**'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together':
Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life**

Jeffrey A. Hall, Ph.D.
University of Kansas
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication Studies
Bailey Hall
1440 Jayhawk Boulevard, Rm 102
Lawrence, KS 66045-7574
785-864-1082
hallj@ku.edu

Abstract:
The impact on fraternity membership on young men's friendships is explored through in-depth interviews of 23 former fraternity members. Men's friendships are explored in relation to the dyadic and structural components of fraternity membership. Former members negotiate their fraternity identity after graduation both socially and individually. Men offer accounts of how fraternity life impacted their adult friendships, their masculine identity, their consumption of alcohol, and their adult lives. Two processes, fraternal maintenance and fraternal divorce, are used to structure the renegotiation of fraternity identity in men's post-graduate lives.

Hall, J. A. (Nov. 2006). *'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together': Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference in San Antonio, TX.

1

'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together':

Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.

Jeffrey A. Hall, Ph.D.

University of Kansas

Assistant Professor

Department of Communication Studies

Bailey Hall

1440 Jayhawk Boulevard, Rm 102

Lawrence, KS 66045-7574

785-864-1082

hallj@ku.edu

Hall, J. A. (Nov. 2006). *'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together': Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference in San Antonio, TX.

2

Abstract

The impact on fraternity membership on young men's friendships is explored through in-depth interviews of 23 former fraternity members. Men's friendships are explored in relation to the dyadic and structural components of fraternity membership. Former members negotiate their fraternity identity after graduation both socially and individually. Men offer accounts of how fraternity life impacted their adult friendships, their masculine identity, their consumption of alcohol, and their adult lives. Two processes, fraternal maintenance and fraternal divorce, are used to structure the renegotiation of fraternity identity in men's post-graduate lives.

Keywords: fraternities, men's friendship, organizational identity

'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together':

Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.

"You just realize the importance of friends more after college. During school even if a close

friend wasn't around, you had a bunch of other people – from close friends to acquaintances –

around. . . . Maybe you don't appreciate the importance of good friends, whereas afterwards you

realize who you can rely on or count on. There is obviously not an abundance of people always

there for you."

When a young man joins a fraternity, he gains a dormitory, is given an identity, and becomes

one of a 40 to 200 man organization (Kiesling, 1997; Smith, 1964; Sweet, 1999). The fraternity

is a home and a social club, an identity and an institution, a place where friendships are born and

masculinity is performed (Anderson, 2008; Kiesling, 1997). Most men do not join for

friendship's sake, yet fraternity-bound friendships shape members' college experience in and out

of the fraternity. Through these relationships, college, and what was shared there, continues to

influence men after graduation. For members of fraternities, college is not only recalled though

friendship, but fraternity identity is also reconstituted (Allan, 1998b). There is considerable

variation between fraternities and between university Greek communities, thereby men's

experiences are equally variable (Anderson, 2008; Boswell & Spade, 1996/2003; Humphrey &

Kahn, 2000; Kiesling, 1997). For members who want to maintain connections with their

alumnus, university and national organizations allow them to do so. If they choose, these

connections enable men to keep in contact with their fraternity for their entire life. Alternatively,

some former members are disconnected with their past fraternity membership. Friendship is the

primary means by which the fraternity experience is brought into the present. Through

friendship, fraternity identity is reinforced, renegotiated, and remembered.

The impact of fraternity life on active members has been documented (i.e., Anderson, 2008; Lyman, 1987/2003; Rhoads, 1995; Smith, 1967; Sweet, 1999), and many of those influences are negative (Boswell & Spade, 1996/2003; Kuh, Pascarella, & Wechsler, 1996; Yeung & Stombler, 2000). Fraternity membership impacts men's postgraduate lives in many ways. As Allan (1998b) argues, the maintenance of friendships plays a crucial role in the confirmation of identity, particularly in the face of economic, geographic, and personal change. Through structured interviews with fraternity members who are between three and seven years after graduation, this investigation explores how the renegotiation of fraternity and gender identity is influenced by men's friendships. This manuscript attempts to offer insight into how men negotiate their fraternity membership and have come to understand its role in their lives after college. As Nardi (2003) suggests, a gendered identity is partly defined through friendship, and friendships serve as an extension of gender identity. By rooting friendship in the context and history of the fraternity, this project seeks to document the impact of fraternity connections on men's adult life.

Men's Friendships

Although task-orientation and instrumentality are the most consistent features of male-male friendships, this portrayal is misleading because it ignores evidence that men's friendships vary considerably (Nardi, 2003; Walker, 1994; 1994/2003; Wellman, 1992). Research that reinforces this portrayal typically compares men to women, rather than investigating within-sex variation (Crawford & Kaufman, 2006). Looking at friendship strictly through the perspective of sex difference ignores the possibility of multiple masculinities and femininities (Connell, 2002; Peterson, 2003; Swain, 2006), and ignores evidence that men and women value and experience intimacy in similar ways (Orosan & Schilling, 1992; Walker, 1994). Research that investigates

Hall, J. A. (Nov. 2006). *'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together': Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference in San Antonio, TX.

5

within-sex variation can explore how men's concept of friendship influences their behavior and explore how gender is performed within friendships (Nardi, 2003).

Whether in or out of the fraternity, a friendship "mediates between the individual as a person and the individual as the occupier of a set of varied role positions" (Allan & Adams, 1998, p. 183). That is, friendship helps to answer questions such as, who was I?, who am I now?, and who will I become? The original social milieu wherein a friendship formed continues to answer questions of self-identity, even when that environment is abandoned (Allan, 1998a; Wellman, 1992). In that sense, friendships are recursively related to self-identity. We made friends because of where and who we once were, and we maintain them because of where and who we are now. By recalling personal history in place and time, friendship is a type of biography, which offers continuity in self-identity by grounding the present self in the past self (Allan, 1998a; Feld & Carter, 1998; Rawlins, 1994; 2009). Friendships not only influence self-identity, they also reflect the broader social institutions occupied in the past and in the present.

Whether a friendship is forged in a workplace, neighborhood, or school, institutional norms are reinforced within the relationship (Allan, 1998b; Messner, 2002; Swain, 2006). As long as a dyad is part of the community from which it arose, it "may influence the norms that guide friendships" (Feld & Carter, 1998, p. 140). This view of friendship is useful in understanding how friendships function within a fraternity. In as much as a fraternity member identifies with the fraternity, he gains an organizational identity that is structured by the norms of the fraternity. Friendships born in the fraternity are crucial for maintaining this organizational identity because each member of the dyad represents the organization (Smith, 1964). As organizations, fraternities are held together by the relationships created within their framework, and these relationships reinforce group norms and gendered practices of the organization

Hall, J. A. (Nov. 2006). *'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together': Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference in San Antonio, TX.

6

(DeSantis, 2007). Maintaining friendships from the fraternity after graduation links a man to his past sense of self. For a man who seeks personal change, his relationships must be changed as well. Documenting the role of fraternity friends after graduation will offer insight into the way men have come to understand their identity as fraternity members and, inasmuch as friendships have changed, how men have reconstituted the role of friendship to change that identity.

Friendships in the Fraternity

For most members, life in the fraternity is a shared experience. Men are forced to rely upon each other to accomplish tasks, to achieve group goals, to lead and manage the organization, and, to some degree, to take care of one another (Holtz, 1997). This interdependence is an exaggerated form of what Floyd (1997) has identified as one of the primary markers of male friendship. Similar to Goffman's (1961) concept of total institutions, fraternity membership heavily structures the daily lives of its members. If a fraternity only created friendships due to shared activities and living conditions, it would be no different than a well-programmed dormitory. What makes fraternities different is that they offer an identity to their members. Fraternities create strong boundaries between members and non-members, encourage members to associate with the organization, and expect the members to be a reflection of its preferred image (DeSantis, 2007; Sweet, 1999). The more the individual fraternity member associates with the fraternity and the more he disassociates himself from other organizations and groups, the more the individual's identity is bound to the fraternity (Holtz, 1997; Smith, 1967). The preservation of the fraternity is critically important for the individual members because their identity and the identity of many close friends—for some men their entire social network—is dependant upon the fraternity's existence (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991). This structure creates an environment where boundaries of identity are strictly enforced. Once a member has

been initiated in one fraternity, he cannot join another, even if he were to transfer to another

college. A man can only have one fraternity identity.

Against the assimilating forces of the organization, the individual can reconstruct a sense of

self (Goffman, 1961; Leflaive, 1996; Messner, 2002). The relationships forged within the

institution play a strong role in this process of identity renegotiation. The recognition that other

members of the institution fail to live up the ideal image of a fraternity member, and the

experience of solidarity with other members against that norm allows individuals to reposition

the self within the group (Levine & Moreland, 1994). In finding valued friendship within the

institutional boundaries, friendships become a mediator between the institution and the self

(Allan & Adams, 1998). As Swain (2006) points out in his discussion of masculinity in school

settings, the creation of a personalized masculinity is made possible by acceptance by a well-

established friendship network among similar friends. The existence of a clique of friends within

the broader fraternity structure allows for men to perform masculinities that may run counter to

the prototypical fraternity image (Swain, 2006). This enables the existence of resistant

individuals within a dominant structure, who are then allowed to perform personalized

masculinities (Leflaive, 1996; Peterson, 2003; Swain, 2006).

As organizations, fraternities vary considerably in their gender practices (Anderson, 2008).

On a single university campus, fraternities can be quite different. Attitudes toward women vary

between members of different fraternities (Humphrey & Kahn, 2000). Even within a chapter

house, members hold disparate gender practices (Kiesling, 1997). Sharing the same letters does

not necessarily mean sharing the same gender identity. Once a new member endures the 'rush'

period of assimilation and gaining membership, he is much more free to negotiate his role and

position within the organization (Kiesling, 1997; Levine & Moreland, 1994). In addition,

Hall, J. A. (Nov. 2006). *'We were just a group of guys who liked to have a good time together': Former fraternity members looking back on fraternity life.* Paper presented at the National Communication Association Conference in San Antonio, TX.

8

maturation within the fraternity changes each member's perspective of the fraternity and his role within it (Holtz, 1997; Kiesling, 1997; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994). However, there is little research on the influence of the fraternity once a member graduates. A man's experiences within the fraternity certainly play a strong role on his reflections on its value in his life. But personal changes, in employment, relationships, and geography may also play a crucial role in accounting for how men who were in fraternities come to regard that experience.

This manuscript will explore what role the maintenance of fraternity identity has on the lives of former members post-graduation. How do men understand their membership in fraternities, and how do they present that membership to others? To do so, it is important to explore the role of masculinity in the process of identity negotiation. Anderson (2008) demonstrates that even within institutions of hegemonic masculinity, there is the possibility of more tolerant and inclusive forms of masculinity. This study intends to document the long-term influences of one of the institutions of patriarchy to offer a more complex picture of the masculinity of college Greeks.

METHOD

Twenty-three men were interviewed for this project. Each had graduated between three and seven years before the time of the interview. This period of time allows for a range of enmeshment with the fraternity. Men could still be very involved – attending events and supporting their own chapter – and men could also be employed, settled, married, and/or geographically remote. Although my interviewees attended universities in California, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, responses tended to demonstrate greater similarity than difference in regard to the influences on friendship and masculine identity, and therefore were not compared by geographic regions. Although all were not secure in employment, interviewees

could be described as aspiring toward upper middle-class. All of my interviewees were white, which is consistent with the traditional Greek system (DeSantis, 2007).

The interview took approximately one hour, was audio-taped, and transcribed. The interviewees gave informed consent as per Institutional Review Board requirements. The interview questions focused on the interviewee's involvement with the fraternity, how he understands the role of friendship in the fraternity, and how the experience impacted him in college and as an adult. To illustrate these experiences, I asked for specific examples of the interviewee's experiences. Like Walker's (1994/2003) discussion of how married men and women understand friendship, this study will attempt to overlay gender and behavior. For example, when former members discussed the role of the institution, they often pointed to certain gender practices during member recruitment and messages on the importance of brotherhood.

RESULTS

There is no single, uniform way to categorize all of the experiences of interviewees. There are, however, three shared stages: 1) joining the fraternity, 2) experiences within the fraternity, and 3) post-college life. These three time periods reflect the format of the interview as well as the life-course of the typical fraternity member. The first two periods of time are well documented in research about active fraternity members (c.f., Anderson, 2008; Boeringer et al., 1991; Keisling, 1997; Rhoads, 1995; Smith, 1964; Sweet, 1999), and will be less thoroughly discussed in this manuscript. Focusing on the post-college years, this project will document how former members negotiate their fraternity friendships, identity, and social involvement in greater detail, using the concepts of fraternal divorce and maintenance as a framework.

Joining and Accepting Fraternity Identity

For some young men, the promise of fraternity membership held tremendous sway. Mark, a member of a fraternity at an elite private college, mentioned that the physical reminders of fraternity presence on campus strongly compelled him to join: I wasn't going to join, "and then rush started happening and I saw all these guys having pins on and starting to carry around the paddles, and, I felt . . . compelled: I had to join a house. I really felt like that was something I *had* to do." The sway of wearing Greek letters is a confusing appeal for many non-members; why would anyone want to be a member of a fraternity? For many men, a fraternity is a type of home. One man who had gone to college in California after growing up in the Eastern U.S., said, "There is always a sense of belonging. You always have a place to go." This sense of 'place-ness' grounds the college freshman within a larger college environment, and some interviewees even mentioned that the fraternity kept them from transferring to another college or dropping out of school. However, interviewees' most common rationale for joining was social: they expected that the fraternity would provide a hyperactive social life and with few institutional constraints. Ryan, three-years post graduation, said he joined a fraternity because, "it was really just to have the best party I could find in college." Another simply stated, "I was looking for a party club; I just wanted to have good times." Mike, a former member four-years post-graduation, suggested that most men who join fraternities "want something familiar, and the fraternity offers something that is familiar. It is a very familiar experience. It is male bonding. It is hanging out and drinking." Like Giddens' (1991) concept of ontological security, fraternity membership combats feelings of uncertainty brought about by a drastic change in context and daily practice that accompanies starting college. It offers an identity that is meaningful on the campus, a physical and social structure that frames daily life, a certainty and clarity of self, and a familiar social

environment. Because fraternities are also institutions of masculinity on college campuses, part of what motivates men to seek out a fraternity is gender insecurity.

Gender theorists suggest that gender is something neither achieved nor secure (Connell, 2002; Kimmel, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Swain, 2006). Fraternity membership does not secure a man's masculinity because it makes it possible to achieve 'manhood.' Instead, the fraternity offers young men 'masculinity' in a form that best coincides with the coarse, traditional, and popular conception of masculinity. This masculinity is widely known and is amply represented in popular culture. The recruitment process, or 'rush', sells a potential recruit a version of masculinity that the potential member most clearly articulates. Jim, a member of a mid-level fraternity known for athletic competitiveness, suggested that every man who joins a fraternity does so because of some type of insecurity: "It is part of what draws guys to a fraternity, there is some sort of insecurity that they feel. Then, [active members] tailor their pitch to what you want to hear, like salesmen." The fraternity promises masculinity men feel is lacking in their lives, such as an ability to pick up women, to party, to compete athletically with other men – all of which were given by my interviewees as rationale for joining. During the pledge period, the power of identity formation through granting membership becomes most acute. Membership, and therefore gender security, is within reach, but is conditional on the performance of masculinity during the pledge period. Evan, a former member from an elite fraternity in the southern US recounts, "Why would you want to go through hell, which is what pledging is, if you aren't going to be part of something special. Automatically, we were special. If we told ourselves we were special, we were special." The achievement of membership represents an achievement of fraternal identity in a literal sense, and an achievement of a gender identity. By being accepted into the fraternity, you become one of the selected, the special men.

After the initial period of rushing, pledging, and getting initiated into the fraternity, each man

can choose to what degree he invests in the fraternity. Levine and Moreland (1994) identify this

process of disengagement after obtaining membership in an organization as *adjourning*. By

choosing to participate in activities or not, to live in the physical house or not, and by deciding to

stay in the fraternity or not, each member negotiates the centrality of the fraternity for his college

life – a negotiation also undertaken in post-college life. Men who adjourn from their fraternity

may either socially disengage or may emotionally distance themselves. This gradual change from

acceptance, to adjournment, to exit is often accompanied by frustrating realizations of the

experience of group membership (Levine & Moreland, 1994). For example, many of the

promises of rush cannot be fulfilled and the glories of fraternity identity are belied by the

frustrating realities of membership. As Adam, a member in a large Midwest fraternity,

exclaimed, "Living in the house was a total pain in the ass. Most of the guys were slobs, and

expected somebody else to clean up after their mess. And I got tired of all of the political bullshit

of chapter [meetings]." As a consequence of beginning to see the costs of being in a fraternity,

each member is forced to renegotiate his participation in fraternity life and the centrality of his

fraternity identity. Friendships developed within the fraternity both constrain and facilitate this

renegotiation (Allan, 1998b). In as much as a friendship reinforces the larger practices of the

fraternity, each man is likely to find greater value in the fraternity identity.

Friendship and Brotherhood

Although other researchers have suggested that fraternity members hold the concept of

brotherhood as an ideal (e.g., Lyman, 1987/2003; Sweet, 1999), my interviewees rejected this

party line. As Bill, a former member of a small strongly academic fraternity in California

explained: "Fraternities have their histories, their credos, and their charters, and their sort of

proclamations about brotherhood, friendships, things like that. They got lip-service, but whatever. I think it is just a personal thing about how you want to treat membership." Rather than seeing fraternity membership as the catalyst for automatic brotherhood, interviewees favor particularistic friendships. That is, brotherhood was experienced at the dyadic level, not at the organizational level. In Lyman's (1987/2003) investigation into fraternities, active members idealize brotherhood as a unique kind of intimacy upon which genuine friendship could be built. Men who are looking back on fraternity membership, rather than currently experiencing it, tended to reverse Lyman's relationship between brotherhood and friendship. Aaron, a former member of a fraternity in a liberal arts college, said, "In the formal part of the fraternity, I felt that there was an idealized message of brotherhood, and what it means to be bound together in this group. But as far as the informal message, I didn't feel that brotherhood was anything any different than just a close group of friends." Rather than intimacy and friendship built on an idealized brotherhood, interviewees tended to see individual friendships as constituting brotherhood. Whether experiences are positive or negative, each friendship metonymically represented the entire fraternity; each friendship was an enactment of the brotherhood as a whole. Experiences with friends make brotherhood real. If experiences are good then brotherhood is strong, if they are weak then so goes the brotherhood.

Jason, a former member of a midsized fraternity in Pennsylvania, was more cynical of brotherhood as a concept, and rejected brotherhood as organization-wide propaganda: "Brotherhood was a bunch of crap . . . [it] is an overused word that tries to justify the fraternity." Another former member offered a similar perspective, saying "I think a lot of fraternities abuse this word saying, 'I'd do anything for this guy.' I think that's bullshit. In a sense, it's just a saying that makes the fraternity system run." For both of these interviewees, the dismissal of

idealized brotherhood accompanied a frustrated realization that fraternity life forced

conformation to unwanted pressures and often impeded personal development. This can be seen

most clearly in the ways ex-members described the role of alcohol.

Alcohol as Unifying Force and Post-Graduation Repellant

    Men in fraternities drink heavily (Kuh et al., 1996; Windle, 2003). Universities and

fraternities' national organizations enforce restrictive alcohol policies at varying degrees. No

matter how it is attained, alcohol is usually available to of-age and underage drinkers alike.

According to interviewees, members drink everywhere all of the time – from sports events and

philanthropic fund raising events to playing video games and hanging out. At the group level,

alcohol, rather than friendship, is a strong unifying force. For Brian, six years post-graduation,

drinking became synonymous with time spent with others: "You get a group of guys together,

you have beers. It is just what you do, basically." This perspective suggests drinking as inherent

to masculine friendships. Others members suggested that the normalization of alcohol in the

fraternity was not brought about by the members, but instead was institutionally created. As

Brad, a former member from an elite private college reflected:

> Its funny, I think a fraternity – just the way it's set up – is more of a drinking club. I think
>
> about what I did with my high school friends and what I've done after college, we do a
>
> lot more of going out to movies or just going out and about. . . . The majority of people in
>
> the fraternity at any given event were drinking. So, I think the drinking part was a
>
> normalization in itself.

Drinking becomes what you do in a fraternity. In that sense, the fraternity is designed for a

particularly short-lived, adolescent form of drinking. Once that period of time is over, many men

change their style and amount of drinking. In recalling his fraternity life six years past, Jason

expressed regret: "Looking back on it, alcohol probably played a more prominent role in my friendships than I would have liked. The most meaningful moments I've had with fraternity friends came while sober." After graduation, men feel that they are 'over' that period in their life. As a result many men differentiate themselves from their former self by changing their style of drinking.

Although alcohol use is a consistent feature of fraternities, many former members see alcohol as a feature of the fraternity, not of themselves. This split between present self-identity and past fraternity-identity is demonstrated at two levels: friendship and maturation. Although friendship is a component of fraternity life and is influenced by the normalization of constant drinking, upon graduation the practice of drinking changes, even with fraternity friends. Adulthood brings about a change in perception of the role of alcohol as part of the friendship ritual. When considering how he spends time with friends now, Dean, a former member five years post-graduation, suggests that alcohol has become less central to interaction:

> In some sense [what my friends and I do now] is more the same; you did the same thing in the fraternity. [Now] you are getting together more because you don't see these people very often and you like hanging out with them, and not to just pass the time and have something to occupy you while you are drinking. Before, the friendship was more a side dish and the main course was drinking. Now drinking is a side-dish and you might not want to eat salad. The friendship getting together to converse and hang out with your friends, it's more of a main dish.

It is not just that the style of drinking has changed; it is that friendship itself has become more central. In addition, maturation, along with personal and domestic constraints on drinking, brings about change. Many members say they are too old in their mid-twenties for that sort of drinking.

The pervasiveness of drinking in the active fraternity encourages many men to disconnect from the fraternity upon graduation. Brad, who was only three years out of his fraternity, said he was frustrated after visiting his fraternity during homecoming:

> It was kind of 'I'd done it before;' I didn't feel like doing it again. . . . I'm around a bunch of guys younger than me getting real drunk and having a great time. And years ago I'd have a great time. Now, I'm old. I'm the outcast. . . . Partly because my identity's changed, partly because I don't drink as much as I used to.

The reliance on drinking in the fraternity succeeds in isolating alums who have changed their way of enjoying friendship. This, in turn, helps many members to divorce from their fraternity identity and to create a new identity.

Fraternal Maintenance, Negotiation, and Divorce

The role and centrality of alcohol is one component of a larger process of renegotiation of friendships for former fraternity members. For many of my interviewees, while fraternity membership is a part of a past-self that is no longer relevant, friendships born in the fraternity, although attenuated in range and number, become more valuable after college. As Allan and Adams (1998) argue, however, by maintaining a friendship that resulted from a shared organizational membership individuals maintain that organizational identity. This means the maintenance of friendships and negotiation of fraternity identity are two processes in the redefinition of self that all former members face. To structure this discussion, maintenance and divorce will be explored as two processes in the renegotiation of fraternity identity. This redefinition of self is social, personal, and intrinsically gendered.

For some men, the bonds built in the fraternity are extended into their emotional and professional lives through job contacts, alumni events, and informal activities. Other men walk

away from that aspect of their lives, form a new identity, and divorce themselves from the fraternity. There are many factors that influence whether men experience fraternal divorce or maintenance, such as geographic proximity to the college, the strength of the fraternity's alumni network, personal and marital relationships, and the demands of employment, but all interviewees experience some degree of both fraternal divorce and maintenance. These are two sides of personal and social continuums that both require some degree of negotiation. Some men find it easy to extend fraternity connections into their post-graduation life because their professional and social lives are embedded with fraternity contacts. For these men, their fraternal identity is resilient and highly embedded. Even men who are socially active with former members of the fraternity feel it necessary to redefine friendship independently. Negotiating the personal identity component of fraternity membership is somewhat independent of renegotiating the social component of membership. Self-identity and social relationships are dual and sometimes competing forces in men's post-graduate experience, neither fully accounted for by the other. Men who are tightly connected with their former fraternity brothers socially may need to negotiate their fraternity identity in their professional life. Other men might be socially disconnected, but still find value in the fraternity identity professionally. To illustrate the most enmeshed example of men's connection with the fraternity, I first consider the case of the most highly embedded former members.

For the men who have the benefit of propinquity, former fraternity members regroup to socialize. Some fraternities are more structured than others in their post-college communication, sending out newsletters, maintaining websites, attending collegiate sporting events, joining fantasy sports leagues, and organizing activities. This degree of fraternal maintenance tended to be reserved for men who were employed near and/or lived near their university, who were highly

invested in collegiate sporting events, like football, and who felt a strong degree of pride for their university. Another important factor is the level of connectedness of their romantic partner. For Steve, a former fraternity member from the Eastern US, the network between his wife and his friends' wives is tightly woven:

> Looking at my friends now, I would consider Joel a close friend, even though he now lives in Georgia. Married to Kate, who was [my wife's] sorority sister. Gary, I talk to him on a weekly basis, we hang out a lot, he is probably one of my closest friends, is married to Diane, who is part of [my wife's] sorority. When we all get together socially . . . five years later now, I don't really look at it as fraternal. Obviously, it was the fraternity or sorority that brought us together, but now we are just friends. Not fraternity brothers.

Even though this man's fraternity friendships are highly embedded in his post-college social life, he no longer identifies them as fraternal. The dyadic relationships that once constituted brotherhood exist in post-graduation only as bonds of friendships, not as fraternity bonds. The removal of fraternity identity from his highly embedded social group indicates an active attempt to disconnect the relationship between self as fraternity brother and self as married, graduated, and employed man. Even men who are highly embedded in their fraternity friendships tend to experience some level of disconnect with their fraternity identity.

The formal alumni organization is another highly embedded form of fraternal maintenance. For Jack, who as an active member was highly involved in his mid-sized Californian fraternity, his alumni organization is merely an extension of fraternity friendships formed in college, "Not an all fraternity-wide thing." Rather than a representation of the fraternity as it was manifested in college, the alumni organization was, "Alumni in the loosest sense of the word. It is another subgroup, just a nucleus of friends." Similar to Steve whose

social network was highly intertwined with fraternity members, Jack claims that a formal alumni network is best understood as an extension of friendships, not of the fraternity. For both of these men and others who are socially embedded in the fraternity, there is tacit dismissal of the origins of their friendships, which allows them to be appreciated without fraternity identification. Yet the question remains, why do these men, who clearly are benefiting from the maintenance of relationships that were created by the fraternity, so quick to dismiss their fraternal origins? From the cynicism men expressed about brotherhood to disconnect they felt about alcohol, former members felt it necessary to divorce themselves from the same coarse, adolescent masculinity that was so tempting during member recruitment.

Negotiated Maintenance

For most interviewees, their identification with the fraternity and its image was cautiously negotiated. Some men were geographically proximate and aware of potential fraternity events for alumni, still chose to circumscribe the influence of the fraternity in their post-graduate lives. Still others had neither the geographic access nor desire to socialize with former brothers. In addition to limiting contact with other members, and thereby not being forced to navigate fraternity identity by socially participating, many men also repeatedly negotiate the role of fraternity identity in their personal and professional lives. For them, fraternity membership is more of a personal identity, which they seek to manage in accord with their maturing sense of self.

This renegotiation takes many forms. Recalling Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach, Tony, a former member from a mid-sized southern fraternity, manipulated props to achieve self-presentational ends: "I don't wear some clothes now, like cargo pants, just simply because that's a frat guy look. You walk into a bar, and they assume you are college guy. I don't want to be associated with that any more." Another equated his fraternity identity with his religion, "It is not

20

something that you introduce if you meet somebody. You don't go, 'Hi, I'm Matt and I'm

Jewish.' You say, 'Hi, I'm Matt' then eventually, you [admit], 'yeah, I was in a fraternity' if it

comes up." When asked why they treated their membership in a fraternity so cautiously, most

pointed to the strong association between fraternities and negative masculine stereotypes. Daniel,

a former member seven years post-graduation, suggested that when most people thing of a

fraternity member, "they think of the big, dumb jock, which translates into big, dumb frat guy."

A few former members indicated that revealing their membership in a fraternity provoked a

strong negative reaction from peers. Elliot recalled his own experience with identity negotiation:

> I started making friends through film school, . . . and there was a very anti-fraternity
>
> feeling there. I was hanging out with some guy. . . . and I had a fraternity shirt on. We
>
> were hanging out the whole time, but when I stood up and walked away . . . I heard him
>
> say to his friend, 'Did you see that fascist shirt that guy has on?'

Although many interviewees understood why others had prejudice against fraternities, some

believed that part of the problem was ignorance of what fraternity life actually entails. Many

members who had experienced negative responses were particularly frustrated because they did

not want to be regarded in accordance with the dominant negative stereotypes. Chris recalls this

experience:

> At my job, there was a guy that was talking about his college life and he [said] . . . 'the
>
> bullshit of the frat.' I understand what it means to be part of [the fraternity] . . . and there
>
> are good things out of it. I do have great friends from it. But how do you get into the fact
>
> that my fraternity life was different than most peoples' impressions?

This creates a duality of identity that many members struggled with upon graduation – an

ambivalent personal experience and a consistently negative public stereotype. This tension is

unlikely to be resolved for any former member because fraternities are exclusive and segregated in recruitment, parties, and identities. Those who were excluded or did not want to be in the Greek system are likely to have the most negative perception of its members. Being a beneficiary of hegemonic masculinity does not put one in the good graces of those who were excluded by it. It became clear from interviews that once men graduate, they needed to renegotiate their public fraternity identity.

For many men it is not advantageous to claim membership, and the negotiation of fraternity membership must be treated delicately. Whatever the economic or social benefits of fraternity membership, ex-members were aware that other people, whether ignorant or accurate, associate fraternities with a host of negative attributes. It is an incomplete perspective to suggest that fraternity membership is a form of privileged masculinity that is always beneficial. As, Charlie, a former member of an elite fraternity, said, "it's a symbol, and this symbol is in a constant state of flux. People look at you differently when they look you in the eye and then their eyes drift down to the [fraternity] shirt and they're like, 'Oh, I thought this guy was cool.'" As symbol that has a different connotative meaning to different people, fraternity men must pick their identification with the fraternity idiosyncratically.

Furthermore, this change in identification with the fraternity typically accompanies a change in the centrality of fraternity identity to a man's masculinity. As fraternity membership become less central to a man's sense of self, the need to even negotiate that identity becomes less important. This means that for some men, it is no longer beneficial to even admit to being in a fraternity. One former member suggested that it was the transitions brought about by graduating that made him realize that being in a fraternity was "supposedly training to be a man. But no, the fraternity's just an extension of remaining a boy forever." In that sense, the transition brought

about by graduation brings about a mature masculine identity that may not be benefited by being

a member of a fraternity. Whether these identity changes are a result of changes in drinking

habits, new relationships, professional or personal obligations, or maturation, men often see the

fraternity as someone they once were and something they once did, but is now confined to the

past. For some men, fraternity identity has become a distant memory, or laughable 'stage' in life.

The drinking, the partying, and the lifestyle all have changed as a result of graduation, and with

those changes a new masculine identity arose. As men get older, the need to shore up masculine

identity through fraternity practice has waned considerably. A job, family, and other life events

serve as new markers of masculinity, and help to encourage a divorce from the fraternity-bound

identity. As Paul, five-years out of a large state university, noticed, "it seems everyone's

priorities have changed from grades, women, and booze, to children, home, jobs, and 401K." As

adults, there are many more signs of masculinity that men can call upon to shore up their gender

identity, and the ones garnered from fraternity membership and brotherhood may be unnecessary

or no longer applicable. As Connell (2002) has suggested, gender practices in daily life transform

how gender is personally known. As men encounter new gender hierarchies, roles, and

expectations as a consequence of graduation, relationships, and employment, the utility of the

fraternity identity is called into question, and sometimes completely disavowed.

Fraternal Divorce

For many men, there is some motivation to remove the potentially negative stigma of

membership, but this can come at a cost to the social aspects of their post-college lives. Research

on men's friendships suggests that the shared episodes of college may be enough to preserve a

close relationship, but geographic, economic, and relational demands may make relational

maintenance difficult (Allan, 1998b; Cohen, 1992; Feld & Carter, 1998; Wellman, 1992). Once

there is no longer the physical structure of the fraternity or the lifestyle of a college student to

provide a social life, men are forced to choose in which friendships to invest. Brian, who moved

across the country after graduating from college, lamented the loss of friendship and connection

with his friends from the fraternity:

> With my friends in college, it has kind of gone downhill; I'm so far away from everybody.
>
> And if I talk to one of my buddies right now . . . I don't have any point of reference with him.
>
> I can tell him how great [my job is] or something like that . . . he won't really care because he
>
> doesn't really know anything about my business out here. At the same time, I don't know
>
> what to talk to him about, as far as what he's doing right now because it doesn't really
>
> interest me at all.

The place of reference that often sustained a friendship begins to wane for friends without the

benefit of routine contact. Even though Bryan felt that it was a positive decision to leave his

fraternity identity behind, this decision came at some cost. For former fraternity members, social

isolation can be even more acute than for other college graduates. In a fraternity, a man's entire

friendship network may be made up of fraternity members (Boeringer et al., 1991), and if he

chooses to socially disavow the fraternity, his friendship network is greatly attenuated. In fact,

fraternity membership may be a detriment to post-graduate friendship, not only because the

potential loss of a tightly constricted social group, but due to changes in the ability to make

friends brought about by being in a fraternity.

Although many interviewees claimed that being in a fraternity taught them to be more

social and out-going, others stated fraternity membership actually weakened their ability to form

new friendships. Carl, seven years out of a large Midwest fraternity, points out, "I had a lot less

in common with many of my friends from high school. We just couldn't relate." This lack of

shared experience drove a wedge between his non-fraternity friends, but Jason, another former

member from a large Midwest fraternity, suggested it was more than a lack of shared experience.

He reflected, "I think the way that a fraternity is set up, a lot of times you don't learn things that

would help you make friends in the world at large. I think you miss out on some of the things

you would learn if you were just trying to meet people in a less structured environment. I think

the fraternity was just that people were there, you become friends through proximity. . . . I think

if anything, a fraternity tends to cause people not to learn a set of skills that make forming

friends easier." Although this view was stated in the minority of interviews, some former

members felt that their friendships were restricted by the structure of the fraternity itself. Just like

in the case of alcohol, leaving the fraternity and the geographic reaches of its membership

enables a reflective stance on the normalizations of fraternity life. For some former members,

departure from the organization demonstrated how dependent they were upon its structure – the

propinquity of friends, the reliance on alcohol for brotherhood, and the clarity and insularity of

identity. Once beyond the influence of the fraternity, some former members felt completely

disengaged and were lonelier and less able to make new friends than when they started.

<div align="center">CONCLUSIONS</div>

Friends are an important resource for college graduates transitioning into adult life. For men

who were once in fraternities, they have a broad network of strong and weak ties offering both

social and instrumental support. Upon graduation, there is a winnowing of friendship. The

benefits of context recede into the benefits of a shared history. For men who were in fraternities,

the shared history offers many pathways for reconnection. A shared fraternity identity is an

instantaneous link between former fraternity brothers. In itself, this is a great boon because the

investment needed to rekindle a relationship is less when there is shared history. Through

fraternity-based social events for graduates, there is always a chance to renew ties with former friends. Geographic proximity, job connections, and how friendship fits into a man's relationships with his romantic partner also define the post-college friendship landscape. As a consequence, maintaining friendships is a considerable struggle from the point of graduation if a fraternity member moves away or takes a job external to the fraternity network. In these cases, fraternity membership is much less of a benefit. For a few members, fraternity membership even decreased their capability to make new friends and reconnect with old ones.

Along with the friendships gained, a former member also carries a fraternity identity with him upon graduation. Some men are still proud of their fraternity identity, but most men have divorced themselves to some degree from their college life. The negative, masculine stereotype associated with fraternities often dissuades former members from wearing fraternity paraphernalia and openly admitting to being members in college. The emergence of new markers of masculinity, such as jobs, homes, and family, shore up masculinity in ways that fraternity membership cannot. This accumulation of masculine markers inspires some men to dissociate completely with fraternity life. The negotiation corresponds with a realization and reflection about the meaningfulness of membership, both where it succeeded and where it failed. Fraternities offer a diversity of experiences for the men who join them. Whatever their experiences, all of the men interviewed found some value in being in a fraternity. The fraternity is not an aggregate of the members who compose it. For each man, the fraternity means something different, and for each man the fraternity affects his life in unique ways.

REFERENCES

Allan, G. (1998a). Friendship, sociology and social structure. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 15,* 685-702.

Allan, G. (1998b). Friendship and the private sphere. In R. G. Adams & G. Allan (Eds.) *Placing friendship in context* (pp. 71-91) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Allan, G., & Adams, R. G. (1998). Reflections on context. In R. G. Adams & G. Allan (Eds.) *Placing friendship in context* (pp. 183-194) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, E. (2008). Inclusive masculinity in a fraternal setting. *Men & Masculinities, 10,* 604-620.

Boeringer, S., Shehan, C., & Akers, R. (1991). Social contexts and social learning in sexual coercion and aggression: Assessing the contribution of fraternity membership. *Family Relations*, *40*, 58-64.

Boswell, A. A., & Spade, J. Z. (1996/2003). Fraternities and collegiate rape culture: Why are some fraternities more dangerous places for women? In M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (Eds.) *Men's lives* (6th Edition) (pp. 179-189). Boston: Pearson.

Cohen, T. F. (1992). Men's families, men's friends: A structural analysis of constraints on men's social ties. In P. M. Nardi (Ed.) *Men's friendships* (pp. 115-131). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Crawford, M., & Kaufman, M. R. (2006). Sex differences versus social processes in the construction of gender. In K. Dindia & D. J. Canary (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication* (2nd ed., pp. 179-194). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

DeSantis, A. D. (2007). *Inside Greek U.: Fraternities, sororities, and the pursuit of pleasure, power, and prestige.* Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press

Feld, S., & Carter, W. C. (1998). Foci of activity as changing contexts for friendship. In R. G. Adams & G. Allan (Eds.) *Placing friendship in context* (pp. 136-152) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Floyd, K. (1997). Brotherly love II: A developmental perspective on liking, love, and closeness in the fraternal dyad. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *11*, 196-209.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *Presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Holtz, R. (1997). Length of group membership, assumed similarity, and opinion certainty: The dividend for veteran members. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *27*, 539-555.

Humphrey, S. E., & Kahn, A. S. (2000). Fraternities, athletic teams, and rape: The importance of identification with a risky group. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 15,* 1313-1322.

Kiesling, S. F. (1997). Power and the language of men. In. S. Johnson and U. H. Meinhof (Eds.), *Language and masculinity* (pp. 47-85). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Kimmel, M. S. (2003). Masculinity as homophobia. In M. S. Kimmel & A. L. Ferber (Eds.), *Privilege: A reader* (pp. 51-74). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kuh, G. D., Pascarella, E. T., & Wechsler, W. (1996, Apr. 19). The questionable value of fraternities. *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* A68.

Leflaive, X. (1996). Organizations as structures of domination. *Organization Studies, 17,* 23-48.

Levine, J. M., & Moreland, R. L. (1994). Group socialization: Theory and research. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 5,* 305-335.

Lottes, I. L., & Kuriloff, P. J. (1994). The impact of college experience on political and social attitudes. *Sex Roles*, *31*, 31-54.

Lyman, P. (1987/2003). The fraternal bond as a joking relationship: A case study of the role of sexist jokes in male group bonding. In M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (Eds.) *Men's lives* (6th ed., pp. 169-178). Boston: Pearson.

Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Nardi, P. M. (2003). The politics of gay men's friendships. In M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (Eds.) *Men's lives* (6th ed., pp. 402-405). Boston: Pearson.

Orosan, P. G. & Schilling, K.M. (1992). Gender differences in college students' definitions and perceptions of intimacy. *Women & Therapy, 12*, 201-220.

Peterson, A. (2003). Research on men and masculinities: Some implications of recent theory for future work. *Men and Masculinities, 6,* 54-67.

Rawlins, W. K. (1994). Being there and growing apart: Sustaining friendships during adulthood. In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 275-294). San Diego, CA: Academic Press Inc.

Rawlins, W. K. (2009). *The compass of friendship: Narratives, identities, and dialogues*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Rhoads, R. A. (1995). Whale tales, dog piles, and beer goggles: An ethnographic case study of fraternity life. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *26*, 306-323.

Rubin, L. B. (1985). *Just friends.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

Smith, T. S. (1964). The emergence and maintenance of fraternity solidarity. *The Pacific Sociological Review, 7(1),* 29-37.

Swain, J. (2006). Reflections on patterns of masculinity in school settings. *Men & Masculinities, 8,* 331-349.

Sweet, S. (1999). Understanding fraternity hazing: Insights from symbolic interactionist theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, *40*, 355-363.

Walker, K. (1994/2003). "I'm not friends the way she's friends": Ideological and behavioral constructors of masculinity in men's friendships. In M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (Eds.) *Men's lives* (6th ed., pp. 389-401). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Walker, K. (1994). Men, women, and friendship: What they say, what they do. *Gender & Society, 8,* 246-265.

Wellman, B. (1992). Men in networks: Private communities, domestic friendships. In P. M. Nardi (Ed.) *Men's friendships* (pp. 75-114). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Windle, M. (2003). Alcohol use among adolescents and young adults. *Alcohol Research and Health, 27,* 79-85

Yeung, K. T., & Stombler, M. (2000). Gay and Greek: The identity paradox of gay fraternities. *Social Problems, 47,* 135-152.