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Place and Power: How Campus Culture Impacts the Perceptions about Sexual Concurrency  
Among African American Male Collegians

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Among African American Male Collegians

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BA  
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2011

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2013

## Abstract

Place and Power: How Campus Culture Impacts the Perceptions about Sexual Concurrency  
Among African American Male Collegians

By Laura Riley

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature and sought to investigate the connections between campus culture and sexual concurrency among male college students. Sexual concurrency is the act of having multiple sexual partnerships within overlapping time periods (Adimora, Schoenbac & Doherty, 2006). Sexually concurrent partnerships have been identified as risk factors for the transmission of HIV and STIs (Adimora et al., 2006; Lenior, et al., 2006). Women currently outnumber men in college, this coupled with the nature of college relationships suggest that more casual partnerships are permitted. Using a phenomenological approach, 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with African American men ages 18-25 that were currently enrolled full-time at a Historically Black College. Results suggest that campus culture plays an important role in the development of masculine identity in that students have a different understanding of their role within the broader institution as they matriculate through the college. Yet in terms of sexual risk behaviors, including sexual concurrency, the intra-group differences vary vastly, from those who are celibate to those who have multiple sexual relationships across different institutions. The young men discuss their rationales for their stance on sexuality mentioning perceived lack of privacy, the sheer number of women available, competition between men on campus or desire to focus on high achievement and post graduation plans. These findings suggest that African American men are complex and diverse; thus, future studies should be conducted exclusively with African American collegiate men to better account for the within group diversity for use in future interventions.

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## Chapter 1-Introduction

Sexual concurrency, or the act of having multiple sexual partnerships within overlapping time periods, has emerged as a significant risk factor for the acquisition and transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) (Adimora, Schoenbach, & Doherty, 2006). This is especially salient for African American women, who experience high levels of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV through heterosexual contact, despite the fact that African American heterosexual men are not experiencing infection at the same rate has suggested that the disparity may be linked to partnerships between low-risk women and higher- risk men that engage in concurrency (Aral, Adimora, & Fenton, 2008; K. Ford, Sohn, & Lepkowski, 2002; Gorbach, Stoner, Aral, WL, & Holmes, 2002). Additionally, the literature suggests that Blacks are more likely to have same-race partnerships despite the disproportionately higher numbers of Black women as compared to men, which may encourage Black men to engage in concurrency (Adimora & Schoenbach, 2002; Laumann & Youm, 1999). The combination of disproportion of the sexes and the high levels of same-race partnerships may create an environment where partner sharing among Black women is the norm.

Sexual concurrency has been defined several different ways in the literature (Adimora, Schoenbach, & Doherty, 2007; Gorbach et al., 2002; Smith, 2012). Most working definitions diverge in the length of time between sexual acts for which a sexual partnership is considered active. Nunn and colleagues, defines concurrency as "overlapping sexual partnerships in which sexual intercourse with one partner occurs between two acts of intercourse with another partner within the last six months"(Nunn et al., 2011, p. 1392). While Adimora, Schoenbach and Doherty determined a sexual

partnership was concurrent if the date of the first sexual intercourse with one partner occurred before the date of the last intercourse with a previous partner, with no respect to the length of time between sexual acts of the first sexual partner (Adimora et al., 2007). Despite the diversity of concurrency definitions, all definitions require that an individual engage in sexual activity with multiple partners within overlapping time periods. Sexual concurrency is believed to aid in the risk for transmission of HIV and STIs (Adimora, Schoenbach, Martinson, et al., 2006; Koumans et al., 2001; Lenoir, Adler, Borzekowski, Tschann, & Ellen, 2006).

### **The Nature of Sexual Partnerships in College Settings**

Although studies have found that engaging in concurrent behavior is not associated with a particular age group, having greater numbers of concurrent relationships were linked to higher rates of STI diagnoses and younger adults. Individuals in college settings may be more likely to engage in concurrent behaviors given students' access to larger social networks (Rosenberg, Gurvey, Adler, Dunlop, & Ellen, 1999). Additionally, because colleges are seen as places to explore one's identity and personal development, students are more likely to experiment with a variety of casual sexual partnerships with the understanding that these partners are free to do the same (Downing-Matibag & Geisinger, 2009). The rise of casual relationships may mean the initiation of sexual intercourse occurs shortly after an initial meeting because both members of the relationship understand that there is little expectation for a long-term commitment. There may be one sexual encounter or many, and participants may know each other or not; however, the defining characteristic of a casual relationship is that a couple must engage in sexual intercourse outside of a committed relationship (Paul, McManus, & Hayes,



2000). As previously stated, colleges also provide a large pool of potential candidates for sexual partnerships. In the fall of 2012, it is expected that students will attend American colleges and universities in record numbers and if trends hold steady, Black women will outnumber Black men, 2 to 1 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). When you combine the very nature of dating and sexual interaction on college campuses with the number of potential sexual partnerships and provide for the overlap for potential sexual partners, it becomes apparent that the sexual networks of college students are complex and they create a potential risk for HIV acquisition.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study used a phenomenological approach to guide the research process. This approach is a method that focuses on individuals and the meanings they associate with particular events or interactions (Husserl, 1970). A phenomenological approach is one that would be best suited for this level of analysis because it is both novel and introductory in nature, and has a more narrow scope than other commonly used research strategies (Crosby, DiClemente, & Salazar, 2006). Phenomenological approaches also employ the use of unstructured interviews, where the researcher has a greater interest in discovering individual perspectives than following a strict interview guide (Crosby et al., 2006). Finally, a phenomenological approach does not attempt to explain causality, thus, this approach is ideal for this introductory analysis (Crosby et al., 2006).

Employing a phenomenological approach was helpful in the study of sexual concurrency among heterosexual Black males in the collegiate environment because it provides for a new perspective in HIV research by allowing for the development of

essence description by encouraging participants to talk about their experiences and the contexts that facilitated these experiences (Creswell, 2009).

### **Study Rationale**

Sexual concurrency is a known risk factor for the transmission of STIs including HIV. Due to the high prevalence of heterosexually- transmitted HIV infection among Black women, it is important to understand the role that interpersonal and related contextual factors play in the HIV transmission process. Understanding this role will help to shape how interventions are created and for whom HIV prevention strategies are targeted.

The body of concurrency research is growing; however, there are several gaps in the literature. Studies tend to examine adolescents, aged 14 to 19, or the general population, aged 18 and over (Carey, Senn, Seward, & Venable, 2010; K. Ford et al., 2002; Lenoir et al., 2006; Nunn et al., 2011; Senn, Carey, Venable, Coury-Doniger, & Urban, 2009). Although, there is some published research with the general population, there exists a relatively smaller body of published studies on Black men, aged 18-25 that are currently enrolled at post-secondary educational institutions. Most studies recruit participants from STI treatment and diagnosis clinics, and even then, very little is known about the role that Black men that have sex with women (MSW) play in the transmission of HIV and STIs to Black women (Adimora, Schoenbach, Martinson, et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007). Research has demonstrated that men are more likely to engage in concurrent behavior, that concurrency allows for the rapid transmission of STIs, and that concurrency is often associated with other risky sexual practices such as inconsistent condom usage (K. Ford et al., 2002; Manhart, Aral, Holmes, & Foxman, 2002; Senn et

al., 2009). Research conducted with racially diverse college students demonstrates that this population has greater access to potential sex partners and have lower expectations about the development of a relationship beyond physical interactions (Paul & Hayes, 2002). This research has not been replicated among populations of Black college students; however the unequal ratio of male to female students at Historically Black Colleges suggest that this phenomenon holds true for Black college students.

Despite the previous studies conducted with the general population of Black men, and the research conducted among racially diverse populations of college students, there is still a gap in the literature for the within group differences among Black men attending college (Harper, 2004). This research is important, as it will aid in understanding the sexual risks of Black college students.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the cultural ideals surrounding masculinity at a Historically Black College (HBC) affects the perceptions about concurrency among Black collegiate males. Specifically this research will address the following: 1) integration into and self- identification with campus culture, 2) perceived differences between dating relationships and sexual relationships, and 3) personal perceptions surrounding sexual concurrency.

## Chapter 2- Literature Review

### Overview

This chapter is designed to review the literature on sexual concurrency, and identify what has been discovered on the nature of multiplicative sexual relationships. This review of the literature will identify common beliefs about masculinity and sexuality, the nature of sexual relationships on a historically Black college campus, the nature of Black relationships and conclude with a detailed examination of the methodologies and results of previous sexual concurrency studies.

### Masculinity and Sexuality

Research often focuses on the plight of the Black woman because of the intersection of racial and sexual discriminations; however, Black men occupy a unique space within the social environment in the United States. They possess the dual nature of racial oppression and male privilege. This duality creates a complex experience where racial realities work to shape and define their experiences as male members of society (Staples, 1978). According to Chaney, when it relates to the expression of manhood, all men are not created equally (2009). She argues that race holds a predominate role in how Black men form their idea of masculinity because they do not share the same social standing as their white counterparts. In an aforementioned? qualitative study that sampled 24 Black men from the south and midwestern regions, Chaney discovered that Black men defined masculinity in four ways: maturity, responsibility for family, as a provider, and an awareness of self. Maturity was defined as being responsible and independent in one's

life. Responsibility for family meant that a man was able to provide for their families in any way that their families needed them. The provider role was defined as being able to influence others financially, spiritually and emotionally. Finally, self-awareness was defined as the ability to control the way they present themselves to the outside world. In essence, this sample of men extolled the importance of educational status and the ability to provide for a family as the purest expression of manhood (Chaney, 2009). Because of the interaction of race on manhood, some Black men are unable to provide for their loved ones. When men are unable to express themselves through economic dominance they may focus on physical dominance, athletic prowess or the exploitation of (Hill, 2005). The previous study was conducted with men who were typically lower income who had limited educational attainment. Research has not determined whether this model holds true for Black men currently attending college. The popular media portrays Black men as either docile and emasculated or over-sexualized, emotionally devoid and violent (K. A. Ford, 2011). Ford found that for Black men, outside of physical appearance, masculinity was associated with higher levels of sexual behavior, where men who have more sex are seen as more masculine (K. A. Ford, 2011). This study found that for men in this sample ages 18-51 (mean= 29), physical appearance and presentation was important for their interaction with masculinity but for those that could not interact with the physical ideal overcompensation was required in how they interacted with women, and whether or not they possessed the cultural competency to act Black, by presenting an aggressive demeanor and dressing in ways that show physical or financial prowess (K. A. Ford, 2011).

For Black men attending college, there is the added complication that presenting oneself as overly aggressive may prevent their social and economic mobility (Wilkins, 2012). Heterosexuality is seen as an appropriate way to rectify the need to be seen as a man without compromising the Black collegiate male's ability to access professional status (Wilkins, 2012). This study suggested that because Black men are often marginalized in terms of power or social status, sexual prowess is sometimes emphasized (Wilkins, 2012). Wilkins also argues that although Black men's sexuality may be a preferred method of expression of masculinity, because of negative media-driven stereotypes, creating a balance between masculine expression and negative stereotyping, is a process that is dynamic (2012). Like their female counterparts, Black men are seen as sexual predators. As a result, Wilkins argues many Black men, especially those who consider themselves to be religious, define masculinity as counter-sexual and that by having restraint and control over their desires, they are more masculine (2012). Whatever the rationale, it is obvious that interaction with women, especially heterosexual interactions, is a defining point for masculinity among Black men. This concept equates to a situation where Black men are given a blueprint for masculine behavior that, if executed fully, results in negative stereotyping. This creates a dichotomous situation where Black men are left attempting to balance the negative and positive outcomes in a way that they are seen as both masculine and a respected member of society.

### **The Making of the Modern Collegiate Relationship**

Although there are many components that shape the cultural expectations of what it means to be a man, one of the most salient is the relationship between men and women. A study of Black and White fraternity members at a Predominately White Institution

(PWI) found that although both groups sexually objectified women, the Black participants were more conscious in their treatment of women because they saw themselves as members of DuBois' Talented Tenth, which is a term coined by W.E.B. DuBois that refers to the top ten percent of the Black race that would be educated and later become the leaders of the Black race (Ray & Rosow, 2009). This study found that because the Black participants believed that they were identified with an elite group, they believed they were held more accountable for their actions than were their white counterparts (Ray & Rosow, 2009).

Despite the fact that the previous study found that Black fraternity members are more likely to be acutely aware of how they behaved with members of the opposite sex, a study conducted by Bradshaw, Kahn and Saville discovered that "hooking up" is still the most frequent heterosexual sexual arrangement among college students (2010). Hooking up is defined as a sexual experience that may or may not result in sexual intercourse, and it usually occurs between individuals that do not have a pre-established relationship and/or friendship (Paul et al., 2000). Because hooking-up is seen as a way to fulfill sexual needs without the monetary investment, many college men choose this option as opposed to dating (Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville, 2010). This accepted culture of "no strings attached" sexual interaction may be a contributing factor for sexual concurrency in that college students may be more accepting of sexual relationships where neither party is committed to each other.

It would appear that if young men were only engaging one-time sexual experiences, their behavior would not qualify as sexually concurrent because each sexual partnership would end before another was initiated. Other studies suggest that although

they do not want committed relationships, most men engage in non-exclusive sexual partnerships with more than one sexual encounter and with partners with a pre-established relationship (Epstein M Fau - Calzo, Calzo Jp Fau - Smiler, Smiler Ap Fau - Ward, & Ward). This behavior, regardless of how the issue is framed, puts both the male partner and his other sexual partners at risk for acquiring STIs, including HIV. A study conducted with high school aged boys who engaged in non-committal sexual partnerships, found that 76.3% of the partnerships were with a friend, and 66.3% of the partnerships had been with an ex-girlfriend (Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006). Epstein et al, suggests that the current literature overestimates the amount of men who "hook up" and that this term is often used loosely to mean any sexual partnership that does not result in a committed relationship (Epstein M Fau - Calzo et al.) The findings of this study suggests that the hooking up culture promotes overt masculinity and young men are more complex, having enough emotions to develop feelings for the individuals that they are engaging in sex with, without having the desire to be in an exclusive relationship with that person (Epstein M Fau - Calzo et al.).

One suggested reason as to why the sex without commitment culture has been so pervasive among college students may be due to women outnumbering men (England, 2012). England found that when the ratio of women to men is greatly skewed, men have more control of sexual partnerships (2012). This study found that for institutions with a higher ratio of women to men, female participants were less likely to have a boyfriend but they were more likely to have engaged in sexual activity during their time at the institution and were more likely to have recently engaged in sexual activity (England, 2012). This finding provides empirical evidence confirming that a decline in



monogamous relationships does not translate into a reduction in sexual activity among those individuals in the college population. Regnerus reports that cultures that have more men than women have people who are more monogamous (2012). Regnerus notes that this phenomenon is an adaptation to gender inequalities where women are primary drivers of the marriage market (2012). Today, women outnumber men 1.3:1 while in 1947 men outnumbered women 2.5:1 (Regnerus, 2012). It appears as though women outnumber men, not only in the general population, but also in college settings. This phenomenon is even more pronounced for Black men who attend college; however, England noted that this sex without commitment phenomenon does not translate to the broader population, thus there may be other factors that encourage college students to engage in more non-committal and concurrent sexual relationships (2012).

### **Being Black and Male in College**

Although there has been a significant amount of research conducted on college men and their sexual relationships, most research has Black men either marginally represented or organized in a way in which they are compared to White men. Research that specifically examines Black men attending college is limited; as a result within-group comparisons are almost non-existent (Harper, 2004). Harper explains that the traditional masculine ideals do not translate to Black males. As a way to overcompensate for their inability to be seen as masculine in the traditional sense they overcompensate in two distinct ways, either in the "tough guy" role or the "sexual aggressor" (Harper, 2004). Of the 32 Black men at six predominately white campuses, most were juniors (12) and seniors (16), with sophomores representing a small percentage of the population (4). Of the sample, all except for two identified as heterosexual, one identified, as openly gay

while the other had not come out as bisexual, but engaged in bisexual behaviors. The findings suggested that in addition to having relationships with women, athletic prowess, and the accumulation of pricy material possessions, Black masculinity was also measured by membership within fraternal organizations, leadership positions, academic honors and the maintenance of a high- profile status on campus (Harper, 2004). This finding suggests that the within- group differences among Black men are vast and thus require a research plan that is designed to investigate the in-group variations directly.

Saida Grundy expounds upon Harper's research by discussing masculinity development for Black men at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (2008). According to Grundy, most of the literature that has purported to investigate how Black men have constructed their ideas surrounding masculinity has focused on the experiences of Black men from the working class and has ignored the class variation among Black men. Grundy's work investigated the masculinities that men exhibited while on campus and she also investigated the way men presented their masculinities off campus. She discovered that campus culture was an important social marker for students to gauge their social, emotional and sexual behavior by. As a result, it becomes apparent that in order to fully understand how Black men attending HBCUs perform masculine identities, research must be done to understand the role that campus culture plays on the development of masculine identities.

## **Chapter 3- Methods**

### **Background on Original Study "An Exploration of Reproductive Health and Protective Behaviors among College Students"**

The proposed study was conducted using secondary data from an exploratory study on reproductive health and protective behaviors among college students. This study included interviews of college males in an effort to understand their behaviors and the role that their undergraduate institution has in their sexual decision-making processes. The original study aims were to examine the contextual and institutional factors that influenced relationships (dating, sexual and non-sexual) of Black, male students at Historically Black Colleges (HBC).

### **Participants from Original Study**

A convenience sample of 19 participants were enrolled through various recruitment venues including: list-servs, posters, and flyers. All recruitment materials included basic information about the study, eligibility requirements and instructions for how to contact study staff for further screening. In order to be eligible for the study, participants had to be a Black male, attending the host institution as a full time student, and fall within the 18-25-age range.

### **Methodology from Original Study**

Data were secured using semi-structured interview technique consistent with a phenomenological approach. Data collection occurred in the spring semester of the 2012 school year between the months of January and May. Study activities were conducted in the principal investigator's private laboratory by trained project staff. To protect the

privacy of the participants, interviews were not conducted by project staff currently enrolled in classes at the host institution.

Participants were greeted by the interviewer, the consent forms were reviewed in detail, and participants were given all of the details about why the study was being conducted. Participants were then given a brief overview of what they could expect during their allotted participation time, they were also informed that the interview would be audio recorded and their participation was voluntary.

After participants were consented, they were given a brief tool to determine participant's demographic characteristics including their age and sexual behaviors. This 6- item tool was administered as an electronic survey to reduce stigma or social desirability and insure confidentiality. Participants were expected to spend no more than 5-10 minutes to complete the demographic survey. This tool was created specifically for this study and was used to ensure basic demographic information was obtained as the semi- structured interviews followed a phenomenological approach and that data may not have been obtained during the interview process. Example questions included: what is your classification (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?; what ethnic group do you most identify with (Black/African American, Black/Caribbean, Black/Hispanic, African, etc.)?; what is your current relationship status (single, dating)?; etc.

The semi-structured interview guide was designed to prompt open dialogue about the participant's experience with the institution and how the college worked to influence their perceptions about sexual risk. The semi-structured interviews lasted no more than one hour each and the interview guide was formulated specifically for this study (Appendix A). Example questions from this guide included: "Tell me about your decision

to attend (college name)?, what influenced your choice?," and "Tell me your most recent or current dating and/or sexual experience?" The trained interviewer guided the conversation to illicit personal narratives and allowed the participants the opportunity to provide their perspectives on the subject matter. Interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken immediately after the completion of each interview to reduce recall bias.

### **Compensation for Original Study**

All interviewees were compensated \$20 for their time at the conclusion of their interview. Participants were allowed to sign the incentive receipt using an alias in an effort to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, access signed receipts were restricted to the study's principal investigator and project staff who were not affiliated with the institution and could not identify participants.

### **Original Study Instruments**

Two instruments were used during the data collection process. The demographic questionnaire was a 6-item self-administered electronic survey. The survey populated the participant's unique identifier using the participant's birth month, year, and mother's initials. This survey obtained the participant's classification, ethnicity, relationship status, assessed participant's sexual activity and history of screening for STI's.

The interview guide was a 10-item guide with probes and sub-questions to help the interviewer elicit rich stories from the participants. The interview guide was designed to obtain information about the participant's decision to attend the host institution, behavioral expectations for a young man attending an HBC, how social relationships and

dating behaviors have changed or are influenced by attending the host institution, campus involvement, dating and sexual behaviors including risky behaviors.

### Secondary Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS19.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated for variables to provide basic demographic information about the sample population. Specific questions of interest included: classification, current relationship status and number of sexual partnerships in the past 3 months.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and exported to qualitative data management software, NVivo 10. Interviewer and transcripts were reviewed to develop an initial codebook. This codebook was updated and reviewed after each transcript was coded and new codes were added as appropriate in an effort to capture reoccurring themes. Once a final codebook was established, all transcripts were reviewed and new codes were applied as applicable. A subset of transcripts was double d coded to establish inter-coder reliability and discrepancies were discussed between the two coders and resolved once a consensus was reached. Coding was continued until discrete categories were formed.

Codes were arranged into three distinct levels. Primary codes or structural codes were broad level codes. These codes included dating relationships and sexual relationships. Secondary codes or parent codes were more specific and represented examples of the structural nodes current relationships, definitions, reasons not to date, drugs and alcohol. Tertiary nodes or subcodes were specific examples of parent nodes. Subcodes are explicit and drawn from the participants' experiences. This level of

contextual analysis may represent more unique experiences within the context of more regularly occurring phenomenon. An example of subcode categories would be: refusal of drugs and alcohol.

## Chapter 4- Results

### Description of Participants

All participants (n=19) were male attending a HBC during the time of the study. The majority (52.6%) of the sample were students in their junior year of college, 31.6% of students were seniors, 10.5% of students were in their sophomore year and one participant was a freshman (5.3). Most participants identified as Black/African American (78.9%); however, there were small variations in ethnicity among the participants; 2 participants identified as Black/Caribbean (10.5%) and 2 participants identified as other (10.5%). The majority of participants were single (62.2%). 94.7% of participants had been sexually active in their lives and had engaged in penetrative sexual activity. One hundred percent of sexually active participants reported having been tested for an STI including HIV. The average number of sexual partners for the sample was 2.44 (sd=2.64). Four of the participants were excluded from further analysis. Two participants were gay identified, one participant identified as bisexual but had not initiated sexual contact with a woman at the time of the study, and one participant was a virgin and had not initiated anal, oral or vaginal sexual intercourse at the time of his interview.

Of those participants (n= 15) included in the final analysis, the majority of the sample was upperclassmen; 8 participants were juniors (53.3%), 4 participants were seniors (26.7%), 2 participants were sophomores, and one participant was a freshman (6.7%). Most of the participants were single and not talking to anyone (n=6; 40%). 3 participants were single and talking to someone (20%), 4 participants were involved in a dating relationship (26.7%) and 2 participants were in a long- distance, dating



relationship (13.3%). All of the participants included in this study had initiated sexual activity (n=15; 100%) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<b>Classification (n, %)</b>	
Freshman	1 (6.7%)
Sophomore	2 (13.3%)
Junior	8 (53.3%)
Senior	4 (26.7%)
<b>Dating Status (n, %)</b>	
Single, not talking	6 (40.0%)
Single, talking	3 (20.0%)
Dating	4 (26.7%)
Dating, long- distance	2 (13.3%)
<b>Sexually Active (n,%)</b>	
Sexually Active	15 (100%)

### Differences in Relationship Types

Participants made a clear distinction between dating relationships and sexual relationships. Sexual relationships could occur within the confines of an exclusive partnership or outside a defined relationship. Participants discussed non-committal sex partners as a range of different kinds of partnerships. One-night stands represented the partnership with the least amount of commitment. [110301\_001] described his experience with a one-night stand saying, "I had just met them at that party. We were dancing. We ended up talking, exchanging numbers, and then like meeting up after the party." It is expected that this type of partnership will be brief and without intentions of seeing the individual again.

Another, more intermediate relationship status was "talking." This intermediate phase is a probationary relationship status where individuals express interest in each other but are not yet exclusive. One participant [110315\_001] explained talking to someone

was a slight variant of dating and that the major difference is the level of commitment; he expressed this by stating, "Well, basically I guess dating, like just having feelings, show affection, but not really having a boyfriend or girlfriend title."

In this probationary period, it is expected that you will court several individuals at the same time, [110203\_001] explains,

"Right. And you have five girls that you-- that you like. You text not everyday but y'all-- y'all text sometimes. You see her; you kick it with her, blah, blah, blah. You're talking to her or your texting her. As those people start showing their true colors, you cut them off. Like the girls you like the most, they rise to the top while the other ones that you don't really like kind of fade a way. You end up with maybe one or two."

Talking to someone as defined by this sample is a pseudo relationship where you are free to behave as though you are in a relationship, but without the commitment. This type of relationship may lead to a more committed situation, but is not guaranteed to do so.

Dating is the highest relationship status. Participants defined dating relationships in terms of commitment and exclusivity. [110216\_002] explained:

"At the end of the day, I'm on the phone with her, every night. She's the only girl that I show emotion to. I mean, a relationship, she's the only one that I guess I'm emotionally committed to."

[110412\_002] focused more on the one on one nature of a dating relationship stating, "I feel like dating is something that's supposed to be exclusive." Two factors help to distinguish between talking to someone and dating someone and that appears to be a level of commitment and use of the "boyfriend/girlfriend" title. For most of the men in this

sample, refusal to date did not prevent them from sexual activity, and many maintained a consistent sexual partner; however, they did give explicit reasons as to why they decided not to engage in a dating relationship.

### Dating and Campus Culture

Although dating was seen as the most pinnacle relationship type, participants talked about the difficulties of having a dating relationship within the context of the HBC. Participants talked about the close-knit familial nature of their campus. As a result of the familiarity of the campus culture, participants noted that it was hard to maintain a healthy dating relationship. [11026\_001] stated that he dated a girl from a neighboring school and noted his relationship would have been different if he dated a girl on his campus, "We both would have known too many people. She would have been too scared about her image and how people would portray her. You don't want to be seen as a dysfunctional relationship. All eyes are on you."

When asked about dating within the HBC [110203\_001] said:

"I try not to. There are a lot of beautiful women here, but like I said, it's really small. It's a really small college, and just everybody kind of knows everybody.

I've seen people's relationships at (college name) implode because so many people were, on their Twitters or on their Facebooks, you know, I saw her at this, I saw him at this party, you know drama. I'd rather just get my GPA straight and date outside."

Participants feel as though it is easier to have relationships with people at neighboring schools because it eliminates the stress associated with having their relationships looked at through a magnifying glass.

Other participants that have decided to maintain on campus relationships mirrored the sentiments of their peers. [110224\_001] said that he enjoyed dating on campus because "it does present you with a lot of opportunities to talk to a lot of different people," but noted that, "There are a lot of eyes looking at us. It's not as personal as it could be. So if I was dating somebody from (neighboring school's name) I don't think a lot of people would be in my business. We're being watched, by everybody."

### **Expectations of Black Males Attending an HBC**

Many male students shy away from engaging in serious relationships on their campus because once they do, they feel pressured, watched and judged. Apprehension towards exclusive relationship status on campus is exacerbated by their perceived value of a Black man attending the HBC outside of their campus. Participant [110329\_001] said that, "It just usually is a conversation starter for everybody, whether it be old, young, whatever. But definitely with ladies my age, I guess usually like- and especially if you're not a part of (school name) because they want to know more." Participant [110216\_002] also spoke of the perception of a Black male student attending an HBC and how that affects his dating opportunities, "I guess girls have different expectations. They think they know you before they know you. I feel like they would be more willing to get to know you." Although most participants didn't feel as though their HBC attendance made a difference in their dating options, they agreed that their status gave them an opportunity to start conversations and set expectations with women.

## Reasons Not to Date

Although some participants had maintained either on campus or off campus relationships at some point in their college careers 62.2% of the sample reported being single at the time of this study. Participants gave varied reasons as to why they decided not to pursue committed dating relationships. Among the reasons given by participants, lack of trust in the women in their environment and focus on preparation for their futures emerged as paramount concerns for men in our sample.

For men who expressly mentioned a lack of trust in the women, they felt as though the college atmosphere is one that promotes exploration and that this exploration extends to their female peers. [110412\_001] gives an example of a time where a female friend had one of her close friends come to visit:

"One of the chicks had a boyfriend for like two or three years, maybe more. And in one weekend, one of my homeboy's friends, he hit that in one weekend. And I see this happen a lot. Like essentially she would have thrown that all away. It just messed me all up in the head."

Participants state that experiences such as this one makes them less likely to engage in dating relationships while in college.

Participants that are focused on their futures say that they don't have enough time to invest into a dating relationship. [110126\_001] said:

"It's just so much that goes into being a good boyfriend that I feel like I can't be right now. I couldn't possibly be-- with the type of time I spend doing other things that prepares me for that next stage because right now I'm just hell bent on getting through graduate school."

Participant [110428\_002] echoes this sentiment:

"I don't really look forward to trying to find somebody or being in a relationship. I'd rather get my work done, stay focused. My degree is my goal right now, you know, finding a job right afterwards. There are other duties, priorities to take care of, so."

This kind of future oriented behavior contributes to an atmosphere where people are less likely to engage in serious campus relationships.

### **It's not Dating, It's Just Sex**

Participants noted that dating relationships, especially those relationships that were developed and maintained on campus were watched in a way that made sexually concurrent behavior problematic, if not impossible. Both members of the relationship would have their actions judged and characters called into question. In this way, the campus culture discouraged many from maintaining dating relationships.

All eligible participants, whether they maintained a dating relationship in college or not, had engaged in sexual activity while in college. During the course of the interview, participants were asked about their sexual relationships, specifically the role that campus culture played in their views on casual sex, protection during sex and sexual concurrency.

### **The Freshmen Effect and Views on Casual Sex**

Participants talk about a change in maturity between their freshmen and sophomore years and their junior and senior years. This maturity changes the way that men approach sex and sexual relations [110126\_001] says:

"I'm not actively pursuing females like I was freshman and sophomore year, like I'm just ready to get to graduate school and see what happens. I've seen so many things, and by the time-- like I said, now I'm junior year, everybody knows everybody. It seems like everybody has been with everybody. It's just not my type of thing."

Many participants talked about the rivalries among their male peers in the dorms. As a freshman masculinity is measured by the amount of women who you are seen with and the frequency of sexual exploration.

This freshman experience is echoed by [110202\_002], "I feel as though you're more inclined-- especially freshman year, like you're more inclined to have sex because we're pretty much competing more or less." He goes on to say that this is a behavior that is usually isolated to the freshman year. He attributes this phenomenon to the culture of dorm life saying:

"I feel as though like now that it's changed now, I feel like freshman year that wasn't necessary, for one you move out of the dorms-- but you just realize that was stupid. Like you were competing with your friends to have sex with girls."

In addition to the competition in the dorms, some participants talked about a lack of financial resources and transportation as a motivation to increase their sexual activity. [110201\_002] says:

"So then I was a whore. That was my routine. Because freshmen here, you can't bring 'em to the dorm, so it's like you gotta find other stuff to do. You're doing stuff on a budget. So I would do that and, before I knew it, we'd be having sex. And then after that, it was like, 'I don't really want to talk to you because you had

sex with me like the second I kicked it with you.' I was going through a whole lot of females and, before I even knew it."

Speaking from an upperclassmen's perspective about establishing sexual relationships within the confines of the school's campus, [110412\_001] says:

"I guess I'm more careful with who I choose to get involved with because it goes back to the whole everybody's going to know your business type of thing. I guess I'm just more careful as to how I treat these ladies, you know, in the sense that I don't get blacklisted or whatever because of the small environment."

Comments such as this one suggest that campus culture does more to restrict sexual behavior than it does to promote it. As students become more ingrained into the culture, they begin to have a shift in their perspectives surrounding casual sex and even dating more broadly, especially within the context of on campus relationships.

### Concurrency

The HBC culture makes it so that dating relationships are overly critiqued, sexual permissiveness is encouraged but only for short periods of time, and somewhere between introduction into the campus and graduation, students become more likely to shift their focus towards future oriented behaviors. This environment creates different expectations concerning sexual concurrency while having overlapping sexual partnerships during periods where people are "talking" would be more likely to be accepted, whereas it would be less acceptable for people who are maintaining on campus dating relationships.

Of the sample of 15 participants, 3 reported sexually concurrent behaviors. This study sought to understand how campus culture impacts the perceptions of sexual concurrency, so for participants that engaged in sexual concurrency, care was taken to



code not only the instance of the behavior but also the circumstances surrounding the behavior. From this small sub sample, the participants each gave unique perspectives as to why they decided to engage in sexual concurrency.

### **Girlfriend Back Home**

Participant [110216\_002] talked about engaging in concurrent sexual partnerships when he left his girlfriend to attend school and although his behavior was stunted because of his relationship, he mentioned the campus culture surrounding casual sex as a motivator to engage in sexual concurrency. When asked to elaborate he responded with:

"Well, I had a girl back home. I still kind of do. So when I first got here, I wasn't really trying to talk to anybody. I wasn't really trying to date anybody when I first got here. I was trying to remain faithful to her. Sex is kind of casual (here) -- well, it can be. It's just something that I guess you can contribute to just (school name) culture. Its just sex is just casual. Like its not- it's not frowned upon."

In this situation, the participant made a clear distinction between his dating relationship with his girlfriend from back home and the sexual relationships he has while at school saying:

"I don't care about the girls out here, honestly. I don't really have an interest in getting to know them too much. Now, I guess that would be the difference between back home, like I actually enjoy talking to her. I'm actually interested in her."

In this instance, it appears as though sexual concurrency was facilitated by campus culture and the belief that most of his peers believe that sex is a casual. This participant

doesn't talk about emotional connections with anyone outside of his pre-established relationship.

### Views on Oral Sex

For participant [110224\_001], there was an issue with the definition of sex. According to this participant, "When I say 'sleeping with,' I'm thinking like- when I say 'sex,' I'm thinking of like either anal or vaginal sex, penetration. So I wouldn't consider oral sexing being sex or sleeping with. I feel like penetration equals sex." As a result of his definition of sex, he didn't believe he had engaged in sexual concurrency. He did admit to engaging in oral sex with individuals other than his girlfriend.

### Special Circumstances

The last participant who reported sexually concurrent behavior experienced extenuating circumstances. This participant talks about being seduced by a young lady who was best friends with his then- current girl friend. According to this participant marijuana and alcohol were consumed prior to this sexual encounter. He explains:

"(I) smoked by myself. Now I'm stuck and she's borderline drunk and she's pushing all up on me. And I'm like, 'No. Stop. Stop playing.' I'm fighting it to the best of my ability and finally give in and snapped out of it. As soon as it gets going good, I snap out of it like, 'Oh, what am I doing?' I just got up and left the room."

This is an extreme example and may have little to do with campus culture but may be an example of how Black men attending HBC's are viewed by other members of their community. Earlier in the interview, participants were asked about their community's perception of young man who attended HBCs. Many participants said they felt as though

they were valued members of their community. Although this is not directly related, this could be an example of how that perception is manifested.

## Chapter 5- Discussion

### Introduction

There has been a significant amount of research conducted with college men concerning their sexual relationships; however, there is a limited amount of information that compares the in-group differences for Black men in college, and currently, there are no studies that look at the role that campus culture plays in the dating and sexual relationships of Black male collegians. Through the use of the phenomenological approach, this exploratory study sought to describe the role that local customs and norms play in the development of perceptions and beliefs surrounding sexual risk taking behaviors, in particular, sexual concurrency. Sexual concurrency is an important behavior to investigate because it is known to be a contributing risk factor in the male to female transmission of STIs including HIV. If the findings from previous studies conducted with majority populations had results that were transferrable to this population, it would appear as though Black men attending colleges where they are outnumbered by their female counterparts would have an overwhelmingly favorable view towards sexual concurrency. Through the use of the phenomenological method, participants were afforded the opportunity to challenge the mainstream assumptions by explaining their reality in their own words and by drawing on their personal experiences.

## Discussion of Findings

### Integration into and Self- Identification with Campus Culture

The most paramount theme in this study was that of the campus culture and its impact on the participants' views on dating and sexual relationships. As the young men in this study became more integrated into the campus culture they reported attitudes that were much more selective about sexual relationships and described behaviors that were much more future oriented. Eighty percent of the sample were upperclassmen and were able to give reflective accounts of their collegiate experiences. These accounts suggested that freshmen students are more likely to engage in more risk taking behaviors in an effort to perform traditional masculine expectations, which is consistent with studies conducted with majority students attending PWIs. The cultural influence was influential enough to change the trajectories of many of the participants in this study. The closeness of the environment encouraged most participants to refrain from engaging in multiple sexual relationships because "everybody has been with everybody" and because participants felt as though every move that they made was being watched and critiqued by their peers.

The one freshman participant seemed very eager to explore his new social environment. He mentioned the availability of girls and the amount of opportunities to date. He discussed the increase in free time and reduction in parental influence. And this is consistent with other, older participants that talked about their progression through the institution. The majority of participants talk about the "mating rituals" between underclassmen and how friendships and social relationship and even dating relationships are jeopardized when individuals become sexually involved too early and with multiple

people. This all changes as students become more aware of their environment, and understand the intricacies of their interactions with members of both sexes while in a college setting.

Once in their junior year, many participants had shifted their focus from any form of romantic interactions and began to invest more in their own futures. Many older participants talked about limiting their interactions with members of the opposite sex so that that they could focus on grades and post graduation plans. One participant talked about obtaining a 4.0 GPA after breaking up with a girlfriend, and another commented that he would rather be celibate until he graduated and then would focus more on women once he had established a stable post- graduate plan.

#### **Perceived differences between Dating Relationships and Sexual Relationships**

Participants noted that there was a clear and distinct difference between dating relationships and sexual relationships. For this study's participants, relationships exist on a continuum where dating represents exclusivity and emotional connection while sexual relationships could be as complicated as a dating relationship or as simple as a one-time encounter; however, when the participants talked about sexual relationships they were very clear in the fact that there wasn't an element of comfort or trust, distinguishing a sexual relationship from a dating relationship. The way a participant made this distinction was by using titles confirm exclusive relationships. The young men would talk about their girlfriends and make these distinctions about them. Even when participants talked about sexual relationships within the context of an established relationship they made the distinction that the young lady was special and the experiences were special.

An interesting finding was that this wasn't a dichotomous relationship value. Many participants mentioned an in-between phase where dating and sexual relationships were more fluid. Participants explained this as a phase where people were "talking". Talking to someone is a pseudo relationship type where it is expected that both members of the relationship will entertain other individuals in an effort to find a dating mate. As time progresses talking relationships will either fade away or stronger connections will be made until an individual is talking to one or two individuals and can make a decision whether or not he or she will attempt to pursue an exclusive relationship. During this period where you are just "talking," there aren't as many financial or emotional expectations for either member; however, sexual partnerships are sometimes, but not always formed as a result.

Although this was an important finding, it was still secondary to cultural influence. Despite the fact that participants were more likely to engage in a relationship where they were "talking" to someone and not dating them exclusively, participants still felt that they needed to make good decisions about who they were talking to, so that they wouldn't limit their future options for partnerships.

### **Personal Perceptions Surrounding Sexual Concurrency**

This was the most individualized section of the analysis process. There was only a marginal sub-population that had a confirmed sexually concurrent interaction and each experience was unique to the participant and their particular life situation. One participant only reported having one concurrent interaction. Another operated under the belief that only penetrative sex constituted a sexual relationship, thus, he could be faithful to a pre-established monogamous relationship as long as he didn't engage in penetrative sex with

anyone other than the person he was with. Finally, the last instance of confirmed concurrency was with a participant who was in a long term, long distance relationship where both he and his girlfriend agreed to an open relationship when they weren't together; yet, the participant talked about limiting his sexual experiences because he had a girlfriend.

### **Implications and Future Research**

The implications of this study suggest that the culture of an environment does play an important role in the development of perceptions and belief patterns. It would appear that younger students are more similar to broader populations of men attending PWIs; however, because HBCs are traditionally smaller and more familial, students begin to shift not only their perceptions but also their behaviors as they become more integrated.

These findings suggest a need for further studies that look specifically at the within group differences among Black, male collegians. This study had a large population of upperclassmen. This study should be repeated on HBC campuses with care to recruit participants from a broader spectrum of student classifications. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the differences between students that attend HBCs and PWIs. Although PWIs tend to be larger, the population of Black students is typically a small fraction of the total population. What differences, if any would emerge from a study that looked exclusively at the perceptions of Black men? By conducting this type of research we can work to understand the missing link in the disparate heterosexual HIV and STI transmission rates among Black women who have sex with men.



## Strengths and Limitations

Although care was taken to make this study as rigorous as possible, it is not without limitations. This was a secondary data analysis of an exploratory qualitative research study. Concurrency was not an aim of the original study, thus, data concerning concurrent behavior with non- dating relationships was not collected. Thus, the prevalence of sexually concurrent behaviors might be much higher than reported in this study. Due to the nature of qualitative studies, these findings cannot be generalized to other populations. In order to increase the generalizability, this study should be replicated on other college campuses. Another limitation was that of the researcher. Interviewers were both male and female, and although participants were assured that the interviewer was a tool to collect information, there were instances where a couple of the participants expressly acknowledged the gender of the interviewer, asking permission to speak freely or assuming judgment would be passed.

This study was conducted with a population that is underrepresented in public health research; thus, this study helps to add to the body of scientific literature. Findings from this study can help to inform subsequent studies and help to refine the enumeration process of risk factors for heterosexual HIV and STI transmission. By employing a phenomenological approach this study became much more comprehensive and illuminated issues and experiences that contradicted mainstream assumptions about this population, as a result, we can move forward with research that can challenge the status quo of ill-informed social interventions so that they may become more effective.

## Conclusions

Environment is an important motivator for behavioral change. Findings suggest that as men became more integrated into an environment that restricted the social desirability for certain sexual risk behaviors they were less likely to engage in those behaviors despite the availability of sexual partners. Participants who reported sexual concurrent behaviors did so for reasons other than an expression of masculinity, which is a finding made in broader populations and was assumed to be generalizable. Future research should explore the connection between cultural beliefs and practice to see if this can be replicated to other populations.

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## Appendix A

1. Tell me about your decision to attend (college name)? What influenced that choice?
2.
  - a. What do you think the community expects a college student at (college name) to be like?
  - b. What time of person do you think the institution is trying to mold you into?
3. (For freshmen only): Do you think that your social relationships and dating behaviors (both sexual and non-sexual) will change now that you're at (college name)? How? Why?

(For sophomore, juniors and seniors only): Tell me how your experiences as a (college name) man have influenced

- a. Your social interactions
- b. Your sexual experiences and "dating" (sexual and non-sexual) experiences?

For both a) and b) follow with probes: How have these relationships changed since arriving at (college name)? Why is that?

What on-campus clubs and organizations do you belong to (or intend to join)?

- a. Probe: Why did you choose to participate in these particular organizations?
  - b. Probe: What social expectations, if any, are involved with participating in these groups (e.g., going to parties together, dating members of the group, consuming alcohol or doing drugs, etc.)
4. Tell me more about your most recent or current dating and/or sexual experience.
    - a. How long have you known the person involved?
    - b. What attracted you to this person? (probe for the person's age, gender, ethnicity, student status, shared values and interests, similarity of leisure activities, etc.)
  5. Tell me about the last time you engaged in sexual intercourse?
  6. Tell me about the last time you drank alcohol? (probe: When and where this occurred, who else was there, how much and what kind of alcohol was consumed, whether this was a "usual" or unusual amount for the respondent)
  7. Was your partner also drinking? What is your relationship to this person?
  8. Do you recall whether the amount of alcohol you drank influenced your sexual decisions or behaviors? How?

9. Did you do anything during this experience to maintain sexual health? Tell me about that (probe: condom use on this occasion and in general, why things were (the sam/different) under these circumstances?)
10. Tell me about the last time you had (if ever) you used other substances
  - a. Was your partner also using substances?
  - b. Did the substance impact your behavior? How?
11. What on campus (formal or informal) resources are available to you, pertaining to your sexual health?
12. Are you aware of any on- campus resources pertaining to your sexual health?