Tagging “the hottest college girls in the world,” that is what Total Frat Move (TFM) boasts on its Instagram account TFM Girls. Women appearing in bikinis, short shorts, and halter tops pose in various positions that, to some, can be seen as sexualized. TFM’s website was created, and is maintained, by fraternity members and alumni Ryan Young and Madison Wickham (Shontell, 2014). TFM is geared toward fraternities, also known as Greek letter organizations (GLOs) because of the Greek letters used to identify them, in the United States. The website is described as a “news and entertainment brand that provides college and fraternity humor” (Lopez-Villafaña). Much of its “humor,” however, directly involves the objectification of women. TFM’s website even has a section devoted entirely to “girls.” The section includes features like “TFM Babe of the Day,” “Rush Boobs,” and other stories that focus on stereotypical women’s issues.

Although the objectification of women has long been an issue in society, more overt references of misogyny, exoticification, and objectification manifested during the 2016 US president election. Specifically, after recordings of Donald Trump surfaced of him stating, “I moved on her like a bitch, but couldn’t get there . . . Then all of a sudden I see her, she’s now got the big phony tits and everything . . . And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything . . . Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.” (Fahrenthold, 2016)

The comments were dismissed by Trump as “locker room banter” (Miller, 2016). Such “banter” has been seen as a tenet of hegemonic masculinity and is used to reinforce one’s masculinity in the presence of other men (Kimmel, 2008). Dismissal of instances of such rhetoric, coupled with the perpetuation of a playful “boys being boys” mentality and the normalization of misogyny, has been described as the root of sexual violence (Filipovic, 2007).

TFM posted a short story on the Trump incident on its website and claimed that Trump’s admission of defeat in sexual conquest was the type of humility no one knew he possessed (Regester, 2016). The comments on the post were met with mixed reactions. Thus, a question is raised on how TFM and its social media followers position women on social media. Specifically, the current study’s goal is to examine how TFM presents mediated images of “college girls.”

### Abstract

The study examines how the TFM Girls Instagram account, along with its followers, shapes and maintains dominant discourses of masculinity. Mixed-method analyses revealed that women were depicted more in bikinis, posed in overtly sexually suggestive poses, excluded the women’s eyes and faces, and included predominately White, fit, big-breasted women. There was a positive correlation between the number of likes/comments with breast size. There were also instances of misogyny and objectification manifested in the men’s comments attached to the photographs. The results highlight Instagram as a digital extension of fraternal social spaces. TFM Girls reinforces hegemonic masculinity on a macro-level by allowing virtual linkages among fraternity members across the United States and by fostering a national online frat house ripe with misogyny and objectification.

### Keywords

hegemonic masculinity, Instagram, social media, digital media, total frat movement, fraternities

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girls” on its Instagram account and how its Instagram followers react to those images through their comments. In order to answer research questions, a mixed-method approach was utilized, employing the lens of hegemonic masculinity. A content analysis was performed on images of college girls posted to the TFM Girls Instagram account, followed by a textual analysis on comments attached to said images.

**Literature Review**

**Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity, rooted in structural Marxist theory, serves a framework of social norms that men operate within, which provides meaning and direction for appropriate patterns of masculine performance (Connell, 1987). These patterns are then internalized, negotiated, and used to construct a male’s gender identity across temporal and cultural spaces (Connell, 1996). These performative patterns are not predetermined or fixed, rather, they are reconfigured as the cultural framework of desired masculinity, evolving to maintain a structure of patriarchy and gender difference in accordance with gender relations in a particular setting (Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity creates a hierarchy that legitimizes a dominant position for men in society, while subordinating women—patterns are performed in relation to women in order to maintain a gender order (Connell, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Performances may include power dynamics, aggression, verbal antagonism, objectification, and other acts of misogyny in an effort to construct a gendered and heterosexual identity. Men who receive the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of these performances still contribute to the hierarchy through complicit masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Woman can be complicit by honoring, desiring, and supporting the hegemonic model of masculinity (Connell, 1996; Demetriou, 2001).

Hegemonic masculinity is contextual and dependent on various intersections of race, class, religion, and age; thus, it also creates a hierarchy among men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For example, a straight Black man would be lower on the hierarchy than a white White man; however, he may recover and move up the hierarchy through athleticism, sexual prowess, or the subordination of women or other men lower on the hierarchy. This process of internal hegemony takes other aspects of hegemonic masculinity in recompense for lower status in the hierarchy and applies them strategically in a constant and contextual practice of negotiation and requisition to maintain and police external hegemony (Demetriou, 2001). Although hegemonic masculinity has been predominately focused on heterosexual males in relation to women, it has also been shown to exist between heterosexual males and homosexual men (O’Neil, 2015), and among homosexuals and men who have sex with other men (Rodriguez, Huemmer, & Blumell, 2016).

**Fraternities and Masculinity.** One space in which hegemonic masculinity is performed and policed is within collegiate fraternities (Kimmel, 2008). College students, who seek acceptance and affiliation from their peers (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), may turn to fraternal organizations for friendship, shared meaning, routines, and artifacts (Sweeney, 2014). The idea of a fraternity, whose membership is male dominated and space is male-only, is in itself a practice of hegemonic masculinity. Because women are not allowed access, it reinforces a woman’s lower status to men (Spain, 1992). Within these spaces, power and privilege are crafted, practiced, and maintained usually through hazing rituals that are emasculating, humiliating, and homosocial (Bird, 1996; Kimmel, 2008; Yeung, Stombler, & Wharton, 2006).

Previous research has found fraternities on college and university campuses, because they make up the vast majority of attendance at social gatherings to control the organization and themes of parties (Sweeney, 2014). Fraternities control access to the college social experience, thus reinforcing dichotomies of both power and privilege. This social space is rife with practices of hegemonic masculinity, which includes, among others, assessing women’s physical attractiveness, playing wingman on hookups (Grazian, 2007), homosocial drinking (Bird, 1996), sexual conquest, and strong disapproval for those who do not conform (Sweeney, 2014). TFM focuses on such types of social interactions as content for its website and social media feeds. It highlights stories and publishes pictures of fraternity brothers from around the country engaging in masculine behavior.

**Online Masculinities.** Social media has long been a space where gendered identities, including hegemonic masculinity, are produced and reproduced (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Previous research has found masculine performances (described as toxic masculinity, hypermasculine, and hegemonic) manifested on various social media platforms, including Tinder (Hess & Flores, 2016), Match.com (Walker & Eller, 2015), Facebook (Cook & Hasmath, 2014), and Twitter (Banet-Weiser, & Miltner, 2016). The integration of masculinity studies and digital media networks, such as social media sites, has been referred to as “networked masculinities” and posited as a critical site for research (Light, 2013). It is also important to note, just as social media has been used to foster and reify hegemonic masculinity, it has also been used as a space for response and counter-hegemonic discourses by feminists (Salter, 2013).

In response to this online counter-hegemonic discourse, a coalition of men’s rights activists (MFAs) has created intricate connections on digital spaces that foster more radical pro-male ideologies and rhetoric (Nagle, 2015). Terming the “manosphere,” this space directly refutes feminism and alleges White male victimhood, while demanding entitlement (Kimmel, 2015). The men within these digital spaces cite biological superiority over women and employ
misogynist, heterosexist, and racist rhetoric to shape and maintain dominion over women and men lower in status on the power hierarchy (Ging, 2017).

Building upon the divergent schools of thought in hegemonic masculinity studies—toxic masculinity as fixed characteristics (Kupers, 2005) versus toxic practices that men sometimes engage in (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005)—Ging (2017) maintains a hybrid of masculinities. She argues that cultures of masculinities—alpha, beta, and zeta males—compete with one another online to establish power within a male hierarchy, despite possessing power offline. The process includes extreme bouts of racism and misogyny, while engaging in hacking and doxing. Hybrid masculinities allow men to claim victimhood in the wake of feminism and political correctness. This allows men to deliberately engage or disengage with hegemonic masculinity and to maintain inequality and dichotomies of power online (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

**Instagram and Society**

Social media, overall, has become a pervasive practice in global communication, fostering relationships between people and imagined communities (Alshawaf & Le, 2015). These mediated platforms are used for content sharing, information diffusion, and publishing thoughts and opinions (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Over the years, social media platforms have continued to gain adoption due to their ubiquity and accessibility. The top five global social media platforms, in rank order, are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit—with over 5.2 billion monthly visitors combined (Kallas, 2017). Of specific interest to the current study is the photo- and video-sharing platform Instagram. A Pew Research study indicated that approximately 32% of Americans use Instagram, the social media platform of focus for the current study, totaling about one-third of online adults (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). The study also found the platform to be even more popular among young adults, with approximately 59% of the reported users being between the ages of 18 and 29 years.

Instagram is both a visual and textual platform. An individual posts pictures and videos on his or her profile, which are visual, and fosters interactions through comments underneath those pictures and videos, which is textual. Because Instagram is a mobile phone-based application, its utility and ubiquity innately influence everyday life experiences, mediating new contexts of social visibility and connection (Vivieene & Burgess, 2013). Instagram’s ability to harness networks of people, coupled with its significant role in everyday life, helps foster interpersonal meaning between images and their perceived representations—meanings that are subjective between the viewer and the object presented (Zappavigna, 2016). Subjective meaning is constructed through visual representations and interactions (Chesher, 2012). Therefore, Instagram is capable of shaping how users come to think about images and the contents within those images.

Instagram has quickly become a staple in the daily lives of social media users and many researchers have sought to understand the overall impact on various facets of society. Specifically, studies have looked at its impact on politics (Valtysson, 2014), body image (Pila, Mond, Griffiths, Mitchison, & Murray, 2017) sports (Antunovic & Linden, 2015), identity formation (Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017), and feminism (Feltman & Szymanski, 2017), among others. Collectively, these studies demonstrate not only the pervasive nature of Instagram but also its influence on society. The goal of the current study is to add to this growing body of literature by extending the impact of Instagram, in conjunction with masculinity studies, to the context of an online fraternal space—TFM Girls Instagram account.

As a social media platform, however, Instagram falls victim to the technological affordances of the medium, such as anonymity. Anonymity may foster antagonistic and/or illegal performances of masculinity online that go unregulated (Turton-Turner, 2013). Furthermore, these performances can be turned on and off, intensified or diminished, or completely erased altogether (Ging, 2017). The structure of TFM Girls does not offer anonymity to the women per se but offers a veil of anonymity for those who interact with the image (i.e., commenting and linking). The images of the women do not have anonymity because sometimes full faces, geographic information, and real names are used when creating the post. However, those who interact with the post have the ability to remain anonymous. The specific focus of the study is on the interaction of the users who comment on the photographs on TFM girls. Overall, the purpose of the current study looks at how a specific group of men, TFM and its followers, shape and maintain dominant discourses of masculinity within the digital-mediated space of Instagram in relation to images of college girls. The study is positioned to address Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) call to more closely examine the relationships between and among local and global masculinities.

**Research Questions**

As outlined above, hegemonic masculinity is not predetermined. It is contextual and dependent on various factors such as race, class, religion, and age (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Examination of hegemonic masculinity in the study will focus on the fraternity entertainment entity TFM and its Instagram followers. Also, because hegemonic masculinity posits masculinity as a representation of how men position themselves through discursive practices, rather than a certain type of man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), it is imperative to investigate the discourse of men. Finally, because “women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinity” (p. 848), the following research questions guide the study:
RQ1. How are “college girls” depicted on the TFM Girls Instagram account?

RQ2. How is hegemonic masculinity reified in the comments of Instagram users on the TFM Girls Instagram account?

Method

Quantitative

A content analysis was used to answer the first research question regarding how college girls are depicted in Instagram posts of TFM. A content analysis allowed for systematic examination of relationships involving values using statistical methods in order to infer communication patterns found in the Instagram posts, specifically the visual context of hegemonic masculinity manifested in the photographs (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). Hegemonic masculinity positions masculinity as a representation of how men position themselves through discursive practices.

Sample. Photographs posted by the public account Instagram account TFM Girls were utilized as the unit of analysis for the quantitative part of the study. A sample frame of 14 months (January 2016–February 2017) was selected in reference to the presidential campaign of Donald Trump. A random sample of 28 photographs was selected from each month. In total, 392 photographs comprised of the quantitative sample (n = 392). Using a live Instagram is a dynamic medium and introduced challenges for multi-person coding. To mitigate these challenges, the researchers took screenshots of the selected photographs and corresponding comments so that coding would be constant throughout the content analysis process.

Coder Training. Intercoder training was conducted with two coders. The coder protocol included a short introduction, description of the study, and procedures for coding Instagram photographs taken from TFM Girls’ Instagram posts. Each level of analysis was fully discussed within the protocol, and all variables were explicitly defined and operationalized. All coders were given this coder protocol followed by verbal instruction. Pilot data were coded by the two coders prior to coding the main sample. Ten random Instagram photographs from March 2017 were chosen for pilot coding. Intercoder reliability was reached on all variables, with the exception of one. Coders discussed possible discrepancies in coding and recoded. Once the pilot data were deemed acceptable, actual coding of the sample from the two coders took place.

Reliability. Krippendorf’s alpha was used to test reliability among coders and all 18 variables. A total of 15% of the sample was tested for reliability. Perfect reliability is 1.0; however, an acceptable reliability is .8 or .7 (Riffe et al., 2014). All variables reported perfect or acceptable agreement. There was perfect agreement between the variables’ number of likes, number of comments, number of individuals, gender, adiposity, breast size, augmentation, muscularity, race, subject tag, symbols, and call to action. Variables that did not report perfect agreement, however, had acceptable reliability, including action (α = .96), objectification (α = .79), gaze (α = .95), hair color (α = .86), attire (α = .94), and TFM tag (α = .97).

Measures. The first two variables looked at the ratio number of “comments” and “likes” that were present on the Instagram post. The coder was then asked to identify the school the TFM girl was associated with, how many people were in the photograph, and the gender of each individual. Next, the individual’s adiposity was reported which looked at the individual’s physical build or level of visible fat (1 = thin [slight frame with little to no visible fat stores], 2 = average [medium frame with moderate level of visible fat], 3 = overweight [high level of excess fat], and 99 = unable to determine). The coders were then asked to rate the muscularity definition of individuals within the photographs (1 = little to none, 2 = visible definition, 3 = high-level definition, and 99 = unable to determine). The breast size of a female individual was then evaluated based on a 1–3 scale of small to large. Looking at the individual’s breasts, the coders were then asked to determine whether the individual’s breast had been augmented. Measures of adiposity and muscularity were adopted from Tiggermann and Zaccardo (2016). All other variables were established based on a preliminary analysis of the data.

The coders were then asked to identify the action the individual is carrying out in the image (i.e., no pose, posing in fitness related, posing on beach, posing in ocean, posing next to water/pool, posing in water/pool, posing outside, pose, candid action, or unable to determine). Next, coders were responsible for identifying the presence or absence of elements of objectification (i.e., a specific body part is the main focus of the image, posing in a sexy manner, or unable to determine). The direction that the woman was looking, or gaze, was coded (i.e., at camera, at object, at another individual in picture, looking up, looking down, looking out of the scene to the left or right, eyes closed, eyes covered, or head and/or face absent or not clearly visible). Race and/or ethnicity of the individual was also reported by the coders, as well as hair color and attire (i.e., fully clothed, pants with halter/bikini top, skirt with halter/bikini top, shorts with halter/bikini top, swimsuit [not bikini], bikini, underwear and bra, naked or partially naked, costume, or unable to determine). The final set of measures were subject tag, TFM tag, symbols, and call to action. This looked at how the TFM organization tagged itself, as well as the women, in the photograph. For example, @sarahsmith might have no tag, tag on her face/head, tag on her breast, tag on her butt, or tag on the stomach/torso. Within the photograph, the coders also identified the presence of symbolic items (i.e., no symbol,
American flag, military gear/uniform, Greek letters, school logo/flag/paraphernalia, beer/liquor/wine, beads, holiday paraphernalia, condoms, sex toys, outdoor items, or other).

**Qualitative**

Comments attached to each of the 392 photographs in the sample were utilized as the unit of analysis for a qualitative discourse analysis, providing a total of 4,704 comments. The comments, all in text form, were extracted and placed in ATLAS.ti, a qualitative analysis software. A discourse analysis was then conducted in a process mirroring DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011). In order to create data-driven codes, raw information is reduced into smaller units by grouping levels of meaning (data that can stand on its own as an individual theme) together. Second, themes within the subsamples are identified. Third, codes are reexamined to determine whether they need to be expanded or whether a new code had been created. Finally, utility/reliability of the codes is determined by comparing them to theory.

**Results**

**Content Analysis**

To answer the first research question, the running of frequency was used to describe the nature of how TFM presents mediated images of college women on its Instagram. RQ1 is descriptive in nature and is an over-arching research question that will be used to inform further content analyses. Thus, the reporting of frequency is justified for analyzing these variables in the sense that it gives a comprehensive description of the data. From the 392 images coded, majority of the images were of females \((n = 390)\), there was one male identified, and one instance of both genders depicted in a photograph.

Looking at the overall image of the individuals, majority of the individuals had a thin adiposity \((n = 390)\), which was a slight frame with little to no visible fat stores. Looking at the individual’s breast size, majority of the images presented on TFM Girls had an average breast size (42.1%), followed by large (31.4%) and small (14.8%) breast sizes. The muscularity of the individuals on TFM Girls was found to have a visible definition (95.9%). There was a strong representation of White females (92.1%) and a weak representation of Latina/Hispanic (6.1%), Black (8.8%), and Asian (3.3%) females. Hair color was predominately blonde (53.1%) and brunette (45.9%).

These descriptive findings position the most desirable female color was predominately blonde (53.1%) and brunette (45.9%). There was a strong representation of White females (92.1%) and a weak representation of Latina/Hispanic (6.1%), Black (.8%), and Asian (.3%) females. Hair color was predominately blonde (53.1%) and brunette (45.9%).

This is consistent with Instagram as the most probable social media platform for photographs glamorizing alcohol consumption (Boyle, Earle, LaBrie, & Ballou, 2016).

The second research question asked how TFM Girls Instagram followers reacted to the images of the women. The qualitative data were supplemented with quantitative analyses—correlations between frequency of comments and likes. The researchers conducted Spearman’s correlation, allowing the researchers to look at how the followers interacted (ratio level) with various ordinal variables (i.e., breast size, muscularity, and adiposity) and quantify the strength of the association. The average mean for the amount of “likes” per image was \((M = 12,948.17, SD = 5,848.33)\), with the least amount of “likes” on one image being 4,841 and the most “likes” on one image being 98,785. The average mean for the amount of comments per image was \((M = 177.02, SD = 188.24)\), with the least amount of comments on one image being nine and the
most comments on one image being 1,174. The only significant correlation found was a positive correlation between follower’s reactions (likes and comments) and individual’s breast size. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between breast size and number of comments from followers, $r_s = .24$, $p < .05$. Additionally, the results also showed that there is a significant positive relationship between breast size and number of “likes” from followers, $r_s = .20$, $p < .05$. This supports our previous claims that the most desirable women are positioned as having big breasts.

**Discourse Analysis**

Various forms of hegemonic masculinity were prevalent throughout the discourse on the TFM Instagram account. Objectification was, by far, the most visible form in which it manifested. Lewd and sexual discourse, as well as name calling and bouts of conquest, were present in the comments attached to the women’s pictures. The men judged and criticized the women’s bodies and, in the process, shaped an ideal “college girl.” The men also displayed a sense of ownership over their bodies and, in a few instances, alluded to wanting to stalk the young women. School, geography, and sarcasm were also used as tools to convey messages of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, other females joined in the criticism and reification of sexual objectivity.

**Objectification and Sexual Conquest**

Although there were a few lighthearted comments such as “beautiful,” “adorable,” “bonita,” and “nice smile,” a majority of the rhetoric was sexually objective toward the women pictured. Some were able to objectify using one to two words such as “hot bodies,” “Christ,” “hell yes,” “whoah,” “yummy,” “nice boobs,” “fuck yeah,” “YAS BABY,” “hotttttt,” and “rack city.” These short phrases, although overly simplistic, were direct and sharp in their conveyance of objectification of the women’s bodies and used to reinforce a dichotomy of power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Other men put a little more effort into their objectification. Fruits of their labor showed two or more girls close to one another or in an embrace, the men would make comments like “I love lesbian community:)” or “who cares if they’re lesbians, I want in.” Not only do the imposed labels reinforce power dichotomies, one that aids in the maintenance of masculine hierarchies (Connell, 2005). Sexual prowess, however, was not always alluded to. There were a number of comments in which the men directly mentioned sexual acts. Comments such as “damn open them up and I’ll do the rest,” “ride my face like a mechanical bull,” “nut,” “I would eat,” “Saddlefrat,” “Daddy like bang bang,” “I would let her sit on my face,” “wow mantap,” “I wouldn’t pull out,” and “Gahdannn man I wouldn’t last 3 minutes” were found throughout.

There were also moments of profanity and vulgarity that manifested within the discourse. Men wrote “holy fuck I just splugged,” “I’d drag my dick thru a mile of broken glass just to hear you fart through a walkie talkie,” “love fuck and suck,” “Fuck that any day,” “I want to suck her titties,” “I would let her pee on me,” and “workout on my dick.” Because the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity calls for the rejection and degradation of subordinate masculinities (Kimmel, 2003), these comments are used to position the men at the top of the masculine hierarchy (Connell, 2005). Not only do they highlight their sexual prowess but they also separate themselves from other men, making sexual comments in an effort to elevate their status.

Two women performing sexuality is not threatening to hegemonic masculinity because it is seen as an act for the pleasure and entertainment of a man. This love for girl on girl affection was evident in comments such as “love it when girls get intimate, so fucking hot.” When photographs showed two or more girls close to one another or in an embrace, the men would make comments like “I love lesbian community:)” or “who cares if they’re lesbians, I want in.” Not only do the imposed labels reinforce power dichotomies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but it also positions the women as sexual objects for men’s gratification irrespective of their sexual preferences.

**Criticism**

As often as the men objectified the women, they also criticized the women’s beauty or lack there-of. Comments like “ugly, ew why is she featured,” “photoshopped,” “this shit has to be fake, this is why our standards are too damn high,” “my dad’s ass got less hail damage going on,” and “not even hot” littered the Instagram feed. The men directly criticized...
the women's bodies by stating “no ass, flat chested,” “if you buy boobs this is a good size,” “your ass ain't that big,” “implants about to pop,” and “fake tits.” The women were deemed too thin in comments like “damn, she looks like she needs food,” “doesn’t eat,” and “skinny bitch.” Some were criticized for being overweight in comments like “lose those fat hips,” “someone get a handle on those handles,” “gut,” “chubbiities,” and “nothing a treadmill can’t fix.”

The men would also rate the women and their bodies. Examples of this include “a hard 5 at that,” “this girl wins,” “u only fuggin 5’s when this is out there banging your QB,” “I had to deduct pts for tfm’s fucking up,” and “colored eyes plus freckles she a 10.” In some instances, they would tag their male friends and ask them to participate. One user wrote “on a scale of 1-1- how lit is this chick,” which was followed by several men typing numbers under the comment section of the picture. Other users wrote “would you rather have the board or her” and “would you bang her,” which were also followed by replies from other men. Sometimes, the men did not need to ask others to solicit ratings or judgments. They would write comments such as “left or right this is a tough one,” “hands down left,” and “I’ll just go all 3 and forget the hard decisions” and create entire threads of comments that mirrored the contemplations going on in their heads. The men used the comment section on the Instagram account to negotiate their assumed sexual encounter.

The men would also degrade some of the women and employ name calling and slut shaming. Men wrote “local whoooorree,” “whore pie,” “cunt,” “you mean slut,” “nice wet ass you skank,” “I know this bitch,” “cuz they hoes,” and “whooorree,” “whore pic,” “cunt,” “you mean slut,” “nice wet ass you skank,” “I know this bitch,” “cuz they hoes,” and “whooorree” on some of the pictures. This mirrors similar research that found name calling of women to be prevalent on anonymous digital spaces (Ging, 2017). The men would also imply that the women would go further than just calling the women names, but would also offer them money, implying that they and their bodies could be bought. “How much gypsy,” “I’d pay for you,” “who’s your sugar daddy,” and “Qué cuesta,” which translates into “how much do you cost” are a few examples.

Criticism and name calling epitomize hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). The repetition of such discourse on TFM Girls’ Instagram reifies patterns of practice that naturalize and normalize men’s dominance over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The women in the photographs are subordinated and, again, a dichotomy of power is reinforced. The men, both alone and collectively, ascribe a cultural template of misogyny and objectivity that become part of the meaning of what it is to be a man, more specially, a man in a fraternity.

All of these assessments of the women also lead to the construction of an “ideal college girl.” Some of the rhetoric in the comments directly constructed this ideal. Examples include “that’s my kinda girl,” “this is the way it should be,” “she knows what I like,” “does she cook and clean,” “no hotter combo than girls and alcohol,” and “I love girls who smoke “cool.” Some men integrated sports and other outdoor activities into this ideal with comments like “I see two more reasons to make me love my cubbies!” and “new fishing friend.” Thus, not only do the comments dictate how to be a man but also how to be a woman.

**Misogyny Online and Offline**

Other forms of blatant misogyny were very present in the men’s comments. “you walk into the wrong hotel room and see this. . .Wyd?” “I probably would if I was drunk enough,” “daddy likey,” “almost as hot as your mother,” “two efficient asses,” “bigger boobs would solve all my problems,” “does she cook and clean,” and “who needs a relationship when this is what you got coming.” This discourse was consistent throughout the sample and was just as evident in February 2016 as it was in February 2017. The misogyny became ingrained in the social norms associated with the digital space of TFM Girls and provided meaning of the appropriate patterns of masculine performance within the space (Connell, 1996).

Ownership of the women manifested through discourse like “dibs,” “that’s my bitch,” “hit it first,” “mine. . she’s mine,” “one for u one for me,” “top or bottom,” “you can have the other if I get dibs,” “I got left, you got right,” “found my wife,” and “she’ll be my first ex-wife.” By identifying women as property, the men subordinate the women to reify their own masculinity and, in the process, reinforce a dichotomy of power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). The men own and the women are owned. One disturbing comment—“Kill left, fuck middle, marry right”—highlighted women as not only inferior to men but also whose lives were at the mercy of men. This user felt that as a man, he had the authority to dictate the fate of women in the bedroom and in life.

The men also used discourse to reify their masculinity in the physical world. They wrote comments like “trust me I already know her. . .and her friends” and “did I smash or naw” to alert the other men that they were not only hetero-sexual but also sexually conquering the women in the picture—both tenets of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2003). Hegemonic masculinity is for the benefit of other males, as much as it is for women. It reinforces a masculine hierarchy and legitimates patterns of masculine performance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2008).

One reoccurring manifestation of hegemonic masculinity that was not as direct as the others mentioned above was attempted contact, which alluded to stalking. Men on the site wrote “give me your email address so we can talk better,” “you should add me,” and “hit my kik what’s your aol ma.” The men would also implore others on the site to initiate contact on their behalf by writing “hook me up” and “tell her she is bae for me.” Stalking-like behavior also manifested in comments such as “I’m gonna try to find her” and “let’s go find her.” Like much of the hegemonic masculine discourse,
this stalking-like behavior creates a hierarchy that legitimizes a dominant position for men in society, while subordinating women—patterns that attempt to maintain a gender order (Connell, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In the form of discourse, this behavior creates hostile power dynamics, but, in some cases, can evolve into physical acts of aggression and sexual assault—violent acts against women that protect privilege, assert superiority, or take advantage (Connell, 2002; Messerschmidt, 1993).

**School and Geography**

Schools and geographic regions were also used as a tool to reify hegemonic masculinity. Male users commented “Berkeley: a school for people with no self-esteem or guidance,” “University of SAN DE butt,” “You make us proud,” and “they didn’t have that kind of smoke at UMSL” to not only objectify the women but also highlight that their school had hotter women. Comments about schools were also used to insult other males from rival schools.

“About the only thing good about OSU is the women” and “She’s hot, USF girls are hotter” are examples of discourse used between men to assert their masculine territory. This competition between men of different schools highlights a man’s “right to rule” as identified by Connell (2005). The discursive process of competition was a way for the males to both peacock and establish masculine hierarchies using women and schools.

Thus, schools were attached to the bodies of the women and also used as a means to justify attendance—“you should start studying at UCLA,” “u applied to the wrong USC,” “Should we transfer to ASU?,” “I can name 3 good reasons to go back to school,” “Should’ve gone to ASU,” “I’m transferring bruh,” and “Arizona for college is a fucking bet.” Here, we see that women are reduced to commodities and used as social capital, as well as masculine capital. Men who attended these schools with the hottest college girls then had the most capital and, again, reinforced masculine hierarchies (Connell, 2005).

Women were also depicted as prizes that could be won from other men through collegiate sports as exhibited in comments like “we got to beat nova. That’s our prize if we sweep” and “She said she’d run it for the team if they beat Michigan State.” Women, again, were depicted as property of men that could be passed around and won. Competition reinforced hegemonic masculinity and helped maintain masculine hierarchies (Connell, 2005). The men at the top of the hierarchy are those who not only win sports competitions but also have the most women.

Geographic regions of the women were used as a way to objectify an entire group of women. Comments such as “California girls forever,” “everything is bigger in Texas,” “now that’s a Georgia Peach,” “Arizona got me too, state full of bad bitches,” and “All the best girls are from SoCal for the most part” were used to generalize one woman’s beauty to the area in which they were from. Similar to schools, regions were also used to insult others regions. One major difference, however, was that males typically insulted regions from which they were from as highlighted in the comments “No cute girls in Vermont” and “I did not see any girls like this in Tennessee.”

Also, evident in the discourse was a nod to patriotism and nationalism. As mentioned above in our qualitative results, American flags were often displayed in pictures. Comments such as “Now that is beautiful patriotism,” “I pledge allegiance to the flag,” “fuck my flag right,” “Morrisa!,” and “God bless America sweet cheeks” reinforce the connection between patriotism and the female body. One attempt at patriotism, yet highly misogynistic and xenophobic, that was influenced by Donald trump was, “I’m gonna deport her terrorist boyfriend and gab her by the pussy.” Other men chimed in and commented American flags or simply wrote “Mercia!”

**Fraternal Interaction**

One important observation, key to hegemonic masculinity, is that in almost all instances of objectification and misogyny, men would tag other men. This would initiate back and forth commentary on the photograph, and would oftentimes encourage others to participate. This aligns with Michael Kimmel’s (2008) contention that men do not feel individually powerful. Therefore, as demonstrated here, they engage in collectivities of dominant masculine discourse. Comments like “smash or pass,” “some pre-game?” and “tag team bruh” not only instigated other males but also reduced women to objects to be used by and among men. They are depicted as sex objects and communal property.

Some of the fraternal discourse was masked by sarcasm and the use of jokes. Men wrote in their comments “on man I didn’t even notice the girl,” “U need to stop provoking me into objectifying women by taging me in these inappropriate TFM posts,” “What a great personality,” “look at that bridge,” “what final is she studying for,” “what a lovely quilt I wonder where she got it from,” and “she looks very down to earth and friendly lol.” Every single male who used sarcasm also tagged one to three other men. The banter back and forth would then make fun of the photograph and turn into sexual innuendos such as “what I would do to be that rope,” “I’d be down to join the dark side,” “I wish I was the dog ha-ha,” “she can steal whatever she wants from me,” “I could give her a couple extra balls,” and “you can smoke my cigar any day.”

Whether the discourse on the comments was jovial or direct, it still reinforced misogyny and objectification of women. Thus, the discourse ultimately fostered a culture of hegemonic masculinity within the digital space of TFM Girls Instagram account. TFM Girls, because of its affiliation with fraternity members—both active and alumni—serves as an extension of fraternal social spaces. Previous research has shown the same type of hegemonic masculine rhetoric and
behavior in physical, tangible spaces (Bird, 1996; Kimmel, 2008; Yeung et al., 2006) and social media sites (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Hess & Flores, 2016; Walker & Eller, 2015) that the current study has revealed on Instagram. This finding, in particular, directly addresses the relationships between and among local and global masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The study sets out to investigate how a specific group of men, TFM and its followers, shape and maintain dominant discourses of masculinity within the digital-mediated space of Instagram in relation to images of college women. We focused particularly on how women in the pictures were depicted and how discourses in the comments attached to said images were used to shape and maintain hegemonic masculinity. Our mixed-method analyses revealed that women were depicted more in bikinis than any other form of clothing and posed in overtly sexually suggestive poses. The photographs excluded the women’s eyes and faces and included predominately White, fit, big-breasted women. There was a positive correlation between the number of likes and comments with the woman’s breast size, as well as a propensity for TFM Girls to tag itself on the breasts, butts, and vaginal regions of the women. There were also instances of misogyny and objectification manifested in the men’s comments attached to the photographs of the women.

One possible explanation for the use of expletives, misogyny, and other shocking and taboo discourse among young fraternity-aged men is that they have not yet acquired the “economic and structural status or other alternative resources for displaying power and dominance” (Markopoulos & Archaism, 2015, p. 87). Previous research has demonstrated the masculine use of language to reinforce strength, elicit, show, break social norms and to assert themselves (Coates, 2003; De Klerk, 1997; Markopoulos & Archaism, 2015). By only showcasing women’s half-naked bodies (i.e., in bikinis), the pictures reinforce a gendered and heterosexual identity and simultaneously reduce women to objects (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Cortese, 1999). Also of importance is the name of the Instagram account. The use of the word “girls” rather than “women” is also an exercise of subjection in order to reinforce hegemonic hierarchies.

The study demonstrates that TFM followers collectively interact to reify hegemonic masculinity and most of the time tag other men in their misogynistic comments. This is in agreement with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contention that hegemonic masculinity embodies the most current way to be a man and requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, thus legitimizing the subordination of women to men. TFM’s followers are caught in a continuous cycle of dominant masculine discourse that both subordinates and objectifies the college girls in TFM’s Instagram posts. It becomes routine and, ultimately, is prescribed as the norm (Kimmel, 2006). These findings demonstrate a practice of adopting hegemonic masculinity when desirable and distancing themselves when it is not (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, masculinity “represents not a certain type of man, but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices” (p. 840).

Most importantly, the study contributes to theory by extending previous research in hegemonic masculinity in physical spaces (Bird, 1996; Kimmel, 2008; Yeung et al., 2006) and social media sites (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Cook & Hasmath, 2014; Ging, 2017; Hess & Flores, 2016; Walker & Eller, 2015) to Instagram. This is extremely significant, considering the criticism that the theory has received due to a shift in hegemonic dominance (Anderson, 2015). The current study exemplifies the relevance and utility of hegemonic masculinity and adds to research that refutes claims of more inclusive masculinities (O’Neill, 2015; De Boise, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2016), especially given the post-2016 election landscape. The men of TFM may be utilizing the unpolicied and uncontested space of Instagram as a place to rally against feminism and modern political correctness—viewed by some men as a threat to their White Male privilege (Ging, 2017).

Instagram may, in fact, be a digital space where frat boys perceive themselves as victims and marginalized (Kendall, 2011; Kimmel, 2015). Personal attacks against women on this digital platform may be motivated by anonymity (Ging, 2017), as well as by emotion (Paperchains, 2014). The rhetoric on TFM Girls links the online to the offline. Men write out the physical fantasies online that they wish to perform on the women pictured offline, and in some instances, initiate contact. Ging (2017) suggests that asking which version of self, online or offline, is the true representation of the male self is irrelevant. Online, exaggerated performances of masculinity have “both the intention and the effect of reasserting male sexual and cultural dominance” (p. 11). The study highlights Instagram as a digital extension of fraternal social spaces. TFM Girls reinforces hegemonic masculinity on a macro-level by allowing virtual linkages among fraternity members across the United States and by fostering a national frat house ripe with misogyny and objectification. The virtual linkages demonstrate the relationships between, and among, local and global masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The social media platform itself instigates hegemonic masculine behavior. Instagram’s community guidelines clearly state regulations of respect, diversity, expression, and lawfulness; however, Instagram is not as proactive or stringent in its policing and enforcing as other social media platforms. The platform also states that users may not post nude, partially nude, pornographic, or sexually suggestive photographs. Although the pictures themselves do not violate these rules, the rhetoric about the pictures certainly are suggestive. The findings of the study highlight the need for better policing of the platform. Instagram’s dependence on its users to
report violations places the regulation of the space in the hands of people who follow and engage with various Instagram accounts. If TFM Girls is only frequented by Greek men and women, then the male users are not exposed to critique from feminists or male rights activists. Unlike previous research which showcases social media as spaces to contest hegemony among hybrid masculinities (Ging, 2017), the users of TFM Girls completely ignore their rhetoric of privilege, male victimhood, and the toxicity of their masculine performances. Instagram affords them a space where they can pretend their culture and privilege is unthreatened and provides them the opportunity to express misogynist, heterosexist, and racist language without repercussion.

The study is limited in its ability to generalize results beyond TFM Instagram followers. Future studies should investigate other forms of social media associated with TFM and its affiliated fraternities. The study did not investigate the women who appear in the photographs, as it was beyond the scope of the study. The women willingly pose for their picture and submit them, themselves, to TFM Instagram. TFM’s choice moderators then select which women’s photographs make it on the Instagram account. Although rationale for posting was not examined, the fact that women willingly participate is an example of Connell’s complicit masculinity, which, in turn, promotes hegemonic masculinity by honoring, desiring, and supporting the current hegemonic model (Connell, 1996; Demetriou, 2001). The women’s complicity reifies a patriarchal structure of social norms and passively participates in the social practice of gendered power relations.

Also of note is the fact that women also engage in commenting on these spaces. Our analysis revealed women not only make comments about fashion and fitness on TFM Girls but also question the exclusivity of White women in the photographs. For example, women made comments like “do you only do white girls or . . .?" and “how come yawl got no black girls on this whole page?” and “the girls on this page are really beautiful, but I’d love to see more women of color.” Future research should examine the motives of women for posing and self-submitting photographs, as well as the discourse produced by women on these digital spaces.

Hegemonic masculinity is seen as problematic and reinforces a gendered hierarchy that subordinates women both in physical spaces and online (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Connell, 2005; Sweeney, 2014). Through interactions on the comment section of TFM Girls Instagram posts, men not only reify hegemonic masculinity but also legitimize it. “Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting” (Connell, 2005, p. 122). Just as “locker room banter” has become normalized in the post-2016 presidential election landscape, so has the objectification of women online in fraternal social networks in an effort to assert a digital hegemony (Ging, 2017). Here, boys will still be boys, and more precisely boys should be boys, and use Instagram as a digital fraternal space to reinforce and police hegemonic masculinity.

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