Brothers without a Mother: An Exploration of Fraternity Life

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Thanks

To Justin, for introducing me to anthropology, supporting me on this journey, and encouraging me to always be creative.

To my mom, for getting me here and teaching me what it means to be a woman.

And to the brothers of Philand, for opening your doors, hearts, and minds, and giving me the most excellent nickname.
Animals

Have you forgotten what we were like then when we were still first rate and the day came fat with an apple in its mouth

it's no use worrying about Time but we did have a few tricks up our sleeves and turned some sharp corners

the whole pasture looked like our meal we didn't need speedometers we could manage cocktails out of ice and water

I wouldn't want to be faster or greener than now if you were with me O you were the best of all my days

- Frank O’Hara

“Fat, drunk, and stupid is no way to go through life, son,”

- Dean Vernon Wormer, Animal House
Author’s Note

When I began my research for this ethnography, I quickly realized that I would encounter challenges with protecting the participants’ privacy. Fraternities themselves hinge on complex webs of secrecy, and though the members of the fraternity where I spent time were eager to participate, they were anxious about me discovering and publicizing their secret rituals that contribute to the fraternity’s culture, and about their identities becoming publically available. For this reason, I have opted to use pseudonyms for the fraternity and all its members, and do not disclose the university to which these members attend. Fraternity members, known as “brothers,” either chose a pseudonym for themselves or gave me permission to choose one for them. For the fraternity itself, I chose the name “Philand” as it begins with a Greek letter like any other social fraternity, and suggests that this fraternity is, to a degree, an autonomous community. Fraternity members generally wish to be a part of a secretive, exclusive community with sets of rules and rituals that distinguish them from the mainstream university culture that surrounds them. Because brothers need to communicate their distinct identity to the rest of the university community or even the greater public, they craft and perform a highly curated, collective identity that looks very different than the private collective identity shared by brothers. I have chosen to include art and poetry in this ethnography to emphasize the multi-faceted nature of the identity brothers perform. Philand itself is a living museum of patriarchy, each room setting the stage for a unique performance with different brothers performing their unique roles to create
the hierarchical backbone of the fraternity. For me to simply provide verbal description of these performances would not effectively capture the significance of the performance because the culture of Philand is mediated by many factors beyond the control of the brothers. The works that I have chosen to incorporate not only reveal my own commentary on the material that I present, but also encapsulate or speak to themes highlighted in each chapter.

- Anna Ehrlich
Introduction: Welcome to Philand

I feel like I’m the host
Of a terrible game show
And the guests on today’s quiz are celebrities.
Won’t respond to any clues
They’re just cracking jokes for views
But the answers to these questions mean everything.

- Los Campesinos! from “Avocado, Baby”

Entrance

I slipped through the doors of Philand on a chilly Wednesday in October. Sam was on his way out and because he knew that I always come to dinner on Wednesdays, he smiled and held the door open. I walked up the staircase to the first floor where we eat, and as I turned left into the dining room, I was met by JP standing in his underwear. He didn’t notice me at first - he was busy gathering his clothes from the floor around him while shrieking obscenities at another brother who was standing on the opposite side of the table. I couldn’t see who it was because I didn’t dare head into the room or peek around the doorway, but based on the squawking noises from the other side of the
room, I assumed it was Colton. Peter, a brother in Colton’s pledge class was pacing the room. He was wearing flannel pajama pants and had a large, thick rope over his shoulder and was loosely gripping a roll of tape, all while making playful jabs at the still nearly-naked JP. He finally met my gaze, and started laughing and waving.

“I’m just going to uh...wait over here!” I said, laughing while feigning discomfort with my expression. JP then also noticed me and managed to choke out a greeting.

“Yeah, I’m not coming in there until you put your pants on...” I waited outside while JP struggled to pull one leg of his pants on. With his pants finally pulled up but unbuttoned, he walked out of the dining room still shirtless and scrambled up the staircase behind me. Finally, I walked into the dining room and set my bag and coat down on a nearby chair. “What was all that?” I asked, even though I was pretty sure I already knew.

“Oh, uh, we were taping JP,” Peter replied, shrugging a little, “but we can’t put tape on his skin, so he took all his clothes off.”

“Ah, I see,” I said, glad to know that I understood the intricate rules of their bizarre taping game well enough to not require further explanation from Peter. Content, we all grabbed dinner plates from the table behind us, and filled them up with the daily offerings from Chef Jake.

Encounters like these are not uncommon at Philand. Many months ago when I began my fieldwork, I was often perplexed by the bizarre behaviors that swirled with the stench of stale beer that hung in the atmosphere. Now, I am hardly surprised by
occurrences such as the one I have just shared. I am not proud to say that I began my fieldwork at a fraternity house at a large university in Boston with a certain set of expectations. I imagined an *Animal House* - esque spectacle with drunk men parading around in togas. I envisioned a house with every surface covered in pizza boxes and empty beer bottles. Most importantly, I constructed dialogue that brothers and I might have. I imagined it would be crude. Unwelcoming. Sarcastic. Maybe even cruel. In many ways, this encounter that I have just described is not far from what I imagined. However, my imagined reality excluded several important details: kindness, empathy, friendship. My reality of fraternities, informed entirely by the media, was rooted in anything but experience and truth. Shortly after we filled our plates and began to eat, JP came downstairs and began laughing and joking. There was no hostility or anger between him and the other brothers. Midway through the meal, Peter even got up and began dancing around the room, shouting out in a bizarre accent while Colton swatted at him.

This type of behavior is not visible to the passerby, or even a guest who frequents parties or beer nights. Rituals like taping only became clear to me after months of visits, and I only began to see past the superficial layers of the brothers’ games and behaviors after careful consideration. These rituals, I now know, form the scaffolding for the secrecy that ultimately distinguishes a fraternity from any other college living group. To me, this secrecy is just as frightening as it is fascinating.
Background

What we, the public, know about fraternities is primarily comprised of two elements: what fraternities publicize and want us to know, and the dirty secrets exposed by mainstream media. Because we see such a curated representation of what happens in a fraternity, we tend to imagine that what happens behind closed doors is comprised mainly of these problematic excerpts that float to the surface. While ritual and secrecy certainly clouds the visible reality of the inner workings of a fraternity, they also create the fraternity.

Recently, the news has been flooded with reports of death and violence at fraternities across the country. From the gruesome death of a pledge at Penn State and the subsequent charging and incarceration of the brothers being held responsible to the numerous reports of sexual violence at various fraternities, it seems fraternities hardly fall into the good graces of the media. It is easy to take these anecdotes as an all-encompassing reality because we can only spin stories from the wool we are given. Universities are even making the decision to shut down all Greek life organizations or suspend certain chapters or groups indefinitely.

At first glance, this may seem like the best solution. A logical response to any problem would be to find the root of the conflict and stop it there. However, I argue that instead of simply shutting down fraternities to put an end to the violence they conjure, we must attempt to peel back the layers of secrecy to explore why men are drawn to these organizations. At their core, fraternities embody the systems of patriarchy that our society needs to confront. These male-centric power systems essentially empower
those already in positions of privilege, and allow those individuals to dictate moral and social codes, and ultimately perpetuate and reinforce harmful misogynist values (Kimmel 2008). Even so, brothers continue to subscribe to fraternity culture and reproduce fraternity culture by enculturating new members because they see value in their culture and want to preserve it. Young men use fraternities to grapple with the privilege associated with masculinity, and though this conflict often manifests in problematic behaviors, men need a space to deconstruct patriarchy. While it is easy for us to vilify organizations that seem to swing into the territory of hatred and misogyny, we must also ask ourselves why young men continue to be drawn to these organizations. To deconstruct systems of patriarchy, we must first take the time to consider why they exist.

Because fraternities are protected by a staggering amount of secret ritual and lore, a superficial sweep of a fraternity cannot uncover any real truth about its values. Fieldwork like my long term participant-observation is essential to understanding how fraternities function and what social function they serve. This ethnography explores not the greater societal impact of fraternities, but the more intricate inner social workings that dictate the impact of fraternities on the communities they inhabit. To understand and analyze my findings, I draw from the functionalist idea that social systems have been constructed by individuals and continue to be produced by individuals to serve a certain set of needs (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). While classically, functionalism refers to biological needs, I have chosen to focus on the mental and emotional needs of the brothers in the fraternity I study. I argue that fraternities serve an essential yet
paradoxical social function in that they perpetuate systems of patriarchy and encourage misogynistic behavior while simultaneously providing a unique homosocial environment for young men to deconstruct their conceptions of masculinity. While brothers at the fraternity I observed often outwardly and superficially seem career-driven, sex-obsessed, and occasionally unnecessarily argumentative, upon closer inspection they are grappling with what masculinity is through these behaviors. In his book *Messages Men Hear*, Ian Harris theorizes that there is no universal understanding of masculinity, but different versions of masculinity inform and dictate how men should behave (Harris 1995, 10). He goes on to say that “each man constructs his own identity in relation to specific gender notions deeply embedded in his culture” and that these different formations of identity and constructions of masculinity manifest in performance. Because there are so many different and nuanced understandings of masculinity, men who are in the midst of constructing their own masculine identity must have an audience to perform their newly crafted identity.

This performance and re-performance ultimately creates a system of mirroring where men construct their identities with the understanding that the performed masculine identity is the true, authentic masculine identity. In this way, the performed identity is understood to be authentic or real. This new reality is known as the hyperreal as in seamlessly and unrecognizably blends the constructed reality with the tangible reality, ultimately creating a simulation (Baudrillard 1981). This continuous cycle of construction, reconstruction, and replacement is known as simulacrum, a process describing the reproduction of a false, hyperreality. In this same vein, a false
construction of masculinity has been continuously reproduced by the members of the fraternity I observed. Because their simulation of hypermasculinized fraternal life falls “at the gates of the unconscious,” it is indistinguishable from what fraternity life could be without the constant bombardment of constructed masculinity (Baudrillard 1981, 3).

This ethnography will focus not on these constructed masculinities, but specifically how brothers construct and reproduce the hyperreal. This close examination of production will ultimately conclude with a discussion of why these men continue to occupy the hyperreal and produce the simulation. To do this, I will focus on deconstructing the intense ritualization of various aspects of fraternity life such as alcohol, sex, women, gender roles, conflict, and even ritual itself. In any of these conversations, it is tempting to think in binary oppositions, especially in the context of morals and ethics. Importantly, much of my analysis will cautiously hinge on the binaries constructed by the brothers to reinforce the boundaries of their society. Binaries are simultaneously helpful and dangerous because they reduce complex issues and questions into easily digestible parts. Binaries help the brothers of Philand to reduce their complex rituals and ideas into manageable doctrine, but external and moral binaries about fraternities do not capture the nuance required for cultural analysis.

Understanding Bias

As I have mentioned, there is a tendency for mainstream media outlets to reduce the actions of fraternities into the moral binary of good or evil. Though I do not disagree that certain fraternity rituals have undoubtedly sinister undertones, it is not
appropriate to chalk these issues up to the actions of men who lack a sense of morality. Analysis of fraternity behavior that follows this path is flawed by reductive and biased reasoning, and only reinforces the harmful stereotypes of fraternities that feed the simulation. For example, anthropologist Peggy Sanday insists that ritual in fraternities that creates the core of their culture exists to exploit and oppress women. She argues that masculinity is most prominently manifested in forms of sexual aggression, and that men in fraternities induct new members through ritualized aggression towards women. I agree with Sanday that ritual plays an essential role in the constructions of brotherhood I have observed and one aspect of this brotherhood is undoubtedly the subscription to a heteronormative reality. However, conflating masculinity with sexual aggression reinforces heteronormative binaries that limit our ability to analyze fraternities and deconstruct the systems that perpetuate these exact harmful constructions of masculinity.

Though challenging, I find it essential to confront these troubling constructions of masculinity. Manifestations of masculine aggression, such as sexual violence, have an intense impact on society. To reevaluate the rationalization of these behaviors, we must confront the root of these issues by examining and deconstructing the barriers that contain and define masculinity. Because fraternities ritualize these barriers in order to better reproduce their constructions of hyperreal masculinity, examining these rituals and self-imposed binaries can illuminate larger themes of constructed masculinity in our society.
Throughout my time in Philand, I often questioned the purpose of these barriers. As an outsider to the group, this ritualized hierarchy seemed bizarre. In many ways, the rituals served their most basic purpose - to separate the fraternity from mainstream society. Even so, brothers often seemed perplexed about the rituals themselves, chalking them up to secret games shared amongst a close group of friends. However, when I would push brothers to divulge details of ritual or ceremonies of the house, they would give vague answers. Clearly, ritual is meaningful to these men beyond merely distinguishing their exclusive society from mainstream culture.

I believe the brothers’ desire to keep their inner workings private is two-fold. Primarily, fraternities are essentially a public secret (Jones 2014). In order for a fraternity to exist, it must create a system that separates the members from mainstream society. However, these systems must remain secret to ensure that the fraternity remains an exclusive society. If the ritual that makes a fraternity an exclusive society became public knowledge, there would be nothing unique about a fraternity in that its form of cultural reproduction relies entirely on secret ritual. The second reason that fraternities are intent on keeping their private behavior so secret is far less obvious and was only observable after months of careful participant observation in the house. Fraternities, in a highly reductive binary, create a public and private display of masculinity. This external construction often appears as misogynistic and highlights the toxic and patriarchal nature of fraternities. However, the internal masculine culture is far less solidified. One common trait of constructed masculinity is that men should handle emotion and insecurity privately without the support of peers, partners, or
mentors. In contrast, fraternity creates a space for men to grapple with constructions of masculinity amongst peers but still in the privacy of their exclusive society. While externally, or to the public eye, men may continue to perpetuate harmful masculine stereotypes, they often internally display emotions and behaviors that are not deemed as masculine in our mainstream society in brother-to-brother interactions. The public face of misogyny, though true to an extent, is also a facade to protect and distort the conflict that these men engage with in the house. Though fraternities encapsulate the essence of toxic masculinity, they also are a place where young men are vulnerable because they are in the process of solidifying their identities. To prevent the public from understanding and interfering with the production of a shared masculine identity, the fraternity must create an undesirable and threatening external presence. Because fraternities like Philand are a unique environment comprised primarily of cisgender young men, they create a homosocial sounding board for men to understand masculinity. This ethnography explores the tension between the public and the private at the threshold of fraternity culture and how this tension relates to the constructions of masculinity created behind closed doors and their manifestation in mainstream society.

Methods, Reasoning, and Outline

Because fraternities clearly rely on complex webs of secrecy, I anticipated that it would be challenging to gain access to a fraternity outside of public events such as parties. However, I knew that visiting during hours not dominated by outsiders would hopefully provide a more authentic view of what everyday fraternity life looks like. A
friend of me introduced me to a brother of Philand in the context of my project, and when he seemed interested, we met for coffee and talked about what the project would look like. He agreed to run the idea past the other brothers, and invited me to a party later in the week to get acquainted with the brothers and the house. For the first few visits, I arranged to come for dinner through this brother. After I got to know more brothers beyond the observer/subject relationship, I would often show up at times that seemed appropriate or arrange a visit with other brothers. Initially, I would categorize my relationship with the brothers was tense, cold, and even a bit awkward. Because I never formally met all the brothers at once and had a chance to introduce myself and my research, I would often meet brothers and would exchange vague snippets of information until we had a shared understanding of why I was at the house and what our expectations were for each other. During one of my earliest visits, one brother explained to another that “It’s like Jane Goodall, except we’re the apes.”

I found it most helpful to visit around dinner time when many brothers would return to the house after being done with work for the day and would talk about classes, work, and even household drama and conflicts. I could sit and listen to them chat and would only interject occasionally after being addressed directly. I sought to become completely immersed in their everyday lives to the extent that was possible (Geertz 1998). Since much of the brothers’ social time is spent hanging out with one another, I soon realized that I would glean the most information from these hangouts if I treated them as more than superficial social interaction. Clifford Geertz describes the practice of becoming immersed in the fieldsite to this degree as “deep hanging out,” a tactic that
is especially useful in fieldsites where members curate and perform culture. Because the brothers of Philand were initially cautious to reveal details about their society to me, it seemed the best way to learn about Philand would be to hang out with the brothers and not play the expected active role of a researcher. In time, as the brothers became used to my presence, we certainly became closer. After we had developed a more trusting and friendly relationship, I became concerned with developing over-rapport, especially since in almost any other context, we would be considered peers. As I continued my attempt to bridge the gap that made me an outsider to better understand their culture, I had trouble distinguishing the limits of an appropriate relationship. However, because I am a woman, I will always be a true and identifiable outsider to the house. No matter how close I become with brothers or how much I know about Philand’s structure, I always remain othered. Brothers sometimes joked that because I was at the house “so much, [that I was] basically a brother.” While that may be true, this is said with the understanding that I will never be fully initiated into the house because of my gender.

My identity as a woman reiterates my outsider status and prevents me from fully participating in any private rituals, whether formal or casual. Essentially, I am allowed to participate in any ritual within the confines that the brothers deem appropriate. For example, I can visit the house when the brothers have chapter meetings. However, when they begin the portion of the meetings that includes secret rituals, I am always respectfully asked to leave the room or instructed to go to another part of the house. To show how I fit into the collective society, the brothers gave me the fitting nickname of “Annathropology,” which highlights how the brothers see my role in the house, but also
indicates that I am close enough to be called something other than my given name. Additionally, as a feminine-presenting individual, I am often in a position where I can easily identify and even contradict the hypermasculine norms of the house and dissect the performative aspect of gender in the house through the brothers’ desire to preserve gender roles. In my everyday life including my time spent at Philand, I identify as a feminist. Though I will not delve into the complexities of what feminism means to me, in simple terms, I believe it is important to study fraternities because they are a highly concentrated intersection of patriarchy and misogyny. As a woman, I am keenly aware of these dynamics even though brothers have been indoctrinated to subscribe to these systems for their entire lives. I know that patriarchy harms everyone, though the manifestation of this harm is different based on the circumstances, identity, and experiences of the individual in question. Fraternities often showcase harmful patriarchy in the public view by performing forms of masculinity that degrade other brothers and women or other guests in the house. During my time at Philand, I navigated many behaviors that would be labeled as problematic and confronted them to the degree that felt appropriate. What I mean by “problematic” is essentially any activity that promotes or perpetuates misogyny, oppression of minoritized groups, or glorifies or exploits patriarchal power structures. I initially feared that engaging in discussions that were heavily laced with racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise problematic undertones would further normalize the acceptance of the topics, I quickly realized that these conversations were a platform for meaningful dialogue. When I reflect on the many such conversations, I did not once entertain the acceptance of these beliefs.
Engaging in difficult conversations does not glorify or condone harmful behaviors. If anything, these conversations provided an outlet for brothers to critically examine the harmful systems to which they subscribe. I would also like to make it clear that conversations with racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise problematic undertones were by no means common, normal, or frequent in my time spent at Philand. I am confident that this is not entirely due to my presence as an outwardly liberal woman; though my presence certainly could have influenced the behaviors of the brothers at Philand, brothers often pointed out that they were not a “typical” fraternity in that they did not engage regularly in common fraternity practices focused to the degradation of others, including hazing. Even if Philand is not a standard fraternity, these problematic behaviors are not necessarily frequent or common at any fraternities - they are simply amplified by the media and are performed to continue the cycles of secrecy that define fraternities.

To best understand these behaviors, both in their constructions and performance, I examine rituals, especially as they relate to gender in several contexts. In addition to my own research, I include comparisons to Freemason societies which share numerous observable traits with Philand, especially pertaining to ritual and secrecy. I will also discuss Melanesian men’s houses, which in addition to including male-specific rituals also share the domestic and home aspect that fraternity life provides. Of course, all of these contexts share the trait of being entirely male in their composition. In the first chapter of this ethnography, I will consider the implications of homosocial environments and the importance of masculinity in relation to Philand’s culture.
Next, I move to discuss ritual in the broadest sense as ritual elevates a homosocial environment from a group to a brotherhood. I will then focus on several rituals in Philand, most notably alcohol as a ritual object and the rituals of alcohol consumption in the house. As an element that is often used to define fraternity life by mainstream American culture, it is essential that this ethnography include a close examination of alcohol rituals, both formal and casual. To an extent, I will also deconstruct the popularized narrative and myth of alcohol usage in fraternities, or at least discuss the extent to which they are accurate to my observation.

Another element that is often used to define fraternities, perhaps in contrast to their inherently all-male environment, is women. I first discuss sex and sexuality in the house, including topics like brothers telling stories about sex and brothers using sex as a means to solidify their identity. This chapter focuses on the homoerotic undertones or even overtones of some conversations, behaviors, and rituals, includes some discussion of the value assigned to women in the house and how they fit into the brothers’ desire to perform their masculine identity through sexual acts.

I conclude with a chapter that centers entirely around women, how women fit into Philand, and the brothers’ performed constructions of femininity. Since sexual violence is an unfortunate manifestation of toxic masculinity within fraternities, this chapter discusses the implications of misogyny in fraternities and the degradation of women in hierarchical homosocial environments. While problems like sexual violence are not unique to Philand or fraternities alone, it is important to discuss the
manifestations of problematic behaviors to best consider how these behaviors can be addressed.

Interwoven with these discussions will be the sometimes visible, sometimes invisible boundary of the house and the outside world. While many aspects of the fraternity community are attached to their house, in some ways the culture is portable and moves with the brothers. The brothers must perform their intimate bonds in public to communicate the brotherhood to outsiders (Jones 2014, Lévi-Strauss 1982). It is important to remember that though Philand’s society relies heavily on their house to create the bonds of brotherhood that they value, this brotherhood is not limited to the boundaries of the house itself. Brothers continue to bond and interact with each other in public sometimes as if they were still in the house, while at other times they might behave differently. However, because the house provides the privacy that the brothers require for certain ritualized practices, moments in the house provide a more accurate sampling of what life at Philand is really like (Lévi-Strauss 1982). Even though these house-specific moments are more representative of the brotherhood than public performance outside the home, my experience is limited and essentially mediated by brothers.

Just as the brothers craft two distinct yet interwoven versions of Philand for the public and private eye, I have curated this ethnography to highlight the dissonance between the differing perspectives they present. While I have included encounters that demonstrate the complexity of the cultural production in Philand, I also treat not only the social structure of Philand, but the physical structure as well, as important
ethnographic data. To address how external factors such as media have impacted fraternity culture, I have peppered poetry, song lyrics, and art throughout this ethnography. Above all, the 1978 film *Animal House* transformed fraternity culture because it emphasized rowdy behaviors that previously had not been mainstream in fraternities while simultaneously criticizing the more conservative, staunch ways of men’s Greek letter societies. Though *Animal House* seems to glorify the chaos of a fraternity, it ultimately criticizes the buffoonish nature of the brothers through humor. Even so, many brothers of Philand adore the film, and see it not as a criticism, but a standard to meet, even though the film is clearly fictional. Because a fictional fraternity portrayed in an edited film has become the paragon fraternity, this ethnography should be read as commentary on a production. The frame of reality in Philand differs from that of mainstream society, and the brothers deftly perform their reality for their public audience.

Ringing out the old and shining in the new  
We’ve been bought and sold and don’t know what to do  
All these empty lies, we bastardise the truth  
We're left in the cold and now it’s up to you

You’ve been tricked and you made up your mind  
Without even thinking  
All the good deeds you did left behind  
And the options are shrinking  
Do you know why we all look the same?  
The scale of destruction  
You feel guilty and know who to blame
It's the Puppet Theatre
The Puppet Theatre

- Claptone, from “Puppet Theatre”

Welcome to Philand.
I. Brotherhood

We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going—North and South excursions making,
Power enjoying—elbows stretching—fingers clutching,
Arm’d and fearless—eating, drinking, sleeping, loving

- Walt Whitman

It seems obvious that an important aspect of most social fraternities is their entirely male composition. I have chosen to focus intently on this defining feature because much of the less obvious aspects of fraternities are embedded in brotherhood. If I were to gloss over this feature, I would also ignore the subtle nuances that contribute to expressions of brotherhood and fraternity culture that are easily visible to the mainstream public, and would ultimately fail to address the symbolic bonds that create the outward expression of fraternity culture that we see represented by mainstream media. Also in this discussion I have included a section to focus on hierarchies within Philand. Social hierarchies within Philand - both official and unofficial - influence and
define many aspects of the brotherhood. To discuss homosociality without hierarchy would exclude unique patterns of behavior that have emerged in this all-male society due to brother-to-brother feedback and policing. Together, homosociality and hierarchy create what we have been enculturated to accept as brotherhood within a fraternity.

The word “fraternity” itself comes from Latin frater, meaning “brother;” the derivative fraternity signifies brotherhood. This word has been used in almost uncountable contexts - from the Middle Ages Catholic Church to modern day Freemasons, men with a common goal or set of principles are quick to call themselves a brotherhood. What is most important about this word itself is the familial implication. Men who join any type of fraternity engage in a fictive kinship, or a kind of relationship between unrelated individuals that is intended to mirror or assume the role of blood family. As far as constructed familial relationships go, fraternal societies are especially unique because they also embody a pure patriarchy, or a society where men hold all control because only men are included. Therefore, the constructed fraternity family must be produced and reproduced entirely without women. This simulation of family so deftly excludes women in its construction that brothers and mainstream society alike blindly subscribe to the brotherhood, ignoring the absent absence women in the family. Fraternities are frequently criticized for embracing problem behaviors like systematically degrading women or causing physical harm to other brothers, and this is often attributed to the fraternity’s all-male construction which could seem steeped in toxic masculinity and misogyny (Sanday 1992). However, very rarely do these critics
question why these behaviors manifest in fraternities beyond the society being comprised entirely of men.

This womanless kinship has been consistently reproduced in so many short generations of fraternity brothers that the absence of women in fraternities is as normal as women in the family in heteronormative, mainstream society. Fraternities are therefore no longer thought of as imitations of families - they are instead viewed by members and society alike as an original brotherhood. Speaking exclusively in gender binary, fraternal societies’ culture is produced and reproduced in response to the absence of women. Because they seek to replicate similar bonds to those which are consanguineal, they must respond and account for the absence of a matriarch (Hogbin 1970). In a Western context similar to which Philand and other college social fraternities belong, hierarchy within a traditional family may largely linked to gender dynamics (Harris 1995). Though gender expression certainly falls on a spectrum, a large portion of the gender scale has been neutralized or is ignored in a social fraternity because brothers are assumed to express a masculine identity.

Patterns of reproducing family structure in the absence of women emerge in many all-male societies, including the gender-separated residences exemplified by Melanesian men’s houses (Lévi-Strauss 1982, Hogbin 1970). In this case, men partake in many rites of passage, culminating in a ritual of penis incising that the young man will continue to perform for the rest of his life. This ritual causes the penis to bleed, and is largely understood to be an act of body cleansing and an imitation of menstruation. Here, the men, who spend most of their time apart from women, reproduce family
structure by imitating the physical characteristics of women. This action does not emasculate men or put them in a position where they would be viewed by their male peers as female during the time of their ritual bleed. However, because the goal of this ritual is to imitate a feminine biological trait, it does create a platform for men to replicate a heteronormative society in a homosocial setting (Hogbin 1970).

The brothers of Philand do not imitate traditionally feminine traits to establish their family-like structure. Instead, they focus intensely on categorizing members of the fraternity and assigning value to these labels. Though this ritual does not imitate a heteronormative society, it does mimic the power structures commonly attributed to different generations of a family. The construction of a heteronormative environment and the construction of familial generations serve the same social function: they allow men to pass on their traditions and culture to future generations without physically producing a new generation (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). The homosocial hierarchy in Philand contributes largely to the outwardly visible and observable behaviors of many brothers. In this case, when I refer to hierarchy, I am not referring to social dynamics that develop organically in any friend group. Though friendship undoubtedly contributes to the way hierarchy manifests within Philand, social dynamics should not be conflated with hierarchy. Because there is rapid turnover of brothers within the house - in four years, there will likely be an entirely different group of brothers in Philand - social dynamics within the house change frequently. Hierarchy, however, is partially determined by factors beyond the walls of the house. The Philand that I observed is not the only Philand. While the group of people is unique, the fraternity
itself is not. Philands can be found at many colleges and universities in the United States, and their social dynamics undoubtedly differ from society to society. However, because all Philands belong to the same national organization and subscribe to the same set of principles, parts of their social structure are determined largely by stipulations from their national headquarters. If chapters of Philand wish to maintain the endorsement of their national organization, they must follow a set of rules.

Though these rules are passed down internally from one class of brothers to the next, the brothers of Philand also receive national guidance. Once a year, an alum of Philand who has chosen to work for the general headquarters of Philand as a career will visit the different chapters of Philand. These “leadership consultants” are assigned a specific region of the country and will spend a few days at the various chapter houses in the area. The purpose of these visits is to ensure that the brothers are following rules and also upholding the values of the fraternity. Though the purpose of these visits seems highly bureaucratic in their description, Eric, the Leadership Consultant of this chapter of Philand, and brothers of Philand alike explained that Leadership Consultants ultimately want to ensure that brothers are modeling brotherhood. Though this has a superficial connotation of being good citizens, to members of a fraternity, this also means the successful reproduction of an all-male group with a social hierarchy that reinforces fraternity values. Most fraternities have a set of principles that were determined by the founding members of the fraternity, and continue to be reinforced by national chapters to ensure the values and mission of the fraternity are upheld by all chapters. These principles often stem from a hybrid goal of academic and social
excellence and most Greek letter societies take their letters from the first letters of the Greek words for their values. The value of the fraternity being all-male goes without saying. When I looked at Philand’s application for former brothers to apply as Leadership Consultant, while there was a space to fill in chapter and class year, there was no box to check for sex or gender.

Eric, the Leadership Consultant for my chapter of Philand, describes himself as a mentor and a leader within the chapters he oversees. His responsibilities are tied equally to helping fraternities fulfill their specific chapter’s mission or short-term goals and assisting with logistics. I met Eric on his last night in town at Philand where we briefly discussed his career and our shared interest in education. He told me that even though he wasn’t in a school setting at Philand, he still felt he fulfilled the roles of an educator as he strives to teach young men about their values. Essentially, he seeks to moderate the brotherhood, which ultimately informs the brothers’ construction of the collective masculine identity that they subscribe to. Eric asked me how I felt about Philand, his questions mostly pertaining to the character of the brothers. I told him that I felt welcomed and safe in the house, and he was extremely pleased by my answer. Later, the brothers set up and conducted a traditional chapter meeting for Eric to observe. Though Eric is a guest in this house, he still is a brother of the greater Philand so he is permitted and welcomed to chapter meetings when brothers participate in a series of rituals unique to Philand. Because I am not a brother, I am not permitted to participate in these meetings when ritual takes place, so I went upstairs to wait for them to be done. Dax, a senior in the house, later told me that Eric spoke about the
importance of brotherhood, and said that “Anna chose this fraternity for a reason.”
Though he didn’t elaborate much beyond that, Dax and a few other brothers assumed he was implying that they are an exemplary fraternity with solid values and good goals. This encounter confirmed to the brothers that they have successfully met the goals of the national chapter and have followed the most important rules and guidelines that have been laid out by the national chapter.

Before Eric’s visit to the house, a few brothers expressed anxiety about the upcoming visit. They spent extra time cleaning the house and even hid their supply of alcohol to create the illusion that they do not consume alcohol regularly in the house. I laughed about this with a few brothers:

“Yeah, but, he has to know that you drink in the house.”
“Well, we’re not supposed to.”
“But he knows. It’s not like he expects you not to have fun...you’re in college.”
“We just want him to be really happy with our house.”

In the days leading up to the visit, some brothers even bragged about how well they hid their personal stashes of liquor.

“Check this out,” Shane coaxed as I walked into his room after dinner. He pushed a flag hanging on his mantle aside to reveal a fireplace full of bottles.

“Wow, that’s clever!” I said.
“Yeah, they’ll never know it’s in here.”

I initially was confused about why the brothers chose to deceive Eric to the degree they did, especially since I suspected that he knew the recreational activities within the walls
of Philand are not quite as wholesome as the brothers made it seem. While it is true that their behavior at the time of the visit was entirely a facade, this facade is necessary for the production of the brotherhood. The brothers must craft a presence that appropriately exemplifies the values of the fraternity in order for their fraternity to continue to be supported by the national brand. If they fail to this, their chapter will be dissolved, and they will no longer have the title of fraternity. Brothers therefore must perform an identity that, though not realistic, exemplifies values determined by their national organization that are largely influenced by the fraternity being all-male and rely on the constructed all-male social hierarchy. Philand members perform an expected standard of brotherhood for Eric so they can continue to live in their all-male society, though their performed brotherhood is really a performance of their moderated all-male social hierarchy. This behavior is consistent with both large-scale societal and small-scale individualized performed masculinity. In his ethnography Messages Men Hear, anthropologist Ian Harris explores normalized constructions of masculinity and how men have been enculturated to perform masculinity due to their upbringing. He argues that “cultural myths contain male messages that set forth prescriptions for how men ought to behave,” which is best exemplified by the cycle of mediated brotherhood that a Leadership Consultant’s presence creates. Here, the “cultural myth” has a dual-meaning: one one hand, it is the brotherhood that upholds national fraternity standards without flaw while on the other, it is the brotherhood that manifests normalized and often problematic fraternity culture. Brothers of Philand receive two conflicting messages of what their brotherhood look like, so they successfully craft two
versions of the brotherhood which both successfully encapsulate the desired standard of being all-male and fitting into a prescribed social hierarchy. Essentially, the official hierarchy that brings Eric to the house mediates and moderates the unofficial hierarchy that emerges in Philand’s internal structure which entirely due to the society being all-male in the first place. Eric visits the house to ensure that brothers do not partake in problem behaviors that frequently manifest in American fraternities, which in turn informs how the brothers of Philand actively construct their brotherhood.

To continue to regulate the goals and mission of the brotherhood, all chapters of Philand are required to have some sort of internal, official hierarchy. The official hierarchy consists of elected positions which brothers vote upon once per semester. Brothers may elect other brothers or themselves for positions such president, vice president, social chair, house manager, and rush chairs. The purpose of this hierarchy is practical and has two essential functions. Primarily and superficially, it serves to maintain order in the house. The president and vice president are responsible for organizing chapter meetings that all members of Philand must attend, while the house manager assigns tasks or duties to brothers to keep the house clean. Social chairs plan parties and other social events, and the rush chairs organize the events to recruit new members each fall semester. Secondarily, and far less obviously, these jobs seek to maintain the sense of tradition that defines Philand. At the chapter meetings led by the president and vice president, all brothers participate in regulated ritual activities that reaffirm the exclusivity of the fraternity and its shared values as a brotherhood. The rush chairs must publicize the unique values and culture of Philand while
simultaneously maintaining the secrecy that creates the brotherhood. The social chairs’

Aside from fitting into a hierarchy established by their national organization, the

The brothers of Philand frequently host social events ranging from small gatherings to

At large parties, brothers use the structure of the house to reinforce boundaries and hierarchy by

At one especially large party I attended, guests flocked outside the door, lining up along the walkway in front of

The door itself is doubled - one brother stood outside the first door and the foyer to prevent a

Finally, one of the brothers guarding the door became fed up with the chaos, and he began yelling from the steps of the house that he “needed everyone to line up or else no one was going to get in.”

At this point in my visits to Philand, I knew enough brothers that I could have quickly gained entrance to the house, but I chose instead to wait outside because I was
eager to see how the brothers would handle a rowdy crowd. I have seen the careful
gatekeeping ritual occur at most parties I have attended, and have learned that this
predictable and unchanging series of events serves many purposes. Of course, brothers
want their parties to seem desirable. Making it challenging to get into their house
reinforces the idea that their parties are exclusive and therefore better than parties
where it is easy to get in. Secondarily, brothers are anxious about police showing up at
their parties. Large crowds on the sidewalks are practically an invitation for police to
get involved - their imaginations must go wild at the spectacle unfolding behind closed
doors if this many scantily-clad coeds are happy to wait outside in freezing
temperatures. These two aspects of parties speak to the cultural myth of fraternities
which is largely determined by how brothers perform brotherhood which is reliant on
their externally-visible social hierarchy (Harris 1995). We have been enculturated to
understand that fraternities are hot spots for undergraduate parties and little else beside
the consequences that stem from these parties. When brothers have parties, they do
their best to perform a standard of brotherhood that is seen as desirable and fun by
mainstream American culture (Harris 1995, Kaplan 2014). It is almost too obvious so say
that this is linked to the fraternity being all-male. What makes fraternity brothers
different from other party hosts on college campuses is that they are all men, and this is
appealing to certain groups of party-goers. Faced with the challenge of competition of
other fraternities on the area, members of Philand then must perform their brotherhood
to attract outsiders. This performance is largely predetermined by the fraternity’s social
hierarchy, so the better reinforced the social organization of the fraternity is, the better their performance will be.

The final reason for this careful regulation of entrance is that brothers really are faced with a challenge of controlling their guests. Once a person enters their house, the person becomes their responsibility. More people creates more liability, and though the brothers do their best to ensure that everyone has a safe and fun experience, they can only control so many factors.

Upon entrance to the house, guests will walk up a few stairs to the living and dining rooms where the dancefloor is set up for large-format parties. To attempt to regulate the behavior of their guests once inside, brothers have assigned positions for all parties. Older brothers tend to have more favorable duties on the main floor while the new pledges are tasked with standing on the staircase leading up to the brothers’ private rooms. Only guests who know and are escorted by a brother are allowed into these spaces. In this way, the brothers physically and subtly perpetuate the hierarchy they subscribe to - even guests are subjected to regulation. Unfortunately for brothers who are assigned to regulate the staircases, guests seeking entrance to the upper levels of the house who do not have a legitimate reason for entry - they are either not recognizable as a friend of the house to the brother on duty or they are unescorted - are often belligerent. It seems that guests feel that once they have entered the main doors, they are entitled to roam about the house as they please.

Initially, I was confused by why brothers with the least amount of experience working parties of this nature would be tasked with such a seemingly important role.
After spending some time with a new pledge class, however, I soon realized that this tasking was a form of initiation. One evening, several pledges were commiserating over their duties that they were assigned. Derek complained that he was assigned cleanup duty, and several other pledges chimed in, agreeing that their jobs are inarguably the worst.

“That doesn’t seem fair!” I interjected, “you should be allowed to do what you want at parties, same as everyone else.”

Derek shrugged, “Yeah, I guess, but next year when we have new pledges, we won’t have to.”

Even at parties, brothers continue to reinforce and regulate their internal social hierarchy because they view their attachments as something significant that differentiates them from the public sphere (Kaplan 2014). Because brotherhood-based societies must have an audience to perform their brotherhood to, they have to ensure that they reinforce constructed hierarchy in the context of being an all-male social club. In the case of Philand, if brothers did not publicize their social hierarchy, they would simply be a group of men who share a home hosting a party together. Like other brotherhood-based societies like Freemasons, brothers must publicly display their collective intimacy or collective bond (Kaplan 2014). The public mediation of brothers’ duties at parties fulfills this function and allows brothers to participate in the party while simultaneously reinforcing the hierarchy that brothers otherwise rely on to build their friendship around.
Though all brothers have roles in Philand and wish to participate in the network of relationships, different roles within the house carry different weight, and the importance of these roles vary by social context (Bourdieu 1986). The title given to members who have not yet been initiated into the society, “pledge,” is a title that new members are eager to shed because it indicates that they still stand on the threshold of the society. Pledges are assigned the worst tasks at parties, and once they have been initiated, they continue to hold undesirable positions like door duty, making sure people do not go upstairs, and cleaning up at the end. Often times, large swatches of their time spent at the party are occupied by fulfilling these duties. Of course, pledges or newly initiated members do not choose these roles - they are assigned by older brothers who have been elected to these positions. Brothers hold positions like President, Vice President, Treasurer, Social Chair, Risk Manager, House Manager, and a handful of others.

Though the person holding the title of President often universally also holds the most power, this is not necessarily true in Philand. During chapter meetings and other official business, the President will complete important logistical tasks. At a party, however, other roles become far more important. The Social Chairs are responsible for planning the party and will be forced by other brothers to accept blame if parties are unsuccessful. For example, one social chair wanted to primarily hold large-format parties instead of smaller, more intimate events. Against the wishes of other brothers, he continued to plan huge parties and ultimately other brothers became extremely frustrated. Similarly, if Social Chairs consistently plan parties that are poorly organized
or are not fun, brothers become frustrated because this is a poor reflection on the fraternity as a whole.

At parties themselves, Risk Manager becomes one of the more important titles. Though Risk Managers will likely have little to do with guests’ enjoyment of the party, they will take part in ensuring the fraternity maintains its legitimacy in the eyes of the University if something goes wrong. A large part of the Risk Managers’ role is to make sure that the party is safe, especially in terms of alcohol distribution and consumption. Fraternities should not, in the eyes of the University and law enforcement, serve alcohol to individuals who are under 21, and Risk Managers often create some system to show that the fraternity is making its best effort so that this does not happen.

In many ways, Social Chairs and Risk Managers compliment each other and carry equal weight in the context of parties and other social events. Social Chairs plan the event to publicize the fraternity and make sure the party is fun, while the Risk Managers plan to protect the fraternity and the guests once they are inside the house. These two positions work together to highlight the unique inside and outside dynamic in the fraternity. Though the positions may seem at odds with one another, in reality, they mediate the performance of brotherhood and Philand’s culture and the degree to which this performance is made public.

On a daily basis, the brother that tends to have an impact on brothers most prominently is the House Manager. The House Manager assigns tasks to brothers to make sure the house stays clean and organized, and also makes arrangements with outsiders like contractors or maintenance workers. Again, this position impacts
brothers and guests in the house. Though the tasks of the House Manager may seem mundane, his position is one of the most important because failure for brothers to complete their tasks will often lead to extreme tension between brothers. For example, if the brother assigned to clean the dishes does not complete his task, dishes will pile up in the sink, and brothers not responsible for cleaning the sink will become angry. The House Manager also has the power to fine brothers for not completing their tasks, giving him the power to ultimately and concretely mediate brother’s behavior.

These positions, along with others, make up the internal official hierarchy of Philand. Notably, the titles themselves do not necessarily indicate the amount of power that the brother holding the position has, and the amount of power the brother has is determined by traditions established by generations of Philand brothers. Because the brothers of Philand determine, in practice, how much power a brother has over them, the positions are mediated by the institution, not the elected brother. Similarly, if a brother performs poorly in his elected position like the unruly Social Chair, he likely will be disliked by other brothers which will impact his popularity and social mobility within Philand (Bourdieu 1986).

Together, the official elected panel of brothers coupled with unofficial social relationships between brothers make up the hierarchy of Philand. These two elements of hierarchy are inseparable as brother popularity undoubtedly influences a brother’s ability to win an elected position. However, they can be examined as two distinct yet interwoven halves to a whole, mirroring the two distinct performances of brotherhood produced for the Leadership Consultant and the brothers themselves. Hierarchy in
Philand exists in multitudes, and these distinct hierarchies exist for different purposes. However, all hierarchies in Philand control the behavior of the brothers or the guests they invite into the house. These hierarchies combined create the scaffolding for brothers to construct and reproduce their culture around.
II. Ritual

I ain't lookin' to compete with you
Beat or cheat or mistreat you
Simplify you, classify you
Deny, defy or crucify you
All I really want to do
Is, baby, be friends with you
[...]
I don't want to fake you out
Take or shake or forsake you out
I ain't lookin' for you to feel like me
See like me or be like me
I don't want to meet your kin
Make you spin or do you in
Or select you or dissect you
Or inspect you or reject you
All I really want to do
Is baby be friends with you
Baby be friends with you
Baby be friends with you

- Bob Dylan, from “All I Really Want to Do”

Bob Dylan’s “All I Really Want to Do” serves as an excellent segue from discussing brotherhood because the brotherhood of a fraternity could not exist without the social component of friendship. When I ask brothers why they joined a fraternity,
many say it is because they wanted a go-to group of friends, or even elaborated to say that Philand has introduced them to people who they never would have met or spent time with otherwise. Contrasting to the simplistic nature of the friendship that is described in Dylan’s song, however, is the complex construction of friendship in Philand. While Dylan seeks a friendship that does not involve competition, restriction, or inspection, the brothers of Philand perform rituals that are inherently competitive and cause brothers to carefully analyze the character and value of other members. In fact, in addition to brotherhood, second most important feature that distinguishes a fraternity from being an ordinary group of male friends is the ritualized aspect of their relationships. Ritual is closely interwoven with the homosocial environment - one cannot sustain or exist without the other. The members of Philand use rituals to define their friendships and boundaries of the brotherhood. On a basic level, a ritual is a routine or a series of events that an individual or group repeats. What traditionally separates ritual from a routine is that it tends to have a religious or spiritual component, and could be almost equated to a ceremony. In Philand, brothers partake in various rituals on a regular basis - they are deeply embedded into their everyday life. Philand is not a religious or spiritual organization, but the rituals that brothers engage in that I have witnessed mimic many religious ceremonies due to the symbolism embedded in everyday culture in Philand. Brothers may not even recognize that many of their everyday behaviors are ritualistic due to how seamlessly embedded symbol and ritual are in their culture.
There are two essential types of rituals that unfold in Philand: official organized ritual and unofficial ritual that is too symbolic and systemic to be included in everyday routine. Primarily, and arguably most important, is capital r Ritual. Ritual is a component of most chapter meetings and to a degree is prescribed by Philand’s national headquarters. I know that Ritual includes some props, some chanting, and a “very long thing that JP [the president] has to read at the beginning” of each meeting. If I ask brothers what happens in Ritual, they will usually smirk and shrug. I once jokingly pleaded with Dax that he share Ritual with me:

“Tell me! I swear, I won’t tell anyone or write anything! I just wanna know!”

He grinned, saying “I can’t tell you what happens in Ritual! The last fraternity that let its secret out isn’t even a fraternity anymore. They’re...well...you probably have one at Wellesley.”

“Phi Beta Kappa?”

“Yeah --”

“No, they’re an honors society!” I argued. He shook his head.

“No, they were a fraternity but they told their secrets and now they aren’t a fraternity anymore.”

Though Phi Beta Kappa is the oldest Greek letter fraternity on record, the myth of its secrets getting out seems to be entirely fabricated. Phi Beta Kappa started out as any other Greek letter fraternity - a group of men with similar interests met, secretly, to discuss their ideas and bond over their intellect. To preserve the intimate group dynamic, these societies made it difficult for other members to join, and had complex
initiation ceremonies and meeting rituals that only members could know. According to modern-day fraternity legend, a member of Phi Beta Kappa slipped, and told a non-member about the secret society and its rituals. Because the society’s secrets were now public knowledge, the social intimacy of the society evaporated, leaving only the shared academic interests. Therefore, Phi Beta Kappa became the first academic Greek letter society, open to all people who qualified. In reality, the fraternity itself was founded as a secret society, but the requirement of secrecy was lifted in the early 1800s due to a large anti-Masonic movement among the academic elite. Though false, the story is certainly compelling and only thinly veils the idea that secrecy and exclusivity is essential to creating a true fraternity.

I was initially frustrated and even hurt that brothers were unwilling to let me participate in Ritual. They sometimes talked about Ritual so nonchalantly that I interpreted my exclusion as a sign of distrust. However, I quickly realized that my interaction with Ritual is a microcosm for fraternity secrecy as a whole.

In order for a secret to be a secret, someone has to be excluded from the secret lest the secret become common knowledge. For a secret to be really meaningful, the party that is excluded from the secret must also be aware that the secret exists in the first place (Jones 2014). If the excluded party is unaware of the secret, they are unaware of their exclusion, and may see themselves as an insider in the group that wishes to exclude them. The most tantalizing and intriguing secrets are those that the excluded party is made aware of. When I became aware of Ritual but was not allowed to participate, the boundary between the brothers and I was reaffirmed (Kaplan 2014).
was reminded that though we may trust each other, I am not privy to their secrets (Jones 2014). Even so, they are willing to give me some small window into what Ritual might look like so that I am aware that I am excluded from Ritual. On one visit, the brothers held a chapter meeting where Ritual took place. I was asked to leave the room, and I obliged, heading upstairs to an unoccupied room. Even though I was physically removed from the room, I could still hear snippets of what was happening in the living room where Ritual was taking place - the sheer volume of men chanting and acting in unison made this more than possible. After the meeting concluded, I told Dax and a few other brothers that I could hear them. Admittedly, I struggled with whether or not to tell them because I feared that I would have breached some boundary and would be looked upon with disappointment.

“I didn’t try to hear you - I mean, I wasn’t eavesdropping. I just could because, you know, the walls are thin and the door was open...”

“Eh, it’s probably fine.”

I was stunned by the response. Brothers had emphasized the importance of keeping Ritual secret, I predicted my accidental exposure to be problematic. I realized then that the brothers must have been at least somewhat aware that I would be able to hear what they were doing when they asked me to move to another room and not leave the house entirely, so excluding me from the room in which they performed Ritual reinforced the idea that I am an outsider in the house. Removing me from the room created a visible barrier between brothers and me, and though it did not prevent me from hearing Ritual, my absence symbolized me being an outsider (Turner 1966).
Unique fraternity rituals like Ritual at Philand are therefore used to identify the group of people who make up the brotherhood (Kaplan 2014, Rhoads 1995). However, Ritual itself does not create the familial atmosphere. Brotherhood cannot grow organically out of a group of people because brotherhood itself seeks to replicate consanguineous relationships. The imitation of these familial relationships instead requires ritual to replace the blood ties that brothers in a nuclear family would share (Hogbin 1970). Official Ritual is not personal enough to create this family, so brothers instead turn to a series of initiation rituals that are more seamlessly integrated into their everyday lives (van Gannep 1960, Raphael 1988).

Before I discuss initiation rituals, I need to be very clear that I truthfully have not witnessed any incidents of hazing that would be considered degrading or would cause any sort of bodily or emotional harm to participants. In fact, when I questioned Dax about what “makes brothers [at Philand] so close,” he told me that one thing that differentiates this chapter of Philand from other university fraternities is the absence of hazing:

“In a state school, it would be the fact that you all got hazed together, and that you’re all friends because you got hazed. You’re always closest to your own class, and maybe harbor a little resentment toward the other classes. But with us, you have to do things within your class — I honestly wouldn’t say it’s hazing! It’s just forced hanging out. And that gets you closer to people. I think it’s the fact that you realize you rushed [joined the fraternity] because you liked some people, and you learn to get along with other people. Your realize you like other people, and maybe you wouldn’t normally hang
out with them, but they are really cool. That’s happened a lot here! I probably wouldn’t have found some of these random people on the street and thought that we’re going to be friends, but we are. And you’re living with people! I’m way closer to people I live with in the house, just because you can randomly stumble into their room at three in the morning. You’re not just getting drunk together — you’re doing work and a bunch of other random things, so I think that helps.”

Dax touches on two major facets of Philand’s setup that creates a family-like environment. Clearly, brothers all living together in one house replicates the residential aspect of a family life (Hogbin 1970). Brothers of the same class year sometimes even share a room with bunk beds, much like siblings of similar ages might in a home. He also touches on the notion of “forced hanging out,” a ritual that could be comparable to time that families designate to spend with each other. Because I am not at the house at all hours of the day, I cannot fully describe what he means by this. Part of what he might be referencing could be events known as “Pledge Tasks,” where new pledges to the fraternity must do an activity of each older brother’s choosing with that brother. Rituals such as this serve two distinct but related functions. On a surface level, they help new members bridge the gap from the outside the house to inside the fraternity. Entry to the home bridges the liminality between the outside, and initiation rituals bridge the liminality between outside the society and the inside (Turner 1966). Simultaneously, brothers who participate in these rituals are seen as full members of Philand, so the informal rituals serve as a rite of passage (van Gannep 1960). For example, Jamieson and Derek’s pledge task was that new pledges come to their room and play videogames.
Throughout the time I spent in their room shortly after initiation, new pledges would trickle in and hang out. The idea of playing games quickly dissolved, and soon brothers were playing loud music and roughhousing.

Informal rituals like pledge tasks can occur at any time. Though the brothers devote about a week in second semester after the fall’s rush, or the period where new brothers pledge the fraternity, to initiation of new brothers, rituals to reinforce the solidarity of Philand happen frequently. “Taping” is a ritual built on unity and cooperation between brothers of the same pledge class - that is, they joined the fraternity in the same year. Members of one pledge class will quickly plan to “tape” a brother of a different pledge class. Once they have chosen a brother who is often alone or at least isolated from brothers of the elected brother’s pledge class, the group of brothers will attempt to wrap the chosen brother in tape. There really are not any rules, other than the tape can only go on clothing, not skin. To avoid being taped, instead of running away from the brothers, JP once removed almost all of his clothing.

The issue of consent with this type of ritual quickly becomes convoluted. No one wants to be taped because taping is like a game with a clear winner or a clear loser. All brothers would protest another pledge class taping him, but the pledge class would not stop. Part of the ritual is the denial, though joining the fraternity indicates that one will willingly participate in all initiation rituals. However, brothers that earnestly protest to this ritual are regarded quite differently:

I overheard the end of a conversation between two brothers: “yeah, I don’t get it. Like, just let us tape you.”
“What? Who?” I feign surprise and make a confused and disapproving face to indicate that I also agree that it is ridiculous for a brother not wanting to get taped.

“James. You know him?” I nod. “Okay so Corey was starting go tape him and he was like “ah, no, don’t do it” but Corey started anyway because,” he gestures with his hands and I nod in agreement, indicating that I understand rituals like taping are just part of Philand life, “well anyway, he started swearing a ton at Corey and eventually he slapped him.”

“Whoa, what?” I am genuinely surprised.

“Yeah, so Corey was like “whatever man” and stopped but that was still pretty weird.”

Though brothers have explained to me that there is no hazing and that no one is “forced” to do anything they do not want to do, this exchange caused me to question the degree of choice a pledge or brother has in these tasks. James successfully ended a ritual, but not unscathed. In doing so, he risked becoming a social pariah. Even if the brothers claim that all initiation is completely voluntary, their behavior and actual practice of ritual indicates that one who does not willingly participate in initiation rituals will not be truly accepted into the group. In the case of Philand, brothers cannot use the excuse of consanguine relations to justify a misfit in their manufactured family - an outsider is an outsider. James’s behavior, though performed by the brothers outwardly as acceptable has evidently created a rift as the other brothers still look down upon his behavior.
Ritual as a supplement for family relations is evident in many homosocial societies that seek to emulate the bonds of family without consanguine relations. In his paper “The Architecture of Collective Intimacy: Masonic Friendships as a Model from Collective Attachments,” anthropologist Dan Kaplan focuses on how interpersonal ties model collective group attachments, and how these friendships are integrated or separated from mainstream society. Like Greek letter fraternities in the United States, the Israeli Freemason groups that Kaplan discusses have no goal or mission beyond friendship - the purpose of both these groups is entirely social. Because there is no concrete mission or goal to perform, brothers of these groups must ritualize and perform friendship outwardly so that their social goals are visible to outsiders. As a group, the members of Philand and this Freemason society must outwardly perform intimacy so that their group appears to be visible, exclusive, but still collective (Kaplan 2014). The performance of this group identity reiterates the brothers fictive shared ethnicity, which causes brothers to communicate the exclusive nature of their society to the public (Cashdan 1991).

Kaplan makes the important distinction between this performed group identity that communicates common social themes to the public, and the internal performed identity that communicates the secret friendship bonds shared between members. He describes the paradoxical “public intimacy” format where members of the Freemason society communicate to non-group members their secret bond through rituals like using code language. This identifiable speech pattern is comparable to the public knowledge of Ritual in Philand - that is, the public is aware that secret rituals happen, but they are
not privy to the details. However, while members of the Freemason society communicate using their secret coded language, they reinforce the intimacy of the bonds they share. Because this system of language is a shared secret, members who can understand these distinct speech patterns are reminded of their group identity. When members speak using code, they self-identify as group members. Therefore, this form of communication simultaneously reinforces the individual’s membership to the group, the group identity, and the group’s identity as it is separate from mainstream society.

Because Philand’s rituals are mostly protected by the walls of the house, there tends to be very little explicit public performance of group identity. However, because outsiders are aware that the house exists and that its members partake in secret rituals, this knowledge itself replaces the performance of an exclusive group identity. For example, when brothers wear Philand-specific apparel on campus, they reaffirm their individual identity as a group member which reminds outsiders of the exclusive nature of the fraternity. Because the general public is aware of the forms of sociability shared by fraternities, the identification of a brother as a member is enough to perpetuate and communicate the system of exclusion. Brothers cannot always travel or be with each other, so they used branded objects like t-shirts emblazoned with their letters to communicate their collective intimacy with the public, even when alone. Wearing clothing specific to Philand marks brothers as group members even when in public and out of the context of the house or other brothers.

Kaplan’s work with Freemason societies illuminates larger themes of public intimacy within homosocial societies, but it does not address homosicality itself.
Though Israeli Freemason societies exclude female members, the rituals Kaplan discusses do not explicitly reinforce the group’s construction of masculine identity. In contrast, many of Philand’s rituals ultimately relate to the group’s masculine identity. For example, part of official Ritual often includes singing, and I have been told by many members that many of these songs relate to hypermasculine themes include crude sexual innuendos. When pledges are initiated into the fraternity, they must learn to perform these songs. In an interwoven pattern of performance and ritualized masculinity, pledges partake in initiation rituals where they learn songs that they will later perform as a part of Ritual. In this way, initiation rituals not only reinforce the group’s identity, but they teach new members how to perform the group identity (van Gannep 1960, Raphael 1988). In many ways, this mirrors a family relationship where older family members teach young members how to behave (Hogbin 1970). However, because Philand’s family is comprised exclusively of brothers, older members not only teach new members how to behave, but how to behave as a man.

The theme of older teaching young boys how to behave as a man is a practice highlighted by Melanesian men’s societies where from a young age, boys partake in rituals that pave the way for them to grow into their manhood (Hogbin 1970). In this society, masculinity itself is ritualized, and the process of becoming a man is broken into distinct milestones that boys will pass through on their journey to becoming men. Fraternities are not nearly as comprehensive as the journey of entering and leaving a fraternity is only four years. However, the time a young man spends in his fraternity will always coincide with his time spent at university, a time period which is commonly
viewed as transformative for many young people in the United States. College is regarded as a rite of passage that young people pass through on their way to full adulthood, so it is fitting that a fraternity would serve a similar function except that it would appeal only to the development of the masculine facet of a young man’s identity (van Gannep 1960, Radcliffe-Brown 1940). Like Melanesian men’s rituals, fraternity rituals seek to reinforce the group’s identity while instructing members how to behave as men (Hogbin 1970, Harris 1995). From what brothers have told me, many rituals focused on masculinity deal with the degradation of women to a degree. In her book Fraternity Gang Rape, anthropologist Peggy Sanday asserts that initiation rituals in fraternity houses rely on the degradation of women and exist solely to perpetuate patriarchy by abusing and exploiting women. She cites a horrific account of gang rape at a fraternity house where members took turns raping a young intoxicated woman as part of an alleged initiation ritual. The example she references is
extreme, and though I disagree that fraternities and fraternity rituals exist exclusively to degrade women, I agree that fraternity members’ conceptions of masculinity are constructed entirely in the absence of women, leaving room for women to be exploited in the process. Since Philand is inherently patriarchal, women are definitely in the lower ranks on the imagined social hierarchy.

At Philand, the physical act of sex with women is never ritualized, and physical sexual acts are never used in initiation activities. However, sex is a common topic in many informal rituals. Because masculinity is defined, to an extent, by a man’s ability to sexually dominate women, when brothers perform masculinity to one another, they often focus on sex (Kimmel 2008, Rhoads 1995). For example, when Jamieson and Derek hosted brothers to play videogames as part of an informal initiation ritual, the conversation quickly focused on sexual innuendo and later turned to sex itself. I noticed that one pledge seemed less aware of hookup culture on college campuses, and rather than validate his confusion, the older brothers and savvier pledges teased him about his innocence.

While most rituals informally approach the topic of sex and sexuality, one ritual in particular focuses on bringing women into the house so that brothers can perform their identity alongside women. During Rush, a time period at the beginning of the school year when the brothers attempt to recruit new members who will become pledges, older members of Philand seek out young college-age women who will come to the house during Rush and facilitate Rush events. When I was asked to be a Rush Girl, I was formally invited to assist with a letter signed by the two brothers who had opted to
plan and run Rush events in the spring prior to Rush. When I pressed brothers to elaborate on why they had Rush Girls, brothers explained that Rush Girls “make the house seem more natural.” This seemed ironic considering the house itself exists without women almost all the time, but I entertained the idea because I was curious to see how women mediating Philand would make the environment more natural. As a Rush Girl, I was gifted t-shirts to wear during Rush by the Rush Chairs, and was invited to a retreat to a beach before Rush began to spend time with the brothers and other Rush Girls. Because brothers want Rush Girls to eagerly represent their fraternity to potential new members, they invest time and resources in ensuring Rush Girls feel appreciated. Rush is a big commitment - attending events takes most of the day, and Rush lasts for the better part of a week. The brothers truly are grateful for their female friends to volunteer to help with Rush, and show their appreciation through material gifts, like the branded t-shirt. However, having young women who are not in the fraternity wear apparel affiliated with Philand serves a similar purpose as brothers wearing apparel outside the house: it indicates to strangers that these women, in some manner, belong with or to the society. Though the brothers do not own my personhood in any sense, because women are never regarded as brothers or full members to the home, wearing a shirt that signals membership to a fraternity to outsiders indicates a passive subscription on my part (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). Outsiders who are familiar with fraternities would know that I am not a member, so me wearing a t-shirt branded with Philand’s name communicates that while I am not a member, I am affiliated with the house. Even though I wore my t-shirt during Rush, I never claimed membership to the
fraternity. Doing so would overstep the boundary between insider and outsider that brothers communicate to me through ritualized friendship behaviors.

The first Rush event I attended was a fancy dinner hosted by the brothers at the house. The brothers had spent all day on campus inviting freshmen to the house, and they even had rented large vans to bring students to their house for the dinner. Their main goal, I soon realized, was to have as many people in the house as possible. They wanted to appear to be a popular fraternity to potential new members, and the best way to create this effect was simply to pack people into the living room. When I first arrived, I was asked to stand outside the house and greet guests and potential new members along with another brother. While my presence physically welcomed people into the house, it also mediated the dynamic between the outside and the inside of the house. Because my gender expression is feminine, I am recognizable as an outsider to all people entering the space, adding an additional layer to the welcoming ritual. An outsider having the power to bring other outsiders into the home indicates that the boundary between inside and outside is easily permeated. As someone who is not a member of Philand but is a friend of the society, I acted as the social threshold just as the foyer of the house I stood in acted as the physical liminal space (Turner 1966). The greeting ritual grants physical and social passage into the house.

When he told me that I should stand outside and greet people, Everett instructed me to be cheerful - I hugged brothers that I knew on arrival and introduced myself to all the guests. This indicates the relationship I share with the brothers to people who are unfamiliar with Philand, and showed guests what behaviors were socially acceptable.
After I greeted the guests, they filtered into the foyer where another brother took their contact information - this ensures that in the future, brothers can reach out to potential new members. Once the event was sufficiently packed and all the vans were back at the house, I went upstairs and checked with Everett once again. He told me to fill my plate, and then to sit with a group of people who were not sitting with many brothers or Rush Girls. Because the brothers were working hard to welcome potential new members, they wanted each person in the house to feel welcomed to reduce the appearance of exclusivity. In order for new members to feel that they can join an exclusive society, the exclusive boundary must appear permeable for membership to seem attainable.

Interestingly, I noticed almost immediately the high volume of freshman women that had entered. In order to appear inclusive, brothers welcome all potential guests.

I settled down with a group where two brothers were already seated. Because we had been away from each other for the whole summer, I was looking forward to reconnecting with the brothers that I knew already. When I sat down, Jamieson introduced me to the freshmen he was sitting with - they all played on the same sports team. Almost immediately after we had exchanged our names, Jamieson told the freshmen that I was writing a paper about the fraternity. I panicked a little as I tend to be cautious about revealing my identity and my research to outsiders, but this topic sparked interest in the two potential new members.

“What have you found so far?” one asked.

“Well, I mean, I really think these are great people,” I said, glancing at Jamieson, “everyone here is super kind and welcoming.”
We chatted a bit about the project, and without going into too many details, I did my best to say what a friendly group the members of Philand are. I later realized that in that moment, I had served my purpose as a Rush Girl. I was meant to act as a salesperson not necessarily for the fraternity itself, but for the friendship and experience of joining the fraternity. My relationship with Philand was commodified and marketed for the purpose of rush, and friendship became ritualized as a part of the Rush Girl experience. Though I am not a brother, my relationship with the brothers as a friend pushes me inside the boundaries imposed by brothers to exclude outsiders. Because new members gained during Rush permeates these barriers, brothers use Rush Girls to mediate this public sphere of intimacy. In this instance, brothers performed our friendship to include outsiders in the same way that they often perform brother to brother friendships to exclude outsiders.

During Rush, brothers rely on Rush Girls because the performance of their friendships alone would only reinforce the barriers they otherwise work to create. Everett instructed me to stand outside to greet guests to physically mediate the barrier between the public sidewalk and the physical boundaries of the house, and then inside asked me to sit with strangers to mediate the social boundary between brothers and outsiders. In Philand, friendship with outsiders is ritualized and placed into the appropriate social hierarchy because the structure of Philand itself relies on carefully crafted systems of exclusion that are reinforced by ritual. Though it initially appears that the fraternity’s social structure impacts only members of the fraternity, because the brothers rely on publicizing their exclusivity, they must also seek to control outsiders.
that come into contact with their public performances of privacy (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, Jones 2014).
III. Alcohol

Reflections on Ice-Braking

Candy
Is Dandy
But liquor
Is quicker.

- Ogden Nash

As the verse from Ogden Nash suggests, alcohol makes an excellent social lubricant. Chemically, alcohol impacts the way humans respond to stress, and depending on an individual’s past experiences with alcohol and the context in which they drink, alcohol causes people to feel less anxiety. Socially, the context in which a person consumes alcohol can greatly influence how the alcohol impacts the body. When commenting on a cross-cultural study of alcohol consumption, Mark Keller, a researcher focused on alcohol consumption and alcoholism, argues that how and when a person drinks may have a greater impact on the body than the quantity of alcohol alone. Providing the example of Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans living in Hartford,
Connecticut, he observes that the way people drink, get drunk, and become reliant on alcohol is largely determined by cultural context. In both these communities, adults consume more or less the same quantity of alcohol over the course of time. However, alcohol addiction affects these communities at different rates because while the Italian-Americans tend to consume alcohol as if it were a part of everyday activity, the Irish-Americans tend to consume alcohol to facilitate social interaction. Essentially, Keller argues that social context matters. The way an individual has been enculturated to understand the rituals alcohol consumption, drunkenness, and acceptable behavior will not only impact how they behave around alcohol, but how they physically get drunk.

In Keller’s studies, because Irish-Americans have been enculturated to affiliate drinking with socialization, they use alcohol to facilitate social interactions. This ritual creates the requirement that for one to interact with others, to an extent, alcohol must be involved. Because humans naturally desire conversation and contact with other humans, the rates of addiction to alcohol is higher in Irish-American communities because alcohol is used as a means to bring people together in a way that is desirable and necessary.

In Philand, brothers largely consume alcohol to elevate or ease social situations. Contradictory to Keller’s account, alcohol is simultaneously woven into normalized social interactions, but is paradoxically regarded as an important ritualized element of socialization. At any party the brothers host, guests can assume that alcohol will be served. Alcohol consumption on this large scale follows no ritual - it simply is a given aspect of social life at the house. However, alcohol consumption in more closed groups -
that is, brother-only or brothers-and-a-few-guests situations - will often include some sort of alcohol consumption that follows a pattern or a set of rules. Before most large parties, some brothers might opt to host private pregames in their rooms. Essentially, brothers and maybe a few guests gather to drink and hang out before a party begins. Pregames provide an opportunity for brothers to get drunk before parties start, which might ease some tension or some anxiety that brothers might feel. Like an appetizer before an entree, pregames whet the participators’ appetites for the event to come. The word “pregame” itself has become jargon of millennial drinking culture, and implies that those partaking in the drinking ritual view the party or event after the pregame as a game. A game is distinct from an event as games have rules or guidelines, players, and aim to follow a certain trajectory to ensure a certain outcome. Beginning the evening with a pregame does somewhat transform the party as those that attended a pregame will share the experience of socializing together prior to the party. They also could be more drunk than other guests upon arrival, depending on the level of consumption. Starting off with a pregame also has the goal of making the party itself more enjoyable, ultimately ensuring that those who drank the party will see their night as a victory, not a defeat.

The way brothers physically consume alcohol at pregames and at other traditional events is inherently ritualized. At one pregame, brothers casually competed to see who could drink a beer fastest, and then began taking shots. One brother made the statement that he could not take a shot alone, so each time a new brother entered the room, a brother took a shot with him. In this situation, some brothers were
consuming large quantities of alcohol in a short period of time, leading them to get drunk quickly. However, because this ritual is normalized and accepted in the house, no one seemed concerned about the large volume of alcohol some brothers were forced to consume as part of this behavior.

Competition within alcohol consumption is a practice that floods beyond Philand to many fraternities across the country. The ability to hold one’s liquor - that is, consume a large quantity of alcohol without showing visible signs of illness or embarrassing behavior - is commonly affiliated with hypermasculinity amongst young men and even women. When discussing alcohol consumption in fraternities, Michael Kimmel hypothesizes that alcohol consumption glorifies those who can consume with ease, but degrades those who struggle, overall reinforcing the hierarchy that brothers establish within the house. This leads to the second implication of Nash’s verse: alcohol is for adults. Candy is a simple pleasure that anyone can enjoy, but only adults can drink alcohol. Brothers use alcohol as a social lubricant because alcohol represents the threshold into adulthood that they are in the process of crossing (van Gannep 1960, Raphael 1988). Fraternities provide the space for young males to go from boyhood to manhood, and alcohol symbolizes this transition. At Philand, brothers who get sick from drinking too much are often teased, and their illness is regarded with humor and brothers who do not get sick are praised. Brothers rarely express genuine concern for brothers who are sick as a result of consuming too much alcohol, or who clearly struggle with a dependence on the substance. Over Facebook Messenger, I had a conversation with Everett about hiring a new Graduate Resident Assistant for the upcoming school
year, and he joked that he would competitively consume alcohol with the candidate to assess if he would be a good fit for the fraternity:

In this conversation, Everett suggests that he “shotgun [a beer]” with the interviewee, implying that he would chug an alcoholic beverage to determine if the candidate were a good leader. I responded by joking that to be “in” or to gain membership and acceptance to the fraternity, one must be able to consume alcohol in this manner. I chose to use the colloquialism “bruh” which indicates how to pronounce the word “bro” in a stereotypical accent. Everett affirmed my sentiment by responding with positive reinforcement, and he did not correct anything I said.

Seemingly in contrast to their desire to binge drink, brothers do tend to express extreme concern or worry for guests at their house who get sick as a result of alcohol consumption. At one large-format party with hundreds of guests packed into a few floors of the house, one young woman became extremely ill and needed medical assistance. The girl was in the basement, and a few brothers stood outside the door to prevent other guests from entering the area while the paramedics attended.

“What happened?” I asked. I was especially confused because the brothers had made an effort to serve very little hard liquor at this party.
“I don’t know,” said Jamieson, “she was drunk when she got here and it’s just gotten worse.”

“Oh,” I said, nodding understandingly, “well, it’s not your fault then...you’re doing the right thing.”

“I guess,” he shrugged, looking over his shoulder at the basement door, “it’s just that once she’s in our house, we’re responsible for what happens to her.” I realized then that the brothers’ extreme unrest stemmed not just from the harm that could come to this girl, but from the likelihood that they would be punished by the university for allowing someone to get sick from consuming alcohol. Unsurprisingly, the brothers do not card or ask for identification from their guests, and it quickly surfaced that this girl was a senior in high school that was visiting her friend in college. Facilitating underage drinking can only escalate punitive measures, especially if this drinking causes harm.

Even though the brothers are aware of the consequences of binge drinking, this does not stop them from hosting or participating in events that explicitly relate to binge drinking. Part of this undoubtedly comes from the brothers’ collective desire to compete and be one of the best fraternities. Between fraternities, there is a partially-humorous partially-serious competition to be “top frat.” Whether there is any specific criteria or a fraternity that
has officially earned the title of “top frat,” is unclear, but the brothers of Philand jokingly discuss it occasionally. These jokes usually stem from larger conversations about other fraternities as ultimately fraternities are competing against each other to be the most popular. Though the ways in which brothers view competition are usually informal, like seeing who has the wildest parties, there are some events that lay out a concrete competition. On the day of the Boston Marathon when most college students party and celebrate the race, the brothers of Philand and other fraternities and sororities gathered for an event known as “boat racing.” Boat races are a type of drinking game generally played with teams of equal numbers. Though the rules vary widely depending on the context and competitors, they generally follow the structure of a relay race with individuals consuming a set amount of beers as quickly as possible. In the spirit of the Boston Marathon, 26.2 beers are divided among eight players. Players drink each beer as quickly as possible and only rest as long as their teammates are drinking. To prepare for this competition, the brothers practiced chugging various liquids as quickly as possible at the dinner table. As I watched them gulp down water or Sprite, I began to feel physically ill at the spectacle. It seemed evident that no brother really enjoyed the experience, but the idea of being the fastest pressed them on: “I heard brothers at [another fraternity] just keep a cup by the bathroom sink. Each time you’re in there, you drink it, and write down your time."

Later, Dax and a few other brothers invited me to tryouts for the boat races - essentially, all the brothers who wanted to be on the team would gather in the basement of the house and hold a mock-boat race. “It’s the most ‘fratty’ you’ll ever see us,”
explained Everett, “like, everyone will be really bro-ey.” One brother was in charge of timing all the others to keep track of who should be on the team, and he paced around the table with a clipboard and a stopwatch. Guests began to filter into the basement along with brothers who would not be participating. Soon enough, the brothers who were competing for spots on the team gathered around a table, three beers lined up in front of each one.

The energy in the room was unlike most other events I had attended. Girls flitted around giggling while other brothers approached the table to admire the setup. I sat on a bench just behind one edge of the table - I preferred to keep back from the action. As the brothers began the race, the room got quiet. A brother would lift a red cup to his lips, and a few seconds later slam it back on the table, practically gasping for breath. He would take a moment to collect himself and would then refocus on the remaining cups in front of him. Several brothers would hold their hands just a few inches outside the cup, hovering until it was time to grab and drain it. Some brothers knew they were not doing well - one choked down a beer while others looked as if they might be sick. Those who failed to perform well were shot sympathetic looks from other brothers.

To the brothers, this ritual is not about the effects of the alcohol on the body, but rather the ability to consume vast amounts of alcohol. In this situation, alcohol facilitates the social encounter, but not because it reduces anxiety. Alcohol is simply the vessel that initiates the ritual. From an outside perspective, because the intent of this game is not necessarily to be drunk, any other beverage could be substituted for beer.
However, because fraternity culture places such emphasis on the importance of beer and equates mass alcohol consumption to masculinity, beer must be used for this ritual.

Brothers use alcohol to measure and facilitate the performance of masculinity in a variety of social contexts. Amongst themselves, brothers will often recount moments when they were extremely drunk, or will make fun of other brothers by telling stories about when a brother was sick or behaved foolishly because he was drunk.

“Okay, so you know JP is like, a total fuck, right?” Issi said one night to me at dinner. Issi had not wanted to eat at the table - he wanted to fill his plate and eat in his room, and when he saw that I had brought brownies he wanted to take one. I joked that he could only take a brownie if he ate dinner with me and told me a story, and this is what he chose:

“Okay, so like, even though he’s our president, he’s a total fuck.”

“Okay, like...what do you mean?”

“Okay, so last year, we shared a room and we had bunk beds. I was on the bottom bunk, and he comes in super drunk one night. I’m already in bed, and I see him, and I’m like ‘yo, are you sure you’re good?’ and he’s like ‘yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m fine.’” At this time, Issi opted to imitate JP’s accent and waved his hands in an exaggerated manner to indicate how drunk he was. “So like, he gets into bed, and I hear him get sick,”

“He threw up?”

“Yeah, he threw up in bed. And like, he doesn’t even try to get up. He just keeps puking, and then it starts to drip onto the wall and onto me.”

“Oh my God! That’s disgusting!”
“Right?” he raises his eyebrows and looks around the room at other brothers, who nod in agreement. “He doesn’t get up! And like, he’ll piss himself too and not get up.”

“What? Really?”

“Yeah, there was one night where he like, passed out on the floor and he pissed his pants. I tried to wake him up, but like, he wouldn’t.”

“What happened then?”

“Well, he had to get transported.” Transported is a term that many college students use to discuss a peer getting taken to the hospital in an ambulance. Though this is not necessarily always related to alcohol, it often implies that the hospitalization was alcohol related. I later asked JP about his experience getting transported, and he told a similar story:

“Yeah, I woke up in the hospital and it was scary...like “ah, where am I?!”” He feigns bewilderment, but is really laughing through all of this.

“Yeah, especially if you can’t remember what happened...so what did happen?”

“Uh, so, basically, I was mixing cocktails for my friends and I would make one for them and one for me. And I’m drinking it and I’m like “ah, this is really good!’”

“Okay...”

“And then, I make like six or seven cocktails for my friends, and I have like, six or seven cocktails myself.”

“Wow, that’s a lot!”

“Yeah, especially because, like, each cocktail has like, more than one --”
“More than one shot?”

“Yes, exactly, so I ended up having like, a lot more than I thought.”

JP’s account characterizes binge drinking in the house as normal and even humorous. Alcohol-related hospitalization is serious, especially since alcohol-related deaths are increasingly common on college campuses and within fraternities. The brothers of Philand go through extensive alcohol training, and even have brothers that have been elected to prevent such incidents. These Risk Managers, as they are called, are meant to educate the brothers and also ensure that parties and other social events will be safe and follow the law. In theory, this is an excellent idea, but in practice, alcohol-related risk in the house is clearly not well managed.

This is, in part, due to the high value placed on alcohol and alcohol consumption in the house. Alcohol is not another beverage, and it is not simply a means to achieve intoxication. Alcohol’s connotation as an illicit substance for many members of the house mimics the somewhat illicit nature of joining an exclusive society. Because brothers often choose to drink together, alcohol represents the closely-knit society within the house. It is a vessel for brothers to publicize their generosity and their manhood and parties, and a way for them to reiterate patterns of masculinity that they value within their own house.

The social and cultural weight affiliated with alcohol and alcohol consumption in Philand is enormous, and brothers often host events centered around alcohol to exchange capital with guests and other brothers. When brothers drink with each other, they affirm their identity and membership to the group. When brothers share their
alcohol with their guests, they are thanking them for coming to their party through a material exchange. To show their appreciation to all the women who assisted with Rush and to welcome the new pledges, the brothers hosted an event that largely revolved around alcohol consumption. Though this Rush Girl Appreciation Dinner was advertised to me as a night of heavy drinking, the point of hosting this event was not to provide a venue or a time for people to get drunk. Instead, Rush Girl Appreciation Dinner is meant to resolidify the bonds between brothers through friendly competition, and warmly welcome guests and new members into the house. Rush Girl Appreciation Dinner could be compared to any sort of celebration where individuals make toasts to one another to celebrate their friendship. However, because alcohol is intrinsically interwoven with masculine identity at the house and this party is meant to glorify the brotherhood element of the fraternity, alcohol must be served and consumed in large quantities.

I arrived at the house shortly after 7:00pm for Rush Girl Appreciation Dinner with two other rush girls, and we let ourselves into the house as we all know the door code. We walked upstairs, and were immediately greeted by two brothers. Everett said hello quickly and then dashed away to deal with some dinner logistics in the kitchen, while Mateo hugged the other girls and me and took our coats to his room for safe keeping. Four tables were set up in three parallel lines in the dining room, with the fourth table in the adjacent hallway. Each table was set to seat 12-14 people, and was covered with a white table cloth. There were three four-liter jugs of different wines on each table, and each place was marked with a wine glass. We found seats at the table
with several other brothers, including Patrick who sat directly across the table from me. Everett came by and requested that I save a seat for him near our group, and then told me that a different brother, Steven, was out buying apple juice for me. I told him that was not necessary - I could drink water, and he responded by saying that it was not a big deal as there are plenty of other people that do not drink. The brothers know that I choose not to drink alcohol, but I surprisingly have never been ridiculed for this choice. Though the culture of the fraternity largely relies on alcohol as a social lubricant, because we have built our relationship in the absence of alcohol, our relationship does not require alcohol to be valid. Rather than offer me a drink, brothers communicate our friendship to me by calling me by a nickname or greeting me affectionately. The ritual of recognizing our friendship does not include alcohol, but instead other indicators of collective intimacy. Everett wanted to make sure that I had something to drink at this dinner because he values our relationship and wanted me to have the full experience of the dinner party even if that meant I would not be drinking.

Guests continued to trickle in, and as the room filled, other brothers began serving food from the kitchen. They were all sophomores, and they first served the rush girls, then the new pledges and their dates, and then the rest of the brothers. While we were waiting for our food to come out, I noticed the brother sitting next to me poring over his phone. I asked him what he was scrolling through, and he told me the GroupMe for the fraternity was blowing up. I asked what about, and he said that JP, the president, had asked if people were ready for “lotties” but no one knew what he was talking about.
He then remembered, and I asked him what lotties were. He told me that I would see later. When I pressed, he told me they were kind of like toasts.

In the time that it took the salads to come out, the older brothers grew restless, and began collecting the caps from the jugs of wine. They went around the room, sneaking the caps into the full wine glasses of other brothers. The game then followed: if a cap was placed in a brother’s cup, he was obligated to quickly drink the rest of the glass. He then could put the cap into another brother’s cup. If the other brother noticed and covered his cup, he did not have to drink the wine.

Soon, the room was rowdy, and Zach switched the music from the jazz that had been playing to more upbeat music. The energy and noise of the brothers and guests quickly escalated, culminating with a senior, Collin, standing up and chugging the entire remainder of one of the large jugs of wine. As he did so, nearly everyone in the room turned toward him and began clapping and chanting his name. Finally, dinner came out, and everyone ate and moved about the room, generally maintaining the lively atmosphere.

Everyone finished eating, and the sophomores came out once again to clear the plates of the brothers and the guests. We sat for a moment, and Everett told me that we were meant to have dessert next and that the sophomores should slice up the cake they had ordered and serve it to the guests. Instead, someone brought the cake to the table that was comprised mostly of seniors, and they did not touch it. Instead, they continued to move about the room and talk loudly, tossing the caps from wine jugs into the glasses of other brothers.
I turned to the brother sitting next to him and told him that I had to use the restroom. He told me to do so quickly and hurry back. I asked why, and he told me that the toasts would begin soon and that I wouldn’t want to miss them. When I returned, all the brothers except for a few sophomores were in the room. I took my place, and soon after, the sophomores brought out cases of champagne and placed a few on each table. The brothers quickly opened the boxes and each took bottles, opening them and letting the corks fall to the tables and the floor. Then, they began to sing:

Here’s to ______________, to ______________, to ______________
Here’s to ______________ who’s with us tonight.
He’s happy, he’s jolly, he’s in Philand by golly,
Here’s to ______________ who’s with us tonight.
So drink motherfucker drink motherfucker
Drink motherfucker drink!

They went around, toasting to various brothers around the room. Whoever they were toasting to in the song drank from the bottle they were holding during the last two lines of the song. As they got more into the singing, brothers and guests began to stand on tables and chairs around the room. Soon, they were toasting to guests and groups of people:

Here’s to ______________, to ______________, to ______________
Here’s to ______________ who’s with us tonight.
She’s with us god bless her
She’s with us god damn her
Here’s to ______________ who’s with us tonight.
So drink motherfucker drink motherfucker
Drink motherfucker drink!
The lyrics of the song changed based on the subject. Soon, the tune changed as one brother began a chant a series of syllables. Because the brothers chant “la dee la dee la dee,” they call this portion of the singing “lotties”. It was a call and response chant, and the general format follows:

Brother: Ay, la dee la dee la dee, ay, la dee la dee lo
Audience: bam bam!
(repeats)
Brother: I know a (guy/brother) whose name is ___________. (or some variation including the name of the brother as the last word)
Audience: oooh!
(Then a pun or witty saying about the brother’s genitals or sexual inadequacy that rhymes with the first verse)
Audience: ohhhhhh!

If the brother speaking made a good pun, then the chant reverted to the original song, with the victim of the pun as the subject - he was made to drink. If the pun was bad, then the brother who made the bad pun was made to drink. Additionally, if the brother made a mistake during the call and response portion or while making the pun, the pattern reverted to the original, and the brother who made a mistake was made to drink.

It became clear that this was a competition between the brothers, not only to be the funniest, but also to make others drink. Collin and Evan started going back and forth, and finally Collin was so drunk that he ceased to be able to put the parts of the chant together. Each time he blundered, he had to drink more. Finally, he stepped down and took a seat, no longer participating.
The chants began to die out as participants became less eager to drink. One brother attempted to keep the game going by honoring various parties, but the toasts became redundant and the guests and other brothers got bored, trying to cut him off. Finally, the JP and Everett got everyone’s attention, and the group dispersed. Seeing a good opportunity to make an exit, I thanked my hosts, hugged them goodnight, and showed myself out.

In this ritual, drunkenness is a side effect of this drinking game. Though it may appear that the point of this game is to consume as much alcohol as possible and get really drunk, the brothers only use alcohol so that they may bond. This ritual makes space for brothers to renegotiate the social hierarchy through the constant reconstruction of masculine identity in the toasts. Pledges are welcomed into the fraternity environment. They are teased and shown their place in the hierarchy, but are also given an in to the society through their participation in the ritual. The ritualization of alcohol in mediates the boundary between the exclusive society of Philand and the outside. Because brothers also affiliate alcohol with socialization, consumption of alcohol in a ritualized contexts helps brothers solidify their bonds. As brothers cross the threshold from childhood to adulthood, they also cross from their home society to Philand.
IV. Sex and Sexuality

So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping our mouths shut? as if we'd been pierced by a glance!

The song of an old cow is not more full of judgment than the vapors which escape one's soul when one is sick;

so I pull the shadows around me like a puff and crinkle my eyes as if at the most exquisite moment of a very long opera, and then we are off! without reproach and without hope that our delicate feet will touch the earth again, let alone "very soon."

- Frank O’Hara, from “Homosexuality”

Dax, JP, Steven, Dax’s sister, and I are out to dinner. We’re sitting in a booth with Dax and JP across from me, and Steven on my left and Dax’s sister on my right.

“So Anna, what’s your thesis about?” I know by the way Dax asks this question that he wants me to give him something beyond a superficial answer, but I decide to play dumb.

“It’s about you.” He sighs.

“Yeah, but, like -- “ JP interjects.
“What’s it about?” He makes a hand gesture and a scrunches his face.

“Oh, you mean...what’s the thesis of my thesis?” I ask.

“Yeah!”

“Hang on...” I take out my phone, “I want to get it right.” I begin scrolling through my outline, but the document is long and the phone’s screen is small. After a few moments, I find a draft of my thesis: “okay, so basically, I’m saying that though fraternities externally perpetuate not-so-good things like misogyny, they provide a unique homosocial environment for young men, like you, to sort of deconstruct patriarchy and be emotionally vulnerable.” Dax raises his eyebrows and not subtly - *not bad* - is what his face says.

“Uh, yeah, okay, I would just like to say that all the homosexual stuff started when I was a freshman,” JP says, grinning. He has clearly misunderstood the word “homosocial,” in my explanation.

“No, no, no!” I say, laughing almost too much to speak, “homosocial, not homosexual!”

“What’s that?”

“Uh, it’s like...” I make a bowl-like gesture with my hands to indicate things coming together, “a community of only one gender, so like, only boys in your case.”

“Ah, okay,” he nods, “but still, all the homosexual stuff started when I joined the fraternity.” I roll my eyes and shake my head, still smirking. “But like, it just started when I joined.”
Conversations like these pepper almost every visit to Philand. Brothers talk about sex frequently, and sexual undertones are often woven throughout other conversations. Since Philand is populated only by men, I actively engage in their discussions about sex because the way the brothers talk about sex and sexuality reveals not only how they regard women and potential partners but also how they construct intimacy in brother-to-brother relationships. Though the brothers craft a structure in Philand that mimics siblinghood, because they are not related to one another by blood, jokes about sex like the one JP made are not taboo. In fact, jokes about sex between brothers often reinforce the idea of familial intimacy to which the brothers subscribe.

“I took the doorknob off so that I could...” JP makes a gesture indicating that the hole in the door between his room and Everett’s was for his genitals. JP and Everett’s rooms are joined by a door, and this has recently become a topic of conversation with an undeniably sexual context.

“Oh, I thought you were going to take the door off so you could put in a sex swing!” I said, recalling an earlier conversation.

“Oh yeah, we should.”

The other guests at dinner laugh because we all know that JP is joking. When I first began visiting Philand, I was often confused about why brothers would joke about having sex with one another - I often interpreted their humor as serious conversation. Frequently, brothers would toss out an insult like “fuck you,” or “suck my dick,” and the response from the brother at which the insult was directed would respond with an
affirmative like “I would love that.” Coming from Wellesley College, another mostly homosocial environment, I often attempted to place these exchanges in a female-dominated space. Though I have had hundreds of conversations about sex with my Wellesley peers, many of which are meant to be humorous, I could not find any that paralleled the conversations at Philand.

Ultimately, this fabricated sexual aggression stems from a major difference in how men and women are socialized to understand, encounter, and discuss sex and sexuality (Harris 1995). Conversations about sex with my Wellesley peers often center around problems women experience with sex, whether it be the act itself or the sexualized culture in which we live. Generally, these conversations seek to empower other women to take action or to control their sex and sexuality. Unless we are
discussing two women who are involved with each other, romantically or sexually, we
do not discuss fictional or imagined sexual escapades with other women.

After hearing numerous exchanges constructing imagined sexual relationships
between brothers, I began to notice patterns. Brothers do not make jokes about having
sex with brothers with whom they are not friendly. Brothers who are less popular in the
house will never be teased in this fashion. Dax explained this well after I questioned the
apparent hostility and faux sexual tension between brothers: “It’s like...a love-hate
thing. Saying ‘fuck you’ is a good thing.” In other words, brothers perform their
affection to one another by making jokes about sex. Because men tend to be socialized
to equate sex to success in their romantic relationships, it makes sense that this idea
would transfer to intimate friend relations (Kimmel 2008, Harris 1995). Additionally,
since the brothers of Philand must continually produce new generations of brothers,
these emasculating comments or imagined sexual relationships somewhat serve to
account for the absence of women in the house. Subjugating men through sexually
degrading comments mimics how women are treated in Philand’s homosocial
hierarchical culture, and emasculating brothers or treating them as women mirrors a
heteronormative culture where men and women could sexually reproduce (Hogbin 1970).
Brothers are unable to physically reproduce with one another, so they ritualize
reproduction by creating initiation rituals and assigning feminine traits or sexualized
roles to other brothers to replace sexual reproduction (Hogbin 1970). My Wellesley
peers, however, do not ritualize sex because the reproduction of Wellesley culture does
not need to mimic family as it does in Philand. New generations of Wellesley students
are produced in the college application cycle, and though Wellesley students use
initiation rituals, sex is not one of them, so Wellesley students do not imagine sexual
relationships in the same way. Additionally, because Wellesley College culture does not
focus on the production of a hyperfeminine culture as Philand produces the
hypermasculine, sex does not carry the same capital (Bourdieu 1986). Wellesley students
might prove or perform their Wellesley identity by discussing the rigor of their
academics, but because the Wellesley student identity does not hinge on sex, Wellesley
College students do not focus on sex in the same way that the brothers of Philand do.

This is not to say that all talk of sex involves fictional interbrother relationships.
Brothers talk about sex and sexuality with women just as much, if not more, than they
joke about having sexual relationships with one another. The range of these topics is
quite varied, but can be sorted into a few main categories. Primarily, brothers make
jokes about sex, or will entertain fictional scenarios with sexual themes or undertones.
The second large category are stories of grandiose sexual escapades - these might be
legends of brothers that have graduated, or recount recent sexual encounters that
brothers wish to share with each other.

Jokes about sex are remarkably superficial - rarely do they evolve beyond a few
laughs before the subject is put to rest and someone brings up a new topic of discussion.
The larger, storytelling structure, however, often plays a crucial role in allowing
brothers to hash out ideas about sex and sexuality that they wish to express for the
purposes of solidifying their masculine identities or simply to reinforce the extreme
correlation between dominant masculinity and sexual prowess (Rhoads 1995, Kimmel
One night at dinner, an alum was visiting and told an elaborate story about a sexual encounter he had while living at the fraternity over the summer:

“Summer at Philand is...the best time,” he says, addressing a brother who has said that he will be staying at the house over the summer, “one day I went up to the roof, and [another brother] and a summer boarder were like...” he nods and makes a gesture to indicate that they were having sex. “So, I go up to her, and I say ‘find me later,’ and then 20 minutes later, she comes downstairs.”

“No way!” other brothers meet his tale with equal parts admiration and disbelief. I remained cynical, and turned to Steven, who was sitting next to me. He was so engrossed by the story that he did not notice me jabbing him in the ribs to share my annoyance at what I presumed to be a lie. Later in the night, the storytelling alum turned to Steven:

“Are you a pledge?”

“Yeah,” the story telling brother slid a bottle of beer across the table, “hey, thanks!” said Steven.

“Open it for me,” he gestured to the ring on Steven’s hand. With great difficulty and obvious discomfort, Steven pried the cap off the bottle and handed the open beer back to the alum. In this moment, it became clear to me that this alum had the full intention of reiterating his place in the social hierarchy of Philand. When a brother graduates, he becomes memorialized as a senior, and this brother used sex and demands to recreate his seniority. In this way, the brother’s sexual escapade became a myth in the household. Brothers can retell the story to recall the brother’s experience and to glorify
this brother. When this brother asked Steven to open his beer for him, not only did he reaffirm his superior position in the hierarchy of Philand, but he initiated a mediation ritual. Because the brother had graduated, he was no longer recognizable as a Philand member to new brothers, and had re-entered the space of liminality that initiation rituals resolve, and made Steven open his beer with his ring because this is a rite of passage for members of the University community (van Gannep 1960). Students are given their rings by the University during the second semester of their sophomore year, marking them as official students of the University community. Within fraternities, brothers are often prompted to open beers with their rings as they can act as a bottle opener. When this older brother made Steven open his beer, he subjugated him by indicating that Steven had to perform mundane tasks for him, but also affirmed Steven’s membership in the University community and in the fraternity by including him in the storytelling. The brother had made his place obvious to the other brothers by telling his story. He then invited Steven to join his audience and participate in the mythmaking through the beer opening ritual.

Not all stories of sexual escapades are told to glorify the brother involved. For example, many brothers have told me on several occasions the story of a brother who performed oral sex on a girl who was menstruating in another brother’s bed. The fluid evidence of this encounter was obviously visible on the mattress when the bed’s owner returned, causing much distress and frustration. Though I was not at Philand when this happened, I can recall every detail of the story because it has become a legend in the house. Because sex is inherently linked to the brothers’ construction of masculinity,
brothers tell sex stories to me, an outsider, to perform their masculine identities (Harris 1995). Even if the brother is not glorified in his sex legend, the existence of the story alone is enough to solidify his masculine identity and place in the hierarchy of Philand (Rhoads 1995).

This story, along with others, usually opens the door for conversation about sex with brothers. To the story I have just described, my response has always been something of disgust, mirroring the reaction of brothers and affirming my knowledge of appropriate sexual practices with brothers. Sometimes, these stories lead to more complex discussions. For example, one afternoon when I was at the house, a brother was having extremely loud sex with a woman in the room next to Everett’s. “That’s so gross!” I exclaimed loudly, hoping that my protest would cause the couple to reconsider their vocalizations. A few days later, I participated in the sex-legend tradition, and retold the story to Keith:

“It was so gross! They were being so loud!”

“Well, it was more her,” said Everett, who was sitting on the couch in Keith’s room.

“Doesn’t matter,” I said, “still gross.”

“I don’t know,” said Keith, “I want a girl who moans.”

I paused here for a moment, considering the implications of Keith’s statement. The piece of me that consistently wants to engage with brothers in understanding misogyny wanted to point out to Keith that a partner’s pleasure during sex is not entirely the partner’s responsibility, and by him stating that he wants a “girl who moans,” he is
implying that sexual satisfaction is arbitrary or even voluntary. I also knew that engaging in this way could put me in a position of needing to speak for all women, and would likely force me to discuss my own experiences or opinions about sex.

In moments where brothers discuss sex, regardless of if they include me in the conversation, I become hyper-aware of how my gender and sexuality intersect to inform my ideology. Brothers tend to affiliate sex with masculinity (Harris 1995, Rhoads 1995). For example, when I asked Steven which brother of the fraternity was the most ‘frat’, he informed that Gabe, a brother who had always struck me as quiet and a little bit awkward, was by far the best archetype for a fraternity brother. “Gabe? Really?” I asked, giggling a little, “why?”

“He’s constantly thinking about sex.”

“What?!” In this moment, I was genuinely shocked that sex was used as the defining criteria for the archetype fraternity brother.

“Yeah, he’s so horny. Constantly thinking about sex,” he said, nodding affirmatively.

In my time at Philand, I would never have come to the independent conclusion that sex played such a vital role in defining what the standard fraternity brother should look like. This conversation with Steven nudged me to consider the gravity of all exchanges I had with brothers where sex was either the topic or the underlying theme. If brothers believe that obsession with sex makes someone the archetype of a fraternity brother, then sexual prowess must intersect with the brothers’ construction of masculinity since the standard fraternity brother must embody hypermasculine traits (Harris 1995).
Because fraternity culture centers on the production and reproduction of the masculine identity, brothers must have some tangible way to prove or perform their masculinity, and also to account for the production of new generations. Because brothers reproduce new fictive familial members without women, they value sex as a topic of conversation because they reproduce their masculine identity through conversations about sex. Brothers must have a tangible way to prove their masculinity and within the house between brothers, this often takes shape in the form of ritual, particularly rituals centering around alcohol and the tradition of storytelling to prove their masculinity to brothers by telling them about sexual escapade.

However, fraternities must also provide the space for brothers to perform their constructed masculine identities to outsiders. Sex therefore is the tangible act for a brother to perform to prove his masculine identity to an outsider. He then retells the story to the brothers not only to gloat, but to indicate that he has successfully performed his masculine identity. In this way, sex serves as an initiation ritual not into Philand itself, but into the identity of being a fraternity brother. Ultimately, the culture that the brothers of Philand seek to replicate is not their own, but an imitation of the fabricated fraternity culture that they have been enculturated to understand as reality (Baudrillard 1981). When brothers retell sex myths, they indicate that they have successfully completed a component that contributes to the fraternity brother archetype identity. The archetype identity is inherently hypermasculine, and since this hypermasculine identity becomes normalized in a fraternity, it is no longer understood by brothers “hyperreal,” but instead replaces reality (Baudrillard 1981, 3). The hypermasculine
identity is so normalized in Philand that brothers cannot consciously decipher truth from myth in the context of sex, and instead accept the myth as truth. This simulacrum of masculinity is then reproduced through the storytelling rituals as truth, not because it replaces reality, but because it is understood to be reality in Philand (Baudrillard 1981).

When brothers talk to me about sex, I must remind myself that their connotations of sex and conversations about sex are different than my own. Brothers discuss sex with each other to affirm their masculinity. Because my gender identity does not hinge on sex, my response to their conversations falls outside the realm of what they expect. When I experience the desire to discuss Keith’s assumptions about sex, my comments are read as inappropriate criticism because Keith did not bring up his sexual preferences to get feedback from his peers - he did so to reaffirm his masculine identity as they already know it.

Jokes about sex between brothers serve a similar social function. Conversations about sex often operate on the assumption that the partner of the brother is female, so the idea of masculinity being performed is contrasted by the assumed femininity of the partner. When brothers joke about having sex with each other, they reaffirm their constructed brother identity by emasculating each other. The brother who makes the joke does not subjugate the brother because in the joke, the brothers are equal partners. In this act of simultaneous emasculation, the brothers reaffirm their brotherhood and shared understanding of masculinity.
Undoubtedly, the desire to emasculate brothers within the context of brotherhood relates to how brothers reproduce Philand’s culture. Brothers are unable to physically reproduce future generations as a family might because there are no women present, so they must emasculate other brothers to fill in for the absent women. Though brothers frequently discuss that gender and sexuality fall on a spectrum, the reality is that they push each other into strict binaries. In doing so, brothers imply that those who are emasculated by other brothers play the role of women in their society. Though these brothers would not play a different role in initiation rituals that equate to a birth, they do fit into the social hierarchy in a way that imitates a family.
V. Women

Psychology which explains everything explains nothing and we are still in doubt. Eve: beautiful woman -- I have seen her when she was so handsome she gave me a start, able to write simultaneously in three languages -- English, German and French and talk in the meantime; equally positive in demanding a commotion and in stipulating quiet: "I should like to be alone;" to which the visitor replies, "I should like to be alone; why not be alone together?"

- Marianne Moore, from “Marriage”

Admittedly, I initially struggled to find a good way to incorporate this section into the greater work - after writing about sex and sexuality in the house, I debated combining these two chapters as women are highly sexualized in Philand. However, I realized in doing so, I would feed into the reduction of women in Philand, and would only perpetuate the oppressive system of patriarchy. Approaching the topic of women in Philand is especially challenging for two reasons: primarily, brothers often act as if
women have nothing to do with Philand at all. When we discuss gender or the role of women in their household, they often respond with something like “we’re all men! Why would gender be important?” Because brothers do not recognize women as a part of their society, it is challenging to glean information about how women fit into the network of Philand. This leads to the secondary obstacle of discussing the role of women in the house: I am a woman. I have been at many dinners where brothers talk about how there “are no girls in the house ever,” while I am sitting at the table. When I object to this assertion on the basis that I, a woman, am in the house, they often laugh or shrug off my comments. My place in the house therefore heavily influences how brothers treat and categorize me in contrast to other women, and I am especially sensitive to the issue as I identify as a woman even though brothers categorize me separately.

The brothers’ act as if I am not a woman because role that women are intended to play in any fraternity setting is not one of an active participant in household activities. When brothers discuss the matter of being “top frat,” or “having the best parties,” part of the criteria used to determine these rankings are the women that come to these parties. Just like Rush, the time when new members pledge to join Philand, having women present within the walls of a fraternity house indicates that the brothers appeal to women in a social setting (Kimmel 2008). Ultimately, a fraternity provides a space for men to construct their masculine identities, and because the masculine identity is affirmed through sex with women, having women present in the house communicates the brothers’ masculinity to outsiders (Rhoads 1995). Women are invited into the
fraternity to reaffirm the brothers’ masculinity, and are essentially treated as passive objects (Rhoads 1995). At parties, women wait outside to be invited into the house, and once inside, they often stand around watching brothers play beer pong, or flirtatiously rally on the dancefloor for brothers’ attention. Unlike male guests who attend these parties where they are expected to behave respectfully or play beer pong alongside brothers, women are never expected to do anything at a fraternity party - they are just expected to attend (Rhoads 1995). When I am in the house, I am performing an active role which contradicts the expectations brothers have for women. Brothers know that my primary goal in visiting the house, though veiled by socialization, is to learn about their society. I have a different purpose in Philand than other women, so I am not regarded as a woman. I cannot serve the function of reaffirming their masculinity, especially since I frequently question their practices. Rather than contribute to the harmony that binds the members of Philand together into a collective society, I actively disrupt their social systems by encouraging brothers to deconstruct their rituals so that I may understand them better. In doing so, I act against the function of women in the house, which makes it challenging for brothers to treat me as they might treat other women.

Though my role in the house often prevents me from being completely subjugated by brothers, brothers who recognize me as an anthropologist treat me just as passively as they might treat other women. Recently, I was on my way out of the house with a man when an unfamiliar man entered the house through the main staircase. He immediately introduced himself to my male companion as an alum, and indicated that
he was only visiting the house to show his friend around. Though they spoke for under a minute, the brothers’ gaze never once fell on me, and he never made an effort to introduce himself. This brother assumed that I was affiliated with the fraternity through my male friend, and that he did not need to justify his presence in the house to a woman because he expected me to perform my passive role as he actively asserted his authority in the house.

Because women are viewed as passive players attached to men in Philand, they are essentially objectified for the sake of preserving the brothers’ masculinity. In this objectification, however, comes an inherent value being placed on women in the house. Having women in the house overall grants Philand more institutional capital than if there were no women in the house. Women are therefore capital that fraternities wish to obtain (Bourdieu 1986). However, because it is challenging to directly commodify a person, brothers must remove women’s agency and objectify women in order for women to serve their social function (Rhoads 1995). The cultural capital of having women in the house also symbolizes the group’s identity - when a group of brothers all relates to a woman in the same way, it resolidifies their collective intimacy. If the group treats all women in the same way, it makes it challenging for outsiders to criticize individuals, and it reaffirms the group’s ideology (Bourdieu 1986). While women are objects of capital in Philand, the treatment of women speaks to Philand’s consistent and cohesive institutional values (Bourdieu 1986).

Brothers regularly subjugate women using a variety of tactics such as labelling, reinforcing gender roles, and conflating femininity with weakness. When referring to
parties, two brothers on separate occasions referred to female party attendees as “drunk BU chicks,” “Wellesley girls,” and “TAGs” - the latter being an acronym for “Tiny Asian Girl.” The act of labeling removes the women’s agency as it indicates that their group identity as seen by the brothers supersedes their individual identity. Interestingly, where brothers benefit and gain power from self-identification as a group member, women lose their power when brothers label them. The act of categorizing alone does not degrade the women, but the characteristics affiliated with these labels do. “Drunk BU chicks,” speaks for itself - it implies that the women coming from Boston University are heavy drinkers, and the derogatory word “chick” implies that the women in question is airheaded. “Wellesley girls,” speaks to the perceived and imagined awkward mannerisms of male-attention-deprived Wellesley students, who are often viewed as desperate for attention from male peers. “TAG,” is especially degrading as it reduces an extremely diverse group of women to an acronym based on superficial appearance.

These different affiliations also reaffirm gender roles, or the understanding that people who express a feminine gender identity will behave in a certain way and perform specific tasks well. The labels brothers assign to women allow them to easily fit into the brothers’ preset passive role for women which ultimately supports the brothers’ expression of their masculine identity. By pushing women to be passive bystanders in the house, female guests do not impact the established hierarchy of Philand. Brothers also make assumptions about the ways that women will behave to avoid questioning their own masculinity. In one case, Steven was expressing his frustration with having to do laundry:
“I wish we could hire someone to do the laundry,” he said, “she could come over every other week or something.”

“She?” I asked, raising an eyebrow and emphasizing the word to indicate my frustration with his assumption that the only person who would wash his clothes would be a woman.

“Oh uh...” his eyes widened and he laughed nervously, looking around the room to avoid my gaze, “yeah...that was bad.”

In this situation, I called Steven out on his affirmation of gender roles to encourage him to consider that individuals other than women are capable of doing laundry. When I brought his prejudice to his attention, Steven immediately recognized how his language patterns were degrading or problematic.

Though brothers are capable of recognizing how their language patterns contribute to the objectification of women, they still utilize these patterns on a regular basis. Even when not discussing women, brothers will use gendered derogatory words like “bitch” to label another brother as weak. These terms are used to emasculate other brothers, which simultaneously reinforces the social hierarchy Philand and reaffirms the fictive kinship that unfolds in a homosocial environment (Hogbin 1970). In an attempt to mimic a family, brothers emasculate each other through language patterns to cast a feminine persona on another brother. Patterns of gendered language are important not only in establishing brotherhood, but also upholding the social and secretive hierarchy. These patterns do not emerge organically -- they are as intentional as the rituals which simultaneously perpetuate the secretive nature of the group.
Understanding that this gendered hierarchy is constructed and not natural is best explained by Deborah Cameron in her piece “Performing Gender Identity.” As the title suggests, Cameron focuses on how gender is performed, particularly through language. She asserts that gender is “performative” in that it “constitutes the identity it is purported to be” (Cameron 1997, 49.) Individuals perform their gender identity through their language patterns, and brothers use this human characteristic to assign alternative gender identities to masculine-identifying brothers (Cameron 1997).

One evening, a few brothers and I were discussing my observations as I wanted them to feel included in the ethnographic process. These conversations often prompted reflective discussions that deepened my understanding of the fraternity. While Everett and another brother talked about the Social Chair at the time, a different brother interjected in a high-pitched voice with an emphasized vocal fry: “omg! He is sooooo hot!” Though I am certain this brother did not seek out to hurt my feelings, his performance of an imagined feminine speech pattern and assigning this vocalization to me was degrading. The accent he performed implied that I am foolish and inappropriately pining over my male peers, compromising my credibility. Though the other brothers at the table and I all know that I do not sound like this, the brother implying that these are my vocal patterns sought to push me back into the passive territory where most women in Philand comfortably sit.

In imitating a hyper-feminine accent, this brother also confirmed my position as an outsider. Brothers generally do not speak with the vocal pattern that this brother used, so by emphasizing my femininity, this brother also emphasized my etic status. Me
taking a more active role in the dinner conversation disrupted the ordinary rituals, so the brother pushed me back into acceptable hierarchical territory to prevent further interruptions (Rhoads 1995).

Though I am confident that the brothers of Philand do not intend on making me feel inferior through their use of gendered language, it is essential for fraternity members to consider the implications of using terminology that degrades and subjugates those who are different from them. Ultimately, the use of gendered language reinforces the exclusive homosocial hierarchy that composes the backbone of Philand (Kaplan 2014, Cameron 1997). At a superficial level, reaffirming the existing patriarchal structure of Philand merely reinforces the brotherhood. However, normalizing the degradation of women in this social context is highly dangerous. Though I do not believe the goal of any fraternity is to degrade women, it is an extremely problematic side-effect of glorifying an exclusive patriarchal society (Harris 1995, Kimmel 2008). Incidents of sexual and other forms of violence are extremely high in fraternities and other hierarchy-oriented all-male or male-dominated societies such as sports teams or military organizations (Sanday 1992, Kimmel 2008). While it could be argued that these organizations simply attract individuals who are more likely to have violent tendencies, the normalization of abusing women is the real reason for these tragedies (Sanday 1992). While I maintain that the true social function of a fraternity is to create a space for young men to construct their masculine identity as they move into their adult lives, a society that links the masculine identity to the domination of women will always subjugate women more than the societal average. The reproduction of fraternity culture
ultimately relies on the ritualized subjugation of women as women provide the contrast to the hyper-masculine identity that the brothers strive to create. In order for brothers to create and perform the desirable masculine identity, they must first control and then degrade the contrasting feminine identity.

When initially writing this chapter, I struggled to make distinctions between women in Philand and sex in Philand. Though brothers interact women outside of the scope of having sex with them, it is impossible to talk about sex in Philand without talking about women. Similarly, the way brothers perform an assertive male identity by making sexually degrading comments about each other mirrors the way they assert themselves over women. While this undoubtedly relates to the constructed fictive familial structure present in Philand, it also has to do with how brothers are socialized to interact with women and understand femininity (Hogbin 1970, Harris 1995). At the end of the day, the way brothers learn to perform masculinity is not solely the result of their time at Philand. Though fraternities undoubtedly solidify the brothers’ identities, they enter the fraternity with their entire lifetimes behind them. Philand ritualizes and glorifies certain behaviors that degrade women, but the brothers entered the fraternity with these concepts not being completely foreign. Toxic masculinity that encourages the problem behaviors that permeate Philand’s walls exists in mainstream society - homosocial environments merely highlight and normalize these behaviors (Kimmel 2008).

However, reducing the systematic mistreatment of women to a symptom of men attempting to preserve their social hierarchy for their own benefit trivializes the
normalization of abuse. While brothers wish to maintain their brotherhood and perform their masculine identity to women, the desire to degrade women stems from the fear that women threaten the homosocial hierarchy. When brothers who are uncomfortable with my active role in the house, they are cruel to me because they are afraid of the threat my presence creates (Hymowitz 2011). Fraternal societies are meant to be exclusive, so allowing me, a clear outsider, to permeate the exclusive boundaries the brothers construct and bypass my assigned role threatens the hierarchy itself. This is compounded by the fact that men’s organizations are threatened by the increasing amount of power women hold in previously male-exclusive spaces (Hymowitz 2011). Fraternities epitomize exclusive, male-dominated patriarchy, and the idea that women can enter these spaces as an equal threatens the epitome of patriarchy itself. Because fraternities serve no real social function other than creating a space for men to construct masculine identity, the idea that women could take an active role in a fraternity is particularly troubling to members who subscribe to the idea that patriarchy trumps equity.
Closing Thoughts

The male is not less the soul nor more, he too is in his place,
He too is all qualities, he is action and power,
The flush of the known universe is in him,
Scorn becomes him well, and appetite and defiance become him well,
The wildest largest passions, bliss that is utmost, sorrow that is utmost become him
well, pride is for him,
The full-spread pride of man is calming and excellent to the soul,
Knowledge becomes him, he likes it always, he brings every thing to the test of himself,
Whatever the survey, whatever the sea and the sail he strikes soundings at last only here,
(Where else does he strike soundings except here?)

- Walt Whitman, from “I Sing the Body Electric”

Just as young men who join fraternities are at a point of transition, so too is our society. Fraternity brothers seek a cohesive peer group to help them solidify their identity because they cannot always find this support in their home communities due to young men being enculturated to internalize their emotions and outwardly express strength (Harris 1995, Kimmel 2008). College marks a new chapter in many students’
lives, and the anxiety of facing this milestone is compounded by social insecurity. Though men, especially those in college, are undoubtedly afforded numerous privileges, this does not mean that they do not face the same social and emotional obstacles as their peers.

Problem behaviors such as the mistreatment of women and even male peers in fraternities manifest not because fraternities exist, but because the hierarchical homosocial environment of the fraternity draws them out. Men learn these behaviors from their families, friends, teachers, and celebrity idols their whole lives, but are never fully allowed to piece these fragmented morals and ideals together until they are surrounded by equally insecure and confused young men in college (Harris 1995). It is easy to vilify fraternities not only because they epitomize irresponsible and toxic masculinity, but because they highlight our own inability to reconcile and deconstruct the patriarchy that permeates contemporary society.

Men join fraternities seeking friendship and support, and with that brotherhood comes the facade of buffoonery that covers up the core of toxicity in the fraternity. In Philand, brothers have a space to construct what it means to be a man but ultimately cannot transfer fully this identity beyond the walls of the house or the circle of brothers because the rest of the world does not tolerate the same behavioral patterns that are supported in Philand. Because brothers wish to preserve the structure that allows them to explore emotional intimacy in through private peer-to-peer relationships in an insulated, supportive environment, they shroud their society in secret rituals which only makes their society seem more dangerous to the excluded parties because this unique
space is not available to them elsewhere due to the emphasis on hypermasculinity found in contemporary society. When criticized for the behaviors that reach the public, these brothers become defensive because they see these problems as a side-effect to their society and not the defining feature as mainstream society might.

Through all the mistakes they make, it is essential to remember that the majority of fraternity members that I interacted with are well-intentioned individuals who are still learning. It is rare that an individual is not presented the opportunity to learn from their mistake, and though young men in fraternities should be held accountable for their actions, they should not be unfairly lambasted. I realize now that generally, when brothers make a statement about women that feels inappropriate but not malicious to me, it probably stems from a place of insecurity. Because men have been enculturated to be highly competitive and degrade each other, it is not surprising that this behavior is amplified when men move into a veritable echochamber. Because the brothers of Philand enjoy their friendships and social activities so much, they become numb to the problematic commentary that spews from their older peers.

Young men are likely particularly eager to participate in homosocial environments, even if they encapsulate problematic behaviors that brothers are personally opposed to due to the shifting gender dynamics in previously male-dominated spaces (Hymowitz 2011). As women begin to take more active roles in the workplace and academic spheres, they challenge and destabilize patriarchy, leaving men insecure. Though in reality, empowering women only asks men to give up their assumed privilege, many men express frustration with these changes and feel the need
to actively cling to what threads of hierarchy they can preserve (Hymowitz 2011, Kimmel 2008). Social fraternities on college campuses today represent the historical and contemporary structures that support men and exclude women, and some men are excited by the opportunity to join a society where they can assimilate into a position of power without the threat of being asked to reconcile their privilege.

Just because fraternities reflect an ugly truth about our society does not mean that they do not serve a critical social function of providing a space for men to form a masculine identity. While I ultimately view these patriarchal systems as oppressive, I see the value in these homosocial environments because they eliminate the pressure to perform a toxic masculine facade that some men may feel in the presence of women (Kimmel 2008). Instead of focusing on behaviors once men move into adulthood, we should direct our attention toward supporting men and allowing them to be emotionally vulnerable before they are grown. Fraternities did not invent harmful and misogynist rhetoric, and although the brothers of Philand tolerate this behavior, it does not mean they support it. In this discussion, it is essential that we remember how our greater society impacts the visible manifestations of culture on a smaller scale.

The patriarchal construction of a fraternity that often becomes visible only through brazen acts of misogyny or violence is not an invention of the fraternity itself, but rather a hyper-concentrated exemplification of misogynist values that permeate our mainstream society. The same contemporary mainstream media outlets that vilify fraternities after they commit atrocities broadcast programming that degrades and subjugates women and supports men who violate their female colleagues. Our society
still clings to harmful constructions of patriarchy, and because fraternities seek to create a power dynamic that revolves around brotherhood, their construction will undoubtedly embody the values that our society assigns to men and masculine behaviors (Harris 1995). While I agree that it is important to address the aspects of fraternity culture that perpetuate violence, discrimination, and other harmful behaviors, it is not appropriate to exclusively blame fraternity members for the patterns of these behaviors. If a brother or brothers commits an egregious act, he should be held accountable for his actions. However, the process of holding individuals accountable should not stop at the individual level - acts of violence in fraternity settings should give us cause to examine the path that led to the tragedy. When the University of Minnesota’s Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity was accused of numerous hazing violations and life-threatening alcohol-related incidents, activists, media outlets, and individuals alike rightly called for punitive measures to be taken against the fraternity. Though the University investigated the manner, imposed sanctions, and finally decided to suspend the fraternity’s activities, the discussion rarely turned to addressing the systemic flaws that led brothers to degrade their peers and threaten their lives through alcohol consumption (Smith 2016). When numerous complaints of sexual assault were made by many different young women at the University of Minnesota, some locals called for all fraternity activities to be suspended or even for fraternities to be shut down. While I agree that all brothers should be held accountable for their actions, I argue that complaints from the greater community should be presented with a fair amount of reflection. Issues of violence, sexual or otherwise, are not unique to fraternities or the University of Minnesota,
and devoting disproportionate time and resources to fixing these problems in fraternities ignores the larger problematic behaviors affiliated with toxic masculinity that are normalized in the United States. Fraternity brothers ultimately ritualize these harmful behaviors in an attempt to better understand what masculinity means to them (Raphael 1988). It is not appropriate to act as if fraternities or universities alone are responsible for manifestations of a cultural value that is widely accepted across the nation.

Just as it is irresponsible to ignore the patterns of violence that exist in fraternities, it is equally irresponsible to act as if fraternity brothers were not influenced by outside factors in their actions. In fact, to hold insecure young men solely responsible for larger, systemic issues is a clear example of scapegoating and allows our wider society to continue to ignore the misogyny that permeates our culture.

Men who join fraternities seek brotherhood, peer support, and a space to construct their identity at a tumultuous time of transition from boyhood to manhood (Kimmel 2008). Additionally, men are searching for the institutionalized capital or sense of belonging that comes with fraternity membership as they unconsciously may believe this membership will ease the social transition from pre-to-post-college, and will supply them with access to a nationwide network of brothers that could assist them with needs such as a career in the future. While the violence that manifests in fraternities is undoubtedly a problem that needs to be addressed, reducing fraternities to only problem behaviors ignores the reality of fraternity culture that continues to draw in young men. From my time in Philand, I can say with confidence that most men do not join
fraternities to oppress women or act violent towards their peers; men join fraternities for the brotherhood which has the unfortunate side-effect of embodying patriarchy that perpetuates systems of violent misogyny. However, this brotherhood has the benefit of informing young men about what it means to be a man and a good friend, and many men who graduate from college after having joined a fraternity do so with fond memories of friendship without ever having engaged in violent behaviors. Fraternities themselves are a unique construction because brothers tend to live each other, and the communal element of their relationship plays a critical role in the group’s identity. The structure of the house itself mirrors the social structure of the fraternity, providing support and shelter to brothers in all facets of fraternity life (Lévi-Strauss 1982). Brothers have the innate desire to continue the legacy of their fraternity because their fraternity had a positive impact on their character development, and they wish to produce this brotherhood for future generations. Brothers pass down rituals and ritualize friendship not only to reproduce their brotherhood, but to perpetuate the group’s identity, title, and living group through time (Lévi-Strauss 1982).

The support that brothers receive from their peers in fraternities has the potential to modify or even remedy a brother’s character. The fraternity culture embodies the nurturing environment that men cannot always access in mainstream society. Though imperfect, societies like Philand serve the critical social function of supporting men in areas where they need it, and to view these societies as solely harmful would ignore and devalue the benefits that brothers gain from membership to fraternities. Men created fraternities in response to a desire for kinship that they could
not find in mainstream society, and the need for men to similarly construct family-like
relationships with their friends speaks to the lingering desire to explore masculinity
privately and separate from the societal pressure to perform an inauthentic masculine
identity. Men accept this simulacra of family as a temporary frame of reality because
this constructed family helps them transition from boyhood to manhood, a time of
uncertainty that is often overshadowed by academic and career advancements. To
deprive men of these relationships would be to deprive them of the support they seek to
grapple with their identity, and only perpetuates the systems of patriarchy that
fraternities themselves embody. The paradoxical social function which externally
communicates misogyny but internally deconstructs toxic masculinity is critical in
times of liminality. It is up to greater society to address the problematic expressions of
masculinity before men reach this point of uncertainty because ultimately, men are just
trying to find their place in society.

The man’s body is sacred and the woman’s body is sacred,
No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers’ gang?
Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?
Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as you,
Each has his or her place in the procession.

(All is a procession,
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)

Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest ignorant?
Do you suppose you have a right to a good sight, and he or she has no right to a sight?
Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse float, and the soil is on the
surface, and water runs and vegetation sprouts,
For you only, and not for him and her?
- Walt Whitman, from “I Sing the Body Electric”
References


