core to the participants' interactions with their brothers as they sought to consistently model productive and responsible behaviors to facilitate growth and maturity within their chapters. One participant shared the following

reflection about how he has earned the respect of his peers because he emulated the attitudes and behaviors he expected of others:

> I feel like I do get the respect because I do tend to stand up for what is right and the guys really do respect that. I make good choices, I'm academically responsible for my grades, I do my part for the chapter, I take the initiative if something needs to be done.

The notions of leadership and accountability, which are reflected in the quote above, repeatedly surfaced throughout conversations pertaining to bringing out the best in others.

Finally, many participants referenced the negative stereotypes and assumptions that are commonly held about fraternity men. They endeavored to challenge these stereotypes and were motivated by them to be men who behaved in responsible ways. While most acknowledged that caricatures of fraternity men as "beer monkeys," "homophobes," and "frat guys" who only care about "hooking up"[4] with women are true of many members, they desired to exemplify a more well-rounded and respectable version of fraternity manhood. In response to a query about how fraternities are viewed on his campus, one participant offered the following: "It's typical frat boys. Sometimes we bring it upon ourselves. There's a lot of fraternities out there who don't stand for good causes, so that's why we have that image, but our fraternity really aims to counter those ideas." In sum, participants assumed that they were responsible for being the type of fraternity men they wished others to see and that they themselves desired their brothers to be.

"A brother is a brother"

Participants in this study embraced and appreciated the learning and growth opportunities that were afforded to them through their interactions with brothers from diverse backgrounds and identities. For these men, the connections they shared with members of their respective fraternities transcended racial, religious, and sexual orientation differences:

> It's a brotherhood, so it doesn't matter if you're black, white, striped, not striped, gay or straight. If you join a fraternity and you go through everything that we've gone through, then you know exactly what we've been through and you're there for each other constantly and you love each other. I love every one of my brothers.

Participants believed diversity enriched their brotherhood, strengthened their chapters, and set them apart from other fraternities on their campuses. "I like the diversity because even in the very traditional fraternities, people still come from all sorts of backgrounds and I think people allow each other to learn from each other," said one participant who came from a chapter that sought and appreciated diversity.

While facilitating the focus groups, we observed robust discussions among participants about their perspectives on having openly gay brothers in their chapters. Throughout these discussions, they talked about the assets gay men brought to their chapters and how their brotherhood was enriched by having them. For example, one participant shared: "I don't want to stereotype, but we've had gay brothers in the past and they've been some of the best brothers our chapter has ever had. They're like the most dedicated, the most respectful, [and] the most polite." Following a brief exchange with other focus group participants, this same student theorized that

gay brothers "just generally seem to be better brothers" because of the "hardships and adversity they experienced with coming out." Another maintained that having an openly gay brother in a leadership position ended the chapter's homophobic discourse: "Our president last year was gay, so you're not going to call your president a fag. So that kind of ended that. But our whole chapter has taken offense to that word."

While all the men who participated in this study said they appreciated diversity within their brotherhood, some were members of AB chapters in which this was not a shared value. These participants shared instances in which they chose to speak up and challenge a brother who may have made a remark that was racially insensitive or homophobic. For example, one white participant recalled the following:

> I did have one member who made a racial side comment to me and he said it and I immediately looked at him and I gave him a death glare like, "What did you just say?" And he thought I was joking because he was trying to make a joke and I was like, "You're done saying that," and immediately his face dropped.

Another spoke of a brief confrontation he had with some alumni of his chapter when he overheard them talking with another brother about not wanting to have a black initiate:

> Some of our alumni was talking with one of our active brothers saying, "We don't want the 'n-word,' we don't want one of those here. That's not what AB at [University] is," and I was like, "How can you say that? AB is a brotherhood, it should be a brotherhood and it doesn't matter what makes up that brother other than they have the values, that's all that matters … you can leave if that's going to be a problem."

These quotes above exemplify the stories that were shared across all seven focus groups in which the participants felt compelled to challenge insensitivity and intolerance in their chapters. These participants chose to "call out" brothers in these instances and employed a range of strategies to challenge problematic behaviors that contradicted the fraternity's espoused values.

Disrupting sexism, homophobia, and racism

Another theme that emerged relates to participants' reflections on disrupting sexism, homophobia, and racism in their respective chapters. We asked AB members to discuss behaviors they observed among their fraternity brothers that concerned them and the strategies they employed to challenge brothers and hold them accountable. They shared stories and recalled instances of brothers telling racial jokes, treating women with disrespect, and discriminating against openly gay men who participated in fraternity recruitment. Participants believed it was important for them to disrupt these acts because they were inconsistent with AB's espoused values. Most believed these acts were unfair to those who were targeted by them. As stated bluntly by a participant, "I feel it's unfair for someone to pretty much lump you into a group and talk derogatorily about you."

There were several strategies on which participants relied to challenge racist, sexist, and homophobic acts. First, they appealed to the values of the fraternity by reminding brothers that their actions were misaligned with principles they pledged to uphold. Second, participants discussed the importance of taking proactive

measures, such as "bringing the right kind of guys" into the chapter. To this end, they actively sought new members who already embodied the attitudes and behaviors that AB promotes. To this point, one participant asserted: "I think it starts with the core recruitment because you're selecting for guys that already embody your principles."

"Calling brothers out" was the third and most widely discussed strategy for challenging sexism, homophobia, and racism. Participants talked at length about the importance of openly challenging brothers in the moment for engaging in behaviors that reflected poorly on the chapter. "The most effective thing that we've seen in the fraternity, is when you call out your pledge brother, you call out your fraternity brother, that's when people listen." Related to our previous discussion of having a group of like-minded peers in the chapter, another participant spoke of the satisfaction of no longer having to be the only person to call brothers out for behaving irresponsibly:

> It used to be just me calling out my brothers, but as we brought more people in with values and more leaders, it was very comforting to sit back and watch these two guys yell at each other because one guy slapped a girl's ass and the other one doesn't know exactly how to handle it the right way. Although he's yelling at him and he shouldn't be yelling at him, he's saying the things that need to be said, "Dude, what are you thinking? That's not what we're about." … and I sit there and smile.

Participants also confirmed that in order to be the guy who was committed to disrupting sexism, racism, and homophobia in their chapters, one had to have "a positive regard for confrontation," which one student described as "carefrontation." This entailed being willing to confront brothers who behaved irresponsibly, but doing so in a way that conveyed respect and understanding:

> I mean, there's a way to do it. If someone says something wrong or says something bad, you don't immediately just jump on their ass. I guess the respectful way to do it is pull them aside and kind of talk to them about it and ask them, "Hey, why did you say that? What made you say this? And why do you feel this way?"

Finally, men in our study discussed formal disciplinary actions that could be taken within the chapter. For example, one participant spoke of his chapter's approach to handling sexist behaviors:

> Well, we have a zero tolerance policy for sexist behavior. The first time, they're brought up to exec and put on probation and then if they do it again … I mean, we've not had it in a while, but we had … about five years ago, they actually expelled a guy because he was just being so disrespectful to a woman.

Referring brothers to "exec," the chapter's judicial committee that imposes sanctions on members who violate the fraternity's policies, was an action participants used. Members who were referred to exec faced a range of consequences, including having to make public apologies for behaving irresponsibly, monetary fines, probation, and even expulsion from the chapter. These accountability measures enabled participants to build and sustain chapters that facilitated their enactment of productive masculinities.

Conditions that enable guys to be good

From our data analysis emerged a set of salient contextual factors that made it possible for participants to be transparent and consistent in displaying productive masculinities. First, as previously noted, these men authentically embraced the espoused values of their fraternities, which guided their behaviors and actions as men. Thus, "character," "integrity," and "treating others with respect" were practiced on a daily basis.

Second, several participants spoke of being thrust into leadership roles within the chapter – president, vice president, director of new member intake, and other officer positions. One participant's personal account of the transformation he experienced after being placed in a leadership role clearly exemplifies the impact that holding a leadership position can have:

> People were like, "We thought you were a fuck up," but what happened was our chapter had just gone through a membership review, so they were down to 12 guys and they needed people, so I don't know if I just got a bid just because they needed numbers, but I got a bid, and I went in and something about the whole process just really spoke to me and made me realize that I was that not-good person and it gave me something to strive for, to try to uphold the values and to make myself a better person and live by the mottos and then when I got in, you know, we only had 20 people, so I got thrown into a leadership position right away and I was forced to hold myself accountable and others accountable and I just really kind of did a 180.

Because of the significance and visibility of being in a leadership role, these members reflected on ways in which they represented their chapters and themselves as men and the implications of being seen as someone who irresponsibly performs masculinities. Participants believed that consistently modeling healthy and productive versions of masculinity was required to serve effectively in these roles, as not doing so would threaten their credibility as leaders and make it difficult to hold other chapter brothers accountable.

Having a critical mass of like-minded brothers in the chapter also enabled participants to be good men and openly embrace productive masculinities. While some were from chapters that reinforced and rewarded hegemonic masculinity, others were from chapters where all members were expected to be respectful and responsible men. Perhaps not surprisingly, men in the latter group found it much easier to be good guys in that there was a shared expectation within their chapters that destructive and irresponsible behaviors would not be tolerated. Given the importance of having a chapter where being respectful and responsible men is a shared value and a standard by which all brothers are held accountable, most of the participants also spoke of the importance of "fishing with the right bait," which meant recruiting and initiating prospective members who already exemplified what it means to be a good guy.

Finally, students in our study spoke of how opportunities to connect with like-minded AB brothers from other chapters across the country were sources of strength and motivation to be good men. Thus, national conferences, leadership retreats, and other gatherings that allowed them to engage AB brothers beyond their campuses or regions were highlighted as useful spaces in which validation, strategy sharing, and peer role modeling occurred. These opportunities were especially impactful for men who were in chapters in which they were one of few members who consistently lived up to AB's values and challenged sexism, racism, and homophobia.

Discussion and implications

The 50 AB undergraduate members we interviewed sought to be the best men they could be by upholding commitments to the values to which they pledged. They desired to challenge and support their fraternity brothers in doing so as well. As such, they relied on a range of strategies to hold fellow chapter members accountable for racist, sexist, and homophobic acts, as well as other behaviors that were inconsistent with the values of the fraternity – "calling brothers out," recruiting new cohorts of like-minded peers, and using formal disciplinary action were among the tactics they employed. Participants also valued the ways in which men from diverse backgrounds and experiences enriched their chapters.

Our findings confirm and add new insights to previously published research on undergraduate men, masculinities, and gender performance in collegiate social fraternities. The majority of studies on fraternities highlight the anti-social behaviors that typically characterize these groups (e.g. Boeringer, 1996; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Jones, 2004; Kimbrough, 1997; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Kuh & Arnold, 1993; Nuwer, 1999; Rhoads, 1995; Sutton et al., 2000). Despite the unquestionable significance of this research, the absence of studies of how fraternity men perform productive masculinities can lead some to erroneously conclude that all members behave irresponsibly and destructively. Exploring the experiences of fraternity men who productively perform masculinities can lead to instructive insights for supporting others within their chapters and elsewhere on campus.

The findings of this study are largely consistent with those that Anderson (2008) reported. Anderson's participants embraced a fraternity culture that prioritized inclusivity and emotional intimacy among men, and sustained respectful non-romantic relationships with women. Likewise, participants in our study also embraced fraternity brothers who were gay as well as those from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. Moreover, participants were diligent in ensuring others treated these chapter members fairly and with respect. As was the case in the fraternity context Anderson observed, participants in our study used peer pressure (calling brothers out), formal disciplinary action (going to exec), and other strategies to hold brothers accountable for behaviors that violated fraternity values and chapter norms.

Kimmel and Messner (2007) argued that men who violate culturally defined norms and expectations of performing masculinities are often targeted for ridicule, alienation, violence, and other consequences. Yet, despite being vulnerable to this, the undergraduates we interviewed performed masculinities in ways that were inconsistent with stereotypes typically associated with college men in general and fraternity men in particular. These students did not prioritize drinking, homophobia, and hooking up sexually in their efforts to express their identities as men. Berkowitz (2011) argued there is a critical mass of college men who want to engage in good behaviors and make smart choices. However, many are often overwhelmed by the pressure of pluralistic ignorance – an assumption that one is the only person in his or her peer group who disapproves of problematic behaviors with which the majority are complying. The 50 AB members in our sample were strategic in finding or recruiting other brothers in their chapters who performed their masculinities in similar ways.

Our findings do not suggest that the participants were perfect men who did not experience gender-related conflicts and anxieties. While all routinely enacted productive masculinities, some recalled moments when they observed peers behaving

badly but did not speak up. Others had to grow into their identities as men who performed masculinity productively and did not do so until they had been placed in a position of leadership within the chapter. Being in a leadership position enabled them to recognize ways in which they could influence their peers. Fortunately, these men chose to do so positively. These shortcomings were indicative of where the participants were developmentally. As Kimmel and Messner (2007) surmised, men's conceptualizations and performances of gender become increasingly complex as they grow and mature throughout their lives.

Also with regard to shortcomings and imperfections, it is important for us to acknowledge the ways in which privilege played a role in shaping what we found in this study. The participants were privileged in several notable respects. First, as stated previously, AB is a member of the IFC. Like most IFC fraternities, AB is a well-resourced organization that is afforded substantial support from its alumni. Thus, the organization is able to offer its members workshops, leadership development opportunities, and other growth experiences that are not typically available to members of non-IFC chapters. Therefore, by virtue of being a member of AB, the participants in this study were in a position to become good guys and to have the opportunity to be acknowledged and rewarded as such by the fraternity. We are certain there are men in other fraternities who are or have the potential to be good guys. Yet because their organizations' resources are perhaps less robust than AB's, they may not have the support or opportunity to emerge or be featured as good guys. Finally, 37 of the 50 participants were white, 31 identified as heterosexual, and all 50 had a male cisgender identity. While the participants embraced diversity; were aware of the ways in which members of their chapters experienced differential treatment because of their racial, religious, or sexual orientations; and were firmly committed to eradicating racism, sexism, and homophobia; we did not observe a keen awareness of the privilege that accompanied their salient identities. Nor did we see a link between the participants' actions as good guys and an effort to unlearn privilege.

Findings presented herein also provide insights into how college men can productively navigate *Guyland*. Kimmel (2008) described *Guyland* as a space where college-age men struggle to self-author what it means to be a man and, consequently, look to their male peers to validate their identities as men. Strategies men in this study employed to hold their peers accountable while maintaining some status and respect within the group could be effective in other male group contexts. As Davis, LaPrad, and Dixon (2011) noted, men's groups can provide rich opportunities for men to "challenge patriarchal norms and promote positive masculinities" (p. 150). Thus, educators who work with men should consider teaching them how to skillfully disrupt problematic behaviors and productively call out their peers. Doing so can potentially have a profound impact in spaces where male group dynamics mirror those that characterize fraternities; for instance, single-sex residential communities, male-dominated academic spaces, athletic teams, student organizations for undergraduate men, and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), to name a few.

Fraternity men in our study were encouraged to disrupt hegemonic masculinities when other like-minded peers who shared this commitment supported them. Therefore, working with current fraternity members to strengthen leadership at the chapter level by getting "the right" guys in key positions may be a worthwhile endeavor. The participants also appreciated and were strengthened by opportunities to connect

with men from other campuses and regions who were equally concerned about racism, sexism, and homophobia. Thus, educators, notably those working in fraternity and sorority affairs offices, should find ways to bring "good guys" together locally and nationally. This strategy is consistent with Davis et al.'s (2011) recommendation of engaging men away from their campuses to enhance the intensity of their thinking and sense-making about masculinities.

Harris (2008, 2010), Harris and Edwards (2010), and other studies of college men and masculinities have advocated critical reflection as a strategy for supporting college men's gender identity development. Findings from our study also underscore the efficacy of critical reflection on masculinities. As such, educators who work with and advise college fraternities should be intentional about providing spaces and opportunities for these men to think critically about their identities as men and the consequences of hegemonic masculinity. For example, educators might consider utilizing films or books (Kimmel's *Guyland* for instance) in which gender and masculinities are critically examined to introduce students to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, educators can partner with faculty members with expertise in this area to lead a discussion about the key issues that emerge in books or films. Educators may also consider partnering with staff from campus counseling centers to discuss masculinities from a mental health perspective. Service learning projects that enable students to consider their identities as men may also provide opportunities for critical reflection on masculinities. Regardless of the form they take, these experiences should be purposefully structured, informed by the fraternity's values, and focused on helping students recognize conflicts between what the fraternity espouses and the ways in which they behave as men. Moreover, requiring students to be transparent in communicating fraternity values (particularly during new member recruitment) and challenging students to consistently enact these values can also facilitate the critical reflection necessary to help men develop productive masculinities. Engaging and partnering with alumni members who are in good standing with the fraternity and well positioned to help students reflect critically on the organization's core values and internalize them may also be worthwhile in this regard.

This study raises important implications for future research on college men, masculinities, and college fraternities. By reframing how we studied and discussed college men, we were able to obtain insights into how they navigate and, in some cases, transform hegemonic social contexts. Thus, while continuing to explore the undercurrents of male misbehavior is important, studying men who perform productive masculinities and disrupt problematic behaviors among their same-sex peers is a seemingly logical but underutilized research approach. Second, since all the participants in this study were members of AB fraternity, future studies that explore productive masculinities among men in different fraternities would likely yield important insights and research findings that are transferable across different organizational contexts. Moreover, future research should also be conducted with men in historically black, multicultural, and other non-IFC organizations. Doing so will likely result in samples that are more racially/ethnically diverse than the one upon which the present study was based, as well as opportunities to better understand the heterogeneity of men in college fraternities.

Notes

1. Founded in 1909, the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) is an association representing 75 men's fraternities with approximately 5500 chapters located on 800+ campuses in the US and Canada with approximately 350,000 undergraduate members.
2. The Interfraternity Council (IFC) on most campuses comprises the predominantly white men's social fraternities.
3. The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) is the umbrella organization for the nine historically black national sororities and fraternities.
4. Bogle (2008) notes that "hooking up" is not limited to casual sex or vaginal/anal intercourse, but also includes oral sex and masturbation.

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