

Homosociality in Men's Talk:

Balancing and Recreating Cultural Discourses of Masculinity

Scott Fabius Kiesling

University of Pittsburgh

Department of Linguistics

Pittsburgh, PA 15260 USA

kiesling@pitt.edu

Abstract

This paper explores how a group of men in the United States creates homosocial (as opposed to homosexual) desire through language. In a society in which dominant Discourses of masculinity provide competing scripts of male solidarity and heterosexuality, the achievement of closeness among men is not straightforward, but must be negotiated through other “indirect” means. However, in favorable speech events, the men do express homosociality overtly, and at times use linguistic features which have been more closely identified with “women's styles” of interaction. The paper shows how men actively negotiate dominant cultural Discourses in their everyday interactions. In addition, it argues for a view of indirectness based on social function as much as denotation.*

Keywords: masculinity, men, language and gender, cultural Discourses, desire, homosociality, fraternities, indirectness

Introduction

There is a popular view that men are unemotional, inexpressive, and impersonal. Yet men clearly form friendships and larger friendship groups, and must therefore manage to ‘connect’ with each other personally and emotionally. In fact, male solidarity – the ‘old boys club’ – even plays a role in the maintenance of men’s power, as it works to exclude women. However, beyond the claim that men connect with each other in the context of competition (see, for example, 1998), little work has been done that shows how men operating in a masculine cultural Discourse¹ of dominance create and display homosocial (as opposed to homosexual) desire.² How do men use language to “do friendship” in a heterosexist atmosphere? How do they talk in a way to make themselves attractive to other men? How do cultural Discourses of masculinity structure the men’s desires, and thus who they find most attractive, or ‘cool?’ Ultimately, how does the way men create their relationships re-create patterns of dominance – how do their everyday conversations re-create wider cultural Discourses? I take up these questions in this article, using ethnographic talk-in-interaction data from an all-male social club (a fraternity) at an American University. I argue that the men’s talk – and the existence of the fraternity itself – responds to and recreates four cultural Discourses of masculinity, which can be distilled from the research on men and masculinities. These cultural Discourses of masculinity describe the unmarked, desired form of masculinity that men in American society should display, especially in talk. Such Discourses are thus an unpacking of what “hegemonic masculinity” is in North America in the 1990s (Connell 1995). Each of the cultural Discourses I discuss can thus be seen as a component a hegemonic masculinity. However, the latter term has become so diluted and imprecise (among other problems; see Whitehead 2002) that I prefer to consider each specific cultural Discourse separately, and investigate the interplay among them. This produces a much more realistic view of

how masculinity is culturally understood, including even contradictions among the four cultural Discourses.

These cultural Discourses, or ideals of masculinity, include: gender difference, male solidarity, heterosexism, and dominance. *Gender difference* is a Discourse that sees men and women as naturally categorically different in biology and behavior. *Male solidarity* is a Discourse that provides a bond among men, either as having similar sexual desires, or through bonds such as sports teams or the military. Men are understood to normatively want (and need) to do things with groups of other men exclusive of women. This Discourse is the most invisible of the four Discourses, as it clashes in some ways with both heterosexism and dominance. *Heterosexism* is the definition of masculinity as heterosexual; to be a man in this Discourse is to sexually desire women and not men. *Dominance* is the identification of masculinity with dominance or authority; to be a man is to be strong, authoritative, and in control. These Discourses are based on my readings of the literature on men and masculinities (see especially Connell 1995, 2000, Edley and Wetherell 1995, Mac an Ghail 1994, and Whitehead 2002).

These four cultural Discourses are inherently contradictory, however, as male solidarity and gender difference clash in many ways with heterosexism and dominance. If men are to form close friendship groups, how are they to do this without expressing desire for one another? And how can all the men in such groups maintain a dominant position? This ‘balancing act’ is the focus of the analysis to follow. I show that the men use indirectness to create and display desire – i.e., create a desire in prospective members to join the fraternity. One way this is accomplished is to show an outsider the camaraderie available to a member of the group, thus creating a desire to be part of that camaraderie. I also show that the men use devices often associated with women’s talk to create desire in rush. While these strategies are used in the context of a discussion about sports,

the men personalize their discussion by describing sports experiences and personal reasons for liking or disliking teams and players. I also show that the men display status and camaraderie in order to create desire, a “homosociality by alliance.” These men thus never in my corpus express homosocial desire individually to the object of their desire. Nevertheless, such desire is constantly communicated, and through the indirectness of this communication, the four cultural Discourses of masculinity are recreated and reified on an interactional level.

These findings are significant in two main ways. First, while I argue that men are using indirectness in their creation of desire, this indirectness is a social one, where the social significance of a speech act is different, if not opposite, of what is expected. An ritual insult remains an insult, but it functions to signal a stance of connection rather than distance or dominance. While this process has been noted before in ritual contexts (see Labov 1972), its significance in terms of the analysis of talk-in-interaction has not been discussed. The definition of indirectness should therefore be expanded to indirectness that includes this stance indirectness (conflict rather than connection), addressee indirectness (addressing a different person with a ratified overhearer the 'real' addressee), and topic indirectness (a different topic or domain is used, such as a connection through sports rather than directly interpersonal).

Second, the analyses presented here show the importance of connecting dominant cultural Discourses with everyday talk-in-interaction, and some ways that this connection is accomplished. Such a connection is especially important when issues of men and masculinity are under consideration, because in the United States it is overwhelmingly the cultural Discourses that produce men's dominance as a class (their hegemony), and not (except in occasional situations) the wish of individual men to actively dominate women. Thus it is important to understand how men can take dominant, powerful stances that recreate the cultural Discourses of masculinity

(even when no women are present). In the widest application, then, this article shows how hegemony works, and how structure and practice are intertwined in everyday talk.

I'll first supply some background on the fraternity and the homosocial desire in it, including a demonstration of its depth. I then present some overt expressions of this desire, which will supply some understanding of the content of, and motivations for, this desire. In the analytic heart of the article, I present an analysis of interaction in the fraternity's rush, which is designed explicitly to generate and test homosocial desire. Data come from over a year of participant observation in one fraternity in Northern Virginia in 1993-94, in which I audio-taped meetings, casual conversations, interviews, and party interaction, as well as observing other sorts of behavior. I was allowed access because I am a member of the same national fraternity.

The fraternity and homosociality

The American fraternity is an all-male social club common on university campuses throughout the U.S. These fraternities and their female counterparts, sororities, form social systems known as "Greek-letter societies" or "greek systems" (because they are known by Greek letter sequences such as "Beta Theta Pi") which, as shown in Kiesling (2002), are heavily focused on heterosexual relationships and identities, both in the events that take place and the way in which identities are evaluated. For example, parties jointly organized by one sorority and fraternity are called "mixers," a name which implies that the fraternity and sorority members inhabit two completely separate spheres and must be actively mixed. The goal of such events is for men and women to "hook up," or couple sexually.

Despite this heterosexual organization of greek society as a whole, however, the fraternity itself is a strictly homosocial organization. Lipman-Blumen (1976) points out that homosocial

organizations like fraternities actually serve to segregate social groups such as men and women and thus perpetuate a gender order of binary difference and heterosexuality. As pointed out by Bird (1996), at least as important as this binary policing is how the fraternity culture and organization defines differences among men (see also Kiesling 1997). But the fraternity also provides a legitimized structure within which the men can socialize with other men, without fear of attracting a homosexual label, stigmatized in the dominant cultural Discourses of masculinity. This legitimization of male friendships is an important aspect of the fraternity. The fraternity's interactional spaces allow the men to 'safely' express their connections with one another through 'approved' channels.

Both views of the fraternity – as liberating homosocial connections and reifying heterosexual divisions – are related to the fact that the fraternity is a community of practice in which each member ideally moves ever more from the periphery to the center, as a rush (potential member), pledge (probationary member), and eventually full member. As the men display how they move ever closer to the center of the fraternity, they distance themselves from people at the periphery: women, gay men, Black men, and immature men, or 'boys' (see Kiesling 2001a, 2002). Mac an Ghail's (1994) descriptions of different male friendship groups in a UK high school are similar to the fraternity in this oppositional identity of the group and its members, in that many of the groups in the school define themselves in opposition to the others. The fraternity members engage in a similar sort of process, as they create more and more differences between themselves and non-fraternity members (as well as between themselves and younger fraternity members, who are removed from the center). The fraternity is a true community of practice (Wenger 1998), in which members begin their association in the periphery as 'apprentices,' and eventually become 'masters' at the center of the community. The kind of language they use displays their commonalities with

each other, and their differences from non-members. There are thus two facets of the creation and display of homosociality in the fraternity, which are two sides of the same coin: developing and displaying commonalities (a positive politeness strategy in Brown and Levinson's 1987 theory), and creating boundaries between the fraternity and non-fraternity members.

The men must create not only a sense of close homosociality for themselves, but also for the prospective members who come to their rush events (parties held to attract new members), and this process can be a balancing act which includes the prospective members just enough for them to want to be fully admitted. The creation of this desire and these connections must be accomplished in an overt environment in which *sexual* relationships among men are taboo, while *social* ones are not. Although physically this is a fairly straightforward distinction, socially it is not, as some kinds of interaction have sexual overtones (e.g., showing the wrong kind of interest in another man's body or looks). The expression and creation of such desire is thus a tricky proposition, and is accomplished by having speech events that sanction such descriptions, as well as certain topics and speech act forms that are understood to be social rather than sexual. The bulk of this paper will describe these 'ratified' contexts and forms for the display homosocial desire. We will begin with a look at overt expressions of homosocial feelings.

Overt expressions of homosocial feelings

In the initiation period known as the pledge period the initiates are severely tested – they are dominated, some to a greater extent than they have ever been dominated in their lives. In order to pass the tests of the period, they must unquestioningly follow the orders of the members, as they do in their first pledge activity: drinking, as fast as possible, an entire bottle of fortified wine (wine with more than the usual alcohol content). This is not a pleasurable or even safe activity, but every

pledge does it unquestioningly, some with enthusiasm. There is thus a kind of paradox to membership in the fraternity, in which each member must first be entirely dominated and powerless before he can be accepted into what the fraternity sees as a privileged and select group of men. What do the men want from this organization? Is homosocial desire so important that they will sacrifice their autonomy (and power) for months in order to become accepted into this group of men? What is the nature of the homosocial desire that motivates their sacrifice?

The following excerpt gives voice to that desire, and allows us to hear what might motivate men to join. This excerpt is from an “emergency meeting” called to discuss solutions to the flagging participation by much of the membership. Jean, a recent graduate, gives this passionate speech in which he articulates clearly the homosocial desire that underlies the fraternity.

Excerpt 1³

1 Jean: The second thing I wanna talk about ..
2 kinda-maybe it's not-
3 yknow the solution to all these problems is not cut and dry
4 but I can tell you one thing that made all the problems
5 go away
6 at one point
7 uh
8 ??: Alcohol?
9 Rene: ?? it wasn't alcohol.
10 It's unity.
11 I mean that's another thing that you learn when you're a pledge
 that gets just totally ingrained into you
12 is unity

13 all this fuckin' shit things that you do together
14 sit around the table and eat the fuckin' shit
15 laughter
16 yknow
17 the reason you do it is 'cause there's strength in numbers
18 yknow
19 the best
20 I can tell you the *best* times I ever had as a brother
21 were when all the brothers were together
22 and it didn't matter if you were at a party,
23 if you drove to New York for Gamma Bowl,⁴
24 or if you were shoveling shit at the [basketball arena],⁵
25 **the fact that everybody was together..**
26 **made it cool**
27 yknow?
28 and you could be doin' the most strenuous labor
29 the stupidest fuckin' job
30 or you could be doin' something really difficult goin'-
31 whatever.
32 yknow s- **when we're together**
33 i- i- **it didn't matter**
34 it was *cool*
35 like when we did greek sing
36 now I would never say to myself
37 yeah I'll get up in front of a whole fuckin' greek community and
and sing and look like a fuckin' idiot
38 but the fact that all the brothers were doin' it

39 I was wearin' my letters
40 I felt safe
41 I felt comfortable yknow
42 and th- hey I'm in-
43 I'm Gamma Chi Phi here I'm surrounded by all these people
44 I feel OK
45 those were the *best* feelings ever
46 ((he finishes with a discussion of how unity can help current
problems))
47 ((applause))

What attracted Jean to the fraternity, therefore, is the sense of belonging it gives him, a “place” socially speaking, where he feels safe, even doing the most silly things. It is this safety and strength in numbers, then, that motivates Jean. Because his speech was followed by vigorous applause, we can infer that a large portion of those present agreed with him. The men’s desire to join the fraternity is largely the desire to be unconditionally accepted and *protected* by other men. It is a place where one can do things that one would not normally do.

In interviews I asked men why they wanted to be in a fraternity. Only one said that it had to do with status and the experience of being part of an organization. While several joked that it was to “get more chicks,” (i.e., attract women for sex) the overwhelming majority said that it was precisely this kind of homosocial interaction that attracted them to the fraternity.

This view of the fraternity makes its existence somewhat paradoxical. As shown in Kiesling (2002), its very male exclusivity, and the interaction therein, makes it a very heterosexist organization. However, because of its safety, it is also a place where men need not worry about

what others think of them (or at least they can worry less than in public, and certainly less than around women). It allows for strong expressions of homosociality.

This would imply that the fraternity is a product as well as a producer of dominant cultural Discourses of masculinity. It is a product in that without the gender order that supports such Discourses, there would be no need for such safety. Consider Jean's example of singing. This is certainly not an activity that displays the dominant ideal: it does not display dominance, either through physical strength, rationality, or rational intelligence. Moreover, Jean implies that he is not a very good singer either, so he is not the best at this activity. It is thus not something these men would do on their own. However, in the context of the fraternity they actually feel 'liberated' for a while from this hegemonic ideal.

This notion that the fraternity can let the men shift, to some extent, the identities they perform is exemplified as well by the fact that the men only declare how close they feel to the other men in fraternity-only settings – in the meetings and in interviews with me. For example, at one point in a meeting Hotdog simply says, without sarcasm "I love you all:"

Excerpt 2

1 Hotdog: Jus- just cause you guys don't get elected to positions doesn't
 mean yknow
 doesn't mean doesn't mean that that people don't think that you're
 capable
3 it's just that things didn't work that way
4 and it doesn't mean you can't do any work
5 so keep the faith
6 and I love you all

The homosociality of the fraternity is in fact sometimes more intimate than between the men and their long-term heterosexual partners. Mack told me in an interview, “I know that I am more comfortable than I can ever be when I’m with my fraternity brothers. The things that I can tell my fraternity brothers I can’t tell my girlfriend.” Some men were criticized when they began to spend more time with a girlfriend than with the fraternity, and this jealousy shows at once the closeness of the fraternity and its exclusion of women on another level. Mack also suggested that the closeness of this particular fraternity was one of the things that made them better than other fraternities. He put it in stark terms, telling an imaginary other fraternity that “You’re not in love with your brothers as much as we are in love with our brothers.” Here the tension between the cultural Discourses of masculine solidarity and competition have become intertwined, as the closeness of each fraternity is being used by Mack as a field of competition.

However, these declarations are made in restricted speech activities and production formats. They are limited to meetings in which the declarations are broadcast to a large number of the membership (and likely with no non-members present), and to very private situations with a third party (one-on-one ethnographic interviews with no ratified overhearers). These restrictions can be generalized by saying that the speaker is not addressing a single person, but a more general audience. This conclusion is supported by comments in interviews, in which several members told me that they might talk about how close they feel to another member if that closeness had been violated by some argument. There is thus no two-person situation in which declarations of brotherly love take place, except when it explicitly needs to be ‘patched up.’ Love is kept abstract. This manner of expressing homosociality finds a correlate in other group activities practiced by

the fraternity men, such as “squawking.” In squawking, the members would roam the campus at night. They would stop at strategic places (houses or apartments of girlfriends, potential members, other fraternities), line up, drop to the ground as if to do a push-up, and then scream “squawk” as they raised their heads up in a seal-like pose.

The speech situations that license declarations of brotherly love are one way of solving what I will call the ‘male homosocial bind.’ In the female *double* bind (Lakoff 1975:5-6), women are seen as ‘unfeminine’ if they make claims to and express dominance and power, but if they do follow the ‘feminine’ role, they end up powerless. The male homosocial bind arises out of two clashing cultural Discourses: male solidarity and heterosexuality. In the former, men are supposed to form a close bond, but in the latter they are supposed to refrain from intimacy. Unlike the female double-bind, however, the man is not powerless if he follows the behavior suggested by cultural Discourses, because for men such ‘hegemonic’ behavior is powerful, while for females it is not. But men are nevertheless influenced in how they can display homosocial desire by the other side of the bind.

Both the feminine and masculine stereotypes referred to above are of course idealizations of what actually occurs, and women and men find ways around such double binds in creative ways, and sometimes by outright ignoring and flaunting the norms. One such solution for women is demonstrated by Eckert (1990), who shows how a group of women manage to compete in a conversation, even while maintaining agreement throughout it. The abstract nature of the declarations discussed above are one solution to this dilemma for men. Similarly, men will use competitive forms to display closeness. This is a stereotyped genre often called “male bonding.”⁶ But this male bonding takes different forms, and is again restricted in its use; it is rarely used with

a new acquaintance, but rather with close friends such as members of the fraternity. If it is used with a rush, for example, it acts as a creative index (Silverstein 1976) to draw the men in.

In this section, we have seen some of the overt ways the men expressed homosocial desire. These expressions have allowed us to hear the voices of the men tell us what this desire is like, and allows us to understand its connection with cultural Discourses of masculinity. We have also seen that such expressions, while overt, are never directly addressed to a single man, but to a group, and physical expressions of such desire are also indirect. In the following section, we will explore more of this indirect development and expression, by focusing on how homosocial desire is created to attract men to the fraternity, and what kind of interaction is commented on favorably.

The construction of homosocial desire in rush

One of the most important activities the fraternity engages in is the attraction of new members. This attraction takes place formally in a period known as “rush,” and prospective members are known as “rushes” or “rushees.” It is a time agreed on by all fraternities on the campus to hold meetings, parties, and other events so that rushes can meet the members and vice-versa. The process is basically a courtship, therefore, with each side testing the other, both gauging their desire for the other and trying to build the other party’s desire for them. Such functions are thus ideal places in which to investigate how men create homosocial desirability.

One way homosocial desirability is created is through heterosexuality and heterosexual prowess; a man attractive to women, or a fraternity that attracts desirable women, are thus mutually desirable in greek society. But there were several other, more common, strategies used in the fraternity. One was to deflect desirability to another arena; in Gamma Chi Phi’s case, this arena was sports. Another strategy was to display a desirable camaraderie among the members of

the fraternity, excluding a rushee. Similarly, the men would create a status for themselves or the fraternity, which would be attractive to the rush by a kind of ‘status transitive property,’ in which the status of one member of a group flows to other members of that group; one way of gaining status is to therefore become a member of that group. These strategies can be characterized as ‘homosociality by alliance:’ the men are desirable as friends because 1) they have status and therefore confer status on their friends (allies) and 2) the fraternity makes the need for competition less important because one knows that one is accepted. By making an alliance (i.e., friendship) with these men, a man thus moves closer to two different cultural Discourses of masculinity: male solidarity and dominance.

The men also used some positive politeness strategies, such as finding common ground and asking questions about an interlocutor's background. While studies have examined these features in women's talk (e.g., Fishman 1978, Coates 1996), these strategies also surface in men's talk. However, these strategies were usually used in conjunction with strategies that create status through interpersonal connections or by displaying knowledge.

Let us consider how homosociality is created in two excerpts from talk at a rush event. The event, the sports-focused “College Hoops Night” was held during the university’s official rush week in the spring semester. The event was organized around watching college basketball on television. It was held in the living room of a townhouse where several members lived, with couches and extra chairs arrayed around a television tuned to a college basketball game. Watching sports, a common activity for the men, is rarely a quiet, non-interactive activity, but includes talk about the games as well as talk about other topics during the game. Much of the time the games served simply as a conversation starter, and faded into the background as conversations moved to other topics.

At this event I used a wireless lapel microphone, which first Saul, then Mick, wore. Saul was the Rush Chairman at the time, in charge of organizing all the rush events, and the excerpts below focus on his interactions. The men he talked to were aware of the microphone, as Saul explained its general purpose. The first excerpt takes up the talk just after Saul has met a rushee and is just getting to know him. The rushee has previously told Saul that he is from Manassas, Virginia.

Excerpt 3

1 Saul: Manassas so what high school did you go to?
2 Rush: Stowell
3 Saul: Wait is Osborne around there ?
4 Rush: Yeah right right next door.
5 Saul: OK cause we got this guy
6 I used to live with guy Sigma Chi his name is Mike Benson?
7 Rush: Oh really
8 Saul: We used to play basketball he's really good
9 Rush: Played for Stowell?
10 Saul: Yeah
11 ??: Ozzie
12 Saul: Yeah (.)
13 Good hoops player no?
14 (.)
15 ??: My roommates uh my roommate's dad is the main football baseball
 coach there
16 Saul: Oh OK. I didn't realize that holy shit.
17 ??: Runs everything over there.

There are two strategies being used to create homosociality here: finding common ground and creating a desirable status. Finding common ground is skillfully performed by Saul, as he takes an innocent demographic question in line 1 (*so what high school did you go to?*) and finds a common connection to that school through a former roommate. The connection is tenuous, in that the person embodying the connection is unlikely to have been known by the rush, but it is the attempt to make this connection, and display some knowledge of the Rush's home region, that functions as a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson 1987:103ff).

Saul is even more skillful in the way that he creates status for the person who is the common link, and then appropriates this person as one of the fraternity's own, followed by the status displays of the other fraternity member. Saul initially does not explicitly point to the connection between the man he knows and the rushee. Using a conversation principle of relevance (Grice 1975, Sperber and Wilson 1995) though, this connection is easily made. Such principles claim that people try to make utterances connect in a relevant way to preceding statements, with the assumption that their interlocutor is cooperating with them. Thus, the only way to make Saul's statement relevant is to assume the Rush's statements are related to those that Saul is making. However, Saul immediately puts Mike Benson in a group Saul is identified with by using the first person plural in line 5 (*OK cause we got this guy*), then identifies him as a former roommate and a member of another fraternity before getting to his name. He then also includes Mike Benson in the *we* who played basketball, thus making further connections. These strategies focus on Saul's connections with the man, and he only incidentally implies that this man is actually a member of another fraternity (*Sigma Chi*). He thus does his best to create connections with the rush through his former roommate and basketball buddy, using pronouns and the principle of relevance.

Saul introduces the status of Mike Benson as a good basketball player almost as an afterthought in line 8 (*We used to play basketball he's really good*). The rush cooperates in this endeavor by asking if Mike Benson played for the local high school as well. The participation framework (Goffman 1981) of the conversation then shifts as another fraternity member, who must have been acting as a ratified overhearer, enters in a dialogue with Saul by saying Mike Benson's nickname (*Ozzie*), and Saul responds by asking him to confirm Benson's skill at basketball in line 13 (*Good hoops player no?*). This exchange sets up a confirmation of Benson's status as well as the fraternity connection with him. One aspect of the creation of this status is its nonchalance: Saul mentions Benson's skill as an extraneous comment in line 8, and asks for confirmation from the other fraternity member using a very short grammatical form (Adjective-Noun-Tag question), as if this fact were common knowledge in line 13. *Hoops*, as a colloquial name for basketball, adds to the nonchalant stance in evaluating this man. We could imagine someone saying something similar about Michael Jordan "Good hoops player, no") or even a lesser professional basketball player and the nonchalant stance becomes clear.

The second fraternity member and Saul then collaborate in a dialogue that creates status for the second member even as the rush moves out of center stage to a ratified overhearer position. The second member makes another connection to the same high school through his roommate's father, whom he says "runs everything over there" Saul's response adds to the implied status of being the main football and baseball coach through his incredulous response in line 16 (*I didn't realize that holy shit*). The two thus work together to create a statusful personal connection to the rush, and the participation framework which actually excludes the rush works to enhance the genuineness of this status.

Saul thus finds common ground, but it is a common ground that displays status. The questions Saul asks lead him to talk about a person who has status in basketball, and receives support from the second fraternity member in this regard. The connection displayed is more about “connections” in the sense of knowing someone with status than making a personal connection. The questions in this segment as well end up allowing Saul to display status rather than necessarily supporting and expanding the Rush's answers. Finally, the relatively open floor that allows the second member to talk is not one in which the speakers finish each others' ideas and expand on it. Rather, it is a chance to add new, possibly tangential information, to the exchange, but information which adds to the speaker's status. There is a subtle form of indirectness at work here, one in which Saul creates connection and common ground while also creating status. Both are important for the creation of homosocial desire.

It is not accidental that the connections and status displayed in this short exchange revolve around sports. This domain of life – which is a community of practice to some extent – was pervasive in the fraternity, and was especially used as a way of creating connections with other men, as well as a domain in which to create status. While the men took their sports very seriously (both as participants as spectators), it was used as a domain for binding the men together in a less serious way and creating a common status. Indeed, one of the accomplishments that was repeatedly pointed out to me was the fraternity's all-sports intramural championship the year before my research. However, I want to caution that we should not generalize this view to all men in a simplistic way, for example by saying that *all* men create connections through sports (although it is very public; see Johnson and Finlay 1997). This fraternity was particularly sports-focused, and I know from other experiences that not all male groups find sports so central to their communities. However, I would like to suggest, along with Tannen (1990) that one general

property of male groups in North American and other European-based societies is the use of common “nonpersonal” interests as a metaphor or conduit for creating both connection and status (and sometimes a shared status of a group). These interests are often groups formed around professions, objects or technology (cars, computers), or even religion. This prediction needs confirmation, but Coates (2003) finds a similar pattern for the stories told by the English men in her study. However, this indirect use of of a topic about a domain not overtly focused on personal relationships is a result of the competing cultural Discourses of male solidarity and heterosexuality; it is one way out of the male homosocial bind.

So the previous excerpt has shown us that one strategy Saul uses in the rush event to create homosocial desire is the creation of connection *combined with* status. The next excerpt shows some other strategies in the same vein as those just discussed. The talk still revolves around sports, but connection and status are created through common interest and narratives about exciting sports events witnessed by the participants. The same participants are still talking, although the talk has moved to professional basketball, and shifts to ice hockey during the excerpt. The Bullets are the Washington, D.C. professional basketball team (who have since changed their name to the Wizards), and the “Caps” are the Washington Capitals, the local ice hockey team.

Excerpt 4

- 1 Saul: You never been to a Bullets game?
- 2 Rush: No::
- 3 Saul: We'll get you out man
- 4 (0.8)
- 5 Saul: See I've never been to a Caps game.

6 Waterson: I've never been to a Caps game either
 I ?????

7 Saul: The thing is I'm not from here so yknow
8 I'm ha-

9 Rush: I really like but they're they're playing ??
10 (and they got into this big braw:l)

11 Saul: Tha- that's the best man.

12 Rush: Yeah it was funny cause like
13 Guy in the stands got real-
14 This guy spilled beer on this guy

15 Saul: mm hmm

16 Rush: so there's was two fights goin'
17 they go in the stands it was great

18 Saul: See I'm from I'm from [city] New York it's funny
 that you said that
19 because in [city] we have the ?? they're an AHL team?
20 (0.6)
21 and fuckin like this guy s- poured beer on this hockey player?
22 (0.6)
23 motherfucker climbed over the glass
24 into the crowd just started BAM BAM just started fightin' that was
 the greatest man a::

Let us focus on two aspects of this excerpt. First, Saul's statement in line 3, *We'll get you out man*, pulls the rush into the fraternity and includes him in a future activity with other fraternity members. Saul does not explicitly invite the rush; however, he uses an ambiguous first person

plural pronoun (*we*) to do this work. The referents to this pronoun are unclear, as Saul could be talking about himself in the plural, the fraternity in general, or some subset of the fraternity. However, given the context of the situation, where Saul is speaking not only as his own principal but also for the fraternity in his role as rush chairman, the implication is that the fraternity as a whole will take him to a Bullets game someday – if he joins the fraternity.

The second aspect on which we should focus is the symmetry and the sharing of experiences (something, we might note, that has been said to characterize women's talk; see Coates 1996:78ff). After the pause in line 4, Saul matches the Rush's experience of not having been to a professional sports match by admitting he hasn't been to a game played by the local ice hockey team, and that admission is in turn matched by Waterson, who is peripherally participating in the conversation (he is sitting on the couch watching television, while Saul and the rush are standing behind the couch). This prompts the rush to begin a narrative about a game that he attended, encouraged by Saul in line 11 (*That's the best man*). Saul's statement both encourages and validates the story the rush is telling, by suggesting that the story is a token of a type of event that Saul approves of, and in fact has witnessed. This interpretation derived mainly from his use of *that*, which refers immediately to the events told by the rush, but must also be something known by Saul as old or presupposed knowledge. *That* thus refers not just to the token as related by the rush, but also to the general type of events which are the best.

The matching and sharing of experience is completed as Saul mirrors the Rush's story with his own story about a fight at an ice hockey game, which was “the greatest.” (It is of course stereotypical of a certain kind of masculinity to glorify this violence as the “greatest” aspect of this sport, but I will not elaborate on this aspect of the excerpt; see Deby 2002) There is thus an

adjacency pair structure (see Sacks 1995:554-560, Johnstone 2002:72-75) which is symmetrical in this excerpt (beginning with line 5, after the pause):

Admission: *I've never been...*

Admission: *I've never been...*

Narrative: Hockey fight

Narrative: Hockey fight

Of course, there is also reciprocity in the agreement of the evaluation of the hockey fights, and the desirability of going to sports events, but this content and approval is supported by the adjacency pair structure which shows a symmetry that implicitly creates connections among the participants. Notice however, that while these are shared values, the story-telling could also be viewed as competitive: who saw the most outrageous fight? While this competitive aspect is discernible, it does not negate the sharing aspect of the speech event, because the participants share the values on which they evaluate the stories, and they cooperate to allow each to tell their stories. Coates (2003) finds similar patterns of story-chains used for competition among men. We find again, then, the men building homosociality even as they compete for status.

The next excerpt shows a similar balance between displaying status and finding common ground, this time in talk revolving around basketball and basketball players. This discussion begins after Saul introduces the topic with a question, which is relevant because the ostensible reason for the rush event is to watch college basketball on television, and indeed such a game is playing as these discussions take place.

Excerpt 5

1 Saul: Follow college hoops?

2 Rush: What?

3 Saul: D'you follow college hoops?

4 Rush: Yeah

5 Saul: Who's your team?

6 Rush: I like Virginia?

7 Saul: Do you?

8 Rush: Yeah.

9 Saul: I ha- I tell you what I hate (Virginia) cause I dated this girl
for four years,

10 Rush: uh huh

11 Saul: and now she goes there

12 Rush: yeah

13 Saul: and every time I talk to her man

14 she |he he he he she let's me know

15 Rush: |???

16 Saul: Yeah but they're good

17 I love- what is it they got like Corey Alexander

18 Rush: He's hurt now he's got a broken leg so

19 Saul: That's right

20 Rush: He's comin' back

21 Saul: But they got like Junior Burroughs

22 Rush: Yeah he's he's tough he's goin' pro

23 Saul: Oh yeah dude

24 Rush: |If he goes (Carolina) I was goin' ???

25 Saul: | No shit he he he he

26 I bet you were man

27 (4.8)

28 Rush: Junior Burroughs is tough he's gonna be (tough to beat)

29 Saul: Oh hell yeah dude

30 I don't remember if it was junior or if was Corey

31 But I worked at Paul Westhead basketball camp here this summer?

32 Rush: I didn't know- You play ball?

33 Saul: Yeah I play ba- I'm all right but I'm not ... great

34 I did a lot of reffing yknow mostly for that

35 He he

36 Unlike .. Mr. Waterson here look at him man

37 he tries to tell me he's a rebounding machine he's like a

toothpick

38 Na he's feisty but um-

39 He did- he came over

40 I didn't do that session but they're tellin' me that either Junior

or both

41 were there this summer just kickin' a::ss

42 Sam Cassell, remember the guy from Florida State?

43 He plays for Houston now?

44 He's in the backcourt with Charlie Ward?

45 (1.4)

46 Rush: Sam Cassell that sounds familiar

47 Saul: Sam Cassell yeah.

48 Waterson: Sam Cassell he plays for uh | |yeah

49 Saul: |Houston now|

There are no strategies in this segment that have not appeared in other excerpts, but this excerpt shows another way such strategies are employed, thus establishing a pattern. Saul finds an interest of the rush (for a domain in which Saul has considerable knowledge) in lines 1-8, then shows he knows something about the Rush's concern in that domain (a personal connection, who the players, are and what they are doing) in lines 15-28, then the addition of personal status with his association with the basketball camp. Saul thus again creates common ground and then status. We can also find a display of homosociality through the playful insult that Saul levels at Waterson; the fact that Waterson does not respond negatively points out the friendly nature of the insult being used to display the solidarity between Waterson and Saul, a strategy we see employed in a members-only interaction below. Finally, status is also created through the display of knowledge about basketball players: notice Waterson jumping in when the status of Sam Cassell is in question.

So there is a recurring pattern in these excerpts of a search for common ground and tacit agreement on values, a display of camaraderie from the members, and a display of status, that gives us an idea of how homosociality is accomplished by the fraternity members and the rush. In addition, we have seen how sports talk can be used as a domain in which to accomplish homosociality. One question which might remain is whether this talk was successful. Did Saul like the rush? Did the rush join? In fact, the rush did become a member of the fraternity. And it is clear that Saul liked the rush, because later in the evening he talked to some other members arriving late in the kitchen, and said the following about the rush (pseudonymed Tom) he was talking to:

Excerpt 6

1 Saul: And f- that boy I was talkin' to Tom:?

2 coo::l motherfucker man
3 I I I could talk to him all fuckin' night
4 Sutton: ??? he plays ?? too
5 Saul: Ye:::::ah uh he he he he he he
6 No what I'm sayin'-
7 Can we drin' at your place man?
8 Sutton: Yeah I don't care
9 |???
10 Saul: |I'm gonna tak- I'm definitely takin' Tom out
11 Sutton: I already told ?? come by tonight=
12 Saul: I'm takin' Tom

(Although drinking with rushes was forbidden by the rush rules of the university, it was common practice to have “after rush” activities with favored rushes that included alcoholic beverages.) We can thus see that these strategies, on the part of both the rush and Saul, were successful in creating homosociality.

We saw above a small view of the camaraderie that was displayed between members in rush settings. Below is another example of such a display. Saul is again talking to a rush (not Tom), about the fact that the rush plays baseball (but not for the university’s varsity team), and has asked him what position he plays. Saul then shouts across the room to ask Alex what position he plays in softball. (A “dip” is a certain kind of chewing tobacco which comes in a small can, and the men often “pack” it to make it more dense before they put it in their mouths.)

Excerpt 7

1 Saul: Hey Alex

2 What position you gon play in softball bro?
3 (.)
4 Easy now! We got a first baseman right here man!
5 That's all right Alex will get the water for us, in between
 innings?
6 Rush: Laugh
7 Saul: We'll have, yknow, in case we need another dip Alex'll just pack
 it up for us?
8 You'll get it packed up for us right Alex?
9 Laughter
10 Rush: Right get it ready.
11 (.)
12 Al: What are you playing
13 Saul: Well you give me a little something and I'll tell you wh-
14 Al: What are you playin'.
15 Saul: See how you are man
16 Al: What are you playin'.
17 (.)
18 Saul: Wherever the fraternity needs me man.
19 Yknow I'm just one of those utility players.
20 Al: Wh- Wh-
21 Saul: I played third base but fuckin' we got Scooter to play third base
 now
22 I'll probably play- I'll probably outfield or shortfield
23 Al: ??
24 Saul: Well he's short I don't know if he can stop much
25 Laughter

Saul and Alex have a recurrent sports-boast competition that forms much of their relationship with each other, so it is not pretense that causes Saul to yell to Alex (he may also have known that Alex plays first base). But they are creating a camaraderie here with their verbal sparring, as they do it constantly interspersed with laughter. Not only do they display the camaraderie of the fraternity, but Saul momentarily includes the rush in that camaraderie, and in fact includes him as a member of the fraternity through his place on the softball team. In lines 5 (*Alex will get the water for us*) and 7 (*in case we need another dip Alex'll just pack it up for us?*) He constructs Alex as a servant for an *us* comprising Saul and the rush, thus including the rush not only on the softball team but also inserting him into the competitive but friendly exchange, in which Saul and the rush share a footing, with Saul as animator and author for the two. If one of the attractions of the fraternity is a sense of belonging and inclusiveness in a competitive world as suggested by Jean's speech, then Saul is in a sense giving the rush a sample of it, showing him what camaraderie there is and thus creating desire in the rush to join the fraternity.

Before closing this analysis of talk in the rush event, there is one more important aspect we should note: the type of 'floor' constructed by these men in their casual interaction, and their topic-shifting behavior. Edelsky (1993) shows in her analysis of academic meetings that women tend to use a more collaborative floor, where the floor is open to all speakers simultaneously without one speaker really 'having' the floor. Coates (1996:133-151) shows how a group of women build collaborative floors. In these rush conversations we find the men using linguistic devices that describe a collaborative floor, easily used by the men when creating homosociality among themselves. In these excerpts we find several instances where speakers finish another speaker's statement the floor even though they have said nothing previously (Waterson in line 48,

excerpt 7), as well as jointly constructed utterances, incomplete utterances, overlapping speech, all characteristics of collaborative floors.

But, as Coates (p.c.) has commented, these still do not seem like collaborative floors. The reason for this is that the formal linguistic features are necessary but not sufficient for the collaborative floor as discussed by Coates and Edelsky; topic is also essential. In these excerpts, rather than an expansion of a topic, we find overlaps and new turns to generally take the discussion in a slightly different direction, away from the previous speaker and towards the new speaker's experience or knowledge. When Waterson chimes in, for example, he is showing off his knowledge (who Sam Cassell plays for), although in his hesitation Saul actually provides the important information.

As noted for excerpt 3, questions also have the dual purpose of building involvement in the conversation and allowing a speaker to create status. For example, the excerpt just analyzed, we see the rush ask several 'supportive' questions (e.g., line 16: *so this fraternity is like nationwide?*) which leads Saul to explain more about the fraternity and create more status for it. The men also use other strategies identified as women's strategies, such as finding agreement and consensus, but these are often in order to create a pair or group against another speaker, as Saul does with the Rush in contrast with Alex, which sets up a display of the fraternity and the benefits of creating an 'alliance' with its members.

The men thus do not necessarily use formal linguistic features associated with men to create desirability and attractiveness in rush, but they use many features associated with women, and the creation of connection. This fact suggests that men in fact may use these linguistic features as much as women, especially when they are in same sex groups that focus on homosociality (cf.

Goodwin 1980, 1990 on girls using boys strategies). However, we have seen the men use these formal features in a strategic way that more often than not builds status for the speaker. The men thus use these features in a way that supports cultural Discourses of masculinity, suggesting that men and women deploy linguistic features and focus on different possible meanings because they are 'said' and 'heard' within these very cultural Discourses. Such claims about how gender affects language use (and vice versa) therefore must take into account the topic or domain of the speech situation, as well as the speech situation itself. If we still want to see this interaction as 'masculine,' then we also must claim that it is not the formal features such as questions, floors, and even minimal responses that make a speech style index masculinity or femininity, but rather these features in combination with content, other forms such as phonology and lexical choice (cursing), speech event context, and each other that lead to an impression that talk is 'masculine' or 'feminine.' The impression we get is rooted not so much in the language but in the cultural Discourses we connect to that language.

Of course we have only seen a few men in conversation here, one of whom is the rush chair for the fraternity. So does that mean we should discount these men because they are somehow out of the ordinary? On the contrary, it points out two important facts, both bearing crucially on the relationship to male dominance and language. The first is that some men, even those who are in an all-male setting, have the ability to use and understand features of 'women's language' even while 'keeping their masculinity.' We must then reject a controlling role for different cultures as a strong explanation – and especially as a sole explanation – for statistical differences we find in the way men and women speak, in a similar way that Cameron (1998) outlines. In short, we must give our speakers some agency: they have the ability to see these cultural Discourses, and use language to recreate them, or in some cases, challenge them. Our language and culture give us the resources

for displaying identity and relationships, but they do not author us, it is we who author ourselves with these tools (see Holland et al. 1998). Second, we must again remind ourselves of the vast diversity among men in speaking style, and remember that individual men may in fact use speaking styles characteristic of women. These findings also suggest that genre or activity type is often more important than gender as a factor in what strategies people choose in conversation, as Ochs (1992) claims.

The cultural Discourses in which to be a man one must be powerful is pervasive in these excerpts, however. Part of how desire is created in these interactions is to display the status that the fraternity holds, and to show how it flows to the members. Thus part of the homosocial desire is created through the status of a fraternity member as more of a man than non-members. The fraternity membership symbolizes power in a number of ways (access to sports, respect, women), and the talk constructs, and to some extent embodies, this power. A man is attracted to the fraternity men in these conversations partly through the possibility of an alliance with something powerful, that will also make him more powerful, as articulated by Rene: “I’m Gamma Chi Phi here I’m surrounded by all these people, I feel OK. Those were the best feelings ever.”

Summary: The anatomy of homosociality

Homosociality is where we might find the male version of the female double bind: To be a man is to be powerful, and to be powerful in the current gender order is, in part, to be heterosexual. Affiliation can be equated with dependence, so homosociality is almost by definition not masculine. To create a masculine identity along the lines of dominant cultural Discourses of masculinity, a man must not create love, dependency, or desire with his fellow men, but at the same time he must create solidarity with them. The men therefore find ratified ways of taking up

homosocial stances that are not homosexual stances. Most importantly, they take such stances powerfully, redefining homosociality as a powerful concept (as Jean does in his speech about the power of unity, which echoes cultural Discourses of male solidarity). We have seen a number of strategies that can accomplish this ‘powerful homosociality’ in this article, strategies which invite other men into a powerful alliance. One strategy is to create privileged speech events where the expression of homosocial desire is ratified (even powerful), such as in ritual, where it is prescribed, and in group meetings. This desire is also expected to be built in rush events, where we saw Saul use many different strategies associated in the literature with women’s interaction. These speech events are distinguished by the foregrounding of the fraternity as an institution or group as almost another interlocutor; speakers tend to be ceding some of their footing as the individual principal of the talk, in Goffman’s (1981) terms, to the fraternity. In other words, it is clear they are speaking for, or to, the fraternity as an entity. Fidelity and friendship are thus pledged to a group, and this loyalty is evaluated quite differently from individual homosociality vis-à-vis masculinity: loyalty, as can be seen in the powerful masculinities associated with patriotism, is a powerful trait. Thus, Jean focused his love on the unity of the collective. These speech events are therefore not arbitrary connections that license the expression of homosociality, but are events which facilitate the indirect expression of homosociality through prescribed speech or through participation frameworks in which there is no single addressee.

Saul’s rush conversations also show a deflection, or indirection, of homosociality. In these conversations he either creates status for the fraternity or associates the interactants with the sports teams they support, or their abilities in sports. This deflection to a ratified, less personal topic (as opposed to more directly personal topics such as love relationships and even homosocial friendships) is thus another strategy for creating homosociality.

The men also rely on ‘indirect’ speech genres, acts, and stances, such as insults, boasts, and other competitive linguistic forms to create homosociality. They use these genres, acts, and stances within homosocial interactions, as well as competitive (speech) activities such as drinking games, betting, and board games (see also Kiesling 2001b). Finally, all of the men, to greater or lesser degrees depending on the situation, employ a ‘cool’ stance. This stance allows for the expression of homosocial desire in a number of ways without the speaker coming across as too earnest in his desire. This stance is encapsulated in the pervasive use of *dude* within the fraternity and by men in general (see Kiesling forthcoming), as well as the greater use of the ‘casual’ pronunciations such as *-in* among men (see Chambers 1995:109-113, Kiesling 1998).

While most homosociality is thus performed ‘indirectly’ or with ‘disclaimers’ it is nevertheless central to the men’s social identities, especially as fraternity members. While their identity as heterosexual is central, their interactions with women are not evaluated as frequently, or monitored in the same way, as their interactions with men. In many ways, the men’s heterosexuality is for their homosociality, and if this heterosexual desire overrides the homosocial desire (i.e., a man becomes “pussy whipped” by spending too much time with a girlfriend to the exclusion of his fraternity friends) it can threaten the status of his homosocial connections. The status of men with respect to other men, then, is central to their identities.

This discussion has implications for both sociolinguistics and gender studies. The data here suggest a reconsideration of what is meant by *indirect*. They suggest that indirectness is more than simply the use of one type of speech act for another (as in Brown and Levinson 1987). Such a view privileges the denotational function of language, but these data show that the use of one strategy, such as competition, for another, such as desire, is another kind of indirectness. An insult is still an insult, and still competitive, but it is socially indirect in that it is not serving only

competition, but solidarity as well. These findings also support Tannen's (1993) claims regarding the relativity of linguistic strategies: linguistic features and strategies rarely have a deterministic meaning, but can always be interpreted differently in actual interaction. Much of such interpretation depends on the cultural Discourses dominant in a group of people, and on the norms of the speech activity in which it takes place. Finally, as Freed and Greenwood (1996) show, and Ochs (1992) suggests, speakers are as likely to use strategies based on the kind of speech event they are engaged in as they are the gender of the speakers in the activity. It may be, for example, that we find women engage in more symmetrical sharing strategies because they interact more in speech activities of this kind than men. But it does not mean that men do not and cannot engage in these kinds of strategies, just that they usually do not. The task for researchers is then to find out if, and then explain why, men and women tend to engage in different kinds of speech activities: Are there institutional or structural restrictions on their participation? Are cultural Discourses such that women are more likely to choose one activity and men another? More importantly, how is the diversity of masculinities and femininities organized in such speech activities?

The discussion above also has lessons for gender studies. The first is that a “hegemonic masculinity” – the most dominant or desired form of masculinity in a society – is composed of multiple, sometimes conflicting cultural Discourses, and that these multiple cultural Discourses and the conflicts between them might explain the patterns of behavior we find much more clearly than an appeal to a single Discourse. For example, Kimmel (2001) appeals to homophobia in his explanation of men’s behavior, arguing that men are afraid of other men by being afraid to be seen as homosexual. While I don’t dispute that this cultural Discourse is important, it only explains behavior if it is understood in the context of other cultural Discourses of masculinity, which proscribe the limits of unmarked male behavior.

Finally, this analysis shows how we can balance the macro, cultural Discourse explanations of gendered language use with micro, interactionally focused data and explanations. We have seen here how the dominant Discourses present choices for the men in interaction, and how the men negotiate these choices depending on the constraints of the speech events and their goals for the conversation. Such micro-focus strengthens the generalized argument from cultural Discourses by showing that there is a way that cultural Discourses of masculinity are translated by men into interaction in their everyday lives. In this way, we also balance an analysis that takes into the wider, ‘objective’ view of the analysts as well as the subjective understandings the participants have of the speech events in question. We thus come upon an explanation that does not need to ‘buy in’ to the dominant cultural Discourses, but can nevertheless use them to explain gendered patterns of language use – the difference gender makes.

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¹ I use “cultural Discourse” here in the post-structural sense of Discourse, as opposed to discourse which is talk-in-interaction. Such cultural Discourses include culturally patterned ideologies, practices, and figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998). See Kiesling (2003, in press) for a discussion.

² I use “desire” here deliberately, rather than “connection” or “friendship,” although these are also social relationships I will consider. I use “desire” because I argue that the men are, in fact, creating a desire to be with each other, and a desire to be part of a men's group. The men thus have a desire for all-male connection and friendship. The desire I discuss here is thus analogous to Connell's (1987) structure of cathexis, which includes both sexual and non-sexual social connections, and the (socially-structured) desire of social actors to have such relationships.

³ Transcription conventions:

((text))	Description of actions that are not talk
??	Speech <i>or</i> speaker identity that was not comprehensible to transcriber
(test)	Speech that was uncertain to the transcriber
wor-	Dash indicates a word that was stopped short before being completed
wor:d	Colon indicates the preceding segment is lengthened
[word]	The actual word has been replaced for anonymity reasons
(0.2)	Period in seconds in which the participants do not speak
text	Lines spoken simultaneously are denoted by vertical lines at the point of overlap
text	

⁴ This bowl is a football tournament in which chapters of the national fraternity compete with each other every year in touch football.

⁵ The fraternity often cleaned up the basketball arena after events in order to raise money.

- ⁶ It is interesting to note that there is no corresponding 'female bonding;' perhaps it is assumed that females are always bonding.