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White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol Use

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Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol
WHITE BOY WASTED: COMPENSATORY MASCULINITIES
IN FRATERNITY ALCOHOL USE

PIETRO SASSO

Alcohol misuse by members of collegiate fraternal organizations has been cited as a significant issue (Wall, 2008). Current research indicates that specifically fraternities consume the most alcohol of any traditional undergraduate student cohort by frequency and volume. However, the current research literature does not discuss how alcohol is used by fraternity members. This study seeks to understand how alcohol is misused through understanding the personal narratives of fraternity members utilizing qualitative inquiry triangulated through interviews and observation. Consistent with previous research, it was found that alcohol use as a compensatory performed masculinity supports a hegemonic social structure reinforced by liquid bonding, competition, acculturation, sex, hegemonic masculinity. Suggestions are provided regarding how to reframe the fraternity experience.

Within the traditional student population of those 18-24, alcohol is the most popular drug and its consumption features widespread misuse. Aggregate data from several major studies paint a vivid picture of collegiate alcohol misuse (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2007; Presley, Meilman, & Cashin, 1996; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson & Lee., 2001). Alcohol use by fraternity members is cited as an exemplified bastion for undergraduate misuse and abuse. Therefore, this issue continues to serve as a significant area of concern for college administrators of which men, particularly male fraternity members, have been cited as a primary population necessitating intervention. This study will provide an extensive literature review to serve as pretext to a qualitative ethnographic study which indicates that fraternity men engage in compensatory masculinities which is a response to hegemonic male ideology. Implications for practice are also suggested for fraternity/sorority advisors.

Alcohol Use in Fraternities

Research has suggested that alcohol use, more specifically binge drinking, is a major issue within fraternities (Farlie, et al., 2010; Long & Snowden, 2011). Larger studies also indicate

that alcohol use within fraternities is a significant issue (Caudill et al., 2006; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000). Single institution studies also reveal a campus-based concern (Lo & Globetti, 1995; Caron, Moskey, & Hovey, 2004).

Policies

Qualitative research suggests that fraternities serve as an access point to obtain alcohol or are often simply associated with its distribution, essentially suggesting through undertone that fraternity chapters serve as nothing more than speakeasies (Fabian, Toomey, Lenk, & Erickson, 2008). Research suggests that most institutional responses in the form of policies have been ineffective as mandating dry housing (Crosse, Ginexi, & Caudill, 2006), banning common source containers such as kegs (Kilmer, Larimer, Parks, Dimeff, & Marlatt, 1999) have all been ineffective or inconsistent. Kilmer et al. (1999) also observed that if there are policies in place to restrict alcohol use, fraternity members will increase their levels of binge drinking. Additionally, educational programs have limited effectiveness in addressing fraternity alcohol misuse (Wall, 2006). Therefore, most measures and attempts to control alcohol misuse such as binge drinking have not resulted in the decrease of alcohol consumption levels sought by institutions (Wall,

Reis, & Bureau, 2012). This failure is indicative of the numerous social aspects of fraternity life that can create an environment conducive to excessive alcohol use (Glindermann & Geller, 2003; Miley & Frank, 2006; Paschall & Saltz, 2007).

Population Comparisons

When compared to other groups, fraternities have been found to consume more than their unaffiliated peers (Alva, 1998; Barry, 2007; Sher, Bartholow, & Nanda, 2001; Wechsler et al., 1996). Pace and McGrath (2002) reported that fraternity and sorority members drank more than other students who were active in volunteer organizations. These highly involved students are often referred to as student leaders within student affairs divisions and have been found to increase their alcohol consumption as a result of their involvement (Theall, DeJong, Scribner, Mason, Schneider, & Simonsen, 2009). Martin et al. (2009) suggested these social experiences connected with alcohol consumption are associated with a high cost for the general traditional student population which has been found to increasingly invest considerable financial resources.

It has also been suggested that fraternity and sorority members drink just as much or more than student-athletes (Meilman, Leichter, & Presley, 1999) which supports the notion that student-athletes have significant concerns related to alcohol misuse (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, & Grossman, 1997).

Members living in fraternity house also consume more than those off-campus or within residence halls (Larimer, Anderson, Baer, & Marlatt, 2000; Page & O'Hegarty, 2006). Fraternity members also are the largest consumers of all students on "game-day" events before a major college athletics events (Glassman, Dodd, Sheu, Rienzo, & Wagenaar, 2010).

Fraternity and sorority members reported more alcohol use than their unaffiliated counterparts, and fraternity men reported more use and more negative secondary effects of alcohol than

sorority members (Eberhardt, Rice, & Smith, 2003). This supports the notion that sororities also demonstrate misuse of alcohol, albeit not to same degree as fraternity members (Huchting, Lac, & LaBrie, 2008).

Culture

Fraternity chapters have been defined as subcultures by Danielson, Taylor, and Hartford (2001) and within many chapters, alcohol is central to the fraternity experience (Workman, 2001). This cultural association between alcohol and the fraternity experience is so strong, that being a fraternity member is predictive of increased alcohol consumption (Sher, Bartholow, & Nanda, 2001). Fraternities have even been coined as addictive organizations by Arnold (1995). Moreover, further research indicates that members self-select into fraternities because of precollege drinking characteristics (DeSimone, 2009; Juth, Smyth, Thompson, & Nodes, 2010; O'Connor, Cooper, & Thiel, 1996; Park, Sher, Wood, & Krull, 2009). This focus on alcohol exists because its use is attributed to social status as the heaviest-drinking chapters are perceived as holding greater prestige (Larimer, Irvine, Kilmer, & Marlatt, 1997). Within fraternity chapters, alcohol is utilized to help sustain bonds of brotherhood (Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996). Alcohol is used in the recruitment and socialization of new members into the chapter culture, which assists in the perpetuation of problems from one generation of members to the next; thus, joining a fraternity or sorority has become a predictor for increasing alcohol consumption as alcohol use is culturally ingrained (Arnold & Kuh, 1992). This culturally ingrained use of alcohol within fraternities has led to distorted in-group norms specifically related to alcohol. Much of this cultural phenomenon is mirrored largely by issues related to masculinity and gender.

Masculinity in Fraternities

The collegiate environment has been connect-

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

ed to increased alcohol consumption as aforementioned within this literature review section; however, it is also connected to images of gender and alcohol use. Further research supports the notion that fraternities are a reflection of a larger issue of alcohol connected to masculinity and gender with alcohol use. College campuses have been depicted as an environment in which men and women “do gender” in which alcohol use or abstention from alcohol has been used for gender construction purposes (Montemurro & McClure 2005; West, 2001; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This gender context of alcohol remains understudied (Miller, et al. 2003). Capraro (2000) has hypothesized that this is socially constructed based on a hegemonic masculine culture within fraternal organizations.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The notion of hegemonic masculinity plays a central role in the socialization of young men in college. Kimmel and Davis (2011) define hegemony as, “the process of influence where we learn to earnestly embrace a system of beliefs and practices that essentially harm us, while working to uphold the interests of others who have power over us” (p. 9). Hegemonic masculinity is the most socially endorsed form of male behavior (Peralta, 2007). Men in specific competitive subcultures project and hold a favorable, culturally-based, idealized version of themselves or others and subscribe to a dominant construction of masculinity (Connell, 1995). These and additional findings posit men, especially fraternity members, as engaging in compensatory behaviors according to a schematic framework of masculinity. Kimmel and Davis also suggest that the reinforcement of traditional masculine norms may damage or hurt those who uphold those notions.

Cultural Norms

Cultural norms within the practice of hegemonic masculinity include assertiveness, subordination of women, aggressiveness, and self-reli-

ance (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Among men in contemporary Western societies, these cultural norms, have been characterized as young, heterosexually active, economically successful, athletically inclined, and self-assured (Connell, 1987). These norms facilitate a demand characteristic that encourages conformity and institutionalizes these in-group norms with rites of passage (Kimmel, 2008).

McDonald (1994) found that marginalized men use alcohol to exert superiority over others who are prohibited from the same alcohol consumption, a practice of hegemonic masculinity. These findings are supported by Peralta (2007) and Wechsler et al. (2000) who suggested that men belonging to male-dominated or male-centered social institutions have an increased likelihood of engaging in heavy episodic drinking and that alcohol is utilized to socialize others. Arnold and Kuh (1992) described the use of alcohol to subjugate males within the addictive organization framework in which pledges’ alcohol consumption is restricted. Additional support of this phenomenon is the sociological findings of Rogers (2006).

Rogers (2006) found that fraternity members create the image of hegemonic masculinity by identifying “Mr. Right” through recruitment, created attitudes and beliefs, and maintaining the image of manhood through hazing and alcohol. Additionally, hegemony is maintained through competition between members and fraternities. Women engage in a dialectical relationship with fraternities and are utilized as tools to aid in the competition between fraternities (Locke & Mahalik, 2005). Negative reprisal occurs if the image is not maintained as this is perceived as a challenge to the masculine identity. Heterosexual rituals and paternalistic chivalry are also utilized to exacerbate the formation and reinforcement of the masculine identity of subordinate members (Rogers, 2006).

These cultural norms are demonstrated specifically when men conform and engage in socially desirable behaviors according to the stan-

dards of hegemonic masculinity. This is evident in certain contexts involving alcohol as a form of gender expression (West, 2001). When these cultural norms are challenged men respond by engaging in compensatory behaviors where they respond to the dissonance as a sex-role threat by exaggerating their masculinity.

Compensatory Masculinity

Compensatory masculinity, also known as performance masculinity, is a form of gender expression in which men respond in overcompensation to challenges to the hegemonic culture (Edwards & Jones, 2009). For example, men from a “blue-collar” socioeconomic background, consume beer as an act of compensatory masculinity to appear more authentic around others of the same socioeconomic class (Hemmingsson et al., 1998; Janes & Ames, 1989; Kaminer & Dixon, 1995).

In a series of two studies Harris (2008; 2010) sought to understand how young men in college made meaning of masculinities and the influence of the college environment. In a diverse sample of 68 participants from a large, private university on the West Coast it was found that men engaged in compensatory behaviors in response to environmental challenges or contextual influences. The participants continued to reinforce individual conceptualization and meanings of masculinity in the form of one’s family, interactions with peers on-campus, and participation in masculine-affirming organizations or activities (2008; 2010). Another method by which males reinforce masculinity to compensate is through alcohol and shared narratives.

Commonly, males share stories and engage in compensatory masculinity about alcohol when, “binge drinking, playing video games, watching and discussing sports, and sharing the details of sexual relationships” (Harris & Edwards, 2010, p. 48). These male alcohol consumption narratives or “drinking stories,” suggests that these personal narratives are a component of male identity formation and engagement in com-

pensatory masculinity (Giles, 1999; Gough & Edwards, 1998; Moore, 1990). These stories indicate that alcohol is an accepted component of male identity formation as Landrine et al. (1988) have suggested that, “drunkenness may be an aspect of the concept of masculinity” (p. 705). Further depiction of excessive drinking in advertisements exclusively as men’s activity provides face validity to this research (Ratliff & Burkhart, 1984). Quantitative studies additionally link alcohol misuse to masculinity (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Capraro, 2000; Cohen & Lederman, 1998; Schacht, 1996).

While the research literature is able to indicate how often and how much fraternity members consume, as well as tertiary health implications, frequency, and context, most of the research literature does not address how alcohol is used. What is missing from the literature is the meaning or purpose of how alcohol is used by fraternity members. Utilizing narratives drawn from fraternity member interviews and observation, this research investigated how fraternity members engage in compensatory alcohol use to validate their masculine identity. All of this is valuable data in the creation of programs and targeting interventions for fraternity chapters. This study sought to identify this phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

How alcohol is used and its meaning to a fraternity member is important in investigating the chapter culture. This culture has been found to vary by chapter where members self-select into heavy drinking culture where alcohol remains central to fraternity socialization in an environment that facilitates use and abuse (Trochel, Wall, Williams, & Reis, 2008). Further research indicates that chapter consumption expectations are strongly predictive of consumption behavior, signifying strong social orientation of members (Trochel et al., 2008). Therefore, those chapters that have the greatest levels of heavy epi-

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

sodic drinking are most deserving of targeted intervention which, as aforementioned, has been found to be successful. Both of these appear to be cultural variables associated with the culture of alcohol use within fraternity chapters.

The purpose of this study was to investigate alcohol use and its relevance among traditional male undergraduate students belonging to fraternities. This study was guided by two primary research questions:

1. How is culture constructed by fraternity members and affected by their alcohol consumption?
2. What are the shared experiences of the researcher and the participants through self-disclosure to enhance the understanding of the experiences and meaning associated with alcohol use by fraternity members?

Methods

The study was conducted utilizing a social constructivist paradigm to examine the experiences co-constructed by fraternity members centered on alcohol-based experiences and their meaning. One of the tenets of social constructivism is that there are multiple realities present and no one true reality of alcohol use by fraternity members exists (Patton, 2002). It is assumed the social experiences created by fraternity members involving alcohol will differ the meaning and purpose of alcohol use exists solely based on the reality constructed by the individuals. The researcher as an observer was also viewed as a participant in this study and employed the use of the ethnographic research tradition.

The ethnographic research tradition for this qualitative study was selected to obtain a personal narrative of the researcher related to the beliefs and practices of others to gain a deeper understanding of a group's culture (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the researcher's own cultural experiences are reflected upon those being observed to critically understand the culture and provide insight into the study as a shared experience between the researcher and the participants

(Patton, 2002).

This study was designed to further investigate the meaning of the experiences facilitated by the use of alcohol among fraternity members. The researcher interviewed and observed fraternity members engaging in alcohol consumption to gain further understanding into these cultural experiences and practices.

Participants

The participants in this study were traditional undergraduate students who held membership in a fraternity chapter on a college campus. Membership was defined as those affiliates who held at least probationary status (e.g., pledge, new member) or those members who are duly initiated and active within an active, recognized chapter in good standing with the university and the International Headquarters. This study employed a homogeneous purposeful sample in order to obtain a representative sample reflective of the fraternity student cohort. With approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), fraternity members were recruited for participation through the use of an intentional sample which was constructed through a chain-referral sampling procedure. A complete frame of social fraternities available for participation in the study was established through contacting "gatekeepers." These gatekeepers provided access directly to the fraternity members. Members of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors were randomly contacted and an electronic mail advertisement was forwarded to the Fraternity Executives Association. Responses were communicated via telephone and electronic mail. An initial frame of 10 fraternity chapters was established and solicited for participation. Through chain-referral methodology, the sample consisted of 16 fraternity members ages 19-22 drawn from 4 chapters at 4 postsecondary institutions. The members were all traditional undergraduate Caucasian males from middle class backgrounds (See Table 1).

Researcher

In authentic ethnographic research, it is imperative that the researcher fully disclose any biases or perspectives. During the time of the study, the researcher was a 30 year old multiethnic male pursuing a doctoral degree in education with a concentration in higher education. The researcher had over six years of experience as a full time staff member of a national collegiate fraternity and as a college administrator overseeing fraternity and sorority advising. Additionally, the researcher has enforced alcohol policies at two colleges as a student conduct officer and an alcohol educator. These experiences have led the researcher to believe that fraternity members construct their own personal narratives and form their own individual experiences regarding alcohol use. These individual experiences form a co-constructed narrative that facilitates a chapter-specific culture that is unique with its own traditions, values, and rites of passage.

The researcher utilized a research team of least two members to assist in the development of interview guides, coding interviews, and observations. The team members provided triangulation and minimized researcher bias, which increased the trustworthiness of the results. The two members of the research team were student affairs practitioners with master's degrees in higher education and members of national fraternities.

Data Collection

This study focused on the lived experiences of fraternity members and their meaning-making regarding alcohol use. Further, this study employed a homogeneous purposeful sample to obtain an intentional sample reflective of the fraternity student cohort. The data collection methods utilized were semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations. A specific number of interviews were not established, rather an emergent approach was facilitated and interviews continued until a point of saturation was reached.

The semi-structured interviews featured in-depth interviews with individual fraternity members as well as members within groups. Both the individual semi-structured and group interviews were conducted utilizing an interview guide, which also served as a protocol (Interview Protocol Questions are available from the author upon request). The interview guide was developed with members of the research team who were subject-matter experts. An informed consent agreement, confidentiality agreement which included the right to a debriefing and the right to confidentiality, and a demographic sheet to determine age, semester of initial affiliation, leadership position, and academic status were all concurrently distributed to participants.

The ethnographic observations were completed utilizing a timeline feedback approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Chapters who agree to participate were observed utilizing a standardized observation sheet which was developed by the research team. The observation highlighted specific behaviors, relationships, environmental factors, social interactions, and language to observe. All these observations were recorded through the use of field notes. The field notes were in the form of a voice recorder or documented in written format. From the field notes, a timeline was reconstructed to facilitate the creation of a temporal sequence. As with the semi-structured interviews, the number of observations was not predetermined. Observations continued until a point of saturation was reached.

Data Analysis

The interviews and observations were analyzed for themes. Each of the participants was asked the same number of questions listed in the protocol. After the first round of interviews, they were transcribed. The participants were given a copy of their transcript to verify that its meaning and text were correct. The members of the research team then created an initial codebook. The research team reached consensus regarding

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

the codebook and modified the questions for the second interview. Once the succeeding interviews had been transcribed, the participants again engaged in member-checking. After the second round of interviews the codebook was updated. Once saturation was reached, the preceding interviews were recoded according to the final codebook. The results were produced from this final codebook.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness was ensured through an external auditor, triangulation of data sources, peer review, clarification of researcher bias, and member-checking. The first strategy for validation was to use an external auditor to oversee the research. This person was not currently active within the fraternity/sorority community, but had a priori experience and knowledge. This external auditor was a university professor within a student affairs graduate program. The second strategy was to utilize triangulation of data sources. The study compared the results from the personal narratives of the fraternity members to ensure they closely resembled the ethnographic observations.

The third strategy was the use of peer review from subject matter experts who engaged in a process that assists by reviewing and questioning the main themes and questions in an attempt to eliminate bias. The fourth strategy was to clarify research bias. Readers of the final research report were informed of the research team and the research, their affiliations, and their perspectives on the phenomenon being investigated. The final strategy was to use member-checking. Participants were provided their transcript of the interview, which were sent to them for review. The participants were able to further clarify any statements and check for errors. Even with the use of the quality measures to minimize researcher bias, there were still limitations that potentially impacted trustworthiness and validity. These are threats and therefore it is necessary to be forthright and disclose them.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study was the demand characteristics presented by the researcher. The researcher has extensive a priori knowledge and experience with the college fraternity cohort. This a priori experience and knowledge may have influenced participants to provide socially desirable responses during the semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations.

The reliance on self-report data, given the esoteric nature of fraternities, may negatively impacted the full disclosure of information. This secretive nature has created a lack of disclosure by fraternity members (Sweet, 1999). This concealment could have impacted the individual and group interviews, where fraternity members may not have been completely forthright about their experiences with alcohol.

To identify social desirability and possible lack of disclosure, the researcher kept a reflexive journal to note any inconsistencies between what was said and the effect on the participant. These inconsistencies were noted in the reflexive journal and then were disclosed in the research findings. While the relevance of this study has already been mentioned, it should be added that it is essential to allow the fraternity members' voices to be heard.

To recruit fraternity members, the researcher had to recruit through current professional contacts who were campus-based professionals in fraternity/sorority advising. These professionals acted as gatekeepers and may have been hesitant to allow the researcher access to their students who were fraternity members for fear of the negative portrait of their institution that might be reflected if participants' experiences were consistent with the mainstream media's portrayal of fraternity members.

Another limitation is the amount of variation in regards to the personal narratives of fraternity members. The purpose and meaning of alcohol use varies between chapters, as each one is en-

veloped by its own respective culture (Arnold & Kuh, 1992). This can create a proliferation of themes that can cause an extreme amount of research tangents. Therefore, the use of saturation and triangulation as components within the methodology are essential in addressing this study limitation. As mentioned previously, alcohol experiences and their meaning or purpose among fraternity members and others became readily apparent as there were an abundance of possible research themes. Despite these limitations, it is the anticipation of the researcher that the data collected can be used to provide insight into the alcohol use issues that have become viewed as problematic by gaining insight into its meaning and purpose (Wall, 2006).

Results

This study was conducted to gain insight into the meaning and purpose of alcohol use amongst fraternity members who are traditional male undergraduate students through obtaining their personal narratives. The study utilized an intentional homogeneous sample to obtain a cohort of fraternity members who engaged in an individual semi-structured interview and a group interview. This data was compared to an ethnographic observation for the purposes of triangulation.

Interviews were transcribed and coded and then recoded shortly thereafter. The keywords and phrases were collapsed into five themes. These semi-structured interviews as well as the ethnographic observation yielded a surprising amount of data. Five salient, main themes emerged in this study and the personal experiences. Their meaning and purpose are further supported and validated by an ethnographic observation.

Theme 1: Liquid Bonding

One of the most apparent themes was the use of alcohol for social connectedness. All participants discussed the bonds and connection that alcohol helped to facilitate between them

as a brotherhood. However, what that brotherhood meant to them was individualized, based on context. The first participant made it fairly clear the use of alcohol was to, "...use alcohol to help everyone have a good fuckin time in college" (Interview 1, Lines 330-331). The participant further clarified this notion by stating:

"College fucking sucks ass man, but if you don't wanna flip burgers or end up in jail, slingin' rock on the corner, or pushin' weight as a duffle bag boy, then you gotta go to college to get an education. That education is what you get outside of it. Fuck physics or all that shitttt. It is about knowin' the right people" (Interview 1, Lines 331-334).

The participant implied that alcohol helps one meet the right individuals. One participant expanded on this social connection established by alcohol using the metaphor of summer camp. When asked to clarify further the social connection established by alcohol, this participant stated:

I made friends and have good memories but the whole brotherhood thing didn't necessarily stand the test of time in any real manner. It might as well have been a football team. There is a real level of camaraderie just like in any group environment. It's like your friends from summer camp. Only its summer camp for nine months of the year. And a lot of them are your friends cuz they're at your summer camp, but if you weren't at the same summer camp, you really wouldn't chill. (Interview 2, Lines 179-184).

It was readily clear that alcohol was utilized to establish and support relationships between fraternity members. This liquid bonding was central and synonymous to the fraternal experience. Many of these relationships appeared superficial and surface, in which the entirety of the relationship was based on the underpinning of alcohol as indicated by the narratives shared by the participants.

Theme 2: Competition

One theme that emerged from the interview

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

data was the notion of competition. The participants consistently made reference to how their fraternity was better than others. This was contextualized while referencing alcohol and parties. One participant stated: "It was kind of a mediocre chapter. Now we are fuckin' beast! We are King Kong up in this bitch! Like I said before, we have the best parties, the sickest fuckin' bitches ever" (PA 1, Line 352-353).

Several of the participants also discussed drinking games. The drinking games are competitive, in that there is an incentive structure associated with these drinking games. Traditionally, the penalty is to consume large quantities of alcohol in which one participant stated, "...I won ten in a row. A bunch of the games came down to last cup, so I ended up having to drink a whole bunch" (Interview 1, Lines 151-152).

Additionally, there was a level of pride associated with winning a competition. One participant stated, "...I was playing beer pong and I was runnin' the table. No one could touch me. They could not come near me. I was on fire droppin' them in like fuckin' bombs" (Interview 1, Lines 153-154).

The consumption of alcohol is transformed into a competitive drinking game. Additionally, this competition appears to be broader between fraternity chapters to determine which one can have the "best" party with the most alcohol. The underlying notion is that the more competitive you are, the more prestige for a fraternity to gain. This indicates that social standing or prestige is linked to alcohol use.

Theme 3: Acculturation

One of the other more salient themes was the use of alcohol to socialize members as part of a larger acculturation process. This acculturation process seems to be led by the upperclassmen members. All the participants were upperclassmen and many of them were very involved chapter leaders as most of them made reference to involvement in the new member process.

Further, the upperclassmen use alcohol as a

meditational tool to acculturate new members also known as "pledges" into the chapter culture. This is a socialization process in which pledges are probationary members and must earn their status as an initiated member. Alcohol is interconnected and is used as a meditational tool to connect members together and reinforce the social norms of the chapter culture. One participant stated:

As a pledge all the other guys would try to impress the brothers to show them how fast they could drink and I would just fuckin' drink because I like it...As a pledge, I was never forced to drink. But damn man, it is encouraged. (Interview 1, Lines 257-258).

Another, participant discussed his personal experience regarding acculturation:

I am not proud to say I was hazed during my pledge period. I still remember the brothers who hazed me, and I still hold it against them. To be perfectly honest, part of me wishes I would have quit because of the hazing. I would have missed out on great experiences because of it, but at least I would have stood up for myself. Regardless, I made it a point to do everything I could to change the culture I was brought into, and not do that to the guys who followed me. I was forced to drink quite a lot of beer and liquor. It was very dangerous. One of the guys I pledged with got alcohol poisoning. (Interview 2, Lines 18-27).

The use of alcohol with pledges as a part of an acculturation process indicates a potential relationship to hazing. Instances of hazing as described in the aforementioned examples reinforce the use of alcohol for future generations as pledges become acculturated into the chapter culture.

Theme 4: Sex

The use of alcohol to meet the opposite sex was another major theme within the interview data. Additionally, several of the participants made the association between alcohol and sexual relations. This association in a broader sense is connected by the fraternity chapter. One partici-

part states; “I didn’t drink that much as a pledge or a brother. Yeah, I get drunk sometimes but I did it to meet women. Guys join fraternities is to meet girls. Some rushes [prospective members] think that by wearing Greek letters you instantly become a chick-magnet. Let them think this way.” (Interview 2, Lines 14-22). Another participant provided a personal experience about a sexual encounter he had at a fraternity party;

The party, all night, there were no grenades. There were none in sight. All the chicks were fucking smoking. One of them was DTF. I took her to one of the rooms upstairs, of course she wanted to because she was DTF. So, we go upstairs to the boom boom room. We have this room where everyone gets fucked. It even has this old metal pole that used to be brick, but we had some engineering majors switch it out for a metal pole. Women love that shit. I wish I had one in my room. So, we are up there, right, and we are sucking face with each other then I reach for her tits and I noticed they feel strange. So, I eventually backed off. However, my other head was talking to me so I was full steam ahead like some old Pirate ship. (Interview 1, Lines 164-171).

These descriptions about alcohol and sex suggest that they are prevalent in some fraternities. Further, the participants pointed out that prospective members join because the expectation is that they will have access to women who want to be where the parties are located. These parties, according to the participants, provide a lot of alcohol and, according to the members, many prospective members are attracted to the fraternity chapter because of the lure of alcohol and sex.

Theme 5: Hegemonic Masculinity

The use of misogynistic and homophobic language underscores a hypermasculine environment within the fraternity chapter culture. The use of homophobic words like “faggot” and “bitch” as well as references to feminine body

parts, particularly genitalia, reveal a culture that is conducive to an overcompensation toward monosexuality and masculine identity. Therefore, showing emotion or any behaviors or language deemed as weak or unmasculine is viewed as negative within many fraternity chapter cultures. One example of this is a personal experience shared by a participant in which an individual displayed weakness:

Oh we do power hour which is where you take a drink every 60 seconds to a song mix. We roll widda Lil Wayne AKA Mr. Make it Rain on Dem Hoes mix. One of my pledge brothers made it and it’s sick. I usually drink beer, some Beast. There is always some faggot that fucking pukes. For formal this year we a bunch of us did in the dorms. One of the girls that was going to formal with one of my pledge brothers projectile vomited all over two brothers, then she spat up all over her damn self too. [Looks annoyed]. This bitch almost puked all over, it was real nasty dude. (Interview 1, Lines 82-88).

The hyper-masculine environment promotes and advances an alpha-male mentality. This reality promotes the development of overcompensation amongst fraternity members in their attempts to sustain a competitive edge over their competitors or adversaries. Through the use of language and the personal experiences shared by the participants, these findings revealed an exaggerated masculine environment centered on alcohol is revealed.

Ethnographic Data

The ethnographic observation yielded results that support and validate the five themes. The ethnographic observation was an attempt to “go native” in which the researcher blended amongst the traditional undergraduate population that attended a large-scale social event which was a fraternity party with a large representation of alcohol. It was the goal of the researcher to examine if the five themes found in the interview data were also consistent with the lived experience

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

through researcher observation. The party began at 9:00 p.m. and formally ended at 2:00 a.m., but there was an after-party event that did not end until after 4:00 a.m. Throughout the party, approximately 10 kegs and 30 to 40 bottles of liquor were consumed in the public areas of the off-campus fraternity house where the party was held. This total does not include any private stock that was provided by the fraternity members themselves during the after-party.

The use of alcohol for liquid bonding was apparent through the sharing of personal narratives of drinking stories and through the use of fraternity drinking songs with misogynistic undertones. Masculinity was very apparent as the men within the chapter referenced “mandals” which are “man sandals.” When asked to explain, the men discuss the differences between men and women’s sandals, in that traditionally sandals are feminine but a special designation made them palatable for men. Additionally, the theme of sex was validated as there was a proliferation of men and women engaging in sexual advances and behaviors throughout the party, especially during the after-party. Social connectedness was also extremely prevalent during the party as individuals bonded through alcohol, especially as they engaged in drinking rituals associated with the hip hop music blasting throughout the fraternity house.

Competition was experienced firsthand by the researcher as he was urged to engage in competitive drinking games such as “beer pong” and “flip cup.” These are competitive drinking games and throughout the party, there were a number of fraternity members and other students who expressed strong emotion when they lost. Finally, acculturation and hegemony were evident for the pledges. Throughout the night, the pledges were cleaning up and serving members, as well as guests, with fresh alcoholic drinks. Guests were provided a new drink by a pledge, even without a personal verbal or behavioral prompt.

The lived experience as depicted by the fraternity members who were participants in the

semi-structured interviews directly reflected the themes from the interview data in the ethnographic observation. Therefore, the ethnographic observation supports and possibly validates, with additional data, the themes reflected in the interviews. Liquid bonding, competition, acculturation, sex, and hegemonic masculinity are all factors that influence alcohol consumption among fraternity members.

Implications

The results of this study indicate that fraternity alcohol use is more multifarious than the contemporary research literature reviewed within this article suggests. The salient themes of liquid bonding, competition, acculturation, sex, and hegemonic masculinity are issues which indicate that alcohol is used for reasons other than simply for mass consumption of alcohol and these themes support previous research.

The findings from the present study suggest that the issues are related to masculine gender expression through alcohol and are not simply about binge drinking as the research suggests. Using alcohol as a means to express and reinforce masculine identity by the fraternity members is the overarching, central theme from this qualitative study. The themes from this study are consistent with previous research (Anderson, 2007; Harris, 2010; Kimmel, 2008; Rhoads, 2010) which found that masculinity and alcohol use were often used to express issues of being respected by others, self-confidence, assuming responsibility, maintaining physical image, and sexual behaviors.

If the issues are cultural, then further intervention is necessary. These themes also parallel findings related to hegemonic masculinity where men use alcohol to perpetuate and facilitate further socialization of men into the masculine ideal. Men reported pressure to conform to expectations established by chapter leadership through competition and hazing practices, mostly involving alcohol.

The findings from this study further suggest that men engage in compensatory masculinity whereas, in public, men may engage in superficial behaviors in order to appear as if they are meeting the expectations of masculinity. In such demonstrations, they are performing “masculinity” (Kimmel, 2004). As a result, the men indicated that they felt as though they acted as different versions of themselves based upon the contexts in which they operated, especially when socializing with alcohol within the chapter. However, these same fraternity men will exhibit more authentic behaviors when alone with others, such as girlfriends or adult mentors (Kimmel, 2008). Fraternity/sorority advisors may see this dichotomy when interacting with their fraternity member students at on-campus events rather than in the confines of their offices. Greater support is necessary to help men feel comfortable expressing masculinity through more constructive, healthy behaviors.

The themes from this study can be utilized to help facilitate the creation of targeted interventions which the research literature suggests has a low economy of scale, but a high efficacy level for effectiveness. This study indicates the meaning and purpose of alcohol use for fraternity members, creating valuable data that can be integrated into intervention programs. Such focused efforts, coupled with a culture-changing approach, could possibly facilitate sustainable change to reduce the tertiary and possible long-term health consequences of alcohol misuse. Additionally, targeted interventions should address these themes in the context of gender, specifically related to masculinity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the men in this study largely describe and demonstrate struggles with their masculinity. Their narratives reveal strong notions of alcohol misuse which increased when the tensions experienced in male gender

roles differed in relation to the expectations of others around them. The men in this study as fraternity members engaged in liquid bonding, competition, acculturation, sex, and hegemonic masculinity as compensatory behaviors in response to sex-role threat by hegemonic masculinity. This compensatory behavior with alcohol is grounded in the performativity of gender as men are actively endeavoring to perform masculinity to varying levels of success.

These fraternity members’ experiences suggested that they are underperforming and unprepared men. These specific behaviors included competitive heterosexual sex, alcohol misuse and potential abuse, being unprepared for academic coursework, and noncompliance with policies outlined by their International Headquarters and host institution. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that fraternity/sorority professionals should be conscious of the developmental levels of fraternity members. Professionals may want to explore the idea that members’ development may be stunted through the behaviors perpetuated by their organizations through alcohol use.

John Robson (1966), author of *The College Fraternity and its Modern Role*, stated, “Man is a noble creature, only a little lower than the angels. A chapter made up of his tribe is the kind that has given the American college fraternity a glorious history and promises it a glorious future” (p. 112). Robson is correct in his assertion that fraternities, and even sororities, have a storied and contributing narrative in shaping higher education. The future of fraternities is one that is undeniable, as collegiate fraternal organizations are enduring and pervasive organizations that have yet to falter despite wide-spread criticism, and this study provides additional face validity to these criticisms. However, whether the existence of fraternities is relevant depends on their capacity to change. If not, we will continue to allow our boys to remain “white boy wasted” and to perpetuate the negative stereotype that endures.

Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

CHAPTER	GENDER	AGE	ETHNICITY	AFFILIATION	INITIATION	LEADERSHIP	INSTITUTION
1	MALE	21	CAUCASIAN	2 YEARS		YES	STEM
1	MALE	22	LATINO	3 YEARS		YES	STEM
1	MALE	19	AFRICAN-AMERICAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		STEM
1	MALE	18	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		STEM
2	MALE	19	JEWISH	NEW MEMBER	NONE		LIBERAL ARTS
2	MALE	20	CAUCASIAN	1 YEAR		YES	LIBERAL ARTS
2	MALE	20	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		LIBERAL ARTS
2	MALE	22	CAUCASIAN	3 YEARS		YES	LIBERAL ARTS
3	MALE	23	CAUCASIAN	4 YEARS		YES	COMPREHENSIVE
3	MALE	20	CAUCASIAN	2 YEARS		YES	COMPREHENSIVE
3	MALE	19	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		COMPREHENSIVE
3	MALE	18	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		COMPREHENSIVE
4	MALE	21	CAUCASIAN	3 YEARS		YES	LAND-GRANT
4	MALE	22	LATINO	2 YEARS		YES	LAND-GRANT
4	MALE	19	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		LAND-GRANT
4	MALE	19	CAUCASIAN	NEW MEMBER	NONE		LAND-GRANT

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Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

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Sasso: White Boy Wasted: Compensatory Masculinities in Fraternity Alcohol

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