

The Unbearable Lightness of Friendship: Homosociality and the “Crisis of Masculinity”

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years in the US there has been a lot of discussion around boys’ and men’s friendships, or the lack thereof. Not only are men, we are told, lacking in friendships, but these friendships are also lacking in affection, emotion, and depth. This so-called crisis is deeply intertwined with the broader social, political, and economic crisis having an impact on boys’ lives. This article will seek to elaborate on the importance of homosociality in discussions of crisis and will be examine friendships in light of these changing relational possibilities. The masculinity model put into place by the ‘crisis’ discourse is premised on a version of masculinity that is competitive and aggressive. In examining homosociality and crisis, this article will present two individual case studies who showcase the ways that the crisis narrative is misleading and does not provide a true picture of the complexity of men’s relationships.

Key words: Mixed marriages, Christian-Muslim couples, Muslim masculinity, migrant men.

Arkadaşlığın Dayanılmaz Hafifliği: Homososyallik ve "Erkeklik Krizi"

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Özet

Geçtiğimiz 30 yıl boyunca Amerikan literatüründe oğlan çocuklarının ve erkeklerin arkadaşlığı veya arkadaşlığın eksikliği üzerine birçok tartışma yürütüldü. Erkeklerin arkadaşlık kurma açısından eksikliğinin yanı sıra bizlere erkeklerin kurdukları arkadaşlık ilişkilerinde derinlik, duygu ve yakınlık eksikliği olduğu da söylendi. Bu sözde kriz, oğlan çocuklarının hayatında etkili olan geniş çaplı sosyal, politik ve ekonomik krizlerle birbirine karışmış durumdadır. Bu makale, homososyalliğin bahsi geçen kriz üzerindeki etkisini detaylandırarak ve arkadaşlığı değişen bu ilişki olasıklar ışığında inceleyecektir. "Kriz" söylemiyle ortaya konan erkeklik modeli rekabetçi ve agresif bir erkeklik versiyonunu temel almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu makale kriz söylemlerinin ve anlatımlarının ne kadar yanıltıcı bir yol gösterdiği ve erkek ilişkilerindeki karmaşıklığı doğru yansıtmadığını gösteren iki adet bireysel vaka çalışması sunarak homososyalliği ve erkeklik krizini inceleyecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: karma evlilik, hristiyan-müslüman eşler, müslüman erkeklik, göçmen erkekler

Introduction

At present, men and masculinity are often discussed in terms of reaching for and performing masculine ideals. Headlines in newspapers, local and national, tell us time and again that masculinity is in crisis, whether it is the startling revelation of a celebrity or a candidate for the presidency of the United States of America, or a lacrosse team at a local university. Of course, the so-called “crisis of masculinity” is hardly new, but what is new, one might imagine, is the persistent media focus on, and therefore popularization of, the crisis. For example, we can look at Christina H. Sommers’ position, who states that we should acknowledge “there are far more men than women at the extremes of success and failure. And failure is more common [for men than women]” (Sommers 2013: 53). While many in the field of men and masculinities are quick to dismiss Sommers, it seems to me that we ought to engage her in some fashion, especially because of her influence in public, rather than scholarly, debates. If research is about impact, Sommers has had an impact on public discussions of men, boys, and masculinity. Her book, *The War Against Boys*, originally released in 2001, has just been rereleased. Its rerelease marks its continued relevance as a marker for particular narratives about boys and masculinity, and provides a critical beginning for understanding the discourse regarding masculine ideals and men and boys’ relationships with other men or boys. It is important to note, moving forward through the article, that the discourse is not simply regarding men’s friendships, but their relationships with other men and boys. This distinction is at the core of this article. In the quote above, she is talking about the number of CEOs versus jobless men, homeless men, and men in prison. She could just as easily be talking about those who are successful at masculinity and those who aren’t. The root of the supposed ‘crisis’ of masculinity, put another way, is that unattainable masculinity has failure embedded within it (Kimmel 2000; Walsh 2010, 1-36). The problem is, rather, systematic. Boys and men are moving away from narrow forms of competitiveness that suggests boys undertake a “strenuous education in autonomy”

(Rotundo 1993: 46). The issues of competition and imposed 'crisis', and the systemic nature of them, has, for a long period of time impacted and been a primary driver of men's social relations with other men. Failure as an inbuilt element of masculinity has elicited competitive behavior, which has often manifested in competitive relations with other men. In many ways, though, one is beginning to be able to see a shift towards new forms of relationality, homosociality, and intimacy between men that in turn problematizes the myth of the Self-Made Man. These new forms of homosociality stem from the opening up of masculinity's possibilities, and the move away from particular strictures. E. Anthony Rotundo describes the "cult of the self-made man" as the "image of the lone male rising steadily by his own efforts from a humble cottage to the mansions of wealth and power" (Rotundo 1993, 195). Much like the construction of a system perpetuated upon class antagonism, this supposed "crisis" is perpetuated by a culturally specific masculinity which is structured to produce these results: "masculinity as crisis". In this way, there is not actual crisis outside of the in-built crisis within masculinity. The Self-Made Man is both unfeasible to achieve, and impossible to sustain. Put another way, as Jonathan A. Allan has suggested, masculinity is a form of "cruel optimism" towards an unreachable impossibility (Allan 2014). Rather than moving towards a more sustainable and intricate vision of masculinity (or masculinities), Sommers – as both an individual and as a representative of the 'crisis' literature – is pushing towards and for a masculinity and style of interaction that is isolating and competitive; providing its own self-fulfilling prophesy of such.

This article seeks to redress and push forward the conversation about boy's and men's homosocial relations, especially in light of the crisis narrative, arguing for a nuanced picture that opens the way for further understanding not only the way that these men see their own relationships but also to open the way for a discourse outside narratives of crisis (as Sommers above) or 'dominance bonding' (Farr 1988; Messner 1989). Too often relations between men have been treated as problematic, as a kind of reinforcement of dominance, as a reinscription

of patriarchy. So much so, it behoves the theorist of gender to ask: is there anything redemptive or good about homosociality? This article, thus, takes on a “reparative” (Sedgwick 2003) approach to the question of homosociality, wherein we move beyond the uncomplicated narratives that surround homosociality to think through the positive, affirming, and productive potential of homosociality, and, more crucially, the plural possibility of homosociality.

Homosociality and the connections that it allows is helping provide social networks for boys, giving them a broader perspective on the ways they are able to connect with others, work with others, and engage beyond the economic model of most educational institutions and the market. E. Anthony Rotundo reminds us, with a historical perspective, that competition is frequently an economic re-establishment of aggressive behaviors. “This ideal [of competition] grows out of a belief that there is, in fact, no proper place for true masculine impulse within modern society... [This belief entails that one is] suspicious of authority, wary of women, and disgusted with corrupt civilizations” (Rotundo 1993: 286). In this way, this article will show the importance for a focus on boys’ and young men’s friendship, showcasing the ways that they are forming relationships that do not create distance, competition, and aggression; but in fact can open up new forms of relationality and intimacy. With the rise of new iterations of masculinity and the growing acceptance of change and gender fluidity, men today have far more options and choice than thirty years ago. In recognizing the multifaceted forms of homosociality – without dismissing the negative elements – one is able to see the openings up of new possibilities of relations outside of the neoliberal-individualist-masculine format (Braedley 2010; Connell 2009; Connell 2010). Once again, they are new in the sense that the changes in neoliberalism itself has foisted particular elements as dominant and, as with anything, resistance opens up challenges to prior formations.

This article will present two examples of men whose homosocial friendships demonstrate a lack of crisis occurring in their lives and repudiate the ‘crisis’ discourse; and who are not only “successful” in a

standard fashion but who are also creating intimate friendships and partnerships with those around them, and, via this interconnectivity and open homosocial connections, are undermining the erroneous conception of the “self-made man”. They, along with their friends and peers, are not only opening up distinct forms of relating homosocially, and are reshaping the types of relationships that are allowable and encouraged. Friendship and intimate social relations are some of the most crucial aspects of the growth of boys and men. These strong homosocial relationships provide bonds that can move past a sense of the ‘crisis’ of failing boys and assist in overcoming an individualizing mentality that has often been a hallmark of masculinity. This article puts forward important elements of homosociality, exploring them in two case studies drawn out of a larger body of ethnographic fieldwork. While situated in a particular location, the article shows that these changes towards openness and potential intimacy in homosociality are broader than merely these case studies or this particular locale, but are taking place on a broader societal scale. These men, simply put, provide insight into broader groups of men who are no longer seeking out ‘traditional’ masculinity.

Before moving further with the argument, the article will outline the basic methodological elements from which the articles derives, as well as the particular context of the case studies. From this vantage it will move on to discussing further the particular media narratives of crisis and the related anxieties and issues. Two vignettes are presented that help deepen and give substance to the argument, and which demonstrate the changes that are occurring in homosociality amongst college-aged men. The conclusion synthesizes these elements to highlight the importance of looking at homosocial relationships, providing an alternative reading of the “crisis of masculinity” and demonstrating the importance of looking at changes in homosociality.

Methodology & Context

Over the course of the year of in-depth, ethnographic field work at the University of St. Jerome (USJ),¹ I took part in hundreds of events, conversations, and activities. During this time, I conducted 75 semi-structured interviews that lasted between one and four hours long. Throughout the time at USJ, I took over 100,000 words of field notes. Utilizing ethnographic fieldwork allowed for a deep understanding of the individuals and their relationships. Ethnography is well known for providing the nuances that are sometimes lost through quantitative measures or by one off interviews or surveys. Similarly, this method also allows for a wider picture of the situation than interviews with individuals because one is able to grapple with the relations in action rather than as described after the fact.

The use of ethnography to explore masculinity and men's relations has been well documented in the recent volume *Men, Masculinities, and Methodologies* (Pini & Pease 2013). Throughout the volume, various authors explore the strengths – and difficulties – of ethnography as a tool for grappling with this topic. Often the discussion of masculinity can be itself a challenging task, and as Tristan Bridges aptly points out: “talking with another man about gender, inequality, and their own lives [is seen] as something out of the ordinary (and as a ‘feminine’ activity)” (Bridges 2013). While these issues do and did occur, deep, long-term ethnography allows these issues to be worked through in various ways, and allows for strong and intimate relationships to be built between the researcher and the guys. Throughout the article I frequently use the term “guys” as a space that is both neither and between “boys” and “men”, and to suggest a challenge to the ways that this transition happens and to situate those boys/men whom I discuss in this paper along a continuum rather than as either one or the other – similar to what Michael Kimmel does in *Guyland*.

Set in the midst of a mid-sized, Midwestern city in the U.S., the University of St. Jerome is a private, Catholic university. Situated over a six by two block radius, the campus community is primarily middle-

class, white surrounded by various neighborhoods of lower class individuals. At either end of campus sits a single-gender residence hall. On the north end is Kemp Hall, the all-female hall of nearly four hundred first- and second-year women. On the south end sits Regan Hall, a three-hundred-person hall that is almost exclusively for first-year students. Originally Regan was an all-female hall when it opened, but has changed populations since then. The building is one of the oldest on campus and has not been maintained well by the university. Almost none of the guys who live there actively choose Regan. Instead they would rather live in the co-ed first-year Herald Hall, which is traditionally known as the 'party hall', a selling point that even the university's website acknowledges. The guys want to be in Herald because it is co-ed. Regan is treated, both by the residents themselves and outsiders, as a less-than-ideal location, and some of Regan's residents are openly mocked for living in the building – this mocking often takes on homophobic undertones (Pascoe 2007, 35). While many of the guys did not actively choose to live in Regan, this provides them an initial bonding agent and commonality from which to build.

Boys' Anxieties

This section looks at the way that notions of "crisis" are impacted by and impact on men's and boys' social relations with other men and boys – utilizing Christina H. Sommers's work and 'crisis' discourse as a lens into the anxieties and realities of men's social relations, though one could certainly also turn to Michael Kimmel's *Guyland* and his more recent work on *Angry White Men*. It should be noted that the crisis Kimmel presents is significantly different from that of Sommers. For Kimmel, and many others in pro-feminist Critical Studies of Men & Masculinities, the crisis is founded on that masculinity is harmful to boys and men – and, of course, to girls and women. Often the crisis is a lack of knowing where men fit, or what role they will or can play. On the other hand, the invocation of crisis is often a reaction to feminism and gains of women; which is indicated, in some ways, in the

title of Anthony Clare's first chapter of his book *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis: 'The Dying Phallus'* (Clare 2001). Put another way, when speaking about the crisis of masculinity we often see the ways that it is integrally related to a sense of loss in relation to the changing role of women (Rees 2016), seen clearly in Payne's *Crisis in Masculinity* (1995). There is, then, a sense of loss, and, often, following this, a desire to move back towards what had previously worked. Part of what then becomes clear, from an analysis of the vast quantity of work done that suggests men and boys are in 'crisis', is that much of this crisis mentality is reflective not merely of a state of men and boys, but is also concerned with their state of being. This distinction is a crucial one. The "state of men and boys" refers to the broader condition that boys and men are in (whether "crisis" or otherwise). On the other hand, the "state of being boys and men" refers more specifically to the ways that they are allowed and encouraged to be, as individuals and as groups. This crisis suggests a necessity for a specific type of masculinity that demonstrates "success", and yet exemplifies "failure". This necessary success is built on the backs of supposed previous successes – often with traditional masculine roles (Roberts 2014) – and necessarily demands future success. In this way, the crisis can be seen to be about what "masculinity" is, ought to be, and means. Building on this, 'crisis masculinity' suggests a specific form of relation that boys and men should take towards themselves, the world, and others— particularly other boys. Boys' homosocial relationships can provide a unique perspective on the crisis (Chu 2014; Way 2011; Rosen 2012). In popular culture, being a boy is often ascribed a number of different attributes that include passivity and vulnerability, whereas adult men are often assigned characteristics of strength, competition, physicality, and aggression. In the most recent iteration of her argument (2013), Christina Hoff Sommers argues that boys' gender appears to be conflated with adult masculinity. For example, Sommers suggests that we need to stop pathologizing "the behavior of millions of healthy male children. We have turned against boys and forgotten a simple truth: the energy, competitiveness, and corporal daring of normal males are responsible for much of what is right in the world" (2013: 13). She

continues, “No one denies that boys’ aggressive tendencies must be mitigated and channeled toward constructive ends. Boys need (and crave) discipline, respect, and moral guidance. Boys need love and tolerant understanding. But being a boy is not a social disease” (Ibid.: 13).

Though Sommers suggests that boys’ aggression should be put to “constructive ends”, one should begin by asking about the necessity of violence in these interrelations. She gives the example of a high school, Heights School, where “sword fights, sneak water balloon attacks, and mock battles” are utilized to help teach history, “but most of today’s schools prohibit [these activities]” (Sommers 2013: 15). We’re told, at the root of all boys’ selves is aggression and competition, and these traits have been turned into negatives by the feminized school districts. Sommers’ approach appeals to a notion of homosociality that has been linked to the reproducing and reciprocating of a dominating masculinity that is oppressive to both men and women. The cultivation of particular forms of masculine subjectivities results in the reciprocation of gendered inequality. Embedded within this notion of homosociality is the idea that it restricts and suppresses the possibility of intimacy and emotional engagement. Bird (1996) suggested that masculinity is cultivated by a homosociality that is built upon emotional detachment, competitiveness and the sexual objectification of women. Recent authors have been reconceptualizing and complicating simple definitions of male homosociality (Arxer 2011; Hammaren and Johannson 2014), emphasizing and including the more intimate, ontological, and pedagogic elements of these relations. Sommer’s approach to homosociality fails to address that not all boys prefer or enjoy competition, but also forgoes any consideration of the type of relationships that are created out of this genre of behavior and interaction. She labels tug-of-war, dodge-ball, and kickball as fun and “critical to healthy socialization” (Sommers 2013, 38), failing to recognize that these are not the favored activities of all boys. It abstains from a nuanced perspective of the “structural calls to inaction, impediments to action, and acknowledging factors outside the individual” (Karioris 2014: 106), which are disseminated through these

behaviors and which are keenly impactful on a deep-seated awareness of how homosocial relations must be structured. The 'crisis' portrait of homosociality is exceptionally limited, and itself helps sustain a simplistic model of relationality between boys and men. Importantly, this notion of homosociality, one that is destructive and violent, underpins current arguments that are located within discussions about changing masculinity and men.

A struggle often takes place over an imagined masculine ideal—for example, that of the Self-Made Man—which sequesters men and boys apart from each other and propels them into competition. The notion of the Self-Made Man, so prevalent in the US, is based on the belief that each man can pull himself up by his bootstraps and make anything of himself that he wants, with no assistance from others. Michael Kimmel, giving an historical perspective, says that the Self-Made Man was “[m]obile, competitive, aggressive in business [and] ...was also temperamentally restless, chronically insecure, and desperate to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity” (2012: 14). This idea of the self-made man permeates the article as both a demonstration of what exactly is in 'crisis', as well as a way of thinking about how boys' and men's homosocial relations resist the vision of masculinity and manhood that is being pushed through these narratives of crisis. Christina H. Sommers' work (2013) has provided, as noted above, a particular edge to this 'crisis' discourse, putting it directly in contact with men's friendships. Throughout this section Sommers's is used, thusly, as a foil for the argument, as well as providing insights into the anxieties that boys are facing on a daily basis.

Much of the academic and popular literature and discussion surrounding homosociality and men and boys' friendships focuses on the negatives. Michael Flood, for example, states that “male homosociality plays a crucial role in many contexts in perpetuating gender inequalities and the dominance of particular hegemonic masculinities” (Flood 2008, 342). He has also stated, though, that “Men may bond as friends, comrades, family members or lovers in ways that do not subordinate women or other men. Indeed, intimate friendships between men are

valuable correctives to men's emotional stoicism and reliance on women's emotional labour" (Flood 2007, 426). Two encyclopedias have recently come out, *the International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* (Flood et al 2007) and *Men and Masculinities Encyclopedia* (Kimmel & Aronson 2003), detailing and overviewing the study of men and masculinities. Both encyclopedia pose men's social relations with other men more often than not as conflictual and competitive, and often directly violent (Flood et al 2007; Kimmel & Aronson 2003). The complexity that these encyclopedias present is one that is rooted in, to a degree, the possibilities of exceptions to the rule. In this way, then, the texts fail to engender complexity but more oft seem to be seeking to explicate the things that do not fit the broader narrative being painted. These narratives of the positive elements of homosociality also often are premised on a political engagement with 'positive masculinities' and attaching to these forms these positive traits, without understanding the ways that intimate homosocial relations interact in real relations for men who do not embody the particularities of 'positive masculinities'. These quotations represent something of the dual presentation of homosociality wherein homosociality is linked directly with violence and the oppression of women in ways that limit homosociality's ability to talk to men's intimate friendships with other men. Building on this, David Greven suggests that homosocial relations and bonds, due to their supposedly compulsory nature, are isolating and put forward a competitive form of relating that isolates outsiders who have not been "assimilated into male collectives" (Greven 2004, 84). These polarities are often now being discussed with more nuance than in previously, with authors like Niobe Way providing new views from which to see these relationships. It is critical to keep in mind though that even for Way these new relations speak to a 'crisis of connection' (Way 2011, 262). For Way, this crisis is not one of masculinity, though, but one of connection (2011, 266). Way notes correctly – a point that seems like it is so simple it should not need to be clarified – that "boys in my study had and wanted male friendships to 'explore the deep seas together,' to share secrets, and to 'be there' in times of need" (2011, 262). What does it

suggest that even when discussing the more positive elements of homosociality scholars find it necessary to label it and put it in the register of 'crisis'? Further, what would it mean to step aside from 'crisis' as the narrative, towards, simply, a potential plurality of homosociality? Way, putting forward an *ought*, suggests – from her informants – that “rather than privileging the self-sufficient and autonomous elements, boys (and girls) suggest that we should emphasize the relational components of maturity” (Way 2011, 268). What she terms “self-sufficient” is similarly conveyed in the idea discussed above simply as the ‘Self-Made Man’. While Way focuses on the loss or lack of connection, rather than, as this article is doing, the existence of new possibilities of connection external to competition, she is simultaneously undergirding the desire that is implicated for intimacy in these formations of homosociality (2011, 272).

Homosociality, while often implicated in violence against women and gender inequality, can also provide the grounds for changes in masculinity, and open up possibilities of relations beyond the competitive. One can look towards the recent volume *Some Men: Feminist Allies and the Movement to End Violence against Women* (Messner et al 2015) or the “#HeForShe” (UNWomen 2016) campaign to see some recent examples of distinct and transformed versions of homosociality for men. These are merely a few of the recent examples of challenges to narratives of homosociality that revolves around an axis of negative traits.

While this article uses the term tentatively, it is crucial to note the multifaceted aspects of homosociality that revolve around ideas of intimacy, bonding, and gender segregated resources. Throughout I seek to recognize all of these aspects and their interrelation with each other, rather than focusing on the patriarchal aspects (Sedgwick 1985) or male/dominance bonding (Flood 2003), while keeping the intimate elements of these relations in view.

Plural Homosocialities

Central to the argument in this article is the idea that we need to recognize the importance of different forms of homosociality and how they can generate different kinds of experience. It is fascinating to note that Way does not use the word 'homosocial' at all throughout the book. Further, we can look backwards to Peter Nardi's (1992) edited collection on friendship, which also does not cite any works on homosociality. While this might seem tangential, it bespeaks the contested division of what scholars write regarding friendship and what is involved in homosociality. Put bluntly, while scholars have sought to present friendships as more positive recently, they have omitted that from the broader sense of homosocial relationships that men undertake, and, thus, forgo a more thorough understanding of the processes and practices through which theorizing around friendship are intertwined with those of other homosocial relations of men. Suggesting this ties with broader theorizing on masculinity which has put the singular form of masculinity in relation to a plurality of masculinities and, through this, opened up an ability to comprehend the intra-masculine conflicts, contest, and orderings. Similarly, through refuting, as above, notions of friendship as, at least minimally, positive and homosociality as primarily negative, and as distinct concepts from each other, this article has set out to explicate the convoluted workings of plural homosocialities that are neither wholly positive or wholly negative. In so doing, it repositions homosociality as itself, as a concept, outside of the framework of violence (as presented above) and opens it to new understandings. This is not simply to say new expressions of homosociality, which will be explored below in the brief vignettes; but new possibilities for the concept itself.

In order to explore this further, the next section draws upon data that comes from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in an all-male university residence hall. More specifically, it examines the relationships between two first year men at the University of St. Jerome (USJ), living in the all-male residence Regan Hall. With these I aim to showcase the

importance that friendships have for these men, as well as to discuss their hesitations surrounding intimacy and emotional engagement. These case studies allow for a more nuanced perspective on homosociality and boys' and young men's relationships, while also giving voice to the boys and young men who are being invoked in 'crisis' discourses. It is important to note that the notion of crisis is also tied to broader concerns about boys' emotional literacy. Not only do boys not have enough friends, their friendships are not intimate, according to sociologist Lisa Wade (2013). She says that men are "searching for something, searching for some place where they can feel like real men again, a place unpolluted by the presence of those others" (Wade 2013). Michael Kimmel (2013: 16) asks: "Where can a guy go these days to just be around other men, just to hang out, be a guy, and not have to worry about who won't like it, or having them wonder if he's gay or some political Neanderthal?" In this, it seems, there is overlap between various camps: men are searching for connection with each other and struggling to locate it. Where they differ dramatically is in what forms homosociality should take. Below are two case studies taken from extensive ethnographic fieldwork. In the first story we find Aaron demonstrating the importance of a homosociality that does not depend on competition or aggression. While Aaron is a strongly social person, Brady, the second guy, provides a portrait of a more academically focused student who prioritizes coursework above socializing and friendship in some ways. Through Brady's vignettes, we gain an insight into a different perspective on the meaning of friendship, and are able to glimpse, again, a homosociality distinct from that which Sommers and others point towards and push for.

Aaron Kane, a first year student from the West coast, came to USJ like many other students without knowing anyone at the school, and without anyone else from his high school joining him. He comes from a white, middle-class family, and attended a private Catholic high school. For him, he left his entire life in high school behind him geographically, but that does not mean that he left them behind socially. He talked about his friends frequently, and kept in touch with them through various

mediums. In an interview, when I asked him about them, he told me that “Since the beginning of sophomore year I’ve had the same group of friends I have now, for the most part. It’s ten of us that I’d consider my best friends.” He went on to tell me about his best friend who had joined the Coast Guard and who he hasn’t seen for a long time. “During the last three years of high school I probably did not go more than three days without hanging out with him.” He describes the rest of his friends, saying, at one point, “I literally have no idea how I met them or became friends with them.” There is a sense of randomness in his description of the friends, though as he tells the story it becomes much clearer how they became friends: through school, classes, and extra-curricular activities. The group of friends is comprised entirely of guys. He tells me that “On the weekends almost always it’d be all of us together and we’d do something.”

His group of friends was like a lot of other guys, with many of them playing on a sports team in high school (Anderson 2011), as well as them going surfing as a group frequently. Beyond sports, Aaron also served on his high school’s student union. He applied to twelve universities, getting into most of them, and getting offered financial aid and scholarships from many. At root, his time in high school was filled with a solid, intimate group of friendships. Keeping in touch with his friends, now that he at university, he is looking forward to Christmas break. Most of the guys from the group though are coming home at the beginning of December to get together for a music festival. Aaron isn’t able to join them because he is the furthest away can’t afford the plane ticket. It is the one time his friend from the Coast Guard will be able to get leave for a while, which Aaron is sad to miss.

One evening, near the end of November of his first year, I ran into Aaron with a group of his USJ friends. They had been drinking together in the hall, and Aaron was fairly intoxicated. While drunk, he was in a good mood, smiling and laughing as he came down the hallway. He was with a large group of his friends, some seeming to have joined him in drinking and others watching over him. Our conversation turned to the Christmas break that is coming up in three weeks or so. His face turned down a bit

and got serious. Surrounded by his university friends, he told me (and them), "I miss my boys at home. And I'm going to see them soon over Christmas break. Then I'm going to miss my boys here though." With all seriousness I responded, "Sounds like you are always missing your boys." There is an understated intimacy in his expression and his tone; one that his friends can also feel. Looking around him at his friends, thinking about those back home, "I am. I have such good boys. They're so awesome. I'm going to miss my boys here when I go home to Cali over break." He hugs his friends on each side of him as he says this, grinning thinking about just how connected he is with those next to him and to those who are thousands of miles away. They walk back into the hallway towards Aaron's room. Ryan stayed behind and chatted with me for a second. He wasn't drinking and was taking care of Aaron for the evening. It was an unspoken agreement, with the rest of the group acknowledging the act as a "taking of care his bro". Here we can see the group collectively coming together to support Aaron in affective and physical ways. Speaking with John that night, he told me not to worry and that "I'll make sure he gets to bed safely." It is this sense of allegiance, in contrast to competition, that is part of the unrecognized forms of homosociality.

Not only has Aaron found a new group of close friends, but also has maintained his intimate friendships from high school. He has found a way to transform an educational context into devoted friendships. It would be difficult to apply the lens of crisis to Aaron's life or experience of education. In this sense, Aaron allows for a very different impression of both boys' situations within education, but also gives a dramatically contrasting perspective on the importance of relationships to these guys. He does not interact with his friends as competition, nor does he perceive education (and schools or schooling) as a place that should sustain a mentality of aggression and competition. For him, there is no clear and present danger of a crisis of masculinity that is rooted in competition. This is not to suggest that he never competes with other men. What he states directly in this way of interacting is that competition is not what sits at the root of his relationships. Here we see not simply some binaristic form of competition/non-competition, but the essence of

what is being driven at and towards in the relationships. Aaron competes with his friends in many things, but these competitions are, when inspected via their context, forms of play-competition. Here we might cite Goffman, who suggests that an analysis of the frame allows us to see how actions and interactions – such as play-fighting and fighting – can be seen as dramatically distinct by those involved, while the external observer might see no difference (Goffman 1986, 45). In this sense, it is not that Aaron represents pure altruistic affection or intimacy, but to state that the driving motivation for his friendships and relations is not competition. It is also important to note that this in no way suggests there is no conflict in his life. What it points one towards is the stark realization that in interactions with other men theorizing has conflated ‘friendship’ with ‘homosociality’, to the detriment to understanding the distinction between them; and, through doing this, has positioned friendships always already in relation to the conflictual and competitive that scholarship sees in the relationships between men. The link between an intimate homosociality and education is obvious for Aaron, whose relationships exist under the auspices of educational institutions (both high school and university) and which shape his experience of schooling dramatically.

Coming from a white, middle-class background, Brady graduated near the top of his high school class. He is a hardworking student, coming to USJ to try to get into its Physical Therapy (PT) program. He wasn’t admitted directly into the course so he has to work extra hard his first year to try and get admitted into the school and its accelerated program. In his first semester at USJ he is taking both Chemistry and Biology, both of which are considered “weed out” classes that he is struggling with—particularly since he needs to get an A in at least one of them to stand a chance at getting into the PT program. Though he spends a large part of his week focusing on academics, he makes sure that he gets to the gym at least five days a week. His best friends are two of his work out buddies, who he sees at least five days a week. They all hold each other accountable for their workout goals, as well as acting as mentors and confidantes. Brady is very serious about working out, drinking protein

shakes and eating as health as possible from his dorm room—he avoids eating in most of the dining halls, finding ways to cook out of his microwave and using the minimal kitchen.

As we were sitting in his room, Arjun—another resident on the floor—passed by the room and decided to stop in and join the conversation, with Brady telling us about his exercise and eating regime. He got his phone out and showed us a picture of himself from high school in his wrestling uniform that shows how skinny he was. He tells us that he has lost some tone and size this year living in the residence hall, but that he has been working on it a lot and is making gains. Arjun also exercises a lot, and they begin talking about their goals and comparing themselves to others. Arjun says, “You need to show them what a real man looks like,” proposing a masculinity and physique focused around an explicit muscular and regimented body and lifestyle. Brady, continuing, says,

Sometimes when I’m sitting in my friend’s room in Helpin Hall [another residence hall] they ask me what I’m up to and I just turn the computer around and show them google image search with half-naked men. I spend a lot of time just looking at guys who are half-naked, looking at their bodies. I like being able to judge them and figure out what they’re doing. I want to be able to really judge and decide on how they are doing with their work outs and what types of work outs they’re doing and how they’re eating.

His statement showcases both a vision of what masculinity is for Brady, but also the very evocative and everydayness of these demonstrations. These statements about bodybuilding and lifestyle could certainly be demonstrative of a competitive idea of masculinity, one rooted in physical strength. This simple image is complicated when one keeps in mind his focus on academics and the amount of time he devotes to his schoolwork. At the same time, his focus on working out and body building is always already enrolled as an element of his homosocial relationships.

Brady has spent his first year of university diligently working on his academics while maintaining a lifestyle dedicated to exercise and bodybuilding. While he expresses himself and his opinions in a specifically demonstrative physical embodiment, he challenges the specific notions about friendship revolving around competition. Rather than seeing these activities as a way of distancing himself, he uses bodybuilding as a way of connecting with others—including his two best friends on campus, whom he works out with five times a week. It is exactly this connectivity that many of Niobe Way's young men are looking for in their relations with other men. For all the bluster of doomsday predictions, not only is Brady succeeding in his desired course of study but is actively finding like-minded individuals to connect with. As the discussion about Aaron shows, understandings of a variety of expressions of homosociality are becoming more allowable, opening new ways of being for men. Brady is not simply pushing a competitive and aggressive version of masculinity, nor do his relations demonstrate feelings or expressions of competition or aggression. So while Brady is highly active and engaged in the world of bodybuilding he simultaneously is deeply rooted into his academic endeavors and is considered one of the most studious residents in the building who many come to for tutoring help. His relationships with his friends sometimes take a back seat to academics, but he has two strong friends who provide mental support as well as encouragement in both fitness and the rest of his life. Brady may have a stronger focus on academics, but his relationships with other guys demonstrate the crucial ways that friendships for men are changing, and the plurality of homosocialities that are more and more becoming allowable.

Conclusion

One of the challenges of discussing homosociality is the difficulty of capturing the emotional sensibility of the everyday, the intimacy shared in passing moments, and the undertones of change. Through these brief vignettes I have sought to showcase the

flexing and gradations of homosociality that are occurring for young men. While these two guys are not enough to demonstrate that there is no 'crisis' occurring for men, the aim in this article is to showcase ways that young men are avoiding and voiding 'crisis' as a necessity, not to disprove other's presentations of crisis. Put differently, what they show is the ways that the singularity of connectivity is being challenged, and through these brief vignettes, one is able not to see the fullness of possibility but the that which is now possible. It is important to think about homosociality as an everyday phenomenon rather than an extreme or part of a polemical argument, or as solely and uniquely structural. At the same time, this article has addressed a particular set of literatures that often forego deep analysis of homosociality, or think in terms solely of friendships. Both of these discourses provide complexity to the picture when looked at together, but when seen singularly can often be more simplistic than informative. Thus, the article has put forward not simply that homosociality is more complicated than previously thought, but that the forms of homosociality that are now possible has itself expanded.

Homosociality is what happens between men sharing ideas, thoughts, jokes, curiosities, worries, anxieties, and the simple pleasures of daily life. Neither Aaron nor Brady seemed to find themselves in the midst of a turbulent and tumultuous crisis; and in fact found their experiences of friendships to be far more demonstrative of a nuanced and affectionate experience. They are working through the challenges presented to them by a social system which perceives and positions men and men's homosocial relations in specific ways and that aims to corral their identities to mirror these expectations. Through this we are able to grasp the complicated nature not simply of the enactments of homosociality itself – a point made throughout this article and in a variety of other scholars' research – but in the conceiving of homosociality itself. In this they are each, in their own way, challenging expectations and opening themselves up to the challenges of cultivating and maintaining relations across borders, boundaries, and social expectations. These young men, sitting in the interstice between what is

meant by “boy” and “man” are working through their own meanings and expectations and creating pathways, leaving one with the question, “whose crisis?” (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2013: 127).

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¹ All names, including of the university and residence hall, are pseudonyms.