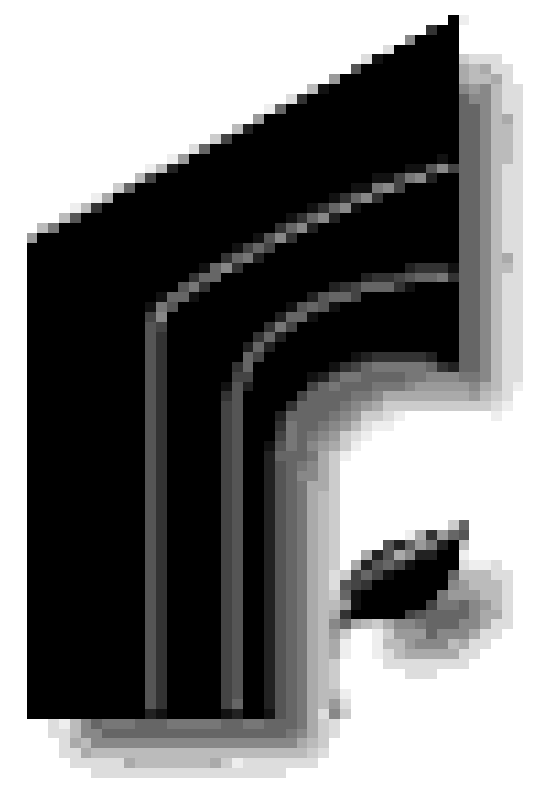


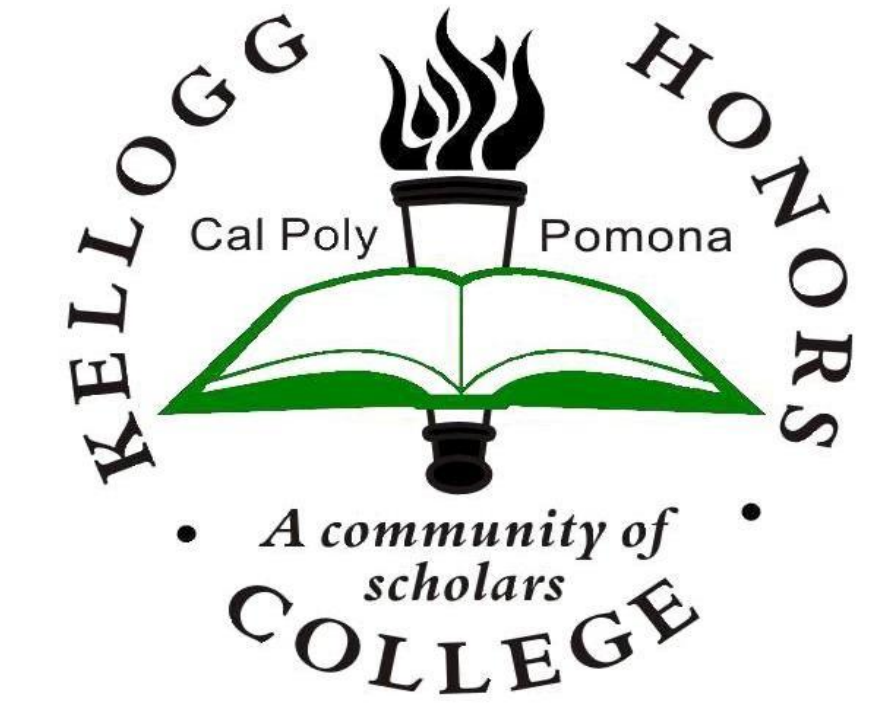
# Performing Masculinity at Bars



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### Kellogg Honors College Capstone Project



#### Background

During the recruitment process of a prior study titled *Risk Factors for Sexual Coercion at Fraternity Parties*, it became apparent that I was purposely showcasing myself in a different manner to create a stereotypically hyper-masculine image which would in effect help me garner approval of fraternity culture. At the time, for example, I consciously decided to carry my motorcycle helmet when approaching fraternities during their “rush week.” When in reality, I would typically leave my helmet on my motorcycle. Upon pondering on this idea – that I was performing a different type of masculinity to the one I typically embody – I questioned how personal masculinity performance is enacted in different social settings. Through internal discussion and further conversations with mentors in the Ethnic & Women’s Studies department, the concept of observing male performance in barrooms came to fruition.

#### Methodology

##### **Ethnographic approach**

Although there are multiple definitions of ethnography and various ways to implement such an approach, the primary objective was to submerge myself in the bar culture and explore what was happening in my surroundings with the focus on observing how males performed. According to a 2011 research publication, *Employing an ethnographic approach: key characteristics*, Veronica Lambert, Michele Glacken, and Mary McCarron explain that most authors concur that a critical element of ethnography is to first-handedly collect information through active participation in social contexts. This is in line with how researchers Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe ethnography as involving researchers to participate ‘in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts’.

##### **Participatory observation**

Multiple observational studies conducted by Kathryn Graham and colleagues employed a similar ethnographic methodology with a specific structure found in *The Safer Bar Study* training manual. I closely followed this manual. For example, the written manual addressed how to observe in bars, procedures for data collection and ethical, confidentiality and safety issues. The 148 observers hired over the course of the project conducted observations in male–female pairs, with assignment to partners and establishments varying each week. Observers were instructed to stay together and to be as inconspicuous as possible (which included being allowed to order or consume one alcoholic beverage if necessary), to minimize interactions with other patrons or staff and to move around during the visit in order to observe different parts of the bar or, if moving around would be conspicuous, to sit in a place where they would have a good view of most of the bar. Immediately after the bar visit or first thing the next morning, the observers completed ratings independently of the physical and social situational characteristics of the bar on machine-readable forms.

##### **Step-by-step procedures**

I attended a total of six bars with a female partner during the bars’ last hours, between 10:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M. While conducting observations, I would take a few notes of specific events to help me create a summary soon after observations ended. For instance, I sporadically took notes on my smartphone which seemed as if I was texting. Soon after leaving the bar, I went home and typed everything I recalled from the previous hours. After some time, I would then revisit my notes once again to code (examining similarities, differences, or patterns when looking at my observations). Through coding, I studied different factors such as how the bar was organized (e.g. some could have a dance floor while others may not, some could be smaller spatially, be near a university, have a certain female to male ratio etc.) in relation with how people interacted and/or performed.

#### Prior Research

##### **Masculinity Norms**

In various studies, the most recent publication in 2014, Kathryn Graham and colleagues have conducted extensive research on barroom settings. In particular, they have found various factors associated with barroom aggression, emphasizing male patrons’ masculinity norms and forceful forms of sexual advancements.

##### **Barroom settings as a social context**

Researchers, including Graham and colleagues have furthermore pointed out highly sexualized settings combined with other factors (e.g. level of intoxication of victim and sexually advancing initiator) that may be present in barrooms. In a qualitative study, researchers identified risky groups from non-risky groups, specifying that high risk fraternities differ from low risk fraternities. The researchers conducted an observational study on different fraternity party settings and a bar to compare characteristics of the different locations to determine if the environment and the way the environment was managed played a contributing role for sexual coercion to be more likely (Boswell, & Spade, 1996). Boswell and Spade observed that the difference was based on the characteristics of their social settings, concluding that low-risk fraternities were more conducive to conversation and thus less likely for sexual aggression to occur. They found, more specifically, that gender relations, peer pressure, the volume of the music, sitting arrangement, and the control of setting and the alcohol were all important factors that could have led to sexual coercion and concluded that fraternities who offered a space where respectful interactions led garnered more positive gender relations thus making them low risk (Boswell & Spade, 1996).

##### **Influence of alcohol**

Extensive research literature conveys that alcohol is one of the most common factors associated with sexual assault (Abbey, McAusla, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; Benson, Gohm, & Gross, 2007). Foubert, Garner, & Thaxter (2006) point out the strong link between alcohol and sexual assault. They ultimately imply that some lack knowledge of how alcohol impairs their and their partner’s decision making and their ability to give consent. Factors that also need to be considered with alcohol consumption are the populations who are more likely to drink.

#### Findings

##### **Observation 1:** Positive homosocial behavior

“One male patron in the group (tallest one) says, “Speak up. Say it from the heart. ‘You never know when we’re going to get together like this again.””

**Reflection:** It was at around 1:00 A.M. that my partner and I were attentive at what this group of five male patrons, who were by a corner of the bar area, were doing. Not too far from us, we noticed that they were all facing each other. They surprised me because this demonstrated an atypical masculinity performance in a public setting. Scholars have expressed that bar settings can be seen as a socially acceptable way for males to express feelings because the act of buying and consuming alcohol creates a passageway to do so. Although alcohol is one factor that could have influence these male patrons to be open to having an emotional connection with one another, another factor in this setting may be the volume of the music. The music volume allowed for conversations to flow clearly. In effect, it may be that the entire bar was full of meaningful verbal interactions amongst the patrons, proving a safer space where it was less likely for aggression to occur.

##### **Observation 2:** Dance floor dynamics and “blurred lines”

“There is a female patron dancing on the dance floor alone it seems. She is holding a glass of alcohol and enjoying the music... as she dances... a male patron stands facing her, looking at her up and down from about three to four feet away.”

**Reflection:** Unlike the previous observation, there was a dance floor which invited many patrons to dance. In this particular case, it attracted a young women to dance while drinking. In clear sight of my partner and I, we saw the encounter develop. Soon after the woman started to dance alone, the male patron gradually moved toward her however, another female patron (who seemed to be a friend “saving” her) started dancing with the aforementioned female patron. As the two female patrons danced together, the male patron continued approaching and danced “getting low” with the female patrons. Soon after both female patrons started walking away from the dance floor, the male patron followed them. As they walked passed our direction, he talked to the female patron and it seemed as if she was rejecting him. After they neared the exit from section B into section A (another connecting barroom in the same facility), the two female patrons move into section A. Ultimately, and to my relief, the male patron did not follow and returned to his original place (where we saw him before the encounter). This situation reminded me of the song “Blurred Lines” which assumes that a female “wants it” (referring to sexual approaching) even though the male is unsure how the women really feels, hence the blurred lines of consent. In the described observation, there were clear indications that the female patron was not interested in the sexual advancement but the male patron continued pursuing (e.g. following them). Although the music in this setting was extremely loud (in order to talk with my partner, I had to lean close to her ear and/or talk at the top of my voice for her to hear me), which may have contributed to lack of vocal communication, there were clear nonverbal messages from both female patrons and male patrons. Also, it did seem as the male patron had been drinking which fogged decision making. He demonstrated clear attributes of a hegemonic masculinity – interpreting rejection as an indicator to “try harder.”

##### **Observation 3:** Crossing the lines

“1:38 – It was as if a minute after, I saw a young bald man come out of nowhere. He was standing by the pool tables looking around the whole bar. After looking around, he moved through the crowd, kept looking around, then started to talk with the woman with the pink blouse. I am not sure what he was asking her but she pointed to her male friend who was right by the bar at this point. The friend noticed and went over telling the bald man that he and the woman were together. I am not sure if the bald man believed it. It seemed as if the bald man had a friend following him, saying something to him as they walked back to where they were originally. But the bald man seemed agitated. He was looking around as if on a hunt. He noticed that the woman with the pink blouse started to go towards the entrance/exit and he followed. As I saw all of this develop, I told my partner, “I’ll come right back.” I followed the man and woman outside. Pretending I was making a call, I saw the woman going to her car and he kept asking her or telling her something (not in a violent but persistent manner). She got into the passenger seat of the SUV and he stayed outside. As I saw him coming back slowly, I went before him, opened the door and behind me, I pushed it to where he got it open and we both went back inside. After I got back to my table, I saw that he was back with his group – a group of men and women by a table beside the pool tables. He just stood there quiet.”

**Reflection:** When I share this observation, respondents state that I should describe this as a “scary” situation. Indeed it was. This is why I remembered everything vividly when taking notes. It was interesting that my partner had no idea any of this happened even though she was beside me. Initially I thought that the male patron was under the influence of drugs. However, it may very well be that this is was a norm for the male patron to behave. To this person, it seemed as if there were no boundaries – demonstrating traits of power and control. I consider this to be a toxic form of masculinity that leads to unhealthy relationships.

#### Theoretical Framework & Discussion

##### **A spectrum of masculinity**

Traditionally, gender performance is seen as a duality between femininity and masculinity. However, some scholars have pointed out that when looking at masculinity alone, one can see different ways masculinity can be enacted. For example, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) have traced how there is a great diversity in masculinities and have further examined how hegemonic masculinities change over time. Ishii-Kuntz (2003) exemplifies this in their research. For instance, they trace the “emergence of diverse masculinities” in Japanese culture. Gutmann (1996) similarly examines Mexican masculinities, and ultimately provides further discourse on masculinities such as “machismo,” “the mandilón,” among others. After observing and analyzing the various ways men perform in different bar settings, it is clear that even though the the setting may influence masculinity performance, there are also predetermined behavioral factors to consider. For future studies, it will be helpful to continue making observations in various bar settings to examine how different factors in such spaces could effect how gender is performed. It would be also intriguing to gain insight into masculinity performance among different sexes and genders (e.g. Queer community). This would help explain if there is uniformity among different types of masculinities.