

## Other Forms of Communication

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# 9

## Race and the Culture of College Drinking

### An Analysis of White Privilege on Campus

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No, we regulate ourselves. It's not the university regulating us because we have to fight for the things we want so why jeopardize it by acting stupid? Why give them another reason to try to take something away from us that we fought so hard to get?

(Pam, African American respondent)

Recent research documents the extent to which alcohol is used among college undergraduates. Presley and colleagues (1998) claim that 24.2% of their sample reported using alcohol 3 times a week or more. These patterns are consistent across epidemiological studies (O'Malley et al. 1998). Twenty-two percent of students in a study by Wechsler and colleagues reported binge drinking (defined as 5 or more drinks in a single sitting for men, 4 or more for women) in the last two weeks in 1998. Survey data suggests most college students feel drinking is a central part of social life (Wechsler et al. 1996). College students regard drinking as central for students in general and for groups such as athletes, social fraternities, and sororities. Indeed, 92% of students report that the social atmosphere on their campuses promotes alcohol use (Wechsler et al. 1996). While these survey results document behaviors and attitudes of the dominant college culture, less is known about the sociology of drinking for undergraduate minority students (for more insight into the sociology of alcohol use, see Peralta in press).

Robert L. Peralta. Prepared expressly for this edition.

We do know that White students appear to drink more than do non-White students. Compared with young Whites, young Blacks have consistently reported lower rates of alcohol use, drunkenness, and alcohol-related problems (Herd 1997; Jones-Webb 1998; Johnson and colleagues 1998; Wechsler et al. 1998). White college students, for example, self-reported drinking 6.6 drinks a week while non-White students consumed 3.4 drinks (Wechsler et al. 1998). Forty-seven percent of White students were classified as binge drinkers compared to 18% of Black, 25% of Asian, 38% of Hispanics, and 37% of "other" students. Disparities in drinking patterns speak to differences in drinking cultures and the social arrangements that produce them (see Pittman and White 1991).

This study explores drinking disparities by race through analyzing accounts of college drinking from African American and White students. I work toward developing an understanding of the social structural factors related to drinking in college as they pertain to Black and White students. The development of a sociostructural understanding of drinking for college students is informed by talking with undergraduates about these issues. Three intertwined themes emerged from the accounts of minority and White students. First, students talked about the importance and structure of university social space. Minority students asserted that campus was largely "White space" where students, staff, and professors were overwhelmingly White (see Feagin and colleagues, 1996, for a discussion of "White space"). It was within this White space that drinking took place. Student's accounts suggest that alcohol use provided a means for White students to participate in White culture and forge relationships with other White students. Those who were not White reported a disconnection from the college culture. In exploring this theme, I looked at how Black students viewed drinking from the perspective of being Black in predominantly White space.

The second theme emerging from these data concerned student's views on bias imposed by institution components of the university itself. African American students stated the university had official and unofficial policies in place that worked to limit their ability to pursue activities, such as drinking. Here I focus on the relationship between drinking behavior and institutional policy.

Finally, privilege emerged as a theme in discussions with African American students. African American students indicated, as numerical and racial minorities on campus, they felt pressure to be "model" citizens for fear of creating or perpetrating existing stereotypes indicative of their race. Here, I attempt to express their concerns involving drinking behavior and the potential for negative stereotypes to arise from engaging in such behavior.

Two overarching goals guide this chapter. The first is to begin understanding, from the perspective of undergraduates, some of the sociocultural mechanisms at work in undergraduate drinking. To achieve this goal, this chapter is organized to present the voices of the students to whom I spoke. The second goal was to connect what was learned from these experiences with the relevant existing literature on social structure. The final section of this chapter summarizes the findings and poses questions for future research.

## METHOD

### Procedure

This research was a part of a larger study on the drinking behaviors of college students (see Peralta, in press, for additional information). A qualitative research design was used to document participants' experiences with alcohol at a single university. Students responded to

TABLE 9-1 Student I

| Race        |
|-------------|
| White       |
| Black       |
| Latino      |
| Asian       |
| Total N (%) |

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### Respondents

A self-selected purposiv  
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respondent self describe  
male (N = 37). Seventy-  
self-identified as homos  
mean ( $\pm$  SD) age was  
freshmen at the time of  
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TABLE 9-2 Student

| Sexuality    |
|--------------|
| Heterosexual |
| Homosexual   |
| Bisexual     |
| Total N (%)  |

TABLE 9-1 Student Interviews: Race by Gender *N* (%)

| Race               | Gender   |          | Total    |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|                    | Males    | Females  |          |
| White              | 29 (71)  | 26 (70)  | 55 (71)  |
| Black              | 10 (24)  | 10 (27)  | 20 (26)  |
| Latino             | 1 (2)    | 1 (3)    | 2 (3)    |
| Asian              | 1 (2)    | — (—)    | 1 (1)    |
| Total <i>N</i> (%) | 41 (100) | 37 (100) | 78 (100) |

class announcements in sociology and criminology courses and to ten posted notices placed in campus areas frequented by these youth. Minority students were purposely over sampled to give voice to those who have been traditionally excluded from research. Difficulty recruiting minority participants (African American and gay and lesbian students) prompted the use of \$10 stipends to encourage their participation.

The University Office of Human Research granted ethical approval for the project. Seventy-eight interpersonal in-depth interviews lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour were conducted in the office of the primary investigator. Informed consent was given for participation and all respondents were assured confidentiality.

### Respondents

A self-selected purposive sample of 78 undergraduate students was interviewed. Data were collected between 1997 and 2001. College class ranking ranged from freshmen to senior status. Students lived both on and off campus. Seventy-one percent ( $N = 55$ ) of the sample was White and 26% ( $N = 20$ ) was Black. Two respondents were of Hispanic origin and one respondent self described as Asian. Fifty-three percent ( $N = 41$ ) were male; 47% were female ( $N = 37$ ). Seventy-two percent ( $N = 56$ ) self-identified as heterosexual, 22% ( $N = 17$ ) self-identified as homosexual, and the remaining 6% ( $N = 5$ ) self-identified as bisexual. The mean ( $\pm SD$ ) age was 20 years old  $\pm 2.75$ . Thirty-two percent ( $N = 24$ ) reported being freshmen at the time of the interview. Fifteen percent ( $N = 11$ ) of the sample reported being a member of a fraternity or sorority (see Tables 9-1 through 9-3).

TABLE 9-2 Student Interviews: Sexuality by Gender *N* (%)

| Sexuality          | Gender   |          | Total    |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|                    | Male     | Female   |          |
| Heterosexual       | 30 (73)  | 26 (70)  | 56 (72)  |
| Homosexual         | 10 (24)  | 7 (19)   | 17 (22)  |
| Bisexual           | 1 (2)    | 4 (11)   | 5 (6)    |
| Total <i>N</i> (%) | 41 (100) | 37 (100) | 78 (100) |

TABLE 9-3 Student Interviews: Race by Sexuality *N* (%)

| Race               | Sexuality |          |          | Total    |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                    | Hetero    | Gay      | Bisexual |          |
| White              | 38 (68)   | 12 (71)  | 5 (100)  | 55 (71)  |
| Black              | 18 (32)   | 2 (12)   | — (—)    | 20 (26)  |
| Latino             | — (—)     | 2 (12)   | — (—)    | 2 (3)    |
| Asian              | — (—)     | 1 (6)    | — (—)    | 1 (1)    |
| Total <i>N</i> (%) | 56 (100)  | 17 (100) | 5 (100)  | 78 (100) |

**Instrument**

A semistructured open-ended interview guide consisting of 12 questions was developed and pilot tested by the primary author to study alcohol use among college students. Many questions were presented in projective form to reduce the response effect on threatening questions (see Sudman and Bradburn 1982). Demographic questions were asked in addition to questions about drinking quantity and frequency, attitudes toward drinking, reasons for drinking, expectations of alcohol use, and consequences of drinking. Some of the questions specific to the study were as follows: (1) What do you think of the idea of getting drunk? (2) What are your experiences with drinking on this campus? (3) What are your expectations for people who get drunk? (4) What goes through your mind when you see someone drinking or getting drunk? Probing questions were used when appropriate to facilitate further discussion. The interview was designed to be open enough to allow students to discuss in depth issues they thought pertained to alcohol use yet structured to keep the discussion focused on alcohol use on college.

**Analysis**

Grounded theory was the analytical technique used in this study, as the purpose was to explore issues related to drinking behaviors on a college campus. This technique allows respondents to inform the development of both theory and relevant hypotheses for testing in future research (see Lincoln and Guba 1985). All of the interviews were transcribed and coded. An initial content analysis was conducted for patterns of responses emerging from the data. After this initial analysis, a more thorough examination of the transcripts was conducted for emergent themes. Interrater reliability was utilized for verifying consistency in coding and interpretation. Specific concepts articulated by various respondents were grouped. These concepts included social space, control and power, identity, social control, and racism.

**RESULTS**

Drinking differences, in terms of attitudes, drinking behaviors, and experiences with alcohol differed qualitatively by race. These differences support existing epidemiological data. Whereas one White female in my sample of 26 White females reported never achieving

intoxication, 4 out of 10 similar males out of 10 similar having become intoxicated complete abstinence versus two drinks in the past

What follows are explained and supported accounts explain in certain drinking patterns found

**Social Space**

Accounts reveal how occupy work to encode an individual, that is, male, for example, a plays an important colleagues 1996).

Talking to Black into discussions about accounts taken from it relates to isolation quote thereafter illustrate

Frieda and Brenda in class and in campus

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*Janice:* I j l :

| %        |          |
|----------|----------|
| Bisexual | Total    |
| 5 (100)  | 55 (71)  |
| — (—)    | 20 (26)  |
| — (—)    | 2 (3)    |
| — (—)    | 1 (1)    |
| 5 (100)  | 78 (100) |

intoxication, 4 out of 10 Black females reported never having felt intoxicated. Two Black males out of 10 similarly reported never having felt intoxicated. All White males reported having become intoxicated during college. Two Black females and one Black male reported complete abstinence whereas one White female reported near abstinence (she had had only two drinks in the past year).

What follows are three interrelated themes that emerged from the data. These themes are explained and supported using accounts from the respondents interviewed. These accounts explain in certain detail the social structural factors associated with the various drinking patterns found on the college campus where the study took place.

### Social Space

Accounts reveal how the social locations of Blacks and Whites and the social spaces they occupy work to encourage or discourage specific drinking practices. The social location of an individual, that is, where in life a person is socioeconomically, racially, as a male or female, for example, and how this status fits into the community or social space at large—plays an important role in shaping the meaning and use of alcohol (see Feagin and colleagues 1996).

Talking to Black students at length about their experiences with college drinking flowed into discussions about segregation, discrimination, discomfort, and isolation. The following accounts taken from African American students first illustrate the concept of social space as it relates to isolation and segregation felt on a campus dominated by White students. Each quote thereafter illuminates the relationship between social space and alcohol use.

Frieda and Brenda, both African American females, talk about the isolation they felt in class and in campus as Black individuals.

*Frieda:* And I was the only Black in most of my courses and that is the way it is going to be everywhere I go, especially in my field.

*Brenda:* It's really segregated on this campus. Like if you walk through the student union you know, there's like the Black's table, they have like two tables and everything else is like White and it's so weird to look at. I always tell my friends "it's like we're in high school, look at this!"

Sandy describes the segregated nature of dormitory living at the university:

*Sandy:* Because of my program, I lived over at the freshman dorm. And there are about, seriously, ten Black people period on that side of campus. A lot of students in our program even dropped out back then or they moved because they didn't feel comfortable there.

Being in predominantly White space creates loneliness, boredom, and isolation. Being Black means not participating fully in the college culture. I asked Janice about her boredom:

*Janice:* [The university setting is] like a suburb as opposed to an urban area and it's just not a big place. And although there might be a large number of students here at the university it just seems that there's a lot more for Caucasian students to do, at least in my view because of the area. And what I'm used

questions was developed and college students. Many questions were asked in addition to threatening questions were asked in addition to toward drinking, reasons for asking. Some of the questions of the idea of getting drunk? (3) What are your expectations when you see someone appropriate to facilitate further to allow students to discuss captured to keep the discussion

dy, as the purpose was to exclude. This technique allows relevant hypotheses for testing interviews were transcribed and of responses emerging from on of the transcripts was confirmed for verifying consistency in various respondents were over, identity, social control,

s, and experiences with alcohol existing epidemiological data. les reported never achieving

to and what my culture is and what I enjoy with my people and my culture so it's not always that easy to go and find things to do.

Eric, an African American male, contemplates decisions about which racial space to occupy and the differences in drinking between these two different social spaces:

*Eric:* Should I be with people that are my race? Those with the same type of background that I have and who are my true friends? I think that is the main reason I got back on the right track . . . made me slow down with the drinking. Which is what I really like about the Black community, 'cause most of the programs they put on are not about drinking. I mean some drinking does go on but it is not the main activity. Like at White parties the main activity is drinking. They hardly dance if they do dance. It is more of go there, drink, get drunk, and socialize. You really don't know anybody. I learned how to interact with White people that have never been around people of color before. I think a lot people here haven't experienced Black people before. You know? I think a lot of people are scared. And they have too many stereotypes.

When drinking takes place in White space, African Americans fear the potential for racism and discrimination to emerge. Brad states,

Well, the whole thing about getting drunk is that it is supposed to make you a social magnet in the sense of you are looser with your tongue. People are, um, putting down the inhibitions, you know. Like that initial nervousness you had to talk to someone you see over on the side. You know if you have that barrier down, that nervousness, that fear of rejection, you know that you are going to talk to them. So I think that is one thing, but at the same time people are susceptible to verbal abuse, sexual abuse, just anything like I mentioned before. I don't want somebody to come out of their mouth with the "N" word cause I will be like "okay, this is what you really think; this is what is really in your head." And I don't want to hear that. I don't want to have to deal with that.

While White space characterizes the social landscape of the university, enclaves of Black space exist on the college campus where this study took place. These spaces, however, are generally tucked away within the private parameters of dorm room space, university space allotted to Black students for a fixed amount of time, or other Black spaces. Darren exemplifies this in his explanations of parties and states,

If White students come to a flow [term used to describe an African American party], I wonder. I'm not racist, but I wonder how they knew about it and why they came. I think it is good that they came. But how did they hear about it or whatever? I think they are brave, you know? That's a good thing. It's a very good thing. Trying to break the color barrier.

Adrian compares Black parties and White parties:

I've been to a couple of White parties. I hate to say "White parties" but let's be real. That's what it is. Normally White parties you go and everybody is just drinking. No music, maybe a little music here and there. But for the most part it is just socializing and drinking.

These statements exemplify the discomfort minority students feel while attending campus parties at a primarily White university. Part of their discomfort is expressed in their

self-reported avoidance of this social structural context. Administrative policies and drinking cultures.

### Institutional Bias

The following account allots certain social spaces for certain groups of students while African American students drink. That is, the following African American

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## 3 Other Forms of Communication

enjoy with my people and my culture and things to do.

about which racial space to occupy in different social spaces:

space? Those with the same type of personality true friends? I think that is the problem . . . made me slow down with my friends like about the Black community, but my friends are not about drinking. I mean drinking is the main activity. Like at White parties they hardly dance if they do dance. They socialize, and socialize. You really don't act with White people that have been before. I think a lot of people here are. You know? I think a lot of people have stereotypes.

African Americans fear the potential for

being used to make you a social magnet in the party by letting down the inhibitions, you know. You see over on the side. You know if you are a Black person, you know that you are going to talk to people, you know that you are going to talk to people, you know that you are going to talk to people, you know that you are going to talk to people. People are susceptible to verbal abuse, and you want somebody to come out of their shell and tell you what you really think; this is what is important to deal with that.

of the university, enclaves of social space took place. These spaces, however, are dorm room space, university time, or other Black spaces. It states,

[African American party], I wonder. Why they came. I think it is good that they think they are brave, you know? Over the color barrier.

parties" but let's be real. That's just drinking. No music, maybe a socializing and drinking.

students feel while attending parties. Discomfort is expressed in their

self-reported avoidance of the drinking culture. Related to issues of social space and how this social structural construct influences drinking behavior are institutional mechanisms. Administrative policies and action engaged in by university officials also help to shape drinking cultures.

### Institutional Bias

The following accounts reveal how Black students believe that the university controls and allots certain social spaces to be used for drinking, thus unintentionally creating drinking spaces for certain groups. For example, social fraternities are in effect given drinking privileges while African American groups at the university are not granted similar privileges to drink. That is, the social space to engage in drinking behavior is not allocated equally. The following African American students vocalize this bias:

*Eric:* Alcohol is not central at Black gatherings 'cause that is how the university has set it up. Whites have more freedom that way.

*Sandy:* [Our functions are] a lot different than White fraternities and sororities 'cause we don't have the house and we do our activities on campus.

*Eric:* [It is how the] university is set up, I mean most Black parties are on campus. You go out and Black people, on this campus, in order to do something, you have to do it on campus. They might have after parties and sometimes there is alcohol there, but a lot of time there isn't.

*Robert:* Do you have a [fraternity] house?

*Michael:* Naw, no, we don't.

*Robert:* Where do you meet?

*Michael:* We have a room over in the student center.

*Frieda:* Yeah, it is a totally different atmosphere in terms of alcohol and the way White students and Black students party. Like, they can go to fraternity houses and drink, things like that. The only way that [Black] students can drink is to do it in their rooms or off campus. I mean that is the way Black organizations work . . . If the party is on campus, it's like we have to pay for security. Whereas you can go to a fraternity house or a house on such and such avenue and drink openly and I've seen minority students who feel kind of like "what is that about?"

Not only is space formally controlled, so too is drinking behavior. African American students report being scrutinized by campus police more so than their White counterparts. Take the following accounts by African American students. Below, Brad talks about participating in an African American organization initiation ceremony and his experience with campus police.

We were out at the [dorm] on north campus and we were all kind of outside on the tennis courts cheering these people on and congratulating them and the police like just rolled up and just said "you know you guys are making a lot of noise; we have heard some complaints." I live right by a condemned frat house. It was a condemned frat house recently and they were sometimes really loud and there have been times when I called the police and told them they are making

too much of a disturbance, and the police might just drive by and like they will come by and it will get quiet and then they will like drive back out. And it doesn't seem like the police really got out of the car. It was more like they see a cop coming down the street and they, like the cop turns around and goes away. There have been times [when] they [White students] were lighting fireworks and things. That to me is, I don't want to accuse public safety of being racist or anything but at the same time we have not always received the same treatment as others and we weren't even drinking outside. Obviously none of us *were* drunk, we were all just cheering on these people that were becoming a part of this organization.

Janice also states:

Minority students have a problem with campus safety. People might not be outright racist, but I think they have stereotypes in their head that Black students are this or that. And so they were [the university] actually last year talking about cutting out our party period and not letting any organization have a party. That's how bad it was going to get for us, whereas you know White students can party until they die, which they do, and it's not a problem.

Frieda states,

It seems like non-Blacks can get away with drinking, and then we have like get-togethers and it's like all the cops come. We're scrutinized a lot more. I mean I've been in places like in the dorms where you have, we call it a "flow," which is like a little get together and we would be in there and, you know, would be dancing and we would have drinks in there. Public safety would knock on our door and come and be like "we wanted to come around and check it out." And there was a White person down the hall with a cup in her hand and was standing out in the hallway and the cop didn't do anything and she was drinking outside her room with a cup in her hand! And it was just like that is real biased. How are you going to come to us and say "okay, well, you all need to do this and what are you doing?" and ask stupid questions when right down the hall somebody else is in violation too. We feel that if we have a party, if anything goes wrong, we'll be the first to get shut down, whereas if it's a frat party or a party on such and such street it won't get shut down.

Jimmy states his experiences at the university:

They have been mostly positive. Maybe some of the experiences have helped me and that is positive. Most of the bad stuff has happened with the police department. One incident happened when I was a freshman. My friends, all Black, and me were walking down the street and we were walking back from a party and it was around maybe 2 o'clock in the morning. And we were looking for a place to eat. And we were the only group, pretty much the only group of Black people downtown at that time and there was a whole bunch of White people around, I mean just a whole bunch of White people. And it so happened that a fight had just broken out and it had just ended while we were walking down and so the police were trying to clear everybody out. And the two or three, I don't know how many there were, but they started following us and the groups of White kids they were just standing there just on the corner doing nothing, just watching. And the cops did nothing to them. But they started following us and were like "alright, everybody move along." And we were like "alright." So we start walking. And we notice that they were following us down the street. And they were passing all the groups of White kids just standing on the corner watching. And they started putting on their gloves and stuff and then like touching on their billy clubs and holding it and stuff and they followed us for like a block. They were intimidating. I guess growing up in a city I should have experienced stuff like that, and I have, but it has never been that direct.

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These accounts highlight the sentiments Black students felt about university policy and procedure as well as activity engaged in by campus police. African American students felt that bias embedded within the social structure of the university system itself shapes who can drink without penalty. Related to both social space and institutional bias are issues of race-based privilege. In the next section, privilege is defined and discussed in terms of drinking behavior.

### Privilege

In this section, the definition of privilege entails the freedom from being singled out and tokenized as a representative of a specific "race." African Americans report not having the privilege to be free from constant race-based evaluation. Black students face the constant risk of adding to existing stereotypes, should they "slip up." White students do not carry the burden of having to represent their race because they do not stand out in White social space. Black students report feeling that they do not have the privilege of blending in. The following accounts illustrate the pressures some Black students report experiencing as they relate to alcohol use in the White social space of college existence. Michael states, for instance,

Um, Black people at University X, we are out of our element. A group of Black kids is going to catch your eye a little bit more, you know? They are going to grab more attention than a group of White guys. You know that happens everywhere. I try not to be out there in public view where people can see. All that does is create more stereotypes like, all Black people, all they do is drink and get drunk. Yeah, I drink and I might get drunk, but they really don't know you (they only know your color). They are going off the fact that I am Black and I am drunk and that becomes the whole opinion of you. When I do go out to a club or something like that I definitely try not to get drunk. You know what I mean and if I do drink, I really don't come out or anything like that 'cause people, I don't even want to give them a chance to make a stereotype about me. If I am out there all drunk, then they will say "all those Black people, they are always drunk. All they do is this and that."

*Robert:* Being watched, does that keep you from getting in trouble with drinking?

*Michael:* I guess it does, but to have to be on your toes like that all the time? I shouldn't have to be on my toes like that all the time. It's crazy that I have to; it's not a good thing but it is a good thing. It's crazy, but that is the way it is. The fact that we have to stay on our toes keeps us out of trouble, but you know I would rather just do what I want to do and not have to worry about all that. Yeah, I would like to be able to do that. Is it possible? No, it is not.

*Seth:* A bunch of Black guys walking, stumbling, they would be picked up right away. They are automatically assumed to be guilty of something. They are guilty before being proven innocent.

*Robert:* Have you ever had any run-ins?

*Seth:* No, not me. Cause when I go out in public I am usually with my White friends. When I am with my Black friends, we are in the safety and privacy of our own room. Away from like, you know. As far away as possible. So we are nowhere to be found.

- Robert:* So is this on purpose because . . . ?
- Seth:* It's racism. Open blatantly racism. Who looks like the criminal? Who looks like the criminal to public safety and to the officers?
- Robert:* Story of officers following a group of Black guys—the cops were intimidating the . . .
- Seth:* Yeah, well, the police are intimidated. It is not just because, uh, the police are trying to be intimidating. They are intimidated themselves. "Which one of these, which one of these *brothas* gotta gun on 'em? Which one of these gang members have a gun or are carrying a nine and are gonna blow up something?" That's what the police are thinking. I'm just, I'm just like one of the White kids they saw but I have color so.

African American students suggest the social arrangements and drinking discussed here are a form of White privilege. Their conclusions about how these social relationships stem from privilege lead me to believe that this privilege is part of the foundation upon which domination rests. The privilege to drink openly and to be praised for this behavior works to inform the social audience who is privileged and who is not. Take the following accounts that reveal the frustration felt by African American students:

- Michael:* I think the White fraternities might drink a whole lot more than, like, Black just, like, from a stereotype. And from what I see, just passing by their houses, when they are having a party you see them doing it. Hanging out of the balconies or whatever. My whole theory is everybody drinks. White, Black, purple. If you are going to drink it doesn't matter. Just some are allowed to and others are not.
- Adrian:* The football house is a house where all the football players live. It's a one-story house and nothing but football players live there. If one football player moves out, another moves in. It's known as the football house. And they have parties there; they are wild crazy fun. The ideal football party, there it is. All the stereotypes you think of it, that's it.
- Robert:* What is the race mix?
- Adrian:* [The majority are White.] Even most of the Black football players don't normally go but you might see a few scattered here and there. You know. But, um, like a lot of Black students that I know just Black students don't drink as much alcohol as White students do.

Christy, a White female college student, in the following statement reveals how a formal agent of social control undermined her sense of privilege. Her privilege to drink was interrupted and this angered her even though her behavior was clearly illegal. Christy angrily remembers:

That got me so mad, you have no idea. The cop, ugh, I have so many letters to write. Like pissed off letters to write, and this is one of them. He pulled me out of a group. I was in a group of four girls and a guy; he came up to me and asked me for ID and at first I gave him, I feel like an idiot now but I gave him, I told him the wrong name. I told the wrong name. A friend of mine did that once and the cop let her go. He wrote it down and let her go.

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*Robert:* Was this at a party or . . .

*Christy:* This was at homecoming! This is *homecoming* with ice shots and kegs and cans and people throwing beer at each other on the field and he comes up to me and I was standing there like, and so I gave him the wrong name and I think that pissed him off! And he was like, "Christy, Christy, Christy, why are you lying to me?" I got defensive and he got the CB and he was like "we have a scared one here." I asked the dean, and she said that if a woman cop is not around, they would do a pat down. And he did that to me. I guess it is procedure and all, but he did that to me. He kept me there for like twenty minutes. I felt like violated. It was creepy.

Interestingly, most White students were oblivious to the presence of Black students, their functions, and their impact on university life. One White student, when asking about Black activity, responded in jest by saying "You mean there are Black students on campus?" White students did not discuss Black activity. White students did not readily understand the concept of "racialized space," whereas Black students openly discussed White and Black space issues. In other words, Black students were well aware of the social dynamics of racial segregation on campus. In and of themselves, White obliviousness and ignorance are indicative of White privilege (see McIntosh for discussion, 1993). White privilege is to not have to face or understand issues surrounding race, race relations, or racial inequality. Their world is one that is self-contained and protected and rarely penetrated by difference. This life experience is radically different from the life experience of Black students who must learn to work at adapting to White communities while maintaining ties to their Black communities.

## TOWARD A SOCIAL STRUCTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF COLLEGE DRINKING

Epidemiological research on alcohol use patterns has revealed interesting and puzzling differences by race (Johnson and colleagues 1998; Caetano 1997; Caetano and Clark 1998) while other literature identifies interesting correlates pertaining to these varying rates of use (Wallace and Bachman 1991). The social location of the college campus proves to be no exception (Wechsler and colleagues 1998). Examining social structural issues pertaining to college life reveals interesting social explanations for some of these differences. Research documents feelings of disconnection with "college life" for Black students at traditionally White universities. This research suggests that Black students do not have as strong a connection to or fondness for the lived "college experience" as White students do (Feagin and colleagues 1996). These data support such conclusions. In interviewing Black students about college alcohol use, feelings of alienation appear to stem from a disinterest in and, for some, an altogether avoidance of the college drinking culture.

Literature suggests that Black students do not have as strong a bond with "college life" compared to White students (Feagin et al. 1996; Smith et al. 2000). Thus, Black students do not necessarily identify with college drinking cultures as they might identify with their culture of origin. This is because African American students do not necessarily feel welcomed, nor are they necessarily interested in assimilating into White college culture. Because African American students do not always identify with the White campus and

therefore are not as apt to consider the university "home," Blacks may look to their Black friends and families as sites of connection, social reference, and leisure time.

Talking to Black students at length about their experiences with college drinking flowed into discussions about segregation, discrimination, discomfort, and isolation. These factors were not taken into consideration at the beginning of the study. This technique allowed for important and often overlooked themes about race relations and their impact on drinking behavior to emerge. The empirical evidence presented here documents how drinking cultures operate within social space and how social space in turn shapes behavior. Some students may or may not find the social space they occupy comfortable or compatible with their own social locations as Black men or women. The degree of comfort appears to have an effect on decisions to participate in drinking cultures.

In the data that are presented in this chapter, African American students describe discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice in a social landscape that is supposed to be enlightened. The present research supports Feagin's et al. (1996) findings suggesting the traditional university campus is primarily White space where African Americans continue to face subtle and overtly racist ideology. In the accounts presented here, I illuminate how cultural, social, and political aspects of the campus environment revolve around Whiteness leaving little "space" for Blacks to openly socialize.

The formal institution of the university and the various social organizations associated with it control much of student social space and hence leisure activity. Nevertheless, informal aspects of social control prove to be quite influential in establishing and maintaining drinking norms regardless of formal laws and sanctions. The questions of who can drink openly; whose drinking is closely monitored; whose alcohol-related behavior is overlooked, pardoned, or praised; and whose drinking is stigmatized and by whom, have a profound influence on the extent and manner in which college students use alcohol. Thus, both formal and informal social control mechanisms intrinsic to the college institution shape the social processes of alcohol use and hence the drinking patterns reported in the literature.

Drinking cultures are exemplary of more than leisure-seeking behavior because drinking behavior is highly meaningful (West 2001). Indeed, based on these data, it appears drinking cultures help to form, shape, and maintain social hierarchies. On campus, it is those in privileged spaces and of privileged races that can drink openly, who can use alcohol to construct legitimate identities, and who can use alcohol to perform behavior that would otherwise be considered destructive.<sup>1</sup> Black students readily recognize the informal and formal social structural barriers that are imposed upon them. Black students talk about the barriers that curtail their drinking behavior and recognize at the same time the freedom with which White students drink and how they are enabled to drink by the university itself.

A deeper analysis of drinking behavior by race reveals how the reproduction of perceived social hierarchy is inextricably connected to drinking cultures arising from established social arrangements. Behaviors associated with drinking, such as vandalism and aggression, work to establish systems of domination on campus through fear. Thus, not only can we see how Whites and Blacks drink differently, we can also see how alcohol-related consequences contribute to establishing and maintaining social hierarchies. Social hierarchies are formally institutionalized by social structures, but it is in everyday interactions that hierarchies manifest themselves; it is in everyday action where hierarchies materialize. Open drinking behavior becomes a privilege.

Kantor (1977) states that "minorities" become of place; however, they create what Kantor call behavior in a model fashion that undermine attempts to role encapsulation.

Perhaps White students social worlds of family to both social locations structure. Students easily education, interests, an ready in place before identify with White space.

Research in the field while to examine if and institutions (see West 2001) measures of alcohol use in certain social contexts to express, construct, and sexuality, and class on campus. Bachman and Peralta (2002) order construction by us uncover the gender-laden

In conclusion, I find an effect on Black students were perceived as images and beliefs about honoring their "race" students in this study existed in attempting to space is primarily White are spaces in which comfortable. The open as White space, and drinking cultures. Finally, the inant college culture ing racial segregate

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Meloy, and J. M. Crandall for data coll

Kantor (1977) states that "tokens" can never really be seen as they are and thus find themselves in a constant fight against stereotypes. "Role encapsulation" occurs when "token minorities" become encapsulated in limited roles. These roles may allow for security of place; however, they constrain minorities to specific areas of "permissible or rewarded" action. Because tokens are apt to receive attention due to their difference, their visibility creates what Kantor calls "performance pressures." This means minorities feel pressure to behave in a model fashion. Black students here assert that heavy or sloppy drinking would undermine attempts to rise above negative stereotypes, thus supporting Kantor's concept of role encapsulation.

Perhaps White students, as a result of their privilege, can move easily between the social worlds of family life and college drinking life. They can perhaps more easily adapt to both social locations because of fundamental familiarity and connection to the dominant structure. Students easily identify with students who are like themselves in terms of race, education, interests, and aspirations (Feagin et al. 1996). When drinking cultures are already in place before White students arrive on campus, White students may thus easily identify with White space and hence the drinking culture that is associated with this space.

Research in the future should examine these questions and more. It may prove worthwhile to examine if and how alcohol is used to perform or "do" gender within different social institutions (see West 2001). Future studies should also explore how quantity and frequency measures of alcohol use, for example, might be important markers of masculinity for youth in certain social contexts. It would be useful to document the different ways alcohol is used to express, construct, and perhaps deconstruct established gender roles. The effects of race, sexuality, and class on the meaning of alcohol-related violence is also in need of research (see Bachman and Peralta 2002; Cruz and Peralta 2001). Studies should address the issue of gender construction by using in-depth research techniques of qualitative methodology to better uncover the gender-laden meanings of alcohol use for students and nonstudents alike.

In conclusion, I interpret the social factors discussed earlier as collectively having an effect on Black student drinking. Blacks in this study were concerned with how they were perceived as individuals in a society they believe to be steeped in stereotypical images and beliefs about persons of their race. Black students report actively avoiding dishonoring their "race" by not participating in potentially stigmatizing behavior. Black students in this study did not necessarily feel welcomed, nor were they necessarily interested in attempting to assimilate into White space. Black students spoke of how college space is primarily White space and how drinking is a part of this White landscape. These are spaces in which Black students do not necessarily feel accepted, welcomed, or comfortable. The open and public use of alcohol by White students may maintain social space as White space, and hence contribute to the reproduction of racial differences in drinking cultures. Finally, these conditions possibly work to separate Black students from the dominant college culture. In sum, these social conditions may be playing a role in maintaining racial segregation on campus, thus producing disparate drinking cultures.

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## NOTE

1. Of course, this works in multidirectional ways. Gays and lesbians are privileged within the "gay space" provided by the gay bar and heterosexuals are not. White individuals are the "guests" when they are in predominantly "Black space." Certain behaviors and expressions are forbidden depending upon one's identity status and the social space they find themselves in.

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