The Habit of Meeting Together: Enacting Masculinity in a Men's Bible Study

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In American evangelical culture, men's Bible studies are a key site for negotiating and reproducing ideologies about 'godly masculinity.' Here, the ideal of an evangelical man is modeled, tried on, and held up for inspection. In their gender performances, these young men draw from three different models of masculinity, each with its own superaddressee (Bakhtin, 1981) and gender schedule (Goffman, 1977). The two more widely-used models are associated with a more hegemonic young American masculinity and with an evangelical model of masculinity— models which directly conflict with one another in terms of their prescriptions for masculinity. Through such strategies as competitive but self-deprecating narration, use of military and sexual analogies, and humor rooted in the Bible, the men are able to simultaneously draw from these two conflicting models. In their interactions, these men also creatively navigate between the two by appealing to a highly local third model of masculinity associated with their local congregation. This model, which offers semiotic resources from 'hipster' or 'intellectual' culture, resists both of the more widely-used models. *Keywords: masculinity, Christianity, language and gender, non-hegemonic masculinity*

INTRODUCTION

> "What does it mean to do this like a man?" —Kevin, participant in a men's Bible study

This study attempts to document how young evangelical men balance conflicting ideologies about masculine behavior via their language practices in a men's home Bible study. Across the landscape of American evangelical culture, men at weekly Bible studies conversationally enact and propagate not only their devotional lives and relative social statuses but also the meanings of being a man. Although participation in these groups is voluntary, attendance is often encouraged by and connected to participation in the leadership of local evangelical communities, either a church congregation or one of the evangelical parachurch organizations which target subsets of the evangelical population (e.g., universities, schools, prisons, and military bases). The goals of these group meetings are ostensibly to: (1) collectively exegete a Biblical text, with individuals' interpretations coalescing around a shared and ratified doctrine; (2) aid members in applying the text

to their daily lives; and (3) pray for each other, with prayer requests providing a town-crier-like airing of the community's goings-on. An oft-cited emic rationale for these meetings comes from Hebrews 10:25 (New International Version): "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another."

Beneath these surface goals, men's Bible study groups also function as a site of socialization into the 'proper' expression of gender. From many influential voices within evangelical culture, there is steady talk of a 'crisis of masculinity' (Johnson, 2010; Piper & Grudem, 2006). This continues a discourse forged in 1990's evangelical movements like Promise Keepers and the Million Man March. In response to this perceived crisis, whereby young evangelical men align with the 'unbiblical' masculinities presented by the mainstream media, churches create a space in which young men are offered an alternative target for their gender performances. Through this 'habit of meeting' as men's Bible studies, masculinities are performed for an audience—tried on and held up for inspection. Like all masculinities, the masculinity undergoing confirmation here is tricky to achieve, particularly because these men must navigate overlapping and conflicting targets for the performance of masculinity. This gendering is often surreptitious; while it is deemed important in these communities for men to have 'godly' male role models, the function of a Bible study as a space for gender performance and enforcement is not present in members' speech about their study. Rather, 'community' is often held out as the carrot to entice members to attend. This study attempts to document how young evangelical men balance conflicting ideologies about masculine behavior via their language practices in a men's home Bible study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Performance and Performativity

In the Bible study I observed, the pre-existence of an effective evangelical masculinity is not assumed but rather is contingent, constantly being performed through the interaction and constantly shifting in the set of models being drawn from. Throughout the 1990's and 2000's, scholars studying gender tended to appeal to either performance-based or performativity-based approaches.

In performance-based approaches, there is no inherent maleness or femaleness but gender is seen as the outcome of "actors' management of self impressions" (Goffman, 1971, p. 26). If an actor gains a

favorable impression, he has authority to influence or define the speech situation being formulated. Goffman (1977) described the existence of different 'gender schedules,' which resemble lists of semiotic resources that need to be checked off in order for a performer to be considered to have played his part authentically and accurately. In Goffman's framework, a performer can be incompetent, or unwilling, to "sustain the appropriate schedule of displays" (1977, p. 8). Different versions of masculinity originating in different realms of society could then produce a different schedule of how to perform masculinity— how to 'be a man' in the way which is most valued in that realm. These schedules could even be competing, with a particular linguistic form being 'on the schedule' for one model of masculinity yet considered taboo on a different schedule. One thing that performance-based approaches share is that speakers are ascribed subjecthood—a pre-existing self that they bring to the table (Brickell, 2003). This subjecthood enables speakers to choose how to structure their performance for a given setting, as any performance is constrained by the principles of organization which govern that interactional setting (Goffman, 1974, p. 10).

For scholars who use a performativity-based approach, there is no subjecthood or pre-existing self (Butler, 1990) who chooses which of the many linguistic 'clothes' to put on for this particular performance. Rather, any characteristic or attribute is momentarily called into being as a form is uttered, as in Austin's (1970) notion of the performative speech act. Incessant repetitions of gender performatives "within a rigid regulatory frame" build up into the construction of a gendered subject (Butler, 1990, p. 33). Researchers in this tradition argue that femininity or masculinity are not pre-existing traits for which we need to figure out an appropriate performance (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992) but merely "effects we produce by way of particular things we do" (Cameron, 1997, p. 49), as we repeatedly perform the acts that cultural norms dictate.

Several writers have attempted to bridge these perspectives by considering both a pre-existing human subject and the effects achieved by invoking a linguistic subject. For Bucholtz and Hall (2004), "performance does not merely refer to the social world but actually brings it into being" (p. 381), echoing Goffman's comment that a self is only achieved within social interactional processes (1971, pp. 244-246). Brickell (2003) claims that saying that a subject acts and that those actions have consequences does not automatically require subjects to be sovereign and self-evident; a subject can "pre-exist the (in this case

linguistic) deed but it never pre-exists the social relationships in which the deed is embedded" (p. 172). In this article I argue that the Bible study participants are indeed 'pre-existing subjects' who consciously negotiate different models of masculinity, performing different masculine identities in the conversational moment.

Models of Masculinity

Each model of masculinity examined in this article is associated with a superaddressee (Bakhtin, 1981), acting as an ever-present ghost interlocutor policing an individual's performance. The superaddressee could be thought of as a stereotype, representing the most prototypical person who would adhere to that particular model. Each of these superaddressees in turn holds a different 'gender schedule' (Goffman, 1977, p. 8). The willingness of a speaker to draw from the resources of each model depends on how much he wants to identify with its superaddressee—the prototypical user of that schedule of semiotic resources. In order to most authentically perform that given version of masculinity, a speaker would have to make use of all the resources on that particular superaddressee's gender schedule.

Kiesling (2001) documents a single fraternity member, 'Pete,' who draws on different stable sets of resources each associated with a different superaddressee. Pete has a wide repertoire of masculine-indexicalized linguistic forms at his disposal with which he can construct different masculinities suitable for the different occasions within which he must interact. 'Hanging out' might be a proper occasion for boasting, while a bar setting might demand less overtly emotional language in the presence of a female. In these contexts, Pete selects linguistic features and takes stances which speak to different superaddressees, with the effect that Pete takes on different personae, such as Working-Class-Hero or Father-Knows-Best. In Pete's mind there is a 'typical working class guy' and a 'typical father giving advice;' he speaks over the shoulder of his actual interlocutor towards these superaddressees, speaking in a way which satisfies each superaddressee's gender schedule. Even though these personae are created by speaking to superaddressees, both 'typical working class guy' and 'typical father giving advice' fall under the aegis of a larger, more hegemonic American masculinity, a point I will explain in the next section.

In this article, I argue that the participants of the men's Bible study shift between three models of masculinity in their interactions, which are invoked at different points and result in different emerging

masculinities. Participants' choices to use the linguistic resources associated with each model reveal in part their desire to borrow the authority of the superaddressee associated with it. This in turn reflects each speaker's desire to self-identify with the superaddressee—the prototypical 'man' according the different models, a man he tries to perform or embody with his language choices. Strikingly, participants seem to be particularly adept at speaking in ways that allow them to draw from more than one model simultaneously, even in cases where these models conflict. Just as the different men in the Bible study compete for the conversational floor, the 'voices' associated with the superaddressees jostle with each other to shape the authority structure of the Bible study.

MASCULINITY IN THIS CONTEXT

My foregrounding of masculinity in the analysis—that a moral yet attractive masculinity is an important expected outcome of the Bible study—comes from the framing of the event. In the local congregation out of which this Bible study is run, Bible studies are intentionally separated by gender. The act of going to the group alone is a kind of performative (Austin, 1970), announcing or invoking masculinity in its participants. The group was advertised in church as a great way to 'meet other guys' and build 'solid friendships' —a phrase which indexes stability, strength, and informality. The members refer to each other as 'my best dudes,' 'dudes' being strongly indexical in the United States of masculinity and homosociality (Kiesling, 2004) and 'best' implying that these men have the greatest authority to influence their performances of a moral evangelical masculinity. 'Man,' a discourse marker which functions very similarly to 'dude,' was by far the most frequently-occurring addressee form throughout the discourse, revealing the salience of masculinity as an interactional frame. As discussed in detail later, many of the analogies used in the meeting also draw on masculine-indexed themes, as does the Biblical text and exegesis which serve as the narrative spine for the gathering.

These young evangelical men are still being actively socialized into both what it means to be authentically evangelical (since not all grew up in evangelical environments) and what it means to be authentically masculine in a way which does not conflict with their religious identity. Many of the studies on gender performativity among groups of youth are sited in formal educational settings, where

membership is hierarchically situated with respect to other groups, a fact which affects the language use. This study is not located at the centers of institutional male power (i.e., the economic or political spheres) but rather a private and potentially much more formative domain. The Bible study is also not overtly educational in the sense of merely acquiring a set of information about the Bible. Rather, through the ongoing participation over the weeks that the Bible study met, the core members both socialize peripheral members into the proper way of being evangelical men and reinforce these behaviors in each other—a process referred to by the local congregation as 'discipleship.' Socializing is occurring in both senses of the word: in terms of the stated goal of making solid friendships and building a new social network and in terms of being socialized into a model of how 'moral manhood' can be performed. This overtly moralizing aspect of the Bible study is also absent from previous youth gender studies that have focused on non-institutional settings (Kiesling, 2001, 2004; Cameron, 1997), where the desire to appear moral or upstanding is not the subjects' purpose.

Hegemonic Masculinity: The "Larger American" Model

In the previous section, I noted that the different personae which Pete embodied (Kiesling, 2001) can all be seen as fitting within a more widely circulating American hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Kiesling, 2006). The term 'hegemony,' unlike its use in political science, does not just refer to a static structure which coerces or dominates. For Williams (1997), "hegemony does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (p. 112). Hegemonic masculinities seek to undermine or neutralize the resistances that crop up, as individuals naturally internalize a system whereby other ways of acting are rendered unviable or unthinkable. Connell (2005) describes hegemonic masculinity as the most socially valued model of masculinity in a hierarchy of masculinities, even if it is not the most common. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is crucially characterized by domination and marginalization. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore something that few men are able to achieve in interactions, although many may try. By combining this approach to studying gender with the concepts outlined in the previous section, I argue that a model of masculinity whose superaddressee represents a more hegemonic form of masculinity would have a gender schedule whose

resources also become more hegemonic. By using these resources, a man can accrue for himself the social capital that inheres in the hegemonic system.

Seeking to identify the linguistic resources most strongly indexical of hegemonic masculinity, several researchers have analyzed the language of men who may be considered more adept at performing the most valorized form of youth masculinity. Cameron (1997) finds that young fraternity men use a high degree of profane and sexually-charged words when in all-male settings, ostensibly to rebel or resist larger social norms which value acquiescence or politeness. She also claims that men's talk is competitive, with a high degree of interruption and use of competitive narrations as each participant tries to outdo the others in coming up with the 'best story.' These stories often involve the most serious violations of social norms. Men's speech is also heavily infused with gossip (i.e., the evaluation of non-present actors), specifically in regards to others' masculinity. McGuffey and Rich (1999) found middle schoolers' creation of hegemonic masculinity involved objectifying women and policing any behavior which was indexicalized as feminine. McCormack (2011) similarly identified hegemonic masculinity as being homophobic, misogynistic, and aggressive— traits which the sociolinguistic work of Cameron (1997) and Kiesling (2001, 2004, 2006) supports. Their work, however, has largely focused on troping the hegemonic perspective, not in analyzing the use of its resources in a dynamic interplay.

As Williams (1977) noted, hegemony is not static but is actively produced and maintained. In my analysis, the most hegemonic model is one I call *Larger American*. The resources on this model's gender schedule are associated with the superaddressee of the typical cool American young male. Examples of such resources include the hegemonic features outlined above: profanity, references to sexuality, competitive conversational behavior, and evaluating others' masculinity. The superaddressee of the model corresponds to the type of young men that often appears in American films, TV shows and music videos (i.e., rebellious, worldly, dominant, and overtly sexual). These media sources "disseminate discursive figures and personae" (Agha, 2005, p. 56) which get indexically linked to performable linguistic signs, resulting in the enregisterment of this hegemonically masculine way of speaking.

Non-Hegemonic Masculinities: The "Evangelical" and "Local Congregational" Models

The other models of masculinity being drawn upon at this evangelical Bible study group are non-hegemonic and in competition with the more hegemonic *Larger American* model. An evangelical man who swears, talks about heavy drinking, tries to outdo others, refers casually to sexuality, and gossips about absent members may successfully perform a more hegemonic masculinity in a mixed audience of young men. However, according to evangelical schedules for gender performance, his performance could not be judged 'godly' or befitting a 'real man.' His unwillingness or incompetence in performing the 'right' masculinity could potentially be censured by other co-present evangelicals. In my study, the participants do not actively or overtly police each other's performance nor try to suppress resources which come from non- or anti-hegemonic models (such as those created by *kogaryu* girls in Miller, 2004, or by Latina gang members in Mendoza-Denton, 2008). Rather, the subjects sometimes draw upon the set of resources which index this more hegemonic masculinity and sometimes resist them. Bucholtz (1999) similarly found that nerd girls use resources originating in the local nerd community (e.g., use of punning and wordplay), as well as uncontestedly use resources which index the local copy of hegemonic youth femininity (e.g., vowel fronting and the use of color terms). Even though the Bible study participants do not police each other, a participant could be policed by his own conscience—an internal evangelical superaddressee. As West and Zimmerman (1991) point out, the behavior wherein an individual chooses his words is no less under surveillance than public oral performances.

Is *Evangelical* masculinity as a model less hegemonic? Influential contemporary evangelicals like Driscoll (2001a, 2001b), Eldredge (2001), Coughlin (2005), and Piper and Grudem (2006) have claimed that evangelical men have grown overly soft, diverging too far from the more hegemonic ideal of a strong, athletic, martial masculinity which would appeal more to young men in American society. Sermons in the evangelical congregation which sponsors this Bible study at least partially draw on these more hegemonic gender schedules, rooted in both the Bible and in popular culture in order to make the church attractive to other young men.

Yet these same local and national voices also emphasize that Evangelical masculinity should differ from the models of young male

masculinity presented in more widely-circulating secular media. For example, the resources on the *Larger American* gender schedule associated with the hegemonic superaddressee of 'frat guy'—profanity, competitive narration, and gossip (Cameron, 1997) or heavy drinking and casual sex (Kiesling, 2001)—are all problematic for performing masculinity in an explicitly evangelical setting. *Evangelical* masculinity contests the *Larger American* model of masculinity by discouraging competition, self-aggrandizement, and overt sexuality, for example. As participants are exposed to all-male evangelical interactional events such as the Bible study, they learn that those resources do not earn a valued masculinity for their users but rather leave them potentially exposed to a Biblical 'rebuke' (as described in 2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 2:15).

The potential for conflict between these two models is both further complicated and, also to some degree resolved, in the presence of a third relevant model which is affiliated with the local congregation sponsoring the Bible study. Wortham (2006) observed that most local models either instantiate, re-formulate, or contest global models. Just as the *Evangelical* model re-formulates and contests the semiotic resources of the hegemonic *Larger American* model, the *Local Congregational* model reformulates and contests *Evangelical* masculinity. Donovan (1998) describes the most widely circulating Evangelical masculinity and notes that it is structured around the middle-aged white suburban man. The most extreme, yet widely-circulating, caricature of the *Evangelical* model of masculinity is the character Ned Flanders from the popular TV show *The Simpsons* (Dalton, Mazur, & Siems, 2000). In contrast, the men of the Bible study examined in this paper would evaluate suburban evangelical bookstores, mega-churches, and 'family-friendly' radio stations as quite lame. The jokes they would make both in the church and in informal hang-out time rejected these sites, where the masculine ideologies described by Donovan (1998) are propagated.

The local norms of dress, taste in music, and literature displayed both privately and at church hewed more to the modern 'hipster' (see Lanham, 2003, for a pop-culture depiction of a prototypical 'hipster'). It must be noted however, that calling this third model 'local' does not imply that the other two models are not also local. This is why Blommaert (2010) uses the term 'translocalization' instead of 'globalization' (p. 79); global forms are made meaningful in local contexts. In Bucholtz' (1999) study, the 'popular girl' model of femininity may

have been a globally-originated high school femininity but it was nonetheless incarnated as a local set of semiotic resources at Bay City High School. Both the *Larger American* and *Evangelical* model are incarnated by young men in the Southern university town where the congregation is located, alongside the *Local Congregational* model.

PARTICIPANTS, EVENT, AND DATA COLLECTION

The Bible study analyzed here met in a college rental house, with eight participants (besides the author) aged 19–25 and an average age of 22. The group met weekly and had been meeting in the same location with roughly the same membership for six months by the point my observations were made. Six participants (Andrew, Nick, Fred, James, Mark, and Paul) knew each other very well, and spent large amounts of time outside the group with each other. These six were core members, not only of the Bible study but also in the congregation out of which the Bible study operated. The other members (Evan, Kevin, and I) were more peripheral members. The circular, egalitarian layout in which the participants were seated (i.e., on couches and on the floor in a living room of a home), brought everyone into full view of the others. The seating arrangement facilitated the negotiated construction of meaning with no clear authority or spatially demarcated leader.

My presence inherently changed the proceedings of the group, so I must be reflexive about my role as a quasi-'participant-observer' (Modan, 2007). Before acting as a researcher, I knew all of the participants from settings outside the Bible Study. Andrew, who was a classmate of mine, invited me first to the local congregation out of which this Bible study operated and, after I had attended the congregation for five weeks, he then invited me to the Bible study. I was encouraged, as a Christian myself, not only to take part in the interaction but to freely contribute to the discussion. A few months prior to the recorded interactions used in this study, I had participated in a weekend camping trip with many of the members of this group, so I was well known to the group as a friendly acquaintance. The transcribed data[1] presented here were recorded on my sixth and seventh visits to the group; the participants were used to my presence, which was not perceived of as an anomaly. I observed the group several more times after the instances recorded in this study.[2] Although not a regular member, I might be seen as a 'marginal member' of this community but still apprenticed enough into the ways this group functioned to be seen as a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Any community of practice that does not have a fixed membership would have to

contend with members who move in and out of active status, and several attendees of this group came with roughly the same frequency that I did to 'try out' the group.

Being a participant-observer in a community, as Modan (2007) notes, has advantages and disadvantages. If I had refrained from contributing in the discussion, this would have raised suspicions as participation in discussion is encouraged. However, by being a contributor to the discussion, I altered the data by introducing 'ways of speaking' into the transcript that would otherwise have been absent. I am confident that I did not violate any norms of this community, as I had observed them in the four weeks prior to my recording, and the general pattern of discourse would have been quite similar had I not been present.

The format of the Bible study was roughly the same for each of the meetings that I attended. The discourse could be broken up into eleven stages, each marked by a transition point: 1) arrival and greeting, 2) informal discussion in the form of collaborative narration, 3) opening pronouncement, 4) opening prayer, 5) summary of past week's discussion and background on current week's text, 6) communal reading of the text, 7) collective exegesis of the text, 8) prayer requests, 9) intercessory prayer, 10) wrap-up, and 11) leave-taking.

Andrew (A) was the Bible study host, whose job was to start and end the group on time. Although he prepared the text beforehand and was ready as a resource, Andrew was somewhat hesitant to overtly shape or guide the discussions. He was content to let conversation flow and often waited until there was a long, awkward pause before contributing his thoughts or transitioning to a new topic. Nick (N) was a slightly older graduate student, who had finished seminary. James (J) had also finished university. Kevin[3] (K), who belonged to a different congregation than the other participants, came in late during the first meeting I recorded. He was a peripheral member of the community and attended the Bible study only a few times. The author, whose contributions are labelled (T), was also a peripheral member of the community, attending the study twelve total times over the course of several months. Andrew, Nick, James, Kevin, and the author were the main contributors to the discussion. Paul (P) and Mark (M) also chimed in occasionally, although Mark was especially interactive in stage #2 (see above) and volunteered to do the opening prayer. Fred (F) and Evan (E) were current university students. Although Fred was more connected to the network, his contributions

were less frequent and often consisted of humor based on wordplay or references to cultural artifacts associated with intellectualism. Evan (E) never made a vocal contribution until prayer requests were solicited in stage #8, perhaps because he was the youngest member and also a peripheral member. His attentive body language and eye gaze showed that he was following the conversation, and subsequent conversations with the author showed that Evan was familiar with the theological content of the discussion and capable of contributing thoughtful responses.

Bourdieu (1991) defines habitus as unconscious dispositions which constrain action. In my observations of this Bible study and experiences with other instantiations of men's Bible studies in other communities, I can roughly identify the overarching cultural dispositions which constrain language behavior in the Bible study genre (see Table 1). It is striking that the language practices which are disallowed by the habitus are similar to those features which typify the speech of hegemonic masculinity in previous sociolinguistic work (Cameron, 1997; Kiesling, 2006).

Cultural Dispositions	Observed Local Innovations	Disallowed Practices
• Avoidance of overt disagreement • Enforcement of sound doctrine by carefully reformulating others' non-orthodox stances • Use of strong brotherhood metaphor (correlates with military and athletic metaphors) • Use of animate, authorized voices • Affirmation of others' contributions	• Popular culture references • Humor springing from the Biblical text • Extensive hedging	• Direct references to sexual actions and functions • Profanity • Gossip • Interruptions • Direct challenges • Humor at others' expense

Table 1. Linguistic habitus of the men's Bible study genre

ANALYSIS

In this section, I describe six language behaviors that illustrate the conflicts and areas of overlap between the *Larger American*, *Evangelical*, and *Local Congregational* models of masculinity. In the kinds of leadership that Andrew deploys and in the choices of imagery and humor that the participants use, these young men draw from

both the *Larger American* and *Evangelical* models of masculinity, identifying interactionally more with the superaddressee of 'typical evangelical' at some points and more with the superaddressee of 'typical American college guy' at others. The young men also appear to draw from the third *Local Congregational* model, especially in their use of word play, choice of vocabulary, and references to pop culture.

Servant-Leading

In negotiating transitions, Andrew draws upon the *Evangelical* model of masculinity, which values servant-leadership. His role as leader authorizes him to push the discussion forward, yet his desire to appear humble and not to dominate the discussion (frowned upon in the *Evangelical* model of masculinity) constrains his ability to move the group from informal small talk to more serious exegesis of the Bible text. In the first recorded meeting, Andrew draws the conversation as well as visual gaze to his moleskine journal, which contains the notes used to organize the Bible study.

```
(1)  A: the last day of my moleskine=
     N: =big day::
     A: big day::
     M: mmmmhmmmm
     A: ye[ah
     N:   [boy
     T: I always like start writing smaller and smaller
        whenever it's
     ((laughter))
     N: when did you start that one?
     A: ummm::
        it was before the summer
     (3.0)
     N: well man::
     A: it's got some
        man
        I started it maybe like 8 months ago
        I go through phases where
        I write
     (5.0)((pause signaling opportunity to make key transition))
     A: cool um::
        yeah ((said abruptly))
        ...
        we're gonna see if we can finish up
        picking up where we left off
```

Andrew's transition from solidarity building to the text-oriented portion of the meeting is hedged by 'um' and several pauses. He draws discursive attention to his moleskine journal, the object which most clearly indexes the exegesis portion for the participants. By uttering the word 'cool,' Andrew pronounces a final verdict on the solidarity building portion, signaling that the time to move to the next discourse stage has arrived. In fact, at this point in the following week's study, Andrew tried but failed to transition from the informal solidarity building stage to the more formal Bible study stage. After making the official pronouncement of the start of Bible study, the conversation twice more drifted back into solidarity-building type stories. Only on Andrew's third attempt was the group able to successfully move on to an opening prayer, marking the 'real' beginning of Bible study. If Andrew were to have interrupted and insisted on someone praying, such overtly dominant behavior might be sanctioned in the *Larger American* model of masculinity. However, this behavior would contradict the Evangelical one by being insufficiently humble, so Andrew patiently tolerates his failed attempts to transition to the next stage. In this case the 'servant-leader' persona, a common trope in Evangelical masculinity, is the most appropriate for Andrew to adopt as a group leader. If leading discussion in a different setting, such as class, Andrew might be free to move more forcefully or be more direct in leadership, drawing on the more dominant *Larger American* model of masculine leadership.

The following excerpt provides further evidence that Andrew is constrained as a leader from being too overt or forceful. In this excerpt, I have just finished telling a story about how I had caught pelmeni, a kind of Russian dumpling, on fire by leaving it on the stove too long.

```
(2)  T: I can never eat pelmeni again ((ominously voiced))
     ({laughter})
     A: its nasty anyways
     T: you think so? ((surprised/challenging))
     A: sometimes:: ((very slow and drawn out))
     T: if you deep fry each one individually:: ((raised
        intonation at end))
     A: yeah ((said with agreement intonation))
     T: and put barbecue sauce
        it's like South Carolina pelmeni
     A: deep fried with barbecue ((laughing while speaking))
```

Andrew initially gives a strongly-worded negative evaluation of *pelmeni* in his first turn, one which attempts to hospitably offer support

to the author. When contradicted, Andrew then downgrades the force of his stance by saying 'sometimes' and, by finally saying 'yeah' to my elaboration of a way to cook pelmeni, ends up completely mitigating his initial stance. As the group leader, Andrew is enjoined to make everyone feel welcome. Overt disagreements such as this one over pelmeni are a feature of *Larger American* masculinity but not Evangelical masculinity, which values peacemaking and hospitality. By quickly backing away from his negative opinion when it becomes clear that this puts him in overt disagreement with me, Andrew avoids a potential conflict and saves face for one of his Bible study participants.

Military and Athletic Imagery

Throughout the discussion, military and athletic vocabulary is used by the Bible study participants. This deftly allows for both identification with the more hegemonic *Larger American* model, in that military and sports are indexicalized as masculine and valorized by most young American men, and with the *Evangelical* model, as the Bible passage under discussion during both recorded meetings makes overt military analogies. As noted above, there is a long current within evangelicalism of drawing on the athletic and military imagery found in the Bible to re-masculinize young evangelical men. Metaphors of men as 'an army of God' on a special 'mission' to 'defend' or 'fight for' what is right are common in the Bible as well as in evangelical discourse (Donovan, 1998). The following section of the discussion was especially rich in this imagery. In this excerpt, the men are discussing 1 Peter 1:13, and how it is worded in the English Standard Version (ESV) used by Andrew.

```
(3) A: mine says 'preparing your minds for action'
       and 'be sober minded'
    T: yeah mine says 'self-control'=
    A: =you know it sounds a bit stronger
       in the ESV
       being sober minded::
       self-control still has a lot to do with the mind though
    T: it sounds like that could be::
       picturing in our modern times::
       you know special ops guys
       'here's your mission' you know like::
       you aren't gonna be getting drunk before they're sent
       out=
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M: =right!
T: you know like::
     it's kind of like the day of action
     like a pep talk you know
J: reminds me of Hebrews twelve like::
     um
     run the race of perseverance
     preparing for battle
     it's like discipline
     I just see like overall discipline
     in the lifestyle you choose for yourself
     preparing for whatever it is they have for you
M: yeah!
N: but don't let your mind be entrenched
```

Even though martial language and aggression are not valued in the more intellectual or 'hipster'-based forms of masculinity which the *Local Cengregation* model draws on, allusion to military imagery is a rare realm of substantial overlay between the hegemonic *Larger American* and *Evangelical* models. Mark eagerly aligns with these expressions of more hegemonically-originating *Larger American* masculinity, as this is a model he seems more proficient at drawing from. Yet all the members negatively evaluate use of alcohol in this excerpt, thus aligning with the *Evangelical* model rather than the hegemonic *Larger American* one.

Self-Deprecating Humor

Another resource associated with the *Evangelical* model of masculinity, and not with the *Larger American* model, is self-deprecation. If using a more hegemonic model, a participant would derive authority from appearing more competent, stronger, or more knowledgeable than other conversational participants. Accordingly, other-directed humor would be employed to marginalize other participants or erode their claims to competence (Cameron, 1997). Humorous turns are frequent in the Bible study, not only in the solidarity-building initial stages but even throughout the more serious text-oriented ones. The men in this Bible study, however, categorically avoid humor at the expense of others, conforming to evangelical values of politeness and humility. In a cascade of five humorous stories used to build solidarity before the official beginning of the first recorded meeting, the butt of each story's humor is the narrator, who each time positions himself as hapless and at fault (for a summary of these stories, see Table 2).

Position in Story Sequence	Narrator	Summary
1	Andrew	Made Turkish coffee which spilled over into the burner and stunk up his house for a day
2	Nick	Left a pot on the stove, which made it glow red hot, created a horrible smell, and ruined the pot
3	Thor	Left pelmeni in oil on the stove for too long, igniting the food and the kitchen
4	Mark	Was cheated by the American Automobile Association, and was helpless to redress his problems
5	Nick	Drank nasty kombucha tea, which was offered by Mark to Nick the last time Nick was sick. *(In this story, Nick is careful never to mention Mark's role in offering the tea; the humor relies only on his own act of knowingly drinking it)*

Table 2. Series of self-deprecating stories involving humor at narrator's expense

Many of these solidarity-building stories draw on the *Larger American* trope of 'guys who are dangerous in the kitchen.' These stories allow the men to appear hapless and humble, which is valued in the *Evangelical* model, yet they also connect to the more widely circulating American cultural model of masculinity by revealing their culinary ineptitude. Even in the act of self-deprecation, which seems to draw on Evangelical masculinity and its prescriptions for humility, the interlocutors end up 'competing' to come up with the most humorous self-deprecating story. In this way, they draw on both the hegemonic resource of competitive discourse as well as the evangelical preference for self-deprecation, with the result that they keep a foot in both worlds. The self-deprecation can be interpreted as a generous gift to the group of solidarity-building humor.

Humor Rooted in Sexuality and Wordplay

As stated above, these participants used military and athletic imagery as a resource associated with both *Larger American* and *Evangelical* models of masculinity. In contrast, humor based on sexual imagery is a highly useful resource for performing hegemonic masculinity yet has potential to seriously violate expectations for evangelical men. The sexual humor that gets used in the group is explicitly grounded in the Bible, allowing the participants to deploy it in a way which fits within the constraints of *Evangelical* masculinity. In the following excerpt from the first meeting, they discuss how the phrase "prepare yourself for battle" is a loose translation of the original Greek, which reads closer to "gird your loins."

```
(4)  T: like another version of girding your loins
     A: hiking up your trousers
     N: girding your mind
        your mind boy is ready
     M: I knew it:: ((laughing hard))
        that's great!
     A: yeah mine's actually got
        maybe this is why you just said it::
        mine's got
        'in the Greek preparing your mind for action is girding
        your loins'
```

Nick takes the bait offered by the image of 'girding your loins' and extends it to an overt reference to male sexual organs. Mark aligns emphatically, as he usually does whenever anyone overtly draws on the more familiar hegemonic model. However, Andrew is careful in the last turn to point out to all that this sexual humor is anchored in the Bible text itself and is thus sanctioned within *Evangelical* masculinity. Immediately after this exchange, James pronounces a statement which effectively summarizes and concludes this segment of the discourse, saying: "It seems like the expression of obedience is resisting the passions of that world." This sage pronouncement seems to reframe the sexual humor just prior in a theological way while perhaps censuring the allusions to 'the passions of that world.'

The next week, a similar use of sexualized humor occurred. One of the Hebrew words for God, 'El Shaddai,' was claimed to have the possible meaning of 'many-breasted one.' This image was relevant to the text at hand, which dealt with God's provision and nurturing. This claim introduced a series of puns playing on the theme of 'breast' which ran throughout the text exegesis stage.

```
(5)  A: I was weaned on that

(6)  F: we have to milk this for all its worth

(7)  J: anything we need to keep abreast of?

(8)  F: that was a titillating discussion
```

This clever wordplay introduces the *Local Congregational* model of masculinity. In this model, authority derives from displaying academic vocabulary and intelligent wordplay. These breast jokes use sexual imagery, are rooted in the Bible, and are dressed in clever intellectual wordplay. The participants are thus able to draw from all three relevant models of masculinity and thereby identify with all three associated superaddressees.

Vocabulary

Throughout the discourse, the participants use clever, intellectual vocabulary and avoid regional Southern language features, as seen in the following excerpts.

```
(9)   A: a bi... a big goal of this passage is to basically
         um::
         incentivize holiness
         umm::
         it's kind of an economics word I guess::

(10) P: I love how adamant you are about it!

(11) K: And hence, we wind up in the sad predicament
         where the American church is today.
```

Mark was the only participant who had not gone to the university and was the only one working a blue-collar job. His use of a more rural Southern variety (salient in vowels, epenthesis, cluster reduction, non-standard syntax) and his choice not to deploy the academic register of English used by the other participants can be seen in the following utterances.

```
(12) M: no jus' quit workin'
         think the starter busted=
         ='r sompthin' ((with strong epenthetic p))

(13) M: right next ta
         to that that one with the ol' arms broken off it

(14) M: get up at the butt crack o' dawn
         tryna solve this problem

(15) M: I'm jus' playin' man:: ((laughs hard while speaking))
         kombucha tea will clean it right out
         it ain't gonna close your esophagus
```

Although the word esophagus is intellectual register, the underlined forms in these excerpts index a working-class toughness, aligning Mark with the more hegemonic *Larger American* model. Toughness is cited as an ideal characteristic of evangelical men as well (Donovan, 1998), enabling Mark to draw on two models at once. The impression of toughness is reinforced by the frequent use of the discourse marker 'man' during his stories. Yet, by using these linguistic forms, Mark is not authentically performing the *Local Congregational* model, which prescribes cosmopolitanness and intellectualism. However, Mark does introduce one topic, herbal teas, which allows him to align with the

Local Congregational model in terms of topic even if his accent and register draw on the *Larger American* model.

Mark, perhaps aware of this tension, has a unique breakthrough into performance in the following excerpt.

```
(16) A: deep fried with barbecue
     M: ((laughter))
        le's put some of that ((in caricatured Inland southern
        accent))
        'squite sauce on thar'
        be jus' faahn:: ((drawled))
```

By animating the voice of a strongly rural Southern bumpkin in an obviously caricatured way, Mark is able to create distance between himself and the more hegemonic model of rural, working-class Southern men. This push against that model may have the effect of pulling him closer to the opposing *Local Congregational* model of urban intellectuals. Mark is never sanctioned for bringing in novel forms; rather, room is made for his Southern—and working-class—indexical forms within the emergent model of masculinity for the Bible study. This illustrates how these actors have power, through their performativity, to shape or create the set of features that can index masculinity in this particular environment.

Animation of Masculine-Indexicalized Pop Culture Sources

Just as the classroom students in Wortham (2006) were asked to 'animate' (in the Goffmanian sense) the voices of classical texts such as Plato or Aristotle when making comments on their contemporary situations, Bible study participants animate voices from within the Bible in order to disagree with participants. Two points are worth noting here. First, since these utterances are animated through the Bible's voice, to disagree with their claim is rendered untenable. Such an act would put the potential disagreer at odds not just with the participant but also the Bible itself. The only way around this trap is to counter with another reference from the Bible. Second, the person making the claim 'absorbs' authority from the quote itself. As Nick and James use their knowledge of other passages of Scripture, their own voices become more authoritative because they are revealed as 'knowers of the Word.'

More surprising is the use of secular pop culture sources to interpret the content of the supposedly more authoritative source, the Bible. One extended turn illustrating this practice comes from my own use

of a *Star Wars* reference to explain the idea of 'the gospel as treasure.' Rather than being sanctioned through awkward silence or a topic shift as an inappropriate parallel, Andrew, Paul, and Mark overtly display their delight at the use of that analogy.

```
(17) A: to add onto that like a legacy that's behind us as well
        and the prophets
        and::
     (3.0)
     T: like so many people died to bring::
        here::
        you know like in those old Star Wars movies [they're like
     M:                                              [go on
     T: 'ten thousand Bothan spies= ((quoting Star Wars))
        =died to bring us this mess[age'
     M:                            [Yes:::!
        ((laughs))
     A: yeah!
     T: you know it's kind of [like::
     P:                       [I love that you [just referenced that
     M:                                        [that's so w(? ?)
     T: and so like::
        it was just like::
     M: not the spies! ((performing sorrow))
     T: it came like so much::
        there's so much behind this
        just to get this into our hands
```

The parallel between the masculine Old Testament prophet-martyrs and Bothan spies martyred to get the Death Star's plans could have been censured as inappropriate; the analogy certainly fails on many counts. The participants appreciation of this analogy is perhaps due partly to its homage to *Larger American* masculinity, wherein Star Wars has been indexicalized as a 'guy movie.' The analogy also relies on servant-leadership and self-sacrifice, central topics of *Evangelical* masculinity, and touches on intellectualism via nerdiness, which is on the gender schedule for *Local Congregational* masculinity. The *Star Wars* analogy therefore manages to again draw from all three models of masculinity simultaneously. These sorts of masculine-indexicalized pop culture comparisons were common and, in my experience, made an otherwise difficult text easier to relate to.

DISCUSSION

In any given interaction, then, there are likely multiple models for gender performance, each containing competing schedules of resources which individuals can draw onto perform authority—a kind of brico-lage (Eckert, 1996). In this Bible study, the young evangelical men draw from two different widely-used targets for their performance of masculinity, each associated with a type of superaddressee. The more hegemonic *Larger American* model associated with the 'typical young American guy' certainly offers coolness, authority, and a famil-iar target for masculinity. Yet due to their religious faith, these men may not identify with the superaddressee of the prototypical American young man, whom they sometimes refer to in discourse as 'lost' (i.e., having not yet found God). Evangelical ideology adjures members to feel a greater allegiance to evangelicals from other cultures than to non-evangelicals who share their nationality as Americans. Despite the fact that the masculine resources associated with the Evangelical model are less valorized in American culture as a whole, 'evangelical' is certainly a more salient identity to these subjects, especially in this setting. Identifying with the body of prototypical evangelicals, which has the 'Body of Christ' acting as a superaddressee, forms a large part of how they conceive of themselves. Based on the way that they talk about belonging to the community of all evangelicals in all places, they feel a weaker identification with the *Larger American* superaddressee than with the *Evangelical* one. Although the more hegemonic model seems to be invoked less often in the Bible study setting, presumably participants invoked it far more often in other contexts in the daily course of life.

At the same time, the local congregation which sponsors this Bible study consisted of well-educated 18–26 year olds, who were perhaps more liberal, educated, and cosmopolitan than the average evangelical church. The following turns exemplify instances where participants seem to draw specifically from their *Local Congregational* model of masculinity.

(18) J: just got back from <u>Hebrew class</u>

(19) N: I usually go to [name of distinguished scholarly
        library] <u>library</u>
    T: huh
    N: I was there for about three and a half hours today

(20) A: I made that <u>Turkish coffee</u> for myself

```
(21)  M: me and my herbal remedies=
      N: =I don't have a problem with herbal remedies
         but that kombucha tea is just wrong

(22)  A: the last day of my moleskine

(23)  N: I would love for [heaven] to look like Narnia
         but if it doesn't, that's cool::
```

Like Bucholtz's nerd girls (whose femininity was, in their own words, 'not normal'), this group uses very intellectual features and topics to stake out a local form of masculinity. This local model takes various resources (e.g., 'hipster' style; indie music; reading Jack Kerouac, Dostoevsky, Augustine, and C.S. Lewis; eating like 'foodies') and deploys them in a way that both partially overlaps with typical *Evangelical* masculinity and stands out against the mainstream American masculinity represented by the fraternity men Cameron (1997) observed. The prototype for the *Local Congregational* model would most appropriately be the core members of the men's Bible study quoted above. It may be easier to stake out a 'not normal' masculine space based on non-aggressive, hipster, or intellectual models of masculinity precisely *because* this local model overlaps in many ways with key features of *Evangelical* masculinity. Indeed many of the authors read by young evangelicals (e.g., Donald Miller, Shane Claiborne, Francis Chan) position Jesus as a type of 'hipster' figure, concerned with the urban poor, environmentalism, and social justice. *Local Congregational* masculinity is best analyzed as the gender equivalent of a 'new ethnicity:' a group "not founded on static and essentialistic [ethnic] categories, but rather emergent, hybrid, and local" (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 538). If a participant were to draw *solely* on resources from this 'new masculinity,' their masculinity would not be valued by either 'typical American young guy' or the 'typical evangelical man.'

The result is a system of three models, associated with three different superaddressees, competing as targets for gender performativity and overshadowing this Bible study. Participants learn the semiotic repertoires of these three models through repeated exposure to American mass media, evangelical media and conferences, and gatherings of the local congregation. The contexts (i.e., topic, audience, setting) where these repertoires get invoked shape participants' perception of the superaddressee associated with each model and the corresponding gender schedule for performing masculinity. Table 3 displays a summary of each of these models.

	Larger American	*Evangelical*	*Local Congregational*
Identification with Superaddressee	Weak	Strong	Strong for all. (Core members are the prototypical superaddressee)
Indexes	• Athletic and martial talk • Overt sexuality • Competitive narration • Social positioning vis-à-vis absent members • Toughness • Profanity • Alcohol references • Directness • Pop culture references • Interruption • 'Man' and 'dude' as address forms • Working class pronunciations and non-standard grammar	• Servant-leadership • Tough yet humble behavior • Meekness • Quotations from scripture • Animating voices of evangelical authors and pastors • Politeness and hedging • Refraining from profanity • Affirming others' statements	• Cosmopolitanism • 'Hipster' fashion • Being well-read • Knowledge of indie music • Connoisseurship of alcohol yet rejecting drunkenness • Academic register • Wordplay • 'Nerdy' pop culture references

Table 3. Summary of the three models of masculinity

CONCLUSIONS

At one point during the first recorded meeting, near the end of the Bible discussion and before the prayer requests are solicited, Kevin offers a summary statement:

```
(24) K: what does it mean to do this like a man?
        men often say, 'I make my holiness.'
        'I'll make my salvation.'
        but it is God who wills us
        and gives us the power
        and He does the work
        our role is to surrender to Him
```

This statement foregrounds the relevance of masculinity, of 'doing things like a man,' in this Bible study. The frame put forth is one of performativity—not doing this *as* a (pre-existing) man, but doing things *like* a (momentarily invoked) man. Kevin's comment also neatly encapsulates a conflict between *Larger American* and *Evangelical* models of masculinity. Emanating from the more hegemonic *Larger American* model of masculine authority is the image of men who take control of their own agency and pull themselves up by the bootstraps.

Evangelical men, in contrast, are supposed to be servants and surrender to God.

While the stated goal of this event is collective exegesis of a Biblical text, gendering is nevertheless performed. By calling the event a men's or guys' Bible study, participants cannot help but be aware of their own masculinity. The participants of this men's Bible study, as all American evangelical young men in general, are not just passively caught in the gravitational pull of competing and self-reinforcing models of masculinity; they can actively choose when and whether to orient toward these models as the topic, setting, and audience leads them. When the 'gender schedules' for two models are in conflict, or when the superaddressees would demand conflicting behavior, these young men show amazing adeptness in performing language where the two models overlap (e.g., grounding sexual humor in the Biblical text). They can also resolve the conflict by collaboratively creating a third path—the *Local Congregational* model of masculinity—which allows them to play against both of the more widely-circulating models.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

[1.] In all transcripts, I adhere to the Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) standard of transcription. The only departure is that text which I want to emphasize for analytic purposes is <u>underlined</u>.

[2.] The occasion for recording the interaction arose from a course assignment, where I was asked to record and transcribe naturally-occurring multi-party conversation. Although at the time I had no idea that I would analyze this data, and collected it as a transcription exercise, several key contributions of humor, and introductions of a new theme originated from me, the author.

[3.] James and Kevin were the only African-American participants. All others identified as white.

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