

How to Ask for a Drink

Brady's Bar is obviously a place to drink. Every night a crowd of college-age men and women visit the bar for this purpose. But even a casual observer could not miss the fact that Brady's is also a place to *talk*. Drinking and talking are inseparable. The lonely drinker who sits in silence is either drawn into conversation or leaves the bar. Everyone feels the anxious insecurity of such a person, seemingly alone in the crowd at Brady's. It is also believed that drinking affects the way people talk, lubricating the social interchange. If liquor flows each night in Brady's like a stream from behind the bar, talking, laughing, joking, and dozens of simultaneous conversations cascade like a torrent from every corner of the bar. Early in our research we became aware that our ethnography would have to include an investigation of this speech behavior.

The importance of drinking and talking has also been observed by anthropologists in other societies. Take, for example, the Subanun of the Philippine Islands, studied by Charles Frake.¹ Deep in the tropical rain forests of Zamboanga Peninsula on the island of Mindanao, these people live in small family groups, practicing swidden agriculture. Social ties outside the family are maintained by networks to kin and neighbors rather than through some larger formal organization. Social encounters beyond

¹This discussion is based on Charles O. Frake, "How to Ask for a Drink in Subanun" (1964b). This classic article provided many insights as well as the framework for the material presented in this chapter.

the family occur on frequent festive occasions that always include "beer" drinking. Unlike Brady's Bar with separate glasses for each person, the Subanun place fermented mash in a single, large Chinese jar and drink from this common container by using a long bamboo straw. A drinking group gathers around the jar, water is poured over the mash, and each person in turn sucks beer from the bottom of the jar. As the water passes through the mash it is transformed into a potent alcoholic beverage. There are elaborate rules for these drinking sessions that govern such activities as competitive drinking, opposite-sexed partners drinking together under the cover of a blanket, and games where drinking is done in chugalug fashion. But the drinking is secondary to the talking on these occasions and what Frake has said about the Subanun might easily apply to Brady's Bar:

The Subanun expression for drinking talk, . . . "talk from the straw," suggests an image of the drinking straw as a channel not only of the drink but also of drinking talk. The two activities, drinking and talking, are closely interrelated in that how one talks bears on how much one drinks and the converse is, quite obviously, also true . . . Especially for an adult male, one's role in the society at large, insofar as it is subject to manipulation, depends to a considerable extent on one's verbal performance during drinking encounters.²

In this chapter we will examine the verbal performances of those who participate in the social life at Brady's. We focus on a single speech event, *asking for a drink*, and the social function of this event. This chapter is intended as a partial ethnography of speaking, a description of the cultural rules at Brady's Bar for using speech.

The Ethnography of Speaking³

Throughout each of the preceding chapters our description has aimed at answering the fundamental ethnographic question: "What would a stranger have to know to act appropriately as a cocktail waitress and to interpret

²Ibid. (1964b:128-129).

³One of the earliest formulations of the approach to a cultural description of speaking behavior used in this chapter is Dell H. Hymes, "The Ethnography of Speaking" (1962). Many earlier works in language and culture implicitly deal with the same issues. See Dell H. Hymes, ed., *Language, Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology* (1964) for the best of this earlier literature. Since 1962 Dell H. Hymes has published a series of articles that elaborate on his early formulation of the ethnography of speaking. This chapter and the next one draw heavily from these works. See especially his "Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication" (1964); "Directions in (Ethno-) Linguistic Theory" (1964); "Models of

behavior from her perspective?" An ethnography of speaking asks this question in reference to the way people talk. It goes beyond the usual linguistic study that analyzes speech in abstraction from its usage. Instead of describing linguistic rules that generate *meaningful* utterances, we sought to discover the sociolinguistic rules that generate *appropriate* utterances. This approach is extremely important because people at Brady's are not interested in merely saying things that make sense; they seek instead to say things that reveal to others their skill in verbal performances. Indeed, this often requires that a person utter nonsense, at least so it seems to the outsider.

In order to discover the rules for using speech, we began by recording what people said to one another, noting whenever possible the gestures, tone of voice, setting, and other features of the verbal interaction. Then we examined these samples of speech usage for recurrent patterns and went back to listen for more instances. At first we sought to identify the major speech events that were typical of the bar. A speech event refers to activities that are directly governed by rules for speaking.⁴ On any evening the waitress participates in many different speech events. For example, Denise enters the bar shortly after 6:30 in the evening and almost her first act is to exchange some form of *greeting* with the bartender, the day employees who are present, and any regulars she recognizes. At the bar she *asks for a drink*, saying to John, "I'd like a gin gimlet." This particular speech event takes many forms and is one that Denise will hear repeatedly from customers throughout the evening. She will also label this speech event *taking an order*. John refuses her request, fixes a Coke instead, and replies, "You know you can't have a drink now, you start work in thirty minutes."

The evening begins slowly so Denise stands at her station talking to a regular customer. They are participating in a speech event called a *conversation*. As more customers arrive, Denise will say, "Hi, Bill," "Good to see you, George. Where have you been lately?" "Hi, how are things at the 'U' these days?" and other things to *greet* people as they walk in. She will *give orders* to the bartender, *answer the phone*, make an *announcement* about last call, and possibly get into an *argument* with one table when she tries to get them

The Interaction of Language and Social Setting" (1965); "Sociolinguistics and the Ethnography of Speaking" (1971); and "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life" (1972). One of the earliest empirical studies based directly on Hymes' formulation of the ethnography of speaking was Charles O. Frake, "How to Ask for a Drink in Subanon" (1964b). This was published in a special issue of the *American Anthropologist*, "The Ethnography of Communication," edited by John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes (1964), and contains other important articles in this area. For a recent collection of studies, see John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds., *The Ethnography of Communication: Directions in Sociolinguistics* (1972).

⁴This definition of a speech event is based on Dell Hymes (1972:56).

to leave on time. Like the other girls, Denise has learned the cultural rules in this bar for identifying particular speech events and participating in the verbal exchanges they involve. She has acquired the rules for greeting people, for arguing, and for giving orders, rules that define the appropriate ways to speak in such events.

It wouldn't take long for a stranger to see that *asking for a drink* is probably the most frequent speech event that occurs in the bar. But, although it is an important activity, it appears to be a rather simple act. A stranger would only have to know the name of one drink, say Pabst Beer, and any simple English utterance that expresses a desire in order to appropriately ask for a drink. The waitress approaches the table, asks, "What would you like?" and a customer can simply say, "I'll have a Pabst." And once a person knows all the names for the other beverages it is possible to use this sentence to ask for any drink the bartenders can provide. A stranger might even go out of the bar thinking that asking for a drink is a rather trivial kind of speech behavior. That was certainly our impression during the first few weeks of fieldwork.

But as time went on we discovered that this speech event is performed in dozens of different ways. The people who come to Brady's have elaborated on a routine event, creating alternative ways for its execution. The well socialized individual knows the rules for selecting among these alternatives and for manipulating them to his own advantage. Asking for a drink thus becomes a kind of stage on which the customer can perform for the waitress and also the audience of other customers. A newcomer to the bar is frequently inept at these verbal performances, and one can observe regulars and employees smiling at one another or even laughing at some ill-timed and poorly performed effort at asking for a drink. Our goal was not to predict what people would say when they asked for a drink but to specify the alternative ways they could ask for a drink, the rules for selecting one or another alternative, and the social function of these ways of talking.⁵ We especially wanted to know how the waitress would inter-

⁵We agree with Frake who maintains that the goal of ethnography is not prediction but identification of culturally-appropriate alternatives. In his "Notes on Queries in Ethnography," he writes:

The aims of ethnography, then, differ from those of stimulus-response psychology in at least two respects. First, it is not, I think, the ethnographer's task to predict behavior *per se*, but rather to state the rules of culturally appropriate behavior. In this respect the ethnographer is again akin to the linguist who does not attempt to predict what people will say but to state rules for constructing utterances which native speakers will judge as grammatically appropriate. The model of an ethnographic statement is not: "if a person is confronted with stimulus X, he will do Y," but: "if a person is in situation X, performance Y will be judged appropriate by native actors." The second difference is that the ethnogra-

pret the alternatives she encountered in the course of her work. At the heart of the diverse ways to ask for a drink was a large set of speech acts, and it was largely through observing the way people manipulated these different acts that we discovered how to ask for a drink in Brady's Bar.

Speech Acts

In order to describe the way people *use* speech we begin with the speech act as the minimal unit for analysis. In every society people use language to accomplish purposes: to insult, to gather information, to persuade, to greet others, to curse, to communicate, etc. An act of speaking to accomplish such purposes can be a single word, a sentence, a paragraph, or even an entire book. A speech act refers to the way any utterance, whether short or long, is used and the rules for this use.⁶

Our informants at Brady's Bar recognized many different categories of speech acts. They not only identified them for us but would frequently refer to one or another speech act during conversations in the bar. For example, at the end of a typically long evening the employees and a few real regulars are sitting around the bar talking about the events of the night. "Those guys in the upper section tonight were really obnoxious," recalls Sue. "They started off *giving me shit* about the way I took their orders and then all night long they kept *calling* my name. After last call they kept *hustling* me and when I finally came right out and said no, they really *slammed* me." The other waitress, Sandy, talks of the seven Annies who were sitting at one of her tables: "They kept *asking* me to tell them what went into drinks and they were drinking Brandy Alexanders, Singapore Slings, Brandy Manhattans, and Peapickers. Then they kept *muttering* their orders all evening so I could hardly hear and *bickering* over the prices and *bitching* about the noise—it was really awful."

Giving shit, calling, hustling, slamming, asking, muttering, bickering, and bitching are all ways to talk; they are speech acts used at Brady's Bar. There are at least thirty-five such named speech acts that our informants recognized and these form a folk taxonomy shown in Figure 6.1.

pher seeks to discover, not prescribe, the significant stimuli in the subject's world. He attempts to describe each act in terms of the cultural situations which appropriately evoke it and each situation in terms of the acts it appropriately evokes (1964a:133).

⁶Our definition of a speech act is based on Dell Hymes (1972:56-57).

WAYS TO TALK AT BRADY'S BAR	Slamming
	Talking
	Telling
	Giving shit
	Asking
	Begging
	Begging off
	Gossiping
	Joking
	Teasing
	Muttering
	Ordering
	Swearing
	Sweet Talking
	Pressuring
	Arguing
	Bantering
	Lying
	Bitching
	P.R.ing
	Babbling
	Harping
	Crying over a beer
	Hustling
	Introducing
	Flirting
	Daring
	Bickering
	Apologizing
	Calling
	Greeting
	Bullshitting
	Hassling
	Admitting
	Giving orders

Figure 6.1 Some Speech Acts Used in Brady's Bar

*Components of Speech Acts*⁷

The terms shown in this taxonomy refer to the *form* that messages take. But, in order to understand any speech act and the rules for its use, one must examine the various *components* of such acts. For instance, a waitress who hears a customer say, "Hey, sexy, what are you doing after work tonight?" also pays attention to the time and place of this utterance, who said it, the intention of the speaker, the tone of voice, and many other components. If said by a female customer, the waitresses would probably be shocked and offended. On the other hand, such an utterance by a *regular* male customer, especially early in the evening, might be interpreted as *teasing*. If said in a serious tone of voice by a male a few minutes before closing, the waitress would see this as *hustling*. Each of these components enters into the rules for using speech acts. Let's take a typical event to look briefly at the components that are the most important in asking for a drink.

It is Friday evening shortly before 10 P.M. In a few minutes the bouncer will assume his duties at the door. Some tables are empty in both sections but the waitresses expect a rush of customers before 10:30. Two males enter and go directly to vacant stools at the bar; Sandy stands idly at her station watching them. The bartender has his back turned when they sit down, but when he turns around one of the newcomers asks quickly and firmly: "Could I please have a Schlitz?" The other one immediately adds, "Make mine Miller's." Without a word the bartender, who has never seen these two customers before, gets the beers, opens the bottles, and sets them down on the bar with two glasses. He collects their money and returns some change before turning to check other customers' needs. Sandy, her tables taken care of, has watched the brief interaction and thinks to herself, "If those *boys* had sat in my section I would have carded them both and asked them to leave—they can't be a day over 17." About five minutes later when the bartender has his attention on other matters, the two customers quietly move to one of the tables in Sandy's section and finish their beers. Later, when Sandy checks their table, one of them orders again, "Could we please have another round?" Without a word she clears their empty bottles and brings another Schlitz and Miller's. Let us look more closely at the components of these speech acts the two young customers have used to ask for drinks.

1. *Purpose*. Because asking for a drink can be done with any number of

different speech acts, customers tend to select ones that will achieve certain ends. In addition to a drink they may want to tell others something about themselves, demonstrate their prowess with females generally, set the stage for later interaction with the waitress, etc. In this case, the two customers want to gain admittance to the adult world of male drinking. Even more, they want to pass as *men*, circumventing entirely the stigma of merely being *boys*. They could probably borrow I.D. cards from college friends that would legitimize their presence. But such a tactic would also announce to everyone, through the public experience of being carded, that they had not yet gained *unquestioned* right to participation in this male world. They have learned that the skillful use of language can be an effective substitute for age and manliness.

2. *Message Content*. Schlitz and Miller's are both common drinks for young males. Had either of these customers asked for a daiquiri, a Margarita on the rocks, or a Smith and Currants, it would have created suspicion. Not that male customers *never* drink these beverages—they do on rare occasions. But because these are female drinks it would have called attention to other characteristics of the customers. Instead of creating the impression that they were "ordinary men," such a request would have made others wonder whether they were *ordinary*, and even more important, whether they were really *men*. An order of scotch and soda, bourbon and seven, whiskey and water, or gin and tonic would not have cast doubt on their maleness but might have been a reason for others to question their age. Men often order such drinks but, in this case, asking for any one of these would obviously contrast with their youthful appearance. By ordering two usual drinks of young men—common beers like Schlitz and Miller's—they effectively created a protective screen around their true identities.

3. *Message Form*. "Could I please have a . . ." is the polite form of *asking* in Brady's Bar. The second customer also *asked* when he added, "Make mine . . ." But they could have *ordered* in a more direct statement. They might have *asked for information* with a question about the kinds of beers available. They could have *muttered* an order in an effort to avoid attention. Other forms were also available but asking politely helped insure an impression of knowledgeable confidence. Other speech acts could easily bring suspicion in the same way that ordering an unusual drink might have done.

4. *Channel*. People at Brady's ask for drinks by using one of several different channels. A person who regularly drinks the same beverage and does so repeatedly on a single night may receive a drink on the house. By his drinking *behavior* he can thus be asking for a free drink. When a regular enters the bar, his very presence asks for a drink, and he can merely take a place at the bar or a table and the drink appears. Various gestures are another frequently used channel as when a regular walks in and holds up

See Dell Hymes (1972) for an extended discussion of the components of speech acts. We have also found Joe Sherzer and Regna Darnell, "Outline Guide for the Ethnographic Study of Speech Use" (1972) especially helpful.

his index finger or nods his head. The waitress takes his order from memory and delivers it to the waiting customer. Asking for a drink by gesture instead of the verbal channel was not possible for the two young customers because of their status as persons off the street. When someone does use one of these other channels it serves as a public announcement of status in the bar.

5. *Setting.* The setting of a speech act refers to the time and place it is spoken. Even though Brady's is a small bar, the place where a person speaks can change the social significance of what is said. Individuals at the bar tend to take on some of the "sacred maleness" associated with that location. Drinking at the tables tends to convey less experience and, combined with an appearance of youth, can be sufficient reason for carding a customer. A person who enters, and walks confidently to the bar, communicates the unstated message that he is a man, a mature drinker, one whose presence at the bar is not to be questioned. By timing their entry prior to 10:00 P.M. they also circumvent the possibility of being carded by the bouncer. Once a drink is served at the bar, the same customers who would have been carded at a table, and probably excluded, can move with immunity to a table in either section. In order for a waitress to ask them for I.D.'s at that point would require that she violate the implicit rule that bartenders know better than waitresses, something few girls are eager to do in such a public manner. By timing the round ordered from a waitress to follow the drinks ordered from a bartender, the customer can ask for a drink and also accomplish other desired ends.

6. *Tone.* A customer who enters the bar is probably not always aware of the manner or tone he uses to ask for a drink. It may have been days since he asked for a drink in any bar and his tone of voice and general manner of speech may be conditioned by experiences earlier in the day. But, to the waitress who hears hundreds of people asking for drinks, the tone communicates a great deal. The person who asks questions about drinks or who hesitates, communicates more than the kind of drink desired. The customer who uses this occasion to hustle the waitress or tease her must carefully manipulate the tone of any utterance to avoid being seen as inept or crude. The two customers who asked for a Schlitz and Miller's exuded confidence in their manner of speaking. By eliminating any hesitancy from the speech act they effectively communicated to the bartender as well as to other customers that they were men who knew their way around in bars.

7. *Participants.* Speech acts are used between two people or between groups of people. In Brady's Bar, the participants in any communicative event can change the meaning and consequences in the same way that other components do. Asking the *bartender* instead of the *waitress* allows underage males to escape the emasculation of being carded by females. When a couple enters the bar and the girl is underage, a quick firm order

for both by the male will mask the girl's discomfort and keep her from being carded. An underage *regular*, on the other hand, can order from either the bartender or waitress without worrying about being carded. As we shall see, *who* is talking to *whom* is one of the most significant variables in understanding the way people talk.⁸

But asking for a drink is not merely a communication between a customer and employee. Nearby customers and employees participate in the exchanges as an attentive audience. Many speech acts cannot be understood at Brady's unless we consider the audience before whom a speaker performs. The two young men who ordered at the bar were not only seeking to get around the barrier of carding but also to communicate their claim to adult male status, especially to those at the center of this male-oriented social world.

8. *Outcome.* The regular participants in the social life at Brady's learn to use language successfully and thereby achieve a variety of ends. Not everyone who manipulates the various features of a speech act accomplish their intentions. Some customers *hustle* a waitress when asking for a drink but to no avail. Some seek to avoid being carded, only to find themselves required to show their I.D. or leave. Others make a claim to privileged intimacy or special status, only to find their performance inept and open to derision. But there are other outcomes that often lie outside the awareness of the actors. In this case the two customers successfully escaped the degradation of carding, demonstrated their manliness and adulthood to their audience, and paved the way for an evening of uninterrupted drinking at a table served by a cocktail waitress. But equally important, their skillful performance in asking for a drink set in motion the social processes that could eventually change their status in Brady's Bar from underage persons-off-the-street to regular customers. For having escaped the carding process once, they have established their right to drink at Brady's, and subsequent visits will reinforce this right.

Rituals of Masculinity

Probably the most important outcome of the various ways to ask for a drink at Brady's Bar is related to the way they symbolize the values of *masculinity* that lie at the heart of bar culture. During our observations of the way male customers asked for drinks it became clear that these performances had a ritual quality about them. Goffman has identified the

⁸The participants in any speech event at Brady's Bar depends on their particular *identity* at the time of speaking. The range of social identities in the bar have been examined in our discussion of the social structure of Brady's Bar in Chapter 4.

nature of this ceremonial or ritual quality in social interaction:

To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony—as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community.⁹

In a sense, the routine performances of asking for a drink at Brady's Bar have been transformed into rituals that express important male values. Customers and other members of this community seldom view these speech events as rituals, but nevertheless they function in this manner. These ritual performances reinforce masculine virtues and symbolize full membership in the male world of Brady's Bar.

Furthermore, these rituals take on an added meaning when we consider that the ongoing social life at Brady's often obscures the presence of a deep structural conflict. It stems from the fact that the bar functions both as a *business* and as a *men's ceremonial center* where masculine values are reaffirmed. The conflict between these two features of the bar is partially mediated by a set of speech acts that customers employ to ask for drinks. We need to examine this structural conflict briefly.

On the one hand, the bar is a business establishment that is organized to sell drinks for a profit. It has no membership dues, no initiation rituals, no rules except legal age that restrict certain classes of people from buying drinks. Any adult can open the doors, walk into the bar, and order any drink in the house. The only requirement for drinking is payment of the usual fees. As a business establishment Brady's Bar has an air of efficiency, casualness, and impersonality. There is no readily apparent organization except the division between employees and customers. Even the spatial arrangement can be seen purely in economic terms with the bar and tables arranged for the efficient distribution of drinks. It is possible for an individual to stop in for a drink without ever suspecting that the bar is much different from a restaurant, a bank, or department store except for the menu, small services rendered, or items sold. At one level, then, Brady's is primarily a place of business.

On the other hand, Brady's Bar is a *men's ceremonial center*. As we have seen in earlier chapters, there is a formal social structure that ascribes to men the places of high status. The spatial patterns in the bar reflect the values of a male-oriented culture with certain places having an almost sacred

atmosphere. The language patterns also serve to reaffirm male values, providing an important symbol of membership in the informal men's association. Even the division of labor that appears to be a strict business function reflects the subordinate position of women in the bar as well as the wider society. At another level, then, Brady's Bar is primarily a place where men can come to play out exaggerated masculine roles, acting out their fantasies of sexual prowess, and reaffirming their own male identities.

The essence of the *ceremonial function* is to reaffirm the official values of manhood in our culture. But this is difficult to do when women enter almost every night to drink and talk. Some even select the same drinks as men and all have the right to sit at the bar itself. Strangers visit Brady's frequently for a quick drink, never entering into the social and ceremonial life of the bar. Students tend to be a transient group that results in a constant turnover of customers. Relationships among people in the bar are frequently impersonal and businesslike. All of this works counter to the ceremonial function that requires some common public expression of the moral values on which masculine identities are constructed. It requires some way to highlight the virtues of strength, toughness, aggressiveness, and dominance over females. Most important, it requires some corporate group of males staging the ritual performances together. It is possible that these ceremonial functions could be carried out by restricting membership to men in a formal way as done by athletic clubs or men's associations in certain New Guinea societies. Some "male only" bars still employ this device. The moral values of masculinity could be reaffirmed by aggressive physical activity from which women were excluded as is done in competitive football from Little League teams for boys to the National Football League. But Brady's managers do not even allow the escalation of the rare fights that do occur but halt them before they hardly begin. Drinks at Brady's could be restricted to men alone or special uniforms and ceremonial regalia could be created to symbolize their corporate unity and importance. But Brady's has none of these. Instead, *male values are reaffirmed by the use of elaborate patterns of language*. It is not so much *what* people say but *how* they speak that serves to mediate between the business and ceremonial functions of the bar.

Language is used to symbolize status and masculinity in public displays. Equally important, customers use speech performances to create a sense of corporate belonging, a feeling of full membership in the men's association that constitutes the hub of this society. Asking for a drink becomes not only a display of an individual's masculinity but a membership ritual announcing to those present that the speaker *belongs*, he is a man who has ties with other men, a male who is at home in a truly male world. Such rituals occur during *dominance displays*, *ritual reversals*, *reciprocal exchanges*, *drinking contests*, and *asking for the wrong drink*. We shall consider each of these in turn.

⁹Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959:35). Our discussion of masculinity rituals in this section has drawn many insights from this book as well as *Interaction Ritual* (1967) and *Encounters* (1961) by Goffman.

Dominance Displays

One frequent way that men ask for a drink is not to ask for a drink at all. In the situation where it is appropriate to ask for a drink, they ask instead for the waitress. This may be done in the form of *teasing, hustling, hassling* or some other speech act. But, whatever the form, it serves as a ritual in which masculine values are symbolized for the people at Brady's. Consider the following example of hassling.

Sandy is working the upper section. She walks up to the corner table where there is a group of five she has never seen before: four guys and a girl who are loud and boisterous. She steps up to the table and asks, "Are you ready to order now?" One of the males grabs her by the waist and jerks her towards him. "I already know what I want, I'll take you," he says as he smiles innocently up at her. Sandy removes his hand and steps back from the table. She takes the orders from the others at the table and then turns back to the first man. He reaches over and pulls her towards him, prolonging the ritual of asking for a drink with a question, "What's good here, do you know?" Sandy patiently removes his hand for the second time, "If you haven't decided yet what you want to drink, I can come back in a few minutes." "Oh, please, don't leave me!" He grabs her by the leg this time, the only part of her he can reach and inquires, "What's your name, honey? Are you new here? I don't think I've seen you before? What nights do you work?" The others at the table begin to smile and chuckle, making the situation worse; Sandy knows that several nearby customers are also watching the encounter. Finally, in desperation she heads for the bar and he calls out, "I'll have a Screwdriver."

Back at her station, she gives the bartender the order and tells Mike, a regular sitting by her station, about the *obnoxious* in the upper section. Mike listens and puts his arm protectively around her, "Look, just make them come down to the bar if they want to order. If they give you any more shit tell me and I'll take care of them." The order is ready and Sandy balances her tray as she heads back to the waiting customers, planning to stand on the opposite side of the table in hopes of avoiding a repeat performance.

This kind of performance is not exceptional. For the waitresses it is a recurrent feature of each night's work. The details vary from customer to customer but the basic features remain constant. She approaches a table where, instead of asking for a drink, a customer seizes upon the brief encounter to display his manly skills. "Where have you been all my life?" asks one. "Sit down and talk to us," says another. "Have I ever told you that I love you?" "Haven't I seen you someplace before?" "Wouldn't you like to sit on my lap?" And often the verbal requests are punctuated with attempts to invade the personal space of the waitress. One customer asks for his drink in a low, muffled voice, requiring the waitress to move closer

or bend down so she can hear. Another grabs her as she starts to leave. Some pinch, grab a wrist, pat, or securely retain the waitress with an arm around her waist. Except for the regular customer whom she knows well, these direct attempts at physical contact are obvious violations of the usual rules governing interaction between men and women. Indeed, their value seems to lie in this fact, as if to say that here is a real man, one who can act out his aggressive fantasies.

Thus Brady's Bar provides male customers with a stage where they can perform; it offers an audience to appreciate their displays of manliness. Furthermore, this ritual setting gives a special legitimacy to expressing one's masculinity. Asking for a drink becomes an occasion to act out fantasies that would be unthinkable in the classroom, on the street, and even perhaps when alone with a female. But here, in the protective safety of the bar, a customer can demonstrate to others that he has acquired the masculine attributes so important in our culture.

But the masculinity rituals would not be effective without the cooperation of the waitress. She has learned to respond demurely to taunts, invitations, and physical invasions of her personal space. She smiles, laughs, patiently removes hands, ignores the questions, and moves coyly out of reach. It is precisely these qualities of her response that complement the performance of male customers. When she meets a particularly aggressive and obnoxious customer she may complain to bartenders or regulars, providing these men with their opportunity to demonstrate another aspect of manliness—the protector role. But the cultural expectations are clear: *she should remain dependent and passive*. As waitresses move back and forth between the bar and their tables, they also move between these two kinds of encounters—warding off the tough, aggressive males, and leaning on the strong, protective males.

Although the girls know it is important to keep their place during these encounters, it is also clear they *could* act otherwise in dealing with aggressive customers. Like the bartenders, they might refuse to allow customers to act in offensive ways. They could become aggressive themselves, "tough broads" who brusquely reprimand customers and have them removed from the bar. On occasion the girls all have acted in this way towards a customer, something it would be *possible* to do with relative frequency. For example, one night Joyce was making her way to the table in the corner of the upper section and she had a tray load of expensive cocktails. Doug, a regular, stepped out in front of her, blocking the path. "C'mon, Doug. Don't make me spill these drinks." He was drunk. "I'll move if you give me a kiss," he replied. "Not now, Doug. I have to get these drinks to that table. Now *please* move!" Doug stood his ground, refusing to budge an inch. "If you don't move, Doug, I'm gonna kick you in the shins, and I mean it!" Doug didn't move, but instead, beer in one hand, he reached out to put

the other arm around Joyce. That was all it took. Joyce gave him a good hard kick in the shins, and then, to her surprise, Doug kicked her back! Joyce glared at him and he finally let her through to the table. She felt both angry and proud as she carried the tray of ten heavy drinks to the table. Most of the frozen daiquiris were melting and the Bacardis had spilled over the tops of glasses. But for one brief moment an encounter with an aggressive male had been changed into a relationship in which she felt on equal footing. But in the process she had destroyed the ritual quality of Doug's attempt to demonstrate his manliness.

Ritual Reversals

The ritual quality of asking for a drink does not always have a serious tone. Waitresses and customers often work together to create humorous scenes for the audiences around them, using speech acts like *bantering*, *joking*, and *teasing*, in ways that appear to be serious. These performances are particularly effective in symbolizing masculine values when they call attention to subtle possibilities that some individual is *not* acting like a woman or man. Two examples may serve to illuminate this complex use of language in asking for a drink. The first one humorously suggests that the waitress is sexually aggressive in the way reserved for men. The second implies that male customer is less than a man because of homosexual tendencies.

Recall an earlier example when Sue waited on a Cougar regular who came to Brady's with three friends. When she approached their table they were engrossed in conversation and to get their attention she placed her hand on one customer's shoulder. He turned to see who it was and then said loudly in mock anger, "Don't you touch me!" Sue jumped back, pretending to be affected by his response. "I'm sorry. Do you want another beer?" He smiled. "No, thanks, a little later." She continued on her circular path around the section. A few minutes later she was back in the area and as she passed the same table the customer reached out and grabbed her by the waist. "Watch the hands," she said. "I'll have another Pabst now," the regular said. She brought him the beer. "That was fast!" he commented as she set the bottle down. "I'm a fast girl," was her response.

"Oh, you mean with the beer?" To which she answered, as she collected the money and turned to leave, "What did you think I meant?" In this encounter, first the customer and then the waitress *jokingly* suggest that she may be a sexually aggressive female, thereby underscoring the important cultural value of actually being a passive female.

During the course of our research, a popular song included in the juke box selections at the bar had to do with a football player called Bruiser LaRue, an implied homosexual. Playing this song or making loud requests for someone to play it, provided abundant opportunities for treating

homosexuality in a humorous manner. One such opportunity involved asking for a drink. Holly notices two regulars come in the door and because it is crowded they end up along the wall at the back of the lower section where she has just taken an order for another round. Because of the crowd and noise, neither bartender sees these well-known regulars or has a chance to greet them. Holly already knows their drinks so does not need to wait for their orders, but one of them says with a smile, "I'll have a Pink Lady, tell him it's for Bruiser LaRue." At the bar when Holly passes the message on, the bartender immediately scans her section to see who this "Bruiser LaRue" might be. Smiles and laughter are quickly exchanged across the noisy bar, and the ritual is complete. If either bartender or customer were to admit even the possibility of being homosexual or accuse another male of such behavior, it would be a serious violation of cultural norms. By joking about it in the presence of a waitress, they uphold the dominant masculine values, saying, in effect, "We are so manly we can even joke about being effeminate." In a similar fashion, it is not uncommon for a waitress to approach a table of male customers who have just sat down and one will say, "My friend here wants a Pink Lady," or "Bill wants a Gold Cadillac." The waitress smiles, the customers poke one another, smile, laugh, and add other comments. The incongruity of "a man like one of us" having a "female drink" has provided a brief ritual reversal of the sacred values. Because it occurs in a humorous context, no one is threatened and all settle down to a night of drinking, comfortable in their sense of manhood.

Reciprocal Exchanges.

There are several contexts in which customers order drinks for other people with an expectation of reciprocity. Buying in rounds is the most frequent kind of exchange and occurs with almost every group of men who stay for any length of time in the bar. A typical sequence goes something like this. Six men take their places at a table and begin with separate orders: a scotch and soda, two Buds, a Lowenbrau, a Brandy Manhattan, and a whiskey tonic. The waitress brings the drinks, arranged in order on her tray, and places each one down for the respective customer. Fred, who is sitting on the corner where the waitress stands announces, "I'll get this one," and hands her a ten dollar bill. He has assumed the temporary responsibility to ask for drinks desired by anyone at the table. Half an hour later the waitress checks the table: "How're you doin' here?" Fred shakes his head that they aren't quite ready, and the others keep right on talking. But the question has signaled the group to prepare to order soon. The next time the waitress approaches their table, Bill, sitting next to Fred, looks up and says, "Another round." The responsibility for asking has now shifted

to him and he orders for everyone. In this case he might check individually or act on a knowledge of his friends' drinking habits. When the drinks arrive he pays for the second round. Soon another member of the group will take over, and before the evening ends each of the six customers will have taken one or more turns. It is not uncommon for the composition of a table to change, adding new drinkers, losing some to other tables, expanding and contracting with the ebb and flow of people, creating ever widening circles of reciprocal exchange.

These exchanges did not seem unusual to us until we discovered that female customers almost never order or pay in rounds. Those who do are usually waitresses from other bars; they know that this practice eases the work-load for the cocktail waitress, both in taking orders and making change. Why then do men almost always order in rounds, asking for drinks in this reciprocal fashion? When we observed the other ways that men typically make work difficult for waitresses it seems improbable that ordering in rounds was intended to assist the cocktail waitresses. Whatever the reason for this practice, it is a continual reminder that *males belong to groups of men in the bar*. The individual nature of asking for a drink is transformed into a shared, social experience. When men request drinks and pay for them in rounds they reaffirm their ties to one another and their common membership in a kind of men's association.

Numerous occasions occur when a single individual will buy for another person or a whole group at another table. The reciprocity in these exchanges may never occur or it can take place at a later date, but the expectation of a return drink underlies the action. In the course of an evening the waitress may have frequent orders of this nature. Two guys and a girl are drinking at a table near the lower waitress station. One of the guys signals the waitress and says, "Would you take a drink to Mark, over there? It's his birthday. Tell him it's from us." Drawing on her recollection of Mark's original order she asks the bartender for a whiskey sour and delivers it to Mark who hasn't even finished his first drink. Another friend of Mark's sitting nearby sees the extra drink arrive and when he learns it is Mark's birthday, he orders a round for everyone at the table, again in honor of the occasion.

As the bar becomes more crowded, waitresses are often kept running to take drinks to an acquaintance here who was recently engaged, a friend there who got a new job, or someone else a customer hasn't seen for a while. "Take a drink to that guy over there in the red shirt who just came in, a gin and tonic, and tell him Bob sent it," a customer tells the waitress, pointing across the bar. Fighting her way back through the crowd to the bar and then over to the man in the red shirt, the waitress says, "This is from Bob." The surprised and pleased customer looks over the crowd, locates Bob at his table and calls loudly, "Thanks, Bob, I'll talk to you

later." Other people notice, look briefly in his direction, and the noisy hum of activity continues at a steady pace.

A regular at the bar motions for Stephanie: "I owe Randy one from last week. Do you know what he's drinking? Whatever it is, send him one from me." Randy is in the other waitresses section so Stephanie passes the word on to Joyce and soon Randy has an unrequested drink arrive at his table. He remembers the debt when the waitress identifies the regular; a wave and shouted words of thanks that cannot be heard above the noise complete the transaction. Later the same night customers will ask for other drinks to be delivered at other places. "I want another round for Alan—tell him congratulations on his new job." "I hear Ron got engaged, take him a drink from me."

In these and similar cases, the drink is purchased, not because someone wants a drink, but rather as a symbol of a friendship tie. On many occasions these exchanges are followed by shouting and gestures that serve not only to communicate between friends but to announce to others that the participants are inside members of the bar crowd. Even when the transaction is known only to the buyer, recipient, and waitress, the ritual performance has fulfilled its function. The customers have both demonstrated they are not alone in an impersonal, business establishment. They know people here and are known by others. The very act of establishing social ties in this manner gives these customers an additional reason for being in the bar. Their claim to membership has been announced, acknowledged, and confirmed.

Sometimes reciprocal exchanges are done in a humorous manner, emphasizing certain masculine values as well as reaffirming membership in the men's association. Recall an earlier example when one night a man at the bar called Holly over and said, "I want you to take a drink to the guy over there in the sport coat and tell him Dan said to get fucked." When the message and drink were delivered they brought a return order—a Harvey Wallbanger for Dan and a 75¢ tip for Holly. The message with its overtones of a tough man who could even use obscenity in the presence of a woman was clear. The return order of a Harvey Wallbanger, a drink with sexual connotations, brought smiles to the faces of bartenders, waitress, and customers alike. In addition, the exchange highlighted publicly the social ties between two customers.

Later on that same evening, Holly was asked to take a double vodka tonic to Gene, a regular, who was already quite intoxicated. A friend across the bar had observed Gene's steady drinking all night and increasingly boisterous behavior. Gene was finishing the last drink he would order when the "gift" arrived. "This is from Bill," said Holly with a smile, loud enough for others at the table to hear. Faced with the choice of increasing physical discomfort and a reputation that he wasn't man enough to down

another drink, Gene raised the drink in a smilingly reluctant toast and finished off the double vodka tonic.

On a typical evening drinks criss-cross the bar in these ways with considerable frequency. The senders and receivers come to be recognized as full members of the bar society. Even those who do not participate in these rituals themselves gain a secure sense that there is a lot of action at Brady's. They are reassured that this is a place where male customers, in general, and themselves, in particular, truly belong.

Drinking Contests

Sometimes customers ask for drinks that involve a challenge to another man's ability to drink. In an earlier chapter we mentioned how waitresses become customer's "lucky charms" in these contests. The night is slow and two guys sitting at Joyce's station pass the time by "chugging", a kind of drinking contest. A coin was flipped and first one customer called and then the other. If a call identified the correct side of the coin, the customer who called was not required to down his drink in a single gulp. Each failure to call the coin correctly meant asking for another drink and chugging it down until one or the other contestants called a halt, thereby losing the game.

At times, such contests involve the entire bar, as customers become spectators cheering on the early demise of the participants. One evening, several of the Cougars were seated at the bar. It was late and they had been there most of the evening. The bar was noisy, but suddenly become quiet as John ceremoniously placed six empty shot glasses in front of one of the football players. "Okay, Larry, ol' boy, let's see you handle this!" Holly and Sue crowded together into the lower waitress station to get a better look as John slowly filled each shot glass with tequila. People seated at tables stood to get a better view. Someone had dared Larry to drink six straight shots of tequila and he was going to do it. John finished pouring and stepped back, bowing in deference to Larry, "It's all yours," he added. Larry picked up the first glass, toasted his audience, and downed it. Everyone applauded and cheered. He picked up the second, toasted again, and downed it too. Again, the group applauded and so it went until all six glasses were empty. Larry had met the challenge and the game was over. Someone slapped Larry on the back, he reddened and headed for the men's room. Activity returned to normal. The contest was over.

While this was one of the more dramatic contests, similar ones take place frequently at Brady's. Such drinking contests bring males together in a competitive sport, one they are allowed to play inside the bar, but in a way which symbolizes desirable masculine traits—a willingness to compete, strength, endurance, and the ability to imbibe great quantities of strong liquor. It is a contest that places emphasis on *how* one plays the game rather

than who wins. Larry may have made a fast retreat to the bathroom, but he *had* played the game, and that is what counted. In addition, those who participated as spectators demonstrated their ties with Larry and others in the bar.

Asking for the Wrong Drink

One of the most curious ways that males ask for drinks involves intentional errors in ordering. This kind of asking for a drink appears to involve a combination of two speech acts: *ordering* and *telling*, or giving information. Consider the following example. Two young men enter the bar and take a table next to the wall in the lower section. The waitress approaches their table and places a napkin in front of each one. She waits in silence for their order. One of them looks up at her and says calmly:

"Two double Sloe Screws on the rocks, uhhhh, for Joe and Bill."

The waitress turns quickly, goes to the bar, and in a moment returns with two, tall, dark bottles of Hamm's beer. A stranger might think this interaction strange, and at first this kind of "asking for a drink" seemed out of place, but in time we noted other similarly strange games being played. For example, someone comes in and says, "I'll have a banana Daiquiri with Drambuie," or another person says, "Make mine a double Harvey Wallbanger." As you watch the waitress in these and other situations, you observe that frequently the drinks people ask for are not served. A scotch and soda is given instead of the banana daiquiri, a bourbon and water is served instead of the double Harvey Wallbanger, two Hamm's are delivered instead of two double Sloe Screws on the rocks.

In no case where a person asks for one drink and is given another, at least in situations like the examples noted, does the customer complain that he received the wrong drink. Two factors complicate the situation. First, sometimes people do order "Sloe Screws" or "Harvey Wallbangers" and the waitress brings these drinks. Second, occasionally the bartender mixes the wrong drink or the waitress serves the wrong drink and the customer *does* complain. If we return to our original ethnographic goal, we can now ask, "What does a stranger to Brady's Bar have to know in order to ask for a drink in this manner, or to interpret correctly when someone else asks for a drink in this manner? Furthermore, why does this kind of "asking" go on?

If the stranger were to assume the role of cocktail waitress, she would have to know at least the following:

1. That the drink requested was not actually desired.
2. That another drink was actually being requested.
3. What that other drink was.

Waitresses do acquire the rules for correctly interpreting these kinds of requests. But what are these rules and how do they operate?

Let's go back to the customer who said, "Two double sloe screws on the rocks, uhhhh, for Joe and Bill." In addition to the utterance itself, he also communicates a *metamessage*, a message about the message, that serves to identify the kind of speech act he intends it to be. The metamessage says something like, "Don't take us seriously, we really don't want two double Sloe Screws on the rocks. We aren't *ordering* but only *teasing*." But how is such a metamessage sent and how does the waitress interpret it correctly? Sometimes this information is sent by the *tone* of a speech act or by accompanying gestures or facial expressions. But when a customer uses these metamessage forms he also signals to others that he is teasing or joking. He may then be seen as a "ham," someone unsophisticated in bar culture. The ideal is to ask for a double Sloe Screw on the rocks or a banana Daquiri with Drambuie in a perfectly serious tone of voice and manner, *sending metamessages in ways that are not obvious* to the surrounding audience. At least three alternatives are open to the sophisticated, well-enculturated customer.

First, he may choose to make a referential mistake that the waitress will recognize but other, less sophisticated customers will not. Let's take the order for two double Sloe Screws on the rocks. "On the rocks" is a feature of several drinks at Brady's. It means that liquor will be served only with ice and not the usual additional liquid. Whiskey on the rocks, for example, is whiskey without soda, water, or anything except ice. Vodka on the rocks is vodka and ice, nothing more. If a customer wants to order something "on the rocks," it usually means naming a type of liquor, not a fancy drink containing liquor and other mixtures. For example, if you order a Screwdriver on the rocks (vodka and orange juice), it would mean a screwdriver without orange juice, the same thing as vodka on the rocks. This order would be quickly recognized by waitresses as a *referential mistake*. It is a name that sounds like a drink, but no one knowledgeable in the ways of the bar would ask for this drink, unless perhaps as a joke. A Sloe Screw is a mixture of sloe gin and orange juice. When the customer said, "Two double sloe screws on the rocks," he was talking nonsense. He asked for a drink that doesn't exist at Brady's Bar, but when he made this obvious and intentional error of reference, he also signaled to the waitress that he was *teasing*, not *ordering*. He might have asked for sloe gin on the rocks, in which case the waitress could have brought the two customers each a glass of sloe gin and ice.

A second way to unobtrusively let the waitress know that a named drink is not desired involves the connotations of certain drinks. If they are clearly female drinks such as a Pink Lady or Gold Cadillac, this can signal that the customer doesn't really want them. Both a "Sloe Screw" and a "Harvey

Wallbanger" have implicit sexual connotations that are widely recognized by the people at Brady's. "A glass full of tequila" carries the connotation of an impending contest and other features of the setting can make it clear that no contest is planned. If a regular wants to tease the waitress, he will not name a scotch and soda or gin and tonic for these ordinary drinks do not have the special connotations that could signal the use of a different speech act.

Finally, customers can signal the intended speech act by combining two or more speech acts. When the customer asked for two double sloe screws on the rocks, he added, "for Joe and Bill." He was *telling* the waitress something else, in addition to the apparent order. The waitress can quickly guess that the customers are teasing, but how will she know to bring them bottles of Hamm's beer? If she doesn't recognize the two customers as regulars or know their customary drinks, she can use this additional information to check with the bartenders: "What do Joe and Bill over there in the corner usually drink?"

These complicated ways of asking for drinks have many functions for both the customer and waitress. Most important, they clearly demonstrate that the customer has mastered the use of bar language. As an individual learns to use the language of this culture with skill, he also becomes recognized as a regular, one who has gained entrance to the inner circle of this little society.

Conclusion

When we began to discover the enormous range of ways that men ask for drinks and how all these patterns of talking reaffirmed masculine values as well as symbolizing full membership in the bar community, we went back to examine the way women ask for drinks. Certainly our interpretation of the significance of male speech acts would be questionable if female customers ordered drinks in the same way as males. One would expect that to women customers the bar would be seen much more as a business establishment, a place to get drinks and perhaps meet men but not a place to participate in ceremonial performances that emphasized male values. The contrast between the way men and women ordered drinks was striking. Furthermore, it shed light on why female customers seemed to unwittingly create problems for the cocktail waitresses, a topic we discussed in Chapter 4. If we exclude the few women who came to the bar as experienced cocktail waitresses, the following significant differences are present.

1. *Female customers order separately, never in rounds.* The bar is more like a restaurant to them; they have come to purchase drinks, to get out of the dormitories for a time, perhaps to meet men, but not to become part of a

ceremonial women's association.

2. *Female customers ask numerous questions about drinks.* To them, a drink is not something to use in establishing an identity as a regular customer. It is much more like an item on a restaurant menu and so it seems appropriate to inquire about the range of drinks available and their contents. After all, Brady's Bar is a place of business that sells drinks. Men hardly ever ask about drinks because such questions would reveal their ignorance and weaken the value of drinks as ceremonial markers of adulthood, masculinity, and full membership in the bar. Women, on the other hand, see drinks more as something to taste, to drink, to purchase for yourself.

3. *Female customers pay separately for their drinks.* The shared experience of ordering and paying hold little significance to women. Like a group of men who go out to lunch in a restaurant and pay separately, the women who visit Brady's are merely following the rules for purchasing things in a business establishment.

4. *Female customers are never ready to order at the same time.* Unlike the men who form small drinking groups, women treat the entire process of asking for a drink as an individual economic exchange between themselves and the waitress. The girls at a table who require the waitress to make six or seven trips to the bar for individual orders are not trying to create difficulties for her. They see these trips as simple acts of service for which they have paid.

5. *Female customers change their drinks frequently.* Men find it useful to stay with the same drink. They can then order in rounds. Because employees tend to recognize people by drinks, asking for the same thing on every occasion establishes one's identity as a regular, a continuing member of the bar society. Sending drinks to other people becomes easier when the waitress knows what a customer "always" drinks. But these ceremonial qualities are hardly significant to a female and so she tries new drinks, changing often for the sake of variety or in search of a drink which has little or no taste of alcohol to it.

6. *Female customers almost never tip.* We suspect that the entire cultural atmosphere of the bar communicates to women that men are receiving a special service in the form of opportunities to express their manhood. Undoubtedly competition between the female customer and the cocktail waitress also influences their reluctance to tip.

7. *Female customers never engage in reciprocal exchanges.* As we noted, they do not order in rounds. They do not send drinks across the bar to a friend who has not been seen for a time. They do not send drinks as jokes nor to a friend who gets engaged or locates a new job. The only occasion when female customers sent drinks to others, and these were rare, was on birthdays.

8. *Female customers never intentionally ask for the wrong drink.* Because the inner circle at Brady's is not open to these women, the skilled use of bar language

is unimportant. Their status is relatively fixed and manipulating speech acts cannot change it.

9. *Female customers never engage in drinking contests.* Again, the symbolic meaning of such activities are only meaningful to males in the context of the bar.

It is clear that asking for a drink in Brady's Bar means one thing to men, another to women. For the female customer it is a simple economic transaction, one that takes only a few alternative speech acts. For the male customer it is an opportunity to manipulate language for a variety of ends. What Charles Frake has concluded about asking for a drink in Subanun could also apply to the men who come to Brady's Bar for drinking and talking.

The Subanun drinking encounter thus provides a structured setting within which one's social relationships beyond his everyday associates can be extended, defined, and manipulated through the use of speech. The cultural patterning of drinking talk lays out an ordered scheme of role play through the use of terms of address, through discussion and argument, and through display of verbal art. The most skilled in "talking from the straw" are the *de facto* leaders of the society. In instructing our stranger to Subanun society how to ask for a drink, we have at the same time instructed him how to get ahead socially.¹⁰

¹⁰Charles O. Frake, "How to Ask for a Drink in Subanun" (1964b).