Difference Without Dominance: Children's Talk in Mixed- and Same-Sex Dyads[1]

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This study explores whether third graders verbalize gender differences in dominance in mixed- and same-sex interaction. We tape-recorded the conversations of 43 pairs of Caucasian working-class children playing checkers in same- or mixed-sex conditions. Children appear to develop gender-differentiated speech styles. Boys brag and insult their opponents in both mixed- and same-sex conditions more often than do girls. Girls talk off-topic, interrupt, and laugh more in same-sex dyads than do boys or either, boys or girls in mixed-sex dyads. Gender differences in same-sex interaction were reflected in mixed-sex interaction. Although boys account for a larger proportion of direct requests and self-promoting speech in mixed-sex encounters, we failed to uncover substantial asymmetry in mixed-sex interaction, indicating that boys do not conversationally dominate girls in third grade. However, children were less mutually engaged in mixed-sex than in same-sex interactions, and girls especially showed less positive affect in mixed-sex dyads.

Children's social use of language is a particularly rich terrain for studying the acquisition of gender roles and attitudes. Although it is well documented that children can use language strategically and for a variety of social purposes (Becker, 1982; Shatz, 1986), we know relatively little about their use of different speech registers to signify social group membership, in particular that circumscribed by sex. Lakoff (1975) claimed that adults invoke different speech "registers" reflecting the power imparity between the sexes. However, while research on gender differences in adult speech across cultures and contexts has burgeoned in the last decade (McConnell-Ginet, Borker, & Furman, 1980; Philips, Steele, & Tanz, 1987; Thorne, Kramarae, & Henley, 1983), little attention has been paid to the emergence of gender-specific registers in children.

Children acquire knowledge about and behave according to gender-stereotyped traits, activities, and roles early in development (Carter & Levy, 1988; Williams, Bennett, & Best, 1975). Since conversation and language serve as principal vehicles for social identity (Coleman, 1987; Goffman, 1959), we would expect that children would be sensitive to gender differences in speech at an early age. Edelsky (1977) asked first, third, and sixth graders to attribute stimulus sentences (distinguished by polite or impolite requests, weak or strong expletives, intensifiers, and tag questions) to a hypothetical male or female (or either) speaker. She found that children discriminated what adults judged as male or female speech by third grade, although sixth graders were most like adults. When Andersen (1984) asked 4-year-olds to speak for a "Daddy" or a "Mommy" doll, all children altered their pitch and volume accordingly. Even young children, therefore, recognize some features characteristic of male or female speech, although their repertoire probably increases with age. The next question is whether they incorporate these features into their own speech with peers.

In describing gender differences in mixed-sex adult interactions, researchers have found that couples report that men are more domineering in relationships (Coutright, Millar, & Rogers-Millar, 1979), and that in conversation between nonintimates, in both dyadic and group exchanges, men interrupt more (and in general talk more), appropriating conversational space (Eakins & Eakins, 1976; Edelsky, 1981; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975). Women, in the role of facilitator, ask more questions (deBoer, 1987; Fishman, 1983). Lakoff (1975) claimed that women's speech is more polite and other oriented than men's, but other researchers found that registers were differentiated more on the basis of power, roles, and context than on gender alone (Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; O'Barr & Atkins, 1980; Thorne & Henley, 1975). These researchers argue that what is characterized as "female" and therefore polite speech is com-

mon to the speech of all subordinates regardless of sex, and "male" speech characterizes the language of power divorced from sex assignment.

While women and men speak differently when paired together, there are also marked differences between same-sex conversations. Women and men prefer to talk about different subjects when in same-sex dyads, with women discussing personal topics, seeking mutual equality (Leaper, 1987), and men's talk more "task-oriented, dominant, directive, hierarchical" (Aries & Johnson, 1983). Maltz and Borker (1982) claim that these and other differences result from segregated socialization experiences in childhood. Gender segregation is characteristic of children's social lives, appearing as early as the preschool years (LaFreniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984; Roopnarine, 1984) and increasing with age during middle childhood (Ellis, Rogoff, & Cromer, 1981). Carter (1986) has pointed out the widespread nature of sex segregation among both children and nonhuman primates. Maltz and Borker (1982) contend that as a result of this segregation, children develop different interpretive heuristics in interaction and conversation. Ethnographic studies have reported marked gender differences in play patterns, with girls more often in dyads and boys in large, hierarchical groups (Lever, 1976; Thorne, 1986). Maltz and Borker suggest that these structural differences in play give rise to different forms of interaction, with girls more focused on maintaining equity while resolving conflict, and boys more oriented toward establishing and maintaining a position of dominance within the group.

There is research indicating that some of the gender differences in conversation reported in adults are present in children's talk. Leaper (1991), for example, in a study of 5- to 7-year-olds' talk during puppet play, found that girls' speech was more collaborative than boys, using more enjoining strategies to get the other child to oblige a request (i.e., "Let's play store"). Little boys, on the other hand, were more coercive, and had more altercations with each other (i.e., "I'm gonna hit you"). Leaper also found more conflict during mixed- than in same-sex interaction for both boys and girls. Esposito (1979) reported that kindergarten boys interrupted girls more often than each other by a 2:1 margin, replicating the findings of Zimmerman and West (1975). Mueller (1972) reported that preschool boys talked more than girls did in same-sex pairs. However, when they asked kindergartners to describe a picture, Cowan, Weber, & Klein (1967) found no sex differences in the mean length of utterances. With respect to issuing polite requests, while there are no gender differences in the perception of what is more polite (Bates & Silvern, 1977; Edelsky, 1977), there appear to be differences in the use of polite requests in the talk between same-sex peers. Sachs (1987) tape-recorded and analyzed the conversations of preschoolers engaged in pretend "doctor/health clinic" play. She found that

boys used more simple imperative forms than girls. Girls, on the other hand, mitigated their requests with tag questions and requests for joint action, as in "Pretend we each took a different kind of drugs in our eyes, right?" or "Let's sit down." Goodwin (1980), studying the patterns of play among African American elementary school children in Philadelphia, also observed that girls playing together asked more questions and issued more indirect requests or phrases enjoining the other to participate such as "We can . . ." or "Let's . . ." than did the boys. Sgan and Pickert (1980) found that in cooperative play kindergarten and first-grade boys made more assertive bids than girls, however, girls' assertive bids for joint play and direct requests increased with age, and by third grade there were no gender differences. It is unclear how children acquire these apparently different styles and goals, although as Maccoby's (1990) review of children's relationships indicates, they do so early on.

The power-based explanation of sex differences offered by authors such as Thorne and Henley (1975) and Thorne et al. (1983), and the "genderlect" hypothesis offered by Maltz and Borker (1983), give rise to different predictions. If children acquire different genderlects, then we would expect differences to be pronounced in same-sex dyads. That is, if interruptions are a marked feature (although not unique) of a masculine speech register, boys should interrupt boys more than girls interrupt girls. However, if status imparity between the sexes accounts for differences, then males would use dominant speech with females but not with same-sex peers, and females would use self-effacing (subordinate) speech with males but not with females. The differences then would be more pronounced in mixed- than in same-sex pairs. Asymmetry in interaction has been described as a hallmark of dominance (Gottman & Ringland, 1981), and we would expect to find asymmetry within mixed-sex but not in same-sex interaction.

The chief purpose of this study was to discover whether children's verbal interaction in mixed- and same-sex dyads corresponds to that in adult speech, and in particular, whether there is evidence for "dominant" speech patterns among third-grade boys when paired with girls or "submissive" speech produced by girls with boys. We had children meet within a competitive context, playing checkers with an unfamiliar peer, because we believed competition would elicit power-based interactive styles and asymmetry. We wanted to maximize the likelihood that gender differences would emerge. We selected third graders for our study because it has been documented that by third grade (in most cases, earlier) children become sex segregated in their play preferences (Hartup, 1983; Thorne, 1986). By the age of 7 children are also sophisticated in their display of sociolinguistic knowledge (Becker, 1982; Ervin-Tripp & Gordon, 1984), and of course, as

mentioned previously, are well able to distinguish gender-differentiated speech styles by third grade (Edelsky, 1977).

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were third graders (mean age = 8.9) from three regional elementary schools in southeastern Michigan randomly selected from a pool of children who had parental permission to participate. The children were Caucasian, from lower and lower middle class families. Third-grade boys and girls were paired with either a same-sex or different-sex peer. Playmates were selected from other classrooms, and if they knew each other they were re-paired with another unfamiliar partner. This was a between-subjects design, with children participating in only one dyadic condition; there were 14 female and 12 male same-sex, and 17 different-sex dyads, resulting in a total of 43 dyads.

Procedure

During school hours two experimenters retrieved children from different classrooms, escorting them to a small testing room. Children were seated at a table with a checker board and checkers, and instructed to play with each other until the experimenter returned. The experimenters went over the basic rules of checkers with each child individually. All children appeared well acquainted with the rules of the game.

An unconcealed audiotape recorder and microphone were placed on a shelf next to the table at which the children were seated. The experimenters told the children that they were interested in studying how children played checkers together, and that they should feel free to talk about anything they wanted while playing because only the researchers would hear the tapes. Children were asked to introduce themselves on the tape recorder so the transcriber would be able to identify the speaker with the voice. The experimenters then turned on the tape recorder and left the room for 15 minutes.

Transcription

Tapes were transcribed and processed through a number of stages. During the first stage undergraduate research assistants transcribed the

tapes according to conventions derived in part from Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). The transcripts then were checked against the tapes by the first author. The tapes again were analyzed independently by another undergraduate research assistant who listened and coded only for interruptions, marking any omissions or ambiguities on the original transcript. The research assistant and first author resolved these ambiguities. The transcripts, then, went through four phases before coding: the original transcription by an undergraduate research assistant, checking for accuracy by the first author, the check by an independent research assistant listening for interruptions, and the final resolution by the first author of any further discrepancies.

Coding

Three research assistants coded the entire set of transcripts. Two undergraduate research assistants coded the same 10 transcripts for speech acts. Intercoder reliability, computed as the number of agreements divided by the sum of agreements and disagreements, was above .85 agreement on all speech variables. Discrepancies in coding on these ten transcripts were resolved by the first author.

Some of the variables we coded corresponded to those reported by previous researchers studying gender differences in adult discourse, and were thought to express interpersonal power or other-orientation. Among the paralinguistic variables coded in this study were the amount of speech (total number of turns in a dyadic condition and the mean length of utterance), the total number of laughing episodes, and the proportion of interruptions over total turns.

Paralinguistic Variables

Amount of Speech. The number of turns per dyad and the mean length of utterance measured the amount of speech between partners. Turns were circumscribed either by the other's intervening speech or by a significant (1 second) pause between utterances. Therefore, a single speaker could produce a disproportionate number of turns, particularly if paired with a reticent partner, although in general we anticipated symmetry in turn taking. On the other hand, the mean length of an utterance, computed by dividing the number of words in the transcript by the number of coded turns (derived and modified from Brown, 1973, p. 53), should be a more sensitive measure of asymmetry in the amount of talk.

Affect. We transcribed the number of laughter or giggling episodes by subject. The code for laughter excluded sarcastic, stylized "ha-ha." A laugh or giggle would be counted as one episode for a single dyad partner if it was continuous, regardless of how long it extended, until it was interrupted by intervening speech, laughter, or a pause. The boundaries of a coded laugh or giggle, then, would be from the point it began until it was interrupted by silence or the partner's speech or laughter. von Salisch (1987) has described how school-aged children synchronize affect with peers, generally through the mutual expression of smiling and laughter. Since we unfortunately were unable to videotape these interactions, we could only code for audible laughing episodes.

Interruptions. We derived our code for interruptions from the codes developed by Sacks et al. (1974). An interruption is essentially a spoken interjection into another person's "turn," an attempt to gain the conversational "floor" (Edelsky, 1981). Essentially, while Sacks et al. (1974) coded interruptions that were two or more syllables "deep" into the speech of another, we coded interruptions if they constituted an overlap of one or more syllables. However, we did not include back channels such as "yeah." We coded interruptions when the interrupted speakers both completed and failed to complete their utterance, and when they maintained or switched the topic, as in the following:

Example 1: Child 1: What are you gonna do?
           Child 2: I was gonna go like this, *but I*—
           Child 1:—*Oh, just move* and you'll have one!

Example 2: Child 1: I've got three and you've got *two*—
           Child 2:—*We're* missing art.

Speech Acts

Speech acts codes were derived from prior sociolinguistic work and Brown and Levinson's (1986) sociolinguistic analysis of politeness. Brown and Levinson describe breaches of social "face," and what recourse people take to save face, once threatened. They propose that face-threatening (threatening the status of the other) and face-saving speech acts (preserving the status of the other, perhaps at one's own expense) contribute to the balance of power relations in the society. We operationalized their notions of face threats with the codes of direct requests and self-promotion. Direct requests threaten the other's social standing in that they are transparent (Clark, 1979)—the intention to command is unmasked. Self-promotion included bragging or insults, obviously intimidating the other's face. Face-

saving acts included indirect, polite requests, and what we termed self-effacement, which included complimenting the other or comparatively downgrading oneself.

Direct and Indirect Requests. Direct requests are commands usually to action in the imperative grammatical form, where illocutionary intent is transparent through the form of the utterance (Searle, 1969; Brown & Levinson, 1987), as in *"Hurry up!"* or *"Take one and put it on top of it."* Indirect requests, on the other hand, take another grammatical form such as a statement or question, but the illocutionary intent is still that essentially of an imperative, as in *"Can you give me the reds?"*

Self-Promotion. These speech acts are face threatening, and highlight one's own advantage or skill at the expense of the other. They involve either bragging or denigrating the other, as in *"You're trapped"* or *"If I had to play them I'd beat them."* We collapsed both denigrating and self-promoting speech acts because they were often uttered together, in a single turn. Both self-promoting and self-effacing speech acts (below) also had a generally low frequency, particularly self-effacing speech acts, and we therefore included both particular kinds of expression within a single unifying theme.

Self-Effacement. Self-effacing speech acts are the counter form to self-promotion. They include statements complimenting the partner, or downplaying own's own skill or advantage. They serve, according to Brown and Levinson (1987) to enhance the other's face.

Questions. Fishman (1983) reported that in mixed-sex interaction women ask more questions. In our study we coded all utterances that were grammatically in question form (e.g.: *"Who's turn is it?"*) or ended with a rising intonation indicating question-asking intention (e.g.: *"You want red ⌃ "*).

Topic Switches. Utterances initiating off-task topics not having to do with the checkers game at hand (e.g.: *"Those ladies are from the University of Michigan."*). Leaper (1991) found that boys switched the topic more often than did girls during a cooperative mutual puppet playing episode.

RESULTS

Dependent Measures and Data Analysis

For our data analysis, we used the raw scores of the amount of speech (mean length of utterance and number of turns), as well as the raw scores on laughter episodes. All other speech variable scores were converted to proportions by dividing the total number of occurrences for any given speech act by the total number of turns for each dyad. Our initial analyses treated the dyad as the unit of analysis. We performed one-way analyses

of variance (ANOVA) for each variable across the three dyadic groups, and subsequent Fisher least significant differences (LSD) post hoc comparisons when a significant overall F value was obtained.

To determine whether children typically invoke gender-differentiated speech registers, we conducted a series of one-way ANOVAs for each speech variable, across dyadic conditions. It was hypothesized that boys would talk and interrupt more than girls; however, as can be seen in Table I, these differences failed to emerge. There were no gender differences in the amount of talk as measured by the mean number of words per utterance or the number of turns by dyad. Within the mixed-sex dyad, children contributed an equal amount of turns; girls = 51%, boys = 49%. Our one-way ANOVA on interruptions revealed a difference, $F(2,41) = 3.01$, $p <.06$, with LSD post hoc comparisons revealing that contrary to expectations, girls interrupted more than children in either of the other two dyadic conditions, $p < .05$. There were no gender differences across dyads in the production of direct requests, although a substantial proportion (18–20%)

Table I. Mean Proportions of Speech Variables by Dyad[a]

Variables	Dyad condition		
	Girl–boy ($n = 17$)	Girl–girl ($n = 14$)	Boy– boy ($n = 12$)
Paralinguistic variables			
Total laughs/giggles	7a	17b	9ab
Total turns	74a	105b	118b
Mean length of utterance	4.33	4.45	4.75
Interruptions	.04a	.09b	.05a
Speech act variables			
Direct requests[b]	.54	.62	.58
Total requests	.20	.19	.18
Self-promotion	.10a	.10a	.14b
Questions	.12	.13	.12
Topic switches	.06a	.14b	.03a
Indirect requests[b]	.46	.38	.42
Self-effacing	.03	.05	.07

[a]Mean, rounded speech act values are represented by proportion scores of the total number of occurrences of a given variable divided by the total number of turns in that dyad. Proportions across rows (dyad conditions) with the different letters are significantly different from each other according to post hoc comparisons at the .05 level. Those values without letters or the same letters are not significantly different from each other.

[b]The proportions of direct and indirect requests were obtained by dividing them by the total number of requests.

of all children's speech focused on controlling the action or speech of the partner, either through imperatives or more indirect, polite requests. In mixed-sex interaction boys accounted for 64% of the direct requests produced (see Fig. 1). There were significant dyad differences in self-promotion, $F(2,41) = 3.52, p < .05$, with subsequent comparisons showing that boys in male dyads produce more self-promoting speech acts than children in either of the other two groups ($p < .05$). Boys also accounted for 66% of the self-promoting speech acts in mixed-sex interaction. Contrary to predictions, boys did not talk or interrupt more than girls. Indeed, girls interrupted each other more frequently than did boys.

There were differences in the amount of topic switching, $F(2,41) = 3.42, p < .05$, with girls' dyads switching topic from the checkers game at hand more than mixed-sex or boys' dyads (LSD, $p < .05$). The difference was large, with 14% of the turns in girls' dyads comprising topic switches, compared to only 4% of the boys' turns and 6% of mixed-sex dyads' turns. In the mixed-sex dyads there was asymmetry in topic switching, with girls producing 64% of the topic switches. A nonsignificant trend showing differences in laughter, $F(2,41) = 2.42, p < 10$, revealed that girls in same-sex dyads laughed more than children in mixed-sex interaction (LSD $p < .05$), although the post hoc differences between same-sex dyads only approached significance, $p < .11$. There was also a statistically nonsignificant trend sug-
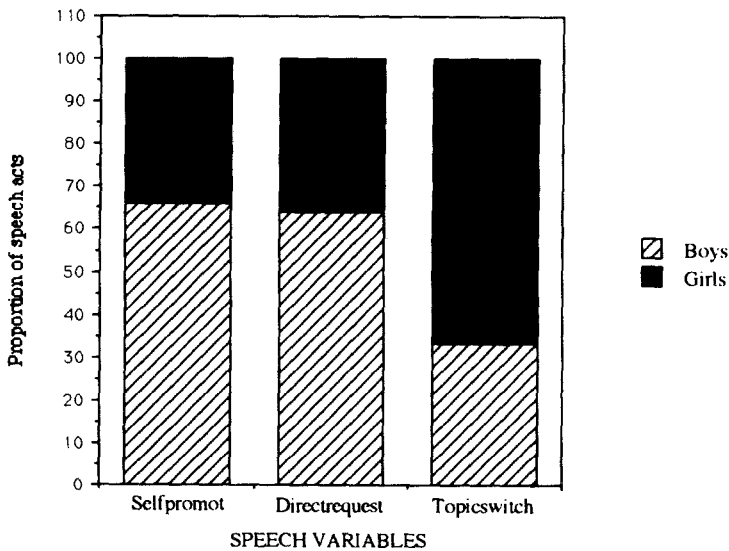

Fig. 1. Asymmetry in the production of speech variables within mixed-sex dyads.

gesting differences in the amount of self-effacing speech produced in dyads, $F(2,41) = 2.39, p < 10$, in the opposite direction, however, than predicted. Boys together produced more self-effacing speech acts than children in mixed-sex dyads, although not more than girls paired together, post hoc LSD, $p < .05$. While we uncovered patterns of asymmetry in mixed-sex speech with self-promotions and topic switches, paralleling gender differences between same-sex dyads, there was no evidence of asymmetry among the other speech variables.

Although the mean length of utterance was the same across dyads, there were differences in the amount of turns children took in different conditions, univariate $F(2,41) = 3.28, p < .05$, with Fisher's LSD post hoc comparisons revealing that children took fewer conversational turns in the mixed-sex than in either of the same-sex dyads, $p < .05$. There was, then, less interaction among children in mixed-sex than in same-sex groups. There was no case where a variable was produced more in mixed than in any form of same-sex interaction.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the claim that children form gender-based styles of interaction common to both same- and different-sex play. However, none of the speech variables are sex exclusive; all are used by both genders to various degrees. Indeed, most of the variables thought to index power or subordinate status failed to differentiate the sexes in this study. We need to keep in mind, then, that these children are more similar than they are different, more likely in mixed-sex interaction to be symmetrical than asymmetrical. The sociolinguistic differences we did uncover, however, might enlighten our understanding of children's social priorities in interaction. With the exception of direct requests, we failed to find instances of male dominance in discourse unique to mixed-sex interaction. Two gender differences emerged common to both same- and mixed-sex interaction: self-promotions and topic switches. Boys contributed more self-promoting speech than did girls to mixed-sex conversations, including statements that insulted the opponent as well as bragging about oneself, but no more than they did with same-sex opponents. Girls changed the topic from the checkers game at hand more than the boys did in mixed-sex interaction, but again, they switch the topic more frequently when they are with other girls. If these variables were simple markers of status, then they should not persist across same-sex and mixed-sex dyads. Indeed, it is notable that both forms of verbal behavior are respectively higher when children are paired with a same-sex peer. This finding corroborates that reported by Mulac et

al. (1988), where they found that women and men showed heightened gen-der-differentiated speech when paired in same-sex than mixed-sex dyads. Wilkinson, Lindow, and Chiang (1985) also reported that boys directed more controlling speech toward other boys than to girls, although a similar effect was not apparent in girls' speech.

Self-promoting speech lends itself well to competitive encounters, aid-ing the face of the speaker at the expense of the opponent's. It is possible that the competitive context of the board game elicits a contentious style among the boys, and this effect might not generalize to more cooperative settings. However, Leaper (1991) reports that boys are more verbally ag-gressive than girls during collaborative play as well. This verbal "sparring" serves as a social tool for the competitive context boys encounter through-out childhood, and might generalize to other social arenas. Since self-pro-motion is symmetrically distributed in same-sex play among peers, rather than indexing dominance, this type of speech act might signify attempts to dominate and to establish hierarchical power. One explanation for self-pro-motion occurring less in mixed-sex dyads is that girls and boys do not strive to dominate each other; their social orientation is focused on same-sex rather than different-sex peers, and they are less experienced and interested in competing with someone outside their hierarchical social ken (i.e., an-other sex).

Girls talked more about topics other than the checkers game than did boys, and this tendency to go off-topic might serve at least two social functions. The off-topic remarks include jokes about the study, questions about where the other child lives, or how the other child feels about a teacher or another child. These personal comments and questions establish a common social ground with the other child. It is possible that girls are more oriented toward developing this common ground than to competing; that they are more interested in their opponent than in the game, or at any rate, more interested than the boys seem to be (boys hardly ever switch the focus from the game). Another social function of topic shifts in this context is to redirect attention from the competitive nature of the exchange, the winning and losing moves, that might be aversive to some girls. If it is the case that girls use topic switches in this context to avoid direct com-petition, then one would not expect to find girls switching topic during a cooperative or mutually interactive task. Indeed, Leaper (1991) found that topic switches in communal puppet play indicated noncooperation and re-sistance, and were more often produced by boys than by girls. There is the possibility that girls prefer cooperative and boys competitive exchanges in their play (Knight & Chao, 1988), in which case off-topic remarks signal the girls' discomfort with the competitive context. Future studies should

illuminate the relative contributions of competitive or cooperative contexts to the development of gender differentiated communicative styles.

The girls in our study also interrupt each other more than boys interrupt, and more than either sex interrupts each other. This finding is incompatible with former reports defining interruptions as dominance markers (Esposito, 1979; Zimmerman & West, 1975; West & Zimmerman, 1983). However, in their analysis of interruptions, Kennedy and Camden (1983) found that about half of the interruptions in same- or mixed-sex encounters serve a confirming rather than an oppositional function. In our study there is symmetry in the amount of interrupting among girls, and such verbal behavior might signify engagement rather than dominance, as it does in studies of family cohesion and dysfunction (Winter & Ferreira, 1969). In other words, variables thought to belie dominance or submission (Holmes, 1986) are versatile, meaning different things in different contexts (McCloskey, 1987). It is also true that the girls seem to be enjoying themselves in same-sex dyads, giggling and laughing more than the boys do. This finding corroborates that of Foot, Chapman, and Smith (1977), who interpreted the higher incidence of laughter among girls than boys in same-sex dyads as indicative of their greater comfort with dyadic interaction, as opposed to the "group" that is more commonly the social backdrop of boys.

It appears that children develop, as Maltz and Borker have suggested, different interactive styles that are to some degree at odds. Although boys in the mixed-sex dyads produce a larger proportion of direct requests, which indexes a display of at least attempted dominance, it does not appear that boys succeed in dominating girls, nor that girls are passive when playing with boys, at this particular age, within this context. This finding corroborates the ethnographic data reported by Goodwin (1980) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1987). In these studies, the Goodwins found that African American girls in Philadelphia were quite capable of arguing with boys or bragging when necessary, although they also used more enjoining speech. Wilkinson et al. (1985) also found that girls often initiated dissent against boys, even when they were outnumbered by boys in small groups.

The segregation of the sexes at this age allows children to set up separate hierarchies, where the approval or acceptance by a different-sex peer is largely irrelevant to one's social standing. Third-grade girls can well afford to be "little feminists." This state of affairs probably changes with puberty, however, when girls' social standing depends on their success in attracting the attention and approval of boys. It is at this point we would expect profound shifts in interactive style from that observed in the present study. While no studies bear on the sociolinguistic transitions from childhood to adolescence, Hill (1987) describes another sort of transition in language use, comparing the speech of young, unmarried women to

middle-aged women in rural regions of central Mexico. The young women "blush, giggle, give one-word answers . . . and speak in tiny voices" (p. 127), whereas the older women are assertive: they talk faster, joke rowdily, and publicly nag their husbands. They have reached a stage of development, much like the third graders in our study, where social life is determined by connections with other females rather than approval by men.

The particular features of gender-differentiated speech we uncovered serve different social goals. Bragging and verbal insults are well adapted to competition, whereas topic switches, in this context, usually involving a shift from the details of the game and establishing some base of mutual interest, serve what Gilligan (1982) and others have described as a general spirit of networking and cooperation among females. As we have shown in our own study, they are clearly capable of bragging and insulting their opponent, but they do so at the same time they are building some common interpersonal thread. Boys brag and insult without trying to establish another level of mutual connection. Children's values are consonant with their behavioral style. Knight and Chao (1989) used a measure to assess values of cooperation and competition, finding that girls preferred cooperative and equal methods of resource allocation and boys more individualistic, competitive methods as early as 36 months.

While children engage in less psychological warfare (as expressed in self-promoting speech) when paired with a different-sex partner, it is also true that the girls, at any rate, attempt fewer topic switches, laugh less, and interrupt less when they are with boys than with other girls. The competitive exchanges characteristic of boys' same-sex play and the attempts at alliance typical of girls' play both decline in mixed-sex interactions. The children appear simply less mutually engaged in mixed-sex interaction, talking less in general with each other. It might be that this apparent discomfort or lack of interest is precipitated by the gender segregation so common to children in this age range, and perhaps even earlier. Langlois, Gottfried, and Seay (1973) observed that 5-year-olds were more socially active and engaged when paired with same-sex than different-sex playmates. Jacklin and Maccoby (1978) found that preschoolers exhibited more social behavior (of both an agonistic and prosocial type) when paired with a same-sex than different sex partner. Leaper (1991) also reported higher rates of conflict in mixed-sex than in same-sex kindergarten dyads. These general tendencies seem to persist in adulthood. In their study of mixed- and same-sex interaction among college sophomores, Ickes and Barnes (1978) found that mixed-sex interaction appeared to be more stressful, marked by less reciprocity and actual engagement than same-sex exchanges.

The features of masculine interaction that carry over into mixed-sex play might be particularly aversive to girls (Maccoby, 1990). Our study

shows that boys and girls do not mix very well, and it is evident girls have more fun together (as expressed in laughter) than they do when they are with boys. Boys express a higher proportion of self-promoting speech and direct requests than do girls in the mixed-sex dyads, perhaps accounting for the girls' apparent lack of enthusiasm and social withdrawal. The implications of our findings for older children and adults are that these stylistic differences indeed could result in conflict and miscommunication in mixed-sex interaction, as Maltz and Borker (1982) originally proposed. However, it is not simply that the styles are different, but that they actually conflict, with opposing social goals. The competitive verbal style of males, as revealed in this study, will by necessity "overrule" a less aggressive one, leading to frustration at least on the girls' part. If the style of assertion and persuasion in our economic and social worlds continues to conform to a masculine register and males fail to develop more flexible interactive styles, females will find it harder to gain access to social power, but perhaps more to the point, they will not *enjoy* the communication game nearly as much.

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