

Why Is Fraternity Membership Associated With Sexual Assault? Exploring the Roles of Conformity to Masculine Norms, Pressure to Uphold Masculinity, and Objectification of Women

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Despite consistent evidence that fraternity membership is associated with greater perpetration and acceptance of sexual violence, less is known about *why* this link occurs. In this study, we use Structural Equation Modeling to test whether endorsement of traditional masculinity explains why fraternity membership is associated with greater rape myth acceptance and more sexual deception behaviors in a sample of 365 undergraduate men. Our assessment of traditional masculinity included the following 3 components: conformity to masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women. Results suggest that conformity to masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women mediate the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence.

Keywords: masculinity, fraternities, sexual assault, rape myths, sexual deception

Between one in three and one in four college women experience sexual assault during their college careers (Cantor et al., 2015; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000). Sexual assault is defined as nonconsensual sexual contact through force or threat of force, incapacitation, nonphysical threats, or lack of consent. Many researchers working to investigate predictors have focused on characteristics of the victim that make her more likely to experience assault (e.g., alcohol or drug use, nonheterosexual identity; Cantor et al., 2015). Fewer studies have focused on factors associated with the perpetrators of sexual violence. Those that have tend to find that alcohol use, rape supportive attitudes, and previous perpetration are all associated with greater likelihood to perpetrate sexual assault (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998; Cantor et al., 2015; Loh, Gidycz, Lobo, & Luthra, 2005). In addition to these factors, previous studies (e.g., interviews, ethnographies, and some survey research) have found that all-male organizations, such as fraternities, tend to establish cultures that endorse violence against women. For example, fraternity membership is consistently associated with more accepting attitudes toward sexual violence (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Corprew & Mitchell, 2014; McMahan, 2010; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007) and greater perpetration of sexual violence (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991; Brown, Sumner, & Nocera, 2002; Franklin, Bouffard, & Pratt, 2012; Lackie & de Man, 1997; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007).

Despite consistent evidence that fraternity membership is associated with sexual violence, less is known about *why* fraternity membership is related to greater acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence. To develop effective intervention programs, we need to understand why fraternity membership is associated with sexual violence. In other words, what is it about being in a fraternity that may contribute to acceptance of sexual violence? The purpose of the current study is to investigate the mechanisms by which fraternity membership is associated with acceptance of sexual violence against women. We are specifically interested in the role of traditional gender and sexual scripts for men as possible mediators in the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence. We draw on scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) and the precarious manhood thesis (Vandello & Bosson, 2013) to explain the relations among fraternity membership, masculinity beliefs, and acceptance of sexual violence.

Theoretical Rationale

Scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) suggests that women and men follow culturally sanctioned scripts in their romantic relationships. These scripts are socially accepted, easily recognized, and serve as a guide for how to behave in sexual encounters. Traditional sexual scripts vary by gender; men's roles are characterized by dominance, whereas women's roles are passive (Sanchez, Fetterolf, & Rudman, 2012). Men are expected to initiate and persistently pursue sex, never turn down the opportunity for sex, prioritize sexual pleasure and performance, value women mainly for their sexual appeal, and avoid anything that could be construed as "gay." Having (heterosexual) sex is a defining aspect of being a man. The scripts for men to follow in romantic relationships are directly related to traditional gender roles, more generally. For example, traditional gender roles for men include exercising power over women and engaging in physical aggression and violence, as well as prioritizing winning, demonstrating emotional control,

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engaging in risky behaviors, and prioritizing work and/or money (Mahalik et al., 2003).

However, manhood is not an inherent consequence of being born male. Instead, to “be a man” requires displaying traditional masculine behaviors. The precarious manhood thesis (Vandello & Bosson, 2013) refers to the idea that manhood is a status that must be achieved and can be lost at any time. Because heterosexual sex is a defining aspect of masculinity, it offers men a way to achieve manhood. Men who have several sexual partners are lauded as “real men,” whereas men who fail to uphold traditional masculine norms are bullied (Toomey, Card, & Casper, 2014), and their very manhood is called into question (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). As a result, there is a great deal of pressure on men to have (heterosexual) sex to prove that they are “real men.” Such displays of masculinity are done to impress other men, because manhood is a status that is bestowed on men *only* by other men (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Therefore, membership in all-male organizations may create extra pressure on men to assert their masculinity. Anthropologist Peggy Sanday (2007) and sociologist Michael Kimmel (2008) theorize that men in all-male organizations are more inclined to engage in sexual violence against women to assert their heterosexuality and, therefore, their status as men.

Fraternity Membership and Sexual Violence

Consistent with Sanday and Kimmel’s hypotheses, previous research demonstrates that all-male organizations, such as fraternities, tend to establish cultures that endorse violence against women (e.g., Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Several studies on fraternity members’ attitudes toward sexual violence have focused on endorsement of rape myths (e.g., women say no when they really mean yes; women fantasize about being raped; Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; McMahon, 2010). A meta analysis revealed a moderate effect size ($d = .31$) for the association between fraternity membership and rape myth acceptance (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Studies also show relations between fraternity membership and acceptance of violence against women, more generally. For example, in their study of undergraduate men, Corprew and Mitchell (2014) found that fraternity members exhibited more sexually aggressive attitudes toward women than did nonmembers.

In addition to greater acceptance of sexual violence, fraternity membership is associated with actual perpetration of sexual aggression (Boeringer et al., 1991; Brown et al., 2002; Foubert, Newberry, & Tatum, 2007; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Lackie & de Man, 1997; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). In their study of first-year undergraduate men, Foubert and colleagues (2007) found that men who joined a fraternity were three times more likely to commit sexual assault than men who did not join a fraternity. In general, belonging to a fraternity is associated with greater perpetration of sexual aggression (Brown et al., 2002) and nonphysical sexual coercion (Boeringer et al., 1991).

Fraternity Membership and Endorsement of Masculine Gender Norms

Fraternity members likely experience a great deal of pressure from their male peers to engage in masculine norms, and especially to have heterosexual sex. Having sex with several different women is a way for fraternity men to gain respect from their peers, and

members who fail to have sex are often teased (Sanday, 2007). Indeed, fraternity members report greater peer pressure to have sex (Franklin et al., 2012; Kingree & Thompson, 2013) and greater peer approval of forced sex (Kingree & Thompson, 2013) than do nonmembers.

Sweeney (2014) refers to the pressure men feel to assert their masculinity and specifically their heterosexuality as “compelled masculinity” and notes that it often takes the form of objectification of women (i.e., viewing women as an object that exists for sexual pleasure, rather than as a human with thoughts and feelings; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Ray & Rosow, 2010; Sweeney, 2014). Research suggests that fraternity members are more likely to objectify women than nonmembers. For example, Bleecker and Murnen (2005) analyzed the décor in male students’ dorm rooms and found that fraternity members had significantly more objectifying and degrading images of women (e.g., *Playboy* pin-up posters) displayed on their walls than nonfraternity men. Additionally, Martin and Hummer (1989) documented that the promise of having access to women is used as “bait” to attract new fraternity members. Ethnographies and interviews with fraternity members reveal that members assign point values to women based on their attractiveness. Brothers earn points by sleeping with women, and compete with one another for who can earn the most points (Sanday, 2007; Sweeney, 2014). Taken together, this research suggests that women serve as objects on which fraternity men can assert their heterosexuality (Sanday, 1996).

In addition to feeling pressure to uphold masculine norms, including the objectification of women, fraternity membership is associated with greater endorsement and enactment of these norms (Iwamoto, Corbin, Lejuez, & MacPherson, 2014; Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Robinson, Gibson-Beverly, & Schwartz, 2004). Scholars argue that men in fraternities have a narrow definition of masculinity that includes rejecting anything perceived as feminine, as well as being able to “score” with women, drinking large amounts of alcohol, being “tough,” and having money (Martin & Hummer, 1989; Rhoads, 1995). These characteristics map on to traditional masculine gender roles such as risk taking (Mahalik et al., 2003) and onto traditional sexual scripts, such as prioritizing sex (Kim et al., 2007). Among college men, membership in a fraternity is associated with greater conformity to masculine norms (Iwamoto et al., 2014). Moreover, fraternity members endorse gender stereotypes and gender roles more strongly than sorority members (Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Robinson et al., 2004), suggesting that the association between fraternity membership and masculinity is unique to fraternity membership, rather than participation in Greek life more generally.

Masculine Gender Norms and Sexual Violence

Endorsement of traditional gender norms may partially explain why fraternity members tend to be more accepting of sexual violence because two prominent pillars of masculinity are demonstrating power over women and engaging in aggression (Mahalik et al., 2003). There is empirical evidence that traditional masculinity is associated with acceptance of sexual violence (Corprew & Mitchell, 2014; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Lutz-Zois, Moler, & Brown, 2015). For example, among college students, endorsement of traditional masculinity is related to stronger endorsement of

rape myths (Lutz-Zois et al., 2015), and endorsement of heteronormative beliefs (e.g., men should be dominant; men are always after sex) is associated with greater acceptance of verbal sexual coercion (Eaton & Matamala, 2014).

Studies of masculinity and sexual violence perpetration find positive associations, as well (Lackie & de Man, 1997; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2013). Indeed, a meta analysis of masculine ideology and sexual aggression found that out of 11 different measures of masculinity, all but one showed a significant effect size in predicting perpetration of sexual aggression (Murnen et al., 2002); the effect sizes were larger for hypermasculinity than for general measures of endorsement of gender norms. A more recent longitudinal study of college men found that higher levels of hostile masculinity (i.e., desire to control women and a general distrust of women; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991) throughout college predicted perpetration of sexual aggression (Thompson et al., 2013).

Because masculinity is a performance done by men for other men (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), the presence of male peers likely places increased pressure on men to uphold masculine stereotypes, such as engaging in sex. The pressure from one's peers to "be a man" by having several sexual partners may contribute to the perpetration of sexual violence. For example, a longitudinal study of fraternity membership (Kingree & Thompson, 2013) revealed that fraternity members reported more approval from their friends to engage in forced sex (e.g., use drugs and alcohol to convince a woman to have sex); peer approval of forced sex, in turn, predicted greater perpetration of sexual violence. Another study found that fraternity membership was related to perpetration of sexual assault because fraternity members reported greater peer pressure to engage in sex, and this pressure predicted perpetration of sexual assault (Franklin et al., 2012). In their ethnographic study of party culture on college campuses, Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney (2008) suggest that "social pressure to 'have fun,' prove one's social competency, or adhere to traditional gender expectations are also predicted to increase rates of sexual assault within a social scene" (p. 495). Together, these studies lend support to the idea that men in fraternities experience pressure from other men to engage in heterosexual sex to prove their masculinity, and that this pressure to engage in sex contributes to perpetration of sexual assault.

Finally, objectification of women is theorized to contribute to sexual violence against women because objectified women are perceived cognitively to be less like people and more like objects, thus devoid of feelings or humanity (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Despite the theoretical link, few studies have examined the associations between men's objectification of women and their attitudes toward and perpetration of sexual violence. Those that have find that objectification of women is associated with greater acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence (Aubrey, Hopper, & Mbure, 2011; Gervais, DiLillo, & McChargue, 2014; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). For example, men who implicitly associated women with objects were more likely to report sexually aggressive attitudes toward women (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Men who had perpetrated sexual aggression in the past year generated more objectifying statements about women and were more comfortable with their friends' objectifying statements about women, as compared with nonperpetrators (Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015). Together, these results suggest that men's

objectification of women is related to acceptance of sexual violence; however, no studies have examined this link in a fraternity context. More generally, pressure to engage in masculine norms is associated with sexual violence and may also help explain the link between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence.

Summary and Purpose

Although research demonstrates that fraternity membership is associated with acceptance of traditional masculine gender norms, and endorsement of masculine gender norms is associated with acceptance of sexual violence, few studies have examined whether traditional masculine gender norms and pressure to uphold them mediate the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence. Further, despite evidence that fraternity membership is associated with the objectification of women, and that objectification is associated with acceptance of sexual violence, no studies have examined objectification of women as the mechanism by which fraternity membership is associated with acceptance of sexual violence. We seek to address these limitations in the current study and believe that investigating these potential connections may provide useful information for university administrators and fraternity leaders as they develop programs to reduce sexual assault on campus.

Further, several studies have focused on either attitudes toward sexual violence (e.g., rape myth acceptance, attitudes toward a rape victim) or perpetration of sexual violence. We think these are important indicators of acceptance of sexual violence, and we expand on these measures by including a behavioral measure of sexual deception (i.e., lying to have sex), which may be perceived as less serious than sexual assault, but is still an important indicator of malicious sexual behavior.

We offer the following hypotheses (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1: Fraternity members will more strongly endorse masculine norms, report more pressure from their friends to uphold masculinity, and be more accepting of objectification of women and sexual violence (i.e., more rape myth acceptance, greater frequency of sexual deception) than nonmembers.

Hypothesis 2: Endorsement of masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculinity, and objectification of women will each

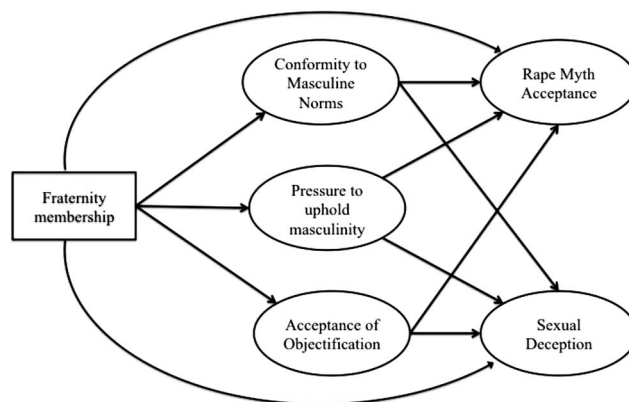


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

mediate the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence.

Method

Procedures

The sample was recruited from a population of 9,521 undergraduate men at a large public university in the Midwest. Recruitment began in mid-September 2014 and continued for 3 weeks. We recruited participants through email messages. Emails were sent directly to fraternity officers (presidents and point-of-contacts provided by the Office of Greek Life) and to a random sample of 1,973 male undergraduates in their first, second, or third year of school. The recruitment emails asked participants to complete a survey about “men’s experiences with media use, dating, and sexual health at college” in exchange for a \$10 gift card to Starbucks. The survey was part of a larger study that included measures of media use, life satisfaction, romantic relationships, and sexual behaviors.

Participants

There were 522 men who completed the survey. Fifty-two participants were deleted for spending less than 6 min on the survey (more than 1 *SD* below average completion time). Another 19 were deleted for failing all three validity checks. Because we were interested in traditional masculine norms about gender and sexuality, we excluded two participants who identified as gender-queer and one participant who did not indicate a gender. We also excluded 10 participants who answered less than 50% of the questions for which they were eligible. Finally, we removed 61 participants who did not indicate their fraternity status and 12 participants who indicated they were in the process of joining a fraternity (but not yet members). We were left with a total sample of 365 undergraduate men.

Most of the sample identified as White and heterosexual and were 19 years of age on average (see Table 1 for detailed demographic information). They came from well-educated backgrounds (on average their parents had completed over 20 years of education, equating to some master’s degree work). Our sample consisted of 26.3% ($n = 96$) first years, 35.9% ($n = 131$) sophomores, 34.2% ($n = 125$) juniors, 3.0% ($n = 11$) seniors, and 0.5% ($n =$

2) fifth years or beyond (because this study was part of a larger longitudinal study designed to follow-up with participants after one year, we purposefully did not target seniors). Compared with nonmembers, fraternity members were slightly older and more likely to identify as heterosexual than nonmembers (see Table 1).

Measures

Rape myth acceptance (RMA; Burt, 1980). To measure endorsement of rape myths, participants rated their agreement with 10 statements using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Sample items include, “When a girl goes to a guy’s house on the first date, it means she is willing to have sex” and, “Girls have a secret wish to be raped.” The RMA scale was validated on a sample of adult men and women (Burt, 1980). Internal consistency in our sample was good ($\alpha = .87$).

Sexual deception. Using deception to have sex was measured using the Blatant Lying subscale of the Sexual Deception Scale (Marelich, Lundquist, Painter, & Mechanic, 2008). Participants indicate whether they have ever done seven different behaviors by responding either *Yes* or *No*. Participants were instructed that sex could refer to intercourse, oral sex, or manual stimulation. Examples include, “Told someone ‘I love you’ but really didn’t just to have sex with them” and, “Had sex with someone just so you could tell your friends about it.” *Yes* responses were coded as 1 and *No* responses as zero. Sum scores were calculated across the seven items such that higher scores indicate more deception. The Sexual Deception Scale was validated on a sample of sexually active university students (Marelich et al., 2008). Internal consistency was good ($\alpha = .81$).

Objectification of women. Acceptance of objectification of women was measured using a modified version of the Sexual Objectification Scale (Morse, 2008). We selected the 12 items that loaded most strongly onto one factor for inclusion in the study. We removed one item (“Women who wear tight clothes or low cut shirts are asking to be hit on by men”) because the language overlapped with an item in the RMA Scale (“Girls who don’t wear bras or who wear short skirts and tight tops are asking for trouble”). We were left with 11 items. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the 11 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Sample items included, “It is okay for a guy to stare at the body of an

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Variables	Full sample	Fraternity members ($N = 85$)	Nonmembers ($N = 280$)	$t(df)/\chi^2(df)$
Age	19.37	19.71	19.27	2.62 (361)**
White	68.5%	71.8%	67.5%	.49 (1, $N = 364$)
Asian/Asian-American	18.1%	12.9%	19.6%	2.01 (1, $N = 364$)
Latino	2.2%	2.4%	2.1%	^a
Black	1.9%	2.4%	1.8%	^a
Multiracial	4.7%	8.2%	3.6%	^a
Middle Eastern	3.3%	2.4%	3.6%	^a
Heterosexual	90.7%	96.5%	88.9%	11.88 (1, $N = 365$)**

^a Insufficient cell count for comparison.

** $p < .01$.

attractive woman he doesn't know" and, "It is fun to rate women based on the attractiveness of their bodies." The original Sexual Objectification Scale was validated on a sample of university men (Morse, 2008). Internal consistency was good ($\alpha = .86$).

Conformity to masculine norms. The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-46 (CMNI-46; Parent & Moradi, 2011, based on Mahalik et al., 2003) was used to assess the extent to which participants adhere to masculine norms. The CMNI-46 contains 46 total items and 11 subscales (Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Power Over Women, Disdain for Nonheterosexuals, and Pursuit of Status). Participants rate their agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Sample items include, "If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners" (*Playboy*) and, "I would be furious if someone thought I was gay" (*Heterosexual self-presentation*). For the purpose of this study, we computed the average score over all 46 items ($\alpha = .88$). The CMNI-46 was validated on a sample of college men (Parent & Moradi, 2011).

Pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes. Perceived pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes was measured using a 10-item, modified version of the Pressure to Conform to Masculine Stereotypes Scale (PCMS; Epstein, 2009). Participants rated perceived pressure from their male friends on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *I do not feel any pressure* to 5 = *I feel a lot of pressure*. Sample items include, "Act like I want sex all the time" and, "Avoid doing anything that is girly." We also added three items to assess pressure to drink alcohol, such as, "Do shots of alcohol" and, "Hold my liquor." Mean scores were calculated ($\alpha = .92$). The original PCMS was validated on a sample of emerging adult men (Epstein, 2009).

Fraternity membership. Participants indicated whether they were a fraternity member (23.3%; $n = 85$) or nonmember (76.7%; $n = 280$).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the outcome variables are presented in Table 2. Participants scored near the midpoint for conformity to masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women, indicating moderate endorsement of these constructs. Participants scored below the midpoint

on both rape myth acceptance and sexual deception, although nearly half (49.3%) of participants reported engaging in at least one sexual deception behavior. We also ran zero-order correlations for the variables of interest (see Table 3). With the exception of the relation between pressure to uphold masculinity and RMA ($r = .09$), all variables were significantly correlated with each other, and correlations ranged from .24 to .58.

Testing the Main Research Question

To examine whether fraternity members are more accepting of sexual violence than nonmembers, we conducted a series of independent t tests comparing fraternity members and nonmembers on each of these constructs. Consistent with our hypotheses, fraternity members more strongly endorsed masculine norms, reported feeling more pressure from their friends to uphold masculine norms, were more accepting of objectification of women, more strongly endorsed rape myths, and engaged in more sexual deception behaviors on average than nonmembers; the effect sizes ranged from small to medium (see Table 2). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation using MPlus to examine whether endorsement of masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and objectification of women mediate the relations between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence. We followed the item-to-parcel balance technique (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002) to create indicators for each of our latent variables. Using this technique, a factor analysis with one factor is conducted for each scale, and individual scale items are distributed across three parcels according to their factor loadings (e.g., the highest loading item on Parcel 1, second highest on Parcel 2, third highest on Parcel 3, fourth highest on Parcel 1, and so on) until all items are distributed across the three parcels. The three parcels are used as indicators of each latent construct.

We followed the recommendations of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to test our proposed model. First, we tested a measurement model for the latent constructs in which each latent construct is permitted to vary freely with all other latent constructs. If the measurement model provides an adequate fit to the data, it is acceptable to proceed with a structural model. We use guidelines described by Kline (2011) and Little (2013) to gauge model fit: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and 90% confidence interval (CI) that fall below .10, a comparative fit index (CFI) above .95, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) below .06 all represent good/acceptable fit. Based on

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Fraternity Members and Nonmembers on Variables of Interest

Constructs	Range	Fraternity members		Nonmembers		t	Cohen's d
		M	SD	M	SD		
1. Conformity to masculine norms	1–6	3.47	.39	3.27	.54	3.06***	.41
2. Pressure to uphold masculinity	1–4	2.31	.80	2.02	.77	2.88**	.36
3. Acceptance of objectification	1–6	3.26	.82	2.79	.87	4.42***	.56
4. Rape myth acceptance	1–6	2.05	.80	1.84	.77	2.18*	.27
5. Sexual deception	0–7	.98	1.45	.53	1.30	2.72*	.33

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Zero-Order Correlations Between Variables of Interest
($N = 347\text{--}365$)

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Conformity to masculine norms	—			
2. Pressure to uphold masculinity	.25***	—		
3. Acceptance of objectification	.58***	.35***	—	
4. Rape myth acceptance	.37***	.09	.42***	—
5. Sexual deception	.24***	.26***	.37***	.28***

*** $p < .001$.

these criteria, our measurement model provided an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(80, N = 365) = 145.84, p < .001$, RMSEA = .05 with 90% CI [.04, .06], CFI = .98, SRMR = .04. Factor loadings loaded significantly on their latent constructs at $\alpha = .001$.

Next, we tested our proposed structural model. In the structural model we allowed our proposed mediators to correlate because we expect that masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification are related even after accounting for the other constructs in the model. Our proposed model provided an adequate fit for the data, $\chi^2(93, N = 365) = 179.04$; RMSEA = .05 with 90% CI [.04, .06]; CFI = .97, SRMR = .04 (see Figure 2). The model also explained a significant portion of the variance in both RMA, $R^2 = .26, p < .001$, and Sexual Deception, $R^2 = .24, p < .001$. As expected, fraternity membership was associated with endorsement of masculine norms, pressure from friends to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women. Furthermore, as expected, endorsement of masculine norms, pressure from friends to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women was each, in turn, related to at least one measure of acceptance of sexual violence. Specifically, greater conformity to masculine norms and greater acceptance of objectification of women was each associated with greater rape myth acceptance. More pressure from male friends to uphold masculine stereotypes and more acceptance of objectification of women was each associated with more frequent sexual deception behaviors.

Finally, to determine whether endorsement of masculine norms, pressure from friends to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women mediate the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence, we calculated the bootstrapped (1,000 draws) indirect effects and 95% CIs for those effects. If the 95% CI does not contain zero, there is evidence of mediation (i.e., a significant indirect effect). The total unstandardized indirect effect (with all mediators) for the relation between fraternity membership and RMA, $B = .19$ with 95% CI [.11, .29], and the unstandardized indirect effect for the relation between fraternity membership and sexual deception, $B = .05$ with 95% CI [.02, .07], were both statistically significant. Thus, our second hypothesis was supported. We conclude that there is evidence that the relation between fraternity membership and rape myth acceptance, and fraternity membership and sexual deception, is mediated by endorsement of masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and acceptance of objectification of women.

Alternative Models

To support our proposed model, we also tested an alternative model in which endorsement of masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculinity, and acceptance of objectification predict fraternity membership, and fraternity membership in turn predicts rape myth acceptance and sexual deception. Because fraternity membership is a categorical variable we used the weighted least squares with mean and variance adjustment (WLSMV) estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015). The alternative model did not provide an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(96, N = 365) = 419.33$; RMSEA = .10, 90% CI [.09, .11]; CFI = .74, weighted root-mean-square residual (WRMR) = 1.49, lending further support to our proposed structural model.

Discussion

Our results support previous research demonstrating that fraternity membership is associated with greater acceptance of sexual violence (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Corprew & Mitchell, 2014; Kingree & Thompson, 2013; McMahon, 2010; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007), and add to the current literature in two important ways. First, despite evidence that fraternity membership is associated with sexual violence, less is known about *why* fraternity membership is related to greater acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence. Our results suggest that fraternity members are more accepting of sexual violence against women in part because they more strongly endorse traditional masculine norms, feel pressure from their friends to uphold masculine norms, and more readily view women as sexual objects. Although the effect sizes for the differences between fraternity members and nonmembers ranged from small to medium, the explanatory power of our model was good: our model explained about 25% of the variance in rape myth acceptance and sexual deception. Considering all the possible influences that contribute to acceptance of sexual violence, our model provides good explanatory power. Second, our study expands on current measures of sexual violence by including a

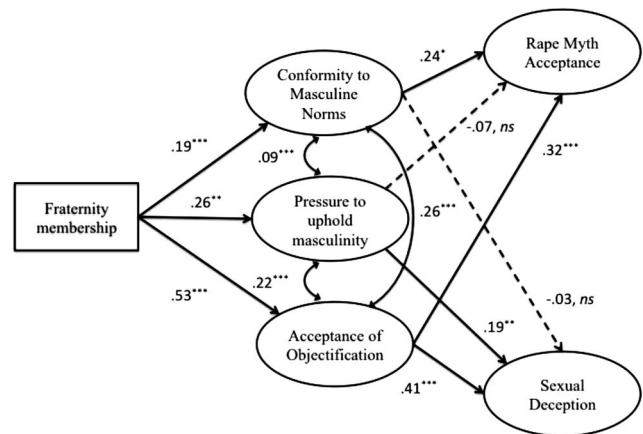


Figure 2. Final structural model with unstandardized coefficients. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant pathways. Fraternity membership coded such that 1 = member and 0 = nonmember. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

measure of sexual deception. We find that fraternity members are more likely than nonmembers to use deception to have sex.

Explaining Why Fraternity Membership Is Associated With Sexual Violence

Some previous research has documented that fraternity members report feeling pressure to engage in some masculine norms, such as having sex (Franklin et al., 2012; Kingree & Thompson, 2013). Our results support these findings: in our study, fraternity members reported more pressure to engage in masculine norms and more endorsement of these norms. Although all men likely feel pressure to uphold masculinity (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), the pressure appears to be even greater in the fraternity context. Because masculinity is a status that men prove to other men, simply being in an all-male group may exacerbate pressure to uphold masculinity (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Having sex with women is one way to achieve masculinity, and fraternity members may engage in sexually deceptive behaviors to have sex and, therefore, prove themselves “real men.” Our results support this conclusion by demonstrating that pressure to uphold masculinity helps explain the relation between fraternity membership and sexual deception behaviors.

Our results also support previous findings that fraternity members more readily objectify women (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Sweeney, 2014), and that this objectification of women is associated with sexual violence (Aubrey et al., 2011; Gervais et al., 2014; Jacques-Tiura et al., 2015; Rudman & Mescher, 2012). Objectification dehumanizes women and reduces them to objects, devoid of thought and feeling (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). When men view women as objects devoid of feelings and thoughts, it is likely easier to treat those “objects” with disrespect and violence.

Ethnographic accounts of fraternities document bonding rituals in which men objectify women (e.g., rating women’s attractiveness, scoring “points” for having sex with attractive women; Sanday, 2007; Sweeney, 2014). Some may see these behaviors simply as bonding rituals done for fun or in jest. However, men’s objectification of women has negative consequences for men. For example, Zurbriggen, Ramsey, and Jaworski (2011) found that among men, objectification of one’s romantic partner was associated with lower relationship and sexual satisfaction. Besides the obvious consequences for women who are the victims of men’s sexually violent attitudes and behaviors, men may also have trouble establishing meaningful and satisfying relationships with women if they see women as sexual objects.

Although our overall hypothesized mediation model provided a good fit to the data, only acceptance of objectification was related to both rape myth acceptance and sexual deception. Endorsement of masculine norms was related to rape myth acceptance only (but not sexual deception), and pressure to uphold masculine norms was related to sexual deception only (but not rape myth acceptance). Perhaps pressure from male friends to engage in stereotypical behaviors (e.g., having sex, drinking alcohol) affects men’s behaviors toward women, but not their attitudes. Many of the pressures we measured were behaviors (e.g., have sex with multiple women, do shots of alcohol); it follows that these behavioral pressures are more strongly related to other behaviors, and not attitudes. Similarly, endorsement of masculine norms (that mea-

sures cognitions about masculinity) may more easily relate to other cognitions (rape myth acceptance) but not behaviors.

Sexual Deception

We expand on the current literature on fraternity membership and sexual violence attitudes and behaviors by incorporating a measure of sexual deception. We found that fraternity members engage in more sexual deception behaviors than nonmembers. Although previous studies have examined fraternity members’ beliefs about sexual violence (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Kingree & Thompson, 2013) and their perpetration of sexual violence (Franklin et al., 2012; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007), no one has examined fraternity members’ use of sexually deceptive behaviors. Most of these behaviors do not meet the criteria for sexual assault (e.g., telling someone “I love you” to have sex is not assault), yet the behaviors do reflect a general disrespect for one’s sexual partner. Because the behaviors are not sexual assault, participants may be more willing to admit to the behaviors, providing a more accurate estimate of disrespectful behaviors toward one’s sexual partner. Indeed, nearly half of our sample admitted to engaging in at least one sexual deception behavior.

Sexual deception behaviors may fall outside the usual interventions targeted at sexual violence because they are not sexual assault. However, we found that sexual deception was positively correlated with rape myth acceptance, suggesting that sexual deception may be a useful predictor of other sexual assault attitudes and behaviors. Sexual deception behaviors can also help us think more broadly about the definition of consent beyond a simple “yes/no” dichotomy (Roffee, 2015). For example, if someone consented to sex because the other person lied about who they are or how they feel, is that truly consensual sex? Interventions targeted at fostering respectful and mutually consensual sexual relationships may want to address sexual deception behaviors, especially among fraternity members.

Limitations

We acknowledge some limitations to our study. First, because our data are cross-sectional, we cannot make conclusions about the direction of the relations in our model. Just as fraternity membership may lead to endorsement of masculine norms, pressure to uphold masculine norms, and objectification of women, it is also possible that men who endorse masculine norms, feel pressure to uphold masculinity, and objectify women are more likely to join a fraternity. Similarly, fraternity membership may cause increased acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence, but it is also possible that men who are more accepting of sexual violence and who engage in more sexual violence are more likely to join a fraternity. However, our alternative model that tested this relation did not provide an acceptable fit to our data. Further, evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that fraternity membership causes an increase in acceptance of sexual violence, and that men who perceive more peer approval of forced sex are more likely to join a fraternity (Kingree & Thompson, 2013). More longitudinal studies are needed to confirm the direction of the relations tested in the current study.

We tested three mediators for the relation between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence in our study, but

there are likely other mediators that may help explain why fraternity membership is linked to acceptance of sexual violence. For example, holding sexist and hostile beliefs about women has been associated with both fraternity membership (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; Koss & Gaines, 1993) and sexual violence (Dardis, Murphy, Bill, & Gidycz, 2016; Eaton & Matamala, 2014), and thus, may help explain the associations tested here. Further, other theories may help to explain the relations between fraternity membership and acceptance of sexual violence. For example, sexual strategies theorists (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) suggest that when engaging in short-term sexual relationships, men have evolved to avoid women who require long-term commitments. Perhaps men use sexual deception to engage such women in sex (e.g., saying “I love you” without meaning it to obtain sex), though it is not clear why such a strategy would be more common in fraternities unless we also consider the pressure that fraternity men feel to uphold masculinity. Social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) may also be useful for understanding sexual violence in the fraternity setting. Social identity theorists argue that mistreatment of out-group members occurs because in-group members want to boost the status of their group. In other words, fraternity members may treat women (the out-group) poorly to boost the status and power of the fraternity (the in-group).

Finally, we know that not all fraternity members engage in objectification of women, endorsement of masculine norms, or sexual violence. Certain characteristics of the fraternity organization, such as members’ ideas about masculinity, reputation on campus, and racial composition, likely influence the attitudes of its members. For example, a qualitative study of 50 fraternity members across the United States and Canada documented fraternity organizations that engaged in “productive masculinity” in which members felt it was important to uphold their stated values by intervening when something racist, sexist, or homophobic happened (Harris & Harper, 2014). Similarly, Anderson (2008) conducted an ethnography with a large national fraternity chapter that actively rejected traditional forms of masculinity and instead embraced gay men, women, and racial minorities. We expect fraternities that actively critique masculinity may not instill the same problematic attitudes toward women and sexual violence as might more traditional social fraternities. Second, a fraternity’s reputation on campus likely affects its members’ attitudes. For example, in an ethnographic study, Boswell and Spade (1996) classified fraternities as either high-risk of sexual assault or low-risk, depending on their perceived reputation from other students. Parties at high-risk fraternities tended to have more objectification of women through explicit judgments of female partygoers’ appearances and discussions of sexual exploits (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Work is needed to investigate whether individual fraternity members’ attitudes differ based on the reputation of their fraternity. Finally, the racial composition of the fraternity likely influences members’ attitudes. For example, Ray and Rosow (2010) found that Black fraternities were perceived to be more gender egalitarian, and members were more concerned with maintaining a positive reputation on campus because they felt their behavior reflected on the entire Black community on their campus. Our sample of fraternity members was predominantly White, and all were in school at a predominantly White insti-

tution. Our results cannot be generalized to other types of fraternities (e.g., Black fraternities, Latino fraternities) or other types of higher education institutions (e.g., historically Black colleges and universities).

Implications

Given the relation between masculinity and sexual violence, prevention programs for men, and especially men in fraternities, should focus on traditional masculinity. Previous research has found that prevention programs that include units on gender socialization are effective at reducing sexism and rape myth acceptance (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Eckstein & Pinto, 2013; Stewart, 2014). For example, the Men’s Project, which includes gender role socialization and male privilege in its curriculum, was found to reduce men’s endorsement of sexism and rape myths (Stewart, 2014). In another study, Eckstein and Pinto (2013) developed an effective sexual violence intervention program that gave men the opportunity to practice resisting traditional cultural norms of masculinity.

In addition to programs that focus on men’s own endorsement of masculine norms, prevention programs that focus on perceived peer attitudes toward women and sexual aggression have been effective at reducing sexist beliefs and increasing willingness to intervene in a sexual assault scenario. For example, Kilmartin, Smith, Green, Heinzen, Kuchler, & Kolar, 2008 found that men tend to overestimate the extent to which their peers support sexist beliefs. Given that men engage in traditional masculinity (including sexism toward women) to impress other men, Kilmartin and colleagues (2008) developed an intervention that addressed the discrepancy between perceived peer beliefs and actual peer beliefs. Men’s sexist attitudes were reduced when their overestimation of peer attitudes was addressed. Although addressing peer attitudes can be effective, it can be difficult for fraternity members to confront problematic behaviors among their brothers. For example, Wantland (2008) designed an intervention in which individual members of a fraternity participated in a sexual violence prevention program and then facilitated the program within their fraternities. Some fraternities were receptive to the program, whereas other members struggled when their fraternities did not take the program seriously, or struggled with the realization that such a program changes the nature of the bonds between members (e.g., members can no longer bond over rating women’s bodies).

Finally, university administrators may want to look to fraternities who engage in productive masculinity for ideas on how to reduce sexual violence. Harris and Harper (2014) identified several conditions that help fraternity men engage in productive masculinity. For example, developing mission statements that include phrases such as “treating others with respect” and upholding those mission statements helped members engage in productive masculinity. Additionally, members of fraternities that engaged in productive masculinity found it helpful to connect with other like-minded chapters across the country. University administrators may wish to facilitate connections between chapters that are already engaging in productive masculinity and develop mentorship programs that match chapters that engage in traditional masculinity with chapters that engage in more productive forms of masculinity.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that the pressure men feel to uphold masculine norms, their endorsement of these norms, and their acceptance of objectification of women help explain why fraternity members are more accepting of sexual violence. Although several studies have documented that fraternity members are more accepting of sexual violence, ours is one of the first to propose a model that explains *why* that difference exists. We suspect that the pressure men feel to uphold masculinity may generalize to other all-male contexts. Future studies should investigate whether this pressure is associated with acceptance of sexual violence in athletic teams or military units, both of which report higher rates of sexual violence than the general population (e.g., Gage, 2008; McMahan, 2010; Turchik & Wilson, 2010). Such research could provide further evidence that the pressure men feel to uphold and prove their masculinity, especially in all male environments, contributes to sexual violence against women.

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- Reviewing a manuscript takes time (1–4 hours per manuscript reviewed). If you are selected to review a manuscript, be prepared to invest the necessary time to evaluate the manuscript thoroughly.

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